

# Death by Donut

A Silly Karl's Bakery Murder Mystery



by Kelly Szabo

*To Paul,  
Thanks for all the love and technical support!*

## Chapter 1

Jackie Tuttle stood inside Karl's Bakery & Coffee Shoppe, and peered through the glass of the donut case. Staring back at her was a vast array of mouthwatering choices: chocolate donuts, glazed donuts, sugared donuts, filled donuts, plain donuts, and of course, donuts with a rainbow of colored sprinkles. The selection was overwhelming.

On this particular day it was Friday. In celebration of the last business day of the week, employees and businesses all around Everett, Washington, treated themselves to donuts from Karl's. For most it was a time-honored tradition, along with business casual khakis, polo shirts, and clean white sneakers.

For Jackie Tuttle, today was more than just a donut Friday. It was also Meet Your Friendly Banker Day at Cozy Colony Savings & Loan, where she worked. This was their first-ever open house, and they'd need extra donuts for the guests.

Shannon, who worked the bakery side of Karl's, stood behind the counter. She had a piece of wax paper in one hand, and a donut box in the other, patiently waiting for Jackie to make her selection.

In line next to Jackie stood Charles Ditworth, Jackie's boss. Chuck, as they all called him, was in his mid-forties, tall and lanky, with very thick glasses that made his brown eyes appear extremely small. He had accompanied Jackie with the outward appearance of wanting to be of assistance. In reality, Jackie knew his ulterior motive: he liked her a lot, plain and simple. She, on the other hand, had absolutely no desire for him. Time after time he made his feelings known to her, yet she continued to turn him down, until a week ago, when she agreed to go out with him for one drink.

The night ended in disaster. Jackie had ordered her drink, along with steamed clams, and had landed in the emergency room from an allergic reaction. She was still irritated that she let Chuck not only talk her into the date, but those wretched clams as well. She was allergic to oysters, mussels, and scallops. Why on earth did she think things would be any different with clams?

Jackie had worked for Cozy Little Colony Savings & Loan for almost ten years. In that time she had helped hundreds of customers invest their money and plan for their retirement. Then one day she realized she was pushing forty without any real means of retirement for herself. Now all that had changed. *Just get through today*, she told herself.

Jackie Tuttle didn't have a very exciting social life. Friendship didn't agree with her; she'd rather stay home on a Friday night and read a book than go out with the girls. Any contact with family was abandoned years ago; they all lived in the far northeastern corner of the country and never called or offered to visit, so why bother? And love was

never something she could really get in to; no one she liked ever asked her out on a date, only those she had no interest in. She figured she just hadn't met the right man. But that didn't bother her now; soon she'd have her pick of any man she wanted. *Ah*, she thought to herself. *What money will do.*

It seemed to Chuck that Jackie had taken a liking to him, that she had seen the light of love that shone so brightly for him, even considering their date from hell. But he had no idea of what was going on in the head of Jackie Tuttle.

As she scanned the selection of donuts, Chuck moved in closer.

"You know, I've been thinking," he whispered. "After the success of last Saturday, I thought we might try raising the stakes by having dinner at Bernie's on the waterfront."

Jackie turned to meet Chuck's beady gaze. She couldn't believe what had come out of his mouth. "The success of last Saturday? Which part are you referring to?" She strained to keep her voice from rising. "The part where you badgered me into eating those clams that almost did me in? Or, the part where my tongue swelled up to the size of a football and I was gasping for air?"

The patrons of Karl's Bakery tuned in to the spectacle. Chuck could feel the back of his neck growing hot.

"Please." He smiled nervously, looking around at all the gawking faces.

Jackie continued. "Oh, I know! It was the two days I had to spend in the hospital! That was darn successful!"

"No, I...I didn't mean it that way. I just--"

"I've got news for you, Chuck." Her face was now inches from his. "There was absolutely no success whatsoever in last weekend! And you can forget about a date at Bernie's or any other place!"

She turned back to Shannon.

"Shannon, you choose the donuts." She waved her hand in a sweeping motion in front of the donut case. "I don't care what you pick. If the other employees don't like what they get, they can go take a flying leap."

Shannon nodded without speaking and filled the donut boxes at lightning speed. When she was done, she rang up the total and collected Jackie's money.

"Don't know if I'll make it to the open house," said Shannon, trying to make small talk. "But best of luck to you just the same."

"Thanks Shannon." Jackie grabbed the boxes, and then stopped. "Oh, I almost forgot. Would you bag me up one of those chocolate cake donuts?" She pointed to a tray inside the case. "No nuts, just plain. And in a separate sack if you can." Turning to Chuck, she said with great emphasis, "I'm *extremely* allergic to nuts."

"No problem." Shannon grabbed the donut and stuffed it into a small white paper bag.

"You know," said Chuck, his voice shaky. "I just got you the vault job you wanted, and this is the thanks I get? First you won't go out with me, and then you will. Then you can't stand me, but the next minute you're kissing me. What is it with you?"

Ignoring Chuck, Jackie paid Shannon for the cake donut, and grabbed the donut boxes.

"Can I help you carry those?" Chuck asked feebly, stepping toward her.

She turned on him like a viper. "I'm going to use the ladies room, Chuck. So the answer to your question is a big fat *no*."

Jackie's high heels clomped loudly on the tile floor as she stomped away to the restroom. Chuck stared after her like a lovesick puppy.

"Well?" asked Shannon, and not without a touch of malice in her voice. "What'll it be, Chuck?"

He turned back to Shannon, deflated. "I don't understand women." He let out a sigh. "I'll have the same. Except, make mine with nuts. I love nuts."

## Chapter 2

In the back of the bakery, Judy Bacon and Stella Martin stood at the workbench meticulously cutting out shortbread cookies in the shape of fat hypodermic syringes. It was an order for 80 dozen cookies to be delivered by ten the following morning; Good Shepherd Hospital was having their annual employee blood drive. Dozen number thirty-eight was almost complete.

Earl Bacon, Judy's husband, was taking a break from his portion of the cookies. It was his job to ice the baked syringes with blood-red icing. He was sitting on a flour bin, sipping on a cup of tea. "Why don't we just do up the first forty dozen today, and then finish the rest in the morning? I don't know about you two, but the sight of blood makes me queasy, no matter what form it's in."

"You've got my vote," said Stella, placing cookies onto a tray. "My feet are getting sore from standing in one position for two hours straight."

Judy, who was having a daydream, shook her head back and forth. "Can you just imagine winning the three hundred and sixteen million dollar Mega Millions jackpot? I tell you what," she said, sprinkling some flour onto the surface in front of her. "If I ever won that much money, I don't think I'd know what to do with it."

"How about taking a vacation?" asked Stella.

Judy had owned Karl's Bakery & Coffee Shoppe for twenty-seven years. In those twenty-seven years she could count her vacations on one hand.

"Yeah, a three-month trip to Mexico, lying on a warm sandy beach, with a margarita in one hand and a cold *cerveza* in the other."

Earl calculated the winnings with a concentrated look on his face. "If you opted for the fifty percent up front, which you should do, because cash in the hand is better than waiting twenty years for the rest, then that's about... one hundred and sixty-eight million. Then of course you've got to subtract almost forty percent for taxes. So... it really isn't three hundred and sixteen million that you'd be winning. It's more like, less than half."

Stella threw a small hunk of cookie dough at him. It hit him in the forehead. "You're such a killjoy Earl."

"Hey, that's still almost seventy million dollars," he said defensively.

"I'd be happy just winning the Quinto jackpot," said Judy. "One hundred thousand dollars would suit me just fine."

"One hundred thousand dollars?" barked Earl. "What good would that do you? You'd still need to pay a huge chunk to the IRS, and then what've you got left? Not even enough to pay off a mortgage. Nope, I'm sticking with the Mega Millions. If you want to be able to retire and see the world, you need to win at least three hundred and sixteen million."

"Well," said Stella, waving off this ridiculous notion. "Unfortunately it was someone else who won the jackpots. I don't know why we do this every single time, torturing ourselves. We always get our hopes up, and then get all depressed when we don't win. I think we'd be better off not playing at all."

"You know," said Earl. "That's not what the winners would tell you."

Stella thought he did make an awfully good point.

Earl and Judy worked as a team when it came to the bakery. Numbers were never Judy's strong point, but she was a darn good baker, and she could decorate a cake better than most. Earl, on the other hand, didn't like baking, but he was fastidious with numbers. Out of almost twenty-eight years doing the taxes and the payroll, he had only made one error, and that was for a mere three cents.

The two of them combined made a lean mean bakery-business machine. But Judy was almost to retirement age, and Earl was already in his seventies. A winning lottery ticket would make them both extremely happy.

They spoke more about the ups and downs of playing the lottery, when a familiar voice rang out from behind them. "Good morning everybody."

They all looked up from their work to see their good friend Emil Hasek.

"Hey, Emil," said Judy. "What's cookin'?"

"Oh, the usual," he said with a chuckle. "Living hand to mouth and hoping for a miracle."

"Yeah," said Stella. "Don't I know the feeling."

Karl's Bakery had many regular customers. Some came in every day for coffee. Some came in every day for a donut. Emil came in every day for breakfast.

He leaned on the workbench with one elbow. He wore a white cowboy hat, and used the help of a cane to move about; World War II and seventy more years had taken its toll on him.

"Yeah, I just found out I didn't win the \$316 million Mega Millions jackpot. Or Quinto for that matter."

"Well that makes four of us," said Earl, standing up from his bin and sauntering back to his cookies and icing.

Emil eyed Stella for a moment. "I guess you didn't hear."

"Hear what?" she asked, rolling out her dough.

"Looks like your ex got lucky again with one of them scratch tickets. Rumor has it he won ten grand."

*Wonderful*, thought Stella. "Well, Emil, that's about the nicest news I've had all day. Good for Victor." She gave her dough a hard pound with the rolling pin.

Emil smiled. "You sure do let that guy get to you."

"Well," said Judy, coming to her defense. "It's disgusting that he's so lucky all the time." She turned to Earl. "What is this, the fourth time he's won?"

Earl shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. Either the fourth or the fifth. I've lost track."

Stella brightened up. "Well, I'm not too worried about it. It's not like he can retire. Every time he wins money, he spends it within a week. This won't be any different."

"That's right," said Judy.

Stella continued, rolling out her dough. "But it still makes me want to do something to the jerk to teach him a lesson." She paused and sighed. "I'm still bummed out that his wife's little heart attack incident wasn't real."

"Hey, that's right," said Emil, remembering. "I forgot about that. Darla checked herself into the hospital last week, didn't she?"

"Yes. Unfortunately it was a false alarm."

At that moment, Jackie Tuttle exited the women's restroom and walked quickly toward the back door of the bakery. Her donut boxes were stacked up three high, the white sack containing her chocolate cake donut teetering on the very top.

"Hi Jackie." Stella smiled, causing Jackie to stop and notice them. "Looks like you bought out the whole store."

Jackie hesitated. "Yeah, I guess I did." She stood there, looking a bit awkward. "Are you guys coming to the open house?"

Judy slid her tray of cookies onto the rack. "I suppose we could come and check it out. By the way, how are you feeling? We heard about your mishap with the clams."

Jackie rolled her eyes. "Oh, please don't get me started. I'm just glad it's over. I'll never go to another seafood restaurant as long as I live."

"Are you allergic to a lot of things?" asked Judy.

Jackie thought for a moment. "Yes. Eggs, nuts, pollen, seafood."

"Wow," said Stella. "That must be a real bummer. I knew someone once who had to carry around one of those special shots in her purse all the time, just in case she was stung by a bee."

"An epinephrine shot? Well, thankfully my allergies aren't that bad." The weight of the donut boxes was putting a strain on Jackie's arms, and she was becoming annoyed with the small talk.

"So how do you like working the vault after all those years of helping folks with retirement planning?" asked Earl, changing the subject.

Jackie forced a sweet smile. "I absolutely love it. The bank has been so good to me these years. I used to want to own my own business, like my father back east, but now I wouldn't change careers for anything."

"Owning a business is a lot of hard work," said Judy. "I know first hand."

"Tell me about it," agreed Jackie. "My dad was a locksmith for thirty years, and after he retired, he never changed another lock. Became a full-time fisherman down at the pier."

Earl laughed. "When we sell this place, I'm sure we'll take up our hobbies full time, whatever those are."

"So you're now working with the safe deposit boxes?" asked Stella

"Yep. I needed a change. This is actually my first week on the job." She shifted her donut boxes. "Well, I'd better get going. These boxes aren't getting any lighter." She gave them a smile and then added, "Swing by and I'll show you the vault."

"Maybe we will," said Judy.

Jackie gave them a big smile and turned toward the back door. Walking up the ramp, her warm smile was quickly replaced by a cold glare.