

Chocolate Madness

By

Jeremy Mac & Tamara Fey Turner

They were relentless; biting, chewing, eating as if driven by a hunger beyond parallel to any they'd ever known. They prayed for death.

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The bunny's long ears perked high toward the thatched roof of the tiny cottage. Knock. . . Knock. . . Knock. . .

It was a soft rapping at the rotting wooden door, muffled, but more than the wind. Someone was there.

All was still when a strong breeze aided Esther in opening the dilapidated door that protected the inside of the old cottage from the creeping night. The sun was setting. The temperature was dropping.

"H-H- Hello?" She managed only a whisper. Her hand gripped tightly around a smaller hand. Both were growing colder.

Olivia shivered, her teeth clicked together. She did not fidget under the pressure of Esther's grip, and she offered no resistance as her older sister stepped through the threshold and into the cottage, bringing them both inside. It was small and open, like one big room.

They were immediately assaulted by a pungent odor. It smelled as if something was spoiled. Esther took another step, and looked around the murky room. The evening was sucking out the light and pouring in more shadows. The small girl saw nothing. No furniture. Nothing identifiable. Just dust clinging to the air.

Then movement. A slow-moving shadow.

Olivia sucked in air with a gulp. Coughing hard she inhaled dust, it was her turn to squeeze her older sister's hand.

"Ssshhh!"

"I'm sorry, Esther."

"It's okay." The high pitched voice came from somewhere in the room. Both girls remained silent and squeezed the hand of the other. "It's okay, little girl." The shadow that spoke seemed to move toward them. It was close to the ground and the size of a small dog. "Oh, little

girls. I didn't realize there were two of you." The thing on the ground moved toward them again. Did it hop?

Now both girls sucked in the rancid, grimy air, and both coughed.

"Don't be afraid. My name is Jarl. I live here."

"W-What are you?" Esther stuttered.

Still mostly cloaked in the twilight, the thing spoke again in a friendly voice. "I am a rabbit. Like the chocolate bunnies you see at Easter time. Only I am life-size. I used to live in the forest, but now I live here, in this cottage. In the dark."

"Why in the dark?" Esther bent down to try to see the animal better.

"Because I will melt in the sunshine that I once love so much."

Thinking this part of a game, Esther giggled.

"Oh, dear girl, it is the truth, I speak. Please do not laugh at my plight. Shayla, the wicked witch, delivered this awful fate onto me."

"What does that mean? I don't understand. You can hop like a real bunny. Not like chocolate ones sold in markets during Easter."

"You are right, dear girl. I have movement like a regular rabbit, but I am, indeed, made of chocolate."

"Mr. Jarl, I am Esther. My sister and I are lost. We were playing and lost sight of our parents. How can we find them in the growing night? Can you help us?"

"You won't find anyone through the forest tonight, sweet girl. But you can stay here. Unfortunately, it will be cold as I cannot allow you to make a fire. It would melt me."

"But, Mr. Jarl, we are already so cold." Shivering, Esther rubbed her hands on her arms, letting go of Olivia's hand.

"Olivia, please do not cry. At least here, you and Esther are safe. The witch is gone now."

"Is there really a witch?" asked Olivia, suddenly no longer crying and seemingly excited at the mention of a witch.

"Not anymore. Witch Shayla's chocolate lust finally took her away."

"Jar-ral, are you really made of chocolate? Did the wicked witch try to eat you?" Olivia seemed very brave in her delivery.

"Dear Olivia, the witch created me to eat."

"Oh, that sounds awful," gasped Esther.

"It would have been horrible to be eaten alive, of course. But I am alive, you know. And I wasn't always chocolate. I used to be a normal bunny."

With eyes as large as saucers, Esther found Olivia's hand and took a giant step back toward the door, pulling her sister with her. This time Olivia resisted.

"I like the chocolate bunny, sister. Jar-ral is nice."

"He isn't really chocolate, Olivia. He's just funning us."

"Oh, but I am chocolate. The evil Shayla used to live here, in the forest, in this very cottage. She craved chocolate, but she was never satisfied. Her spells turned many things into chocolate for her to eat. The table and chairs, plants and berries. Yet, it was never enough to calm her appetite. The more she ate, the more she wanted. Her hunger for chocolate grew to such a degree, that she would eat nothing else. She casted more and more chocolate spells. Still, her hunger seemed to never decrease."

With another giant step back and pull on Olivia's hand, Esther brought the girls nearly into the doorway, when a burst of wind pulled the door closed with a loud slam. Both girls whimpered.

Jarl hopped closer, but the shadows still prevented the girls from seeing him clearly.

"Shayla was always hungry, you see. This made her sad. She used to say her chocolate cravings were the most severe pain imaginable. At first, I had no idea what she meant. When she wept, her sadness grew into anger. Anger made her spells more powerful, and soon she was able to cast stronger spells. But it wasn't enough. She needed something else. . . something more to satisfy her. Something *alive*. Her spells began to develop into something more vicious, as she practiced turning forest creatures into chocolate. At first, the animals were trapped inside a hard chocolate shell that was dull and inanimate. Squirrels, rabbits, mice, and even deer and birds were trapped within her relentless, evil spells as she experimented on them. They were in great agony and screamed in pain and terror. When the chocolate coating broke, the animals died. They were simply encased in chocolate. Tortured. Terrified. Suffering. We saw many horrendous deaths. It was a sad time. When Shayla tried to eat the chocolate covered animals, they made her sick. The witch could not eat flesh and blood. She needed chocolate! She continued her awful magic. She would not give up. She would find a way to be satisfied. At any cost. It was clear she would never abort her mission. It was also clear she was enjoying the torment and misery of the creatures she once lived with harmoniously."

"This is just a tale to frighten us more! What kind of rabbit is chocolate and can hop about, speaking to little girls in the forest?" Esther demanded, taking a step in front of Olivia, as if offering protection to her younger sister.

"No, my dear, this is not meant to frighten you at all. I merely want you to understand the situation. Think of it as sort of an explanation. And an apology."

"Why on earth should you apologize to us? Other than refusing to help us find our parents or light a fire?" Esther's words were meant to bring shame to the creature for not assisting her and Olivia better.

It did not seem to work. The rabbit simply continued. "The story is true. Witch Shayla was never one to use her magic. Never, that is, until she grew mad over chocolate. No one knows why, of course. . . why she went mad. She was once friendly with all the forest creatures, lived in this cottage happily, and mostly kept to herself."

Esther thought she saw movement, a new shadow come to life, somewhere behind the talking bunny. She couldn't be sure, though. The shadows could be playing tricks on her eyes. Her mind could be playing tricks on her too. After all, was she really conversing with a living chocolate rabbit? She shook her head and peered at the creature, still trying to see him clearly. Still trying to comprehend what was going on.

"The chocolate changed Shayla. Her heart and face became hard and ugly. Her temper fierce. We all feared her. The witch no longer came into the sunlight. She hid in the shadows and spied on the animals that no longer loved her."

"I don't believe you!" Esther shouted defiantly and continued to stand in front of Olivia. Now she held her arms down at her sides, as if shielding her younger sister from something, but Esther wasn't sure from what. Yet Olivia, on the other hand, did not seem to be alarmed. In fact, she appeared to be leaning forward, squinty-eyed and slack-jawed... and did she just lick her lips?

“You will believe me, young Esther, in time. Due time. Trust me. You will see and understand.”

There *was* movement behind the bunny. Another shadow was hopping. Was it another bunny? Another chocolate bunny? Esther’s fear was growing. If this was a dream, she wished she’d awaken. Quickly!

“Why should I trust anything you say? You haven’t even shown yourself to us. “

“I will, Esther. I will show you. Soon. When my story is finished, and I think you are ready. Then you will see who I really am. Then, perhaps, you will understand.”

“Show yourself now! That is, if you really are a chocolate bunny.” The girl’s words and frown did not convince the creature.

“I saw the evil witch turn my brother into chocolate. She ate him. He screamed and fought. But he was no match for her. She was merciless in her feeding. I watched. Helpless. Shayla said she would starve without chocolate. Living chocolate. She swore she had no choice. Then, I did not understand. I did not believe. I did not know what to do. As she spoke words of magic I did not understand, those of a chocolate spell, his brown fur turned into chocolate. He tried to hop away from her but could not. Even though he could still move about, his movements were very slow. Like mine are now. She seemed to be overcome by some chocolate madness. Her sharp finger claws grabbed his ears and ripped them apart. His brain fell out onto the floor. It was squishy but oozed chocolate syrup instead of blood. She cackled at the sight of it. Her fangs gnashed down like a lion upon his belly, tearing him open. His guts spilled into her mouth. Chocolate blood rushed over her face, dripping from her tongue, lips, and chin. She threw her head back in high-pitched laughter as she crunched the chocolate bones in his back and swallowed his ears. As she chewed, she stared at me. I was frozen in fear. And overcome with guilt.”

Esther heard every word the rabbit spoke, but her eyes were glued to the movement behind him. No, *movements*. More than one shadow was shifting in the darkness within the cottage. It was so dark now. Only faint moonlight shone in through a single bare window. The air now appeared to be alive and flowing near the leafy cottage floor.

“I’m sorry about your brother, Mr. J-Jarl. I really am. That is a very sad story. But where is the mean witch now? I’m frightened. Very frightened! Something else is in here with us, Mr...”

“Understandable, Esther, your fear. There is much to fear in the woods, even in normal circumstances. And this is not a normal situation. Please do not be anxious. There is no reason for concern now.” His voice was reassuring, but the moving shadows were not.

“I’m hungry,” Olivia said, barely above a whisper, more like a longing sigh, unaware she’d even voiced it. She was thinking about the delicious chocolate bunnies at Easter time. But Easter seemed such a faraway time right now.

“I’m hungry too.” Esther turned to face Olivia. “And we’ll be leaving soon for home where our dinner will be waiting.” Her tone was calm and deliberate in her attempt to be a strong example for her sister.

“For now, we want you girls to stay here.”

“I’m sure you are lonely and want company and, well, we’ve never met a talking bunny before. Certainly not a chocolate one! And who will even believe us, unless they see it for

themselves? Of course, we haven't rightly seen you for ourselves yet. Perhaps if you come out of the shadows... assuming you actually are a real chocolate bunny, you could come home with us. We could eat you. I mean, we could play with you, of course. If you would like that."

"You will see me. . .us. . . very soon."

"Jarl, who else is here? My sister and I really need to find our parents. They must be quite worried. Won't you please help us?"

"I'm afraid we cannot do that. You see, Esther, after my brother. . . the witch also turned my mother to chocolate and bit into her face in front of us, my brothers and sisters. We all went a little crazy after that."

"Oh! Is that why the witch ran away?"

"My darling Esther, the witch did not run away. My siblings and I ate her. Piece by piece. A bit at a time." He spoke severely now. His kind tone vanishing.

The girls were statues. Esther was engrossed in the tale of the chocolate storyteller, her fear and belief growing. Olivia was lost in thoughts of milk chocolate Easter bunnies melting in her mouth.

"Rabbit bites are a lot like rat bites. If you ever anger a rabbit, the bites can be savage. . . deep and burning. In our rage, we tore at the witch's flesh, skinning her while she was alive, and eating her whole. Peeling her skin, drinking her blood, and crushing her bones, until there was nothing left, I admit that we savored the revenge and the taste of blood, skin, and human meat. We enjoyed eating the witch. In doing so, we became infected. A chocolate madness reversal, you could say. At first, we were afraid of being eaten. Of melting in the sunlight. Or of someone finding us and capturing us, as you said, wanting to eat us. . . I mean *play* with us. But now, *we* have cravings. A demanding, all-consuming, uncontrollable hunger. We are ravenous. We understand now that Shayla could not fight the urges. We understand why she would never stop. She could not. *We* cannot. As Shayla once required chocolate, we chocolate bunnies now require blood. Human blood. That is why we need you to stay here tonight."

Both girls shrieked, as the darkness revealed a multitude of chocolate bunnies that descended upon them. Tripping both girls to the ground, the rabbits fought for a place to sink their teeth, taking long, deep bites out of their flesh. Chunks of Esther and Olivia stuck in the front teeth of several creatures who closed their eyes in ecstasy, tenderizing the young flesh before swallowing and deciding on the next morsel.

The girls felt their skin being violently shucked back, exposing bare muscle. Blood spurted upon the chocolate bunnies who rejoiced in showering in the blood of their young victims, making happy, high-pitched squeaking sounds.

A few played tug-of-war with Olivia's intestines while she watched. Then they wrapped them around her neck until she was blue and pale and no longer moving. Back kicks to her temples finally caved in the soft flesh.

"Sweet. . ." One of the rabbits murmured, covered in blood and reaching deeper for more tender brain matter.

Esther's fingernails and toenails flew toward the ceiling as they were ripped off and thrown like trinkets from a parade float.

"Useless. . ."

“ . . . inedible garnish. . . ” two chocolate assailants hissed to one another.

Esther’s cries for help and mercy were ignored by the feasting bunnies who danced and giggled around their scrumptious meal.

When the girls’ screams subsided. . .

When the bunnies had devoured all the bones, and nothing remained . . .

They receded back into the shadows, hoping it wouldn’t be too long before another blood-filled victim came along to quench their chocolate madness.