

## The Thing about the Sugar Cube

*Bella Braxton, Agnes Scott College*

I went to church every Sunday morning with my family. Being inside the church building nauseated me. The organ sounded, and the teenaged children of the church members walked up the aisle and lit the candles. During the service, we were made to stand up, sing, and sit back down, stand up, sing, and sit back down; this cycle continued ad infinitum. While the preacher read from his bible, there were small noises of affirmation or praise from the assembly. His sermon was different every Sunday, but he spoke with the same voice. We concluded with a synchronized “Amen” and everyone shuffled out behind the old ladies. While I waited for my parents to finish socializing, I was urged to join the children’s choir. Then, we left.

It is worth mentioning that no one in my immediate family fully believed in God. We were there for morals, for community, and out of habit. I was under the impression that no one at our church entirely believed, and I wondered why we couldn’t all meet under less fabricated pretenses. Love your neighbor, Love your enemy— the illogical nature of God’s love scared me. The adults, who seemed to hold an infinite power over me, surrendering to a greater authority, scared me. They would nod their heads, saying, It doesn’t need to make sense; it’s true.

My father made the coffee. It sat in a pot on a fold-out table in the church’s lobby. There was also hot water for tea, creamer, packets of artificial sweeteners, and the sugar cubes. The sugar cubes were perfectly square and smooth-sided, despite being composed entirely of those messy, miniscule, sand-like grains. If a god created the sugar cane for us, I thought, he must be proud of the way we earthly beings have processed it into something so easily manageable, portable and convenient. The sugar cubes carried the faint odor of Halloween candy. Sinking to the base of a plastic coffee cup, the sugar cube lets go of its straight edges and its pure white color. Anyone watching the scene is left to wonder whether the sugar cube has been corrupted or the coffee given virtue.

I wanted a sugar cube, and there they were on the table, for anyone to take. I wanted to take in that clear honest prism and be made whole. I wanted to crush its geometry between my teeth, ruin it, interrogate its granular structure with my tongue and melt it down to a sticky sweetness in the heat of my mouth. The sugar cube was there, so close to me, and so faultless it seemed to be breathing a soft warm breath, and my mother told me no.

It’s too much sugar. That’s what she said.

A sugar cube is a teaspoon of sugar, four grams. I thought about the song in which they sing, a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down. We went out to lunch every Sunday after church. At lunch, I drank a soda. A soda, maybe twelve fluid ounces, about forty grams of sugar, about ten teaspoons. The contradiction did not occur to me until later, but this is what I realized then: the thing about the sugar cube is that it is too perfect. It is unadulterated and uncut by intervening substances. Too much sugar is not too much sugar when it is dissolved invisibly in carbonated water or stirred into black tea. Too much sugar is only a threat when it presents itself unveiled, and so we mask it ourselves to still our suspicions.

People talked about the devil. He sneaks up and hides just to give us the things we feel bad about wanting. I think our bad has dissolved in our good. I think the snakes sing like angels sometimes and tell the truth. Nobody knows which apples are meant for eating.