

Tamasin Day-Lewis

SMART

TART



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**SMART  
TART**

**OBSERVATIONS FROM MY COOKING LIFE**

**TAMASIN DAY-LEWIS**

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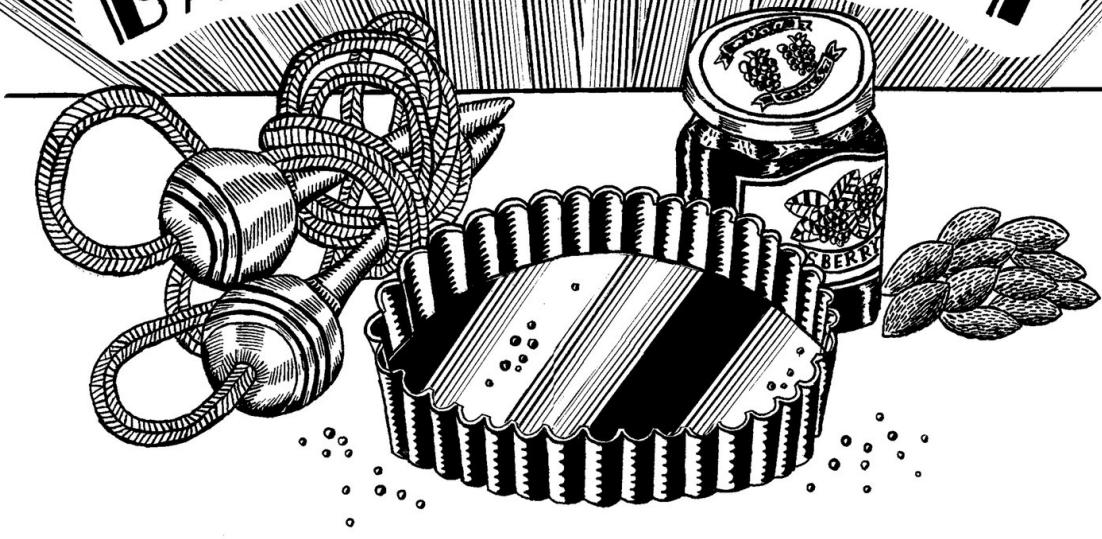
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'Dwell on the beauty of life. Watch the stars, and see yourself running with them.'

'Never forget that the universe is a single living organism possessed of one substance and one soul, holding all things suspended in a single consciousness and creating all things with a single purpose that they might work together spinning and weaving and knotting whatever comes to pass.'

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, (AD 121–180)

# BAKEWELL TART



## 1 BAKEWELL TART

Rhoda Fisher was my grandparents' cook in the days when cooks were cooks not chefs: they lived in, were 'in service', it was a job for life. Rhoda retired well into her seventies after a lifetime of routine. Of appearing in my grandfather's dressing room first thing each morning to discuss the menu for the day with my grandmother. Of agreeing to cook exactly what was asked of her six days a week.

I still have an old black and white photograph of me sitting on Rhoda's knee on the low wall that surrounded the drive at Upper Parrock, my grandparents' house. Me as a toddler, Rhoda in her old maid's shoes: black, laced high up the instep; hair netted and scraped tight into a tiny grey bun; her clothes always careful not to draw attention to themselves: maroon cardigans, navy blue, modest, clean, carefully pressed; moderate in her words and deeds; her room, the little bedroom next to the four-poster room that my brother Dan slept in when we went to stay; shared bathroom, a home, but not – oh never – her home.

My earliest tart memory, other than the jam tarts I helped make in my mother's kitchen, where the molten jam welded itself to the roof of your mouth in the agony of greed and haste that meant the never-cooling-what-you'd-cooked of childhood, was Rhoda's Bakewell. It is almost the memory



*Top, Tamasin with her grandparents.  
Bottom, Tamasin with Rhoda Fisher.*

of a memory so faint is the whiff of bitter almonds and her home-made bubbling, seedy raspberry jam seeping into the frangipane. Not that I knew the word then. The shortest of pastries, the most brown- buttery scented, nutty middle; the contrast of hot sweet jam with sticky almond.

Perhaps the pleasure for Rhoda was seeing the tart sent out to the dining room, and the tart tin returned as picked clean as a skull. The cream came out of the silver jug in clots you couldn't control and began to turn to butter on the slice. The jam oozed and wept. We never tired of this simple classic. It became, with lemon meringue pie and treacle tart, one of the defining puddings of childhood, of Upper Parrock, of my grandparents' polished table, the oak whorled and stained and contoured with the age and weight of dinners gone by over nearly two centuries.

My Bakewell tastes nothing like Rhoda's, how could it? I grind Marcona almonds from Spain's southern groves and intensify them with a smidge of bitter almond. My jam could never taste as good as the warm raspberries I picked there in the Sussex walled kitchen garden, because the food of childhood still has newness and surprise attached to it. My pastry is just different, like everyone else's always is. My tart is less cakey-middled, more damp. But the funny thing is, every time I make a Bakewell tart I don't try to recreate Rhoda's but I involuntarily recreate the memory of it. I am swept back to the table where the happiest meals of my childhood took place – other than in the west of Ireland – and to the quiet gentlewoman whose life was measured not in coffee spoons, but in the approval and joy of others that is the pleasure of any generous-hearted cook.



## **BAKEWELL TART**

*I bother to buy lovely Spanish Marcona almonds and grind them myself for this dish, for flavour and texture. Ready-ground almonds are invariably dry and stale, but do what you will. Home-made raspberry jam, or the best you can find please, so that you have whole raspberries and seediness. You may prefer apricot, blackcurrant or strawberry jam. I also sliver my own almonds to scatter on top after cooking, tossing them in a little hot pan for just long enough over the heat for them to begin to release their oil and turn biscuit-coloured.*



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**300g best raspberry jam**  
**150g unsalted butter**  
**120g vanilla caster sugar**  
**200g whole skinned almonds or ground almonds**  
**3eggs + 1yolk**  
**1 tsp bitter almond extract**  
**3 heaped tbsp double cream**  
**a handful of whole skinned almonds to sliver and toast**

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makes 20 cm/8 inch tart serves 6–8

Preheat oven to 180°C/Gas 4. Make shortcrust pastry (see p.196) and line a 20 cm/8 inch tart tin. Bake blind and return to the oven in the usual way.

Heat the raspberry jam with 1 tsp water gently until warm and runny. Heat the butter in a small pan and when it has melted, allow it to cook until it has just turned brown and started to smell nutty.

Pour the brown butter over the sugar, ground almonds, beaten eggs and yolk, double cream and bitter almond extract which you have stirred together in a bowl. Mix together.

When you remove the tart from its 10 minutes drying out in the oven after baking blind, pour over the jam, scrape on the filling and return to the middle shelf of the oven for between 35–40 minutes. The top should be browned and set. Remove to a rack.

Dry fry the flaked almonds, a handful, until biscuity and oily and sprinkle over the top. Allow to cool for at least 15 minutes before turning out and serving with clotted cream.





Note: This frangipane mixture works well with a cherry and almond tart, so make it in exactly the same way adding 3-4 dozen stoned cherries to the mixture in the summer, or 400g drained morello cherries from a jar in the winter.



TEA AT FORTNUM'S FOUNTAIN



## 2 **TEA AT FORTNUM'S FOUNTAIN**

The food you experience in childhood always remains the food you return to for succour and comfort. Obviously I am not referring to school food here. Things like the pudding we christened 'Purple Puke' that we imagined grew under the school quad and Manchester tart, which was a heinous concoction of grey margarined pastry, turnip jam, cornfloury custard and a dusting of toenails on top, the hideous, desiccated coconut flakes that stuck in teeth and craw.

But those earliest taste memories are really not about expensive, luxurious ingredients. They are about the simplest of things that make home seem like home: eggy bread for breakfast with a lacey frill of egg around the more squelchy, golden middle; airy puffballs of Yorkshire pudding with bloody gravy from the beef sogging into them on the plate; the first sweet peas from the garden drowning in cream and butter and mint; crumpets with far too much butter; soggy fat chips doused in watered down malt vinegar and salt from the chip shop where I changed buses on the way home from school; vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce poured on top that sets as you watch it like ice on a pond, the ice cream turning to milky liquid; doughnuts with a burst of jam, doughy-middled and crisp skinned, the sugar gritting your mouth and teeth.

We don't think about texture when we are young, but there it is, assaulting our taste buds and palate like a fist, its contrasts affording us such sensual pleasure as they play into each others' hands: crisp with soft; mallowy with custardy; crunch and grit with silken, slippery and gelled. Our senses delight in things that stick to our teeth, our tongues, the roofs of our mouths; that feast the eye with colour, the nose with scent, that alert us to almost-pleasure and activate our taste buds.

Is the real thing, the first bite, ever as exciting as the anticipation, the expectation, the wait?

Is the childhood memory in later life not best of all? The reminder of when treats were treats and became, with repetition – but not too often – tradition and ritual, defined our family and its particularity and singularity from everyone else's?

What was, and remains, the best treat of my childhood – my mind is still stirred to pleasure by it and, when I conjure it up, I remember it with a smile, a taste – was my trips to Fortnum's Fountain for tea with my grandmother.

My maternal grandmother took more pride and joy in keeping a good table than many in her social position during those times where having a cook and staff and a kitchen garden and home farm were not as unusual as they are now. Hers was not an era of food and restaurant culture, but, being well travelled and cultured in the European sense, she brought her knowledge to her kitchen and thence to the dining room.

When she was not in the country house in Sussex with my grandfather, she was in a dark, quite gloomy flat in Mayfair's Down Street. 'You can only go up Down Street,' she used to say, deposited there on a Monday morning with eggs and cream from the country by her chauffeur Shackleton in the beetle-black shiny Bentley.

I hated it, I felt sick in the ridged leather seats that Dan and I sat in on the journey down to Sussex with our nanny for holidays, and I was, invariably, sick on the journey. Thank God in London we walked, though walking was not an activity my grandmother indulged in much in London or the country. Except to 'the little grocer's down the road', Fortnum's.

As my brother Dan and I were swirled in through the doors, the red tailcoated assistants would welcome my grandmother with a 'Good afternoon m'lady' and we would idle past the riveting tins of bees in honey and ants in chocolate, imagining what they tasted like, and downstairs into the embrace of the Fountain.

The waitresses, in those days, were there for the duration and changed as rarely as the uniforms and the menu. That was the point. Something that modern restaurateurs and chefs singularly fail to grasp, is that many of us return for the comfort of sameness. And in our case, we never

ventured off-piste. We would have been to the dentist first, our great-uncle Gerald in Devonshire Place, but, far from being afeared, we knew that next stop was Fortnum's, so the whole trip was a treat.

We ordered freshly squeezed orange juice, chocolate Sachertorte and blackcurrant ice cream which came in a heavy sundae glass with a squirl of whipped cream and a thick fan wafer. Sometimes Dan had a Dusty Road which had, I seem to remember, a rubble of chocolate and blackcurrants in syrup poured around the ice cream and little shards of broken meringue. Children's heaven. Our grandmother would beam indulgently. I think she got as much pleasure from watching us eat as she did from eating. If we didn't want a second helping she would ask us if we were sickening for something. When did a child *not* want more ice cream?

Fortnum's Sachertorte thrills and surprises each time. Like mercury, it slips through your fingers evanescently when you try to define it. It's partly the gleaming bitter chocolate on top with its hidden, sharp-apricot glaze that the chocolate cake crumb absorbs beneath, and the strata of thick, rich chocolate that break the layers of sponge and seems to burst onto the roof of your mouth. But really it is the whole thing, not too sweet or too tart, that just does it for me.

The purists who insist chocolate is best left to itself and not adulterated by fruit simply fail to understand the point. Apricots, cherries and raspberries were born to work with chocolate if you get the balance and the sweetness right. Shunning a Black Forest gâteau as suburban kitsch misses the point. It's all about technique and ingredients.

I use Julian Temperley's morello cherry eau de vie and his jars of morello cherries that he sells dunked in eau de vie in my chocolate brownie tart and the principle is the same, the very essence of cherriness with their whiff of bitter almonds buried in bitter chocolate. If you get the texture right you have that raw-looking un-crumby brownie texture that squidges moreishly in the mouth.

If you can't be bothered to make pastry just make the brownies: who is going to know you've only made the middle of the recipe?

But the tart really is a treat. Just like Fortnum's Fountain.



## **CHOCOLATE AND CHERRY BROWNIE TART**

*This is a humdinger of a tart, which I make with fresh cherries in the summer, and a jar of morello cherries in the winter, soaked in Julian Temperley's cherry eau de vie, which can be skipped by the faint-hearted. The crimson, almondy, cherry whiff embedded in the sludgy, giving, depths of brownie is quite enough, in fact all it takes, to radiate happiness.*