CHARLIE AND THE CHRISTMAS FACTORY



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In the early hours of Christmas morning, a girl arrived at the gates of Mr Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.

A purple girl.

She had a purple forehead and a purple nose and purple cheeks and a purple neck. When she removed her woolly gloves it was plain to see that there was not an inch of her that wasn't purple – every finger was purple, even her nails. She gripped the icy gate so tightly that the deep dark purple on her knuckles drained to violet.

At her feet sat a large wriggling sack.



Inside the factory, while everyone else was still asleep, Charlie Bucket was busy preparing for **CHRISTMAS DAY.**

He had transformed the grand Chocolate Room overnight – its edible grass was now covered in sparkling white chocolate that CRUNCHED underfoot like crisp snow. Candy baubles hung from yule-log trees made of scrumptious chocolate sponge and the whippiest whipped

cream. Gingerbread men sprouted from flowers painted in red, green and gold along pathways paved with warm mince pies. A cinnamon mist filled the air, making the whole place smell **DELICIOUSLY** festive, while on the bubbling chocolate river, Mr Wonka's pink boiled-sweet of a boat was decorated with twinkling edible tinsel.

Charlie eyed the tinsel hungrily – especially the bits trailing in the melted chocolate. But he had promised himself he wouldn't eat a thing.

Not until the children arrived.

Because this year, Christmas Day would include three very special guests: the lucky winners of three foil tickets striped in red, green and gold. For the first time, Charlie Bucket was opening up his factory for a day, just like Mr Wonka had done years before. It was all anyone in the world was talking about.

Charlie had been so busy since Mr Wonka retired that he hadn't had time to invite anyone into the factory. Everyone knew special things were happening inside, of course, from the loud **CLANGS** and **BANGS** and

strange-coloured smoke rising from the chimneys. Some new products had been filtering into the shops, like the best-selling, tongue-tingling, impossibly gloopy, Charlie's Chocolate Toothpaste. It was exactly what it sounds like – toothpaste made of chocolate. It cleaned teeth better than actual toothpaste, so no adult could object. Children up and down the country had smiles so bright, teachers were resorting to wearing sunglasses, and dentists were going out of business. So, with such fun new additions to the Wonka chocolate line, it stood to reason that what was *inside* the factory, the things yet to be seen or tasted, were going to be very special indeed. Charlie was determined to live up to the rumours and to give the three winners an unforgettable day, just like the one he'd had. All he hoped was that they'd be nice children, not children like Veruca or Mike or Vi–

'VIOLET!' came a shout, and Mr Willy Wonka clattered into the room, wearing a dressing gown made of purple velvet – just like his signature coat. Although he was older now, his eyes were as bright and as sparkly as ever.

'Violet Beauregarde is at the gates!' He turned to an Oompa-Loompa and said, 'Still *very* purple.'

(Years ago, when Mr Wonka's finest gum creation was in its development stage, Violet had chewed it and turned purple. Permanently, it now seemed.)

The Oompa-Loompa studiously whipped out a clipboard and made a note under the NOVELTY GUM LONG-TERM SIDE EFFECTS section.

Charlie stood frozen to the spot, unable to believe what he was hearing. It was – he checked his watch – six o'clock in the morning! What could Violet Beauregarde want? He hadn't seen her in years, not since they'd both found **GOLDEN TICKETS** in their chocolate bars and been among the first children to see inside Mr Wonka's factory. He charged down the hall, tightening his dressing-gown belt as he went. Mr Wonka galloped behind him, his gold-topped cane rapidly striking the ground as he tried to keep up.

'What do you think she wants, dear boy?' he asked Charlie.

'I have no idea,' Charlie said as he unbolted the door and stepped out into the cold. Through the flurry of snow he could see Violet standing there, in all her purple glory – and at once, every second of his first trip to the factory came flooding back. A huge grin spread across his face.

'Well, hurry up and open up! It's an emergency!' Violet shouted.

Charlie glanced up at a lit window at the very top of the factory and gave a nod. There was a click and a little whirr, and the gate swung open.

As soon as it did, he could see the squirming sack at Violet's feet.

'It's a long story, Charlie,' she said, her words squished between the gum she was chewing. She began dragging the sack towards him, struggling to move it more than an inch at a time.

'What's in –' Charlie began.

'LET ME WALK AT LEAST!' came a shout from inside the sack.

Violet stopped and sighed, and then began to untie the strings.

'Violet . . .' Charlie said slowly. 'Who's in there?'

Mr Wonka stood behind the door, shielded from view. He rarely stepped outside the factory – it was a long-standing habit. 'What's happening?' he whispered. but Charlie couldn't hear him through the whistle of the icy wind.

'So, I wanted to prove he was real,' Violet said as she struggled with the strings.

Charlie's stomach lurched. It couldn't be. She couldn't have . . .

'I chewed *a lot* of Wonka gum over the last year,' Violet explained. 'Enough to line a chimney.'

'Oh no,' Charlie whimpered.

'Charlie, my boy, what is she saying?' Mr Wonka hissed, but Charlie still didn't hear him.

'Got jaw cramp and everything from all the chewing,' Violet went on. 'Lined every inch of the flue, then he came down and –'

'Oh no!' Charlie cried.

'Exactly. But it gets worse,' Violet said.

'Worse?!' Charlie said.

'Is this about the purpling?' Mr Wonka pressed.

'I didn't realize I'd caught him, for a while,' she said. 'And he was there for hours before I checked . . . Um, how many hours was it?' She looked down at the wriggling sack, just as a bearded old man popped out.

'Four hours!' he cried indignantly, rising to his feet.

'Four whole hours,' Violet confirmed with a nod. 'Enough to throw the whole present-delivery timings out of whack. Plus, in those four hours, the reindeer flew off with the sleigh and all the presents.'

Charlie stood in shocked silence, feeling as SMALL as a speck at the feet of the great man himself. He was exactly how Charlie had imagined him: PUFFED up with pure magic, with his shiny red suit, glossy white beard and big black boots shedding soot on to the snow. The chewing gum stuck all over him and the furious face were, however, a bit of a surprise.

'Anyway, to cut a long story short,' Violet continued, 'he said Christmas could be saved if I brought him to his old friend – the only person in the world who might be able to help.'

'Kringle, you old chimney sweep!' came a delighted shout, and Charlie turned to see Mr Wonka standing in the doorway, gesturing for Santa to come inside.

Violet leaned into Charlie and whispered, 'Apparently they go way back.'

