Childhood Juice: The Root of the Soul

Scardavino

It wasn't a new concoction. *Childhood Juice* came in tiny opaque glass bottles, like the homemade yogurts grandmothers once made. The label, printed in vintage typeface, warned: *"Consume at your own emotional risk. The past never expires."*

It sold out instantly. It was bought by those who had forgotten how to cry, or to recall the texture of a genuine laugh; by the ones who felt hollow. It was the newest—and cruelest—form of self-medication.

The ritual was mechanical: half a bottle, three seconds, and the exact flavor of one's own childhood would assault you. Not a clean, isolated memory, but the full sensory broth—the forgotten language, the nameless anxiety, the smell of fear when your parents fought in the kitchen.

My job was to be a *nostalgia taster*. To test samples, calibrate their emotional profile, and approve them for sale. Bottle *9213*, pale-blue label, was marketed as *"warm memories with slight notes of regret and a hopeful finish."*
It was a corporate lie.

I drank it. The truth split me open.

I felt the sweetness of a canned peach stolen on New Year's Eve. I heard my mother's voice begging me not to tell what I had seen in the bedroom. I smelled my father's fermented breath. I felt the hot metal of a park bench as I waited for darkness to hide me from everyone.

But then the light broke through: the cereal that never ran out, the dog that never tired of playing, the purest laugh, the Christmases when we still gathered in my grandparents' house. The entire universe of a former self, condensed into ninety milliliters of liquid truth.

I threw it away. No one should drink that. It was touching the naked root of the soul.

I demanded that batch *9213* be withdrawn.
"Should we remove it because it's too *real*?" asked the CEO, contempt in his tone.
"No," I said. "We're removing it because it's too *true*."

The blue batch became the best-selling product in history.

I resigned. On my last day, I opened the only bottle I had left.
It tasted like silence.
Then, for the first time, I cried—with an intensity that had no shape of guilt.
As if the flavor, returning, had absolved me of something I never knew I carried.

As if the purest extract of my childhood could still find me and speak from the bottom of that bottle:

"I'm still here. I remember you perfectly, even if you've forgotten yourself."



Scardavino is a writer born in Mexicali and currently based in Durango, Mexico. To date, his work has appeared in over 150 international literary journals and anthologies. He was the winner of the fifth Ventosa-Arrufat / Fundación Elena Poniatowska short story contest and has been selected for publication in Yale's *Variantes* and *Fiction on the Web*. His creative output is characterized by a high degree of formal flexibility, navigating a wide range of stylistic registers and narrative structures.