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The Duchess Bakes a Cake by Virginia Kahl

A long time ago there lived over the waters
A Duchess, a Duke, and their family of daughters—
Madeleine, Gwendolyn, Jane and Clothilde,
Caroline, Genevieve, Maude, and Mathilde,
Willibald, Guinevere, Joan and Brunhilde,
And the youngest of all was the baby, Gunhilde.



The Duke spent his time either resting or fighting
And the Duchess did reading, or spent her time writing.
The children were busy with their play or their schooling
While the king of their country spent all his time ruling.

One day the Duchess sat up in the tower,
She had listened to minstrels for many an hour.
She was bored with embroidery, tired of talking,
She hoped no one suggest that she venture out walking.

So she sat in the tower and thought what she'd do
While the girls were at school and the Duke busy, too.
Then, quickly, she sat up, a light in her eyes—
"Why, I'll bake them a cake—what a lovely surprise!"

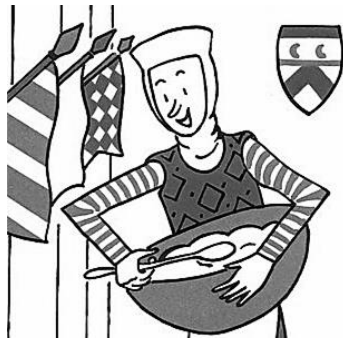
So she raced down the turret, three steps at one leap,
Cleared the help from the kitchen and said, "Don't you peep.
You'll all be delighted, for I'm going to make
A lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake."

The cook said, "Now, Duchess, I've advice you could take."
But the Duchess said, "No, I am baking this cake.
So take the day off and be sure to have fun.
By the time you get back, the cake will be done."

The Duchess sang happily, "I'm going to make
A lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake."



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She stirred the ingredients, all in a flutter,
In went the sugar and flour and butter,
In went the almonds, the raisins, the suet;
She added some vinegar and dropped in the cruet.

She added the yeast, six times for good measure.
(A light fluffy cake is really a pleasure.)
She added some eggs, several dozen, well-beaten,
And some left-over pudding that they hadn't eaten.

Bilberries, gooseberries, cranberries, bogberries,
Blackberries, mulberries, burberries, dogberries;
Peppermint, cinnamon, laurel and squill,
Wintergreen, nutmeg, angelica, dill—

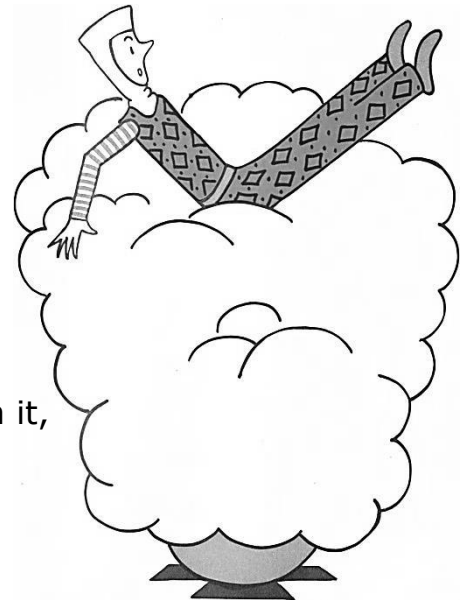
Whatever she found she put into the batter,
And what she left out didn't really much matter.
Then she added more yeast—it seemed like a ton—
She stirred it together and the mixture was done.

When she was through, she put the pan on the fire
Where it started to rise, going higher and higher.
She pushed it and pummeled it, punched it and pat on it,
She poked at it, pinched it—and finally sat on it.

And though she had pulled it away from the fire,
Still the cake rose—going higher and higher.

Her cries brought the family, one and another.
"Come girls," said the Duke, "Say good-bye to your mother.
"I fear an improper proportion of leaven
Is taking my dear Duchess right up to Heaven."

They had run to the tower in order to see her,
But no one could think of a plan that would free her.
So the Duchess sailed past them (the dough was so light)
She rose higher and higher, nearly out of their sight.



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And they waved to each other as she billowed by.
"Think of something," she said, "Or at any rate, try."
But they couldn't do it, for their poor brains were such
That they couldn't think often, and hadn't thought much.

"Oh, dear," said the Duchess, "all I wanted to make
Was a lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake."



Nearby the King hunted, the Queen was along.
They rushed to the castle to see what was wrong.
All the people bowed down and the Queen waved her hand.
"You'd better come down now. This is a command."



"I'm sorry, dear Queen," the Duchess called down,
"It's not that I have no respect for the crown.
You won't find another with any more loyalty;
But I cannot come down, not even for royalty.
You see, I had made up my mind that I'd make
A lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake."

So they called on the General, who called out his men, [
The foot soldiers, cavalry, guardsmen, and then I
They called the longbow men with their bows and arrows
And a catapult, chilling them all to their marrows.
For a catapult throws heavy boulders and stones;
If they hit her with them, they would break all her bones.

"Don't worry, Duchess," they said with a frown.
"This won't be easy, but we'll shoot you down."

Then the Duke and his daughters looked very upset,
For they had no intentions of losing her yet.
They feared as each shot caused a frightful loud rumbling,
That they'd see their dear wife and mother come tumbling.

But the soldiers kept missing, and bombardment is tiring,
So the King said at last, "You must cease all your firing."

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So the longbow men shot a great shower of arrows,
But all that they hit was a couple of sparrows.
"Oh, dear," said the King, "since we're none of us clever,
I'm afraid that the Duchess must stay up forever."

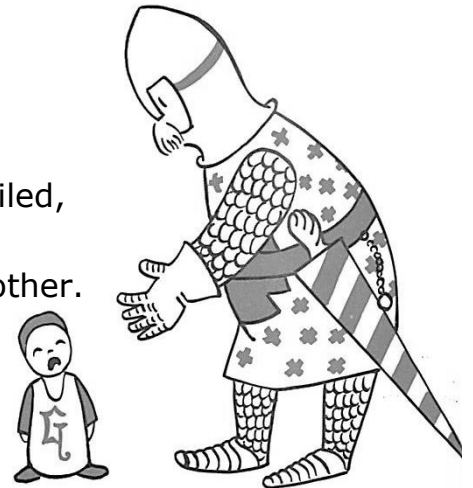


"At least," said the Duke, "she's near, which is nice—
We can always call up when we need her advice."
The Duchess then told them the things they should do—
The girls were to study, the duke to work too.

She called to the gardener, "Prune all the bushes."
To the housekeeper saying, "Sweep under the rushes."
She called to her husband, "Tell the Countess for me
I'm afraid I can't join her on Thursday for tea."

"I hope," she said then, "the warm weather will hold—
If it rains in the night, I'm afraid I'll catch cold.
So thank you so much for all you have done.
I'll see you tomorrow—let's hope there's some sun."

Then Gunhilde, the youngest, she howled and she wailed,
And their every attempt to quiet her failed.
"Don't cry, dear," the Duke said, "about your poor mother.
I'm sure, if you wish, I can find you another."



But nothing could stop her. She continued to bleat
Until she confessed, "I want something to eat."

Of course! That would do it, and it could be a treat;
They could bring down the Duchess if they started to eat.
"How lovely!" the Duchess said. "Come, let us sup.
I'll start eating down; you start eating up."

So they all began eating, the General, his men,
The King, Queen and Duke, the children, and when
The cook had come back from her holiday, she
Went in and prepared them a huge pot of tea.

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"I do hope," the Duchess said, taking a mouthful,
"That the cake turned out right—I'm a little bit doubtful."
"My dear," said the Queen, "you really can make
A lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake!"

After many an hour spent eating like that
The Duchess was down, but they were all fat.
"By the way," said the Duke, "care to join us for dinner?"
"We can't," said the King, "till we're all somewhat thinner."

"Duchess," the Queen said, "please teach me to make
A lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake?"
"Oh, no!" said the Duke; "Oh, no!" said the King,
"You never know what all this baking will bring.
The cake was delicious, but there won't be another.
For you know that these girls really need their dear mother."

So the King went back to his hunting and ruling,
And the children went back to their games and their schooling,
And the Duke went back to his hunting and fighting,
And the Duchess went back to her reading and writing.

But they never forgot how she once tried to make
A lovely, light, luscious, delectable cake.

