

JOANNE HARRIS
THE LITTLE BOOK OF
CHOCOLAT
AND FRAN WARDE



*Fifty recipes celebrating the
bestselling novel Chocolat*

THE LITTLE BOOK OF
CHOCOLAT

About the Book

Try me . . . test me . . . taste me . . .

Joanne Harris's *Chocolat* trilogy has tantalized readers with its sensuous descriptions of chocolate since it was first published. Now, to celebrate the much-loved story of Vianne Rocher's deliciously decadent *chocolaterie*, Joanne Harris and Fran Warde have created the ultimate book of chocolate lore and recipes from around the world, bringing a touch of magic to your kitchen.



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Acknowledgements

About the Authors

Also by Joanne Harris and Fran Warde

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JOANNE HARRIS
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To chocoholics around
the world

x





INTRODUCTION

Back in 1998, when I started to write a little book called *Chocolat* – my third book, and something of a departure from the Gothic pastiches I'd written before – I was completely unaware of the genie I was about to release into my ordered little world. My story, a light-hearted fable set in a not-quite-current France, had as its central metaphor the concept of food as redemption – food, and most precisely, chocolate.

Why chocolate, do you ask? Why not cheese, or chillies, or olives, or bread? I am not a chocoholic: although I do enjoy chocolate occasionally, it's not among the foods that I could never live without (for that, see the chillies and cheese above). And yet, as I wrote my story, I found myself increasingly fascinated by the history and folklore of chocolate; its capacity to transform and evolve; and, of course, the emotional resonance that chocolate holds for so many of us, something that transcends mere taste and becomes a spiritual journey.

I was born in a sweet-shop. A corner sweet-shop in Barnsley, to be precise; a place as far removed from Vianne Rocher's elegant little *chocolaterie* as it was possible to be. The shop, which belonged to my grandparents, sold mostly newspapers and sweets, the sweets in glass jars in the window, kaleidoscopic and fascinating. I very rarely ate any. Chocolate, too, was a rare treat – and, at that time, generally not of wonderful quality. The kind of boutique chocolate shops that now inhabit the high street were altogether unknown – except perhaps in London – and the occasional trip to Thorntons was a very special pilgrimage.

But on my trips to France to visit my French family – trips that coincided with my school holidays – the story was very different. At Easter, in particular, every *confiserie* – that word which translates as 'confectioner' but which holds a wealth of other associations, and

which the French high street finds as indispensable as any bakery – was filled with Easter chocolates.

Of course, we had Easter eggs in England. But ours were dull in comparison – gritty, fatty chocolate in foil and cardboard, while the French ones were works of art, wrapped in transparent cellophane, their natural gloss shining through, tied with artfully curled ribbons and decorated with clusters of flowers and fruit, cleverly piped on in icing sugar. Others were made of brightly coloured papier-mâché, painted with traditional designs and filled with tiny chocolate shapes. Some were small enough to be sold at pocket-money prices; others were large enough to qualify as sculpture, each confectioner vying with his rivals to create bigger, better, more beautiful pieces.

And the French confectioners did not limit their creativity to decorating eggs. There were also chocolate menageries of hens, rabbits, piglets, ducks – all symbols of prosperity – along with winged bells and paper cones filled with chocolates and toys, like pagan cornucopia. At the time, it seemed to me that this very Catholic country had retained far more of its ancient Easter rituals and images than England, although it could simply be that Catholicism has always had a natural capacity to assimilate and re-invent popular traditions.

Thus, when I was a child I was taught that the reason why church bells fall silent on Good Friday is that they magically leave their bell-towers, grow angel wings and fly – invisibly, upside-down – to Rome to be blessed by the Pope before Easter. The Pope's blessings take physical, magical form as chocolate figures – animals, eggs, and, of course, those winged bells – which fill the church bells as they fly home to ring on Easter Sunday. But as soon as the bells return to the church-towers and start to ring, the thousands of chocolate shapes they contain are flung out all over the countryside. The only way to collect them and stop them smashing on to the ground is to build a nest and to hide it in the branches of a tree, so that the chocolates land inside. On Easter Sunday, before setting off to church, French children still make nests to be filled with chocolate animals and collected after the service: Catholicism and paganism co-existing happily in a celebration of spring rebirth and spiritual regeneration.

And this was where *Chocolat* was born, between the beautiful chocolate shops of western France and the close little Yorkshire community that shaped so much of my childhood: a story, not just of chocolate, but of people living together in a place formed by traditions; of insiders and outsiders; of folklore and religion; tolerance and cruelty; feasting, fasting and family. At the time, I had no idea how far that story was to take me. It gave me wings – just like those bells – and sent me all around the world. A story can sometimes do that, you know: and quite unexpectedly, *Chocolat* had become one of those stories, linking me with readers from over fifty countries, sending me to Hollywood, boosting me out of my orbit into a new, extraordinary life.

It was the first time I'd really considered the magical powers of chocolate. Papal blessings aside, I was used to thinking of chocolate as a delicious indulgence rather than the stuff of dreams. And yet, there is a real magic to this ancient, mysterious substance. After all, the history of chocolate predates Christianity. There is evidence to suggest that it was used over 2,500 years ago in Central America, where the Olmec were probably the first consumers. The Olmec were a fascinating people – deeply spiritual, sophisticated, scientific, artistic – and though we still know too little about them, we do know that they used chocolate, although they ground the beans to make a strong, bitter drink very different to the kind of hot chocolate we enjoy today.

The Olmec created a solid foundation for the later Mesoamerican cultures – the Maya and the Aztecs. Certainly, by the time the Maya took over from the Olmec, chocolate – or *cacahuatl* ('bitter water') – had become more than just a drink. It was prized as a health food, a stimulant and a divine gift, and its preparation was increasingly ritualized. Mixed with cornmeal, water, chilli, vanilla, honey and spices, the first chocolate drink was red, not brown, and was probably served hot. These people also used chocolate as a condiment – perhaps something like the mole sauce still used in Mexican cooking.

Most importantly, the Maya venerated chocolate as a divine gift from the goddess Ixcacao, who gave the first cocoa tree to mankind.

In other Mayan mythologies, Ixcacao was married against her will to Ek Chua, the trader god, who turned her divine gift of cacao into currency; a currency that endured in some parts of Latin America into the nineteenth century. From their uneasy union came a war between chocolate's spiritual and commercial aspects; a war still fought today in the Western world, between those who feel that Easter should be a time of spiritual contemplation, and those who simply want to eat as much chocolate as they can.



After the collapse of the Mayan culture came the Aztecs, who also used chocolate as currency. A tomato was worth 1 cacao bean; a night with a prostitute, 10 beans; the price of a slave, 100 beans. Stores of counterfeit beans have been found – even then people were prepared to cheat the system. Now a commercial enterprise, chocolate was the privilege of the elite: leaders, priests, warriors and officials.

The Aztecs also seem to have lived in a state of perpetual fear of sin, or offending any one of their many hostile deities. The land of chocolate had become a land of fear and nightmare, and when Cortez arrived in the New World, he was quick to exploit such local beliefs – especially the legend that the god Quetzalcoatl would one day return to Earth as a fair-skinned, bearded man. Emperor Montezuma assumed that Cortez and his people were gods – or at the very least, their envoys.

I suppose this is where the second book in my *Chocolat* series was born: in the time of blood and chocolate. My villain, Zozie de l'Alba, is a representation of this inheritance – the dark side of chocolate, if you like. Today, of course, it's hard to believe that chocolate ever had a dark side. And as I learnt more about it – some as research for *Chocolat*, but much more after the book had come out, as kindred spirits all over the world were impelled to share their experiences and to add their voices to the growing number of people my story had inspired – I realized that there's a lot more to chocolate than Easter eggs, or chocolate bars, or Cadbury's chocolate animals. We tend to take it for granted now; chocolate has become an everyday indulgence, and as our taste for it has grown, the range of flavours and quality has also grown accordingly. But the story of chocolate has a magic of its own and, in spite of its popularity, the world's favourite flavour still retains some of its ancient mysteries. Perhaps you'll discover a few of them in the pages of this book. Or perhaps you'd rather just indulge. Either way, it's all right.

Joanne Harris
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