



Ham Biscuits, Hostess Gowns, and Other Southern Specialties: An Entertaining Life (with Recipes)

Julia Reed

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Julia Reed spends a lot of time thinking about ham biscuits. And cornbread and casseroles and the surprisingly modern ease of donning a hostess gown for one's own party. In *Ham Biscuits, Hostess Gowns and Other Southern Specialties* Julia Reed collects her thoughts on good cooking and the lessons of gracious entertaining that pass from one woman to another, and takes the reader on a lively and very personal tour of the culinary—and social—South. In essays on everything from pork chops to the perfect picnic Julia Reed revels in the simple good qualities that make the Southern table the best possible place to pull up a chair. She expounds on: the Southerner's relentless penchant for using gelatin; why most things taste better with homemade mayonnaise; the necessity of a holiday milk punch (and, possibly, a Santa hat); how best to “cook for compliments” (at least one squash casserole and Lee Bailey's barbecued veal are key). She provides recipes for some of the region's best-loved dishes (cheese straws, red velvet cake, breakfast shrimp), along with her own variations on the classics, including Fried Oysters Rockefeller Salad and Creole Crab Soup. She also elaborates on worthwhile information every hostess would do well to learn: the icebreaking qualities of a Ramos gin fizz and a hot crabmeat canapé, for example; the “wow factor” intrinsic in a platter of devilled eggs or a giant silver punchbowl filled with scoops of homemade ice cream. There is guidance on everything from the best possible way to “eat” your luck on New Year's Day to composing a menu in honor of someone you love. Grace and hilarity under gastronomic pressure suffuse these essays, along with remembrances of her gastronomic heroes including Richard Olney, Mary Cantwell, and M.F.K. Fisher. *Ham Biscuits, Hostess Gowns and Other Southern Specialties* is another great book about the South from Julia Reed, a writer who makes her experiences in—and out of—the kitchen a joy to read.

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