

The Number 128: The Picnic

by [Paul Martin Freeman](#) (January 2022)



Picnic (Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, circa 1893

"Let's go on a picnic," the older one said;
"We'll take tins of salmon and slices of bread."
"We'll set up a table away from the trees"
"And sit in the sunshine enjoying the breeze."

The younger disliked the idea and replied
That beetles and suchlike she couldn't abide.
Besides, she declared, she was *sure* it would rain,

And eating tinned salmon she held in disdain.

"We'll tell all our friends and we'll get them to join us,"

The other rejoined with her usual adroitness.

"They'll bring us some chocolates and bake us a cake;"

"We'll eat them in deckchairs and look at the lake."

"We'll spread a tarpaulin though first all around us,"

She went on to show fears of beetles were groundless.

"And then should it rain, pull it under the trees,"

"As sunshine comes always without guarantees."

And so the two sisters discussed the idea,

Though where they would go was not really that clear.

They had no tinned salmon nor knew of a lake,

Nor anyone able to bake them a cake.

But nevertheless in the end they agreed,

And then made a list of the things they would need.

They did try to ring friends but no one would answer,

Yet this they decided was not a disaster.

"The more at a picnic," the older opined,

"The less there's to eat for some reason I find."

"And since there's no salmon nor even much bread"

"It's *actually better* it's just us instead!"

And so they assembled the things for their picnic

With all that they needed including a toothpick.

The one that they chose they had found in a drawer;

They'd known where to look: they had used it before!

A toothpick was always essential, she'd found,

The older was solemnly heard to expound,

Especially when there was *nothing* to eat:

It made people think you'd been chewing some meat!

And as they collected the items together—

Two slices of bread and some mouldy old cheddar;

The toothpick, of course, which the elder one held—
The plan they had thought up appeared unexcelled.

Then finally packed up and ready to go,
They checked on the weather in case there was snow.
For snow on a picnic was not opportune,
Especially when it was sunny in June!

The sisters however were greatly relieved
To glance out at Ilford where none was perceived.
And when further research confirmed this the case,
They ran through the hallway as though on a race.

This part of their scheme had proceeded as planned,
The elder disdaining to offer a hand
To carry the picnic across the hall floor,
And now they were standing in front of the door.

But suddenly then in one horrible moment
They saw their plan lacked one essential component.
So focused they'd been on the issue of snow,
They hadn't decided yet where they would go!

The sisters stared blankly the one at the other,
Some seconds required for the pair to recover.
Till then they'd been basking in dazzling success,
But now this *huge question* they'd have to address!

So dazed and bewildered they trooped back again,
Their faces expressing confusion and pain.
But just then the grandfather clock sounded three,
And Mummy, as every day, called them to tea.

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Paul Freeman is an art dealer in London. The poem is from an

unpublished work, *The Bus Poems*.

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