



V. A. Jeffrey

The Candy Shop

A short story

By V. A. Jeffrey

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In the historic district of the city in the very middle of Fiche Lie Vims Street sat a jewel box of a candy shop. It was made of red stone and wood with brilliantly coloured stained glass bay windows filled with images of children and candy canes. It had an oval-shaped, candy-apple red door. The proprietress of the shop was a lady named Miss Pretty-Pretty.

Miss Pretty-Pretty was not particularly tall or short. She had long, red hair crowded in glossy curls like voluminous waves of ribbon candy, pulled back with a golden comb. She had eyes the colour of toffee. Her complexion was bloodless and her smile sweeter than a serenade. Her teeth were perfectly white, hidden behind a small, round, red mouth. She wore dresses that displayed a tiny waist, a figure that was as svelte as a swan's neck except for the bustle in the back and most thought she was the epitome of what a great beauty should be. The fact that she worked in the midst of all and sundry that did absolutely nothing for a lady's waistline made her all the more attractive to me. As well as to quite a few others for she had a fair amount of suitors. Whence she came from no one new nor did I ever ascertain anything about her family and their whereabouts, if she had any. I suppose I should have troubled myself to do so before the incident but there it is. I did not. Miss Pretty-Pretty remained as enigmatic as the candies in her shop.

What I really mean to say is, after the incident there is something that still troubles my mind.

As to the shop's contents, what shall I say? Only that it boasted the most delicious treats to be found anywhere, all made by the proprietress herself. Early each morning one could smell perfumed waves of honey, molasses, caramels, butterscotch and chocolate. They permeated the air of Fiche Lie Vims Street like an invisible fog. And each morning there were to be found rows and rows of a great many jars and trays filled with confections. Chocolate truffles, of course, reigned supreme and came in many flavours: tobacco, mint, cherry, clover, rose, raisin, lavender, gooseberry, maple, blueberry, oregano and sage. There were stands filled with suckers as big as a child's head and some infused with more than just exotic flavours. There were licorice sticks, candy sticks of peppermint, spearmint, lemon, horehound, strawberry, grape, even candy sticks filled with bee pollen. There were peanut butter crisps, brittle brackle, marshmallows, gumdrops and jellybeans of flavours mundane to marvelous. One could not name them all. As the rows went on the candies became more exotic. These were housed in glass terrariums. Vanilla fingers, blinking gumball eyes, elaborate gingerbread and chocolate houses. Zebras made of licorice and white mint, even a chocolate tower of Big Ben and a ribbon candied *Roundabout.

On some days one would have thought that one had stepped into Barnum and Bailey's side-show circus, all the cast in sugary confection and bottled and packaged for one's pleasure. Fridays were those such days. On Fridays there were tours and the shop was filled with gabbling children from the neighborhood school, all wide eyed with wonder. Here was when the magic of the place could really be seen: lollipops as big as your face displaying great works of art that changed scenes of the Madonna to the Mona Lisa to Botticelli's Venus. Candy mosaics of Roman gods and goddesses displayed in red lacquered boxes, gumball planets that revolved around glowing, jawbreaker stars. There were airy cream puffs that floated in their terrariums like delicate clouds, candy dragonflies and butterflies that alighted on the hand or cheek, butterscotch fingers that played on the old, upright piano in the corner, maple Faberge-like eggs with orange or lemon cream filling. Such wonder and amazement. There were even candy foetuses!

"But Miss Pretty-Pretty," I once cried at my astonishment at seeing the odd little things for the first time, "are those baby-shaped candies or candied babies?" Miss Pretty-Pretty smiled.

"Wouldn't you like to know." She said in her sweet and lilting voice.

"I would, indeed."

As I had asked her many times in the past how she created her creations, this time was no different in my asking. Except this time she bade me come early the next morning and she would show me how she did it. I took her up on the offer not only to find out this secret but to court Miss Pretty-Pretty.

That day had come soon enough. I readied myself early that fine morning, wearing my best silk vest and coat and even my new top hat and made my way to my soon-to-be true love's gilded shop. Once again, the air was ripe with the scent of sugary delicacies. The usual clip and clatter of hooves and carriage wheels over the streets calmed my excitable nerves. The neighbors were about their daily business. There were the usual greetings.

"Hello, Mr. Radlens."

"How do you do, Mrs. Gopiss."

"And how are you today, Miss Gelgig?" I said with joy in my heart. I turned the corner, made my way down Fiche Lie Vims Street and walked up the steps, heart floating. The rising sun shined upon the stained glass windows, making their colours even more brilliantly illuminating than usual. The sign on the door indicated that the shop was closed but as I was expected, I let myself in. The front of the shop was dark but I could hear the sounds of cooking and preparation in the back. The chime on the front door rang merrily, alerting her to my arrival. She came out from the kitchen dressed in a bright white apron holding a long, marble rolling pin.

"There you are, Mr. Ragus. Always the sweet tooth. Help yourself."

"But I came to see you."

"Oh? Is that so?"

"My, yes! I . . . I came to see not only your secret but you too. There's . . . there's none like you in the whole world Miss Pretty-Pretty!" I stammered. Her eyes narrowed. It was an odd look and a light glinted there, now that I recall.

"Do come in then. This way, into the kitchen." She said. I followed her back to where the magic, I assumed, began. There were shelves upon shelves of ingredients, vats and pots of honey and syrups and fireplaces housing boiling cauldrons of liquids. Right there in front of us I saw a mass of rolled ribbons of twisted sugar sitting on a broad counter. She pushed her fingers into it. Soft and delicate flesh like mallow blushed with cherry dust.

"Oh Miss Pretty-Pretty, you are most beautiful. How do you do it? What is your secret ingredient?" I asked. She smiled and took up the rolling pin. Her skin glistened as she worked the candy ribbons. Glistened like newly made toffee, her curls quivering. She reached out a pale arm and pointed to a thing beside the biggest fireplace in the kitchen. Inside the fireplace was a cauldron big enough to swallow a man and it was full of boiling sugar. This *thing* she pointed to was a small table standing beside the fireplace and on that table, a very large jug of maple syrup.

"I plan to make a unique batch of maple candies today."

"Unique? How do you mean?"

"As unique as the fingers and fetuses in my shop. Would you mind?" She stared at me meaningfully.

"Why, I don't mind at all." I said, eager to do her bidding. I turned and went for the jug. It was far heavier than I had anticipated. Hearing footsteps come up behind me I turned, tripped and bumped into Miss Pretty-Pretty and we went toppling over, the rolling pin went crashing over my shoulder and fell to the floor. But not before one of her lovely, delicate hands landed on my face. I caught a taste of one of her fingers. She picked up the rolling pin and to my shock tried to strike me but I took it and threw it into the cauldron and kissed her hand instead. How sweet it was, such delicate ladyfingers.

In my infatuation and confusion about what happened I became stressed and when I am stressed you see, I eat. It's an uncontrollable problem that I do not care to discuss in public. In the subsequent feast I had utterly forgotten myself. It pains me to say that my infatuation with the beautiful proprietress and my sweet-tooth converged in a most unpleasant way. Needless to say, the object of my affection is no more, yet, sometimes I think that I have finally realized the secret to her success. I do not like to think on the matter too hard.

The shop is now gone. No one else knows what happened to it or to its proprietress and all sorts of fanciful stories float about these days. Some say she moved away to Paris or Venice. Some even say she melted away (I would prefer not to go round discussing that. I wonder where Mrs. Gopiss would get such an abominable idea.) Others say she married a wealthy businessman and her shop was merely a ruse to catch a husband. Ridiculous! My, how people talk.

As for myself, I have already explained as far as I feel that I can, without getting into a myriad of untold unpleasanties, about that unfortunate business and I shall say no more. As for the shop, it has now been turned into a bakery. The Bakers' Guild has taken it over and made it just as respectable as any other shop on the street. Yet, it isn't the same gilded lily of beauty, the jeweled box it once was. The stained glass windows are gone, the round red door too. Now it is like any other ordinary shop. No longer the pretty and peculiar thing it once was. I have a keepsake, however. The only thing truly left of the shop. And of her. Where others may keep locks of hair, rings or love letters, I have a marble rolling pin.

But there is something odd that remains. More a fading whisper of half memory, for this was quite some time ago, you know. You see, I cannot seem to remember whether it was called Miss Pretty-Pretty's Curious Candy Shop or Miss Pretty-Pretty's Shop of Candied Curiosities.

*A Somers Wheel, better known as the Ferris Wheel.

†There are several anagrams in the story.

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