Chapter One

The quarter moon peeked between the cloud filled sky as Phyllis Gray navigated her Datsun down the narrow, winding mountain road. Her headlights illuminated the approaching hairpin turn as she prepared to brake. She glanced to the left over the edge of the road at the long fall below and then returned her attention back to the upcoming turn. Just as her foot moved towards the brake, her headlights went out. The road ahead disappeared as the darkness lunged at her. Her foot slammed down on the brake pedal, but the pedal refused to budge. Her scream ripped through the quiet wilderness as her car hurtled forward in the darkness through the guardrail and off the edge of the cliff. It slowly began flipping end over end...

The alarm was ringing, jarring Phyllis Gray from her nightmare back to reality. It had seemed so real, the failing lights, the fall over the edge of the mountain... Dreams of this sort were becoming a habit with her. She was soaked in sweat, the sheets from the double bed wrapped around her. Damn, she thought, it had seemed so real. Groggily walking towards the bathroom, she wiped the sweat from her face onto the sleeve of her nightgown. Only a dream, she said to herself, only a dream.

She'd been having this dream or one similar to it for the past few months. If it kept up, she'd mention it to her husband. She might as well. With a Ph.D. in Psychology, it was right up his alley. She had even asked her husband to check over her car, claiming the brakes had felt spongy. Actually, she had thought the dreams might be a premonition of some sort. No harm in having him check her car over. Oh well, she thought, maybe I'll mention the dream to him tonight over supper.

It's 10:30, Wednesday morning, she thought. I'd better get a move on. Today's my day for some illicit fun.

Phyllis showered, washing away the vestiges of her nightmare as she did so. She dressed hurriedly, putting on a black bra, garter belt with hose, short, pink skirt with matching blouse and white pumps. Intentionally, she wore no panties. Where was James, she wondered? She couldn't remember if her husband had to teach an early class this morning or not. After meticulously applying her makeup, she grabbed her purse and walked out the kitchen door into the two-car garage. James' car, she noticed, was gone.

She raised the garage door and looked across her front yard towards the mountains. It was a lovely summer morning, punctuated by the sound of birds and the green and darker shades of the mountains on all sides of her. The dew sparkled as the sunlight began to push away the shade from the front of her home. Just like a picture postcard, she thought. I've got to paint the mountains from our back yard, maybe once the leaves start turning. Phyllis' oil paintings had been selling fairly well in town. Marrying Dr. Gray had given her the time to turn a hobby into a fairly lucrative endeavor.

The temperature in Scanlon, Tennessee was in the 70s. The air in the mountains smelled clean and cool and the sky was a bright azure. It looked like it would be a lovely day for a drive through the mountains.

As the warming sun began to beam through the treetops over the peak of Paris Mountain, she looked at her watch. Almost 11:30. Damn, she thought, I'd better hustle or I'll be late. She pondered a moment and then lowered the windows her 1983 280z Datsun. Plenty warm enough, she thought.

Although barely four months pregnant, she carefully lowered herself into the sleek, silver car and snugly fastened her safety belt, weighing barely one hundred pounds, you could hardly tell she was pregnant. But she thought that she couldn't be too careful, especially when she was carrying another life inside her.

As she backed out of the garage, she glanced at her home. Evenly spaced four-foot hedges graced the front of the single-story, white, three-bedroom ranch house. The house was in the $80 thousand bracket, with all the conveniences she wanted, and the lush, green lawn looked as if it had been manicured. Definitely a beautiful day, she thought. Almost too nice to plan on spending it in bed, she giggled to herself.

Her husband, Dr. James Gray, professor of Psychology at Granville University, pulled his car up the driveway and parked next to Phyllis' Datsun. He walked over to her car and leaned into her window. "Honey, I tried to find what was causing that brake problem you mentioned. I think it's just a little low on brake fluid. I'll pick up some this afternoon when I go into Granville and add it tonight. If that doesn't fix it, let me know and I'll check it out further."

Dr. Gray loved tinkering with cars and anything else that wouldn't work right, be it electronic or mechanical. He prided himself on his repair ability, and the fact that he did his own maintenance work on both cars. Although he wouldn't admit it, he welcomed the minor breakdowns in appliances and cars, so he could pit his talents against them. More often than not he won. He drove a classic, baby blue 64 Mustang that was his pride and joy. Over the past year and a half he had slowly been restoring the interior, and planned to personally rebuild the motor over the upcoming Christmas break.

"Is it going to be okay to drive it like it is?" Phyllis asked. Her knowledge of cars was limited to knowing where to add gas and open the hood. For anything else she relied on her husband or service station attendants for assistance. She had learned that with a smile and an appearance of helplessness people would jump to help her.

"Sure, just so long as you aren't planning on driving cross-country or entering the Indy 500" he joked. James knew Phyllis had a penchant for driving fast through the mountains, testing her car and its limits against the mountain turns.

"Nope, just going shopping and maybe catch a movie in Tuborg."

"Okay. Drive carefully, Phyllis. I love you," he said.

"Bye," she said. "I love you, too." If he only knew, she thought guiltily. I hope that everything works out. I'm really scared. She wondered if her dreams had any relation to what she was planning to do.

She shifted into first gear and let out the clutch so that a small squeal of rubber echoed on the quiet street. Phyllis accelerated away from the house, shifted into second and began driving towards the mountain parkway that would lead through the nearby college town of Granville to

Tuborg. She waved at her next-door neighbor, Julia Hubbard, who was pruning her rose bushes. Julia waved back and Phyllis returned her attention to the road. Glancing at the other houses in the subdivision, she thought that if theirs wasn't the best-looking house on the block, it was close to it.

It was a pleasant drive with the green of the mountains and trees on the right and the long, winding view to the ground below on the left. It would have been breathtaking to another, but her mind was only partially enjoying the scenery, while her main concentration was about the pleasures awaiting her that afternoon.

Damn brakes do feel weak. Maybe I ought to stop at the Exxon before I start heading down the mountain. No... Then I'd be late and Don would worry. Ostensibly, she was to go shopping in Tuborg, a small city about five miles past Granville, with a friend who would meet her at the Gable restaurant. Actually, she would be meeting her lover of the past six months at the Avion restaurant.

Is that all it's been? Only six months? As she began to think back, her mind focused on the past, and how she and Don had first met...

She had met Don Blake while on a shopping excursion. Phyllis had planned to meet her friend, Jane Cummings, at the Gable, but Jane had cancelled at the last moment. Impulsively, Phyllis decided to go ahead by herself. She went to the Gable for lunch, planning to shop some afterwards and perhaps take in a movie.

Phyllis had decided to have a quick drink before lunch. Not really a drinker, she enjoyed an occasional Mai Tai. As she sipped her drink at the bar, she had appraised herself. She was in her late twenties, about five-two, 96 pounds. Her hair was dishwater blond, straight and long, and worn down her back. She was thin, but well-built for her size, which she kept that way by tennis and swimming. She was lean but firm in her breasts and hips and didn't have to diet to keep herself that way. She was dressed in yellow, well-fitting slacks which showed off her figure and wore a short sleeve, beige blouse and low heels.

She had been seated for a few minutes at the restaurant bar when she noticed a man sit on her right, two stools away. He glanced in her direction and smiled.

"Hi. Couldn't your friend make it today?" He asked. Phyllis looked questionably at the man. She had certainly not come to the bar to get picked up.

"How do you know I usually come here with a friend?" Phyllis asked hesitantly. Phyllis crossed her legs and looked at him demurely.

"Because I frequently eat lunch here myself and I've seen the two of you come here on Wednesdays. To be honest, I've been hoping that one day you'd come by yourself so I could meet you. My name is Don Blake, and I hope you don't think I'm too impetuous. I run a small dry-cleaning business here in Tuborg."

Don Blake was in his early thirties, tanned, with dark brown hair. He was athletic looking, with a quick grin and a friendly manner. Don had an infectious laugh and an open way of looking directly at you while he talked to you. He was dressed in tan gabardine slacks with a form-fitting, dark brown banlon open at the neck, exposing a hairy chest. At five-ten, he carried his 160 pounds well. He was lean but muscular without appearing bulky.

"You're rather sure of yourself, aren't you?" She asked. "Even from where you're sitting you can tell by my ring that I'm married."

Don turned to the left so that he was facing her, and put his right arm up on the bar. Phyllis faced a little more towards him as he did so, keeping her legs crossed.

"I'm not trying to pick you up, and I hope I'm not offending you by talking to you. It's just that we're both here alone and want to have lunch. Why not have it together?"

It had started that way, six months ago, in the early spring. Their conversation, which at first was limited, soon became animated. They discovered they shared several common interests including the same authors and tennis. Although Don couldn't paint, he had an awareness of fine paintings. He expressed an avid interest in her work.

She had consented to the meal together. They sat at a small corner booth near a fountain. He had ordered another drink for her and it appeared in front of her before she noticed that he'd ordered it. She sipped her drink slowly, trying to understand his motive. She had no intention of being picked up and jumping into bed with him. Over roast duck, which he insisted on ordering and paying for, she found herself enjoying his company. He was very likable, and she found that she was beginning to wonder if he would try to pick her up after the meal. Not likely, she thought. I made it very clear that I'm married.

Perhaps it was the relaxing effect of the second drink that caused her to accept the third. It seemed natural for him to order for her. In any case, she didn't object when it arrived. Even so, she decided to sip it, because she was feeling the effects of the first two. With the remains of the meal cleared away, and the last sips of their drinks in their hands, Phyllis found herself wishing that the lunch wasn't over.

"I guess that now I'm supposed to ask you if you want to look at my etchings, except that I don't have any," Don had said. "Seriously though, I really enjoyed myself, and I honestly would like to see you again if you'd permit me."

Phyllis was almost sorry that he hadn't asked her to walk out with him. Although unsure as to how she would have rebuffed him, she felt sure she would have turned him down. But just to meet again for lunch. There was no danger in that, she thought. She agreed to meet him for lunch next week.

The following Wednesday, it was she who told Jane that she had other plans as she left to drive into Tuborg. Phyllis had found herself looking forward to meeting Don for lunch more than she cared to admit. She found herself not wanting to share Don with Jane, even though it was to be an innocent encounter.

She surprised herself, when after lunch she asked Don if he lived nearby. She had never run around on her husband, although she was certainly no prude and had not been a virgin when they married. But she had never initiated an encounter such as this before.

It was a cool afternoon in May when they had walked into his apartment. But their affair, as it had quickly become, was anything but cool. Although Don was younger and certainly not as well-educated as her husband, he had demonstrated knowledge of sex to her that had been anything but limited. She had learned to experience, enjoy and participate hungrily in sex, in a way she had never before done with any man.

Don had lived nearby the restaurant, and so it had become a habit. An intimate lunch at the Avion, a brief shopping excursion, to justify her visits to Tuborg and then to Don's apartment for a satisfying, randy afternoon of sex.

There had been only one thing she had not counted on, and that had been her getting pregnant. Phyllis welcomed the pregnancy because she had always wanted children. It's just that she had funny twinges inside because she and James had been unsuccessful in their attempts in three years of marriage to get her pregnant. She was sure it was James' baby, but still that doubt remained. What was really odd was that James hadn't seemed to be overjoyed about the baby.

She remembered that she had wanted to make the occasion special. She had prepared a luscious supper of meat loaf, with dumplings and brown gravy, which was James' favorite. It had been a Saturday night almost two months ago in July that she told him she was expecting.

They had been drinking wine in front of the fireplace. James had praised her about the excellent supper, and was sipping red wine in his favorite armchair.

"Well, tell me, Phyllis," he teased. "What is it? I didn't look in the garage and haven't checked the mail but I know that you're buttering me up for something. Did you rearrange the front end of the Datsun or did you charge a very expensive present for yourself?" He smiled at her, knowingly, his love for her evident in his eyes.

She almost felt guilty instead of brimming with happiness. Why did she feel this way? Of course it was James' baby. She refused to allow the thought of Don to ruin what should be a very special time for the two of them. Phyllis walked over to James' chair, sat on the hassock facing him with her back to the fireplace, and took his hands in hers.

"James," she began slowly, "I, well... We... We're going to have a baby. I'm so happy," she beamed. "After all those years of trying, I'm finally pregnant."

A furrow creased James' brow and he seemed to jump. His eyes became un-focused and he shifted his gaze quickly past Phyllis towards the setting sun which was framed in the glass double doors of their patio. It was quiet for a few moments.

"I... I... don't know what to say," he said in a choked voice. It was obvious that he was overcome with emotion and would be unable to talk until he regained his composure.

"How long have you known?" He asked slowly, continuing to stare at the crimson sunset.

She had tears of joy in her eyes as she gazed at him. Clutching his hands tighter she pressed them to her stomach. "We'd been trying so long that I didn't even think about it when I missed my period last month. I figured I must have just skipped it. But when I missed again this month I decided to have Doctor Logan test me. When the results came back positive and the nurse called me I was just ecstatic. I wanted to run into your class, jump into your arms in front of all your students and tell you. But I wanted it to be special, so I decided to wait until tonight. Aren't you excited? Just think. There's life inside my tummy right now that one day will be our child."

Upon hearing the last few words, James seemed to wake from his stupor. "Of course I can see how overjoyed you are. It's just that I'm stunned after us trying for so long," he said quietly. "This has affected me so much I hardly know what to say."

Even though he didn't seem as happy as she thought he would be he had treated her especially tender since that night. She attributed his current lack of exuberance and cooling off in his ardor to worries about his potential selection as head of the Psychology Department. She was sure that he would get more excited about becoming a father as the baby's birth neared.

Phyllis could hardly believe that Don had appeared more excited about her pregnancy than her husband had been. Although he didn't say so in so many words, it was obvious that Don thought that it was his baby.

When Phyllis had mentioned her pregnancy to Don, his eyes glistened, and he had positively glowed. “How pregnant are you?” He asked. “I mean, how many months?”

“About two months, I think. It’ll be several more months before I begin to show,” she said.

“Whose is it? Am I the father, or is James?”

“I don’t even want to think about that,” she said uneasily. “So long as James thinks it’s ours there’s no problem. I certainly don’t plan on telling him that there’s a possibility that he’s not the father.” God, she thought, next thing he will want to hand out cigars once I deliver.

Phyllis’ thoughts snapped back to the present as she headed into a sharp turn. The brake pedal was noticeably closer to the floor. She tested the brakes noticing that every time she stepped on the pedal, they sank lower.

Oh God, she thought, this isn’t supposed to happen. Don’t let my brakes fail me here, Lord. Panic set in as she threw the gear shift from third into second, trying to slow down. The rear tires squealed as they protested the attempt to decelerate. She was still approaching the turn too fast. She glanced left down the edge of the mountain, as sweat beaded on her forehead. At least a mile straight down if it’s a foot, she thought. As the S turn to the right approached, her hands tightened on the steering wheel and she unconsciously arched her body, tensing as she approached the curve. Still too fast she mumbled, trying to keep herself in control.

She tried shifting into first gear. The car shot forward as the incline accelerated it faster. The car was racing too fast to allow the gear to be shifted into first. She jerked back on the emergency brake lever. The handle pulled back easily, almost too easily. It slowed the car some, but didn’t grab enough to lock the rear wheels. “What the hell!” she yelled to herself. She pulled harder on the handle, but it was at its farthest limit already and wouldn’t pull back anymore.

Total panic set in. She had perhaps three seconds before she would begin entering the sharp turn. She knew inwardly that she’d go over the edge if she couldn’t stop or slow down on this curve. She slammed the gear shift back into second, the tires momentarily grabbing so hard she nearly lost control as she entered the turn.