

# Christmas Fudge

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“Dad? Isn’t it time?” asked Audrey.

“Time for what?” he asked, as he put the finishing touches on the wooden Christmas angel he had made for his wife.

“Dad, come on, you know. It's the first weekend in December. It's time to make our famous Christmas fudge!”

“Famous?”

“Well, our friends think so. I’m sure they’re waiting for it.”

“Well, we’d better not disappoint them. You think you can get everything out?”

“Dad. I did it last year, I think I can do it this year.”

“Okay. You get started; I’ll be there in a few minutes,” he said, putting his tools away.

Audrey gave her father her biggest grin as she ran out of the garage and into the kitchen, her long brown ponytail swinging from side to side. She hummed her favorite Christmas carols as she pulled out the utensils and the ingredients they would need.

“I see we are going to use real measuring cups and spoons this year,” said Dad, walking in from the garage.

“Dad! Mom says that I have to use the right pans and utensils when I’m baking, so we’re going to use them for our fudge, too.”

“Okay. This is your batch. Unless it comes out really good, then it’s mine.”

“Dad,” Audrey said laughing. She always enjoyed her dad’s gentle teasing when they worked together - doing everything from sanding wood to making candy. Right now, they were making fudge to give as presents to family, friends, and relatives. Mom

was teaching her to cook and bake, but Dad had the magic touch when it came to making candy.

“All right. Did you get the right pan?”

“Yup. Here’s our candy making pan,” she said, handing over a large aluminum pan with a dented bottom. Dad put it on the counter, and asked, “What’s first?”

“Let’s get the stuff ready for later on,” said Audrey, pulling out two large measuring cups. She handed her dad the bag of chocolate chips, which he poured into the first cup while she emptied the bag of nuts into the second cup.

“Hey Dad! You only put in one cup of chips. It takes two, remember.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yup. We had this same problem last year. Remember? I finally got the recipe out, and it was two cups. Besides, this is my batch, and I say two cups.”

“Okay, it’s your batch.”

Audrey then handed her dad the vanilla and the marshmallow whip. He opened the jars, and Audrey set them on the kitchen table along with the buttered pans that would hold the finished candy.

“Now what?” he asked.

“I’ll put in the sugar while you pour in the milk.”

Audrey handed her father the can to open while she carefully measured out the sugar. Dad gently poured the milk; Audrey slowly stirred the two ingredients together. The pan was then placed on the stove, the heat turned on medium-low, and Audrey added the butter.

“Now, we stir until it’s done. I’ll take the first shift,” she said.

Dad sat in a kitchen chair while he watched his only daughter slowly stir the sugary substance.

"Dad, how long have we been making candy?"

"How old are you?"

"Nine."

"Well, then, we've been making fudge for eight years."

"That's silly. I couldn't have helped you when I was only one."

"Well, Mom and I wanted to make something special for our family, so I said I had Grandma's special fudge recipe, and I'd make a batch. I needed more marshmallow whip, so, while I started the fudge, Mom ran to the market, leaving you with me. You sat in your little jumper seat and giggled and cooed at me and kept me company. And you've been helping me ever since."

"Really?"

"Really!"

Audrey let this information filter through her mind as she stirred and watched the whiteness of the butter, sugar, and milk slowly turn into a beautiful caramel gold.

"Dad? Can I ask you something?"

"You mean something else?"

"Dad!"

"Of course," he said chuckling. "Ask away."

As the pleasant smell of buttery caramel filled the air, Audrey said, "Jennifer, one of the girls in my class, said there's no Santa Claus. Is that true?"

"Hmmm. You really want to know?"

"Yup, I really, really do." "

"Okay. The truth is that Santa Claus is one of the helpers of the Spirit of Christmas."

"Huh?"

"What do you think the Christmas season is about?"

"Well, it's Jesus' birthday, Santa Claus brings presents, we make fudge, peanut brittle, and cookies, and we buy presents for our friends and family."

"Okay, but why do we do these things? You think about that for a minute while we trade places. I'll stir for awhile." Audrey scooted over to the chair while Dad took up their special wooden spoon and stirred the golden liquid, which was just beginning to rise in the pan.

"Okay?" asked Dad.

"Well, it's fun, and it shows everyone that we care about them. I especially like visiting people we don't see all the time, like Aunt Rose."

"That's a good start, honey. The Christmas season has a spirit all its own. It's about that special place in your heart where you keep your friends and family. The spirit helps you remember to be nice to each other and to tell people how much you care about them by giving them gifts. But mostly, it reminds us of God's love and peace."

Audrey sat still, her forehead scrunched under her bangs and her lips pressed tightly together as she thought about her father's words. Before her mind was finished sifting through this information, she noticed that the sugar mixture was boiling near the top of the pan, and her father was turning down the heat.

“It’s my turn to stir!” she said excitedly, realizing that the candy was nearing the final stages, and the two changed places once again. Instead of talking, she watched the mixture as it bubbled and roiled and slowly deflated, all the while trying to comprehend the meaning of the spirit of Christmas.

“Dad. I think it’s time.”

Her father took a small cup of cold water off the table and placed a few drops of the liquid into it and tried to roll the cooled cream into a small ball.

“It needs just a few minutes more,” he said, rinsing and refilling the cup.

“I think I understand what you mean about a special Spirit. But does that mean that there’s really no Santa Claus?”

Dad heaved a sigh and looked into his daughter’s beautiful, inquisitive eyes. “You know how the Christmas Spirit helps you to remember that it’s time for fudge?”

“Yup.”

“Well, that same spirit helps all Santa’s helpers remember that it’s time to buy gifts for their families and place them under the tree on Christmas Eve.”

While she was digesting this new information, Dad retested the mixture and pronounced it ready. He turned off the heat and moved the hot pan to the potholder Audrey had placed on the counter across from the stove.

“Can I stir while you put in the chocolate?”

Dad handed her the wooden spoon, and she began to tenderly stir while he poured in first the chocolate chips and then the Vanilla. The buttery smell was replaced by the scrumptious smell of melting chocolate. Dad carefully added the marshmallow whip, and, the more he added to the pan, the harder the candy became to stir. Finally,

she handed the spoon to her father who stirred while she added the rest of the whip. When everything had been blended into the chocolate, Dad picked the pan up by the handle and beat the candy until it became smooth. Audrey added in the final magic ingredient – walnuts.

Audrey held the small aluminum pans while Dad filled them with candy.

“Are you and Mom Santa’s helpers?” she asked.

“Yes, honey, we are.”

They finished filling the containers and left them on the table to cool before they could cover and wrap them in preparation for their journey to friends and family.

Dad handed Audrey a small dinner spoon, and he used the wooden spoon to scrape up the little bit of chocolate that was left in the pan.

“I guess I’ll have to tell Jenny that Santa Claus is real, and he’s part of the Christmas Spirit.”

“That’s a good idea. So, it’s okay that Mom and I are Santa’s helpers?”

“Yup, because I am one of his helpers, too! We make the best Christmas fudge ever! And it’s really a blessing to be able to give it to everyone.”

Dad chuckled at his loving, caring daughter, as they both savored the remnants of the now cooled Christmas fudge.