

Candy in Action

Matthue Roth

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The feminist call for good female role models has been wildly successful. Hermione Granger's wit and grit shine brightly among wizards, while Candy Cohen sparkles in the realm of mere heroines with mortal skills.

Candy is the only child of a wealthy doctor, and not only is she a college student who plans on going to medical school, but she's paying her own way by modeling and working in a family restaurant. The restaurant job is to keep her grounded, but the modeling is what really pays the bills. Cynical about her beauty and the men it attracts, she observes their behavior clinically, saying, for example, that a restaurant customer "was already pissed that I didn't lean over to put his food down so he could look down the front of my shirt." Candy's wit, sass, and verve sustain her as she embarks on an international flight from a stalker whose ultimatum of "date me or die" proves to be a serious threat.

Preston Reign owns a cosmetics company and is "heir to one of the largest fortunes in North America." When Candy turns him down for a date, he shows up in her bedroom, accompanied by three goons. Outraged, Candy breaks out her kung fu kit, jamming "two fingers into a pressure point right below his ear." The goons attack *en masse*, and "my left leg swung into a battle kick" as she knocks all three of them unconscious in thirty seconds flat.

Luckily, Candy doesn't have to evade Preston on her own. Her best friend Velma—who is even more fabulously wealthy—accompanies her through Preston's increasing (and *Matrix*-style unbelievable) attempts to coerce Candy. As the plot spins in an ever-widening gyre, Velma breaks out a secret gold cell phone and calls in the resources of her "Family." And yes, as Candy learns, that does mean think "*Sopranos*."

Enter Mr. Patterson, a Family employee whose expertise uniquely qualifies him to ensure Velma's security—and Candy's. With unlimited resources and an army of security guards, he ushers the two girls through numerous safe locations and clothing changes in far-flung locales, including San Francisco, where the girls disguise themselves in glamorous Chinese dresses and relax in a mob safe house, but this idyll ends with a television broadcast about the suicide of Candy's father.

Despite Mr. Patterson's security measures, Preston manages to isolate Candy at an Italian airport, where he requires another dose of her kung fu to put him temporarily in his place. After that, however, Preston's attacks on Candy include increasingly improbable numbers of goons in increasingly public places, until literally every person on the street is a gun-packing member of either Preston's or Patterson's army.

Despite the high-glamour world in which Candy and Velma move, their values mimic those of their creator, Matthue Roth, a religious Jew who is also the author of the young adult novel, *Never Mind the Goldbergs*. Roth's characters confront sexuality even though they aren't sexually active themselves, and he is at his best when portraying how strong core values can keep one afloat despite the pressures of the secular, appearance-oriented world of consumer culture. Candy's first person narrative sits comfortably between self-assured post-feminist analysis and impeccable fashion sense. During a therapeutic rest in a Buddhist monastery, she dreams: "I am all of those twelve rabbits, and I

am the field too...What the hell am I wearing?" Today's girls can indeed have it all.

ELIZABETH BREAU (October 9, 2007)

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