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Mma Ramotswe's Cookbook

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Extract

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Making time for Cake

Cake of course goes so terribly well with tea and has a universality that straddles the bush/china divide. Mma Ramotswe is a very busy lady. Few people who knew her would dispute this point, but even for one with as harmonious and well-ordered a sense of priorities as Mma Ramotswe, there had to be sacrifices and cake-making was one such casualty that Mma Ramotswe had been working to resuscitate.

The indomitable Matron of the Orphan Farm, Mma Potokwani said that one had to make time. She knew very well the fondness which Mma Ramotswe and Mr J.L.B Matekoni each had for the Orphan Farm fruitcake; there was a deep, silent rapture to it which she fully understood. The Senior girls made this cake entirely proficiently and to Mma Ramotswe's satisfaction. However, one of the Housemothers, Mma Gotofede made the cake whenever Mma Potokwani had visitors and Mma Ramotswe was very good, the Matron had told her friend approvingly, at turning up, just as she was about to have tea.

Some ladies are said to have hands for making pastry, others the touch for meringues and Mma Gotofede was recognised as an alchemist in producing this golden fruitcake, the recipe for which she shared with Mma Ramotswe, who had known that Motholeli and Puso would like it.

Persuasive Fruitcake

Ingredients:

250g dried mixed fruit
250g soft butter or margarine
4 eggs
100g corn flour
Grated rind of 1 lemon
100g chopped almonds
200g castor sugar
300g flour
3tsp baking powder
Icing sugar

Method:

Grease a 10 inch baking tin with some butter.
Preheat oven to 180c – thermo oven to 160c
Chop almonds
Cream butter or margarine in mixer and add sugar.
Add eggs one at a time, mixing in thoroughly before adding the next egg, and continue until all the sugar has dissolved.
Sift flour, corn flour and baking powder over the butter mixture.
Once the flour mixture has been incorporated, add fruit mix, almonds and lemon peel.
Fill batter into baking tin and smooth over the top.
Bake cake for 1 hour and 15 minutes.
Remove from tin and cool on a rack.
Before serving, cover cake with sifted icing sugar.

Cake & the art of pump maintenance





Mr J.L.B Matekoni saw the cake, and for a moment he frowned. He knew Mma Potokwani, and the presence of a large cake, specially made for the occasion, was an unambiguous signal that she had a request to make of him. A cake of this size, and emitting such a strong smell of raisins, would mean a major mechanical problem

Though she would have said that Mma Gotofede was the better baker, Mma Potokwani was herself an old hand at making fruit cake and her deployment of it was masterful. As far as Mma Ramotswe knew, it was the same recipe as the one she'd been given (though the with-holding of the one magic ingredient was not unknown in the most competitive of cake and jam circles) and stirred with the same vigour with which Mma Potokwani changed gear and generally met life head-on.

Both Mma Ramotswe and Mr J.L.B Matekoni knew that the formula for the cake's richness and the size of piece (or pieces) that slid hypnotically onto their plates, bore a direct correlation to the scale of the favour that would follow, yet each was rendered powerless in its presence. Mma Potokwani's handling of this beguiling instrument of persuasion really had a breathless virtuosity to it and there was, as Mma Ramotswe often reflected, no point in fighting some things.

While she instilled a proper African strictness and sense of Botswana values in the Orphan Farm, Mma Potokwani would have done anything for the children entrusted to her care and a formidable advocate for them, managed not to take no for an answer from those who could provide support. In one such instance, the persuasive matron, unleashing fruitcake upon an unsuspecting surgeon who came under its spell, secured an operation on a child's leg. For Mr J.L.B Matekoni, the invitation, to visit Mma Potokwani at the Orphan Farm and the subsequent sight of cake was a sure sign that the Orphan Farm pump, which should long-since have been retired, needed his mechanical skills:

That was her technique, he now understood; just as Eve had used an apple to trap Adam, so Mma Potokwani used fruit cake. Fruit cake, apples; it made no difference really. Oh foolish, weak men!