

Chapter One

The Reunion

Santa Fe, New Mexico, Monday afternoon, 6 August 1990

Charles Slater stopped running when he reached the Sandia Hotel. He wiped sweat from his brow and scanned the street behind him for any sign of the two men who'd been following him. When he saw only tourists strolling and window shopping through downtown Santa Fe, he stepped into the hotel lobby. A huge banner above the reception area bade welcome to New Mexico's archaeologists. Late for the presentation he wanted to attend, he hurried to the meeting rooms. A sign on the door to the Santa Clara Room announced a lecture about the Pueblo Indian Revolts. Slater entered.

Even though the burnt-orange carpet muffled his steps to the nearest aisle chair, a few people in the back row turned. He sized up the room—seven rows of less than ten chairs each, no middle aisle, two rear exits. Not good, unless there was another way out. He relaxed a little when he spotted an exit sign above a small side door in front.

The lecturer, his gray hair and thick lenses barely protruding above the lectern, read from prepared notes in a stultifying monotone to an audience clearly fighting boredom. Slater was anything but bored. He kept glancing at the rear exits. Just when he thought he'd lost his pursuers, a stocky man entered through the left rear door and lingered there. Slater checked the other side. His stomach knotted at the sight of a bald-headed man in jeans guarding the right rear door.

He'd seen the two of them earlier at the Santa Fe Plaza among the throng of tourists perusing the wares of the Indian jewelry vendors. They'd crossed his path several times, and when they reappeared on a side street off the Plaza, he realized they were following him. Their presence at both rear exits dispelled any notion of happenstance. Who were these guys and what did they know?

Slater resisted the impulse to make a dash for the front exit forty feet away. To curtail rising panic, he took a deep breath, then another. He wiped perspiration off his forehead and rose. He approached the podium. Engrossed in reading from his notes, the professor kept up his monotone until the audience's murmur caught his attention. When he looked up, Slater raised his hand.

The professor waved him off. "I'll take questions at the end, please."

Ten feet to the unguarded exit. Slater ran to the door, pressed on the steel bar and pushed. In his peripheral vision he caught a commotion at the rear of the room. He charged through the doorway and crashed into the far wall in the hallway. The door slammed shut with a clang that reverberated throughout the hall. Flakes of plaster rained down on him. He stumbled to his feet and bumped into a table and chairs propped along the wall. Straining, he pushed the heavy table in front of the door, grabbed a chair and wedged it between the table and the opposite wall. Just then the door sprang open a crack, smashing into the barricade.

Slater heard two angry male voices. He had a minute at most before his pursuers came around through the rear exits. He fled down the hall, which spilled into the lobby bar. Its wide-open space offered no hiding place. He sprinted across the lobby, past a row of telephones and the hotel restaurant, toward a door at the far end of another hallway. That had to be an exit. He depressed the handle. Nothing happened. He threw his shoulder against the steel door. It didn't budge.

He couldn't risk returning to the lobby. The restaurant was his only hope. A few quick steps carried him to a glass door, inscribed *Chez Paul* in sweeping white letters. He opened the door and stepped inside. Patrons enjoying a late lunch occupied most of the tables. At other times Slater would have found the cozy atmosphere appealing and the hushed conversations soothing, but not

today.

A hostess approached. "Do you have a reservation, sir?"

"Uh . . . no. I'm meeting a friend. Do you mind if I look?"

"Go right ahead."

Pretending to search for someone, he moved around the tables. On his way to the street exit, he passed a door to a side room. It might lead to a safe hiding place while his pursuers ran through the restaurant and checked in the street. Following his impulse, he opened the opaque glass door.

An attractive young woman, long dark hair falling over a red blouse, put down her fork. When her companion turned around, Slater stared at him in disbelief. Though his hair was now more brown than blond and he'd grown a mustache since law school, Slater instantly recognized Rolf Keller, the man who had cost him his diploma. Stunned, he stepped inside and shut the door behind him.



Rolf eyed the intruder—lean, dressed in baggy cargo pants and a navy sports shirt. A sun-tanned face had replaced the pallid complexion from law school. Could it really be Charles Slater, his former classmate who'd been expelled weeks before graduation?

Slater's breathless voice interrupted Rolf's musings. "I'll be damned if it isn't Rolf Keller, my old chum from law school."

Still the same smart-ass, Rolf thought while fighting to regain his composure. "What are you doing here?"

Sylvia shot him a quizzical look. Was she annoyed at the interruption or at his failure to introduce the intruder?

Slater took a chair facing the door and turned toward Sylvia. "I'm Charles Slater."

"Sylvia Mazzoni."

"What brings you to Santa Fe?" Slater asked.

"Sylvia performs at the opera," Rolf said. "What about you? Did you know I was here?"

"No. Sheer coincidence . . . but I'm glad I stumbled in here. I'm in a bit of a tight spot, and you might be just the person I need."

"You're kidding."

Sylvia stared at both of them. "You want to tell me what's going on? What's between you two?"

"The law journal board accused me of plagiarizing my article and Rolf was the editor-in-chief. They got me kicked out of Brandenburg Law School."

"That's not what happened, and you know it."

Slater put up a hand. "You can tell her your version later. You know I got the shaft. Only two weeks to graduation and they canned me for something I didn't do." He pointed to their plates. "You two go ahead."

Sylvia eyed her salmon filet but made no move to pick up her silverware. Rolf ignored his rare filet mignon. His appetite gone, he put down his knife and fork. So much for the intimate tryst he'd planned for this reunion with Sylvia.

Thinking that he might as well make the best of an awkward situation, he asked, "So what field did you go into?"

"I'm an . . ." Slater stared past him.

Rolf turned. A waitress stood in the doorway, looking at Slater. "Would you like to see a menu, sir?"

"No, thank you."

The waitress shrugged and drew the door shut behind her.

Slater took a deep breath. "I'm a professor of archaeology in the anthropology department at

the university in Albuquerque. But I live up here between semesters.” He looked at Rolf. “I really do need to talk to you.” He hesitated, glancing at Sylvia.

When Rolf didn’t react, Slater continued, “I’ve never put much stock in the Pueblo Indian tales of lost treasure from Spanish colonial days, but something happened last weekend that completely changed my mind.”

Rolf set down his glass hard.

Slater glanced at him, then at Sylvia, then around the room. Rolf caught Sylvia’s questioning gaze. Recalling Slater’s shifty demeanor during law school, Rolf felt rising skepticism.

Slater leaned forward. “I’ve made a find . . . well, let me just say the kind of find I wouldn’t have thought possible.”

“I’m a lawyer, Sylvia is a singer, and you’re the expert. Why are you telling us?”

“Because I’m in trouble. I came in here to shake two rough-looking guys who’ve been following me.”

“Who’s after you and why?”

Slater did not seem to have heard his question. He stared over Rolf’s shoulder at the door, then his eyes darted frantically about the room. Rolf turned and through the opaque glass glimpsed the blurry outline of three figures approaching from the restaurant.

He turned back and saw Slater freeze in his chair. “Quick. Under the table.”

Slater ducked beneath the white tablecloth that hung halfway to the floor. Rolf motioned Sylvia to move closer. The door opened. The hostess stood at the threshold with two men.

Feigning embarrassment, Rolf withdrew his hand from Sylvia’s shoulder. “Do you think you could knock before you come barging in?”

“I’m sorry, sir. These gentlemen are looking for someone. They say it’s urgent.”

The two men—one stout with blond hair, the other muscular and bald—did not strike Rolf as gentlemen.

The blond one spoke. “A man in his mid-thirties, skinny, wearing khakis, navy shirt. Have you seen him?”

Rolf shook his head. “No, we haven’t. As you can see, we’re not in need of company.”

The hostess looked confused, but if the waitress had told her about their visitor, she did not let on. “Sorry to have bothered you.”

She moved to close the door but the bald one blocked it, and scrutinized the room. Rolf could hear Slater’s breathing. Just when he thought the others had heard it as well, they stepped back from the door, and the three of them left.

A red-faced Slater emerged from under the table. He steadied himself by grabbing a table leg and in the process snagged the tablecloth. The glasses danced and spilled water onto the table. Slater returned to his chair, but kept an eye on the door.

He exhaled. “That was close. Thanks.”

Sylvia blotted a water spot in the tablecloth with her napkin. Rolf ignored the wet spot spreading in front of him. “They looked like bad guys to me. Why don’t you go to the police?”

“Maybe I should.” He paused a moment, then added, “Rolf, how long do you plan on being in New Mexico? I’m serious about needing some help.”

“If you’re looking for legal advice on archaeology, you’ve got the wrong person. That’s an area I know nothing about.”

“That’s not it. Someone must have gotten wind that I’m on to something big and sent the tough guys after me. Look Rolf, normally you’d be the last person I’d turn to, but there must be a reason I ran into you here. I’m desperate and I’m asking: help me out here. At least think about it. I’d forgive and forget what happened back in law school—wipe the slate completely clean.”

“There’s nothing to forgive,” Rolf snapped, but he couldn’t help noticing how quickly the

man had regained his composure after his narrow escape, and despite himself, he felt respect growing for this new Slater. Besides, given Sylvia's busy rehearsal schedule, he'd have time on his hands for something as intriguing as this sounded.

Rolf felt his trial lawyer's curiosity kick in as he heard himself say, "But I'm willing to listen."

"Not here." Slater glanced at his watch. "It's two o'clock now. Can you meet me at my bank at four? I must show you something." He produced a pen and wrote on a paper napkin, which he handed to Rolf. "Here's the address."

"I'll think about it," Rolf said.

Slater walked to the door, opened it a crack, and peered out. Then he turned around. "See you at four." He glanced at Sylvia. "Both of you."

He pulled the door closed behind him with an eerie swish. Fitting for a ghost from the past, Rolf thought.