

Chocolate Girl



The Louisiana summers were always so hot; even on days like this when the sky was completely over-cast with dark, grey clouds. Henry was grateful the good ol' USPS had issued shorts for the summers; otherwise it would make being a mailman that much worse. As he drove down his new route he could feel the sweat that had soaked through his shirt chill his lower back every time he hit a bump in the dirt road. It was a long day; the distance between houses on the backwoods, swampy area of his new route was almost a half mile or more a stretch. His beard was wet and blowing in the small, personal fan that dangled from the carrier-truck's ceiling. The air conditioning had gone out and it was miserable hot.

Henry had always been a friendly man who, at times, seemed over-qualified in the brains department for his job. He was never seen without something in his hands that he was reading. In the mornings before all the mailmen started out from the post office, they would stand around discussing politics, social concerns, and life in general. He never joined into the conversations willingly, but was always asked his opinion on what was being discussed. Henry's opinion was always held in the highest regard, as he always made the most sound, and thorough statements of anyone else working there.

Now, as he drove past the tall grass and Spanish moss-covered trees, Henry did what he always did: took out his thermos of homemade, chocolate-malt liquor and took a sip. Henry was no drunk and never had been; but he enjoyed his sipping liquor as much as the next. Something about the chocolate malt and the slight buzzing effect of the liquor that made him feel childish again. He smiled his broad smile that he always seemed to have one whether he was with people or not. The next stop was an old manor that had originally belonged to cotton barons in the early 1800s. By this time, the plantation itself was all but gone and

the manor was in a state of major disrepair. As Henry pulled up, he remembered that he had a large box to deliver here so he was going to have to get out and walk to the front of the house.

As he approached the manor, he realized the disrepair was far worse than he had originally noticed. The home looked as though it ought to be condemned. Windows were cracked and shattered, ivy had crept all the way up the side of the house and onto the roof even, paint was flaking off everywhere, and the wrap-around porch looked completely warped and as disfigured as his grandfather's arthritic hands. The garden was overgrown and the iconic, religious statues within the garden were crumbling and worn.

The walk-way was long and made of old, brittle bricks that had lost their mortar years ago. Henry noticed an old woman looking out of one of the partially broken, upstairs windows. Her hair was completely white. In fact, Henry noticed, everything about her seemed white. She turned and walked away from the window into the recesses of the manor with what appeared to be a great difficulty in movement. Henry decided with the old woman having such a difficult time moving, he would actually set the package inside for her instead of leaving it on the porch as he might otherwise do.

When the door opened Henry was greeted by the old woman. She was even more old and haggard-looking up close and in person than she had seemed to be at the window even.

"Would you like me to bring this inside ma'am?"

"Yes. Please young man, come in."

"Where would you like me to set it?"

"Could you bring it into the kitchen for me please?"

Henry followed the woman into her granite kitchen and set the box on a perfectly intact counter. The rest of the home he had seen, inside and out, was falling apart, yet the kitchen appeared to be immaculate. He looked over and saw the shaking woman's hands trying to cut open the box with a kitchen knife. She was unable to make any progress on it and set the knife on the counter-top and began to rub her old, sore hands.

"Let me get that for you."

“Thank you very much for helping a poor old woman.”

“It’s my pleasure ma’am,” Henry said as he easily sliced opened the box.

“Could you be so kind as to help me set the things on the counter? I fear that some of them may be too heavy for my hands.”

“Not a problem at all miss,” Henry said as he began to place the confectioner’s sugar and cocoa onto the counter from the box.

“A baker huh?”

“Oh yes. I’m making chocolate pudding for my children.”

“I see. That may be difficult though. I don’t see any gelatin in here.”

“Oh my.”

“That’s ok. Y’know, that’s tuff is mostly bone-meal anyways,” Henry said to the woman, whose hunched back was turned towards him now. She was leaning on the counter as though she were tired.

“Oh yes. I know it is,” she said calmly just as she effortlessly whipped around and slashed across Henry’s neck, “Thankfully you’re here for that.”

“Here you go babies,” the old woman said as she lowered the large pan of chocolate pudding to the ground. She no longer looked or moved as an old woman. The meal she had before getting the bones had rejuvenated and somehow given youth to her body.

The short hairless, creatures came out of the bushes, dragging their long, bony arms and spidery fingers. Their small mouths twitched and

their oversized black eyes looked greedily at the chocolate pudding...

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