Guinness Beef Stew with a Wee Bit 'o Chocolate

2 ½ lbs. beef stew meat, cut to 1 ½" cubes
½ cup all-purpose flour
2 tsp. sea salt
1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
4 tbsp. olive oil, separated
4 rashers bacon, cut into little strips
2 medium yellow onions, sliced from tip to tail
1 lb. button mushrooms, cut in half
1-11.2 oz. bottle Guinness Foreign Extra
2 cups beef broth (or more)
5 sprigs thyme, tied together with a bit of string
1 oz. 90% chocolate (or as bittersweet as you can find. We have 90% bars available on our website.)
another 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 tbsp. dark cocoa powder
1 tbsp. red wine vinegar
3 tbsp. water (or more)
garlic salt or sea salt and white or black pepper to taste
1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped

Put the ½ cup flour, salt, and black pepper in a large mixing bowl. Add the meat and toss to coat with flour evenly (this does not mean throw them across the room, just stir it around in the flour).

Heat a large pot or Dutch oven over high heat. Add 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and when it is smoking, add half of the meat cubes, shaking the excess flour from them as you go. Brown on all sides and remove to a vessel that will handle all the meat for a little while. Add the second 2 tbsp. of olive oil to the pot and brown the second batch of meat.

Remove that to join the rest of the meat and reduce the heat to medium. Add the bacon to the pot and fry, stirring occasionally until almost crisp. Add the onions. Sauté until soft and starting to brown. Add the mushrooms, increase the heat a little and continue to cook until the mushrooms start to brown. Put the meat back in with the onions and mushrooms. Pour the bottle of beer in the pot and bring to a boil. Add the beef broth to cover. Throw in your bundle of thyme and stir in the 90% chocolate. Bring to a boil, then turn down to a low simmer. Simmer as low as you can go for about 2 hours, or until the meat is tender. Fish out the bundle of thyme and discard it.

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To thicken the stew, whisk together the ¼ cup flour and cocoa powder. Add the red wine vinegar and water, whisking to a smooth paste. Add water to make it pourable. (If you have any lumps, run it through a sieve before you add it to the stew.) Pour into the stew while whisking - I know, there are all sorts of solid objects in there to hinder a whisk, but just do it. Continue to simmer and stir with a wooden spoon until lightly thickened (you don't want library paste consistency). Adjust the seasoning with your desired salt and pepper.

Divide amongst serving bowls and sprinkle with parsley. I like to have buttery boiled potatoes and carrots on the side.

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