

## **'The Baker's Wife' Synopsis**

Setting - A rural French village in 1935

It is early evening outside the cafe as the villagers await with nervous anticipation the arrival of the new baker. The cafe owner's wife, Denise, explains to the audience that the isolated village has been without bread for several weeks since the previous bakers' death. She sings in contemplative mood about their unchanging lives whilst her husband, Claude, overlooks her needs and is preoccupied about the running of the café ("Chanson")

As the clock ticks, we witness the villagers comically bickering amongst themselves with all too familiar gripes and petty disagreements ("If It Wasn't For You"). Barnaby is dismissive of his wife Hortense, whilst the Teacher and Priest squabble about religion and education. When an argument ensues about the immorality of the Mayor and his entourage of "nieces", the middle-aged baker, Aimable Castagnet, finally arrives. The villagers mistake the baker's young wife, Genevieve, for his daughter. As they are escorted to their new home in the bakery, gossip erupts about the couple's age difference.

The genial baker expresses his delight with their new start in life, and along with their cat, Pom Pom, he strikes up a celebratory gig with his wife and reaffirms his love for her ("Merci Madame"). Genevieve is still somewhat struggling with the repercussions of being married to a doting husband, but she is carried away by his good-humored affability and genuine affection.

The next morning the villagers are enticed from their beds by the aroma of fresh bread and between mouthfuls of brioche they shower the baker with effusive praise ("Bread"). But they are soon bickering again and we hear of an age-old dispute between Claude and Barnaby, though neither men know of its origins. Before long they are gossiping again about the Baker's young wife.

In the bakery Genevieve encourages Hortense not to dismiss her own preferences when following her husband's pastry order. The Mayor's driver and village heartthrob, Dominique, enters and initially mistakes Genevieve for the baker's daughter. She corrects him with some annoyance but he continues to flirt with youthful charm until she rejects his offer of going for a drive together. On entering, Aimable is complementary about the young man and Genevieve is puzzled why he isn't jealous of the attention other men pay to her. Left alone, Genevieve reveals in song a previous love affair with Paul, a married man for whom she continues to harbour feelings, but she resolves to be a good wife to the loving and gentle Aimable, and close the door on her past ("Gifts of Love").

A few weeks later some of the villagers notice Pom Pom hiding in a tree and whilst they again comically bicker, Dominique attempts to rescue her, without success. Genevieve is grateful for his efforts and though somewhat charmed by his honest humour, assertively reminds him she is happily married and asks him to cease his advances. Left alone he sings "Proud Lady", an affirmation that in spite of his reputation with the ladies he has finally, truly

fallen in love and will stop at nothing to win her affections ("Proud Lady").

Outside the cafe the village disputes continue and, after some mis-judged banter at her expense, Denise attempts to challenge her husband about his behaviour. Genevieve enters and gifts Hortense her favourite tarts, but Antoine makes advances on the baker's wife and jokes at Aimable's expense resulting in a fracas between Antoine and Dominique. As Genevieve exits in embarrassment the villagers gossip and bicker ("If It Wasn't For You: Reprise").

In the bakery a distressed Genevieve finds Aimable's innocent interpretation of events frustrating and she accuses him of not knowing people, or her. As evening falls ("Chanson: Reprise") Dominique brings his guitar playing pal, Phillipe, as backup to serenade Genevieve under the guise of thanking the baker for what he has brought to the village ("Serenade"). Aimable is oblivious to his motives but she is annoyed and tries to reject his passionate advances. Before exiting, Dominique tells her they should elope that evening. Aimable falls asleep supervising the ovens and left alone with her conflicting feelings Genevieve recounts a childhood fable, realises she has to take the opportunity to follow her heart, and leaves with Dominique ("Meadowlark")

The next morning the village is woken by the smell of burning bread at the bakery and they rouse the baker from his sleep. Despite the villagers' suspicion about Genevieve's disappearance, Aimable is convinced she is visiting her mother and promises to start another batch of bread. Outside the cafe the villagers debate as the Mayor reveals that Dominique has taken his car. A partially inebriated Aimable approaches the cafe for a tipple and good-humouredly dismisses Antoine's accusation of being a cuckold, raising a glass to his mother-in-law's health ("Any-Day-Now-Day"). More concerned about their bread supply the villagers discover the bakery is a chaotic disaster-zone of flour and dough. Aimable resolves to stop baking and Act 1 ends with the villagers yet again in despair.

Days later the bakery remains shut ("Chanson: Reprise") and Aimable is finally discovered 'resting' under the kitchen table. Trying to raise his spirits Claude congratulates him for avoiding the pitfalls of eternal marriage and the village celebrate his good fortune ("The World's Luckiest Man"). The priest is appalled when the Mayor offers Aimable his niece's attentions ("Feminine Companionship") and as an argument erupts the baker finally loses his temper and throws them all out.

The Mayor calls a village meeting to find a solution to the bread famine by enticing Genevieve back, but agreement and cooperation is hopeless between the villagers ("If It Wasn't For You: Reprise"). Aimable unexpectedly enters and stuns them with a heartfelt apology for his behaviour and a movingly honest admission of the truth about his futile marriage. He exits, and in his wake Hortense turns against the men for their ridiculous bickering. The village men agree to cooperate in searching for Genevieve, and Aimable is left at the bakery to sadly contemplate his broken marriage ("If I Have To Live Alone").

Waiting for the men to return the women enjoy time in their own company and comically sing about the limitations of their husband's and their relationships ("Romance"). The men return as best buddies but empty handed, until Antoine, in comically long-winded fashion, reveals he has found Genevieve. As the Mayor, Priest and Teacher bicker about who should bring her back, Denise suggests the blindingly obvious, and the three of them are persuaded to locate her as a team.

In a seedy hotel in Marichon, a drowsy Dominique shows a lack of understanding in Genevieve and as he falls asleep she is struck by his indifference and decides to leave ("Where Is The Warmth"). As she arrives at the local bus stop the Mayor, Priest and Teacher attempt to persuade her and in doing so find themselves unexpectedly extolling the virtues of commitment, forgiveness and feelings.

Back in the village the streets are cleared to allow Genevieve a sensitive return. When Therese demands to stay put to shame "the sinner" the Teacher pretends to seduce her to get her to leave, with humorous results. Denise encounters Hortense who has decided to leave the village, alone.

Genevieve returns to the bakery just as Pom Pom arrives back on the scene and by admonishing the cat about her disappearance, Aimable is able to indirectly address his wife about his deepest feelings. Through an honest exchange the couple heal their relationship and we witness Claude able to make amends with his wife. The villagers celebrate their newfound relationships and valuing how the smallest of gestures can change the world ("Finale Act 2").