

Candy Candy

The final story

Volume 1

Prologue

“Dear Miss Pony...”

Writing her name on the paper is enough to constrict my heart. I put my pen down.

Then I let out a deep sigh. A sigh of relief and gratitude.

Without even thinking about it, I fold my hands together tight.

It's been several weeks since I could do only that: pray.

Pray with all my heart and write to her every day.

“Pony's Home” is so far away. It's so painful to me that an ocean separates me from her! I would have loved to be at her bedside, to look after her, to comfort her...

I have only written her name but, without going any further, I read Sister Lane's letter again.

According to that, Miss Pony has pulled through. She has passed the most difficult phase and is now recovering: Sister Lane's fine and smiling handwriting is dancing with joy.

“ ‘Really, Sister Lane? You don't say that to reassure me?’ you will surely tell me, my dear Candy, so I also enclose a few words from Miss Pony. You will certainly receive a longer letter as soon as she is better.”

And indeed, a short letter from Miss Pony is attached to Sister Lane's letter. How many times have I read that letter, over and over? Every time, tears come to my eyes.

“Candy, I'm sorry I've made you worry.

I'm better now, rest assured.

I still have so much to do for my children.

And then I've decided not to die before seeing you again.

God will do me this favor.

Paulina Giddings

I trace her signature with my fingertips.

No doubt this large and round handwriting reflects the character of the generous Miss Pony. Perhaps it still lacks her usual vivacity, but I can almost hear her voice which has the flavor of freshly made pancakes.

“Miss Paulina...”

Pronouncing her name makes me smile unintentionally.

I had only discovered Miss Pony’s real name much later, when I was an adult.

“I was called Pony since I was a little girl because I looked a lot like a small pony owned by the neighboring farm. Well, as you see, my appearance hasn’t changed much since then,” Miss Pony explained to me, laughing.

And whenever we talked about names and nicknames, Sister Lane would repeat every time the same touching confession:

“Lane Roach...I had to endure such mockery during my childhood. Roach...It was so disgusting that I tried as much as possible to pronounce it differently. Come to think of it, I was very ungrateful to my ancestors who bequeathed me my family name; such a precious asset!”

I can still see Sister Lane looking up at the sky with a serious expression and repenting of her selfishness.

The warm atmosphere around the fireplace of Pony’s Home...The crackling of the firewood...Miss Pony was comfortably sitting in an old armchair. I was standing in front of the fireplace and Sister Lane handed me a cup of steaming hot chocolate.

“Be careful, Candy, it’s still hot.”

However, I had already plunged my lips into the liquid without waiting. The result: I made a grimace while burning myself...Today I recall with nostalgia the sweet memory of that winter scene.

Sister Lane burst out laughing.

“Well, Candy, you’ll never change!”

The delicious marshmallows were roasting by the fireplace...

Outside, snow was falling.

Silence reigned in the adjoining wing of the building where the children were resting. But I knew very well that they were not sleeping. They were impatiently waiting for snow to accumulate.

They would get up noiselessly when we would be deeply asleep, in order to make a huge snowman and laugh at our surprise the next morning.

I should know: I had done that before them! With Annie and Tom, we used to wait until late at night for snow to accumulate, staying awake

with great difficulty, and pinching each other if necessary.

I am grateful to my parents for abandoning me in front of Pony's Home.

This is where my real home is, the one I can return to whenever I want.

I get up from my chair and walk slowly towards the sideboard.

An oil painting of about fifty centimeters wide in a handmade frame is placed in such a way that it can be visible from anywhere in the room.

He was the one who chose where to hang it, as it was *he* who gave me that painting which he found in a flea market in London, a few years ago.

What a wonderful gift.

With just a glance, *he* had spotted among a whole bunch of antiques that old oil painting representing the orphanage.

A panoramic view of Pony's Home from the top of the hill with the same name.

I stand in front of the painting and look at it.

A signature is barely visible in a corner of that painting.

Slim.

The day I discovered that signature for the first time, my heart almost stopped.

Slim!

Slim was a mulatto. His grey eyes gave him a sad look. He was always crying at nightfall.

"Twilight makes him cry...Is it because the sunset reminds him of the circumstances in which he was abandoned, even though he was still just a baby?" Sister Lane wondered.

It was she who had given him that name: Slim.

He was not very sociable, except with me. I had managed to earn his affection. In the morning he woke me up by tapping me with a finger and pouted with a sad expression. It must be said that Slim wetted his bed very often. I changed his sheets before anyone noticed, even though Miss Pony and Sister Lane were never fooled.

Slim was thin and frail. He was drawing all the time.

"I would have liked him to study painting."

Miss Pony's words suddenly come back to my mind. She had spoken with a sigh, as if she was thinking out loud.

When I returned to Pony's Home, Slim was no longer there.

I was told he had been adopted by a blacksmith in a distant city. Miss Pony and Sister Lane deeply regretted that Slim must now live in an environment that had nothing to do with painting.

So you continued to paint, Slim!

The painting I have now in front of me has delicacy and preciseness that belong only to him. He is the only one capable of reviving Pony's

Home of that time.

Today Pony's Home is larger than it used to be.

How did a painting of Slim, who had been adopted by a blacksmith, end up in London, so far away from America...and in a flea market of all places?

That boy's life seems to have had as many twists and turns as my own life.

“Candy, such a coincidence is a miracle! A miracle that happened to cheer you up. Take care of Slim's painting. We are all there, in that canvas. In a way, Candy, we are always close to you, to encourage you. Slim and the other children are there too; take a good look at them!

Candy, keep that painting with you always.”

When I told her about the discovery of Slim's painting, Miss Pony had written those strong and comforting words to me. However, I had initially intended to offer it to them since they had been worried about Slim for a long time.

No doubt they had sensed it was me who needed that painting the most.

That place I could return to whenever I wanted...

Even though it is actually so far away, Pony's Home is still here, in my living room.

To tell the truth, I can't help thinking that Slim painted this picture for me.

How beautiful the month of May is!

When Pony's Hill is covered with buttercups and white clover.

Pony's Home, seen from the hill, is surrounded by trees of dazzling green. Soft grass grows, and flowers of many colors, lupines and black-eyed Susans, decorate the surroundings of the house.

It seems as if the old wooden door will open squeaking, and Sister Lane is about to rush out chasing Tom who has done some mischief again.

We are there too.

Annie and me.

The day my life changed suddenly.

That day when Annie was adopted by the Brightons...

Time is quickly turning backwards.

I close my eyes...