

THE THIRTEENTH BATCH, 2015.

BY VARIOUS NEW FOOD TASTERS

Camel Balls Bubble Gum (Extra Sour)

Submitted by Mara Altman

My friend's Central Park potluck picnic was upon me. I didn't want to bring the ordinary massaged kale or tub of hummus; I wanted to delight and fright people. So I went to a novelty shop and found the perfect item: a box of Camel Balls Bubble Gum. The packaging depicts a desert-scape with a dromedary—a one-hump camel—mischievously looking over its shoulder in the direction of its rather conspicuous scrotum. Just beneath the gonads reads the phrase, LIQUID FILLED. To the left is a drawing of the product: a brown oval with a red gooey center. It looked like a Toucan miscarriage and/or something that Marina Abramovic might use as confetti.

Buying the balls was clearly a life-of-the-party move. This was going to be legendary. The potluck goers, lauding me for bringing something edgy yet functional, would all say, "Holy crap, Mara, how'd you find something so edgy yet functional?" There would be high-fives, laughter, and a hook to enable radical and taboo discourse like vasectomy reversals, canine neutering, and whether or not polyethylene was causing boobs to grow in adolescent boys.

I arrived one-hour into the festivities and pulled the box of Camel Balls from my purse, pointed to it and shouted "Camel Balls!"

The box was not torn excitedly from my hands. I waited. Waited. Nothing. No one even mentioned jock itch. I was wondering when everyone decided to get so darn mature.

Right then, I felt a pinch in my lower abdomen. Was that the sensation of my ovaries growing crow's feet? Whoops, silly me, I think that was just a hunger pang.

Another two hours passed and the Camel Balls remained untouched. People were busy opening up the 23rd tub of red-pepper-flavored hummus. So I brought the box to the center of the blanket and unwrapped it myself. Inside, each gumball was individually packaged. I discussed the finer points to anyone within earshot: "These balls are safe to chew." "These balls never get blue." "These get you pregnant with happy."

Yes, I've already fully investigated it, rewinds can't happen in real life.

One hour later, I left with all of the Camel Balls rolling around loosely at the bottom of my purse.

On the subway ride home, I had a lot of balls and nothing to lose. So I tore into one. The gumball was the size of a robin's egg and had the glossy sheen of something 100% inedible. So I popped it in my mouth. When my teeth sunk in to it, the flavor leached out: sweet and sour bursts that made my brows crinkle and my eyes squint. The intense

artificial sugary flavor was nostalgic. It tasted a bit like being invited to a game of spin the bottle, but only to watch. The flavor dissipated rapidly. *Ta-da*, all of a sudden it felt like I'd attempted to snack on Elmer's adhesive putty. I spit out the rubbery wad shortly thereafter. Overall, the gum was gross. So I put another one in my mouth. What else to do? This was clearly my karma: to wind up alone, sucking on camel balls.
