

The (Untitled) Baker

Chapter One

“We just had to come round and thank you for Mother’s cake Mr Baker. I could have sworn she was sprightlier after it. Though the doctor said it could have just as easily have been her last gasp.” Bella Paton had just come from her mother’s funeral and instead of joining the rest of the family at the wake; she had decided to thank the baker who had made her mother’s last birthday cake.

“We’ve never tasted such a happy cake.” Added Mr Paton turning to leave the busy shop.

“I am humbled by your appreciation.” Edward Baker didn’t like these confrontations with his patrons. He had staff to deal with them, but he never refused to speak to them. “Now you must excuse me. Just be sure to comeback if you have any other special requests.”

“We will Mr Baker. Thank you again.”

“Bye.” Edward Baker waited until the Patons were out of the shop before adding. “I only want to be disturbed if it looks like I have won the Lottery.”

“Yes Mr Baker.”

There was no point in correcting Lillian; she had been with him for twenty years. In all that time she, Lillian never questioned the fact that her employer had never got any older. This normally meant The Baker had to start looking for new premises. It was this thought which filled his mind as he decorated an anniversary cake. A silver wedding to be

exact. It was these cakes which were hardest to deal with as they reminded him of his own wife and some of the women he tried to fill the gap with. He wouldn't be doing that again. His last wife had been lost in the bombing of Glasgow during the Second World War.

"Baker your presence is required at The High Table. Now." The talking cake should have been ridiculous, but The Baker just saw it as a waste of a good cake. For once magic of this type had touched it, it would have to be destroyed.

"Sorry Mr Baker, but a limousine has just drawn up and the driver says it's for you. Have you won The Lottery then?" Asked Lillian with little or no interest.

"Tell them I'll be out shortly."

"He appears to be quite insistent Mr Baker. And if you don't mind me saying so, he looks more like a gangster than a lottery deliveryman."

"And as always Lillian you'd be right. If you would lock up for me and I'll hopefully be back in the morning."

"Yes Mr Baker. Are you going to be all right?"

"Lillian, I'll be fine." The Baker checked his appearance in a pot which looked as if it were new, but definitely wasn't. "Think I'll do?"

"Fine Mr Baker fine."

"Thank you."

The car outside wasn't so much a limousine as a large saloon with darkened out windows. The Baker wasn't

impressed and said as much to the driver. The latter was as expected not interested. He waited patiently for The Baker to fasten his seat belt and then they were off. Slowly, but perceived speed and actual velocity were two different things.

“Just when you’re ready.” Uttered the driver who had grudgingly got out of his seat and opened the coach door. “They’re waiting for you.”

“Then why are the gates closed?” Asked The Baker as he stepped from the coach.

“I’m just a driver. Was a time when we were tipped by our passengers?”

The Baker resisted all the clichés which entered his head and headed for the vast gates which blocked his entrance to Mildark Palace. The current residence of The Five, well four as The Baker only stayed over when he was imprisoned there. He made a point of not staying after that. At least not in the Palace.

“I have no intentions of saying it, so either open the gates or face a nasty repair bill.” Uttered The Baker with his hands on his hips. He ignored the fact that he was now in full robes having got into the car wearing his baking overalls. “Very well.”

“You have to say it your Lordship.” Stated a small soldier appearing on one of the battlements. “The High Table has been convened and all those entering must recite The Passing.”

“That won’t happen here. Now open the damn gates or I promise the first and only time you are at The High Table, you’ll be one of the courses.”

“Just say the blasted Passing Baker and then perhaps we can all go back to sleep.” It was the old king himself. The Baker didn’t know whether to be delighted or humbled. He chose furious.

“Your Highness. I was summoned therefore my right of entry is guaranteed. So just have the gates opened for me. It is you not me who is in the wrong here. Shall I say it again?”

“Open the blasted gates. Baker you will push my patience too far one day and you’ll have another spell in my dungeon to think over your mistakes.”

“Your Highness is wise as always.” Beamed The Baker as the gates slowly opened. “I wonder how long they let him sleep for this time.” Muttered The Baker as he was gently ushered to the Great Hall. “I might have appreciated a few hours to prepare.”

“Don’t you know why you’re here Baker?” The words were spat at The Baker by Lord Thomas; an old adversary and occasionally ally if the conditions necessitated it, which they rarely did.

“Shouldn’t you be meddling in the technology of the other world instead of coming back here to polish the King’s ego?” The Baker waited for an equally cutting remark, but only expected the usual rebuff about The Candle Stick Maker getting on his wick and ending up in a pie. Such wit

often had The Baker seeking refuge in a large flagon of beer. The palace wine was undrinkable.

“You really don’t. Interesting.” Taunted Lord Thomas.

“Why is that interesting exactly?”

“Let’s not get into exactly as the years pass exactly becomes more exacting.” Lord Thomas chuckled to himself but didn’t wander away as he normally would to hobnob with more like minded Lords.

“You’re looking well Baker.” Stated Lord Lewis as he deemed to join their company. “So have you picked one yet?”

“If I knew what you were talking about then perhaps I might know what you’re talking about.” The Baker was getting more peeved by the minute.

“Are you really that old Baker? Have you forgotten what all this pomp and ceremony, which you choose to, ignore is about.” Asked Lord Thomas cuttingly but as The Baker took in his surroundings a fanfare began sounding the arrival of The King and his entourage. As a consequence rather than respect The Baker followed the others to The High Table where they bowed as The King hobbled over to his throne.

“Well if you two won’t tell me he will.” Muttered The Baker.

“Show some respect Baker. You did...”

“And I’d do it again in an instant. Oh.” The dawning had been slow, but finally hit like a brick. “It can’t be. He’s younger than me. Younger than all of us.”

“The successor will be named and we can all get back to business as normal.” Stated Lord Thomas and drained his glass of wine during the King’s salute. “Of course if standing had anything to do with it then either I or Lord Holmes should be name successor.”

“If age has anything to do with it then it should be The Baker.” Grinned Lord Holmes nudging Lord Thomas.

“You are right of course because age comes wisdom.”

“My eye. He’ll be told to keep it if he tries that one. This Kingdom has had over a thousand years of my life. A broken promise got me on that one and I can sit out another thousand.”

“That’s not your choice to make. You forget how you came to be here.” Stated Lord Holmes who was loyal to the throne as anyone else, but he too had doubts over how long each King was lasting.

“Pray silence for the King.”

“Loyal subjects, my Lords of The High Table, Lords, Ladies and one and all. You see before you a man at the end of his time. As my right for forgoing children I claim the right to name my successor.” The King allowed a small, but tasteful amount of objections before continuing. “The tide of time has served to turn all too soon for me. Bringing in changes and eroding the past.” The King shook as he spoke but knew if he sat down before his proclamation was over it

needn't be observed. "I have five instructions to be followed on the event of my death. First my body is not to be laid in state, but to be burnt with the minimum of ceremony. Secondly on my death The High Table will appoint more places in addition to that of my replacement. It's time you had new blood to shake you out of your lethargy. I have listed the new positions and my chancellor will announce them after agreement from the new king. Thirdly The Farmer's Union are to be given an additional twenty percent of new land to work, but only for fruit growing, the diet of these lands is disgusting. My fourth instruction is that, like my predecessor there will be no union of worlds for one thousand years. This leaves naming my replacement. I name The Baker; if he accepts then his bonds will be served. If he does not then his bond is to be extended indefinitely." With croaking laughter The King died where he stood.

"Can't say I saw those addendums coming." Stated The Baker King through gritted teeth. "The man was obviously less of a fool than I thought he was."

"Are you taking it?" Asked Lord Thomas respectfully.

"You have no real choice Your Highness. The bondage is to be served in the dungeons." Advised The Chancellor.

"Show me to the dungeons."

"Sire. You can't."

"My one and only command as King is to lock me in the dungeons. Okay a second one find yourselves a better King." The Baker King made his way to where several

soldiers in full ceremonial uniforms stood. “I am your King and I want you to lock me in the dungeon now. Then on appointment of a proper king I wish to see him, or of course you might find yourselves a queen without marrying a king.” This brought more than a few furrowed brows than like a squint ploughed field. Nonetheless The Baker King laughed all the way to the dungeons.

“Can we put him to death?” Asked Lord Thomas in The High Table Chambers with his fellow Lords and The Chancellor. “Don’t look at me like that. I know two of you are thinking the same thing.”

“Now that it has been said it can be put to one side. You would need everyone to and I don’t. So Chancellor tell us what our options are.” Instructed Lord Holmes avoiding The Baker’s chair which was the closest to the fire.

“This isn’t the first time this has happened. On the previous occasion the punishment was expulsion to the other world to live out their life naturally with a full knowledge of what they had lost.”

“Not exactly a punishment for our Baker King. How do we proceed given we can’t convince The Baker to his place on the throne.”

“Given it was the last request from the previous king. I suggest we proceed with the previous king’s requests.” Answered The Chancellor.

“I object, The High Table has always been five. We should only be looking for another baker. The Five represent the five great trades, stone, wood, clay, metal

and of course food. Thanks to the late King Frost. All the others have their unions and federations. They don't need to join The High Table." Lord Thomas was about to go on when The Chancellor cut in.

"The High Table is to be joined by a teacher, scientist, a medical and legal professional. The King asked that each and everyone be proficient their professions on both sides."

"I for one can't think of one who matches those criteria. Obviously we want to avoid a full on recruitment from the other side." Uttered Lord Holmes sitting back in his chair having lightened his pipe. The others followed suit. "The High Table can run the lands for one calendar year which we can extend to a degree. However it doesn't get us anywhere."

"Then we start the recruitment straight away. The High Table will never be the same. This leaves our reluctant Baker King. He listens to you Holmes."

"I will speak to him regarding a caretaker role. Just why you would think I can get through to him is beyond me. He is the obstinate man I have ever had the displeasure of knowing. Maybe in part he had good cause, but you would think he would let it rest after eight hundred years." Lord Holmes looked at his colleagues coldly and shook his head before he headed down to the dungeon however his path was blocked by priests and ministers, not forgetting high ranking soldiers and diplomats. "You will make way, or be made to make way." Lord Holmes' tone was harsh enough for the most insistent minister to stand aside. "An enlightened time my ear. Soldiers clear this corridor all the

way back to the Great Hall. From here on in only The High Table may enter it." There was a sudden pause in the mayhem as Lord Holmes' instructions filtered through the thick skulls of the soldiers, whereupon the corridor was cleared with amazing alacrity. This allowed Lord Holmes to centre on the task at hand, but not one which he relished. "May I come in Your Highness?" Asked Lord Holmes standing at the unlocked door to the dungeon where the Baker King stood looking out his window at the vast court yard below. "Your Highness wishes to be left alone then?"

"Enter if you wish Lord Holmes, but I am not your King. I never wanted to be Lord for that matter, but I am not your King. I never wanted to be Lord for that matter, but you made me welcome and taught me the ropes." The King Baker stepped down from his bench and looked at his old friend. "I've disappointed you haven't I?"

"No, not because of the refusal to be King, but a little in the way you did it."

"How do I resolve this?"

"That's a good start. Shall we go for a walk whilst they change your straw?"

"Very witty. I can't face the people as their King."

"Then we'll walk along the seawall."

"Can't think of an argument. After you, but no entourage. I mean it."

"Just my loyal guards. Sire."

"Sire my eye."

Chapter Two

Eight high level sorcerers followed The Baker King and Lord Holmes up and onto the Seawall. Whereupon four took it upon themselves to take the lead keeping ten paces ahead and the other four an equal distance behind. Below gentle waves from the east caressed the rocks. Seabirds of numerous species squawked and dived into the blue water. Lord Homes let this gentle magic work on his reluctant King before approaching the subject of a caretaker King.

“It would allow us more time to find a suitable replacement. The Kingdom needs some continuity whilst The High Table is lengthened and those missed off are tempered. A coronation would help enormously.”

“A coronation? I don’t know about that unless it could be written into my speech that I am only in power temporarily and that the first act of the replacement would be to set me free from all my bonds.” The Baker King sighed as the smile struggled to stay in place on Lord Holmes’ face. “The High Table once it’s complete again has the power to rule indefinitely in times of crisis.”

“This isn’t a crisis. This is just a storm in a tea cup which may not be the case if the people think we have imprisoned you. Chinese whispers the mortals call it.”

“The kingdom has never been larger and yet we’ve not had as much as border skirmish or raider report in centuries. The people are content. That definitely wouldn’t be the case if I remain in power for long.”

“Does this mean you are considering the situation or are you now trying to talk yourself out of it again?”

“As King I may not be everyone’s choice. The troubles you’re seeking to evade may come tenfold if I am on the throne. Still, I will agree to a formal coronation, but only until The High Table has been filled. In the meantime I’ll keep as low a profile as possible.”

“There will be duties you can’t avoid, but we will keep them to absolute minimum.”

“I would be completely lost without your guidance and if there is any way I can repay you now or afterwards. Then just let me know.”

“Your Highness’s thanks are more than enough.”

“I suppose I’m going to have to get used to that.”

“There is no easy way of saying this Your Highness, but there is one objection which even we, The Sorcerers Guild cannot overcome. The crown may choose to reject you.”

“There’s only one way to find out.”

There was definitely a buzz about the palace as word got round that there was to be a coronation. Invitations to all the representatives of the land were despatched and replies toted up. And no matter how many times the King asked that the pomp and ceremony be kept to a minimum, the coronation just kept on growing. Of course rehearsals were daily events as were lessons on how to address the various guests and what gifts he should expect to receive.

“When will you people understand I am only to be King for as long as the selection process takes to fill the High Table?” The would be King Baker watched himself deflate in the full length ornate mirror in the robbing chamber. “You do realise this could and probably will all go to hell the minute that crown is placed on my head? Do you speak?”

“They’re not allowed to Your Highness. They are to act as if they are deaf and mute so as not to disturb your thoughts at this most auspicious of occasions.” Answered The Head Dresser.

“What nonsense if all goes to plan I will be King for a day, so I’m saying they can talk.”

“As you wish Sire.”

“You will be killed instantly Sire if the Crown rejects you.” Uttered one of the fitters bowing frantically.

“I’m sure it won’t come to that Sire. The Crown is merciful.”

“That’s right. It knows a black heart when it sees one.”

“Let’s hope not.” The would be King Baker took one last look at himself in the mirror. “Well let’s just hope Lord Holmes’s tonic keeps me going through the speeches.”

To prevent a huge cleaning bill and compensation claims, the initial crowning was held behind closed doors just in case of an exploding head incident. The remaining High Table got to their feet slowly and bowed. It was Lord Holmes’ job to place The Crown upon the head of the new king. A job he had long since learned not to relish. The

would be Baker King knelt onto the well padded stool and gritted his teeth, even if he wasn't rejected by The Crown it would have plenty to say about his past.

“You have been chosen by the former King and approved by majority of The High Table. However the final decision is left to The Crown. If it accepts you then you will be King of all our lands.” Lord Holmes gently placed the perfectly fitted Crown which was created by The Sorcerers. Their only mistake was that the Crown would never accept one of their number hence Lord Holmes would never be King. “That has to be a good sign Sire.”

The Baker King smiled gently but his mind was being carried away or rather back to the day he was approached by The King regarding the cake. The bakery was going ten to the dozen. His wife and four of his five children were working furiously to meet the demands of their customers, but no one was unhappy. “Are you sure?” Asked a voice in The Baker King's head which was surprisingly like Lord Holmes'.

“Look at us. Working day and night. Money coming in and taxes paid up. The customers are getting the best bread and pies in the kingdom, but not for a King's ransom.” The Baker King watched himself wipe the sweat from his brow before kissing his wife who had come in for more bread. “As I said no one would starve when I took over the bakery.”

“You're saving grace, because what you did next was unforgivable. Yet they too saw some redeemable feature or you'd have been put to death as well.”

The Baker King's eldest son ran into the bakery like he had just been knighted. "Father the King is here and he wishes to taste our wares."

"If he has money in his pocket then he has as much selection as everyone else. King or no king nobody gets a crust without paying."

"Solomon you mustn't talk like that. What if he's here to offer you a royal seal of approval?" Protested Meredith Baker as she quickly carried a tray of loaves to the front of the shop.

"A lot of fuss over nothing. You can't eat a seal and they'll take more taxes off us. Old Tom told me as much the last time I was in the tavern and that wasn't yesterday."

From outside the front of the bakery a large crowd approached behind several mounted men. The Baker shook his head and continued his work whilst the rest of his family abandoned their duties and went to greet the king. "What of our customers are they not to eat tonight because we get a royal visitors?" Bellowed The Baker above the growing excitement inside and outside the bakery. A few moments later two well dressed men entered the bakery from the shop and proceeded to tell The Baker how to behave in the company of The King. The Baker was about to tell them he was too busy for such matters when The King himself entered. All three men bowed whereupon The Baker continued his work.

"Sire this is Solomon Baker, simply the best baker in Gwenport if not the region." The man who spoke had the

expectation that The Baker would drop what he was doing and offer his wares, but he just scowled heavily.

“Does your King get to taste these wares?” Asked the second man nudging The Baker, but he resolutely refused to stop mixing.

“Here Your Highness, the best there is.” Insisted The Baker’s son offering a tray of sweet cakes and fresh bread.

“And who is to pay for them?” Asked The Baker under his breath drawing daggers from The King and his men.

“I apologise for my father Sire.”

“You what?” Raged The Baker about to swipe his son with the long wooden spoon. “Who are you to apologise to me? I am master here not you and you’ll remember your place. Go and get peat for the ovens and then consider your position in my family whilst you assist with the washing up.”

“Yes Father. Please excuse me Sire.”

In the midst of this domestic The King sampled the wares and insisted his men did the same. Then ordered that his soldiers dismount and help themselves to The Baker’s wares. “What’s wrong Baker? Aren’t you honoured that I have led my people here and they are eating?”

“I am pleased that you and your men enjoy my wares Sire, but unless they are paid for then it won’t only be the people of Gwenport who go without today. I am but a humble Baker who works from day to day to meet the needs of my customers and family. Surely you have far

finer chefs and bakers who deserve your merit.” The Baker held back from saying that they could face the increase in taxation, he felt he had said enough if he was facing a wise man and not that of an over privileged job with a crown.

“I can see you are a proud man Solomon Baker, but keep a leash on that tongue of yours in my presence.” The King was seething and was looking for someone to blame, his men took the brunt and were ordered to leave the bakery. “My son’s twenty first birthday is next week. I want you to prepare his feast.” Ordered The King long since giving up any expectation of The Baker falling on his knees in thanks, and he didn’t disappoint whilst he just worked away at his cake mixtures. “Serve me well and I will give your bakery my seal of approval.”

“We’re too busy to serve just one family.” The Baker found himself on the floor having been slapped across the face by a metal and leather glove. “Is this the true face of our King? To have simple men brought to their knees for their enjoyment?” The Baker was held down by two soldiers as others smashed up the shop and bakery.

“Take his family and throw them in my dungeons. His women can amuse my guards until he comes to his senses. He has until the week’s end. Then they will be put to death. No one refuses me.” The King left the shop with his prisoners. “The moment we get back to the palace. Have them all put to death and him in irons. He will bake for my son or he’ll bake for no one.”

“I didn’t know he said that. I was just dragged back to his palace and made to watch my family raped and then

killed. That's why I applied the dark arts in my baking. They'd been passed down through every generation. It was our only protection." Uttered The Baker King as he watched his bakery burnt to the ground by The King's soldiers. "I don't, never understood his response, an honest King would have seen I wasn't being disloyal."

"So you weren't to blame for any of this, then who was to blame for this Baker King?" Asked The Crown softly as they flew across the land to the palace. "Do you take no responsibility?"

"I made my position clear. I didn't lie, but he saw his son's indulgence as being more important than that of the needs of my community."

"Paying customers you mean, and couldn't they have managed without you for a few days. Your son was promising to be a fine baker and confectioner like yourself. Wasn't it your intention to allow him to open a shop of his own on his twenty first Birthday? I know of many who would say this was an indulgence." The words might have had savage overtones but they were still spoken softly.

"Do not compare us to them. Until this day my worst thoughts were aimed at the young men chasing my lassies."

"And the taxes collected from you?"

"Paid in full and on time. I was a loyal servant of the Kingdom."

"But not of the King."

“No. He demanded too much and offered little to the people in return. His father wasn’t much better, but at least he brought peace and prosperity for those prepared to work for it.”

“Didn’t The King just ask you to work for him? Many would see that as an honour, but not you. You were too good to work for just him. Though the rewards were sure to have benefitted more than just your selfish desires.”

“I won’t argue on that point. I have often wondered what would have happened to the town and villages if I had just swallowed my pride.”

“How many times have you played this scene over in your head Baker King?” Asked The Crown as they stood watching The Baker prepare his cakes and pastries.

“I have no idea, but what’s the point? I was wrong in your eyes at least.”

“You have enough there for all the people of the kingdom Baker.” Noted one of many chefs drafted in for the royal bash.

“And I’ll guarantee you Chef that they will want more.”

“Think your baking is that good Baker?”

“It’s not for me to say Chef. That is for The King and Prince to decide.” The Baker shook his chains which kept him in the kitchen.

“That was doubt I heard Baker King.” Stated The Crown as The Prince in question entered the kitchens. “The last of his line. I wonder if he knows or feels it.”

“Arrogant young toad, but you know what he does next.” The Baker King watched and felt himself tense up as the Prince entered the kitchens and sneered at the work in process

“He shortens your chains because you asked him to leave the food until it was served. Whereupon he told you the fate of your family.”

“I had a knife in my hand and I should have used it.”

“It wouldn’t have brought them back, nor would it have called off your curse. It may well have been kinder to kill him that way instead of wiping out an entire royal court just because you were too good to serve your king.”

“Just make my head explode if you must.”

“Who says I haven’t?”

“You’re enjoying seeing me suffer too much for that to be the case.”

“Perhaps you should have used that reasoning earlier.”

Chapter Three

“Reasoning? Reasoning doesn’t help me endure these tasteless titbits of my past.” Argued The Baker King now having to watch The Royal Party gorge themselves on a feast that would have fed a thousand not just The Royal Family and a handful of selected guests, basically every successor to the throne. Of course The Baker might have known this if he had stopped to think about his revenge. Whether it would have stopped him was another matter entirely.

“How does this make you feel?” Asked The Crown.

“Disgusted. It’s strange I know, but I can’t stand watching people eat at the best of times. These people are just pigs. My dishes haven’t even been served yet.”

“Do you think they eat this meal knowing it’s their last?”

“How could that be? They have reserves piled to the ceilings and soldiers to protect them. Don’t expect me to pity them.”

“No, we both know you lost your pity before this.”

“I lost my pity yes, but on both sides of the coin.”

“Yet they decided not to put you to death.”

“Only because I begged to be put to death. Then they wanted to make me a political leader. That’s when I sought out Lord Holmes. Only he wasn’t a Lord then he was a simple warlock. I asked him for a potion to take my life, but he just marched me back here again.”

“We’re getting a head of yourself. They’re about to serve the cake and pastries. I believe this is where it gets interesting.”

The cake was as ornate as ornate could it be. A positive feast for the eyes. The pastries were dripping with honey fruits. The King insisted on wishing his son all the best before allowing him to cut the cake. The moment this was done a swarm of servants approached the cake and started the slicing whilst The Royals dug into a large portion of the cake. There were nods and full mouthed mutterings of delight. Then their faces lit up like a full moon. Without warning The King ripped another lump of cake and tried to ram it into his mouth. The rest of the family went after the crumbs of the cake. The guests were devastated by the demolished cake and demanded their share of the pastries. Fights broke out when it was announced that the last trays had been delivered to the party. Nobody noticed or cared that The Royal Family were at the point of exploding. When they failed to explode, but started to choke, all anyone cared about was the food left on their plates. Like starving rats they ripped at each other forgetting the food as they fought each other for more.

Slowly silence fell on the great hall, but the eating wasn’t over. The Royal dogs and servants fought each other for the scraps, what few there were of them.

“Did you forget that the servants helped themselves?” Asked The Crown, but The Baker King wasn’t listening, he walked among the bodies strewn among the up turned tables and dishes. It was the stillness that got to him and

whilst he was the cause of this carnage he never shed a single tear in regret. “What do you think of your handiwork Baker King?”

“In all honesty.” Began The Baker King in a respectful whisper. “It was a job well done.”

“On seeing the servants?” Asked The Crown sternly.

“Had their King put me to death and not my family, they’d have been alive to feed off of his scraps, but if you ask me that’s no way to live no matter how much honour and respect it brought them and their families.”

“And you wondered why they wanted you to be their leader.” The Crown sounded distinctly dismissive of The Baker King’s answer and moved time onto the point where the news of the incident involving the whole royal court reached the kitchens.

A stunned silence fell on the kitchen staff after the initial and uproarious disbelief died away. Suddenly the silence was broken by one of the chefs cutting his own throat. This was accompanied by the noise of frantic palace guards running about the stairs. The initial word of poison was soon replaced by plague and then witchcraft. And during all this hubbub The Baker continued to clear his benches and help with the washing up. Some said the pots ought to have been burned, others called for sacrifices to be made to the old gods whilst other buried their heads in prayer to whoever would listen.

When the order eventually came to round up all the kitchen staff and servants, The Baker decided then that he

would take sole responsibility. At the head of this military enquiry was Captain Hamill of the Palace Guard. By all accounts, though most were heavily laced with hope rather than fact, said Hamill was a seasoned soldier and fair to the lowest to the highest.

By the time it was The Baker's turn to be questioned the finger was already pointing at him. "It was I and I alone Captain. End it now by putting me to the sword." The Baker's words were rational and his behaviour normal but Captain Hamill looked at him as if he were mad.

"How could a village, sorry, town baker carry out such a deed? Alone?"

"With the right ingredients and a touch of old magic handed down through the generations, but to be lost with me. As your King had my family put to death."

"I know about your family though none of my guards took part in their deaths. Is that why you spared us?"

"I spared no one. I have no successor. The King has no successor. To be King it should be earned and not by right."

"And you see yourself as King?"

"I have neither the right nor the will for such a post. Let the people govern themselves."

"You are truly a revolutionary, but it's only my place to detain you until the inquisitor returns. He'll decide what your end will be. And you swear to me on the souls of your family no one else knew of, or assisted in your plan?"

"No one I swear."

“Take this man to the dungeons. No harm is to befall him prior to The Inquisitor’s return. I will eat with him so that his food and water is not poisoned for his benefit or others.”

Briskly, but far from brutally The Baker was taken in chains to the dungeons whilst the rest of the kitchen staff and servants were freed. In his dungeon and for the first time The Baker allowed himself to weep for his lost family.

“Genuine tears, but only for your own. And then you faced the Royal Inquisitor.” Uttered The Crown.

“Yes, but he got what he deserved in the end.”

“Yet you forgave him.”

“I did that. I just kept telling myself the more pain he put me through the easier my road would be in rejoining my family. Little did I know what you had in store for me.”

“We’ll leave my creation out of it for now. I wish we could hear what The Royal Inquisitor’s final thoughts of you were.”

The Baker was tied to a chair, his flesh was rotten, rat eaten and sores covered old wounds. The Royal Inquisitor paced around the chair wringing his hands and muttering to himself. “You’ve not endured the longest inquisition, nor have you suffered the worst I have ever meted out, but I believe you to have been telling the truth from the outset.”

“Thank you Lord Inquisitor.” Seethed The Baker through his enduring agony and growing illness. “Then please, you’ll sentence me to death?”

“Oh no. How could I put the King Maker to death? No my friend The Baker, your actions have seen to it that I am to be crowned King. I am the last of my line. Such is my place that I have no children so an heir must be sought so until that time I will be King.” The Inquisitor couldn’t believe his luck; a simple delay in his duties had prevented him from joining the festivities. He had cursed his luck then, but now he was to be king because of the spiteful and revenge hungry Baker. No he couldn’t put this man to death anymore than he could refuse to be King. “This is my sentence Baker. You will wander these lands a freeman, but no man woman or child can offer you solace in any shape or kind. And it will remain this way until I am cold and dead or you are. In fairness our physicians will heal you in one week or do the best they can and then I wish never to set eyes on you again.”

“I would rather die now. There is no place for me out there. I beg of your Highness to put me to the sword.”

“I have said it and it will be done. Heal fast Baker, seven days then you face the world alone.”

The scene before The Baker King melted into a blur as several physicians tended to his wounds and sores. Then just as easily the blurring cleared and he found himself in the Great Hall just after The Inquisitor’s coronation.

“I had no part in this Crown. His assassination was his own doing.” Stated The Baker King as through the throngs of well wishers and general suck ups moved a young woman. Not hurried, stopping to speak to other revellers, dancing but forever getting closer to The King. Then she

achieved her goal she along with several maidens of fine figure were presented to The Inquisitor King. Biding her time like a true assassin the young woman curtsied to her King with his hand in hers. Then gently kissed it. Before the curtsy was over The Inquisitor King was dead.

“She never got the benefit of the doubt you got.” Stated The Crown as soldiers rammed swords and spears into the young assassin. “Then again she only killed the last of the line.”

“From the mythical set. The old king sent every knight and soldier he could spare to wipe them out. He had been told that there would never be a union of worlds until we like they had destroyed all the magic.”

“Odd given that he had a court warlock in Lord Holmes’ father.”

“Dark magic. I’ve lived a very long time and I don’t understand where the line is drawn. I proved good magic could be used for evil purposes. So there is a blurring of the line. Anyway I was never here at this time. I was on the road as it were.”

“You had a visitor before you left. I think we should see that.”

“The final part of the curse.”

“Without it you wouldn’t be who you are this day. Who you may even become.”

“So this curse does go on?”

“I never said that. I may have implied it, but I never actually said it.” The Crown had put them back in the dungeons. The Baker looked better than he had, but was far from his previous stature. “Warlock Holmes, a dark wizard indeed, but even he saw something in you; if only to get what he longed for.” Added The Crown with just a touch of attitude which made The Baker King smile if only momentarily.

“Well Baker Assassin. News will have reached even these dark holes that The Inquisitor King is dead?” Asked Warlock Holmes revelling in The Baker’s terror at his sheer presence. “Good then this is easier for me and you.”

“Please tell me you’re here to end it.” The Baker fell to his knees and begged.

“Oh do get up. No your punishment is to be extended and expanded. The Inquisitor King had made me work so very hard on these spells and it would be a shame to waste them now. You my dear Baker are going to travel this land and the next for an eternity. You are going to watch death’s hand at work time and again. In the hopes that someone, someday will see that you had no right to kill the king and insight madness in these lands. So off you go. I’m serious run along.” Only The Baker remained on his knees. “I’m sorry but were you expecting some form of fireworks? Obviously you were.” The Warlock Holmes helped The Baker to his feet and mockingly dusted him down. Then in the harshest of whispers added. “We both know Baker Assassin that the best magic is reserved to the quietest and most unobtrusive spells.” Then with a hearty push towards

the dungeon door where he mocked. “Enjoy your journey, because it’s going to be a long one.” Turning his attention to the guards Warlock Holmes ordered that The Baker Assassin be given enough food for seven days and nights. “Only the very best mind you.”

“Yes Sir.” The Guards helped The Baker out of the dungeons and saw to it that his wounds were once more tended to and that part of his bundle was ointment he could self administer. “Come on Baker we’ll escort you to the palace limits, you deserve that at least. We’ll see to it that you have weapons to protect yourself once we leave you.”

“Why are you showing me this kindness?” Whispered The Baker.

“You have no idea how you have changed these lands. And if giving you a few items the palace will never miss helps you on your way, then please think of us kindly on your journey. This is where we have to leave you Baker. May whatever Gods and magic you worship keep you in good health and heart.” The Guard looked truly sorry to leave The Baker’s side. They spoken of a great many things and now they were being forced to part.

“If it was in my power to bless you and your men I would, but all I have is my thanks which I give freely.” The Baker slung a bag over each shoulder and sheathed his sword. This didn’t appear like a good time to say he’d never had to use a sword before.

The Baker King chuckled to himself as he watched himself try to sheath and unsheathe the sword. “I never got it right. The curse came with a small blessing which I learned the hard way. I can’t die. Lots of pain, but no death. Just up that track couldn’t have been a mile into the woods and hello pain.”

“Then we’ll watch it, it’s not as if this time counts.”

“You’ve frozen time just to walk me down memory lane? A lot of effort over nothing.”

“If you don’t understand why then we need to travel a bit further down memory lane.”

“Oh the joy. How about throwing in some mood music?”