

Sweet Things Come in Small Packages

I waggle my eyebrows and pull the small, vacuum-sealed package out of the front pocket of my homespun shirt then wave it in front of her, just barely out of her reach. With a mischievous smile playing across my lips, I prod her in a low baritone voice that I know she finds hard to resist, "Look what I found."

She makes a grab for it and misses, so I quickly tear off one side of the packet. I tease her further by opening the bag and taking a deep whiff. "Ahhhh..."

I offer her the open end of the package and she takes a tentative sniff, instantly recognizing the aroma; she inhales deeply and slowly, then a big, excited grin lights up her face. She squeals in delight, "Oh my gawd! It's Chocolate!"

Her eyes widen in anticipation as I break the chocolate bar in two and offer one of the chunks to her. She quickly breaks off a piece from her portion, pops it into her mouth and rolls it around on her tongue. "It's been two years..." she giggles. "Two years!"

Caught up in her excitement, I break off a piece from my portion and pop it into my mouth. We watch each other savor the flavor as it dissolves in our mouths.

For the first time since our paths crossed five weeks ago, we laugh together--just the two of us--enjoying this small reminder of our past lives, of something each of us took for granted before the apocalypse, and what each of us has lost since it began.

She takes her remaining piece of chocolate and surprises me by popping it into my mouth. I take my last piece and pop it into hers. Again, we watch each other's expressions, savoring the flavor as these final pieces melt in our mouths. In a voice, soft and sexy, she purrs, "Oh, gawd, that was sooooo good."

She runs the tip of her chocolate-stained tongue across her lower lip. In that same soft and sexy voice, she adds, "That was awesome."

She looks at me with those fascinating, milk chocolate-colored eyes. And despite the pain and horror that she's been through, I notice that her eyes still manage to somehow crinkle and laugh and dance with me. It's been said that the eyes are the windows to one's soul, and it's her eyes that call to me now. How long did we stand there with our eyes locked, our bodies unmoving? Was it a few seconds, a few minutes, a few hours, or a lifetime? Does it really matter when either one or both of us could be dead tomorrow?

I start to bend down to nuzzle her neck, but the spell is broken when a voice behind us asks, "What was awesome?"

She lets out a squeal of surprise as we both instinctively pivot towards the intruder, our weapons up and at the ready. "Aw, sheesh, Dylan!" I hiss through clenched teeth. "That wasn't funny! You scared the shit out of me!"

The commander stands there with a hint of laughter in his blue eyes, but a stern look plastered across his chiseled face. He caught us red-handed and he wasn't going to let us forget it. Faster than I thought he was capable, he whips the empty wrapper out of my hand. "Chocolate? You two were eating chocolate?"

Annoyed with his unwanted interference, I snatch the wrapper back from him. "Yeah. We were," I respond, perhaps with a bit too much defiance in my voice.

Dylan looks at her, then turns to me. "You disregarded our protocol," he reminds me in a terse voice. "You're supposed to be on watch."

I was watching her. That should count for something.

He cocks an eyebrow. "And don't tell me that you were watching her."

Damn. He knows me too well. "I wasn't--"

"Hey! Stop talking about me like I'm not here!" She frowns and works her toe at a clot of dirt in the grass. "It was just a piece of chocolate."

Charlene Premru Kaye