

### Chapter 3

Rob and Monty walked the few blocks downtown and caught a ride with a neighbor who was heading home. He lived only half a mile from Rob, and offered to take them to their door, but Rob shook his head, saying, "No thanks, Jim. Your place is close enough."

He felt an unusual need for solitude. Normally he had enough of that in his work, but now he wanted a few minutes of uninterrupted time for thought. While Monty wandered nearby, Rob hiked along the road.

What devil had made him kiss her that way? What had made him think it wouldn't matter, that nothing would change? Damn it, everything had changed. Even if he never let it happen again, there would be a difference. But a difference in what? There hadn't been anything to begin with. They were strangers, barely acquainted.

And that was another thing. She didn't seem like a stranger. He'd seen her before, somewhere, sometime—seen those eyes. They were unforgettable. But where had he seen

them, looking vulnerable as they had today, frightened? Hell, even her name's familiar. I don't know the answer to that one, either, he thought in frustration.

He looked for Monty, spotted him flushing crows at the edge of a cornfield and whistled him back. As the dog raced over to him, Anne returned to his thoughts. With an exasperated sigh, he accepted what he couldn't change.

She's so damned beautiful. That was part of the problem, part of the reason for those uncomfortable tugs in the gut each time he saw her. Too bad she's not my usual subject, he mused, trying to channel his thoughts. I could do some spectacular shots of her. He tried to push aside the possibility that he might make an exception in this case, but the thought was still with him as he started up the slope of his driveway.

By noon the next day, Anne was ready to climb the walls. She'd made a test run downstairs for breakfast, and the ankle hadn't been too painful. Now, determined not to lose any more time, she rewrapped it, grabbed her purse and drove to town.

Tillie's menu was limited, but suited Anne's preference for a light meal. She chose a booth near the front where she could see the door, ordered a salad and iced tea, and hoped Sylvia Mills would come into the coffee shop for lunch. She wanted to ask the clerk's advice, off-the-record, and calling to arrange a meeting, even at break time, simply seemed too official.

She couldn't believe her luck when Miss Mills walked in a few minutes later and scanned the room, obviously looking for somebody. When she spotted Anne, she looked surprised, then smiled and walked over.

"Well, hi. I see you decided to take my advice."

Anne smiled and said, "Would you like to join me?"



"Sure, for a few minutes. I'm meeting Mike Walters. You remember him from the other morning, don't you?"

"Yes, I do. I don't think he appreciated my taking so much of your time."

The dark-haired girl pulled a small mirror out of her purse as she said, "He really didn't mind." She checked her lipstick, tucked a few stray hairs into place, then looked at Anne and asked, "Did you have any trouble getting hold of that Mrs. Howard about the Schaeffer survey?" She dropped the mirror back into the purse and closed it with a snap.

"To tell the truth, I haven't tried to yet," Anne admitted. "I've had some other things to do."

At the look her mild inquiry her statement earned, Anne explained briefly about her father's book, thinking that by sticking to her story, things would stay simple. Of course, if she confided the true status of the survey, as she was considering, there would be some degree of complication, but that couldn't be helped.

Anne reached under the table to tug at the bandage, which had loosened. For a moment she remembered strong, lean fingers winding it with an easy skill. And she remembered what had happened afterward. No, stop that, she ordered herself. You've got a job to do here, and it has nothing to do with him.

When she looked back at her companion, she found Miss Mills regarding her curiously. "I wondered about your interest in the property the other day. I thought maybe you wanted to buy it. Apparently it's sat idle for a long time. Has it something to do with the book, instead?"

"Well, in a way," Anne answered carefully. "Look, I probably shouldn't bother you with this on your own time, but I wonder if you can tell me how to go about having a mistake in a survey corrected?"

Miss Mills widened her eyes. "You think there's something wrong with it?"

"Oh, yes, I'm sure of it," Anne told her. "In fact, it's a completely wrong one. I have the original it replaced to prove it."

Completely intrigued now, the clerk folded her hands on the table and said, "In that case, I'm not sure. I suppose you'd have to go through a law enforcement agency in Nibbs's Run, that would be the sheriff's office. Maybe the responsible party would be fined or something. And a new survey would have to be done. To tell the truth, I've never heard of anything like this. You're absolutely sure?"

Anne met the other woman's gaze steadily and nodded. "You think I should take my evidence to the sheriff, then?"

Miss Mills studied her hands for a few seconds, then looked back at Anne. "Probably. But the first thing he's likely to ask is how you got it and how long you've had it. As I recall, it dates back to the forties, and that's a long time to be sitting on something like that. Not that it could have been you, of course, but Bill Ryan's going to want to know who did, and why."

Anne thought about it for a minute. "Look, Syl—I mean, Miss Mills," she corrected hastily.

Miss Mills waved a hand and said, "It's all right, call me Sylvia. And you're Anne?" Receiving a nod, she smiled and said, "Sorry. Go on with what you were saying."

"It's just that the person responsible for the fraud and the one who's held the document in recent years, are both deceased. And really, doesn't it all boil down to simply restoring the property to the rightful owner? Probably neither of the present owners knows anything about it, so wouldn't you think it would be enough just to have a new survey done and the deeds corrected?"



Before the clerk could reply, Anne's lunch arrived and they sat silently until the waitress had moved out of ear-shot.

"Well," Sylvia finally said, "that seems reasonable to you, and to me, too. But I don't know what the official point of view would be. Would you mind if I ask Mike about this?"

Anne's fork paused halfway to her mouth. "I'm not sure. Does he work for the Land Office, too?"

"No, actually, he's an accountant. But he knows about property laws and land claims and taxes. He'd give a straight answer. He's very honest."

Because she still wasn't sure how to reply to Sylvia's request, Anne asked, "Do you suppose you could ask him hypothetically?"

"I could try, I guess," she said after a moment. "But he's smart enough to add two and two, especially if he comes in and finds us talking. After all, he was there the other day."

Anne gave her a rueful smile and interrupted with, "In that case, you'd better do whatever you think best, because we've just been found out."

Mike walked directly to the booth, said hello to Anne, then bent to kiss Sylvia. "You ready to go?" he asked.

She nodded, but before sliding out of the booth she told Anne, "I'm not going back to work today, but if you can come by sometime tomorrow, I'll try to have that information for you."

"Thanks, I will," Anne promised.

She watched them leave, thinking what an attractive couple they made, then picked up her fork. But before she'd lifted it to her mouth, Rob MacKenzie slipped into the seat Sylvia had just vacated.

She would have preferred not to feel so much pleasure, and did her best to keep it from showing, acknowledging it

arrival by only the slightest lift of her brow and a casual, "Hi, MacKenzie."

"Anne," he inclined his head, but didn't smile.

She raised her fork again, but paused with it halfway to her mouth, then placed it back on the plate with a little clink of annoyance. "Okay, what's wrong?" he asked.

"I was just wondering what it would take to get a straight answer out of you."

"I have your fork."

He sat with his hands loosely clasped on the table and looked directly into her eyes, his expression displeased. "You told me yesterday you were just curious about the old Schaefer place."

"That's right, I did. It interests me. Do you have some problem with that?"

"No, I have a problem with lies."

A slap couldn't have stung more. Anne felt her face flush as heat came from his eyes. If he was calling her a liar, he had just declared war as far as she was concerned. Her voice vibrated with anger when she said, "MacKenzie, I don't know why you're making it so difficult, but I don't tell lies. And if you've got some half-baked notion that one kiss entitles you to a full explanation of where I go and why, you'd better think again."

"This has nothing to do with that kiss. I just want to know why you didn't tell me about the survey when I asked why you were there."

"The survey. How do you know about the surv..." Then her eyes widened and she squeaked in outrage, "You spied on me!"

"For God's sake, I was sitting in the next booth. I couldn't help overhearing you," he said irritably.

"Oh, you couldn't help it! Isn't that convenient?" She was furious. "Well, let me tell you something so you'll know



just where we stand. If you have a problem with liars, I have one with sneaks."

Rob shifted, leaning closer as he spoke in a lowered voice. "It wasn't deliberate, damn it. I didn't even know you were here till I heard you talking, and by then it was too late." How the hell had she managed to get him on the defensive so quickly? he wondered.

Anne snapped, "It's bad enough you eavesdropped on a private conversation, but then to demand an explanation as though you had some right to it..." She drew a frustrated breath and continued, "The survey has nothing to do with the Schaeffer house. It's for another property all together. And it's still none of your business."

"Maybe it isn't, but if you don't have something to hide, why are you so damned reluctant to talk about it?" he persisted. "And you said it's phony. Anne, what the devil are you mixed up in? Why don't you level with me?"

She gave him a stony look, and he met it steadily. After a few seconds, she released her breath in a sigh and thought about getting up and walking out. But he just sat there, watching her with something between anger and expectancy, and she reminded herself that it was her booth, her lunch.

"Look," she suggested after it had become obvious that he could outwait her if necessary. "I only expect to be in town for a few days. I'm staying at Nora's because there really isn't any other place. She's your friend, and if you want to visit her, that's understandable. Why don't we just do our best to avoid each other, and if we can't, let's be civil. We'll call what happened yesterday a weak moment. There's obviously no danger of its being repeated. I don't think we really have a problem here, do you?"

She watched his anger deepen in his eyes. "That was a very tidy brush-off," he acknowledged after a moment. "Now shall I tell you why it won't work?"

"It will work," she insisted.

"No," he said softly, "it won't. Because I'm going to get the whole story out of you, Anne. The truth, and a whole lot more." Then he slid out of the booth and walked to the door without once looking back.

"Telephone for you, dear," Nora said when Anne answered her knock that night.

"Who on earth could be calling me?" Anne wondered, following her into the hall.

"I think it's a man, but the voice sounds peculiar," Nora supplied as she moved toward the stairs. "Maybe it's long distance with a poor connection."

Anne shrugged, but didn't point out that no one knew where she was. She lifted the receiver of the upstairs extension and said "Hello?"

Nora's characterization of it as "peculiar" in no way prepared Anne for the muffled, sexless voice that uttered a brief message in her ear. "Be smart, Miss Goodwin, and keep well. Don't stir up ancient history." Then there was a click and the dial tone.

A few stunned seconds she placed the receiver and walked slowly back to her room. "Weird," she murmured. "But who would...?"

She closed the door and leaned against it for a moment as reality set in. She wanted to believe it was the prank of some bored youngster, but she knew no youngsters in Noble's town, and this caller had used her name.

The message, though vague, had definitely been a warning. That put the call in a different category altogether, something far beyond prank. Anne wasn't quite steady as she walked to the desk and dropped onto the chair.

She pondered the phrase "ancient history." How ancient? She thought of the call her father had received fifty years ago, a sexless voice warning him not to make the



survey public. But how could the survey pose a threat to anybody now, after all that time? After all these years could it be the same person, using the same tactics? The idea was too preposterous.

"I wonder if I'll get one of those funny, mailed letters next?" she mused, then shuddered, for it seemed anything but funny when she remembered how that voice had sounded.

"Who could it be?" she asked the empty room. Who knows about the survey? Sylvia, probably Mike Walters by now, Rob MacKenzie...

She pressed her fingers to her temples as a throbbing began. Then she considered the possibilities. She may have been wrong to trust her instincts and confide in Sylvia, but she simply couldn't picture the young woman as being behind the strange call. Mike Walters, of course, was more an unknown quantity. And MacKenzie? She gave a mirthless laugh. Though he wasn't at the top of her list of favorites, she couldn't actually see the man resorting to such scare tactics. He'd be much more likely to stalk her room and order her out of town. The man wasn't subtle.

Face it, she thought. Any of them could have told someone else. No one was sworn to secrecy. And if Rob MacKenzie overheard us talking, someone else might have, too. God, my head hurts. I'll order with you mine tonight.

But Anne knew she wouldn't be able to sleep, so she reached for a novel that she'd begun to read while she was pampering her mother. She could just get her mind on something else, she'd worry about the call in the morning.

Mac just sat down to eat breakfast when Nora and a girl of about sixteen walked into the dining room. She introduced the pretty teenager as her grandniece, Debbie Wolf.

The girl acknowledged the introduction with a greeting and a smile, then turned back to wait for her neighbor's conversation. "Honestly, I can't see what Mom's so upset about. We're only going to Harrisburg, and it's just for a few hours. Of course, Joel likes me, and I've been thinking it would be fun to stop at that cute new Mexican place, Delgado's. But Mom says I've got to be back by four."

Debbie pouted prettily for a few seconds, then said, "Aunt Nora, do you suppose you could talk to Mom? I mean if we should get held up or something? Not that I expect it, of course, but you know Joel better than she does. She'd listen to you."

"Now, Debbie, you know I'm not going to fall for that old trick," Nora said briskly. "It's your place to be back when your mother says you must, or to explain if you can't."

The girl turned to Anne with a shrug and a grin. "Well, it was worth a try," she confided. Before Anne could respond, a knock at the front door had Debbie flying out of the room. She was back moments later with a sandy-haired youth in tow.

Nora introduced him as Joel Boyd, and he took Anne's hand carefully, for just a second, then let it go and started urging Debbie toward the door. "C'mon, Deb, we'd better get going. I've got to be back home by three-thirty."

In the quiet that followed their departure, Nora refilled the coffee cups and sat back down with a sigh. "Young love," she remarked. "Isn't it wonderful? Of course, I should be grateful because I do see a good deal more of Debbie since Joel's come into our lives."

"Oh, is he new in town?" Anne asked, more out of politeness than any real interest in the teenage romance, but Nora's next words had her paying closer attention.



"No, he's lived here all along, but we've only come to know him since Rob's been back in town and started sending him around to help with a few chores. And, as you saw, Debbie's quite taken with him, so she's here often, and she helps out, too. Oh—and that reminds me—may I ask a favor of you this morning, my dear? It shouldn't take very long."

"Of course, what is it?" She thought of her appointment with the doctor, but there was no time. Besides, she wanted to give that phone call a little more thought before they met.

"I need a package run out to Rob's," Nora explained, "and Debbie obviously won't be able to do it today. You do remember how to find his house, don't you?"

She stopped speaking when she saw dismay move through Anne's eyes. "Of course, if you haven't time..."

Forcing a smile, Anne replied, "I have the time. I'll be ready to leave in about twenty minutes. Will that be okay?"

"Yes, fine. Thank you, dear. It's in the kitchen so just come by whenever you're ready."

Before either of them could say anything else, the telephone rang and Nora got up to answer it. Moments later, she came back through the door to reach for her cup, with the phone at her ear and the cord stretched to its limit. She grimaced and rolled her eyes upward as she withdrew once more into the kitchen.

Her voice drifted through the door in snatches while Anne finished eating, and the call was still in progress when she rose to leave. It seemed the question of Rob MacKenzie's whereabouts before he came back to town would have to remain unanswered a bit longer.

Anne found it ironic that she was about to call on a man she'd hoped to avoid for the rest of her stay, but she

wouldn't waste any time visiting him. She'd simply knock on the door, hand him the package and leave.

As she drove, she thought of the anonymous caller and again wondered if it was connected with the call her father had received all those years ago. She'd still reached no conclusions by the time she needed to watch for Rob's place, and when the house appeared around a bend in the road, the call was forgotten. White frame, with a porch running around two sides, it had the look of a farmhouse. Shade trees towered behind it and along the sides.

The driveway wasn't as steep as she remembered, and she conceded that her first impression may have been somewhat colored by circumstances. After all, it's hard to be objective when you're soaked, scared and generally miserable, she thought, smiling wryly.

There was ample space for her car even though the truck she'd seen at Nora's, a good-sized van, and an intriguing shape under a tarp that could only be a low-slung sports car, were already parked there. MacKenzie with a sports car? Another puzzle to occupy her idle hours, Anne reflected ironically.

There was no answer to her knock. She considered pounding as she had the night of the storm, but a hoarse yapping from somewhere around the back changed her mind. She left the porch and walked around the corner of the house.

The back was an even bigger surprise than the front. Directly behind the house an area of lawn yielded to a long slope of taller grass, and at its base a stream curved by. Beyond that, dense forest rose to the same ridge that backed the museum and the Schaeffer house.

What a marvelous view, Anne thought. It must be a lovely spot to watch the sun set. For a moment she gazed toward the ridge in quiet contemplation, then, reminding herself of her errand, she turned toward the house.



There were a number of outbuildings nearby, and at the far end of the house an area had been prepared for a foundation. Next to it was a framework for what could only be a deck. So MacKenzie was expanding—times must be good.

Four broad steps led to a small flagstone terrace, which should have looked out of place but didn't. As Anne was crossing it, she heard growling and a sharp yap—from inside. When she knocked, the screen door rattled against its frame.

"Come in," Rob's voice invited, only his tone made it more an order. For some reason she didn't try to analyze, Anne obeyed. As she stepped inside she saw him in the kitchen to her left. He was standing with his back to the door, at a blanket-draped table, and there was an animal on top of it. She caught a glimpse of white fur and a paw.

He didn't turn around, and before she could announce herself, he began handing out instruction. "Grab those gloves on the shelf there and give me a hand, will you? This little fellow's not cooperating."

Anne located some heavy work gloves and set down Nora's package. Though they were several sizes too large, she slipped the gloves on.

"Hurry it up, will you?" Rob demanded impatiently.

Well, he's certainly in character today, she thought as she moved around to stand directly across the table from him. "Okay, what do you want me to do?" she asked. It was extremely satisfying to see his astonished expression.

But in what she thought must have been record recovery time, he inclined his head and said, "Well, you're not Albert, but you may do. See if you can keep him quiet. Be careful, though, and stay away from those teeth. They're sharp as hell."

She reached to restrain what she thought at first was a small dog. Then she realized from the narrow, pointed muzzle and the large ears that it was a white fox. Surely that

had to be rare. And what was he doing on MacKenzie's kitchen table? With the animal raised its head in its struggle, she saw terrified pink eyes and realized it was an albino.

"Try to hold his head against the table," Rob requested in a surprisingly gentle voice.

She found herself speaking to the animal in an attempt to soothe it. "There, there, little one. It's just trying to help."

The moment she'd said the words, she realized she hadn't the faintest idea what Rob was trying to do, and she wondered at her own ready assumption. For all she knew he might be a madman doing nameless experiments on the poor creature. But she continued to hold the fox's head against the blanket, rubbing him behind an ear with one bulky glove.

"There, now, it'll be all right," she murmured in the same tone, willing to see just what MacKenzie was up to.

He was trying to fashion a sling—obviously to immobilize the already-banded right front leg. The fox's struggle made the task almost impossible, and two extra limbs, even if they weren't as large or as strong as the gloves made them appear, seemed to make the difference.

And as she moved to Rob's side and she felt a disconcerting flutter in her chest. His expression was composed and compassionate. There was no hardness in the set of his mouth, no look of annoyance on the brow. This discovery brought on a frown of her own.

When he finally had the sling in place, he spoke for the first time since he'd told her to hold the fox's head. His voice was calm. "Would you mind opening the door?"

She tossed the gloves onto a chair and held the door while he carried the fox to him. The fingers of one hand clamped around its muzzle. Anne hurried after Rob, in order to open an empty cage he indicated, one of several.



Once the fox was inside, Rob turned, gave her a long look, and said quite simply, "Thank you."

She nodded, but her attention was on the cages. "Aren't those rabbit hutch?" she asked after a few seconds.

"Yeah, as a matter of fact they are. Why?"

"Don't you think a fox might find that a bit—well—de-meaning?"

Rob stared at her for a moment, then began to laugh as he took her arm and steered her toward the house. "Not that one. He's got a well-developed sense of irony."

As he walked, he glanced down at her foot and observed, "You're limping. Don't you have that ankle wrapped?"

"Yes, in a manner of speaking. I did it myself and it doesn't seem to stay in place," she confessed. "It really doesn't hurt much, though. MacKenzie, where did you get that fox?"

"Found him with his foot in a steel trap this morning," he told her, his voice sounding a grin. Then, as he held the door for her, he said, with little change in inflection, "I'll rewrap your ankle for you."

"No, that's all right, really," he began to protest, but her words died on her lips as she found herself pushed into the living room.

She wasn't sure what she'd expected—only that what she now saw wasn't it. The room had a fantastic—though not blatant—visual impact. There was a comfortable nonchalance about the large furniture, designed using an unconventional mix of woods and fabrics. The hues were basic earth tones with splashes of contrasting color in throw pillows. He also had some excellent pieces of pottery.

Above the couch hung a landscape with a depth and quality that pulled the viewer right into the picture. The scene was one of open space and muted mountains viewed through a fringe of branches. A herd of grazing animals

occupied a portion of the open plains area between foreground and background. She wondered what artist's hand had created it.

"Why don't you sit down?" Rob invited, and she sank onto the couch. "This is nice," she murmured. "Very nice, indeed."

"Glad you approve," he muttered, and began unwinding the bandage.

She watched his hands and noticed for the first time a long gash on his right forearm. It was raw in the center with an angry red area around it. "That's a nasty-looking scratch," she observed. "A gift from the fox?"

He dismissed it with a glance. "It's nothing much. I'll take care of it later." With her attention on his arm for a moment, he looked up to study her face while he tucked away for later consideration the sound of concern in her voice. She missed the flicker of awareness and doubt in an instant of uneasy coexistence in his eyes.

By the time she looked up, he was frowning at her foot. He held it with the heel cupped in his left hand while the fingers of his right slid lightly around the ankle, then along the top to her toes and back. She has such soft skin, he thought. Soft hands, soft arms, soft feet. Even as his fingers made the brief journey, he reproved himself for yielding to the urge to touch. He had some unfinished business with the gorgeous Ms. Goodwin, he reminded himself. It wouldn't be a good idea to lose sight of that fact.

An unwelcome tingling raced up and down Anne's spine and something happened to her breathing for the few seconds he traced his fingers over her ankle. "It really doesn't hurt," she told him when she could trust her voice again. She forced her thoughts back to their encounter at Tillie's and tried to remember her anger.

When Rob looked at her, she turned quickly to make a closer study of the landscape and discovered it wasn't a



painting at all. Rather, it was a photograph—a wonderfully effective study done with special filters and printed on pearl paper to give it a soft, almost dreamlike quality. It's beautiful, she thought.

Then he was wrapping his ankle again, and she tore her gaze from the picture to watch, hoping she might duplicate his technique the next time she had to do it herself. As before, she was struck by the combination of strength and sensitivity in his fingers.

"I think that'll hold you for a while," he said matter-of-factly when he'd finished. "You should keep it supported for another day or two, and stay off it as much as you can."

"All right," she agreed, a little uneasy as their last conversation replayed in her mind. She didn't trust this new affability.

But when he suggested, "How about some coffee?" she found herself agreeing. A cup of coffee, then she'd go. It should be safe enough.

They went back to the kitchen where he turned on the heat under the pot, then began to clear the table. While he worked, he asked, "What brought you out here this morning?"

"Nora sent me with a package for you," she answered, and watched while he poured coffee into two mugs and set them on the table with an admirable economy of motion.

"Milk? Sugar?" he asked, and when she shook her head, he gave her a look that might almost have passed for approval, and motioned for her to sit.

Taking a chair across from her, he remarked, "I didn't notice the package. Is it still in your car?"

For a moment she looked around in confusion, then remembered where she'd put it. "I set it down when I picked up the gloves. Your patient drove it right out of my mind. Tell me, do you patch up wild animals on any kind of regular basis?"

He sipped from his cup before he replied, "No, but as I mentioned, I was lucky. It was a fox."

She looked at him, surprised at the bitterness in his voice. Then, after a moment, she repeated the name. "'Blanc'?"

"You're a person," he said, "and I'm a fox?"

In a manner of speaking. I've been photographing him with his brothers and sisters all spring and summer, since they were a couple of weeks old."

"Where did you find them? I mean, I suppose in the woods, but were you looking for foxes to photograph?"

He regarded her steadily before he answered. "Not specifically. I'm usually on the lookout for like subjects."

Something tugged at her memory as she reached for her cup, but a commotion at the door interrupted her train of thought. Rob rose to open it and let Monty in. When the dog saw Anne, he walked straight to her chair and sat looking at her while his tail swept back and forth across the floor.

She reached to pet him, and he responded by leaning against her. "Where've you been, fella?" he asked the retriever. "Out hunting more foxes for your boss to photograph?" She glanced back at Rob to find him watching her intently.

Straightening, she reached for her mug, and after she'd taken a long, satisfying swallow, she asked, "May I see your pictures of the foxes?"

"Upon so," he replied, but made no move to get up. Instead, he asked in an idle, almost-lazy tone, "Where'd you say you put that package?"

"On the shelf near the door."

He rose and returned with the package. He set it down, open it, then gave a little laugh and muttered, "Well, that's a bit of a nice thing," and he took a small stack of photos across to her.



Anne went through them slowly, studying each one at length. They were marvelous. The white fox and four others of varied but normal coloration had been caught in a series of shots ranging from small pups nursing, through awkward playfulness and mock-battles, up to nearly full grown, Blanc's present size. Their faces and postures clearly registered fun, surprise, curiosity and cunning, depending on their activities in each picture.

There was no question that she was looking at the product of a professional whose work went far beyond competence. The photos had been taken by an artist who instilled emotion into every shot. Sometimes it was quiet, reflective, sometimes tense, often humorous. And Anne saw more than the series of fox photographs he had handed her. One glance at the "R. W. MacKenzie" embossed in the lower right corner brought to mind dozens of others—nature studies, exotic animals and wildlife documentaries—that had claimed every major award.

She thought of the photograph over the couch, and looked intently at the man quietly sitting across from her. After a moment a gleam of humor appeared in his eyes and he said, "Your mouth's open."

Anne clamped it shut, then opened it again to speak. "You're Robert MacKenzie, the photographer. Why didn't you say something?"

He looked faintly puzzled. "Why should I? If I was a tree surgeon, would you expect me to introduce myself as Rob MacKenzie, plant doctor?"

None was aware that it sounded foolish, but she said, "I probably wouldn't have heard of Rob MacKenzie, the tree surgeon."

His eyebrow went up. "MacKenzie, the photographer, is hardly a household phrase," he replied. "Where did you hear that?"

"Books, magazines, television. I've seen tons of your work. I'm a researcher. I was with a publishing house in Omaha until six months ago. For that matter, when I leave here I'm heading for New York and a bigger firm. But before I left Omaha, you were one of my projects. That is, your work was. I'd have expected you to be older, though," she added teasingly. "I never saw a picture of you. They seem to be pretty scarce."

He gave her a slow, distant smile. "I don't often step around in front of a camera."

But he should, Anne thought as she gathered the photos into a stack. Women would flock to bookstores looking for his work.

He watched her, letting his gaze drift from her hands to her face. The idea of photographing her was beginning to haunt him and he again reminded himself that he didn't do portraits.

She looked up and found him regarding her with the suggestion of a frown, but something in his eyes, quickly veiled, had her wondering where his thoughts had been.

"Isn't Noble's Run a little off the beaten path to New York?" he asked abruptly, his tone gruff again. Somehow, Anne found herself more comfortable with that.

"Yes, I suppose it is," she admitted. "But I've got to take care of the loose ends on the book my father was finishing when he died. I had quit my job in Omaha to take care of him and help with it."

Surprise followed at once by sympathy moved across his face. "You've just lost your father?" At her nod he said, "That's rough, I know. I'm sorry."

It was so simply said and so obviously sincere that Anne felt a lump form in her throat. "Thank you," she said unevenly.

"What's the book about?" he asked as he rose to bring the coffeepot to the table. "None of it," she said, but she



