# Nemesis and the Candy Man

O. Henry

“We sail at eight in the morning on the Celtic,” said Honoria, plucking a loose thread from her lace sleeve.

“I heard so,” said young Ives, dropping his hat, and muffing it as he tried to catch it, “and I came around to wish you a pleasant voyage.”

“Of course you heard it,” said Honoria, coldly sweet, “since we have had no opportunity of informing you ourselves.”

Ives looked at her pleadingly, but with little hope.

Outside in the street a high-pitched voice chanted, not unmusically, a commercial gamut of “Cand-de-ee-ee-s! Nice, fresh cand-ee-ee-ee-ees!d

“It’s our old candy man,” said Honoria, leaning out the window and beckoning. “I want some of his motto kisses. There’s nothing in the Broadway shops half so good.”

The candy man stopped his pushcart in front of the old Madison Avenue home. He had a holiday and festival air unusual to street peddlers. His tie was new and bright red, and a horseshoe pin, almost life-size, glittered speciously from its folds. His brown, thin face was crinkled into a semi-foolish smile. Striped cuffs with dog-head buttons covered the tan on his wrists.

“I do believe he’s going to get married,” said Honoria, pityingly. “I never saw him taken that way before. And to-day is the first time in months that he has cried his wares, I am sure.”

Ives threw a coin to the sidewalk. The candy man knows his customers. He filled a paper bag, climbed the old-fashioned stoop and banded it in. “I remember — ” said Ives.

“Wait,” said Honoria.

She took a small portfolio from the drawer of a writing desk and from the portfolio a slip of flimsy paper one-quarter of an inch by two inches in size.

“This,” said Honoria, inflexibly, “was wrapped about the first one we opened.”

“It was a year ago,” apologized Ives, as he held out his hand for it,

“As long as skies above are blue

To you, my love, I will be true.”

This he read from the slip of flimsy paper.

“We were to have sailed a fortnight ago,” said Honoria, gossipingly. “It has been such a warm summer. The town is quite deserted. There is nowhere to go. Yet I am told that one or two of the roof gardens are amusing. The, singing — and the dancing — on one or two seem to have met with approval.”

Ives did not wince. When you are in the ring you are not surprised when your adversary taps you on the ribs.

“I followed the candy man that time,” said Ives, irrelevantly, “and gave him five dollars at the corner of Broadway.”

He reached for the paper bag in Honoria’s lap, took out one of the square, wrapped confections and slowly unrolled it.

Sara Chillingworth’s father,” said Honoria, “has given her an automobile.”

“Read that,” said Ives, handing over the slip that had been wrapped around the square of candy.

“Life teaches us — how to live,

Love teaches us — to forgive.”

Honoria’s checks turned pink. “Honoria!” cried Ives, starting up from his chair.

“Miss Clinton,” corrected Honoria, rising like Venus from the head on the surf. “I warned you not to speak that name again.”’

“Honoria,” repeated Ives, “you must bear me. I know I do not deserve your forgiveness, but I must have it. There is a madness that possesses one sometimes for which his better nature is not responsible. I throw everything else but you to the winds. I strike off the chains that have bound me. I re-nounce the siren that lured me from you. Let the bought verse of that street peddler plead for me. It is you only whom I can love. Let your love forgive, and I swear to you that mine will be true ‘as long as skies above are blue.’

On the west side, between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, an alley cuts the block in the middle. It per-ishes in a little court in the centre of the block. The district is theatrical; the inhabitants, the bubbling froth of half a dozen nations. The atmosphere is Bohemian, the language polyglot, the locality precarious.

In the court at the rear of the alley lived the candy man. At seven o’clock be pushed his cart into the narrow entrance, rested it upon the irregular stone slats and sat upon one of the handles to cool himself. There was a great draught of cool wind through the alley.

There was a window above the spot where be al-ways stopped his pushcart. In the cool of the afternoon, Mlle. Adele, drawing card of the Aerial Roof Garden, sat at the window and took the air. Generally her ponderous mass of dark auburn hair was down, that the breeze might have the felicity of aid-ing Sidonie, the maid, in drying and airing it. About her shoulders — the point of her that the photographers always made the most of — was loosely draped a heliotrope scarf. Her arms to the elbow were bare — there were no sculptors there to rave over them — but even the stolid bricks in the walls of the alley should not have been so insensate as to disapprove. While she sat thus Fe1ice, another maid, anointed and bathed the small feet that twinkled and so charmed the nightly Aerial audiences.

Gradually Mademoiselle began to notice the candy man stopping to mop his brow and cool himself beneath her window. In the hands of her maids she was deprived for the time of her vocation — the charming and binding to her chariot of man. To lose time was displeasing to Mademoiselle. Here was the candy man - no fit game for her darts, truly — but of the sex upon which she had been born to make war.

After casting upon him looks of unseeing coldness for a dozen times, one afternoon she suddenly thawed and poured down upon him a smile that put to shame the sweets upon his cart.

“Candy man,” she said, cooingly, while Sidonie followed her impulsive dive, brushing the heavy auburn hair, “don’t you think I am beautiful?

The candy man laughed harshly, and looked up, with his thin jaw set, while he wiped his forehead with a red-and-blue handkerchief

“Yer’d make a dandy magazine cover,” he said, grudgingly. “Beautiful or not is for them that cares. It’s not my line. If yer lookin’ for bou-quets apply elsewhere between nine and twelve. I think we’ll have rain.”

Truly, fascinating a candy man is like killing rabbits in a deep snow; but the hunter’s blood is widely diffused. Mademoiselle tugged a great coil of hair from Sidonie’s bands and let it fall out the window.

“Candy man, have you a sweetheart anywhere with hair as long and soft as that? And with an arm so round? ” She flexed an arm like Galatea’s after the miracle across the window-sill.

The candy man cackled shrilly as he arranged a stock of butter-scotch that had tumbled down.

“Smoke up!” said he, vulgarly. “Nothin’ doin’ in the complimentary line. I’m too wise to be bam-boozled by a switch of hair and a newly massaged arm. Oh, I guess you’ll make good in the calcium, all right, with plenty of powder and paint on and the orchestra playing “Under the Old Apple Tree.” But don’t put on your hat and chase downstairs to fly to the Little Church Around the Corner with me. I’ve been up against peroxide and make-up boxes be-fore. Say, all joking aside — don’t you think we’ll have rain?”

“Candy man,” said Mademoiselle softly, with her lips curving and her chin dimpling, “don’t you think I’m pretty?”

The candy man grinned. “Savin’ money, ain’t yer? ” said be, “by bein’ yer own press agent. I smoke, but I haven’t seen yer mug on any of the five-cent cigar boxes. It’d take a new brand of woman to get me goin’, anyway. I know ‘em from sidecombs to shoelaces. Gimme a good day’s sales and steak-and-onions at seven and a pipe and an evenin’ paper back there in the court, and I’ll not trouble Lillian Russell herself to wink at me, if you please.”

Mademoiselle pouted.

“Candy man,” she said, softly and deeply, “yet you shall say that I am beautiful. All men say so and so shall you.”

The candy man laughed and pulled out his pipe.

“Well,” said be, “I must be goin’ in. There is a story in the evenin’ paper that I am readin’. Men are divin’ in the seas for a treasure, and pirates are watchin’ them from behind a reef. And there ain’t a woman on land or water or in the air. Good-evenin’.” And he trundled his pushcart down the alley and back to the musty court where he lived.

Incredibly to him who has not learned woman, Mademoiselle sat at the window each day and spread her nets for the ignominious game. Once she kept a grand cavalier waiting in her reception chamber for half an hour while she battered in vain the candy man’s tough philosophy. His rough laugh chafed her vanity to its core. Daily he sat on his cart in the breeze of the alley while her hair was being ministered to, and daily the shafts of her beauty rebounded from his dull bosom pointless and ineffectual. Unworthy pique brightened her eyes. Pride-hurt she glowed upon him in a way that would have sent her higher adorers into an egoistic paradise. The candy man’s hard eyes looked upon her with a half-con- cealed derision that urged her to the use of the sharp-est arrow in her beauty’s quiver.

One afternoon she leaned far over the sill, and she did not challenge and torment him as usual.

“Candy man,” said she, “stand up and look into my eyes.”

He stood up and looked into her eyes, with his harsh laugh like the sawing of wood. He took out his pipe, fumbled with it, and put it back into big pocket with a trembling band.

“That will do,” said Mademoiselle, with a slow smile. “I must go now to my masseuse. Good-evening.”

The next evening at seven the candy man came and rested his cart under the window. But was it the candy man? His clothes were a bright new check. His necktie was a flaming red, adorned by a glittering horseshoe pin, almost life-size. His shoes were polished; the tan of his cheeks had paled — his hands had been washed. The window was empty, and he waited under it with his nose upward, like a hound hoping for a bone.

Mademoiselle came, with Sidonie carrying her load of hair. She looked at the candy man and smiled a slow smile that faded away into ennui. Instantly she knew that the game was bagged; and so quickly she wearied of the chase. She began to talk to Sidonie.

“Been a fine day,” said the candy man, hollowly. “First time in a month I’ve felt first-class. Hit it up down old Madison, hollering out like I useter. Think it’ll rain to-morrow?”

Mademoiselle laid two round arms on the cushion on the window-sill, and a dimpled chin upon them.

“Candy man,” said she, softly, “do you not love me? “

The candy man stood up and leaned against the brick wall.

“Lady,” said be, chokingly, “I’ve got $800 saved up. Did I say you wasn’t beautiful? Take it every bit of it and buy a collar for your dog with it.”

A sound as of a hundred silvery bells tinkled in the room of Mademoiselle. The laughter filled the alley and trickled back into the court, as strange a thing to enter there as sunlight itself. Mademoiselle was amused. Sidonie, a wise echo, added a sepulchral but faithful contralto. The laughter of the two seemed at last to penetrate the candy man. He fumbled with his horseshoe pin. At length Mademoiselle, exhausted, turned her flushed, beautiful face to the win-dow.

“Candy man,” said she, “go away. When I laugh Sidonie pulls my hair. I can but laugh while you remain there.”

“Here is a note for Mademoiselle,” said Fe1ice, coming to the window in the room.

“There is no justice,” said the candy man, lifting the handle of his cart and moving away.

Three yards he moved, and stopped. Loud shriek after shriek came from the window of Mademoiselle. Quickly he ran back. He heard a body thumping upon the floor and a sound as though heels beat alter-nately upon it.

“What is it?” be called.

Sidonie’s severe head came into the window.

“Mademoiselle is overcome by bad news,” she said. “One whom she loved with all her soul has gone — you may have beard of him — he is Monsieur Ives. He sails across the ocean to-morrow. Oh, you men!”