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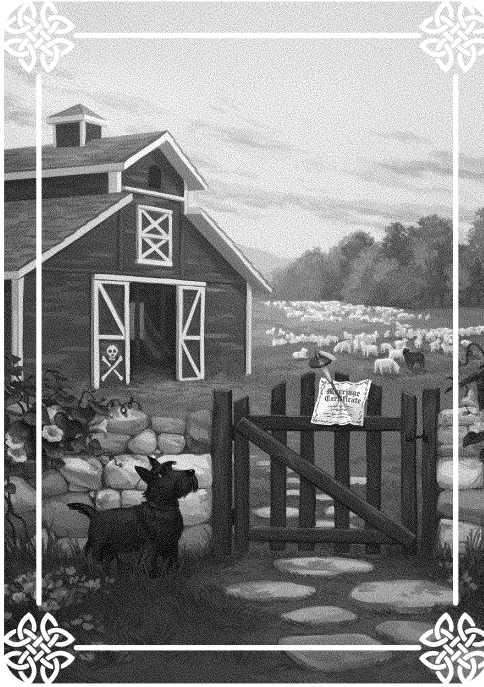
Shepherd's Lie



Elizabeth Penney



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Shepherd's Lie

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“These are our last scones until Laura can get us more,” Molly Ferris called to Carol MacCallan, who was helping her serve customers at the front counter. Along with head baker Laura Donovan, Carol and Molly operated Bread on Arrival, a Scottish bakehouse located in Loch Mallaig, a quaint village in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. The Bakehouse Three, as they called themselves, were former college roommates who had joined together to start a business in their fifties.

Molly handed the two plated scones to the customers waiting for their order. “Blueberry and maple crunch,” she said with a smile. By their attire—khaki shorts, walking shoes, and polo shirts under open fleece jackets—she guessed they were visitors. The warm September weather seemed to be boosting tourism, with a steady stream of foot and vehicle traffic passing through town and frequently stopping at the bakehouse.

While her husband paid Molly for the scones, the woman, lean and middle-aged with no-nonsense hair, held up a flyer. “Is Thistledown Acres far? I see there’s a yarn festival tomorrow and Saturday.”

“It’s right outside town,” Molly said, happy to answer despite the pressure of new customers lining up. The Bakehouse Three were committed to making everyone feel special, and sometimes that took extra time. She pointed out the route to the farm on the town map they kept handy by the cash register. “Take the first left once you pass the Castleglen resort. It’ll be Adair Road, which is named after the original owners of Thistledown Acres, who settled the property over a hundred years ago.”

“We’re staying at Castleglen so that will be easy,” the woman said.

“Thank you,” her husband said. “I sense a lot of yarn purchases in our future.” He rolled twinkling eyes behind wire-rimmed spectacles.

“I love knitting,” the woman said, clutching the flyer. “No harm in that.”

“There certainly isn’t,” Molly said. “You’ll see us at the festival, working the charity knitting booth.” The Fair Knitting Ladies, who met weekly at the Knit Hoose in town, would be selling scones and other goodies at the booth to benefit the premature infant ward at the local hospital.

“We’ll look for you there,” the man promised. He turned to his wife. “Come on, dear. People are waiting.” They carried their order to a table.

“How may I help you?” Molly asked the man next in line.

“Do you have any scones left?” he asked.

Molly gave him a regretful smile. “I’m afraid not at the moment, but the bagels and muffins are delicious.” She named the choices available.

For the next half hour or so, each person Molly served was replaced by another almost immediately. After she automatically gave her standard greeting around the twentieth time, the customer laughed and said, “Good morning, Molly.”

Molly blinked. Fergus MacGregor stood in front of her, grinning in amusement. After Molly had moved from Chicago to Loch Mallaig, she and Fergus had rekindled a childhood friendship formed when Molly had spent summers in Loch Mallaig. Now a widow, Molly had to admit she still found the tall, dark-haired divorcé very attractive.

“I’m sorry,” Molly said. “I guess I’m on autopilot because we’ve been so busy. What can I get you?”

Fergus ordered coffee and shortbread, and as Molly prepared his order, he glanced around the room. “Oh good, there’s a table open.

I'm meeting with a small committee to discuss the yarn festival." The third-generation owner of the Castleglen resort, Fergus was one of the festival sponsors.

"I think that's your group now," Molly said, nodding toward the bakehouse entrance. Aileen Morrison, the short, redheaded proprietor of The Knit Hoose, was holding the door for the always-chic local real estate agent Beverly Scott and a woman with abundant, wavy red hair who looked to be about the same age as Molly's 27-year-old daughter, Chloe. The three women headed toward the counter.

"It sure is. Have you met Gwyneth Carter, the owner of Thistledown Acres?" Fergus asked Molly.

"Not officially, but I've seen her around." Molly studied Gwyneth, who wore a lovely knitted shawl in shades of green and blue over a blouse, jeans, and work boots. She wondered if the shawl was made from Gwyneth's hand-spun wool.

Fergus introduced the young sheep farmer to Molly and Carol, who had just come from the kitchen with a fresh tray of scones. "It's so nice to meet you both," Gwyneth said. "This is one of my favorite spots when I do make it to town." She tossed her long hair back with a laugh. "Which isn't very often. There's always something to do on the farm. Lambing, shearing, spinning wool."

"How many sheep do you have?" Carol asked, her dark eyes curious. "I love driving past and seeing them frolic in the fields."

Gwyneth counted on her fingers. "Forty-three. I always forget a lamb or two. I have Merinos, Corriedale, and a newer breed called Polypay."

"Gwyneth is becoming one of the leading wool producers in the area," Aileen said, beaming with pride. "I just added hand-dyed Thistledown yarn to the store."

"I'm trying," Gwyneth rolled her eyes. "There are so many challenges."

Aileen patted the young woman on the arm. “Especially when you’re doing it all alone.”

At this comment, Gwyneth grimaced but didn’t respond. Molly wondered what the backstory was but thought asking might be rude.

Fergus glanced at his watch. “We’d better go ahead and order. I have to be back at the resort in an hour.”

Molly straightened. “Then let’s make sure you’re not late. What would you like, ladies?”

Soon the small group settled in the corner with their choices, and Carol and Molly returned to serving customers and cleaning up the seating area as people left. The steady stream dwindled to a trickle at last, providing a welcome breather.

Laura emerged from the kitchen, carrying a tray of bread. “Every time I peeked out here, you were slammed,” she said, arranging loaves in display baskets. “I wasn’t expecting this.”

“Me neither,” Molly said. But thinking of the total stored in the cash register, she was glad. Like squirrels gathering nuts for the winter, they had to take the business when it came. As with many things in life, it had a tendency to ebb and flow.

Laura finished setting out the bread, then studied the cases with a practiced eye, determining the batches needed to replenish supplies. She made notes with a pencil on a piece of paper.

Fergus approached the counter. “Could I nab one of your carafes to refill our coffee, please?” he asked, nodding toward the insulated pitchers behind the counter. “And if you have time, we’d love to talk to you ladies about the festival.”

The women exchanged glances. “Sure, we’ve got a few minutes,” Laura said. “I wanted to finalize the booth order with Aileen anyway.”

Molly checked the wall clock. “Bridget will be here any minute, so we should be okay.” Having trusted employees like Bridget Ross,

a college student who worked the counter part-time, and Hamish Bruce, an older man who helped in the bakery and also served as their resident handyman, meant Molly and the others could leave the bakehouse during business hours. That was handy when they took on other obligations like the festival.

Bridget soon breezed into the bakehouse and the trio joined the group at the corner table, coffee and a midmorning snack in hand.

"This scone is fabulous," Aileen said, demolishing the last of hers with a smile.

"Raspberry white chocolate," Molly said to Laura, since there was nothing left for the baker to identify. "They seem to be quite a hit."

Laura appeared pleased. "I was able to get some late local raspberries. I have enough to make a few batches for the booth tomorrow." She showed Aileen the list of flavors she was preparing.

"I'll be your first customer for the raspberry," Gwyneth said brightly. "That's what I had today, and it was amazing. I've definitely got to come to town more often."

"Our baked goods freeze well," Molly said, ever the saleswoman. "You can pick up a week's supply at once."

The farmer nodded. "Good idea. I think I'll do that today."

"I often buy a dozen or two muffins at a time," Beverly said, tucking a lock of her wavy, shoulder-length black hair behind her ear. "Jessica, my 10-year-old, loves them for breakfast." The attractive real estate agent had been a faithful client at the bakery ever since she'd helped them buy the old Victorian mansion that housed it.

Aileen was studying her phone, which had just beeped. "Uh-oh. Two of the volunteers for this afternoon just bailed on me. Medical emergency." She groaned. "We have the whole historical exhibit to set up."

Carol glanced at Molly, who could easily interpret her friend's

expressions after knowing her for decades. “We can help after the bakehouse closes,” Molly said. Today it was so busy, she didn’t dare to leave Bridget on her own.

“That will work,” Aileen said, beaming with relief. “Thank you.”

“Plan on a meal at the farm after,” Gwyneth said. “I’ve got three slow cookers going to feed the setup team.”

Fergus was flipping through what appeared to be schedules and layouts. “We have more than forty vendors, sheep trials and shows, lectures and exhibits, and demonstrations. Really amazing for a first year.”

Molly felt a frisson of excitement at the fun promised by the festival. The predicted weather was beautiful, and what could be better on an autumn day than hobnobbing with adorable sheep and buying wool?

“I couldn’t have done it without you all,” Gwyneth said. “More than once I’ve wondered what I was thinking to host this on my farm. But I’m hoping the festival will boost the local farms attending and the vendors as well.” She held up crossed fingers. “It better. I’ve got a lot invested.”

“On that note, we’d better get cracking.” Beverly said with a grin before draining her coffee and standing.

The others got up with a shuffle of feet and the scrape of chairs. “We’ll see you later,” Fergus said to Molly. He checked his watch. “I’ll get back to the resort in time to settle some things there before I head to the farm.”

“See you then,” Molly said, then returned to the front counter, admiring Fergus’s energy and productivity. On top of running the resort—which had one hundred guest rooms, a couple of restaurants, and a golf course—Fergus was an active volunteer in town.

Fergus stood back to let the women exit first. Before he could walk through the door, however, he got pulled aside by Ewan Loganach, the owner of the Two Scots Guesthouse, a local B and B. Fergus let

the door close and chatted amiably with Ewan, probably shop talk. A few moments later, the door opened, and a couple pushed past Fergus and entered the bakehouse. Both wore leather jackets and jeans and had the casual yet polished look of hip urbanites.

To Molly's surprise, the young woman stopped and stared at Fergus. With a giggle, she tossed a head of curls and said, "Hello, new boss." She held out her hand for him to shake. "I'm Carly Peters. I just started work at the resort spa."

Fergus seemed slightly taken aback, but he quickly recovered and shook her hand. "Nice to meet you, Carly. I hope you're enjoying your new job."

Meanwhile, her male companion sidled past them and headed to the counter. He was tall and lean, with an easy saunter and a smirk on his handsome features. His long blond hair was tucked behind his ears, and he sported a goatee.

"Hello, good-looking," he greeted Molly. "What's the best thing on the menu?" His gaze roamed the baskets and cases.

He's a bit over-the-top. Aware that Carol was watching with a smile, Molly said, "We bake everything from scratch, so you can't go wrong."

His gaze shifted to Carol. "I see that."

Carol's smile fell off her face. She turned her back and began vigorously cleaning one of the coffee machines.

Molly yanked a piece of tissue out of the holder with a little extra force than necessary. "What can I get you?"

The bell on the front door jingled as Fergus left the bakehouse. Carly joined her companion at the counter. She wrapped an arm through the young man's elbow and leaned her weight on him. "Isn't my new boss awesome, Ernie?"

"He's my new boss too," Ernie said, draping an arm around Carly. "What do you want, babe? According to these ladies, it's all good."

Carly's nose wrinkled. "You know I don't do gluten." She shuddered. "I can't eat anything in here."

Molly forced a smile and said, "Sorry about that. But we do have a great selection of coffee and tea."

A device chimed and Carly peeled away from Ernie. "I'll have a chai tea," she said over her shoulder as she walked away, pulling out her phone. Staring at the screen, she found a table for two and sat.

Ernie gave Molly a crooked smile. "Women. Can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em." He cleared his throat. "One chai tea and a regular coffee. And I'll take two pieces of bannock bread."

"Coming right up," Molly answered, determined to remain professional.

While Molly prepared the order, Ernie leaned on the counter, tapping one hand and humming. He glanced around at the other customers, the racks of food, the pile of order slips on the spindle. "So you must make all kinds of dough here," he said with a laugh. "Pun intended."

Molly set down a tray with his order. "We do all right. Here's your bannock and coffee." She pointed to a nearby station. "Utensils, sugar, and milk are right there. Chai tea is coming right up."

He tapped the edge of the tray, watching while she prepared the creamy tea. "This is a big house. Do you rent apartments upstairs?" He jerked a thumb upward. "I might be looking for a place."

"I'm afraid not. That's where I live." Molly clamped her mouth shut. It wasn't a good idea to reveal personal information to strangers. She placed the chai tea on the tray, then rang up his purchases.

After he paid with cash, Ernie carried the tray gingerly across the floor. Watching him settle in at the table with Carly, Molly smiled in amusement. It really took all kinds. And some days, the bakehouse got most of them.



Once the bakehouse closed, the Bakehouse Three and Bridget went through the familiar routines of cleaning up and getting ready for the next day's opening. Then, after saying goodbye to Bridget, they hopped in Carol's white Chrysler 300 and headed out to Thistledown Acres. Although Molly's beloved Scottish terrier, Angus, would have loved a trip to the farm, Molly was concerned that he'd get into trouble—namely of the muddy variety—while they helped Gwyneth, so he stayed at home in Molly's apartment.

"Whew. What a day." Molly sat back against the front passenger seat. "I think this is the first time I've sat down."

"I hear you," Carol said as she braked to let a group of tourists cross the street. "Loch Mallaig is bustling today."

"I'm glad for this little break." Laura sighed. "Then it's back to the bakehouse to make scones for tomorrow."

Molly twisted around in her seat to give Laura a sympathetic smile. "Don't worry—we're definitely going to help." Although former chef Laura was their head baker, the other two women pitched in, especially Carol, who was quite the expert, especially when it came to cakes. Molly was still learning the skills needed for commercial production. A former event planner, Molly handled Bread on Arrival's marketing and outside sales.

Carol drove through town and out past the Castleglen resort entrance, marked by stone pillars and a large sign. Golfers and carts dotted the rolling greens. Although the property was a familiar sight, Molly's heart always lifted when she saw it. Was it the reminder of happy vacations with her family? Or because the resort belonged to Fergus, one of her dearest friends? Both, she decided.

Soon after, Carol steered onto Adair Road, which climbed a hill edged by trees and fern-filled ditches on both sides. Molly opened her window and inhaled cool, fragrant air. Except for a stray leaf or two that had turned, the forest was still lush and green.

The woods opened up to reveal fields on both sides of the road. To their right, campers, trailers, and trucks peppered the grassy area, along with canopies and stone firepits. “That must be where the out-of-town vendors and exhibitors are staying,” Carol said.

“Makes sense,” Laura commented. “I know some people travel from one show to another and camp to save money.”

To the left, Molly glimpsed sheep grazing, and soon a white farmhouse, a red barn, and several outbuildings came into view. The charming two-story house was tucked among rose and lilac bushes and surrounded by well-tended flower gardens. From fields to farmhouse, Thistledown Acres was like something out of a storybook.

Carol turned up the gravel drive and passed the house, stopping next to several other vehicles. “Aileen is here already,” she said, pointing to the shop owner’s car.

Molly checked the area for Fergus’s Range Rover but didn’t see it. But she did see two men standing in front of the classic big red barn. By their body language, she could tell they were arguing. One man was dark and sturdy, dressed in overalls and rubber boots. The other was Ernie, the obnoxious customer who had gotten her skin crawling earlier.

She guessed the other man didn’t like him either, judging by the fist he was shaking in Ernie’s face.



Carol shut off the engine and prepared to get out. Noticing that Molly's attention was on something outside the car, she asked, "What is it?"

Molly pointed. "Those two men could start trading punches any second."

Laura leaned forward and peered through the window. "Maybe we should go find Gwyneth. I'm sure she doesn't want people fighting on her property."

But as the women watched, the two men broke apart. Ernie loped across the grass, while the other man stomped into the barn.

"Show's over, I guess," Molly said, reaching for the door handle. Hopefully Ernie wouldn't cause trouble again. Judging by her limited contact with him, Molly had the feeling he was responsible.

Once outside the car, Carol scanned the yard. "Why don't we go to the house first? I don't see Aileen anywhere."

The women trudged across the gravel toward a side porch, which seemed to be the primary entrance judging by the row of footwear lined up on it.

Carol rapped on the door's glass pane, and a moment later Gwyneth appeared. Her face lit up as she opened the door. "You made it. Come on in, we're having a quick cup of tea before tackling the barn."

Inside the large, homey kitchen, Aileen was seated at a long table, a steaming mug in front of her. She waved. "Thanks for coming, ladies."

“Glad to do it,” Carol said. “Plus, it’s fun getting a sneak preview of the festival activities.”

“Have a seat.” Gwyneth gestured to the table, then ignited a burner under a kettle on the old-fashioned but spotless stove. “Hot water will be ready in a jiffy.”

Molly glanced around as she took a chair, noticing the line of slow cookers emitting savory aromas on the Formica counter. Ruffled curtains hung at the windows, and the broad apron sink appeared to be original.

“My grandparents used to live here,” Gwyneth said, grabbing mugs from a shelf and setting them on the table. “I haven’t had a chance to redecorate yet. I’ve been too busy with the animals and the festival and everything else.”

“I like it,” Carol said. “It’s a wonderful old farmhouse kitchen.”

Laura leafed through the basket of tea bags Aileen had nudged her way. “I think so too. Plenty of room to work.” She removed her selection, then handed the basket to Molly.

“In the old days, there were plenty of farmhands and a big family to feed,” Gwyneth said. “This kitchen sure put out the meals.”

As she chose a packet of spice tea, Molly pictured a hungry, hardworking group seated around this table. Aileen had mentioned Gwyneth ran the sheep farm alone. “How on earth do you manage?”

Their hostess smiled at her. “Part-time help. I have professional shearers and hire other services as needed. And farmers help each other out too.” The doorknob rattled, and the dark-haired man who had been arguing with Ernie walked in. “Like Colin Christie, for example. He’s another sheep farmer. In fact, my border collie, Lally, is spending the weekend at his place. She usually lives in the barn with the sheep, but she might not take kindly to all these strangers around her charges.” Gwyneth grinned.

But Colin didn't return her smile. His brows knit together as he said, "Gwyneth, we've got a problem. Your husband is back in town."

Hands flying to her face, Gwyneth gasped loudly, the sound blending with the shriek of the boiling kettle. Aileen jumped up and turned off the burner, then dispensed hot water into the waiting mugs.

Molly was startled by the news that Gwyneth was married. She and Aileen had made so much of the fact that the farmer had to work alone. The couple must be estranged—especially since Colin referred to him as a problem.

Gwyneth sank into a chair. "Ernie's here? Are you sure?"

Ernie. The man from the bakehouse. But he had been with a woman . . . Molly felt her mouth drop open and quickly shut it. Carol appeared equally stunned.

Colin, still standing on the mat due to his muddy boots, nodded grimly. "Positive. We had a little argument out by the barn."

"We saw that," Laura said. "To be honest, we were worried for a minute that you two might come to blows."

"Yeah." Colin barked a rueful laugh. "He's pretty aggravating. It was almost like he was goading me into hitting him."

Gwyneth picked up a spoon and began stirring her tea, her gaze distant. "That's Ernie for you. He's infuriating."

"Well, I'd better get back to it," Colin said. "I set up several pens in the old livestock barn for visiting sheep. Now I'm going to work on the feeding stations."

"Thanks, Colin," Gwyneth said, her tone absent. "In a few minutes, we're going out to the red barn to arrange the exhibits."

With a nod, Colin left the kitchen, the window glass rattling as he shut the door.

"Are you all right?" Aileen asked, reaching out to pat Gwyneth's hand. "You look like you're in shock."

Gwyneth gave a humorless laugh. “I guess I am.” She ran her gaze over each of the Bakehouse Three. “I don’t have your usual happily-ever-after story. My husband and I got married right after college. Eloped, actually.” Her upper lip curled. “It was never a happy marriage. We were apart more than we were together.”

“You never thought about divorcing him?” Aileen asked, her voice gentle. “It would be totally understandable, I’m sure.”

“I did. More than once.” The young woman shrugged. “But then he’d come back and we’d patch things up. I had promised to spend my life with him, so I always told myself I had to do everything possible to make it work. The last time he left, I really thought it was over. That’s why I’m so surprised that he’s back.”

Molly exchanged glances with her friends, wondering if she should share the news that Ernie didn’t appear to be here alone. Carol gave a tiny headshake and Molly exhaled in relief. She really didn’t want to be the messenger in this situation. Gwyneth and Ernie could figure it out themselves.

“Why do you suppose he was arguing with Colin?” Aileen asked. “Do they know each other?”

Gwyneth shook her head, color staining her cheeks. “Not really. I’ve only gotten to know Colin as a good friend recently.” The blush deepened. “From the way he acts sometimes, I think he wishes I was single.”

But do you wish you were single? Molly didn’t blame Gwyneth for wanting to move on, if she did. A husband who took off all the time wasn’t a true mate.

“Well, if Colin is a friend, he probably gave Ernie a piece of his mind,” Aileen said tartly. “I might do the same if I see him. He’s acting very immature and irresponsible.”

Gwyneth patted Aileen’s arm. “Thanks for sticking up for me. You’re a great friend too.” She pushed aside her untouched tea and

stood. She went to the counter and peeked at the slow cookers while the others finished their tea. After a few moments, she turned back to the group. "Ready to get started?"

With a chorus of affirmatives, the women made their way outside. As they stepped off the porch, Gwyneth pointed to two low wooden barns. "Those are the sheep barns. The red barn is where my grandparents used to keep horses and cows. I don't have either at the moment, so that's where we're putting the exhibits."

She led the way across the drive to the red barn. Inside, a hint of hay and cow remained in the air, but what had once been stalls on both sides were now long rooms. The central area was already set up with rows of chairs facing a podium.

"This will be the lecture hall," Gwyneth said. "The side rooms will be historical exhibits on one side and crafts on the other."

"What do you need us to do?" Laura asked.

Taking over, Aileen pointed to some boxes and old spinning wheels. "Those are historical items that need to be displayed. And on the other side, Gwyneth is moving some office stuff out and into storage."

"I've been meaning to do it for ages, but haven't made the time," Gwyneth said. "Now this event is forcing me to get it over with."

"I'll help you. It'll seem less overwhelming with two," Molly offered. She followed Gwyneth while Carol and Laura worked with Aileen to set up the historical items. "What can I do?"

"All these need to be packed," Gwyneth said, pointing to shelves lined with binders. She pulled an empty cardboard box off a stack. "Once the shelves are cleared, I'll get a couple of guys to carry the boxes out."

"What are they?" Molly asked, grabbing another box. She pulled binders off the closest shelf and packed them neatly.

"Breeding and farm records going back a hundred years," Gwyneth said. "I've been meaning to go through them. Maybe this winter."

The long, cold Michigan winter was a perfect time for inside tasks. Molly had a few lined up herself. “The old farm records must be fascinating.”

“I think they will be.” Dust rose off the books, and Gwyneth sneezed.

“Bless you,” Molly said automatically.

“Thanks.” Gwyneth sniffed. “I’m hoping to glean some useful information about raising sheep. Things haven’t changed that much.”

The same was true of baking, Molly mused, although every age tried to put its own spin on things. Molly loved the fact that Bread on Arrival was carrying on venerable Scottish traditions. It gave her a feeling of being connected to a rich, storied past.

“For a few decades, there weren’t sheep here.” Gwyneth filled a box and moved on to the next. “My grandfather gave it up before I was born. But I decided to bring them back after college. I have a degree in agriculture.”

“I’ve seen articles that small-scale farming is making a comeback,” Molly said. “And I’m glad. I appreciate being able to buy locally produced food and such.”

Gwyneth wrinkled her nose. “It’s not easy. But I suppose nothing worthwhile is.”

Molly laughed. “You can say that again.” While they packed boxes, Molly told her about starting the bakehouse with her college friends. “It was a risk,” she concluded, “but more rewarding than I ever dreamed.” Now that she was self-employed, Molly couldn’t imagine going back to work at a nine-to-five job. Yes, she worked hard, but she and her partners reaped the benefits, not some faceless corporation.

“You’re really encouraging me,” Gwyneth said. “Now and then I’m tempted to sell everything and move to the city. But then I realize

how much I love farming." She held up a thick tome titled *Sheep Herd, 1952*. "I think it's in my blood."

"Probably," Molly agreed. She closed the flaps on her last box. "Where are these all going?"

Gwyneth studied the stack. "I have the wheeled carts that the folding chairs came on. How about we put the boxes on one of those? Then I'll have someone help me move it to the house."

Gwyneth trundled a long cart in from the main room and they loaded it. Then Molly swept the space while Gwyneth went to get helpers, who turned out to be Colin and Fergus.

"Fancy meeting you here," Fergus said with a grin. He eyed the boxes. "You've been busy."

Molly smiled. "We sure have, but it's been fun getting to know Gwyneth."

"That's great." Fergus glanced around. "This is going to be the craft area?"

"Yes. People are bringing their own tables and displays." Molly patted the set of shelves. "So these have to be moved too."

Fergus nodded. "We can do that."

While the men pushed the cart toward the house, Gwyneth leading the way, Molly wandered over to the other side of the barn to check on Laura and Carol.

"Hi, Molly," Carol said. She was twisting a peg hook into a wooden wall. Other metal farm tools were already hanging, and Aileen was setting an ancient spinning wheel in place.

"This looks great," Molly said. "What is that?" She pointed to the object in Laura's hands. It had a hook at one end and was made of thin twisted metal.

"It's a drop spindle," Aileen said, coming over. "You use it to spin carded wool into yarn by hand. Most are made of wood or even glass,

but now and then you find a metal one.” She pointed to the disk circling the metal. “The whorl holds the yarn in place as you spin. We’ll have demonstrations during the festival.”

“Cool,” Laura said. “But it must have taken ages to make even one garment in those days.”

“It sure did,” Aileen agreed with a laugh. “Shear the sheep, wash and card the wool, maybe dye it, rove and spin it. Then you could start knitting or weaving.” She hung up the spindle. “How’s it going in the other room?” she asked Molly.

“We’re all done,” Molly said. “Gwyneth, Colin, and Fergus are moving boxes to the house. The shelves are going next.”

Aileen shook her head. “I’m concerned about Gwyneth. It’s not good news that Ernie is back. Not at all.”

“I gathered that,” Molly said.

“It’s not just about Gwyneth’s feelings, although he’s certainly hurt those. Her grandfather died recently and left all this to her.” Aileen waved a hand, as if to indicate the entire property. “Everything was in a trust, which couldn’t be touched until his death. The good news is, she won’t be struggling anymore. The bad news . . . well, her no-good *husband* is back.”

Molly read between the lines. Aileen was worried that Ernie would lay claim to some of Gwyneth’s inheritance. “Well, marriage is a mystery,” she said. “If she loves him, maybe it’ll be okay.”

Aileen pressed her lips together with a scowl. “Love means nothing without trust.” With that remark, she changed the subject. “See that floor loom over there? Can you three help me move it over?”

A short while later, the room was set up to Aileen’s satisfaction. “Looks like a wrap,” she said. “Thank you all so much.”

The exhibit did look good, Molly had to admit. Besides arranging the vintage tools and old photographs, Aileen had put up explanatory

captions. Anyone who wandered through would get a good grounding in what sheep farming entailed a hundred years ago.

Gwyneth appeared in the doorway and gazed around with admiration. "Oh this looks fantastic. You've earned your supper. Dinner is served." She performed a sweeping bow that made them all laugh.

The early evening air was still balmy, so the volunteers served themselves bowls of stew or chili, grabbed homemade corn bread, and sat outside. Molly and Fergus found spots on the low porch floor, feet stretched out in the grass. Laura and Carol sat on the porch with Aileen and Gwyneth, and a group of men gathered at a picnic table under a nearby tree, Colin among them.

Laura eagerly spooned up beef stew. "I'm starving. And tired. And I still have dozens of scones to bake."

"You mean *we* have dozens of scones to bake," Carol said. "I already called Harvey and told him I'm going to be late. He's heating up leftovers for dinner, then he has some orders to fill." A retired journalist who still wrote an occasional freelance piece, Carol's husband also made and sold fishing lures.

"Harvey and I have been trying to go fishing for ages," Fergus said. He took a bite of corn bread. "I keep saying we'll go once the season slows down. But it doesn't seem to be doing that. Not that I'm complaining."

"We were slammed today too," Molly said. "The customers kept on coming."

"I think we passed out all the festival flyers you gave us," Carol told Aileen and Gwyneth. "Judging by that, you should get a good crowd tomorrow."

Gwyneth held up crossed fingers. "Let's hope so. The weather is cooperating, anyway."

During the rest of dinner, the conversation turned to general

topics of local interest. Afterward, the Bakehouse Three helped clean up, then went on their way.

“I did some of the prep for the scones this afternoon,” Laura said as they drove back to the bakehouse. “So we’ll be able to whip them out.”

While Laura and Carol chatted about recipes in the front seat, Molly studied the passing countryside. More visitors had arrived at the camping field, and a few fires were going, cheerful in the twilight. People gathered in groups or sat at tables under canopies. One tall figure near a fire looked familiar, but before Molly could figure out who it was, they were past and heading down the hill.

“Watch out!” Laura shouted. “He’s in our lane!”

Molly’s head snapped around to face forward. A big, black pickup was roaring straight at them, headlights blazing.