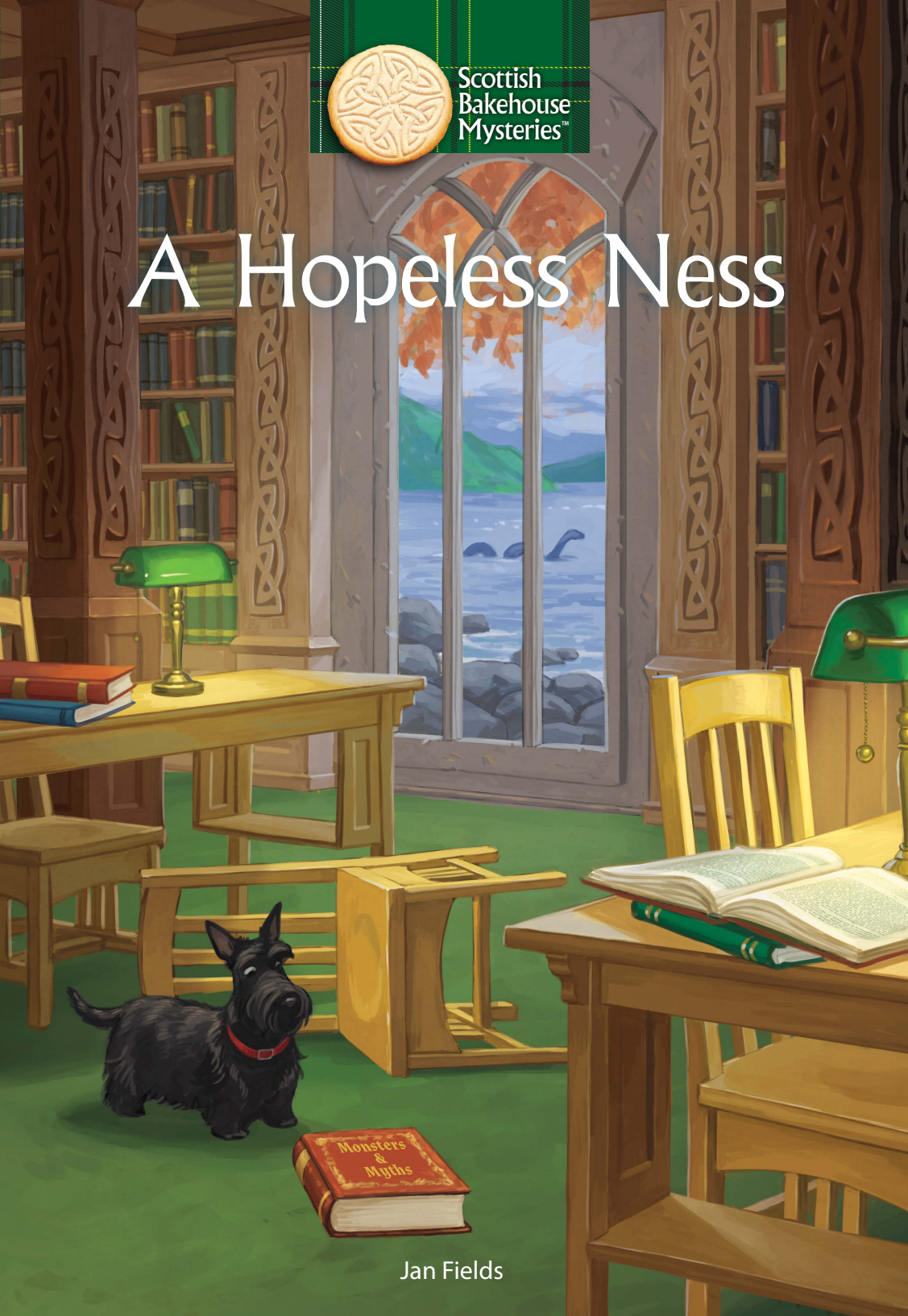




Scottish
Bakehouse
Mysteries™

A Hopeless Ness



Jan Fields



A Hopeless Ness



Jan Fields

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A Hopeless Ness

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Molly Ferris's little Scottish terrier, Angus, pressed forward with a focused determination that drew a smile from everyone he passed. He was a dog on a mission, pushing crisp fall leaves along the park path with his nose, and had no intention of leaving any ground un-sniffed.

From the other end of the leash, Molly regarded her little dog fondly. She supposed there was something about a crisp fall afternoon in Michigan's Upper Peninsula that intensified the usual scents in the air.

At least she assumed all the scents Angus ran into should be familiar. They walked in Dumfries Park almost daily, especially when the weather was clear. The park began practically in their backyard—well, the backyard of the grand, yellow Victorian that housed Bread on Arrival. Molly co-owned the Scottish bakehouse with her two best friends, retired math teacher Carol MacCallan and former NYC chef Laura Donovan. The windows in Molly's cozy apartment above the bakery offered gorgeous views of Loch Mallaig, both the town and the lake.

As she stepped off the path to make way for someone hurrying by, Molly noted that Dumfries Park was busy for a Sunday in October. She recognized fewer of the people they passed than she would have normally expected by mid-autumn. By October in the UP, the daytime temperatures could sometimes fall into the upper thirties, and tourists rarely rushed to Loch Mallaig for that. Something had changed this year, and Molly was fairly certain she knew what it was.

A squeal of delight drew Molly out of her musings. Ahead on the path, a child quickly waddled toward Angus and plopped down on the sidewalk in front of him. Though the day was chilly, the child seemed overly bundled to Molly. She couldn't even tell if the bundle enclosed a boy or a girl, not with the heavy coat, thick knit hat, and two scarves allowing only a peek at the child's eyes.

Angus froze for an instant, surprised by the sudden arrival of the squealing stranger, but the little Scottie rarely failed to rise to the occasion when faced with a potential new friend. With his tail wagging wildly, he scrambled into the child's lap for petting.

"Edward!"

Molly turned her attention toward the speaker, suspecting she now knew the answer to whether Angus's new friend was a boy or a girl. An equally bundled woman hurried toward her, nearly colliding with a stout middle-aged woman in a long trench coat and rubber boots. The woman carried a pair of binoculars and an old-fashioned umbrella, though the skies above them were nearly cloudless. "Watch yourself," she snapped.

The other woman didn't respond to that and merely continued toward Molly. If the child petting Angus was Edward, he didn't show it. His full attention was on Angus as he patted and chattered at the dog.

"Edward," the bundled woman repeated. "You can't run off in a strange town. And you shouldn't be petting a dog we don't know. It isn't safe."

"But he doesn't mind, Mom," Edward said, his tone stretching each word into a bit of a whine. "He likes me."

"Which is good," the woman said. "Since I'm sure you gave him plenty of reason to bite you." She directed her next words at Molly. "I'm sorry. Edward can be impulsive."

“Angus didn’t mind,” Molly said. “Though you have a good point about strange dogs. Many pups need to be introduced much more gently.” She directed her next words toward the little boy. “Startling a dog you don’t know can make it bite.”

If the boy felt rebuffed, he didn’t show it, paying no more attention to Molly’s words than he had to his mother.

“Come along,” the woman said as she bent to tug at Edward’s arm. “I thought you wanted to see the lake from the pier.”

Edward’s eyes grew round and he scrambled up too quickly, nearly dumping Angus onto the path. “I forgot. Let’s go.” He grabbed the woman’s gloved hand.

“Sorry,” the woman said, her expression harried as she let the boy drag her toward the loch.

With his tail still wagging, Angus watched the boy and his mother walk away, then shifted his black eyes toward Molly in an expression of bafflement.

“Sorry, buddy,” Molly told him. “He has other things to do besides pet you, I guess.”

Angus gave a small doggy sigh and continued down the path at a slower pace than the boy and his mother. The woman with the umbrella stood exactly where she’d been earlier, peering through a pair of binoculars toward the lake on the other side of Yooper Boulevard. Molly wondered if she was a bird-watcher. The park drew plenty of them in the warmer months, but if this woman was searching for waterfowl, she’d surely be disappointed since many had migrated to warmer climates already.

When they drew close to the woman with the binoculars, Angus pulled ahead a bit to sniff at the woman’s umbrella.

“Get away,” the stranger demanded as she kicked at him.

It wasn’t a particularly hard kick, barely more than a nudge, but Molly most certainly didn’t appreciate it. Not one bit.

“Don’t kick my dog!” Molly tugged Angus toward her and scooped him up. “He has as much right to the path as anyone else.”

The woman glared. “No, it does not. I am a human and it is a dog. And it has no right to chew on my things.”

Molly’s mouth fell open in surprise at the audacity of the lie. “Angus didn’t chew on anything. He barely even sniffed your umbrella.”

“Because I drove it away before it could begin the destruction. If you cannot control your animal, you shouldn’t bring it to a public park.”

Heat raced into Molly’s face. She simply could not believe the nerve of the woman. Molly stammered a couple of syllables, but the woman paid her no mind at all. She merely pivoted on her heel and strode along the path toward the loch. Molly cuddled Angus close as she stared after the woman. Molly normally welcomed tourists of all sorts, but she thought Loch Mallaig could easily do without this one.

With the unpleasantness of the encounter still buzzing along her nerves, Molly set Angus down, then kept an eye on the dreadful woman as she followed her toward the pier. She wondered as she walked if the woman was generally dreadful to everyone she met. Molly planned to take the next fork in the road that would lead her away from the cantankerous stranger.

Glancing away from the woman, Molly was startled when she spotted a section of the pier visible through the trees. It was packed with people. Even though Molly had a good idea of what had drawn the people to that place, she still couldn’t believe the size of the crowd gathered for what she considered pure foolishness. *Surely they don’t believe they’re going to see anything. Not really.*

Molly shrugged. “Let’s go check.” They didn’t walk fast, Molly making a point of not catching up to the obnoxious tourist with the umbrella. She’d had quite enough of that woman. They took their time

descending the stairs that connected the beach and pier with the top of the bluff along which Yooper Boulevard ran.

When Molly drew close to the pier, she studied the crowd, checking for any familiar faces. As she expected, the group was made up of strangers for the most part, but she did see one man she knew well. At over six feet tall, he wasn't that hard to spot, especially since he stood near the edge of the crowd with his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket, his expression a mixture of interest and mild embarrassment.

Molly paused for a moment, enjoying the chance to watch Fergus MacGregor without him seeing her. His dark hair was tousled by the breeze and his attention was focused on the water. *No*, she thought. *Surely he can't expect to see something. Not Fergus.* It was too absurd. Fergus was an intelligent man. He had to be to run Castleglen, the luxury golf resort and lodge at the edge of town. The business had been in his family for generations, but Molly knew Fergus had helped it to grow since he took over for his father.

Molly tightened Angus's leash and stepped onto the pier, still contemplating Fergus's presence. Since they were good friends, Molly would have expected Fergus to stop by her apartment if he planned to be this close. They often shared an after-church meal, so why not today if he planned to be in town? *Maybe it was a last-minute thing.*

"Playing hooky?" Molly asked when she caught up with Fergus. She was pleased that her voice sounded light.

He grinned at her sheepishly. "I couldn't resist. I love a good monster story."

Molly blinked at him. "You can't believe in the Loch Mallaig Monster. You realize it's got to be a prank, right?"

She had heard all about the sightings, of course. The paper had published more than one lurid account, but that didn't mean much.

The *Crown Press News* never caught wind of gossip that it didn't exploit. But monsters didn't simply appear in a lake that got as much traffic as Loch Mallaig did. Mix into that the fact that it was the Month of the Faeries in Loch Mallaig, when pranks were practically a way of life. She had no doubt this whole monster foolishness was someone's elaborate prank that had gotten out of hand in the name of a silly local tradition.

In response to Molly's raised eyebrows, Fergus said, "I haven't forgotten the Month of the Faeries, but that isn't proof that there is no monster. Hamish is one of the people who've seen the thing. A skeptic like Hamish would hardly fall for a prank, then tell the tale afterward. He'd be too embarrassed."

That was true. Retired history teacher Hamish Bruce worked at Bread on Arrival, and though he was prone to grumpiness, he did not indulge in wild flights of fancy. "I agree that Hamish's report is hard to explain away," she said hesitantly, "but there must be some rational explanation. There's no such thing as sea monsters."

"Technically, this would be a lake monster." In response to the face Molly made at him, Fergus chuckled. He rocked on his heels, and his attention strayed toward the water. "You're probably right that this is some kind of prank, but wouldn't it be wonderful if there was something incredible out there?"

"A giant monster is not my idea of wonderful," Molly said. But she knew it could be Fergus's idea of wonderful. When they were teens, her family had come to Loch Mallaig regularly on vacation, and her path had crossed often enough with Fergus to spawn a friendship—and a crush on her end. When they had hung out, he'd often recounted monster stories he'd read in books or seen in movies. Fergus was a good storyteller, and Molly remembered more than one nightmare inspired by such tales.

“I wouldn’t want to take it home,” he admitted. “But I’d like to see it.” Molly didn’t have the heart to rain on his hopes any further.

His enthusiasm was infectious, and she stepped closer to him and followed his gaze to survey the lake. It was even colder here than in the park, with the breeze chilled by the water. Suddenly, the bundled mom and little boy didn’t seem overdressed. She hugged Angus after picking him up, glad for the warmth, and when Fergus moved until his shoulder brushed hers, she felt warmer still.

Having admired the lake many times from her apartment, Molly knew that when the air was still, the low angle of the autumn sun often transformed the water into a mirror. Today, however, the wind on the water made the surface choppy, and the lake roiled as if angry. Molly smiled with the thought that the lake might not appreciate this silly monster talk either.

Being fully honest, though, Molly would have to admit that the influx of monster-hunting sightseers had boosted business. Bread on Arrival had never seen such a busy October. Normally tourist dollars were gone by this time of year, or at least thinner, and though locals came in frequently, every business in town felt the pinch that arrived every year with the cold. But sales were as high as they had been in the middle of summer.

She peered up at Fergus. “How are bookings at the resort?”

“About normal,” he said, his eyes still on the water. “The restaurants are doing well, but we’re a little high-end for most of the tourists visiting right now, I think.” Finally he lowered his head and his light-blue eyes sparkled. “Why? You wondering if I invented the monster as a publicity stunt? If I did, I’d have it sailing past the lodge at least once a day.”

Molly grinned at the mental image. “I can’t see you building a monster in your garage.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Are you doubting my handyman skills?”

“I wouldn’t dare. You were a big help when we were getting the bakehouse in shape to open.”

“I was excited,” he said.

Molly laughed. “Sure you were. You’d tasted Laura’s cinnamon rolls.”

“They are the best I’ve ever had,” he agreed easily. “But that’s not why I was excited.”

Molly wasn’t sure what he meant, but the intensity in his expression warmed her cheeks in what she knew must be a blush. It was a wonder her cheeks didn’t simply burst into flames today since they seemed intent on reddening at the slightest provocation. She lowered her face and rubbed it against the top of Angus’s head to hide the blush before Fergus could tease her about it.

Fergus cleared his throat, drawing her eye again. “Not to change the subject,” he said. “But I’ve been meaning to ask you something.”

Molly felt a sliver of misapprehension at his intense expression. Did he have bad news? She tried for a light tone. “Fire away. I’m all ears.”

He glanced at her ears, covered by a pale blue knit hat, and his expression softened, but before he could voice whatever question he intended, Angus began squirming in Molly’s arms, barking.

“Angus,” she said. “Hush. What is it?”

The Scottie wriggled until she could barely keep hold of him, and his barking increased in volume and pace. Molly saw Angus’s attention was focused on the lake. In fact, everyone’s attention was focused on the lake. She tightened her grip on Angus further still, careful not to hurt him, and risked her own peek at the water.

What she saw was riveting. Something had changed the pattern of chop in the water, sending it into fat ripples that signaled a large object moving under the water. Judging by how much water was affected by this movement, whatever was moving below the lake’s surface was the size of a small boat.

Molly cast about in her mind for a fish that could possibly influence the water that way. It could, she supposed, be a lake sturgeon. During their vacation stays, her father had often caught the huge fish, and she knew they could grow to over seven feet in length. Was that big enough to make all this disturbance? She wasn't sure.

Her theory popped like a soap bubble when the mysterious object broke the surface of the water, making the crowd gasp in unison. It was a head, and it kept rising on a long neck until there could be no doubt that this was not a sturgeon or any other animal that belonged in Loch Mallaig.

Molly tried to guess at the dimensions of the creature, but it was some distance from the pier and there was nothing close to it for scale. Although she got the impression of tremendous size, she knew that could easily be a trick of perception.

The crowd on the pier pressed closer to the water, desperate for a better view of the creature. Molly raised a hand to her mouth, suddenly terrified that the rush of people to the edge of the pier would result in disaster. The water was deep and deadly cold. If someone fell in, she worried they wouldn't make it out.

The creature's neck slowly descended back into the water, suggesting whatever this thing was, it was diving again. Soon even the head was below the surface, but the wake continued to track the creature's movements as it glided away. Still more of the crowd pushed close to the pier's edge to get a last glimpse of the lingering trail before it vanished from sight.

Once the water finally settled to the steady chop it had exhibited before the arrival of whatever they'd witnessed, Molly felt her muscles unclench. Relief flooded her because no one had ended up in the lake. She found Fergus staring at her.

“Did you see that?” he asked.

“I saw something,” she said. “What did you think it was?”

His serious expression broke into one of excited joy. “I think it was a monster.”



Molly still questioned her own experience, but the image of the creature's graceful neck and head stayed with her for the rest of the evening and even visited her dreams. Although the thing in the lake had been quite far from the pier and the sighting was brief, it had appeared to be alive to her.

These thoughts were still swirling through her head as she sat in her tiny kitchenette and sipped coffee while contemplating the darkness outside the window. Baker's hours didn't often let her sleep in past sunrise, and she needed to head downstairs soon. Laura and Carol would be arriving shortly, and she had no doubt that it would be a busy day.

Finally Molly sighed, making Angus prick up his ears and stare at her questioningly. "What do you think about the monster?" she asked him. Angus thumped his tail, but other than that, he had no comment. "I expect you'd enjoy a chance to chew on him."

Angus trotted over and plunked down near her foot. He couldn't understand her words, but he apparently recognized that her tone implied a need for a comforting lean against her shin.

Molly scratched his ears. "You're wise to stay noncommittal."

She got up and rinsed out her mug, then checked to make sure Angus could get outside if he needed to. He had access to the large fenced-in yard, though on chilly days he was often in and out. He generally hated to miss the possibility that one of the Bread on Arrival customers would want to pet him or even drop off their own dog for

a romp, but Angus appreciated a nice warm apartment every bit as much as Molly.

When she reached the first floor, Molly walked straight to the front café to check for anything that needed tidying up. She never wanted customers to find an errant spiderweb or patch of dust on the stone fireplace, which tended to draw both. Molly found it clean. She stood before the hearth and studied the room, admiring everything from the rustic Celtic Northwoods-style tables and chairs to the gleaming wood floors and vintage display cases. The room radiated warmth and Loch Mallaig's Scottish roots in perfect combination, and Molly was incredibly proud of it.

Still, there wasn't time to stand around. She could hear Angus barking outside, which signaled the arrival of at least one if not both of her best friends. Molly trotted to the kitchen in time to greet Carol and Laura coming in together. Carol held up a copy of the *Crown Press News*. Molly wrinkled her nose at the sight.

"Did you hear?" Carol asked, her face bright with excitement. "A hoard of tourists claim to have seen the monster yesterday afternoon."

"Those people get sillier every day," Laura added as she shucked off her jacket and hung it up.

Molly swallowed hard, unsure how to admit that she was one of the silly people who saw monsters. Finally she simply took a deep breath and blurted, "I was there. I saw it, and so did Fergus."

Laura raised her eyebrows until they nearly disappeared into the auburn hair that hung over her forehead. "You saw a monster?"

Molly shrugged. "I saw *something*. Fergus believes it was a monster. It looked real, but I don't believe it could be."

"I imagine not," Carol said, though Molly thought she sounded slightly disappointed. She set the newspaper on the table where they often left purses and other stray items. "Harvey has been excited about it. He loves the idea of a big story landing practically on our doorstep."

“Harvey?” Laura said, her tone still full of surprise. “What has happened to the men in Loch Mallaig? First Hamish, then Fergus, and now Harvey.”

“I didn’t say Harvey *believes* in a monster,” Carol said as she tied an apron around her waist. “He loves a good story. It’s the journalist in him. He’s read me all the newspaper accounts, in print and online. He thinks it’s funny, but he also thinks it’s an interesting portrait of ‘human group behavior.’” She imitated Harvey’s deep voice on those last three words. “I can’t deny that it is interesting.”

“I suppose we should be at least a little grateful for the monster, regardless of whether it’s real,” Molly said. “It’s helping businesses all over Loch Mallaig, including ours.”

Laura sniffed and fished in her pocket, pulling out a hair tie to pull up her shoulder-length hair. “I suppose. People have gone monster mad. I worry that someone is going to get hurt while slipping and sliding around the banks of the lake.”

“I worried about the same thing on the pier,” Molly admitted. “There was a crowd and they rushed toward the monster to see it better. I was surprised no one ended up in the water.”

“Well, the monster craze is going to grow until someone figures it out,” Carol chimed in. “In fact, there is going to be a presentation at the library tomorrow night about large water cryptids. According to the *Crown Press News*, the presenter is a well-known cryptozoologist.”

Laura wrinkled her nose. “I know what a zoologist is, but what’s a cryptozoologist? If they study animals that live in crypts, I cannot imagine what that has to do with our lake monster.”

“I asked Harvey the same question,” Carol answered. “It’s someone who studies animals of myth and legend with the thought that they could possibly exist.”

Laura rolled her eyes so hard that Molly could practically hear it. “I cannot believe Grizela Duff would allow a talk about monsters in *her* library. Can you imagine?”

Molly wondered about that as well. As head librarian, Grizela did treat the library a bit like her kingdom, and she disapproved of any and all frivolity within its walls. Molly would have guessed Grizela wouldn’t approve a program about monsters. “Maybe she sees it as a community service?”

Laura headed to the sink to wash her hands. “Well, I’ll be there, if only for the entertainment of watching Grizela spontaneously combust when the presenter talks about imaginary creatures as if they’re real.”

Carol followed her to the sink. “Harvey and I are going as well. I don’t think I could keep him away if I tried.”

Laura and Carol turned in unison to focus on Molly, a question clear on their faces. Molly nodded. “I’ll come. I’m curious, especially after what I saw yesterday.”

“You should ask Fergus if he’s going,” Carol said. “We could sit together.”

“He’ll be there,” Molly said with assurance. “I can’t imagine him missing a presentation on monsters. When we were kids, he once dragged me to a swamp—well, wetlands anyway—to watch for the Creature from the Black Lagoon. Scared me half to death.”

“Sure it did,” Laura said with a mischievous gleam. “Huddled behind a bush with the handsome Fergus MacGregor.”

“We were kids and he was the scrawny Fergus MacGregor,” Molly insisted, but both her friends laughed.

“He’s grown up well,” Carol said in a voice that was far too innocent.

“I’ll say,” Laura said. “Don’t you think so, Molly?”

“What I think is that you’re both being obnoxious,” Molly scolded. “And that we should probably get to work.”

After the teasing, Molly was glad the talk of monsters faded as they divided up the prep work for the morning and got busy. The kitchen was never completely silent, even when they were all dumping ingredients in mixing bowls and checking orders on a list, but conversation did become more sporadic and often focused on the baking and orders.

Sometime after noon, Molly's stomach growled loudly as she was packaging an order of shortbread for shipping. Bread on Arrival did a thriving online business, and Molly cheerfully took on the task of packaging orders whenever she could. She sometimes imagined the faces of the customers when they received their packages and opened them to discover the bakehouse's goods were often as beautiful as they were tasty.

After she slapped the final sticker on the box of cookies, Molly pressed her hand to her grumbling stomach and peered at the clock. Maybe she could sneak up front for a quick scone.

Bridget Ross, the cheerful college student who worked the front of the bakehouse whenever she could fit hours into her class schedule, poked her head around the doorway. "Could someone come and cover the front for a few minutes?"

Laura and Carol glanced up from their tasks, but it was Molly who spoke. "Sure, Bridget. I was thinking of going up to nab a scone anyway."

"Awesome," Bridget said. As Molly joined her in the hall that led to the front of the bakery, the younger woman added, "One of my friends from school, Katie Barbour, is here to discuss a group project we're doing."

"Anything interesting?"

"I'm sure it will be," Bridget said with a grin. "The class is outside my major, but I needed another elective. It's outside Katie's major too. I guess we're going to see what happens when a forensic science major and an art student collaborate on a psychology project."

Molly chuckled. "What's your topic?"

"I wanted to do it on the whole phenomenon of the Loch Mallaig Monster," Bridget said. "About why people believe in stuff that ridiculous even though all the science is against it."

Molly's supportive smile faltered slightly as they walked behind the counter. She was already getting a bit tired of the monster, but she didn't want to be a downer. "That's a great idea," she said as she poured herself a cup of coffee.

"I thought so." Bridget lowered her voice so it didn't carry into the seating area of the bakehouse. "But Katie was dead set against it. Maybe she's scared of monsters. Anyway, we're going to be writing about the idea of paying things forward instead."

"How do you mean?" Molly took a sip of the coffee.

"Like when people buy coffee for a stranger or pay for someone's gas to be kind. And how these kind acts can spread. It's a bit of a phenomena."

"I think that is a wonderful topic," Molly said. *And much better than monsters.*

Bridget thanked her again, then slipped around the counter to join another young woman already seated at one of the small tables near the fireplace. Molly guessed that this must be Katie. She couldn't be more different from Bridget if she tried.

Katie had a head full of bright golden curls. The gold contrasted sharply with Bridget's straight, fuchsia-streaked black hair when the two girls put their heads together over an open notebook.

Molly was reminded of her own years at Newkirk College in Grand Rapids, which felt both long ago and barely yesterday at the same time. Though they'd had different majors, she'd roomed with Carol and Laura, and they often parked at the same table in one of the coffee shops near campus to work late into the night on tough projects.

Shaking herself free of nostalgia, Molly shifted her attention to the small line of customers that had formed since Bridget left to find someone to take over. Fortunately no one in the line was in a rush and everyone waited patiently as Molly filled their orders. She never quite caught up, though, as there was a steady stream of customers coming in.

Each time the front door bell jingled, Molly glanced in that direction, and she noticed Grizela Duff as soon as the librarian came in. As usual, Grizela's expression was somewhere between aggrieved tolerance and disapproval, though she nodded slightly at each person who greeted her.

When they'd first opened the bakehouse, Molly had been terrified of stern, grouchy Grizela. Over time she'd come to realize that the librarian had a deep love for Loch Mallaig, nearly as deep as her love for order. That didn't exactly make Molly think of Grizela as cuddly, but she didn't tense up every time the older woman spoke to her anymore.

This is why Molly had the nerve to bring up the library presentation when Grizela reached the front of the line and asked for the box of cookies she'd preordered. "I'll be attending the presentation tomorrow night," Molly said in as conversational a tone as she could manage.

Grizela's expression turned razor sharp. "I'd think you'd have more sense."

Molly decided not to react to the mild insult and simply picked up the box of cookies from the stack of waiting orders. She checked the contents, then taped the box closed before setting it on the counter for the librarian. "You disapprove?"

Grizela snorted. "Of course I disapprove." She ducked her head to root in her purse for her wallet. "I only agreed to the ridiculous farce because I could give a proper rebuttal to the crock of foolishness afterward."

Now that sounds like the Grizela we all know and fear. Molly had to be careful not to give in to the urge to chuckle. “I admit I didn’t even know what a cryptozoologist was when I heard about the presentation.”

Grizela snorted again as she counted out the money for the cookies. “That’s because it’s an imaginary job for silly people. Apparently the Nordwich woman takes the whole preposterous thing seriously.” Her eyes focused on Molly with an uncomfortable intensity. “Have you met her?”

Molly shook her head. “I don’t think so.”

“You’d remember. She has a dreadful temper,” Grizela said without a trace of irony as far as Molly could tell.

“Really?” Molly said as diplomatically as possible.

“And she dresses as though she’s tromping the moors rather than lurking in Dumfries Park,” Grizela added. “She actually wore her ridiculous rubber boots into the library. And that isn’t even accounting for the silliness of carrying an umbrella everywhere in clear weather.”

Molly nearly yelped as realization struck, but Grizela wasn’t leaving room for comment.

“The silly woman was determined to do the presentation *somewhere* in town, even if she had to pay for it out of her own pocket.” Grizela slapped the last of the change down as if she were personally offended by the coins. “I knew Veronica Drummond would give in quickly enough and let Emmaline Nordwich spew her ridiculous tales at the Loch Mallaig Community Center without rebuttal. What kind of librarian would I be if I allowed that to happen in my own community?”

“Right.” Molly had no intention of arguing, though she felt a pang of guilt at not defending Veronica Drummond, whom she considered a friend.

Grizela narrowed her shrewd green eyes. “Once that crackpot is done speaking, I will present a well-researched, factual rebuttal that should put this monster talk to bed once and for all.”

“Sounds good,” Molly said evenly, though she suspected it would be a futile effort. She highly doubted that die-hard monster fans would give up their notions that easily.

However, there was one thing Molly did know for sure. The library presentation was going to be interesting indeed, if not during Emmaline Nordwich’s talk, then afterward when the presenter and the librarian clashed. Molly wasn’t going to miss it for any reason.