

**FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL**

Story Material

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# The Recipe Book

*A heartwarming story about a teenager who discovers her great-grandmother's wartime recipe book and zero-waste wisdom.*

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**Level:** B1

**Skill:** Reading

**Duration:** ~45 min

**Age:** Teens (11-16)

**Topic:** Food & Heritage

**Pages:** 14

## The Story

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### Chapter I— The Biscuit Tin

The house smelled of dust and lavender. Maisie stood in the attic of her great-grandmother's cottage in the Cotswolds, surrounded by boxes, suitcases, and the accumulated belongings of a life that had lasted ninety-four years. Great-Grandma Dotty — Dorothy Ellen Fairweather — had died in March, and the family had gathered for the long, bittersweet process of sorting through her things. Maisie's mother was downstairs, wrapping china. Her father was in the garden, clearing the shed. Maisie had been given the attic.

Most of what she found was unremarkable: old magazines, moth-eaten curtains, a box of Christmas decorations from the 1970s. But tucked behind a stack of hatboxes, wedged into a corner where the roof met the wall, she found a battered biscuit tin. It was dark blue with faded gold lettering that read HUNTLEY & PALMERS — READING. Inside, wrapped in a square of yellowed muslin, was a notebook. The cover was stiff brown cardboard, stained and softened by decades of kitchen steam. On the first page, in neat, sloping handwriting, were the words: *My Recipe Book — Dorothy Fairweather — begun January 1942.*

Maisie sat cross-legged on the attic floor and began to read. The notebook contained over a hundred recipes, written in pencil and ink, some with small illustrations of **ingredients** and cooking methods. But these were not ordinary recipes. They were the recipes of a woman cooking under wartime **rationing** — the strict government system that limited how much butter, sugar, meat, eggs, and other staples each person could buy. Every recipe was an act of **improvisation**: making cakes without eggs, pies without pastry, cream without cream.

Between the recipes were notes — not instructions, but memories. Stories about neighbours sharing their rations, about growing vegetables in the garden, about **foraging** for wild garlic and blackberries in the hedgerows. One entry, dated November 1943, read: "Mrs. Patterson brought over a tin of golden syrup she had been saving since before the war. We made treacle tart for the whole street. Seventeen slices from one tin. Not a crumb wasted." Maisie felt tears prick her eyes. She had known Dotty as a gentle, white-haired old lady who always had biscuits in her pocket. She had never imagined her as a young woman of twenty, feeding a family and a neighbourhood with almost nothing.

### Chapter II— Cooking from Nothing

Maisie took the recipe book home and spent the following week testing Dotty's recipes in her family's kitchen. Some were astonishing. The "Mock Cream" — made from margarine, sugar, powdered milk, and a splash of vanilla — tasted remarkably close to the real thing. The "Eggless Victory Sponge" used vinegar and bicarbonate of soda instead of eggs and rose beautifully. A "Potato and Leek Pie" made with a topping of mashed potato instead of pastry was genuinely delicious. "She was a genius," Maisie told her mother, licking mock cream from a spoon. "She figured out how to make amazing food with almost no **ingredients**."

"She was **resourceful**," her mother corrected gently. "There is a difference. Genius is a gift. Resourcefulness is a skill. Dotty learned it because she had to. During the war, wasting food was not just wasteful — it was unpatriotic." Her mother paused. "She kept that up her whole life. I never once saw her throw food away. She **composted** everything, grew her own vegetables, preserved fruit for winter. She would be horrified by how much we throw away now."

That comment stayed with Maisie. She looked up the statistics and was shocked: the UK threw away 9.5 million tonnes of food every year. One-third of all food produced globally was wasted. Meanwhile, millions of people did not have enough to eat. The contrast with Dotty's world — where every gram of butter, every teaspoon of sugar, every potato peel had value — was staggering. The **scarcity** of the 1940s had forced a generation to cook with precision, creativity, and zero waste. The **abundance** of the twenty-first century had made waste invisible.

Maisie began keeping her own notebook. She adapted Dotty's recipes for modern kitchens, adding notes about where to source **seasonal** and local ingredients, how to use vegetable scraps for stock, and how to **preserve** gluts of summer fruit for winter. She called her project "Dotty's Kitchen" and posted photographs on social media. The response surprised her. People loved the stories as much as the food — the human history baked into every recipe.

## Chapter III— The Competition

In September, Maisie's food technology teacher, Mrs. Kapoor, showed her a leaflet for the National Young Chef Challenge — an annual competition for students aged 14-18. Entrants had to design and cook a three-course menu around a theme of their choice. The regional finals were held in November; the national final in London in February. "You should enter," Mrs. Kapoor said. "Your work with those wartime recipes is exactly the kind of thing they look for — creativity, technique, and a story." Maisie hesitated. She loved cooking, but the idea of competing against other students — many from specialist catering colleges — terrified her. She was fifteen, self-taught, and her most advanced equipment was a hand whisk.

"Dotty would have entered," her mother said that evening, reading the leaflet. "She was never afraid of a challenge." That settled it. Maisie filled in the application and chose her theme: "*From **Scarcity** to **Sustainable**: Wartime Wisdom for the Modern Kitchen.*"

She designed her menu over two weeks, testing and refining every element. Starter: a wild garlic and nettle soup, using plants **foraged** from the hedgerows near her home, served with soda bread made using Dotty's 1943 recipe. Main course: a slow-cooked vegetable and barley stew — Dotty's "Dig for Victory Hotpot," adapted with modern **seasonal** vegetables from a local farm — with a potato-top crust. Dessert: an eggless apple and blackberry crumble with mock cream, using fruit from the garden and blackberries picked from the lane.

Every **ingredient** was local, seasonal, or foraged. Every scrap was used: vegetable peelings went into the stock; bread crusts were dried for the crumble topping; apple cores were boiled for pectin. The total food waste from the entire three-course meal was zero.

Maisie practised the menu eleven times. By the regional finals, she could cook all three courses in ninety minutes with her eyes half-closed. She arrived at the competition venue — a **culinary** school in Birmingham — carrying Dotty's recipe book in her bag like a lucky charm.

## Chapter IV— The Kitchen

The regional final had twelve competitors, each assigned a professional kitchen station with equipment Maisie had only seen on television: induction hobs, convection ovens, immersion blenders, vacuum sealers. The other contestants looked confident and experienced. One boy had brought his own set of Japanese knives. A girl from a catering college had practised molecular gastronomy techniques that Maisie could not even pronounce. For a moment, standing in front of her station, Maisie felt completely out of her depth.

Then she opened Dotty's recipe book and placed it on the counter beside her chopping board. She looked at the handwriting — steady, practical, full of quiet authority — and remembered something Dotty had written on the last page of the book: "Cooking is not about having the best ingredients or the fanciest equipment. It is about paying attention, being grateful, and feeding people with love. The rest is just showing off." Maisie smiled, tied her apron, and began to cook.

The ninety minutes passed in a blur of chopping, stirring, tasting, and adjusting. The wild garlic soup filled the kitchen with a deep, earthy fragrance. The stew bubbled steadily, its barley softening into the rich vegetable broth. The crumble turned golden in the oven while Maisie whipped mock cream with the hand whisk she had brought from home, ignoring the electric stand mixers available at her station. When the timer sounded, she had three complete courses plated and presented: simple, honest, beautiful food.

The **jury** consisted of three professional chefs and a food writer. They tasted every dish in silence, making notes. When they reached Maisie's station, the head judge — a woman with sharp eyes and a reputation for blunt feedback — tasted the soup, paused, and looked at Maisie. "Where did you learn to balance flavours like this?" she asked. "From my great-grandmother's recipe book," Maisie said. "She wrote it during the war." The judge tasted the mock cream, raised an eyebrow, and wrote something in her notebook. Maisie could not read what it said, but she saw the judge smile.

## Chapter V— The Verdict

Maisie won the regional final. The judges' comments were unanimous in their praise: "Exceptional understanding of flavour and texture. A menu that is simultaneously nostalgic and forward-thinking. The zero-waste approach is not a gimmick but a genuine philosophy rooted in historical practice. This is **sustainable** cooking at its most compelling." The food writer, in a column published the following week, wrote: "In a competition full of technical ambition and expensive ingredients, a fifteen-year-old with a hand whisk and a wartime recipe book reminded us what cooking is actually for."

The national final, held at a prestigious **culinary** institute in London, was a different scale entirely. Twenty competitors from across the UK, television cameras, a live audience, and a judging panel that included two Michelin-starred chefs. Maisie was, by some distance, the youngest competitor. She was also the only one who arrived carrying a battered biscuit tin containing a handwritten recipe book from 1942.

She cooked the same menu — perfected now through dozens of repetitions — but added one final element that she had been working on in secret. For the dessert course, alongside the crumble, she served a tiny glass of elderflower cordial made using Dotty's 1944 recipe: elderflowers picked from the garden, sugar, lemon, and water, **fermented** for three days to create a gently fizzing, floral drink that tasted like summer distilled into a glass. The head judge closed her eyes when she tasted it. "This," she said quietly, "is extraordinary."

When the results were announced, Maisie finished second overall — narrowly behind a seventeen-year-old from Edinburgh who had cooked a technically brilliant seafood menu. But Maisie also won two special awards: the Sustainability Prize and the People's Choice Award, voted for by the live audience. Standing on the stage, holding a trophy in each hand, she thought about Dotty — about a twenty-year-old woman in a cold kitchen in 1942, making treacle tart for seventeen neighbours from a single tin of golden syrup. She wished Dotty could see this. She suspected, somehow, that she could.

## Chapter VI— Dotty's Kitchen

## Chapter VII— The Garden

The competition changed everything. A publisher contacted Maisie and offered to turn Dotty's recipe book into a real book — combining the original wartime recipes with Maisie's modern adaptations, sustainability tips, and stories about Dotty's life during the war. Maisie spent the summer writing, testing recipes, and interviewing elderly neighbours who remembered Dotty and the wartime kitchen. The book, titled *Dotty's Kitchen: Wartime Recipes for a Sustainable Future*, was published the following spring.

It became a bestseller. Not because of celebrity endorsement or marketing budgets, but because it told a story that people needed to hear: that the solutions to modern food waste, environmental damage, and disconnection from nature were not new. They were old. They were in the notebooks and memories of a generation that had learned, through **scarcity**, to value every ingredient, every season, and every meal. Dotty's **legacy** was not just a collection of recipes. It was a philosophy: cook with what you have, waste nothing, share everything.

On the anniversary of Dotty's death, Maisie returned to the cottage in the Cotswolds. The new owners had kept the garden exactly as Dotty had left it: the apple trees, the vegetable beds, the compost heap, the blackberry bushes along the back wall. Maisie knelt beside the herb garden and planted a row of wild garlic bulbs — the same variety Dotty had **foraged** from the hedgerows eighty years ago. She pressed the soil down gently and watered them in.

"I wrote the book," she said quietly, as if Dotty were sitting on the garden bench behind her. "People love your recipes. They are learning to cook the way you did — with care, with creativity, with nothing wasted. Your **heritage** is alive." She sat in the garden until the sun went down, listening to the birds and the wind in the apple trees. Then she opened her own notebook — the one she had been keeping since the summer — and wrote the first line of a new chapter: "Great-Grandma Dotty taught me that the most **resilient** recipes are not the most complicated ones. They are the ones that feed people when there is nothing left. And somehow, they always taste of love."

## Key Vocabulary

Term	Definition
<b>Rationing</b>	A system of limiting the amount of food or goods people can buy
<b>Resourceful</b>	Good at finding ways to solve problems with limited materials
<b>Heritage</b>	Traditions, recipes, or objects passed down through generations
<b>Sustainable</b>	Able to continue without wasting resources or harming the environment
<b>Improvise</b>	To create something using whatever materials are available
<b>Scarcity</b>	A situation where there is not enough of something
<b>Nutrition</b>	The process of eating the right food for health and growth
<b>Fermentation</b>	A chemical process that preserves food using bacteria or yeast
<b>Preserving</b>	Treating food to prevent it from going bad
<b>Ingredient</b>	Any of the foods or substances used to make a particular dish
<b>Culinary</b>	Relating to cooking or the kitchen
<b>Forage</b>	To search for food in the wild, such as berries or mushrooms
<b>Allotment</b>	A small piece of public land rented for growing vegetables
<b>Abundance</b>	A very large quantity of something; more than enough
<b>Compost</b>	Decayed organic material used to enrich soil for growing plants
<b>Seasonal</b>	Available only at certain times of the year
<b>Memoir</b>	A written account of personal experiences and memories
<b>Resilience</b>	The ability to recover from difficulties and keep going
<b>Jury</b>	A group of people who judge a competition or trial
<b>Legacy</b>	Something meaningful left behind for future generations

## Comprehension Quiz

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### 1. Where did Maisie find the recipe book?

- A) In a second-hand bookshop
- B) In a biscuit tin in her great-grandmother's attic
- C) At a school library
- D) Online on a history website

### 2. Why were recipes from the 1940s so creative?

- A) Because people had unlimited ingredients
- B) Because rationing forced cooks to improvise with limited supplies
- C) Because cooking competitions were popular
- D) Because restaurants were closed

### 3. What was special about Dotty's 'mock cream' recipe?

- A) It used expensive imported ingredients
- B) It recreated cream using margarine, sugar, and powdered milk — no real cream
- C) It was identical to modern cream
- D) It required a special machine to make

### 4. What theme did Maisie choose for the cooking competition?

- A) French haute cuisine
- B) Modern molecular gastronomy
- C) Wartime recipes adapted for modern sustainable cooking
- D) Traditional Sunday roasts

### 5. How did Maisie's approach differ from other competitors?

- A) She used the most expensive ingredients
- B) She focused on zero-waste cooking with seasonal, local, and foraged ingredients
- C) She cooked the fastest
- D) She used only raw, uncooked food

### 6. What did the judges particularly praise about Maisie's menu?

- A) The large portion sizes
- B) The connection between wartime resourcefulness and modern sustainability
- C) The use of rare imported spices
- D) The speed of preparation

### 7. What does 'foraging' mean in the context of the story?

- A) Buying food from a supermarket
- B) Searching for edible plants and ingredients in the wild
- C) Growing food in a greenhouse
- D) Ordering food online

### 8. Why did Maisie say that Dotty's recipes were 'ahead of their time'?

- A) Because they used technology that did not exist yet
- B) Because they practised zero-waste, seasonal, local cooking decades before it became trendy
- C) Because they were written in a foreign language
- D) Because they included futuristic ingredients

**9. What happened to Dotty's recipe book after the competition?**

- A) It was sold to a museum
- B) It was lost
- C) It was published as a book combining wartime recipes with modern sustainability tips
- D) It was returned to the attic

**10. What is the main message of the story?**

- A) That old recipes are always better than modern ones
- B) That the wisdom of past generations — resourcefulness, zero waste, seasonal eating — is exactly what the future needs
- C) That cooking competitions are the best way to learn
- D) That wartime food was unpleasant and should be forgotten

## Answer Key

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#	Ans	Question
1	B	Where did Maisie find the recipe book?
2	B	Why were recipes from the 1940s so creative?
3	B	What was special about Dotty's 'mock cream' recipe?
4	C	What theme did Maisie choose for the cooking competition?
5	B	How did Maisie's approach differ from other competitors?
6	B	What did the judges particularly praise about Maisie's menu?
7	B	What does 'foraging' mean in the context of the story?
8	B	Why did Maisie say that Dotty's recipes were 'ahead of their time'?
9	C	What happened to Dotty's recipe book after the competition?
10	B	What is the main message of the story?

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