

CHAPTER TWO



Amy stared at the snow, somehow alien. Different from snow in Virginia—Virginia where all her friends were. Maddy would help her, but Maddy was in Williamsburg where the snow was softer. No one here would help her. No one here knew she wasn't eighteen.

A few weeks ago, with the red and yellow leaves still on the trees in Virginia, her grandmother shouted, "Santa Fe! That's where your tramp of a mother met that—that *Indian!*"

Amy had stepped back, repelled by the hatred in her grandmother's voice. Prejudice? From a woman who claimed to be fair-minded? Amy knew then Grandmother Adams wouldn't tell her anything more about her father. Shaken, Amy packed a bag and climbed on a bus headed to New Mexico. She hadn't run away—just left the grandmother who had lied to her for as long as she could remember.

She needed someone she could trust to help her. Becky Delgado. Why hadn't she thought of Becky sooner? She picked up the phone in her lap, punched in half the numbers, and stopped. Becky wasn't at the gallery, and Amy didn't know her

home number. It was no good. Becky led her right back to the sheriff.

Who else?

She gulped air, held it, and exhaled slowly, desperate to halt the panic welling up inside her. Amy felt hope seeping away when another name popped into her mind. *Diego*.

Mahu had come to Santa Fe to show a friend something old and valuable he'd found, his friend Diego. Amy had also met someone named Diego, a college student a couple of years older than she was. Could he be Mahu's friend? Probably too much to hope for. Santa Fe was a big place. But any straw to grasp was better than sitting here paralyzed.

Amy turned on the phone and scrolled. She found the name in the contact list—*Diego*. She pressed the number, held her breath, and waited. One ring, two, three—

“Mahu? Sorry I missed you earlier, but hey, bro, it's 4:30 in the a.m.”

She thought the sleepy voice belonged to the guy she'd met, not too deep and slightly scratchy. Not positive, but sure enough to try. She blurted, “It's not Mahu. It's Amy. Amy Adams. You might not remember me. I took one of your tours at the museum.” *Too much information.*

“I remember you. Girl with long black hair. Looking at the pottery, trying to find your family or something.” He yawned. “But why are you on Mahu's phone and why are you calling me at 4:30 in the morning?”

“I'm Mahu's twin sister. I need help. Mahu and I both need help!”

“Mahu is your brother?” He sounded confused, but the fuzziness of sleep was gone from his voice.

“It's complicated.” Not far from where she sat, a siren wailed. “I'll explain later! Right now I need a ride. Can you come get me?” *Please—Please, believe me!*

“Where are you?”

KOKOPELLI'S SONG

Relief washed over her, relief so strong the tears she hadn't had time to cry filled her throat, threatened to choke her so she couldn't answer.

The siren, closer this time, wailed again. She had to move. The only place she could think of was the interstate. "The rest area on I-25. The one on the south edge of town."

"Amy, what's happened? It's more than a breakdown, isn't it? Is Mahu okay?"

"He isn't okay. He's not dead, but he's hurt. If you want to help him, help me. Please! I need clothes." She was shivering again, shivering so hard she could barely hold the phone. "Something warm—and shoes. I need shoes."

A long pause, so long Amy was afraid he'd changed his mind. Finally, like he was thinking aloud, he said, "I guess my mother has some extra things. She's out of town, but she won't care."

"How long?"

"In this snow? Thirty minutes."

An eternity. "I'm in Mahu's pickup."

This time, he didn't ask what was going on. Just disconnected.

Amy closed the phone, dropped it on the seat beside her. She put the pickup in gear, pulled on the headlights. The wipers struggled to shove the heavy wet snow that covered the windshield to the side. One pass, two. On the third pass, she could see enough to risk driving.

The tires slipped as she backed out of the parking space, but help was on the way. And she was moving. She was about to pull into the street when a fire truck, siren blaring, lumbered past, headed for a fire stubborn enough to blaze in snow.

Relief flooded through Amy, making her light-headed. Inhaling deeply, she fought the pickup out of the parking lot and headed toward the interstate. When she was finally up the ramp and following the single cleared lane, Diego's face came into her

mind—skin the color any blue-eyed blond beach bum would kill for, intelligent black eyes framed by wire-rimmed glasses, and a mass of curly black hair.

She'd met him at the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, MIAC, the second week after she arrived in Santa Fe. She visited several times, searching for an exhibit that might give her a clue, if not to her family, at least to her tribe.

After Diego's tour they sat on a stone wall in the shadow of a bronze colossus depicting a Native dancer and traded bits and pieces of their stories. The son of the director, he worked as a part-time tour guide showing exhibits of thousand-year-old pottery, contemporary weavings, and duplicates of sand paintings.

She hadn't known about Mahu then, but Diego sounded surprised when she told him Becky Delgado had given her a job.

'Becky's loaded,' he'd said, 'but she's not exactly quick to offer a helping hand. She must like you.'

A semi rumbled off the highway a few hundred yards ahead of Mahu's pickup, spraying snowy slush on the windshield and jerking Amy back into the present. The truck pulled into the rest area. She'd been concentrating on Diego, not on where she was.

Steering carefully to keep from sliding on the icy exit, Amy followed the semi. Except for the two of them, the rest area sat deserted. The big truck turned toward the oversized-vehicles lot, and she parked as far from it as she could, picking a space away from the two streetlights.

Turning off the motor, she took a deep breath and tried to relax. Out on the highway, a patrol car moved toward the rest area. Panic gripped her. She couldn't wait for Diego in Mahu's pickup. Even if the sheriff hadn't traced the plates yet, a teenager in a blood-soaked sleep shirt would attract attention. Taking the cell phone, she opened the door and slid out.

Freezing air pricked her skin, made her want to run, but that would attract attention. Ice and snow glazed the walkway.

Watching where she put her feet, she made it up the slight incline without falling. As the patrol car's headlights swung into the parking lot, Amy ducked into the women's restroom.

The fluorescent lights made her blink, but a quick check reassured her she was alone. She moved quickly to the farthest stall and perched on the old-fashioned toilet's closed lid with her knees pulled up under her chin.

The outside door squeaked. "Anybody in here?" A man's voice with the hint of a Spanish accent echoed in the empty restroom.

Amy held her breath. *No one you want!*

"Sheriff. Coming in."

The memory came suddenly, so clear it seemed to be happening right then. She was five. She was Kaya, and she and Mahu were sitting in her father's lap. Outside the adobe house, they looked up at tall white clouds suspended in an electric-blue sky. Taáta said, 'Mama and Baby are with the Cloud People.'

Kaya shook her head. 'No! I want Mama to come home.'

'She can't come,' Taáta murmured, 'but she can see us. She still loves us very much.'

'I want her!' Kaya said.

'Me too,' Mahu whispered.

A white car with red and blue flashing lights left the highway and turned onto the dirt road. It headed toward them. They watched for a little while. Taáta stiffened and stood the twins on their feet. As he got up, he said, 'Go inside, children.'

'Why?' Kaya demanded. Mahu took her hand and pulled.

Taáta, his voice harsh, said, 'Into the house. Now!'

Grandmother Iso came to watch from the doorway. Kaya and Mahu stood behind her, one on each side, clinging to her long soft skirt. The car stopped in front of their house. An Anglo woman with red hair like Mama's got out of one side. A man dressed in a brown uniform got out of the other.

In the restroom, two stall doors banged. The patrolman was

checking stalls. His footfalls came closer. He pushed the door to her stall, but she'd locked it. The flimsy lock held. Through the tiny crack at the door's edge, Amy watched him bend over and check for feet.

Please! Please, she prayed. *Don't let him find me. All I need is five days.*

"Out of order," he muttered and moved away. "Always at least one."

Amy allowed herself a shallow breath, but she didn't move until the outside door squeaked open and swung closed. Putting her bare feet on the floor, she took a deep breath, followed by two more. Her heart raced. Dots danced in front of her eyes. She couldn't pass out. Leaning over, she put her head between her knees and waited.

Through the wall, she heard two voices in the men's restroom. Suddenly, she was afraid the truck driver had seen her. After another minute, the voices stopped. A toilet flushed. The outside door opened and shut. Twice. Then silence. Wonderful, safe silence.

She heard an engine start and wheels crunch on the snow—the patrol car leaving. The semi still rumbled in the background, idling the way trucks idle, sometimes for hours, while drivers sleep. She waited for what seemed like a long time, listening with the extra intensity she'd heard a blind person develops. Nothing.

Amy stood and left the stall. She was headed for the door to risk a peek out when the cell phone rang. Not music or bells, a buzz that ripped the silence she had begun to trust, announced her presence to the truck-driver or anyone who might have crept on foot into the rest area.

Diego—Please don't tell let him have changed your mind! Holding her breath, she put the phone to her ear.

"His phone *was* in the pickup. I thought it might be."

Not Diego's voice. Not a voice she recognized. A muffled

voice, a man's voice. "A very organized person, our Mahu. Are you an organized person, Amy Adams?"

Shock, as much as the need to keep silent, made her mute. Besides Diego, only one person on the planet could know she'd taken Mahu's pickup.

Mahu's attacker, the man who had chased her to the pickup and grabbed the door handle. How did he know her name? She trembled. Not her arms and legs, but her insides.

"I need the rest of the lienzo, Amy. You shouldn't have taken it."

Lienzo? "I don't know what you're talking about," she whispered.

"Don't bother lying to me, Amy. It tore when I tried to take it from him, and you have the other piece. You ran away, but I'll find you. I found Mahu, didn't I? Now, what do you say we make a little plan?"

Fighting the urge to throw up, Amy disconnected and turned off the phone. Every nerve screamed at her to run, but she forced herself to stay in the restroom. He couldn't know where she was, couldn't trace the cell phone without specialized equipment. And Diego was coming, would be there soon.

She waited, forcing herself to breathe. Calm in: one ... two ... three ... Fear out: one ... two ... When at last she could breathe normally, she forced herself to think. Mahu's attacker was after the scrap of cloth, the lienzo behind the seat of his pickup.

What was it and why was it worth stealing? An image of the arrow in Mahu's chest flashed her mind. *Was the lienzo worth killing for?*

A thousand or maybe only a hundred breaths later, she heard tires crunch on the snow. Her pursuer, the patrolman again, an unsuspecting tourist, Diego. One chance in four, but she had to know. She pushed the outside door open carefully so it didn't squeak and looked out.

The semi, its motor still idling, sat shrouded in snow. Mahu's pickup was where she had left it, covered with snow so that only the corner of the orange abandoned vehicle sticker the patrolman had placed on the windshield showed. A snow-dusted Jeep had pulled in beside the pickup.

The chances were down to one in three—her pursuer, a tourist, or Diego. The driver's door opened. Light glinted briefly off a pair of glasses. Suddenly the odds were good enough that Amy ran down the sidewalk, away from the confusion and fear of the last hour, toward help.

Diego stared at her and took a step back.

With a sick feeling she pictured what he saw—a barefoot girl in a darkly stained sleep shirt that hung to her knees. Long dark hair so matted and tangled it hid her face, both hands clenched into fists.

He looked confused. "Amy? Where's Mahu?"

She stopped just short of him, terrified he might turn away and leave her there. "He's hurt." She held out her hands with the phone to reassure him she wasn't armed. "I called 9-1-1."

"I thought he'd be with you."

"He was at the gallery." Her entire body trembled. "I guess he's at the hospital by now."

"You guess?" His tone sounded skeptical. Angry, even. "You didn't stay with him?"

"I couldn't! You don't understand." The tears she'd been holding back escaped, ran down her cheeks, mixed with snow, froze on her skin, stuck to her eyelashes. "I tried to help him. But the guy came after me. He's still after me!"

"The message on my cell—" Diego yanked open the passenger's door and half-helped, half-shoved her into the Jeep.

The dots returned. Amy put her head between her knees as Diego shut the door. Then he got in the other side and slammed his door. The motor started. Warm air rushed onto Amy's frozen feet. Ignoring the wave of dizziness that gripped her, she raised

KOKOPELLI'S SONG

her head, dropped the cell phone, held out her hands to the heat. "The cloth." Her voice shook. "It's in Mahu's pickup, behind the seat."

"You have the lienzo?"

"You know what it is?"

"Yep. I know." Diego was already opening his door, letting in the cold that fought against the heater's welcome blast.

He returned in a heartbeat. Silent and grim, he handed her the scrap of cloth and swung the Jeep around to head for the interstate.

In the east, the sky lightened, not yet with sunrise but with predawn gray that pushed the snowflakes farther apart. Two exits later, Diego pulled into the parking lot of an all-night café. He turned off the motor but left the heater running. "Tell me what happened."

She couldn't tell him because she didn't know, not really. "I was asleep. Mahu was downstairs in the gallery."

Amy put her hands to her temples and pressed, trying to drive the image of Mahu curled in his own blood out of her head. "He fell and hit his head on a tall pottery vase. Someone stabbed him with an arrow. It wasn't from the gallery. I'm sure of it."

Diego frowned. "This is my fault."