

# THE BAKER'S DOZEN



A true story of love and suffering in war-torn Ukraine leading to  
Dynamo Kiev's infamous "Game of Death"

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## **Kiev, capital of The Ukraine, June 1941**

MAKAR GONCHARENKO, has everything going for him. He's a star at Dynamo Kiev and one of the top footballers in the Soviet Union. At a friend's wedding he meets the devastatingly beautiful IRYNA KORDIK. It's love at first sight...and her father the bakery superintendent, IOSIF KORDIK, is one of Dynamo's most ardent fans.

The next day their whole world falls apart when Hitler, having torn up his Peace Pact with Stalin, invades the Soviet Union. Only JAKE FORREST, a swash-buckling, American photo-journalist, who by chance had been renting rooms above Kordik's bakery, is elated, being the sole Western reporter with access to The Front Line.

A few days after the invasion Makar is press-ganged into service, where he and thousands of his fellow Ukrainians are forced to take on German tanks, often armed with little more than pitch forks. Like over 650,000 others, he disappears, presumed dead.

Iryna is totally devastated.

## **October 1941.**

The German Army led by MAJOR GENERAL EBERHARDT, occupies Kiev. Eberhardt visits the bakery to tell Forrest that as an American neutral, he can continue his work, under supervision. During the same visit Eberhardt bumps into Iryna and is attracted to her. He invites her and Kordik to dinner. Kordik, desperate to keep his job and without considering the implications, jumps at the chance. Iryna's fate is sealed and she is coerced into becoming Eberhardt's mistress.

One evening as she gets out of Eberhardt's car, she is watched by a bedraggled figure. It is none other than Makar himself. He is in despair and trudges away past a cafe. Kordik, inside, recognises the starving Makar, and chases after him to bring him inside.

Over Makar's first real food for months, Kordik explains that some of the ex-Dynamo players work at the bakery, and he asks Makar to join them. Makar refuses, thinking of Iryna and the Major General. However when a Gestapo patrol appears asking for papers and Kordik insists that Makar works for him, he has no choice but to accept.

Kordik takes Makar back to the bakery to show him the dormitory where he will sleep, and gives orders for a hot bath, a shave and a haircut. It is Iryna who shows up to give the latter. She's different. Just as beautiful, only now sad and nervous, even pretending to be proud of becoming Eberhardt's mistress.

After a few days Kordik asks Makar to look for more of the ex players and offer them jobs too. With Forrest's help Makar finds some old team mates including his friend, KOLYA TRUSEVICH. Only the war has taken its toll and the goalkeeper is a pale shadow of his former self.

One night Iryna, unable to keep away any longer, comes to Makar begging for forgiveness. They fall into each other's arms. He asks her why her father is hiring the players, and learns that the Germans are planning a tournament for morale and propaganda - and Kordik wants to enter a team! Makar thinks he must be crazy. How could a bunch of half-starved men, ravaged by war, possibly play?

Yet little by little, the players get into training. The girls in the bakery find them shirts and make them shorts, socks and boots.

### **Early summer 1942**

The players are as ready as they'll ever be. Kordik proudly leads his team out against a team of local police. To the delight of their supporters and Iryna, (but not Eberhardt), they trounce them.

On subsequent match days, Makar looks in vain for Iryna, but she is being kept away and punished by Eberhardt. The team goes on to beat sides from Hungary and Romania.

The final is against the top Luftwaffe side. The whole city is in a state of intense excitement, but the odds are stacked against them with an SS Major as referee. This time Iryna is in the crowd, but sitting next to Eberhardt.

Despite vicious fouls by the Germans, ignored by the referee, Kordik's team is leading at half-time. And then they are warned of the dire personal cost if they win. But patriotism prevails and at the final whistle, The Baker's Dozen have achieved the seemingly impossible, emerging as the 5-2 winners.

But victory has come at a terrible cost. The crowd's celebrations are brought to an abrupt and violent end, by the baton-wielding police and trigger-happy German soldiers. Forrest, Kordik and the team, are taken to Gestapo headquarters, "for their own protection". Under interrogation KOROTKYKH is the first player to die.

Iryna goes to Eberhardt and, without disclosing her feelings for Makar, pleads with the Major General to release them. He relents in the case of her father, but nonchalantly tells her that the others have all been sent to the infamous Siretz camp. Kordik returns to the bakery, but the Gestapo experience has taken a heavy toll on his health and state of mind.

### **The next 18 months.**

Iryna cycles out to the camp every day in the hope of catching sight of her beloved Makar, not knowing whether he is dead or alive.

Meanwhile the tide is turning on The Eastern Front after Stalingrad. One morning, with the Red Army advance sounding in the distance, the German guards at Siretz are ordered to start shooting the inmates. Makar and Forrest wait nervously in line, as KUZMENKO, KLIMENKO and TRUSEVICH, are systematically shot.

At his headquarters, Eberhardt hurriedly clears his desk of papers, and is then driven through the streets to the bakery. Kordik overhears Eberhardt telling Iryna that he wants to take her to Poland. She laughs at him. He threatens to shoot her and her father, just like the players had been shot that very morning.

At this news, Iryna flies into a rage, and with hidden scissors she stabs a stunned Eberhardt in the neck. Eberhardt struggles to shoot Iryna, but Kordik barges into the room and takes the bullet meant for her. Weakened, Eberhardt drops his gun, which Iryna grabs and shoots him.

Back at Siretz, Makar and Forrest are saved by a Russian air attack, which scatters the guards, although Makar has taken a bullet in the shoulder. They find an abandoned German Jeep and drive back to the city. Despite intense street-fighting, they make it to the bakery. A barrage of fire from a Russian Tupolev fighter accidentally ignites a fire in the bakery.

Despite Forrest's protestations, Makar fights his way up the stairs to Kordik's apartment where he finds Iryna crying over her dead father. As Makar and Iryna start to leave, a fireball ignites from below, throwing him down the stairs and engulfing the apartment with her still inside it.

### **Many years later.**

It's a big match. Outside the rebuilt Dynamo Kiev Stadium a frail, elderly Makar, the only known team survivor, lays flowers on a statue to his fallen comrades, convinced that no one will ever remember the players and what they achieved. In the Directors Box, where he is the President's guest of honour, the whole crowd rise to their feet and applaud him as he takes his seat.

Two seats along Makar sees Forrest, back in Kiev for this special occasion. With tears in their eyes, the two elderly men embrace and recall the days when The Baker's Dozen gave an embattled nation reason to hope.