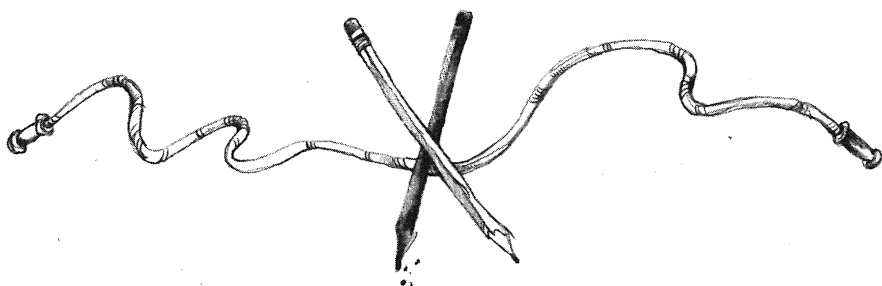


## 6



When the others had been excused to go out for midmorning play, John had to go and stand by Miss Plimsole's desk.

"John," Miss Plimsole said, "you mustn't make up silly stories to excuse your failures. I

must have the truth. What did you do with your pencil?"

"This is it," John said, showing Miss Plimsole the pointed stick of chocolate. "Really it is. It's changed."

"What do you mean, it's changed?" Miss Plimsole demanded.

"That's my pencil," John tried to explain, "only it isn't the same anymore. Nothing stays the same today if I put it into my mouth. The same thing happened when I chewed my gloves. They were chocolate, too."

"John," said Miss Plimsole slowly, "do... you...feel...all...right?"

"Yes, thank you," John said. "I feel all right. Except," he added, "I'm getting so thirsty. The water from the water fountain turned to chocolate and so did the water upstairs. I would like a drink of cold water."

"Yes, John," Miss Plimsole said. She suddenly looked pale. "You run out and play with the others. I'm going to have a talk with the nurse. And John," Miss Plimsole said, as he started toward the classroom door, "here's another pencil. Be a good boy and try not to lose it. I'm afraid I'll have to keep this piece of chocolate until school's out. You know we don't allow anyone to eat candy in class."

Miss Plimsole put the slightly chewed chocolate pencil in her desk drawer, and John went out to look for Susan. He found her skipping rope with two girls in his class.

John usually scorned skipping rope. He preferred hide-and-seek, tag, F.B.I. and spies, kick the can, or any other good, exciting game. Jumping up and down in one place just to avoid being hit by a rope seemed silly to him. But he was sorry for having spoiled Susan's silver dollar, and he was willing to make a sacrifice.

"Susan," he said.

Susan continued to bounce on one foot as her two friends swung the rope, over and under, over and under, over and under her. She didn't seem to notice John.

"I'll skip with you," he offered.

Susan stopped, and the rope was caught by her shins. "Let's try doubles, backwards," she said, but not to John. She ignored John. "You go first, Betty. Ellen, you go second. I'll go last. The one who does it the most times gets the first slice of my birthday cake."

Susan looked at John, raised her eyebrows, shut her eyes, and stuck out the tip of her pink tongue. Then she turned back to the girls and smiled. Ellen whispered in Betty's ear, and Betty whispered in Susan's ear. Then all three of them looked at John and at each other again and burst out laughing.

"Oh, Susan!" John protested. "I didn't mean to do it. The trouble is there's



something magic about me today. Everything I put into my mouth turns to chocolate."

The girls giggled.

"You wouldn't like it," said John, who was beginning to feel sorrier for himself than he had ever felt before. "I think it's getting worse," he added reproachfully. "At first just the part in my mouth turned to chocolate. But when I nibbled the end of my pencil, the whole pencil changed."

"Pooh," Susan said. The others hooted with glee.

"Maybe I'll get sick and die," John warned. "Maybe I'll turn to chocolate myself. Then you'll be sorry."

"I don't believe one word about the chocolate," Susan said. "And if it was true, you'd be glad, because all you ever like eating is chocolate."

"If you don't believe me," John retorted,



"just you give me that skipping rope and I'll prove it."

The girls looked questioningly at each other for an instant. But as they hesitated, the bell rang and it was time to go back to the classroom.

The rest of the morning passed slowly for John. He was afraid that his mother was going to be cross about the missing gloves. She might not accept the excuse that he had eaten them. He regretted his messed-up arithmetic test. He was sad about Susan's anger and disbelief. And he was getting terribly thirsty. Once during geography and once during art he was excused to get a drink of water. Both times, however, he swallowed nothing but sweet chocolate. His mouth was getting stickier and sweeter and drier by the minute.

# 7



"All right, boys and girls," Miss Plimsole said. "It is almost time for lunch. Clear up your things: paint pots securely closed, brushes washed, paintings unpinned and laid out to dry, drawing boards stacked against

the wall. Ah! There's the bell! Front row first, Timothy leading, then Robin, in single file—go!”

John, alone, walked slowly in the throng hurrying along the corridors to the school cafeteria.

The school was proud of the cafeteria and the food served in it. The room was spacious and bright, with windows all the way along one side overlooking the playground and the playing fields beyond. The opposite side was wholly taken up by the shiny silver service counter.

Several boys and girls were already settled at tables by the time John took his place in the line. Enviously John noticed a boy at a nearby table suck at straws dipped in a milk bottle that was dull with frost. John could imagine the refreshing taste of cold, creamy milk. At another table a group of girls were

eating fat red cherries. John could almost feel the firm fruit on his tongue and the pleasure of biting through the tart, juicy pulp. The cherries must taste good. They must be thirst quenching!

John unhappily took a tray from the pile and slid it along the rails in front of the top of the counter. He put a paper napkin, a glass and a gleaming spoon, a knife and a fork on the tray. It seemed hardly worth the while, but he felt that he might as well try the food and drink.

"Perhaps if I eat a different way, without letting anything touch my lips," he muttered, "my lunch won't all change to chocolate." He was not very hopeful.

"What?" asked the boy standing next to him.

"Nothing," John said.

"I thought I heard you say something

about chocolate," the boy said. "I hope this is the day for chocolate cream pie," he added. "That'd be super."

On chocolate-cream-pie days of the past, John had been known to skip the main course, so that he might spend all his lunch money on dessert. The thought of four pieces of chocolate cream pie now suddenly made his stomach feel as though he were on a roller coaster—an uneasy, flibberty-jibberty sensation. John shuddered. "Ooky," he commented, wrinkling up his nose.

The other boy shrugged his shoulders and started to choose his meal.

John took a plate of cold chicken and ham, potato chips, and a crisp, moist lettuce-and-tomato salad. The white of the chicken, the pink of the ham, the gold of the potatoes, the pale green of the lettuce, and the red of the tomato looked delicious. He also took a half

pint of milk, a thick-crustcd whole-wheat roll and a cool pat of butter, a tumbler of water with ice cubes clinking against the glass, and a dish of fresh fruit—slices of orange and grapefruit and banana and grapes.

John's tray was loaded with just the sort of meal his mother was always trying to persuade him to eat. Until today John had always thought it was pretty dull to eat "sensible things" when there were sweeter food and drink to be had. Today, however, the "sensible things" looked most appetizing, and his mouth began to water in its new sticky way.

John paid for the lunch with the money his mother had given him, went to an empty table, and sat down.

His fingers trembling slightly with eagerness, he cut a slice of lettuce. His fork went through the leaves with a promising crunch.





He stuck the prongs of the fork into a mouth-sized piece of lettuce and carefully inserted it into his mouth. The lettuce didn't touch his wide-stretched lips. John's teeth came together in crisp layers of sweet chocolate.

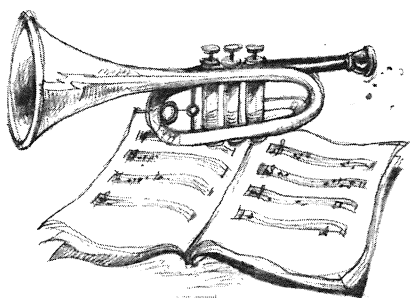
He took a small piece of potato chip, tilted back his head until he was looking straight up at the ceiling, and dropped the morsel straight down into his throat. He felt it go down, a sharp fragment of sweet chocolate. He tried the milk, the ice water, the fruit. Every solid and liquid that he sampled was transformed as soon as it entered his mouth.

Then he became aware of a shocking novelty that he hadn't noticed at breakfast. At the rim of each glass there was a small semicircle of opaque brown; the bowl of his spoon and the prongs of his fork had become brown. As John watched, horrified, the areas

of magic chocolate slowly spread until at last the glasses and cutlery were all solid chocolate. The trouble was unquestionably growing worse.

John's scalp tightened with fear. "What am I going to do?" he asked himself miserably. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! What is going to happen to me?" Leaving his tray of chocolate food and drink and utensils, John stumbled away from the cafeteria and out to the playground.

# 8



English class passed without incident. Miss Plimsole distributed word lists for her pupils to take home. "The more words you know," she explained, as always, "the more exactly you can think."

There were some difficult new words, John noticed: avarice, indigestion, acidity, unhealthiness, moderation, digestibility. As Miss Plimsole explained the meaning of each one, it seemed to John as though they all had a special bearing on his present uncomfortable condition.

At last the bell rang. "Very well, class," Miss Plimsole said. "Time for outside activities. Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon, Miss Plimsole."

Miss Plimsole gave the signal for dismissal, and the pupils in the front row filed out, followed by those in the second row, including John and Susan.

Susan played a violin in the school orchestra, and usually she and John went to the rehearsals in the auditorium together. This time Susan hurried on ahead of him. John followed very slowly.

The members of the orchestra were sitting at their music stands on the auditorium stage when John, carrying his dark-blue trumpet case, got to his chair in the brass section. Mrs. Quaver had already begun to explain a difficult passage to the girl who played the flute.

"Just after Jay sings, '...nestlings chirp and flee,' " she was saying, "you come in with your trill—*doodle-oodle-oodle-oodle—oo*. Do you see the place on your score? Good.

"Ah, John," Mrs. Quaver exclaimed, seeing him in his place. "I'm glad you're not absent. As I have just told the others, this afternoon we're having the first joint rehearsal of my arrangement of 'A Boy's Song,' by James Hogg.

"We've been over all the individual parts and all the sections, you will recall. Now it's time to fit the pieces together."

John nervously opened his trumpet case and took his shining golden trumpet from its bed of scarlet velvet. The beautiful new instrument gave him confidence. He worked the valves nimbly with his fingers and looked up at Mrs. Quaver again.

"Now, John," she said, "tell me when your little solo begins."

"Right after the end of the second verse," John promptly replied. He had practiced his part every evening in the basement at home for the last two weeks. He knew every note perfectly. "After the line, ' That's the way for Billy and me.' "

"Good," Mrs. Quaver said. "And don't forget what I told you, John. This is a *happy* song. I want you to play *tab-tuh, tab-tuh, tab-tuh-tuh, ta-a-ah*, simply repeating the rhythm of the voice. And I want you to be light and lively. This is supposed to be the song of a boy who loves romping in the country."

*Tab-tuh, tab-tuh, tab-tuh-tuh, ta-a-ah,* John thought. That shouldn't be too difficult, even with the whole orchestra listening to him. He had played it over and over again at home. But he would have to try extra hard here. This was to be his first solo. Everyone else was depending on him to play it properly.

"Right," said Mrs. Quaver brightly. With her baton, she rapped twice sharply on the music stand before her. All the musicians brought their instruments into playing position. Susan poised her bow over the strings of her violin. John held his trumpet close to his mouth and wiggled his fingers on the valves.

Mrs. Quaver's baton moved from side to side, up, and then down! The cymbals clashed and the drums thumped. The pianist brought his fingers down on the ivory keys of the piano. The violinists and cellists made their



wheeing and whumping sounds. All were in perfect unison. The rehearsal had begun.

After the introduction, one of the older boys began to sing.

“Where the pools are bright and deep,  
Where the gray trout lies asleep,  
Up the river and over the lea,  
That’s the way for Billy and me.”

After the last line of the first verse, John’s fellow trumpeter echoed the rhythm of the singer’s voice. *Tab-tuh, tab-tuh, tab-tuh-tuh, tab-a-ah!*

Mrs. Quaver smiled approvingly at the successful performance and, with her baton, gave the singer the signal to begin the second verse.

“Where the blackbird sings the latest,”

(An oboe went *pe-e-e-p.*)

"Where the hawthorn blooms  
the sweetest,  
Where the nestlings chirp and flee,"

(The flute warbled according to plan.)

"That's the way for Billy and me-e-e-e!"

John swallowed with an effort and put the mouthpiece of his trumpet to his lips for his solo. The mouthpiece instantly changed to chocolate. Then, almost as fast, the chocolate spread along the instrument, changing all the flashing gold into dull brown.

The first note came out fairly true. *Tab*—  
But chocolate trumpets cannot withstand much pressure. The hole in the mouthpiece softened and clogged up, and the valves stuck

as John desperately tried to finish his part.

Mrs. Quaver's eyes almost popped out of her head as she listened to him play.

Tah-

*tuh,*

*too-*

*tuh,*

*ter-t-t-*

*t-t-*

*t-*

It sounded as though John were trying to play a soap-filled bubble pipe. Terribly flustered, he put down his trumpet.

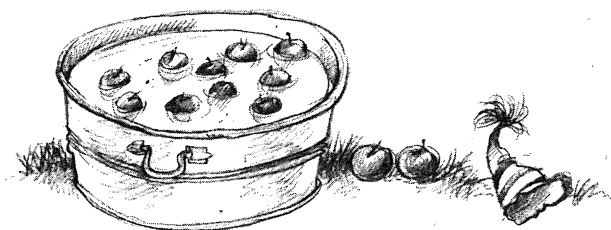
Mrs. Quaver was speechless. The orchestra was rocked by uproarious laughter. The other trumpeter leaned over toward John's chair and picked up the trumpet. "It's a chocolate trumpet!" he shouted derisively. "No wonder



it sounded like that! John Midas was trying to play a chocolate—”

John didn't wait to hear any more. He fled from the stage and out to the playground. Without stopping even to look around, he ran through the stone gateway and homeward.

## 9



Oh, the shame of it! The humiliation! John wept breathlessly as he ran, shocked and frightened, indignant and angry at the world that had suddenly turned against him.

Mean old things, John thought, blaming

Miss Plimsole and Mrs. Quaver for his failures, even though nothing that had happened to him had been their fault in any way.

Horrible old school, he thought, even though he had liked school until that morning. Hateful Susan, he thought, even though he knew at the same time that he was really longing for her to be friendly with him again.

Through the window Mrs. Midas saw John coming up the pathway. "Hello, John dear," she called from the living room. "You're home early today. How nice! As a reward, there'll be a piece of chocolate after supper."

"I hate it!" John shouted. He was crying too hard to say anything else for a moment.

When she heard the sound of his voice, Mrs. Midas rushed into the hall. "Why, what's the matter, dear?" she asked, putting

her arm around him. John twisted away from her grasp, ran past her, and started up the stairs toward his bedroom.

"Susan doesn't want me at her birthday party," he said as he went. "I know she doesn't. Well, I don't want to go to her rotten old party, anyway!"

"I don't think you really mean that," Mrs. Midas said. "Besides," she added, and John was halted by the softness of her voice, "Mrs. Buttercup just telephoned to say she was going to drive over herself at four o'clock to pick you up."

"She did?" John said, blinking down at his mother from the top of the stairway.

"Yes, she did," Mrs. Midas assured him. "So you'd better hurry and get yourself washed and brushed. Your party clothes are laid out on your bed."

\* \* \*



There were games on the Buttercups' lawn while it was still warm enough outside. Later the party supper, including the birthday cake, was going to be served indoors, and there would be a magician and a short movie.

John joined in the blindman's buff, and Grandmother's footsteps, and fox and geese, and soon he became more cheerful. He even temporarily forgot about chocolate.

Susan looked very pretty. Her yellow curls had been brushed so hard that they looked silkier than ever. She was wearing a big blue ribbon the same color as her eyes. Her cheeks were flushed with excitement—a deeper pink than her new party dress. On her feet were dainty little white socks and white shoes with straps that buttoned.

Between games, Susan smiled at John and said, "I'm glad you came." They seemed to be on good terms again.

Then Mr. Buttercup approached, bringing a bucket of water from the garage. He set it down in the middle of the lawn without spilling a single drop.

"We're going to duck for apples," Susan whispered to John, "the boys against the girls. You can be captain of the boys' team."

The two teams lined up for the race, Susan leading the girls and John the boys.

"The idea is this," Mr. Buttercup explained. "When I say *go*—not yet, John!—Susan and John will run to the bucket. There are twelve apples floating in the bucket and twelve people in the race. Using only their teeth, Susan and John will grab their apples and run back to their lines. As soon as they touch the hands of the Number Two runners in their teams—Dinny and Duncan—Susan and John will go to the end of their lines, and Dinny and Duncan will run to the bucket to duck for

apples. Do you all understand the way it's going to work? All right! One to get ready, two to get steady, and three to—go!"

Susan bounded ahead like a jackrabbit and had her face deep in the bucket by the time John reached her side and crouched down for his apple. He got his eye on a big red one with its stalk jutting up conveniently for him to grab. He lowered his face, opened his mouth, and lunged. Somehow his nose reached the apple before his teeth did and pushed it below the surface of the water. John's mouth followed the apple down.

Then a terrible thing happened. The clear water in the bucket turned into dark-brown, sweet, liquid chocolate. Susan and John immediately pulled their heads up. But it was too late. Their faces were drenched with chocolate syrup.

"Oh!" Susan exclaimed, wiping chocolate

out of her eyes. Chocolate syrup dripped down all over her delicate pale-pink dress. "Oh!" she moaned.

John was in the same state. There was chocolate all over his face; there was chocolate on his white shirtfront and on his gray flannel shorts. And there was chocolate in his mouth. "Glug," John said. "Glug!"

Susan was too surprised and angry to speak. For the second time that day she turned her back on John and ran away from him.

Mrs. Buttercup offered to clean John up. But he couldn't bear to stay at the party another minute. He started off at once for home.





Dragging along and thinking of all the dreadful things that had happened, John had walked about halfway home when he heard the cheery voice of his father.

"Hello, hello!" called Mr. Midas, crossing

over from the other side of the street. He was on his way home from the station. "You left the party rather early, didn't you? What—!" Mr. Midas had just seen the patches and streaks of chocolate that were drying on John's face and on his clothes. "Good gracious!" he said. "No wonder you left the party early. How did *that* happen?"

John burst into tears. It had all been so awful. But now he could tell his father about his terrible day. He stopped crying and only sniffed a little now and then as he told the whole story—about taking the coin to the candy store, about buying the box that had turned out to have only one chocolate in it, about the toothpaste, about breakfast, the gloves, the silver dollar, the pencil, the lunch, the trumpet, and finally the apple-ducking water.

"You mean to tell me they really all turned

to chocolate?" Mr. Midas asked. "You're sure you didn't imagine some of this?"

"Oh, no," John assured him.

"Well," Mr. Midas said, still looking doubtful, "we're only a couple of blocks from that candy store of yours—not that I've ever noticed one there. Suppose we stroll over and ask the man whether his chocolates always do strange things to people?"

"It's on the next corner," John said, recognizing some of the houses on the side street. "Not the next house, not the next house, not the next," he said, "but...." John's voice faded into silence.

The corner where he had found the candy store was nothing now but an empty lot—flat, open ground littered with a pile of rusty tin cans and broken bottles around a splintery old sign saying *For Sale*.

"Hmm," said Mr. Midas, frowning anx-



iously at John. "I think we'd better pay a visit to Dr. Cranium before we go home."

"That's where the store was, though," John protested, beginning to cry again. He had shed more tears in that one day, it seemed, and certainly eaten more chocolate, than in all the other days of his life put together. "I know it was."

Dr. Cranium was a busy man. As luck would have it, however, he was able to see Mr. Midas and John almost at once.

"Well, well, well, well, well!" said Dr. Cranium. "And how are we getting along now, John? Have we cut down on our candy, eh?"

"How do you do?" John responded dully.

"Apparently he's had a bad day, Dr. Cranium," Mr. Midas said. "Trouble at school, you know. And a little accident at a

birthday party. What I'm worried about is that he keeps saying that everything he puts into his mouth turns to chocolate."

"No more than a nursery fantasy, I'm sure," Dr. Cranium said to Mr. Midas. "Well, John," he went on, looking down with a smile, "suppose you tell me in your own words what the matter seems to be."

"Everything I put into my mouth turns to chocolate," John explained. "Everything I eat and everything I drink changes into chocolate. I'm thirsty. And I'm getting a pain. A bad one, I think."

Dr. Cranium sighed patiently and invited John to open his mouth and say *ah*.

"Ah," John said.

Dr. Cranium peered into John's mouth briefly and gave a low whistle of surprise. "This chocolate eating simply must stop." He went to a supply cabinet. "I don't think

there's any time to be lost," he told Mr. Midas. "I'm going to give the boy some of my own special compound—Dr. Cranium's Elixir, I call it. Never fails."

Dr. Cranium selected a large bottle from one of the cabinet's crowded shelves. He removed the top from the bottle. He got a spoon from another shelf. He filled the spoon with an oily greenish-yellowish medicine that had yellowish-reddish lights glinting in it. "It doesn't taste very pleasant," Dr. Cranium warned John in a pleasant tone of voice. "But I'm sure it'll do the trick. Clear the stomach and you clear the mind. That's what I always say."

Dr. Cranium offered John the brimful spoon.

"Must I?" John asked his father. "I know it'll turn into chocolate."

"Go on." Mr. Midas nodded encouragingly. "Drink it down."



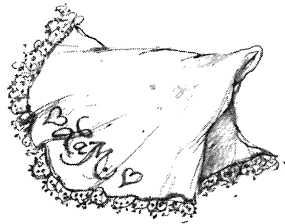
John took the spoon between his lips. The medicine turned to chocolate. The spoon turned to chocolate. John choked and spluttered, and chocolate syrup spurted from his mouth.

Dr. Cranium dropped the spoon in alarm. When it struck the white-tiled floor, the chocolate handle snapped into several pieces. "Mercy!" said Dr. Cranium. "I've never seen anything like it! The boy's whole system seems to be so chocolatified that it chocolatifies everything it touches."

After he had recovered somewhat, the doctor went on. "I believe that this must be an unprecedented case of...er...chocolatitis. I shall call it Cranium's Disease. I shall want to make an exhaustive study of the child. I—"

"I think John has had enough excitement for one day," Mr. Midas said.

# 11



Mrs. Midas was much upset when Mr. Midas told her that John had Dr. Cranium's Disease.

"He said it was chocolatitis," Mr. Midas explained, a worried frown on his face. "But

he's calling it Cranium's Disease, because it was his discovery."

"Dr. Cranium didn't do it," John said. "It's magic. It all started after I ate that chocolate....I'm scared," he added.

Mrs. Midas sat down and dabbed her eyes with a lace handkerchief. She was crying.

Mr. Midas blew his nose, said he had to attend to something, and abruptly left the room.

John had been so busy feeling sorry for himself that he had not realized how his mother and father would feel about his chocolate disease. "Never mind, Mother," he said, putting his arm around her shoulders. "It's all right." Really, nothing was all right, but he couldn't bear to see his mother's tears.

He kissed her wet cheek. His eyes were shut as his lips softly touched her, so he didn't see the change right away. Then his

lips began to feel sticky. He opened his eyes. His mother had turned into a lifeless statue of chocolate!

John ran wildly out of the house without thinking where he was going or what he was going to do. All he knew was that somehow he must get help. For the first time in a long while he forgot about himself altogether. Now he didn't care about anything but bringing his mother back to life. Without quite knowing how he got there, John found himself at the corner where he had bought the chocolate box. The lot was no longer an untidy rubbish dump. The neat red-brick building with two show windows was exactly where it had been in the first place. But the display of candy he had previously seen in the windows was no longer there. In one window John saw a chocolate trumpet, a chocolate pencil, and a silver dollar with a piece bitten



out of it. In the other window he saw a cafeteria tray littered with chocolate utensils and the remains of a chocolate lunch. Clearly, this place was the right one. Clearly, the proprietor must know a lot about John's hateful chocolate touch. John rushed into the store.

The proprietor was standing behind the counter, carefully polishing something small and round and flat and silver. "I was just thinking of you," he said.

John had no time to waste on pleasantries. "Remember-the-old-coin-I-found-and-gave-you-and-you-gave-me-a-magic-chocolate?" he demanded. Without waiting for a reply, he babbled on. "I-ate-it-and-it-made-everything-that-touches-my-mouth-turn-to-chocolate-and-I-kissed-my-mother-and-now-she's-chocolate-and-I've-got-to-change-her-back!"

"Easy now," murmured the storekeeper.

"Calm yourself." There was an expression of satisfaction in the old man's eyes.

"It's all your fault," John declared. "If my mother isn't made better again, I'll fight you till you're dead!"

"My goodness!" the storekeeper exclaimed. "Whose fault, did you say?"

"Yours!" John said. "If you hadn't taken that money, I wouldn't have—"

"Now, John," the storekeeper interrupted, "I must insist on honesty. I'm glad to hear that you're thinking about your mother for a change. Unselfishness is important. But honesty is also important. If you'll be truthful, perhaps I can help you."

John's ears reddened. It was becoming unmistakably evident to him that he had only himself to blame for all this unhappiness. He looked straight into the storekeeper's eyes. "I'll do anything. I'll work for you all my life



for nothing, if you'll turn my mother back. You can turn me to chocolate, instead, if you want. You—"

The storekeeper apparently ignored John's offers. "You were right, John," he said, "when you guessed that I had something to do with your acquiring the chocolate touch. But you yourself earned the coin that bought the chocolate touch. Only greedy people can even see that kind of money. Dr. Cranium was right, up to a point. I suppose that one could say that you had chocolatitis. But it was just an outward sign of selfishness."

"My mother!" John reminded the storekeeper frantically. "My mother's turned to chocolate! Do something about it! Oh, please do something about it!"

"I'm glad that you are concerned," the storekeeper commented unhurriedly. "Part of your cure is to be concerned about other people. You have been so greedy that you

didn't care what happened to other people."

"Oh, I know, I know," John admitted woefully. "But please decide about me later. And please make my mother better now."

"Well, John," the storekeeper said, "if you had to choose between getting rid of your chocolate touch and restoring your mother to life, which would it be?"

For one moment John couldn't help imagining a future of all-chocolate meals. The thought was terrible. But then he thought of his mother as she had been when he had left her, a motionless chocolate statue, unable to speak, her chocolate hand still holding her lace handkerchief. Without further hesitation, John said, "Help my mother."

"Well, John," the storekeeper said, "I am going to give you another chance. When next you go to school, your chocolate pencil will be a real wooden pencil with lead in it."

"But—" John began to protest. What did the pencil matter?

"The chocolate knife and fork and spoon you left on your tray in the cafeteria will have turned back to metal. Your chocolate trumpet will be a shiny golden one again."

"But—" John said.

"Don't worry about Dr. Cranium's spoon. He will find a whole silver one on the floor, where the broken chocolate one lay."

"But how about—?" John said.

"Susan Buttercup will discover that the chocolate stains on her party dress and her party shoes were nothing but water, after all. Her silver dollar will be all right."

John could stand the suspense no longer. "My mother!" he shouted. "What about my mother? Will *she* be all right?"

The storekeeper smiled. "Why don't you run along home and find out?" he suggested.

John turned without even saying good-bye and ran out of the store.

The storekeeper went back to the disk that he had been polishing, a disk the size of a quarter. It had to be polished smooth, ready for a new set of initials in case the need for them should arise.

# 12



The front door was open and John rushed into the living room, where he had left his mother. She was not there now, but on the chair was a small, wet lace handkerchief. John ran into the dining room and on to the



kitchen. As he came to the kitchen door, he heard the ring of silver against crockery. Then he saw a wonderful sight—his mother arranging the coffee things on a tray!

He dashed into the kitchen and flung his arms around his mother's waist, sobbing and laughing with relief and joy.

"There, there," said Mrs. Midas, stroking the hair from John's forehead. "You've had a very disturbing day, dear. But in a few minutes we're all going to have supper and everything will be fine again. Goodness! I do believe I need some coffee myself. I felt so strange just then in the other room. I really don't know what came over me."

The door from the garden opened, and Mr. Midas came in.

"Before we settle down," Mrs. Midas said to John, "have a glass of good, cold milk. You look so hot."



So they didn't know what had happened to her! Well, John thought, he certainly wouldn't scare them by telling them. He watched gratefully as his mother took a frosty blue jug from the refrigerator and poured from it a glassful of icy, creamy milk.

Trembling with nervousness, John tilted the glass against his open mouth. The liquid flowed in and down his throat—and remained purely milky, deliciously milky, tasting of nothing but fresh, clean milk.

After the first long, wonderful gulps, he suddenly recalled that he had not thanked the storekeeper for saving his mother. "Mother," he said, "may I go out for a minute? I'll be right back."

"All right, John," she said, "but supper will be ready in ten minutes. Don't keep us waiting."

John ran briskly down the street until he

came to the corner where he always turned right when he was going to Susan's house. There he turned left instead and started along the two blocks of unfamiliar street leading to the candy store. Soon he came to the corner where the red-brick building had been.

But there was no building and no store and, of course, no storekeeper. In the corner lot there was nothing to be seen but a heap of rusty tin cans and broken bottles surrounding a signboard with new lettering that said—*Sold.*

## About the Author and the Illustrator

Born in London, Patrick Skene Catling was educated there and at Oberlin College in the United States. As a Royal Canadian Air Force navigator and as a journalist, he has traveled extensively. His present home is in the Republic of Ireland.

The original appearance of *The Chocolate Touch* in 1952 stirred much reviewer enthusiasm. *The New York Herald Tribune* remarked, "it has already proved a hilarious success with children," and *The Saturday Review* said, "it is told with an engaging humor that boys and girls will instantly discover and approve."

After receiving her B.F.A. from Pratt Institute in 1969, Margot Apple attended the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina and subsequently established herself as a free-lance illustrator in the fields of publishing, advertising, and greeting-card design. Recently she has illustrated *Soft House* by Steve Futterman.

An advocate of self-sufficient living, Ms. Apple grows and preserves her own food and sews her own clothes. She now lives in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

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