

EPISODE 16B: SHORT STORY EXCERPT (FIRST PAGES) – *SOOK'S CAKE* by BONNIE FURLONG

Ed

good beginning

"What took you so long!" Talking nonstop, my exuberant older sister pushed steadily against my front door until I was forced to let her in. "Did you know somebody ditched an old baby carriage at the end of your drive? No baby, though." Linda continued past me, carrying two large shopping bags out to the kitchen. "What smells so good?"

"Cake."

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"Heck, no! I'll stretch it by mixing it with regular. The kids'll love it." Sure enough, the other bag was full of candy corn and pumpkins, along with a variety of mini chocolate bars, everything individually wrapped to allay parental fears of razor blades and rat poison. "I was hoping you would help me fill the goody bags."

"I wish I could," I said, "but I'm going to be baking all day."

- good beginning!
- I can tell the sisters apart by the way they talk
- I can't tell where the story is going, but, it's interesting so far
- why are they doing what they're doing?

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I popped a chocolate baby into my mouth and chewed it slowly. No caramel bulls-eyes among the candies, I noticed. They had been my favorite when I was little. *zing?*

"Cake is *not* traditional for Hallowe'en," Linda said, narrowing her eyes. "Whose birthday is it? What's going on?"

"I'm baking, um ... *Christmas* cakes," I said, pleased with my quick thinking. "Nut cakes, you might call them, studded with golden raisins and, uh, so forth. I have to bake them now so the flavors can blend and mellow before the holidays." *why the deception?*

"Why are you talking like a cookbook?" Linda's gaze went from the kitchen counter with its basic baking supplies to the table beside us, where bowls held juicy pineapple wedges, chopped citrus peels, and nuts of all kinds. Her avalanche of candy had pushed the *glacé* cherries perilously close to the table's edge. I moved them back to safety.

"*Fruitcake!* You're making *fruitcake!*" In Linda's tone, I heard all the scorn and derision that have been heaped upon this venerable cake for the last hundred years. "But *why?*" she asked. "You've never made fruitcake before. We're not a fruitcake family."

"That's probably because we've never tasted a real one," I said. "Professor Kaye --"

My sister rolled her eyes at the name; it's one she hears more often than she cares to.

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"Spiritual or *spirited*?" Linda had spotted the brandy, standing beside an open bottle of Guinness.

"That's not for you," I said, as she reached for the bottle. "It's for basting the cakes."

"You're basting a cake with *beer*?"

"It's a Guinness *cake*," I said, as if that explained everything. "And it should be just about ready to come out."

The cake passed the fingertip test, the toothpick test, and cookbook author Edna Lewis's listening test. It was a beauty, full of walnuts and orange peel. I only hoped it would taste as good as it smelled. I admired it for a quick moment, and then I turned off the oven.

"Oh, good," Linda said. "You *are* finished. You can help me with the treats."

"No, I can't. The next cake has to start in a cold oven, that's why I turned it off. Would you mind reading the Guinness recipe for me? I want to double-check the last step."

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"You're kidding." She scanned the recipe. "It says to turn it out of the pan and pour on the booze."

doesn't actually pour

I gently turned the cake out on to the cooling rack. The Guinness foamed and hissed as the hot cake soaked it up.

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"Phasmatis ex machina," I suggested, as the cake sucked up a few more drops.

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"Hey, where's mine?"

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She handed me a cold bottle, after twisting off the cap. "Does Professor Kaye put beer in his fruitcake?"

"I don't know. The one he brought to class was oozing with brandy. The main fruit was pineapple, but there were cherries and pecans, too, cut up in bite-sized pieces. And the cake part was very light, not like that nasty stuff in the grocery store."

"Well, anything will taste good if you booze it up like that."

"I staggered out of class that afternoon," I admitted, laughing at the memory. "Usually I'm just drunk on the poetry, but this time it was definitely the brandy. Unless it was a sugar high. I cut myself a huge second piece when he wasn't looking."

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"I'll go look," Linda offered, "and you can start melting chocolate or whatever."

"Thanks. If you don't see it, would you print it out? I left the web site up. I had a feeling I'd have to go there again."

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"How's it coming?" she asked.

"Slowly. I've been waiting for the recipe. Where is it?"

"Right here." She raised the hand that was not holding the bottle. The hand was empty.

We stared at it for a moment.

"Well, it *was* here."

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YES, EN MEDIAS RES IS GOOD FOR A NOVEL START, BUT
MAKE IT MORE ENGAGING.
WHERE IS PROTAGONIST - IN HALLWAY? IN KITCHEN?
DOESN'T SIS HAVE KEY?
MAYBE: "THE DOORBELL'S INCESSANT RINGING DISTURBED
MY REVERIE."

Narrator
or Linda?

g
? Start here
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"Cake."

Good image.
"Look!" Linda up-ended one of the bags on the kitchen table. A shower of individually wrapped candies flew out of the bag, nearly knocking over a bowl of brandied fruit. "It's retro!" she exclaimed. "Penny candy!"

Choose 1 nostalgic item. see P. 2.
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Time of day
of week

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But, narrator enlists Linda's help later. Delete

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Choose 1 nostalgic item. See p. 1.

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Clever!

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"That's not for you," I said, as she reached for the bottle. "It's for basting the cakes."

"You're basting a cake with *beer*?"

Italicize "Guinness" not "cake"

"It's a Guinness cake," I said, as if that explained everything. "And it should be just about ready to come out."

Explain

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"I not only saw it, I read the whole story, all about little Truman and his cousin Sook delivering fruitcakes in a baby buggy.

Ahh! Have 2 lightbulb go off for Linda.
DOES TRUMAN CAPOTE PLAY AN INTEGRAL ROLE
IN THE STORY?
HAVE LINDA ADDRESS THE NARRATOR, SO THAT WE
LEARN HER NAME.
LINDA BARRELED IN THE FRONT DOOR AND IS
DESCRIBED AS EXUBERANT AND TALKATIVE.
YET, SHE SEEMS SUBDUED IN ~~LINDA'S~~ KITCHEN.
KEEP HER FRENETIC.
SISTER

DAVE

This story is charming with nice people doing nice things like making fruitcakes – a pleasant afternoon with everyone nice, nice nice. A compelling story needs some starch in it; some edge that draws the reader in to wonder how does this turn out. Something has to be gambled; something needs to be jeopardized in some way. Maybe some kind of deadline where the cakes have to be done before a certain time. Or, perhaps, a challenge from her sister.

Anyway, the reference to Sook and the fruitcake is an interesting element. The Christmas Memory by Truman Capote is a wonderful, but ultimately heartbreaking story. To use only the cake as a vehicle to tell a story about cake baking is shortchanging the original.

There's nothing technically wrong with the beginning, but it needs some fire under it to make it stand out. I guess what I'm saying is after five pages, I don't really know what the short story is about. In something like a short story, that can be a killer.

"What took you so long(!)?" Talking nonstop, *Linda*, my exuberant older sister *said as she* pushed steadily against my front door until I was forced to let her in. ("Did you know somebody ditched an old baby carriage at the end of your drive? No baby, though.") *Irrelevant dialogue. Stay on topic.* Linda continued past me, carrying two large shopping bags out to the kitchen. "What smells so good?" *Remember to identify the speaker.*

"Cake."

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All the candy discussion distracts from what should be the main thrust of the story – SOOK'S Cake

"I wish I could," I said, "but I'm going to be baking all day."

"You're kidding," *my sister said as she* (My sister) looked around the kitchen. I had just finished tidying up after *I put* the first cake(, which was baking) in the oven. Mixing bowls and measuring cups stood on the counter in front of sacks of flour and sugar. *Passive sentence, Try to avoid.* A cardboard carton held brown eggs from free-range hens. Cinnamon from Saigon and vanilla from Madagascar added an appropriate touch of the exotic -- "appropriate" because I felt that I had embarked upon an adventure. *A solo* adventure.

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My sister rolled her eyes at the name; it's one she hears more often than she cares to. "Professor Kaye," I repeated, "brought one to class last summer. It was delicious."

If Professor Kaye is important, maybe you should introduce the reader to Professor Kaye. If he's a throwaway character, avoid the reference to him.

I explained how his mother waited for him to come home to southern Virginia every Thanksgiving, and how they would make a different fruitcake every day for a week. "And, I don't know," I concluded, wistfully. "He made it sound so, sort of spiritual." *Use this conversation to display your dialogue abilities. Let us hear the conversation as it developed. It would help us to understand why this baking adventure is important. Spiritual is a hot word.*

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Dennis Comments

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two large shopping bags out to the kitchen. "What smells so good?"

"Cake."

"Look!" Linda up-ended one of ~~the~~^{her} bags on the kitchen table. A shower of individually wrapped candies flew out of the bag, nearly knocking over a bowl of brandied fruit. "It's retro!" she exclaimed. "Penny candy!"

She slid red wax lips between her teeth and struck a pose. There were wax bottles, too, filled with blue sugar syrup and licorice Scottie dogs. I unwrapped a Bit-O-Honey. It tasted exactly as ~~it had~~^{I remembered} thirty years earlier, when a dime allowance lasted me all week. "Does it still cost a penny?" I asked.

"Heck, no! I'll stretch it by mixing it with regular. The kids'll love it." Sure enough, the other bag was full of candy corn and pumpkins, along with a variety of mini chocolate bars, everything individually wrapped to allay parental fears of razor blades and rat poison. "I was hoping you would help me fill the goody bags."

"I wish I could," I said, "but I'm going to be baking all day."

EPISODE 16B: SHORT STORY EXCERPT (FIRST PAGES) – *SOOK'S CAKE* by BONNIE FURLONG

"You're kidding." My sister looked around the kitchen. I had just finished tidying up after the first cake, which was baking in the oven. Mixing bowls and measuring cups stood on the counter in front of sacks of flour and sugar. A cardboard carton held brown eggs from free-range hens. Cinnamon from Saigon and vanilla from Madagascar added an appropriate touch of the exotic -- "appropriate" because I felt ~~that~~ I had embarked upon an adventure. A solo adventure.

A solo
Sook didn't do it
as solo.

I popped a chocolate baby into my mouth and chewed it slowly. No caramel bulls-eyes among the candies, I noticed. They had been my favorite when I was little.

"Cake is *not* traditional for Hallowe'en," Linda said, narrowing her eyes. "Whose birthday is it? What's ~~going on?~~ ^{the occasion?}"

"It's fruit cake weather"

"I'm baking, um ... *Christmas* cakes," I said, pleased with my quick thinking. "Nut cakes, you might call them, studded with golden raisins and, uh, so forth. I have to bake them now so the flavors can blend and mellow before the holidays."

"Why are you talking like a cookbook?" Linda's gaze went from the kitchen counter with its basic baking supplies to the table beside us, where bowls held juicy pineapple wedges, chopped citrus peels, and nuts of all kinds. Her avalanche of candy had pushed the *glacé* cherries perilously close to the table's edge. I moved them back to safety.

use exclamation
points sparingly

"*Fruitcake!* You're making *fruitcake!*" In Linda's tone, I heard all the scorn and derision that have been heaped upon this venerable cake for the last hundred years. "But *why?*" she asked. "You've never made fruitcake before. We're not a fruitcake family."

"That's probably because we've never tasted a real one," I said. "Professor Kaye --"

My sister rolled her eyes at the name; it's one she hears more often than she cares to.

"Professor Kaye," I repeated, "brought one to class last summer. It was delicious."

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I explained how his mother waited for him to come home to southern Virginia every Thanksgiving, and how they would make a different fruitcake every day for a week. "And, I don't know," I concluded, wistfully. "He made it sound so, sort of spiritual."

"Spiritual or *spirited*?" Linda had spotted the brandy, standing beside an open bottle of Guinness.

"That's not for you," I said, as she reached for the ^{beer} ~~bottle~~. "It's for basting the cakes."

"You're basting a cake with *beer*?"

"It's a Guinness *cake*," I said, as if that explained everything. "And it should be just about ready to come out."

The cake passed the fingertip test, the toothpick test, and cookbook author Edna Lewis's listening test. It was a beauty, full of walnuts and orange peel. I only hoped it would taste as good as it smelled. I admired it for a ~~quick~~ moment, and then ~~X~~ turned off the oven.

"Oh, good," Linda said. "You *are* finished. ^{Now} ~~You can~~ help me with the treats."

"No, I can't. The next cake has to start in a cold oven, that's why I turned it off. Would you mind reading the Guinness recipe for me? I want to double-check the last step."

Linda picked up the sheaf of recipes I was pointing to. "Are all these for fruitcakes? Good grief, where did you find so many?"

"The Guinness is the newspaper clipping on top. The rest of them came off the Internet. I got thousands of hits."

"You're kidding." She scanned the recipe. "It says to turn it out of the pan and pour on the booze."

I gently turned the cake out on to the cooling rack. The Guinness foamed and hissed as the hot cake soaked it up.

good image

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"I can't believe you found *any* fruitcake recipes on the Internet," Linda said, as she flipped through my printouts. "I mean, this is a cake that everybody in the world *despises*. If fruitcakes are as horrible as people make out, who's posting recipes?"

"Mmm," I said, to let her know I was listening. The Guinness was puddling on top of the cake now, a sign of saturation. I stopped pouring, but held the bottle poised in case the cake wanted more. Linda kept talking. "It's as if fruitcake has taken on a life of its own, and won't let itself be forgotten. It's creepy, when you think about it. I mean, who knows what *other* horrors from humanity's past have got themselves saved in the circuits of our home computers?"

"Phasmatis ex machina," I suggested, as the cake sucked up a few more drops.

"Ghosts in the computer? Ha ha, good one."

The cake could absorb no more Guinness, so I drank the last ounce ~~of~~ myself.

"Hey, where's mine?"

"Fridge," I said. "Could you get me one, too? ~~This one got warm.~~"

She handed me a cold bottle, after twisting off the cap. "Does Professor Kaye put beer in his fruitcake?"

"I don't know. The one he brought to class was oozing with brandy. The main fruit was pineapple, but there were cherries and pecans, too, cut up in bite-sized pieces. And the cake part was very light, not like that nasty stuff in the grocery store."

"Well, anything will taste good if you booze it up like that."

"I staggered out of class that afternoon," I admitted, laughing at the memory. "Usually I'm just drunk on the poetry, but ~~this~~ ^{that} time it was definitely the brandy. Unless it was a sugar high. I cut myself a huge second piece when he wasn't looking."

"Pig. Are you going to make his fruitcake? Which one is it?"

EPISODE 16B: SHORT STORY EXCERPT (FIRST PAGES) – *SOOK'S CAKE* by BONNIE FURLONG

"I don't have it. It's his mother's secret recipe, he said, so I didn't ~~like~~ ^{want} to ask for it."

"Well, which one *are* you making?" Linda riffled again through the recipes. "I want to help, so we can fill the goody bags."

I repressed a sigh. Until that moment, I had been hoping she would pack up her candy and leave. I took a healthy slug of Guinness, for strength. "I'm making one of Truman Capote's aunt's recipes. Could you pull it out for me? It just says 'Chocolate Fruitcake' at the top."

"I've never heard of chocolate fruitcake," Linda said, and muttered something about wasting perfectly good chocolate, but I let it go.

"I can't find it," she said, after a moment.

"Let me see." I searched through the pages myself. "Damn! I don't understand why I keep losing it. Maybe I left it on the printer."

"I'll go look," Linda offered, "and you can start melting chocolate or whatever."

"Thanks. If you don't see it, would you print it out? I left the web site up. I had a feeling I'd have to go there again."

My computer is in a small bedroom down the hall that I've fixed up as an office. I remembered that the recipe called for half a cup of butter to be creamed with one cup of sugar. I had just finished doing that when Linda came back, hanging on to her bottle of Guinness.

"How's it coming?" she asked.

"Slowly. I've been waiting for the recipe. Where is it?"

"Right here." She raised the hand that was not holding the bottle. The hand was empty.

We stared at it for a moment.

"Well, it *was* here."

"I know; I believe you. That recipe is driving me crazy."

I don't understand why
the paper disappears.
Does Sook's ghost not
want it to be made

EPISODE 16B: SHORT STORY EXCERPT (FIRST PAGES) – *SOOK'S CAKE* by BONNIE FURLONG

"Maybe that's because you stole it off the Internet."

"I didn't steal it! What makes you think I stole it? It was right there, on a legitimate web site. You saw it yourself, if you printed it out."

"I not only saw it, I read the whole story, all about little Truman and his cousin Sook delivering fruitcakes in a baby buggy."

A love the banter between the two sisters, but overall nothing really happens. I don't see the connection between the Capote story + your story.

Your writing is good. Just add some conflict, or mystery in here to spice up the story.

Great imagery.

EPISODE 16B: SHORT STORY EXCERPT (FIRST PAGES) – *SOOK'S CAKE* by BONNIE FURLONG

Summary: *It's Hallowe'en afternoon. The main character is baking fruitcakes when her sister drops by and asks her to help her fill Hallowe'en goody bags. To speed things along, the sister decides to stay and help with the next recipe, which has ties to Truman Capote and his family.*

"What took you so long!" Talking nonstop, my exuberant older sister pushed steadily against my front door until I was forced to let her in. "Did you know somebody ditched an old baby carriage at the end of your drive? No baby, though." Linda continued past me, carrying two large shopping bags ~~out~~ into the kitchen. "What smells so good?"

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"Look!" Linda up-ended one of the bags on the kitchen table. A shower of ~~individually~~ individually-wrapped candies flew out of the bag, nearly knocking over a bowl of brandied fruit. "It's retro!" she exclaimed. "Penny candy!"

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"I wish I could," I said, "but I'm going to be baking all day."

Commented [s1]: Have Linda use her sister's name (the protagonist) right away so that we also know the name of the protagonist.

Commented [s2]: Always one space between sentences, not two.

Commented [s3]: Yes, I remember! ☺

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Commented [s4]: Good voice. Good sentence structure this paragraph. I can picture everything well.

I popped a chocolate baby into my mouth and chewed it slowly. No caramel bulls-eyes among the candies, I noticed. They had been my favorite when I was little.

Does the sister leave out the favorite candies on purpose?

"Cake is *not* traditional for Hallowe'en," Linda said, narrowing her eyes. "Whose birthday is it? What's going on?"

"I'm baking, um ... *Christmas* cakes," I said, pleased with my quick thinking. "Nut cakes, you might call them, studded with golden raisins and, uh, so forth. I have to bake them now so the flavors can blend and mellow before the holidays."

"Why are you talking like a cookbook?" Linda's gaze went from the kitchen counter with its basic baking supplies to the table beside us, where bowls held juicy pineapple wedges, chopped citrus peels, and nuts of all kinds. Her avalanche of candy had pushed the *glacé* cherries perilously close to the table's edge. I moved them back to safety.

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pick one

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✓ funny 😊

"That's not for you," I said, as she reached for the bottle. "It's for basting the cakes."

"You're basting a cake with *beer*?"

"It's a Guinness *cake*," I said, as if that explained everything. "And it should be just about ready to come out."

Commented [s5]: Emphasize "Guinness", not "cake"

The cake passed the fingertip test, the toothpick test, and cookbook author Edna Lewis's listening test. It was a beauty, full of walnuts and orange peel. I only hoped it would taste as good as it smelled. I admired it for a quick moment, and then I turned off the oven.

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it will take hours for it to cool

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"I not only saw it, I read the whole story, all about little Truman and his cousin Sook delivering fruitcakes in a baby buggy.

I'm not sure where to start! I think the writing is very good – varied sentence structure, good descriptions, authentic dialogue between the sisters. I can also picture myself in her kitchen (does the protagonist have a name?) and can easily see everything that's happening. I feel like I'm right there. So that's all good.

The part I'm having a hard time with is: I'm not sure what this story is supposed to be about. Admittedly, by now I've read the second half of the story, so I have a better idea, but up to here, I have a tiny hint that a mystery is going on, but that's it. And I'm not sure if I would have known that at all if I hadn't read the second half. To grab me from the start, I think you need to introduce the mystery right at the beginning, on the very first page. You provide small hints that something's going on, but not enough to grab the reader. Let's see...on the first or second page, when the sister arrives, the protagonist could glance at the table, perhaps feel a bit of panic that her sister will guess at what she's doing. Or maybe she feels like she needs to hide something. Then we'll want to know why. Or a strong feeling that she must bake after reading the story by Truman Capote, that she feels compelled to do it. Not that you have to hint so strongly at the beginning, but maybe at least allude to the compulsion right from the start. Her sister has to leave because the protagonist has to bake. Maybe she even feels a presence in the room. I'm not sure where you want to go with this story, so how you do it is up to you. But you need to add in that element; otherwise, it's good writing, but with no clear understanding of what the story's about.