

A Candy Pull in the Dark

(By Mrs. C. F. Fraser, Halifax School for the Blind, in 'Presbyterian Witness'.)

'Please may we borrow your kitchen this evening?'

This is the request which a deputation of the older blind girls of our school frequently make of me.

'A candy party?' I replied interrogatively; and at the prompt answer I usually give my consent, stipulating only, for the benefit of my own sweet-tooth, that samples of the evening's product shall be brought me, after a proper amount has been set aside for the benefit of the younger pupils.

'Dear me! I should be afraid they would burn themselves, or perhaps set the place on fire,' said a solicitous visitor to me one evening when the deputation had smilingly departed.

At my laughing answer that I feared neither of these disasters, the good lady expostulated still further. 'You surely do not trust these girls alone, without some seeing person to help them and to watch over the fire?' she said, anxiously.

And for answer a half-hour later I bade her come with me to my cozy kitchen. The fragrant aroma of boiling molasses stole through the crack of the kitchen door as we pushed it further ajar while a merry hubbub within told that a good time was in progress.

My guest gave a little start of surprise, 'I don't understand this in the least,' she exclaimed in a whisper. 'The gas is not lit, the blinds are closely drawn, and there is nothing but the dim light from the front of the stove to show what is going on. I am sure it is very unsafe.'

As she stood in the hallway accustoming her eyes to the flickering light, a voice which seemingly came from the same locality as the sound of the steady clank of an iron spoon against the sides of a pot, said brightly, 'Mary, Maud and Alice are to get the platters ready. The butter is in a small dish in the left-hand corner of the second shelf of the pantry. Please remember that the taffy pans are to have an extra greasing, for they are rough on the bottom and the candy sometimes sticks.'

My friend became not a little interested. 'That young woman is evidently the Mistress of Ceremonies,' she said, indicating who she meant by the nod of her head.

'The girls always call Alma the little housekeeper,' I said, softly. 'She is very capable and knows how to carry out whatever she undertakes.'

A scurry in the dark, a rattle of tins and cookery, combined with the sound of tearing paper and vigorous rubbing, told us that the instructions were being carried out to the letter. Then again the voice of the young housekeeper was heard.

'Another cup of cold water, Dora,' she said; and at once a tap was turned on, a cup filled, and a small girl was dimly seen crossing the kitchen.

It was evident that the crucial moment had not arrived, for the molasses, instead of balling in the cold water, remained, so the young cook announced, 'as soft as mush.'

'But how does she know? She cannot possibly see,' said my friend, amazed.

I murmured something about the practical use of the sense of touch, but as I spoke the spoon ceased its regular movements and the stirrer said, 'Nelly you may come here for a few minutes, my poor finger nails are smarting to the quicks.'

A tall, slender girl moved slowly across the room, but our attention was speedily

diverted from her by the voice of the Mistress of Ceremonies. She now spoke from a distant corner, from whence a crunching sound had been steadily proceeding.

'Are you nearly ready with the pea-nuts, Jennie and Lulu?' she asked. 'I do hope you have been careful not to drop shells on the floor—'

'Nor to leave the inner brown coats on the nuts, in order to tickle the throats of those who eat our candy,' interrupted Jennie, saucily. While Lulu added teasingly:

'Don't fuss, old lady; we have done everything just as your own particular self would wish.'

Just here the housekeeper's nose and ears warned her of danger, and she hurried back to her post. Under the less vigorous rule of her successor, the molasses had frothed lightly to the brim of the pot, and a tiny trickle had already run down on the stove, whence arose a smell of scorching. A few strong, roundabout strokes at once brought the seething pot to order, but immediately a new excitement arose. Dora, in the course of an excited trip with the testing cup, inadvertently trod on the tail of the cat, who uttered a doleful 'miaow' as she sought refuge under the stove.

'I'm so sorry, pussy! I hadn't the least idea you were there,' began Dora, apologetically, at which the girls burst into peals of irresistible laughter.

'But you all know I would not have hurt her for worlds!' began Dora, with a trace of grievance in her voice.

'Don't fret, Dora. A tiny thing like you couldn't hurt her much, anyhow,' said the cook soothingly. 'Please forget all about it, and bring me fresh water quickly, for I think the candy is nearly ready.'

The testing was evidently satisfactory, for immediately the pot-block was laid on the table, while the cook with the aid of a helping hand, carried the pot to the table, rested it on the block for a moment, and then, tilting it forward, allowed the thickened molasses to spread out on the waiting platters, which were at once set outside on the window ledge to cool. A small quantity of molasses which had been reserved for taffy was retained in the pot and again set to boiling.

But the little housekeeper was by no means through her duties. 'There is a saucer of flour on the shelf over the sink, girls,' she announced. 'Rub your hands well with it, so that there will be no burns or blisters to complain of later on.'

It was not long before the platters were brought in and great lumps of the soft substance were given around. Jennie and Lulu whose knowledge of this stage of the work evidently exceeded that of the others, combined their portions, and pulled and stretched the soft, yielding mass from each other's outstretched hands, until, as Lulu expressed it, the consistency changed from soft dough to that of spun silk. The others worked singly, but evidently with excellent results, for when the taffy mixture had been set aside to cool, the cook had nothing but words of encouragement or approval to give her assistants.

'Don't stop, girls, even if your arms do get tired!' she urged. 'The candy hardens quickly, and must be worked while it is soft. And don't try to whiten it with flour, either, Nelly,' she added, as she recognized the girl's suspicious nearness to the flour saucer. 'Work the air well through it, and it will whiten through in the proper manner. Jennie and Lulu, yours must nearly be ready by this time. I will flour the bread-board

while you pull out long thin strips that will make a pretty braid.'

Since the real work of candy-making was really over I drew my friend into my own sitting-room, whereupon she at once began asking many more questions.

'Will they not leave the kitchen in a terrible state?' she asked. 'I should expect to find molasses over everything; though to be sure,' she added, reflectively, 'everything seemed to be done in a very orderly manner—so far, of course, as one could judge in the dark.'

'They will leave the kitchen in the same condition in which they found it,' I answered her. 'The pot will be filled with water and left to soak over night, but they will come early in the morning before we are astir and give it a thorough washing. The floor will be neatly brushed up and the stove top left scrupulously clean. Oh, I assure you our girls are by no means the bad housekeepers you think them.'

Just here the little housekeeper, flushed but radiant, came to my door. 'We have such good luck to-night!' she said, happily. 'The worked twists and braids are better than ever before, and I am sure you will have no fault to find with the taffy.'

While my friend and I were showing our appreciation of the toothsome dainties in the most practical manner, a chorus of 'Good-night' and 'Thank you so much for the kitchen,' greeted us, and presently the retreating footsteps of the girls could be heard in the corridor.

'They are really wonderful girls,' said my friend slowly, as she nibbled at a bit of the crisp taffy. 'An hour ago I did not believe it possible that they could make candy at all, but now,' she added, with a smile, 'I can truly say that the candy pull in the dark has been an unqualified success.'

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