

Rosette **BONBONS
AND TRUFFLES**

Sweetheart Rose



**TERI
WILSON**

Bonbons and Truffles
by Teri Wilson

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Dedication

For Angel, my own Bonbon

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Valentine's Day descended on Melody Sweet like an uninvited guest. The holiday wasn't so much a "day" as an Ironman endurance event. Like most other chocolatiers, she depended on this romantic occasion for a full quarter of her annual business revenue.

The insanity started around the first of February. Then, every day for a fortnight, Melody helped husbands, boyfriends and lovers select the perfect chocolate concoctions for their sweethearts. Some chose fancy, frilly heart-shaped boxes filled with gooey squares. Others, long stemmed chocolate roses. And at the end of every day, Melody Sweet trudged upstairs to the quiet apartment above her chocolate shop.

The mad lover's rush in preparation of St. Valentine's Day finally became too much for Melody to handle on her own. This year, for the first time since opening her shop in the sleepy, old-fashioned town of Paulsbo, Washington, she was forced to seek part-time help. As she positioned the "Help Wanted" sign in her window among the chocolate-covered cherries resting on lacy doilies, Melody noticed the bespectacled bookseller across the lane straightening his own window display.

In his hands he held an ornate hardback edition of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Melody's gaze lingered. *How romantic*. Just as her fingers began to tingle and offer a tiny wave, she was distracted by the tinkling of the bell on the shop door.

A pretty teenager bounced into the store. "Hi! I'm Charlotte." She bobbed from one foot to the other. "Are you

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putting up that sign or taking it down? I could use a part-time job. Is the position still available?" She crossed her fingers and bit her bottom lip.

Melody had to blink because she imagined a red superhero cape wrapped around the young girl's shoulders, so desperate was she for rescue from the frenzied shoppers. "Yes, certainly. Come on in and put on an apron. You're hired!"

"Oh, goody, goody!" Charlotte clapped her hands together and giggled.

Charlotte spent a lot of her time giggling. Melody was grateful for the help and, honestly, didn't know what she would have done without her. But, between the smitten lovebirds shopping for their sweethearts and the perky, blonde teenager batting her eyes at customers, Melody felt more and more like a third wheel.

Male customers lingered for what seemed like an eternity. "I just can't seem to decide? Which one would you want if you were my girlfriend?" they would say.

Charlotte would respond with her signature giggle, toss her hair and smile. "You're such a sweetheart. I'm sure she'll be happy with whatever you choose."

At least she was good for business, no matter how nauseating her sales techniques were.

Finally, The Day itself arrived, dawn bringing forth a secret smile to Melody's lips. As she dipped strawberries in melted milk chocolate and wrapped last-minute gifts in colored cellophane, she floated around the chocolate shop in a dreamy haze. So distracted were her harried customers, they didn't even notice the subtle change.

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Charlotte, however, narrowed her eyes. "You seem unusually happy today, Melody. Do you have big Valentine plans for tonight?"

"Oh, nothing special." Melody smiled, thinking about the very special appointment she'd made for that evening.

"Are you sure? You look like the cat who swallowed the canary." Charlotte winked.

A warmhearted feeling came over Melody. After years of working in the chocolate shop alone, she enjoyed the camaraderie she shared with the teenager. "Well, if you must know..."

However, before Melody could share her secret, she was distracted by the enchanting bookseller sweeping the front steps of his shop, the broom moving back and forth with a gentle rhythm across her heart. For a moment, she imagined him holding her instead of the broom and the two of them waltzing up and down the sidewalk.

She tried to recover. "I-I'm going to-to..."

Charlotte's eyes flew open wide, and she jumped up and down. "Melody! Do you have a date?"

"What? Oh, no. It's nothing like that." She squeaked out the words, her throat suddenly dry. Her gaze darted back and forth between Charlotte and the bookseller.

The teenager followed Melody's glances across the lane and gasped. "Oh my gosh! Is that your date? Do you have Valentine plans with him? He is adorable."

"No, no, no! I don't even know his name. I don't have a date tonight. I promise." Melody's face burned with heat. She didn't want to draw attention to her unrequited crush on the

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bookseller, but now she sounded pathetic. She fumbled with the cocoa hearts in her fingers and dropped several to the ground.

"He's so cute! Isn't he handsome?" Charlotte waved to the bookseller and twirled her hair between her fingers.

Melody was mortified. She cringed and waited for him to wave back, another male entranced with Charlotte's youthful beauty.

Instead, he just pushed his glasses up further on his nose and retreated into his bookstore.

"Hmm. That was weird." Charlotte knitted her brows.

"He probably didn't see you." Melody tried her best to sound sympathetic, but was relieved to see one male on the planet not hypnotized by Charlotte's blue eyes.

She shrugged her shoulders. "Yep, I'm sure you're right."

"Charlotte, I know you have big plans for tonight. You can jot down your hours on your timesheet and head home. I can finish up here by myself."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, really. It's no problem. You go ahead and get ready for your Valentine date."

"Okay, I'll see you tomorrow." Charlotte folded her apron and bounced out the door.

Yes, she would be back tomorrow. Melody had decided to keep her on at the shop after Valentine's Day to see if she could continue working her magic on the customers. Sales had never been so great.

Once she performed her final cupid's chore, she locked up her shop and headed down the cobblestone path towards her

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date with destiny. Giddy with excitement, Melody brazenly waved at the dashing bookseller across the lane and to Franklin, who owned the dry cleaner next door. Tomorrow I will no longer walk down this lane alone.

When she reached her destination, Melody knocked, anticipation tickling her heart.

The door swung open. "Melody! We're so glad you're here."

Little did they know, but Diane and Kip Thompson stood on the threshold between Melody's old life and her new one.

"Come on in," Diane urged. They walked through a mahogany living room decorated with countless photographs in gleaming silver frames. A stunning English Cocker Spaniel struck an impressive show pose in many of the photos. Melody also noticed a large picture of the couple smiling next to the elaborate chocolate fountain she had created with painstaking effort for their wedding six months ago.

"The little darlings are right in here." Kip beamed like a proud father.

Before she entered the den, Melody heard cheerful yipping. Then, six squirming bodies all headed her direction. She dropped to the floor and took them all in. The puppies crawled over her legs, licked her fingers and tugged on her shoelaces.

"Oh, they're delightful. I'm just thrilled to have one."

"Yours isn't even in here. We wanted it to be a special surprise." Kip signaled to Diane who darted out of the room.

Melody stood with Kip's assistance amid the wriggling mass of puppies.

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Diane returned in a flash, carrying a puppy that took Melody's breath away. While all the other pups were black and white, this one was a deep cocoa color with white swirls in its coat. A perfect chocolate soufflé dusted with confectioner's sugar.

"Oh, my," Melody whispered as she took the puppy from Diane. "My little Bonbon."

"Of course, you can see why we picked this one for you," Kip said with a knowing smile. "You're the perfect pair! Miss Sweet and her chocolate puppy."

A lump lodged in Melody's throat. "I just don't know what to say. Thank you so much."

"Oh, please. We'll always be indebted for the wonderful chocolate fountain and that fabulous wedding cake. It's the least we could do." Diane hugged Melody and Bonbon good-bye.

Filled to the brim with joy, Melody danced and twirled down the cobblestone path leading up to the chocolate shop with Bonbon prancing tiny circles around her feet. Melody halted, tumbling the puppy in a heap beside her.

Her eyes grew wide as she stared at a huge bouquet of daisies wrapped with a pink satin ribbon lying on the steps of her shop. "Where in the world did these come from?" Melody muttered.

Bonbon cocked her head to one side at the sound of her voice.

After looking over her shoulder for mysterious daisy-carrying strangers lurking in the shadows, Melody scooped up the flowers and walked up the wooden steps to her

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apartment. While Melody found a vase for the daisies, Bonbon busied herself exploring her new home. With lingering anticipation, Melody unwrapped the fragrant bundle to find a small pink envelope buried among the green foliage.

"Great! Now we'll have an answer to the daisy mystery." Even though this was Melody's first night as a pet owner, she found talking to her new puppy very natural.

Bonbon watched Melody open the tiny envelope with big puppy eyes. Melody let out a squeal and Bonbon scampered away. The small card was written in precise, careful handwriting.

Chocolate Girl,

I hope you have a happy sweetheart's day.

You looked radiant this afternoon.

Shy Boy

Melody's trance was interrupted by the unmistakable sound of crunching. A telltale petal poked out of Bonbon's lips. "You naughty puppy!"

Melody plucked what was left of the daisy from Bonbon's mouth and thought again about the mysterious gift. Who was Shy Boy? Did she have a secret admirer? She felt a thrill of excitement run up and down her spine. This was all too bizarre. When she woke up this morning, she had a quiet, little life. Now, she had a secret admirer and a flower-eating puppy. The subtle smile Melody had worn all day spread into a huge grin that danced on her lips even throughout the night as she slept.

* * * *

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When Charlotte got her first glimpse of Bonbon, she bounced with more animation. "This is the most adorable puppy I've ever seen! So, this must be your big Valentine secret?"

"That's right. Her name is Bonbon."

"How perfect! She's so precious. How are we going to get any work done today? All I want to do is cuddle with her."

Melody gave the puppy a chew toy and tucked her into a fuzzy dog bed in the corner. "We've got plenty to do. Why don't you start taking down the Valentine decorations while I work on a new window display."

Creating the new display helped occupy Melody's mind and served as a distraction from the mysterious flower giver. Perhaps inspired by her new puppy, Melody decided on a Noah's Ark theme for the new window décor.

"What's the white chocolate for, Melody?" Charlotte asked.

"Polar bears. And then maybe we can make some white chocolate zebras with dark chocolate stripes."

"They look great. I'll take the tray of chocolate horses over to the counter and get them out of your way." Charlotte placed the cocoa ponies on the counter and then paused to point at the pretty vase of daisies. "Where did these flowers come from?"

The arm off a milk chocolate monkey snapped. Melody sighed in frustration and pitched the wayward limb in the trashcan. "I'm not sure, actually. I found them on my porch last night with a note."

"What did the note say?"

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"Just something about sweetheart's day and signed Shy Boy."

Charlotte bounced on her tiptoes and clapped her hands. "That's so exciting! You have a secret admirer."

Melody's stomach clenched. She had a horrible thought looking at Charlotte with her petite figure and flirty blue eyes. What if the daisies were meant for Charlotte?

"Uh, Charlotte, can you go to the storage room and get me another horse mold? This one is cracked." Longing for a minute alone to regain her composure, Melody hid the pristine mold underneath a dishtowel.

She continued pouring, carving and fashioning the display items, constructing an impressive ark of chocolate bark for the grand finale. She lined up the candy animals two-by-two and stepped back to admire her work.

"You need a flood." Charlotte held up a bottle of Godiva chocolate liqueur.

"Let's add the flood in the morning. We can close up shop for the day."

* * * *

Melody and Bonbon strolled down the cobblestone path for an evening walk. Bonbon bobbed at the end of her leash while Melody munched on a leftover cocoa giraffe leg. She was deep in thought, filled with doubt about the secret admirer's actual intentions.

A car slowed beside her. Melody turned and saw Hugh Biggs, one of her customers, behind the wheel of an expensive convertible.

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"Hey, Miss Chocolate."

Melody's heart flipped over in her chest. Miss Chocolate? That was close to Chocolate Girl.

Melody's face flushed, and she struggled to keep her voice steady. "Good evening, Hugh."

"That's a nice looking puppy you have there. What kind is it?"

"Thank you. She's an English Cocker Spaniel."

"What's that? A mix between a Cocker and what?"

"It's not a mix. It's a breed—English Cocker Spaniel. They're not very common here in America." Melody smiled. Kudos to herself for researching this very topic.

"Whatever you say, but I think someone ripped you off. Cockers aren't supposed to have long snouts like that. Anyway, how about going out with me for a drink?"

Melody fumed. How dare he insult her dog and her intelligence in the same breath, and then have the nerve to ask her out. Bonbon growled a soft hum at her side.

"Hugh, didn't you just buy a heart-shaped box of caramels from me last week for your girlfriend?"

He stammered, and then recovered. "Well, we're not really exclusive."

"I don't think so. Thanks anyway." Melody had to make a special effort not to be rude since Hugh was a regular customer. She watched Hugh drive off and hoped with desperation he was not her secret admirer. If the world were made of chocolate, Hugh would be a hollow bunny. A fancy façade, but no real substance.

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Melody fantasized that if she was the real Chocolate Girl, her secret admirer would be a rich truffle. The outside appearance of a truffle didn't matter. In fact, they were usually downright plain. But, at its creamy ganache core, a truffle was an intense, decadent surprise.

As Melody and Bonbon approached the comfy cobblestone lane, the puppy strained at her leash towards home pulling on Melody's arm.

"Bonbon! Take it easy."

Melody spotted another mysterious package on her front steps, the contents of which explained Bonbon's sudden burst of enthusiasm. Nestled in the box was an impressive assortment of basted dog biscuits. The note resting on top of the treats was written in the same neat handwriting.

Chocolate Girl,
Congratulations on your new
precious puppy.
She's adorable.

Shy Boy

Melody's heart danced a rumba in her chest. *I am Chocolate Girl!*

Melody peered up and down the lane. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but someone had been watching her.

Bonbon climbed into the box of biscuits.

"Good evening, Melody." Franklin said as he locked up for the night.

"Hi, Franklin. Did you happen to see anyone leave this package by my door or notice anyone strange in the neighborhood?"

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"No, I'm afraid not. Just the usual suspects. Cute dog. What kind is it?"

"Thanks. She's an English Cocker Spaniel." Melody dragged Bonbon out of the treat box.

"Is that like a mix between a Cocker and a Springer or something?"

Here we go again. "No. It's a breed. The Cockers you see here are American Cocker Spaniels. Bonbon is an English Cocker Spaniel. They're quite common in Europe, England..."

"Yeah, sure. Next, you're going to tell me she barks with a British accent." Franklin doubled over with laughter from his own lame joke and walked away.

* * * *

After a fitful night's sleep, Melody awoke the next morning with her hand resting on Bonbon's soft puppy fuzz. She glanced at the clock and panicked. It was almost time to open up the shop, and she still needed to take Bonbon for a morning walk. When she turned on the lights for the shop, she found Charlotte waiting by the door.

"Good morning, Charlotte. I overslept. Would you mind the shop while I take Bonbon for a little walk around the block?"

"Sure. No problem, Melody."

The cobblestone lane was full of its morning flurry of activity. Next door, Franklin was already busy helping customers. The debonair bookseller across the street was changing his window display with shiny, new books with animals on the covers. In the center sat a large Noah's ark picture book.

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Melody smiled. The bookstore often coordinated its window display to match hers. She thought it gave the neighborhood a nice friendly touch.

She stood and watched the bookseller step among the books behind the glass windowpane. His movements were tender and full of care.

"Bonbon, Charlotte was right. He is handsome and charming." The puppy cocked her head in response and the two sighed at the exact same time. Melody patted the dog on the head and squinted at the glossy storybooks. Perhaps they could give her more ideas for her own Noah's ark.

"Come on, Bonbon. Let's go." She decided to get a closer look.

Melody approached the window display and froze. She could have sworn there was something different about the man in the bookstore. Surely she must be imagining things.

She blinked and took another look. There ... in the bookseller's lapel buttonhole rested an incriminating daisy. Her stomach did a somersault and Melody knew it had to be him. She and Bonbon entered the shop.

The bookseller looked up in shock and a deep blush crawled up his neck to his face. "Um ... good morning." He had a delightful British accent.

Before Melody could say a word, Bonbon launched herself into the man's arms. He recovered from the near toppling and was rewarded with wet kisses.

"What a sweetheart! She's beautiful. It's fantastic to see a proper Cocker so far from home."

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Melody sighed with admiration. "Oh, wow ... Yes, I do love her."

The two stood eyeing one another. Melody stuck out her hand. "My name is Melody ... Melody Sweet."

With a brush of gentleman charm, he took Melody's hand and held it in his. "And, I'm Edward ... Edward Truffle."

Melody's heart fluttered. "It's nice to meet you, Edward Truffle."

The couple stood, hand in hand, captivated while Bonbon chomped on the daisy in Edward's buttonhole.

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