

Breaking Bread
(for my parents)

*The Abbey of the Genesee rises from grass green hills,
arrow roof pointing heavenward,
enshrouded in silence and the earth smell of baking bread.
Trappist monks rise in moonlight and knead dough before dawn,
contemplating the tangled threads of life and time.*

*White, wheat, raisin, sunflower bran, genesee rye
are mixed, baked, bagged in silence,
flour-covered hands pressing prayers into dough
beneath the watchful eyes of the stars.*

When my parents meet, he is black-aproned
and armed with brown paper bags
folded into square-cornered stacks
waiting for glass milk bottles and oranges rolling within mesh bags.
She is the blonde with the serious eyes
who types in prices of eggs, milk, bread like a court stenographer,
lips pursed, tallying numbers.

They are separated by a wall of grocery bags
and culture.
He eats fresh *malazadas* and *chourico* with sweet bread
and cuts class at Durfee High School to play three-hand bid whist.
She goes home to *tourtieres* and shepherd's pie
and geese penned up on Westport farmland.

Friends and fate push against them, pressing their lives into one another
until their paths mesh, twist, twine
like interlaced fingers.

I imagine him before he asks for a date,
his Adam's apple bobbing nervously
against the Windsor knot of his necktie.
His hands twist in the pockets of his overcoat.
Fluorescent lights find surprise and disbelief
alongside mingled futures
reflected in her eyes.

She hides their conversation as a sale by pressing a loaf of Monks' bread
into his hands,
a gesture they will repeat and exchange over decades:
first with wedding rings
then newborn babies
and anniversary cards.
He holds his breath, sinking fingertips into the bread crust.
The air smells of flour and unmade promises.

She says yes.

The future spreads out before them,
a tapestry woven from the golden strands of moments.

Today, when she shares their story with me, her eyes drift and four decades
dissolve.
Swollen knuckles soften, laugh lines fade,
and they are back in the bakery aisle holding Monks' bread.

My parents sit together on the deck in the pre-dawn grayness
wrapped in mist and memories,
fingers intertwined as geese alight on the glass-smooth lake.
They have blended their cultures and futures
and raised children to adulthood.
Now, in the endless spring of kept promises, they break bread together.

-Leah Makuch, December 2006