

Chapter Fifteen

Amber woke up fully rested and ready to head back to the United States. She stretched her arms widely across her pillow, but pulled it back when it cut her arm. She quickly opened her eyes and saw the sun above her. She must still be dreaming. She is supposed to be lying in a bed in her hotel room in West Africa. She closed her eyes tightly, rubbed them and opened them again. The sun was still rising above her. She sat up in a panic and looked around. She had been lying on the ground in some kind of field. She tried to get up, but her knees buckled under her and she fell back to the ground. She was dizzy for some reason. She couldn't remember how she got there! Had Dr. Mtube and Gereau snuck into their room and drugged her and brought her out here? And if so, what had they done with Clayton?

Raw, cold fear enveloped her. This was a nightmare! She was stuck in Africa somewhere, and her passport must still be in her room! The only comfort she had was that she didn't look African, so the authorities would know she wasn't from there, and could quickly get her to the nearest American Embassy.

"I am Amber Brooks." She said to herself as her head started to clear. "And I will get out of here!" She affirmed strongly. She was so afraid she could barely get up. She willed her body to move, but she was too terrified.

She bet this was what had really happened to her brother. Kidnapped. And to think she had bought into all that time travel crap. She bet Liu Kim and Dr. Mtube were probably in it together in order to steal her brother's research. And she had convinced Clayton that the black mysticism was true. He was going to kill her when he found her for putting him through all this!

She finally convinced herself to get up and look around. She didn't remember seeing so many fields on their way to Dr. Mtube's. As a matter of fact, she didn't remember seeing any fields at all! And since Africa was hotter than hell, how could they grow all these crops on such little rainfall? How long had she been out? Could they have taken her to another country? Where in the hell was Clayton?

She needed to find the nearest road out of there and walk it until she came to someplace safe. She walked until she reached the edge of the field and looked for the road. There was no road. She saw a woodsy area a little ways away and ran to it. She went further in so as not to be seen. She hated the woods. They always gave her the creeps. Her mother used to joke that black people weren't supposed to be running around the woods setting up tents in the middle of nowhere. Judging from the foreboding nature of these woods, she had a good reason to listen.

She didn't want to make the mistake they always do on TV, which is running into the woods and being trapped there on all sides. The best thing to do would be to find a tall tree, and climb it until she could figure out where she was and what was going on. She found a reasonably tall tree that appeared fairly easy to climb. It was high enough to see what was going on, but low enough so she could get down without killing herself. No way did she intend to make a career out of this place; she just needed to sit and watch for anything. Including her brother. Maybe the compound they were holding him at was nearby. If everything went well, she'd see him, rescue him, and they'd figure out how to find Clayton and get them back home to the United States. Either that or Clayton would figure out a way to save them.

She tried to climb the tree, but her canvas shoes weren't picking up any traction. She made a few false starts before she finally caught the branch and made some headway. She climbed and climbed a good twenty feet up into the air, and covered herself with leaves, so she wouldn't be seen. And she waited for any sign of the bastards that had kidnapped her!

She angled herself around on the limb so she could check her pockets. Interestingly enough, they had left everything in her pockets. She pulled out the napkin with the talisman design on it. Useless. By now James was hip to the fact that he had been bamboozled into believing in all this regression crap. Poor James. She was about to rip it up, but decided to hang on to it in case she might need it. After all, it was part of Ganny Ida's dream, so it did figure into this whole mess somehow.

She took an inventory of her other pockets to see what else she had with her. Her "guy" travel-wallet with her driver's license and credit cards were still on her person. She had read that women should carry these wallets when traveling because they could be put into front blouses and pockets easily. She took a good look at her American Express Gold card and promised it she would be using it shamelessly at Nordstrom's as soon as she could. She put it away, and continued her examination.

She pulled out the picture carrier from her wallet, and took a long look at her loved ones. Her mother's smiling face in the family picture

taken last year; her grandmother's serious eyes when she caught her off guard at the family picnic; James and Malcolm clowning around at the laser tag arcade; she and Clayton posing at his company Christmas party last year. She didn't realize she was crying until a teardrop fell onto the plastic and threatened to ruin them all. She quickly put everything back in her wallet and put her wallet back in the side pocket of her jeans. She wiped her face.

Please let me see them all soon!

She did a quick check of her other pocket and found her comb. *There you go*, she teased herself. *If nothing else, you will look good up in this tree until hell freezes over.* Or James or Clayton come, whichever is first. She was just about to run the comb through her hair when she heard sounds coming from the field. Here we go, she thought. She prayed it would be someone who could help her and not her abductors.

They came. It looked like a mass descent upon the fields. From the distance, she could see nothing but small, almost insignificant forms slowly moving into the fields. There wasn't one field as she had originally thought, but three separate fields with different crops. As the forms became bigger, Amber saw that they were all black. Which was to be expected since they were in Africa. They were probably the equivalent of the migrant farm workers who did harvesting jobs up and down different parts of California.

They walked into the fields slowly and methodically, as if they were robots trained to move. Where had they come from? She couldn't see any buildings in the near distance, but there must have been one close in order for them to have gotten there on foot.

As they moved into the fields, she saw an open wagon approaching behind them. It looked like an antique, even by poor farming standards. She made out two men in the wagon, one white, one black. Could that be Clayton out there?

Her semi-relief was short lived as the black man was pushed from the carriage, and fell onto the ground. She must have been at least the equivalent of three city blocks away, but she could hear the rattling of the chains from across the field. She couldn't see the chains, but she could hear them. The white man kicked the man on the ground, making the chains rattle even more. He looked like he was going to help the man up, but instead he bent down and did something or said something to make the man attempt to get up on his own. When he did, the rattling began again. His legs were chained together! The white man pushed him away from the other people and away from the fields and looked around. She sunk back into the tree, praying his vision was limited, and that he couldn't see her in the distance. She was ashamed of herself for being

relieved that he pushed the man toward the nearest tree, and hadn't brought him out to where she was. He tied the man to the tree.

She watched in horror as the white man pulled something off his belt and struck the black man. His scream bellowed into the air. Amber gasped in disbelief as he continued to strike the man, and the man continued to scream.

After a few minutes, the black man began to sink down toward the ground, and she couldn't hear his screams anymore. Did he kill him? She surveyed the field to get the reaction of the working people, certain that at any minute a few of them were going to strike out at the lone man and retaliate. But not only weren't they huddled together to strike, they were still working! How could they work through all that screaming? What kind of people sit back and let one measly man beat and possibly kill another! She hoped they had gotten paid enough, because when she escaped, she was going to let the American Embassy know exactly what was going on here! The human rights agencies would get involved and blow the lid off the whole operation. Before they knew it, they would become another CNN cover story.

Maybe a few of them were scared, but there had to be at least twenty people out there in the fields. One of them could have rushed him with a shovel or a hoe or something else and subdued the one man. There were a million ways this could have played out. All of them meaning that poor man didn't have to suffer!

She sank back in the tree and tried not to think about what she had seen. She tried to pretend that it all was one of those fake reality TV programs, but she couldn't get the sound of his screams out of her head. She had never heard a man scream before in real life. On television or the movies maybe, but not in real life. It was horrible. What if they had done that to a woman? How could a woman live through that? My God, these people in these foreign countries lived like animals!

She began to cry as she realized the danger she was in. She couldn't hide in the tree indefinitely, and she couldn't expect any help from the farm workers below. Think! What should she do?

She continued to watch the events in the field near her. The white man had by now unchained the black man, but he had left him at the foot of the tree to continue to suffer. Asshole! The more she looked at the people around her, the stranger they looked. They all seemed to be wearing old clothes. Not last year old, but old old. She couldn't remember ever seeing Ganny Ida in her old pictures in clothes that old. And the women in the fields were all wearing long dresses instead of jeans or pants. Some cultures did believe in shielding the bodies of their women, but she had thought that was Middle Eastern women and not

African women. And what was with the white guy overseeing the whole project! In Africa, she would have expected an African leading other Africans. It was all so bizarre and surreal, yet it seemed familiar somehow. Maybe from National Geographic or the Discover Channel or something.

The white man sat back on the wagon over the next hour watching all the activity. After a while, he went back over to the tree to check on the beaten man. He bent over him, and must have said something for Amber clearly heard his pained voice. Only this time she could make out what he had said in the distance.

“No, Mista Jake, no! No more!”

The hell he said! Mista Jake? Oh, God! It couldn't be! Amber stopped breathing as she put it all together. How stupid could she be? These weren't migrant farm workers! These were slaves! With the token white driver watching them. It couldn't be! She never touched the talisman, but somehow as she slept, she had been regressed back to American slavery!

The last thing she remembered before everything went black, was falling from the tree.