

inward  
she turned.

I have  
Chapter 6

Groverton was larger than Noble's, but the Howard home proved easy to find. It was in an old neighborhood of big houses on broad lawns. Shade trees lined the street, their spreading branches forming a tunnel of cool green.

Rob followed a curved driveway and stopped in front of broad, stone steps. There he turned to Anne and took her hands in his. "All right?" he asked.

"Yes, of course I am," she snapped, still annoyed at his insistence on coming along. They had argued about it for a good part of the hour's drive. And I'm quite capable of talking with Mrs. Howard alone.

"If something did happen, I wouldn't be much good to you sitting in the truck," he pointed out. "But I promise I'll let you do most of the talking. It's your show."

They mounted the steps and rang a bell whose muted sound reached them through the carved panels of the door. It was opened by a carefully groomed, attractive woman in her forties.

"Are you Mrs. Howard?" Anne asked, and at her nod they introduced themselves.

"We'd like to talk to you about some property you own in Noble's Run," Anne explained. "It won't take much of your time."

The woman looked from one to the other of them, then asked, "Are you the MacKenzie who takes those marvelous animal pictures?"

"Guilty," Rob acknowledged with a quick smile, which wasn't wasted, Anne noted, as Mrs. Howard's answering smile was directed to her. "Goodwin," she repeated thoughtfully. "I don't believe he's a poet, but there's something about him."

"You may have heard of my father," Anne replied. "He and I were in Noble's Run some years ago while he cataloged exhibits for the Beeling Museum."

"Yes, perhaps that's it," she said slowly, then stepped back and motioned them inside. "I was working in the solarium—perhaps we can talk in here while I finish."

She led them into a short hall, then into a room bright with sunlight flowing through uncurtained French doors. Dozens of plants hung from the ceiling and sat on shelves and stands. A round, glass-topped table ringed by a set of white wrought-iron chairs with thick cushions occupied the center of the room.

Mrs. Howard picked up a watering can and moved toward one of the shelves. "Please sit down," she invited. "I assure you, I'll be listening. Are you interested in buying some of my land?"

"No," Anne and Rob replied together, then he made a smiling gesture for Anne to continue.

"To tell the truth, I'm not sure how to explain this," she said. "But I have two surveys of a piece of your property east of town near the river, and a letter from the surveyor written to your father. These three documents indicate that



the survey on file in the Land Office is, uh, incorrect, and that a strip of land along your north boundary actually belongs to someone else."

Mrs. Howard gave her a long, curious look before she spoke. Then, in a rather clipped tone she said, "My dear, whatever are you talking about?" She set down the watering can and walked over to take a seat at the table.

"Maybe it'll be easier if you just show them to her," Rob suggested, and Anne pulled the papers from her purse.

Blanche Howard studied them for several minutes, and finally murmured, "What the devil's that rascal. He just couldn't leave alone." When she finally looked up, she asked, "But, how in the world did you get these? How long have you had them?"

Anne explained, excluding the threats that had been responsible for her father's keeping the papers. She said instead that it had been an inadvertent oversight, that there had been so many work details occupying his mind he'd simply put them aside. "And by the end of summer, he'd forgotten. Father could be quite absentminded at times," she finished. "He's not that much older than I am, and he really wasn't, but sometimes..." Palms up, she shrugged.

The older woman tapped the papers with a finger as she said, "I take it you're asking me to straighten this out with the Land Office?"

Anne exchanged a quick look with Rob before she answered. "I'm not sure," she finally admitted. "I had planned to do it myself, but now I don't know what's best. It should be set right, though, don't you think?" Here she paused again, this time to send Mrs. Howard a questioning look.

"Naturally," the woman agreed.

"And I don't want to see anyone hurt or embarrassed," Anne continued. "After all, you and your sister aren't responsible for what your father did."

"My sister?" Mrs. Howard asked sharply, giving Anne a quick, piercing look.

"Yes, Anne. One of the Land Office records, you inherited the property jointly, but they couldn't give me an address for her."

Mrs. Howard transferred her gaze to Rob for a moment, then nodded in the direction Anne took to her agreement.

Encouraged, Anne folded her hands on the table and leaned slightly forward as she continued. "And if the owner of the adjoining land has inherited his property, as well, he probably has no idea who she is either."

"Hmm." Mrs. Howard stood and walked to one of the doors where she looked out for a few seconds. "That land used to be owned by Raymond Kincaid," she said when she turned back. "He was some years younger than Father. If he's still living, and I believe he must still own it."

"Then maybe he'll know what there is about that strip of land that made your father so anxious to have it," Anne exclaimed, excited at the prospect of having the small mystery solved.

But the older woman began to shake her head. "I really doubt it had anything to do with the land itself," she said.

Anne gave her a perplexed look. "I don't understand."

"No, I fear not. How could you? Look, Miss Goodwin, Mr. MacKenzie, it was good of you to bring this to me instead of just requesting a new survey without considering its effects, so I'll give you a little background. I'm sure you must be curious."

They nodded, and waited while Mrs. Howard walked back and sat down again.

"My father hated Raymond Kincaid," she began. "And the feeling was mutual. There's no good reason for it—their



attitudes were imprinted along with their land. There'd been a long-running feud between the Nobles and the Schaeffers that dated back to the town's early history."

"That's right," Rob agreed, nodding. "The story was even included in a local history course when I was in school. I couldn't tell you much about it now though."

"Part of it involved the difference in area of the lots they gave to the town," Blanche Howard elaborated, addressing the remark to him. "It was very small, less than a quarter acre. But after that, his lines over boundaries kept cropping up wherever Noble and Schaeffer land touched. The amount in question rarely exceeded a quarter acre. I know it was ridiculous, and most of the present-day Nobles know it, too, but that was the status quo for a long time."

"But what does all that have to do with Mr. Kincaid?" Anne asked.

"Raymond Kincaid is a Noble on his mother's side," Mrs. Howard replied. "The Schaeffer family lost little bits to the Nobles in a couple of legal actions, and it looks like my father finally took the law into his own hands and stole a little of it back. I'm only guessing, but I'll bet the difference between these two surveys is less than a quarter acre."

A fractional lift of the eyebrow was the only response Rob gave when Anne looked at him. She glanced at the papers still lying on the table, then shifted her gaze to Blanche Howard.

"What do you think is the best way to handle it? Shall I take these back and request a survey, or do you want it done some other way?"

Mrs. Howard allowed herself to smile for the first time. "I think that I'll take these down there myself and tell them I've just come across them. Oh, dear. I can't do that, can I? Didn't you say you've already talked to someone?"

"Yes, I have," Anne replied. "But maybe we could go in together. I think the woman I talked to will do her best to accommodate you."

"Yes, that might be best," the other woman agreed. "All right, we'll take care of it on Monday if that's convenient for you. It should make old Raymond Kincaid a very happy man, especially since I've paid his taxes on that strip all these years."

Anne smiled, happy to have the matter so simply resolved after her weeks of worry. "It's wonderful that you're making this so easy," she said. "It worried my father deeply when he started on the papers, and he made me promise to come here and make things right. He felt so guilty at having kept them all those years."

Blanche Howard smiled again and said, "Strange isn't it, when you think about it? My father had no scruples about a deliberate fraud, but your conscience stricken over contributing to it unintentionally. And he was too tired to tidy up the mess they left behind." Anne seemed to remember her duties as hostess and asked, "Would you folks like a glass oficed tea before you start back?"

As they accepted, Anne gathered the papers together and offered them to Mrs. Howard, but the woman smiled and shook her head. "Why don't you just keep them until Monday?" she suggested. "As a token of good faith on my part." She led them down another hall while Anne slipped the envelope back inside her purse.

The living room was elegant, Anne thought. The furnishings weren't ornate, but their fine quality was unmistakable. Muted tones gave the room a softness that offset the lack of warmth its size might have conveyed otherwise. Mrs. Howard indicated a grouping of a love seat and two chairs. "Please make yourselves comfortable," she invited. "I'll only be a few minutes."



Rob sat beside Anne on the love seat and draped an arm around her shoulder as good as Blanche Howard was out of sight. "You're doing great," he told her with a smile.

"In spite of the fact that she's such a dangerous woman?" Anne quipped. "My, I am complimented."

Irritation flickered in his eyes. "Okay, she seems genuine," he admitted. "But there was no way to tell that in advance."

Anne sighed and said, "Oh, I know. It's just that it's so darned nerve-racking to have to suspect everyone. But she had a perfect opportunity to take the papers and keep me from pursuing it. All she had to do was say she'd take care of it herself and I'd have gladly let her."

Rob nodded. "Which makes it unlikely she had anything to do with that anonymous call."

Anne had let her gaze wander around the room while they talked. A fireplace commanded much of the outside wall with French doors to its right. Above the hearth was a mantel of dark wood holding a row of photographs on either side of a clock. One photo was of a couple, with the woman recognizable as Blanche Howard some years earlier. A double frame held pictures of two children, a boy and a girl. There was another of an elderly man and woman, and in the last frame held the likeness of a young woman about Anne's own age. It was this that drew her to her feet for a closer look.

While Anne studied the picture her heart began to thud. A cool clamminess covered her face and neck when she squeezed her eyes shut and admitted to herself that this was not a picture of Blanche Howard taken twenty years earlier, although the resemblance was strong. Without having to be told, she knew exactly who it was.

"Anne, what's wrong?" Rob's hands on her shoulders, his voice at her ear, turned her sharply to him instinctively.

"She's the one! Oh, my God, Rob, that's the woman I saw!" She looked up at him, eyes large in a pale face, and he pulled her close to him while her hands clutched convulsively at his shirt.

"Come on, you'd better sit down," he said, and led her back to the love seat.

Seated again, Anne leaned on him for a few seconds, before she made a effort to pull herself together. "I've got to tell her," she said urgently. "I've got to know, but I don't know how to do it."

"We'll take it a step at a time." The deep voice was quiet, calming. "First we have to find out what she believes happened to her sister."

Anne nodded and gave him an uncertain smile. "Thank you," she said, suddenly conscious of his arm around her. And, unexpectedly, she found that she was glad he was there.

Rob turned toward her, his eyes glowing once more. "Anne, listen... I began to speak but stopped speaking and released her when Mrs. Howard came back into the room carrying a tray.

As she looked at Anne she said, "Miss Goodwin, are you all right? Heavens, you're white as a ghost!"

An apt choice of words, Anne thought as the world began to revolve again. "I'm fine," she said, and gave their hostess a reassuring smile.

Mrs. Howard set the tray on a table and looked at Rob as though for confirmation. He nodded and said, "She'll be okay. Anne's not used to our particular brand of heat yet. The humidity, you know."

"Of course," Mrs. Howard murmured. "Perhaps this will help," She handed Anne a glass of tea.

Anne sipped, then said, "It's wonderful, thank you. I'm feeling much better now."

The older woman regarded her critically for a few moments longer, and finally said, "Well, your color's better,



but I was sure you were going to faint for a moment there. Does this happen to you often?"

"No, just since I've been in this part of the country," Anne stated gratefully.

"Perhaps it is the climate, then," Mrs. Howard decided.

Anne nodded and sipped again. "We were admiring your pictures," she said. "I suppose they're your family. That must be your husband in the one with you."

"Yes, that's Mark. And the other man and woman in the next picture are his parents."

"And are those your children?" Anne asked. "It's so quiet here I wasn't sure you had any."

"Yes, Paul and Patsy. They're at camp for two weeks. Believe me when I tell you I don't usually like this," she replied with a little laugh.

"And the last picture—would that be your sister? Margaret, I believe the land records said." Anne watched the woman's reaction as she reached again for her teacup.

There was a noticeable pause. Mrs. Howard answered with a trace of amusement remained. "Yes, that's Peg. An old picture, of course."

While the other woman looked at the photograph Anne shot Rob a questioning glance. He closed his hand over hers and gave her a nod, then mouthed, "Go on."

Anne took a quiet breath of courage, and asked carefully, "Mrs. Howard, do you ever hear from her?"

The woman started at the unexpected question, and her expression was troubled when she replied, "No, why do you ask?"

Anne sat helplessly, trying to decide what to say next, but it was Rob who answered the question, in a quiet, sympathetic voice.

"Mrs. Howard, I'm hazy on the details, but I remember your sister's disappearance, and I've told Anne as much as

I can about it. Frankly, we were surprised that her name's still on the records."

"I know. I should have that corrected, but even after hope dies, habit remains."

"I'm so sorry. It must be terrible for you," Anne offered.

"Well, it's all in the past, but it still hurts sometimes."

"Didn't you hear from her at all?" Anne asked tentatively. "It seems so long ago I was only nine that summer. Or would you rather not talk about it?" she added. "If it's too painful, I understand, but Rob remembered so little—only enough to make me wonder about the rest."

Mrs. Howard studied Anne for a moment, glanced briefly at Rob, then said, "It was very simple, really. A while ago you spoke of stereotypes. Well, my father was one of the worst. I might as well tell you that. Peg wanted to work in the family business, but to him a woman's place was at home. He sent her to business school just to shut her up. I think. She really did well, though, and when she returned home she wanted to jump right in and go to work. Of course, Father wouldn't hear of it."

She paused to take a long swallow of her tea, then replaced the saucer on the table with a napkin and resumed the story.

"In a way he couldn't be blamed, I suppose. His health was failing, and he worked more and more at home. He kept a set of books there, and about twice a week a bookkeeper would go by to update them. Peg wanted to take over that job, just to prove to Father that she could, but he was afraid she'd make an error that might go undetected since he wasn't able to keep as close tabs as he had in the past."

Anne was beginning to feel a definite sympathy for Margaret Schaeffer's position, and she felt even more for Blanche Howard in the present.



"Before she disappeared," Anne asked gently, "did she say anything to you that indicated she was thinking of leaving?"

"I knew she was growing more unhappy at home," Mrs. Howard replied quietly. "So it wasn't that big a shock when she packed her bags and left for a writer—"

"She typed the note," Rob interrupted with a lift of his brow. "Doesn't that strike you as odd?"

"Perhaps so—to someone who didn't know Peg," Mrs. Howard answered. "But I think it is a reasonable statement about her training going to waste, that sort of thing. It was completely in character for her, believe me."

"And you never heard from her at all?" Anne asked, her expression serious and a little sad.

"No, I didn't. I always thought she'd get in touch with me someday, but she never did." Here the woman's voice became uneven, and her eyes filled with pain.

"How must it be, to lose someone you love and not know if that person is ever coming back?" Anne wanted to offer comfort, knowing she could only add to the pain, and turned to Rob to plead silently for help.

He met her gaze and thought, she really cares, and this is tearing her apart. He hadn't misread the plea for help, but at the moment he wasn't sure he was any more equipped to handle what had to be done than she was herself. Still, she needed his help and he had to try.

"Mrs. Howard, I—both Anne and I—know how painful it must be for you. Fifteen years of not knowing has got to be a special kind of hell."

She looked at him and nodded. "Thank you," she said, and her voice strengthened as she spoke. "It has been difficult, and as you said, not knowing has been the worst of it. I came to the conclusion a good many years ago that Peg

would have called or written if she could, that she must have died. But not knowing when or how, never being sure..." She stopped speaking.

Anne knew that she'd never have a better opportunity to tell what she'd seen, so she said, choosing her words with care, "Mrs. Howard, I think I can help. It won't stop the pain, but at least you'll know."

Mrs. Howard looked at her without comprehension for a second or two, then asked, "Could what? What are you talking about?"

Rob reached for Anne's hand again, and when his fingers tightened around hers she found the courage to say, "When I was here that summer, with my father, I saw someone strike down a woman beside that hedge that runs between your father's house and the Beeling property. I was playing nearby and saw it through the branches."

"What are you saying?"

It had been no easier to tell Rob than it was to tell the sister of the victim. Anne tried simply to stick to the facts, but emotion inevitably crept in as the tale unfolded. Rob still held her hand, and his fingers traced back and forth over it, letting her know he was there, offering support.

Blanche Howard sat without moving, a look of growing horror on her face until suddenly, angrily, she interrupted. "That's quite enough. I won't listen to any more of this."

"Shocked, Anne stared for a moment, but when Rob leaned forward and began to say something, she put a restraining hand on his arm.

"Mrs. Howard," she insisted, turning back to the woman. "I know she was your sister. I was sure of it the moment I saw her picture today."

Blanche Howard compressed her lips into a tight line. "Miss Goodwin," she said, "I'm afraid this rather sordid tale of yours puts all you've said here today in serious doubt.



If it weren't for those papers, I'd dismiss our entire interview as some sort of exercise in bad taste.

As was his habit in forming coherent thought, but Rob leaned forward, saying earnestly, "This has been a shock to you. We understand that. But Anne is telling you the truth, Mrs. Howard. If you'll just give it a little time to sink in, you'll realize that."

"Never. I simply will not accept this bizarre tale of some kind of vision. I don't know what you hope to gain by telling it, but I don't believe in all that occult nonsense. As for the survey—there the facts speak for themselves, so I will be at the courthouse at eleven Monday morning. But I don't want to hear any more of this other business."

Both Anne and Rob recognized the futility of pushing her. Together they rose and walked to the door, with Mrs. Howard following behind. Rob had his hand on the knob when Anne laid hers over it and said, "Rob, wait just a moment, please..."

Then she turned back to Blanche and said, "If someone told me my sister had been murdered, I'd at least give the claim enough consideration to try to disprove it."

Mrs. Howard looked startled, but her lips tightened and she said only, "Eleven o'clock Monday." Both her voice and her gaze were cool and distant.

Anne looked at Rob but he only shook his head and opened the door. A moment later they were outside and it closed behind them with a distinct click.

"Well, I handled that brilliantly," Anne said with disgust as they walked across the porch. "Not a performance I'm proud of, especially that nasty little parting shot."

"You did what had to be done," Rob told her, and opened the truck's passenger door. "Don't be hard on yourself. We both know she might not believe it." With a hand under her elbow, he helped her inside.

"I know, but Rob, I wanted to help her. I feel awful. All I did was tell her more what she already knew."

"Anne, you'll drive yourself crazy worrying about it," he said. "By Monday she'll have had some time to think it over. She might still change her mind."

Nevertheless, on the drive back, Anne reconstructed the entire conversation. She worried that there were things she might have done differently but Rob assured her, "You did all anyone could have done under the circumstances. She was upset—it would have been useless to try to convince her. And anyway, I can see her point. Twenty years of trying to tell her after fifteen years that her sister didn't leave of her own free will, but was murdered. That's got to be a bit hard to swallow."

Anne fell into a gloom of silence. If only she could remember the man's face, she thought. Who would want Margaret Schaeffer dead, and why? Her father? Could he have lost control during an argument? She remembered the expression of rage, but the image was too vague even to guess at the man's age. "I've got to know more about Peg," she said abruptly. "About whether she had enemies. And Blanche Howard is the only one who can help me with that. Somehow, I've got to convince her."

"Agreed," Rob said. "But not now. You'll have to give it a little time."

"I know," Anne sighed. "Maybe she'll listen on Monday."

"Which leaves us the best part of the weekend. Anne—spend it with me."

"What?" Her eyes widened as she turned to look at him. "Spend it how?" she asked, her expression a blend of surprise and suspicion. Rob glanced at her, then began to laugh.



"I didn't have anything specific in mind," he said. "But after that look, it occurs to me that you may have, and, honey, I'm game. You just name it."

Caught between embarrassment and amusement, Anne finally smiled. "I'm not sure, Mackenzie," she finally admitted. "Let me think about it."

Nora intercepted them as they walked through the door.

"Oh, good, you're back," she said. "I'm just sitting ready to order supper. Will both of you be staying?"

"I wouldn't mind," Rob answered. "It's been a while since I've had to choke down one of your soups." Anne laughed and gave him a playful punch on the arm, then turned to Nora.

"Yes, I'd like to," she decided, and headed up the stairs.

"I'm going to change," she said over her shoulder. "I'll be down in a minute."

Anne didn't question or deny the warmth she felt at the thought of Rob waiting for her downstairs, or at the prospect of perhaps spending the next day with him, as well. "Although I don't know what we'll do all that time," she murmured as she slipped her room key into the lock. Before she could turn it, though, the door swung inward. Shocked, she stood rooted to the spot.

The room was a disaster. Only the legs of furniture were in place. The rest of the furniture had been thrown off the bed and the bedding stripped. The sheets lay in a heap on the floor, along with a pile of clothing. Her suitcases were empty and returned, desk and dresser drawers were open, and everything had been pulled out of its closet.

Fear was her first emotion, then anger. Her room, her things. Someone with malicious intent had handled her possessions, her intimate apparel. She felt violated.

Then she saw the letter taped to the mirror. Even from the doorway she could see that it was composed of words cut from newspapers and magazines. The result was an almost

jaunty-looking patchwork of print in varying sizes, shapes and colors.

With her heart beating rapidly, Anne picked her way over the piles on the floor until she could read the message. "THIS IS YOUR FINAL WARNING. LEAVE THAT SURVEY ALONE. NO CHANGE OR NO MORE ANNE GOODWIN." The word *survey* and her name had been compiled of individual letters, mismatched, uneven and strangely ominous, aside from the implied threat of the message.

"Oh, God," she whispered, then she said, "Rob." Realizing her voice was still a whisper, she turned and fled through the door and into the hall. "Rob!" she called, and this time it was almost a scream, with undeniable intonations of fear.

He was there in less than a minute. About to walk out to the garden with Nora, Anne's shout had stopped him with his hand on the screen door. He'd spun around and rushed from the kitchen, leaving Nora to run after him.

Anne was standing in the hall near her room, shaking, her eyes fearful. Rob's arms were around her in an instant. "What's wrong?" he asked. He could feel the rapid thudding of her heart. "Anne, are you hurt? Ill?"

"No—no!" She shook her head and clung to him. "It's my room," she managed. "Someone's been in there."

He held her arms while he looked her up and down. Satisfied that she hadn't come to any physical harm, he moved her gently aside and turned to the open door.

Rob swore ripely when he saw the condition of the room. Anne joined him just inside the door, and he put his arm around her in a protective gesture. Then he saw the note. "What the hell?" he muttered, and stepped over to the mirror to read it.

"Merciful heavens, what's happened?" Nora's voice came from the doorway.



"Someone's been in my room." Anne stated the obvious without turning.

"But who on earth...?" Nora began, and stepped inside.

Rob had finished reading the letter, and now he turned back to the women. "Don't touch anything," he cautioned, and moved to Anne. He held her arms and anger flashed in his eyes. Knowing that it wasn't directed at her, Anne was grateful it was there.

"This has gone far enough," he growled as he drew her from the room, allowing Nora out, as well, with a hand on her arm. "I'm calling Bill."

After asking Nora not to speak of the incident to anyone, they waited in the parlor for the sheriff, talking in low voices so that the others in the house wouldn't overhear.

"What can there be about that survey that warrants all this?" Anne asked. "I can't think of a reason on earth that it should matter to anyone except Blanche Howard and Raymond Kincaid. She clearly doesn't care, and he could only be pleased."

Rob nodded. "Maybe it's the location of a critical spring or something. It probably won't help, but I'm going to take a run out there after a while and see what the land looks like."

"You mean we are," Anne corrected.

He started to object, but thought better of it. As long as she was with him, he'd know she was safe. "Okay," he agreed, giving her a smile. "We are."

Nora's voice reached them from the front hall, saying, "Yes, the house has been open all day with people in and out. It's possible no one would notice." A moment later she came in, followed by a man in a khaki uniform.

Anne was surprised somehow at the contrast between the two men. Blond, blue-eyed Bill Ryan was a good three inches shorter than Rob. He wore his hair short, and where

Rob was rangy, he was wiry. He seemed to have the quality of tough alertness, while Rob appeared more laconic despite the evidence of temper in their earlier encounters.

Rob introduced his friend to Anne. Ryan's hand was warm and callused, his grip firm. She immediately felt that he was a man who could be trusted.

His inspection of her room was brief but thorough. He handled the letter carefully, touching only the edges and studied it at some length. "I want to take it with me," he said to Anne. "I don't know if we can get prints off it or not, but it's worth a try."

Anne nodded, then turned with Rob to follow Ryan back downstairs. They went outside to talk, where they could see if anyone approached within earshot.

"All right, Anne," the sheriff said when they were seated in lawn chairs in the shade of a venerable maple. "Suppose you tell me why anyone would want to tear your room apart."

Anne told him all about the survey and the murder, careful to include as many details as she could remember. He asked a few questions, and there was an occasional word of support from Rob. When she had finished, the sheriff sat for half a minute, frowning as he thought about it. Finally he said, "I'd like to have a look at those documents now."

"Of course," Anne replied, and hurried into the house to get them. As soon as she'd gone, Rob turned to the other man with an inquiring look.

"I'll see what I can learn about this bit of land," Ryan began. "As soon as I verify it with the Land Office, I'll drop in on old man Kincaid. Maybe he'll have some notion of what it's all about."

"Thanks, Bill. I appreciate it."

"It's my job," Ryan reminded him. "A threat made in my territory falls within the province of official business."



Rob nodded, then said, "I know the Land Office will be closed today, but if someone will let you in, I'd like to tag along."

"Sure, why not?" the sheriff agreed. "We'll check out the other owner—make sure it is Kincaid—and get a fix on the exact location. That's probably about as much as I'll get done today unless I get a chance to see Kincaid or whoever owns that land."

"What about the rest of it?" Rob asked.

"You mean that dream business?" Rob's eyes narrowed but Ryan did not to let on as he continued. "Well, that's a different matter altogether. She's received no threats in connection with it, there's no evidence that a crime was even committed, and the whole allegation is based on childhood memories. Even those memories are suspect, my friend, because by her own admission, Anne had a penchant for whoppers at that age."

Rob bristled and made no effort to disguise it. "Damn it, Bill, she's telling the truth. Don't you remember who she is—the history professor's daughter? Have you forgotten the day we beat the hell out of the Murphy brothers for pulling her into that alley and roughing her up?"

"No, I haven't forgotten," Ryan replied. "But what's that got to do with anything?"

"Nothing directly, but she'd forgotten that memory, too," Rob stated. "Then when I said something that triggered it, she recalled the whole incident with total clarity. Now the details of the killing are coming back, and she's badly shaken. It's real, damn it. She really saw it happen."

The sheriff regarded him thoughtfully for a few seconds, then said, "Look, I'm not refusing to look into it, Rob. I'm just establishing the priorities. We deal first with facts, then with possibilities. As soon as this survey is wrapped up, I'll check into Margaret Schaeffer's disappearance."

Rob nodded curtly. "All right. I guess I can't change your mind. But, damn it, Bill, make it so that to himself he determined that he'd do what he could in the way of

After Rob had left with Ryan, Anne asked "Nora, do you have an old blanket I can use to lie in the sun for a while? I'll be happy to have it laundered when I leave."

Nora gave her a long look. "I have several," she replied. "And laundering isn't an issue. But do you think it's wise to lie outside, my dear? After all, Rob warned you to stay put till he got back, and he's only been gone a few days."

"I know," Anne agreed. "But what could be safer than your backyard on a Saturday afternoon? And I only plan to stay out a half hour or so. It's just been such an upsetting day—I thought it might help me unwind."

"All right, you've convinced me," ~~she said, but she~~ ~~nothing more was to be said.~~ "The blankets are folded on the back porch. Help yourself, my dear. But I'll be keeping an eye on you."

Something moist against her thigh startled Anne awake. ~~She sat up, startled, and found a warm, wet, and very soft voice call,~~ ~~"What's that? What's that? What's that?"~~

Her eyes opened and she sat up only to find her view blocked by large, canine eyes, golden fur and a long, pink tongue. "Monty!" she exclaimed, and laughing, tried to ward off the dog's display of affection.

She heard Nora's voice answer from the house, "You might as well get four while you're at it."

Anne was still trying to fend off the dog when Rob approached. "Monty," he said with quiet authority, and the retriever backed off.

She became acutely aware of the skimpiness of her bikini as Rob's gaze traveled over her in a long, deliberate appraisal. At his expression she felt a heat that had nothing to



do with the sun, and she took refuge in anger. "Seen enough?" she snapped as she reached for her bathing lotion and the book she'd been reading before she dozed off.

"We're getting there," came the amiable reply. Then he grinned and moved on toward the garden, snapping his fingers for Monty to follow. By the time he returned with four cucumbers in his hands, Anne had vanished, blanket and all.

The shower cooled her temper, and as she dressed for supper she began to regard the brief encounter with a certain degree of amusement. After all, why should she be embarrassed? She'd been within the bounds of decency. He was the one who'd stood there ogling.

She insisted to her reflection that her choice of the coral beads with a fitted bodice and a skirt that flowed gently over her hips had nothing to do with Rob's presence downstairs. She fastened on a single strand of coral beads and wore no more than her usual makeup, but took special care in its application. She told herself there was no significance in that, either. When she stepped into the bathroom, she heard a scratching at the door.

"I don't believe this," Anne muttered, rolling her eyes at her reflection. When she opened the door, Monty bounced playfully a time or two before he stood before her in an expectant posture, tail wagging.

"Did he send you?" she demanded, then heard a call from downstairs.

"Monty, damn it—get down here!"

Well, that answers that, she mused, and followed the retriever down the steps to where Rob waited in the hall below.

He had changed clothes, too. It was the first time she'd seen him in anything but jeans. But the tailored slacks and casual shirt he now wore suited him, too. They gave him a gloss of civilization that suddenly enabled her to see him in

other settings—any settings. Rob MacKenzie, she realized, could be at home anyplace he chose. Why that should please her so much, she couldn't say.

Desire ripped through him when Anne appeared, and Rob struggled to control it. His skin was tinted from her time in the sun, and the color of her dress made him think of a summer fruit, ripe, sweet, juicy. "God, MacKenzie, get a grip on yourself," he admonished silently. He managed to put a damper on the stranger feeling, but couldn't prevent the warmth in his eyes as she reached the bottom step and he greeted her. "You're lovely."

Anne was dumbfounded at the simple compliment. She'd expected some wisecrack reference to her bikini, or an attack on her intelligence for not staying inside in the first place. Just as unprepared for the pleasure the words gave her, it took a few seconds to find her voice and say, "Thank you," as she smiled and stepped down in front of him.

She saw desire in his eyes before he reached for her. Her brief hesitation was only in her mind. She moved into his arms and raised her hands to his shoulders, holding fast as a quick heat suffused her. Her lips parted under his and she pressed against him with a small sound of pleasure.

His senses were assailed with her scent, the soft yield of her body, the warm press of her lips, her flavor as their tongues met. He'd felt warmth and anticipation before he touched her—now it was fire and passion in an escalation so rapid that it left him breathless.

Only by forcing himself to remember where they were was he able to relax the embrace and had him feeling every curve and the pounding of her heart through the layers of their clothing. He held her away and smiled, but his eyes were serious when he said, "We're going to finish this at some more opportune time."

He said nothing more about the weekend, and Anne decided he'd changed his mind. Nor was anything said about



her room, since a few of the regular boarders were on hand for the meal.

By the time they'd finished, Anne was wondering what would be a decent interval before she could escape to her room. Suddenly the telephone interrupted, and Nora walked into the hall to answer it. "Anne, it's for you, dear," she called.

Remembering the last call she'd had, Anne's heart missed a beat as she rose to take it.

Even half prepared, a chill still invaded body and mind, held her in its grip. The voice—sexless, expressionless, menacing—said, "I hope you've been heeding my warnings, Anne Goodwin. This is the last one. If you do anything with that survey, neither you nor anyone who helps you will be around to see the outcome."

Anne stood clutching the receiver and staring as though mesmerized.

From where he was sitting, Rob could see her. When the color drained from her face he was on his feet and standing front of her in a second.

"Anne?" She didn't answer, so he took the receiver from her and put it to his own ear, ready to give someone hell. There was only a dial tone, so he hung up and gripped her shoulders, giving her a little shake to snap her out of it. "Anne," he repeated. "What is it? Was that the same caller?"

She looked at him for a moment, her eyes wide and fearful, then tried to turn away. But he cupped her chin with one hand while his other slid around to her back. "Well?" he repeated. His voice was gentler now, although inside he was eager to tear somebody apart for putting that look back in her eyes.

"Yes." She sighed, then became aware that he was holding her again. "Oh—Rob—what are you going to do?" she asked, pressing her face to his chest.

The wave of tenderness that swept him at the small admission of vulnerability left him shaken. His other arm went around her, and he held her tightly, to steady himself as well as to comfort her. When he dared try his voice, it was hoarse, uneven. "Yes," he told her. "We're going to end it."

She raised her head to search his eyes and watched their expression alter from angry to something less definable, while his touch gentled. "Let's go someplace where we can talk," he said at last.

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea," she began, but he was already guiding her toward the door.

"Yes it is," he insisted. "And I know one that will still be fairly quiet at this hour."

She repeated him for the long moment before she nodded and let him lead her out the door, with Monty sneaking ahead of them.