

Bubble Gum and Paperback Books

by Foster Trecost

Something small, easy to hide. These were his thoughts as he folded his fingers around a pack of bubble gum and stuffed it in a pocket. Just like that, just that fast, he became a thief.

He read books where bad guys got away. A block after his first crime, he found a bookstore to commit another. Again something small, a paperback, bendable. He leafed through the first few pages and started down the stairs, book in hand, but tucked it under his shirt before reaching the bottom.

In a restaurant he refused the menu, but let his waitress recite the specials. While waiting for the food, he thought about bubble gum and paperback books. His meal arrived and he mixed things that were separate. He took a bite and it tasted different; not bad, but not how he remembered. He asked for the check and slipped away before it got there.

He picked a park bench beneath a tree. He smelled the book, searched for the new book scent, but it wasn't there. He began reading, but like the food, his taste in literature had also changed. After a chapter he backtracked to the convenience store: "I forgot to pay for this gum."

He went to the restaurant: "It was an accident, my apologies."

At the bookstore, he said: "I just walked right out, never paid."

He hurried back to the park to start again from the beginning, but it didn't take long to realize he *still* didn't like the book. "It's no use." He shook his head and looked at his feet: "I need new shoes."

He found a pair and tried them on. After a few minutes, he handed the box back to the clerk: "No thanks," he said. "These aren't for me."

He left in a hurry and turned up the street. Someone called after him: "Hey you, come back here!" He walked faster and thought about bubble gum and paperback books.

