



# The Sugarplum Shoppe

by

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Strange for a grown man to believe in a fairytale bakery, but for as long as I could remember, Miss Cookie's Sugarplum Shoppe had been a part of Christmas. My little town in the Colorado Mountains was a friendly place filled with loving, giving individuals.

And then there was Miss Cookie.

She kept to herself eleven months of the year—her smile and sweet laughter nowhere to be found. But every December 1, at one minute after midnight, a brilliant light appeared on Main Street where darkness prevailed inside a deserted store, and the Sugarplum Shoppe would come alive. Inside we'd see plump Miss Cookie bustling about her goodies.

The contents of the Sugarplum Shoppe drew me inside each year from the time I was four until now, and I've long since retired as a postman. My dear Greta and I used to visit Miss Cookie and chat about all things cheery and warm and Christmasy.

The lure of the bakery came with what took place inside, not just the cookies baked in every shape of the holiday, or how each morsel melted in my mouth, or the merriest carols that tickled my ears, or how Miss Cookie greeted me by name.

I felt the magic. So did everyone else.

Miss Cookie never changed. She always wore a red dress and red shoes and a white lace apron. Her cheeks were rosy as though she'd studied a picture of Mrs. Claus before dotting blush. My grandmother remembered her, and her grandparents before them.

This year, I planned to ask Miss Cookie why we saw her only at Christmas, and why the Sugarplum Shoppe looked dark and dreary until December first. I also wanted to know her age. After all, I wasn't getting any younger, and my children and grandchildren had asked me the same questions.

Part of me feared she might not return if I posed those questions, but I hoped not.

On December 1st, I stepped inside the Shoppe, brushed snow off my jacket, and breathed in the aroma of sugar cookies and warm chocolate. "Away in a Manger" played softly.

Miss Cookie smiled. "Good morning, Jonathan. So glad to see you. I heard you have a new great-granddaughter, and your youngest grandson will graduate from college this year."

“Yes, ma’am. You have it all right.” Deep in the pit of my chubby belly, a twirling and whirling made me laugh. Just like I’d ridden straight down on a roller-coaster. Happened every year.

“I’m not getting any younger, Miss Cookie,” I said.

“Age doesn’t mean a thing. Look at me.” She handed me a star-shaped sugar cookie with white frosting and blue sprinkles. My favorite. “But you wanted to ask me something, especially since Greta passed ten months ago.”

Miss Cookie read minds too. “Thanks. I do miss her.” I sighed. “Excuse me, but how old are you?”

She tapped her chin. “I think four hundred-seventy-three, maybe four. Hard to keep track after the first three hundred.”

My eyes widened. “That’s impossible.”

“No, Jonathan. I have a purpose. You deliver mail in all kinds of weather, and I bring Christmas cheer to everyone who enters my shop.”

“Is it magic?”

“Oh, no. It’s a miracle.”

“What’s the difference?”

“Magic can be good or bad. Miracles are always from God.”

“So you’re an angel?”

She giggled like a little girl. “Do you want me to be?”

I pondered her answer. “Tell me how it all began.”

“I was nearing sixty, and I’d never married. I opened the Sugarplum Shoppe on December 1 so I could be a mother to everyone in our town, but the oddest thing happened. On January 1st, the bakery disappeared. All that remained was a dark, empty shop. I was grief-stricken. The next year I awakened at one minute after midnight on December 1 and had this urging to see about my shop. There it was! Ready for me to begin baking.”

“But you didn’t age.”

She leaned across the counter. “It’s part of the miracle. Since that time, it seems like I never get older or feel ill. But sometimes people try to shut me down. They think I’m a witch and discourage others to visit. Those are the ones I’m extra kind to. Personally deliver Christmas goodies to them, even those who throw away my gift.”

“I’ve heard the gossip. But I never believed it for an instant.”

“I know. That’s why you’re here this morning. The true meaning of Christmas lasts all the year through.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Last Christmas you bought cookies from me to give to the poor and homeless. You even bought toys for the children. You rented a bus and picked them up for Christmas Eve church. Then you continued to pick them up every Sunday morning. That’s the true

meaning of Christmas, and this year I have something special for you.”

“I never saw what I did as special.”

“Miracles come in all shapes and sizes. Even as bakery shops and those who deliver mail and drive buses.” She tilted her head. “This year you arranged caroling and a fine dinner afterward for the needy. You walk in love, Jonathan.”

I scratched my whiskered chin. “Just showing others my love for Jesus.”

She handed me a cup of her finest hot chocolate with extra marshmallows. “Jonathan, you miss your wife, Greta, but it won’t be long until you see her again.”

Good news. I was ready to meet Him and see my beloved wife.

“Are you ready to see her now?”

I swiped at a tear. “In my heart, she’s always near.”

Miss Cookie pointed to the door. There my Greta stood, just as I remembered her on our wedding day. Joy bubbled inside me. I took her hand, and we waltzed around the room.

Her blue eyes sparkled. “Soon we’ll be together, my love,” she said. “Until then, keep loving and giving. That’s Christmas twelve months a year.”

The End

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