

"Well, how about the lobby of the courthouse, say around two?"

"Yes, all right. Can you give me any idea what—"

Before she could complete the question, Blanche cut her off. "It'll be much simpler to show you. Peg did mention a man, an employee of Father's, but never used his full name. I'm hoping that what she wrote about him will trigger something in your memory. And while you're reading it, I thought I'd run out to the company office and see if I can find some connection in the old personnel records?"

"Yes, that's certainly worth a try," Anne agreed. "I'll see you at two."

She returned to Rob and repeated the conversation. When she finished speaking, he said, sounding almost belligerent, "I'm still going with you."

Anne smiled and said, "Naturally."

He looked shocked, then conscious. "Aren't you going to tell me how unnecessary it is?" he asked. "Don't you want to point out that the sheriff's office is practically next door and that it will be broad daylight? Don't you even want to remind me that you can take care of yourself?"

"No." She smiled. "You already know all that."

"And you're not going to make me try to convince you?"

"Nope."

"Tell me," he demanded as he extended a finger and twisted a strand of her hair around it. "Is all this agreement because you're afraid I might handle you again?"

"No," she repeated. "It's because I'm afraid you won't."

"Oh, God," he groaned. "What am I supposed to do now?"

"Just kiss me," she replied.

And he did.

you won't ..
i won't

inverse
reverse

Chapter 11
for a moment

Still no answer at the Howard residence. Sheriff."

"Keep trying, Jim," he said. "No, wait. That's taking too long. Look, start calling the dentists around town, any who have been in practice fifteen years or longer. Find out who took care of Henry Schaeffer and his family."

"Right," the deputy acknowledged. Then, with a double take at his boss, he repeated, "Dentists?"

"Yes," Ryan confirmed, turning back to the papers.

"How can I tell how long they've been in practice?" the deputy asked cautiously.

Ryan looked up for a moment, torn between twin impulses to laugh and to swear. Then, in a voice that made its point with its exaggerated softness, he suggested, "Why don't you make that your first question? If they've been around that long, ask about the Schaeffers. Otherwise, thank them and move on to the next call. Think you can handle that?"

"Yes, sir." Jim nodded, reddening as he reached for the directory.

When the phone rang again, Ryan said, "I've got it," and lifted the receiver. The conversation was brief; he was already on his feet as he hung up. "Dr. Simon's on his way," he said. "I'm going out to meet him. Keep working on those dentists. Orthodontists, too. I'll give you a call later from the lab. Meanwhile, if you come up with anything, try to raise me on the radio."

"Right!" Jim agreed, his confidence restored at the thought of being in charge of the office again. Ryan, behind an involuntary grimace, told himself to be grateful that Jim didn't favor the expression "Ten-four."

"What time are we supposed to be at the courthouse?" Rob asked as Anne slid a drawer shut.

It was wonderful to have the misunderstanding resolved and be back on a more or less solid footing with her, but he hadn't missed the momentary annoyance in her expression at his use of "we," a reminder that this new accord was still fragile. He knew she'd agreed to his going along only because she didn't want to deal with another argument.

"How long?" she asked, with a glance at her watch.

"Only a little more than an hour."

"Would you like to have a bite of lunch somewhere first?"

"That sounds good. Maybe we could pick up something for Nora, too. I imagine she's too busy canning to fix anything for herself."

"Good idea. How about—"

A loud crash and a cry from downstairs stopped him in mid-sentence. They exchanged quick glances of alarm before they rushed to the bedroom door. Rob reached it first and hurried out, with Anne and Monty racing down the stairs behind him. It was in that same order that they burst into the kitchen seconds later.

"Good God," Rob exclaimed as he took in the scene.

Nora was sitting on the floor next to a spill of stewed tomatoes and broken glass. Two jars, still intact, lay oozing their contents.

Nora's face was white and drawn while her fingers clutched the outside of her right leg a few inches below the knee. Blood streamed from under her fingers.

Anne gasped and cried, "Oh, Nora..." as Rob rushed to the old woman's side.

"Here, let me have a look," he muttered, pulling Nora's hand away from the wound. The long, deep gash was bleeding profusely. He turned to Anne and ordered, "Get me a clean cloth, please, something quick."

Anne searched drawers frantically until Nora, through the tears that coursed down her cheeks, indicated where they were. Moments later Rob folded one into a bandage, and tied it with a second.

Nora moaned softly as he held her up, and he noticed for the first time the bright red splotches on both legs where tomatoes and their liquid had splattered over her skin. "Easy now," as he lowered her on a kitchen chair that Anne had brought across the large room.

"I'm sorry to be such a baby," Nora sniffled, "but it hurts like fury."

"I'll do my best to help you, Rob replied gently. Then he turned to Anne and said, "Sweetheart, grab some ice, will you? Maybe we can take some of the sting out of those burns." While he spoke, he propped up a second chair and propped up Nora's feet.

Rob and Anne held the melting ice against the worst of the burned areas for a few minutes, while Nora began to fuss about the mess on her kitchen floor.

"Nora, don't worry, I'll take care of it," Anne assured her.

"I hate for you to have to," Nora began. "Oh, it was such a stupid thing to do! I didn't have the potholder placed right

and I burned my hand and dropped the kettle before I could think. I can't believe I was so clumsy after all the canning I've done."

"Are you trying to tell us this was your only lapse from style and grace in all these years?" Rob asked. He smiled, but Anne sensed the gravity beneath the quip.

"No, my record is unblemished until today," Nora defended on a sound that was half laugh, half sob.

Rob frowned when he saw a red stain spreading through the towels. "A doctor's going to have to stitch that out," he said. "If the doctors are feeling any better, I think we'd better go."

"I want to go with you," Anne began, then remembered their appointment, and glanced at her watch. "I'm not sure there's enough time," she said, and met Rob's gaze helplessly.

"I don't want you going without me," he warned. "Why don't you try to get hold of Mrs. Howard? Maybe she can come here, or we can meet her if she checks those records. I'll call from the clinic as soon as I know how long we'll be."

Anne knew it was useless to argue, and she could see from Nora's expression that the doctor's woman would soon be worrying about them, too. So Anne only nodded and said, "Okay, I'll call her."

She walked outdoors and stood to one side while Rob helped Nora into the truck. As he opened the door, he pulled Anne close for a brief, hard kiss. "I'll leave Monty with you," he told her. "Stay inside and keep the place locked." Then, speaking urgently, he added, "Anne, wait for me."

She nodded and then they pulled away, then went back inside with the dog and locked the door.

There was no answer at Blanche's home, and Anne realized she'd have needed to leave quite some time before to be

in town by two. Frustrated, she cleaned the floor and worried about Nora.

"What's taking so long?" she asked in a low voice as she paced near the kitchen radio. Monty's ears perked, and he tilted his head to one side, but with canine wisdom remained prone on the cool linoleum and let her do the walking.

She glanced at her watch again. "Ten to two," she muttered. Monty opened his eyes in momentary acknowledgment. When the phone shattered the silence, Anne snatched up the receiver and was relieved to hear Rob's voice.

"How's Nora?" she asked at once.

"She's going to be fine," he assured her, "but she's got stitches. They're getting her ready."

"You mean they haven't even started yet?" Anne cried.

"You know how clinics are," Rob replied calmly as he heard panic rising in her voice. "We'll be there as soon as we can. Did you talk to Mrs. Howard?"

"No, she's already left," Anne replied. She paused to take a deep breath before she said, "Rob, it's nearly two now. I'm going to have to go on."

"No!"

He said it with such vehemence that Anne pulled the receiver from her ear and stared at it for a moment. Then she said, a little breathless because of the pounding of her heart, "Rob, I've got to go. I'll be waiting. I'll be careful, darling, don't worry. Remember, I'll be in a public place the whole time. Just come as soon as you can, okay? If I'm not at the courthouse, I'll be at the sheriff's office. I'd say by four at the latest. Meet us then, Rob, please? Sooner if you can?"

"Damn it, Anne, don't do this."

"I'm sorry, there just isn't time. Give Nora my love and come as soon as you can." She heard an oath as she moved the phone from her ear to hang it up.

Rob continued to hold the lifeless instrument in his hand for several seconds, then replaced the receiver. He stood

with his eyes closed and his hands balled into fists. "Oh, God, Anne, be careful," he whispered.

Neither Anne nor Blanche wasted any time with preliminaries. Blanche handed over the journal and said, "I've marked the page where the pertinent entries begin. Some are fairly long, but she didn't write every day. You shouldn't have any trouble finishing it by the time I get back, hopefully within an hour. Are you planning to read it here?"

"Yes, it should be quiet in the courtyard, and it's handy to the sheriff's office. I thought maybe when you get back we should take whatever we have to him, even if it's inconclusive."

"Yes, that might be best," Blanche agreed thoughtfully. "All right. If you decide to go on ahead, I'll catch up with you there."

Anne hurried to the courtyard, anxious to begin reading. She glanced skyward and was reassured by a square of hazy, unbroken blue. The commonplace of birds twittering in the trees provided a counterpoint to her dramatic sense of expectation.

She opened the book to the page Blanche had marked and was captivated within moments. Peg had written with varying degrees of detail, depending on her mood. Often, she omitted small words, as though dashing off a quick thought. Occasionally her penmanship grew less uniform and took on a more forward slant, indicating haste or emotion.

The first, brief reference was the second week after her return from business school.

The man Father has doing his books came by this afternoon. His name is Ross. He positively ogled me—how I hate that! And I know I could handle those books every bit as well, probably better. But Father

won't listen.

A week later she wrote more.

Ross was here again today, sitting at Father's desk, looking pleased with himself. When I walked in, he winked and suggested we go for a walk. Naturally I declined. I don't like his type. There was one like him in my classes, utterly arrogant, thought he was God's gift to women and the business world all rolled up in one irresistible package. Believe me, I can resist Ross. He'll bear watching, though, and I'm going to have a look at those books. There's something in his eyes I don't like.

Before long a pattern emerged. Ross visited the house two or three times each week, depending, apparently, on the volume of business. Whenever Peg encountered him, he tried to make a date. She consistently turned him down, always spoke of him with disdain. As Blanche had said, she never used his full name. It was either Ross or R.C. Anne began to wonder if they might have been his first and middle initials, rather than first and last. She hoped Blanche was checking that possibility, as well.

Peg's distrust of Ross continued. At first Anne thought it might have been the result of jealousy, but one day Peg found a paper wadded in the bottom of the wastebasket. When she examined it and compared it with some related entries in the ledger, she found a discrepancy.

She confessed to the journal a feeling of triumph at the discovery, but waited for more evidence. Even distrusting him as she did, she knew that what she'd discovered could be an unintentional error. During the following days, however, she found several more questionable figures, and finally decided that the detested R.C. was stealing from Henry Schaeffer.

Meanwhile, the man had become more persistent in his advances. On at least two occasions, he'd cornered her and tried to kiss her. Peg was furious, and it was there that her handwriting and wording revealed something of her emotional state.

Damn him! That infuriating Ross made a pass at me! Revolting to have those eyes with their heavy brows, that hard mouth so close to mine. Tried to knee him, but he twisted aside. Swore at me, too. Never have I seen such fury on a face. If there'd been a weapon at hand, my life wouldn't have been worth two cents at that moment.

Finally, after debating whether to take the information to her father, who might refuse to listen in his usual adamant way, or to confront Ross and take her chances with his temper, there was a new development. Anne's heart raced as she read about it.

Watched Ross through a couple of inches of open door and saw the most peculiar thing. He was at Father's desk and reached into the top right drawer as though it was caught on something. Then there was a click, and a panel I'd never noticed popped open. I think he was just as surprised, but he took some papers out of it and closed it. He carried them over to read them by the window and began to smile in a rather nasty way. Then I heard Father coming up the stairs with some papers. Ross looked pretty bad. He couldn't get back to the desk in time, and he stuffed the papers into a box of documents that was waiting to go to the new museum. I stayed out of sight and saw two men carry out the museum boxes. Father followed them, and Ross looked plenty worried. I wondered what in the world Father had hidden? And I'd give

anything to know how Ross plans to keep Father from finding out he was snooping when those papers turn up in that professor's hands at the Beeling House.

Anne rubbed at her eyes for a moment. The glare of the sun on the paper was tiring them, but there wasn't much left to read. She skimmed the last few entries and found that only one of them was relevant—the final one.

I've decided what to do. I've made a list of the pages where R.C. tampered with the figures. And at the bottom of the list I've suggested that Father examine those, along with the trashed papers I salvaged and attached. I've also told him to take a look in his secret drawer and ask Ross what he knows about it. Tomorrow's Friday, the day Father reviews the books himself. As soon as Ross leaves, I'll slip the papers onto the desk under my paperweight. By sundown that jerk will have his walking papers, and Father's bound to give me a chance.

Anne closed the book just as three women entered the courtyard carrying cups from the vending machine. They smiled and nodded to her on their way to a distant bench, leaving her to her own thoughts.

Poor girl, what had she done with her plan? The most likely explanation was that she'd been so premature in placing her evidence on the desk. Ross may have returned unexpectedly and discovered the papers. Or he could have walked in while she was placing them there. Had she run, only to be overtaken outside the house, or had he dragged her out there himself? However it had come about, it had sealed her doom. She felt tears burning. She hoped passionately that Blanche learned something that would help identify him. Poor woman, she must want to see him apprehended even more fervently than Anne did.

Simon, a deceptively frail-looking man in his forties, sat in a molded chair outside the autopsy room, waiting for the sheriff. He lifted a cup of coffee to his lips, shuddered at its flavor, and set it aside.

That skeleton, he reflected as he reached inside his lab coat for his cigarettes and lighter. And odder still that Ryan seemed to know in advance everything the examination revealed—even those scraps of material. They'd been stiff and uniformly brown from years in the soil, but when he'd soaked them in a mild soap solution and gently squeezed out the excess, Ryan had seemed to expect the stained yellow-and-white pattern that emerged.

As Simon took his last drag on the cigarette, the sheriff strode over. "Well?" Simon asked, stubbing out the butt in an ashtray.

"Dr. Bristol said he'll be over in an hour. He's just finishing with a patient, and it'll take a little time to locate the Schaeffer files. Are you through?"

Simon nodded. "I found nothing that substantially differs from what you expected. The clerk's typing my report."

Ryan's smile was one of grim satisfaction, not pleasure. "Can you give me the fifty-cent summary while we're waiting? Or are you in a hurry to get home?"

"No. I'd like to wait for Dr. Bristol." Simon looked at his watch. "At the rate you're going, you'll have your killer in the jug by sundown," he said, reaching again for his cigarettes.

"Sundown might be a little too much to hope for, Harve. I don't have a suspect, although my gut feeling says he's still around."

Simon nodded. "Well, to give you your four bits' worth, the skeleton is that of a female in her early twenties. She would have stood about five-four and weighed about 110."

He paused to exhale a cloud of smoke. "In my opinion the bones have been out there twelve to twenty years, but we'll need more testing to pin it down. Her skull was crushed in the upper left parietal area by a blow or blows with a blunt instrument, or by a fall. I lean toward the blunt instrument because it's damned near impossible to hit that exact area of the skull in a fall. The extent of damage is enough to have caused her death. She'd had fairly extensive dental work done. Her teeth and the entire mandible area are well preserved. Your Dr. Bristol shouldn't have too much trouble giving you an ID."

"Good." Ryan glanced at his watch. "How about grabbing a burger somewhere while we're waiting, Doc? I didn't have lunch today, and knowing you, you can probably use something to sponge up the caffeine you've been sloshing down all day."

With a chuckle, Simon clapped a hand on Ryan's shoulder. "My friend, you know me indeed." He smiled. "Bring on your burger."

The courtyard door opened again. Anne looked up and

"Anne! Why didn't you let me know you were down here?"

"I'm just killing a little time, waiting for someone," Anne replied, slipping the journal into her purse. "Are you on your break?"

"Not exactly," Sylvia replied. "I've got to run some papers over to Mike's office. Of course, I'll let him buy me a coffee if he isn't busy. Why don't you walk with me? Or is your someone due right away?"

Anne looked at her watch and shrugged. "I guess I have a few minutes, but I can't stay for a drink."

"That was just wishful thinking, anyway," Sylvia said with a laugh. "He'll probably be too busy."

They left through a side entrance and walked along Front Street while Sylvia shopped enthusiastically. Pausing to admire a sweater in a store window, Sylvia said, "I know it's too hot to think about it, but a working girl has to look ahead to the next season."

Anne had the thought that she'd have to do some shopping herself, once she reached New York. Then, on the heels of that first thought came a second. Am I still headed for New York? she wondered. Do I even want to be?

She was thinking of Rob when her companion announced, "Here we are." Sylvia pushed open a white door. Beside it, a marbled sign bore the words Edmund Chambers and Associates, Certified Public Accountants.

Surprisingly, the reception area was unattended. Two desks faced each other from opposite sides of the room. Papers littered the top of one, and an uncovered typewriter sat on it. The other was bare, with a tracing of dust on it.

Open doors off a small hallway across the room from the entrance led to unoccupied offices on either side. A third door, directly ahead, was opened partway, and Edmund Chambers's voice drifted out to them.

"Looks like Tracy's still out sick," Sylvia observed with a glance at the dusty desk. "The boss on the phone and everybody else is off somewhere. I might as well leave these on his desk, then we can go." She disappeared into the left-hand office to reemerge moments later.

"You know," she said thoughtfully, "Mike often slips next door to the office to shop and take a quick look? I know he wants to see me."

Sylvia was out the door before Anne could answer, leaving her with only the sound of Chambers's voice for company. She shrugged with a tolerant smile. After all, she was in love herself. In her situation, if different, she'd probably have strong reasons to see Rob. If Sylvia wasn't back in three minutes, she'd return to the courthouse alone.

Moving toward a visitor's chair, Anne knocked some papers off the cluttered desk. They fell to the floor, and she bent to pick them up. As she put them back, an open checkbook caught her eye. Two signed checks, evidently waiting to be enclosed in envelopes were lying there. Absently, Anne's gaze went to the signatures. "R. Edmund Chambers," they read in a hand more stylized than Anne would have expected from the unexceptional personality of the accountant.

The sound of Chambers's voice rained in sudden anger. Anne could see part of its interior, including a mirror that reflected Chambers as he came from his study.

"You'd damned well better be here to pick it up today!" he insisted to someone. "I can't hold it for you indefinitely." ~~Then he spoke as he listened, then as he spoke, surprising in both its violence and its volume, ripped from his lips.~~

"Be here," Chambers repeated, his voice dropping and somehow acquiring a menacing quality in the process. "And have the cash with you."

As he turned to slam the receiver, he raised his head, looking a full-faced reflection in the mirror. He'd removed his glasses, and his eyebrows were drawn into a furious arch. The full heat of his rage radiated from the odd, muddy eyes.

Anne's astonishment yielded to horrified recognition, then terror, as his reflected gaze met hers. There was a flash of something in his eyes that might have been alarm before a hard glint replaced it. Heart pounding, Anne spun away.

He was beside her before she could reach the door, his fingers clamped in a viselike grip around her wrist. "Not a sound," he growled as he pulled her into his office and shut the door.

"So you've finally figured it out," he said, shoving her roughly into a chair. "Too bad you didn't listen to the warnings."

Anne was speechless. She stared at him, another face, younger, narrower, superimposed itself over the one looming above her. She closed her eyes as the pieces fell into place. If the eyebrows were heavier, if his hair grew lower on the forehead and fell forward... His initials are R.C.!

"Well, you won't have to worry about it much longer, Miss Goodwin." She opened her eyes just as his hand shot out to strike her face. Anne cried out in pain and shock.

"You've made my life a living hell this past week," Chambers spat. "You've got that and a lot more coming." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief, which he began twisting into a roll.

Believing that he meant to strangle her, Anne suddenly found the strength to spring to her feet and open her mouth to scream. But his fist caught her on the temple, and dazed, she dropped to her knees. She was half-conscious of the handkerchief being forced into her mouth and dimly aware of putting up a struggle, but she was no match for him. Quickly, he tied her wrists behind her back, then bound her ankles.

He dragged her across his office and through a door into what she realized was a supply room.

Bending over her, his face was still contorted with fury. He gripped her shoulders and gave her a hard shake that snapped her head back against the edge of a shelf. She felt a sharp pain, then sank into blackness.

Chambers let her slip to the floor and stepped into his office without a backward glance. Anne's purse lay beside the chair into which he'd pushed her. Picking it up, he tossed it into the supply room. Then he locked the door and walked over to reopen his office door as it had been before.

He sat behind his desk, took several deep breaths and composed his face. Then, combing his fingers through his thinning hair in an almost-gentle gesture, he turned his attention to the papers on the desk.

Rob knew he'd be completely out of his mind before they got out of the clinic. Why was it taking so long to sew up Nora's leg? He paced the corridor outside the treatment room, growing more anxious about Anne with each step.

He stopped at the end of the corridor and looked out the window. He rubbed both hands over his face, then turned to trek back in the other direction. The door of the treatment room opened as he neared it, and the doctor stepped out.

"Mr. MacKenzie, there you are. Mrs. Perry will be ready to leave in about twenty minutes. I had to numb her leg of course, and I want her to wait till the feeling's restored before she walks."

Rob's heart sank at the thought of another delay. It was past two-thirty. Anne would already be well into that journal. He hoped it held the information she needed, and he desperately hoped that when she found it she'd take it straight to Bill. She has to be safe, he thought, and tried to believe that she would be.

Aware that the doctor was still speaking, he apologized. "I'm sorry, what were you saying?"

The physician gave him a curious look. "I asked if there'll be someone at home to help Mrs. Perry for the rest of the day. She should stay off that leg until tomorrow."

"I'll make her comfortable before I leave," Rob promised. "And her boarders should start arriving soon."

"Not good enough," came the reply. "We both know that Nora Perry will be up trying to cook a meal tonight if somebody doesn't keep her in line."

Rob knew he was right. "Look, Doc, I've got an urgent errand to run, and I'm late already. But it's possible her grandniece will be there; she often drops by to help out. In fact, I'll give her a call while I'm waiting for Nora. She can handle things till the others arrive, and I'll leave word that they'll have to fend for themselves and look after Nora till I can get back."

The doctor seemed reluctant to trust his patient's care to a teenager, but let him be persuaded. Rob hurried to phone Debbie. She was immediately concerned, and promised to be at the house by the time he arrived with Nora. As he hung up the phone he muttered, "Thank God. That's the first break we've had all afternoon."

It was nearly three when they reached the boarding house. Debbie was on hand, and Nora promised to behave. Rob left the house at a run, with Monty, as usual, at his heels.

While he was looking for a parking space, he spotted Anne's car half a block beyond the courthouse. After he'd parked, he let Monty walk with him. It was too hot to leave him inside the cab and even the open bed was sizzling from the sun beating down on the metal.

He commanded the dog to stay at the door and entered the courthouse. He wasn't surprised to find the courtyard deserted. She'd had more than enough time to finish her reading.

When he found she wasn't at the sheriff's office, and further, that the deputy hadn't had so much as a call from her, his anxiety returned tenfold. "How about a Mrs. Blanche Howard?" he asked. "Have you heard from her?"

Surprise moved across the deputy's face at the mention of the name. "Mrs. Howard? No, she hasn't called, but it's funny you should ask because the sheriff had me trying to locate her earlier today. Never did find her, though."

"Okay. Where's Bill?"

Mindful that he wasn't supposed to tell anyone about the skeleton, Jim hedged, "He had to drive out to meet a helicopter, and he hasn't checked back yet."

Too impatient to probe past the evasion, and satisfied that Jim knew nothing helpful in any case, Rob left. He checked at Tillie's, just in case Anne had decided to get in out of the heat to wait for Mrs. Howard, but she wasn't there.

Circling back to the courthouse, he left Monty outside again, and had another quick look in the courtyard. Then,

with his hands growing dimmer, he took the steps to the second floor two at a time.

"Where's Mrs. Miller on an errand," he was told in the dim light. "She shouldn't be long, though, if you'd like to wait."

Rob's head impatiently and asked, "Was anyone with her? Another young woman? Brown hair, gray eyes?" He held his hand out and just above his head. Both women assured him that Sylvia had left alone.

She must have gone with ~~the~~ the Schaeffer. He reasoned as he headed for a phone booth. He stopped inside, slipped Rob's coin into his pocket for a coin.

The man who answered told Rob that Mrs. Howard had left some time before, but that no one had been with her. He replaced the coin and stood for a moment staring blankly through the glass. It was a quarter to four. Oh, God, Anne, where are you? he asked in silent agony.

The bonds cut painfully into Anne's wrists and those at her ankles. Her mouth was dry, and itched for a drink, but Anne didn't expect any gestures of goodwill, such as a glass of water. At least he's leaving me alone, she thought gratefully.

As though Chambers had read her mind, the door opened and he walked over to her. Scowling, he pulled a penknife from his pocket and cut the bonds at her ankles. A moment later he yanked her feet and muttered, "Come on. We got to get you out of here."

He pulled her through a rear door and along a back hall to a stable exit. A long, dark car was parked there, with both doors on the driver's side standing open. There was no one in sight, although sounds of traffic and voices reached them from nearby. Chambers pushed her into the car. Then, peripherally, Anne saw motion along the alley to her right.

She turned her head, and her heart leaped as she saw a large golden retriever running after another dog. Monty, she thought joyously. For an instant she expected to see Rob materialize behind him. She forgot the gag and tried to lunge toward the dog, but Chambers's fingers tightened as he jerked her back.

Anne saw the dog pause and look at her. Then he barked and ran toward them. Chambers swore and sent her sprawling onto the back seat. The door slammed, then the one in the front closed and Anne felt the car swerve to the right out of the alley, then swerve again in the other direction.

Albert Hayes, driving his old pickup north, had to slam on his brakes at the corner of Potter Street when a fast-moving car took the turn south, cutting in front of him. A moment later a flash of tawny gold racing after the car had him sticking his head out the window. "That's Monty!" he exclaimed. For a few moments his gaze fastened on the retreating vehicle, then both car and dog were lost to view in the flow of traffic.

Albert questioned that it had actually been Rob's dog, after all. There were other retrievers in the area—and Monty was not a car chaser. "But, damn, it sure looked like him," he muttered to himself. And where the hell is Rob, anyway? he added silently.

It wasn't like Rob to go off when he was expecting someone, Albert mused, any more than it was like Monty to race through town after strange cars.

Ryan watched impatiently while Dr. Bristol took impressions of the girl's teeth.

The door behind him opened, and Ryan turned to see Rob come in. He looked harried, and only glanced at the table where a skeletal leg extended beyond the white-coated figure bending over it. His questioning gaze shifted to the

sheriff. "Your deputy told me you were here. What's that?" he added, nodding toward the door.
"Margaret Schaeffer, I think," Ryan replied. "Raymond Kincaid uncovered the bones when he was plowing his new strip of land this morning."

Rob stared for a moment, then whispered, "Kincaid... Oh, my God. Then Anne was right—she's been dead all along."

"So it would seem," Ryan confirmed. "Part of the skull was crushed with a blunt instrument, according to the medical examiner. That's the Schaeffer's dentist working on her now. We should have his conclusions in a few minutes. In a quick check of subject, he observed, 'You look like hell, Rob. What's wrong?'"

Making no effort to mask his anxiety, Rob replied, "It's Anne. She went to meet Blanche Howard, and she's vanished. Or maybe they both have. I've looked or called every place I can think of, trying to find her. I was supposed to meet them at your office by four, but your deputy hasn't heard a word. Her car's still parked downtown."

Ryan frowned, but before he could say anything, Dr. Bristol called to him. Rob walked with him to the table and stood looking at the skeleton while the dentist spoke of his findings.

"There's no question that these are Margaret Schaeffer's remains," he said. "The visual examination checks with the chart in my files, and the impressions of her teeth before her disappearance. And the impressions I just made match those I brought with me, allowing for the absence of gum tissue."

"All right," Ryan said, after a cursory examination of the casts. "I'll need that in writing, Doctor, at your earliest convenience."

"Of course," Bristol agreed. "I'll have my secretary prepare a statement immediately."

Minutes later Rob climbed into his truck to follow Ryan back to his office. He automatically scratched Monty's head