

The Boy Who Liked Chocolate

by Janie Reynolds

Newly in love, a young man and woman, wafted romantically along the high street with their soft faces and pink lenses. The petite girl, in her boho dress, was dwarfed by the tall boy, with lops of black hair and fancy tailored clothes. Their walk had been sweet and dreamy until, all of a sudden, as they approached a chocolate shop, she had been pulled sharply into the road so that the boy could lead her to the other side.

Having met at a party, the two had fallen quickly in love. Both had healing hearts, so had boldly left town and rented a rose-trellised cottage in the deep, surrounding countryside.

The cottage was ruled by an old, wise willow, who had watched over it for centuries, but didn't know so. Poets, musicians and artists had all once lived there, but the tree had no recollection of them. All he knew was the feel of the winds as they circled his watery bark and the sense of the warmth or the cold of the breeze as he stood. He had no memory of the floods and darkest of winters that had frozen him stiff in the past, nor of the smouldering summers that had bleached and crisped his slender branches. He didn't wish for more or less rain, bigger or smaller clouds or hotter or colder sun. Things were as they were.

During their first summer, the sweethearts had found a perfect place to lie together under the wispy web of the willow, where they would read together and enjoy the exotic flowers. But as winter fell, the tree sensed an unease from the house, and noticed the boy often driving his car back into the town where he would visit a chocolate shop lady. He would talk to her and she would give him chocolate beans, some which he would scoff down right there and then and others with which he would fill his pockets.

As Spring came, the lovers would still read under the willow, but alone. And one day, when it was the boy's turn, some chocolate beans slipped from his pocket onto the ground and started to grow into little brown saplings.

When it was the girl's turn to sit there, she could not, for a thick, brown chocolate beanstalk had wrapped its talons around the old willow's base. As she turned to call to the boy, she saw he was carrying a heavy suitcase to his car and she watched him drive away.

Saddened, she wrapped her arms around the strangled willow. But, although the tree was grateful for her kindness, he was as fine and strong as ever. He had no fear of anything that had risen from beans from the past, which, of course, doesn't exist. He could not feel the beanstalk, which only aspired to *imaginings*. And when the girl looked down to the ground again, she was surprised to see nothing but the gnarly old roots of the willow, and it were as if no beanstalk had ever been.