



Scottish  
Bakehouse  
Mysteries™

# Of Ice and Men



Elizabeth Penney



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*... and more to come!*

*Of Ice and Men*

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Library of Congress-in-Publication Data

*Of Ice and Men* / by Elizabeth Penney

p. cm.

I. Title

2020940197

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AnniesFiction.com

(800) 282-6643

Scottish Bakehouse Mysteries™

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10 11 12 13 14 | Printed in China | 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



“Would you look at that?” Carol MacCallan asked, a note of awe in her voice. Her hands stilled on the stack of plates she was unloading from a tray. “I guess the forecasters were right.”

Molly Ferris followed her friend and business partner’s gaze to the tall windows of the old Victorian that housed Bread on Arrival, their Scottish bakehouse. If the precipitation were rain, she’d say it was bucketing down. But it was dense, heavy snowflakes that made it nearly impossible to see more than a few feet into an almost impenetrable veil of white.

Molly shivered as a gust of wind buffeted the building. “I heard it’s the worst winter in fifty years. And it’s only January.” Even to her own ears, her laugh sounded a little frantic. Moving automatically, she scooped coffee into a filter and slid it into the machine, then pressed the button. She’d lost count of the number of pots she’d brewed today.

Fortunately, the weather wasn’t keeping customers away. No, they seemed as desperate as Molly felt to relieve the season’s monotony by getting out of their homes for a while. They liked sitting by the roaring fire, sipping hot drinks, and devouring delicious baked goods created by Laura Donovan, the third partner in what had come to be known as the Bakehouse Three. The women had been roommates in college, and their friendship had endured more than three decades—long enough to decide they all wanted to try their hands at a midlife career shift into bakehouse ownership, which had come along with a move to the quaint Scottish-themed town of Loch Mallaig in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

“Are ye suffering from a wee bit of cabin fever, perhaps?” part-timer Hamish Bruce inquired. He stroked his white beard, blue eyes twinkling as he exaggerated the faint Scottish burr he had acquired as a lifelong resident of Loch Mallaig. “You’re as fidgety as Octavius and June.”

As a matter of fact, Molly did empathize with Hamish’s pet budgies. Their cage was large and well-appointed, but it was still a cage. “Do you blame me?” She made a dramatic gesture. “I not only work here, but I live upstairs. I haven’t been anywhere for a week.” If not for needing groceries or walking Angus, her Scottish terrier, she wouldn’t even have put her nose outside during this last cold snap. Having grown up in Ann Arbor, Molly had endured many a Michigan winter, but this year seemed a bigger struggle than ever.

“You’re not the only one who’s getting edgy,” Carol said. She put a Scottish snowball on a plate and set it in front of Molly. “Harvey’s been climbing the walls. Thank goodness the Jock McCauley Ice Fishing Derby is starting today and lasts into next week.”

“That seems like a long time for a fishing tournament,” Molly mused.

Carol laughed. “The entrants are a bunch of bored retirees and guys who do warm-season work like construction. They’d let it last two months if they could.”

“Are they actually ice fishing today in this storm?” Molly held up the confection, a raspberry sandwich cookie dipped in powdered sugar and coconut. “These are the only snowballs I want to see.” She took a bite, allowing the sweetness of sugar and vanilla to mingle on her tongue with the slightly tart raspberry.

“Apparently so,” Carol said. “If the snow backs off, I plan to go down to the loch later and check it out.”

“Take me with you,” Molly practically begged. “Angus will enjoy

the outing too. One good thing about his black fur—we won't lose him in the snow." Molly's spirits lifted, although she didn't know if it was the sugar boost or the mild joke.

The front door opened to admit Fergus MacGregor, owner of the Castleglen golf resort and lodge. He stamped his snowy feet on the doormat and said, "It's a good day for polar bears." He pulled off a knit cap to reveal dark, tousled hair that he straightened with his fingers, then stuffed the cap into his parka pocket.

At the sight of her friend, Molly's spirits lightened further. "Welcome," she called, waving her half-eaten snowball. "You've got to try one of these."

"Way to market our goodies," Laura said with a laugh, carrying a tray of buttery melting moments to the case.

"Molly's method might have serious consequences for our waistlines," Carol said wryly. "And it's tough enough to keep the pounds off in winter anyway." Strong and fit thanks to her regular Pilates sessions and the fact that she was on her feet at the bakery all day, Carol's concerns were likely misplaced.

"You look wonderful, Carol," Fergus said gallantly. He pointed at the snowball. "I'd like to try one of those and the largest coffee you can pour." He rubbed his hands together. "It's brisk out there."

Molly hurried to do the honors. "How are the roads?"

Fergus made a face. "A little slick. And this last squall came so suddenly that the plow trucks haven't been able to keep up."

As if summoned by his words, a large orange truck, its lights flashing, went past on the road with an audible scrape of the huge plow. *The soundtrack of winter*, Molly thought. She could be anywhere and she would recognize that sound.

"There they go," Hamish said. "I'm sure they'll be working 'round the clock. Again."

Laura, who had been assessing the cookies remaining in the case, finished and stood. "I'll have to make up a box of goodies for the public works employees. They deserve a treat."

Fergus sipped from the coffee Molly had poured, lingering by the counter while she rang up the sale. "I'll drop it off on my way home if you want."

"How nice," Carol said. "I'm going to take some treats and hot drinks out to the ice fishermen later."

"I love that idea," Molly said. "I'll help. We'll carry twice as much with the two of us."

"Perfect." Carol smiled, then cocked her ear toward the sound of a timer going off in the kitchen.

"Duty calls." Laura gave a salute, then hustled away.

"So Harvey is still doing the tournament today?" Fergus asked, returning his wallet to his pocket. "I know he'll fish in any weather, but this is something else."

Carol snorted. "Of course he's still doing it. He's been talking about it for weeks, hoping the ice would cooperate and freeze deep enough."

"It's thick enough for sure." Even though Fergus had his order, he didn't seem eager to leave the counter and go sit down. "I was there when they cut a test section. It's over a foot deep."

Hamish folded the newspaper he'd been leafing through. "Enough to hold a vehicle then. If it's over eight inches, you can drive on it with a small car. Trucks, you need fifteen inches at least." The retired history teacher was a font of information about the most eclectic matters.

"They're using snowmobiles to pull the bob-houses out, so they should be all right," Carol said. "But now they have extra snow to dig through to make their fishing holes."



“A lot of it blows off,” Fergus said. “You’d be surprised.” He took another sip of coffee. “Anyway, it’s a nice memorial event for Jock. It even starts on his birthday.”

“Did you know him?” Molly asked.

Fergus smiled. “I sure did. Jock McCauley was a great old guy. It’s too bad he passed before you moved to town.”

Molly leaned on the counter. “He was the original owner of Neeps and Tatties, right?”

“That’s right,” Fergus confirmed. “Brodie McCauley is his nephew. The food now is every bit as good if not better, though that could be Catriona’s influence.”

“Between Brodie’s family recipes and his wife being a trained chef, I’m not surprised,” Molly said, suppressing a giggle as Fergus took a bite of the snowball and shed coconut all over his short beard.

“I’m looking forward to the Burns Week kickoff dinner the historical society is holding at Neeps and Tatties,” Carol put in, then chuckled. “My grandkids are jealous that Robert Burns gets a whole week to celebrate his birthday, instead of only one day—especially since the twins have to share a birthday. Try explaining to seven-year-olds the importance of Scotland’s premiere eighteenth-century poet.”

“I wouldn’t know how to begin,” Molly said, laughing. “Now that I think of it, I’m surprised the derby and the birthday celebration are being held at the same time.” She raised an eyebrow, thinking of the town’s head librarian, who was also the Burns event’s chief planner. “Usually Grizela Duff doesn’t like competition.”

“Ah, but Grizela has a soft spot for poetry lovers,” Fergus replied. “She and Jock were friends, and she knows he was a huge fan of Burns. He would have gotten a kick out of the derby and the birthday celebration coinciding.”

Squaring his shoulders, Hamish began to recite, exaggerating

the natural Scottish brogue he shared with many other Loch Mallaig residents. “The wintry west extends his blast.”

Fergus joined in with the next line. “And hail and rain does blaw; Or, the stormy north sends driving forth the blinding sleet and snaw.”

The men gave a bow as their recital concluded, drawing a few claps from around the room. Fergus still had flakes of coconut in his beard, and they resembled snowflakes to Molly’s amused eyes.

Fergus grinned at Molly. “I can keep going if you want. I had to memorize the whole poem for a class.”

“That’s a nice offer,” Molly said. “But I’ve got a feeling we’ll have lots of opportunities to hear Burns verses this week.”

“But boy, talk about a perfect poem for today.” Carol gestured toward the window. “From what I’ve heard, the weather in Scotland can get nasty too.”

“I think they get snow, but not as much as us,” Molly said glumly. “I wouldn’t mind if we’d had a white Christmas and a green New Year.”

“Cheer up, lass,” Hamish said, clearing a nearby table with a clatter of dishes. “Life’s too short to get down in the mouth.”

Molly fixed an amazed stare on Hamish. Normally he was a grumbling bear of a man making a fuss about the smallest inconveniences.

Before she could comment, he went on. “Are the Snide Pipers playing during this week’s festivities?” he asked, invoking one of his nicknames for the local bagpipe group Molly played in. “I can hardly wait.”

*There’s the Hamish I know and love.* Molly raised her head with dignity. “Yes, The Piping Yoopers are playing. And Bridget is dancing with The Leaping Lowlanders,” she added, knowing the mention of sunny Bridget Ross, the bakehouse’s other part-timer, would soften Hamish. Everyone loved Bridget.

“Speaking of the festivities,” Fergus said, “are you going to the planning committee meeting tonight, Molly? I am.”

“Wouldn’t miss it,” she told him.

“Me neither,” Carol chimed in. “Grizela would kill me.” Grizela ran a tight ship, both at the Loch Mallaig Library and as the president of the historical society.

Laura emerged from the kitchen, holding a large bakery box. She set it on the counter and patted the top. “This is for the public works department. Thanks again for delivering it, Fergus.”

“No problem.” Fergus popped the last of the snowball into his mouth and drained his coffee. “I hate to eat and run, but I’ve got to get back to the resort. See you tonight, ladies.” He nodded farewell to Hamish, and exited into the teeth of the snow squall.

But as Molly watched him drive his silver Range Rover out of the lot, she saw a patch of blue appear in the sky, as if the clouds had been torn apart. The snowfall lightened, tapering off as fast as it had started, and shafts of sunlight warmed the bakehouse floors. They had a reprieve . . . for the moment.

Perhaps lured out by the sunshine, customers streamed in at a steady pace for the rest of the morning and afternoon. Molly finally took a much needed break and ran upstairs to her apartment. Even before she got the door open, she heard Angus snuffling at the threshold, nails dancing on the wood floor.

“Hold on, hold on,” she said with a laugh when she got inside. “Don’t worry. We’re taking a walk.”

She dressed him in a warm coat—red with white snowflakes on it—then put on her own winter gear: lined boots, a puffy down parka, wool hat, and fur-lined gloves. She felt as round and soft as a marshmallow, but she was taking no chances with Michigan winter. Not wanting to brave the outside steps, which could be slippery, she went down the inside staircase and out through the back door.

Angus spent plenty of time in the fenced backyard during the

day, but that didn't give Molly any exercise, so she forced herself to get out at least once a day and stretch her legs. Although she was on her feet much of the time in the bakehouse, it wasn't the same as a brisk stroll in fresh air.

*Very fresh air today*, Molly mused as the breeze slapped her cheeks. She and Angus entered Dumfries Park, where the wonderful public works department kept the main paths clear of snow all winter. Otherwise, no one could use the trails until spring.

At first Molly thought she and Angus were alone, but then she saw a figure running in the distance. A jogger, judging by the way the person pumped his or her fists. She'd always admired but never shared the dedication of runners who braved the worst weather conditions for strenuous exercise.

The jogger turned a corner and headed toward Molly, still moving fast. Build and height revealed the runner was male. A hat worn low over the brow and a half mask hid his facial features—but they couldn't conceal the glare in his ice-blue eyes.

The sense of barely checked rage was so fierce, Molly recoiled. However, it seemed the runner's anger wasn't directed at her. He swept past, ignoring Angus's adorably longing gaze, and was gone. But he left a lingering swirl of dark energy in his wake.



The short winter day was slanting toward evening when Molly and Carol drove out to the ice fishing tournament. The event was being held on Loch Mallaig's namesake lake in front of Castleglen, so to access it, they drove past the main lodge and down to the shorefront. In summer, this was a lively scene of swimmers, fishermen, and kayakers, but today there was only the huddle of bob-houses set a distance from the shore.

“Are we taking the refreshments out to the bob-houses?” Molly asked. In addition to the baked goods, they’d brought large insulated pots filled with coffee and hot chocolate.

“No, thank goodness,” Carol said with a laugh. “We’re going in here.” She parked in a lot beside a tidy, whitewashed cottage used as a changing house and concession stand in the warmer months. Lights were on in the interior of the cottage and a stream of smoke drifted from the chimney. Harvey’s truck was parked along with several other cars that probably belonged to the other fishermen.

Although Molly would have liked to walk out on the lake and visit Harvey’s fishing hut, she didn’t mind that they’d be inside the warm cottage. The snow had stopped for now, but as the sun sank, so did the temperature.

They headed along a shoveled path to the front of the house, Carol carrying the box of baked goods and Molly toting the insulated pots. As they came around the corner, Molly saw a group of men standing on and near the porch, where a hanging scale was set up. A large fish with mottled skin rested in the weigh basket, hanging out on both ends.

The activity around the weigh station was interesting, but what caught Molly’s eye was a big, burly man with his fist raised, who was advancing on a much slighter man. Two equally large men stood poised behind the aggressor, as if to provide backup.

Had Molly and Carol walked in on a brawl in the making?



Carol's steps hitched. "What's going on?" She craned her neck, scanning the onlookers. "There's Harvey."

Molly spotted Harvey's friendly, handsome face at the fringe of the crowd. To be honest, she spotted his red plaid tam with its big pom-pom first. Carol had bought him that hat in Scotland, and he wore it a lot.

As they drew closer, the snatches of words they caught on the wind resolved into intelligible sentences. "Hold on a moment," the slighter man said. His tone was deep and rich, what some might call a radio voice. "As judge of this contest, I am responsible for ascertaining the source of each entry so as to ensure the utmost—"

The man who had been shaking his fist interrupted with a bark of laughter. "Enough already. You accused me of cheating by catching a bigger, heavier fish somewhere else and bringing it here." He thumbed his chest. "I heard you. And my friends heard you."

"That's right, you did," one of the friends said. "And Rick here heard it too. Didn't you, Rick?" The third man nodded.

A young man spoke up. "I'm sorry about this misunderstanding. Why don't we go ahead and enter your catch?" He stepped to the scale, and something about the way he moved seemed familiar to Molly.

She squinted at him. Could he be the runner she'd seen earlier? He didn't seem at all angry now. In fact, he was being rather ingratiating to the angry fisherman, sending him conciliatory smiles every few seconds as he weighed the fish.

“This sure is a big one,” the younger man said, steadying the scale basket. “A real beauty.”

Crunching footsteps sounded behind Molly, and she turned to see who was coming. Rail-thin Vernon Pennycook, owner of The Auld Crabbit bait shop, was trudging along, eyes glowering under his thick brows. It wasn’t surprising that he was here, since he was one of the most avid fishermen in Loch Mallaig—and notoriously one of the grouchiest residents. When he got really fired up, he made Hamish seem like a cuddly old teddy bear.

“Hello, Vernon,” Molly said. “Here for the tournament?”

His response was a grunt. “I’m in charge, aren’t I?” He continued slowly but surely toward the group, his shoulders hunched over with age.

Relief broke across the young man’s face when he saw Vernon. “Hey, boss. Glad you made it back. We’re weighing up today’s catches.” He lifted the fish from the scale using two hands. “Check out this beauty.” He placed it gently on the table and began to measure its length from head to tail.

Vernon’s gaze roamed the crowd. “Och, looks like ye all had a fine day.” He trudded over to one of the people waiting to have his fish weighed and asked to see his catch. They were soon deep in conversation about fishing exploits.

The expert fisherman’s presence appeared to calm the troubled waters of the situation. Even the burly trio seemed mollified. Carol and Molly continued toward the cottage, joined by Harvey, who cut through the throng to meet them.

After greeting the women, he reached for Carol’s box. “Let me take that,” he said, then nodded his head at another man to indicate he should come take Molly’s burden.

The foursome climbed the porch steps and went inside. All was

warm and toasty in the cottage, with a large cast-iron woodstove radiating heat, the flames visible through glass doors. The cottage had one main room with benches lining the walls and a couple of long tables in the middle. Doors on either end led to the men's and women's restrooms and changing areas, while in the back, a pass-through window was open to reveal a kitchen beyond.

Harvey set the box on the table, where there were already cups, plates, and napkins, and his companion did the same. "Thanks, Sheldon," Harvey said. "Do you know my wife, Carol, and her friend, Molly Ferris? Ladies, this is Sheldon Barker."

Sheldon, who had wind-reddened cheeks and seemed to be in his forties, grinned. "I haven't had the pleasure." He pulled off a glove and extended his hand. "Nice to meet you both."

"Are you a visitor to Loch Mallaig?" Carol asked politely as they all removed their coats and hung them on a rack.

"The wife and I recently moved here from Marquette," Sheldon said, edging closer to the warm fire and rubbing his hands together. "I'm in insurance, with my own agency." He eyed Molly. "In fact, if you need—"

Guessing he was about to launch into a sales pitch, Molly interrupted, "Would you like a cup of coffee?" She pulled a cup off the stack and held it poised under the spigot. "Fresh brewed right before we left Bread on Arrival."

"I can't say no to that." Sheldon left the stove and ambled over to the table. After Molly dispensed the coffee, he moved along to the cream and sugar that Carol had set out.

"What was all that about outside?" Carol asked Harvey as she opened the lid of the pastry box. "I thought that fisherman was going to punch the judge." She glanced out the window. "And who is the judge this year? I didn't recognize him."



Molly poured a cup of coffee for Harvey. “I didn’t either. Is he another newcomer?”

Harvey took the coffee with a smile of thanks. “Finlay Croft is his name. A friend of his has a cabin here, so he’s been coming up quite often. They’re both professors at Barrie-Firth College.” Harvey added cream and sugar to his coffee, stirring it thoroughly.

Sheldon perked up. “Barrie-Firth? That’s in my old neck of the woods. Good college.”

Harvey acknowledged this contribution with a nod. “Anyway, Vernon was looking for another judge this year because he wanted to cut back. He’s been organizing and judging the derby since it started. Finlay offered, and that was that.” He shrugged. “Most of us want to fish, not judge.”

Carol straightened the collar of Harvey’s plaid flannel shirt. “How did you do today, dear?”

Her husband made a face. “Nary a bite. But there’s always tomorrow.”

“Good thing, huh?” Sheldon barked a laugh. “I’m in the same boat. Or actually not, at this time of year, but you know what I mean.”

Molly gave his joke a polite smile. “Better luck tomorrow, then. Both of you.”

Carol sat on a bench, stretching her legs out. “So what happened with the argument?” Harvey and Molly joined her, but Sheldon remained standing near the stove.

Harvey’s lips twisted in a grimace. “Finlay accused Sam of cheating by bringing in a fish he caught elsewhere.”

“That sure was a big pike, you have to admit,” Sheldon said with a whistle. “Going to be a hard one to beat.”

“Well, for me, it’s more about the chase than the actual catch,” Harvey said. “If we depended on fishing to eat, well, that might be a different story.”

“Yes,” Carol agreed. “Thank goodness for the grocery store.”

Harvey’s attitude was a healthy one, Molly reflected. But for some people, competition wasn’t fun unless they were winning. She scanned the contest flyer pinned to the wall nearby. Whoever took first place would win a hefty cash prize. She didn’t know much about fishing, but Molly guessed it would pay for a lot of equipment.

“Do you want to walk out and see Harvey’s bob-house before we go?” Carol asked Molly. “We won’t linger. It’s too cold.”

Outside, the winter sun was dipping low, casting blue shadows, but it couldn’t be any worse than the walk she’d taken earlier. “I’m game,” Molly said. “I’ve always been intrigued by bob-houses. They’re cute.”

While she was sliding her coat back on, Molly saw a slender woman with a sharp nose and a sour expression outside. She wore a quilted parka and a fur-lined hat with flaps. She spoke to someone and they pointed toward the cottage.

The woman stomped up the porch steps and came inside. Molly had to step aside quickly to avoid the swinging door. “There you are,” the woman said to Sheldon, her voice as sour as her face. “I thought you’d be home by now.”

Sheldon gave a nervous laugh. “I was about to leave. You didn’t need to venture all the way out here.” He tossed his empty cup into a trash can.

The woman pulled her hat off with her left hand, revealing a head of blonde curls. “Oh, it’s not far.” She turned to the others. “We live on Bridgegate Drive.”

“My friend Laura lives on Bridgegate too,” Molly said. “Hers is the original crofter’s cottage for the Castleglen estate. Fortunately, it’s been kept up well.”

“Small world. Ours is brand new, though. Probably a little less drafty.” The woman smiled thinly for a moment, then refocused on

Sheldon. "I'm going to head back out," she said, then added pointedly, "There's a big pile of customer paperwork for you to go over at home."

"Be there in ten, honey." After the woman left the cottage, Sheldon explained, "That's my wife, Sheila. She helps me in the office." He gave an uneasy chuckle. "And, as you can see, she has her moods."

No one had a response to this observation, and after a moment, Harvey heaved himself to his feet. "See you tomorrow, Sheldon. Have a good night."

"You too." Sheldon glanced at Molly and Carol. "Nice meeting you. Thanks for the coffee." He zipped up his coat, then left.

As Molly stepped out of the cottage with Harvey and Carol a couple of minutes later, a group of fishermen passed them going up the steps. Through the big front window, she saw them cluster around the table, eagerly helping themselves to goodies and hot drinks.

Vernon and Finlay were talking near the weigh station while the younger man cleaned up the area. "Next time you think there's a problem with the catch," Vernon told the judge, "Come get me." He made a snorting sound. "I've been fishing on the loch so long I practically *ken* all the fish by name. I'll be able to tell if one of 'em came from somewhere else." At this remark, the younger man smiled to himself.

Finlay stood with arms folded across his chest, his expression both condescending and skeptical. "If you insist. But there was something shifty about those fellows. And Jeanne says—"

"How is Jeanne?" Vernon interrupted. "I haven't seen her yet." He nodded at Molly and the others. "Giving them the grand tour, Harvey?"

"I am," Harvey said with his rich chuckle. "They think the bob-houses are cute."

This remark was met with laughter from Vernon and the young man, while Finlay merely seemed bored at this diversion of the conversation.

“They’re cute enough when you need one,” Vernon agreed. “They keep the wind off your back at least.”

With Harvey leading the way, Carol and Molly trudged along a well-worn path through the snow to the shore. On the lake itself, other tracks led to the various houses set a short distance apart from each other.

“Who is the young man helping with the weighing?” Molly asked. “I don’t think I’ve met him.”

“That’s Noah Taggart,” Harvey said. “He works for Vernon at the bait shop.”

Harvey led them to the bob-house on the end, a little square structure with windows on each side and a door in front. It sat on runners that allowed it to be pulled onto the lake by a snowmobile.

“Welcome to my humble abode,” Harvey said, opening the door and standing back to let the women enter first. “Emphasis on the humble.”

There was barely enough room for all three of them in the shack, which was furnished only with benches around the walls and a small propane heater. A couple of circular holes were cut in the wood floor, and matching openings were carved into the ice below.

“Those are my fishing holes,” Harvey said. “I cast my lines into the water, and I drink coffee and think about life until something bites. It’s not a bad pastime.”

“Especially when you bring something home.” Carol turned to Molly. “He tosses back most of his catches, but once in a while, he keeps a fish for us to enjoy.”

Molly sat on a bench, picturing herself ice fishing. It really was peaceful out here on the ice, and the windows were at the right height to enjoy the scenery.

“Some fellows bring radios or televisions,” Harvey said, “but I think that defeats the whole point. You go fishing to get away from all that.”

As if the world was reminding them it really hadn't gone away, Molly's phone rang in her pocket. She considered ignoring it and wished she'd at least put it on silent.

"You'd better get that," Carol said. "It might be important."

Molly dug the phone out of her coat pocket right before it went to voice mail. "Hello?"

"Molly?" It was Laura. "Sorry to bother you, but Grizela called right as I was leaving the bakery. She said there's a big problem with the Burns Week."

*Uh-oh.* "What is it?" Molly asked. Everyone had worked so hard to pull the event together. They certainly didn't need a last-minute problem.

"The orator canceled," Laura explained. "Not only does he have a bad cold, but there's a blizzard grounding planes in Chicago."

Molly gasped. "What are we going to do? Without an orator to recite Robert Burns poetry, our celebration is ruined."