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FOR A GOOD TIME...

## Send in the Crowns

WHEN THE AUTHOR PROPOSES AN ENGLISH LUNCH, ONLY THE QUEEN OF PUDDINGS WILL DO

*By Serena Bass*



BOB CAREY

In England, the word *pudding* means anything sweet eaten after the main course. And the word *dessert* is categorized as common or low-class.

Harsh words here in the US, where Americans consider *dessert* to be a perfectly normal word and could hardly imagine that — in the upstairs/downstairs world of UK etiquette — it would inspire supercilious judgment.

This is all the fault of

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NOMAD EDITIONS REAL EATS

Nancy Mitford, who wrote an essay entitled “The English Aristocracy” in 1954 and came up with a glossary of terms used by the upper classes that are U and non-U (for “Us” and “non-Us”). Some of these non-U words still jar my sensibilities, so soundly was their incorrectness instilled into my young brain. The use of the word *wealthy*, meaning rich, *couch* for sofa, and *toilet* for loo, all *a bit of a problem!* Undoubtedly this is why so many people fled to a more egalitarian clime, i.e., here.

This information is supposed to be a helpful note so that if you go to England and ask for some pudding, expecting a smooth, chocolate-y,

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*“We have treacle tart, floating islands, summer pudding, meringue baskets, lemon mousse, spotted dick, and ginger cake.”*

custard-y thing, you will not be confused when you’re told, “We have treacle tart, floating islands, summer pudding, meringue baskets, lemon mousse, spotted dick, and ginger cake.”

All puddings.

## **Burning Cat**

I was nattering on with a friend of mine about Sunday lunch and what a wonderful institution it is. Her birthday

is coming up, and I offered to give her a Sunday lunch birthday party. She is also English, and the words were hardly out of my mouth before she was saying breathlessly and with shining eyes, “Can we have Queen of Puddings?”

It certainly is an emotion-laden dish. Only just elevated from nursery food and redolent of a simpler time when families

would sit around together listening to plays and *The Goon Show* on the radio.

We had an Aga, a coal-fired stove with four permanently hot ovens and two huge round covers that are lifted to reveal a medium-hot cooking surface and a very-hot one. We also had a big black-and-white cat called Patch, who would creep in behind the stove to sleep. Every now and then she would roll over in the wrong direction, ending up behind the very hottest oven, and her fur would start to singe. We would smell it and shout, “Burning cat, burning cat!” and my mother would have to encourage Patch out with a broom.

When Queen of Puddings was made, I remember

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seeing the dish with a cumulus cloud of white meringue going into one of the ovens and – one *might* say – a regal confection coming out. Swirls of golden meringue, tipped with bronze, crisped and hot, were just begging for a big spoon to scoop in and reveal the breadcrumb-thickened custard and strawberry-jammy interior.

There are many recipes, but, having tried several in

search of perfection, this is the one I’ll make for my friend.

## Queen of Puddings

Serves 8.

### FOR THE PUDDING

- 3 ½ cups whole milk
- 2 ounces unsalted butter
- 3 tablespoons sugar

- 3 ¼ cups homemade, fine fresh white breadcrumbs

- 3 extra large egg yolks (save the whites for the meringue)

- 3 extra large whole eggs

- 2 teaspoons lemon zest

- 20 scrapes of a whole nutmeg or ½ teaspoon ground nutmeg

- 4 tablespoons warmed strawberry jam (Smucker's or Hero brands are best)

#### **FOR THE MERINGUE**

- 5 egg whites
- 1/8 teaspoon of salt

- ¾ cup superfine sugar plus 1 tablespoon for dusting

**1.** Position a rack in the middle of the oven and preheat to 350 degrees F.

**2.** Generously butter an 8-cup ovenproof dish. Better shallow rather than tall so the uncooked custard is about 1-inch deep.

**3.** Heat the milk, butter and sugar till nearly boiling. Add the breadcrumbs and set aside for 20 minutes.

**4.** Beat the eggs, yolks, lemon and nutmeg together, and when the 20 minutes is up, whisk into the milk and crumbs.

**5.** Pour the mixture into the buttered dish then transfer it to a roasting tin and add hot water to halfway up the sides of the dish. Bake for 25 minutes then remove from the oven and spread the baked custard evenly with jam. Reduce the oven to 300 degrees F.

**6.** Beat the egg whites and salt until white and foamy, then add the sugar gradually and beat to soft (not stiff) peaks. Spread or pipe on top of the pudding and dust with the remaining sugar.

**7.** Return the dish to the oven (without the roasting pan) and bake for 30 – 40 minutes or until the meringue is golden and

crisp. Ideally, if you have time, set aside to cool. Just before you come to eat the pudding, return it to a 300 degree F oven for 15 minutes to re-crisp. This is a little extra step, but it really improves the texture of the finished dessert.

*Comments or questions?*

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