

# Baking Bread II

The Loaves

by Errant Etta

“Will you take the first thrust, Mrs. Peel? Or shall I?” Steed looked down at the blue crockery bowl.

“How about one blow apiece?” She looked at him with her sly smile.

“I’ll go first,” he popped the soft dough with his fist as he said it. His amused expression showing his relish of their shared thought, “your turn next. I really need to powder my nose.” He turned to head for the door.

*Your face does look rather sticky* she thought and laughed out loud at his reticence to say what he really meant. “My turn will come soon enough.” She called after him. “But we really need to contain ourselves ‘til these loaves are in the oven. Besides, it needs to be my turn in there after you’re done.” She turned the dough out on to the table and began to shape the loaves.

He washed his hands and scrubbed his face with lavender scented soap thinking *Thank God! I’m not eighteen any more, after all.* He smiled to himself behind the towel. She really was a *most* unusual woman; never the sort he though would exert this hold over him. A hold he did not understand at all. Sexual attraction yes, but not this, he couldn’t think of a word that adequately captured exactly what he felt. When they made love, *Yes, that’s it* made love, not had sex. Not that he hadn’t made love before, but not many times. Had sex, well, that was another matter entirely. The swath he cut through town was quite well known. When he had, on a few occasions, had feelings for a partner extending beyond the physical, it still did not compare with this. He wrinkled his brow, the crease between his eyebrows deepened.

Still thinking he walked back in the kitchen. “Yours now, Mrs. Peel.”

She turned and smiled, he had tried to make his hair lie down but it was impossible to tame those waves without assistance from a bottle. “It’s about time. I thought I would have to come and see if you’d gone down the drain.” As she passed him in the doorway she traced a floury finger across his exposed chest trailing it down to the top of the towel wrapped around his narrow hips. She popped him on his bottom for good measure.

“Mrs. Peel!” he said his forehead smoothed out, his mouth turned up in a grin.

“Back in a flash.” She echoed his earlier words. Thinking while she was in the bathroom, she wondered if this wasn’t too good to be true. There wasn’t anything about him she didn’t like, well, that ‘stuff’ he used on his hair. She would have to talk to him about that. The wet head was dead after all. She’d seen it on the telly just the other day. She loved it when his hair was all mussed up.

Her eyes narrowed slightly. There was one other thing. She hated it when he kept

her in the dark when they were investigating. That Gordon Webster thing. It had taken him a while to work himself into her good graces after that one. If he didn't 'piffle' so well. She smiled. She had read a book once in which the hero piffled, talked endlessly and wittily on any and every subject, disarming everyone with his charm. Steed was certainly a 'Master Piffler'. Her eyes softened.

She walked into the kitchen. "Steed! You've undone all my loaves."

"I'm making braided bread Mrs. Peel, a lesson learned at the knee of Mrs. Garner. Do you have an egg? We'll need egg wash before they go into the oven. Pour us a glass and I will impart to you the knowledge, gleaned in my childhood, from that Mistress of the Kitchen."

As their eyes met she broke in to her brilliant smile, he answered with his charming one.

She poured the wine, he made the loaves and in intricate detail explained each action, the traditions associated with braided bread, and the history of cultivating wheat. She leaned back in her chair, smiling, and listened to him piffle.

When the loaves were set to rise he refilled their glasses, pulled out a chair; they sat and talked. He asked who the loaves were for. "Someone who has everything" she said. And they talked and laughed and listened while the yeasty smell of bread filled the room. They both thought in the intervals in the conversation how strangely comfortable and easy it was to just be with each other.

*It was never like this with Peter*, immediately guilty at the disloyal thought. But it hadn't been. She could never be herself with Peter, only what he wanted her to be. Well, it didn't matter now. She sighed a mental sigh. If she hadn't met Steed would she have ever known the difference? Would she ever meet another man she meshed so well with? She began to wonder if it *had* to end.

He watched the corners of her eyes crinkle as she laughed at something he had said. He wondered if he'd ever find anyone to compare with her. Who made him feel he was the man he tried to be. He never had before. Had she spoiled him for any other woman? Would he ever find someone who completed him so well again? *She completes me, makes me whole*. He began to wonder if it *had* to end.

The buzzer buzzed, he checked the loaves, turned on the oven, while she beat the egg and searched for the pastry brush. Their movements seemed choreographed in the small kitchen. Graceful body around graceful body, almost a dance as each did their part.

The oven door closed, he set the timer. She reached out and took his hand. He smiled that small, knowing smile that turned her heart to water. Came up close behind her as

she turned toward the door. His arms went round her, her back to him as she led him to the bed. She kept his hands trapped in her own, "My turn now," her voice was low. He stood very still as she undressed him, not that there was much to remove. She slid her hands along his body as she moved the shirt off his shoulders, following its' path down his back 'til it was free and drifted to the floor. She gave a small tug on the towel; it dropped to his feet. She stepped back; her eyes caressed him as they drank in the hard-soft contours of his form. She loosed the robe's belt, shrugged her shoulders. It floated to the floor. She watched his eyes as they follow its' descent. Felt her body grow warm as they traveled down the long, slender length of it and slowly returned to her face.

She took his hand again, "lie down, relax" she smiled as he complied. She kept hold of his hand and sitting on the side of the bed began to examine it closely. She traced the outline of each finger, felt the smoothness of each nail. First with soft fingertips, then with her lips, brushing over the satin surfaces, slightly cooler than his skin. On the back of his hand she followed the path of each vessel, etched just under the skin, ruffled the sparse, coarse, dark hair that grew on the outer side. Turning his palm up she traced the lines with the tip of a nail, then with the tip of her tongue. Her warm tongue invaded the spaces between fingers, ran trailing up each finger to suckle the sensitive fingertips.

Her hair fell in a curtain so that he could not watch her face. His eyes ran down her body turned almost in profile bent over his hand. How could this be so erotic? He would never feel the same about a handshake again. He felt the familiar stirring in his groin and she was as far away from it as she could get and still be touching him. He wanted to stop it, to take her, but he didn't. He held very still. Still as a statue he watched her. Only his eyes moved as he followed her progress. Giving himself up to her completely. Losing himself in the sensations she stirred.

She followed his arm all the way to his shoulder feeling the changes of skin texture from inner to outer arm. The forearm lightly covered with short dark hair and higher up, smooth and bare. Feeling the muscles flex when she hit a particularly sensitive area. Marveling at the differences she could see and touch; the firm flexibility of this relaxed state and the steel of those same muscles in action. She looked up then to see his face. His eyes were closed his face relaxed. He could have been asleep but for a tiny twitching at the corner of his mouth. She looked down and her observation was confirmed. He definitely wasn't sleeping. She smiled with her eyes, *we'll see who can be still* she thought and crawled across him the repeat the process on the other side.

As her body crossed over his he could feel the heat of her passing. He clenched his teeth as she took up his left hand, wondering how long he could last. The urge to take her and forget this game grew by the minute, but *fair's fair* he had started it. The muscles in his jaw moved underneath the skin.

When she again reached his body she ran her fingers, lips, tongue everywhere in her explorations. Traced the definition of each muscle in his chest and abdomen. She paid

special attention to his nipples and wondered if they were as sensitive as hers. The quickened pace of his breathing providing a clue. She bypassed his straining penis and went down to start at his feet. He moaned.

“Two points, and be glad it’s not more. But *he* really has a mind of his own doesn’t he?” a smile in her tone.

He clenched his teeth more tightly and tried to regulate his breathing but as she inched her way up his long legs he began to think he would explode.

When she reach her goal she hovered just above it. Her hair brushed softly against his skin. She ran her fingers along the grooves where legs join bodies, those sensitive valleys. He flexed his hips involuntarily. “Two more” her voice filled with laughter. She looked up. The muscles in his neck were corded. “You’re supposed to *relax*.” She teased.

He fought fiercely with himself not to reach down and just grab her, have her now and stop this torment. But he had started playing games and he would play until he won. He smiled *either way I win* the part of his mind that was still rational thought.

Her tongue ran the length of his rigid penis; she felt the subtle contours of the seemingly circular shaft. She blew cooling breaths on the moisture from her mouth. Drew back and watched the ebb and flow of the darker skin of his scrotum. He breathing quickened and she relished the effects of her actions. She felt her own excitement grow. She covered him with her mouth. Her tongue explored the tight satin surface, following the edge of the glans all around and probing the tiny opening. Salty drops on her tongue.

He broke. Strong hands reach down and grasped her arms making her release her hold. She didn’t fight; she wanted it as much as he. To feel that first thrill as he entered, his strong hard body over hers. They strained together, the sounds of their urgency mingled. Each aware of nothing but the building need. Neither heard the other arch or cry out. Each separate but together as they reached completion.

The weight of him reassuring as he lay upon her, she ran her hands along the long muscles down his back. His breathing slowed, he rolled them on their sides, facing and still joined. Each floating in their own thoughts as the descended from that peak. Hands roamed tenderly, lips touched softly as they drifted together. Peaceful, empty, filled, complete.

“I think that was more than ten points, Steed. You lose.” Her voice seemed to come from far away.

“Provocation, Mrs. Peel, You have to factor in the provocation. But even if you think I lost, I won.”

Her hand came up, caressed his cheek. He kissed her soft and slow.

The buzzer buzzed.

“I’ll check,” he said pulling away and going from the room.

She watched the muscles in his buttocks flex as he walked through the door. Rose herself and walking toward the bathroom wondered if any other man would be so considerate of the necessary, practical considerations. His semen trickled slowly down her inner thigh.

He stood, his back to her, naked in the middle of the kitchen floor. An unusual occurrence. He always felt exposed, more than just physically, when he was not completely clothed. He held a loaf unturned, rapped on its’ bottom.

“Does it sound hollow?” she asked.

Putting it on the rack to cool, “Yes, my dear, it does and I know just how it feels.”

She laughed and extended the box she held in her hand. He took it. Lifted a questioning eyebrow.

“It was to be a gift. To go along with the bread. I thought you might want it now.” She looked him up and down.

Still quizzical he opened the box. A soft caramel colored dressing gown. He put it on, tying the belt at the waist. “Who was the lucky fellow?” a hint of jealousy in his voice.

“Look at the card, Steed.”

He found it. A heavy textured paper. A watercolor of a stylized red chest piece. A knight. And underneath in flowing calligraphy: FOR STEED, A KNIGHT IN TARNISHED ARMOUR. A slow smile transformed his face.

She ran her hand down the lapel, “Now that you spoiled the surprise and made half your own present, let’s eat some now.” She turned to get a knife.

“No, no, Mr. Peel you must never cut braided bread with a knife. One must break it with the hands. Dreadful luck will follow if it’s cut. Cuts your luck, you know. In the Near East the custom—”

She smiled and listened to him piffle.