

How Sweet It Is

by F.R. Southerland

“Do you ever notice how root beer flavored things taste more fruity than root beer-y? Like, I get why but it doesn’t taste right to me and that takes away from the enjoyment.” Andy shook her head, nose wrinkling slightly in disgust as she put the wax bottle candies back on the shelf. “Hard pass.”

Jamie shrugged and moved up beside her. “I like them.” He took the bag for himself, jostling the contents before dropping them into his partially filled basket. “More for me.”

“How damaged are your taste buds exactly?” she asked, a small teasing smirk at her lips.

“No less damaged than yours. Root beer does not taste like fruit.”

“Yeah. It does. I legit thought it was called fruit beer, when I was a kid.”

Jamie chuckled and stepped on down the aisle. “Just tastes like root beer to me. Sweet, but not fruity.” But speaking of fruity—he paused to grab a scoop and a plastic baggie from the self serve bins, balancing the basket in the crook of his elbow. The jelly beans were too tempting to pass up.

“Well, everyone’s different. We can’t all agree on the flavor profile of root beer.” Andy finally conceded. As Jamie scooped large amounts of jelly beans into the bag, she looked over the selections of gummies, deciding if she needed to replenish her stash. Probably so. She grabbed a bag as well. “At least I can say you have good taste otherwise.” She nodded toward the bin. They might not share the same ideas about root beer things, but they both loved fruity candies. When he finished with the scoop, Andy took it to get her own.

Their love of candy wasn’t the only thing they shared, she mused as she filled her own bag with colorful sugary beans. He was Neoma’s ex too and Dylan’s current—at least, according to the bragging demon. It made Andy wonder how many degrees of separation was between them. She knew Aaron better than she did Jamie, but then again she and Aaron had shared a few drinks at Ludlow’s and she only ever seemed to run into Jamie on the streets or in local candy stores. Nice guy, she thought, but a bit hard to read sometimes, like his brother.

Heat followed Jamie as he moved away, stepping down an aisle to pick out something else. All he knew about Andy he’d learned from Neoma—with a few tidbits from Aaron making mention of her. She was a strong witch; he could feel the power emanating from her. He glanced back when she made her way behind him, side-stepping him with a smile and a murmur of apology.

He wasn’t a fan of small talk, so when Andy began to speak again, Jamie stayed quiet. “I like the atmosphere of candy stores. I visited one in Canada, a few years back. Near Niagara Falls. The best damn fudge I’ve ever had,” she said, laughing a bit when she stopped in front of a display of gourmet fudge. “Nothing like any of these. Shame. I don’t much feel like traveling back there just for fudge.”

“Mmhhh.” His response was noncommittal and earned him an amused look from Andy.

“Coming on a bit strong, huh?”

“What?” He blinked at her, then shook his head a bit when he understood. “No, no. I’m just not big on talking.”

“Ah. Then I’ll shut up then.”

“No, no. It’s fine. Talk if you want. I just don’t always have something to say.” Jamie made his way

to the register, unloading the candy from the basket and setting it aside. The cashier started to ring up as Andy moved into line behind him.

She should've remembered that, from what Neoma had told her. She'd mentioned it, she was sure. Along with the fact that Jamie had been in a bad place when she'd first met him. Something to do with grief and visions. Something else they appeared to have in common. It made Andy wonder, but she wouldn't breach the topic. It was probably a confidence shared between them that Andy shouldn't have been privy to anyway. Curiosity aside, Andy wouldn't betray what Neoma had told her.

Instead, she smiled a little. "That works out. I'm a talker and need a good listener."

Jamie let out a short laugh. "Yeah, well, you'd get that from me."

There was a pause—a long one, where Jamie conversed with the cashier and paid for his candy. He picked up his bag and moved out of Andy's way. She immediately put her basket on the counter and faced him before he could turn to leave.

"You know, we keep running into each other around town. We should hang out some time. Minimal talking required. A drink or something at Ludlow's."

A smile started to tug at his lips. "Yeah, a drink or something. Okay."

Andy's smile was much wider. "Awesome."

A drink or something wasn't much, but it was a start.