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The Hidden Spark Beneath The Adversary: Bajan Bakes

Bajan Bakes: my cruel adversary from their launch. According to my mother, grandmother, and aunt, bakes are a staple in all Bajan households. Described by all who enjoy them as semi-flat, oval-shaped, with perfectly browned edges, they sound just as they look when bitten. Their golden-brown center, a trap of vanilla-rich, dense warmth, gives the illusion of lightness. So why my adversary? Simple: impatience.

I don't recall the exact moment I was introduced to bakes, but I remember my aunt's guilt-tripping during her visits and my mother's relentless Saturday morning ritual. She'd chase me around the house, calling out, "Joy, I don't have time for this! One of these days, you'll understand the importance of this recipe." That. That line, the weekly repetition of, "One of these days, you'll understand the importance," turned the trivial, hearty dough bite into an adversary. I was frustrated because my impatience clouded my understanding of why bakes had stirred such strong, warm, yet unsettling feelings in me. It had been frustrating to see everyone around me enjoying them so much while I struggled to make sense of my own conflicting emotions.

I'd never admit to being a stubborn person, but in this case, I was. While it may seem like a simple mother-daughter disagreement, there was more to it. It wasn't just the crunchy exterior paired with the dense, starchy interior that bothered me. It was a feeling on which I couldn't put my finger. A spark of small, but ever-present electricity surged beneath the surface, travelling through each bake to touch me. It was the feeling of warmth, an electric current I couldn't fully understand. This current wasn't just in the bake itself; it was in an unspoken shared history

between generations. This I couldn't yet grasp. That spark was set alight the moment my bare feet hit the cold, hardwood floor. As I descended the stairs, my mother's gaze locked on me from the living room at the first creak of the wood panel. It surged when I realized I'd once again be constrained to making bakes, and it reached its peak when my mother inevitably caught and steered me into the role of sous chef.

While on duties as sous chef, I remember the kitchen air becoming starchy and thick as she added flour, sugar, salt, and baking powder to a bowl. The spark sent an electric pulse through me again when she insisted I add the water, "so you can feel when it's just right." She'd say this with her eyes sparkling in a way I could never quite understand. As I trickled water into the dry mix, I felt that same surge, not just in my hands but in my chest, as though I were somehow connecting with something deeper. That connection was both comforting and confusing: a mix of resistance and longing as the bakes themselves held the secret I had yet to uncover.

It wasn't until the nutmeg hit the batter that the spark became undeniable. The nutty, warm scent filled the kitchen, creeping into the back of my throat and sending a wave of warmth through me—an electric warmth. It felt like safety, but it was safety from something I couldn't name. That warmth unsettled me, and the snap of the nutmeg jar in my mother's hand only magnified it. The sound rang in my ears like the final spark of a live wire, cutting off my thoughts mid-flow.

I stood there, confused, trying to grasp why this simple ritual, this act of making bakes, made me feel so safe, though there was nothing to fear. Every step, every bite, carried a hidden current—a spark that connected me to something more, even if I couldn't yet understand it.

Years went by. I had moved to Barbados, and my mother's weekly ritual was no longer part of my life. Many things had changed, but I wasn't ready to face that reality. As Christmas approached, my aunt flew into Barbados, slipping into her usual routine of guilt-tripping me into helping her make bakes. This time, I didn't feel the urge to win the race. Instead, I quietly accepted my role as sous chef, content with the peaceful, serene scene of my grandmother's cold, white kitchen made warm by the yellow sunbeams reflecting off every surface.

As the final bake sizzled in the hot oil, I took my first bite. For the first time, amid the swirling thoughts in my mind, one thing became clear: I began to understand what my mother meant by "you'll understand the importance of this recipe." Instead of just tasting the doughy, dry texture, I found myself smiling, not only because of the taste itself, but because of the memories and emotions wrapped in that one bite. It wasn't long before that feeling faded, just as quickly as it had come, much like how the aroma of nutmeg had disappeared in previous years. And that feeling—I ignored it because, despite its warmth and depth, I wasn't quite ready to accept it. It had come and gone like a spark leaving behind an unspoken truth that I had yet to fully grasp.

More years passed, and countless other stubborn rivals clouded my memory until recently when the weight of the world seemed to press down on my shoulders. The more I tried to relieve that pressure, the more intense it became. To my surprise, I found myself thinking about bakes. Seven simple ingredients, amid chaos, brought me clarity. Yesterday, as the sun set and its orange rays blazed through my house, I found myself back in that serene moment, mixing the spice-scented batter, a long-lost smile spreading across my face. The feel of the flour between my fingers, the smell of nutmeg rising with the heat—it all centered me, pulling me away from the chaos of the outside world. As the stove heated, I felt a surge of energy, a spark.

When the last sizzle died down and I dodged the final splatter of oil, I took a bite of the warm, greasy dough. Time froze. Tears welled, and suddenly, I understood—a spark, a warmth. I realized then it was a connection to my roots, my family, a reminder that even when I feel as if I am standing alone somewhere in the world, I have an unwavering backbone composed of so many individuals. It is a warmth that could fill my body with the energy and hope of a thousand galaxies, without the weight or complexity of life.

The smell, the sight, the feel—it all came together, a symphony of the senses, reminding and reassuring me of who I was and where I came from. Simple ingredients. The heat of the stove. The reminder that this moment didn't define me. That was all I needed. That spark, which had lingered all those years, revealed its true colours and purpose and showed me that the spark I truly needed was the one that could only be found in a homemade Bajan Bake.

Bajan Bakes



Ingredients

- ☐ 2 cups all purpose flour
- ☐ 2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder

- ☐ 1/2 cup sugar
- ☐ 1/2 teaspoon salt
- ☐ 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- ☐ 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- ☐ 1 teaspoon vanilla/almond essence
- ☐ 1 - 1 1/2 cups water
- ☐ Vegetable/Corn Oil (for frying)

Directions

1. Combine all dry ingredients in a mixing bowl.
2. Add essence and water gradually to create a stiff consistency.
3. Heat the oil in a frying pan.
4. When hot, drop spoonfuls of the mixture into the oil and allow to fry on each side, until each side is golden brown.
5. Remove from oil and allow to drain and cool.
6. Enjoy your Bajan bakes!

Smith, John. "Bajan Fried Bakes Recipe." The Crane Resort, 10 August 2016, <https://blog.thecrane.com/blog/2016/08/10/bajan-fried-bakes-recipe>. Accessed 22 October 2024.