

## Alex—World's Greatest Chef

Alex's mother opened the front door of the restaurant. The restaurant was closed on Mondays, but Alex's mother had finally said he could cook by himself. She'd even agreed he could use her work kitchen. *Today I become the World's Greatest Chef*, thought Alex.

"Ready for your big day?" asked Alex's mother. She locked the door behind Alex. "The place is all yours. I'll be in the back doing paperwork. Let me know when you are ready to use the oven, and I'll help you."

Colorful flower vases adorned the empty tables. Chairs were neatly pushed under the tables. The restaurant looked like it always did. Yet, it felt different. The restaurant felt like his, Alex realized.

Alex grew up watching his mother cook. He knew how to safely use cooking tools and stoves. He knew the difference between mixing and beating. Most of all, he knew how to make food that looked beautiful.

"Food should look as good as it tastes," his mother always said.

Alex no longer slapped a peanut butter-and-jelly sandwich together. Instead, he cut the bread into interesting shapes like stars or octagons. Then, he spread peanut butter and jelly evenly to the edge of the bread. Sometimes he used blackberry jelly. Sometimes, he used strawberry jam. These different ingredients created different colors and flavors. His peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches were like great works of art.

In the kitchen, the sinks, stoves, and ovens gleamed. The steel closets and drawers held every kitchen tool imaginable, and the walk-in refrigerator was a small food market.

Alex put on a white jacket and a tall chef's hat. Last night, he'd searched through cookbooks. He didn't want a fancy recipe, and he didn't want to fix an entire meal. He wanted a simple recipe that he could prepare perfectly. Alex finally chose allspice muffins since he understood the directions.

He read the first direction: preheat the oven to 375°F. Alex turned on the oven. He proceeded to read all the directions in the recipe and then set out the bowls, spoons, and measuring cups. *These will be the best muffins ever*, he thought.

Alex measured the dry ingredients and put them into a large bowl. He added the ingredients in the order listed: flour, sugar, brown sugar, and baking powder.

The next listed ingredient was a half teaspoon of allspice. *That's a lot of spices*, thought Alex. He opened a drawer packed with jars of spices. The combination of spicy scents tickled his nose. He sneezed.

*Pay close attention*, Alex told himself. Don't skip a spice or add one twice by mistake. Alex began with the jar in the lower right corner of the drawer. He measured a half teaspoon and sprinkled it into the bowl. He added spice from the next jar. He worked through the drawer half teaspoon by half teaspoon.

The last jar was labeled "allspice." Alex had a bad feeling, like discovering the snack drawer empty. He wondered if the recipe had called for the spice named allspice, not all the spices. Alex could ask his mother, but he really wanted to cook on his own.

Alex continued with the wet ingredients. He beat melted butter, eggs, and milk in a small bowl. Then, he poured this mixture into the dry ingredients. The directions stated the batter should be lumpy. Alex stirred until the batter was lumpy. Then, he spooned the batter into muffin pans.

"Mom, I'm ready to put the muffins in the oven," Alex said.

Alex's mother strolled into the kitchen. "Okay, let me help you put the muffin pans into the oven," she replied.

A wave of heat rolled over Alex when his mother opened the oven door. His thick oven gloves made it hard to set the pans on the top rack. He spilled a little batter.

"Okay, call me when they are done. I can't wait to taste them," Alex's mother said.

Someday the World's Greatest Chef would hire helpers to clean, but not today. Alex washed the dishes and wiped up the drips and spills until his workspace gleamed.

The scent of baking muffins spread through the kitchen. Alex frowned. The smell should say, "Welcome." This smell said, "Keep out!"

The oven timer dinged.

"Mom, the muffins are done!" Alex exclaimed.

Alex's mother came into the kitchen and helped to retrieve the muffin pans from the oven.

Alex set the muffins aside to cool.

"What do I smell?" Alex's mother asked, walking into the kitchen.

"Too many spices," replied Alex. He explained his allspice mistake.

Alex's mother struggled to keep a straight face. "Next time, gather all the ingredients before you begin," she suggested. "If you had, you would have caught your mistake before you made it."

"So much for being the World's Greatest Chef," Alex sighed.

"When I was your age," his mother said, "I made a tuna dish for Grandpa. Only I forgot to add the soup, which was one of the ingredients. Talk about dry! Grandpa ate it, not wanting to hurt my feelings."

Alex thought about all the spices he'd added. "Eating these muffins might not be safe," he said.

Alex's mother laughed. "Chefs learn from their mistakes, but we don't always eat them."

"Has anyone else mixed up allspice with all spices?" Alex asked, hopefully.

"Most people don't talk about their blunders," replied his mother. "But we all make them."

"Not the great chefs," said Alex, dumping his muffins into the trash.

"They make mistakes too," Alex's mother said, getting two brownies from the refrigerator. She handed one to Alex. "I've heard plenty of stories of cakes that fell flat, of underbaked or overbaked meals, the list goes on. One famous TV chef even mixed up the salt and sugar bins. She ended up with a salty dessert."

Alex imagined a great chef staring at a failed dish. He grinned. Becoming the World's Greatest Chef might take a bit more practice. But when he became famous, he would not hide the story of his allspice muffins.

65. Which sentence from the passage best shows that Alex is being very careful?

- (A) "Alex put on a white jacket and a tall chef's hat."
- (B) "Alex measured the dry ingredients and put them into a large bowl."
- (C) "That's a lot of spices, thought Alex."
- (D) "Pay close attention, Alex told himself."

66. Read the sentence from the passage.

“The steel closets and drawers held every kitchen tool imaginable, and the walk-in refrigerator was a small food market.”

What does the metaphor suggest about the refrigerator?

- (A) The refrigerator has food in many drawers.
- (B) Some food in the refrigerator is for sale.
- (C) The refrigerator has many food selections.
- (D) Some food in the refrigerator is difficult to find.

67. What advice does Alex’s mother tell Alex to help him in the future?

- (A) She explains the reasons why Alex’s muffins are dry.
- (B) She suggests gathering all the ingredients before starting to bake.
- (C) She suggests ways to make meals interesting for people.
- (D) She explains the importance of safety while preparing food.

68. Read the sentences from the passage.

“ ‘Most people don’t talk about their blunders,’ replied Alex’s mother. ‘But we all make them.’ ”

What does the word blunders mean as used in the passage?

- (A) actions
- (B) feelings
- (C) mistakes
- (D) problems

69. Which is a theme of the passage?

- (A) Success comes to those who set goals.
- (B) Work is completed quicker by a team.
- (C) Accept help from those who offer.
- (D) Learn from your mistakes.

70. This question has two parts. Answer Part One and then answer Part Two.

### **Part One**

What action in the passage causes a problem?

- (A) Alex not understanding the recipe directions
- (B) Alex gathering the supplies needed to make muffins
- (C) Alex cleaning his working space in the kitchen
- (D) Alex not hearing his mother offer to help

### **Part Two**

Which sentence from the passage supports your answer in Part One? Choose **one** answer.

- (A) “He proceeded to read all the directions in the recipe and then set out the bowls, spoons, and measuring cups.”
- (B) “He wondered if the recipe had called for the spice named allspice, not all the spices.”
- (C) “A wave of heat rolled over Alex when his mother opened the oven door.”
- (D) “Alex washed the dishes and wiped up the drips and spills until his workspace gleamed.”