

Prelude: Yesterday we resorted to grapes and dried figs, spooned cashew butter from the jar. The figs we ate whole, their insides warm and grainy. At the edge of the village, where our mothers had warned us not to go, mangoes plopped from the trees and dried into parchment which we softened on our tongues. We teased each other with stories of ice lollies and nougat studded with cherries and almonds. One of us remembered a slab of red chocolate he'd seen hidden inside a tree not far from here, so we went looking for what we'd never find. In the evening we sucked the sugar from steamed rice, licked honey off the fish our fathers seared on the flames. We told each other stories of great fasts, too, ancestors who'd gone for weeks without a morsel. Then we conjured up vats of melted chocolate, tubs of jelly beans, sang the words we remembered to "The Big Rock Candy Mountain". The only ones being the big rock candy mountain. Repeated over and over.

Entrée: There is a story my mother tells and which I've told many times, about our flight home to Port Elizabeth from Johannesburg when I was a boy (we'd been to visit her brother) and the only way to stop me crying was to feed me chocolate. I have no memory of this, not of the flight, the visit, or the chocolate, but still, forty years later, chocolate can fill me with immense sadness.

A quick inventory of sweet things in my flat: A bar of Toblerone, ice cream, marble cake, toffees, 3 Gü puddings. I do things in multiples of three. Three cubes of chocolate, or six, nine, three slices of cake, three handfuls of roasted nuts. Twenty-one pushups. Three sets of twenty-one pushups. Three sips of apple juice. Twelve chocolate biscuits.

Everything is changing with the diet: I've stopped eating bread and pasta, transitioned to dark chocolate. Over time, my body has adapted to dark chocolate; I can eat more and more in one sitting. In my fantasy, I collect the sugary things in my flat and hand them over to my neighbour. We often exchange gifts. She and I bring each other sweet things when we come home from holidays, a thank-you for: collecting in the post, checking the roof hasn't leaked, feeding the cat, watering the plants.

In the meantime, The Company is trying to wear us down, they send us messages asking to see more documentation, that what we sent last time wasn't enough. One more of this, one more of that. They want to see us squirm. They saw us on our death bed and waited for us to ask for water. That's the kind of thing they do at The Company. They saw it all, how sick we were, and still they're asking us to prove what they saw with their own two eyes. Their messages are brief: We are sorry that this contradicts our previous request.

Allemande: My grandfather fled the Nazis to South Africa and became a salesman for Beacon Sweets. We loved Cadbury's most of all, though, except for Nestlé's Peppermint Crisp, with its equal amounts of crisp and chocolate, maybe even more crisp, as green as baby leaves. It's our national chocolate. Here in the London diaspora, so far from the Cape, Peppermint Crisp is spoken of with awe and longing. Sometimes I cycle down to the South African shop at Liverpool Street Station to buy Peppermint Crisps.

Chocolate would calm me now, but all my chocolate is with my neighbour, and my neighbour likes chocolate, too, so it's unlikely there'll be any left to give back. There's no point in saying: Give me back my chocolate, neighbour.

And to The Company we say: Give us back what's ours, Company.

Courante: "What do you want to do?" the mother says.

"Go home," the boy says.

"Are you sure?" she says. "We can look at the paintings in the foyer."

"They're boring," the boy says.

"They are, aren't they?" she says. "Do you want to finish my tea?"

"Ugh," he says, sipping. "There's no sugar."

"I'll get some from the counter," she says. "Do you want a croissant?"

"I want someone to play with," he says.

"We could walk to the square," she says. "There'll be clowns there."

"I don't want to see any more clowns?"

"You haven't seen any yet," she says.

"I want to play with him," he says, pointing to a man in a black suit.

"But he's going upstairs."

"So?"

The mother moves her chair closer to his. She strokes his head and cups his chin-and-cheeks in her hands. "Can I give you a cuddle?" she says, and they sit like that in silence, shh, his head on her shoulder, her nose in his hair, Johnson's Baby Shampoo. No tears. They watch the paintings.

"Can we go now?" he says.

The mother slips a mug into her bag and takes him in her arms out onto the square. The sun is high in the sky. She looks at the boy and smiles and throws him in the air and he falls back into her open palms, shrieking.

"Again," he says.

Sarabande: When we get to the café just Calle de Atocha, Gabriel orders *chocolate* and *churros* for both of us.

"You in Spanish is sexy," I say. "I like it when my lovers know things I don't."

"You're avoiding the issue," he says.

"I've got a better idea," I say. "Draw me while we wait and tell me what's going on in your head. I want to know what an artist thinks."

"I can't do both," he says, his eyes moving between my face and his sketchbook.

“Try,” I say.

“You always want me to talk,” he says. “*You* talk.”

“About what?” I say.

“I don’t know,” he says. “Talk about me. Put me into words.”

“You’re lovely to kiss,” I say. “Your lips, that rosiness in your cheeks. Is that what you mean?”

“Shut up and keep talking,” he says.

“You have the loveliest back to stroke,” I say. “Long and smooth, and the soft hair at the base that leads to the glen, so wonderful, and that grand cock, such an honour to suck. What a fine body – so slim and elegant - and that face! a *scheine ponim*, so open and warm, those eyes, *kein ayin hora*, so green, rarest of all colours.”

“Where have you been all my life?” he says.

“This is so good,” I say, plunging another stick of *churros* into the chocolate. “Now show me what you've done.”

Intermezzi: My habit is a sweet thing after lunch and dinner. Dessert as reward, the cigarette after sex, whisky at the end of a day. A sweet thing signals the end, first and second course completed. Don't leave me hanging. After lunch: three Spanish strawberries, an apple from my personal trainer, a slice of rye bread with peanut butter. After dinner: a slice of lemon cake, a cube of Lindt dark chocolate, a single toffee. Sometimes my sweet to savoury ratio is 1:1.

This is what I decide: at the end of these days without sweets, there will be a Chocolate Window during which everything will be possible. Sweets, cake, candy, ice-cream, pastries, hot chocolate. When I was a boy, maybe eight or nine, my father had caught me smoking and threatened to make me smoke a whole box if I did it again. At fifteen I began smoking in earnest. Some days I smoked two whole boxes. The Chocolate Window will be a ceasefire. A lull. The memory of snipers. Then shooting. The idea comes to me in a spin class with the instructor keeping the beat, one two, one

two, and I'm so in synch with the rhythm, with the music, with everything, that my thoughts come out clear and precise as if they're decisions already made. These days without chocolate have focused my mind, made me determined. I have climbed a mountain, dug a well, stood until the grass turned yellow and green footprints were left on the lawn. I walked from one end of town to the other, spok to strangers, to the man cycling next to me in the kind of tights hId like, cycling tights, which I will go home and order online. Everything is there.

"Sweet," the instructor says at the end of the class. "Nice one, guys."

Minuet: Somewhere in the world a child is being trafficked to produce cocoa. Somewhere in the world a child has never tasted chocolate. Google chocolate popularity according to country. Google the weight of a slab of Cadbury's Dairy Milk. DM them about their DM. Tweet them that you don't like the new cubes: they're smoother, but they're not cubes, or what we called "squares" even though they weren't and now they definitely are not. They're mounds. Molehills. Chocolate bubbling up from the earth.

We're angry with The Company and their requests for more documentation. We're like: What would Lydia Davis do? But we haven't read the full version of her frozen peas story, those green peas (or was it the *picture* of the peas?) that she wasn't happy about. The book hasn't been released, but somehow we know that if we googled, we'd find the complete story online. Everything is out there. If you want something, someone has wanted it before you and shared it with their friends/fans/followers and it's there to be picked up.

The Company says: We thank you for your correspondence in connection with the above matter.

Gigue: I will not lust after Cadbury's Dairy Milk. Dairy Milk Dairy Milk Dairy Milk. See how you like it. Buy my Dairy Milk. Here's my Dairy Milk. My Dairy Dairy Dairy Milk brings all the boys to the yard. Where's my Dairy Milk? Cadbury's Dairy Milk. All

I want is. All I want want want. A bar. A whole bar. All of it. Line by line. Row by row. Denial is purification. To abstain is to achieve spiritual elevation. Fuck abstinence. Fuck sugar-free whatever. I want Cadbury's Dairy Milk. Cadbury's Fruit and Nut. Give me Fruit & Nut. Melt it in your mouth and put aside those raisins and nuts until all the chocolate has melted in your mouth because you don't want to be confused by textures. You want the chocolate that melts and if there has to be fruit and nuts then so be it. Eat them later. After melting comes crunching. Purple is the warmest colour. Drape me in purple and feed me Cadbury's Dairy Milk.

Polonaise: In the morning, Gabriel goes back to his parents in Warsaw for Christmas, taking with him an oversized bar of chocolate, the kind you buy in duty-free shops. He leaves an unfinished cup of hot chocolate which is cold by the time I sip it. The cold hot chocolate tastes like chocolate, not like cocoa. This is cheating. This is not the 100% chocolate I'd bought thinking it wasn't chocolate chocolate, that it's not having sugar meant that it was not in breach of the diet.

Siciliana: I had a lover called Mario who liked Kinder Bueno.

I'll come out and say it: I miss Cadbury's Dairy Milk. Since I gave up God, I mean chocolate, I've been craving Cadbury's Dairy Milk, whole bars of it. On my own. One cube at a time. Or as a feast, like a symposium, hundreds of us gathered on sofas and chaises longues, on banquettes for banquets. And we melt cubes of Dairy Milk in our mouths before waxing lyrical (what a stupid phrase) about the genesis, the purpose and the nature of chocolate. Come, come, fellow symposiads, who shall begin? Pour the cocoa and let us proceed.

Bourrée: That same afternoon, the chocolate brownies are staring at me. I'm at EAT on the Southbank and they're saying eat me. I pick a nut bar instead and tell myself I'm not cheating. Is it chocolate? Is it cake? Is it a sweet? When I said no to chocolate, was I

saying no to chocolate or to the sugar in chocolate, and if no to sugar then why not the sugar in the apple or the sugar in the grape or the dried figs that are so fat with syrup. When I said no to bread I said no to wheat flour, to bagels and cakes and scones and crumpets. I was not saying no to bread as bread. Rye bread I eat. The heavy (delicious) thinly-sliced German gluten-free wheat-free rye bread, that I eat. When I said no to flour I said no to pasta. It was not bread I said no to but to white wheat flour. Bread was not the problem.

If I'm saying no to chocolate am I saying no to the word chocolate? Is 100% chocolate chocolate? In other words, is everything called chocolate chocolate? Gabriel says it is. He says 100% chocolate is chocolate. If it was chocolate made from spinach and calling itself chocolate, then that would be okay.

Now, mildly virtuous, drinking coffee and eating almonds by the river, the Savoy clock strikes 7pm. A man I know, whose name, if I said it in Hebrew, would have a similar sound to the Hebrew word for fire, walks past, though I'm not entirely sure it is him. He is slimmer and more handsome than the last time I saw him. I want to call his name – Ash! - but I don't.

I am, to be honest, still post coital.

Gavotte: Some mornings I go downstairs to the Cinnamon Village Café in my house clothes and bring back a cappuccino to sip with my toast while listening to Radio 4, then I return to bed for a short nap, John Humphreys' voice mumbling in the other room, David Cameron this David Cameron that, the taste of cocoa in my mouth as I fall back to sleep and dream of rum truffles coated in sprinkles, candy cigarettes that crumble in your mouth, red at the tips, Rowntree's TEX bars, Cadbury's Old Jamaica. I dream of Cadbury's Dairy Milk, back in South Africa, opening the wrapper and saying to myself: but you've weaned yourself off these. Still, line by line I make my way down the slab of chocolate. All rectangles are the page, arenas of possibility. By the time I get to the end an answer should reveal itself, a problem be solved. It's why I set out in the first place.

The canvas, the bed, the pool, the window, the frame, the desk, the page. Line by line the slab disappears until I have nothing left to say, the entire story – told.

The Company has refused our request for compensation. They will not be giving anything back.

Some addictions have no substitute. Some pleasures neither. Nothing can replace sex, nor chocolate. End of. Not art. Not God. Chocolate is more essential than God. We have loved chocolate more than we have ever loved God, been comforted by chocolate more than we've ever relied on God for whatever. God means nothing; chocolate everything. But what would it be like to live without the full-stop of chocolate? To stop relying on a gesture that slows you down. A life that flows, not sliced up into equal bites, each day mirroring the one before, each projecting itself onto the one to come. Those summers by the old tennis court watching movies screened onto the practice wall, us eating Smarties and jujubes, the night alive with insects and gunshots and the whirring 16mm. In the film version all you see is a mouth eating Cadbury's Dairy Milk so that it's kind of like shitting in reverse. The lips are painted purple, pantone 2685c. The script hasn't been written yet but it could be a story about the opposite of child-birth, whatever that is.

Passepie'd: We thought we'd die from longing.

By midnight we began to imagine the sugar in chunks of cheese, the sweet oils in roasted cashew nuts. We tasted nectar in the water. One of us fell asleep at the table and whispered what sounded like *chocolate* in his sleep, exhaling with *choc*, inhaling with *lit*. We muffled our laughter, the hysterical laughter that comes with recognition and forbidden desire. By morning we'd been transformed. The rains came and we were all mud, warm wet earth that would dry into chocolate to break off into bits that melt in your mouth. For we had been dust and to dust we have returned.

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