Abigail, Anne-Marie, and Amelia McDougal are smart and pretty enough to turn any man’s head, but marriage isn’t for them. They’ll stick together through thick or thin. The trouble is, the thin times are coming faster than the thick times.

The nuns who run the mission in Mercy Flats, Texas, do the best they can with the three orphaned girls, but they are constantly glad to know the Lord forgives, since those three need a huge dose of tolerance daily.

In book one, Sisters of Mercy Flats, we witnessed how Abigail had Barrett Drake scratching his head with bewilderment. So sit back and hold tight as Anne-Marie attempts to tame Creed Walker, a man who has no intentions of being tamed…
large chestnut stallion galloped headlong across the dusty plains, carrying two riders pressing low against its sides. Man and beast had ridden hard for over an hour and the animal’s side was heavily lathered, its flanks heaving from exertion.

Anne-Marie McDougal locked her hands around her rescuer’s waist and held on tightly, praying she would survive this newest catastrophe. Her sisters, Abigail and Amelia, had been rescued from a jail wagon and carried off in different directions, and Anne-Marie was in the hands of a stranger. A very large, intimidating man, who had plucked her off her feet and now raced along the road at a frightening clip. Glancing over her shoulder, she saw no sign of the band of youthful braves who had been chasing them. Perhaps they had tired of the pursuit and broken away.

The Comanches, the sudden flight from the jail wagon, and now galloping across the countryside with a savage was like an awful dream, but Anne-Marie knew it wasn’t a nightmare. It was really happening. She tightened her grip around the Indian’s waist and wondered
about this uncivilized being who had swooped down from the heav-
ens to save her from a fate worse than death.

Her heart raced with alarm. Who were these men who had seized
her and her sisters, Amelia and Abigail, to safety, and then sprinted
in opposite directions?

A new, more disturbing thought came to her mind. What if the
three Samaritans had not come upon them? Anne-Marie shuddered
to think where she would be now. Scalped...or dead.

She held tight as the Indian cut the chestnut off the trail and
pushed the animal up a steep ravine. If only she had thought the last
scam through more carefully. She had warned Amelia and Abigail
it would be risky to make a fool of A.J. Donavan. He was an intelli-
gent man, and she had sensed that he couldn’t be tricked as easily as
the others.

Panic welled up inside her. She had never been apart from Abigail
and Amelia. She and her sisters had always faced life together, afraid
of nothing, anxious of no one. If anything happened to them she
couldn’t bring herself to go on.

But she couldn’t allow herself to entertain such thoughts. Opti-
mism was her strength; she couldn’t lose it now. She had escaped
unharmed, hadn’t she? She wasn’t bleeding or wounded. And the two
men who had rescued Abigail and Amelia were white men, not a sav-
age like her defender.

The Indian’s stoic silence was beginning to grate on her. Obviously
he neither understood nor spoke a word of English, but she would
have to find a way to communicate soon. She had to make him under-
stand that he must help her find the nearest stage or rail station so she
could return to Mercy Flats, Texas, immediately.

There, by the grace of God, she and her sisters would be reunited—
provided her sisters’ rescuers had been as cunning in eluding the
Comanches as her protector. But was he her rescuer? She had no
assurance that he wasn’t as intent on evil as the band of young war-
riors chasing the wagon.
No. She must believe that he had good intentions and that Abigail and Amelia were safe. At this very moment they might be as confused and frightened as she was, but they would be back together soon—very soon. And they would continue providing funds for the orphanage in Mercy Flats as they always had.

Leaning closer against the man’s powerful back, she shouted above the racing wind. “It’s getting colder. Can we stop soon—is there a town nearby?”

When he showed no signs of responding, she sighed, realizing that communication was impossible. He didn’t understand a word she said, but it didn’t matter. She would forgo small talk if only he was skilled enough to get her to safety with her scalp intact.

She was limply clinging to his waist by the time he finally angled the horse down a gulley and through a deep thicket. She tensed. This was the moment she had been dreading; this was the hour he would prove his intent. He was either her defender or her adversary. Her heart tripped in her chest and she sucked in a deep breath.

Half turning, the man grunted, pointing toward the ground. When she was slow to comprehend, he grasped her by the arm and eased her off the back of the horse. She had been astride the animal for so long that her legs threatened to give out. When she stumbled, a strong hand reached out to steady her.

Motioning her to a nearby log, the man slid off the horse and set to work. In a surprisingly short time he had a fire going, its warmth gratifying in the deepening twilight. The day had begun warm and balmy, but during the afternoon clouds had formed overhead and now the biting wind carried a hint of snow.

Anne-Marie tried to ignore the grumbling in her stomach. She hadn’t eaten since sometime early this morning, and she had no idea where her next meal would come from. The Indian appeared to have little provision for travel—a canteen tied to his saddle and a bedroll. His tribe could be nearby, yet if that were true, considering the worsening weather, why hadn’t he elected to seek shelter with them? But
if he planned to do her harm, he was certainly being a gentleman about it.

“I’m hungry,” she said, patting her stomach to convey her misery. “I’m hungry and cold,” she added, using the same insistent gesture, hoping he would comprehend her need.

Giving her a brief, vacant stare, the man moved closer to the fire. In the light he looked wild and uncivilized. He was large, and his buckskin shirt and trousers smelled as if he hadn’t washed in months. Thick black shaggy hair blew in the wind. Nut-brown skin stretched tightly over high, hollow cheekbones. In the deepening shadows, he appeared even more ominous.

Her eyes traveled the length of his ragged form. He was from an impoverished tribe. Even the leather moccasins he wore were old and threadbare.

Pity momentarily flooded her, and her compassion deepened when she saw that he was shivering from the cold.

Drawing a deep breath, she glanced about the campsite, wondering if either one of them would make it through the night. She didn’t see how. They had nothing, virtually nothing, to protect them from the elements.

“Do you have a blanket?” She mimed rubbing her shoulders.

His gaze fixed on the shower of sparks shooting up from the dry timber.

“Perhaps we should huddle together. We have to do something or we’ll both die!”

The man remained stoically silent.

She thought for a moment and then tried again. Pointing at the fire, she lifted her brows in question. Food? Surely he could understand that. They had ridden for hours. He had to be as hungry as she was. Didn’t his kind run down rabbits on foot or catch fish with their bare hands? She glanced around the campsite and her heart sank when she spied a stream that was little more than a trickle of water. There would be nothing in there to ease their hunger.

She rose and began to pace around the campfire, her frustration
mounting. She had to try to think of a way out of this. If she had to be stuck with a man, why couldn’t it be one who understood simple English? The other girls would surely have a laugh when this was over and Anne-Marie told them about her captor. At least Amelia and Abigail had been rescued by men who undoubtedly spoke or understood a common language.

Positioning herself on a rock, she focused on the sounds coming from the bushes. She wasn’t squeamish. It took more than rustling sounds in the thicket to spook her, but she had never been out alone much at night.

And she had never depended on a man for anything.

She didn’t like the fact for the time being that she was dependent on one now—and especially this particular man.

She bit her lower lip. If it weren’t so late, she’d scare up her own supper. Her eyes returned to the dense thicket, but it was extremely dark.

Not a hint of moon shone through the bare tree branches. In another few minutes she would barely be able to see her hand in front of her face, and she didn’t have a gun.

Shivering, she burrowed deeper into the woolen nun’s habit she’d been wearing as a disguise during the caper that had landed them in the jail wagon. The shrieking wind reminded her of how little protection the disguise was in a full-blown blizzard. Her gaze returned to the Indian. At least her habit was warmer than what he was wearing.

He stirred, adding wood to the fire, seemingly oblivious of her presence.

Miniature snowflakes began to form in the air as the two forlorn figures huddled close to the fire.

Long minutes of silence passed when Anne-Marie decided to take matters into her own hands. She was so hungry she couldn’t sleep, even if she wanted to, which was impossible in such deplorable conditions. She had no idea what she would find beyond the rustling bushes, but she—

She stiffened as the corner of her eye caught sight of something slithering across the ground. A lizard seeking the warmth of the fire.
She lowered her eyes to the toe of her boot, and her throat squeezed so tightly with fear that she couldn't make a sound.

A pair of reptilian eyes stared up at her.

There were few things in life Anne-Marie dreaded, but a lizard was one of them. As a child, she had slipped into an abandoned well and spent the next hour in a bed of various species of lizards before Father Luis and Sister Agnes had been able, with the help of a long rope, to pull her out. For years afterward Anne-Marie couldn't close her eyes without reliving the horror of that old well and the slithering reptiles that had mercilessly crawled over her body while she lay paralyzed with terror.

Cold yellow-green eyes stared back at her while she attempted to find her voice. She squeaked, and then squeaked again, trying to gain the Indian's attention.

The man calmly piled more wood on the fire.

By willing her vocal cords to move, she succeeded in making a small, barely perceptible noise pass her lips as her eyes riveted on the intruder reclining on the top of her left boot.

Glancing up, the man finally caught Anne-Marie's anguished stare. He rose slowly to his feet, his eyes warning her not to move. The hairs on the back of her neck rose when she saw the glint of a blade appear in his hand.

With catlike stealth, he advanced on the lizard. The knife blade reflected the fire's dancing flames, looking more sinister than any gun. The man's black eyes glittered as he concentrated on his prey. Anne-Marie's gaze beseeched him to move faster, but he showed no signs of understanding. Instead he crept closer, each step methodically calculated.

While still a few feet away, he took aim and let the knife find its mark.

Anne-Marie's eyes rolled back in her head, and with a soft whimper she slumped to the ground in a lifeless heap.
Snow had started to fall heavily when the Indian knelt beside the sister to check her pulse. He laid his fingers on the base of her throat, his eyes softening when he detected a strong heartbeat. For so small a sparrow, the sister had much spirit. His gaze traced her delicate features. It had been some time since he had seen such a lovely woman.

Bending forward, he gently picked her up and moved her closer to the fire.

His gaze lingered on her beauty when he slowly straightened. Snow was gathering on her dark lashes, and in the flickering firelight her face radiated a childlike innocence.

Kneeling again, he tucked the skirt of her habit around her tightly, making sure the wind could not penetrate her small frame.

When he stood, his eyes moved regretfully to the bushes where he had thrown the lizard carcass. Too bad she was so afraid of the creature; it would have made an adequate meal.

His eyes once again returned to the sister. She was such a beautiful woman to have chosen to live out her life in a convent. He briefly speculated as to why. Dedication like hers was not often found in one so young.

A moment later, carrying his knife, he disappeared into the heavy thicket.

Anne-Marie opened her eyes to see large, cottony white balls floating down in the moonlight, settling like feather down on her cheeks. For the longest moment she couldn’t remember where she was.

Staring up, she saw a layer of white coating the tops of the trees, their branches decked out in glistening winter finery. Icicles dripped from the boughs of cedar trees, turning branches into dazzling Christmas tree ornaments.

She lay drinking in the magnificent sight. The night was so silent she could almost hear smoke drifting from the fire.
When her memory rushed back she bolted upright. Where was the Indian? The campfire blazed brightly, but he was nowhere in sight. Panic seized her and she called out, her voice hollow in the icy stillness. She sat for a moment, trying to collect her thoughts. Had he left her? What if he had taken the horse and ridden off, leaving her to fend for herself? A groan escaped her when she remembered the lizard and the speed with which the Indian’s knife had killed it.

A sound drew her attention, and she glanced up, catching back a shout when she saw the man returning. He was carrying something in his right hand.

“There you are!” she called out. “I was afraid you’d left me here—alone.”

Her eyes focused on the meat he was carrying, and her stomach rumbled with hunger. “Thank goodness you found something.” She wasn’t sure what he held, but by now it didn’t matter. She’d settle for anything to appease her empty stomach.

Moving to the fire, the man deftly skewered the meat and hung it over the hot flame.

“What is it?” she asked, not expecting a response, but just to hear a voice breaking the unnerving silence. “Well, no matter, it looks delicious,” she added a moment later.

They sat in silence, surrounded by falling snow and the occasional sound of fat dripping into the fire.

When the meat was nearly black, the Indian removed it from the spit and laid it aside to cool.

After a while he tore the fare into chunks and handed her a portion. She couldn’t hide the trembling in her hands when she took it from him.

His eyes darted to hers briefly, and she smiled back in gratitude. “Thank you. It smells wonderful.”

Picking up the crusted meat, she told herself to be grateful for the kindness he had shown her. Maybe they couldn’t communicate, but at least he had treated her with respect, and she should consider herself fortunate.
He paused as if waiting for something.
When she returned his gaze vacantly, his eyes fell away, and he began eating.
Later he tossed the last bone aside and settled near the fire and closed his eyes.
Anne-Marie rolled herself up in a blanket he provided from his saddlebags and lay down near the fire. Was there a woman somewhere tonight concerned about his welfare? Tall, sleek muscle ridges showed through the rugged buckskin. He was handsome to be sure—or he could be most striking with the proper care. A good scrubbing, a pair of scissors, and a shave would make a big difference. She looked away when her cheeks heated. What thoughts! Abigail would think she’d lost her mind.
She studied the worsening weather. “Maybe we should sleep close together.” The offer came out louder than she’d intended. She didn’t mean anything improper by the suggestion. If he planned to hurt her he would have done so by now. If they combined their body heat, they might survive the night.
In the distance coyotes—or something worse—howled. She wasn’t going to dwell on that fact for fear that panic would set in again.
“With the weather worsening, the good Lord would not hold us accountable for trying to survive the elements,” she continued, more to herself than to him, because he didn’t appear to be listening. The suggestion was brazen and dangerous but he couldn’t take offense. He didn’t understand a word she was saying. They would be frozen carcasses by morning, and if she dared creep closer to him for warmth she might very well end up in the bushes with the lizard carcass.
The wind howled through the bare tree branches when she rolled to her side and stared at the fire. She was safe. She huddled deeper into her habit. He thought her to be a holy woman. She was only using common sense; she didn’t want either of them to freeze to death. At the moment he was her only hope of reaching a town alive, and the thought of anything warm, no matter how unkempt and smelly, appealed to her survival instincts.
“Well…you can let me know if you should change your mind,” she said over her shoulder. Then she sat up to see if he had heard.

Rolling to his side, the man presented his back to her.

Sighing, she closed her eyes, the weight of the world heavy on her shoulders.

She didn’t know about his plans, but her goals were clear. She must stay alive. The McDougal sisters were the primary support for the mission, and without them, the mission would have to close.

Dawn lit the sky, and the Indian doused the fire long before daybreak. The snow had tapered off to occasional blowing flakes, but bitterly cold air encompassed the campsite. Only the golden sunrise filtering through the trees promised a pleasant day for traveling. The orange ball of sun, now beginning to top the trees, brought a smile to Anne-Marie’s face and a renewed optimism when she accepted the Indian’s hand and he pulled her up behind him on the chestnut.

Reining the horse, he set off, riding south.

It was late morning when their stallion topped a rise. What a strange sight they must be—a nun and an Indian together on a horse.

Peering anxiously around the man’s shoulder, Anne-Marie couldn’t hold back the shout that bubbled to her throat when she spotted the small community spread out below them. “Holy smokes!” They’d made it! They’d beaten the elements, and she was going to live!

The Indian glanced over his shoulder at her, and for the first time since they’d met, she thought she detected shock on his perpetually stoic features.

Catching herself, she added a perfunctory “Thank the Lord,” and hurriedly crossed herself.

Nudging the horse forward, the Indian rode into town.
High Bluff, Texas, was an ordinary border town. The steady clang of the blacksmith’s hammer rang out from the livery, the mercantile sat next to the cafe, and the hotel was facing east so it wouldn’t bake in the late afternoon sun.

The saloon, the Gilded Dove, was just beginning to come to life as the Indian and nun rode through the center of town.

An occasional head turned when the couple passed, but for the most part folks were accustomed to strangers. The train ran straight through town every Tuesday and Friday morning, regular as clockwork, so the comings and goings of outsiders never caused much of a stir.

Although a nun riding horseback with an Indian wasn’t an ordinary sight.

Reining the horse in front of a hitching post, the Indian swung down and then lifted a hand to help the sister.

Adjusting her rumpled skirts, Anne-Marie glanced up and down the street, relieved to see they weren’t attracting the curiosity she’d feared they might. “I want to secure a room at the hotel right away,” she murmured.
Looping the reins around the hitching post, the Indian pointed to the train depot.

Anne-Marie located the hotel near the large water tower and nodded. “Oh, yes—thank you so much for all your trouble.”

Her words dribbled off when she realized she was talking to his retreating back. He disappeared into the mercantile, closing the door behind him.

Straightening her habit, she turned with quick, determined steps and headed for lodging. She would rent a room, order a hot bath and a hot meal, and then lie down in a soft bed and sleep for hours. Who knew how long she’d have to wait for the next train? She wasn’t ready to presume that God was on her side today. Dare she ask for His help when so much of her life was lived in deceit?

She shrugged off the troublesome questions. Whatever the reason, she’d survived another day. Although she was rumpled and penniless, she was still wearing her disguise, and any God-fearing man or woman would be eager to provide a woman of the cloth with food and comfortable quarters while she waited.

Minutes later the front door opened and Anne-Marie stepped out, drawing a deep breath as she straightened her veil. There wasn’t a single room available.

So much for God-fearing charitable souls. “May they all get a blood blister today,” she muttered as she crossed the street.

Turning to her right, she headed for the mercantile where the Indian had earlier disappeared.

When the bell over the door tinkled, the proprietor turned from stacking boxes on his shelves. He climbed slowly off the ladder, wiped his hands on his apron, and walked toward her, smiling. “Afternoon, Sister.”

“Good afternoon.” Anne-Marie glanced around the room, trying to locate the Indian. He was standing near the back, studying a knife.
display in a glass case. When he glanced up and recognition regis-
tered on his face, he quickly stepped away from the counter and dis-
appeared behind a tall stack of dry goods.

The kindly-looking clerk skinned the nun’s rumpled habit, still
smiling pleasantly. “Something I can help you with today?”

She leaned over the counter, trying to see around the stacks of
woolens and linens. Was it her imagination or was her benefactor
actually trying to avoid her? “Nothing in particular. I’m just brows-
ing, thank you.”

“If you see anything you want, I’ll be happy to get it for you.”
“Thank you, I’ll let you know.”

Moseying toward the bolts of colorful ribbons and lace, she kept
an eye on the Indian, who—no, it wasn’t her imagination—was mak-
ing himself conspicuously absent. Apparently he understood enough
to think his part in the rescue was over, but since he had rescued her
and she now found herself without a cent to her name and not a single
room available, he might take pity on her.

Turning pleading eyes on him, she was annoyed to see he was
returning her silent reprimand with a surprisingly astute one of his
own, one that clearly suggested that he considered his part finished.

Done.
Through.

Stepping to the counter, the Indian pointed to an expensive-
looking rifle.

Climbing off the ladder again, the clerk said, “You want to see the
Sharps carbine?”

The man gave a brief nod.
“You got enough wampum to purchase it?”
He nodded curtly.
“All righty.” The clerk took the rifle off the shelf and handed it to
him.

After a cursory inspection the Indian nodded, indicating his
approval.
“Guess you’ll be needin’ shells? A box do you?”
The man nodded.

Anne-Marie watched the exchange with growing interest. The Indian seemed to have no trouble understanding the clerk. No trouble at all, yet he’d pretended he hadn’t understood a word she’d said for the past twenty-four hours.

Laying the cartridges on the counter, the clerk totaled up the purchase. “Looks like you owe me forty dollars.”

Anne-Marie’s lips parted indignantly when she saw her rescuer produce a small leather pouch attached to his breeches and calmly remove several gold coins. Judging from the lumps in the pouch, there was more where they came from, maybe a lot more. Why, the man had enough money to burn a wet mule! She felt her cheeks turn red. What was he doing with that kind of funds? He didn’t have a penny an hour ago—her eyes narrowed—or did he?

The proprietor tossed a few coins of change onto the counter while glancing at Anne-Marie. “Finding everything you need, Sister?”

“Thank you, I’ll just be looking today. Does the stage come through here?”

Picking up his purchases, the Indian turned and walked out the door. Anne-Marie’s teeth worried her lower lip as she watched him leave.

“The stage? Sure does, once a month, just like clockwork.”

“What about the train?”

“Twice a week regular as clockwork.”

The man seemed to have a fixation on clocks. “On what days?”

“Tuesdays and Fridays.”

Her frown deepened when she watched the Indian cross the street.

“Today is Saturday, isn’t it?”

“That it is, Sister. Saturday.”

Two whole days in town without a penny. She smiled, bowing her head subserviently. “Thank you, you have been most kind.”

Plucking an apple from a barrel, the proprietor polished it on the sleeve of his shirt before handing it to her. “An apple a day will keep the doctor away,” he offered with a twinkling eye.
Nodding, Anne-Marie jammed the fruit into her mouth and stepped out of the store.

Now what? She stood looking up and down the unfamiliar street, munching on the apple. Her eyes located the Indian, who was walking in the direction of the sheriff’s office, and a sense of injustice struck her. Where did he think he was going with his pouch full of coins and a new, expensive rifle? Her eyes followed him as he strolled past a saloon. He’d rescued a woman in distress and now he planned to leave her still in danger?

Since he had taken it upon himself to be her protector, the very least he could do was see that she was properly protected. What was she to do about the price of a train ticket and, for that matter, where was she supposed to stay until the train got here? Men. No matter what color skin, they were all alike.

Taking another bite of the tart fruit, she made a face, stepped off the planked sidewalk, and crossed the street, falling into step behind the Indian. If he had understood that clerk, then he could understand her—and he was going to be made to comprehend in no uncertain terms that he wasn’t going to desert her now.

“I would like a word with you, Mr. Indian!”

When his footsteps didn’t falter, she articulated more loudly. “I know you have money, and obviously I don’t, so don’t you think that since you appointed yourself my rescuer, it’s only fair that you see to my well-being until the train arrives on Tuesday?”

He walked on.

Anne-Marie’s temper flared. “I know you can understand what I’m saying—you understood the clerk at the mercantile perfectly.”

He crossed the street and picked up his pace.

Following him, she grabbed the apple out of her mouth and hurled the uneaten portion at his back, thumping him soundly between his very impressive shoulders.

“Answer me! Do you hear me? I said, say something!”

The door to the sheriff’s office opened and a deputy cautiously stuck his head out, eyes trying to locate the ruckus.
At the sight of the lawman, the muscles in Anne-Marie’s stomach tightened. For a moment she had forgotten her disguise. Nuns didn’t fling apples at Indians’ backs and demand a response.

“Afternoon, Sister,” the deputy called when she walked past.

Nodding severely to the deputy, she marched on, passing the jailhouse door, still dogging the Indian’s steps.

She told herself to calm down when the deputy continued to stare after her. Neither she nor her sisters had ever been in High Bluff, so no one could possibly recognize her as one of the three women who had been operating con games in the area.

“Oh, Sister?”

Anne-Marie froze, not particularly liking the tone of a second man’s voice that had suddenly joined the conversation.

“Oh, Sisterrrr?” repeated the mocking voice.

The Indian’s footsteps picked up and he walked faster.

Anne-Marie was close on his heel when the voice sang out again, “Sister!”

Turning around slowly, Anne-Marie swallowed when she saw a large man with a silver star on his chest striding toward her. A man in a brown suit followed on his heel, breathing like a charging bull.

“Sister, I wonder if I might have a word with you?” the sheriff inquired pleasantly when he approached.

Shoot! Shoot! Shoot! A.J. Donavan, the man she and her sisters had scammed just a few short weeks earlier, was accompanying the sheriff, his swarthy features molten with anger.

Whirling, Anne-Marie started to make a run for it when she suddenly felt the cold barrel of a .32 caliber Colt resting lightly between her shoulder blades. “Now, now, what’s your hurry, little lady?”

She jerked upright. “Sir, how dare you—”

“Is this the woman, A.J.?”

“That’s her, all right. I’d know those green eyes anywhere!”

“Now, Sheriff,” Anne-Marie began, and then immediately piped down when she saw that the deputy had cornered the Indian and was pushing him back, at rifle point, in her direction. Donavan had
a grudge. She and her sisters had sold him cattle that didn’t belong to them—but how had he found her so quickly?

She straightened her veil. “Now, see here, how dare you treat a woman of the cloth—”

A.J. sneered “Save your breath, woman. We’ve got you dead to rights. No con artist sells me a herd of stolen beef and lives to brag about it!”

The sheriff ushered the Indian and the nun down the sidewalk over Anne-Marie’s loud and spirited objections.

Entering the jail, the sheriff steered Anne-Marie into a cell.

The deputy snatched a key ring from a hook on the wall. “What are you, mister? Crow?”

The Indian lifted his head, black eyes spirited, and nodded.

“How did you fall in with the likes of this woman?” He shoved the man in the cage and turned the key.

“I demand you release me this instant! You can’t grab innocent people—” Anne-Marie glared accusingly at A.J. Donavan. “Innocent nuns,” she amended. She turned pleading eyes to the sheriff. “You can’t just grab me off the street and treat me like common riffraff because some wild man is making ludicrous accusations about—cows.”

“There’s two more of’em around somewhere,” A.J. warned the sheriff.

“We’ll find them, A.J. They couldn’t have gone far.”

Glaring at the Crow, Anne-Marie warned him silently that if he could speak, he’d better be doing it.

The Indian refused to meet her eyes.

The sheriff smiled reassuringly. “Now, don’t you be worrying your pretty little head, ma’am. You and the Injun will have yourselves a fair trial. I guarantee you that.”

“I demand proper legal representation! Get me an attorney!” Anne-Marie shouted as she clapsed the bars with both hands.

“Why certainly, ma’am.” He turned to A.J., smiling. “I believe the lady would like a word with you, A.J.”

Anne-Marie frowned. “He’s my lawyer?”
The sheriff nodded. “Yes, ma’am, but don’t you worry none. Not only is A.J. the town’s finest attorney, but he’s the onliest.”

Anne-Marie’s heart sank. “Onliest what?”

“Onliest attorney.” The sheriff’s smile widened. “He’ll be speaking on you and your friend’s behalf.”