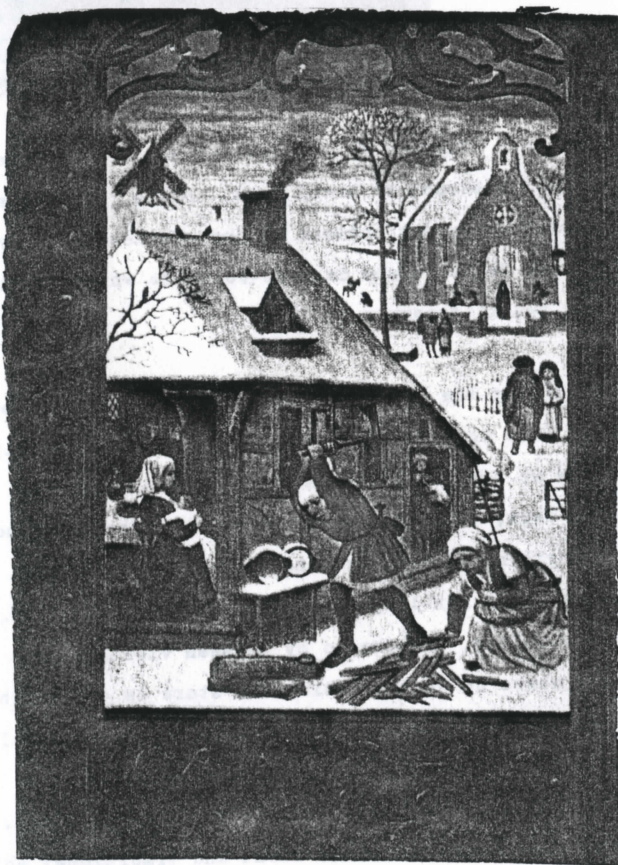


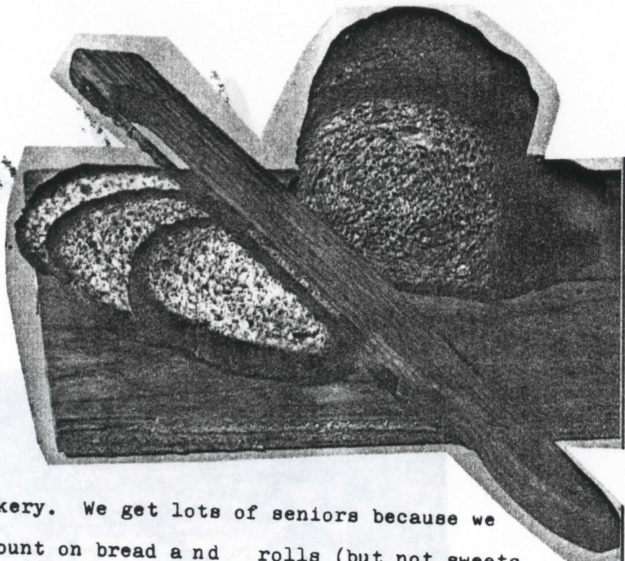
Bread *fellows*

written by Margaret Dragu



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THANKS TO ARNIE ACHTMAN



I work part-time in a bakery. We get lots of seniors because we give a ten per cent discount on bread and rolls (but not sweets or specialty items) every day instead of just Wednesday or every-other-Thursday like Zeller's and Save-on-Foods do which are the big shops in our two kitty-corner malls.

I have been working at the Discount Bakery #403 in the suburbs for three years. It's not too bad: it's union, which means zip these days, since we are all part-time and don't qualify for benefits or sick days; but it IS kind of funky. There are no computers so everything is done by hand (inventory, ordering, cash outs) which leaves room for loopholes like "employee grazing", a polite term for stealing. Months go by between visits from management which makes us workers think the store is ours. The *laissez-faire* set-up makes it all very human, and that means I get to talk to a lot of people just like an old-fashioned shopkeeper in a village. The international daily marketplace. As I tally up my customers' 60% whole wheat and traditional white sliced, we could be in Paris on rue du clés -- or the Chile stand in Oaxaca in Mexico -- or the farmers' market stall in Esterhaze in Saskatchewan. Of course, we really are in a suburban mini-mall in suburban Vancouver surrounded by a beauty parlour, a pizza-to-go joint, a Mexicali bar-restaurant, and a fitness supply store. Bad architecture. Great people. That is one of the reasons I am still there. The people.

Especially the seniors who have destroyed my ideas about what getting old means. Like the day the six motor-cycles roared up to the bakery and parked and I thought, oh oh, trouble. Until they took their helmets off and I could see they

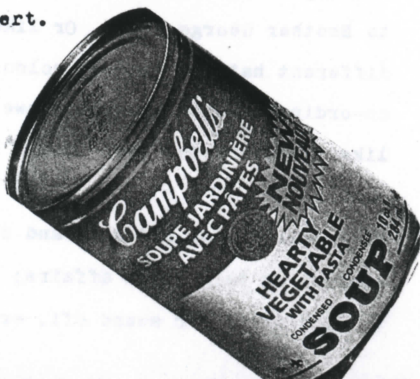


all had white hair. They were members of the EASY RIDERS MOTOR-CYCLE CLUB whose membership criteria includes the age guideline of 70 years or older. Like the senior marathon bicyclist (started when he was sixty after a triple by-pass and a major lifestyle re-route) who repairs my bicycle in the backroom of the bakery. I call him Uncle George when people ask who he is but he is looking younger as I look older so I shall have to change that to Brother George soon. Or like the Hat Lady who has sixty different hats of various colours and styles which she carefully co-ordinates with scarves, jewellery and her clothes; she looks like a Vogue model even though she is almost eighty.

My regulars stop and shop and chat. We tell each other funny stories or talk world affairs; we exchange recipes; we listen to each other, or sound off, or advise.

Aman was a regular. Although he was retired, he had a part-time job as a security guard in banks and malls. He worked all night and slept all day; he came to the bakery around four o'clock to buy bread for himself and his wife. He was at least six feet tall and slender and he had excellent posture. He wore cotton suits. Grey or beige. They were old and had discreet stains. But they were impeccably tailored and clean and pressed. He had thick grey and white hair that was regularly cut by a barber to a short length. He had laughing eyes and a laughing mouth that showed off excellent teeth. In the winter, he wore a wool vest and scarf with the cotton suits but he said he was never cold. By the time he was shopping regularly at the bakery for two years, I knew he was born in a small village in the Punjab and that he and his family

had come to Vancouver in 1980. His children had all married and he was a grandfather. He kept busy with all his family duties and he was also a combination of extremely formal and extremely outgoing. He always called me "most gracious madam" even though my name tag says MADGE and most of our customers call me by my first name. He had made many friends in Vancouver -- in and out of the Indian community. He brought many new friends to the bakery with him -- all men -- whom he had met at work or with whom he had become neighbours. He went to church dinners and community events and MacDonald's with his new friends of every race and religion and then met even more people. Aman was easy to be with and talk to. People liked him. I did too. He liked my eclectic choice of radio stations at the bakery. Some days I played classical music from CBC-FM, some days the campus station, some days the multicultural channel so during one conversation we might hear ragas, polkas, and a shakihachi concert.



Aman was often in a state of being astounded.



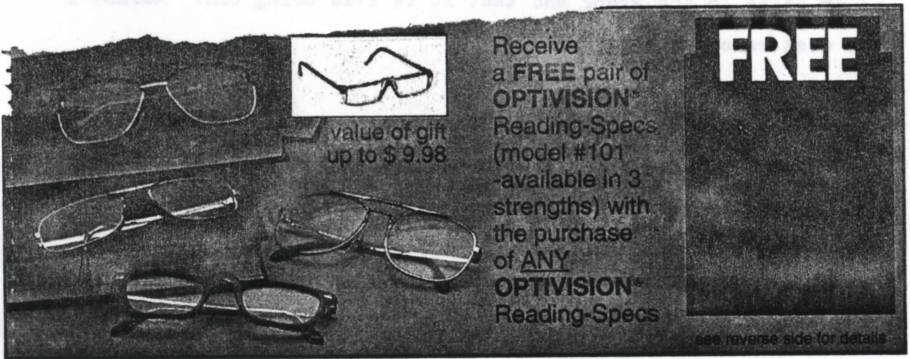
"Most gracious madam," he would say, "I am being most astounded at how this country deals with thieves. The police tell me that I am being in the wrong and that it is I ^{who} am being bad! Madam, I am most astounded!"

Aman had been working at a building supply factory as night security when three thieves with a truck came to the factory's back door and began loading their truck with lumber and bricks. Aman yelled STOP STOP STOP and ran to the truck. One thief jumped into the truck and drove off leaving two thieves, one on each side of Aman.

Aman threw his arms around one thief and attempted to wrestle him down to the ground while the third thief used some of the boxes of bricks as a ladder to jump over the fence and run away. Aman is a senior citizen and it didn't take long for thief number two to get out of Aman's clutches and run for it. Aman called the police. When they arrived they lectured him about thieves and guns and knives and calling 911 instead of trying to be a hero. He came to the bakery the next day to buy his loaf of 100% whole wheat sliced.

"Most gracious madam," he said, "in this country people are supposed to step aside when they see such wickedness? This I do not understand. In my country, when you see a thief do some wickedness you must grab him and hold onto him. He must be punished. But here, in this country, you step aside. I do not understand. Even a gracious mother as yourself, madam, in my country, even an older woman, if she saw a thief at his wickedness she would grab onto him and hold him down and he would then be punished. That is what we do in my country, madam."

Once he came to the bakery astounded that three teenagers (two boys and one girl aged fifteen and sixteen) had set fire to an apartment building he was sent to guard against looters one night. A hundred people had to leave in the middle of the night and be housed someplace else for two weeks while the fire and smoke damage was repaired. "Such wickedness, madam," he said during those two weeks.



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Less than three weeks later, he was astounded that a woman had been robbed and raped by two men in a parking garage. "In my country, madam, we respect Mother. Mother is holy. That is why in the street, even if I know a woman, in my village, I must not speak to her in public. It would show a lack of respect. Even when my wife and I were first married, we must not speak with each other in front of her mother. This, also, shows respect. But to do to that woman in the parking garage, this is terrible wickedness, madam. Terrible."

In the down times between moral astonishment, Aman was surprised at what could be inappropriate in Canada. The public and private dividing line. His method was to say "yes" to everything. Any neighbour or co-worker could get a "yes" from Aman for raffle tickets or a walk-a-thon sponsorship; he accepted all invites to Little League baseball and T-ball playoffs as well as amateur music recitals and potluck dinners. He began to invite people out, too. Sometimes he was confused as to why some people said "yes" some said "no" and some said "maybe", and reluctantly at that.

ARTS & L...
SUPERCHANNEL

Family Channel (PAY)			
TBS Atlanta (PAY)	(TBS)	21	
WGN Chicago (PAY)	(WGN)	20	40
KTLA Los Angeles (PAY)	(KTLA)	85	41
YTV (YOUTH)	(YTV)	38	25
CBC Newsworld	(NEWS)	73	26
VISION TV	(VIS)	71	24
Weather Now	*		22
MUCH MUSIC	(MM)	48	27
CATHAY INTERNATIONAL	(CA)		45

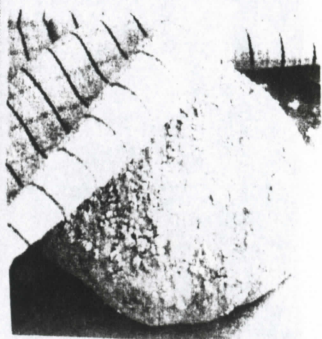
Nashville Network	(NIN)	52	32
Country Music	*		
Headline News (PAY)	*		36
Cable News Network	(CNN)	61	33
TLC	(TLC)	51	37
Community TV			4

* Not listed in TV Times

One afternoon, Aman bought his 100% loaf and waited for a busy lineup to pay and leave the store. He showed me an advertisement for a music concert in his Punjabi newspapers which he always carried in his inner suit pocket. He was nervous when he asked if my husband and daughter and I would like to see the advertised concert held by the India Music Society. It was hard to explain why I didn't socialize with the customers from the bakery. Or even my co-workers. Work is work and private life is private life is a peculiarly North American idea. Extremely difficult to explain. Why did going to a concert with Aman seem inappropriate to me? It felt that way to me but not to him...

Answers to Last Week's Puzzle

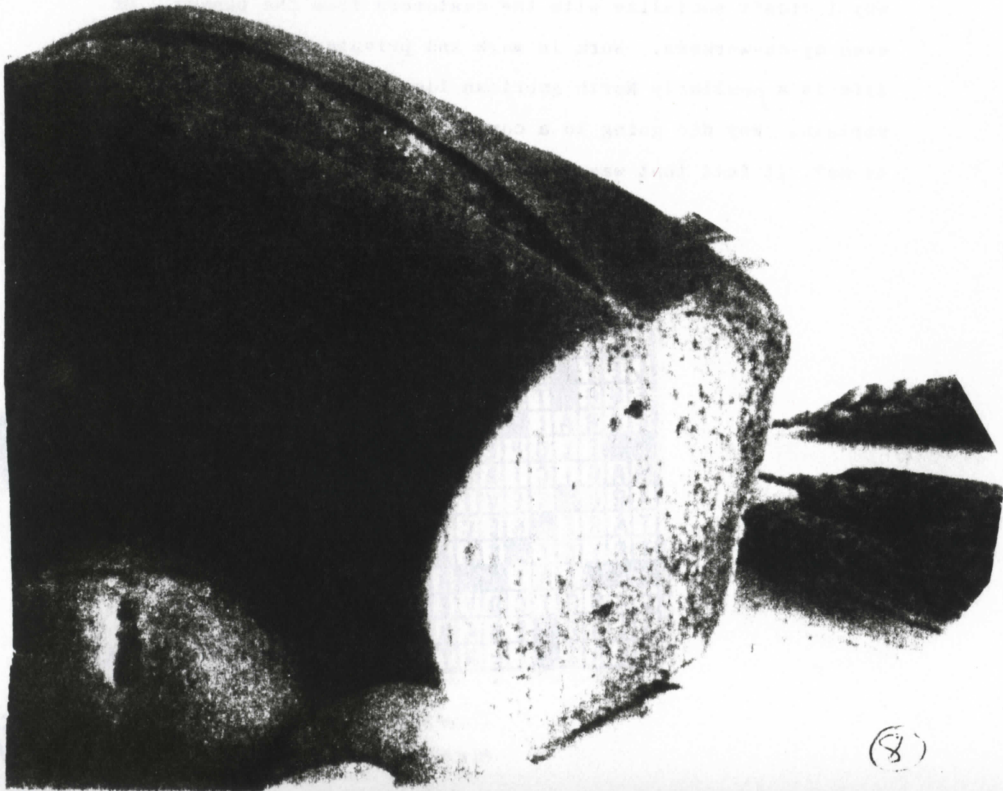
ALS	MULE	PAIL
LET	AMER	ETNA
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CORAL	SAW	
	ELOPE	WEBER
MAGICIAN	EIRE	
AGO	KEVIN	GSA
TARE	RECEIVER	
TRYST	SKALA	
	TAI	RALPH
CABOT	COVE	LIE
SLAP	ERAS	ENS
TEDS	TENT	YES



Cover with clean tea towel and let rise 30 minutes in a warm place.

We were as friendly as ever. He still came at least twice a week to the bakery. If I was not there due to illness or holiday, he would leave messages, that he had been there and that he missed me.

Occasionally, Aman was in low spirits. "What am I doing in this country, madam? What is my place? I walk and walk and walk and have a tea at a restaurant and then I walk and walk and walk and I have another tea. But I do not know anyone and no one knows me. In my country, in my village, I know everyone. And everyone knows everyone. If you were from my village, madam, you would go to get the water from the well and there you would have all your women friends and you would stop and talk and you would know them and they would know you and your mother. This is very good. But here, it is all strangers." The day he told me this, Aman was pale and unshaven. His suit had not been pressed. His hair was not sleek. His eyes were dull and vacant. He appeared to be ten years older as if the weight of living in Canada had been placed on his shoulders, rounding them.





Valery Gergiev, head of the Kirov opera

PHOTOGRAPH: SEAN SMITH

One day, Aman said that he would be taking a trip home to India with his eldest daughter and her family. He was laughing and happy and eager to share all the details of the planned trip. It would be rainy season but that is "of no matter, madam, we are most used to rain and mud. We do not have roads that are paved like here in this country but we just walk anyways, madam".

Aman and I began to discuss religion. "You may have travelled, madam," he said one afternoon, "but you have not gone anywhere different until you have gone to an Asian country. Or to my country. England, South America, Romania," he said, "these are all Christian countries, madam, catholic and protestant are all the same."

Aman was preparing for his trip to India. He would stay four months. He renewed his invitations to go out -- perhaps a tea someplace. I countered with an offer to serve him tea and biscuits at the bakery during his next visit. He could sit beside me at the counter. I had a chair and a kettle and I already had had a couple of other people there for tea. It was strictly against bakery management's rules but they were rarely around. Particularly at closing.

He arrived as usual at 4:00 p.m. and I made tea and gave him a chair as I served other customers. We chatted inbetween busy spells. He had brought his chequebook and balanced his accounts and drank tea and ate tea ring sugar cookies but he was much quieter than his usual self. He sighed and put his chequebook away. I was draining the last half cup of tea from the pot and polishing off my fourth tea ring cookie when he began to speak.

"I believe there is both goodness and wickedness in this world, madam, and that anytime anyone has goodness in them it is like a small flame. And flame makes flame. And it is best to be with flame, that in goodness, rather than have company with wickedness. And I believe that even though the people of this world are of many religions, some people have goodness and some have wickedness. You have goodness, most gracious madam, and I believe all of our goodnesses burn and shine for Allah. And that is good. Do you agree, madam?"

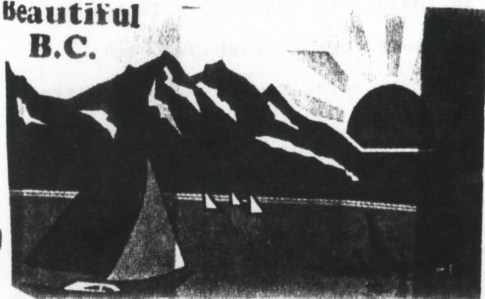
I agreed.

"And madam," he continued, "I believe that goodness is love. And that love is for god whom I call Allah. I live for goodness and not for wickedness, madam. And I believe that you, too, live for that."

I agreed.

There was a sudden busy rush of customers where I sold \$84.00 worth of bread and rolls while Aman continued his thoughts about goodness, love, Allah, God, and what I heard all sounded fine to me.

Beautiful
B.C.



After the rush, I leaned my hip against the counter in a half-sit and faced Aman who was still in the chair. He told me a story about a king who sent his love a rose and when his love had accepted the rose, the king had the messenger killed as a further example of something about beauty and perfection and love and devotion. "Is that from a Hindu poet?" I asked.

"Oh no, madam, that is a famous English poet. I have had a real British education, madam, I know Keats and Byron and Shelley. I am educated in these things."

"Sorry," I said, "I am just a high school graduate. That is why I am working at the bakery. In fact, ..." but Aman continued quoting

poetry as if I had not spoken. When he finished the last sonnet, I checked the clock on the cash register and said, "It is three minutes to closing. I am sorry, but I am not allowed to cash out while people, even friends, are in the store." Aman stood.

"But can we not be going someplace, madam? For tea ..."

"We had tea," I said, "and I enjoyed our visit. Thanks for hanging out." He looked startled and then said, "But I would rather take you out omewhere, someplace."

"But I am a married lady with a child; why, you met them once here at the bakery. It would be -- innapropriate -- for me to go out with you. I must go home and make dinner and take care of my daughter. Bob has taken care of her all day while I have been working here at the bakery. You see?"

Aman looked impatient. "But madam," he said, "I want to be kissing you. Is there a place for us to go to be kissing? Is this not possible?"

"Absolutely not," I said.

Aman shook his head as if I had told him that "down" was "up". His eyes darted around the room. He licked his lips. He stuttered a little and was short of breath. I was confused, too. I felt like someone had switched the reels on the movie projector -- suddenly showing the ending upside down where the middle should be. I was getting quick polaroid photographs of his face, the hot dog bun display ("our buns are the freshest"), the memo from management advising us to include a tray count in the next period end inventory, the "choco-mallow hut" which displayed postindustrial cookies two dozen for the price of one, the one brown tile in front of the multi-grain bread rack that was just a millimeter higher than the other tiles so everytime you re-stacked the multigrain loaves you gave yourself an appendectomy, the clipboard with the blank bank deposit forms, the cracked "day old donuts" sign beside the cash register, and the zoom of a trolley bus going past the bakery. I brought my eyes back from the trolley bus and looked at Aman -- but not in the eyes. I looked at his shoulder. I just wanted him to leave. He did. Without his usual extended exit of goodbyes and blessings and bows and promises to return soon. I locked the door.

My heart suddenly was pounding with adrenalin. Not fear, surely, as I could have pushed him over easily. He was not physically a threat to me. Why was my heart pounding? Why did it start pounding after I locked the door? Was I embarrassed? Angry? And what were all the flight response hormones doing in my body?



Knead on floured board 5 minutes. Dough should be smooth and elastic, not sticky.



I phoned my husband Bob.

"Well, you are far too nice to all those old guys. This was bound to happen sooner or later. I'm suprised it hasn't happened before this, actually. Are you okay?" I was still high on anxiety and I laughed nervously. "That is not what you are supposed to say. Bob, you aren't supposed to blame the victim!" I said, still laughing. "But I'm not blaming you," said Bob.

"You are, too," I said. "Am not! That isn't what I said!"

I laughed more.

"Listen, I got to cash out. I'm running a little late." I hung up.



I giggled sporadically. I made the deposit at the bank. I took some buns to a fellow shopkeeper at the wine store. "Bonjour, Madge!" said Marie-Hélène as I entered her store and gave her the rolls. "And how is your sweet little boy? Have you decided on French immersion for kindergärten? "

We wrapped up gossip/news and I told her about Aman. "And you are upset?" she asked. "Yes, but I am not sure why."
"Oh, some of these viêux-hommes-avec-viêux-têtes! They make me so mad. I had one guy here. He was always saying things to me when he came for his bottle of Canadian sherry. He wanted me to go into the backroom with him and let him 'make me feel good'; shit," she shook her head from side to side. "Finally, I said to him, I said -- you like the younger woman, yes? And he said -- oh, yes, I do! So, I looked him in the eye and I said, well, so do I -- I only like the younger man. Mmm... And then he left with his tail between his legs, let me tell you. He had made me mad because he was so persistent, and he thought it was perfectly okay for man to have younger woman but not for woman to have younger man. "



I biked towards home. I stopped and bought some brocolli and apples. I biked some more. Aman wasn't like Marie-Hélène's difficult customer. That wasn't it at all. I wasn't frightened. I wasn't angry. I was frustrated. I knew I had lost a friend and a customer and I hadn't seen it coming and I still didn't understand why our signals and languages had gotten so totally mixed up. I felt foolish. Why didn't I see this coming? I am nearly forty years old. When will I know what I am saying? What I am hearing?



Breakfast Cookies

Heat oven to 375 degrees

Blend: 3/4 cup margarine (or butter)

3/4 cup brown sugar

2 beaten eggs

1/2 cup milk

Mix: 1 cup whole wheat flour

1 cup bran

3/4 tsp. baking soda

Add dry to wet. Add 2 cups slow oats or tricale flakes. Add handful or raisins and carob or chocolate chips. Bake for 12 minutes.



September 1993