

Sweet Tooth

by angel readman

There was a hole in my tooth. It was small enough to draw my attention to my tongue, its small water, squish of the tip of it against the crown. It got bigger a day at a time, made me consider yesterday's supper. A speck of yellow, a flake of pink. The tooth wouldn't let anything go.

'Go to the dentist already,' you said. I had no intention. I pulled you to me and kissed you and the gap in my enamel caught your saliva, saved it for later.

The hole was getting more persistent.

'Honey..' I said, 'Sugar.' I seemed these days I had a hundred names for you that simmered in the dark hole. They didn't mean anything really. These days I couldn't stop them, just sidling out into the air around you. I put my hands on you belly sometimes and called you 'Gummy man,' 'jelly bear,' anything. The hole was a canyon. It was probably only the size of a jelly babies hand. It felt like inside was a whole man.

Sometimes I watched from the window to see you come home, aching. Inside my sweet tooth a small woman put her foot to the pedal of her sewing machine and stitched into my gum. She worked round the clock, sewing sweet nothings to give you, tossed the scraps of them onto my tongue. When we were silent, when you were there and weren't, I still said them. Once I waited for you outside work. I'd been shopping. I thought about just going home together. I stood in an alcove across the street and saw you leave. The woman in the cave put her foot down and stitched pain to my bones. I didn't cross the street to catch up. I just watched you walk, slower than normal, maybe walking to your car with a colleague, give her a ride. I saw you smile another smile I hadn't seen in some time, then turn the corner, out of sight.

'Honey, you want more...' I made dinner. Instead of questions sweetness poured its syrup out, yellow streams poured over doubt. The woman in the hole in my tooth put her foot down hard, a pain wired to my blood. She said there's no greater burden than being civilised, rational, polite.

The next day I went to the dentists. He took the tooth out. I took it home, looked at it at in hand, amazed how something so small could hold such a big hole. There was a space in my mouth my tongue couldn't stop considering. I never called you a sugar or jelly bear again. You didn't notice. For a while there we continued our lives.

