

Nothing Stays the Same

by Angie



It was early autumn in New York and the den in the brownstone was quiet, unusually so. That was because Catherine and Vincent were thoughtfully sucking on horehound candies, something Catherine had decided to try again, having not had them since she was a child-and disliking them then. Vincent was trying them for the first time.

Catherine sighed. "All I taste is sweet. They could be anything. I don't taste the horehound at all. They should be a bit unusual ... a little tart ... or something. They had a unique flavour."

It had taken her a long time to locate a candy shop that even knew what they were. These were all she could find. She shook her head in disappointment.

"Perhaps you have forgotten what they were like," Vincent suggested mildly. Sweet they certainly were. He would have said they were plain boiled candy, the kind that William made occasionally, when he had a lot of sugar. These even had sugar sprinkled on them, he supposed so they wouldn't stick together.

"They look nothing like what I remember either," Catherine retorted, annoyed at the world for denying her this simple thing, something she wanted to share with her love. "The ones I remember were half this size, darkish honey-coloured with white stripes across them. And they were either wrapped in cellophane or pillow-shaped. Not like this at all. These look like cough lozenges."

Vincent almost choked at that, but managed to prevent himself from swallowing the candy whole. He decided not to mention that his research on horehound had revealed that it had indeed been a remedy for coughs and respiratory ailments. He cleared his throat as he tried to control the laughter that tried to rise through his sternum. Catherine didn't notice, fortunately - or pretended not to.

"They do say you can never go home again, Catherine. Perhaps it refers to treats too - that everything changes, not just places you once loved."

"That's something you'll never have to worry about, my love," Catherine commented, gazing at him, just a little enviously. She had never considered his life from this perspective, but it was true, just the same. He had never left home, for obvious reasons.

"I wonder what Devin thought on his return," she mused.

"He told me very little had changed, except of course the people - there were more, and the ones he knew were much older, some had died. Rock does not change. To him it was still a 'hole in the ground'. At least he decided to return for visits once in a while."

"That's true," Catherine mused, looking at the bag of candy. "People make a place home. They rarely stay where they grew up and if they did, they'd be different in many ways to anyone who returned. Truly, there is no going back."

They were silent for a few moments, sucking on their candies.

"There are a lot of candies here, Catherine," Vincent commented finally, as he crunched the last remnant and swallowed it. He looked pointedly at the large paper bag from which Catherine had filled a smaller plastic bag for her windmill gift bag. "I do not think I will be able to eat them all."

"I shouldn't either," she agreed. "I'll take them to the tunnels for the children. Mary can give them out as treats."

She sighed again and her jaw clenched in a way he knew well. "I'm not giving up, you know. Somewhere there must be real horehound candy as I remember it. Some company made them then, so the recipe exists, if only in some dusty filing cabinet. I need to know someone else remembers them, even if they aren't sold. It's as if a piece of my childhood has been excised - as if it was all a ... daydream, or something."

"I wish you success," was all Vincent could think of to say.

Devin had boasted he had tried some horehound candy from Father's desk, and hated it, but asking him would be pointless. Who bothered to look for candy they didn't like? If New York didn't have them, who would? Perhaps they were no more, disappeared from all but memory. He suspected there were many such treats which had done so over the decades.

Catherine turned to him, her face sad. "I'm sorry I couldn't give you what I promised, Vincent."

Vincent gathered her in his arms. "Catherine, you have given me so much more, that the loss of a candy is nothing, so long as I have you."

Catherine sighed again, in contentment this time. Vincent was right, of course. He had given her just as much. What was a candy? But she was still determined to solve the mystery. Later.

END

***Marrubium vulgare* (white horehound or common horehound)** is a flowering plant in the mint family (Lamiaceae). Horehound has been mentioned in conjunction with medicinal use dating at least back to the 1st century BC, where it appeared as a remedy for respiratory ailments. Horehound candy drops are bittersweet hard candies, like cough drops, that are made with sugar and an extract of *M. vulgare*. They are dark-colored, dissolve in the mouth, and have a flavor that has been compared to menthol and root beer. (Wikipedia)