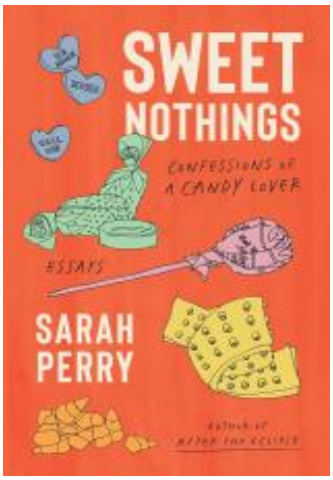
Sweet Nothings: Confessions of a Candy Lover

by Sarah Perry



About the Book

A fun and sophisticated illustrated collection of essays that catalogs the simple and not-so-simple pleasures of the eclectic world of candy from the award-winning author of AFTER THE ECLIPSE. With illustrations by Forsyth Harmon.

A taxonomy of sweetness, a rhapsody of artificial flavors, and a multi-faceted theory of pleasure, SWEET NOTHINGS is made up of 100 illustrated micro essays organized by candy color, from the red of Pop Rocks to the purple Jelly Bonbon in the Whitman?s Sampler. Each entry is a meditation on taste and texture, a memory unlocked. Everyone?s favorites --- and least favorites --- are carefully considered, including Snickers and Trader Joe?s Peanut Butter Cups, as well as the beloved Good n? Plenty and Werther?s Originals.

An expert guide and exquisite writer, Sarah Perry asks such pressing questions as: Twizzlers or Red Vines? Why are Mentos eaters so maniacally happy? And in THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE, how could Edmund sell out his siblings for, of all things, Turkish delight? She rejects the dreaded ?What is your favorite candy?? question and counters: Under what circumstances? The question itself is flawed --- favorite under what circumstances? In what weather? On the road, or at home? In what mood? For candy is inextricably tied to the seasons of our lives.

SWEET NOTHINGS moves associatively, touching on pop culture, art, culinary history, philosophy, body image and class-based food moralism. It challenges the very idea of ?junk? food and posits taking pleasure seriously as a means of survival.

Sarah Perry?s pure love of candy weaves together elegiac glimpses of her '90s childhood --- and the loss at its center --- with stories of love and desire. Surprisingly smart and frequently funny, SWEET NOTHINGS is a tart and sweet ode to finding small joys where you can. Yes, even in black licorice.

Discussion Guide

1. Sarah Perry writes, of Twizzlers, ?It?s good to have to work infinitesimally harder for the satisfaction, especially if you?re a person whose sense of pleasure is sharpened by effort and waiting, as I am?. How do they taste? Does it really matter?? Perry spends many of the essays describing the process of eating certain candies, and with Twizzlers she explores the relationship between effort, patience and finally pleasure --- the goal, for her, of candy-eating. Where else does this relationship come up in Perry?s stories? Where do you strike the balance between these sensations in your own life?

2. Aero bars make Perry think of Australia. Her friend, Liz, brings her Chinese candy from San Francisco. Are there foods you love that you can?t find where you live? How did you first encounter them? How do you obtain them now, if ever?

3. In "On Root Beer Barrels," Perry writes of the emotional and creative aftereffects of publishing a memoir about her mother?s death and how SWEET NOTHINGS developed in relation to that experience. But because childhood is so wrapped up in candy, her mother appears in this book as well. What sense of her mom do you get from these essays? How do you think it might differ from treatment in a full-length memoir? Does that spirit of finding joy in the wake of loss resonate for you? Is there a time in your life when you have done something similar?

4. Sense memory is a major factor of our experience eating in general. What role does it play in Perry?s essays? What are other experiences that evoke strong sense memories for you?

5. Sarah Perry uses the invention of Blow Pops, and chewing gum in general, to teach a little bit of U.S. history. What American values are reflected in the story of gum? What other surprising facts about food history or pop culture did you find in SWEET NOTHINGS?

6. Another personal thread that runs through the collection is the author?s polyamorous relationship with her partner, Preston. What does Perry have to say about love, pleasure and long-term relationships --- both with people and with candy?

7. Tan M&Ms are an indicator of time passing, when the author realizes that many young adults today have never seen them. Is there any food, item or trend that evokes a similar feeling when you remember it?s fallen out fashion or been made obsolete?

8. The essays in SWEET NOTHINGS are of varying lengths and tones. Which style of essay did you like best? Which did you relate to most? What did you think of the decision to group the candies by color?

Author Bio

Sarah Perry is the author of the memoir AFTER THE ECLIPSE, which was named a *New York Times* Book Review Editors? Choice, a *Poets & Writers* Notable Nonfiction Debut, and a Barnes and Noble Discover Great New Writers

pick. Her latest book is SWEET NOTHINGS: Confessions of a Candy Lover. Perry is the recipient of the 2018 Betty Berzon Emerging Writer Award and is a finalist for the 2024 MFK Fisher Distinguished Writing Award from the James Beard Foundation. She holds an M.F.A. in nonfiction from Columbia University and is currently teaching in the graduate program in Creative Writing at Colorado State University.

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