



Scottish
Bakehouse
Mysteries™

A Lass Resort



Gayle Roper



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Molly Ferris was completing a sale when the door of Bread on Arrival opened and three of the most extraordinary men she'd ever seen walked in from the cold December day.

She recognized them immediately.

The eldest, somewhere around fifty, had the craggy, handsome face of a man who had spent his life saving the world from evil cabals and treacherous regimes. The one in his midthirties had the sculpted abs and broad shoulders of kids' action figures the world over and the sweet smile of the boy next door, dimples and all. The youngest had the round cheeks and uncertain movements of an early teen but the unconscious charisma of someone who would one day become a magnet for adoration.

All had the most amazing blue eyes.

Molly's breath caught in her throat. She couldn't believe it. Superstar Adrian Sinclair, his equally well-known nephew, Rocky Sinclair, and some not-yet-famous young Sinclair had stepped into her Scottish bakehouse. Of all the bakeries in all the towns in all the world, they'd walked into hers.

Talking quietly together, they made their way to the display cases and began debating what they wanted to eat.

Molly blinked herself back to the real world. She grinned at her friend, police officer Greer Anderson, who stood waiting for her change for the melting moments she was buying.

"You do know that all their exploits are phony, right?" Greer

muttered as she shot the trio a skeptical look. “It’s the stuntmen and body doubles who do all the real work.”

Molly raised an eyebrow. “And you know all this how?”

Greer shrugged. “I read.”

“You’re just afraid they’re going to put the Loch Mallaig police department out of business as they fight for truth, justice, and the American way,” Molly teased.

“I’m afraid they’re going to give us more work than we need with their crazy parties and wild living.”

“Really? Those guys?” Molly studied the Sinclair men. Adrian was pointing to a Scottish snowball, a sandwich cookie with raspberry filling and coconut coating. Rocky already held a prepacked box of shortbread, and the boy whose name Molly didn’t know was asking bakehouse employee Bridget Ross for double cream cheese on his bagel. Somehow, the college-age girl was managing to serve them as if drop-dead gorgeous celebrities came into their Upper Michigan bakeshop every day.

Bridget glanced at Molly with an expression of wonder lighting her delicate features. When the men had their orders, she disappeared into the kitchen, doubtless to tell Laura Donovan and Carol MacCallan, Molly’s friends and business partners, about their famous visitors.

Molly eyed the disgruntled Greer. “I don’t see much about these guys in the tabloids.”

Greer smirked. “Molly Ferris, a tabloid reader. Who’d have thought?”

“I check the headlines while I wait in the line at the supermarket,” Molly corrected. “‘Tragic last days of—’ or ‘Martian sighted in—,’ or ‘So-and-so has finally found true love.’ I never see these guys’ names. They seem to avoid the party circuit.”

“There were pictures of Rocky all over the media last week. Each was with a different woman.” Greer withdrew a melting moment from her bag and took a bite, a smile chasing away some of her grumpiness.

“He’s got a new movie coming out, right? He was probably promoting it.” As a former event planner now in charge of the bakehouse’s marketing efforts, Molly knew a thing or two about the importance of promotions.

“Another Matt Bryant film.” Greer rolled her eyes as if the character had offended her personally.

“I like Matt Bryant movies. Great action and intricate plots. I read Adrian played his father this time for comic effect.”

Greer made a disgruntled noise.

Molly watched the men wander to a table and sit. “I wonder what they’re doing here. Loch Mallaig is a far cry from Hollywood.”

Greer pulled another melting moment from her bag. Her attitude mellowed as she ate it. “I’m sorry for being so grumpy. Personal issue.”

Molly was instantly concerned for her friend. “Are you okay?”

Greer waved a dismissive hand. “Some guy won’t leave me alone.”

“Like a stalker? I’d say you ought to call the police, but . . .” Molly motioned to Greer’s tidy uniform.

“Ha.” Greer pulled a face. “It’s nothing that serious. The guy simply doesn’t understand the words ‘I’m not interested.’”

Molly grinned, taking in Greer’s sparkling hazel eyes, athletic physique, and wavy blonde hair, which was currently pulled into a neat bun. “You’re pretty and powerful. It’s hard to resist.”

“If you say so. I wish he’d move on, though. It’s an uncomfortable situation to say the least.” Greer zipped her coat against the December cold and pulled on a department-issued, fur-lined cap to cover her ears. “Have you thought of closing early to beat the weather? This storm is going to be a doozy.”

“I probably won’t since I live upstairs, but the others will go home soon.”

“The sooner the safer.” Greer waved her bag of melting moments. “See you when I run out.” The bakehouse’s fresh Christmas wreath thumped gently against the front door as she pulled it shut behind her.

Molly surreptitiously observed the three handsome men now drinking coffee and enjoying their treats. The white lights twinkling on the Christmas tree beside them highlighted their distinctive features.

Adrian held out his Scottish snowball. “This is better than one I had in Glasgow,” he said loudly enough for Molly to hear.

She grinned. Scottish snowballs were a Laura specialty, and the former NYC chef would be delighted to hear the praise. Was there a way to work it into an advertising line? *Adrian Sinclair says . . .*

The front door opened again, and Bobby Elder of Lochside Realty swept in on a burst of cold air. Molly eyed the heavy skies over his shoulder. Nasty. They’d start dropping their loads any second.

Bobby pulled off his knit cap and ran a hand through his flattened hair. “Was that Greer Anderson I saw driving off?”

“It was,” Molly said.

“I should have been a few minutes earlier.” He stared down the road in the direction Greer’s cruiser had gone.

If Bobby was Greer’s persistent suitor, Molly was afraid he didn’t have a chance. Not that there was anything wrong with him. She liked the man in spite of his always-on salesman persona. It didn’t matter whether he was trying to convince St. Andrew’s Church to buy new chairs for the fellowship hall or the town to fill potholes more quickly or a prospective buyer that this particular house was the one. He couldn’t help selling, though he seemed to have a good heart. He was a bit full of figure, but he was handsome in a comfortable, well-rounded way.

But as a match for Greer, who was fit, feisty, and full of life? Molly couldn’t see it.

Bobby grinned at her. “I see my clients are here already.”

She realized he meant the Sinclairs. “The Sinclairs are looking for real estate in Loch Mallaig?”

Bobby’s eyes were bright with excitement. “Adrian wants a vacation home on the lake, and Rocky wants a year-round place for him and his brother, Trace.”

“The boy is Rocky’s brother?”

“That’s right. Rocky is Trace’s guardian. Their parents died several years ago in a car accident. Apparently Rocky wants to get the kid out of the Hollywood scene, save him from all the dangers lurking there.”

“By living up here? We’ve got dangers too.”

“That’s right,” Bobby agreed. “Bears. Nature. Bad weather. Overzealous Scotsmen in kilts and tams determined to cling to their ancestral legacies.” He chuckled at his joke, which referred to the town’s enthusiastic celebration of its Scottish heritage. “But those aren’t the same threat as wild living.”

“Still,” Molly mused, “moving to Loch Mallaig seems a bit extreme to me.”

“It’s a wonderful plan to me.” Bobby rubbed his hands together, dollar signs practically floating in the air before him.

Molly glanced out the window again at the heavy, dark clouds. “I think this storm is going to interfere with your plans, Bobby. From what I hear, we’re going to get snowed in big time. You won’t be able to get to the properties you want to show, especially the ones on the lake.”

Bobby waved her concern aside. “It won’t be that bad. You know how they hype things.”

“And sometimes they’re correct. I think this will be one of those times.”

Even as she spoke, rain began to fall in a fine mist—the kind that froze as soon as it hit the earlier snows already on the cold ground.

"I'd better talk to my clients," Bobby said, alarm creeping into his tone. "We need to move while we still can."

Bridget passed Bobby as he walked to the table and she went to the counter. She grinned at Molly, her eyes sparkling. "Can you believe I get to be in the same room with two of the most handsome men on the planet and their understudy? So exciting . . . yet all I want to do is leave before the weather gets bad."

"I was about to shoo you out," Molly said. "Chances are good we won't be open for the next couple of days. I'll give you a call when things settle down."

Bridget hesitated. "How tacky would it be to ask for a picture with them? So I can prove to the kids at school that I really waited on them." She was working on her degree in forensic science at nearby Superior Bay College.

"May I have another of these Scottish snowballs?" Adrian called. "They are amazing."

"You bet, Mr. Sinclair." Bridget hurried behind the counter. As she set the treat on the table in front of him, Adrian smiled at her. "Why don't you get your friend to take our picture?"

Bridget flushed and sent Molly a wide-eyed look. Molly whipped out her phone and snapped a photo. Bridget's smile lit up the room.

Bobby, who had stepped out of the frame, returned to the table. "We really need to get moving if we want to see some properties before the storm hits," he told his clients.

"First things first." Adrian took a bite of his snowball, raspberry jam oozing comfortably between the layers of cookie.

"I don't think we're going to beat the storm." Rocky pointed out the window. "It's already started. We should probably go back to Castleglen and hunker down for the duration. We can check out houses afterward. There's no hurry."

“If that’s what you think is best,” Bobby said, clearly trying to tamp down his disappointment. “I’m available whenever you are.”

Adrian fixed his bright blue eyes on Molly. “You must know the weather up here. What do you think? Should we go back?”

“Returning to Castleglen is your safest option,” she said. “It’s going to be a very nasty storm. A cold front coming down from Alberta, Canada, and one coming up from Colorado are meeting here. Lucky us. It’s beginning as rain, which will freeze on the cold ground and the snow we already have. When the temperature drops as the day moves toward night, the rain will give way to snow, dumping a couple days’ worth on top of the ice.”

“Do you get storms like these often?” Trace watched the threatening sky with an uncertain expression.

Molly wondered if the kid had ever seen a snowstorm of any significance. Southern California got heavy rains that led to mudslides, as well as earthquakes and terrible fires. Nothing to sneeze at there, but a whiteout blizzard was another experience entirely.

She smiled at the boy. “Fortunately we don’t get storms of this intensity often. Lots of snow and cold, sure. It is the Upper Peninsula of Michigan after all. But we’re all used to regular winter weather. You’ll be fine at Castleglen.” She appraised the men. “I do have to tell you that what concerns me most is your clothes.”

All three men glanced down at their trendy jackets. In contrast, Bobby wore a beige puffy jacket that made him resemble a slightly toasted marshmallow. Not a particularly stylish sight, but a fully appropriate one.

“What’s wrong with our clothes?” Trace asked.

“I’m sure in California, nothing,” Molly answered. “But those jackets are not going to withstand a winter storm. Where are your hats and gloves? Your boots? Scarves?”

“Then we’d better get back to Castleglen.” Rocky stood.

“May I recommend a stop at Northern Woods Outfitters on your way?” Molly suggested. “Our friend Trent McKade will get you dressed for the weather. Even after the storm’s over, it’ll still be brutally cold.”

Bobby shifted nervously from foot to foot as if concerned that Molly’s warnings might incite the men to flee Loch Mallaig, costing him his potentially lucrative sales. He stepped forward. “I can take you to Northern Woods, gentlemen.”

Molly had to admire Bobby’s moxie, a true salesman keeping himself front and center in the Sinclairs’ minds.

As the men moved toward the door, it opened and several new customers blew in, including Fergus MacGregor, owner of Castleglen and Molly’s beau. The other newcomers, two men and a young woman, seemed to know the Sinclairs, and loud chatter erupted as they greeted each other.

Fergus extricated himself from the crowd and moved to Molly’s side. He had a smile just for her, and her heart did its usual jump of pleasure at seeing him.

“Is Neil at Castleglen holding down the fort?” she asked. Fergus’s son, Neil, was his right-hand man at the resort.

“He’s out of town at a hospitality conference,” Fergus answered. “It’s sunny and warm where he is, lucky man.”

“That is lucky.” Molly smiled brightly and nudged Fergus. “Though I prefer to be wherever you are.”

“Or wherever Adrian and Rocky Sinclair are?” His silver-shot beard and mustache twitched with a teasing grin.

“They’ve got nothing on you,” she said affectionately, meaning it.

That smile came again as he pulled off his knit cap and shook it, sending little droplets of rain flying.

She wiped a drop from her cheek. “It’s getting worse out there, isn’t it?”

“And will be a lot worse before it’s over.” His smile faded to concern. “Will you come stay at Castleglen for the duration? I don’t like the idea of you alone in your little apartment upstairs.”

Molly hadn’t been looking forward to staying alone either. “I was thinking of asking Laura if Angus and I could stay with her.” Her little Scottie wouldn’t mind where he weathered the storm as long as he was with Molly.

“That’s better than either of you being alone, but better still, why doesn’t she come to Castleglen too? It’ll be safer for her there. Her little cottage will get a lot of fierce wind and drifted snow since it’s right on the lake.”

Molly raised an eyebrow at him. “And it wouldn’t hurt to have a gourmet chef on hand for your VIP guests.”

Fergus blinked. “Do you really think she’d cook for us?”

“I’m sure she’d be delighted, especially if it means she gets to stay in one of those newly renovated rooms. I showed her pictures last week and her jaw dropped.”

“I’ll ask Trent if he’d like a room too.” Fergus grinned. “Can’t let a man be snowed in alone.”

Molly chuckled. “Laura and Trent always have difficulty making their schedules work for dates. Being stranded together at Castleglen will certainly help.”

“And I’ll ask Carol and Harvey too. Their place is a bit isolated.”

“Will it be a problem to host so many of us?” Molly asked, not wanting to impose.

“Not at all,” Fergus reassured her. “These folks are the only guests I have left at the resort. When the forecast got dire, everyone decided they didn’t want to get caught in the back of beyond for several days, and they left early. Incoming guests have decided to wait until after the storm. I can’t give rooms away.”

“Except to us.”

He grabbed her hand. “There’s no one I’d rather have with me.”

Warmth slid through Molly at the affection in his blue eyes. He gave her hand a squeeze and released his grip, becoming all business.

“I’ve sent my staff home,” he said. “Before the chef left, he prepared meals for the Sinclairs and me. Then this trio showed up.” He indicated the folks he’d entered alongside. “The lone staff person still at Castleglen is the gym manager, Chet, who has an appointment with Rocky and wanted to wait for him. If anyone else wanders in needing shelter, Chet can take care of them until I get back.”

“Hey, Fergus.” Adrian waved a hand, indicating the chic woman, an older man wearing a golf shirt, and a muscular man in trendy clothing. “Come meet some business friends of ours.”

“Be right there, Adrian.” Fergus returned his gaze to Molly. “So you’ll come to Castleglen, Molly?”

“I’ll double-check with Laura and Carol, but I think you’ve got yourself a kitchen crew.”

“Your safety is what’s most important, but I’ll take the kitchen help too.” Fergus gave her a quick hug, then joined Adrian and his group.

“You got room for three more at that little place of yours, Fergus?” Adrian asked.

“All taken care of, Adrian,” Fergus said. “I checked them into their rooms before we came to meet you. They’re down the hall from you.”

With a grin Molly headed for the kitchen and her friends. She knew they wouldn’t mind cooking for everyone, especially since it meant enjoying the decadent luxuries at Castleglen. She felt a little bubble of excitement. What she’d thought would be a dark and lonely time, snowbound with her dog, now promised to be like a fun week at camp. She couldn’t wait.



“Harvey’s over the moon.” Carol returned her phone to her pocket with a smile. “He’s going to settle the girls in the garage. You know how he dotes on those hens.”

Laura set a mixing bowl in the dishwasher. “Chickens in the garage?”

Carol shrugged. “It’s better than putting them in the living room.”

“I have to agree with that.” Laura grabbed a dish towel and dried her hands.

Molly watched her friends with affection. Their friendship, sparked as college roommates, had weathered three decades of living states apart—Molly in Chicago, Laura in New York City, and Carol in Pittsburgh—and proven a strong foundation on which to build their business after they’d decided to reinvent themselves as bakehouse owners in the Upper Peninsula.

“It’s more secure than their coop,” Carol explained. “Winds could harm that structure, and airborne debris could damage it. The garage is dry and holds a temperature of about fifty, so they’re safe there. Even if the electricity goes and we lose heat, it’s warmer than the coop. Add lots of feed and water, and they’re fine in the garage if we leave them for a few days.”

“Won’t they get frustrated pecking at that cement floor?” Laura asked.

“They’ll find a roosting spot on a shelf or in a rafter and sleep most of the time,” Carol said.

“And Pascal?” Molly rarely saw Carol’s all-but-invisible cat, who loved hiding under beds.

“Jenny and Craig took him to their house. Searching for him will entertain Maisie and Gavin while they’re snowbound.” Carol grinned. “Should I feel guilty for spending the blizzard at a luxury resort while my daughter tries to keep up with twin seven-year-olds?”

“Not in the least,” Laura said as she hung the towel to dry. “It was so generous of Fergus to invite us to stay at the resort. A major winter storm alone can be scary, especially if the electricity goes out.” She had survived life in New York City, but the coming storm was scary in its own way. “As soon as I clean up things here, I’m there.”

“Trent’s invited too.” Molly gave Laura a knowing smile.

Laura colored. “That’s nice.”

Molly suppressed the urge to roll her eyes. She’d seen the sparks flying between her friend and Trent, and she was glad Laura had found such a nice guy—even if she wasn’t willing to call him her significant other yet.

Molly went back up front to tell Fergus that Carol and Laura were in, but she found chaos, with almost everyone speaking at once. The young woman who had entered with Fergus—a tall, elegant brunette with lots of long, sleek hair cascading down her back—currently wore a worried expression and paced by the door, talking on her phone. She wore a billowy red top over turquoise-and-red snakeskin leggings. Her white, knee-length cardigan would offer very little protection against the cold. Molly tried to decide if she should recognize the woman from some movie or show, but nothing struck her. Surely if she’d seen that gorgeous face on a screen, she’d remember.

A muscular man who bore a strong resemblance to Rocky stood off to the side chatting on his own phone. He seemed quite concerned about whatever was being said. Molly assumed he was Rocky’s body double or stuntman. Suddenly he smiled, and he had his own charm.

Fergus was in deep conversation with Adrian, both of them laughing like old friends recalling old adventures. Had they known each other before Adrian had come to stay at Castleglen? She'd never heard Fergus talk about Adrian. Of course, Fergus hosted lots of notable guests at Castleglen, and he didn't go around bragging about them.

A man with an air of self-importance gesticulated wildly during what appeared to be a serious conversation with Rocky. His carefully barbered white hair was unaffected by the wind that had blown him into the bakery, and his strident voice carried across the room. "You can't do this, Rocky," he was saying. "You owe me."

Rocky shrugged, unmoved by the man's urgency. "I've more than repaid you for anything I might owe, Jonathan. You aren't my primary responsibility. I have to do what I think is best." What that responsibility was became obvious when his eyes cut to his little brother.

Trace stood uncertainly by the display case, shifting from foot to foot, appearing overwhelmed by all the noise around him.

Molly felt sorry for the boy and approached him. He glanced down at her, then away. She realized he was already several inches taller than her five-foot-four, well on his way to being the height of his uncle and brother. She smiled at him and waved her hand at the crowd. "Do you know who all these people are?"

He turned red at the attention. "Sort of."

When he said no more, she prompted, "Tell me, will you?"

"Um, sure. That big guy is Adam Lorbetki." He indicated the not-quite Rocky. "He's my brother's double."

Molly thought of Greer's comments. "That means he does all Rocky's stunts?"

Trace frowned. "Actually, Rocky does lots of his own stuff. He'd do it all if they'd let him."

Molly was touched by the boy's immediate defense of his brother.

"They're afraid he'll get hurt, you know, if they let him do it all," Trace continued. "Then production would be closed down and it'd cost everybody a lot of money. So they make sure Adam does the really dangerous stuff. He also does all the boring stuff, like blocking and the over-the-shoulder and distance shots."

"So he's important."

"Yeah," Trace said. "And he's nice. Rocky likes him."

As if he knew they were talking about him, Adam grinned at Trace and gave him a wink. Trace smiled back.

Molly followed the interaction. "You like him too."

"He's real."

And doesn't that say a lot about the others, Molly thought.

Adam lowered his head and, phone still to his ear, frowned again at whatever was being said on the other end of the line.

"His girlfriend has an ex who sometimes bothers her," Trace told Molly. "Maybe she's being hassled now that Adam's out of town. The guy hates Adam. He says it's his fault she broke up with him—which is ridiculous because Adam has only been with Jill six months. He didn't know her when she was with that guy."

"Sounds complicated," Molly said.

Trace shrugged. "Or maybe he's talking to the police. Some guy was trying to blackmail him, and he went to the cops about it. Now the guy's in trouble and is really mad at Adam."

"Well, he certainly has an exciting life. Who's the tall, pretty lady?"

Trace shook his head. "I don't really know her. She's Paula Somebody from the studio. She's here to get Uncle Adrian or Rocky to do something they don't want to do."

Molly watched Paula move back and forth as she continued to talk on the phone. She thought the woman appeared a little desperate.

Trace felt no such sympathy. “Good luck to her. Uncle Adrian and Rocky told everybody they would be unavailable. They didn’t say why, but they made it clear they didn’t want to hear from anyone from the studio or their agency about anything until the New Year.”

Molly blinked. “Are you spending Christmas in Loch Mallaig?”

Trace shrugged. “I don’t know. I guess it depends on whether Rocky or Uncle Adrian find some property they like.”

“So you guys could become regular customers here,” Molly said with a smile.

“They’re determined to move to the area to ‘save me from a life of corruption.’” Trace spoke as if he couldn’t imagine such a life or understand why they thought he’d pursue it.

“We aren’t exactly known for wild living in Loch Mallaig,” Molly said. “How do they even know about this town? We don’t get many celebrities.”

“Uncle A knows the guy who owns the hotel where we’re staying. They’ve been friends since forever.”

“Your Uncle Adrian is friends with Fergus?” Molly wanted to hear that story.

“They went to camp together or something when they were young. When Rocky decided to get out of SoCal, Uncle A told him all about this place. So here we are, though I think they could have found a warmer spot.” He glowered out the window. “Or at least waited until after the storm.”

“Loch Mallaig isn’t your first choice,” Molly said sympathetically.

“Maybe a visit in the summer would be okay. But now? And to live here?” Trace sighed. “Not that anyone has asked my opinion.”

Molly bit back a smile at the familiar lament, which she had heard from her own now-grown daughter, Chloe, on numerous occasions. She shifted her attention back to the people milling around. “Who’s the man

in the golf shirt, the one with the white hair?" She cringed inwardly at the shirt's thin cotton—not a good choice for Loch Mallaig in winter.

"Um, that's Jonathan Hooper." Trace said it as if Molly should recognize the name.

She shook her head. "I don't know him."

"He's head of The Hooper Agency." Trace seemed unable to fathom that Molly had never heard of the man.

"And what does The Hooper Agency do?"

"Mr. Hooper is the agent for some of the biggest names in Hollywood. He's Uncle A's agent and Rocky's. He says he wants to be mine."

"Are you going to carry on the family tradition and be an actor too?" Horror flashed over Trace's features. "Not in a million years."

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to be a Marine." He blushed as if regretting what he'd said. "Forget it. It's a dumb idea."

"I don't think it's dumb at all. I think it's brave."

"Really?"

"Really." He wanted to be in real life what his uncle and brother were on the screen—a hero.

Adrian interrupted their conversation with his commanding voice. "She says we need better clothes for the weather." He gestured to Molly, and she stood straight at the sudden attention of everyone in the room.

"She's right." Fergus indicated Adam and Jonathan. "Sweatshirts and polos aren't going to cut it."

"Hey, I've got flannel on under my sweatshirt," Adam said in friendly self-defense as he slid his phone into his pocket.

Bobby raised his hand. "I was about to show them the way to the outfitters."

“Sounds good.” Adrian started for the door. “Let’s go, everyone. Puffy coats all around. And gloves and hats and boots.”

“I’ve got boots.” Paula, the woman Trace said came from the studio, held out a foot shod in a gorgeous turquoise cowboy boot, tooled and patterned and one of the most beautiful pieces of workmanship Molly had ever seen. It must have cost a fortune.

Adrian eyed the boots. “I don’t think they’ll cut it in this weather.”

Paula’s face fell at the lack of appreciation for her footwear. Adrian didn’t notice as he and the others made for the door.

Molly approached Paula. “Your boots are absolutely amazing.”

Paula perked up. “They should be for what they cost.”

“I bet they’re just the thing for home,” Molly said, “but wearing them in this storm would be a crime. They’d be ruined.”

“They can take a little rain.” Paula indicated the outside.

“But what about ice and snow?” Molly asked. “Those slick soles will give you trouble too. Don’t risk it. Here, you dress for the weather, not fashion. Forget looking good and choose safety—for yourself and those wonderful boots.”

To help make Molly’s point, sleet began tapping against the side window. Paula wound a strand of hair around her finger and studied first her boots, then Molly’s practical, comfortable shoes. She eyed the nasty precipitation and shrugged in resignation. “I suppose you’re right.”

Molly peered out the side window to see how the parking area was faring. A human-shaped shadow interfered, briefly blocking her view of the rain and sleet. She blinked, the shadow disappeared, and she saw the parking area was still fairly clear of ice.

While Fergus remained inside to finalize plans with Laura and Carol, Molly followed the Hollywood folks to the front door and out onto the wraparound porch of the big yellow Victorian that housed Bread on Arrival. Wind blowing off the lake and through Dumfries Park

drove the sleet sideways, but the deep porch roof offered protection. She pulled her sweater tight and folded her arms to hold in what body heat she could.

As people ran to their cars, they held up their arms for some protection from the icy needles. Paula slipped at one point, the slick soles of her cowboy boots no help at all. Molly worried she might fall, but she caught herself. At least she now hopefully understood the need for appropriate gear.

One by one the cars left the lot, all heading for Northern Woods Outfitters. In no time, Fergus's Range Rover and a gray SUV remained.

Molly was about to return to the warmth of the bakehouse when a short, slight figure raced from the back of the house across the parking lot. He wasn't one of those who had been in the bakery. He had a bulky backpack slung over one shoulder. He continuously cast about as though he feared being seen. He reached the gray SUV and opened the door, then carefully put his backpack inside. After one last peek around, he climbed in and left, heading in the same direction as the others.

Where had he come from? Curious, Molly made her way to the bend in the porch and gazed toward Dumfries Park. Had the man used their lot for his car, then gone to the park on foot? In this weather? In those inadequate clothes?

She glanced at the outside stairs that led up to her apartment. Perhaps he was a courier and he'd been upstairs searching for her. But if so, why hadn't he simply come into the bakehouse?

A gust of wind blew a fresh pulse of sleet across the porch and into Molly's face. She shivered, and suddenly it didn't matter where the man had come from, where he'd been, or where he was going. She was freezing. She hurried inside, pushing the door shut against the increasing wind.

Fergus came out of the kitchen and smiled that wonderful smile he saved for her alone. "I'm glad Laura and Carol are coming to Castleglen. We thought it would be best if I drive the three of you to the resort. Harvey will meet us there, as will Trent."

"That's very considerate," Molly said. "Your car is certainly better in these conditions than mine." She thought of the Range Rover's leather seats, which were butter-soft and heated. "And much more comfortable."

He touched his index finger to her chin. "Only the best for you."

She knew she was smiling like an idiot, but having someone who wanted to take care of her filled her with delight after all the years of having to rely completely on herself. She'd been lonely after her late husband had passed away more than a dozen years earlier, and she hadn't thought she'd ever feel this happy again. The affection of a good man like Fergus was rare, indeed.

Any thought of the furtive little man and his gray SUV disappeared into the sleet.