

VERONIKA'S CHARLIE CONFECTION

Charlie wasn't all that impressed with the gift shop at the Veronika Vedma chocolate factory. It was pretty standard, despite how lavish and regal the rest of the facility was. There was candy for sale by the pound, t-shirts, bumper stickers, pins, and even plush toys, but nothing that she wanted to actually purchase.

It had been a year since the place had reopened; a year since Charlie and four other tour guests had explored the world-famous chocolate factory. Since then it had become a simple tourist attraction, opening its doors to anyone willing to fork over twenty dollars.

Charlie's trip back had been dull and uneventful. This new tour was far less involved than the original one. It was more crowded, moved much faster, and unlike her first experience, this one really made it feel as if she was being advertised to.

"I guess that's all there is to see... I could get a postcard, I guess..." She muttered under her breath, thumbing through a rack of merchandise.

It was then that she heard an announcement over a loud speaker. "Charlie Borowitz, Miss Vedma wants to speak with you. Please follow signs to R&D." The directions were delivered in a squeaky, female voice with a strong Polish accent.

Charlie felt perplexed. How did they even know she was at the factory again? "What the... Well, I guess they saw me walk in or something." It wasn't too much of a stretch, so Charlie did as she was told, and made her way through a nearby 'employees only' door.

Charlie quickly lost her sense of direction. The corridors of the factory were long and winding, and all the signage was written in Cyrillic.

“I better ask for directions...” She muttered, seeing a few of the factory’s strange workers walking along. They were only about three feet tall, with skin as yellow as a rubber duck.

“Hey, which way to uh, ‘R and D’?” Charlie asked.

The workers pointed towards a set of bright blue doors at the end of a hallway, with a neon-lit “Research and Development” sign.

“Ah, thanks...” Charlie muttered, a little annoyed. She was *just* about to turn that corner anyway.

With a huff, she walked inside, and the doors locked behind her.

Research and Development was a strange room, though not in the way one would expect for the factory. It was a somewhat cluttered mess of machinery, tools, kitchen equipment and gizmos. The only specific traits of note was its black arcade-esq carpeting, low hanging light fixtures, and a few wooden lanes jutting out from one of the walls of the room.

There were a couple dozen of the yellow workettes all sitting on toddler-sized swivel chairs, with Veronika Vedma towering above them in the center. It wasn’t just that the workers were small; the factory owner was a full two feet taller than Charlie.

“Ah, there you are.” Veronika called, ushering Charlie over to the group. “I was worried you had gotten lost.”

“Nearly... Uh, how are you? I guess it’s been a while...”

“A year, almost to the date! Yes...” Veronika smiled, thoughtfully.

“That call... This isn’t about the last tour, right?” Charlie muttered.

“Oh no no, not at all. I simply wanted to ask for a favor...” the imposing Russian said slyly, a glimmer in her eye “I am looking for a new item to sell in the factory gift shop: cake pops! Another *interesting* creation from you Americans, yes?”

Charlie nodded, but narrowed her gaze. There was really only one way this could go. “Uh... huh... And what do you need me to do?”

“Why, You’d be the main ingredient for the first batch! Just to test, not to sell or anything, so don’t worry about going missing~!”

Charlie took a step back, putting her hands up. “No way! I’m not getting involved in any of that junk, not now, not ever!” Charlie had seen *quite* enough transformations on her *first* tour of the factory.

“I had a feeling you might refuse... But if you take a look at the waiver you signed when you entered the factory today, you’d see you have already agreed to this.”

One of the workers pulled out a copy of the liability waiver that all the current guests had to sign to enter the factory. It read in fine print:

I waive my right to refuse participation in any group activities, experiments, contests, punishments, or events orchestrated by the chief executive officer of the Veronika Vedma Confectionary Company. I also waive my right to pursue legal action in the event of injury, emotional damage, loss of property, restraint, inconvenience and karma-induced harassment.

Charlie was stunned, gripping the form tightly and reading it twice just

to make sure. She immediately jumped to bargaining with Veronika.

“Miss Vedma, I... I can't do this today, honest! You can't *really* need *me* as an ingredient to bake a batch of cake pops!?”

Veronika leaned in, whispering into Charlie's ear. “Well, technically I don't. But the workettes... the poor things, they really could use the *enrichment*. It's been a while since anyone fell into the machinery...” She gestured to the eager little gals.

Charlie grimaced, but Veronika gave her a pat on the head. “Tell you what. If you can outrun them, you can leave.” Veronika smirked.

“Wha, but I- ”

“Three-two-one-go.” Veronika called, and snapped her fingers.

Charlie's heart jumped, before she scrambled into a sprint.

The workettes bounded towards Charlie; twenty pairs of little feet thumping against the carpeted floor, chasing her down. While the workers had numbers on their side, Charlie did have much longer legs.

“Get away from me!” She yelped, jumping over stray electrical cables and power tools strewn across the floor.

Her eyes scanned the room for some sort of exit door, spying one on the other end of the massive room by a break area. Charlie ran as fast as she could, snaking through various oversized kitchen implements and pallets of raw ingredients. She outran the swarm of pint-sized pests, and dashed through the break-area, arms out-stretched for the door.

Just then, a bathroom door swung open and a stray workette, drying her hands, stepped into the break area, turning just in time to see the legs of the lanky blonde girl slam into her. Charlie tripped and spun

around, yelping in shock, crashing and crumpling against the exit, and splatting like a cartoon character onto the metal door.

“A-AH!” She managed to squeak out, before flattening into a thick and rubbery pancake, about three feet wide and two inches deep. She slid down the surface of the door, flopping to the ground, face-up.

“Oough... what... What was *that*?” She muttered, staring right into a fluorescent light fixture hanging above her, though the light was quickly masked by the silhouettes of her two dozen pursuers. With a chorus of giggles and hushed whispers, they peeled their source of entertainment up off of the linoleum.

Charlie had zero say in what came next. Before she could even figure out what had happened to her, the little terrors were getting right to work. They brought Charlie over to an industrial sized stand-mixer, filling it with bags of flour, sugar, pounds of butter and eggs, and a whole bottle of vanilla extract. Charlie sniffed reflexively at the smell, just as they lifted her up and over the lip of the mixing bowl.

“W-wait! Miss Vedma! Help!” She cried out, only to hear a soft chuckle from the other side of the room.

Charlie met the surface of the cake mix with a wet SPLAT, and slowly sank into the gloopy mix. A mixing paddle was lowered in next, and in short time the cake-and-Charlie mixture was a homogenous batter. With a gentle tip of the mixing bowl, they poured the mixture into a washtub sized cake pan, letting it rest for a moment.

Charlie’s features appeared on the surface of the mix. Her face and a few curves hinting at her shoulders, chest, head, and hair.

“Mmph... This was supposed to be a *vacation*...” She sputtered. It sounded like she was speaking with a mouth full of pudding.

Without one ounce of sympathy, the playful workers slid the cake pan into a walk-in oven built into the wall, leaving Charlie to cook for a whole half of an hour. It was incredibly hot, but not painfully so at least.

Thirty minutes later there was a loud *ding*, and the workettes pulled the cake out of the oven. It smelled fantastic, and was a perfect golden-brown color. Charlie didn't look all that impressed.

“A-alright, are you satisfied now? Is this enough ‘enrichment’ for you guys?” The blonde dessert grumbled. She felt so strange, not at all like a person, she was completely *cake* now, and just as light, fluffy, and edible as one too.

The little devils just laughed at her in a playful, yet sweet way. Amongst the high-pitched Slavic rabble, she did hear out one of them say quite earnestly, “Hehe! She's funny~!”

Before Charlie could respond, she was dumped out of the cake pan, and lifted up by the tiny bakers.

“H-hey, what are you doing now!?” She could feel them tensing up and preparing to do something. Suddenly, she was thrown up into the air, a whole twenty feet! She nearly touched the ceiling.

“Yah-a-Aah!” She yelled, tumbling back towards to the ground. She could see a couple workettes holding something shiny bellow.

With a CLANG, they caught Charlie between two half-spheres, two metal mixing bowls about the size of half a basketball. The blonde cake had been quite compacted and squished, but not *quite* enough. The gaggle of girls carried the metallic sphere over to what appeared

to be a re-purposed bowling ball polishing machine. They set the sphere inside, and turned it on *high*.

The pastry orb was spun around rapidly, growing incredibly dizzy, so much dizzier than she could have imagined possible. It was as if she'd drank an entire bath tubs' worth of alcohol.

“W-woa-aoaoah~! T-turn it off! m-my brain feel no good!?” She stammered, though despite her condition they kept the machine running for a solid ten minutes.

Eventually they pulled the sphere out and cracked it open, revealing a perfectly smooth, featureless, dense, sugary ball of cake. The only trace of Charlie left were two very dizzy eyes and a half-opened mouth, practically drooling and unable to stay shut.

“Uh... You guys are... mean... I didn't even steal nothin' from... the gift shop...”

Charlie could just barely make out a large white lollipop stick coming towards her lips. The workettes shoved it in firmly. There was a huge glob of white chocolate on the end, sealing the stick to the roof of Charlies' mouth, and gluing her lips to it. She was still so disoriented that she hardly reacted, just mumbling a bit and groaning.

The rest of her treatment flew by without much fuss. She was dunked into a vat of colorful white chocolate and coated in oversized sprinkles and candy drizzle. And when it was all over, the workers grabbed her tight, and bowled her down the wooden lanes at the end of the room. There was a crash and a bit of commotion, but in brief a moment she emerged out of a return mechanism wrapped in a plastic film with a bow tied around the cake pop stick.

Charlie's head was still spinning when Veronika returned, walking over to inspect the workettes' craftsmanship.

“Wonderful work, everyone... I could absolutely see these flying off of the shelves... though, a smaller version of course. This one certainly cost *someone* an arm and a leg...”

Veronika teased, licking her lips at the sight of the dizzy cake pop. It was *almost* too cute to eat.

THE END

