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Maribeth Roskam

Kid

Kathleen Keenan

She used to go for the

Winners in the Bubble Gum Machine, yellow and black striped dreams, like marbles shot into air; they were worth a dime from the store-owner, and she won, once, traded it for six thin pieces of salami that she ate on her walk home, the sausagey taste fermented in the bag by the sun, stayed on her breath all day long, that was part of why she bought it; it was something she could count on, something that never went away no matter how hard you tried to get rid of it — that was part of why she always respected garlic, the steadfastness of the thing, the commitment, if you ate it, you had to be prepared to live with it . . . It was the same sort of feeling when she had Cracker Jack, the ritual of searching for the cellophaned surprise scrunched down at the bottom with the candied nuts, stickied fingers peeling open little pocketed treasures of miniature tic-tac-toes, plastic men with punch in sockets connecting their arms, legs to themselves, tatoos you'd lick and they'd decorate your arms for days, stain your tongue . . . If you were to ask me, and no one ever did, why I loved those hours spent for days on the floor, cross-legged, playing with fish bowls, turtles complete with plastic houses, tiny tropical trees, and always, always, being allowed the-ease-to muddle on, puddle on, through childhood, doing as I pleased, pleased at the doing, the “newing,” the definition of the day disappearing into the magic, the dreaminess, the adventure, that was my life.