

Gummi Worms, Love, etc.

by Jesse Jarnow

It was R who embodied love for me. We'd eaten gummi worms in the park, held them up to the sun, yellow and green and translucent. When we returned to her flat, they were everywhere. I'd never seen such a thing. They hung in the air, these gummi worms. In the living room, they shifted slightly as the radiator clicked on. It was early fall, and the atmosphere was starting to get trapped behind closed windows.

"This is insane," I said to R. We'd not known each other that long. "How are they doing that?" They floated, mostly, straight up and down. R didn't say anything. I felt them around my legs. Their touch was warm, like a cat disassembled into its component textures. There was some kind of collective mind, I decided, if only at a very small level, like a school of fish turning suddenly. Except the gummi worms stayed in place.

R smiled and took off her blouse as she walked towards her bedroom. I followed obediently, the gummi worms parting.

There were worms above her bed while we had sex, though fewer. I watched them over her shoulder. I rocked back and forth beneath with increasing speed. R bit her lip, clenching her teeth slightly. I thought about Japan. Perhaps this was some kind of new candy. From there. We had sex once more that night, and went to sleep, eventually moving to our own sides of the bed. I took the wall.

The next morning, while R was in the shower, I got dressed. I noticed a skid mark of blood on the light lavender sheets. A cut on my elbow had opened up, grinding repeatedly into the mattress during our lovemaking. In the morning light, the gummi worms hung in the air like wisteria. I could hear somebody leaving the apartment next door. I looked at the gummi worms again, as real as could be in

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the daylight. I could feel them as an organism emitting some kind of chemical satisfaction, recently nourished.

The door opened and R came in. I was wearing my jeans. No shirt. Instinctively, I pushed the blanket over the bloodstain. I pulled on the rest of my clothes while R put on hers. I watched her breasts disappear beneath her bra. She kissed me for a second, tasting of toothpaste. My morning breath embarrassed me.

"I'll call you later, okay?" she said, and made our way out through the thicket of gummi worms. With the sunbeams criss-crossing the room from the eastern window, it was like being inside a living night sky. Tiny pricks of light all around, it would take years, I thought--years!--for their energy to reach anybody else.

R texted me later that day, just to say "hi." I thought about the blood on her sheets, sitting under her comforter, something she couldn't even know until that night or, more probably, the next morning -- back in the harsh, honest sunlight under which I'd seen it. All day I had, if I'd wanted, if I could, to say something to R, to her rosy cheeks and soap-smelling hair. But I couldn't. Or, rather, I just didn't. I kept thinking about the gummi worms, hungry. I didn't have time to eat breakfast before work that day.

As you might've guessed, that was pretty much it for R and me. The worms were gone by the next time I went over there, a week or so later, like they'd been a seasonal phenomenon. There were some, hanging mildly in the corners, but the consciousness I'd sensed before was absent, had never existed. It smelled like air conditioner to me. Unappealing. It wasn't like we broke up right then. R never brought it up, the blood. We just slept together less and less.

I talked to her not long ago, R. It had been a few years. Her number was still in my phone and I got her while trying to call my friend Robert. We spoke for a minute, R and me, and it was good to hear

her voice, me standing here in my apartment where she isn't and will never be again. She moved to Florida. R says she is well.

