

HEARTWARMING INSPIRATIONAL ROMANCE

Love Inspired.

GAIL GAYMER MARTIN

WITH Christmas
IN HIS Heart



Mills & Boon Love Inspired

Gail Gaymer Martin

With Christmas in His Heart

«HarperCollins»

Martin G.

With Christmas in His Heart / G. Martin — «HarperCollins»,
— (Mills & Boon Love Inspired)

Caring for her grandmother was a labor of love, but busy executive Christine Powers worried about the paper piling up in her office. And no sooner had she arrived on Mackinac Island during the frantic holiday season than her haughty attitude was challenged by Will Lambert, her grandmother's enigmatic boarder. His laid-back style grew on her, as did his steadfast faith in this season of joy and wonder. But an ultimatum to return to work or lose her job forced Christine to decide between her heart and her career.

Содержание

He made her laugh.	6
GAIL GAYMER MARTIN	7
With Christmas in His Heart	8
MILLS & BOON	9
Acknowledgments	10
Contents	11
Chapter One	12
Chapter Two	19
Chapter Three	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

He made her laugh.

Earlier she'd tried to cover her amusement with sarcasm, but lately Will had a cute way of getting back at her. She felt like a kid again, rather than the dignified woman she'd considered herself to be.

"You're on," she said. "If I love it here, I owe you something big. A seven-course dinner or..." She faltered, realizing she was having a good time.

"I'll make that decision when I collect," he said with a wink over his shoulder.

Above the roar of the engine, he hollered back his usual witty comments, his youthful spirit so evident as they soared across the snow. Youthful, yet he had depth, too, Christine had noticed. She watched the tenderness he had for her grandmother, and Christine couldn't help but notice how he studied her. She didn't think he'd figured her out yet, but he would.

GAIL GAYMER MARTIN

lives in Michigan with her husband, Bob, her dearest friend and greatest supporter. She feels blessed to be writing stories that touch people's hearts and share God's mercy and forgiveness. Friends often tease her that they're afraid to share life experiences with her. They have asked, "Will this be in your next novel?" Sometimes it is.

Gail is multipublished in nonfiction and over thirty works of fiction. Her novels have received numerous awards: a Booksellers Best in 2005, a Holt Medallion in 2001 and 2003, the Texas Winter Rose 2003, the American Christian Romance Writers 2002 Book of the Year Award and the Romantic Times BOOKclub Reviewers Choice as best Love Inspired novel of 2002. At present, over one million copies of her books are in print.

When not behind her computer, Gail enjoys a busy life—traveling, presenting writers' workshops, speaking at churches, business groups, libraries and civic centers. She is a soloist and member of her church's choir, as well as a ringer in their handbell and hand-chime choirs. She also sings with the Detroit Lutheran Singers.

She enjoys hearing from her readers. Write to her at P.O. Box 7600063, Lathrup Village, MI 48076 or at gail@gailmartin.com. Visit her Web site at www.gailmartin.com.

With Christmas in His Heart

Gail Gaymer Martin



MILLS & BOON

Before you start reading, why not sign up?

Thank you for downloading this Mills & Boon book. If you want to hear about exclusive discounts, special offers and competitions, sign up to our email newsletter today!

[SIGN ME UP!](#)

Or simply visit

signup.millsandboon.co.uk

Mills & Boon emails are completely free to receive and you can unsubscribe at any time via the link in any email we send you.

In his heart a man plans his course,
but the Lord determines his steps.

—Proverbs 16:9

Acknowledgments

A huge thank-you to Kay Hoppenrath, a year-round resident of Mackinac Island, who kindly provided me with so much wonderful information about the island life, especially in winter, so that my story could be real. Though I tried to be accurate, I occasionally took a novelist's prerogative. Mackinac Island has given me and all visitors wonderful memories. It is a special place that takes me back in time to a world we don't know anymore. What a blessing. Also, thanks to bookseller Tamara Tomac, who found Kay as a willing ear for my questions.

To Shelly Gaponik, my niece, who helped me with my snowmobile lingo. Hopefully I got it right.

Thanks to physician Mel Hodde and writer friends Marta Perry and Carol Steward, who provided me with accurate stroke information.

As always to my husband, Bob, who is my right arm and my dearest friend and who provided me with stained-glass information.

Contents

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven
Chapter Eight
Chapter Nine
Chapter Ten
Chapter Eleven
Chapter Twelve
Chapter Thirteen
Chapter Fourteen
Chapter Fifteen
Chapter Sixteen
Chapter Seventeen
Letter to Reader
Questions for Discussion

Chapter One

Christine Powers clung to the railing of the ferry, chilled to the bone yet hot under the collar, a cliché her father often used.

Her father. Her parents. How could she begrudge them an anniversary cruise? Yet while they swayed in the tropic breezes, she had been trapped into this freezing trip to Mackinac Island to care for her grandmother.

Important projects were piled on her desk back in Southfield. Her clients' deadlines had been pushed back as much as they could be so she could make the trip that had rankled her from the moment her father had asked.

She loved her grandmother. She loved her parents. But she also loved her career, and putting it in jeopardy hadn't sat well with her.

The ferry bumped against the pier, giving her a jolt, and Christine watched a crew member toss a line to a dockhand. Her gaze moved up the long wooden pier to the island town. Through the swirling snowflakes she could see Fort Mackinac sitting proudly on a hill, its white concrete walls providing a barricade when, hundreds of years earlier, many nations entered the Michigan waters to take over the island.

In the summer, Christine loved Mackinac Island. She loved its history and landscape and the uniqueness that captured tourists from all over. But she didn't love it now—not when she felt mired in the midst of too many projects that needed completion. She had advertising copy to edit, two ad campaigns to finalize and a new client to impress. The Dorset account would make her shine in the eyes of her firm.

A ragged sigh escaped, leaving a billow of white breath hanging on the air. She lifted her shoulders and grasped her carry-on bag, determined to get through the next few days.

When she heard the clang of the gangway, she maneuvered through the expansive benches toward the front of the boat to disembark. As she neared, she surveyed the prow, where she hoped to see her other bag, but the area stood bare.

A crewman flagged her forward, and she stepped onto the slippery ramp, clutching the railing until her feet hit the pier.

"Careful," a crewman called.

She muttered a thank-you and had taken two steps forward when her foot slipped on the icy planking. She skidded, her arms flailing while her carry-on bag landed on the pier. A hand grasped her arm to steady her, and the crew member who'd warned her gave her a knowing grin.

She managed a smile—better than screaming—and retrieved her bag. She took guarded steps toward the ferry exit, where she eyed a workman unloading the luggage. She looked through the feathery flakes, praying hers was there and not left back in Mackinaw City.

If she weren't so stressed, the snowfall would be appealing. The soft flakes drifted past her, twirling on the frigid breeze that streamed off the straits. Why would anyone want to live on an island so isolated in the winter? By the beginning of January their only escape would be by air until the ice bridge was ready.

A shiver ran through her as she stepped beneath the enclosure and reached the ferry's cargo. Her worry eased when she spotted her suitcase. She set down her small bag and tugged at her luggage beneath the other baggage.

"Let me help."

Her focus shifted to the stranger who'd stepped beside her. She jumped at his closeness, then was thrown off guard by his wide grin.

"Thanks. I have it." She gave another determined tug and settled the suitcase beside her, pulled up the handle and tried to connect the carry-on bag to the larger piece.

The man didn't move from the spot. He shook his head as he watched, then gave a chuckle when her carry-on slipped to the ground.

If she hadn't been so irked, she would have enjoyed his smile, but his laughter rubbed her the wrong way. "That wasn't funny. My laptop's in there."

"Sorry," he said, looking less than sorry with his boyish grin and snapping dark eyes. "I assume you're Christine Powers. I've been waiting for you."

She stopped short. "I'm Christine, but who are you, if I might ask?"

He drew back and looked surprised. "I thought you knew I was coming for you. I'm Will. Will Lambert. I board with your grandmother."

"You board with my grandmother? Since when?"

"For the past year."

She controlled her jaw from sagging a foot. "No one told me."

He shrugged. "I guess you'll have to trust me. I'm trusting you're actually Christine Powers."

That made her laugh despite the cold penetrating her leather gloves. "I wasn't expecting anyone to meet me," she said, anxious to get away from the bitter wind. "I'd planned to take a taxi."

"Then you have your dream come true."

She squinted at him, wondering if he were loony or being humorous. He gestured toward the street. "The taxi's waiting. I offered to meet you because your grandmother thought you'd have a ton of luggage."

He grasped the handle of her large case and reached for the smaller one, but she clutched it as if it held her life's treasures. "I'll carry this myself."

"Okay," he said, shrugging. "The carriage is this way." He took a step forward and looked back to make sure she was following.

Carriage? The question was fleeting. What else? The unique island had no motorized conveyances except for a couple of emergency vehicles and snowmobiles when there was enough snowfall. Horse and carriage was a common mode of transportation.

Her limbs tensed as she checked the ground for icy patches. Christine eyed the man ahead of her. He had broad shoulders and an easy gait, as if he knew who he was and liked himself. She would enjoy having that feeling, but at times, she wasn't sure she knew who she was. The boarder had a casual manner, sort of a rough gallantry like a young John Wayne. She could almost picture him in a tilted Stetson.

When Will stepped from under the covering onto the sidewalk, Christine stopped beneath the enclosure and looked at snow that quickly dissipated to slush beneath the feet of the horses.

Will turned toward her as if wondering why she'd been dawdling, but she didn't hurry. Let him wait. She studied him, watching his breath puff in a white mist. He wore a dark leather jacket and a dark blue scarf around his neck. He had a youthful look yet a face that appeared seasoned by life.

Christine had learned to study people first and form an opinion before she let down her guard. She'd learned to analyze her clients at the firm. Sadly, she hadn't always been as astute at judging people as she was today.

Stepping from beneath the shelter, she turned her attention to Main Street, where buggies lined the road—hotel shuttles, private conveyances and taxis, like the one that would take her to her grandmother's. The town had already captured the feeling of Christmas. Large wreaths with bright red ribbons hung from the old-fashioned streetlights, and the dusting of snow created a Christmas-card setting.

The scent of winter sharpened the air and softened the scent of horse muck that steamed from the cold ground. She recoiled again, amazed she'd agreed to do this "little favor" for her parents.

As the driver loaded her case behind the seat, the horse's flank quivered, and it stomped its foot as if ready to be on its way. Will reached for her smaller case, and this time she relinquished it.

He handed it to the driver, who put it behind the seat with her other bag. He told the driver where they were headed, then offered to assist her.

She placed her hand in his, feeling his warm palm and long fingers clasping hers to give her a lift into the buggy.

The cab tipped as Will joined her and pulled a lap robe over her legs. "This will keep you warmer."

The driver looked over his shoulder through the front window. "Ready?" he asked.

"We're all set," Will called. When he settled against the seat, his eyes sought hers, and she must have grimaced, because his look softened. "You'll get used to this. It takes a while. Modern conveniences are a habit, not a necessity."

He said it with a self-assured tone that seemed patronizing. Christine liked conveniences. In fact, she liked luxuries, and she wasn't planning to apologize for her taste.

The horse jerked forward and moved down Huron Street, its clip-clop rhythm rocking the floorboards. Her shoulder hit Will's, and he shifted. A cool spot filled the space, and she almost wished he would have stayed closer.

The driver snapped the reins again and the horse picked up its pace. She studied the scene, noting many shops appeared closed as they trotted past, their interiors dark and the displays gone from the windows. A wreath on the door gave sign that the restaurant was open, and more Christmas decor brightened the pharmacy and grocery store.

Will was quiet, and she wondered what he had on his mind.

He glanced at her, as if realizing she'd been looking at him. "Life here is different from the big city. Can you imagine not having to lock your doors?"

"Not really," she said, turning toward the scenery.

But her quiet didn't stop him. He talked about the community while she viewed the passing landscape. She didn't want to get caught up in his lighthearted prattle. She'd been miserable about coming here, and she planned to stay that way. Her attitude jolted her. She was being childish, but right now she didn't care.

Ahead, Huron Street veered right past the visitor's center. Christine viewed the wide lawn of the fort now hidden beneath a fine blanket of snow. The jingle of the horse's bells set her in a holiday mood, despite her opposition to being here.

The driver pulled the reins, and they turned up Fort Road. As they climbed Fort Hill, the wind nipped at their backs and sent a chill down Christine's spine.

"Cold?" Will asked, tucking the blanket more securely around her legs. "If you move closer to me, I'll block the wind."

She noted his masculine frame and, though feeling odd nestled beside a perfect stranger, she shifted toward him, grateful for the offer. When she moved, he slid his arm around her shoulders.

For a fleeting moment she drew away, but the wind lunged across her again. Reconsidering, she settled beside him. Pride and independence held no value if she froze to death.

Steam billowed from the horse's nostrils as it trotted along, its hooves clapping on the asphalt road and breaking the deep silence.

"How long will you be here?"

"Only a week or so." Her breath ballooned like a white cloud.

"That's right. Your parents went on a cruise."

She eyed him, wondering what else he knew about her family. "A Caribbean cruise."

"Warm weather in the Caribbean. Sounds nice, although I like winter," he said. As a second thought, he added, "Nice you're filling in for them."

Nice probably wasn't the word. She'd resented it, but she'd come. "They're celebrating their fortieth wedding anniversary."

Will drew her tighter against his shoulder. “Forty. That’s great. Your parents are nice Christian people.”

“They are,” she said, feeling on edge again. Her Christian upbringing had taught her to honor her parents and show compassion, but while her parents followed those rules, she wasn’t always very good at it.

The road veered to the right, past the governor’s summer residence, then at the fork, the driver turned onto Cupid’s Pathway. When she saw the house ahead of her, she pulled away from Will’s protection, hoping to regain her composure.

“Here we are,” he said, as the driver reined in the horse beside the lovely Victorian home. The house tugged at her memories—summer memories, she reminded herself.

Will jumped off the rig and extended his hand. She took it, thinking he was not just irritatingly charming but a gentleman. When her foot touched the ground, Christine felt off balance. She steadied herself, not wanting to let Will know how addled she felt.

He released her and scooted around to the back of the carriage while the driver unloaded her luggage. When the large bag hit the road, Will pulled out the extension handle, grasped her carry-on and paid the driver.

Will led the way, and by the time she’d climbed the porch steps, he’d given a rap on the door, opened it and beamed his toying smile. “I live here.”

Christine gave a nod, thinking he might live in the house, but her grandmother wasn’t his. She hoped he remembered that. Hearing her grandmother’s welcoming voice, she surged past him.

“Grandma,” she said, sweeping into the cozy living room. She set her case on the carpet and opened her arms to her grandmother, noticing the droopiness on the right side of her face. Seeing her made the stroke seem so much more real. “You look good, Grandma Summers. As beautiful as ever.”

Her grandmother shook her head, her hair now white, her body thinned by age and illness. “That’s a wee bit of stretching the truth, Christine, but thank you. The truth is, you’re as lovely as ever.” Though her words were understandable, Christine noted a faint slur in her diction.

Christine ached seeing her grandmother’s motionless left side. Her mind flew back to the first time she was old enough to remember a visit from her grandmother. Ella Summers had appeared to her as a tall, well-dressed woman with neat brown hair the color of wet sand and a loving smile. Today she still had a warm, but lopsided smile.

Choked by the comparison, Christine leaned down to embrace her. When she straightened, she glanced behind her, wondering what had happened to Will.

“I’m happy you’re here,” her grandmother said, “but I’m sorry it’s because of my health. I feel so—”

“Just get better, Grandma. Don’t worry about feeling guilty.” Let me do that, Christine thought, as her grandmother’s words heightened her feeling of negligence.

She slipped off her coat, but before she could dispose of it, a sound behind her caused Christine to turn.

Will stood with his shoulder braced against the living room doorjamb. He had removed his jacket, and she noticed his chestnut-colored sweater, nearly the color of his eyes. She pulled her attention away and focused on her grandmother.

“Now that I’m out of the hospital’s rehab and you’re here, I’ll get better sooner,” Ella said, trying to reach for her hand without success.

The picture cut through her. “Mom and Dad told me what happened, but I’d like to hear it from you.” She draped her coat on the sofa, then sat in a chair closer to Grandma Summers.

Her grandmother’s face pulled to a frown. “You know, Christine, my memory fails me when it comes to those first days. I can remember details of my childhood, but all I remember about my stroke is Will found me and called nine-one-one. I’m not even sure if I remember that or if he told me about it.”

“I can tell you what happened,” Will said, stepping more deeply into the room.

Christine ignored his offer. She’d heard secondhand details. She wanted it from her grandmother. “I see the stroke affected your arm,” Christine said, watching her grandmother’s frustration grow when she’d tried to gesture.

“My left arm and leg. My leg doesn’t cooperate, and I’m a little off balance.” Discouragement sounded in her voice. “But I’ve made progress.”

Christine patted her hand. “I’m so sorry.”

“Where do you want her bags, Grandma Ella?”

Christine froze. Grandma Ella? At least, he could call her Grandma Summers. Even better, Mrs. Summers. She opened her mouth to comment.

“The room at the top of the stairs,” her grandmother said.

Will winked and tipped an imaginary hat—cowboy hat in Christine’s mind—before he headed up the staircase with her luggage.

“How long has he been here?” Christine asked, fighting the unexpected interest she had in him.

“Will’s such a nice young man.” Ella turned her gaze from the staircase to Christine. “He moved in at the beginning of the season last year in May. I decided I’d like to have someone around, and he’s been a blessing. He’s like a grandson.”

A grandson? Christine weighed her grandmother’s words, confounded by the unknown relationship. “Mom and Dad approved?”

“Certainly. They met him on visits before my stroke, but they became much better acquainted when they were here recently. You should come here more often, dear. You’re out of the loop.”

Christine could have chuckled at her grandmother’s modern lingo, but guilt won out. An occasional trip to the island wouldn’t hurt her.

“Will’s been through so much with me. He’s the one who called nine-one-one when he realized something was wrong. He saved my life.”

She realized her grandmother had already told her that, but it was a point she couldn’t forget. How could she dislike someone who had saved her grandmother’s life?

Will’s footsteps bounding down the stairs drew Christine’s attention to the hallway. He whipped around the corner like a man who owned the place.

“How about some cocoa?” he asked. He gave her grandmother a questioning look.

“That would be nice,” Ella said. “And you can bring in some of the cookies Mrs. Fields baked.”

Christine chuckled.

“It’s really Mrs. Fields, the neighbor. Not the franchise,” Will said.

Christine watched him head into the next room, tired of his knowing everything. Right now, she really did feel out of the loop.

“Linda Fields has been helping me in the morning since your mother left. Dressing myself is difficult. She does other things for me when Will’s at work. She’s been so kind.”

Christine felt herself sinking lower in the chair. “You can’t dress yourself?”

“I had therapy.” She rubbed her temple with her right hand. “Occupational therapy, I think is what they call it. They showed me how to get dressed, but sometimes it’s so frustrating. The therapist guarantees me I’ll be as good as new again.”

The vision of a neighbor helping her grandmother dress wavered in Christine’s mind. She’d never dressed anyone, and the indignity for her grandmother seemed unbearable. “How long?”

“She’s been coming in since your mother and father left.”

“No. I meant how long before you’ll be good as new?”

“It’s up to the progress I make in my therapy. Judy, she’s my therapist, only comes twice a week to see me, and I have to do the routine myself a couple times a day.”

“Who helps you now?”

“Will or Linda, but Will’s devoting too much time to me. He has his work.”

Apparently he'd become her grandmother's super-hero. "Mom'll be here soon, and you won't have to worry." Christine hated the feeling of inadequacy. She'd never nursed anyone. Apparently Will had. Will this. Will that.

With Will permeating her thoughts, another question struck her. "Who is he, Grandma Summers?"

Her eyes shifted with uncertainty. "He? You mean she. Judy's my therapist."

"No, I mean Will. Who is he?"

"He's a nice young man who needed a place to stay. I thought I told you."

"You did, but you mentioned he has a job. Is it here on the island?"

Her grandmother's eyes brightened. "Not just a job. He owns a store in town."

"Really?" So Will Whatever-His-Name was a businessman. "What kind of a store?" Hardware, she figured.

"He's an artist. Stained glass. It's so beautiful." Her grandmother's left arm twitched, and a look of despair washed over her. "I keep forgetting," she said, then gestured to the window with her right arm.

Christine looked to her left and saw a glass angel glinting in the growing sunlight. A rainbow decorated the carpet. She rose and wandered to the faceted design. Clear beveled glass shaped the figure about eight inches high. The angel clasped a vibrant floral bouquet, the only color in the lovely artwork.

"It's beautiful." The unbidden words slipped from Christine's mouth.

"Thank you."

His voice jarred her, and she turned toward Will, standing beside her grandmother, holding a tray.

He looked away and set it on the old chest her grandmother used as a coffee table. "Here you go," he said, handing her grandmother a mug.

Christine grimaced as she watched Ella struggle to grasp the drink with one hand.

"Sorry," he said, retrieving the heavy crockery and pulling a straw from his pocket. "You've always been so independent it's hard to remember." His warm smile seemed attentive as he tore the paper wrapper from the straw and lowered it into her cocoa, then held it up for her to sip.

The chocolate aroma wafted in the air and reminded Christine of the years she was a child and her mother would make her hot chocolate in the evening as a lure toward bedtime.

Christine observed his attentiveness. He was not only a gentleman, but a gentle man. It seemed strange to her, and she couldn't help but question his motives.

When Will finished, he grasped another mug and offered it to Christine. The movement brought her back from her thoughts. "Thanks," she said, accepting the drink.

He pushed her coat to the far end of the sofa and sat. In silence, they sipped the chocolate, and Christine sensed each of them had sunk into their own thoughts. Hers asked questions about the man who sat across from her looking as if he belonged there while she knew she didn't. She belonged behind a desk at Creative Productions, where she generated unique promotion ideas for other companies' ad campaigns. The whole situation coursed through her like a bad case of stomach flu.

When she lifted her head, Will was eyeing her as if trying to read her thoughts. She turned to her grandmother. "Does your therapist fly in from St. Ignace?"

"She's from Vital Care located in St. Ignace," Will said, "but the nurse is on the island. She works at the Medical—"

"I was asking my grandmother," Christine said pointedly.

Ella shook her head. "Will knows the answers to all your questions, Christine."

"I know that, Grandma Summers, but—"

"He's been through the whole thing with me. He and Linda."

Christine lowered her gaze, reeling from her grandmother's subtle reprimand. She looked at Will. "I appreciate your help."

Ella's frown thawed. "Now that you're here, Christine, you can take over, and we can give Linda and Will a break."

Christine blinked. Bathe her grandmother? She worked in a think tank, not a bathtub. She paused while indignity coursed through her, not for herself but for her grandmother. How did she feel having to allow others to help her with tasks most people took for granted? "And Mom will be here soon," she said.

Ella lifted a warm gaze to Will. "Did I thank you for meeting Christine at the ferry dock?"

"No thanks necessary." He set down his mug and rose. "I should get over to the studio. I have a big project I'm trying to finish."

Christine watched him stride toward the door, then pause and look back at them with his casual grin. A young John Wayne, she thought again.

He wasn't such a bad guy, she supposed, but he seemed way too familiar with her grandmother. He had to have an ulterior motive, and she felt determined to learn what it was.

Chapter Two

Will stood inside the small stable and placed the saddle pad on the horse. She whinnied and stamped her foot as if to say she wanted to go and wanted to go now. The action reminded him of Grandma Ella's granddaughter. She seemed to lack patience worse than the mare. And trust? She had less trust than a mother bird. He pictured her clinging to her carry-on at the ferry station, as if she had the crown jewels inside the little case.

He shifted to reach the saddle and lowered it on the horse's back, adjusting it on the pad to make sure it didn't rub the horse's withers. He gave Daisy a pat. Women. He didn't understand Christine at all, and rubbing? He must have rubbed her the wrong way. She didn't like him, and since the moment he'd met her, he'd trudged through his thoughts trying to imagine how he'd offended her. He must have, because she obviously had an attitude toward him with a capital A.

Still, she was prettier than the baroque glass he worked with in some of his stained-glass artwork. Like the glass, she had texture and lines—very pretty lines, he had to admit. Working with his art, he could lay out his pattern and select the most unique whorls and designs in the glass created by the melding colors, but with Ella's granddaughter, he had to deal with the whole of her. He couldn't lop off the parts that weren't as nice. Her attitude fell into that category.

Will bent down and buckled the cinch snug around the horse's belly. He checked the tightness, then adjusted the stirrups. When he rose, he paused a moment while Christine's image filled his mind. When he'd stood beside her near the taxi, he'd noticed she was only a couple inches shorter than his six feet, and she was as slender as a bead of solder. She was a work of art with a bad attitude.

He could still picture how her golden hair fell in waves and bounced against her shoulder. In the taxi, he couldn't help but admire her glowing skin, her wide-set eyes that studied him so intently. Hazel eyes, he guessed, as changeable as she seemed to be.

Will reached for the bridle and moved to the horse's left side. He placed his hand on the horse's forelock and pressed gently. Daisy lowered her head, and he grabbed the headstall, separated the mouthpiece from the reins and held it to the horse's mouth. She opened it, and he slipped the bit gently inside, then pulled the headstall over the horse's ears. After he adjusted the chin strap, he gave Daisy's shoulders a pat.

"You're not bad-looking yourself, young lady." He tucked his hand into his pocket and pulled out a sugar cube. Daisy sensed it and lifted her head to nibble the sweet from the palm of his hand.

An unexpected thought came to him. What treat could he use to have Christine nibbling out of his palm? He wiped his hand on his jeans and gathered the reins. He leaned against the stall as once again his thoughts filtered through the morning's events. The woman had a message in her eye, warning that she didn't trust him and didn't want to try. He'd seen the same look of disdain on his father's face more often than he wanted to remember.

Will pulled his back away from the boards and led Daisy to the stable doorway, then shifted his focus toward the house.

He needed a plan. If he had to spend a week with this woman hovering beside Ella—her granddaughter no less—he had to find a way to get along with her. Daisy's sugar cube entered his mind again.

He kicked a stone with the toe of his boot and grunted. Get along? He got along fine with everyone else. The problem belonged to Christine.

Christine stepped into her guest bedroom and found her suitcase lying on the bed. Will had placed her small bag on a table beneath the window. Will again. He was like a woodpecker—irritating but intriguing.

Winter sunshine spread a spiderweb design on the table's wooden top. She wandered to the window and pushed back the lacy curtain. Will stood below just inside the stable doorway with a

horse, saddled and ready to ride. Knowing he couldn't see her, she watched him staring into space as if his mind were faraway.

Seeing him with the horse, his hand on the reins, brought the same gentle cowboy to mind. She grinned at her imaginings. She'd daydreamed as a teenager but not as a woman with brains in her head.

A ragged sigh escaped her. What was it about the handsome man that she disliked? From the moment she'd laid eyes on him, he'd set her on edge, and it made no sense. She could only reason she was killing the messenger. He'd picked her up at the island ferry—a place she hadn't wanted to come.

She let the curtain drop and reminded herself the visit was only a week—eight days at the most. She had her laptop and her cell phone. Though it wouldn't be easy, business could be conducted that way, she hoped, for a short time.

She thought of her friend, Ellene, who'd had a similar gripe earlier in the year when she was stranded on Harsens Island in Lake St. Clair. She'd blown off Ellene's concern about island life, and now her friend was married to Connor and lived there. Amazing what love could do.

Love. She didn't really like the word. She'd been bitten too badly to trust. At thirty-nine, marriage seemed an unlikely prospect.

Christine returned to the window and peeked out. Will had vanished from the doorway. She could see the horse's imprints in the mounting snow. Perhaps he'd gone to work. Good. He needn't worry about her grandmother any longer now that she was there. He could spend the whole day at his job.

Stained glass. A businessman and a creative type. He seemed too—she couldn't find the word—too lackadaisical for a man who had to make a living running a business. Why hadn't he dropped her off and gone back to work instead of making them hot chocolate?

The delicate stained-glass angel filled her mind—a perfect gift for her grandmother, who'd always been a strong Christian. She could only deduce Will was a believer.

Sadness wove like tendrils into her conscience. She was a believer, but—but what? “Admit it,” she mumbled. “The Bible says faith and actions work together, and faith is made complete by a person's good deeds.”

Letting the thought fester away, Christine slipped back the curtain again and scanned the yard. She had an empty feeling, thinking about her lack of compassion for others. It wasn't that she didn't care. She just didn't take the time.

She backed away and turned her attention to her luggage, slipped her pants into a drawer and her sweaters into another, then hung up a few items. Easy when she knew how to travel light. She pulled up her shoulders and drew in a lengthy breath.

“Be nice,” she whispered to herself. The man had been kind to her grandmother. The next time she saw him she knew she should show her gratitude.

She left the bedroom and descended the staircase into the large foyer. She loved her grandmother's house with all the nooks and crannies of an elegant Victorian home. So many lovely homes had been built on the island in the late 1800s.

The first floor greeted her with silence. She paused to listen. Still hearing nothing, she crossed the tiles to the living room doorway and saw her grandmother seated where she'd left her, her head resting against the wing of the chair. Her eyes were closed, and her chest rose and fell in an easy rhythm.

She studied her grandmother's face a moment, the classic lines—a well-sculpted nose, wide-set eyes as green as a new leaf, a full mouth that always curved upward into a pleasant grin, her mother's features in her grandmother's face.

Christine smiled at her grandmother's quiet beauty. Even though the stroke had left its mark, she felt confident her grandmother would get well.

“Nice smile.”

Christine's heart jolted, and she swung toward the window seat that looked out to the garden. She poked her index finger into her chest. "Me?" she whispered, not wanting to wake her grandmother.

He gave a quiet chuckle and tilted his head toward the sleeping form. "She's not smiling so it must be you." His voice was hushed, and he glanced toward her grandmother as if to make sure he hadn't awakened her.

Christine tiptoed across the carpet and settled onto the next window seat. "Why are you sitting in here?"

"Waiting for you."

"Me?"

Will tilted his head. "She's sleeping so I'm not—"

"Waiting for her, I know." The man confounded her. "Why are you waiting, and where's your horse?"

His eyebrows raised, and she realized she'd given herself away.

"You were watching me?"

"No. I happened to look out the window."

He flashed her a teasing smile. "Daisy's tied up outside ready to go. I thought you might need something in town."

She frowned, looking for his motive.

Will rose, his grin fading to match her scowl. "I'm trying to be nice. I want you to feel welcome."

"I always feel welcome at my grandmother's."

"But I've never seen you here in the past year and a half. Maybe since you've visited last, she's moved the silverware to a different drawer."

His barb added another notch to her guilt. "I can find the silverware. Thank you."

He shook his head and strutted to the doorway. "Have a nice day."

"You too," she said, thinking hers would be nicer with him gone, but the thought gave her a kick. She was being so unfair. Jealousy? Was that it? Was she being that childish about ownership of her grandmother? The idea hounded her as she hurried from the room.

"Will," she called, having distanced herself from the living room doorway. She headed in the direction she suspected he'd gone. "Will."

He didn't respond, and she dropped her arms to her sides.

"You called?"

Her neck jerked upward, and she looked at him near the back hallway. Now facing him, her apology knotted in her throat. "Look, I'm—I'm sorry. It's not your fault that I'm here. It's no one's fault. My parents planned their trip, and my grandmother didn't know she was having a stroke. I—"

She stopped not knowing what else to say.

He looked at her questioningly. "It's okay. Sometimes things happen that we don't expect, and it's difficult to adjust plans. My parents like planning everything to the letter. My father wishes I would, but I don't. As he would say in the words of Shakespeare, 'Ay, there's the rub.'"

"You're quoting Shakespeare?"

He laughed, and the look in his eyes unsettled her. His rich smile reflected in the sparkling blue of his iris. "Like everyone, I took English lit at university."

"You were a college man?"

His smile faded. She studied him, curious why her question had triggered the negative look.

He seemed to regroup. "For nearly three years."

No degree? "What was your major? Art?" she asked.

"Business."

Business. She drew back, startled by the new information. "So where does the art come in?"

His eyes drifted, and she could see he was uncomfortable with the probing.

“I left U of M and went to Creative Studies in Detroit, then to Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh.” Now that really knocked her off guard. “I’m impressed.”

“Don’t be,” he said.

His comment was so abrupt Christine didn’t understand what happened. “I don’t mean to keep you.”

“I’m on my way.” He took a step backward. “Drop by the studio sometime.”

“If I have time. My grandmother’s my priority.”

He gave a quick nod and headed out the front door. She followed and watched him through the Victorian glass window. He put his foot into the stirrup, flung his trim leg over the saddle and snapped the reins. The horse took off at a good gait and, before long, he’d vanished around the bend.

She let out a sigh. The conversation had been strange. Strange and strained. Something bothered Will, and she wondered if her grandmother knew his problem.

With her grandmother in mind, Christine returned to the living room, and when she came through the doorway, her grandmother opened her eyes. “I guess I caught a little catnap.”

“Naps are good for you. I unpacked and talked with Will a few minutes.”

Her grandmother straightened. “Why don’t you like Will, Christine?”

“Why don’t I what?”

“I can see you don’t like Will, and I can’t understand why. I’m sure Will sees it too.”

“I apologized to him before he left. I know I was a little abrupt.”

“But why, dear?”

Christine wandered deeper into the room and sank into a nearby chair. “I—I keep thinking he must have an ulterior motive.”

“Will? He’s as gentle as a lamb and so kindhearted.”

She ached watching her grandmother try to gesture again. “But why is he so thoughtful? You’re his landlady.”

Her grandmother straightened in the chair. “Because he follows God’s Word. He clothes himself with compassion and kindness. You’re a Christian. You should understand that.”

“I—” She felt her heel tapping against the carpet and tried to stop herself before her grandmother noticed. Christine knew she would disappoint her if she admitted her faith had paled from the actions of her youth.

“What motive do you think he has?” Her grandmother’s sentence came out disjointed.

“I don’t know.” She wanted to end the direction of the conversation. “I just think a mature male would have better things to do than to be a nursemaid to—”

“An old lady.”

Christine flinched. “I didn’t mean it that way, Grandma.” She wished she could just keep her mouth shut. Where was the tact she used in the business world?

“I know.” Her vivid green eyes captured Christine’s.

Christine could barely look in her eyes. “I’m—”

“You’re a career woman,” Ella said. “You make important deals and enjoy success. I’m proud of you, but you can also be kind and still be successful. God says, there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. In fact, success is even greater when it’s done with a humble heart and a desire to please the Lord.”

Christine fought her tears. She felt like a child being chastised by her parents for misbehaving, but this was Grandma Summers, and grandmothers were supposed to be supportive and forgiving.

Yet her grandmother was right. Christine had been unpleasant, but she’d thought she’d had good reason. “I did apologize.”

“I know. You told me.” She eased back and didn’t say any more.

Christine’s mind slid back to that moment. “What’s in the back hall off the foyer? Will came from that way.”

“It’s the back entry. He can come from the apartment that way or leave to go outside. I can lock that door, but it’s been convenient for me.”

“Is that how he found you after you had the stroke?”

“It was. He came in one morning to see if I wanted anything from the store in town. He found me confused and weak. At least that’s what he tells me. I tried to walk and couldn’t. That’s when he called for help. Fast thinking.”

“I’m glad he was here,” Christine said, and meant every word. She rose and kissed her grandmother’s cheek. “So what can I do for you? Can I help you with your therapy?”

She glanced around the room and noticed dust on the table. “I can dust and run the vacuum.” She crossed the room and gathered shoes and a jacket from the floor. “What should I do with these?”

The shoes were definitely not her grandmother’s. They were men’s shoes, and so was the jacket. “Will’s?”

Her grandmother chuckled. “He drops his belongings like a teenager, but I don’t mind. It’s nice to have someone here.”

“Well, he shouldn’t cause you extra work. He has his own home. I’ll talk to him.”

Her grandmother shook her head. “Sometimes Will forgets. Don’t worry about cleaning. Will pitches in, and I should really hire a cleaning lady for a while.”

“Mom will be here. She won’t want a cleaning lady. You know Mom. You do it her way or no way.” She chuckled, then realized she’d almost described herself.

Her grandmother gave a nod, then gestured toward a table with a toss of her head. “See that little ball? Would you hand it to me? I’m supposed to squeeze it off and on during the day to strengthen my muscles.”

Christine handed her the ball and had turned to discard Will’s belongings when the telephone rang. “I’ll get it.” She headed toward the small secretary and picked up the receiver. “Summers residence.”

When she heard her father’s voice, her spirit lifted. “Daddy, where are you?”

She covered the mouthpiece and turned to her grandmother. “They’re in Jamaica. I can hear the steel drum band.” Christine longed to be on some exotic island with sunshine and balmy breezes. “Are you having fun?”

“A great time. Fantastic.” His voice boomed.

“I’m really happy for you, Dad.”

“How’s Grandma? And be honest, Christine.”

“Grandma’s fine.” She couldn’t believe he told her to be honest. “Really. We’re doing okay, and you’ll be here soon. We’ll see you on Monday, right?”

Her heart sank a little with his answer.

“Okay, Wednesday will work. I can leave on the afternoon ferry if you’re early enough. Love you both.”

She hung up and faced her grandmother. “It’s eighty-five degrees there.”

“I’m sure they’re having a wonderful time,” she said, her eyes searching Christine’s.

Guilt blanketed her again. She needed to fix her attitude. The problem was timing. Timing? Face it, she thought, no time was ever good for Christine. She liked to plan her course and sail away with no waves, but things didn’t always happen the way she wanted. She needed to learn to roll with the tide. Will’s comment about things not always going as planned echoed in her thoughts.

“I’d like to go to church tomorrow,” Ella said. “It’s difficult, but I have the wheelchair. Would you like to go?”

“Church?” She stood in the middle of the room and looked out the wide front window and across the porch to the splotches of white and tried to envision what good a wheelchair would do in the snow. “But how—”

“Will can handle it. We’ll get a taxi. It’s just a short ride down Fort Hill.”

Christine stopped herself from rolling her eyes. Will again. “Is it worth the trouble, Grandma?”

“Worth it? What has more worth than spending time with the Lord?”

She closed her mouth before she put her foot in it again. “I meant it’s so difficult for you.”

“My therapist said I should try to get out. I’ve been too embarrassed to have anyone see me so useless. My face is drooping. I can see that in the mirror.”

Christine knelt beside her grandmother. “You’re not useless. I’m sorry I said anything. I—”

Her grandmother patted her arm with a weak hand. “You didn’t make me feel that way, Christine. I’m just...” She paused and looked at her unaccommodating fingers. “Did I ever tell you about when I was a girl?”

Christine figured she’d heard every youthful tale of her grandmother’s, but she’d already hurt her feelings enough. “I don’t know, Grandma.”

Ella gave her a tender look and leaned back in her chair. “When I was a girl, my mother sent all of us to Bible school during the summer. It was like a summer camp but at the church. We learned so much about compassion and giving to others. We memorized Bible verses. One of my favorites was that whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Even as a girl, I realized that our deeds reflect our faith.”

Christine recalled thinking that same thing earlier that day, and she wondered if the Lord was pounding a lesson into her head. “I know, Grandma, but—”

“No buts. We had a project one year at the Bible camp. We visited a hospital to bring little gifts we made to some of the elderly patients. I saw a woman there unable to use her limbs. At the time I didn’t know anything about strokes, but I’m sure that’s what it was. She couldn’t speak well, either. That very day I promised the Lord I would always be kind to people in need. So being useless myself makes it doubly hard because of the promise I made to God.”

How could she argue with her grandmother’s way of looking at her vow. Christine figured God was the one who had allowed her grandmother to have a stroke. He knew she couldn’t continue to be helpful, so He’d have to forgive her breaking her vow. But she couldn’t verbalize that to her grandmother.

“Then, I think, it’s most important that you get better. Right, Grandma?”

“Right,” she said, a gentle look in her eyes. “And that’s why I want to go to church.”

“Then you and I will go to church,” Christine said.

“You and me and Will.”

Christine managed to smile. “You and me and Will.”

Chapter Three

“There, that wasn’t so bad.” Will stomped the snow from his shoes on the porch mat. Today when he’d awakened, he was surprised to see a heavy snow had fallen while he’d slept, leaving the island shrouded in white.

He wheeled Grandma Ella through the front door to the middle of the foyer. “Let me take your coat.”

“I can get her coat,” Christine said, bustling toward him.

He shrugged. “It’s all yours.” He tried to figure out the big deal. Either one of them could help her. It wasn’t like a jump ball in a basketball game.

Christine hung her grandmother’s coat in the foyer closet, then hung up her own and closed the door without a glance his way.

Will shook his head and passed her, removed his wet shoes and left them by the living room archway, not wanting to dirty Ella’s carpet. He headed across the carpet, shrugged off his jacket and hung it on a chair, then settled on the sofa.

Yesterday’s newspaper lay on the floor. Will lifted it to his lap and swung his feet around to spread out on the cushions. Though he tried to focus on the first page, his attention had shifted over the top of the paper toward the foyer.

Christine came through the doorway pushing Ella’s wheelchair. He really wished Grandma Ella would get out of the thing. She needed to get her legs working and strengthen the muscles. That would alleviate her unsteadiness. He’d encouraged her to use the walker, but she said she felt like an old lady.

Christine turned his way, and her expression let him know she wasn’t pleased to see him sprawling on the sofa.

Will dropped the paper onto the floor and swung his feet to the carpet. “Sorry. Usually on Sundays, I keep Grandma Ella company for a while. Am I taking up too much space?”

A pink tinge lit Christine’s cheeks. “No.” She sank onto the chair with a sigh. “Not at all.”

“What’s wrong, dear?” her grandmother asked.

“Nothing.”

“You look unhappy.”

“Really. I’m fine.”

A look of uneasiness filled her face, and she gave Will a smile that looked a little forced to him.

She studied her fingernails for a moment. “I need to go into town. I should have thought of it while we were there for church. I noticed at breakfast we need a few things from the grocery store.”

Will glanced at his watch. “It’s Sunday. The store’s just about to open. I’ll take you,” he said. “I need to drop by the studio anyway and pick up some paperwork I forgot to bring home.”

“You have a tandem bike, or am I supposed to ride with you on the horse?” As the words left her, she concocted another grin.

The look on her face made him laugh. “No, but that’s a good idea. Daisy would love to go for a good run this morning. She leaves for the mainland tomorrow.”

Christine looked surprised “Leaves?”

He loved to confound her. “Once the heavy snow begins, Daisy is stabled at a farm on the mainland. Only the horses used for taxis and drays stick around here for the winter.”

Christine gave him a look. “The horses are smarter than people, I think.”

He chuckled, but he got her point. He jumped up and headed for the doorway. “We’ll take my sled...or you can ride your grandmother’s.”

“Sled?”

He laughed aloud this time. “Snowmobile.”

“You want me to drive myself? I don’t know a thing about snowmobiles.”

“One day I’ll give you a lesson then.”

“Yes,” Grandma Ella said, “that’s a good idea.”

Christine held up her hand in protest. “I’m leaving next week. Save the lesson for my mom.” She chuckled.

Will enjoyed her unexpected good humor and wished he could always see that side. “You can ride with me. I’d like you to see my studio anyway.”

“You’ll enjoy seeing the shop,” her grandmother agreed.

She paused a moment, then said, “Okay.”

Will glanced back to make sure he had heard her correctly. No argument?

“Who can I call to stay with you, Grandma Summers?” Christine asked.

Her grandmother waved her away. “I’m not a baby. I can stay by myself for an hour. Put the portable phone next to me, and set my walker here. I’ll use it if I need to get up.”

“We won’t be gone long,” Will assured Christine, then turned to Grandma Ella, “and we can check on you, okay?”

“I’ll be fine. You can’t tie an old horse down for long.”

Christine chuckled. “If you were a horse, Will would be shipping you over to St. Ignace.”

Will gave her a high five, and to his amazement, she responded and took a step backward toward the foyer.

“I’ll change and make a list,” she said.

“Keep it short,” Will said. “We go to the mainland for the bulk of the groceries.”

Christine stopped and motioned toward the window. “But what about when—”

“No ferry service? Then supplies are flown in.” He enjoyed teaching this strong-willed woman about island life.

She arched a neatly trimmed brow. “As I said, island living isn’t very convenient, is it?”

“No, but then if you’re looking for convenience you don’t live on an island.”

Christine gave him a see-I-told-you-so look.

Will didn’t bother to comment. “I’ll change and be ready in a minute. And remember, we’re not going back if you forget anything.”

She looked as if she wanted to say something but didn’t.

Christine stood outside the small barn, eyeing Will’s snowmobile and trying to imagine herself seated on it. She’d surprised herself by agreeing to ride the thing, but she needed to get around, and walking down and up hills to town in snow appealed to her even less than riding with Will.

She felt like the Abominable Snowman, with a sweatshirt and down jacket over her sweater. She could barely move. With two pairs of socks under the tall boots she had borrowed from her grandmother—already a little tight—she tromped through the snow like Frosty on a bad day.

“Are you warm enough?” Will asked.

“I hope so.” She could only deduce that his silly expression was lighthearted sarcasm. She shifted her attention to the snowmobile. “You want me to get on this thing?”

Will lifted his hand. “Hang on a minute.” He walked back into the stable and came out carrying two helmets. “You’re not going anywhere without this.”

He tossed her one, and she nearly dropped it. “I’m supposed to wear this?”

“You’re not only supposed to—you will. It’s for your safety. No one gets on my sled without one.”

Sled? She pictured the little red sled from her childhood, then eyed the monstrosity he was telling her to get on. She gazed at the helmet and then at him. How much danger was she in?

“Put it on,” he said, slipping some kind of hood over his head.

“What’s that?”

“A smock. You’ll have to get one.” He slid the helmet onto his head and attached the strap.

She followed what he'd done, attached the strap and felt as if she had a cooking pot on her head with a large shield over her face. "I look stupid."

"You don't look stupid," he said, accentuating the word "look."

"I hear a but in that statement."

"I'm not going there," he said, a teasing smile growing on his face.

Will looked amazingly handsome, his broad shoulders accentuated beneath his sledding jacket. Below the helmet, his eyes sparkled when he looked at her. "Okay, Bigfoot, can you climb on?"

He made her laugh. She liked that but not his I-know-more-about-island-life-than-you-do attitude. Earlier she'd tried to cover her amusement with sarcasm, but lately he had a cute way to get back at her. She felt like a kid again, rather than the dignified woman she'd considered herself to be.

She'd studied Will, weighing his boyish charm and easy manner, and had pondered how old he might be. She'd wanted to know, but she knew good manners, and one couldn't blatantly ask. She'd be irked if he asked her.

Christine straddled the vehicle as best she could, then plopped onto the seat, scooting back as far as she could to make room for him. She felt her cell phone press against her leg. She'd tucked it in her pocket.

He waited for her to get settled, then slipped in front of her. "I made it. You're not as fat as you look."

She gave him a jab. "I feel undignified enough. Don't add to it."

"Dignity is nothing without a sense of humor."

"I don't mind laughing with someone, but I don't want to be laughed at by someone," she said.

"Then next time, you'll have to leave about half that garb at home." He grinned. "You need a bib."

"A bib? I'm not eating lobster."

"Snow pants, to you," he said, chuckling. "You'll get used to it, and if I were a betting man, I'd wager you'll get to love the island even in winter."

"You're on," she said. "If I love it here, I owe you something big. A seven-course dinner or—" She faltered, realizing she was having a good time.

"I'll make that decision when I collect," he said with a wink over his shoulder. "Now keep your feet on the foot board." He pulled the cord and started the engine. He revved the motor to warm it, sending another grin with each vroom-vroom sound. "Ready?"

"Absolutely," she said, then jolted backward when the sled shot forward. She let out a squeal and clung to him, her arms wrapped around his waist, praying her feet were glued to the footrest.

He paused at the end of the driveway. "Lean with me on the turns," he called over his shoulder.

She nodded, and he rolled forward, then made a right toward Custer Road.

Above the roar of the engine, he hollered back his usual witty comments, his youthful spirit evident as they soared across the snow. Youthful, yet he had depth, too, Christine had noticed. She saw the heavy thoughts in his eyes. She watched the tenderness he had for her grandmother, and Christine couldn't help but notice how he studied her. She didn't think he'd figured her out yet, but he would.

The wind whipped past, and Christine clung to Will's body for warmth and security. A chill rolled down her back despite her heavy clothing, or wasn't it the wind at all? She'd never done anything quite so daring, and perhaps it was only the adventure that took her breath away and sent excitement prickling up her spine.

Will seemed to be in his element—relaxed and carefree. She wished she could be more like him, more easygoing, and definitely more trusting.

The snow-burdened trees shimmered in the muted winter sun, and occasionally the clouded sky opened to let a bright ray stream down to earth and drop sequins in the snow. She closed her eyes from the glitter.

"Hang on," Will called.

Her heart rose to her throat as they made a curve past the governor's house and flew down Fort Hill and the whitewashed buildings flashed past her. She clung to him even tighter, enjoying the unfamiliar feeling of holding a man in her arms.

Instead of heading to Main Street, Will slowed and turned onto Market Street. They shot past the medical center and post office. Along the way, the quaint shops and homey bed-and-breakfasts lined the road, adorned with green-and-red wreaths and garland announcing Christmas. Finally he decelerated and pulled to the curb. "Here we are."

She looked at the store beside her. The window held displays of magnificent stained-glass windows, and sun catchers in all shapes and sizes hung from the French panes. The brilliant colors glinted in the afternoon rays.

The quiet street seemed so different from the hustle and bustle she recalled from the summer afternoons when tourists packed the streets—fudgies, the residents called them, because most visitors left the island with boxes of homemade fudge purchased in the famous island fudge shops.

Will climbed from the sled and extended his hand. Christine looked at it and at her feet adhered to the running board, her body cramped from clinging to Will's waist as they flew across the unblemished snow. "I'm not sure I can move."

He pulled off his helmet, his grin as wide as the Mackinac Bridge, and shook his head. "Let me help."

She gave him her hand and dismounted, her knees trembling from the bumpy vibration of the sled. "I need to get my land legs."

He drew closer, balancing her in his arms. "You'll get used to it."

But could she ever become used to being held in a wonderful man's arms? The thought rushed down her limbs, and, embarrassed, Christine stepped away and pulled off her helmet.

Will took it from her and hung it with his on the handlebars.

For a moment, Christine felt overwhelmed by the newness of her experiences, but she had to admit she felt exhilarated. The fresh air, the wind nipping at her cheeks, the unspoiled beauty of the landscape, the feel of Will's arms—it all had painted a memory in her mind and on her senses.

She drew in another breath, filling her lungs with pure air. "It smells wonderful."

"The cold freezes the horse dung."

His surprising comment made her laugh. "That's very romantic." As the word left her, she tried to stop it, but it was too late. Why would she say romantic to a man she barely knew and probably would never see again once she returned home?

"Thanks," he said. "I'm glad I can make a good impression on someone in this world."

Though he smiled, Christine sensed an undertone in his voice. She eyed him, but he didn't give a hint of what he had meant and she didn't know him well enough to pry, although she was tempted.

Will pulled a ring of keys from his pocket and headed for the door while Christine moved closer to the shop window to take a better look at his artwork. She saw the name on the window, Sea of Glass. She'd heard that phrase before.

Her mind shifted back to Will's behavior. He was hiding something or... Maybe he was more like she was than she'd thought. Now that she'd gotten through her own murky days as a naive businesswoman, she had gained confidence and had also developed a deep curiosity to look more deeply into people.

People said much more below the surface than their words expressed. Subliminal messages were important in the advertising business. She needed curiosity to sense what the company really wanted to convey in their ads, and then needed it again to express the underlying message to the consumer. If Will was playing games, he didn't know with whom he was messing.

Will pushed open the door, and a bell tinkled, catching her attention. Christine followed him inside, feeling the warmth of the building and the varied aromas of raw wood, dust and all the products that went into stained-glass art. She knew nothing about it, but she was awed by what she saw.

“This is beautiful, Will.” She paused beneath a large window hanging from the ceiling. A rich tapestry of colors created a pastoral scene with flowers, a river, sun and shade—multiple hues of greens and blues. “How do you do this? It’s amazing.”

“Very carefully,” he said, the playful tone returning to his voice.

Her admiration rose as she turned in a circle to view the magnificent pieces of glass designs that adorned the store. “You learned to do this in college?”

He shrugged. “It’s like anything. You learn techniques, and then you let your creativity take flight. You must do something creative in your own work—maybe something different than me, but still unique and your own style.”

She searched his face, surprised at the matter-of-fact way he discussed his art. Something bothered him. “I suppose I do, but it’s very different.”

He stood a moment in silence. “Why is it different?”

“In advertising, I create ads and promotional campaigns for clients.”

“That’s creative.” He gave one of his sun catchers a poke. “It’s the same. You didn’t learn everything in college.”

“That’s very true.” She thought of all the mistakes she’d made and her feeble attempts to cover them. “I work with a team. I can always blame them for my errors in judgment. You can’t.”

“No, but what’s the difference. You know you made the mistake, the same as I do.”

His comment left her flailing. He’d pinpointed an important issue that hit too close to home. No matter what she had done wrong, she knew about it herself—and so did God.

She looked at Will’s expectant face, his eyes searching hers as if filled with questions he didn’t have the nerve to ask. Something about him was endearing. “I’m really impressed.” She made a sweeping gesture around the store, seeing wooden crates filled with gigantic pieces of marvelous glass in many colors and textures.

“I figured you’d like some of my things.”

“Some? Everything is unique.”

His questioning look faded, and a grin replaced it. “Then come into my back room and see some more of my work.”

Will winked, then smiled at her over his shoulder.

Christine had to admit he had a wonderful smile that seemed contagious. She wanted to grin back, but she wasn’t planning to let him know she found him attractive.

He passed through the doorway. “This is my studio where I make all of these things.”

She followed him through the door and paused. She’d seen the supplies he sold in the front of the store, but in the back she surveyed worktables laden with projects and crates with a mixture of glass nearby.

“Where did you get the name for the shop—Sea of Glass?”

He turned to face her. “It’s in the Bible. Revelations. Those who were victorious over Satan stood beside the sea of glass as clear as crystal.” He gestured toward the lake. “The studio’s only a couple blocks from the water. I thought it was fitting.”

“It is. I like it.”

“Glass is like people,” he said, holding up a piece. “If you just glance at it, you see one thing, but if you really look inside—” he held it toward the light “—you see all kinds of nuances and textures.”

She ran her finger over the swirled design, wondering what he’d seen inside her. “What kind of glass is this?”

“Baroque.” He slid the large piece back into the rack, then selected another. “This is water glass.”

Christine looked at the texture appearing like raindrops.

“And this is a smooth ripple. Here’s an opal glass, bull’s-eye, English muffle and cathedral glass.”

“You’ve lost me.”

He lowered the glass and then stepped closer and tousled her already messed hair. “No, I haven’t. You’re right here. See.” He stepped closer and gave her a quick hug.

The embrace surprised yet pleased her. Will looked different in the studio, as if he were in control of his life. She saw confidence, and a look on his face that intrigued her—pride and a kind of wholeness. She wished she felt that way.

“You love this work,” she said. “I can see it on your face.”

“I do. It’s like cheating. I earn a living doing something that I have to do because I can’t help myself.”

“That’s not cheating. It’s finding the right job.”

He patted a stool beside the tall raw-wood table. “Sit here.”

She slid onto the stool, and he leaned his hip against the table.

“Have you found the right career?” he asked.

“I like to think so. When we do a good job and make the client happy, I can sit back and see the result of my work. It feels good.”

“That’s what counts.” He shifted away, but his response left her questioning her own decisions. She saw a specific difference between Will’s attitude toward his work and hers.

“Would you like to see how I do any of these things?” He motioned toward the projects scattered around the room.

“I’d love to, but I think we’d better get going. I’m nervous about leaving my grandmother too long.”

He nodded, then reached beneath his worktable and pulled out a large folded paper. “A pattern I’m designing. I’ll show you back at the house.”

“I’d like that,” she said. “Let’s go. We still have to stop at the grocery store.”

As the words left her, her cell phone played its familiar tune. She dug into her pocket, curious yet concerned. “I left the number with Grandma. I hope she’s okay.” She stared at it, afraid to answer.

“You’ll know, if you answer that thing.”

The melody stopped when she hit the green button. “Hello,” she said, expecting to hear her grandmother’s voice, but who she heard instead gave her a start. “Dad. Where are you?”

She heard the upset in his voice, and she listened as her pulse pounded in her temple.

“You’re in Florida? Why?”

Her stomach tightened as her world crumpled. She turned her head toward Will, unable to believe what she’d just heard.

She closed her eyes, then opened them again. “My mother fell and broke her hip, jogging.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.