

# McTAVISH TAKES THE CAKE



Meg Rosoff

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*Meg Rosoff*



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For Alex





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1

## THE PEACHEYS COOK

“What’s for dinner?” asked Ollie.

“Whose turn is it to cook?” asked Ava.

Betty stuck her head out of the kitchen.

“It’s mine,” she said. “On the menu tonight is vegetarian lasagna with a salad of baby greens, and for dessert, caramel-chocolate tart with cream.”

“Great,” said Ollie.

“Yum,” said Ava.

Ever since Ma Peachey had decided that mothers should not be responsible for all the daily chores of family life, the Peachey children had taken over their share of the cooking.

They learned that making a meal wasn't difficult. You didn't have to be old and experienced to make lasagna or chocolate brownies. You didn't have to be married or very clever to roast a chicken or make fruit crumble. You just had to be able to read a recipe, measure ingredients, and follow directions.

In no time at all, the three Peachey children were making delicious meals. The Peachey family had never eaten so well.

Today was Wednesday, so it was Betty's turn to cook.

"I still have a great deal of work to do,"

Betty told Ava and Ollie, “so please go away.”

Only McTavish was allowed to stay in the kitchen while Betty mixed flour into melted butter, then slowly added milk to make a sauce for the lasagna. McTavish paid close attention as she whisked together the oil, vinegar, mustard, and salt to make a dressing for the salad.

McTavish the rescue dog was often called upon to rescue the Peachey family. But in cases where rescue was not actually required, he still found ways to help.

While Betty was cooking, McTavish helped by cleaning up anything that fell on the floor. McTavish was faster and more effective than a vacuum, and although certain things (like lettuce) were not to his taste, he was excellent at cleaning up bits of cheese, cake, or bacon.



His services came in very handy when any of the Peachey children cooked. They were all very inventive when choosing recipes, but not always very tidy.

An average week might begin on Monday with Ava's roasted vegetable couscous followed by a special Moroccan milk pudding with rose syrup. Not to be outdone,

Ollie would follow on Tuesday with roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, and beans, with crème brûlée for dessert. Betty always cooked complicated vegetarian dishes on Wednesday, while Ma Peachey preferred a simple dinner of spicy tomato pasta with fruit salad for Thursday. Pa Peachey was supposed to cook on Friday, but he grumbled about it so much that the rest of the family just made sandwiches on Friday nights and ate in front of the TV.

“I don’t like to cook,” Pa Peachey said.

“You like to eat,” Betty observed.

“That’s different,” he said, which Betty had to admit was true.

Cooking became so competitive in the Peachey family that even breakfast was exciting.

Instead of a bowl of cereal, breakfast

might be a stack of pancakes with fruit compote and genuine Vermont maple syrup. Or oatmeal with blueberries and figs. Betty had even started making sourdough bread every week, because—she said—it made much tastier toast. Which it did. Once you'd eaten homemade sourdough toast with butter and jam, it was difficult to eat anything else.

As week followed week, the Peacheys became more and more particular about their food. The problem with eating good, healthy, homemade food every day is that you don't really want to eat boring meals or junk food anymore.

So it happened that one fine morning, Pa Peachey sat down to breakfast, picked up a piece of toast from his plate, and gasped.

“What is this?” he demanded.



“I know what you’re going to say,” Pa Peachey said. “But any toast is *not* better than no toast. This so-called ‘toast’ is packed with chemicals, preservatives, and sugars, prepared in a fraction of the time it takes to make real bread, then packaged in plastic that is guaranteed to destroy the oceans.”

Pa Peachey glared at his youngest child and pointed an accusing finger.

“You!” he said to Betty.

“Are you blaming Betty for the destruction of the oceans?” Ollie asked.

“My sourdough bread is still rising. It will not be ready till tonight,” Betty explained.

“One day of supermarket bread will not kill us,” Ava said.

“Perhaps,” said Pa Peachey. “But this toast is fit only for a dog.”

Everyone looked at McTavish, who

felt deeply offended. He thought Betty's sourdough bread was much better than supermarket bread.

"Betty is only nine years old," Ma Peachey said. "She has school and homework and friends and chores. It is a special treat for us when she makes sourdough bread. It is not her job."

"Why don't you make the bread yourself?" Betty asked Pa Peachey. "Then you could be certain of having it for breakfast every day."

"Maybe I will," Pa Peachey said with a thoughtful expression. "After all, if the youngest member of the family can make bread, it must not be very difficult."

Ollie and Ava turned to look at Betty.

Betty frowned.

McTavish blinked.

Ma Peachey looked nervous.



## 2

# PA PEACHEY BAKES

The following morning was Saturday.

When Ma Peachey woke up, Pa Peachey was already hard at work in the kitchen.

Ma Peachey pulled on her clothes and started down the stairs. Before she reached the bottom, she heard a terrible noise.

**BANG!**

In the kitchen, she found Pa Peachey. At least she thought it was Pa Peachey. The person she thought was Pa Peachey was



