

A Chocolate Battering

A Silly Karl's Bakery Murder Mystery



by Kelly Szabo

*Merry Christmas Mom!
Sorry this one took so long.*

*Love,
Kelly*

Chapter 1

It was another early morning at Karl's Bakery and Coffee Shoppe. The loud clunking of the mixers drowned out the music on the radio as the day's bread was mixing.

Judy, the owner of Karl's Bakery, was busy at her post, frying donuts. This was not a job she wholeheartedly relished, but one that she knew was important. After all, Karl's Bakery had recently won Best Donuts in the tri-county area. That was pretty impressive.

Stella Martin was Judy's right-hand gal and had been employed at Karl's for over ten years. She stood at the workbench chopping the Apple Chop-Chop bread as if it were her ex-husband. Recently divorced, she was still trying to work out some personal issues.

Earl, Judy's husband, was up in the office doing paperwork, and at the scaling bench was the newest employee, Eddie Talbot.

Eyeing the scales carefully, Eddie poured powdered sugar into the scaling boat until the scale tipped. Then he dipped his scoop back in and took a bit off the top. This caused the scale to tip back to where it started. He let out a curse under his breath, and began all over again. Judy and Stella secretly watched this display of obsessive behavior, trying hard not to burst out laughing. When he finally got the amount to his liking, he carried it over to the Champ mixer, and poured it in, all in one dump. A cloud of powdered sugar went everywhere, saturating the air like a dense fog.

"What the heck are you doing?" Stella stood at the bench, waving a rag through the air, back and fourth, and coughing. "You're gonna kill us with powdered sugar inhalation!"

Eddie let out a couple coughs. "Sorry about that." He looked towards Judy.

"Just put the paddle on and start'er up," said Judy, dipping hot donuts into chocolate icing. "You can sweep up the mess later."

Judy had owned Karl's Bakery for over twenty-five years. Until now, she hadn't had the chance to take time off. She decided to hire another baker so that she could have some vacation when the opportunity arose. Eddie was the one.

Eddie turned around and eyed the rack of paddles, craning his neck trying to figure out which one belonged on the Champ. He reached up and grabbed the biggest one, and walked back to the mixer. He stood, scrutinizing the paddle and mixer, trying to figure out how to put it on.

Judy, unable to contain herself, said, "I thought you told me during your interview that you knew how to run an industrial-sized mixer?"

"Well, uh, this one is different than the ones I used when I was in England for a year," he said. "Remember, English baking standards and equipment are a bit different from the ones here in the US."

"Yes, but I'm sure even the English put the paddle on the darn thing before they turn it on." Judy gave Eddie a stare and grabbed the paddle out of his hand.

Stella tried hard to suppress a smile, adding more apples to her Chop-Chop.

Judy attached the paddle to the mixer, then turned to Eddie.

“If you can successfully finish this batch of icing today, I’ll promote you to chocolate cake tomorrow morning. And whatever you do, don’t go sticking your arm into the mixing bowl when the mixer is running. These are powerful enough to break your arm faster than you can blink.”

An hour later, the rest of the employees, arrived. Betty, Shannon, Nelly and Elizabeth came in through the back door and down the ramp. “Good morning girls. Just about got these babies ready for you.” Judy lifted the screen of donuts out of the fryer and slid them on to a cake pan. Then she began slapping them into the chocolate icing.

Betty, Shannon, Nelly and Elizabeth worked the front of the bakery, selling the pastries and running the deli. Betty and Shannon had been at Karl’s the longest, then came Nelly, then Elizabeth. Elizabeth and Eddie were the newest employees, unless you counted Mazey, Judy’s new cake decorator.

“Good morning, Judy,” they all murmured as they past by.

Eddie was focused on the women instead of his icing. Shannon, Betty and Nelly all beamed at him. They proceeded to the front of the shop, giggling like schoolgirls.

“Uh, Earth to Eddie.” Stella was trying to get his attention. “You’re dripping icing all over the floor.”

“Huh?” Eddie snapped out of it. “Oh, crud.” He began wiping up the mess.

Stella looked on. “I guess Travis will have his work cut out for him tonight.”

Just then Earl came tromping down from the office, waving a piece of paper over his head, extremely agitated.

“Judy! You are *not* going to believe this!”

When Earl wasn’t helping with donuts or icings, it was his job to do the bookkeeping: taxes, payroll, banking, etc.

“What is it now?” Judy was irritated by the fact that she now had a baker who probably couldn’t boil water, and her whole reason for hiring a baker was so that she could take some time off. Now she’d have to figure some way of getting rid of Eddie so that she could find a baker who could actually do the work.

“We received a letter from Enos Bailey, our landlord.” Earl began to read the letter word for word. “It says here, ‘Mr. & Mrs. Bacon, bla bla bla...’ Earl scanned the page to find what he was looking for.

“Ah, here it is. ‘I have been left no choice but to sell your building to Consolidated Conglomerates, Ltd., due to the common wall. CC, Ltd has already received permission from the Honorable Judge Cornelius Strominhammer, and will begin construction on the neighboring property within two weeks.’ ”

Judy was so busy listening to the contents of the letter that she burned her fritters. “What! They can’t just tear down the building next door! Everyone knows we both share the wall. If they tear down the building, we’ll have no wall! That can’t be right, can it? They can’t do something like that so quickly! It’s... it’s unconstitutional!”

Judy began turning a bright shade of crimson. Stella and Eddie were afraid Judy might burst a vessel.

“Jesus, Earl,” she continued, almost in tears, her donuts a lost cause. She slumped down onto a bucket of cherry filling, head in her hands. “What are we going to do?”

Earl shook his head. “I don’t know that there is anything we *can* do. It looks to be legal and everything.” He glanced back at the letter, shaking his head. “But I’m going to make a phone call to our lawyer. Maybe there’s something we can do to stall them.”

It didn’t take long for the news about the wall to reach the girls working up front.

“I just can’t believe a company could be so heartless,” said Shannon, bagging some whole wheat bread. “Don’t they even care about anyone else but themselves?”

“Well what would be the point of that,” answered Nelly, washing donut trays. “If they had any compassion for other people or businesses, they wouldn’t be the rich, powerful people they are today. I hate to say it, but I’d probably do the same thing.”

Elizabeth was loading the dishwasher, a disgusted look on her face. “I wish people would quit stuffing their dirty napkins into their coffee cups. I hate having to pull them out with my bare hands. Gross.” She turned to Shannon and Nelly, and said, “I can’t figure out why no one said anything about it before now. At least have the decency to give more notice than just two weeks.”

Mazey was the new cake decorator. She was what the girls considered happy-go-lucky. In fact, she was so chipper it was disgusting. Never in a bad mood, never an unkind thing to say, and never one to gossip. What kind of woman never gossiped?

Elizabeth took a cake order back to Mazey to be decorated for a customer. Mazey was humming while she was mixing colors.

“Good morning, Mazey,” said Elizabeth.

Mazey looked up from her work, happy as a clam. “And a good morning to you, too, Elizabeth dear. What can I do for you this fine morning?”

“Well, I have this cake order that just came in. I’d do it myself, but I’m afraid I’d end up ruining the merchandise.”

Mazey waved away this negative comment. “Oh don’t be ridiculous dear. Why, I couldn’t tell the difference between a frosting tube and a cake foil when I was your age. In fact,” she reflected, “I had thought about a career as a lawyer. So many lawyers in my family, it seemed the logical thing to do, but finally found my calling in cake decorating. And look at me now. It takes time to get good at something. What you need is a little patience and lots of practice.”

Elizabeth smiled and Mazey gave her a wink. “Now why don’t you hand me that order and let’s see if I can’t fix it up for you.”

Later that morning, Judy and Earl left to meet with their attorney. Eddie and Stella were finishing up in the back. Eddie was gathering up the rags and placing them in a bucket.

“I guess I’ll put these in the laundry,” he said.

“Oh, don’t worry about those. Travis takes care of that later after closing. He’s the one that will let you in tonight.”

“Who’s Travis?” asked Eddie.

“Judy’s son. He’s the one who does the cleaning. He’s been doing a lot of work in the basement lately. Cleaning out clutter and junk. He can do the laundry for you. Why don’t you go ahead and get out of here. We’ll see you early in the morning.”

Eddie seemed relieved by the invitation to go, but was still insistent. “No, I’ll just go ahead and pop these in. I should clean up my mess from earlier this morning.”

Stella shrugged her shoulders. “Suit yourself. You know how to get into the basement?”

“Yep. Thanks. See you tomorrow bright and early.”

“See ya.” Stella grabbed her coat, and left out the front door.

Eddie watched her until she was out of sight.

Chapter 2

Earl and Judy sat in the waiting room of the law offices of Amsbaugh, Bismark, Justice, Pritchard and Weinstein. The place was empty, aside from the young receptionist. Earl and Judy found themselves staring at the goldfish that meandered through a large murky tank.

A petite and nervous looking woman with glasses came through the door. With a shrill voice she asked, “Mr. and Mrs. Bacon?” She glanced around the room, as though it were full of clients. Earl and Judy rose and followed her through the door into an extremely small office with papers stacked on every horizontal surface.

“Please have a seat. Mr. Justice will be with you shortly.” She motioned them towards two brown plastic chairs in front of a cluttered desk. As the receptionist left, Judy and Earl gave one another a glance. It said: ‘What a dump’.

After a moment the door burst open and in flew Bob. “Hi folks. Sorry I’m late. Had some briefs to file with a judge down in District, and to top it off, I spilled coffee on my new tie.” He plopped down into a squeaky chair, let out a big sigh, and began to situate himself. “Now lets see.” Looking through all the piles of papers and files that surrounded him, he finally found what he was looking for. “Aha. Found it. Yes, this mess may look like disorganization, but I’ve found over the years that this system actually works best for me.” He gave them a wide grin, and pushed his thick glasses back up the bridge of his nose with a finger. “OK. Karl’s Bakery. What seems to be your trouble?” He folded his hands over the open file and looked intently at Earl and Judy, waiting for them to fill him in.

“Bob,” said Earl in a disheartened voice. “We’ve got a wall problem.”

The next morning Judy and Earl picked up Stella from home and drove to the bakery. They filled her in on what Bob Justice had told them.

“Bob says there hasn’t been any complaints against Consolidated Conglomerates,” said Earl. “And with Strominhammer as purveying judge here in Everett, it doesn’t look like we’ll be able to do anything. Bob said he’d try filing a motion to postpone the demolition, but he doesn’t think Judge Strominhammer will allow it.”

“Why not?” asked Stella.

“Well, not only is Strominhammer real chummy with the fellows of Consolidated, but last year Bob got on Strominhammer’s bad side because Strominhammer’s wife got a DUI, and Bob just happened to be the prosecution’s star witness.”

Stella winced. “Ouch.”

“Yeah,” Earl continued. “Well, that’s what you get when you let your lush wife drive herself home from the Washington State Bar Association’s annual charity drive.” He paused for a few seconds and then said, “Bob seems to think we don’t stand a chance. He says our legal position stinks. But, he’s going to do some digging at the local library to see if he can’t come up with something.”

They arrived at the bakery. Earl unlocked the front door and let everyone in. They could see that the lights were on in the back.

“It looks like we won’t have to turn the lights on,” he said. “Travis must have forgotten to turn them off.”

“I wonder how Eddie’s chocolate cake is going to turn out,” mumbled Judy. She and Stella went into the deli to pour a cup of coffee. Judy was just picking up the coffee pot, when she heard Earl.

“JUDY!” Earl bellowed. Judy almost dropped the coffee pot. She and Stella were like sprinters on the US track team – no obstacles such as garbage cans, rotating fans, or pan racks could slow them down.

What they saw when they arrived on the scene made Judy whimper and Stella suck in her breath. Two legs were sticking straight up out of the Champ mixing bowl, and the rest of the torso was submerged in chocolate cake batter. The mixing bowl had been turned off, but there was chocolate batter splattered everywhere.

Judy looked at the two legs, and then looked at Earl. “Is that...Eddie?”

Earl nodded and let out a big sigh. “I think so. What in heck happened here?”

“It doesn’t look like Eddie was being very careful,” Stella answered. “I’m going to call the police. Don’t touch anything.”