

Baker's Daughter

I am the baker's daughter. The baker is my father. He is an interesting man. His talents are numerous. One approaches the question of how to describe him as if lost in a beautiful field. At the same time, the numerous flowers, venerable trees, fine blades of grass, are essential and also distractions. Yes, where to begin?

The baker has a small family. It consists of a wife, a son, and a daughter, who is the youngest. I am she. I am nothing like my mother, although her qualities are worthy of report. In a judicious ratio, they are also encouraging of emulation. For instance, the baker's wife has an unconscious habit of digging her broom into corners when cleaning the kitchen and bakery. Yet its distance from her consciousness is exactly its problem. In the morning, the bow of her apron hardly sustaining its weight, the baker's wife cleans the floor from an ambulatory slumber. I wonder, as I trail with my dustpan, is she leaning on the handle with all that fuss over the corners? Furthermore, does she know how strongly I relate to the action? No, I am not tired. As the baker's daughter, I am never tired. Nor am I permitted to be. Nevertheless, I observe the baker's wife and wonder: has my life not disclosed itself as the mirror image of that action? Yes, there are times when the baker's daughter understands her situation as fighting her way beyond a corner with an ineffective broom. The knowledge is troubling, but also delightful. Certainly, the more accurate appraisal depicts a fighting toward the corner, a mouse-ish crouching among its angles. Yet I am at liberty to abandon the insight as soon as it sours, as I must abandon this next one: I have only one liberty--to abandon.

In quiet moments, I speculate over the origin of this freedom. Probably, I inherited it. Science has proven that everything is inherited, although an orphan itself. Still, I prefer to believe that fate holds unique plans for each person, and that my particular vision is a singular event. There is loneliness here. When I die, who will replace me, remember me? Thousands learn to knead dough, but no ten fingers weave the same web of its flesh.

My brother is a good example, and I do want to explain him. With unsuitable gratitude, he is the baker's son. He awakens in the morning after the bakery is immaculate. His dreams need not hurry. On the contrary, they linger among blossoming loaves of bread. In his insolence, he describes the phenomenon, and curses its interruption. I am loath to repeat the scene. "Are you ready for work?" doubts the baker's wife. The baker's son holds his tongue. "A king," he says at last. "Everyone did as I commanded." The baker's wife retreated to her sanctuary within a corner. "Kill the baker," she half-instructs. Probably, the baker's son will have his own son before he hears her.

In that description, I hope to transmit a glimpse of the baker's son's obtuseness. But now I perceive my need to include his future bride. I am not she. Nor am I pregnant. Nor does my belly protrude beyond the cleft of my jutting chin. Nor does my chin jut, or have a cleft. The future bride of the baker's son has a cleft in her chin, which juts, although less than her belly, which holds a child. She is hoping for a boy. Additionally, one concludes from her repetition of this wish that she credits her voice as its likeliest benefactor. I am not inclined to be noticed in a room. Nevertheless, the future bride of the baker's son offers me her wish at even those times when we are alone in the bakery and she does not see me.

Of course, there is more. The future bride of the baker's son is taller than the baker's son, and wears elegant clothes. However, she does not wear black to the bakery anymore. One afternoon, the baker whipped together a great cloud of flour, from which he did not seem to emerge at all. When the flour dispersed, the future bride of the baker's son wore white hand prints across her softer areas, including her head, where the hair is thick and brown. But I should not be clever. Nor is cleverness permitted me. Nor is writing. In an outfit of black and white, the future bride of the baker's son was a Halloween costume of a skeleton. She was an X-ray. In either case, the bones were all visible, but in all the wrong places. The baker's wife entered with a tray of steaming buns as the door slammed shut. Again, the baker created a cloud. This time, he was gone when it dispersed. In the settled flour, his footprints indicated his escape toward the supply room. But did the baker's wife pursue him? Rather, she drifted to her broom. Delicately, she prodded the baker's footprints toward the corner, where the baker's daughter waited with a dustpan. As expected by the baker, she emptied the powder into the anonymity of the flour barrel, where it remained a discrete lump until the baker's son gave orders for the cake to celebrate his imminent proposal. As the baker's daughter, I created it. I have never loved the baker's son more than when I served that command.

In fact, I believe I dislike him. He lacks the charisma of the baker, but expects the benefits of their relationship. Has he not been instructed regarding such things? After all, there is nothing in this circle that I hear before another member. Meanwhile, I have heard more times than necessary that I have no right to expect anything of my relationship to anyone. In fact, I am told constantly to wash my hands because they will dash my expectations the soonest. My compliance adds a positive hint of soap to many loaves. I

know this has no place here, but occasionally I dream that the loaves are yellow fish that desire my company among their school. It is less surprising than with the earlier issue that the baker's son is ignorant of this dream. But how can he harbor his outlandish expectations? Again, the seeds of fate must grow uniquely in his nature. Yes, but no. No, he cannot harbor anything because he does not realize his dependency. The baker's son commands his circumstances, but unconsciously.

An example should suffice, and I cringe that already I have given one. In the second, the baker's son emerges from the [bathroom] wearing an expression of complete befuddlement. The unusual part is that his hands are clasped together atop his head. Already knit, his brow crunches further beneath the weight of his arms, which extend like frames for his prominent ears. He flaps them. He is clearly embarrassed. To save face, he explains that the mirror told him he could fly. Sadly, it did not elaborate upon its promise. There is silence until the baker's wife asks if the baker's son has therefore reasoned himself into his present position, and how long he intends to maintain it. "Until I receive my proper allotment," he says. To his dismay, the baker appears beyond the door to the supply room. "What the Pete is going on here?" he barks. The baker's son immediately confesses. "Sir, I am forcing the blood to my nether parts, where it must boost my fertility." Accepting this response, the baker enters the chambers. He paces energetically between the bakery's entrance and display cases. The baker's wife drifts slowly to the corner. "Not pregnant yet?" says the baker. The baker's wife nods, but says nothing. She has misunderstood the direction of the question. It seeks only the baker's son. He flaps his arms around his head. "Not my fault," suggests the baker's son. "Perhaps mine," concedes the baker. They exchange probing glances. At length, the

baker's son receives permission to excuse himself from suppers until the future bride of the baker's son conceives life. He does not partake of supper for a period of two months, by which time the future bride of the baker's son has begun to show visible signs, but not wear black.

Overwhelmed, I provide this example for its portrayal of witless advantage. The baker's son is free to leave the supper table, and seizes the opportunity with complete disregard for its limits. In this sense, he commands his circumstances. However, he has not answered any questions regarding the delay over his actual marriage. Rather, he spits at the baker's daughter whenever the issue arises. Nor is the baker's daughter responsible for its entry into the conversation. Nor does the baker's daughter speak at all. I am the baker's daughter. At night, I pray for the baker's son that his child will please him, and his marriage come to pass. But God denies me comprehension of the relevant obstacles, and my prayers confound me. At bottom, I long to harness science, but cannot devise the right hypotheses. I linger over the notion that fate obscures my insight into many things, including fate itself. Finally, I abandon the notion, because abandonment is my freedom. When I awaken in the morning, it is very early, and I hold the dustpan in front of the crumbs of one more day.

Occasionally, roaches lace the bakery floor at that hour. They scuttle from the light, which cannot be escaped. I am the only one to notice. The baker's wife sleeps on a broom.

That excursion was not correct. I am the baker's daughter, and I am not entitled to venture from the point. In truth, I am seldom aware of the point. Nevertheless, such humility does not excuse me when the point has not escaped me. Before the excursion,

the point concerned the delay of the marriage of the baker's son. Is he too busy with work? Again, I transgress my bounds. I am the baker's daughter, and the baker's daughter must not intentionally be funny. The baker's son is not too busy with work. Nor is he busy with work at all. The baker's son has been known to spend weekends inconclusively clipping toenails. Is the baker's son too busy with toenails? In truth, he is fascinated by them, and collects them in jars as a hobby. I have seen him empty the jars to sit on the toenails, which crackle strangely. Once, he asked me to sit on his lap during the exercise. My compliance decreased my punishment to only two slaps. Additionally, the baker's son delivered them playfully, tugging off my apron. For two quiet minutes, we bounced. Afterward, the baker's son was angry, and made up for lost punishment. I am used to these reversals. I am the baker's daughter. I wonder: did the baker's son expect something more of our game? Again, I cannot penetrate his expectations. At the same time, he always gets what he wants and does not want what he gets.

However, he does not get the future bride of the baker's son. Instead, the expansion of her belly forces a larger and larger wedge between their hearts, which once beat to one rhythm. Now there are three rhythms, and no syncopation. He reports that his dreams contain burnt loaves of bread. He dashes into the bakery screaming. He does not care about his hair. His toenails perform loops. Once skinny, he gobbles cookies at a rate that might as well include taping them to his stomach. Is he asserting his independence by simulating his own pregnancy? I am certain he has argued with the baker. In fact, their continuing animosity is the reason I am writing. I am the baker's daughter. I am not permitted to write. Nor may I wonder. Nor is my muse a manifestation of wonder. On the contrary, dread stirs me. I tremble inside. I tremble outside, but

always have. I feel a transition occurring. I perceive my position at the edge of an abyss. I do not claim to fly like the baker's son. I am the baker's daughter.

The baker's son has not been in the bakery for several weeks. Nor does he possess the baker's permission to be elsewhere. Meanwhile, the future bride of the baker's son visits the bakery every morning before the baker and the baker's wife take lunch. The future bride of the baker's son expands daily. A great mystery rises within her belly. Because of the flour episode, she will not let the baker stretch his palm across the capsule of her child. He did not want to until he appeared during an interval when I had my hand there. The bakery was empty of customers. "Get a good grip," he instructed. "There's a daughter in there, and you should care most. But step aside. I am the baker," he explained. Thus, I abandoned my post, because that is my liberty. The baker approached, but to no avail. The future bride of the baker's son turned her back and offered only her behind. Never in his life has the baker stared at me for so long, as if punch-drunk. The twitching of his white moustache was the only sign of life on his face. He practically huffed like a bull. At the sound of the customer bell, he brightened, and departed for the kitchen after bidding me to serve the incoming couple. They wore matching green jackets, and smoked long cigarettes. I remember their purchase as a sourdough roll and two éclairs. That day the éclairs sold very well. The future bride of the baker's son left with four.

There is probably a need to describe the bakery's customers, and their attraction to desert items. As the baker's daughter, I measure the ingredients involved in all pastries, which receive terrific amounts of sugar from me, who likes to sweeten their short lives. Also, I like to believe that extra sugar accounts for their popularity. In my own short life,

the baker has shared with me only one terse secret. "Double the sugar," he said. The rest of the remark did not slither down my ear as did those first whispered words, but echoed throughout the kitchen in general. The baker declared them as if slapping his thigh with intense satisfaction. "I'll double everything," he sang, "until I'm only half a man and too sour to like sweets." Then he humphed for emphasis. Anyway, my conclusion favors that reading.

The customers are much easier to fathom. They are pleased. Their taste buds shoot them tingling blasts of sweetness. I have seen one short woman in a belt that spanned the full length of her torso experience convulsions and quickly throw up upon consuming a peach tart. When the baker expressed his apology and surprise by ordering me to clean the woman's clothes for the next week, she recovered her stability, and said, "No, the sweetness is astounding." The rest of the tart disappeared down her throat immediately thereafter. So too has the woman returned to the baker every day since the experience. To my concealed delight, she has become the woman who disagreed with the baker that the baker's daughter was to blame. However, on less vengeful days, of which there are many, I refer to her instead as the woman who returns to the bakery to relive her first catharsis. I am not sure the title is accurate. Similarly, I am not sure I will remain the baker's daughter. He seems to sneer at me more often than he used to.

Still, there is nothing more to be gained by moving this pen along this paper. My revelations have proven no more powerful than had I scratched them into dough. The tablet is amorphous, impermanent. It does not hold its shape. Yet for some reason, I feel a special kinship for this comparison, as if I too am a paddy. I splash among the elastic

waves of myself. My special fear of drowning proves impossible as I break the dimpled surface at every side. What might I be if not this dreaming? I am the baker's daughter.