



SAN DIEGO DECAMERON PROJECT

Sweet and Sour

Marilyn Woods

I slouched on the couch in the small room originally intended for a housekeeper which is now my television-watching nest. David Muir droned on with depressing news about the coronavirus. Late afternoon sunshine spilled through the window as I struggled to delay the start of happy hour. The evenings are exceptionally long in isolation.

My stomach began to growl, its reminder rumble telling me that I might be hungry. What does it matter when I eat? My routine is totally screwed—late to rise, dinner mid-afternoon, shameful midnight snacks. My senses dull. I'm eating, not tasting. Limited opportunities to smell fragrances. I detest hearing people talk over one another in Zoom gatherings. No hugs. No touching. Weirdness everywhere.

As the highly polished news anchor handed off to the raven-haired correspondent with glistening white teeth on the scene at a nursing home in New Jersey, a figure flashed by my window. Startled, I rose and, with caution, went to the glass to peek outside.

A bandana-ed guy, my older son, dressed in well-worn jeans and a dark grey sweatshirt bent over the table on my terrace. This son, my CEO son, whose main focus these days as he works from home is putting out savage stock market fires for an edgy client list of investors, stood arranging a vignette on the table under the umbrella outside my dining room door. I watched him make one minor adjustment to the arrangement before turning. A few steps and he was at my window; we locked eyes.

He smiled and gave me a virtual hug; I formed a heart with my forefingers and thumb and placed it on my chest and smiled. I looked past him. On the table, three items arranged with the creative perfection of a Cézanne still-life painting. My son, my busy and important son, had left a gift. An expensive bottle of Rombauer Sauvignon Blanc plucked from a much higher shelf at the market than my go-to, chilled and ready for me to drink alone, a package of cashews, and a neon-bright colorful packet of gummies. Sour Patch Kids.

“You like the watermelon flavor, Mom?”

I nodded.

“Let me know if you change your mind. They've got lots of flavors.”

When he returned to his home next door through the weathered gate that separates our yards, I stepped out into the dusky evening. On my table, treats. Treats that brightened an otherwise depressing day of solitude. Sauvignon Blanc, salty nuts,

and “sour and sweet bite size candies for kids.”

Back inside, I opened the wine and poured, a good pour. With my stemless wine glass in hand, I returned to my spot on the couch and pulled up My List on Netflix. Weighed my options—*Self Made*, *Tiger King*, *Schitt’s Creek*. Maybe a feel-good movie. I cued up *As Good as it Gets* and open the sunny yellow packet of candy trimmed with splashes of fluorescent pink. “Sour Then Sweet” the colorful two-ounce packet with a wide-smiled green gummy man in the corner promised. And delivered. Small sugared hot pink wedges, each with a rim of green. Watermelon slices.

Soft and chewy candy.

Sweet and sour.

Shelter-in-place.

