

Mr. Putter & Tabby Bake the Cake

By Cynthia Rylant

1 A Good Cake

It was winter time. Mr. Putter and his fine cat, Tabby, sat at their window every night to watch the snow come down. They watched and dreamed. Mr. Putter dreamed of the big red sled he rode as a boy. He dreamed of snowmen big as a house. Tabby dreamed, too. She dreamed of the snowdrifts she walked on as a kitten. She dreamed of deep tunnels through white yards. Mr. Putter and Tabby were old now. They had a lot to dream about. That is why they loved wintertime. They also loved wintertime because wintertime brought Christmas. Mr. Putter loved to give Christmas presents. He started thinking about Christmas presents in July. He liked to think of what he could give to the grocer, and to the librarian, and to the postman. Mr. Putter also had to

think of what he could give to his neighbor Mrs. Teaberry. This was hardest of all. He usually had to think about this all the way to December. Mrs. Teaberry liked strange things. She liked coconuts made into monkey heads. She liked salt shakers that walked across the table. She liked little dresses for her teapots. She even liked fruitcake. Mr. Putter could live with monkey heads and walking salt shakers and dressed-up teapots. But Mr. Putter could not believe that Mrs. Teaberry liked fruitcake. He could not believe that anyone liked fruitcake. Every Christmas Mrs. Teaberry ate mounds of fruitcake. It worried Mr. Putter. This winter it was worrying him a lot. He thought Mrs. Teaberry should have a good cake for Christmas. Not a fruitcake that could break her toe if she dropped it. A good cake. A light and airy cake. And one night as he and Tabby sat dreaming at their snowy window, that is what he decided to give Mrs. Teaberry for Christmas. Mr. Putter would bake her a Christmas cake. It would be a cinch.

2 No Pans

The cake was not a cinch. In the first place, Mr. Putter did not know how to bake a cake. He could bake instant muffins. He could bake instant popovers. But he had never baked a cake. He didn't know how. In the second place, Mr. Putter had no pans. He had muffin pans. He had popover pans. But he had no cake pans. If he baked a cake, it would have to be in a shoe. Or maybe in a flowerpot. Or even in a hat. But not in a cake pan, because he did not have one. And in the third place, Mr. Putter had no cookbook. He had books on seaweed. He had books on clouds. He had books on Chinese trees. But he had no cookbooks. Mr. Putter thought about no cookbooks, no cake pans, and the fact that he did not bake cakes. He said Tabby, "Maybe for Christmas Mrs. Teaberry would like a nice cup of tea and a card."

3 Mary Sue

One week before Christmas, Mr. Putter and Tabby took a trip to The Sweet Shop. It was owned by a woman famous for her cakes. She baked cakes with names like Strawberry Watermelon Pumpkin Apple Brownie Surprise. Her name was Mary Sue, and if anyone could teach Mr. Putter to bake a cake, it would be she. Mr. Putter told her his story. He wanted to bake a Christmas cake, he said. Something light. Something airy. Something that would not break a person's toe. Mary Sue listened carefully. She took good notes. And then she began to sell him things. She sold Mr. Putter seven bowls. She sold Mr. Putter three sifters. She sold Mr. Putter ten spoons, five cups, two spatulas, a roll of waxed paper, and a Christmas tree pan. Then she sold him an Easy Baker cookbook and sent him out the door. Mr. Putter had spent one hundred dollars. And she still didn't have any flour.

4 Something Airy

On Christmas Eve Mr. Putter had everything he needed. He had flour, sugar, eggs. He had spoons, bowls, sifters. He had a cookbook. He had a pan. And he had a good cat to keep him company. Mr. Putter baked all night long. His first cake fell flat. His second cake wouldn't leave the pan. His third cake caught on fire. By the time he baked his fourth cake, it was Christmas morning. Mr. Putter's eyes were droopy. His face was saggy. He was moving very slowly. But Mr. Putter did not give up. And by nine O' clock in the morning, he had made the most beautiful Christmas cake in the world. It was light. It was airy. It would not break a person's toe. He woke up Tabby, and together they took the cake to Mrs. Teaberry. Mrs. Teaberry was delighted! She was thrilled! She was PATIENT. Because as soon as Mr. Putter sat down in her chair, he fell asleep. And she had to wait twelve hours before she could cut her cake. She wouldn't have any

without Mr. Putter, and that is how long he slept. But when he finally woke up, Mrs. Teaberry was there with Tabby and her own dog, Zeke, and they ate cake and drank tea and watched the snow fall all night long. And Mr. Putter and Tabby went home with a very nice toaster that sang "America the Beautiful" when the bread popped up.