

## Bubble Gum

I like bubble gum. Not just any type, but the original pink bubble gum that I can pop to make really loud noises. I remember my first piece bubble gum. My mom took me to a bowling alley where she used to work at the night time, I think I was five. Now I'm eight. So the gum was much bigger back then, compared to how big it looks now. It was the coolest thing in the world. It had the shape of a Chupa Chups with a really fat stick part, and the candy part of it was glass made, filled with bubble gum. I never tried gum before that time, so I thought it was candy. I asked mom for the quarter. I asked for it nicely because she looked tired. I hate when my mom is tired. She hits me more often after her night job. I don't know what she exactly does at her work, but I surely think there has to be some evil in the jobs she has. Because when I wake up in the morning, smile and kiss her, she brightens up a bit. After her first job and coming back home, she brightens up only half of the time. After her night job, she comes back home and I get punished. I tried cleaning up my toys, washing the food plate I eat out of, but it's no use. She says, "What did you do that for? Now I have to not only wash the dish that you ate out of, but the other dishes that were folded with the dish that you washed. Look at how filthy the dishes you wash are. Do you ever see *me* washing dishes like this?" And get 'popped' on the back of my head and have to kneel down, raising my both hands high as she is cleaning the dishes. Some nights she forgets to tell me to stop raising my hand and go to bed, so I secretly went to bed after a really long time. I hate those time because I can't possibly raise my hands longer, but I want my mama to like me. Maybe I'll stay punished till morning one day, and she will love me more, and kiss me in the morning before I do. She's like that one bathroom light that we had to replace. For the first few minutes of being turned on it would be lighting, but after a while, it would start

blinking on and off, and then the 'off' time gets longer than 'on' time, and it gets finally all off. On the day of the bubble gum machine, she was half off.

"Mom, can I please have quarter for the candy machine?" I asked carefully and pointed at it.

"It's actually called a Gumball machine. But, whatever. Here," she said, and handed me the quarter. I didn't know if I should have taken the quarter because she said it in a voice like an old balloon was farting out some air from it. Then she shouted, "Just take it, already!" So I took it quickly and ran to the gumbo machine. It had a fitting name. The gumbo machine had mega gumbo size bubble gum. I could just imagine the gum inside my mouth, and it made me so happy. I carefully readjusted the coin slot so it opened up to the top and slid the quarter in it. I turned, till it made the clear click sound. Gumbo bubble gum rolled down, using its own slide and popped out of its exit into my hand. I just didn't know how to eat this beautiful thing, with the glaring shine around it. It was really big. I was three back then though, I'm eight now so it looked even bigger. I popped it inside my mouth. Because it was too big for my mouth, I really had to stretch out my mouth till it made the pop sound and suck inside my mouth. I drooled a lot that time too. I hadn't been told how to blow bubble gum, and that was my world's first bubble gum, but I knew how to blow bubble gum. The big bubble gum had giant hole inside it. I imagined if I was surrounded by this giant bubble gum and I could roll around inside it. I sucked the sweet juices, squeezed the gum out between the gap of my front tooth, formed a round ball with it inside my mouth, and made gum cover up my whole tongue like my tongue was wearing a sweet thick sweater. I chewed that bubble gum the whole day. Really! All I did that day at my mom's work was sucking the juices out of the bubble gum. Once on the Discovery Channel, I

saw a spider digging his tooth into a butterfly and sucking out the juices. I might as well be that spider sucking juices. I sat on a chair and just closed my eyes, occasionally opening up just to see if the bubble gum tastes different. Bubble gum has magical powers that grown-ups don't seem to know. When you are so focused on something, you don't hear or see anything, or feel anything about someone saying anything. Having bubble gum in your mouth means that you always have something else you can focus on other than Mom or Dad.

On the way, in car that day, she kept shouting to me:

“I don't know where you learned that kind of behavior. Just an embarrassment, that's what you are. Chew and pop gum when you are talking with adults? What country's manners are that? Maybe you picked that up from your father- ignoring whatever other people are saying. Do you hear me, missy?”

I nodded but I didn't hear a thing. Even when she smacked me on the back of the head at the red light, I didn't feel a thing. I chewed that till I couldn't taste the sweet at all, and it felt more like chewing the eraser at the back of the pencil by the end. I chew bubble gum all the time now. I chew when my daddy gets drunk and hits Mom, when my mom cries on me afterwards, when my teacher asks me question I don't know how to answer, or when grown-ups talk about their own boring thing and I'm supposed to sit there and behave. Now if you want to chew on bubble gum too, I have a little secret. First bubble gum will give you some pain. Adults shout at you for it for a while, and when you chew it for a really long time your tongue and the whole jaw feels like it's going to just drop because it's so tired. So days that my daddy gets drunk, my jaw just feels numb. But you got to get past that, because that little bit of pain is what pushes away the other pain. My daddy said that that's why he drinks too. I'm not like him in looks, but I got

that other stuff from my dad.

I tried quitting once, like daddy tried quitting before, but I planned it wrongly. Our school had parent visitation the next day, and I had gotten caught having bubble gum in my mouth during the class (we aren't allowed to do that, so I usually hid it under my tongue and poked around in my mouth). So I stopped doing it, and it was the hardest day of my life.

When I chew, chew and Pop! There is no need to be someone else. I just feel the leftover taste of bubblegum, it's a sweet smell mingled with a slight rubber smell mixed into it when it's old, I hear the popping and all my focus is to move my jaw up and down. When I have bubblegum I don't need no one else, so I don't have someone else who is talking to me anymore. I remember a few kids coming up to me to eat lunch with me, asking my name and stuff, but all that is just a distracting because all my energy is focused on chewing the gum only. So I don't eat with people, I don't answer the teacher's questions, and I still don't understand why some girls share their lockers with each other, or go to bathroom together. But my mom doesn't like that. She thinks I should interact. She thinks I'm embarrassing her. But I want my mom to like me, so a day before the parent visitation day I decided to quit chewing. It was weird. I heard my classmates talking with each other for the first time. They talked about their dolls, puppies, Spiderman, homework that they didn't do, and candies that they liked.

"I like bubblegum. My mom like gives me some after I go to church sometimes."

"I don't like bubble gum."

"Yeah, you do- I saw you eating some the other day."

"When? Prove it. Exactly where, what time, what minute, what second?"

And they started to fight about it so I didn't know what to say. I just sat there. Listening

to what they said. I didn't know either one of their names, because I couldn't remember seeing them in class before, but I know now. And the teacher walked in and talked about where Indians live and what kind of God they worship. If I could create a God, I would make a bubble gum God. I would make a piece of gum that is as big as elephant, bow to it over and over, and after I express the how holy that piece of gum makes me feel, I'll go and bite it's head off and chew, chew and pop! And that's how I was during the whole class. Why not? Why shouldn't I? I know my mom doesn't want me to, but I'm so much happier with bubble gum. Class is much more delightful with bubble gum. People are much more fun to be with, with Chew Chew and Pop! When they talked about adding and dividing, I thought about 18 pieces of gum added by 20 pieces of gum. I listened to what teacher saying for the first time. I'm not sure what her name was. I've heard it before, but I never listened for it.

Some chairs were lined up at the back of the class room before we started the next class. I learned about different pets. I always wanted pet. Moms come in and sit down on the chairs as quietly as possible. I didn't look back. We learned about bunnies, dogs, and hamsters. The hamster was inside the round plastic ball with some small holes in it. Teacher said that it's called a hamster ball. I felt like my mom came in just now. I still didn't look back but I knew. The hamster could be inside and roll the ball by himself and go around places. I looked back. White mothers were whispering. I wished I had my own ball. A bubblegum ball. A clear pinky ball surrounding my whole body, so that I could just sleep there when I'm tired, roll around only to the places I want to go, hear only the things I want to hear. My mom tries to pass through the chairs, saying excuse me, but they didn't move for her. I missed bubble gum. I had to chew, chew and pop! Mom sat between white moms and black moms. Maybe I could let my mom in

gum bubble too, so that daddy can't hit her. My tongue moved around to imagine the gum inside my mouth. I pushed the tooth and counted the tooth I had. One of them was shaky. Maybe I'll get new teeth again like the last time. Although, my tooth fairy seemed to be always too busy to drop by my house. The bell rang and class ended. Us kids were going to cafeteria to get lunch. The teachers stayed and talked with parents. I looked at my mommy. Chew chew, I didn't for you today, Mom. So that you won't be embarrassed of me. I ate some of the food. Not too much though.

Later my mom drove in and I expected a big hug because I didn't chew the whole day. She didn't even look down at me, and sighed. Something was wrong. My mom finally said one thing

"I heard you chew bubble gum in class." And again a long sigh.

That wasn't fair. That just isn't. I did the day before that and the day even before that, but I wasn't going to that day and the day after that and many days after that. The teacher didn't mention that. My teacher didn't tell my mom that I didn't chew the whole day. That wasn't fair. The only way to make it fair though, was if I was going to chew again. So I chewed again that day, and till now, every day. But I really wasn't going to.

Today is especially hard day to chew. It is the weekend, where I don't have school, and mom doesn't have work. Mom is tired sleeping in bed. She doesn't wake up till really late in weekends. I only taste this bubble gum. It's not important that it doesn't taste sweet anymore. Chew, chew, chew and Pop! It tastes different than usual, but I don't check, Chew, chew and Pop! And I bite something hard in it. That is weird because bubble gum is only hard and sweet at first. I open my mouth and spit out the whole piece onto my hand. There is some spit and some

blood. And something white and ugly covered with the blood. It is one of my teeth. It must be that tooth that had been shaking in the back. Because I'm not chewing I hear things. I hear cars running down the street, honking so loud. I hear people in street. I hear how people cuss outside to each other.

I have to chew and pop again, so I go to bathroom and wash off the blood, gargle out my mouth. I feel the blood in my mouth quickly back again though. I rescue the tooth piece from drowning in the bubble gum and wrap it in the tissue and place it under the pillow. I heard tooth fairy sometimes brings money. The Tooth fairy hasn't brought me anything before, so maybe she saved up to bring me the money all together, much more at once. I want to chew, but the blood keeps coming back. I never thought I wouldn't be able to chew before. Even in class I hid the gum under my tongue and poked it around with my tongue.

I still have to chew. Chew, chew and pop! And I don't hear a thing. Yeah, I am tearing up in my eyes, but I am not crying. I only taste my spit, the blood, and the bubble gum flavor mixing in my mouth. Blood tastes awfully bad and has metal-like smell, you know. I have to swallow it down sometimes. My jaw hurts from chewing so hard. It hurts a lot when the bubble gum touches the slot where my tooth used to be, but I chew, chew and pop. I sometimes push away the gum to the side of my mouth and I feel the little baby tooth wedged in there. It's small but it's going to grow, just as big and strong as the others. I wonder if my mom will be strong too someday.