

Plums

"Hello, Fred. Got any supplies for me? I've run out of sugar and I'm dying for a cuppa." Gloria had been waiting anxiously for the cream carrier all morning, and greeted him as he climbed from the cab of his old truck. "I'm expecting an order from QPS."

"Yes, there are a couple of boxes I picked up at the station, and it looks like a bag of sugar as well," Fred told her as he climbed up and started moving cream cans and boxes around on the truck. "There's some mail in the cab, and a case of plums."

"Plums? I'm not expecting plums."

"Young Mrs Driscoll from out along the main road says they're for you. She's got a big crop and thought you'd be able to use a few."

"That's kind of her. Be sure to thank her for me, won't you?" Gloria smiled, but her heart sank. The last thing she needed was a case of plums. Plums were the reason she was out of sugar. She thought of the bottles of plum jam cooling on her kitchen table and cringed. She couldn't face another couple of hours over the stove, and knew the kids were heartily sick of plums. They'd already picked buckets and buckets and the trees still were covered in fruit. What a crop!

Sipping her sweet black tea, Gloria wondered what on earth she could do with the plums. She was sorely tempted to throw them in the pig pen, but it was kind of her neighbour to send her a case, and she wouldn't be able to face her if she didn't make good use of them.

More jam was out of the question. She had more than double what they'd need for the year, and she couldn't afford the sugar to make any more. Two large containers of dried plums took up all available room at the back of the pantry. She already had plenty of chutney and any fruit left on the tree would be more than enough for any desserts she wanted to make. What could she do?

When John returned to the kitchen for lunch he was surprised to find his wife sitting at the table holding an empty tea cup and staring at a case of plums. She sprang to her feet and rushed to the bread bin.

"Is that the time?" she asked. "I'm sorry I didn't realise. Lunch will be ready in a few minutes."

"That's good. I was beginning to think I had to eat plums."

"You can have a plate full of plums if that's what you feel like."

"I'd rather not. Don't we have some cold meat left from Sunday? A sandwich would be nice."

"Of course," Gloria smiled. "I was just joking. I've been wondering how I can use the plums."

"How about jam?"

Gloria shook her head and said, "We've already got more than enough. And enough chutney, and enough prunes and enough everything and still the plums keep coming. I feel as if I'm drowning in plums."

"That's it, Gloria. Plum wine. If you're going to drown in it, better to be wine than whole plums," John laughed and accepted a large sandwich from his wife. "That would put a kick in the next school dance."

"I couldn't get it ready by then. It takes a few weeks to make and then you shouldn't drink it for at least six months. Yes ...that's it. We'll have it in time for Christmas. Oh, John, you are so clever."

"Steady on, my dear. Do you seriously mean you know how to make plum wine?"

"Not really, but I'll ask Charlie. I'm sure he knows. You leave it with me, John. There'll be a few surprises at Christmas, you wait and see."

And so it was that young Mrs Driscoll was responsible for much hilarity at the end of year dance at the local school. Mrs Benson smiled for the first time in twenty years, and Peter Morrison proposed to Miss Cole, who blushed and accepted his offer. Mrs Baker forgot to act prim and proper and Old Barny Jones laughed so much he nearly fell down the stairs backwards.

John and Gloria? They remembered to thank Mrs Driscoll for her plums, smiled at each other and waltzed dreamily around the dance floor even though the band was playing the latest rock and roll music.

Charlie's Plum Wine Recipe

(makes one gallon)

3 1/2 lb ripe plums

4lb sugar

1 pack yeast

1 gallon boiling water

Wash plums and pour on water.

Stir and mash with wooden spoon.

Leave for ten days.

Remove mould carefully.

Strain off into another bowl and add sugar, yeast and stir.

Cover and stir daily for three days.

Store in a demijohn or gallon jug.

The wine will be ready to drink in six months, but better after nine.

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