

HEARTHSTONE KITCHEN

THE HEARTHSTONE TABLE

BRAM HALLORAN



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THE HEARTHSTONE TABLE.

PLAIN FOOD FOR COLD MONTHS

BY
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*For everyone who has ever warmed cold hands over a working
stove.*

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A note on the kitchen

This is a book for a small kitchen in a cold house, the kind of kitchen where the window fogs by four in the afternoon and the good light is gone by five. I wrote it over one long Vermont winter, cooking the same handful of dishes until they were plain enough to trust. Nothing here is clever. Everything here is meant to be eaten while it is still warm, at a table close to the stove.

If you take one idea from these pages, let it be patience. A pot on low heat asks very little of you, and it gives back more than a pot rushed over a high flame ever will, because a good soup forgives a distracted cook. So does a long stock, which asks only that you leave it alone and let the bones and an onion give up their flavor in their own time.

Keep your salt within reach and taste as you go. Read a recipe all the way through before you start, then cook it your own way the second time. These dishes want to be repeated, adjusted, and handed on. That is the whole purpose of a kitchen: to feed the people in front of you, again and again, through the cold.

I Soups and stocks

A pot of soup is the surest way I know to make a cold day bearable. It stretches, it keeps, and it improves overnight in the refrigerator. Most of what follows begins with a good stock, so make more than you need and freeze the rest in jars.

This white bean soup is the one I cook most. It is cheap, filling, and quiet on the stove for an hour while you do something else.

- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 cloves garlic, sliced
- 1 pound dried white beans, soaked overnight
- 6 cups vegetable stock or chicken stock
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- salt and pepper to taste

Melt the butter in a heavy pot over low heat, then add the onion and a pinch of salt. Cook it slowly until it turns soft and gold, stirring now and then, which takes about fifteen minutes. Add the garlic and thyme for a minute, until the kitchen smells of them.

Drain the beans and add them with the stock. Bring the pot to a gentle simmer, cover it, and leave it alone for an hour or so, until the beans are tender and creaming at the edges. Fish out the thyme stems, season the soup well, and mash a few beans against the side of the pot to thicken it. Serve it hot with bread.

2 Bread

Bread is the one thing in this book that cannot be hurried, and that is exactly why it belongs in a cold house. You are not going anywhere. Neither is the dough. It is enough to know that bread wants a warm corner and your patience, and in return it fills the whole kitchen with a smell no candle can match.

This is a plain loaf, mixed in one bowl, with no machine and no shaping to speak of. Stir together four cups of flour, two teaspoons of salt, half a teaspoon of yeast, and two cups of cool water until you have a rough, sticky dough. Cover the bowl and leave it on the counter overnight, or for up to twelve hours, until the surface is bubbled and loose.

In the morning, heat your oven as hot as it will go, with a heavy covered pot inside. Tip the dough onto a floured board, fold it over on itself a few times, and lower it into the hot pot. Cover it and bake for thirty minutes, then uncover it and bake until the crust is deep brown.

Let the loaf cool before you cut it, hard as that is. Eat the first slice warm, with a good amount of butter, standing up in the kitchen where no one can see you.

Appendix A: Index of subjects

Numbers are chapters and letters are appendices; both stay put across editions, which page numbers do not. The locations below are found in the text on every build, so the index cannot drift from the book.

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About the author

Bram Halloran cooked in other people's kitchens for fifteen years and now cooks in his own, a small one, in a cold house at the top of a hill. He believes that most good food is plain food paid attention to, and that a recipe should tell you what to watch for, not only what to buy. This is his first book.