

Don't get me wrong, the sex is great

The candy store closed in 1983, or  
Was it 1981? Hard to  
Remember now.

The long curved shop window,  
With its enticing dark purple tint  
(People had come thousands of miles  
To admire that window and its contents)  
Shattered, spraying wicked glinting  
Shards across the square.

It seems we were lucky  
To have been sitting on  
The bench in front of the shop,  
Sharing a single perfect peppermint buttercream,  
When some flaw (still poorly understood) in the glass  
Sent a wave of stress  
Streaming up the material behind us  
Until the neat purple curve at the top  
Bulged more and more, and having no more to bulge,  
Showered  
Bright spears of glass out above us,  
Flattened us on the sidewalk below, where we  
Contemplated candy wrappers and our mortality.

The two of us lay on hard gritty cement  
Beneath the ruined window,  
Anxiously observing the panoply of  
Newsreel devastation in the square before us,  
And wondering how peppermint could taste like blood.

Just as we nerved ourselves to  
Brush aside the long bright shards and  
Stand to face what next,  
Cops arrived,  
Crouched behind innocent parked cars,  
Bull-horned instructions

NOT TO MOVE. As if we were running amok!  
In fact we'd just been pleased to  
Find that, with double-timed pulses and  
Mouths so dry our tongues glued to our palates -  
What happened to the candy? -  
Our pants were still, wow, both clean and dry.

## Commands

NOT TO TOUCH THE GLASS,  
Its edges so sharp, so inclined to  
Slice unrealized into soft skin.

Jesus Christ! We can't just  
Cower here forever (we think we  
Remember thinking). So we  
Rose up in an agony of caution,  
Each holding the other,  
Pulling him up until we stood in  
One another's arms.

"I'm scared shitless",  
I admitted, as he  
(With his greater height)  
Sheltered my head  
Against his chest.  
He, not being given to  
Words of distress,  
Wept openly and shivered  
In mortal fear and bravery.

We picked our way  
Across the street,  
Out from the square,  
Up to our rooms,  
Embraced one another and  
Whispered how  
Lucky we were.

And lying down, curled around  
One another in  
Sleeping lovers' first position,  
Suffered survivors'  
Guilty dreams.

The candy store is long gone now;  
A vegetarian deli stands there instead, the  
Disastrous window converted to  
A wall of simple redwood shingles.

But we don't eat at The Celery Stick, or  
Even walk around the place;

The papers say

NO TRACE OF DEATH GLASS:

SQUARE IS SAFE

But you can't really believe

What the papers say.

Today the headlines struck an  
Ominous note:

DEATH GLASS CHEMICAL

A SILENT KILLER

More flamboyant dailies proclaim:

PEOPLE WHO DIED

IN SQUARE WERE

LUCKY ONES

It seems

That special purple tint, the tone

That made a simple licorice stick in that window

So achingly attractive that

My lover and I once blew off our afternoon appointments

Just to commune together with one such stick

(Not to mention those peppermint buttercreams),

This color (they say) comes from

Cryosulfate compounds - or some such, the

Terms vary in ways we can't follow -

Which, once entered into your body, spread

Silently, over hours or days or months or decades,

Who knows how long,

Until they reach some critical point only

The compounds themselves appreciate and then they

Shrivel your guts until

You die, and pray hotly to die, with

Your insides knotted into a

Tight fist of tissue.

And they say: KILLER COMPOUND  
CAN SPREAD BY  
SHARING FOOD  
Still no one understands the  
Underlying mechanism.

Do we believe this? Could it  
Be true? Oh fucking Christ, please  
No, no,  
No.

It is true. People  
From the square now appear  
On television, carefully chosen  
In that brief public transitional period  
When they have just realized  
<IT IS HAPPENING  
INSIDE OF ME; I AM  
ONE DEAD SUCKER>  
But before they become  
Tastelessly  
In need of Sister  
Morphine.

What to do? Advice proceeds  
From every quarter. Loony  
Advice, advice to seize the  
Day, advice to move at least  
Ten miles from any of the  
"Cryosulfate victims", as these  
Unfortunates - us unfortunates? -  
Are now referred to. Advice  
To stop eating altogether;  
To stop eating from the same utensils with others;  
To stop eating at the same table with others;  
To stop eating in the same room with others,  
Or...maybe just with others  
Who were in the square, or  
Were close to it that day, or  
Are acquaintances of someone who was either of these,  
Someone who is, oh sweet Jesus I call on you again,  
(Fucking or not) a  
PEC (person "potentially exposed to  
cryosulfates").

So the two of us are PECs. We call ourselves  
"Peckers" and wave our  
Cocks at one another in greeting,  
Like obtuse  
Teenagers in a  
Locker room  
But we are, both of us,  
Scared shitless.

Why do I invoke you, Jesus?  
Innocent or carnal, you are not  
Anything I believe in, but still  
I call on you. Not for help; you are  
Hopeless, dead hopeless. Can you give me  
Advice, then? What do  
We do?

By the way,  
My lover wants to  
Know, too.

Step by step, we  
Abandon our rites,  
The practices that  
Have bound us together.

No longer do we  
Share a banana  
In a race from each end  
Till we kiss in the middle.

No longer does he  
Feed me ices  
From a spoon that I use  
To feed him some too.

We try an experiment,  
Plates and bowls in two parts,  
Divided in the middle,  
Just in case.

Just in case, what, Jesus? Tell  
Me, what are saving each other from?  
More important, can we do it?  
Are we hopelessly screwed (my apologies, Jesus,  
To fucking and all of its relatives; no  
Slight intended) by that  
One potentially astounding  
Peppermint buttercream  
That he had his teeth in and  
I had my teeth in and we could  
Smell one another's breath and  
(For that matter) sweat and that we were  
Just about to get this great  
Soul-filling hit from as we kissed  
And, incidentally, swallowed the  
Candy (I guess; where else could it have gone?)  
When the goddam weird  
Window blew up?

We really do  
Want to know.

The experiment  
Runs a bad course;  
Each of us  
Is gripped by  
The fear that he  
Just might be killing the other.  
We retreat at first  
To eating at opposite  
Ends of the table,  
Separate utensils (though  
It's against our way of life),  
Then to eating at  
Opposite ends of the  
Fucking room, I ask you,  
What is this world  
Coming to, when loving  
Couples can't  
Eat together?

Yes, we do salacious food-  
Talking in bed, but it just  
Isn't the same.

The trouble with you, Jesus,  
Is that you and your associates don't  
Have a lot to say to  
People like us.

And now they say  
PECs CAN GET CAT-SCANS  
TO DETECT CRYOSULFATES

Hey! No cats on our  
Pecs, thank you! Those claws hurt like,  
Oh shit (We're giving up on you,  
Christ; at least we understand shit, and just maybe  
It will listen), we can't talk about any of this  
Stuff any more: Whoever's listening,  
Hear our word-play and enjoy how  
Cute it is to have peckers like us talk about peppermint  
Buttercreams. I don't think we can ever again  
Eat together the way we  
Used to.

You see, Jesus, (and the rest of you), we're not like  
Most of the others.  
We set one place at table, one glass, one fork.  
Each feeds the other, each gives  
The other what he  
Wants and needs.  
Two mouths share an apple,  
A peppermint, a companionable slice of  
Bread.

How can they, how can you, dubious Christ,  
Take this away from me, but especially  
From him?

Our dreams now are fantasies of  
Recollection; we share memories of the candies,  
Dirty secrets, we  
Trade racy images of the store,  
While fearing the very thoughts might wrench my lover's gut,  
Or mine,  
Into a hard final walnut of pain.

We remember with delight:

The broad fruit-flavored sugar strips, in  
Cranberry, tangerine, kiwi, nectarine,  
Lingonberry, mango - (there was a specialized  
Candy-maker for each of these, and occasionally other,  
Flavors), which we would suck on  
Langorously for hours while their tastes  
Somehow grew more and more  
Intense...until they were suddenly gone,  
And we were desolated but satisfied;  
And the peppermint buttercreams,  
Which exploded on some timetable of their own  
Into a sharp hot coldness that flirted with  
Pain but filled our mouths, our heads, our  
Entire bodies, right down to the holes in our  
Inner beings that had long needed patching.

Christ, we really did like doing  
Those peppermint lovelies. I never even thought of  
Eating one alone by myself.

Is this fucking impasse we're in fair, Jesus? Do you  
Care about fairness?

Most of our friends are joined  
The other way -  
Your standard genital unions.  
They just don't understand.

Sometimes we walk with them in the evening  
And they say, "What's the  
Big deal? So you can't eat  
Together, you can still  
Eat alone." I'd like to see them  
Fucking alone.

(Behind our backs I think they say  
We fuck like rabbits -  
That's true enough I guess -  
And they disapprove.

Don't get me wrong, the sex  
Is great.  
But an apple just isn't the same  
If your lover's lips are not also  
On it.  
(Not to mention peppermint buttercreams.)

We can't complain, though.  
We have our health and  
We have each  
Other.