

My deepest gratitude
to Doris Kennedy for igniting the spark,
to Norman for fanning the flame
and to Lou Anne Hueneke for controlling the burn.

1 awoke

Chapter 1

You've got to expect thunderstorms this time of year, just
every day. That's what the old man in the Welcome
Center told Anne when she stopped for a Pennsylvania map.
"We'll make it through this without rain. Just be sure
you're out of the mountains by midafternoon."

She would have heeded the words if it hadn't been for the
rain, and that ridiculously slow in the gas station
where she had to fix it.

Still, Anne had been lucky. The churning gray mass had
crept right over her shoulder and the steep
Allegheny slopes behind. She'd only had a brief look at
rolling pastures and fields of vegetables in long, even rows
stretching north along the ridge. Then
the storm hit with a fury. Lightning slashed
through the sultry air and thunder rolled among the sur-
rounding hills.

As a child, Anne had been terrified of thunderstorms. As
an adult, she'd conquered that fear.

As a child, Anne knew that uneasiness and power had her grasp at the steering wheel until her knuckles turned white.

Progress was slow because water washed over the windshield, blurring visibility. She had to dig her fingers to hold her small car on the road in the shuddering gusts of wind. With each new flash of lightning she saw thick forest crowding the edge of the road. Used to Nebraska's open plains, this new constriction added to Anne's uneasiness, and the darkness between flashes deepened as night fell.

Anne winced at a white flash followed by a deafening crack that seemed right on top of her. "Why am I doing this?" she moaned. "If I had any sense I'd be in a nice dry hotel room, someplace warm."

But she'd had no choice. A promise had been made, and there were questions to be answered. These nagging little glimpses of something half-remembered needed to be dragged out into the light of day and examined. Fulfillment of the promise, and hopefully the answers to these questions lay ahead on this road.

How much farther? Anne demanded silently. In answer to her question another prolonged flash illuminated a road sign: Noble's Inn, a small, white, one-story building. The rain slackened as abruptly as it had started, and in an effort to make up some of the lost time, she pressed the accelerator.

She had no idea how many of the first ones were behind her when an animal darted out into the beam of her lights. She hit the brakes, swung the wheel to the left, and went into a skid that ended an eternity later. The car reached a jarring stop as Anne clung to the steering wheel.

The first thing she noticed was that her headlights sent shafts of yellow into the night at an upward tilt. The next was that she was facing the road.

Hopeful, she started the engine and carefully depressed the accelerator. But the back wheels spun uselessly, and

when she lifted her foot, she felt the car settle more deeply into what could only be mud.

With a muttered "Damn," she took the flashlight from the glove compartment and opened her door. Her foot sank well over the sole of her shoe as she directed the beam along the side of the car. The left rear wheel was buried to the hubcap. From the angle of the light, it was apparent that the right side was mired even more deeply.

"This is great, just perfect," she muttered as she looked around. The prospect of sitting helplessly in her car did nothing to cheer her, but there were no coming lights to give hope of rescue. She'd hardly had the thought when a fresh downpour started and Anne was soaked to the skin within seconds. She was about to crawl back into the car when a flash of lightning, much too close for her peace of mind, revealed a house sitting on a hilltop across the road.

No lights, she thought as she stared toward the spot, invisible again in the darkness. Probably nobody home—that would be just my luck. Still, if someone was there...

Her imagination conjured up a pleasant couple who would invite her inside to dry off. The woman would insist that she have some homemade soup or a cup of coffee. After the rain let up, the husband would bring his tractor around and pull her car out of the mud. She'd slip him twenty dollars and be on her way.

"The kitchen's probably in the back," Anne said aloud to give herself courage as she began to cross the road. "That's why I can't see the light." Another flash and more thunder had her scurrying the rest of the way. She wondered briefly what had become of the animal responsible for her predicament, and the thought of unknown creatures had her looking warily in each direction. "Of course, any sensible animal is holed up in a nice, dry log," she muttered as she climbed the gravel driveway.

She wasn't cold, but she was shaking from a delayed reaction to the shock. Her fingers were plastered to her, and for a moment her face, pale as time could remember, few times she'd been more miserable.

Now she could see a faint flicker of light through a window. Candles. The power must have failed, but at least someone was at home. She moved toward the door, waited, then knocked again. A crash of thunder drowned out the third try, and finally in frustration she began pounding on the door. "Come on, come on," she muttered. "Candles don't light themselves."

When the door opened she had her fists raised, ready to pound again. She lowered them and tried to see the man's face, but in the dim light she could tell only that he was tall. She could see a bare chest with a moderate covering of hair, and below that, man's encasing long legs. At the man's side stood a golden retriever who raised a friendly muzzle to sniff at her hand while it wagged his tail.

"What the—" the man began.

"I'm sorry to bother you," she apologized as her hand went automatically to stroke the dog's silken head. "My car went off the road and it's stuck in the mud."

He stood motionless at first, then he stepped back and said, "You'd better come inside." His voice was deep, but there was something about his speech—a slight slurring—that bothered her. Still, she stepped through the doorway, grateful to get out of the driving rain.

"Monty, get back," he commanded as the dog continued to sniff Anne's hand. The animal obediently moved a few feet away and sat on his haunches.

Mellow light spread over the man's face as he moved nearer a table where a kerosene lantern glowed, revealing strong angles of nose, cheekbones and chin, while leaving his eyes in shadow. Dark hair fell over his brow. Anne's quick study ended when she observed his lips, set in a tight

line of displeasure. The image of a helpful farmer and his kindly wife fled from her mind.

Not speaking, he regarded her with no discernible change of expression. She found the continuing silence uncomfortable, and finally broke it. "If I could just use your phone to call a tow truck, I'd appreciate it."

"The phone's out," came the curt reply.

Then a new voice called out "Who is it, Rob?" Another man had come into the room, but stopped speaking when he saw Anne. She had the impression of gray hair mixed with dark, but in the subdued cast of the lantern, couldn't be sure.

"Where's the—"

The sudden question from the younger man—Rob—had her turning back to him. When she saw his scowling gaze aimed at her, she became flustered. "What?"

"Your car. Where did it go off the road?"

"Almost straight across from your driveway," she told him and watched as he walked to the window, moved the curtain aside with a long finger, and peered out.

"Gonna be a while before you'll want to go out in that," the older man observed, speaking to his companion.

Rob let the curtain fall into place and turned back to Anne. "That's right. How badly is it stuck?"

He was plainly annoyed, and Anne willed herself to remain calm. "Both back wheels are in pretty deep," she admitted cautiously. "I think the right front tire may be sitting in mud, too." At his look of disbelief she tried to instill a positive note by adding, "But the left front tire is on the shoulder."

"Good Lord," he said. "You managed to do a thorough job of it, didn't you? What in hell were you trying to do?"

Anne felt heat crawl up her neck and over her cheeks. After her fright and the frustration of getting stuck, not to mention her soaking, she didn't welcome criticism from a

stranger. "I swerved to keep from hitting an animal," she replied through clenched teeth. "The car went into a skid."

She couldn't make out everything he muttered at her explanation, but the implications were clear enough.

"Listen," she said hotly. "If you can't help me, fine. I won't bother you any longer."

She started to turn toward the door, but stopped when the second man spoke again with a suggestion of amusement in his tone. "Rob, why don't you get the lady a towel or something, and let's get back to business?"

She wondered fleetingly what he meant by "business," but the surly Rob sent an irritated look in his companion's direction and said, "You go ahead. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Anne watched the second man leave the room. He was a little unsteady, and for the first time it occurred to her that they might have been drinking. She turned back to Rob to find that he had disappeared.

"Great," she muttered to the dog. "Only a woman short on brain cells would stay here with two men she doesn't know." She moved toward the door, grumbling to herself, "I drive fifteen hundred miles and the first time I have any trouble, I have to pick a spot where the only help around can't walk a straight line."

"What was that?"

She hadn't heard Rob return. She whirled, wondering how much of her mumbled complaint he'd heard. "Nothing," she answered crossly.

He carried a towel and a brown robe over his arm. His irritated expression hadn't altered. "If you want to get out of those wet things, we can dry them in the kitchen," he grudgingly offered.

"No thank you," she replied crisply, reaching for the doorknob.

"You can't be seriously thinking of going back out there."

"Oh, yes I am," she replied. "I'll just flag someone down."

He stared at her for a moment, then said, "Suit yourself. But, lady, you're crazy if you think we're going out in that to push your car."

"I wouldn't dream of asking you," she replied haughtily and pretended not to hear his muttered oath as he closed the door behind her.

It was still raining heavily, and the mud was even deeper when she got back to her car. She climbed inside, locked the door, and sat frowning while she thought of the rude man across the road. "If he's an example of local helpfulness, I'm going to have an uphill fight while I'm here," she told herself.

She watched with fading hope for the approach of a motorist while she continued to rail under her breath about the unpleasant stranger. "He might at least have shown a little common courtesy. After all, I didn't ask for this to happen. Well, not exactly, she amended silently, remembering her eagerness to make up for her lack of a sigh, she acknowledged that she might have been traveling just a tad too fast for the road conditions."

"But I'd have been a fool, an absolute fool, to stay there alone with two strange men," she told herself. "Who knows what they might have tried?" As she had the thought, though, she was forced to admit that Rob-whomever-he-was had hardly seemed overcome with lust, and his companion had shown no interest beyond an initial curiosity and a matter-of-fact suggestion of basic hospitality.

The lights in motion caught her attention. They came bobbing down the hill across the road, and Anne stared in amazement as they moved closer. She rolled down the window when the older man from the house came alongside.

"We'll try to get you out," he said. "This car auto-

"No, it's a five-speed."

"Okay. When we give you the word, start it up and let the clutch out real slow and easy."

"All right," Anne said, nodding.

The man moved away. She stuck her head out the window and looked after him. The glow of his lantern revealed that he was wearing boots and a slicker, and held several small boards in his hand.

Although she couldn't see the other man, she heard him say something to which his companion replied, but she could distinguish nothing of the low-voiced exchange. After a minute the order came from the older man. "Okay, start it up."

Anne turned the key in the ignition, and the engine started smoothly. "Remember, slow and easy," he reminded her. "Now, let it out."

She felt the car lift and move forward, only inches, but it was a start. "Hold it a minute," the man called, and she braked.

"Okay, again."

This time she could feel the right front tire move up onto the pavement. The men stopped her only one more time, apparently to wedge the boards under her back tires. On the third try, she was able to pull all the way onto the road.

Again, it was the older man who paused at the window.

"Thank you," she said. "I'm very grateful. I'd like to pay you and your friend for your help."

But he shook his head and replied, "No, we don't want anything. You be careful, now," he added.

"I will. Thanks again." Anne looked through the windshield in time to see Rob walk by. He paused for a moment to look at her, and she lifted a hand and forced herself to

smile. But he turned away without returning the smile and walked back across the road with his companion.

She looked after them for a few seconds, shrugged, then turned the wheel and drove on toward Noble's Run.

Anne came awake slowly as sunlight fell across her face. She sat on the edge of the bed to look around. The room was cheerful, with walls of pale blue and a gleaming hardwood floor. A few braided rugs were scattered among furnishings of unmatched oak.

She crossed to the window and was immediately struck with a sense of familiarity as she studied the scene outside. The grass of the small yard was still wet from the night's rain. A white picket fence trailing morning glories edged the sidewalk, and the street was shaded by huge maples.

To the left, beneath a low roof, was the front porch. She remembered a rose-covered trellis at the end by the door, and though it had been too dark to see them the night before, she knew there would be chairs and a glider.

We must have stayed here, she thought with a stirring of excitement. She hadn't recognized it last night, but there had been so many rooms in so many towns through the years, it wasn't surprising that this particular boarding house had slipped from her memory.

After a ordeal in the mud, the rest of the night had been antinematic. She'd pulled in at a gas station to make inquiries and learned that there was no hotel in town. But the attendant, who apparently felt some sympathy at her bedraggled appearance and told her, "You might try Mrs. Perry's over on Lincoln Street. She takes in boarders."

When she explained her plight a few minutes later to the plump, white-haired woman who answered the door, Mrs. Perry had invited her in at once. She led her upstairs, explaining that breakfast was included in the price, but other meals were extra, and that she'd have to share the bath.

"But it's available now," she added with a smile. "And it looks to me like you could use a nice, long soak." Anne acted on the suggestion and spent twenty minutes luxuriating in a hot tub.

Now, dressed in slacks and a sleeveless blouse, she made the bed and went downstairs in search of food. Aromas of bacon and coffee reminded her that she'd had no supper the night before, and she followed the smells to the dining room.

Mrs. Perry looked around from a coffee urn at the end of a buffet. "Good morning, Miss Goodwin," she said, smiling. "Or may I call you Anne?"

"Please do," Anne replied, returning the smile.

"Lovely. And you must call me Nora. We're not much on formality around here." She drew a cup for Anne and said, "The others have already eaten and gone to work, but there's plenty left. It's all along this sideboard." She indicated a row of covered pans, then added, "I'll just make some fresh toast while you help yourself to the rest. Eat as much as you'd like, my dear. I made plenty, and it won't keep."

There was, indeed, plenty. Anne loaded a plate with enough food for a lumberjack and sat down at the deserted table.

Before she'd made a dent in the food, Nora was back with the toast. She looked approvingly at Anne's plate and said, "It's good to see a young person with an appetite. So many seem to be on diets these days." She sat down with her own coffee.

"I don't always eat like this, especially in the morning," Anne managed after she swallowed a bite of potatoes. "But I didn't have any supper last night, and I'm famished."

"Why you poor thing! Why didn't you say so? I could have thrown something together for you under the circumstances."

Anne took a bite of toast before she answered. "To tell the truth, I considered asking, but after my bath all I could think of was getting some sleep."

"Well, I must admit you looked all in when you came to the door. Now just where was your said bath? Not stuck?"

Less than overjoyed to be reminded of the night's adventure, Anne tried to dismiss it with an offhand, "I guess it was a couple of miles south."

But the older woman obviously found the subject of interest, for, smiling expectantly over the rim of her cup, she quickly followed up with, "And who was it you said helped you out?"

Forced to think of her encounter with that unpleasant man—and infuriated that the incident was implanted with merciless clarity—Anne again studied the tall figure with the muscled chest and scowling face. Suddenly aware that Nora was waiting curiously for her reply, Anne stammered, "He—uh—they didn't tell me their names." Then she added, "Just a couple of men at a farmhouse. They weren't overly friendly."

"Hmm," the landlady murmured as she lifted her cup.

When Anne had finished eating and helped herself to more coffee, she remembered that there was a lot of ground to cover and decided this was as good a place as any to start.

"Nora, I'm not sure," she began, "but I think I stayed here before, with my father. It would've been fifteen years ago. He was organizing exhibits for the Beeling Museum."

The woman's blue eyes widened at the cry. "Of course, the little blond girl with the history professor!"

Anne nodded, smiling. "Yes, that's right."

"Well, I certainly do remember, though I'd forgotten the name. But, my dear, I'd never have recognized you. Your hair's darker, for one thing. And you were an appealing child, but I'd not have expected you to turn out quite so

pretty. No offense intended, of course, but you weren't often cleaned up. Needed a woman's hand, I daresay."

Anne laughed. "You remember all too well. I guess I was a bit of an oddball, and Father was always so preoccupied with his work that he didn't pay much attention to my appearance."

"Or to your activities," Nora amended. "Let you run all over town and have no idea if you were dead or alive half the time. Still, you seem to have turned out well enough. Tell me, did he ever remarry? I do remember he was a widower, and that's why you were with him."

"No, he didn't, but he eventually stopped dragging me all over the country. And when he finally retired, he began writing a book about his summer projects. He finished it just a few weeks ago, right before he died." With his last words, Anne's eyes grew misty. It was still hard to believe he was gone.

"Oh, Anne. I'm so sorry," the older woman said gently, reaching over to touch her hand. "He's all alone now?"

"I have two brothers, but we're not close," Anne answered with a sigh.

Nora looked sympathetic. "And, what brings you back to Noble's Run, my dear?"

Anne had no trouble with the question. She'd been answering it in her mind for weeks. "I just need to verify a few points of local history for Father's book before it goes to the publisher."

"Then you'll be wanting to go out to the museum, I suppose?"

"Yes, I will—after I look up a couple of things in the county records. Do you know if there's a Land Office? Father had a particular interest in old land claims and historic properties."

"Why yes, there is," Nora confirmed as she rose and began stacking Anne's dishes. "You just turn left at the cor-

ner, go three blocks, and take a right." She sketched the directions in midair as she spoke. "You can't miss it."

"Sounds simple enough," Anne decided. "Well, thanks for the breakfast, Nora. It was wonderful."

Nora smiled and turned to allow her way through the kitchen door, leaving Anne to get ready for her errands.

Rob MacKenzie got out of his truck in front of Nora Perry's house. He stopped to stare at the car parked just ahead of him.

Curious, he walked over to take a closer look. It was a small car with Nebraska plates. Circling the vehicle, he frowned at the mud lines on the tires. His frown grew deeper as an image of a woman's curves under clinging garments intruded, not for the first time.

Muttering an oath, he walked to the porch with long strides while his dog barked at his side. As he reached the door it swung open and he dodged it but wasn't quick enough to avoid the slender woman who was pushing out. She collided forcefully with his chest and he reached out instinctively to steady her.

"Oh, excuse me," Anne exclaimed. "I..." The rest of her apology was forgotten as she looked up into deep brown eyes beneath level, black brows.

His fingers were curved firmly around her arms, but Anne felt decidedly unsteady as she looked at the dark, narrow face. She may not have seen his features clearly the night before, but she didn't need the retriever's presence to confirm the man's identity.

Still unable to draw her gaze away, she noticed fine lines by his eyes that suggested long hours in the sun, and the way his thick, dark hair threatened to slip over his forehead. There was an aura of rugged masculinity about him that spared him the tag of too good-looking.

a plot followed
 Snell recovered enough of her wits to try to pull free of his grasp, but he seemed in no hurry to let her go. A gleam that may have been humor moved in his eyes and he smiled as he said, "You again. The mud hen."

"And you," she replied, anything but amused at the label. A cautious person would have been wary of the lethal change in his eyes from soft gray to steely, but he stood apparently unconcerned, still holding her. Then he deliberately released her.

She nearly raised her own hands to touch her arms where he held her, the skin tingling. She could have given a great deal to come up with a scathing remark, but all she managed was a half-hearted glare and a dry, "Excuse me."

She found herself backed into the entry hall. "Wait a minute," he said in a tone laced with amusement. "Don't run away just when we're hitting it off so well."

Anne couldn't help looking up at him upon hearing the outrageous remark. "Beg your pardon?"

"We might as well carry things a little further and exchange names," he suggested blandly.

The dog picked that moment to move to Anne's side and nudge her with his nose. She absently stroked the retriever's head.

"I'll go first," the man prompted. "His name is Monty. Mine is Rob. See how easy it is?"

"Your name is *mud*," Anne corrected, and immediately regretted her choice of words.

"Why, Rob, I didn't know you were here." Nora's pleased voice coming from the doorway across the hall had both of them turning quickly in her direction.

Anne didn't intend to stay a minute longer than necessary, but flight just then was bound to look odd to her landlady. So she watched as the tall visitor and the older woman embraced, then smiled at each other with obvious affection.

tall obvious
 "It's about time you showed up around here," Nora announced when he released her. Then she turned to Anne and asked, "Have you two introduced yourselves?"

Anne replied, "Not exactly—"

At the same time he said, "We were just about to." Both stopped.

Nora stepped into the breach. "Well, why don't I just do it for you?" she suggested. "Rob, meet my new boarder, Anne Goodwin. Anne, this is Rob MacKenzie."

"Ms. Goodwin," he acknowledged with a slow smile.

the tall obvious breach
 "Mr. MacKenzie," he greeted coolly. When he held out his hand she had no choice but to place hers in it. His palm felt warm and slightly hardened, and again he prolonged the contact for a few seconds, forcing Anne to meet his gaze.

But his smile faded and the amusement left his eyes to be replaced by something less definable, something that sent a shiver of awareness racing through her. As he let go of her hand, Anne had the uneasy feeling that she should have pulled it free the first moment she touched her.

the tall obvious breach
 "Well, sorry, Nora," he apologized, again turning away from Anne. "I want to come around before this. Have you been okay?"

"Of course. You worry too much, my dear. Now what have you been up to? Any excitement, or is that what you're in town to escape?"

Anne thought Nora's question an odd one, but her guest chuckled and remarked, "I usually take my excitement where I find it. You never know when a surprise might turn up right on your own doorstep."

the tall obvious breach
 Anne was furious. She had no doubt that the whole unpleasant episode was about to surface again, and she sent MacKenzie a dark look. It was Nora's abrupt laughter that broke the mood and once more restored her own humor.

"Don't tell me that was *you* last night," Nora exclaimed to Rob. "You were the unfriendly man who pushed Anne's car."

"See could mean Albert," he replied with a hint of laughter in his eyes. "Guess you'll have to ask the victim."

With both of them watching her, Anne took the only way out of the situation by treating it lightly. She admitted grudgingly that there was some basis for amusement, so she looked squarely at Rob MacKenzie and said, "You were rude, surly and insufferable. Otherwise I have no complaints."

Nora gave him a scolding look and demanded, "What in the world got into you to make you behave like that?"

With his gaze still on Anne, he replied, "Aside from a few slugs of Albert's rotgut, I'm not quite sure."

He looked quickly back at her and said, "I've really got to be leaving, Nora." Then she gave MacKenzie a quick nod and fled through the door.

The Land Office was a small room on the second floor of the courthouse. A dark-haired young woman with an attractive smile stepped over to help Anne. Her name tag identified her as Sylvia Mills.

Anne introduced herself and explained, "I need to check a survey to see if there've been any changes in its boundaries or ownership during the past fifteen years." As she spoke she handed a photocopy of the survey across the counter.

Ms. Mills left to check but returned quickly with the information that there had been no changes. She provided Anne with the names of the present owners, Margaret Schaeffer and Blanche Schaeffer Howard.

"I think the previous owner, Henry Schaeffer, was their father," Ms. Mills said. "There was no need for a new survey when they inherited the property."

As she finished speaking an athletic-looking blond man walked into the office. He carried a jacket over his arm with a tie hanging out of a pocket. His shirt was open at the collar.

"Hi, Mike." Sylvia gave him a warm smile when he walked over to lean on the counter beside Anne.

Anne hesitated for a moment, then asked, "I was wondering if you all would have the present owners' addresses?"

The clerk consulted a paper on which she'd made some notes, then handed it to Anne. "Here's what we have on file for Mrs. Howard," she volunteered. "It's current, according to the tax records. We don't have anything for Margaret Schaeffer."

Anne looked at the address. "Groverton—is that far?" she asked.

"Oh, it's about—forty miles, I think," Ms. Mills said. She turned to the man with a questioning look and he nodded confirmation. "About an hour's drive."

"Then I guess that's all I need," Anne decided. "Thanks a lot. Oh, there is one more thing."

Ms. Mills was ready to give her attention to the man, but she turned back to Anne with her smile still intact.

"Can you tell me where I can get a cup of coffee around here?" Anne asked.

The clerk laughed lightly and said, "Sure. There's a little place, right across the street. Or, if you're a transient person, there's a vending machine downstairs just inside the courtyard entrance. The coffee's abominable, but the courtyard's a nice spot for a break."

Anne thanked her again and left. As the door she glanced back and saw Mike lean across the counter to give the pretty brunette a kiss.

The courtyard was deserted. Holding her coffee cup, she tried to decide what to do next. Anne took a seat on a stone

bench backed by a large planter, wondering what her father would have done in a case like this.

While she considered the problem, she watched a robin land in the tree, causing a momentary swaying of the thin branch.

Then something else flashed across her vision, transporting her to another time and place where a different bird fluttered up almost directly in front of her. She saw the shadowy image of a person, and a dark, blurred motion of something descending through the air. Just before the hazy image vanished, there was the suggestion of a face.

The whole experience occurred in the space of two heartbeats, but it left her palms sweating and her pulse racing. Anne swallowed, trying to dispel her eerie feeling, and the robin flew off the branch and disappeared from the courtyard.

She'd had these impressions often, but never before had she seen a face. Its appearance meant an uncertain progress, which left her deeply disturbed. She couldn't account for it, describe it, couldn't honestly say she'd even seen it, but the face's expression was now imprinted in her mind. And without so much as one clear feature to suggest it, Anne had recognized fear.

Once again Anne thought back to a day in her father's study two months earlier. That was a scene she could summon at will. She massaged her temples for a few moments to dispel the tension building there, then let the memory flow into her mind.

Anne pushed the door open and entered the cluttered room, looking for a clear space large enough to deposit the tray she carried. When her father had a project going, she thought with a wry smile, it was worth a person's life to cross his threshold.

"Father," she said quietly, not wanting to startle him. The gray head was bent over a desk top littered with papers. "Father," she repeated, a little louder. Then, as he straightened, she made her voice deliberately cheerful. "Since Mohammed won't come to the table, I've brought the table to Mohammed."

He swiveled slowly in his chair to face her, but didn't meet her smile with the faintly apologetic one she'd expected. Even the vague, distracted expression he wore so much of the time was absent. Instead, his gaze fixed on hers with something akin to anguish.

"Father, what is it? Are you in pain?" Hurriedly she set the tray on top of the disorderly desk and turned to look at him more closely.

"No, no," he mumbled, shaking his head. "I'm all right, Anne. No pain."

"What is it, then? Something's wrong."

"Yes," he agreed faintly. "Something is very wrong. To think I'd forgotten, that I've let it go all these years. It's unforgivable."

Anne studied him with concern. She'd never seen that look in his eyes, nor heard such self-condemnation in his voice. Gently, she tried to wheedle an explanation. "Now what could be so awful? Father, you're just overtired from putting so much pressure on yourself with this deadline you've imposed. How about a lunch break?"

He had turned away from her, but now he whipped his head back and met her gaze. "Not now, Anne. I'm not hungry. I must decide what to do." Then, in a rare burst of temper he declared, "See here—you've set this right on top of my work. Move it away before something spills on a document."

He swept his hand in an impatient gesture as he spoke, and came on off the heated response that came in her and moved the tray to the top of a stack of books.

When she turned back to him, the faded blue of his eyes reflected the same anguish they'd held when she first walked in. "Can't you tell me what's bothering you?" she asked.

After a moment he nodded and said, "Perhaps I'd better. Sit down, Anne."

She cleared a chair and took a seat. "Okay," she said. "What is it?"

"I've made a discovery among my Beeling papers that simply cannot be overlooked," he began. As he spoke he lifted a paper from the desk and handed it to her.

Anne studied it for several seconds, then sent him a mystified look. "What is this? A land survey?"

"Precisely. Note the date."

"August 4, 1947. Father, where did you get this? That's only—what—some forty years old? It's too recent to have any bearing on your Beeling project."

He nodded, his lips compressed into a grim line, and handed her two more papers. One was a photocopy of a survey. At first she thought it was a duplicate of the original she already held, but closer examination showed a difference in the northern boundary. It bore the same date and survey number as the other, however. Puzzled, she looked at her father for an explanation.

"Read the letter," he instructed. His voice was tight with suppressed emotion. On paper slightly discolored with age, it was addressed to Henry Schaeffer, and simply stated that the "replacement" survey he had requested was attached and thanked him for his "generous gift." The letter was signed, "T. Woods, Surveyor."

"I must be missing something," Anne said, handing the papers back to her father.

He tapped the original survey in agitation and said, "This is genuine, but the copy is fraudulent. And the original of the copy is on file in Noble's Run, accepted as the real thing. Henry Schaeffer apparently bribed this T. Woods to draw

it up so that he could claim land that actually belonged to somebody else.

"Father, are you sure?" Anne exclaimed.

"Yes, yes!" he cried in agitation. "While we were in Noble's Run, I went to the county records office and checked to see which survey was actually on file."

Anne reached to touch her father's hand. He was so upset that he was shaking. "But how did you get the original?" she asked. "And why do you still have it?"

Holding his head in his hands, Goodwin didn't answer for a few moments. Finally, he looked up and said, "I came across it in a box of books and papers that Henry Schaeffer had donated to the museum. Obviously he wouldn't have put it there, but I have no idea who did, or why. And I couldn't turn it in to the authorities—not at that time. I'd received an anonymous telephone call, then a threatening letter, both instructing me not to."

"What? Father..."

He interrupted her with a fourth paper which would have been laughable were it not for the message on it. Words of all sizes and print types were pasted together to read, "Professor, if you don't want your little girl accident-prone, say nothing about that survey you found. Wait for instructions."

Anne stared into her father's eyes. "But you never said a word about this to me."

"Anne, how could I? You were a child. And you'd already had a frightening experience the day I received the call. At first I thought you were reciting one of your make-believe adventures. You used to do that, you remember, after your mother died. You'd tell made-up stories to get attention when I allowed myself to become too wrapped up in my work. In my own attempt to deal with her death, I failed to see your need."

His eyes had filled with tears while he was speaking, and his voice broke. Anne took his clenched hand in hers and tried to reassure him. "Father, it doesn't matter. I understood when I was older. And they make believe I never did any harm."

"I know, I know. But I could have made it easier for you. And this—" again he tapped the original survey—"this is inexcusable. I meant to mail it back to the museum the day we got home. I'd put it behind the lining of an old briefcase for safekeeping. When I heard no more about it, I must have made myself forget that it was there. All these years I've kept papers stored in that case, and today when I took them out, the lining came loose. These are still there. And I swear I thought I'd mailed them all back."

"Can't we just mail them now?" she asked. "It's better late than never, isn't it?"

"I don't know, I just don't know." Although his voice had become steady, he wrung his hands as he spoke. "It may not even be necessary after all this time. The land could have been sold, and a new survey done. And I doubt if Henry Schaeffer is still around to be brought to account. But, Anne, if it *hasn't* been corrected, something must be done. Somebody was charged with that must be made right. I know I won't have time to do it. You'll have to take care of it for me."

"What do you mean you won't have time?" But she knew the answer and asked it. His health was failing with alarming speed, and he was desperate to finish his book. She knew it was ridiculous to keep up the pretext that he'd get better, but she couldn't help herself. Perhaps she hadn't outgrown the childish habit of make-believe, after all, and that thought reminded her of something he'd said minutes before.

"Father, what was the frightening experience you mentioned? I don't remember anything like that."

He began shuffling through papers, and for a few seconds she thought he wasn't going to answer her. Then he turned back and said, "I never quite understood what you'd seen, or thought you'd seen. You came running into the Beeling House where I was working and cried 'Stop him,' or something of the sort. Instead of letting you clarify it, I told you that your imagination was running away with you."

Anne frowned, trying to recall the incident. "Well, maybe I did imagine it," she said finally. "I certainly don't remember it now."

The professor ran a hand through his thinning hair in a gesture of frustration. "You tried to convince me again later that day, and I gave you a lecture on how you'd finally succeeded in frightening yourself with your stories. I told you to forget about it and try to be more truthful in the future. Suggesting to you that the make-believe was like lying seemed to do the trick, because you never brought me any more of your wild tales after that day."

"But then that evening I received the call," he continued while he fidgeted with several sheets of paper. "I don't remember the exact words, and the caller disguised his or her voice. But he, or she, alluded to documents I might find among the Schaeffer things—documents that didn't relate to my exhibit. I was told to simply hold any such items and await further instructions."

"And when did you get that?" she asked, motioning with her hand to the crumpled letter.

"Two days later. By then I'd done my research, so I understood the survey's significance, although the only person clearly threatened by making it public would have been Henry Schaeffer. But it wasn't he who called. I knew his voice and his inflections. And after those two contacts, I never heard another word. But it occurred to me that you may have been telling the truth that afternoon, that someone could have staged a scene to frighten you, and to let me

see just how easily you could be reached. I said nothing more about it, because I thought it best for you to simply forget the incident."

"And you forgot it, too," Anne remarked.

"Yes. And when I think of the injustice I helped perpetuate by my silence, it makes me ill."

"But, Father, the situation had already existed for a lot of years by that time." She glanced at the survey again and added, "In any case, it doesn't look like enough land for anyone to lose sleep over."

But a few nights later, she had her first dream of the shadowy form, and the dark blur of something descending. After that it slipped up on her at odd moments during both her waking and sleeping hours. There was another scene, too, that was even more elusive. It was almost as though her childhood make-believe had come back to haunt her.

That her father was wrestling with his own ghosts became obvious during the next few weeks. He fretted repeatedly about the survey, and chastised himself for sins ranging from negligence to cowardice. He repeatedly told Anne that she had to "make it right."

Finally, worried about his deteriorating health and increasingly disturbed about the strange flashes of memory she was experiencing, Anne promised him that she'd go to Noble's Run and do what she could. She hoped making the commitment would give them both some peace of mind, and for a few days, it had. Then he suffered a massive stroke and died.

"Miss Goodwin, are you all right?"

Anne snapped back to the present and looked up to see Sylvia Mills standing beside the bench. "Oh, yes. I'm fine." She made herself smile. "I guess I was daydreaming."

"You looked kind of well-anxious," Mrs. Mills remarked.

Anxious was the word, all right, Anne thought. But her problem was not for the ears of a stranger so she simply said, "It was really nothing, but thanks for asking. Is there someplace I can dump this?" she asked, indicating the half-filled coffee cup.

"Try the planter behind you."

Anne laughed and poured the coffee among the plants. "I hope I won't be fined for destruction of public property when they find it."

"If that stuff was going to hurt them, it would've done it a long time ago," the clerk assured her.

As she rose, Anne said, "Next time I'll try Tillie's."

"Well, like I better," the pretty brunette promised. "That's where I usually have lunch." She hesitated a moment, then said, "I've got to get back to work."

Anne looked after her, thinking she could get to the Café via Mills.