

Magic in a Parisian candy shop

The novel opens in modern-day Paris, five years after Vianne Rocher and her daughter, Anouk, have fled the town of Lansquenet. Now with another daughter, 4-year-old Rosette, the family lives within view of Sacre-Coeur above a chocolaterie that Vianne manages. Setting up new identities and a secure existence for them, the mother buys a cheap wedding ring and introduces herself as a widow. She dresses in drab black sweaters and abandons her use of magic and wandering with the wind. No more spells or charms; no sprinkled salt or red silk sachets hung by the door for good luck; no flick of the fingers to sting adversaries; and no appeasing the winds that can change their lives on a whim. She tries to forget Roux, the riverboat man, who has been the love of her life. In tedious domesticity, she subdues her magical essence.

Harris, who is half French, half British, got inspiration for these tales from family history. Her grandparents once managed a sweetshop in France and the locals had considered her great-grandmother a witch and a healer. She employs three narrators to set forth the movement of the story: Vianne, Anouk and a stranger, Zoie de l'Alba, a beguiling bad witch with her own magic learned in Mexico. In what could be a study of two sides of a personality, the author contrasts the Vianne of old: confident, independent and energetic with the manipulative and deceptive stranger.

Zoie, an identity thief, wears brightly colored clothing and scarves with sparkling lollipop-red high-heeled shoes as she enters the candy shop and insinuates herself into the lives of everyone, playing each against the other.

The sequence of events that begins a few weeks before Christmas picks up speed when Roux shows up in Paris and Zoie's sinister activities become evident. We are held bewitched on a thrilling ride to see which woman's magic will prevail.

Mary Popham is a writer who lives in Louisville

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