

CHOCOLATE: DARK AND LIGHT

BY LOUISE DUCOTE

When I first moved to South Austin, my mother came to help me scrub the cabinets and hang hooks and to make sure my outside lights worked and that no serial killers were lurking around. I hope to perform this service for my children when they're grown, if they will let me. Before she left to go home, she said, "Louise, I'm going to hide some choco-



late bar duct-taped under the lowest shelf of my pantry.

Three years later I made the terrible mistake of leaving Austin for Colorado. (I'm sorry! I'll never do it again!) Far from my family and friends, freezing my ass off, and deeply unhappy on a number of levels, I inhaled and mainlined chocolate. I had truffles Fed-Exed to me from Maison du Chocolat in New York. I ordered

late somewhere in your house. When you really need it, call me and I'll tell you where it is." I said, oh, she didn't need to do that. But she knew better.

I had a novel coming out the next spring and was writing another, and I needed chocolate to write fiction. Not great quantities, but a little bit every day. Dark. Straight. Not infused with crystallized ginger, raspberries or chipotle. The idea of milk chocolate offended me and still does; I would rather go without, would rather suffer the emotional plummet, the desolate craving, than deign to eat it. I was childless, cared about little except writing, and I sat in front of my computer day after day, eating small bits of straight dark chocolate and making stuff up. One late night I phoned my mother and she directed me to the choco-

cases of Endangered Species chocolate bars and ate a whole one every day. I baked batch after batch of, I have to say, excellent chocolate chip cookies and carried baggies of them around with me. In spite of my sad habit, I was not fat. I ran miles and miles uphill, a different kind of comfort.

In 2003 I moved back to South Austin and discovered some local goodies. I think Miles of Chocolate is pretty amazing. It's a cross between a truffle and a brownie, and you must eat no more than one cubic centimeter a day or you'll end up shopping at Goodwill for a nice mumu. I have not found a good chocolate croissant around here, but I keep hoping. My most frequent chocolate purchase is the Central Market brand organic truffles, \$4.99 per box, and out of this world. For the price of about one and a half Honeycrisp apples (also spectacular, and at \$3.49 a pound they should be), I get a treat that lasts a few weeks.

At 9 a.m. on January 27, 2006, I met my true love. Because I express affection by baking, I soon asked him what kind of cookies he would like. Oatmeal! Shocking! Turns out he also loves rice pudding, bread pudding and the previously unthinkable: carrot cake. I had to call my mother for recipes.

Real, lasting love reveals things about life that are difficult to grasp otherwise, no matter how intelligent or insightful you may be. One of these secrets is the same one that is (ideally) learned upon having a child: that living for something outside yourself is profoundly meaningful. When your goal is the greater good of your love, you will not cling to your old positions, opinions and habits when to do so is detrimental. You won't go through life encased in yourself, or locked in a sibling rivalry with your spouse, battling for the most and best toys, when it feels so good to say, "Here, want to play with this?" You won't keep making chocolate chip cookies when the man wants oatmeal.

Is chocolate truly an aphrodisiac? It is just as much as anything else I decide is an aphrodisiac: a great run, fall weather, Oscar Peterson's Night Train, the sight of my husband. For me chocolate was most often a solitary pleasure, a lonesome comfort. The more love I have, the less chocolate I need.

My husband and I did have a chocolate wedding cake, baked by me and enjoyed on our back porch after we were married one beautiful May morning. It was both delicious and superfluous. That's exactly how I like my chocolate these days.

An advertisement for Miles of Chocolate. It features a yellow box with the text "A Baked Chocolate Dessert" in red script, "MILES OF CHOCOLATE" in large blue letters, and five red stars. Below the stars, it lists ingredients: "Ingredients: sugar, eggs, butter, chocolate, unbleached wheat flour, vanilla, salt." At the bottom of the ad, the website "www.miles-of-chocolate.com" is written in white script.