

# **Mister Fudge and Missy Moran**

by  
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**HAWKER BROWNLOW**  
E D U C A T I O N

**1** MISSY MORAN WAS making macaroni and cheese for dinner.

About any box meal was easy, but macaroni and cheese took the prize for easiest. You just cook the noodles until they're soft. Then you slop on milk and butter. Finally you add this orange, powdery stuff they call cheese. Presto; it's done.

Easy or not, Missy's dad always liked it. When he came home from work, he'd grin and say, "Missy, you're the best cook in town!"

This always made Missy smile. After all, she was just eleven. The only cooking she was any good at was making fudge. And she was very, very good at that. Missy made the best nutty fudge of anybody she knew.

Missy figured she must have gotten her fudge "genes" from her grandmother. She was the one who had created the fudge recipe.

Missy certainly didn't get any cooking talent from her mother. No, Missy's mom lived in New York and had never made

fudge in her life. In fact, Missy didn't remember her mother ever cooking anything. What Missy's mother did was phone twice a month to tell Missy that she loved her.

Missy heard the crunchy wheels-on-gravel sound of her father's car in the driveway. He was a little early today. Missy hoped that didn't mean trouble.

Don't panic yet, Missy warned herself. So she stirred the orange stuff into the macaroni and started tearing lettuce for the salad.

The front door opened and Missy sang out a cheery, "Hi, Dad!" She grinned at him when he appeared in the kitchen doorway.

When there was trouble coming, Missy usually tried to grin it down. Like at school when she was late turning in homework. Ms. Turpin would growl and Missy would grin like crazy.

Once in a while it worked. Grandma said Missy could melt an iceberg when she grinned. But when you wore glasses and had hair the color of macaroni cheese

sauce, you needed all the gimmicks you had to survive.

“Hi, honey,” Dad said, setting his banged-up briefcase on a chair next to the old kitchen table. “Mmmm. Do I smell your yummy macaroni and cheese?”

“Yep,” Missy said, going along with the game. She and her father had been playing it so long, the rules were second nature to them both.

The game went like this. You pretend everything is okay, no matter what. If things are slightly crummy, you pretend a little. If the roof is falling in, you pretend a lot.

Missy and her father were like that little train in the kid’s story. Over and over they said to themselves, “I think I can, I think I can!” while climbing steep mountains.

The going had been tough lately, and the Morans’ mountain seemed very steep indeed. Near the end of the month, with the budget stretched to the breaking point, they lived on Missy’s “yummy” macaroni or her “tasty” spaghetti. If