

The Giant's Euclid Cake

Melvin Fitting

INTRODUCTION

Once a man named Euclid wrote a textbook in geometry, a part of mathematics. He called it "The Elements of Geometry"; most people called it "Euclid's Elements". It was a very good textbook and was used for over 2000 years. In Universities in the Middle Ages students had to learn the first five lessons, or "Propositions" of it. Now the story.

(1)

"You may leave the details entirely to me," said the little pastry cook, "I am considered to have very good taste."

The giant began to look alarmingly interested.

"No, no," the pastry cook went on hurriedly, "I mean I have good taste, not that I taste good."

The giant ceased looking so interested and the business at hand continued.

"Now let me see if I have the matter correctly so far," the little pastry cook said. "You want a cake suitable in size for your son. That would be about twenty feet across. Will that be sufficient sir?"

"Um, oh, eh, ah, yes, certainly," the giant replied, looking intently at some ducks in the air over the shop.

"And you said something about an inscription?" The pastry cook smiled in his most pleasant manner for this most important customer, the Lord and Giant of the manor.

"Eh, inscription? Of course. That's why I'm here. Euclid's Elephants. Of course. Got to have em on the cake."

"Euclid's Elements? Certainly." The pastry cook replied, correcting the giant quietly, hoping he wouldn't notice.

"Don't need em all though. Only the first five prepositions."

Melvin Fitting

“The first five propositions. Yes, very good.” The little pastry cook smiled and bowed.

“Stupid stuff, I say. Never saw the point of it. What’s it got to do with fish or fowl? But the University where my boy goes says it’s necessary. Umff. He says he can’t get it into him. Well, I’ll get it into him, all right.” The giant snorted and nearly upset a flour barrel. Fortunately the little pastry cook leaped onto it just in time.

“Very good,” he said, smiling up at the giant from the top of the barrel.

“Stand still. Stop leaping around so,” said the giant irritably. So the little pastry cook stayed where he was, on the barrel.

“Let me see now. That’s one cake, twenty foot, inscribed with the first five propositions of Euclid’s Elements.”

“Right.”

“Oh. Do you want the inscription in Greek, Latin or Arabic?” the pastry cook asked. He had come from a scholarly family and showed it off whenever he could.

“English, of course,” the giant huffed, “What’s good enough for you and me and this Euclid is good enough for a cake. Have it at the castle on Friday,” and he left, never hearing the pastry cook’s whisper, “but Euclid wrote in Greek,” as he climbed off the barrel.

(2)

The little pastry cook quickly shut up shop and went home, through the back door of the store into the part of the building in which they lived.

“I heard some shouting,” his wife said without looking up from her ironing, “is everything all right?”

“I made a sale to the giant; I made a sale to the giant,” the little pastry cook sang, and danced around the room.

His wife opened her mouth in astonishment. “What did you sell him?”

“A cake. This afternoon, this very afternoon I’m going to have a sign made, ‘Cake-baker to the giant’. Our fortune is made.”

“A cake? And he came himself? How wonderful. What kind of cake?”

“It’s for his son. I think it’s a surprise. And he wants it inscribed. He wants the first five propositions of Euclid on it.”

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"In Greek, Latin or Arabic?" said his wife, who also came from a scholarly family.

"In English," he said sadly. His wife looked disappointed. She knew how to make Arabic letters but she never had a chance to use her knowledge. The pastry cook brightened quickly and went on. "And it's to be twenty feet across. It'll be a famous cake. It'll make us famous. I'll have to get some larger cake tins. Let's see, where would I get a twenty foot cake tin?"

"A cake with twenty feet in it," said his little boy, "wow. That's better than blackbirds any day. Can I watch you get the feet?"

The pastry cook was still dancing. "Twenty feet? Yes that's a problem." He stopped abruptly. His mouth dropped open. He turned to his wife and said with awe "A twenty foot cake! That's a big cake. That's a, that's a big, big cake." He sat down in a sort of trance, thinking about the size of the cake.

"Our oven is six feet across," his wife said quietly, "maybe you better return the order."

The little pastry cook shook himself alert. "No" he drew himself up proudly. "I said I'd do it, and I will. A pastry cook's word is as good as a giant's. We'll manage."

"How," asked his wife.

"Somehow," he answered.

After a pause his wife asked, "and do you have a recipe for such a cake?"

"I can invent one," he answered. "I'll base it on the fanciest cake recipe I know. The giant will be pleased and tell his friends and they'll all come here."

"I hope not," his wife replied. "Base it on the simplest recipe you know. Then we may succeed."

The pastry cook thought about not succeeding. He looked terrified for a moment. Then he agreed. He got out the simplest cake recipe he knew. And a yardstick. And a slide rule. And an abacus. And a set of Napier's rods. And a table of logarithms. And a multiplication table. And he gathered his family around him with their fingers and toes held out so he could count on them. And he set to work. After ten minutes his son grew tired and said he wanted to go outside and play. His father said no. After twelve minutes his son started wriggling his toes and they had to begin all over. After fifteen minutes his son started whimpering. After twenty minutes his son was sent sternly outside to

Melvin Fitting

play and his place was taken by a trayfull of day-old rolls. Two hours later the little pastry cook sighed. "There," he said. "We're ruined."

"You have the recipe worked out?" his wife asked.

"Yes. We're ruined."

"Let's hear it anyway," she said. "What do we need?"

"Do you want it exactly, or approximately?" he asked.

"Exactly."

"Well," he cleared his throat. "We need $474 \frac{37}{64}$ bushels of flour," he began.

"Approximately," she said.

"About 475 bushels of flour then," he went on, "about 141 bushels of shortening, 11 bushels of baking powder, 4 bushels of salt, 264 bushels of sugar, 1688 gallons of milk and 4500 dozen eggs, and a few other odds and ends."

"We're ruined," his wife said. The pastry cook only nodded.

(3)

The little pastry cook's son came in. "I'm tired of playing," he said, "can I help with the counting now?"

"The accounting is finished. We are ruined," his mother replied gloomily. "Oh," said the little boy with great interest. "But you don't look any different. Are you sure you're ruined?" His mother did not reply.

"Hush. Let us think," his father said. They thought. "What have you thought of?" the little pastry cook asked his wife.

"About being ruined," she answered.

"I see. And you, boy, what have you thought of?"

"I didn't know what to think about, so I didn't think at all. I pretended I was an apricot."

"How could you pretend you were an apricot at a time like this," his mother said in exasperation.

"Like this," the boy replied, and pretended he was an apricot for his mother. She snorted and turned to her husband.

"And did you think of anything?"

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"I almost thought of something," he replied brightly. "I came very close to one or two very good ideas, but I couldn't quite get at them."

"Then you've thought of nothing either. We might as well all pretend we're apricots." She began to cry.

"No, no, mama," her little boy interrupted, "like this," and he once more pretended he was an apricot for her. She drew him close to her and looked at him.

"You're as bad as your father. At least his father has some sense. He..." she stopped suddenly and turned to her husband. "Ask your father what to do. He knows all sorts of things."

"Of course," the pastry cook replied.

Now the little pastry cook's father, who had been a pastry cook himself in his time, lived upstairs over the shop. Some years ago it had been his shop, then he shared it with his son, and now it was his son's alone. He had retired and moved upstairs. As years went by he came downstairs to visit the shop less and less often. One day, in fun, the giant's boy knocked the staircase flat and it was never fixed, or missed. Sometimes the little pastry cook and his father used to shout hellos to each other out the window but lately the old man had grown somewhat deaf and this was no longer possible. If anything needed to be said it was written down and given to the pastry cook's little boy, who was put into a clothes basket and hauled upstairs with a block and tackle. So the old man was left to himself much of the time, time which he passed in thinking. He became very good at it.

(4)

"Yes, let us ask your grandfather," the pastry cook said to his little boy. "He will tell us what to do." So he and his wife got out their notepaper and set to work writing. They wrote what they considered to be a capsule history of the pastry cook's interview with the giant, and concluded, on page 47, with: "but we can't bake the cake because our oven is too small, and if it were big enough, our pans are too small, and if they were big enough our mixing bowls are too small, and if they were big enough we'd still need 474 bushels of flour, 141 bushels of shortening, 11 bushels of baking powder, 4 bushels of salt, 264 bushels of sugar, 1688 gallons of milk and 4500 dozen

Melvin Fitting

eggs, and we can't afford to buy so much until we are paid for the cake and we won't be paid unless we bake it and we can't bake it. What can we do?"

"Does that cover everything?" he asked his wife.

"More or less," she answered.

So they gave the letter to their little boy, put him in the clothes basket and hauled him up to the second floor window to get a reply. They sat under the window and waited. And waited. And waited. They heard laughter coming from upstairs.

"They're playing," the pastry cook said, somewhat shocked. "How can they play at a time like this?" He was about to shout something up at his son when a paper airplane sailed out the upstairs window. He ran after it and caught it. It was the last page of their letter and after their closing words, "What can we do?" the old man had written, "Get help, of course."

"He says, 'get help'," he said to his wife.

"Who?" she asked.

"Who?" he echoed. "Who?" he shouted up to the window. "Who?" he heard his son yell from inside. "Who?" he heard his father repeat faintly. There was silence. Then a second paper airplane sailed out the window. It was a better one than the first and went considerably further before the pastry cook was able to catch it. He unfolded it and carried it back to his wife.

"It says everybody."

"Everybody?" his wife shrugged, "Why not. Does it say how?"

"How?" the little pastry cook repeated. "How?" he yelled up to his son. "How?" he heard his son yell to the old man. "How?" he heard the old man repeat faintly.

"He got the message," he said quietly to his wife who was seated on the grass outside their house.

"I heard," she said quietly in reply. He sat on the grass beside her and put his arm around her. The shadows began to lengthen and the sky turned red as the sun went slowly down.

"Hey," they heard overhead. Their son was ready to come down. He had a folded paper in his hand. The little pastry cook lowered him gently. He was excited and happy. "He says I do a great apricot." His mother smiled at him. The sun was nearly gone by now and the sky was a deep streaked red. They sat

The Giant's Euclid Cake

and watched it with pleasure for some moments. Then the pastry cook shook himself, slowly unfolded the paper and read its message aloud to his family.

"It's a matter of pride, mostly," it began. "Get the village to see it's their pastry cook against the lord and giant and they'll help. I know them. Best thing to do is get the village council back of you. Then you're all set."

The little pastry cook turned to his wife. "He's right, you know."

"I know," she said. "Look," she told her son, "some stars are out. There's the great bear. See it?" She held her son's hand. Her husband held hers. They watched the stars grow in number until the sky was full of them. Then they went peacefully inside to supper.

(5)

The next morning the little pastry cook left early and went to call on Owen the blacksmith. Owen was a dwarf and was very wise. He knew many things other people did not know, and many things other people thought ought not to be known. And he was head of the village council because he owned the gavel.

As the little pastry cook approached the smithy he could hear Owen hammering. It was early, but Owen was earlier than anyone in the village. Some said the dwarf never slept. Some whispered strange things about him. Most people, though, quietly observed that he seldom won at Rummy but he always played, and took this as proof that he was a kindly man. Owen himself just hammered his iron when hot, played his cards as dealt, and ran the town council like an honest dwarf.

"Good morning, Owen," the pastry cook said.

"Good morning, baker. You're up early."

"I am. I am. I've got a problem, and I think it's a problem for the village," and he proceeded to tell the blacksmith all about the giant's visit, his need for big pans and huge quantities of supplies, and, finally, he gave his father's message.

"Your father's a smart man," the smith said. "Let me think." And he thought. The hot iron on the anvil cooled, the forge fire went out, the chillness of the early morning began to come in.

Melvin Fitting

“Go, fetch me Harold the herald,” Owen said finally, “we need a meeting of the whole village.”

And soon Harold the herald was heard along the length of the village street crying “Hear ye, oh hear ye, oh ye people, come to the meeting, mass, hard by the steeple, the afternoon of this, this day.” (Harold, the tanner’s boy, was not a great town herald, but the village council thought it a pity to pass up the name.)

Early that afternoon people began gathering in the town square before their little village church. There were rumors and rumors of rumors. Everybody had some opinion and some had every opinion. Then Owen the dwarf appeared, carrying the ceremonial gavel. He pushed his way through the crowd, mounted the church steps, tapped twice on the top step with the gavel and cried, “I call this meeting to order.”

(6)

The crowd in the village square quieted down. “The baker has a problem,” Owen the smith began abruptly. “The Lord and Giant of the manor,” (here a few older village folk doffed their caps), “has hired him to bake a twenty foot cake iced with Euclid’s Elements.” (All looked surprised while a few young lads home for the holidays doffed their caps and shouted, “Euclid, Euclid, rah, rah, rah!”) Owen looked sternly at them and went on. “He said he’d do it. It wasn’t good judgment, but it’s been said. Now the thing is this; we’ve got to see he does it. Our village honor’s at stake, not just his. It hasn’t been a left hand full of years since the Lord and Giant gave us a little government of ourselves. Four years now we’ve had our village council. But you know how the giant thinks. He doesn’t think of this baker or that blacksmith, this man or that dwarf, we’re all just villagers to him, all the same: his villagers. If the pastry cook can’t keep his word he’ll say his village failed. It don’t matter what it was. And if his village can’t keep its word he’ll say we little folks ain’t more than children. We’ll loose the little run of ourselves we’ve got. You see we’ve got to stick together because it’s the way he sees us. We’ve got to see that cake gets baked as promised.”

There was excited chatter for a few moments among the village folk, then Owen the dwarf tapped on the top church step with his gavel a few times and

The Giant's Euclid Cake

it grew quiet. An old man in the crowd raised his hand then started to speak.

“Worthy council-master, maybe I don’t know much about things like this but this don’t make sense. I’m not saying anything about sizes, that’s as may be, but an element icing just ain’t right. Whoever heard of such a thing. Now if he were to try for chocolate the whole thing might go down better with the village.”

One of the students home for the holidays shouted, “It’s not supposed to go down with the village, it’s supposed to go down with milk.”

“Quiet,” several shouted.

A woman raised her hand. “Worthy council-master, I’ve got to say, that’s a man for you. That much chocolate’s no good. Gives you an upset stomach. Let him put a plain white icing on it and then you’ve got something.”

“White icing’s too plain; let him try his elements if he wants. Sounds good,” someone called out.

“Well, I like chocolate, myself,” called another.

“White.”

“Chocolate.”

“Euclid, Euclid, raw, raw, raw,” the students cheered over and over. Everybody shouted something. Owen tapped his gavel for order. Nobody heard him. There was a chocolate faction, a white faction and a small Euclid faction. Owen called for order. Louder and louder, but nobody heard him. All were yelling and arguing about the cake. Finally Owen the dwarf reared up a full four feet, gave out a deafening cry of, “Silence!” and whammed the top church step with the gavel one mighty blow which split the stone from one end to the other and started the church bell ringing. The crowd in the village square instantly fell into awed silence except for little Harold the herald who got in one last, “Gee whiz,” then all was quiet.

“Now,” said Owen quietly, “the problem ain’t the frosting, that’s as it’s got to be. The problem’s the cake itself. It’s big.” Owen paused to let that work its way in, then went on. “Needs a good sized pan and lots of eggs and barrels of flour.”

Several people nodded wisely, as if to say I told you so.

“Now, as I see it,” Owen went on, “we got three separate problems: equipment, supplies, and know how. The pastry cook tells me he’s got the know

Melvin Fitting

how.” (The students started a chant, “He’s got know how but we don’t know how, he’s got know how but we don’t know how.” Owen glared at them and they stopped and looked sheepish.) “He says he’s got the know how, and I believe him. Now about the other problems. We can get the supplies, but no one of us can afford them all. So I suggest we buy them all together.” (The students looked like they wanted to shout something, but didn’t.) “Suppose,” Owen went on, “suppose we sell shares. Cake shares. If everybody’ll buy a pookel’s worth of shares we’ll have enough to buy supplies. And when the giant pays for the cake you’ll each get two pookels back. I’ve figured it out and that’s what it comes to. Now as for equipment, we need a twenty foot pan, a pretty good sized mixing bowl, and such like things. I don’t see why we can’t make them ourselves. We’ve got a good tinsmith and a good potter and a good bellows mender and the like. In fact, we’re a village worthy the name of town. We can make that cake easy if we all work at it. Let’s make it our village cake. We’ll show our Lord and Giant what we are and who we are. We’re the little people who do great things.”

“Hooray,” everybody shouted. “Ray for the baker. Ray for the blacksmith. Ray for the cake.” The students started a chant, “Euclid’s cake, Euclid’s cake, we’re going to bake Euclid’s cake,” and this time everybody joined in, over and over, louder and louder, until at last even the giant in his castle heard the noise and wondered vaguely what was happening.

The Giant's Euclid Cake

(7)

It was very late that night before the little pastry cook returned home. His wife met him at the door. "I held dinner as long as I could. I can reheat it if you want." But the little pastry cook was too excited to eat. His eyes glittered. His wife caught his excitement and grinned. "So things are all worked out, then," she said.

"They are, they are," the pastry cook replied. "We spent the afternoon and evening on it."

"Then you're to have the supplies you need?"

"Well, yes, I suppose so. We didn't actually get to that."

"Oh," she looked a little alarmed. "But the tinsmith is to make a twenty foot cake tin?"

"We haven't asked him directly, but I think he knows about it."

His wife looked very alarmed. "And mixing bowls, and spoons, and an oven?"

"All in good time. We can't be hasty. Things must be done in good order."

"Then what did you do?"

"Why we organized a corporation of course, a cake corporation. And we spent the afternoon writing up rules for it. Can't have these things without a proper set of rules, you know."

"What... sort... of... rules?" she asked slowly.

"Rules like who's to head it, Owen of course, and who's to speak at meetings, and how, and what about. Now that all that's done things will work out well. The board of directors has its first meeting a week from Monday."

"A week from Monday! But the cake's due Friday!"

The little pastry cook's face fell. Then it brightened. "They can take care of cleaning up," he said. "Everything'll work out, you'll see."

"And this took all evening?"

"Not really," he said sheepishly.

"Oh?"

"No."

"Oh?"

"Well, you see, Owen adjourned the meeting to tell us about the time his

Melvin Fitting

grandfather beat the giant's grandfather in an anvil throwing contest. Then Paul the peddler told us that he heard the giant's people way back had all been midgets but were made giants for service to the King. Then Owen said that maybe someday they'd be midgets again, and then we'd all be happy. And that shocked old Tom the tinsmith, and he left, and then the rest of us played cards."

"Played cards!"

"Well, yes, the meeting was over. And I won a pookel and three dill seeds."

"A pookel and three dill seeds, and maybe lost the shop." She looked like she wanted to cry. The noise woke their son who called out, "Is daddy home yet? I want to tell him I've got a great way to bake the cake. You see we put it in the cellar and burn the shop on top of it. Isn't that great?"

Now the pastry cook's little wife did cry. There was no stopping her. She cried herself to sleep. The little pastry cook sat sadly for a time. Then he too went to bed. He did not sleep.

(8)

Very early the next morning the little pastry cook was back at Owen's smithy. The dwarf was pumping his bellows and the red glow of the hearth matched the greater red of the sunrise outside the shop. The pastry cook noticed the similarity and shivered a little, then passed it off as morning chill.

"Owen," he began, "I thought things over last night when I got home. We didn't do anything yesterday, did we?"

"Nope," Owen said, and pumped his bellows harder.

"But the cake's got to be baked," the little pastry cook said.

"I know."

"But the committee doesn't meet till next Monday."

"Somebody's got to clean up."

"But the cake's got to be baked."

"I know," Owen said, and with his tongs he plucked a cherry red horseshoe out of the coals and sat it on the horn of his anvil.

"But the cake's got to be baked," the little pastry cook said again.

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"You'll bake it, baker," Owen said, and started hammering on the horseshoe, bending it into the right shape. He paused, laid the shoe back among the coals and started pumping the bellows again. "You'll bake the cake, of course. You'll need a good sized cake tin from the tinsmith, and a mixing bowl from the potter, and other odds and ends from other people. They're working on it." The horseshoe slowly grew cherry red again.

"But how? The committee doesn't meet till next Monday."

"All that's needed is that somebody ask the tinsmith to make a twenty foot cake tin, and somebody ask the potter to make a big bowl. Well, I asked. They'll be ready. Now, clean-up, that takes lots of people. Good thing there's a committee." Owen again plucked the hot horseshoe from the coals and started hammering it at the anvil.

"But who gave you the authority?" the pastry cook asked.

"Baker, you speak a lot of buts. I did what I did because somebody had to. Now you bake that cake." Owen took the horseshoe off the anvil with his tongs, inspected it, and satisfied, plunged it into a bucket of water which hissed and steamed.

"Of course," the little pastry cook said, a bit dazed. "Good morning, Owen."

"Good morning, baker. Best to your father."

The little pastry cook walked down the street to his shop thinking, in a way, but the thinking gradually merged into chanting, "Euclid's cake, Euclid's cake, we're going to bake Euclid's cake." He reached his shop, grinning. The sun was well up now and no longer red. He no longer thought about Owen and his forge fire. There was a cake to be baked.

(9)

And sure enough, all that day and the next bales and boxes, crates and cartons arrived at the little pastry cook's little shop. There were stickers and labels all over them: this side up, use no hooks, handle with care; and one boldly labeled handle roughly, any end up. "That'll be from old Tom the tinsmith," the pastry cook thought. "He always boasts a bit."

The sheer bulk of all this was quite overwhelming, it was out of the question that it could go into the shop. Indeed, the shop itself could go into

Melvin Fitting

some of the boxes, with enough left over for the baker, his family, his recipe file and his entire ten volume set of "The Compleat Cake." So all these packing cases were piled in the street in front of his shop. It was most impressive.

Still, the little pastry cook did not look entirely confident. His wife noticed. "Has all the equipment come?" she asked.

"It has."

"The twenty foot cake tin?"

"Yes."

"And the 40,000 quart mixing bowl?"

"Yes."

"And the ladders, and the concrete mixer, and the gravel sifter, and all?"

"Um-hum," the little pastry cook grunted.

"Well, have the supplies all arrived?" she went on.

"They have," he sighed.

"The 475 bushels of flour, and the 264 bushels of sugar, and the 1688 gallons of milk, and all?"

"Yes."

"The eggs? Did the 4500 dozen eggs come?"

"They did," he sighed again.

"Fresh? Are they fresh?" she asked anxiously.

"They are," and he sighed once more.

"Well have the preparations all been made?" she went on in some exasperation, "You have the boys of the Latin School coming, and you have the stonemasons to operate the derrick, and you have the loggers cutting fire-wood?"

"What? Oh yes," the little pastry cook replied, somewhat dazed.

"Well, did you get a fire permit?" she asked as a last resort.

"Of course," he snapped. There was total silence for a minute.

"Then what is it?" she shouted.

"I'm not sure the recipe is right," the pastry cook shouted back. His wife's mouth fell open and there was total silence for another minute. Slowly she closed her mouth. The pastry cook sighed three more deep sighs.

"Well, but, no, maybe," she stammered, "why don't you ask your father?" she blurted out finally.

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"You think so?" the little pastry cook looked hopeful. But she was not able to say anything more. He trudged slowly out the front door of the shop, eyed the massed packing crates, and started climbing. When he reached the second floor front window (the pile went much higher) he stopped climbing and clambered in.

Two hours later a happy pastry cook climbed back down and reentered his shop. His wife still sat there in a daze, one elbow in a tray of tarts. "We straightened it out," he shouted. "There was too much baking powder, my father said. We cut it from 44 pecks to 42."

"I, ah, do you really think that will make a difference?" she asked.

"All the difference in the world," he fairly shouted, "it's just what the cake needed. Now, let's bake."

And bake they did. All the people were gathered by noon on the outskirts of the town. They had dragged the equipment and supplies with them. The master stonemasons, who were used to dealing with heavy things, set up the mixing bowl. The carpenter's guild erected a scaffolding around it. The flour and other dry ingredients were run through the gravel sifter and into the cement mixer. After blending, the mixture was shoveled into the vast mixing bowl. The dairyman's league had the honor of dumping in the 1688 gallons of milk. At a signal from the pastry cook (who was standing on a high platform, conducting) the boys of the Latin school began breaking the 4500 dozen eggs while chanting, "Sum, es, est, sumus, estes, splat," over and over, though a small minority insisted on, "hic, haec, yolk." Nearly all the eggs went into the bowl, but it was quite clear that some did not. Then, with great paddles the local bargemen stirred the mass. They stirred in relays. As the front ranks of batter stirrers tired they fell back and fresh men came up. At last the batter was right. Up the bowl swung on the stonemason's derrick and into the baking pan the mixture went.

The pan was on rollers. Immediately (as the glowing pastry cook directed) all the men started pushing. Slowly the huge pan crept to the entrance of Fingal's cave. Inside, for the past day and night a fearsome fire had burned and now was out. The walls and floor and ceiling of the cavern glowed red hot. No one dared approach the mouth (though some remarked that Owen the smith went nearer than others.) Now the pan was pushed with long poles.

Melvin Fitting

Slowly the massive cake tin crept into the cave. It glowed and glimmered red for a moment, then Owen, with one mighty heave on a crowbar, rolled a great rock against the entrance to the cave. It landed with a thud. Now no more could be done by men. The cake must bake, and by itself. The village sat down to wait.

(10)

The sun was low in the western sky when the little pastry cook made his decision that the cake was done. The village folk rose on legs stiff from sitting and watched anxiously as the stonemasons unsealed the cave. It was dark inside; the glow was gone, but shimmers of heat still rose from the now open mouth. Quickly Owen the dwarf darted inside with a logging chain, hitched it to the cake tin and was back outside with his black beard just slightly singed. Without any command at all everyone sprung to pull and tug on the chain and slowly, majestically the cake rolled out into the breezy afternoon air. The assembly waited quietly as the little pastry cook scurried up a ladder to inspect the cake. A few anxious moments later he stood erect and announced, "It's good, but..."

"Hurrah," all shouted, and the but was heard by few.

"Hurrah, hurrah," the crowd shouted.

"He said, 'but', he said, 'but'," those in front cried out.

"Hurrah," the rear cheered.

"He said, 'but'," cried the front.

"But?"

"But!"

"But he said, 'good'. Hurrah!"

"But he said, 'but' too."

"But?"

"But." The hurrahs died off to a buzz of buts which slowly faded down.

All looked up at the pastry cook.

"The cake is sound, but skewed." The crowd looked aghast. The little pastry cook went on hurriedly. "That is, it is... lopsided. What shall we do?"

"Pile the frosting higher on the low side," one called out.

"Serve it on a side hill," cried another.

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"File down the high side."

"Build up the low."

"File down the high side, build up the low. What does the giant's great little boy know?" one of the Latin students called out.

"Hush you," old Tom the tinsmith bellowed. All was becoming chaos when Owen the smith climbed up the steps of the pastry cook's perch to inspect the cake. The tumult died down. Owen looked thoughtful. "Got any other cakes, baker?" he asked.

"Well, no, I mean, not like this one," the pastry cook stammered.

"Of course not. I mean people sized ones. Got any?"

"Dozens. But..."

"No more buts now baker. Master builder, come up here a minute, will you." Big Frank, the Master builder, came up the ladder too and there was a hurried conference. At its close Big Frank sent his apprentices for his building jacks. While they were fetching, Owen wielded tinsnips and cut the pan from off the cake. Soon they were back. The jacks were scattered around the low side of the cake and at a signal from Owen, up came the cake. "Now, baker, wedge those cakes of yours in that gap."

"But..."

"Stuff em in!"

He did. The jacks were let down. The cake was level. "A good thick frosting over that," Owen said, "and no one'll ever know. Not when it's been eat at all odds. Baker, you bake a good cake. Ray for the baker."

"Hurray," the village responded. The little pastry cook beamed, and beckoned. A wheelbarrow of frosting was pushed up. The plasterer's guild got out their trowels and set to work, and shortly the cake was covered over with a smooth white frosting. It was truly monumental. And it was ready for Euclid's Elements to be inscribed.

(11)

In the eastern sky a few stars were to be seen as the little pastry cook's wife tenderly unwrapped a few worn sheets of paper, notes taken by her great uncle long ago at the University. Euclid's Elements (through Proposition 5). By the dim light of the departed sun she studied the writing and figures while

Melvin Fitting

her husband buckled her into a set of straps the village harness maker had fashioned. This done, the harness was hitched to the stonemason's derrick, the apprentices pulled at the ropes, and up into the air she flew, a bucket of chocolate icing in one hand and a trowel in the other. Carefully she flitted back and forth over the white cake, blocking out the overall lettering arrangements. The village folk stood in a circle around the cake, holding tall torches against the gathering gloom.

In her baker's apron she was like a tiny white moth fluttering over the cake. "There," she called. The apprentice masons swung her over the spot she indicated and she started the lettering. The circle of torch bearers around the cake hushed as the little pastry cook began reading to her.

"Definitions," he read.

"DEFINITIONS," she slowly lettered on the cake.

"A point is that which has no part," he read.

"A point is that which has no part," repeated the village folk around the cake in wonder.

From beyond the circle of the torches the University students home for the holidays set up a chant, "A point is that which has no part, has no part, has no part."

"Hush," cried a few. The little pastry cook's wife, hovering over the cake, paid no attention, but calmly lettered out, "A POINT IS THAT WHICH HAS NO PART."

"A line is breadthless length," the pastry cook read carefully.

"A line is breadthless length," muttered a wondering few.

"Breadthless length, breadthless length. Has no part, has no part," came the chant from the darkness beyond the torches.

"A LINE IS BREADTHLESS LENGTH," the little white figure above the cake lettered.

A chill breeze flickered the torches and for a moment the cake and the tiny figure flying above it were not seen. Only the students chanting could be heard, "breadthless length, has no part, breadthless length, has no part." One lone voice above the rest sang out, "Elefuga. Euclid save us. Elefuga."

Relentlessly the cake was lettered. Bucket after bucket was hauled up to the baker's wife. The Definitions were finished. The Postulates spelled out.

The Giant's Euclid Cake

The Common Notions iced in place.

The afterglow of sunset long was gone. All looked reddish in the torchlight. The students still were chanting in the darkness, now, "all right angles equal are," now, "the whole is greater, the whole is greater," now, "has no part, has no part, has no part," in a drone. And over and over, "Elefuga, Elefuga. Euclid, Euclid, Elefuga." The cake loomed large. The baker's wife hung white and tiny against the stars.

Old Tom the tinsmith shuddered. The torch he held wavered.

"Steady," hissed Owen the smith. The old tinsmith snorted. "We never had such stuff in our day, Owen."

Owen didn't answer.

"Pounding iron and beating tin makes more sense, eh Owen?"

Owen only grunted. His eyes glowed red in the torchlight. They followed every letter, every line, greedily. "Once there was beauty, Tom," he said, "and greatness."

Old Tom the tinsmith looked at him with wonder but Owen only saw the cake.

Now Proposition by Proposition, Proof by Proof, Diagram by Diagram the cake was filled out. As Proposition Five drew nearer the chanting of the students grew wilder. "Elefuga, Elefuga. Euclid save us. Elefuga."

Above the cake the pastry cook's wife finally heard it and looked up in fright. "Elefuga. Elefuga."

The torches hissed and sputtered. "Elefuga. Elefuga." A few crickets tried to chirp. The students grew louder yet, "Elefuga. Woe, oh Euclid. Elefuga."

"Silence," cried the blacksmith, and all was silent. "Let the lady finish calmly. Oh, and baker, two lines up in that column, that should read AB is equal to AC, not AD."

"I, ah, yes, of course. I should have noticed, but all that chanting."

Old Tom the tinsmith stared at Owen for a long moment, but Owen's eyes no longer glowed. Quickly the cake was finished. The last QED put in place. The pastry cook's wife was lowered amid a round of cheers, and people noticed a full, bright moon was up.

A procession was formed. Someone tripped on Harold the herald and woke him up. He took his place at the head of it.

Melvin Fitting

“Oh ye people, all be waked
Euclid ’s giant cake is baked,”

he cried over and over as the procession set forth. Behind little Harold came Owen and the village council. Then the little pastry cook, his wife and boy. Behind them came the boys of the local Latin school, holding aloft a charter from the village council granting them bowl licking privileges. And behind them came the cake. It rode on great log rollers. Men pulled in front and pushed in back. Then came the rest of the village folk with torches and guild banners. All were singing, laughing, cheering. Slowly, majestically the procession wound through the town and up the hill to the castle of the Lord and Giant of the manor. It approached the great front gate. Owen stepped forward with the ceremonial gavel and rapped three mighty blows on the oaken door. Slowly it opened. There stood the gatekeeper.

“Who are you and what do you want?” he asked.

“We are men of the village,” Owen answered proudly. “We have brought the cake.”

“Tradespeople call in back,” the gatekeeper said and slammed the door. Owen was speechless.

“Well, we are tradespeople, Owen, you know,” the little pastry cook said finally.

“Good ones, too, eh Owen,” old Tom the tinsmith said with some heat.

Owen finally nodded and waved little Harold the herald on. The procession started up again, a little quieter than before. Slowly they came around the giant’s castle, to a lesser rear door. Here Owen knocked again, with his fist. The door opened, the steward came out, “Ah yes, the cake. Just leave it. My men’ll bring it inside. Don’t wait. And baker, send the bill. Thank you. That’s all.” A body of men quickly issued forth and pulled the great cake inside. The door closed and it was seen no more.

No one moved for a few minutes. Then, one by one the people left. Quietly. The pale white light of the moon was enough now to see by. Torches were put out. Banners furled. Separately the people made their several ways back to the village to their houses, to their beds. Over the village the castle loomed up large and silent in the moonlight.

The Giant's Euclid Cake

(12)

Sleep was not an easy thing for the village that night. The little pastry cook explained to his wife what should have happened. Then he explained again. And yet again. Finally he subsided, and for a moment there was quiet. "Hey, why don't you punch that giant in the nose," their son piped up.

"He's big," the little pastry cook explained.

"Well, get Owen to drop an anvil on his toe, then."

"Hush, child," his mother said, "go to sleep."

"Hit him with a brick, huh, please. Will you? I want to watch. Can I watch daddy hit him with a brick? Can I, please?"

"Will you be quiet and go to sleep," the little pastry cook roared. The boy was quiet then, but sleep was another thing.

Old Tom the tinsmith thought he would mend some pots before bed. He hammered quite a few all out of shape before he settled down to sleep.

Owen the smith sat by his cold and lifeless hearth and stared at ashes in the moonlight. Sunrise found him still awake, still staring.

Little Harold the herald hung his bugle on the wall, took off his uniform, folded it and put it away, and cried himself to sleep.

The next morning people went on with life as always. People met and talked. Horses were shod, fields cultivated, dresses sewn, beer brewed and bread baked. But no cakes were made, or wanted. The night before was never mentioned. People had their thoughts, no doubt, but no words for them. The pookel a share the people put up, and the pookel for labor and profit were all that could be hoped for, the glory was gone.

But one day made way for the next, and that for the next in turn. Regular work cures much and soon it and the passing days filled a giant cake sized hole in the life of the village. All was as before, almost.

The end of the month came, the baker figured up his accounts and sent out his bills, including one which read, "cake, twenty foot, one, Euclid Element icing. Delivered. 528 gherkins, 14 pookels, 3 dill seeds."

(13)

No payment was received from the Lord and Giant of the manor that week,

Melvin Fitting

nor the next, nor yet the next. Finally the month closed and no payment had yet been made. The little pastry cook therefore sent the bill again, omitting his usual charges for overdue bills, Lords of the manor being sensitive about such things, and Giants even more so. The very next day a messenger wearing the Giant's colors called at the bakery. He bore a message from the Lord and Giant's Very Own Secretary which read, "His Highness is distressed at the necessity that the information be conveyed that the cake commissioned was wholly inadequate and that consequently no remuneration will be forthcoming."

"Hooray," cheered the pastry cook's son. "What does it mean?"

"It means he won't pay us because the cake was no good."

"It does?"

"It does."

"Gee. I thought it was fine."

"But you didn't taste it."

"Oh yes I did. When you weren't looking I ate a handful. I filled the hole up with frosting."

The little pastry cook looked sharply at his son. "Well, no matter, I guess," he said finally. "Tell your mother I've gone to see Owen," and he left.

As always he found Owen at his anvil, hammering. "Owen," the little pastry cook blurted out, "he won't pay for the cake."

"Why not?"

"He says the cake was no good."

"Bah. It was delicious."

"You tasted it?"

"Of course. I'm president of the cake corporation. It's my job. It was good. Don't worry, I filled the hole with frosting."

"Oh. Well what now?"

"We need a village council meeting. Fetch me Harold the herald." This was quickly done.

"Harold," the smith instructed, "summon the council."

"Yes sir." Then, turning to the little pastry cook he said shyly, "I've got to tell you. I ate a piece of your cake, I mean the giant's cake."

"You did?"

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"I filled the hole up with frosting. I'm sorry. Really. It was good cake. Really good cake."

"Ah, thank you."

"Go," Owen roared. Harold the herald went.

Soon the village council was gathered. Owen read them the giant's message and told them what it meant.

"That ain't right," old Tom the tinsmith said abruptly. "That was a good cake."

"How do you know?" Owen asked.

"I, ah, I tasted it, of course."

"So did I," called out another, "it was good."

"Yes, it was," shouted another.

"It was good. It was good," everybody was shouting. Owen looked around him in amazement. "Silence," Owen cried. "Now," he glared about him, "Now, who didn't taste the cake?"

No one spoke. "Hm," said Owen. "Harold, go from door to door and ask the people if they tried the cake too. Quickly now."

Harold ran out. Presently he returned. The village council put away the playing cards and resumed business.

"Harold," Owen said slowly, "did anyone else taste the giant's cake?"

Harold the herald nodded.

"Many?"

Harold nodded again. He was on the verge of tears.

"Very many?" Owen said patiently.

Harold nodded again.

"How many?" Owen exploded.

"Everybody," Harold the herald said, and sniffled.

"Leave us," Owen said grimly. Little Harold the herald started to go. At the door he turned.

"I'm sorry, I really am. Is this why?... Oh gosh I'm sorry," and he ran out.

After a pause Owen faced the council. "I'm of the opinion that we might owe our Lord and Giant an apology," he said. "It may be he didn't get any cake at all."

Melvin Fitting

“Worthy council master,” Tom the tinsmith said, “I don’t think even all us put together could have eaten much of that cake.”

“Maybe not, Tom. I don’t know. There was a lot of it, certainly.”

“It don’t seem reasonable, somehow,” the miller said.

“There is a lot of us, though,” the tanner said.

The discussion went on for some time. Finally Owen called a halt. “Men,” he said, “the thing is this, we don’t know why the giant didn’t like the cake. It may be he didn’t get any. Maybe he did. If he didn’t, we should apologize. If he did, it was good cake he got so he should pay for it and I want to know why he won’t. So I suggest we call on him in a body to ask about the harvesting. We’ll work the conversation around to the cake and find out what the matter was.”

Everybody liked the plan, so that afternoon off trooped the village council to pay a call on their Lord and Giant.

(14)

The village council found their Lord and Giant just come from hunting. A falcon perched serenely on his little finger while a squire on a stepladder brushed him off. Great clouds of dust filled the hall. Owen waited for the giant to speak first.

“Umph,” the giant snorted.

“We’ve come to arrange the harvest,” Owen said.

“Harvest? Good,” the Lord and Giant rumbled. “Stop that blasted brushing.” The squire scurried off and the Lord and Giant seated himself. “Harvest, you said?”

“Yes,” Owen replied, “though there’ve been better. Too much rain in the Spring. The crops are small.”

“Best fishing year I ever saw,” boomed the giant. “Caught a blue-gill yesterday that would feed a man your size.”

Owen blinked then went on quietly. “We need four new grain cradles. I’ll make the blades when you send the iron.”

“See my steward.”

“One of your sets of harness needs a new breast strap. The harness maker is ready when you send the leather.”

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"He can see my steward too. And say, smith, you live off the Great South Meadow. Seen anything of a grey fox round about there?"

"Evenings and early mornings," Owen replied.

"Hah," the giant bellowed. "I thought that's where he kept to." He banged his fist down on the chair arm almost flattening the falcon. "I'll get him now. Come on, smith, what more?"

"Well, there's still the widow Douglasses field. We want to mow it in common."

"See my reeve. Now, have I settled everything?"

No one spoke. The giant fidgetted and crockery rattled in distant cupboards.

"Did you get any cake?" old Tom the tinsmith exploded finally.

The Lord and Giant stared at Tom. "Don't eat cake much, tinker, eat cow mostly. What cake?"

"The, the Euclid cake," Tom stammered.

"Oh that. Boy ate it all. Liked it. Got sick, though. Always does. Why?" he continued staring at Tom.

"Your Giantship," Owen interrupted, "we are asking, for the baker, why you didn't pay, ah, why his bill to you remains unpaid."

"Have him ask my secretary."

"He received a message from him. We, I mean he wants to know what it means."

"Wonderful secretary, that," the giant said. "Can't understand a thing he writes myself. Worth his weight in pookles."

"Why won't you pay the bill," Owen said bluntly. He was sweating. The Lord and Giant frowned. "The cake didn't work. Boy still don't know geology. Can't hunt either. Trips on things."

Owen let this sink in for a moment. Then he cleared his throat and began quietly. "You ordered a cake. You got a cake. You should..."

The giant stood up abruptly. The village council members bent backward to look. Three fell over. "Got a fox to catch. No time to talk cake. Tell the baker no money. So be it."

That made it official. Even so Owen the dwarf said, "That's not right," but the giant was on the way out; the breeze of his exit drowned out Owen's

Melvin Fitting

words and scattered the little village council about the room.

“Men,” said Owen firmly from atop the salt cellar, “we need a plan.” Those who could, groaned their agreement.

(15)

A tattered and battered village council trooped slowly into the council room. The little pastry cook sat playing solitaire, badly. He looked up at Owen.

“The cake’s all right, baker,” Owen began. “Our Lord and Giant’s boy don’t know geometry, and our Lord and Giant don’t know us. I’ve got a plan.”

Old Tom the tinsmith nudged the pastry cook. “Red seven on the black eight,” he whispered.

Owen waited till the play was made, then continued. “We can’t meet here. We’ve got to meet in secret. Can’t have the giant finding out too soon. Baker, those boxes still out front of your shop?”

The little pastry cook nodded.

“Then we meet upstairs over your shop. Your father can help us. Come on.” The council and the pastry cook started to leave.

“Oh, and baker,” Owen said, “bring the cards.”

They left, and, at Tom the tinsmith’s insistence, went by separate ways to the bake shop, which was difficult in so small a village. Soon the council was gathered in the rooms above the shop, with the little pastry cook below as a lookout. Through the ceiling of the shop he could hear the sounds of heated discussion and cards being shuffled. He sighed. Finally he heard a fist banged on a table, then silence. Soon a message dangled on a string before his window.

“Baker,” it said, “bake up one custard pie, then fetch Harold the herald.”

The little pastry cook did so. Soon a custard pie was cooling on the window sill and Harold the herald was running all about the village bearing messages.

The pastry cook’s little boy ran into the shop. “Hey, there’s going to be a war,” he shouted. “Can I watch?”

The pastry cook’s wife looked alarmed. “Where is this war to be?” she asked.

“Right here,” the boy answered. “Wow!”

The Giant's Euclid Cake

"Where did you hear that?"

"Upstairs." Then he hesitated. "I mean, I happened to be playing on the pile of boxes and I couldn't help hearing."

His mother looked at him sharply.

"Well, gee," he went on, "papa said I could, didn't you?"

The pastry cook's wife looked at her husband sharply. He pretended to be reading a cookbook. "And grandpa's making weapons," the boy went on, "caterpillars, he said. If the war's at night can I stay up? Can I?"

His mother didn't answer.

"Aw, gee. I never get to do nothing," he wailed.

"Anything," his mother said.

"Yeah."

Just then several notes came from the floor above. One read, "send Harold to castle with pie and enclosed note." The enclosed note read, "To our Lord and Giant. Please accept this pie with our compliments. We petition you to change your mind and pay the baker's bill. If not, you have been given a taste of things to come. Respectfully, your village. Reply requested." The last note read, "send up a fresh deck and some cookies." The little pastry cook stared at the ceiling of his shop in wonder, then did as he was told.

(16)

Very late in the day Harold the herald brought a reply from the castle. It was from the giant's secretary. Owen read it to the council.

"Greetings," it began. "By virtue of article 14 of the Manor Owner's Manual, which article may be paraphrased to wit, 'Manor owners own their manors, villages included,' it is decreed that the village council of this, his Lord and Giant's village, no longer exists." Below this the giant had carefully printed, in big letters, "So be it."

Owen looked from face to face slowly. "Well, men," he said at last, "do we exist?"

"Course we do," the tanner snorted.

"Ain't that easy to get rid of us," the miller said.

"It means a fight, men," Owen said quietly.

"So be it," old Tom the tinsmith replied.

Melvin Fitting

Owen the dwarf grinned briefly, then looked grim again. "Harold," he said, "go from door to door. Go quickly and go quietly. Tell everyone what you've heard. And tell them to be gathered in the, our village square at dawn, ready to bake."

"Yes, sir," said Harold the herald smartly, and went to carry out his mission. The council prepared to get what sleep they could.

(17)

The dawn was a cold and grey one. The church steps were wet as Owen climbed them to survey the village square. It was filled with silent people. Owen carried the ceremonial gavel, but did not use it.

"The giant says he won't pay for the cake," Owen began abruptly. He paused. "We say he will. What do you say? Are you with us?"

There was a mighty roar of "Yes!" Owen held the ceremonial gavel up so all could see it, then used it to tap for order on the top church step. The crowd fell silent.

"Worthy council master," said a woman in front, "I got to say it and let others make what they can out of it. We elected you. We didn't any of us elect our Lord and Giant, nor we wouldn't either if we'd had the chance." She turned to face the crowd. "Ain't that so," she said.

"Yes," said some. "Right," said others. The rest nodded. No one said no. Owen tapped for order. His eyes glittered.

"Time's wasting," he said. "Men, go cut wood. Women, get all the pie tins you've got. Children, go cut bean poles. Bring it all to Fingal's cave. Now hurry."

Almost at once the square was empty. Owen looked at the ceremonial gavel for a minute, then snorted, slid it in his belt and hurried off.

(18)

A few of the village people had been working all night on secret orders from the council. So, as the crowd slowly collected at Fingal's cave they found crates of eggs and barrels of flour waiting for them. The huge mixing bowl in which they made the cake batter was still standing where they had left it, scoured clean. And on each of four hill tops, stretching in a half circle about

The Giant's Euclid Cake

the castle, they could make out huge wooden machines of some sort. But Owen left them no time to wonder.

"Over there," he gestured, "start a fire. Big one. Quickly now. And here, in the big mixing bowl, you, you and you, start making custard pie filling. Use up all the supplies we've got here. The rest of you start rolling pie crust. Fill those pie tins. Hurry."

At once all was busy, and in no time there was a roaring fire, gallons and gallons of pie filling, and a hundred pie tins ready to be filled.

"Now," said Owen, "fill those crusts with custard. Use those bean poles to push em near the fire. Soon as one is done, pull it back, get the pie out from the tin, fill it up again, and bake another. Snappy now. We need all the pies you can make."

All morning one custard pie after another was made. By noon even the university students were pretty good at rolling out a pie crust. There was no stopping for lunch. Everybody ate pies as work went on. Slowly the number of custard pies grew. Hundreds. Thousands. All count was lost. There were mountains of pies. By mid afternoon the supplies were used up.

"Now," said Owen slowly, "Pile those pies on wagons and deliver em to those machines you see in the distance."

Quickly ox teams were hitched up and this was done.

"Is our Lord and Giant in his castle? Spy, report."

"He is, sir," said little Harold the herald. "He's in the courtyard with his hunting dogs."

"Good enough," said Owen. "Now, where's our artillery officer?"

"Here I am," and the little pastry cook's father stepped out of the crowd.

"Go," said Owen the dwarf, "aim those catapults at the castle courtyard."

The little pastry cook's mouth fell open. "I didn't know you knew how..." he began.

"There's lots you don't know yet," his father said. "You're learning though. We'll talk later," and he rode off on horseback to aim the catapults.

"At last," said Owen, "one team to each catapult; you there, you there," Owen pointed about him. "Load those machines up. A bushel of custard pies apiece. When I signal, let em loose, and keep em going till I tell you. Go!" he shouted.

Melvin Fitting

Fifty men sprinted off for the distant hills and did as they were bid. Owen looked about him, satisfied. All was quiet.

“Now!” barked Owen. Four wooshes drifted back to Fingal’s cave. Hundreds of custard pies could be seen flying toward the castle. They disappeared behind the castle wall. Then came a roar from the giant which shook the ground. No one paused. Another bushel of pies shot up, and another, and another. The roaring grew louder. The great castle door burst open and there stood the giant covered head to foot in custard. He started toward the nearest catapult.

“Position two,” the pastry cook’s father shouted, and the four catapults slowly swung around. The giant took the next four bushels of pies head on. He fell over backwards with a crash that set the church bell ringing. He struggled to get up and four more bushels of pies hit him. He tried to scramble to his feet but the ground about him was slippery with custard. Slowly he began crawling back to his castle. Four bushels of pies hit him in the backside and stretched him flat. Suddenly his pack of hunting dogs came running from the castle. They surrounded him and happily started licking him off.

“Enough,” he sobbed. “Enough.” Tears washed great streaks through the custard on his face. “What do you want of me?”

“We want you to pay your bills,” cried out some. But Owen hushed them and rode off alone to talk with the giant. The little village waited anxiously as, far away, they could see Owen the dwarf beside their Lord and Giant, talking. What they said could not be heard. Suddenly Owen raised his arm.

“Ready another load, men,” he cried.

“No, stop,” the giant shouted. Then they resumed talking. Presently the two figures disappeared into the castle. The village waited nervously. Half an hour later Owen rode out the great front gate of the castle with a bag. The village breathed a sigh of relief. Owen rode up and addressed them from horseback.

“First of all, he paid,” Owen began. “The money’s here.” The crowd cheered, but Owen had more to say and they grew quiet again and listened. “I asked for something extra. More than money. And I got it.” He waved aloft a piece of paper. “This is a charter. In writing. We’re a town now. Our own town. Nobody else’s.”

The Giant's Euclid Cake

The noise was deafening. People shouted. People wept. People cheered. The pastry cook's boy made cymbals of two pie tins and banged them together. One still had a pie in it and people found the "splat, splat" strangely satisfying. Owen sat smiling on his horse holding the charter up so all could see. Then slowly he started off for the village, now their town. The townsfolk fell in behind him and the grand procession reached the town square just as the setting sun bathed it in red. Bonfires were lit and added their flickering red glow to the square. A celebration and a feast went on till dawn.

The Lord and Giant did not sleep well that night. He said the cheering bothered him.

(19)

S ometime between night and morning the townsfolk decided, in secret, to build a splendid monument to commemorate what had happened; and to buy for Owen anything he wanted, within reason. Then someone counted pookles and realized there were not enough for both. Wisely it was agreed that a monument could wait. A committee was formed to see what Owen wanted. Old Tom the tinsmith headed it.

"Town wants to buy you something," he told Owen. "What do you want?"

"Don't want anything, Tom," Owen answered. And try as they might they could get no other answer. Finally the pastry cook's father made a suggestion to the committee, which, to a man agreed.

One month later Owen was given a complete edition of Euclid's Elements. Owen picked up volume one, started to speak, and cried instead. The committee left, satisfied.

It was Tom the tinsmith who got the monument built. "Too fancy a monument ain't right for us," he said. "Should be simple. Get that big mixing bowl we made, put it in our town square and fill it with water. A few swans would look pretty good in it, and they'd keep the bugs down too."

Everyone agreed that this was a proper monument, and it was done. And ever after, on warm summer evenings the townsfolk liked to gather in their square to watch their swans and talk boldly of the Giant who was no longer their Lord. The little pastry cook came often with his father and his son and his wife and they talked long hours. Harold the herald came and walked about

Melvin Fitting

with his girl on his arm. Tom the tinsmith came to sit on the church steps and just watch the swans. And Owen the smith came sometimes. Sometimes he played Rummy. Sometimes he sat quietly and read his Euclid. Whatever he did, the town was content.