





THE  
CHOCOLATE  
CLOUDS



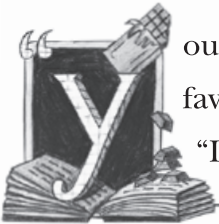


Henry looked up from his favorite book.

## Chapter One



# CHOCO-LOCVILLE



ou're so fat," Henry said as he looked up from his favorite book lying in front of him on the bed.

"I wish I could give you anything other than chocolate and sweets."

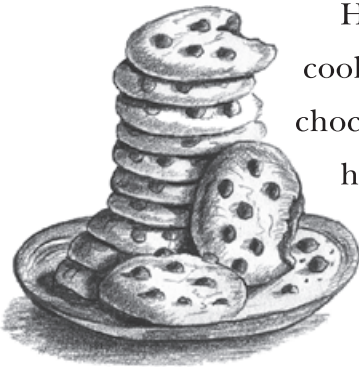
The obese ginger cat sitting next to Henry meowed briefly and gave him a disapproving look as if he wanted to say, "Look who's talking."

"I know," Henry whispered. "I'm fat myself. I wish I could lose some weight." He grabbed a roll of blubber from his waist and jiggled it like pudding. He was at least thirty pounds overweight, and it made him very unhappy. Even though he had tried to lose



weight, he couldn't. Neither could anybody around him.

The citizens of Sugarland were all heavy because there was no other food source than candy and chocolate. It was normal to eat sweets all day long in Henry's hometown of Choco-Locoville. Life was about producing the best sweets, and nobody knew how to prepare any other food. As much as some of the inhabitants sugarcoated their weight problem by calling themselves padded, bulky, or cushioned, Henry knew, despite being just ten years old, that he was overweight. And Henry didn't have a problem using the evil word "fat" when he referred to himself.



Henry stared at a towering stack of chocolate cookies on the plate next to him. He loved chocolate, but he wanted to lose weight more than he wanted to eat sweets every single day. "I'm so hungry," he whined, pushing the cookies toward his cat. "But I shouldn't eat them."

The potbellied cat sniffed and stretched one paw toward the stack of cookies.

"Just one," Henry admonished. "No more!"

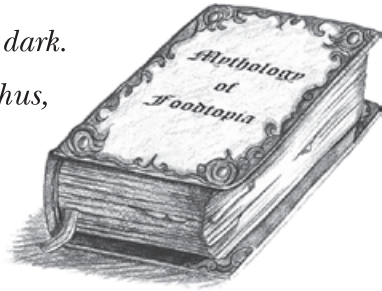
The cat jumped forward and started devouring the entire stack.

"Tiger, stop it," Henry shouted. "I said one, not all!" He rescued the plate from Tiger and pushed him off the bed. "Go and get some exercise. It'll do you good."

Tiger plopped down on the ground, and left the room.

Henry turned to the book in front of him and read the title: *Mythology of Foodtopia*. He flipped over the first page and read the foreword.

*The true history of Sugarland lies in the dark. No one knows what happened in the past. Thus, this book cannot claim with certainty that it is a true historical account. Perhaps it is no more than a collection of legends and stories.*



Henry loved reading about the history of Sugarland, but contrary to what the foreword said, he believed the stories to be true. The scholars claimed that the citizens of Sugarland were the only living beings in the world but to Henry, it made more sense that they weren't alone.

And this was exactly what the book was telling him. According to these stories, Sugarland was only one part of a world called Foodtopia where many different types of food were produced. Four kingdoms ruled the land, and each one was responsible for a specific type of food. Sugarland was one of those kingdoms. But there was also Veggington, where they grew plants in the ground and harvested edible things like potatoes, tomatoes, and carrots.

Henry always tried to imagine what these types of food looked like, but the descriptions in the book were not precise enough to





visualize them all. So Henry just pictured them the way he wanted them to be.

What fascinated him the most, though, were the sweet snacks that were healthy versions of candy. They were called “fruits,” and one of the kingdoms grew them in trees and bushes in a town called Fruitopolis. It was unbelievable to Henry that although this food was sweet, it wouldn’t make you as fat as chocolate.

A loud meow echoed from downstairs. “What’s wrong, Tiger?” Henry gazed up from his book and called down to the ground floor. But Tiger didn’t make another sound.

Henry turned back to his book and read about Barebone Island. This place in Foodtopia always gave him the creeps. The family in that part of the kingdom raised animals that provided them with food other than candy.

“Get off the table, you stupid cat,” yelled a squeaky voice from downstairs.

“Reese, leave Tiger alone,” Henry shouted as he closed the book with a thud and jumped off the bed. He knew that his family’s servant wasn’t very fond of his cat. Henry dashed down the staircase of the mansion and found Reese chasing after Tiger with a broom in her hand.

“Stop it now,” Henry said.

The woman who looked more like a balloon than a real person dropped the broom. “I’m sorry, Sir! Your mother said I shouldn’t let the cat on the table.”





“Fine, but you don’t need to scare him with a broom,” Henry protested and picked up Tiger, who was trembling behind the couch. “Where’s my mother anyway?”

“She’s at work at the chocolate factory, Sir,” Reese said.

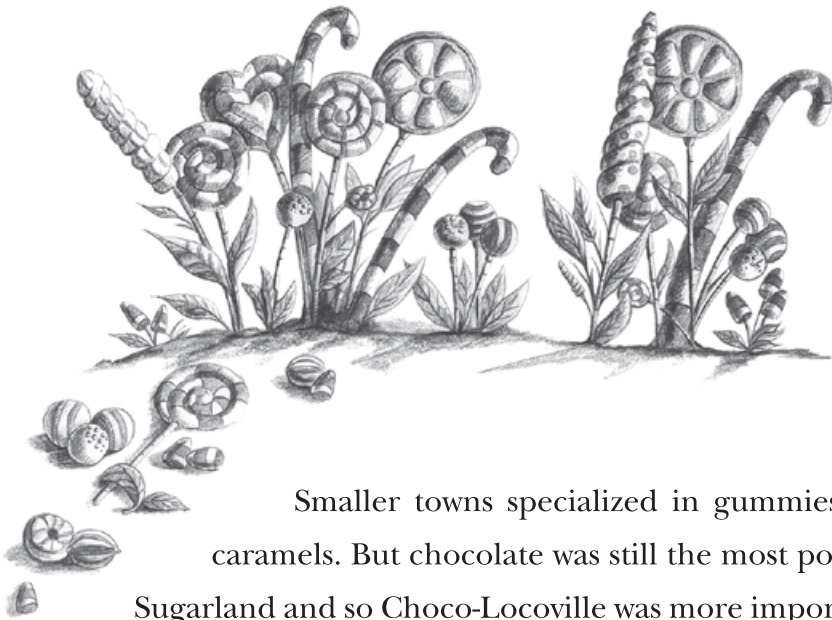
“But it’s Sunday,” Henry said.

Reese shrugged and gave him a look as if she felt sorry for him.

“Of course,” mumbled Henry. He wasn’t surprised that even on a Sunday, his mother would be working. Her entire life was



about making the best chocolate in all of Sugarland. Being the sole producer, all the stores in Choco-Locoville bought her chocolate. This is how Henry's family had become the most influential in the country. Besides Choco-Locoville, other towns in Sugarland also produced sweets, but not chocolate. Lollipopington harvested candy in the fields and Jellybeania excavated their product from candy mines.



Smaller towns specialized in gummies, licorice, or caramels. But chocolate was still the most popular food in Sugarland and so Choco-Locoville was more important than any other town.

“Your breakfast is ready in the dining room,” Reese announced.

“Thanks!” Henry said. “Do you know when Mom is coming back?”

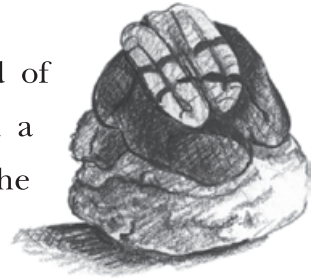
“Sir, you know that she always stays late,” replied Reese. “The whole country needs her.”

“I need her, too,” Henry mumbled to himself as his head drooped. If only his dad were still alive. Back then, his parents shared the work, allowing his mother to spend more time with Henry. But now she had to take care of the entire company, making Henry second on her priority list.

Henry walked away into the dining room and sighed as he stared at the large table in front of him. It was stacked with chocolate eggs, chocolate drinks, chocolate spread, and all kinds of chocolate beans.

“Chocolate, chocolate, chocolate,” repeated Henry. “I’m so sick and tired of it.”

He knew that chocolate was the livelihood of the family. Without it, he wouldn’t have such a comfortable life. If it wasn’t for the chocolate, he could have ended up working in the jelly bean mines like some of the kids from the poor families. His mother might have ended up being a lollipop field picker.



But still, it didn’t make him happy. If it wasn’t for all the sweets, his father would be still alive.

In fact, his parents had hatched an ingenious plan a long time before Henry was born. At the time, chocolate clouds floated above Sugarland. People followed them everywhere. When the sun peeped out above the clouds, the chocolate melted and dripped down to the ground. The people would try to collect all





the chocolate drops in buckets, but most of them landed in the dirt and were lost.

Henry's father had the idea to pull the clouds to his property. There, his parents built a system in which every drop was collected and nothing was lost anymore. Ever since, Henry's family had become rich and built the fancy

Gingerbread Mansion where Henry grew up. But as their fortune grew, so did his father's belly. And eventually, his weight became his death. Since that time Henry tried to watch what he ate, so that he wouldn't become like his father, but with only sweets around it was impossible to lose weight.

Henry sat down at the large table. "I wish Mom was here," he mumbled as he put Tiger on the chair next to him. He grabbed a jelly bean and gave it to his cat. "I'm so glad I have you, Tiger. Without you, I'd be be all alone." The cat purred as Henry scratched his back. "If Mom hadn't given me those stupid tutors, I could have had some friends. But no, she thinks public schools suck."

Just as Henry was about to take a bite from a biscuit, a scream blasted through Gingerbread Mansion.

Reese came running into the dining room. "Sir, you better take a look at this," she waved at Henry. "Your mother is out there with the whole staff."

"What's going on?" Henry asked. He jumped up from the table



and sprinted after the servant.

Henry threw the front door of the mansion open and stepped outside. Hot air blew into his face.

Usually, the citizens of Sugarland didn't leave their houses during summer, but this time hundreds of people had gathered around the hill where Gingerbread Mansion was located. Henry recognized them as the workers of the chocolate factory. Everything seemed normal, except that they were standing in the full light of the sun. That was very strange. *Where was all the shade they usually had beneath the the Chocolate Clouds?* Henry thought.

"This is horrible," Reese shouted as she stared into the sky.

Henry's heart began to race and sweat dripped off his forehead. He turned his head toward the sun.

"This is more than horrible," he cried. "It's a nightmare! The Chocolate Clouds are gone."

