

When tenting with her, I remember her sombreness. In 1975 I'd met her family—mother, unsmiling father, unwedded sister with her baby. Before we slept one night on the Goulais trip, Mary Lea talked about quarrels between her parents and grandparents, and about how it hurt to lose Grandfather. She also described wounds that she, a rather frank rebel, had had from her fellow-citizens. We compared our behavior and aspirations, and Mary Lea argued against a couple of my statements which were not beliefs, but a fifteen-year-old's wishy-washy proposals about humanity. "Everybody has something good," she avowed, "nobody is all evil." One can sometimes feel that the wickedest criminals are exceptions, but I remember Mary Lea partly for her firm opinion that we all come with our merits. From a person so earthy, so hearty and practical, but reserved and pensive too, the declaration seems especially believable.

CANDY STORE

Emmy Leeman

The second graders got to go uptown by themselves. This didn't mean much to the town kids, of course, but it sure made us country kids eager.

I got me a penny from my dad for picking potato bugs. I didn't want it tied in the corner of my handkerchief because I liked feeling it in the soft part of my hand, even if it did make my hand sweat.

Noon recess, which was a long time coming that day, was time enough for me to go. I breathed in the sweet-smelling air before I could see the store. The brick building had used to be a barber shop. It was whitewashed, with one big window. The floor was dark, oiled boards and one squeaked when I stepped across the doorway.

The candy was lined up in dozens of long even rows in two big glass cases. There were chocolate slow-pokes, black licorice "nigger babies," dark and light squares of creamy fudge, and even some that looked exactly like strawberries. I looked at the blue and pink "kewpie doll" candies that melted as soon as they touched my tongue. And yes, there were the red, spicy, cinnamon squares that were so hot and sweet that they made tears come to my eyes when I sucked them. The lemon balls were uneven with damp sugar sticking to them. I could feel the water starting at the back of my mouth and I wondered if she'd let me choose the lemon drops myself.

"Well?" said Miss May. She sounded mad but I didn't think she was because she sounded the same way, dry and hard, even when she said "Good Morning" to Father Weller on Sundays.

I didn't believe she could have eaten any of the delightful sweet drops that she made. Looking through the glass, I could see her skinny arms and bony shoulders. Her fingers had big bumps on each joint and they looked like they had been soaked in water. There was a red sore-looking burn on one wrist.

I knew she wanted me to choose, and so I leaned over and pulled my ankle sock down. I looked a long time at my mosquito bite. When I heard her stop tapping her spatula, I raised up and pointed to the cinnamon squares. She put five of them in the little, brown sack and was turned around stirring something bubbling before I got to the door.

I walked slower going back to school, dragging my heels the way that made Mom yell. Holding the sticky, red square carefully and sucking on one corner, I could smell the metal on my hand.

I wished I'd picked the lemon balls.



Patton Marches on Disneyworld
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