

GINGERBREAD (excerpt)

by D.L. Siegel

['Talk of the Town' Tavern, Staten Island, NY. It is summer, early evening, and the sun has descended just far enough that shafts of sunlight come through the windows in clawing streaks along the floor. The bar is next to the Great Kills train station, and we both feel and hear the low rumble of the train below. Vinny, the bartender, is painstakingly assembling a Gingerbread house. The house is surprisingly intricate, and he handles it with great care. He is in his early 20s, a swarthy Italian, and his build suggests that he was likely a star athlete back in the day. Despite the thickness of his accent, Vinny's way of speaking is surprisingly gentle. Luanne, a frequent patron of this bar, sits on a stool in front of Vinny, idly sifting through the pieces of candy in front of her. Luanne is about the same age as Vinny, or just slightly older, but she conducts herself with the callous bitterness that is elemental to the South Shore of the Island. Her voice has the distinct rasp of one who has been smoking for most of her life. A drink sits before her, virtually untouched, as she has been too preoccupied with watching Vinny work on the little house to drink much. The Yankees game plays on mute on the television set behind Vinny and Journey's greatest hits are pumping through the stereo system. Or perhaps something by The Human League. Maybe a combination of the two. Outdated and loud, regardless.]

VINNY

Gimme one of the green ones?

[Luanne holds out a gumdrop to him.]

Thanks.

[He finds a spot for it and squishes it into the icing.]

LUANNE

Ya look like crap, Vinny.

VINNY

(positioning a small gingerbread person in front of the house)

That's nice.

LUANNE

Ya do though. I don't say it to be mean, ya know that. It's just...noticeable. You not sleepin'?

VINNY

(moves the house around to examine it from another angle)

I been sleepin. Does it look too cluttered on this side?

LUANNE

(not even pretending to look at the house)

It's fine. How much? How many hours you gettin'?

VINNY

Jesus, Luanne! I SLEEP. I sleep enough.
Now would you look at this for me? Really look at it? Please, I haven't made one o' these since I was 6. I want it to look good.

[Luanne takes a long look at the house, furrows her brow.]

LUANNE

Uhh...Vinny?

VINNY

Hm?

LUANNE

What *is* this?

VINNY

It's a gingerbread house.

LUANNE

Right. Right,ok...so why isn't it made of gingerbread?

VINNY

Gingerbread's flimsy. Falls apart in, like, a second. Who the hell makes these outta gingerbread?

LUANNE

...Everyone.

VINNY

Really?

LUANNE

Yes, really. It's in the *name*.

[She gently pokes at the roof.]

Is this...Vinny, is this cardboard?

VINNY

...Yeah?

LUANNE

But you can't *eat* cardboard!

VINNY

Why would I want her to—why would I want someone to eat it?

LUANNE

‘Cause it’s a fuckin gingerbread house, Vinny. That’s why.
What about the little ginger man?

VINNY

Oh. Yeah, that’s a cookie. My sister had the cutter.

[Luanne makes a face.]

Whatever, you don’t get it. You don’t get it, Lu. It’s...symbolic, like.

LUANNE

Symbolic of what?

VINNY

(shifting his focus back to the gingerbread house)

It’s, like...*artwork*. Doncha want art to last as long as possible?

LUANNE

Well, sure. “Artwork.” But it’s “artwork” made of candy. And icing.

[She examines the house more carefully.]

Or...candy and Elmer’s glue? Is that Elmer’s?

VINNY

Yeah. But I did most of it with hot glue. Ya know...the little gun.

LUANNE

(patronizingly)

Aww, Vin.

VINNY

Come on! Everything I make in here gets...consumed. Disappears in half a second. For once I just wanna give somethin to someone that won’t be gone that fast. All right?

LUANNE

Fine, *fine*. Make a gingerbread house outta shit that nobody can eat. In the middle of the summer. Don’t let me stop you.

VINNY

I won’t.

[Vinny checks his watch, frowns. He pushes the drink towards her.]

VINNY

Just take your drink, will ya?

LUANNE

I'm gettin' there!

VINNY

The ice is gonna melt and you're gonna whine about it bein watered down.

LUANNE

Fine! Fine. You made it strong, right? You made it strong?

VINNY

Hard to make a Long Island weak, Lu.

LUANNE

But you made it like I like it?

VINNY

Heavy on the cuervo, light on the gin. Drink it.

[Luanne takes a careful sip of her drink. Winces. Smiles. Gives Vinny a thumbs-up. He picks up a damp cloth and begins to wipe down the bar as Luanne speaks.]

LUANNE

So...?

VINNY

So *what*, Lu.

LUANNE

You gonna tell me why you're makin' this thing?

VINNY

Wasn't planning on it, no.

LUANNE

So you're just expectin me to help you without—

VINNY

You don't wanna help me no more, you don't hafta.

[Luanne drinks. Sizes him up.]

LUANNE

(eyeing the gingerbread house)

You know, I haven't seen your girlfriend in here lately.

VINNY

(opening a package of candy canes)

Who?

LUANNE

You *know* who I'm talkin about. Whats-her-face. Canoli, Cookie, Angelfood—

[Vinny looks up, wistfully.]

VINNY

Cupcake.

[Cupcake appears briefly, as though conjured by the conversation. She is the same age as Vinny, although she doesn't look as worse for wear. She is effortlessly seductive. 'Heat of the Moment' by Asia plays as a wind machine blows through Cupcake's hair and she does a sexy little dance. We hear a record scratch as Luanne starts speaking and Vinny's attention returns to their conversation. The image of Cupcake disappears.]

LUANNE

Right! That's it.

VINNY

You know her name, Lu. *[Luanne shrugs.]* And she's not...my *girlfriend*. I mean, she *was*. But in, like, high school.

LUANNE

Well, whatever she is. Shame to name such a pretty girl such a stupid thing.

VINNY

Don't start. Please.

[Vinny checks his watch again. Luanne notices.]

LUANNE

Anyway, I haven't seen her lately. Am I right?

[Vinny refuses to respond.]

A couple of weeks, maybe?

VINNY

Three.

LUANNE

You two have a fight or somethin'?

[Vinny makes a face.]

Lovers' quarrel?

VINNY

What are you...? No. No “lovers’ quarrel.” She’s just been busy.

LUANNE

Oh yeah? Busy doin what?

VINNY

Practicin. For her audition.

LUANNE

Ohhhh right! *That* nonsense.

VINNY

Not nonsense to go after somethin you care about.

LUANNE

Uh-huh.

[She pauses and takes a long look at the gingerbread house.]

Radio City, right?

[Vinny nods.]

When is it?

VINNY

When is what?

LUANNE

The audition.

VINNY

(trying unsuccessfully to sound nonchalant)

...Today.

LUANNE

Oh reeeeeeeally!

VINNY

(backpedalling)

I think. I mean, I know it was soon...mighta been today. Mighta.

[Luanne starts laughing at him.]

What?

LUANNE

Nothin...nothin at all.

[She picks up a candy cane and twirls it between her fingers.]