

## Edgar Molasses and His Quest to Find Something Beautiful

Perhaps the most humbling thing to ever happen to Edgar Molasses was starting a relationship with his roommate, whom he was not really certain he had gotten feelings for beyond sexual attraction until she called it off. They share a wall, and on the night that Edgar heard her bringing home another man not four nights later than their coital ceasefire had he realized that her moans of pleasure were indeed as loud as she suggested they were when they first did the dirty.

It was then, at one in the morning and midway through a rewatch of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and a glass of gin, that Edward Molasses decided that he would, no, he needed to see something beautiful.

It would kill him if he failed.

The next morning, he swung his legs over his bed and gripped the sheets. He narrowed his focus after a pill of advil went spelunking into his lungs and looked up the definition of “beautiful”. The definition did not satiate him, and Edgar instead looked at pornography for a bit, then landscapes that would inspire awe, and finally videos of dogs greeting their owners returning from war. Edgar realized in the shower that he did not know what beautiful was, but would know it when he sees it. Satisfied with this ambiguity, Edgar set off to work. He listened exclusively to hipster folk music on his commute.

Edgar worked at the Swasenk Candy Factory, located just off the corner of a derelict road wedged in between a nameless warehouse that either ships or receives defunct pinball machines and a squatter commune who insists they are an independent country that seceded from the nation. The Swasenk Candy Factory was a one trick pony in its delicacies; they made those sour

straws that leave an almost sticky and sandy residue on your fingers and lap after opening just one corner. Their main distribution went into the nameless subway bodegas in Midtown. Edgar once joked that you can find their product if it doesn't have any discernable name, because they seem to package it in hieroglyphics. No one thought the joke was funny, and at the end of the day Edgar found his own humor cringy.

Everyone who worked at the Swasenk Candy Factory was just as incompetent as they were passionate about their sole product. Even the new recruits, brought in from some swathe of the outskirts of Brooklyn or Queens, seemed to focus on Edgar and trail him like the tail of a comet, spewing new ideas as to how to reinvent the sugar straw wheel. Just the other day, someone suggested they make it into a wheel. Edgar said it would not be a straw then, and the worker literally wept in the bathroom out of overwhelmed confusion.

Edgar Molasses's official title was "Flavor Artist". Edgar believed this to be a stupid waste of the company's resources. His responsibility was naming new flavors to make them sound appetizing and, as the CEO once stated, "full of sexual zest". If Edgar was another man, he might have been proud of his flavor artistry. "Loony Lime" and "Blood Orange Sunset in Oregon" were among the most popular of the flavors. Edgar was not as excited about the success of his naming as everyone else was. His entire day consisted of drinking water through the sour straws and staring at the wall, tossing notecards of potential new flavors into the trash.

He sat in his chair and leaned back, looking at the gathered pile of wasted flavor names in the steel netted basket. The flavor "beautiful berry" caught his eye and once again his roommate entered his thoughts. Was she beautiful? Edgar refused to give that title to anyone. Still, the audacity of her to take his heart and knuckle it into submission was an art of emotional combat in and of itself. It started as a nice massage, a mutual massage, a naked massage, and turned into

solid and unapologetic pressure points. He wondered if that new man had seen her butthole or the birthmark that popped out when she spread her legs and reminded Edgar of an advent calendar. Edgar growled, consumed the sour straw, and wrote “Audacious Apple” on a notecard. He gathered his coat and bag and headed home.

He wondered what “beautiful” meant to him. He almost enjoyed that he could not put a finger on it, but did not enjoy that he could no longer put a finger on her. Historically, Edgar was usually the heart breaker. Now he knew how it felt. It sucked more than the Swasenk Sour Straws.

Still, what was beautiful? He went home, said hello to his other roommates, and dropped his belongings on his bed. He ordered Chinese food, listened to the Pixies, and wondered if Kim Deal was beautiful. Was she beautiful because she started that smoldering female drummer trope? Was she beautiful because she produced music? Edgar did not know.

Four hours later he found himself pacing around his room. He put on his boots, picked up the bottle of gin, put it down, and stormed out of his apartment. He walked to the park where a mural of a giant pigeon looked down at the patrons with evil, judgmental eyes. He walked to the benches and looked out the city, staring at its beautiful geometry of anonymous yellow squares across the bay. He fiddled with a coin that had found its way into his pocket, feeling the silver ridges with his thumbnail. Stars twinkled in the night sky, flashing like ballet dancers.

He heard the woman approach before she actually did. She walked through the cloud exhaled from his lungs. She sat next to him, her arms tucked in the pockets of her parka, her breath exhuming from the fake fur on the hood. Strands of pink hair blew in the winter wind.

“You’ve ought to see something beautiful,” she said, “you know, before you die.” Her voice sounded like a stream, tapping along rocks of a riverbed.

Edgar nodded. He kept his gaze straight. “I’m trying.”

The woman shrugged. “Yeah, I guess so.”

“You guess so?”

“You seem like the type of guy who keeps a notebook but never actually writes anything in it.”

“Do I really?” Edgar said.

“You really do.”

“Well, I don’t have a notebook, thank you very much.”

“You seem like the type of guy who still has a waterbed.”

Edgar leaned back on the bench. He was starting to get frustrated. “What is your problem?”

The woman withdrew her hand and handed Edgar a piece of cinnamon gum. She said, “Just trying to see something beautiful, that’s all.”

Edgar took it and popped it in his mouth. He thought of how stupid people look when they eat angrily. He felt like a commercial for cinnamon gum; so spiced it makes steam come out of your ears!

“Me too,” Edgar said, “What’s your name?”

“Does it matter?”

“No, I suppose not.”

The woman stood. She said, “Good night.”

“Where are you going?”

He turned to find her black parka waning farther along the cobblestones. She was farther than she should have been for someone who had just stood up. “Good night,” she said again.

And Edgar was alone now. He sat in silence until several lights in the buildings across the bay turned off. He watched his breath create clouds and listened to The Pixies on his way home. The cinnamon gum was almost everlasting, like a gobstopper. As he brushed his teeth he wondered if Willy Wonka was a pedophile and hoped that he wasn't. He also wondered if he was a cannibal and hoped that he was.

The following morning, Edgar made his bed because that was a new habit he was going to start, and stretched, because that was almost a new habit he was going to start. He had his eggs and hoped he would not see his roommate. She worked nights and he worked during the day, which made the rare moments of their passing an eruption of suppressed emotions because they were unplanned and unpredictable. He hoped that she would not wake up to use the bathroom, because that would mean they would be in the same room together for a fleeting moment and their energies would clash with the awkwardness of two negative batteries. After his breakfast, Edgar passed the man she had brought home the previous night. Edgar went into his room and screamed into a pillow.

Work at the Swasenck Candy Factory led to new developments in his flavor artistry. He found that he definitely did not like the name “Silly Strawberry” nor did he find “Poke-Me-Persimmon” to be particularly appealing. The workers were vocal about their enjoyment of

“Kill-You-Kumquat” but Edgar merely put that in as a test to see how delusional the factory really was. He had half a mind to see how far the suggestion could ride and pondered the implications as he ate the rest of his sour straw, now soggy from sitting in his water glass too long. It burned the inside of his mouth with an unexpected sizzle, and Edgar immediately recognized it as cinnamon. The taste came as quickly as it went, just like his sexual relationship with his roommate. This bothered Edgar because he did not like how his own problems weeded into his mindscape during work, and also because the Swasenk Candy Factory never even had a cinnamon flavor in the first place.

He went home, ordered Mexican food, and finished the second half of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. When the credits rolled he looked around his room and wondered if he should masturbate out of boredom. Instead, he put on his coat and went to the park.

The stars were more lonely tonight, but the yellow squares across the bay seemed just as motivated in their daily routines as the previous night. This time, Edgar did not hear the woman approach him. Although when he heard the muffled crinkling of a parka next to him he knew it was her. He thought about sliding over to give her room but his butt had already warmed the planks of his seat. They sat in silence for a while, communicating in empty speech bubbles and staring at the tired bay. Both of them refused to stare at one another.

She said, “Have you seen something beautiful yet?”

Edgar rolled his shoulders back. His brows suddenly felt sweaty underneath his hat. He said, “Not yet. Have you?”

“Yes,” the woman said. She offered a stick of gum and Edgar knew it was cinnamon even before he put it in his mouth.

A ferry skated across the bay. Edgar wondered if the workers felt awe from crossing underneath the Williamsburg Bridge, to see the magnificent architecture in its undercarriage. It was then that Edgar wondered if beauty was seeing intimate, rare moments right before euphoria. He wondered if psycho-active drugs were beautiful. In the corner of his eyes the pigeon mural glared at him from its brick wall enclave. That goddamn giant bird had the personality of a cockney accented snooker player who said things like *'ail haff anotha one and you've taken a rong tun, mate*. Edgar did not find the pigeon beautiful.

The woman popped a bubble. Edgar forgot she was there. Her gaze was kept straight and she made no notion to look at Edgar just as he made no notion to look at her. Edgar said, "And what was it?"

A wind swept across the park, carried in from the horns of taxis and the collective raucous shouts of Manhattanites. Her pink hair floated in the night as if pulled from strings. Somewhere a windchime danced.

She said, "I don't know."

"That's not an answer."

"No it is not."

"You're very difficult, you know that?" Edgar said. He leaned forward and then relaxed. He adjusted his hat and kept to their mutual distance from one another. "Why do you pick this bench anyway? There are others on the dock and the pier."

The woman stood up. "Good night."

“Good night,” Edgar said. When he heard the rustle of her coat he straightened his spine and turned toward where she was sitting, “Wait. Wait! I was rude, I’m sorry.”

“Good night,” the woman said again, her hands folded in her pockets. She was on the other side of Edgar, moving towards the glaring pigeon. How had she managed to walk to the other side of him without him noticing? Still, she was farther along the path than she should have been for someone who had just gotten on their feet. Edgar slumped into the bench and found the seat cold. He thought of his roommate and how her and this new man of hers had showered together the morning after. She had never showered with Edgar, and it was this intimacy of moment that made Edgar think of the ferry and its travels underneath the Williamsburg Bridge.

Experiencing those moments in life, so sparse they should be captured and released only on special occasions like a nice bottle of champagne. Was there really a difference between caressing a lover underneath a blanket of hot water and within a cloud of steam and looking at the brilliance of a bridge?

Edgar walked home and heard this new man laughing with his roommates, and suddenly he felt very self-conscious about how he fits into the ecology of their shared apartment, and if they even really liked him to begin with. He went into his room, paced around while taking off his clothes, and decided not to masturbate even though he wanted to, and then did anyway. His quest to find something beautiful was going awry, and he was jealous that this mysterious parka woman had found something he had not. He was worried that he had scared her off, afraid of the type of person he had become.

That Friday, Edgar joined his coworkers for the weekly congratulatory meeting, where the CEO personally goes around the room, gives a compliment to every employee, and gives

them a hug. Edgar was not sure why this needed to happen every week, or at all, for that matter. Half of the time, the compliments were as flaccid as Edgar expected himself to be in the near future. They were all “excellent outfit the other day, Janine, the purple really brought out morale” and “I love that you can sometimes whistle to a tune that we don’t know, Marc, and sometimes whistle to a tune that we do know. It really brings out morale” and then he gives out two fully embraced hugs like a tree growing around a foreign object.

He came to Edgar. He said, “I really love your flavors this week, Edgar. ‘Murder-Me-Mango’ was a hit with the marketing department. It really brought out morale. And a special thanks for your contribution to the creative team for the new flavor suggestion.”

“Pardon?”

“Cinnamon! We are going to try cinnamon!” The CEO drew Edgar close, pushed his sweaty armpits into the bridge of his nose. The factory workers clapped. Some even cried, as if ‘cinnamon’ was a new flavor to be harvested in some adventurous part of the world.

All Edgar could think was that he never suggested cinnamon to the company. It would be a horrible flavor for a sour straw anyway.

Edgar skipped the apartment’s weekly dinner. It was essentially cancelled. His roommate and this guy were out to a dinner that Edgar himself could not afford, and they would surely be locked in their room all night entangling themselves in one another, as Edgar and she were wont to do just a week prior. He played videogames before donning his own parka to take a walk to the park. He wondered if he would find the parka-clad woman again.

He passed the judgmental pigeon and toyed with a paperclip that managed to find his way into his pockets. He chewed on the inside of his cheeks and wondered exactly how, in all his

years of life, had he managed to find himself in this spot of the world at this exact moment in time. He supposed that was beautiful, in a narrative, coming of age sort of way. Was pain beautiful? Was loneliness beautiful? Edgar was frustrated to admit that in its own way, it was.

The woman appeared next to him. The damn woman seems to teleport.

“I’m sorry about last night,” Edgar said.

“It’s alright.”

“My name is Edgar,” he said.

Her coat rustled and Edgar knew that she had finally turned to face him. He could not see her face in the blocked view of his hood, but he felt her gaze on his right. It was more intense than the giant pigeon on his left.

She said, “That’s nice.”

Her voice was very, very close, almost as if she was speaking to him from all angles. That running river quality in her voice echoed throughout the starlit sky, bursting through the chilled winter air like a heat wave. The vibrations from her lungs dominated Edgar’s conception of space and time and he was not sure if it bothered him or not. He turned to look at her.

Her face was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. The woman had no features. No mouth, no nose, no eyes. Underneath her silky pink hair a perfect oval of purple and orange galaxies occupied in such a way that Edgar was sure her face was photoshopped away and a moving image of a far away cosmos replaced it. He was sure someone was fucking with him. She was galactic, interstellar in the most literal sense. Far away a planet moved along an asteroid belt, and suddenly Edgar felt so very small yet so incredibly significant. He wanted to be

everywhere and nowhere at once. A breeze swept across the park, swathing her pink hair across the asteroid belts that had come into view. The fur on her parka wiggled like tiny fingers.

The woman turned back to face the bay and Edgar released his breath after realizing that he was holding it. They looked at the Manhattan skyline in silence and Edgar wondered if all those people in all those yellow rectangles ever sought to find something beautiful like he did.

“You’re going to be alright, Edgar Molasses.”

Edgar nodded. “Thank you.”

The woman offered a stick of cinnamon gum. She said, “Do you ever wonder what people think about when they can’t sleep at night, when they stare at their ceilings and think, just *think*, of how silly their existence really is?”

“Does it matter?”

The woman leaned back. Her parka rustled. A windchime swayed in the distance. “No. No I suppose not.”

They sat in silence until the yellow rectangles across the bay turned off one at a time. Finally the woman stood up, and after she said goodnight, Edgar knew he was never going to see her again. He did not know who or what she was, but he was happy to know that beauty exists somewhere and that he had seen it.