

The Fabulous Baker Boy

I wasn't surprised when our youngest son Adam found himself a temporary job in a Baker's shop. I've always maintained that it's better to have an interest in your work, no matter how short term it might be and Adam has always had a healthy attraction for cakes.

Next to working in a chocolate factory this was probably Adam's idea of a dream job and there was even talk of a staff discount, the thought of which made Adam swoon.

Since the Baker's shop was in a particularly colourful part of town he was also going to experience a slice of real life. But I was fairly confident that a six foot body builder could handle any tricky customers that might come his way. Although I did get worried the first time I collected him from the shop. I was early and Adam bolted from the shop like an escaped mad scientist in his white coat. With a nervous eye over his shoulder he ordered me to park round the corner out of sight.

"They'll think we're lottery winners, or drug dealers!" he said and ran back into the shop where the queue was apparently salivating at the thought of the special offer on caramel squares.

An old lady with purple hair and a matching shell suit had already elbowed two hoodies into second and third place. Adam said you could have cut the atmosphere with a ladle.

Since everything was prepared on the premises Adam always came home smelling freshly baked. One sniff and you felt simultaneously hungry and comforted. Which just goes to show you really can be cuddled by a smell. This wasn't the only thing Adam brought home. Every evening we entertained a new character and plot line as Adam recounted the day's events. It was like listening to an episode of a soap opera you didn't like but couldn't resist hearing about.

Most of it was very funny, but quite often my wife and I sat with our mouths open, and thought what sheltered lives we led. Although we were comforted by the thought of the shop owner Brian keeping an eye on Adam's every move via the internal CCTV system. This came equipped with a microphone and speaker so if Adam was unsure about the price of an item the dour, beleaguered voice of God would boom out from above.

"That's one pound and eighty seven pence change," Adam would glance up over his shoulder at the camera, "now give Muriel her change."

Needless to say this had an interesting effect on some of the customers, none more so than the lady with no teeth and a large wart on her upper lip who burst into the shop every Monday morning and shouted lengthy bible passages at everyone. Apparently this sorted the men from the boys. While the locals looked on with glazed expressions anyone who had just been driving past and fancied a sticky bun immediately vanished. After her sermon the hellfire lady would march up to the counter, parting the queue like the Red Sea and demand the right to buy two fruit scones. On her way out she would absolve everyone of their sins.

"God is watching you son and he loves you!" she would blurt toothlessly.

Adam had to admit that after a few weeks of this it began to lose its appeal, particularly if the shop already had a healthy quota of baroque characters each one adding their own unique flavour to the proceedings. Like the bloke who had to sing, 'I'll take you home again

Kathleen' to everyone. Apparently he was always shocked when people refused to let him move in with them. True, some of the customers were either inebriated or severely hungover, but most of them had just survived a generous helping of life, and they stayed for hours to tell Adam all about it, without ever buying anything at all.

Scars were held up as evidence and at least once a week someone would come in with a black eye and a tale of Shakespearean complexity and gothic horror that would curdle the cream cakes. Personally, I think Adam's white coat had something to do with it. A lot of these people probably thought they were visiting some sort of clinic.

Even although there was a police station just a few doors down, we were constantly telling Adam to be on his guard. Particularly when it turned out that he was either manning the place on his own, or at best with a tiny lady called Moira who wore huge sunglasses night and day.

"Moira's more of a shop mascot really," he told us with some affection, so we imagined her perched on the counter all pink and fluffy waiting to be petted. In reality Moira was hard as nails and was 'studying' Kung Fu. Her pals in the local Neighbourhood Watch had dubbed her 'mad' Moira. When Adam asked her how she had earned her a nickname she told him it was because she went commando round the streets at night. We didn't say anything.

Typically, 'mad' Moira wasn't there the day the crazy pieman called; instead Adam was left in charge with a new girl who seemed to be mute. The pieman was a small, slightly built bloke with a bright ginger beard whom Adam described as a Troll.

"He's probably of Scandinavian descent," said Adam thoughtfully. Wherever he originated from, he had more recently been visiting distant planets. While taking a brief respite from his galactic travels he had developed a taste for the Baker's steak pies and was renowned for his gloomy manner and 'far off' stare which was further complicated by a bad squint so you always felt he was staring at someone else who was hovering on your right shoulder.

Adam had been having a particularly bad day when the mad pieman turned up. The bible lady had made several bonus visits warning about impending Armageddon, and a giant stray dog, frothing at the mouth had to be carefully ejected.

On top of this Adam had been too busy to have his lunch so he was not in the best frame of mind when the pieman marched in holding a pie he had bought a few days earlier and slammed it down on the counter. The top of the pie was missing so Adam stared reluctantly at its mashed contents and then told the bloke that he didn't need any extra pies today – he had a shop full of them.

"That's nae steak!" barked the pieman, "it's bloody mince!"

Deciding not to argue with someone who was visibly on another channel, Adam handed over a replacement steak pie and watched as the bloke ripped off the top, took one look inside, and then slammed it down on the counter with a hideous wail.

"It's still mince!" he shouted, his eyes rolling together in his head like magnetised marbles. Adam silently offered yet another steak pie and watched it meet the same fate as the pie man started howling like a wolf. Stopping only momentarily to grin at the new mute assistant who looked on like a hypnotised statue. Adam didn't think he had enough pies for this to go on much longer so he told the bewildered new girl to guard the shop and marched out. Down the road he could still hear the pie man screaming, "It's mince!" and for a moment Adam toyed with the idea of getting on the bus which had just stopped in front of him, but instead he headed for the cop shop.

Apparently the policeman almost fell off his seat when Adam strode in with his white coat splattered with blood red jam.

Thirty seconds later, wearing his armoured vest and carrying his truncheon the policeman was fit for the fray. He ordered Adam to stay well back, but the little mad pieman was already scuttling up the street, visually abusing them as he went on his way. The policeman shouted a stern warning at him then picked up a topless pie from the pavement.

“Is this the pie in question Sir?” he asked gravely. Adam peered at it carefully.

“One of them,” he said nodding and the policeman sighed and shook his head. Adam gave a statement and the pie was held as evidence. Needless to say Adam now looks back on his freshly baked days with mouth-watering fondness. If nothing else he learned that you can’t have your cake and sell it.