

Chocolate: Reading

While I was out shopping in the local supermarket I bumped into a friend of mine. It was great to see her although she had put on a lot of weight since the last time we'd met. While we were chatting I glanced into her trolley and couldn't help noticing how much chocolate was in there - there were boxes and bars of all kinds of chocolate!



"Ah, yes," Cheryl said having seen my glance, "I know it's bad for the children to eat so much chocolate but I like it too." We carried on chatting about this and that and then arranged to have a coffee together after we'd both done our shopping.

In the café I ordered an espresso, but Cheryl asked for a hot chocolate and two pieces of chocolate cake. "Oh, not for me thanks," I said when I heard the request, "it's time for lunch soon." Cheryl went scarlet and said with a forced laugh, "they're both for me - I'm starving!" While she was eating and drinking I could see that she was really enjoying the chocolate. "You certainly like your chocolate!" I laughed. She then looked very serious, leant towards me and said in a whisper. "Please don't laugh, please don't tell anyone - but I'm addicted to chocolate!"

Cheryl went on to tell me that for some years now she had begun to have cravings for chocolate. It started because whenever she felt unhappy, or angry or just generally fed up she had a bar of chocolate which would make her feel better, and much happier. Sometimes she had two. She then needed to have the chocolate regardless of how she felt; it was like wanting to have a cigarette she said. She found herself wanting to buy her children chocolate bars so that she could buy lots for herself too. She admitted to having a box in a cupboard just for her chocolate bars, it was hidden away of course because she didn't dare confess her addiction to her husband.

Addiction? It sounded a strong word to me, was she really *addicted* to chocolate? Cheryl explained that she had tried to give up a few times but she would have terrible headaches which only went away when she started to eat a chocolate bar. Once, when there was none in the house, the urge to have some chocolate was so bad that she drove out late at night to find a garage in order to buy some bars. "Luckily nobody noticed I was gone, they were all asleep but I felt very bad about it," Cheryl added. She also admitted to stealing chocolate from her children, "So the chocolate makes me feel good when I eat it, but then very guilty too!"

Cheryl had done some research on chocolate to see if her addiction was very bad for her or not. She wondered whether chocolate was all right to eat in large quantities and perhaps there was less cause for anxiety. "There was a report that suggested chocolate might help fight heart disease. Apparently, there are chemicals in chocolate that could thin the blood and help to prevent clotting. I thought this was a positive thing, but then saw that the scientists' research was funded by a company that makes chocolate!" Cheryl sighed and took another big bite. "Other research also suggested if you eat chocolate three times a month you'll live a year longer. But then they said that chocolate's high fat content means it can lead to an increased risk in heart disease!"

Wiping chocolate from her mouth she continued, "It's not my fault. There are natural chemicals in chocolate which make you feel good, and can cause cravings too. I know I have a sweet tooth anyway, but chocolate has over 300 chemicals in it - it's not just a nice taste, you know! The only good thing I learned really was that dark chocolate is better for you than milk chocolate. This is because it has lots of flavanoids and antioxidants in it which can help control blood pressure, so I try to buy more of that - although I prefer the taste of milk chocolate. And sometimes," she said with a smile, "I dream of chocolate. I dream that I've fallen into a deep pit full of chocolate bars and I can eat them all!"

We had now both finished our drinks, and Cheryl's plate was spotless. So what was she going to do about this? "I don't know!" she sighed. "Well," I suggested, "wouldn't it be a good idea to _____ first of all?" She agreed, and we parted, although I saw her slowing down as she approached a chocolate vending machine. I called her name and she turned round, "Yes, you're right of course!" She put her purse back in her bag and reluctantly walked away.