



# AUNTY ITHALIE'S LOVE CAKE



## A NOTE FROM ROSHI FERNANDO:

**Aunty Ithalie was my grandmother's cousin. She was one of those irascible old ladies who stared you into submission. She was greatly loving and kind and fun. She had a 'Daaaahling' on her that could beat Tallulah**

**Bankhead and meant so many different things—admonishment, anger, sadness, happiness, joy, all in that one little word. When I got married twenty something years ago, she took over the kitchen and had many aunts and uncles chopping cashew nuts, separating eggs, whipping, stirring. I think a record twenty-four eggs went into that cake. It was so good that we served the first tier on that day, froze the rest, and served the second tier at our son's christening and the third tier at our daughter's christening. The joke was we'd need her to come back to make another one for the divorce.**

**Sadly Aunty Ithalie passed away this year and I report fairly equanimically that my husband and I are still married. Love Cake is served at the new year, pre-wedding parties, post wedding parties, birthdays, and, if I had my way, every time I wanted to replicate that moment when I snuggled up to my grandmother's voluminous saree-clad chest: a smell of cologne and rose water and sweetness. It's a smell that makes me homesick.**

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## INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups powdered sugar
- ½ cup butter
- 6 large eggs, separated
- 1 cup raw cashew nuts, chopped (see notes)
- 1 cup semolina
- 3 tablespoons honey
- 2 tablespoons rose water
- finely chopped zest of a lime
- 1 teaspoon ground cardamom
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon grated nutmeg
- ½ cup crystallized melon or pineapple or preserved pumpkin (but if you can't find any of these, it doesn't matter – you can leave them out)

## METHOD:

**NOTE:** Auntie Ithalie would sit at a table and take one nut at a time and chop it into two one way, then the other until all the bits of nut were uniformly finely chopped. Save yourselves. Use a food processor (but be careful because cashew nuts tend to release a lot of oil, so only process a little).

1. Use an electric mixer to cream the sugar and butter together until they're really pale and creamy. Auntie Ithalie would have used elbow grease and love and a li-i-ttle bit of passive aggression, I'm thinking. Add the egg yolks one at a time and really beat well after each one is added. Use a metal spoon to fold in the cashew nuts, semolina, honey, rosewater, lime zest, cardamom, cinnamon, nutmeg, and crystallized fruit or pumpkin, if used.

2. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until firm peaks form. (Yes, Auntie Ithalie would have done this by hand too. But not her hand. Her servant's hand.) Fold the whites into the main mixture with a metal spoon.

3. Turn the batter into a greased 9x13 cake pan and bake for an hour and a quarter (or thereabouts) at 300°F (150°C), until firm to the touch. Turn the oven off and open the door, leaving the cake to cool.

4. Auntie Ithalie would then cut the cake into quite small pieces: one inch by two inches. It would be served on silver salvers. You must imagine fragranced saree-wearing ladies holding the pieces to their lips with lipstick-smudged white napkins while fans played percussion above their heads and men sipped Arrack on the veranda. It's the smell of Love Cake that will hit you first. It's a mouthful of Sri Lanka—there. Right there.

