

### **Lumps and All**

“Step five,” said the overly perky lady on the YouTube video. “Mix the batter. Fifty strokes ought to do the trick.”

Too many new things in one day, he thought. He and Shelley made it official that morning, leaving their respective apartments and moving in together. If nothing else, he hoped, plenty of good home cooked dinners and no more General Gao on speed dial. But already variations on the theme. They had planned this move months ago. Who knew that Shelley’s partner would schedule the big meeting with their venture capital investors the week before – and then catch pneumonia. Shelley had to spend the past two days in California, and if the god of airlines was with them, would get home by five – just in time for him to pick her up at Logan and drive straight to her parents for dinner where they were planning some big announcement.

The good part – were there any good parts? Yes, the good part was and had been Shelley. And will be. The interesting parts – or as Shelley the optimist and MBA deluxe would say – the challenging aspects were several. Here he was in an apartment with boxes and stacks of their two lives coming together literally. That morning, during the second – and counting – call, she told him that her baking tools were in “Box K3.” It wasn’t as if he had to learn how to melt the chocolate in a double boiler, she reasoned. This was basic stuff, not so different from the multitude of mac & cheese dinners he had made during his years of bachelorhood, except the final product was going to be brown and chewy.

In her family, Shelley had become the Brownie Queen. Even when she told them the brownies weren’t from scratch, just a \$1.49 mix with eggs, oil, and water thrown in, they continued to defer to her baking prowess. In fact, her brownies became *de rigeur* for all family gatherings and her parents showed deep disappointment one time last year when she tried to change things up with a fruit salad instead. “It’s like Led Zeppelin having to play *Stairway to Heaven* at every concert, no matter how sick of it

they got," she told him. "Guess I ought to be flattered that, 19 years and three degrees later, I'm good at something."

Except that this time, he was the understudy in his first try who was giving the Saturday evening performance. He unpaused the video. Miss Perky – he wondered if Shelley would approve of his indiscretions with another cook – cheerily beat that thick brown batter. "Now, if you've been with me since the beginning – and why wouldn't you? – I know you've completed Step One – pre-heating the oven to 350 degrees – and Step Two, greasing your pan. But if you haven't yet – and *tsk tsk* on you – now's the time to get ready before pouring your batter in the pan."

Was he ready? He looked at the apartment in disarray. Yet he could see it was so full of opportunities. He looked down at his mixing bowl. Still some lumps to smooth out. "Don't worry if you still have a few lumps in your batter. You'll hardly notice them. And isn't that what homemade baking is about?" Well spoken from a YouTube video, he thought. It was time. He put the pan in the oven.

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