

Chapter 1

The sun streamed through the windows set in the vaulted whitewashed ceiling high above Brother James's head. The golden light illuminated the cloud of flour drifting upwards from his working hands, danced on the dough and was kneaded into the mix along with a whispered prayer and the live pungent yeast. He divided the great body of bread into eight equal pieces and set them to one side, covered in warm tea towels to rise. The scent of yeast and clean cloth filled the high kitchen.

An arched door opened and one of the younger brothers stuck his tonsured head into the room. Brother James looked up, irritated at the interruption.

'Father Pierce says you are to go to him.'

Brother James threw one anxious glance towards his rising bread but obeyed the greater imperative. He rubbed his hands, enjoying the familiar pleasure of dry dough peeling from skin, washed them under the tap, dried them on a towel hung in front of the huge monastery cooker and, still wearing his crisp white apron, strode down the length of the kitchen aisle. At the far end, as distant as possible, the young vegetable cook was slicing an avalanche of courgettes.

'May I see to the bread?'

'No!' Brother James snapped. 'Leave it alone.'

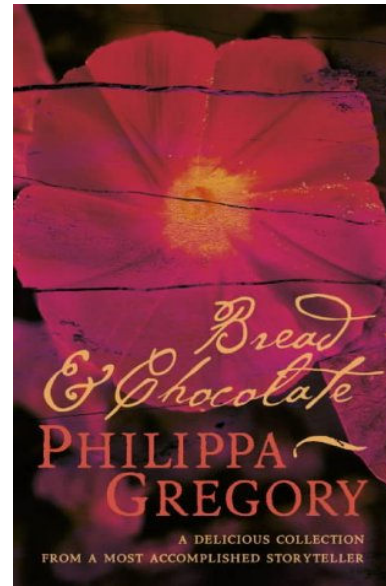
He reproved himself for lack of charity as he shut the door on his brother's crestfallen face. But he cheered up almost immediately. Any man who obeyed the rules of poverty, chastity, and obedience, daily and without fail, might allow himself the occasional human error of grumpiness, especially to some damned carrot peeler.

'It's about your book,' Father Pierce said without preamble.

Brother James stood before the huge carved desk, his head slightly bowed to signify absolute obedience.

'I have a letter here from the publishers. Turns out it's doing rather well. They want to reprint it.'

A flicker of what might have been pride gleamed for a moment in Brother James's face and was instantly repressed.



‘People are keen on cookbooks,’ the abbot remarked. ‘And they say that your bread recipes and the spiritual element are exactly right for ...’ He consulted the letter ‘ ... the gourmet new-hippie market.’ He looked at Brother James over his severe horn-rimmed glasses. ‘Gourmet new-hippie? I thought it was just bread recipes with a few prayers.’

‘It is,’ Brother James said modestly.

‘They want you to do a programme for television,’ Father Pierce remarked. ‘Show people how to cook the bread, I suppose. They want to film our daily life here, and then cut to the studio kitchen where you will be making our bread.’

‘Cut?’

‘Should I say slice?’