

CAROLINE FRENCH BENTON

THE FUN OF COOKING: A
STORY FOR GIRLS AND
BOYS

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Story for Girls and Boys**

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The Fun of Cooking: A Story for Girls and Boys

CHAPTER I THE DAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS

The Blairs were a particularly nice family. That is what the neighbors always said of them, and, to tell the truth, the Blairs believed it. That is, the father and mother thought the children were particularly nice, and the children thought their father and mother and each other particularly nice; and so, of course, they all must have been very nice indeed.

Saturdays and Sundays and vacation days were all holidays to them, and they did such interesting things, and laughed so much as they did them, that everybody said, "What good times those Blairs do have!"

Jack and Mildred Blair were named after their father and mother, and Brownie, whose real name was Katharine, was named for her grandmother; so to avoid getting everybody mixed, the children were called the Junior Blairs by everybody.

Now it happened that there were ever so many uncles and aunts and cousins who were Blairs, too, but most of them lived a long way off, and they were very seldom able to get together for a family party; but this winter, ten of them were coming to spend Christmas with the real Blairs, and, as five of them were between fourteen and twelve, the ages of Mildred and Jack, and some more about nine, like Brownie, they were all planning to have the very nicest sort of a time, and everybody was as excited as could be.

Christmas was only two days away, when, suddenly, it began to snow. And how it snowed! The flakes came down steadily hour after hour, and soon the sidewalks were covered, and the steps were buried, and the piles of snow almost covered the gate. Everybody said that all the trains were delayed; and it was not long before the little Blairs began to whisper, "Whatever shall we do if they can't get here in time for Christmas?" Mother Blair guessed what the trouble was, and said cheerfully that, of course, the snow would stop falling before long, and the trains would be on time in the morning.

"And a beautiful white Christmas is the loveliest thing in the world," she added. But the children looked out of the window and were afraid, deep down in their hearts, that something dreadful might happen.

"If we only had something nice to do right now," groaned Jack, "so we could forget the snow. But we can't trim the tree till everybody comes to help, and the presents are all tied up, and there isn't anything Christmasy to do that *I* can think of."

"Why not cook?" suggested Mother Blair, "There are lots of things to make – Christmas things, you know."

Mildred began to brighten up. "If we could cook things all alone, I'd like that," she said.

"Boys don't cook," Jack said scornfully, still looking out of the window.

"Boys make pop-corn, though," laughed his mother. "And then suppose you make that up into nice balls, and have them all ready when the cousins come. And, Mildred, I think Norah would give you and Brownie one corner of the kitchen, and let you cook all by yourselves."

So Jack took the corn-popper and went down to the furnace, and when he opened the door, he found a great bed of red coals waiting for him; and Mildred and Brownie put on their big gingham aprons and went out into the kitchen.

Underneath the large table was a smaller one; this Mother Blair pulled out and pushed across the room to an empty place. Then she wrote out very plainly a little receipt, and under this she explained

exactly how to put things together; this she pinned on the wall over the table. "There!" she said. "Now you can go right to work." This was what was on the paper:

CHRISTMAS CAKES

¼
cup of butter.
½
cup of sugar.
¼
cup of milk.
1
egg.
1
cup of flour.
1
teaspoonful of baking-powder.
½
teaspoonful of vanilla.

Put the butter and sugar in a bowl, and rub them together till smooth and creamy. Beat the egg without separating it, and put that in next; beat all together, then add the milk, a little at a time. Put a rounded spoonful of baking-powder in the flour and stir it well, and add that slowly, mixing as you do it; and, last, put in the vanilla. Grease some little scalloped tins, and fill them half full; bake till brown.

Mildred rubbed the butter and sugar while Brownie beat the egg; they took turns putting in the other things, and, last, Norah set the tins in the oven for them. Then the two girls rushed into the sitting-room and said, "That's all done, Mother Blair! Now something else to cook, please!"

"But don't forget to watch your cakes," said Mother Blair, as she handed them a second receipt. "Open the oven door every little while just enough to peek in at them; if you forget them, they will surely burn."

The second receipt was for

OATMEAL MACAROONS

3 cups of rolled oats.
2½ teaspoonfuls of baking-powder.
½ teaspoonful of salt.
3 level tablespoonfuls of butter.
1 cup of sugar.
3 eggs, beaten separately.
1 teaspoonful of vanilla.

Put the butter and sugar in a bowl and cream them; beat the yolks of the eggs, put them in, and beat again; mix the oatmeal with the baking-powder and salt, and add this next, a little at a time; then put in the vanilla, and, last, the stiff whites of the eggs. Have ready a shallow pan, greased, and drop the batter on this in tiny bits, no larger than the end of your thumb, and two inches apart. Bake in an oven that is not very hot. When they are brown on the edges, they are done; remove them from the pan while they are still warm.

While Mildred was mixing these, Brownie took a last peep into the oven, and found the cakes were baked. Norah helped her take them out, and she herself took them from the pans and put them

on a platter to cool. Then it was not long before the first panful of macaroons was done, too, and these came out all crisp and delicious.

Just as they were finishing them, their mother came out into the kitchen. "Oh, how lovely!" she exclaimed, "I never, never saw anything so good as those macaroons. Perfectly delicious!"

"But see the scalloped cakes, Mother," said Brownie. "Aren't they lovely, too?"

"Lovely? Of course they are. And I've such a bright idea about those cakes, too!"

"Oh, what?" cried both the girls together, because Mother Blair's bright ideas were always particularly nice, just like herself.

"I've been looking over the boxes of Christmas candy, and I find we have lots of candied cherries. And, Norah, you had some of the citron left from the plum-pudding, hadn't you?"

Norah said she had a large piece put away.

"Well, then, suppose we cut the citron into thin slices, and cut those up into little bits of green leaves, and cut some of the cherries into tiny bits to look like berries; then we will ice the little cakes and around each one, right on top, we will make a green holly wreath with holly berries in it. Won't those be pretty?"

"Oh, Mother, let me, let me!" Brownie begged.

"Very well, you make the leaves and berries, while Mildred ices the cakes," said Mother Blair.

So while Mildred mixed the icing, Brownie took some small scissors and cut up the citron and the cherries. At first her scissors bothered her by getting sticky, but Norah showed her how to dip them in water often and wipe them dry, and after she tried that way, she had no trouble.

Mildred's rule for icing was this:

ICING

The white of one egg.

1 teaspoonful of cold water.

1 cup of powdered sugar.

½ teaspoonful of flavoring.

Put the white of the egg in a bowl, add the water, and beat till light; stir in the sifted sugar and the flavoring, and spread on the cakes while they are still a little warm; smooth over with the blade of a knife.

After the cakes were iced, the leaves were laid in a wreath around the edges, with the tiny red berries among them; and they were the prettiest things for Christmas anybody ever saw.

When, at last, they were put away, Norah told them she had some bits of pie-crust left over from her mince-pies that they could have, if they wanted it. Brownie dashed into the hall, shouting, "Mother, Mother! What can we make with pie-crust? Norah says we can have some."

"Tartlets," called Mother Blair from upstairs. And when Brownie ran up for it she gave her this receipt:

TARTLETS

Flour the pastry board; roll out some pie-crust very thin, and press it into little scalloped tins; prick holes in the bottom to let the air in. Cut off the edges smoothly, and bake till light brown. Just before you need them fill the shells with jelly.

The very moment when the tarts disappeared in the pantry, Jack came up with his pans of pop-corn.

"Real cooking is just for girls," he said, with his mouth full of a stolen macaroon. "It's all right for boys to make pop-corn balls, though. Only how do you do it?" His mother told him to wash his hands well, and then gave him this rule:

POP-CORN BALLS

1 cup of molasses.
½ cup of sugar.
2 teaspoonfuls of vinegar.
½ teaspoonful of soda.
2 teaspoonfuls of butter.

Boil fifteen minutes, stirring all the time. Pour a little over a pan of corn, and take up in your hands all that sticks together, and roll it into a ball. Keep the candy hot on the back of the stove, and pour on more till it is all done.

This made a great dishful of lovely balls, and they set them away in a cold place; and then Norah told them they must run out of the kitchen, because she wanted to get luncheon ready.

After lunch, Jack had to go and shovel out paths again, because those he had made had all disappeared. Mildred and Brownie dressed a tiny doll for a cousin they were afraid might not have quite as many as she would want, and when that was done, they said they wanted to cook some more.

Their mother told them she had one very, very nice receipt meant especially for holidays, which, strangely enough, had Brownie's name. "Because you are so very, very nice yourself," she said with a hug, "perhaps you can make these all by yourself, too."

BROWNIES

3 squares of chocolate.
2 eggs, beaten together.
½ cup of flour.
2 cups of sugar.
¼ cup of butter.
1 cup of chopped English walnuts.

Cream the butter and sugar together, and add the eggs, well beaten without separating; then add the flour. Melt the chocolate by cutting it up into small bits and putting it in a little dish over the steam of the tea-kettle. Put this in next, and, last, the nuts. Lay a greased paper on the bottom of a shallow pan, and pour the cake in, in a thin layer. Bake twenty-five minutes; mark off into squares while warm, and cut before removing from the pan. These should be as thick as cookies when done.

"Don't you want me to help you make them, Brownie?" Mildred asked, as she read the receipt over. "You see, I could beat the eggs for you, and you know how hard it is for you not to tip the bowl over when you beat them!"

"Well," Brownie said slowly, "I might let you do just that one thing, Mildred, but Mother *said* I was to make these cakes all alone."

"But let me help just a tiny little bit," Mildred coaxed; "they do sound so interesting!"

So in the end the two made the cakes together, all delicious, and just the thing for company.

While they were still fresh from the oven, in came a pretty grown-up neighbor, whom all the Blairs, big and little, loved very much, because she always was ready for a good time with them.

"Fee-fy-fo-fum!" she exclaimed, wrinkling up her little nose. "I smell something good to eat!"

"Oh, *dear* Miss Betty," Brownie cried, "it is Christmas cooking! Come and see it."

So Miss Betty saw all the lovely little holly cakes, and the tartlets, and the macaroons, and the Brownies, and ate little crumbs off wherever she could find one. Then she said, "I want to cook too! May I, Norah?"

"Sure you may," said Norah, who thought Miss Betty was the nicest young lady in the world. Then Miss Betty wrote out this receipt, and pinned it up, and everybody helped her make:

GINGERBREAD MEN

2 cups of molasses.
1 cup of equal parts of butter and lard, mixed.
1 level tablespoonful of ginger.
1 teaspoonful of soda.
Flour to mix very stiff.

Melt the butter, add the molasses and ginger, then the soda, dissolved in a teaspoonful of boiling water; stir in flour till the dough is so stiff you cannot stir it with a spoon; take it out on the floured board, and roll a little at a time, and with a knife cut out a man; press currants in for eyes and for buttons on his coat. Bake in a floured pan.

"These are going to be Santa Clauses," said Miss Betty. "Jack, if you will cut me some tiny cedar twigs, we will stick them in the right hands – one in each." So Jack whittled down the ends of some little twigs till they were very sharp, and while the men were warm and soft, they put a twig in the right hand of each, and they were as funny as could be.

"Now, Jack, I've something lovely for you to make!" said Miss Betty. "I came over on purpose to tell you about it."

"Boys don't cook!" said Jack, loftily.

"Boys would be perfectly wild to make these," laughed Miss Betty, "if only they knew how; but of course if you don't care to –"

"What are they?"

"Christmas elves, and the cunningest things you ever saw." She opened a box and showed them a dear, droll little figure, brown and fat. It made the children laugh to look at him.

"We will make one for each person at the Christmas dinner, and stand them at the plates with cards in the hands, to show where everybody is to sit. Now, Jack, do you want to try?"

Jack instantly was hard at work.

CHRISTMAS ELVES

Take a square of thin wood and drive two long, slender nails through it; these are the legs of the elf. Turn it upside down and push two large raisins on each nail, and then a fig on both – these are the legs and the body. Take a wire about four inches long, and put two raisins on each end, twisting up the ends to hold them. Lay this across the fig body and press it down to hold it firm. Put a marshmallow on a wooden toothpick, and put that on top for a head, and half of a fig for a cap. Draw eyes, nose, and mouth on the face with pen and ink, and, if you choose, brush a little melted chocolate on the sides of his head, for hair. Put a sprig of Christmas green in his cap.

Just as the elves were put in a row on the table. Miss Betty exclaimed, "Children, it's stopped snowing! It will be all clear to-morrow, and everybody will get here in time, after all!"

They rushed to the window to look, for sure enough, the storm was over, and everybody was going to have *A Merry Christmas!*

CHAPTER II

SUPPER AT THE HOUSE IN THE WOODS

When the Junior Blairs came down to breakfast on New Year's morning, there were three good-sized red-covered books lying on the table, one by each plate, and on the cover of each, in gold letters, was the name of Mildred, or Jack, or Brownie. But when they opened them there was nothing inside – only just white paper leaves.

"What are they for?" asked Mildred, puzzled. "For school, for examples and compositions?"

"Not a bit of it!" laughed her mother. "They are cook-books, or they will be when you have filled them full of receipts. When you made such delicious things for Christmas, I ordered these for you, so you could write down each rule that you used then, and add others as you learned other things. You see, there are little letters all down the edges of the book, and when you want to find gingerbread, for instance, all you have to do is to turn to G; and when you want – "

"Cake," interrupted Brownie, "you turn to K."

Everybody laughed then, but in a minute Jack said soberly: "If you don't mind, Mother, I think I'll use mine for school. You see, boys don't cook."

"It seems to me I've heard that before," said Father Blair, nodding at him. "But you just tuck that book away in your bureau drawer and keep it, because I've an idea you may want it yet for a cook-book."

Jack shook his head energetically, but as Norah just then brought in a fresh plate of popovers, he was too busy to say anything more.

That afternoon, the girls began their books by copying very neatly the receipts they had already used: Brownies, Christmas Cakes, Icing, Christmas Elves, Gingerbread Men, Oatmeal Macaroons, Pop-corn Balls, and Tartlets all went in, each under its own initial. Then they said they wanted some more receipts right away, because these looked so lonely.

"Very well," said their mother; "but first we will have a talk, because I have a bright idea."

Now it happened that one of the particularly nice things about the Blair family was that they owned a little bit of a house not many miles from town, right in the midst of a pine grove. A farmer lived quite close by, but the trees hid his house from sight; and the trolley-cars ran just around the corner, but they could not be seen either; so when the family went there for a day or two, or a week or two, it was just as though they were a long, long distance from everybody in the world. They called this little place the House in the Woods, and Brownie Blair often pretended it was the one in the fairy book, and that Goldilocks might come in at any moment to eat a bowl of porridge with the three Blairs, instead of the three bears.

"You see," Mother Blair went on, "the snow is still so fresh and lovely, and the sleighing so good, and the full moon is still coming up so very early, that I thought – "

"Oh, I know!" Jack shouted. "A sleighing party!"

"Yes," said his mother; "to the House in the Woods for supper. Won't that be fun? And you can cook the supper. Only, if you invite seven boys and girls to go with you, we must have plenty of things for them to eat; and of course you will want to cook them all yourselves."

"Of course," Mildred said decidedly. "What shall we have for the supper?"

"Oh, have cheese dreams!" Jack begged. "The fellows think they're great. I'll make 'em myself, if you will. I learned how at the Dwights when I was there last week."

"You did!" teased his mother. "But I thought boys didn't cook!" Jack's face grew decidedly red.

"Of course boys cook with a chafing-dish," he explained; "so do men, too. In college, lots of them make Welsh-rabbit and oysters and things like that for spreads, you know. And you can make

the same things in a frying-pan on the stove just as well. So I'll make the dreams up before we go, and cook 'em when we get there."

"Very well," said his mother; "but I bargain with you that you are to put the receipt in your own cook-book." And Jack had to promise.

Then Mildred and her mother planned the rest of the supper. They were to have oyster stew, because that was what everybody wanted at a sleighing party; and then the cheese dreams, and potatoes, and cocoa; and Mother Blair said they would have a dish of scrambled eggs for anybody who did not like cheese. And, last of all, they would have little hot brown biscuits and honey; Farmer Dunn always had beautiful honey.

"Now, let us plan things out," said Mildred. "You and Brownie and I, Mother, can go out to the House in the Woods by trolley, and get the fires going and the table all ready; and Father and Jack can drive out with the others just at supper-time, and then we can all go back together afterward." This seemed the very best way of managing; so early one Saturday afternoon they reached the little house, and while Mildred and her mother went in and opened the windows and looked all around to see if everything was as they left it, Brownie ran off for Farmer Dunn, who soon brought wood and made up rousing fires in the rooms. By the time the baskets were unpacked on the kitchen table, he was ready to go back to his house and get milk and cream and eggs and butter and honey. As the Blairs always left the house ready to open at a moment's notice, they had sugar and flour and salt and things like that in the pantry.

Mildred and Brownie laid the table, putting on plates and cups and glasses, and they rubbed the forks and spoons and made them as bright as the sunshine. When it was all done, they got a beautiful great bunch of feathery pine branches for a centerpiece, and then it looked exactly as though the table knew there was going to be a party.

"It is nearly five o'clock," their mother called to them as they finished. "It is time we began to get supper. Brownie, here is a receipt for you; do you think you can manage it all alone?"

"Of course," said Brownie, with great dignity. "Only you might just tell me how, first."

Mother Blair laughed, and read the receipt over to her, and told her what to do.

STUFFED BAKED POTATOES

Take six large potatoes, wash and scrub them well, and bake them for about forty minutes in a hot oven, or till they are done. Take one potato at a time, hold it in a towel, and cut it in two, lengthwise. Scoop out the inside with a spoon into a hot bowl. When all six are ready, add ½ teaspoonful of salt and 1 teaspoonful of butter, beating and mashing well till they are light; then fill the potato shells, heaping them full; arrange in a shallow pan, and set it in the oven; bake about ten minutes, or till they are brown.

As soon as Brownie was busy with the potatoes, Mildred said she would make the cocoa, because that could stand and wait while other things cooked. Her mother told her to get the double boiler, put some hot water in the outside, and set it on the stove. Then she gave her this receipt:

COCOA

- 6 teaspoonfuls of cocoa.
- 1½ cups of boiling water.
- 1½ cups of boiling milk.
- 1 tablespoonful of powdered sugar.
- 1 small pinch of salt.

Always measure spoonfuls just a little rounded. Put the powdered cocoa into the double boiler and pour on it the boiling water, a little at first, stirring it until it melts; add the boiling milk, and cook two minutes, stirring all the time; add the sugar, stir a moment longer; add the salt and take from the fire. If not to be used at once, stand the double boiler on the back of the stove till wanted.

"But, Mother, we will need a great many more cups of cocoa than this," Mildred exclaimed, as she read the rule over. "Those boys will drink at least two apiece, and the girls may, too; they will all be just starving!"

"Of course," said Mother Blair. "But what do you go to school for, if not to learn multiplication? How many times over must you make the rule?"

Mildred thought two whole minutes, and then said she thought about five times would do; so she very carefully measured everything five times over. "I never thought arithmetic was any good before," she said soberly. "But now I see it is to cook by."

"Yes, I find it useful myself," her mother said, with a smile. "Now, Mildred, we might make the biscuits. I think those will not be hurt by standing any more than the cocoa will. But this rule I think you will have to multiply by three."

BAKING-POWDER BISCUITS

1 pint of sifted flour.
½ teaspoonful of salt.
4 teaspoonfuls of baking-powder.
¾ cup of milk.
1 tablespoonful of butter.

Put the salt and baking-powder in the flour and rub the butter into these with a spoon; little by little add the milk, mixing all the time; lift the dough out on the floured board, dust it over with flour, and flour the rolling-pin; roll out lightly, just once, till it is an inch thick. Flour your hands and make it into little balls as quickly as you can; put a very little flour on the bottom of a shallow pan, and put the biscuits in it, close together. Bake in a hot oven about twenty minutes, or till they are brown.

These were great fun to make, and when the very last panful was done, Mildred tucked all the little brown biscuits up in a big fresh towel, and put them in a pan in the warming oven to keep hot till they were needed. At that very minute, they heard sleigh-bells, and everybody rushed to throw open the door and let the party in. Such shouting and laughing and talking you never heard in all your life! All the boys and girls had been out to the House in the Woods often before, and they were so glad to come again, they hardly knew what to do.

While they were taking off their wraps, Jack slipped out into the kitchen and demanded the frying-pan. "See," he said proudly, opening a box, "here are the cheese dreams, all ready to cook! Aren't they fine?"

"Lovely!" exclaimed his mother, and then added, with a merry twinkle in her eyes, "you'll be a great cook yet, Jack!"

This was the receipt Jack had used to make them:

CHEESE DREAMS

(Six large sandwiches)

12 slices of bread, cut half an inch thick.

12 thin slices of cheese.

1 pinch of soda, cayenne pepper, and salt for each slice.

Put together like sandwiches, and then cut into rounds. Heat a frying-pan very hot, melt a teaspoonful of butter in it, and lay in two or three sandwiches; when one side is brown, turn it over and cook the other; take from the pan and lay in the oven in a pan on a paper till all are ready.

Of course Jack had made more than six sandwiches, for he knew everybody would want two apiece; so he had a great boxful, and it took him quite a little time to fry them all; but it was just as well, for Mildred and her mother had to make the oyster stew, which was to be eaten first.

OYSTER STEW

1 pint of oysters.

½ pint of water.

1 quart of rich milk.

½ teaspoonful of salt.

Drain the juice off the oysters and examine each to remove any pieces of shell that may still adhere to it; add the water to the oyster juice, and boil one minute; skim this well. Heat the milk and add to this, and when it steams, drop in the oysters and simmer just one minute, or till the edges of the oysters begin to curl; add the salt and take up at once; if you choose, add a cup of sifted cracker crumbs.

"What is 'simmer?'" asked Mildred, as she read the rule over.

"Just letting it boil a tiny little bit," said her mother, "around the edges of the saucepan, but not all over. And here is the receipt for:"

SCRAMBLED EGGS

1 egg for each person.

2 tablespoonfuls of milk to each egg.

2 shakes of salt.

1 shake of pepper.

Break the eggs in a bowl, beat them twelve times, then add the milk, salt, and pepper; heat a pan, put in a piece of butter the size of a hickory-nut, and when it is melted, pour in the eggs; stir them as they cook, and scrape them off the bottom of the pan; when they are all thick and creamy, they are done.

"I have taken the rule for the stew three times over for twelve people, and I don't think it will be a bit too much; but as almost everyone will want the cheese dreams, suppose we scramble only five eggs.

"You'd better do that right away, for supper is almost ready. Brownie's potatoes are just done, and she can be filling the glasses with water, and putting on the butter and bread, and these two big dishes of honey to eat with the biscuits for the last course."

While Mildred was cooking the eggs, Mother Blair put the oysters on the table, with the hot soup-plates and a generous supply of crisp oyster-crackers; the cheese dreams were done and in the oven, and Mildred covered the eggs and set the dish in the warming oven, and put the cocoa on the table in a chocolate pot. Then everybody sat down and began to eat.

After the oyster stew was all gone, they had the hot cheese dreams and scrambled eggs and the stuffed potatoes and cocoa all at once; and when those too had vanished, there were the little biscuits and the beautiful golden clover-honey in the comb, and perhaps that was the very best of all.

"Never, never, did I eat anything so good as this supper!" Father Blair said solemnly, as he ate his fourth biscuit. "That oyster stew – those potatoes – the cheese dreams – "

"What a greedy father!" said Mildred. "And you never said a word about the cocoa – "

"Nor about the scrambled eggs – " said Brownie, eagerly.

"But I ate them all," said her father. "I ate everything I was given, and I should like to eat them all again! Next time we come, have twice as much of everything, won't you?"

But everybody else said that they couldn't have eaten one single crumb more. And they knew perfectly well that Father Blair couldn't, either.

Then everybody helped wash the dishes and put things away, and Farmer Dunn came over to put out the fires and shut the doors; and presently it was all dark in the House in the Woods, and so still that, far, far off, you could hear the sound of the singing of the boys and girls as they rode home across the snow.

CHAPTER III

JACK'S SCHOOL-LUNCHEONS

"Mother," said Jack, one evening, "I'd like to take my lunch to school for the next few weeks; all the fellows are going to, so we can have more time for class elections and so on. Do you suppose Norah could put up one for me every morning?"

"Why not let Mildred put it up? Her school is so near that she does not have to start till long after you do; and then, Jack, you could easily pay her for her trouble by helping her with her Latin; you know she is bothered with that just now."

Mildred was overjoyed at the suggestion of the bargain. "Oh, Jack! I'll do you up the most beautiful luncheons in the world if you will only help me with that horrid Cæsar. I'm just as stupid as I can be about it. What do you like best to eat in all the world?"

Jack said he wasn't very particular as long as he had plenty of pie and cake and pickles and pudding and ice-cream; Mildred laughed, and said she guessed she could manage to think up a few other things beside.

So the very next morning she put up the first luncheon. But, alas, Norah had no cold meat to slice – only bits of beefsteak left from dinner; and not a single piece of cake. All she could find for lunch was some plain bread and butter, which she cut rather thick, a hard-boiled egg, and an apple. "Pretty poor," she sighed, as she saw him trudge off with the box under his arm.

That afternoon, when she came home from school, she went to Mother Blair for help. "I must give him nice luncheons," she explained. "Now what can I have for to-morrow? I can't think of anything at all, except bread and cake, and stupid things like those."

"Oh, there are lots and lots of things," said her mother. "Putting up lunches is just fun! I only wish you would do up some for me, too! And first, dear, you had better see that there is plenty of bread, because it takes a good deal for sandwiches, and it must not be too fresh to slice nicely, nor too stale; day-old bread is best. And if you can find some brown bread as well as white, that will be ever so nice. You will want cake, too, and fruit; you might ask Norah what she has on hand."

In a moment, Mildred came back with the news that, as there was to be fish for dinner, there would be no left-over meat at all in the morning; the bits of steak were still there. "But imagine beefsteak sandwiches!" said she, scornfully. And though there was no cake now, Norah was going to make some.

"I think we had better learn first how to make all kinds of sandwiches, because that will help you more than anything else in putting up lunches," her mother said, getting out her cook-book. "You will need some paraffin paper for them, too, and paper napkins; suppose you look on the top shelf of the kitchen closet and see if we had any left over from summer picnics."

By the time Mildred had found these, as well as a box to pack the lunch in, these receipts were all ready for her to copy in her own book:

SANDWICHES

Use bread that is at least a day old. Spread the butter smoothly on the loaf; if it is too cold to spread well, warm it a little; slice thin, with a sharp knife; spread one slice with the filling, lay on another, press together, and trim off the heavy part of the crust; cut in two pieces, or, if the slices are very large, in three. Put two or three sandwiches of the same kind together, and wrap in paraffin paper.

MEAT SANDWICHES

Take any cold meat, cut off the gristle and fat, and put it through the meat chopper. Add a pinch of salt, a pinch of dry mustard, a shake of pepper, and, last, a teaspoonful of melted butter; press into a cup, and put away to grow firm.

"Now you see the nice thing about this rule is, that any sort of cold meat will do to use, and if you have bits of two or more kinds, you can use them together. There are those beefsteak ends; all you have to do is to follow your rule, and they will make as good sandwiches as anything else."

"But, Mother, if you had nice roast-beef slices, you would not chop those up, would you?"

"No, indeed! I would make sandwiches of plain bread and butter and put the slices of meat in by themselves. But chopped meat makes better sandwiches than slices of meat between bread."

"But what do you make sandwiches out of if you don't use meat? I think plain bread and butter is horrid for lunches."

"Oh, there are plenty of other things to use; see, here are your next rules:"

EGG SANDWICHES

1 hard-boiled egg, chopped fine.

1 teaspoonful of oil.

3 drops of vinegar.

1 pinch of salt.

1 shake of pepper.

Mix well and spread on buttered bread.

"And then sometimes you can have:"

CHEESE SANDWICHES

Spread thin buttered brown bread with cream cheese; sprinkle with a very little salt and pepper. Sometimes add chopped nuts for a change.

"Or, here are these:"

LETTUCE SANDWICHES

Spread some very thin white bread; lay on a leaf of lettuce; sprinkle with a very little oil, vinegar, salt, and pepper, as in the egg sandwiches.

SARDINE SANDWICHES

Drain off all the oil from a little tin of sardines; skin each fish, take out the bones, and mash smoothly, adding a teaspoonful of lemon juice; spread on white buttered bread.

"And then, when you have no cake or cookies for lunch, you can have two or three sandwiches with meat and two more like these:"

SWEET SANDWICHES

Spread buttered bread with a very little jam or jelly; or with chopped dates or figs; or with scraped maple sugar; or with chopped raisins and nuts; or with a thick layer of brown sugar.

"Those are just as good as cake, and better, I think," said Mother Blair, as Mildred finished copying them all down. "And now, what comes next in a lunch, after sandwiches?"

"Cake," said Mildred, promptly.

"Yes, sometimes, but not always. What else can you think of that would be nice?"

Mildred said she thought gingerbread might be good, or perhaps doughnuts; but she could not think of anything else.

"Oh, I can think of ever so many things," said her mother. "But we will put down the gingerbread first; and, by the way, what do you think Betty calls it? This:"

"PERFECTLY LOVELY" GINGERBREAD

1 cup of molasses.

1 cup of shortening (butter and lard mixed).

3 cups of flour.

1 teaspoonful each of cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and soda.

1 cup of sugar.

2 eggs.

1 cup of milk.

Cream the butter and sugar, add the eggs, well beaten without separating, then the molasses mixed with the spices and soda, then the flour, then the milk. Stir and beat well. Put in a shallow tin and bake slowly.

"Things don't sound as good as they taste, do they?" said Mildred, as she read the receipt over. "I just love gingerbread, but butter and lard and soda don't sound appetizing."

"Well, then, try this," laughed Mother Blair; "every bit of this sounds good:"

PEANUT WAFERS

1 cup of sugar.

½ cup of milk.

½ teaspoonful of soda.

½ cup of butter.

2 cups of flour.

1 cup of chopped peanuts.

Cream the butter and sugar; put the soda in the milk, stir thoroughly, and put in next; then the flour. Beat well. Grease a shallow pan and spread the mixture evenly over the bottom, and scatter the nuts on top. Bake till light brown, and cut in squares while warm.

"Oh, those *do* sound good!" Mildred exclaimed, as she wrote the last words down.

"What sounds good?" asked Miss Betty's voice, as her pretty head popped in the door. So they told her all about the luncheons, and she said she knew some good things, too, and the first one was:

CHOCOLATE CRACKERS

2 squares of chocolate.
1 teaspoonful of sugar.
Butter, the size of the tip of your thumb.
3 drops of vanilla.

Cut the chocolate up into bits and put it in a saucer over the tea-kettle; when it melts, add the sugar and butter and vanilla; stir, and drop in some small crackers, only one at a time, and lay them on a greased paper to dry.

"Oh, Mother, I've just got to stop writing and make some of those this very minute!" Mildred exclaimed. Miss Betty said she had lots of things she wanted to talk over with Mother Blair while Mildred was busy. Brownie came running in just then, and the two girls worked so fast they had a whole plateful of crackers done in no time; and after everybody had had one apiece to eat, Mildred said: "Now, I will learn to make some more things."

"Let me see," said her mother, slowly. "Sandwiches and cake – what else can you think of for luncheons, Betty?"

"Devised eggs," said Miss Betty, as quick as a flash. "Please let me tell how!"

DEVILED EGGS

Boil three eggs for ten minutes; peel them, cut them in halves, and put the yolks in a bowl; add

¼ teaspoonful of salt.
¼ teaspoonful of dry mustard.
1 pinch of pepper.
1 teaspoonful of oil.
½ teaspoonful of vinegar.

Mix well, fill the whites, press smooth with a knife, and put two halves together.

"But three eggs are too many for Jack," complained Brownie. "He won't need three; can't I have one for my lunch here?"

Miss Betty laughed, and said it would be easy for Mildred to make enough for everybody instead of making three, as the rule said.

"If I just made one, I suppose I'd take pinches instead of teaspoonfuls," said Mildred, thoughtfully. "I mean, I'd take just a little of everything, enough to make the egg taste good?"

"Exactly!" said Miss Betty; "that is just the way a real grown-up cook does. And, Mildred, when I had to take my lunch to school, I used to have the best thing – salad. I had it when there were no real sandwiches, only bread and butter; it was put in a little round china jar with a tin top that screwed on, so it never spilled. But perhaps Jack doesn't like salad."

"He just loves it," said Brownie; "he loves every single thing to eat that there is!"

"Then he will surely 'just love' these things! Write them down, Mildred."

CHICKEN SALAD

½ cup of cold chicken, cut in small bits.
½ a hard boiled egg, cut up.

Or use celery in place of the egg, or use both.

FRENCH DRESSING

2 teaspoonfuls of oil.
¼ teaspoonful vinegar.
1 pinch of salt
2 shakes of pepper (paprika is best).

Beat the dressing well and mix with the chicken and egg.
Make more dressing if the salad is too dry.

LUNCHEON FRUIT SALAD

Cut a seedless orange in halves; take out the pulp with a spoon; use alone, or mix with bits of banana or other fruit; or use chopped celery and apple together. Add the dressing.

"There!" said Miss Betty, triumphantly, as Mildred read the receipts aloud when she had copied them. "If Jack doesn't like those, he isn't the boy I take him for. And you see, Mildred, when you have no salad for him, you can sometimes put in a nice stalk of celery; and when you have had the same fruit over and over, you can just give him a fruit salad. I do believe I'll start on a long journey and take a whole week's supply of lunches along. All these receipts make me feel just like it!"

"Oh, do let me go too," begged Mildred.

"So you shall," laughed Miss Betty. "But before we start, I must tell you one thing more: if you want an ab-so-lute-ly perfect lunch, you must always have a surprise for the very last thing of all."

"How do you make one?" asked Brownie, curiously.

"Oh, you don't make them at all, or at least not usually; a surprise is something which has to be eaten last of all, after all the sandwiches and other things are gone, for a sort of dessert; sometimes I had a piece of maple-sugar, or a bit of sweet chocolate, or a couple of marshmallows; sometimes it was a fig or two, or a few dates. But it was always hidden down in the very bottom of the box, and everything had to be finished up before I opened the little paper it was in. Honestly, I don't think boys need surprises at all, because they will eat everything up any way, but often girls will skip a sandwich or two, unless they know about the surprise."

"When I take my lunch, I shall have one every time," said Brownie.

"So shall I," laughed Mother Blair.

"I shall certainly give Jack one every day, because of Cæsar," said Mildred.

The next morning bright and early, Mildred hurried to get Jack's luncheon all ready before breakfast, and her mother said she would help her, just for once. First they made three beautiful thin sandwiches out of bread and butter spread with the nice beefsteak filling, and wrapped these up by themselves and put them in one corner of the box; then in the opposite corner went the surprise, this time four little chocolate crackers, all wrapped up carefully; on top of them, to hide them, went three more sandwiches, made of brown bread and butter and cheese; then the deviled egg filled the corner on top of the other pile, and one of Norah's cakes was put opposite.

"Now for the fruit," said Mother Blair. "What is there?"

Mildred said there was an orange, but it would not go in the box.

"Oh, you don't give anybody an orange whole for luncheon! Peel it first, then break it carefully in halves, wrap each half up in paper by itself, and you will see how well it fits in and how easy it will be to eat when you have no fruit-knife or orange-spoon to use with it. Now that is all, and it's what I call a perfectly delicious luncheon, don't you?"

"*Perfectly!*" said Mildred, rapturously, as she tied up the box. "I guess the other boys will wish they had lunches just exactly like it; and I think it's very interesting to do them up, too."

That afternoon, when Jack came home from school, he shouted up the stairs:

"Say, Mildred, what will you take to do up lunches for the crowd? They told me to ask you. They said they had never seen anything so good. Where is that Cæsar? I'll do about ten pages for you if you want me to."

When the lesson was over, Mildred hugged Jack gratefully. "I can do it alone in no time now, because you're such a good teacher," she said, as Jack squirmed away. "And, when summer comes, just think of all the picnic lunches I can do up for everybody!"

"We won't wait till summer for a picnic," said Mother Blair. "I've got *such* a bright idea!"

CHAPTER IV

THE BIRTHDAY PICNIC

Just as Mother Blair declared that she had "*such* a bright idea!" a caller came in, and it was dinner-time before Mildred had a chance to ask her what it was. And then her mother put her finger on her lip and shook her head; so Mildred knew, of course, that it was a secret, and waited till later on to hear what it was.

"Now I will tell you all about it," Mother Blair said, after she had read Brownie a fairy story and tucked her up for the night. "Jack, you can hear, too, and Father, if he wants to." So they all drew up around the fire to listen.

"You remember how much Brownie loved the picnics we had last summer," she began. "She used to say that she would rather eat plain bread and butter out of doors than ice-cream in the dining-room; and whenever we took our supper and went off for the afternoon, she was so happy!"

"So she was," said Father Blair. "Brownie is her father's own daughter; I love picnics too."

"But, Mother, we can't have a picnic at this time of year!" exclaimed Mildred. "Just listen to the rain and snow coming down together this minute; and the slush on the sidewalk is so deep you have to wade to school."

"But this is just where my bright idea comes in! You see, next week will be Brownie's birthday, and every year since she was two, she has had some sort of a party; now this year, for a real change, I think it would be fun to have a picnic for her, a lovely in-door picnic, for ten boys and girls; and we'll have it up in the attic!"

"Isn't that just like Mother!" Jack exclaimed, laughing. "Who else in the world would ever have thought of such a thing!"

"But think what fun it will be!" Mother Blair went on, her cheeks growing pink as she explained all about it. "The attic is nice and large, and empty except for the trunks and old furniture which are tucked away around the eaves. The children will all come in their every-day clothes, and wear their coats and hats, so they won't take cold up there. And we can spread down in the middle of the open space the two old green parlor carpets, for grass; they are all worn out, but nobody will notice that. And then, Jack, you can carry up the two palms and the rubber plant, and put them on the edge of the 'grass,' and Farmer Brown can bring us in some little cedar-and spruce-trees from the woods the next time he drives to town, and we will plant them in sand in big earthen flower-pots, and stand those around, too. Can't you see how lovely it will be? Just like a little grassy grove!"

Everybody laughed, but everybody thought it was going to be great fun to make a picnic-place in the attic.

"And we will tie a hammock to the rafters," said Father Blair; "and there is the old ping-pong set to play with, and the ring-toss; and the boys can play ball, if they choose; there's nothing they can hurt."

And so it was all arranged; and Brownie was told she was going to have a beautiful surprise for her birthday, and she must not ask a single question about it. Mother Blair asked ten boys and girls to come at twelve on Saturday and spend the rest of the day, and, after the notes were sent, she and Mildred began to plan the luncheon.

"Of course all the things must be packed in baskets," said Mildred, "exactly like a regular picnic."

"Of course!" said her mother. "And in one basket we will put a lunch cloth to lay on the 'grass,' and wooden plates, and paper napkins, and glasses, and forks. And they can spread the cloth and arrange everything themselves."

"And what will they have to eat? They are sure to be dreadfully hungry."

"Well, there must be one substantial dish to begin with. We might have cold sliced ham, of course, but I think perhaps they would like something else better. Suppose we have veal loaf?"

"Just the very thing," said Mildred. "May I make it?"

"Of course you may, and everything else as well, if you want to. If you will get your book, you can write down the receipts this minute. Here is the first:"

VEAL LOAF

2 pounds of veal, chopped fine.
¼ pound of salt pork, chopped with it.
½ cup of bread crumbs, soaked in milk.
1 egg.
1 teaspoonful of chopped onion.
½ teaspoonful each of pepper and paprika.
1 level teaspoonful of salt.

Have the meats chopped together at the market; put the crumbs in a bowl and cover them with milk, and let them stand for fifteen minutes; then squeeze them dry and add to the meat. Beat the egg without separating it, and mix that in next, and then the seasoning. Stir all together, and put in a bread tin and bake one hour. Have on the stove a cup half full of hot water mixed with two tablespoonfuls of butter, and every fifteen minutes open the oven door and pour a quarter of this over the meat. When done, put in a cold place over night. Slice thin, and put parsley around it.

"You see, this is very easy to make, and it is always good for luncheon for ourselves, and for Sunday night supper as well. You can make it Friday afternoon, and then, by the time for the picnic, it will be ready to slice."

"And what are they to eat with it?"

"I think it would be nice to have some sandwiches – hot ones."

"Hot sandwiches, Mother Blair! I never heard of them. How do you make them?"

"I invented them myself," laughed her mother. "I really did, this very morning, when I was thinking about the picnic. Here is the rule."

TOASTED SARDINE SANDWICHES

1 tin sardines.
8 slices of toast.
½ a lemon.
Large pinch of salt, and as much dry mustard.

Open a can of sardines, drain off the oil, and spread them on brown paper. Scrape off the skin carefully, and open each one on the side and take out the back bone. Sprinkle over them all the salt and mustard, and squeeze the lemon on. Then make the toast, large brown slices, and butter them a little; lay two together, trim off the crust, and cut them in strips. Open the strips, and between each two put one sardine and press together. Put them in the oven between two hot plates till needed.

"Oh, those do sound *so* good! Can't I make some for lunch to-day, Mother?" Mildred begged.

"But they belong to the surprise! Let's wait till after the picnic, and then you may make lots of them."

"Well!" sighed Mildred, "then let me have another receipt right away, so I'll forget them. I do want to make them so much."

"Here is another receipt you will like just as well; part of it is for the picnic, and part of it is for a little bit of a party for you and Miss Betty and me, while the picnic is going on upstairs."

"A party for us? What kind of a party?"

"Lovely grown-up afternoon tea!" laughed her mother. "You can invite Miss Betty yourself won't that be nice?"

"*Perfectly* lovely! Do tell faster!"

"Well, first you make for the picnic some sweet sandwiches like those we planned for the school lunches; these are simply, to begin with:"

ORANGE MARMALADE SANDWICHES

Spread thin white bread and butter with orange marmalade; trim off the crusts and cut into even shapes; a round cooky cutter makes pretty sandwiches.

"I've made those for Jack, lots of times," said Mildred, as she wrote this down, "only I didn't cut them in round shapes, because boys don't care about that."

"No," said her mother, smiling, "boys don't, but girls do! So make part of these in rounds, and put them away, and send the square ones upstairs. And when it's time for our party, just toast ours quickly, and you will find them the most delicious things you ever ate, especially with tea; that's what we three will have."

"Those will be Miss Betty's surprise!" laughed Mildred, as she wrote down the word *toasted* after the title of the sandwiches. "Now what next?"

"Suppose you try some very easy cookies; those are just the thing for a picnic; you can make them Saturday morning, and then they will be fresh. Here is the rule:"

SPICY COOKIES

Sprinkle the baking board with flour and rub it smoothly over; do the same to the rolling-pin, and scatter a little flour evenly also over the bottom of some shallow tins. Have a panful of sifted flour ready on the table, as you may need to do this several times.

- ¾ cup of sugar.
- 3 tablespoonfuls of butter.
- 6 tablespoonfuls of milk.
- 1 egg.
- 1½ cups of flour.
- ¼ teaspoonful of soda.
- ¼ teaspoonful of salt.
- 1 tablespoonful of hot water.
- ¼ teaspoonful of cloves.
- ¼ teaspoonful of cinnamon.

Melt the butter, add the sugar, and rub together. Beat the egg without separating, and put in next. Mix the soda and hot water, put the milk with this; put the salt in the flour; add part of the flour to the sugar and other things, and then part of the milk, and so on; then put in the spices and stir all together. Put the dough on the board, roll it out thin, and with a cutter mark it all over; then lift out the pieces with a cake turner, very carefully, and arrange them in your pans, but do not let them touch. Bake fifteen minutes; take them out of the pans while warm, and spread out on a platter to cool.

"Dear me, that sounds pretty hard!" said Mildred, as she finished.

"Cookies are not quite as easy to make as some other things, but they are so good, so nice for luncheon and suppers and other times, that I think you will be glad to know how to make them. And Father is so fond of cookies!"

"So he is. Well, Mother, I'll try them. And now what comes next?"

"Some cunning, easy little cakes, so easy that next time Brownie can make them herself. They are called:"

MARGUERITES

20 round, thin crackers.
20 marshmallows.
2 tablespoonfuls of chopped nuts.
2 teaspoonfuls of butter.

Butter the crackers on one side, just a little; put a marshmallow on each, a tiny bit of butter on it, and a sprinkle of chopped nuts of any kind. Put them in a shallow pan, and bake till they are soft and brown; eat while fresh and warm.

"Oh, lovely! Mother, I must have some of the girls in and have those for myself!"

"So you shall, any day you want to. Now don't you think that is almost enough for the picnic?"

"I think we ought to have something to finish off with – to eat with the cookies and marguerites; don't you think so?"

"Yes, I do; something in the way of fruit. Suppose we give them this – it is much nicer than plain oranges or bananas; write it down, dear."

ORANGE BASKETS

6 large oranges.
2 bananas.
2 tablespoonfuls of powdered sugar.

Cut the oranges in halves; take out the pulp with a spoon, and put it in a bowl. Scrape out the inside, leaving nice, clean shells, and then scallop or point the edges with the scissors. Peel the bananas, cut them in long, narrow strips, and these into small bits, and mix lightly with the orange, and add the sugar; heap in the baskets and set away to grow cold.

"If we happened to have any pineapple or white grapes in the house, I should put some of those in too; but these will be delicious just as they are. Now anything more?"

"Something to drink with the lunch. I think pink lemonade would be nice."

"Perfectly lovely!" laughed Mother Blair. "We will get a can of raspberries out of the fruit closet, and make something for them that will be ever so good. This is the rule:"

PICNIC LEMONADE

8 lemons.
12 glasses of water.
3 cups of sugar.
1 cup of raspberry juice.

Roll the lemons till they are soft; cut them and squeeze the juice out. Put the sugar in a little pan with a glass of water, and boil it two minutes; add this to the lemon and raspberry juice, and strain it; add the rest of the water; serve with broken ice in a glass pitcher.

"Be sure and boil the sugar and water together, Mildred, whenever you make any kind of drink like lemonade; it is so much better than if you put in plain sugar. When it is all done, if it is not quite sweet enough, you can add a little powdered sugar without hurting it."

"Mother, we forgot the surprise! You remember, 'every luncheon must have a surprise,' you said; see, here it is in the book."

"Dear me, so I did! What shall it be, Mildred? I can't seem to think of another thing for that picnic."

"Neither can I."

"Stuffed dates!" exclaimed Mother Blair, presently. "I knew there must be something, and those will be exactly right."

STUFFED DATES

Wash the dates and wipe them dry. Open one side and take out the stone; in its place press in half a pecan or other nut; close the edges, and roll each date in powdered sugar.

"I do hope there will be some of those over for us," said Mildred, as she put her book away. "Those children are going to have a *wonderful* lunch!"

Brownie could not imagine what her birthday surprise was to be. She could not help guessing, but she never once was "warm." When Saturday came, and the boys and girls arrived in their everyday clothes and even kept on their wraps in the parlor, she did not know what to think; and there was actually no lunch for them in the dining-room! She began to look very sober.

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