Anne paid careful attention to her surroundings as they hurried along, but annoyingly, no stranger followed them today. *And after you have worked up the nerve to confront him!* It was most vexing*.* But no, there he was after all, lurking about near Meraux’s house, and the flutter of nerves resumed in her stomach. Trying to appear unaware of the eyes focused on her, Anne took Bonnie from Guy and bade them good-bye, but the prickle one gets when being stared at traveled up her spine.

“I see him now, Miss Anne,” Bill Fenton said in a low voice as he stepped up beside her. “He must have been waiting here for us. What do you want to do?”

Eyes straight ahead, Anne set a brisk pace. “Go to the market as we planned. I do wish you had been able to find out more about him.”

“I could try again today. At least go back to see if the *Senhor* Lusitain learned the fellow’s name yesterday. Or maybe if he goes home….”

“No.” Anne cut him off in mid-sentence. “Knowing his name is not going to tell us anything.” Bill grunted his agreement, although a sideways glance at his face told her he was not pleased by her insistence. But foolhardy as it may be, she felt drawn to the man in some uncomfortable way.

They stepped into the marketplace, and were instantly surrounded by the cries of the vendors and the hum of conversations carried on above the noise. The area holding the herb seller’s stall was relatively quiet, and they moved slowly in that direction. Keeping a few steps behind Bill as he shouldered his way along the aisle, Anne shifted Bonnie more comfortably into the crook of one arm, wishing she had insisted that the dog stay with Maggie. She had just decided to pass the animal to Bill when she saw the stranger leaning against a wall, staring fixedly at her. She touched Bill on the shoulder to get his attention and stepped with him to one side.

“He is just ahead. This is the perfect time, while it is not so crowded—and I still have nerve enough.”

“You do not have to do this,” Bill insisted.

Anne’s free hand fluttered up and down in denial. “I do, I do. Here, take Bonnie.” She thrust the dog at him, whirled around and marched toward her nemesis—who had disappeared.

Anne stopped abruptly and stared at the spot where he had been a moment ago. How could…? The sudden hard grip on her arm shocked her to such an extent that she allowed her captor to guide her some distance before she found her tongue. “Just what do you think you are doing?” she hissed, attempting to pull free.

“I am avoiding a public scene, Miss McKenzie, which I believe you were about to initiate. Don’t worry, your watchdog is right behind us.”

Anne glanced once at the stranger’s stern expression, looked over her shoulder to see if Bill *was* in sight, and with a meekness that both surprised and infuriated, trotted along beside him.

By the time they reached a quieter side street, the anger had won out, and Anne made another, futile, attempt to break his grip. “If you do not release me this instant, I will scream, I swear it.” She stopped, dug in her heels and glared at him.

He looked down at her, raised his eyebrows in a mocking expression she immediately detested and removed his hand from her arm. “I’m tempted to put it to the test. I don’t think you will, but since this street is not unpopulated…. Give me a few minutes of your time and I’ll bother you no more.”

“Are you all right, Miss McKenzie?” Red-faced and panting, Bill hurried up and planted himself in front of Anne. “I don’t know what your game is, Mister, but you’ve no business accosting women like that!”

The Englishman looked at them both for a moment, his mouth pulled into a thin-lipped smile, and he let out a loud, harsh breath. “No, I do not. My apologies, Miss McKenzie, but it is urgent that I speak privately with you.”

Whatever secrets the man hid behind that now bland expression, there was enough sincerity in his unusually clear hazel eyes to give Anne pause. She did not like his high-handedness in the least, or the inherent arrogance lurking under the now polite surface, but she was curious about him and his interest in the children. In fact, she strongly suspected his *only* interest was Danielle and Guy.

Anne touched Bill on the forearm. “I’m fine, Mr. Fenton. While I can hardly approve of Mr…?” She tipped her head in question.

“Blackwell.”

“…Mr. Blackwell’s manners, I have no objection to speaking with him.” Anne lifted Bonnie, who was watching the proceedings with great interest, into her arms. She raised her chin and looked pointedly at him. “Not here, however. If you will accompany us to our residence, Mr. Blackwell? You know the way.”

His mouth twitched at this sarcastic reference to his spying, but he refrained from comment and followed Anne and her companion along the street.

“Come in, sir.” Pleased that her cool, calm voice displayed no inkling of the way her heart banged heavily in her chest, Anne preceded the two men through the gate and into the courtyard. “If you will wait here, I will join you shortly.”

The thought of inviting him into the house was fleeting. He was not a *guest,* but a man who had *spied* on them! Besides, the rooms were too small and he was too big. *Not* *burly big, but tall and muscular for all his whip-chord thin build. He is nothing like the Major, Anne. You must not allow him to intimidate you.*