

she said with a barely audible sigh. "When do you want to talk?"

~~Probably not before the morning~~ "he  
~~still gave you a call after a bit."~~

## Chapter 5

After lunch Anne thought about the morning with Rob, his insistence on helping her, and the unexpected revelation about the past. If one memory could surface with the right nudge, mightn't another? she wondered. For all the incidents had been only a few days ago.

I do want the answers, she told herself. I have to have them. And a memory can't hurt me. I'll just have to think it through before I act. A few minutes later she was in her bedroom, looking out the window at the town.

She drove to the museum because both parking and walking were easier from there. As she made her way across the expanse of lawn she stole reluctant looks at the hedge, but it looked so solid.

The hedge was so tangled with vines that there were few spaces large enough to afford a view through. She rolled on the lawn, remained in the hollow and as it happened her knee when she fell was just the right spot. She looked



part was looking at the house. It seemed to grow more ominous with every step.

She stopped and drew several deep breaths. You're not even there yet, she told herself. There's no one else around, nothing to hurt you. It's just a mental exercise, a test of memory. ~~And she's going to make the thought.~~ Images were already crowding, trying to break through.

~~She took another fresh breath, then lifted her hand and~~ willing her eyes to stay open. ~~The impact was dizzying.~~ She felt herself ~~swaying and reached for something,~~ anything, to steady her. ~~Her fingers closed around a handful of leaves, as once more she saw the house, the way it had been then.~~ She heard the hum of bees and faint strains of music from her father's radio in the Dealing House window.

Then voices reached her from the other side of the hedge, loud, raised in anger. ~~Somebody's fighting, she thought. A woman said, "I tell you, I saw it myself, and you'll never get away with it. Never in a hundred years. As soon as I show him, you'll be finished."~~

~~Minutes not going to show anybody anything, came the furious response in a different voice.~~

Anne could see them, at least parts of them, through little breaks in the hedge. The couple on the other side shifted positions and she saw the ~~man's~~ face. ~~She was pretty,~~ Anne thought, ~~really pretty, in a yellow sundress with white flowers all over it. Then while she was looking helplessly, the woman's face twisted with fear. "No!" she cried, and raised her arms to ward off some motion of the man's. He knocked one of her arms aside and grabbed the other. "No!" she cried again, as his face loomed above her head, then swung down towards her. He was wearing a dark jacket, and the motion was just a blur to Anne.~~

~~There was a quick flash as the sun reflected off some thing shiny in his hand. Then she heard a sound, a sound~~

~~somehow, but with a distinct crack, and the woman's knees buckled. As she fell toward the ground, he swung to follow her motion, and raised his arm again. Anne could see the rage that twisted his features.~~

~~Then the sound of the shiny object hitting the woman's head was repeated. Anne recoiled while ears filled her eyes, blurring her vision. The woman lay on the ground, and the man dropped to his knees beside her. Something fell from his hand, a gleaming, spherical object, which disappeared into the grass.~~

Anne backed away, horrified—three steps, four—then she began to run.

Oh, God, she thought. Oh, my God. The little-girl Anne had run toward the Dealing House to her father. The grown Anne gave no thought to direction, but simply obeyed the compulsion to run, and clawed her way through brush and branches.

She broke free of the trees into the tall grass of the Schaeffer yard—and into the present—but had taken only a few steps before she was forcibly stopped. Her arm was ~~grasped and she was spun around. As she drew in a painful gulp of air ready to scream, a hand clamped over her mouth and an arm, like steel around her waist, pinned her against a hard body.~~

~~Anne twisted against the terrifying embrace and found herself held all the tighter. It was several seconds before anything but her imprisonment registered. Then she began to hear a familiar voice, low but urgent and a little breathless from the ongoing struggle.~~

~~"For God's sake, stop fighting me. Damn it, Anne, hold still!"~~

~~Shocked, she stopped struggling and he removed his hand at once, but still held her. She looked up into brown eyes that met her gaze with thinly disguised anger.~~



Then temper swept through her, wiping away the last remnant of fear. "Damn you, MacKenzie," she spat out. "What do you think you're doing, scabbing me like that?" Her eyes were no longer soft, but shot little sparks of fury. He might have enjoyed the spectacle under other circumstances, but a moment ago those same eyes had held pure terror. Some strong emotion had raged through him, shaking him to his core. With it his anger had risen—anger that she'd broken her promise to wait till he'd talked—and more than anger that she'd foolishly placed herself in danger.

He'd called out her name in alarm when she'd burst from the trees, but she hadn't hesitated, hadn't even paused in her headlong rush. Overtaking her had taken only seconds—his adrenaline was already flowing, triggered by her flight. Even as she'd struggled, he'd scanned the area, trying to see who was after her. But she was stronger than she appeared, and subduing her had cost him a thorough look. Whoever it was could easily have ducked behind that old hedge and made his escape.

When he could speak with some degree of control, Rob growled, "Why the devil didn't you wait for me? I didn't think you were stupid."

Anne glared up at him, would have pushed him away if her arms hadn't been pinned so securely against his chest. "You have no right to tell me—"

"The hell with rights! Damn it, Anne, I'm trying to talk common sense here. You received a threat but you're still running around as though nothing had happened. Did you at least get a look at him? Was he someone you know?"

"Who? What are you talking about?" she demanded, confused by the question and by his anger.

"Whoever was after you!" he shouted in exasperation.

"There was nobody after me!" she shouted back.

Still struggling for control, he glared at her. "No one? Then why..." but her expression stopped him as realization dawned in her eyes.

"Rob, my being here has nothing to do with that survey, nothing at all. I'm fighting for something else entirely, something I— Realizing she'd already admitted more than she wanted to, she stopped speaking abruptly.

By then he'd managed to regain his self-control, but there was something in his tone that was impossible to ignore when he told her, "Anne, I want to help you. Why won't you tell me what's going on? Why are you really here?"

"I can't," she said.

"You mean won't," he challenged.

She couldn't speak. For an instant the nightmarish episode replayed in her mind, bringing with it the horror, putting fear back in her eyes. As before, it produced a strong emotional response in Rob, one that he recognized with wonder, and some degree of alarm, as a need to protect, to comfort.

She saw the change in his eyes, and knew that his anger was gone, but didn't know why, nor how. She knew only that she now saw some emotion that caused her to catch her breath.

Suddenly his arms were around her, strong as they'd been when they stopped her, but with warmth and safety in their strength. His lips brushed over her hair while his hands moved on her back, soothing, pressing her close. Then he whispered in her ear, "I'd never hurt you, Anne. I could make you believe that, if only you'd trust me."

He drew back and looked at her with such intimacy, such grave concern, that Anne's eyes filled with tears. But if her wanted desperately to trust him, perhaps already did, while not insisting that to trust a stranger was foolish, that she needed only herself, her own strength. But if I did need someone, it could be him. The thought settled down to stay.



For when he held her she drew an undeniable strength from him that drew back his tears.

Her arms had been freed and now, as he lowered his head, she wound them around his neck. He drew her closer, and her mouth touched his lips. When he paused for a moment, their gazes met, then there was no space, no vision, only sensation as their lips touched... and pressed... and clung.

Everything stopped—hearts, breathing, time. She leaned against him, his arms tight around her, and on a low moan of need, he took the kiss deeper. Her arms were so soft, so warm. The field of their flesh against the corded strength of his neck had him crushing her to him, absorbing, devouring. Her lips parted under the pressure and his tongue probed her mouth, greedy for the sweetness, the flavor that was Anne.

All her senses were heightened, but with a single focus. Him. His taste, his lips, hard, the soles of his feet against her, his warmth seeping into her, heating her blood. She heard it rushing through her veins, felt her heart thudding against his. Hadn't she known, even while she tried to deny it, that it would be like this? Their other kisses had been wonderful but this—with his body pressed against hers, lip to lip, breast to breast, thigh to thigh—was beyond imagining.

Nothing had prepared him for this. Her mouth was so responsive, the emotion pouring from her so potent, that desire curled deep inside him, then spilling outward through every muscle, vibrated in every nerve. No woman had ever taken him so far so fast, or made him feel a hunger so devastating that reason and control slipped away before he could think to reach and pull them back.

He tore his mouth from hers and took a wild, hot journey over her face, her neck, her throat. Supported by his hands, Anne's head tipped back to offer him greater access,

while he pressed through her lips. Then his mouth was on hers again, gently, until he made some small sound of pain that had him pulling back and gentling the kiss.

When he finally released her, it was all at once. He couldn't stay in contact with any part of her without wanting everything.

"We have to talk," he said hoarsely. "Now." He took her arm and started walking toward the Bowling Museum.

At first she went along without a protest, still overwhelmed by the passion and confused by his abrupt halt. Hadn't he felt it too? She had, though not at the time. She hadn't reached that state alone—already she was yearning to return to it. But he continued to probe her rapidly over the uneven ground until she tripped and she cried, "Can't he slow down?"

Rob modified his stride at once and slipped his arm around her waist, murmuring, "Sorry."

"Rob, how did you know I was here?" she finally asked, still breathless, trying not to stir up the pace.

"I didn't see your car when I was driving by, and went into the museum looking for you."

"But I thought you were going to work on your house this afternoon," she remarked as they walked the last few feet. His truck was parked next to her car and they stopped between them.

"Albert had already finished most of what we planned for today, so I decided to drive back to Nora's, instead. Lucky thing I happened to know this way."

When Anne didn't comment, a corner of his mouth twitched. "Apparent, this opinion isn't unanimous."

"I'm not sure," she admitted. "Where do you want to have this talk?"

"My place. Any objections?"

"I can think of several," came the dry reply. "But I suppose we'd have the least chance of interruption there."



"That's the idea. Do you want to ride with me? I can bring you back for your car later."

"No, I'll follow you." The time, she qualified mentally. I can't let this become a habit.

As Anne parked in her usual spot at his house, she told herself that she had no business having a usual anything where Rob McKenzie was concerned. She'd been attracted to other men, but never like this. It's not a good time for this kind of chemistry, she told herself. Not now, with the survival and that—that and now remembering what happened behind the hedge. I can't let myself be distracted.

But she was distracted. Uninvited, the scene slipped up on her again. The woman was still clear, or as clear as it could be after fifteen years. I'd recognize her if I saw her, Anne thought. But I won't see her. No one will. "Oh, God," she whispered, and her pulse jumped violently as the full implication registered for the first time. He'd witnessed a killing. And she knew the face of the victim, if not yet that of the killer.

Anne lay her head on her arms against the steering wheel, trying to dispel the images. Then the door was wrenched open, startling her, and then flashed across her face, only for a moment, but it was enough. Rob swore as he pulled her out of the car.

"Damn it, Anne, you've got to tell me what's going on. I can't stand seeing you like this."

She shook her head and tried to turn away, but he caught her chin and forced her to look at him. "You know I'm not going to let it go," he said in a low, tense voice.

"I can't." She sighed, then pausing to muster some strength, added, "I'm not ready. I wouldn't be able to make you understand, Rob. Not you, not anyone. I don't know you well enough."

"You know me well enough to kiss me," he corrected in a voice taut with emotion. "I'm not the threat."

No, he wasn't, Anne thought. But who was? She fought down another wave of fear as he remembered the rage on the face of the man.

Rob led her around back, where Monty came bounding up the long slope from the stream to welcome them. They stopped for a minute, and Anne looked at the framework for the deck, now partially floored—the work Albert had done earlier.

"Doesn't it seem like you'll be staying here now, or will you still go off to shoot films in exotic places?" she asked as Rob opened the door and held it for her.

He stared at her for a moment, wondering just what it would take to get her to open up. Fine, he supposed. Time they didn't have. Finally, he made himself concentrate on her question. "I'll still travel for my livelihood. But this—this is a sweeping gesture that took in the house, and the outdoors as well, "—is my home. I'll always come back between projects."

"That was your friend," she said. She made the remark as he steered her into the living room.

"Yes. Sit down," he said unceremoniously. She settled somewhat stiffly into a chair, and he sprawled on the couch across from her and pinned her with his gaze.

Uncertainable under his stare, Anne looked around the room, and hoping to keep the conversation impersonal, she asked, "What's upstairs?"

"Three bedrooms, one bath, storage rooms front and back where the ceiling slopes," he itemized. "I won't touch any of that until I finish my bedroom down here and do the kitchen. Look, can we just forget the house for now?"

"But I'm interested. I told you in the car, old houses fascinate me. What are you going to your bedroom?"

"Expanding it," he answered on a frustrated huff of air. "Putting in bookshelves and a reading area. Damn it, Anne, I didn't bring you here to talk about the house. I'll give you



a touch later, if you'd like, but we have more important things to discuss right now."

"All right," she agreed on a sigh of resignation. "I suppose we might as well get on with it."

She met his gaze, eyes wide and troubled, and he began to feel a little guilty about his own. But the woman was infuriating—she made him act that way. No one he'd ever known could make him feel so much of the time. Or could she just look, make him want to be so badly that he ached with it.

"Would you like something to drink?" he asked, reminding himself that she was on the upper hand if he didn't cool off and stay that way. A drink might do them both good.

Anne started to refuse, then changed her mind. "Do you have any wine?"

"Chablis, Burgundy, a zinfandel, I think. And sherry."

Surprised, she considered for a moment, then said, "Chablis."

She began to relax. There was no way not to in that room. A minute ticked by, and another. She stretched and closed her eyes. How can he have such a taste, that marvelous, delicate, sensitive photographs and still manage to memorize me almost every time we're together, she asked herself.

"I'm sorry."

Anne jumped. She hadn't heard him return, and the apology had come with such uncanny timing she almost believed he'd read her mind.

At her questioning look, he offered her a glass and said, "For being so tough with you. But understand, Anne, to me you and I aren't strangers, and I still believe you need help."

She frowned thoughtfully and accepted the wine without comment. Rob walked back to the couch, dropped onto it, and took a sip from his own glass.

"Well, I suppose you thought it was necessary," she finally conceded, "but you *did* scare the wits out of me, grabbing me like that."

"No." He gave her a steady look. "You were already scared before I touched you. You were so wrapped up in whatever had you running that you didn't hear me call out, didn't even see me until I stopped you."

He looked her squarely in the eyes. "Anne, for God's sake, talk to me. I might be able to help. Why were you running?"

"It's not something I can talk about," she insisted again. Deliberately she looked into her glass. She knew that when he saw her eyes, he saw too much.

She sipped, tasting nothing, while the tension mounted, and the muscles in her neck and shoulders drew tight. Absently she set down her glass and reached with both hands to knead them.

Rob watched her for a moment, then rose and walked around behind her chair to place his hands on her shoulders and began a slow, gentle massage. She would have protested, but he seemed to know just where to touch and exactly how much pressure to apply. She had told herself that it was he who had caused the tightness, but now, as the strong fingers drew it out, she had to question that theory.

"You should hire yourself out," she murmured, and leaned against the back of the chair, letting her eyes drift shut.

"Think so?" he replied. He looked down at the top of her head, and on an impulse, bent to press a kiss at a spot where the long, brown strands spiraled away from a small cowlick.

Anne opened her eyes and looked up at him. He was still bent over her, wearing the suggestion of a smile. "Is that part of the regular service?" she asked.



"Yeah, the famous MacKenzie touch." He angled his head so that his mouth hovered an inch above hers. "And here's another." The kiss was long, thorough. She fought it at first, but he coaxed a response from her with changing pressures, new angles. When he finally straightened, he took her hands in his, pulled her to her feet, and led her to the couch.

"I'm not sure this is such a good idea," she protested weakly as he pulled her down beside him. "We're supposed to talk."

Rob settled back, taking her along, and held her firmly with one arm around her shoulders. With his other hand, he cupped her chin, forcing her head back, capturing her gaze. "That's right," he agreed. "But you seemed reluctant, and we do have other options." He placed his mouth over her again and began to trace the shape of her lips with his tongue.

The situation was beyond her control. Anne admitted it as she struggled out of his arms. "You have a unique form of coercion," she accused him. "But it's coercion all the same."

Rob shrugged and gave her a thin smile. "Whatever it takes," he said, and watched patiently while she waged a silent battle.

"I *could* just get up and walk out." The statement didn't carry the force she'd intended.

"Maybe," he agreed. "But you won't."

Anne's eyes darkened. "You're awfully damned cocky, MacKenzie. Somebody really should take you down a peg."

"Okay," he said agreeably, reaching for her again.

Face flushed, she pulled free and stared at him for several long seconds until her pulse steadied. The expression in his eyes was no less heated, and had she touched it she'd have discovered that his pulse, too, had been affected.

"Anne, talk to me," he said. "Tell me why you were running."

When had he lost his anger? she wondered. When had patience and concern moved into his eyes? He was so calm, while she was in such turmoil. She longed to be calm again. Could it really be that simple? Then she met his gaze again, and she knew it would.

It wasn't so hard, after all. He listened quietly, without interrupting, and his gaze never left her face.

When she described the scene by the hedge and relived the horror, tears came flooding into her eyes. But he looked at them and kept on talking, though her voice broke once or twice. When it was all out, she turned away, not sure she could handle the rejection that was bound to come, or even worse, the ridicule.

She jumped when he touched her, but when he pulled her close and enfolded her in his arms, she took a deep, shuddering breath and held on to him the way a drowning person clings to a life preserver.

He stroked her back, smoothed her hair, and murmured, "Good God, Anne, I can't believe you were trying to handle this alone. No wonder you're running scared."

"I didn't know who to trust. I still don't really," she admitted. "And I hated to dump all this on you. I guess you were right to insist."

When she pulled away, he didn't try to stop her, but he held closely to the pole a few inches between them.

"Thank you for listening," he said. "And for believing me at least a little. Or even a bit." She added, meeting his gaze for the first time since she'd finished telling her story. "I haven't given you a chance to say what you think."

"I believe you," he told her. "It's not a very believable story, but it's not to be denied."



"That's some basis for belief," she remarked dryly. "~~But I don't see that I've got to do anything about it.~~"

"Anne, don't," he said when she turned away. He hadn't missed the moment of hurt in her eyes that belied her casual words, and his voice grew soft, caring. He reached for her hands and clasped them tightly. "Don't shut me out. It's too late for that now. We have to decide what to do next."

It took her a few seconds to blink away the threat of tears, a few more to get up her courage, but she did turn back to look into his eyes before she spoke. "I've got to talk to Mrs. Howard. Tomorrow."

"About Margaret?"

Anne started, then shrugged. "I should have known you'd arrive at the same conclusion."

"It's an obvious possibility," he commented. "As for the reality..." He shrugged before he continued. "How do you plan to go about it?"

She set her lips in a firm line. "I thought I'd approach her about the survey first, and suggest that she take care of it herself to avoid notoriety. That should get me in the door."

He nodded and released her to reach for his wine. But as he drank, he gave her a considering look. "Are you sure Sylvia will go along with this?"

"Yes, I think so." She brushed her hair back from her face and reached for her own glass. "Then once I'm inside, I'll try to steer the conversation to Margaret to see if Mrs. Howard knows anything that ties in with what I saw." She sipped, then sat staring into the pale fluid.

"And if she does?"

Anne raised her head, met his gaze again. "Well, that's where it could start getting complicated. Any suggestions?"

"One or two. First, we have to talk to Bill Ryan. I realize there isn't much in the way of concrete evidence at the mo-

ment, but you've got to tell him what you saw, and who you think the victim was."

"All right. But Rob, wouldn't it be better to wait till after I've talked to Mrs. Howard? Then there might really be something to take to him."

"Maybe. Let me think about that for a few minutes. Which brings us to the second point, ~~concerning~~ going with you. As she began to protest, he shook his head and said, "Anne, you've already been threatened, ~~and you've got to assume you could be in danger. Until all this business is settled, you're not going anywhere alone.~~"

"I don't need a bodyguard," she flared. "I've told you before, I can look after myself."

He only said a crude word and finished his wine. ~~but he was irritated, silent, and his cold, knees crossed while her foot swung in impatient circles. Rob leaned back and watched her, half-amused, half-annoyed. Damn, but she was stubborn. And damn, but she was beautiful.~~

When she asked, out of the blue, about the closed door across the hall, he decided to go along with the obvious day-laying tactic for the moment. "It used to be a library," he explained, "but now it's my darkroom."

"Really?" Genuinely interested, she said, "I've never seen one. Would you mind?"

He rose and extended a hand to her. "No, come on. I promised you a tour."

The room gleamed almost antiseptic after the warmth of the living room, but it was a lab, a setting for meticulous work, not a place for relaxation.

He explained simply about the equipment—enlarger, automatic processor, chemical tanks—so that she got the basic picture without being overwhelmed by detail. The entire back wall contained built-in shelves holding technical books and large cupboards that housed his equipment.



"And do you do all your work in here without light?" she asked when he'd finished.

"No, very little of it, actually." Leaning back against the edge of a counter, he added, "I do most of my developing with the processor, but I still work with the trays for a few projects, especially large format films, and I send out most of my printing. It's too time-consuming."

"Then why do you have all this?" she asked.

"Well, I like to keep my hand in," he said, bracing the heels of his hands on the counter beside his hips. "There are times I can't afford to wait for a commercial lab to handle it. And I've been teaching Joel Boyd. With the right training he could be very good."

"Oh, yes, I met him at Nord's. She mentioned that he was a friend of yours," Anne said as she ran her finger over a countertop and found a smudge. "Does he live nearby?"

"No." His lips twitched at the casual inspection and he brought his arms up to fold them across his chest. "He lives in town. Joel had a little trouble with the law a while back, but Bill got him a hundred hours of public service work in one of six months. He's got a job now, but he needed a sponsor. Someone to keep tabs on him."

"And that's you," she stated, already sure of the answer.

"He's worked off most of the hours now, and he helps Albert and me with my renovations. Then he does odd jobs for Nord and puts in about fifteen hours a week at Green's Market in town. The idea is to keep him too busy to get into any more trouble. Joe's not a bad kid, but he's had a rough time at home."

Anne studied Rob with a slight frown. Here was yet another good side of the man, even though she played it down. She found herself wishing he didn't have so many redeeming qualities. It had been so simple when all she'd had to deal with was dislike him.

"Seen enough?" he asked abruptly.

"I guess so," she very impulsively said, moving toward the door just as he reached to flip a light switch, leaving only the fading light from the living room. She collided with his arm, and they both froze, facing each other across a few inches of space.

Then he banished the distance. His arms went around her, and Anne inhaled the fragrance of soap and fresh air mixed with whatever the darkness brought to him. The essence was uniquely Rob, and overwhelmingly male. This time, she didn't fight it.

"Do you know what you're doing?" he murmured as his lips covered hers, drawing a long sigh from her. He raised his head and watched her eyes darken. By the dim light, she could see that shimmering in his eyes just before his mouth crushed hers.

Heat, taste, the low sounds of desire—Anne was adrift in their wash as his mouth moved over hers. Their tongues met and twined, hers with as much fervor as his. Her arms were around his waist, and she was clinging to him. Never had the hard press of a body, the pliancy of a pair of lips been so arousing. Never had a man's arms around her felt so right.

He was losing himself in her. Caution, purpose, restraint—all were gone, sacrificed to a desire he hadn't expected, a passion he couldn't deny. She was hot and strong and supple in his arms. Every movement she made cut through those few remaining threads of control, and her taste... As he demanded, she gave, but it wasn't enough, and he was suddenly afraid that it would never be enough. The thought that he might want to keep feasting snapped him back to reality. Carefully, but firmly, he drew her away.

For long moments they stared at each other, shaken, searching for answers, finding only more questions.



It was Anne who finally broke the prolonged silence, willing her voice to steady. "I've got to go." He still held her arms, reluctant to release her, but she pulled free and quickly left the room.

He caught up with her on the terrace. Heavy clouds lay along the top of the ridge, and fingers of fog were already descending into wooded depressions. The air had become oppressive.

"There's another storm brewing," he observed as he stood beside her, careful not to touch her.

"Yes. A good time to come to head for town," she replied, keeping her attention focused on the distant ridge.

"You could stay here and wait it out," he offered with the suggestion of a smile in his voice.

She turned to give him a long, appraising look. "No, MacKenzie. Not this time."

"No, even if I promise to be more hospitable than the last time?"

"Especially not then," she said, and his face relaxed into a grin.

Again she looked at him, and his gaze was inevitably drawn back. Now he was regarding her quietly, but the smile lingered. "What time are we leaving tomorrow?" he asked, and fell into step beside her as she started walking to her car.

"Don't make this difficult," she began, but he caught her wrist and stopped her.

"The idea is to make it easier. And safer. I know nothing about Howard, but don't forget, she's also a ~~Belgian~~. It's conceivable that she knows all about the situation. She might even have been behind that call. And I'm not going to let you walk into a situation that I'm by yourself."

Anne glared at him, but his expression was determined.

"Oh, all right," she finally agreed with an impatient sigh.

"I want to leave around nine, right after breakfast."

"Okay," he agreed. "I'll be there. And Anne, I'll

~~She stopped in the process of opening her car door.~~

"Be careful," ~~he said~~. "Stay in tonight and keep your door locked."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" ~~she exploded~~. Then, holding up a hand to ward off an argument, she said, "Okay, okay. I won't budge. I promise."

"Good," he approved. "See you in the morning." He bent down to give her a firm kiss, then watched as she hastily climbed into the car and drove away.

Lightning flashed above the ridge and thunder roared as Anne passed the museum on the drive to town. Her afternoon's experiences tumbled through her mind, creating a mix of emotions. She was actually afraid, but her uneasiness had dulled. When she'd been with Rob, both emotions disappeared. Her time with him had produced its own odd brew of anger, frustration and excitement.

Somehow I've got to exercise a little self-control, she told herself. ~~In doing so, what I said I wouldn't by letting myself get distracted.~~ I have enough trouble as it is without getting involved with a man like Rob MacKenzie. He's unpredictable, bossy, chauvinistic. "And those are his good points," she said aloud, then swore mildly when handsome, sexy and exciting sneaked onto the list. Forget it—think about something else, she commanded.

A long, blue car was parked in front of the boarding house when Anne arrived. She pulled up behind it, wondering whose it was.

A man stood at the door, holding an attaché case in one hand. When Anne started up the walk, he turned and walked to the top of the steps. He looked familiar, and as she drew closer she recognized him. "Why, Mr. Chambers," she exclaimed. "This is a surprise."



"Ms. Goodwin? How delightful," he said. "And here I was, just about ready to give up and leave. There doesn't seem to be anyone at home."

Surprised, Anne glanced at her watch. She'd expected Nora to be inside, deep into supper preparations.

"Are you looking for Mrs. Perry?" she asked as she opened the front door.

Chambers followed her into the foyer, explaining, "Yes, I'm here to do his books."

"Then she must have been expecting you, so I doubt if she's gone far," Anne said.

"Probably not," he agreed. "Perhaps I should give her a few more minutes."

She went into the parlor with him. No doubt Nora Perry had known the accountant for years, but Anne felt uncomfortable about leaving someone who was a stranger to her downstairs alone while he went to her room. Besides, she told herself grimly, Nora's face stopped back into her mind, a few minutes' distraction from that distraction would be welcome.

"Well, how are you coming with those loose ends on your father's book?" Chambers asked as soon as they were seated.

"Pretty well, thanks," Anne replied. "I've got most of what I need now."

"I suppose that means you'll be leaving soon," the accountant remarked. "Have you enjoyed your stay?"

"Yes, for the most." Anne thought of the variety of experiences she'd had in a few short days and wasn't sure if "enjoyed" was the right word.

"Still, I expect you'll be glad to be on your way. Small towns don't offer much entertainment," he observed, smiling while he fiddled absently with the handle of his case.

Anne felt a little sorry for him. Here he was, trying to make conversation with someone whose brain was out to

lunch. He certainly wasn't the dynamic type. Still, he wasn't a bad-looking man, might even have been attractive when he was younger, despite those odd-colored eyes.

She forced a smile and responded to his last statement. "I've managed to keep busy." Then, in a genuine effort at two-sided conversation, she asked, "Do all your clients rate house calls like this, Mr. Chambers, or is Nora Perry special?"

He chuckled and replied, "Well, she is certainly special, but I do go around to do the books of several of my older clients. Tell me, Ms. Goodwin, do you happen to remember many of the—" But whatever he'd begun to ask was lost in the commotion of a carriage.

"Why, Mr. Chambers!" she exclaimed. "Is it time for you already? I thought that wasn't till next week."

"No, today," he replied as he reached into his shirt pocket to pull out a small appointment book. "We are, the twenty-first—"

Then he stopped and raised his head, wearing an expression of disbelief. "Well, I'll be damned. You're absolutely right, Mrs. Perry, it *is* next week. I don't understand how I could have made such a mistake. And, Ms. Goodwin, I must apologize for taking up your time, although it's been pleasant chatting with you." He turned back to Nora and said, "I'll see you next week, Mrs. Perry." Then he let himself out, closing the door quietly behind him.

"How odd," Nora remarked after he'd gone. "In all the years he's been coming here, I can't remember Edmund Chambers ever making such a mistake."

"Yes, it is strange," Anne agreed. "He strikes me as such an efficient man. Oh, well, I suppose he's just having one of those days we all run into now and then." She turned to go upstairs, and the accountant was quickly forgotten as her mind filled with memories of the afternoon's earlier encounter.