

The Baking Lesson

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Give this an almost 6/8 swing feel: divide the two quarter notes in each half measure about 60:40 instead of the notated 50:50



As I walked through the co-op on a sun-ny Satur-day morn,



I saw a wo-man stan-ding there, all sad-eyed and for - lorn,



Be - tween the whole-wheat flo-ur and the fine-ground yel-low corn.



I asked her why a frown should cross the face of one so sweet.



She said that ma-ny days had passed since she had had a treat.



I said I'd glad-ly treat her, so she smiled at me and said,



"Why don't you come to my place then and help me bake some bread?"

As I walked through the co-op on a sunny Saturday morn,
I saw a woman standing there, all sad-eyed and forlorn,
Between the whole-wheat flour and the fine-ground yellow corn.
I asked her why a frown should cross the face of one so sweet.
She said that many days had passed since she had had a treat.
I said I'd gladly treat her, so she smiled at me and said,
"Why don't you come to my place then and help me bake some bread?"

Well, I was feeling nervous as she led me through her door,
For, though I'd had a kitchen for a dozen years or more,
A loaf of bread was something that I'd never baked before.
I asked her to describe for me the method she would choose,
And show me what equipment and what recipe to use.
And though she used familiar terms like "oven", "yeast", and "dough",
It sounded like the strangest bread that I would ever know.

She set me to proceeding as our appetites increased.
I worked without instruction for a half an hour at least,
In hopes the dough would leaven through the action of the yeast.
But soon it was apparent that a problem lay at hand;
The dough would not develop on the schedule she had planned.
And though an expert baker she for many years had been,
A loaf so lacking gluten she had never before seen.

I asked her, "Is it hopeless?", and she said, "The problem looks
Like something I once read about while studying my books,
Revealing knowledge gained in France, the home of famous cooks.
You've worked so long already, it would really be a waste
To call the loaf a failure now. Here, let me have a taste."
And saying that, she placed a bit of dough upon her tongue.
She was an expert baker lass, although she was quite young.

She said, "The yeast is ample, as you'd know if you would read,
But yeast alone is not enough to make our loaves succeed:
The gluten won't develop if we never learn to knead."
She placed her fingers on the dough. Her touch was strong and warm,
And through her gentle kneading I could feel the gluten form.
And as she was so skillful, it was really no surprise
When, after a few minutes more, the dough began to rise.

I asked her, "Shall we bake it now?", and she said, "Surely not.
I told you of the recipe; it seems that you forgot
The dough cannot be baked until the oven is quite hot.
I hope that you work well by touch and don't depend on sight,
For, down beneath my oven, you must start the pilot light.
We'll let the loaf rise once more while the oven gains its heat,
And then we'll set it baking so that we can have our treat."

The loaf we set to baking I was eager to devour.
She bade me to have patience, and to give my will the power
To leave it in the oven for the best part of an hour.
And while I took instruction through that hour we had to fill,
She said I was untutored, but I had some native skill.
And when the course of time that she had set had finally run,
The top crust cracked, some steam escaped, and then the loaf was done.

Oh, members of the co-op, here's the moral of my tale:
It's not enough to have the best ingredients for sale;
We need to work with knowledge, or our recipes will fail.
So stand among the flour bins, and state your needs aloud.
Ask for help with cooking, and you'll gather quite a crowd.
Choose an expert teacher from among the ones who speak,
And may you have a baking lesson like I had that week.

This song was written for and first performed at the tenth anniversary party for Karma Co-op in Toronto in April, 1982

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This latest slight revision of the lyrics was prepared in 2009