

# Shortnin' Bread

James Whitcomb Riley

The image shows the musical notation for the song 'Shortnin' Bread' by James Whitcomb Riley. It consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. The first staff has a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a common time signature (C). The melody is written in treble clef. Above the first staff are the following chords: C, F, G7, F, C, C, G7, C. The second staff begins with a measure rest labeled '5', followed by the melody. Above the second staff are the following chords: C, F, C, F, C, F, C, F, C, F, G7, C. The music ends with a double bar line and repeat dots.

1. Two little chillun lyin in bed,  
One of 'em sick and de odder mos' dead,  
Call for de docter and de doctor said  
"Feed dem chillun on shortnin' bread".  
**Chorus**  
Mammy's little baby loves shortnin',  
shortnin',  
Mammy's little baby loves shortnin',  
bread,  
Mammy's little baby loves shortnin',  
shortnin',  
Mammy's little baby loves shortnin'  
bread.
2. Goin to da kitchen and put on da led,  
Put on da skillet for shortnin bread,  
Shortnin bread and it baked thin,  
Always makes dem chillun grin.  
**Chorus**
3. Messin' round the kitchen lak a busy bee,  
Da busiest mammy you ever did see,  
Gotta hurry up wit da shortnin bread,  
Gotta get dem chillun right outta bed.  
**Chorus**
4. "How about dat shortnin bread?",  
"When i gonna git that shortnin bread?",  
Cried a little baby a-lyin in bed,  
his eyes was shut like ben dead.  
**Chorus**
5. De odder little fella sick in de bed,  
When he hear tell of shortnin bread,  
He popped up well, He dance and sing,  
He almost cut da pigeon wing.  
Chorus

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"Shortnin' Bread" (also spelled "Shortenin' Bread", "Short'nin' Bread" or "Sho'tnin' Bread") is a song written by James Whitcomb Riley in 1900. A folk version titled "Shortened Bread", was collected from East Tennessee in 1912 and published by E.C. Perrow in 1915.

Shortening bread refers to a fried batter bread, made of corn meal, flour, hot water, eggs, baking powder, milk and shortening.

Riley's original lyrics were set in the faux Negro dialect of the minstrel era:

Two little niggers lyin' in bed,  
One of 'em sick an' de odder mos' dead.  
Call for de doctor an' de doctor said,  
Feed dem darkies on short'nin bread.

It is song #4209 in the **Roud Folk Song Index**. It was printed in John Lomax's **American Ballads and Folk Songs** and in Alan Lomax's **Folk Songs of North America**.