

seen them before. Trouble was, I kept trying to put them in an old space, not a new one."

"That's strange," she murmured. "Just now, when it all came rushing back, it was your eyes that I remembered. You looked so angry."

He set his mug down with a little thump. "I was angry. Bill and I were mad as hell at those idiots."

"Bill? That was the other boy with you?"

"Yeah, Bill Ryan. We had just passed you. You do remember that?" At her nod, he continued. "Bill always knew everything that was going on in town, and he'd just told me you were the history professor's kid when we heard you scream afterward. They said we were just trying to scare you."

"Well, they succeeded," Anne replied. "I suppose it's a little late to say thank you, but I am grateful, even after all these years. One way or another, you seem to have spent quite a bit of time rescuing me."

He grinned appealingly and said, "Tell me, do you have anything special in mind for the next time?"

"No," Anne laughed. "There isn't going to be a next time."

"And I was just getting used to the idea."

His tone was ironic, but when Anne looked at him, his expression grew more contemplative. The quiet study unnerved her as she rose, taking her cup with her, and walked to the window.

When he spoke again, she stiffened at his words. "Anne, I'm sorry if I was a little rough on you the other day. But I've been thinking about that survey, and everybody your friend correctly, it only dates back to the forties. Now it seems to me your father's book would deal with a much earlier period, so there couldn't be any connection. Am I right?"

## Chapter 4

Anne."

She felt Rob's fingers on her wrists and looked into his dark eyes. She now saw concern there, not anger.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Just give me a minute."

"I'll wait," he agreed, and turned to drape an arm over the back of his chair while he lifted his mug.

Monty picked that moment to place his head on Anne's thigh in a bid for attention, and welcoming the distraction she reached to stroke his hair. Rob regained her composure and turned to face Rob.

"You'd forgotten the incident until I mentioned it, hadn't you?" he asked.

"You might say I pushed it to the back of my mind," she conceded.

"Well, I'd half forgotten myself, but there was something about your eyes that had me wondering just where I'd



so apparent that it also became obvious how disturbed she really was by the situation.

"If you still have his name, it shouldn't be too hard to check," he suggested quietly.

"It's Woods. I've got his letter in my purse." She went to retrieve the documents while he followed every movement with his eyes.

"Here they are." She handed him the papers, then waited impatiently while he examined each one. Once he was satisfied, it took only a few minutes and a couple of phone calls to learn that T. Woods was also deceased.

"Well, so much for that idea," he said, picking up the threatening letter and reading it. When he turned back to Anne, still looking serious.

"Listen, Anne," he said. "That call you got puts this whole business in a different light. You can't be sure what you're getting into, and I don't think you should treat it lightly. If someone feels threatened enough to scare you, there's something more behind it than a little piece of land."

He stood before her, searching her eyes for a long moment, then lifted his hands to her arms. This time his touch was gentle, but his expression grave.

She tried to deny the sudden jump in her heartbeat, the brief catch in her breathing at the instant of contact. She wanted to pull away, to put some distance between them as she was flooded with memories of that kiss they'd shared. But she couldn't move.

He frowned slightly as her gaze searched his. God, those eyes, he thought, and as some shadow of emotion moved through them, he experienced an immediate, almost-painful tug of desire.

"Anne," he began, ~~handing her the letter~~, but she pulled back.

"What do you suggest I do? If there's something going on, isn't that all the more reason to pursue it? Besides, I promised my father that I'd take care of this for him."

"I know that." His fingers were just enough to keep her from moving farther away. "But we've got to take a little time to figure out who's behind it."

It was impossible to form a thought with his eyes burning into hers, and Anne's reply was a little breathless. "We? Rob, the last time I looked, there was only me, but I was doing just fine."

"Look again," he suggested, and slipped a hand to her back to pull her closer as he lowered his head.

She hadn't expected his lips to be so soft or so warm. They moved against hers with a slow persuasion that was far different from the heated demand of their first kiss. Anne's thoughts began to drift, leaving her defenseless against the subtle attack on her senses. He drew her to him until they were pressed tight, and any thought of resistance, any will to struggle was gone.

She was herself responding and realized vaguely that her arms had gone around him, as well. Her lips were eager at first, then greedy, in a sequence so rapid that there was no anticipation of the change.

Rob reeled with the impact as her heat flowed into him, swam in his veins, and lapped at the edges of his nerves. Then his mouth crushed hers, and his hand moved down her back to slide over her bottom and caress the curve of a hip.

She now was melting. This wasn't supposed to happen, this stunning tide of sensation, this fervor, this need. It was too intense, too compelling, and much, much too soon. Anne fought for reason and her lips began to moan in a bare, unadorned, almost senseless way. She parted her lips to seek her tongue, to explore her mouth in search of the sweetness he knew was there. When he found it, he made

one last desperate grab for sanity. Good Lord, what am I doing? he demanded of himself and drew her away.

Her eyes were as dark with passion and longing as his, and desire hung in the air. For long moments they fought to level their breathing, to understand what had happened. Then he managed a husky, "Some things call for teamwork. Anne, I'm staying with you. I'll be in the Mills."

"No, that isn't necessary. It's not what I want." She let her own control return with the words, and scolded herself for having let him usurp it, even momentarily.

And before he could argue about it, a man's voice at the door interrupted and brought Monty to his feet. The dog trotted over as Rob called, "Come in, Albert."

Anne returned to the table and studied the man who entered. He looked much as she remembered from the night of the storm. His hair was a grizzled salt-and-pepper, and a matching stubble covered his face. A hammer hung from a loop on the right hip of his overalls. He could have been anywhere from fifty to sixty-five.

Rubbing the dog's neck, the newcomer said, "Monty Mackenzie, you're the greediest animal for attention that I've ever seen." Then he walked, steadily this time, across the kitchen to the cupboard where the mugs were kept, poured himself some coffee, and joined Anne at the table.

Rob had said nothing, apparently content just to stand to one side and watch. Anne waited quietly to see which of them would make the first comment about her presence.

When the newcomer had settled onto a chair, he looked at Anne with mild curiosity, then turned to Rob. "Well, aren't you going to introduce me to the lady?" he demanded.

Rob chuckled and said, "Excuse me. I thought you'd met. Albert, this is Anne Goodwin, recently arrived from

Omaha, Nebraska. Anne, meet Albert Hayes, who probably hasn't even heard of Omaha, Nebraska."

Albert guffawed and extended a callused hand to Anne. "My pleasure, young lady. And don't pay any attention to this character," he added, jerking a thumb at Rob. "He thinks just because he goes off on those fancy safaris all the time, that I'm nothing but an armchair traveler. The truth of the matter is, I nearly went to Omaha once, but I ran out of money in Chicago and didn't quite make it."

Rob, looking slightly liking him, said, "You must try again, Mr. Hayes. Nobody should miss Omaha."

"There now, you see?" Albert said, turning to Rob. "I told you this lady had class the first time we saw her, didn't I?"

Anne smiled inwardly to see that Rob looked a little uncomfortable.

"I guess I'd better be going," she said as she rose and faced the men.

"Wait a minute." Rob, ignoring Albert's knowing grin, said, "I'll walk out with you."

Monty rushed ahead of them, but as soon as they walked across the terrace, Rob stopped Anne, turning her to face him. "I meant what I said about going with you," he told her. "Just give me a couple of minutes to talk to Albert."

"Rob, I told you I don't need any help. I appreciate the offer, but I'll handle it. After I talk to Sylvia the whole thing may be resolved anyway."

"And what about the threat?" he persisted. "Do you think I'm going to let you take a chance with that?"

"Once I've turned the papers over to the Land Office, what can anyone do?"

"Listen," he said as he caught her hands in his. "Suppose I go with you this time, and if the whole thing is resolved, fine. If not, we'll talk it over and decide the next step. Then if you can convince me that you'll be okay,

you're on your own. That shouldn't bother you, and it'll make me feel a hell of a lot better. Anne, humor me, please."

She couldn't have said if it was from the conviction in his eyes, his argument or the physical contact, but she finally nodded. "All right, just this once. But I guarantee you, Mr. MacKenzie, I'm big girl, and I can take care of myself."

With a smile he said, "I'm already convinced of half of that. Then he turned to go back inside.

It was nearly eleven that same day when they walked into the Law Office. There was a moment of surprise in Sylvia's eyes when she saw Rob, but at Anne's nod she said, "I was beginning to think you'd change your mind."

*the word is the plot to be followed.*

Anne apologized to Rob. "I got sidetracked. Did you learn anything?"

"Yes, I'll grab my bag and we'll go someplace where we can talk. The courtyard okay with you?"

"As long as I don't have to drink that coffee," Anne quipped. She introduced Sylvia and Rob as they walked down the steps, and noticed the speculative look the pretty clerk gave him before she smiled and said, "Mike Walters has mentioned you. Weren't you in high school together?"

"That's right," Rob confirmed. "How's he doing these days?"

"Oh, fine," Sylvia replied as they reached the courtyard.

They had it to themselves and chose a bench near its center. "So what did you find out?" Anne asked as soon as she and the clerk were seated. Rob stood to one side and took a slow look around, then put a foot on the bench beside Anne and rested his arms on his thigh as they listened to Sylvia.

"Well," she began, "I asked Mike what he thought, and he said it should be pretty straightforward if it's treated as an inadvertent error. A new survey would be ordered and both property owners notified that there'd been a mistake,

and that as of such and such a date, the records would be corrected. Then, with the next tax bill, adjustments would be made as to who pays on how much property. I looked up a few regulations at work this morning that say just about the same thing."

"That does sound pretty straightforward," Anne agreed. "But, what if it's treated as deliberate deception?"

"That's where it gets more complicated," Anne said he's pretty sure that if a document was deliberately falsified, there'd have to be an investigation and maybe some kind of settlement between the parties. There could be a fine levied against the guilty party.

"But if the person who falsified it is dead, whom could they sue?" Anne pressed.

Sylvia shook her head and said, "His estate, I suppose. The heirs. Look, Anne, I'm really not sure about this. That's my best guess."

Anne paused thoughtfully, then asked, "Sylvia, did either of you happen to mention this to anybody else?"

"No, of course not. Why?"

"I just want to make sure word doesn't get around before I decide how to handle it. Assuming I have a choice?" she added with an inquiring look.

"I'm sure I've covered you here. But what do you think you'll do?"

"I'm not sure," Anne admitted.

She looked up at Rob who gave her a slight shrug and said, "Your decision."

Anne nodded and turned back to the clerk, saying, "You're sure there's only one daughter around? The one who lives in Groverton?"

"Yes, that's right. But that reminds me—I heard something interesting about the other one," Sylvia exclaimed with an air of excitement.

Before she could say more, though, a door opened and one of the women from the Land Office came out. "Oh, Sylvia, I'm glad I found you," she interrupted. "Mr. Banyon wants you right away."

Sylvia's brow drew into a frown as she rose and turned to Anne and Rob. "I'm sorry, but when the boss calls..." She shrugged apologetically and added, "Let me know as soon as you decide what you want to do, okay?"

"Yes—Monday for sure," Anne promised. After the door had closed behind Sylvia and the other woman, she turned back to Rob and found him looking thoughtfully at his hand, then he had turned and looked closely around his knee. It looked like his mind was miles away. Anne waited until he snapped his attention back to the moment, then gave him an inquiring look.

"Is something bothering you?" she asked.

"It was that remark your friend made about the other Schaeffer sister. I kind of remember something myself, but I was shy and I didn't pay much attention to gossip." He sat down beside her.

"It was the summer you were here. Bill was my usual source. I told you he had his finger on the pulse of Noble's Ryan."

Anne nodded when he paused, then something clicked. "That would be Bill Ryan," she stated, looking at him for confirmation.

"Um-hmm," he answered.

"Is he the same Bill Ryan who's your sheriff now?" Anne asked.

"That's right." Rob smiled. "Bill's never quite kicked the habit of keeping tabs on the town. Married his high-school sweetheart, worked his way up through the department, and has three kids and a mortgage. He's one of the happiest men I know."

"And you're still friends."

Anne digested this for a moment before she got back to the earlier subject. "Do you remember about Margaret Schaeffer?"

"Very little. There was some kind of trouble between her and her father, so she packed up and left home. She never even got in touch with him again, as far as I know," he said musingly, then his eyes brightened and he snapped his fingers. "Miss Wiley," he said. "She's the librarian, and she might know more about it. She knows everyone in town, everybody's business. Let's take a walk over there—it's only a few blocks." As he finished speaking, he caught her hand and stood up, pulling her to her feet.

The young girl at the library checkout desk told them Miss Wiley was away on vacation, but when they said they were interested in events of the summer fifteen years before, she told them the town's newspaper was on the library's microfiche records.

Minutes later, seated in front of the small, lighted screen, Anne tilted back her head to look up at Rob as he stood behind her. "Where do you think we should start?" she asked.

"How about June through September?" He pulled over another chair and sat at her side, draping a casual arm along the back of her chair.

"All right." Slowly she began to turn the two knobs that controlled movement of the text down the screen and brought it into focus. Several minutes they had failed to find anything about the disappearance, but began to have an idea of where, within each issue, to concentrate their efforts.

As the second week in June rolled onto the screen, Anne exclaimed excitedly, "Here's Blanche Schaeffer's wedding." Rob leaned closer to read with her, moving his arms to her shoulders in a gesture too casual for comment or objections.

The article stated that the nuptials had taken place on June 10 and that the newlyweds would make their home in Harrisburg. Margaret's name appeared as a member of the wedding party.

Anne moved the files into July without seeing the Schaeffer name again. Rob watched her, studied her profile with its strong bones and delicate curves. She was so intent as she looked at the screen, hoping for—what? Why did it matter about Margaret Schaeffer? If she had to deal with the woman connected with the land in getting this survey business straightened out, Blanche Howard would do.

There's something wrong, he thought. Something she hasn't told me. Without thinking, he moved his hand to the back of her neck and let his fingers wander into her hair, there to twine gently in the long, flowing waves. She turned to face him. His expression was quiet, brooding, and her pulse fluttered, then steadied at an accelerated pace. Unaware, she turned one of the knobs on the microfiche machine before her fingers slipped away from it.

"Rob—" but the protest died as he drew her closer. His other hand came to her cheek and caressed it as his mouth leaned over hers in a gentle, lingering kiss.

Oh, dear Lord, she thought, this has got to stop. But still she was kissing his back, moving her lips against his and reveling in sensations of light-headedness and desire. Alarmed to feel so much in so short a time, she tried to pull back, but he held her firmly and deepened the kiss briefly before he released her.

"Why—" Her voice broke and she began again, but with her gaze still locked on his she was breathless, and her tone lacked the disapproval she'd intended. "Why did you do that?"

"Because I can't seem to stop," he said quietly, and somehow Anne knew it was the truth.

With an effort she turned back to the microfiche. Immediately the small picture popped out at her. "Local Woman Disappears Without Trace."

"Rob, look!" she cried, grabbing his hand. They read it together, but didn't hurry to change. On July 23 Margaret Schaeffer had left town for an unknown destination, leaving only a note to her father stating that she couldn't "take it any longer" and was staying out on her own. Henry Schaeffer refused to comment, but an unidentified "friend of the family" stated that Margaret was testing her freedom, and that she undoubtedly be back "sometime soon." Other quotes in the article, friends and former classmates of Margaret's, took the opposite view. "It's been coming for quite a while," was the general consensus. "It's unlikely she'll be back for a long time."

Back outside, Anne turned to Rob and said, "I really want to give this a little more thought before I do anything. With the weekend coming up, I might as well wait till Monday. And, I think I should forewarn Blanche Howard. She may not appreciate any adverse publicity, and it could be handled quietly with her cooperation."

"Okay," Rob agreed, surprising her. "So, where would you like to go now?"

Anne made a waver wish. "Back to Nora's, I guess. I think I can still make it in time for lunch." Then she looked up at him and smiled. "I don't think she'd object if I like to go. There's always plenty."

It was her first genuinely friendly gesture, and Rob was sorry he couldn't accept. "I promised Albert I'd get back and give him a hand. He's helping me with my renovations," he explained. "But I'll be back later so we can talk. And until we do, you've got to promise me you won't do anything more about this woman."

Anne began to bristle at the instruction, but then she reminded herself that she had agreed to his terms. "All right,"