



# Cook's Challenge

## By Lois Lewis

**NARRATOR:**

Everyone in the packed television studio feels the excitement as host Fiona Fennel enters the room. The audience applauds and cheers.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Thank you, thank you! Welcome to our show, *Steel Cook*. Tonight's program is being shown live from Nursery Rhyme Kingdom. A challenger from this land will face one of our steel cooks in a unique culinary competition.

**AUDIENCE:** (clapping, shouting)  
Yeah!

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Two of our steel cooks are here for the contest. First, meet the queen of quick meals, Susanna Speed.

**SUSANNA SPEED:** (waving to the crowd)  
In just minutes, anyone can create meals that are tasty and delicious.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Our second steel cook is the popular owner of several famous restaurants. Say hello to Edgar Langoustine!

**AUDIENCE:** (chanting, in unison)  
Edgar! Edgar! Edgar!

**EDGAR LANGOUSTINE:** (shouting to the audience)  
What do we say when we're ready to spice our food?

**AUDIENCE:** (screaming)  
KAPOW!

**FIONA FENNEL:** (laughing)  
Thank you Edgar. Now let's meet the challenger -- the Baker's Man,

**NARRATOR:**  
The audience applauds as Fiona greets the award-winning pastry chef who'll bake you a cake as fast as he can.

**FIONA FENNEL:**  
Welcome Baker's Man! Are you ready to choose your competitor?

**BAKER'S MAN:**  
Yes, Fiona. I choose Susanna Speed. We both create fast dishes.

**NARRATOR:**  
Susanna walks over to the Baker's Man and shakes his hand as a large cart covered with a white cloth is brought into the studio.

**FIONA FENNEL:** (to the audience)  
The cart you see holds the mysterious theme food for this show. It comes from the farm of the Farmer in the Dell. Farmer Dell, please show us the item!

**NARRATOR:**  
The audience gasps when Farmer Dell removes the cloth. Some of the characters whisper to each other.

**PETER, PETER PUMPKIN EATER:**  
I've never seen anything like that in my pumpkin patch!

**LITTLE MISS MUFFET:**  
I've certainly never had it in my curds and whey!

**FARMER IN THE DELL:**

Tonight's theme is fiddlehead ferns! They are the small, curly ends of fern plants. Fiddleheads are quite a delicacy.

**FIONA FENNEL:** (surprised)

Well! This should be a most interesting challenge! The chefs have just 45 minutes to create three dishes using the theme food. Let the cooking begin!

**NARRATOR:**

The chefs quickly take the fiddlehead ferns to their stations. While they prepare their dishes, Fiona introduces the judges.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Our first judge is a baker and author of several cookbooks. Please welcome Her Royal Highness, the Queen of Hearts.

**QUEEN OF HEARTS:** (applause)

I wonder if the menu includes a tart.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Our second judge is the diet and fitness expert, Jack Sprat.

**JACK SPRAT:** (applause)

I usually eat only fat-free foods, but I'll make an exception tonight.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Our last judge is the world-famous candy maker, Sugar Plum Fairy.

**SUGAR PLUM FAIRY:** (applause)

Dessert is my favorite part of every meal.

**NARRATOR:**

The contestants continue chopping and cooking through the final minutes. The timekeeper counts down the last seconds.

**TIMEKEEPER:**

Four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . . Time's up!

**NARRATOR:**

The crowd claps as the chefs bring their dishes to the judges. The Baker's Man goes first.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Baker's Man, please tell us about your creations.

**BAKER'S MAN:**

My first dish is a creamy fiddlehead fern soup. My second dish is a rice casserole with fiddleheads and grilled chicken. Since I'm a baker, my dessert is a carrot and fiddlehead cake with vanilla frosting.

**QUEEN OF HEARTS:**

What a delightful meal!

**JACK SPRAT:**

I especially enjoyed the crunchiness of the fiddleheads in the rice.

**SUGAR PLUM FAIRY:**

Yum! The cake is delicious! And the flavors in the soup are excellent.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Thank you, Baker's Man. Now, Susanna, it's your turn to describe your dishes.

**SUSANNA SPEED:**

My first dish is a warm fiddlehead and tomato salad with olive oil. My second dish is pasta with shrimp, fiddleheads, and garlic. For dessert, I made a soft chocolate ice cream with pureed fiddleheads.

**QUEEN OF HEARTS:**

Simply scrumptious!

**SUGAR PLUM FAIRY:**

Wow! I can't believe there are fiddleheads in this dessert. It's wonderful!

**JACK SPRAT:**

The salad is terrific! The pasta has a surprisingly light taste.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Thank you, Susanna. Judges, it's time for you to vote. Whose creations were the best?

**NARRATOR:**

The judges quickly complete their ballots and give them to Fiona Fennel. Her jaw drops when she counts their votes.

**FIONA FENNEL:** (shouting)

Ladies and gentlemen, it's a tie!

**NARRATOR:**

The shocked audience listens carefully as Fiona explains the results.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

Out of 30 points, Baker's Man received 28 points: 10 points for taste, 10 points for appearance and 8 points for creativity. Susanna Speed also received 28 points: 10 points for taste, 8 points for appearance and 10 points for creativity.

**NARRATOR:**

The surprised chefs look at each other and shrug their shoulders. They shake hands as the audience applauds.

**FIONA FENNEL:**

We'll be back in Nursery Rhyme Kingdom next week for a tie-breaking cook-off. See you soon -- and happy cooking!

