

JAMIE AND THE BAKERMAN

By Phyllis Root

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JAMIE HUDDLED under the shop awning, watching the rain. “Now I’ll never find a birthday present for Mom,” he sighed.

He had come downtown to find a gift, but everything he liked cost more than sixty-eight cents. His sister Jennifer was baking a birthday cake, but she chased him out of the kitchen.

Jennifer always says I’m too little to do anything, he thought.

Then the smell discovered him. A whiff of berry and cherry, a tingle of chocolate and cinnamon tickled his nose. He looked around. Behind him was a bright yellow door, and around this door the tempting aromas curled.

It must be a new store, thought Jamie. I’ve never seen it before.

He pushed the door open an inch. In the shop he could hear someone singing,

Bakerman, bakerman, what are you baking?
I’m baking the rain and the snowflakes that fly.
I’m baking the wind, and I’m baking a moon,
Orange as a pumpkin, round as a pie.
I’m baking some starlight to fill up your pocket
And stars to fill up the sky.

Jamie pushed harder. The door swung open, a bell tinkled, and the singing stopped.

“Come in, come in!” a cheery voice called.

Jamie looked all around. In front of him was a long wooden counter cluttered with bowls, spoons, measuring cups, rolling pins, and cookies sheets. At last he saw a little man bending over to pop a pie into an oven. The man’s white hair poked wildly

out from under a huge chef's hat. His eyes were as blue as huckleberries. Whenever he moved, little clouds of flour puffed up around him.

“What will it be?” asked the bakerman. “My bakery has all the best treats.”

Jamie's mouth watered, but he swallowed hard. “I only have sixty-eight cents, and that's for a birthday present,” Jamie said. “I just came in to get out of the rain.”

“It's a fine rain, isn't it?” exclaimed the bakerman. “One of my best. Well, then, how would you like to help me bake? I've a lot to do today.”

Jamie shook his head. “I can't,” he said. “Jennifer says I'm too little to help.”

“Peppermint pie! Big sisters aren't always right,” exclaimed the bakerman. Jamie's eyes opened wide. “How did you know Jennifer was my big sister?” he asked.

The bakerman winked. “Oh, I know many things. How to mix up stars and chocolate bars, what makes a full moon—I even know how light to make clouds for a soft summer day. What do you say?”

“All right,” Jamie said. “I'll help.”

So the bakerman tucked an apron around Jamie and handed him a bowl filled with flour, a cup of water, and a long wooden spoon.

“Sprinkle this onto the flour,” the bakerman said, “and stir it all up.”

So Jamie sprinkled water into the bowl. Rain poured down the window and ran gurgling through the gutters. The more he sprinkled, the harder it rained. Meanwhile, the bakerman rolled cookie dough out on a pastry cloth, singing to himself as he worked,

Roll the thunder,
Let it roar.
Mix the rain
And watch it pour.

Thump, thump went the rolling pin on the table.

R-r-u-m-m-b-l-l-e, rolled the thunder. Thump, thump, r-r-u-m-m-b-l-l-e.

How strange, Jamie thought. He started to stir the dough in his bowl. Whoosh! went the wind. Faster and faster Jamie stirred, and the wind whipped along the street, rattling the shop windows. He stopped to listen, and the wind died down.

The bakerman stopped, too, and the thunder faded away. “Now,” he said, taking the bowl from Jamie, “let’s make a pie.” Together they patted the dough into a pie pan and filled it full of pumpkin, eggs, cinnamon, and nutmeg. The bakerman sang,

Fill it full, bake it bright,
For a harvest moon tonight.

He hummed as he whisked the pie into the oven and hustled Jamie over to the table.

“Would you like to help cut out cookies?” he asked.

“Am I big enough to do that?” Jamie wondered.

“With a little help you are,” said the bakerman, and he lifted Jamie onto a chair. Together they started filling a cookie sheet with stars. But no matter how many stars they cut out, there seemed to be room on the cookie sheet for more.

Finally the bakerman shouted, “Enough!” and he covered them all with sparkling sugar and hurried them into the oven. Then he gathered up the corners of the pastry cloth and handed it to Jamie.

“Shake this out for me, will you please?” said the bakerman. Jamie opened the door.

The rain had stopped. Jamie shook the cloth, and clouds of flour filled the air. Snowflakes drifted up from the cloth and floated along the street.

That’s funny, thought Jamie. The harder I shake it, the more snow it makes. He snapped the cloth, and a flurry of flakes blew in his face.

“Not too much,” the bakerman called.” It’s only the third of November, you know.”

Jamie gave the cloth one last shake and peered up through the snowflakes at the sky. It was almost evening.

“I have to go,” he called over his shoulder. “I have to be home before dark.”

“Just in time, then,” said the bakerman. He took the cookies out of the oven and gave Jamie one bright, warm star. “A special one, for all your help,” he told Jamie, beaming. “I couldn’t have done it alone.”

“Thank you,” Jamie remembered to say. He carefully put the cookie in his coat pocket and scurried down the street, humming to himself. The snow had stopped, and the moon was beginning to rise, full and orange.

“Where have you been?” his mother asked when he came running in. “The weather’s been so crazy—snow and thunder and rain.”

Jamie pressed his nose against the window. Overhead the sky was filling with sparkling points of light. He pulled the cookie out of his pocket. It twinkled and shone in the kitchen.

“Happy birthday!” He handed his mother the cookie.

“Why, thank you!” She gave him a hug.

“Is that what you did all day?” Jennifer wanted to know.

“That’s not all,” he told her proudly. “I helped to bake up a storm.”