

THE READER'S DIGEST ASSOCIATION, INC.  
Pleasantville, New York



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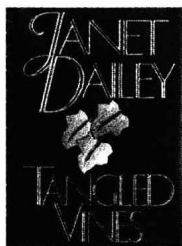
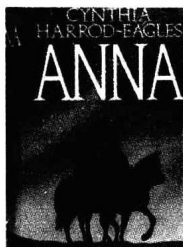
Tom Sullivan and Betty White have been treasured friends for more than twenty years. Yet they did not write the story of *The Leading Lady* together. Instead, Betty explains, "Tom wrote of *his* Dinah through the years, and I wrote of the Dinah—and the Tom—that I know. We would exchange chapters as we went along, and because we both have ridiculously busy work schedules, we would often trade pages by mail." Indeed, she adds, they touched base only now and then by phone.

Putting Dinah's story down on paper was originally Betty's idea. One afternoon, while she was enjoying a relaxing conversation with a friend, Dinah was looking on as usual. "Quite suddenly," Betty says, "I was struck by the realization that I was privileged to be part of something extraordinary that had to be documented." When she broached the subject to Tom, his response was instant enthusiasm. With that, they were off and running. Says Betty, "We had a very good time following where Dinah led."

*Tom Sullivan and Betty White, with Dinah*



READER'S DIGEST  
CONDENSED BOOKS





THE BEDQUILT  
*by Deborah Chabrian*

# READER'S DIGEST CONDENSED BOOKS

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Pleasantville, New York



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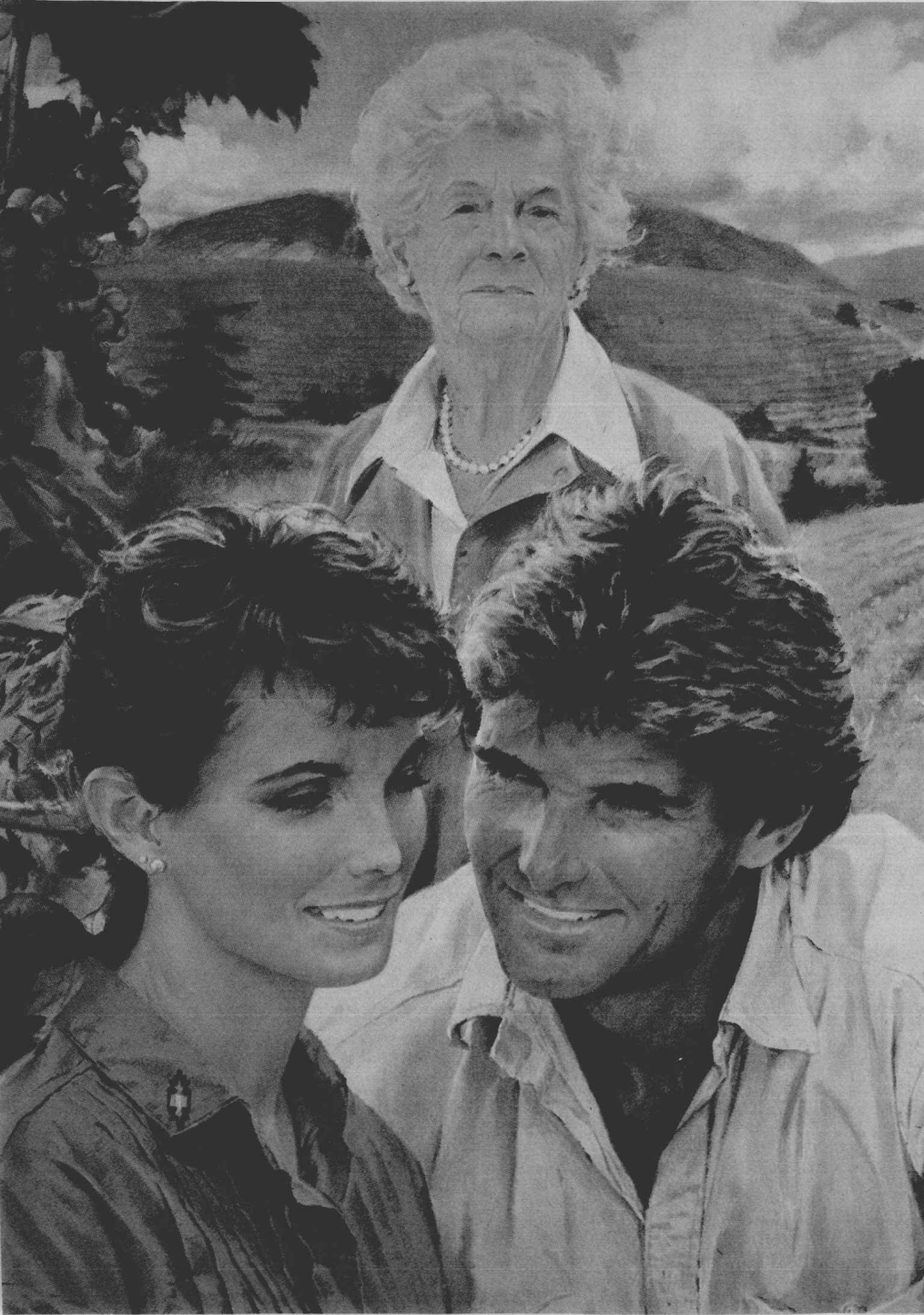
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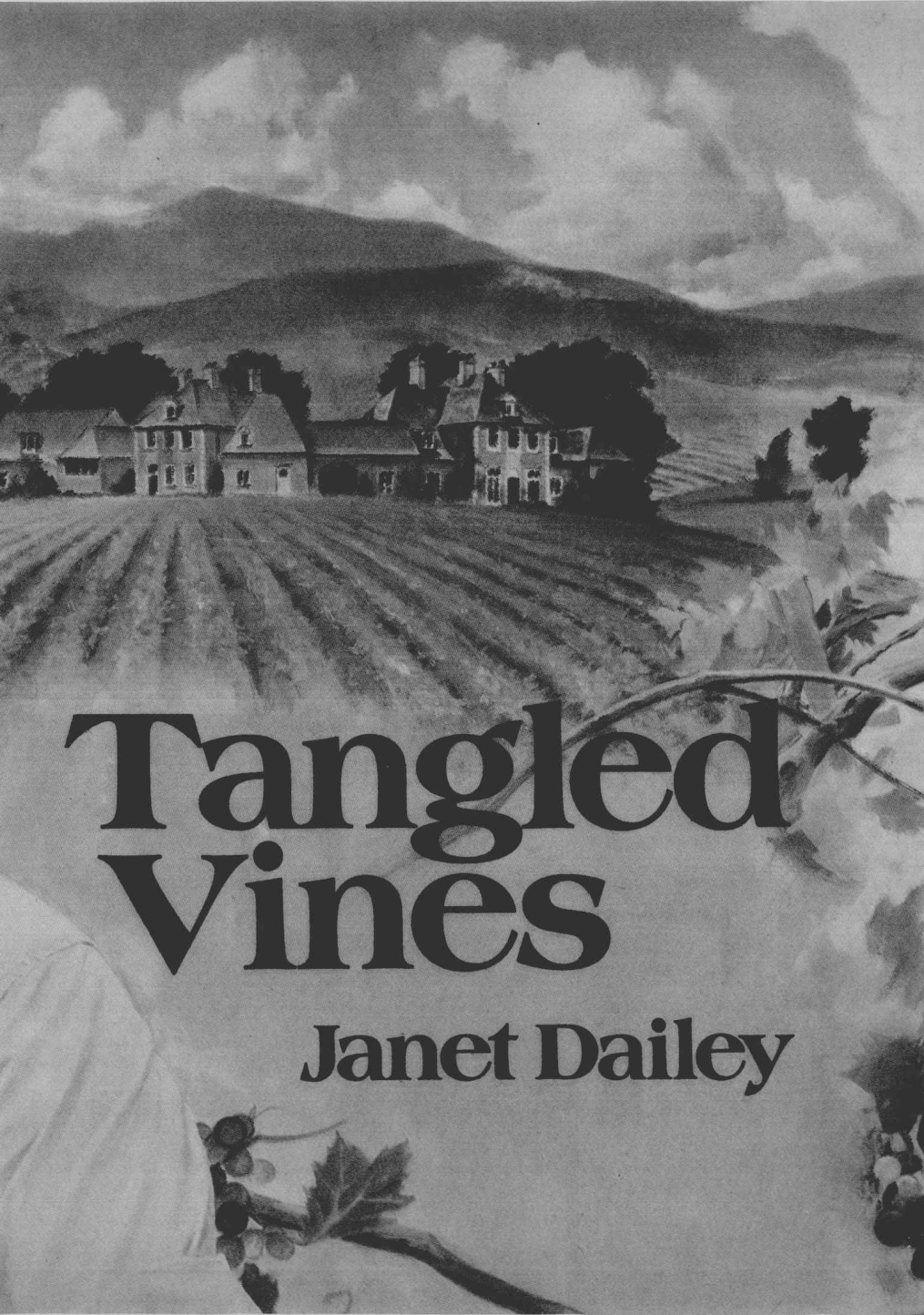
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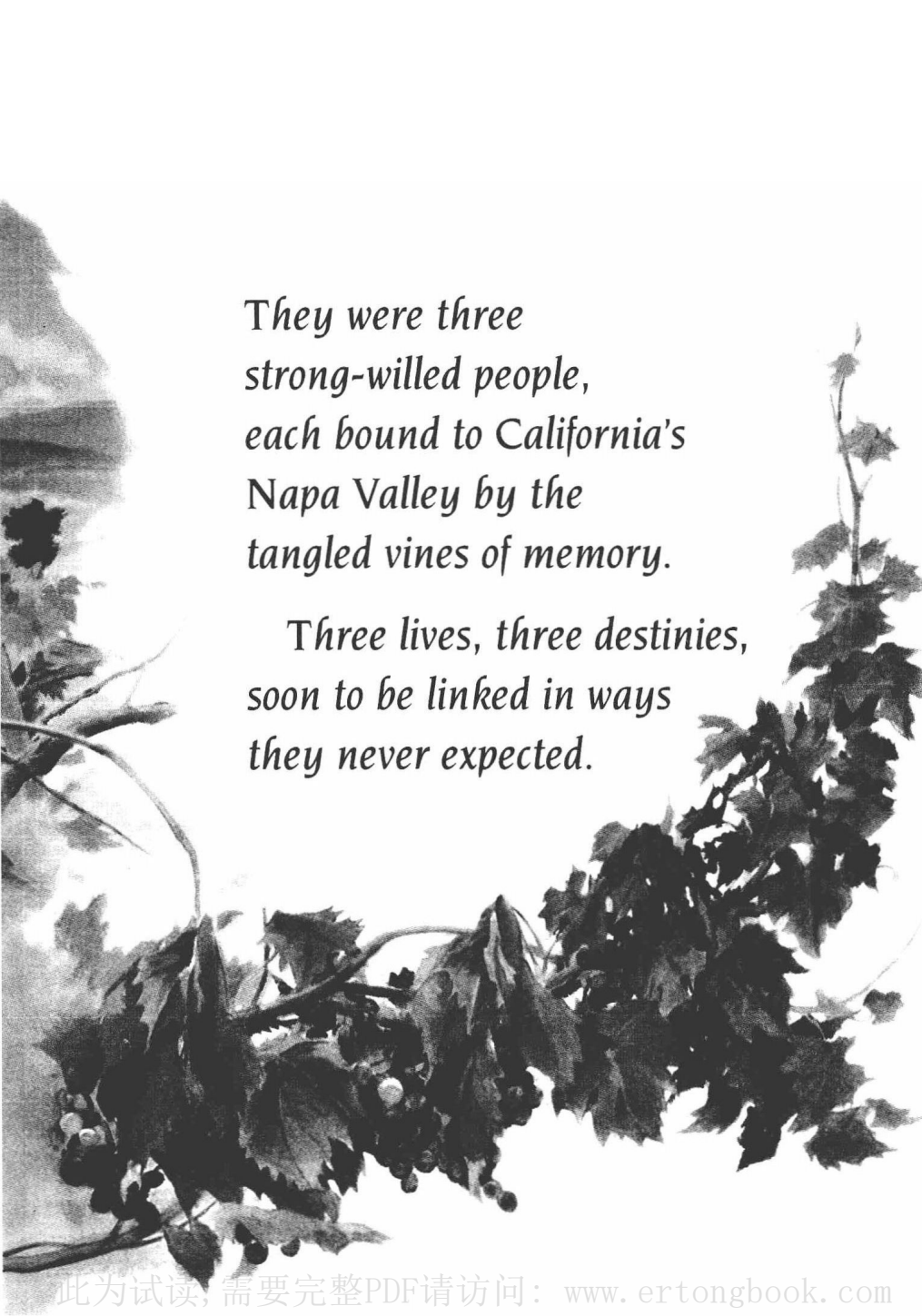






# Tangled Vines

Janet Dailey



*They were three  
strong-willed people,  
each bound to California's  
Napa Valley by the  
tangled vines of memory.*

*Three lives, three destinies,  
soon to be linked in ways  
they never expected.*

## Chapter 1

**A** TELEVISION-satellite van bearing the logo of the local NBC station in New York stood at the curb, a short distance from Playmates' Arch, in Central Park. There, along the footpath, a camera crew was busy setting up for a remote telecast of the local *Live at Five* report. Behind portable barricades a horde of onlookers watched the proceedings in the steamy heat of an August afternoon.

Old-fashioned hurdy-gurdy music from the park's carousel drifted above the drone of the van's generator as Kelly Douglas stepped out of the air-conditioned vehicle. A co-anchor on the local evening newscast at WNBC for almost two years now, she was in full makeup, her auburn hair drawn back in a French braid.

"Hey, Kelly." One of the tech crew came trotting up. "Man, you talk about hot." He wiped a sweaty cheek on the shoulder of his T-shirt. "It must be a hundred in the shade."

"At least," Kelly agreed. "Welcome to New York, nature's summertime sauna."

"You've got that right." He started to turn away, then swung back. "I meant to tell you—I loved the interview you did with that bureaucrat Blaine the other day. You really had her squirming when you pointed out all the discrepancies in her report. You shouldn't have taken pity on her, though, and backed off."

Kelly smiled and shook her head. "I learned back in Iowa not to have a battle of wits with an opponent who has run out of ammunition. Especially an opponent with powerful friends."

He chuckled and conceded, "You have a point there."

"I know I do." Kelly laughed, and set off to join the camera crew,

## *Tangled Vines*

on the footpath to the arch. As she drew close a male voice shouted from the gathering of onlookers, "Hey, Kelly, aren't you worried about coming here to Central Park?"

"Only with you," she countered quickly, and smiled, automatically scanning the crowd to locate the caller.

An older man stood apart from the others, his face turned in profile. He was dressed in a plaid shirt and a faded pair of golf-green slacks. The clothes, the cocky sneer of his lips . . .

Kelly went cold when she saw him. Images flashed: a fist swinging, pain exploding, the stench of whiskey breath, a small voice sobbing, "Don't hit me, Daddy. Don't hit me."

She stared, frozen in shock. How had he found her after all these years? She had made a new life for herself. People liked her, respected her. She couldn't let him ruin that for her. She couldn't let him hurt her again.

"Kelly, what's wrong?" a voice asked. "You're white as a ghost."

She couldn't answer. She couldn't look away from him. Then the man turned, giving her a full view of his face. It wasn't him. Relief came in waves. Finally she was able to focus on the woman in front of her, one of the producer's assistants. "It's the heat," she lied—something she did with skill. "I'll be fine."

She glanced back at the man, confirming again that it wasn't him. How could it be? He was in California. Back in Napa Valley. She was safe. She had nothing to worry about. Nothing at all.

THE vineyard baked in the heat of an August sun, its vines strung along the mountain's rugged slope in orderly rows, their roots sunk deep in the rocky soil from which they drew moisture and the distinctive taste of the earth. The land was poor, incapable of nourishing any other crop, yet from the grapes of this vineyard had come some of the finest wines in Napa Valley—some said the world.

Rutledge wine made from Rutledge grapes grown on Rutledge land.

A Jeep with the insignia of the Rutledge Estate winery painted on its doors sat at one end of the vineyard, parked on the grassy shoulder of a dirt road. Sam Rutledge slowly made his way back to it, pausing now and then among the vines to examine a cluster of ripening grapes. At thirty-six, he had lines bracketing his mouth and fanning from the corners of his eyes. He wore an old and weather-worn brown hat, tan chinos, and a blue chambray shirt with

the cuffs rolled back, exposing the corded muscles of his forearms.

As he neared the end of the row he scooped up a handful of soil, a mixture of dust and pebbles—Rutledge soil, the same as the vines. His life revolved around them. It was the way he wanted it.

Still holding the dirt in his hand, Sam lifted his head and turned to look across the narrow vineyard-strewn valley. The wild canyons and spiny ridges of the Mayacamas Mountains lay to the west, a twin to the coastal range that walled the valley on the east. The rounded peak of Mount St. Helena dominated the northern horizon, and over it all arched the blue canopy of an unclouded sky. It was a land of sparse rainfall and unrelenting sun, of cooling fogs from the Pacific and baking heat, of rock, volcanic ash, and the sediment of ancient marine life. Sam saw it as nature's crucible.

As he opened his hand and let the soil fall back to the ground, he heard a vehicle on the road. He wondered who had left the main gate open.

A green-and-white Buick LeSabre rounded the bend in the road, trailing a thick cloud of dust. Sam recognized the old car even before he saw the sign on the door panel that read REBECCA'S VINEYARD. The car and the vineyard belonged to Len Dougherty. The last time Sam saw Dougherty's land, it was a jungle of weeds and brush. He hadn't been surprised. Dougherty only masqueraded as a vintner; his true career was drinking, with brawling an occasional pastime.

Sam had no use for the man and no pity for his financial problems. It showed in his face when the Buick shuddered to a stop.

"Where is she?" Dougherty stuck his head out the window, his heavily lined face twisted in anger.

"I assume you mean Katherine," Sam said, referring to his grandmother. He didn't have to guess why Dougherty wanted to see her. Obviously he had been served with the foreclosure notice.

"You know damned well that's who I meant," the man snapped. "And I'm telling you the same as I'll tell her. You aren't taking my land from me. You don't have the right."

"Any lawyer in the county will tell you otherwise, Dougherty," Sam replied evenly as he approached his Jeep. "You borrowed money from Rutledge Estate and gave a first mortgage on your land to secure the loan. Now you've fallen behind in the payments, and we are foreclosing. It's as simple and legal as that."

"Legal thievery, you mean," Dougherty retorted, and tromped on the gas, sending bald tires spinning as the car sped away.

Sam swept off his hat and ran combing fingers through his khaki-colored hair. He had expected Dougherty to be outraged by the foreclosure notice. But in Sam's opinion the real outrage was Dougherty's neglect of the land.

The ten-acre parcel had once been part of Rutledge Estate. Then, some sixty years ago, Dougherty's father was killed in a freak accident at the winery, leaving his pregnant widow without money or a place to live. Out of a sense of duty, Katherine had given the woman a small house on the estate along with the surrounding ten acres of vineyard. As far as Sam was concerned, it was time that land was once again within the boundaries of Rutledge Estate. He pushed his hat back on and threw a glance at the sun. At this time of day Dougherty would find Katherine at the winery with old Claude.

Sam climbed into the Jeep and folded his six-foot-one-inch frame into the driver's seat. He drove off in the direction Dougherty had taken, but with no thought of rescuing his grandmother. Even at ninety Katherine Rutledge was more than capable of dealing with Len Dougherty. Or anyone else for that matter.

A GROVE of cinnamon-barked madrona trees shaded the dirt yard outside the winery of Rutledge Estate. Built over one hundred years ago, it was a massive structure of weathered brick that stood three and a half stories tall. A cupola atop the roof provided embellishment.

Katherine Rutledge walked through the doors of the main entrance, a silver-topped ebony cane touching the ground with each stride. She was a petite woman, weighing barely one hundred pounds, but she walked with shoulders perfectly squared, her posture always correct. White hair framed her face in soft waves. Her features seemed delicate, almost fragile, until one looked into her eyes. There was a kind of power in their dark blue depths, a merging of intelligence and determination.

Claude Broussard was at her side. Fifteen years younger than Katherine, he had been the cellar master at Rutledge Estate from the time Prohibition ended. French by birth, he was a stocky man with big hands, big shoulders, and an even bigger chest. Age had grayed his shock of hair, but his step, like Katherine's, remained firm, and his legendary strength was undiminished. Recently, after a full keg of wine had tumbled from its pallet on a forklift, workers

had watched in awe as Claude hoisted the thirty-gallon keg onto his shoulder and set it back on the pallet.

"A man called Ferguson came by the winery this morning," he informed Katherine. "He has purchased the vineyard planted by Cooper. He wished to sell us his grapes."

"What nonsense." Her response was immediate, her voice still carrying the lilt of her European finishing school. "Rutledge wine is made only from Rutledge grapes. If this man should call again, inform him of that."

In full agreement, Broussard nodded. "As you say, Madam."

He had always called her that, from the moment of their first meeting, in France, when he was a boy. Never Madam Rutledge. Certainly never Katherine. To him she was simply Madam, an appellation others had picked up years ago. It was not uncommon for those in the industry to refer to wines bottled under the label of Rutledge Estate as Madam's wine. In the decade following the repeal of Prohibition the title was used in jest, mocking her attempts to produce a red wine to rival the great Bordeaux from France. When her wines began to win in blind tastings against those from famed châteaux, it was spoken with respect. No small amount of the credit belonged to Claude as *maître de chai*, master of the cellar. Aware of that, he lifted his head a little higher. But his pleased look faded when an old Buick swung into the winery yard. Claude cast a worried glance at Katherine.

Distaste flickered through her expression when she saw Len Dougherty pile out of the driver's side. She smoothed all trace of it from her face as he approached.

"You can't do this." He halted before her. "You can't take my vineyard away. That land is mine."

"If you wish to eliminate my claim to the property, Mr. Dougherty, you have only to pay me the balance you owe."

"But that's more than thirty-five thousand dollars," Dougherty said. "I can't get my hands on that much money before the end of October. I need more time." The protest carried a familiar wheedling note. "It hasn't been easy for me since I lost my wife—"

"She died some twenty years ago." Katherine's voice was like cut crystal. "You have sufficiently milked her death. Do not expect to gain any more from it."

He reddened. "You are a cold and heartless old bitch. No wonder your son Gil hates you."



Katherine stiffened. "My relationship with Gilbert is not a subject I intend to discuss with you, Mr. Dougherty."

Dougherty had scored, and he knew it. "It must gripe the hell out of you that his winery is as successful as yours. Who knows, in a few years The Cloisters might even be bigger."

A Jeep pulled into the yard. Out of the corner of her eye Katherine saw her grandson Sam climb out.

"I fail to see the relevance of your remarks, Mr. Dougherty. You have been served with legal notice. Either you pay the amount owed or you forfeit your vineyard. The choice is yours."

"Damn you," he cursed bitterly. "You think you got me beat, don't you? But you'll see. Before I let you get your hands on my place, I'll burn every inch of it."

"Do that," Sam said as he joined them. "It will save us from bringing in a bulldozer to clear it."

"Go," Katherine ordered Dougherty. "I am too old to waste more time listening to you." She turned to Sam. "Take me to the house, Jonathon." Inadvertently she had called Sam by his father's name. Sam didn't bother to correct her. He was a boy of fourteen when his father died, but Katherine still slipped now and then and addressed him as Jonathon.

He helped Katherine into the Jeep. As he swung behind the wheel he heard her sigh. "Thinking about Dougherty?" Sam ventured, throwing her a glance as he turned the Jeep onto a tree-shaded drive.

"Dougherty does not concern me. He can do nothing."

The crispness of her voice made it clear the subject was closed. Her mind could shut doors like that—on things, feelings, or people. Just the way she'd shut his uncle Gilbert from her life. Sam had been away at boarding school at the time of the split. In the valley there had been a hundred versions of what happened. Any of them could be true. His father had never discussed it with him, and Katherine certainly never spoke of it. She had bought out Gilbert's interest in the family business following the breakup. Gil had used the money to buy some abandoned vineyard property not five miles from Rutledge Estate and build a monastery-style winery. He dubbed it The Cloisters, and successfully launched a wine of the same name, going into direct competition with his mother.

More than once, Sam had observed chance meetings between them. No hostility was exhibited. Katherine treated Gil as she would