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A Party

by Mary Brannigan

When I was seven my aunt Nellie persuaded my mother that I should have a birthday party. Nellie had been in service at a large manor house in the days when girls did such jobs. This had served her well after her marriage to my uncle Paddy. Her cooking skills were second to none and I often watched her make delicious cakes. This ability was brought to bear in the plan to seduce my mother in the matter of my party. She would make a large chocolate as the centrepiece of the birthday celebrations. My mouth watered at the thought of it, and better still, she promised to let me help her.

After much cajoling my mother agreed to the deal. The day before my birthday I walked up the hill to Nellie's house. 'Now, she said 'this is my best recipe. I want you to take note of the ingredients so that one day you can do this yourself. Then when you have a little girl you can make a cake for her'.

I watched as she measured out the makings of the cake:

6 large eggs
12 oz. self raising flour
12 oz. caster sugar
12 oz. softened butter
2 level tsps. baking powder
3 oz. cocoa powder
8 tbsp. boiling water
A little icing sugar to serve.

Before proceeding she said, ' I'll write this down so you can keep it till you're old enough to make it'. I have the recipe to this day. I knew I'd never meet a better cook than Nellie. I watched as she put each item into the mix, till at last it was ready to go into the old fashioned range in the kitchen. 'Now you can go home' she said 'and I'll bring the cake to your house in the morning'.

Next day dawned bright and sunny. At around eleven o'clock Nellie arrived with the most beautiful cake I'd ever seen. The party began at three o'clock attended by many of my school friends and some of our adult neighbours. There were all sorts of goodies like ice cream, jelly and some small cakes made by granny. But the piece de resistance was the chocolate cake, which was saved till last. My mother sliced it into pieces on a large plate. She handed this to me with the admonition 'take this round and offer it to all the guests before you take any'. This was her way of making sure I didn't "make a show of her". I suppose she thought I make inroads into the cake without leaving enough to go round.

When I returned from the allotted task she asked if everyone had been given a piece. 'Yes' I answered, looking down at the empty plate, after which she enquired if I'd had mine. The answer was 'No'. I'd given the last slice to Mrs Hurson from across the way. I didn't dare leave anyone out.

To this day I can't resist the lure of chocolate cake.