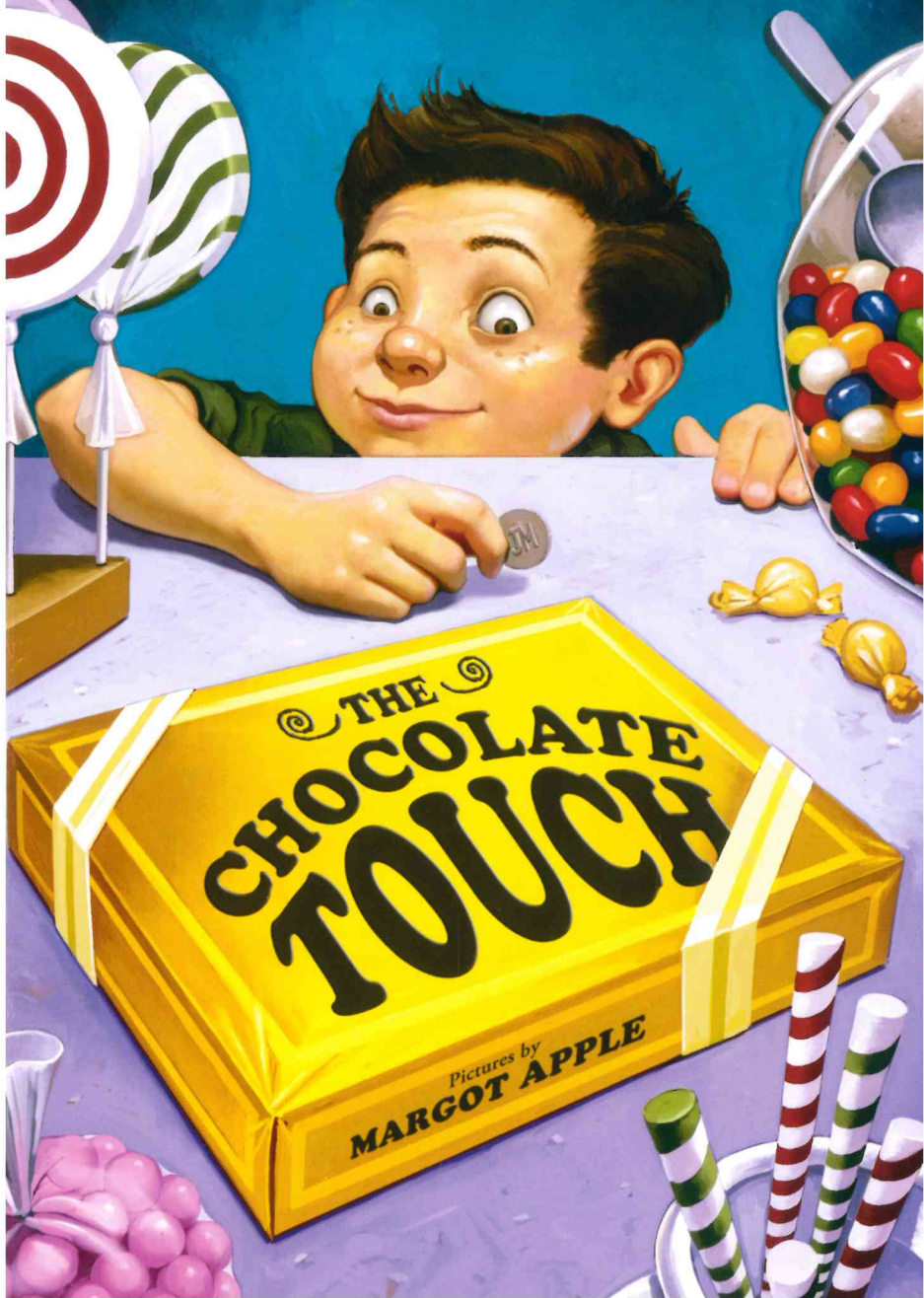


PATRICK SKENE CATLING



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**CHOCOLATE
TOUCH**

Pictures by
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The Chocolate Touch

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Most of the time John Midas was a very nice boy. Every now and then, of course, he broke a rule, such as the rule against pretending to be a tiger when his sister, Mary, was supposed to be getting to sleep.

Generally speaking, however, he behaved very well.

He should have behaved better.

He lived in a comfortable house surrounded by a green lawn and wide-spreading shade trees that were suitable for climbing. His mother was gentle as well as practical. His father, when he didn't have to hurry to town, spent hours telling John interesting things about baseball, beetles, birds' nests, boats, brigands, and butterflies.

John went to school and liked it. His teacher, Miss Plimsole, was fairly easy to get along with, as long as he did careful work. He had received a new, shiny golden trumpet and music lessons as a going-to-school present. Mrs. Quaver, the music teacher, had soon agreed to let him play small parts, a few notes at a time, with the school orchestra.



Finally, there was Susan Buttercup, who was in his class. Susan had soft yellow curls, round pink cheeks, blue eyes, and one of the best collections of marbles in the neighborhood.

John should have been completely well-behaved. But he wasn't.

He had one bad fault: he was a pig about candy. Boiled candy, cotton candy, licorice all-sorts, old-fashioned toffee, candied orange and lemon slices, crackerjack, jelly beans, fudge, black-currant lozenges for ticklish throats, nougat, *marrons glacés*, acid drops, peppermint sticks, lollipops, marshmallows, and, above all, chocolates—he devoured them all.

While other boys and girls spent their money on model airplanes, magazines, skipping ropes, and pet lizards, John studied the candy counters. All his money went on candy,

and all his candy went to himself. He never shared it. John Midas was candy mad.

At lunch one Saturday Mrs. Midas noticed a couple of little red spots on the end of John's nose. "Look," she said to Mr. Midas. "John has spots."

Mr. Midas leaned forward to look at them. He gravely shook his head and clicked his tongue. John tried to look too. But it is very difficult to see the end of your own nose without a mirror unless you happen to be an elephant with a long nose that you can bend double. When John tried to look at the end of his nose, first with one eye and then with the other, and then with both together, all that he could see was a pink blur. Besides, trying to look at something so close made his eyes ache.

"I can't see any spots, Mother," John said.

"Well, I can," Mr. Midas said. "Just because you don't see a thing doesn't always mean it

isn't there. Try feeling the end of your nose with your finger."

John rubbed his finger over the tip of his nose. It felt a bit rough.

"It may be measles," Mrs. Midas said anxiously. She placed her hand on John's forehead to feel whether he was warmer than usual. "But I don't think he has a temperature," she decided.

"I suspect John has been eating too much candy again," Mr. Midas said. "Have you been eating candy this morning, John?"

"Some," John admitted.

"What?" Mr. Midas asked.

"Well," John replied. "Well... I had a few Cream Delights. Susan gave them to me."

"Anything else?" Mr. Midas asked.

"A little Toffee Crunch," John said.

"And what else?" Mr. Midas asked, beginning to look cross.

John's ears grew red. He knew he wasn't

supposed to eat candy before meals. "Oh, only, er, oh...hardly anything else," he said.

"John!" Mr. Midas said, and his son recognized the tone. It meant that John had to tell everything.

It turned out that John had been around to see most of his friends and had managed to get candy from nearly all of them. The list he recited was a long one.

"No wonder you have spots," Mr. Midas commented at last. "I think we'd better take John to see Dr. Cranium," he said to Mrs. Midas.

Dr. Cranium was a tall, thin man with a bald head and a gray mustache. He looked through his glasses at John and said, "Hmm."

"He eats a lot of candy," Mr. Midas said.

"He hasn't been eating his meals properly," Mrs. Midas said.

"That's just what I thought," Dr. Cranium said. "I can tell by looking at him that he eats much too much candy." The doctor shone a little electric light into John's right ear. Then he shone it into John's left ear. Then he shone it in John's nose. He told John to open wide and say *ah*. Then he shone the light into John's mouth. "Much too much candy! Gracious me—he seems to be full of candy!"

He told John to sit down and relax. Then he picked up a small rubber-headed hammer and gave John a light tap on the right knee, just below the joint. John's foot gave a weak kick. John giggled.

"It's nothing to laugh about," Mr. Midas said.

"No, John," the doctor reproved him. "A healthy little boy who didn't eat too much candy would kick harder than that."

"I'm sorry," John said politely. "But I can

kick harder if you want me to." He gave a sudden high kick, which knocked the hammer out of Dr. Cranium's hand. It landed on its rubber head and bounced across the room.

"John!" exclaimed Mrs. Midas. "I'm so sorry, Dr. Cranium. John, tell the doctor you're sorry for kicking his hammer."

"I'm sorry I kicked your hammer," John said.

"I would recommend less candy," Dr. Cranium told Mr. and Mrs. Midas. "An upset stomach can lead to all sorts of complications."

On the way home Mrs. Midas tried to explain to John what she thought the doctor meant by complications. "You see," she said, "if you put too much of one kind of food in your stomach and not enough of other kinds, it is bad for your whole body, because different parts of your body need different kinds of food. Do you understand?"

"I think so," John said.

"You've been eating so much sweet stuff," Mr. Midas added, "that there isn't room for eggs and meat and milk and bread and spinach and apples and fish and bananas and all the other things you're supposed to have to make you grow big and strong."

"I like bananas," John said. "Especially in thin slices covered with chocolate. They're called Banana Surprises."

Mr. Midas looked at Mrs. Midas, and Mrs. Midas looked at Mr. Midas. They both shrugged their shoulders. Sometimes it was hard to make John understand things.

At home, while Mrs. Midas was busy in the kitchen, Mr. Midas continued to reason with John. "You mean you'd rather eat candy than anything else, and chocolate rather than any other kind of candy?" Mr. Midas asked.

"Yes!" John assured him. "Oh, yes!"

"Don't you think there's such a thing as enough?" Mr. Midas persisted. "Don't you think that things are best in their places? I mean, don't you think there's a time for spaghetti and a time for roast beef and even a time for pickled herring and garlic toast, as well as a time for chocolate? Or would you rather have chocolate all the time?"

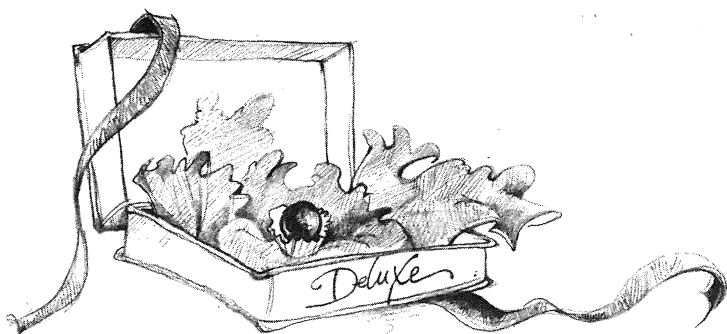
"Chocolate all the time," John replied emphatically. "Chocolate's best, that's all. Other things are just food. But chocolate's chocolate. Chocolate—"

"I think I understand," Mr. Midas broke in sharply. "Very well." He took a deep breath and went on. "John," he said, "if you can't understand what sort of diet is really best for you, can't you at least get it into your head that you make your mother very unhappy when you eat so much candy that you can't eat anything else?"

The conversation always seemed to get around to the effect of John's candy eating on John's mother. John couldn't see how it could possibly do her any harm if he ate candy.

He sat silent for a moment. Then he said, "May I go out and play, please, Daddy?"

2



It was Sunday afternoon. The sun was sinking low in the sky, but the air was still quite warm. John was wandering along in the direction of Susan's house, absentmindedly looking down at the sidewalk, when his eye

was suddenly caught by a dully gleaming, silvery gray coin lying right in his path.

The coin was the size of a quarter. But even as he leaned forward eagerly to pick it up, John noticed there was something strange about it. It did not have a picture of George Washington or a picture of an eagle. On one side there was a picture of a fat boy; on the other side were the letters *J.M.*—which was funny, John thought, because those letters happened to be his initials.

Grasping the coin firmly, he ran on toward Susan's house. She liked to collect things. He thought she might be interested to know that he had the beginning of a coin collection.

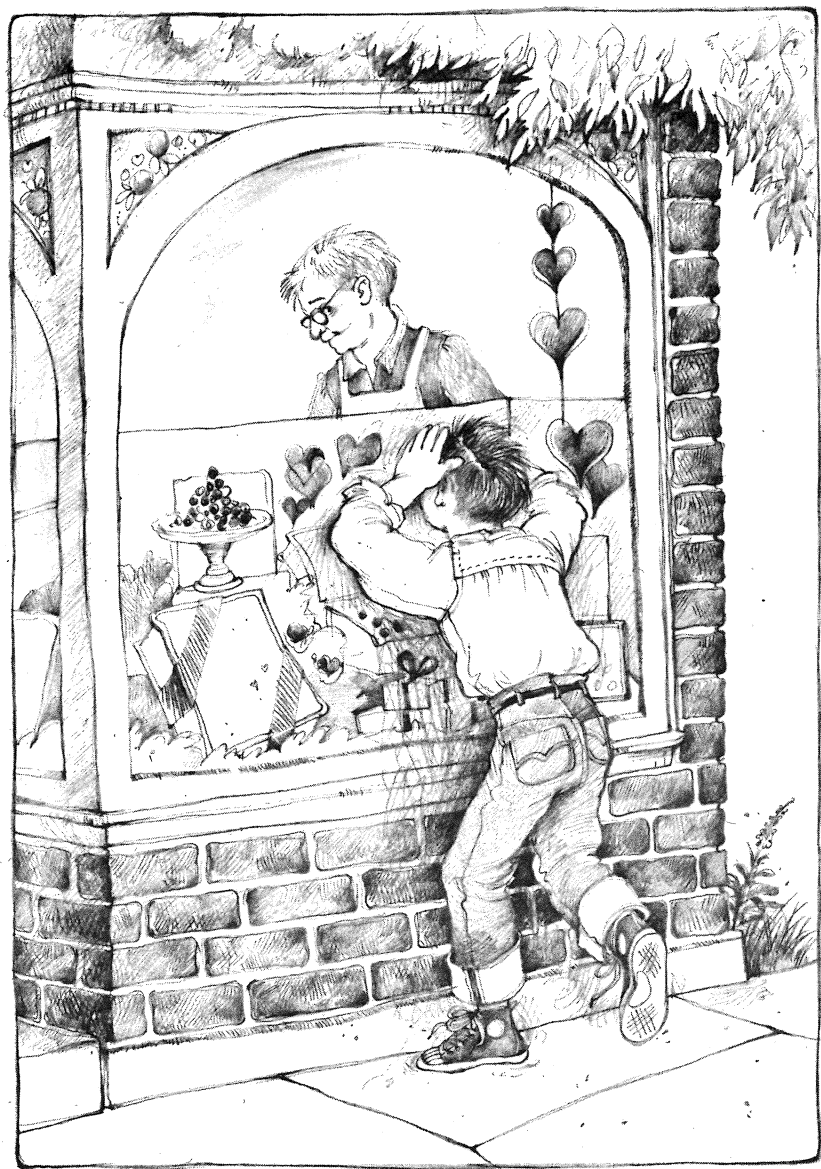
Although he was in the habit of going over to Susan's by the same route once or twice almost every day, this afternoon John found himself turning left where he usually turned right.

I always go the same way, he thought. This time, for a change, I'm going a new way.

He didn't stop to consider that you cannot go east by going west, unless you go all the way around the world.

Only two blocks along the unfamiliar street, John came to a small corner store. It was a neat red-brick building with two big show windows. They were full of all sorts of candy. Susan was immediately, absolutely forgotten. John pressed his nose against one of the windows. He was imagining the taste of the chocolate-covered almonds and chocolate fudge on the other side of the glass when he noticed a man in a white apron standing behind the counter and beckoning to him. John was surprised. He hadn't expected the store to be open on Sunday.

"Don't just stand there in the doorway, John," the man called heartily. "Come on in



and get some fresh, sweet, creamy chocolate. There's a special sale today."

How did the man know his name? John wondered. He couldn't remember ever having seen the store before.

The storekeeper saw John hesitate. "The chocolate I use in my kitchen comes direct from the heart of Africa," he said. "I use none but the finest ingredients. And my recipes—! Well, I bet you've never had chocolates like mine before. Come on in."

"Thank you," John replied, walking to the counter. "But you see the trouble is...well"

"No money?" the storekeeper asked. "No money whatsoever? What've you got there in your right hand?"

John had forgotten the old coin in his hand. "Oh," he said, "this is part of my coin collection. I mean," he added more honestly,

"I'm going to save this coin and then get some more to make a collection."

"Let me have a look at it," the storekeeper said. He looked briefly at the coin. "Aha!" he exclaimed.

"Is it any good?" John asked, his hopes suddenly rising.

"Very good," said the storekeeper. "In fact, it's the only kind of money I accept. But I don't suppose that you'd want to spend it on a box—"

"A whole box?"

"I imagine you'd rather keep this for your coin collection than spend it on chocolate, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, no!" John said. "Chocolate any day!"

"Go ahead then. Help yourself," the storekeeper said, pointing to a heavily laden show table piled high with large cellophane-wrapped candy boxes, all exactly alike.

"You mean I can have one of *these*?" John asked, his eyes round with surprise. The candy boxes were as big as the ones his father always brought home at Christmas time.

"Just help yourself," the storekeeper assured him. "That is, unless you think it might be better to ask your mother first."

"She wouldn't mind," John said hastily, and blushed.

The storekeeper winked knowingly. "I'm sure she won't," he agreed. "Not in the long run, anyway."

John tucked one of the large boxes under his arm, declined the storekeeper's offer to wrap it as a gift, thanked him, and hurried out of the store before there could be any question of anyone's changing his mind.

The storekeeper smiled as he watched his customer hurrying away down the street.

* * *

John decided that it might be sensible to enter his house quietly by way of the kitchen. With the large candy box hidden behind him, he let himself in by the back door and crept up the kitchen stairway on tiptoe toward his own room on the top floor. Just as he was about to round the corner on the second floor to continue his way upstairs, he had to stop for a moment while his father walked by, coming along the hall from the bedroom telephone.

"That was Mrs. Buttercup on the phone," Mr. Midas called to Mrs. Midas, as he walked down the front stairs. "She said she was sorry John hadn't been able to get over to play with Susan this afternoon. But it was a good thing in a way, she thought, because Susan's already so excited about her birthday party tomorrow. I wonder where John can have got to."

As soon as the second floor was quiet

again and John knew there was no danger that his candy box would be seen, he hurried silently up to his bedroom, pushed open the door, and slid the box under the bed. Then he walked heavily down to the living room.

"Well, there you are," said Mrs. Midas. "We couldn't imagine where you had been. What have you been doing?"

"Oh, just sort of playing around," John said.

John usually took a long time to put his things away and undress and bathe and get ready for bed, for he thought sleeping was a waste of time. But this evening he started yawning long before his usual bedtime.

"Ho, hum. Ho-o-o, hum-m-m. Sleepy," John announced.

"All right," said Mrs. Midas. "you'd better be getting to bed. Time for your tonic."

John's tonic came in a bottle. It had been prescribed by Dr. Cranium. John had to drink a big spoonful every night to make up for all the vegetables and fruit that he left on his plate at lunch and dinner. The tonic tasted like soap, mud, glue, ink, and paint. It tasted horrible.

Much to Mrs. Midas's surprise, John ran ahead of her to the dining-room cupboard where the tonic and the tonic spoon were kept. By the time she got there he had already filled the spoon. Then, without any coaxing, he emptied it into his mouth.

"Ugh!" John spluttered. "Oof! Baw!"

"That's a very good boy," Mrs. Midas said. "Now why can't you be sensible and eat up your nice dinner that way? If you'd only stop eating so much candy, you'd be able to eat your meals properly and you wouldn't need to take the tonic."

Soon John was scrubbed and in his pajamas and in bed, ready to be tucked in for the night. Mrs. Midas sat on the bed and stroked his forehead for a moment. Then she leaned forward and kissed his cheek. John, pretending that he was very sleepy, shut his eyes and began breathing deeply.

When Mrs. Midas rejoined Mr. Midas in the living room, she said, "I've never known John to be so good about going to bed before. He went to sleep in no time."

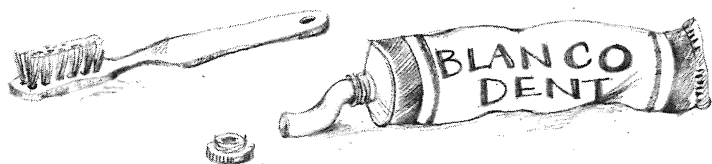
A few seconds after the bedroom door had closed behind his mother, John leaped to the floor, got down on his hands and knees, and felt under the bed for the candy box. He soon had it on the pillow and set to work unfastening it. First he took off the thin outer sheet of cellophane. Then he lifted off the lid. Then he removed a sheet of

cardboard. Then he pulled off a square of heavy tin foil. Then he took out a layer of shredded paper.

As the wrappings piled up around him, John became rather anxious. At last he came to a small central ball of cotton batting, and there, right in the middle, was a little golden ball. He picked at the ball with his fingernail and peeled away the gold paper, revealing a tiny piece of plain chocolate. It was the only piece of chocolate in the whole box.

Deeply disappointed, John nevertheless put it into his mouth. He had never tasted a chocolate quite like it. It was the most chocolaty chocolate he had ever encountered.

3



The birds were chirping in the tree outside John's window, and the sky beyond was deep blue. The bedroom door opened a few inches. "Hey, sleepy!" Mrs. Midas called. "Everyone else is up!"

John put on his bathrobe and slippers and ambled to the bathroom. His sister, Mary, was still brushing her teeth, and he had to wait until she finished.

"Come on, Mary," he said a little crossly. "Don't take all morning."

"Here you are," Mary said, handing him the toothpaste tube.

While Mary soaped her face, John squeezed a little of the toothpaste onto his brush. The paste was pink. John made a face at his toothbrush. It didn't seem fair that he should have to brush his teeth with stuff that tasted just like his tonic. "A stinky taste," he called it.

John opened his mouth and pushed in the end of the toothbrush. As soon as it touched his front teeth, he noticed a delicious sweetness in his mouth, a taste of the best kind of chocolate. He pushed the brush to

and fro, and the taste seemed to grow stronger. He removed the brush. The bristles were brown.

"What kind of toothpaste is this?" John asked.

Mary was drying her face. "The same kind," she answered. "It says on the tube."

"Blanco-Dent," John read. It was the same kind they had always had.

"Why's it chocolate-flavored this time?" he asked. "Boy, it's good!"

"Silly!" Mary said. "Course it isn't chocolate!" She hung up her towel and swished out of the bathroom.

John squeezed some more toothpaste onto his brush and continued to brush his teeth. Chocolate again! It was marvelous—rich, sweet, smooth chocolate, chocolately chocolate, like the single piece of chocolate from the box the night before.

There seemed to be no further need for the toothbrush, so John rinsed it and hung it up: He squeezed out another bit of toothpaste, onto a fingertip this time. He put his finger in his mouth and ate the toothpaste off. When he took his finger out again, it was stained chocolate brown. John wasted no more time. He put the end of the toothpaste tube into his mouth and emptied the paste onto his tongue. It squeezed out like thick, creamy chocolate.

Mary looked into the bathroom. "Hey, what are you doing?" she demanded.

"Yummy!" was all John said.

John and Mary were a little late getting to the dining room, and Mr. Midas was already on the way to his train when they sat down at the breakfast table.

"John ate up all the toothpaste," Mary told their mother.



"Ooh, you sneak!" John whispered.

"Well, you did," Mary reminded him. "And that's a waste. Isn't it a waste, Mother, to eat up all the toothpaste in one day?"

Mrs. Midas was serving their orange juice. "Mary really!" she said. "I'm sure John was only joking. He must have been pretending to eat the toothpaste."

"No, he wasn't," Mary insisted. "I was watching, and I saw him squeeze it right into his mouth. He said it was chocolate."

"Oh, dear," protested Mrs. Midas. "Chocolate again! Now I know it was just a joke. He just wished it were chocolate, Mary. Come now, drink up your orange juice, both of you. Your bacon and eggs will be ready in a minute."

As Mrs. Midas left the room, John took up his glass of orange juice and put it to his lips. As soon as he tilted it and the liquid began to

flow into his mouth, a happy look came into his eyes. "Boy, that's good," he said at last, lowering the empty glass. "Chocolate juice."

Mary looked at John. Then she looked at her glass of orange juice. It was a bright orange color. She tasted it. It tasted like orange to her. "It is *not* chocolate juice," she said. "It's orange juice. Orange juice is good for you."

"Yes, John," Mrs. Midas said, hearing the last few words as she carried in the tray of bacon and eggs. "You must drink your—" She caught sight of John's empty glass. "John," she said, "you good boy! That's the first time in ages you've finished your orange juice without having to be told to."

"It tasted of chocolate," John explained.

"All right," Mrs. Midas said. "Very funny. But don't tease Mary too much. Remember—Mary's younger than you are."

John silently picked up his fork and sliced the yolk of his fried egg. The yellow broke over the white and he shivered as he watched it, as he always did. "I can't eat this," he told his mother.

"Of course you can," Mrs. Midas said. "You drank your orange juice. Try to eat your bacon and egg."

John scraped up a small piece of egg and put it into his mouth. It immediately became chocolate—chocolate white and chocolate yolk. Both lovely, lovely chocolate. "Mmm!" John mumbled. "Chocolate egg!" In almost no time he had finished every scrap of egg on his plate. Then he tried the bacon. The bacon turned to chocolate, too.

John had never before enjoyed his breakfast so much. After the orange juice that had turned to chocolate juice in his mouth and the fried bacon and egg that had turned to

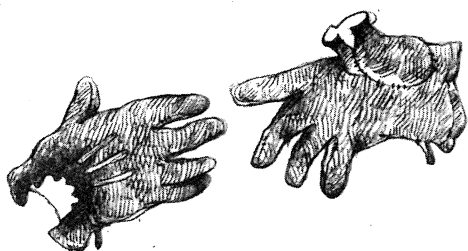
fried chocolate, he ate two slices of chocolate toast with chocolate butter and chocolate marmalade, washed down with a glass of chocolate milk.

"I'm very pleased with you this morning," Mrs. Midas said, as she helped John on with his coat. "If you promise to eat your lunch at school as well as you ate your breakfast, I'll give you a dime to buy some chocolates with."

"Oh, that's all right," John said. "I don't think I'll need it."

Mrs. Midas looked puzzled as she waved good-bye.

4



John had the bad habit of chewing things when he was thinking hard. This morning he had several things to think about. What had made the toothpaste taste like chocolate? What had made the orange juice taste like

chocolate? What had made the bacon and egg taste like chocolate? What had made the toast and butter and marmalade taste like chocolate?

Each one of these things had felt the way it had always felt before. The toothpaste had been soft and pasty. The bacon had been hot, crisp, and oily. The toast had been crunchy and the marmalade sticky and lumpy. But everything had tasted like the chocolate he had eaten in bed last night.

John put a gloved thumb in his mouth and thoughtfully chewed. His mother had frequently pointed out to him that chewing his gloves made little holes that let in the cold air. But he chewed them just the same when he was thinking hard. This time he noticed something very queer about the thumb of his glove. Instead of tasting leathery, it tasted like chocolate. John pulled his thumb out of

his mouth. The part of the glove that had been in his mouth was now brown, instead of black like the rest.

He bit the end of the leather thumb again. It came right off in his mouth, leaving his own thumb bare. John chewed, and it was like chewing leather made of chocolate, leather that melted like chocolate....In a second or two he swallowed it.

The gloves were not new. John had had them quite a while. He couldn't understand why he had never thought of eating them before. He tried to tear off one of the fingers, but the leather was too strong for him. He put it into his mouth, and it immediately turned into chocolate. Then he was able to break it off easily. He popped it into his mouth and chewed it up and swallowed it. It was delicious.

Walking along devouring his glove, John

did not notice one of his schoolfellows, Spider Wilson, until he heard his voice. "John's gone crazy! John's gone crazy!" Spider yelled. Then he turned on John. "Don't they feed you where you live?" He sneered. Spider was in the grade just above John's and was one of the meanest and slyest boys in the whole school.

John gulped down a large piece of the second glove's palm and looked pleased.

"What's the matter?" Spider demanded. "Do your people make you eat leather?"

"This is special leather," John replied. He licked his lips and sighed contentedly. "It turns into chocolate as soon as you put it into your mouth. Look." John bit off the glove's little finger and took it out of his mouth. "Now it's chocolate." He put it back into his mouth and gulped it down.

"Give me a piece," Spider said.



"Why should I?" John wanted to know.
"They're my gloves."

"Hand over a piece, " Spider said.

"Do I eat your gloves?" John asked reasonably, his mouth full of chocolate. "Why should you eat mine?"

"Those aren't real gloves," Spider said.
"Whenever one person has candy, he has to share it with the others. That's the club rule."

"What club?" John asked.

"Never mind what club," Spider said. "But you'd better let me have some of that chocolate."

Without waiting longer, Spider snatched what was left of the second glove. John was too surprised to resist, and he didn't want to, anyhow. He had a feeling that he'd had enough chocolate for a while. He was getting a bit thirsty.

Spider ran only a little way ahead. When he saw that John wasn't going to fight to get

the glove back, he started to eat his prize. He stuffed the leather into his mouth and took a big bite. Spider stopped short in his tracks. He frowned and bit deep into the leather again. Disgusting! It tasted worse than just leather. It tasted like leather with which a boy had made mud pies and snowballs and patted old dogs.

John thought perhaps he might be getting late for school, so he started running. He left Spider Wilson spitting the soggy remains of the glove into the gutter.

Still giggling to himself about the defeat of the enemy, John walked between the great stone pillars at the entrance to the school grounds. He had gone no more than halfway to the main building when he heard Susan Buttercup calling him. She was standing near the jungle gym with some of her friends.

"I've got something to show you, John," she shouted.

As she came running to meet him, he could see that she was waving something in her hand that flashed as it caught the rays of the sun. It was a silver dollar. "It's a birthday present!" she explained, showing him the dollar. "Isn't it beautiful?"

The sight of such wealth made John forget the triumphs of his own day. "It's a good present," he said. "Are you sure it's made of silver, though? I once got a whole bag of gold coins in a Christmas stocking, only they were chocolate coins covered with gold paper."

"Of course it's real, silly," Susan said. "My daddy said so. You can feel it if you don't believe me." She handed him the coin.

John looked at the coin suspiciously.

"All right," Susan said. "Bite it, if you think it isn't real. Go on, bite it!"

John felt rather silly. "I can see it's real now," he said. "I don't have to bite it."

"But I want you to," Susan insisted. "You

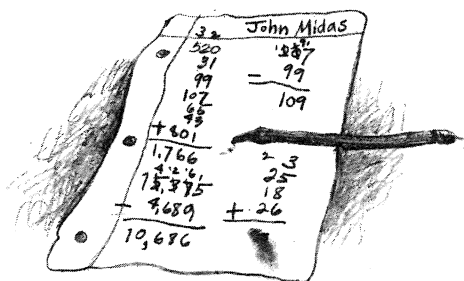
weren't sure. Well, *make* sure. That's what they always do on television. When a cowboy wants to make sure a dollar's real, he bites it."

John put the dollar about halfway into his mouth and reluctantly bit it. His teeth went right through the coin. The part that had passed between his lips was hard but sweet chocolate.

Susan could hardly believe her eyes. She had given John a complete circle of silver. He sadly handed back a crescent.

John didn't know what to say. Susan couldn't speak. Tears trickled down her cheeks like rain down a windowpane. She looked at the piece of dollar in her hand. She looked up at John, whose face was red with embarrassment. "John Midas," Susan blurted out at last, "I hate you." She turned and ran away before John could think of anything at all to say.

5



John hung up his coat, got his notebook and pencil out of his locker, and sat down at his small table just in time for the second bell, when Miss Plimsole walked silently into the classroom. As soon as she appeared in the doorway, all the chattering and scuffling

stopped. The twenty boys and girls sat straight in their chairs and looked straight ahead at the clean blackboard.

"Good morning, children," Miss Plimsole said.

"Good morning, Miss Plimsole," the class answered respectfully.

Miss Plimsole sat at her high desk, blinking her eyes as she surveyed the room. Then she opened a little drawer in her desk and pulled out a spectacles case, from which she took her reading glasses. She removed her long-distance glasses, put on her short-distance glasses, snapped shut the spectacles case, replaced it in the drawer, shut the drawer, tilted her head forward so that she could look over the glasses on her nose, and said, "This morning, children, we are going to have an important test."

There were some groans and a few "ooh's" and "ah's."

Miss Plimsole lifted up one of her hands and silence was restored instantly. "No complaining, please!" she said sternly. "This test will show me how well you have been learning your arithmetic this year. It will be a short one. I am going to write just four problems on the board. I shall expect you to solve them all swiftly and accurately and to write your answers neatly. You will place your paper in front of you now. You will write your name at the top right-hand corner. And then you will place your pencil beside your paper, sit back in your chair, and wait until I give the signal to begin work." Miss Plimsole turned to the blackboard and began chalking up the test problems.

Tests always made John nervous. Besides, his lips were feeling dry, and the taste of chocolate was strong in his mouth. He raised his hand.

"Yes, John?" Miss Plimsole asked.

"Please may I go and get a drink of water, please, Miss Plimsole?" he asked in a small voice.

"Very well. Hurry back. We're going to start in a few minutes."

John gratefully slipped out of the room and walked quickly down the quiet corridor to a water fountain. His tongue felt thick with chocolate. The cold water would be refreshing.

He pressed his foot down on the fountain treadle, and a stream of clear, ice-cold water spurted up from the silver nozzle in the white enamel basin. He lowered his head until the jet of water reached his lips. The cold water splashed delightfully against the outside of his mouth. He opened his lips. As soon as the water gushed in, it turned into ice-cold chocolate water, thin and sweet.

Quickly stopping the flow, John looked

with dismay at the shallow puddle that had formed and was now draining away in the basin of the fountain. He hurried to another fountain, on the second floor of the building. But there the same thing happened. The clear, ice-cold water turned to liquid chocolate in his mouth.

When John finally got back to his classroom, all the other pupils were bent over their tables, busily scratching away. Miss Plimsole looked up from her book as John tiptoed in. She looked at the clock on the wall, looked back at him, and wagged her finger reprovingly.

John began on the first of the four problems, but he was so worried about the chocolate water that he couldn't keep his mind on his work. By the time he was ready to start the fourth problem, the other boys and girls were already putting down their

pencils and straightening up and smiling at each other.

"Two minutes to go," said Miss Plimsole.

Concentrating hard, John took the end of his pencil between his teeth and began to nibble it. It immediately turned to chocolate. Then he noticed an even more disturbing change. Although he had taken the pencil out of his mouth as soon as the first piece of chocolate had crumbled off, the pencil was continuing to change to chocolate. The chocolate was slowly but steadily, moving down the pencil, replacing the wood and the lead inside, changing it into a chocolate pencil before John's very eyes. The magic—for John now knew that his power must be magic—was apparently getting stronger.

By the time the whole pencil had changed from red, yellow, and black to dark brown, Miss Plimsole was announcing that only a



few seconds remained in which to write down the final answer.

"Just a minute," John pleaded.

"Sh!" Miss Plimsole cautioned him, holding a finger up to her mouth.

"Sh!" chorused the slow workers, who were becoming almost as excited as John. But John felt worst of all. He felt sure that he could finish the problem and write down the correct answer, if only he had something to write with.

"But Miss Plimsole," he begged in a loud whisper, "my pencil's turned to chocolate!"

"Hush, John!" Miss Plimsole said. "I'll speak to you after the bell."

John tried to write with his changed pencil. But the point was too soft, and he only succeeded in making a chocolate smear where he should have written. 72.