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Short and Stout

THIS ISN'T ABOUT LITTLE TEAPOTS, although a nice cuppa would be welcome right now. Record low temperatures, howling wind, black ice. Everything necessary to keep me huddled beside the fireplace with a good book in my hands, and a simmering pot of stew on the stove. Sounds like a great plan, right? Except I'm in Florida where I've never seen a roaring fireplace, and the book I brought is something banal from a section called "beach reading" at the bookstore. What is that genre, anyhow? The plot is implausible, and I soon find myself wandering the halls looking for another selection.

I discovered an old cookbook, its pages worn and tattered. Someone else must have needed a diversion, too. There was a section in the book called "game". Fine and dandy, but the only game I could see were some seagulls, screaming and squawking

as they dive bombed into the white-capped waves. I kept turning pages. The section called "low and slow" featured many different stews and braises. I thumbed through the choices. I didn't have a chuck roast hanging around just waiting to be browned and braised, much less carrots, potatoes, and beef stock. I kept thumbing.

I came to desserts, skipped the fruit tarts and pies, and came to a stunning picture of a chocolate cake. Skimming the list of ingredients, I realized I could actually make this indulgence with what I had on hand. I had a mixed carton of beer, and wonder of wonders, a bottle of stout. Chocolate stout, no less. Let them talk about "comfort food". What's more comforting than just a little piece of moist chocolate cake with a creamy chocolate frosting? I know. A big piece.

The cake came together easily, and surprisingly,

just a little piece was enough to satisfy. I kept eating those little pieces until the entire cake disappeared. (Applause.) For St. Patrick's Day, I'll serve it again, with a scoop of Guinness ice cream on top. 



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Chocolate Stout Cake

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup Guinness stout or chocolate stout
- 10 tablespoons unsalted butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup unsweetened cocoa (not Dutch processed)
- Scant 2 cups sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sour cream
- 2 large or extra-large eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons baking soda

INSTRUCTIONS

Make the cake: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Butter a 9-inch spring-form pan. In a medium saucepan, combine the stout and butter. Heat slowly until the butter melts. Remove from the heat and add the cocoa and sugar. Stir until the sugar dissolves.

In a large bowl, combine the sour cream, eggs and vanilla. Stir to combine. Add the stout mixture, then the flour mixed with baking soda. Whisk until smooth. Turn the batter into the prepared pan and bake in the center of the oven until well risen and a toothpick inserted into the center of the cake comes out with just a few crumbs, about 45-55 minutes. Remove from oven and place on wire rack to cool. Meanwhile, prepare the frosting.

Chocolate Butter Frosting

INGREDIENTS

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy whipping cream
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup sugar
- Pinch kosher salt
- 8 ounces semisweet chocolate, cut into pieces
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup strong coffee
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon vanilla extract

INSTRUCTIONS

Combine the cream, butter, sugar and salt in a saucepan and bring to a simmer over low heat. Remove from heat and stir to make sure the butter has melted. Add the chocolate. Let stand for 5 minutes, then whisk until smooth. Whisk in the coffee and vanilla. Chill the frosting until it is spreading consistency, checking frequently so that the frosting doesn't become hard. (Check frequently after 10 minutes.) If the frosting does become hard, stir it in a bowl over hot water until it softens. Frost the top and sides of the cake and store, covered, at room temperature. Serve it to lucky friends or take comfort in eating it yourself.