

Better than Chocolate

by Jeanne Holtzman

Teddy laughs like a machine gun. People back away when they hear him. Every time I see him at work, I try to make his skinny body rattle. I would never back away.

We both work at the supermarket. He doesn't go to my school, he goes to the voc. school. I'm pretty sure his mom is dead — cancer or drugs or something. His dad owns a junkyard. My friends think he's mean and scary, but they're a bunch of wusses, and besides, they don't see him the way I do.

Today when I ring up Teddy's bottle of Jolt, he says he'll be the watchman at the junkyard tonight, he'll be lonely, I should come visit. As he walks away, I watch the slight slump of his shoulders, the tendrils curling at the nape of his neck.

I don't tell my mom where I'm going. She'd get all excited and start lecturing me about STDs and birth control and feminism and blowjobs and exploitation. Then she'd batter me with questions and act all phony pretending she didn't care that he was poor and not in honors classes. I tell her I'm going to the movies with my friends. I tell my friends I have to visit relatives with my family.

I drive out of my neighborhood with its perfect lawns, past the police station and Pizza Hut and McDonald's, past the sketchy Glen Meadow apartment complex that my friends call Glen Ghetto, and out of town to where there are no streetlights and the road curves around straggly fields and falling down barns. Dead leaves blow across the narrow, crumbling pavement like animals running for their lives.

I text Teddy when I'm almost there, so he can tie up the dog. As I pull up, I hear it barking and growling and tearing at the earth.

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Dirty yellow light leaks out of the barred office window. Shadows hulk in the distance.

Teddy stands behind the wire fence, his fingers laced through the chain links next to his face.

"You came," he says. He smells of weed and beer. He peers out between the diamonds with those eyes, sad and cynical, the color of chocolate and shit. Something loosens inside me.

"I'm here."

"Your friends didn't talk you out of it."

"I didn't tell them."

"Aren't you the little rebel?"

"I brought some of my mom's homemade chocolate chip cookies." I lift up my hand and show him the bag. "Are you going to let me in?"

Teddy reaches for the fly of his pants. "Nah — I thought we'd just fuck through the fence. I think my huge dick will fit through the hole." He erupts in a burst of laughter.

I hope it's too dark for him to see me flinch before I laugh.

His hand disappears into his pocket and he pulls out a key, unlocks the gate. "At least you brought food."

I step into the yard and hear the gate clang shut behind me, hear the lock snap in place. Teddy grabs the bag.

We walk up a gravel driveway to an office that smells like grease and rust and wet dog. Teddy takes my hand and leads me through a door

to the back room. Old-fashioned pin-up girl calendars hang on the wall next to a ripped up poster of a crying Happy Bunny saying, "You suck, and I'm sad." Gunshots explode from Grand Theft Auto on an old TV. I see the grimy mattress on the floor, covered with wadded up chip bags and empty beer bottles.

Teddy brushes off a spot, and I sit propped against the wall with my shoes on the sheet. Teddy sits next to me. I can feel his arm warm against mine. He doesn't talk, just eats the cookies. He doesn't offer me any.

When he's done, he throws the crumpled bag across the room, then turns and kisses me. His tongue tastes like Nestles morsels. He reaches under my shirt and unhooks my bra, squeezes my breasts with calloused hands. I've never heard myself whimper before. He takes my hand and puts it on his fly and tells me how hard I made him. He undoes his zipper.

"Take it out," he says. I hesitate. He does it himself.

He lies back and closes those eyes. I stop myself from kissing his eyelids. I take him in my mouth. I hope I'm doing it right.

Teddy comes like a baby crying.

I sit back on my heels, and look down on his spent, panting body. His eyes flutter open for a moment. I wonder if he sees my smile.

