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## The Piece of Fudge

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# The Piece of Fudge

Liz Burns

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The paper bag sat in the middle of the back seat of my car. I couldn't see it but it was there. I could feel it. It was almost as if it were looking at me and I felt my mouth water. It had entered my life a couple of hours earlier when I picked up my friend Jean Marie to go to the movie. She had opened the car door, thrust a bag at me. "Fudge," she said. "I made fudge for Alan's birthday and saved a few pieces for you." I accepted it with respect and carefully placed it on the seat.

After seeing the movie and dropping Jean Marie back at her house, I headed home. I drove the few more blocks to my house, inching my car into our tiny garage. I knew there were a few things I wanted to do quickly before the day ended—put the chairs away from a meeting earlier today, unload the dishwasher, fold a small load of laundry, check my e-mail. Then, exhausted as I am every night, I would slide into bed next to my snoring spouse, shivering until the down comforter surrounded and warmed me.

I am not going to eat fudge before bed. No, I am not. I have already eaten enough sweets today, more than usual, and I need not add to the sugar content in my blood stream. Fudge before bed is not a good idea. Definitely not a good idea. I might, however, drink a half a glass of wine. It is such a comfort, relaxing.

When I came into my kitchen, I hung up the car keys and dropped the movie review on the counter next to today's mail. Carefully I placed the fudge right next to the coffeemaker. I peeked in and saw three pieces of fudge, wrapped in Saran. Jean Marie is a really good cook. It looked perfect. The candy was in a white bag, as if it had come from the fudge shop in Galena or Fannie Mae in Chicago. Professional looking but homemade by a friend... and so much fresher. So I unloaded the dishwasher, went to the basement to put the chairs away, brought up a load of laundry. Of course, I had to pass through the kitchen to get the laundry, to carry the chairs. The white bag just sat. I could not ignore it. It was a Presence. Perhaps I should put it out of sight, inside the cabinet, maybe behind the mixing bowls. Or at least hide it behind the Cuisinart over in the corner.

I went into our home-office to check e-mail. Possessively, I picked up the bag and took it with me, sat it down next to the monitor. I tried to ignore it. I peeked into the bag again and got a whiff of that chocolate odor, admired the dark brown color. I reached in and brought out the pieces. Surprise! There were four big rectangles of beautiful thick

fat smooth fudge. Each rectangle is cut in half. Eight pieces of fudge! I stuck my nose right next to the wrapping and the divine smell brought back memories of a kitchen scene in my childhood. I could see my mother and my sister lifting a heavy kettle, pouring out a batch of fudge. It gushed onto a marble slab; then they pushed and teased it with two wooden spoons until it smoothed out evenly, glossy and opaque. After it cooled slightly, they would cut the chocolate fudge into squares and anyone in the kitchen had free rein to eat the uneven pieces and the delicious ends and corners. It was a wonderful memory, vivid. The smell is the same now as it was then.

No, I'm not going to open the fudge now. I shall save all eight pieces for tomorrow. Resolutely, I put the candy back in the white bag and folded it over three times, pushed it behind the computer.

Checking e-mail, I remembered the small amount of a very good Shiraz in the bottle we had opened yesterday to share with neighbors. I decided to treat myself to that and took it back to the computer. The thought of the fudge followed me into the kitchen and back, spiritually and emotionally.

Surely there isn't anything really wrong with a little taste of the fudge. If I wait until tomorrow, it will not be as fresh as it is now. No one will ever know that there were eight pieces originally. I will just break off a small smidgen.

I opened the bag, pulled out the full packet of the fudge, unwrapped the Saran, and removed one square. It was even heavier and denser than I had anticipated. It also had pecans in it. The color was rich brown; the texture was sleek, not a bubble, not too dry, not runny, not sticky. It looked perfectly decadent.

I bit into this square of fudge. Ummmmm, the taste exploded in my mouth. It was the ultimate chocolate taste—exciting, yet soothing. Satisfying. I put the rest of the square in my mouth and then began to wrap up the remaining pieces.

I looked at a second piece; it looked at me. I was tempted. I hesitated. I popped it into my mouth. It completely filled the cavern in my mouth and I held it there, not swallowing. I felt close to heaven. I was happy. I sipped the wine, breathing its bouquet. Good chocolate and good red wine are a divine combination of tastes, worthy only of a special occasion. A very fine glass of wine deserves a very fine piece of chocolate.

My day was fulfilled and I went to bed.