

## CHAPTER 1



“Don’t be a snob, Mom.” Sadie didn’t look up from the gelatinous bread pudding she was poking with the serving spoon. “Bread pudding should not jiggle. If this is any indication of the food I can expect on this cruise, it’s going to be a very long week.”

“It’s the first buffet,” Breanna said as she spooned some berry cobbler onto her plate. “Don’t judge the food so harshly from just one meal.”

The cobbler looked okay, so Sadie took a small amount, then followed her daughter down the buffet line.

“You never get a second chance to make a first impression,” Sadie said, narrowing her eyes at what was supposed to be cheesecake but looked like stiff pudding. She settled for a cherry turnover that looked exactly like the ones Arby’s sold for a dollar. “On that cruise I took with Gayle in January, the food was awful.”

Sadie had always loved cruises, but just over a year ago, she had undergone some traumatic experiences associated with water, so the inexpensive, three-day Baja cruise with Gayle had been a test to see

if Sadie could handle being in a floating hotel. The cruise convinced her she was okay *on* the water, just not *in* it.

The food on that ship, however, had been very low quality. It was a cheap cruise, though, so perhaps that was to be expected. Now she was on another cruise—a longer, more expensive one—with a different cruise line, and the first foray into the menus had shaken her confidence. Good bread pudding should be dense, flavorful, and topped with a creamy caramel sauce—like her cousin Kara’s recipe which Sadie had made for years and years. It wasn’t difficult to make good bread pudding. If the ship’s cooks couldn’t do right by a basic dessert, what would their beef Wellington be like?

They finished the dessert segment of the buffet and made their way to the salad bar—dessert first whenever possible.

“If you don’t mind my saying so, you seem a little uptight,” Breanna said once they finished dishing up and were winding their way through the dining room in hopes of finding an empty table. “Is everything okay? Have you already found a dead body you’re afraid to tell me about?”

Sadie scowled at her daughter’s back. “I’ll have you know I haven’t seen a dead body for eight months, if you don’t count Brother Harper from church, but he was eighty-seven and properly laid out in his coffin when I saw him at the viewing. It was a lovely service.”

“Eight months—that’s got to be some kind of record, right?”

“Oh, stop it,” Sadie said, wishing she had a free hand so she could playfully slap her daughter’s arm. “I think that phase of my life is over.” She scanned table after table filled with people already eating. “Is there not even one empty table in this entire dining room?”

“There are some back there,” Breanna said, nodding toward the back of the ship. “Just calm down.”

They made their way past their fellow passengers and finally slid

into their seats, officially staking their claim at a table for four near a window that looked out over the Seattle pier. The ship wouldn't sail for another two hours.

"Seriously, though," Breanna said once they were seated, "are you okay?"

Sadie took a breath and decided to spill it. "I'm worried about this trip."

Breanna unwrapped her silverware from her napkin, placed the cloth in her lap, then raised her brown eyes to meet Sadie's blue ones. Both of Sadie's children were adopted, and not for the first time Sadie thought that Breanna's birth mother must have been very beautiful.

"*You're* worried? This whole trip was your idea."

"I know, but I guess the worry didn't hit me until I realized Pete and Shawn would be on the transfer bus together. They were on that bus for half an hour, then in line for another hour. What if they decide they hate each other by the time they get here? Then we're stuck together for seven really lousy days."

"Shawn and Pete have spent time together before," Breanna said. "I'm the one who hardly knows your boyfriend."

"Oh, don't call him that," Sadie said, feeling her cheeks heat up. "It sounds so . . . young." Sadie had recently turned fifty-eight years old. Young was feeling further and further away as she tried to wrap her head around her impending AARP membership.

Breanna laughed and stabbed a bite of her salad with one hand while tucking her long, straight, brown hair behind her ear with the other. "I'd call him your fiancé, but he hasn't made it official yet, though I don't know what he's waiting for."

Sadie took a bite of her own salad to stall before she answered. The truth was that she and Pete had talked about marriage often

during the last few months as Pete's retirement grew closer and the threat Sadie had been running from felt more and more distant—she'd been safely living back in Garrison, Colorado, since December and nothing had happened. But, even so, Sadie had always stopped the wedding discussions when they got to the point of timing and specifics.

Breanna had been engaged for more than a year now, and the happy couple had finally set the date for October nineteenth. Sadie was loath to take any attention away from her daughter's special celebration of a joined life.

Pete understood Sadie's reasons to delay their own vows, but two and a half years was a really long courtship. This cruise therefore, had multiple purposes: to celebrate Pete's retirement from the police department, to allow Sadie's children to get to know him better, and to allow Sadie to catch up with Breanna's wedding plans. Seeing as how Breanna lived in London and Sadie lived in Colorado, mother and daughter hadn't had a lot of time to talk things over.

"So?"

Sadie looked up, her fork halfway to her mouth. "What?"

"I asked if Pete was going to make an honest woman of you or not?"

"Breanna Lynn!" Sadie said, lowering her fork as her cheeks heated up again. "Are you implying that my relationship with Pete Cunningham is anything less than respectable?"

Breanna's grin widened, and she pointed her fork across the table. "Bazinga."

"Bazinga? What does that mean?"

Breanna laughed again and took another bite.

It must be European humor.

“Isn’t this whole cruise about you making an announcement to Shawn and me?”

“No,” Sadie said, shaking her head. Is that what they thought? “It’s a family vacation . . . with Pete, and my chance to get caught up on your wedding plans.”

“Oh,” Breanna said with a shrug of one shoulder, showing how unconcerned she was about the information. “Shawn and I both like Pete, so I don’t know why you’re worried.”

Sadie considered how best to proceed as she and Breanna took a few more bites of their meals but decided she may as well lay all her concerns on the table. “I’m also a little worried about Shawn.”

Bre kept her eyes on her food, a sure indication that she knew something, and Sadie’s stomach fell. As much as Sadie hated being left out, if Shawn were in *serious* trouble, he wouldn’t only talk to Breanna about it, right? One thing was for certain, if Sadie hoped to get information from Breanna, she couldn’t push too hard or her daughter would clam up. She wasn’t one to be casual with other people’s confidences. “Does he seem okay to you?” Sadie asked innocently.

“Well, you know, he’s finishing up school this summer and . . . it’s not the best time to get a job and, well . . . it’s a big transition.”

While Shawn had walked with his graduating class just last month, he still had two online classes he needed to finish up over the summer in order to complete his degree in criminal justice.

But it was obvious to Sadie that school and the inevitable transition that followed wasn’t *it*. “Why wouldn’t he talk to me about that?”

Breanna still wouldn’t meet her mother’s eyes. “Um, well, have you asked him what’s wrong?”

“Of course I have. He’s assured me everything is fine, but he

only calls me back about half the time these days. I can just feel this . . . vagueness from him.”

“Maybe don’t worry about it, then,” Breanna said, attempting a smile as she finally made eye contact. “When he’s ready, he’ll tell you.”

“So he *is* having trouble that he doesn’t want to talk to me about.”

“Mom,” Bre said, but the roar of a lion cut her off. Breanna rummaged in her bag and pulled out her phone. She’d majored in zoology and currently worked as a docent at the London Zoo, so of course her text message tone was a lion’s roar. Because they were in port, there was still cell service, but once they headed out to sea, cell phones would only be useful to check the time and to take pictures.

“They’re checked in,” she said while typing a response.

“Shawn and Pete?” Sadie asked, sitting up straighter and instantly dropping her concerns in favor of an appropriate welcome for her two favorite men. “Where are they?”

“Shawn says they just had their ‘Welcome Aboard’ photo taken.”

“Together?” Sadie said, a tender lump in her throat at the thought of Pete and Shawn superimposed in front of their boat, the *Celebration*.

Breanna smiled at her and sent the text message. “They’re on their way up. Shawn said to save him some bacon.”

“Even if it’s undercooked?”

When Pete found them, Sadie jumped up for a hello kiss and hug. It had only been a week since he’d dropped her off at the Denver airport so she could fly up to visit some friends in Portland

before the cruise, but she'd missed him. Only when she pulled back from the embrace did she realize he was alone. "Where's Shawn?"

"He said he'd catch up. I think he saw someone he knew."

"Really?" Sadie asked with heavy skepticism in her voice as all her concerns came rushing back. What were the chances of him knowing someone other than Pete, Breanna, and herself on this cruise?

"He told me to go ahead and he'd be right behind me." They all looked behind Pete, but there was no 260-pound Polynesian man with an Afro bringing up the rear.

"You go get yourself some food—avoid the bread pudding, though—and I'll find my boy," Sadie said to Pete. She hadn't seen Shawn since Christmas—almost six months—which was far too long to go without one of his signature bear hugs. She knew she'd feel better once she saw him in person.

"Okay. He was one level down, in front of the elevators when I last saw him. Hurry back." He gave her a wink, and she felt all jiggy inside for a moment.

Sadie made her way out of the dining room and down the set of stairs just outside the entrance to the buffet. Unlike deck twelve, deck eleven was primarily a cabin deck, though a sign indicated that the security office was forward on the starboard side and the bridge was forward on the port side of the ship. Although there were several people waiting for an elevator when Sadie arrived, Shawn was not one of them. If she didn't find him soon, she'd call his phone, but she liked the idea of finding him on her own.

She headed to the port side and glanced down the long narrow hallway lined with turquoise doors that led to the passenger cabins. There was a younger couple coming out of a room, but no Shawn. She crossed in front of the elevators to the starboard side, glanced

right, and then left, relieved when a familiar set of shoulders and six inches of picked-out curls caught her eye. She smiled to herself and headed toward Shawn's towering form when she realized he was talking to someone. And he didn't look happy about it.

Sadie slowed her steps and observed the scene with a little more interest. The woman Shawn was talking to was a light-skinned black woman with hundreds of long thin braids pulled back into a bulky ponytail. Some of the braids were dyed hot pink. She wore a black cotton sundress and was very engaged in whatever it was she was explaining to Shawn, who had his arms crossed over his chest and a scowl on his face.

The woman was gesturing with her hands, but the expression on her face was somewhat pleading, as though she was trying to convince Shawn of something. As Sadie got closer, she realized the woman was older than Shawn. She was thickly built and at least six feet tall. The two of them completely blocked the hallway.

Sadie stopped about twenty feet from them, not wanting to be rude and interrupt, but not inclined to back away either. Why was Shawn upset? Who was this woman?

The woman said something, then leaned forward slightly, awaiting his answer. Shawn shook his head and began to speak, then saw Sadie out of the corner of his eye and pinched his lips together. She smiled, but he didn't smile back and instead turned to the woman with some urgency. Sadie couldn't hear what he said, but the woman looked at Sadie too. She didn't smile either, and Sadie found herself taking a step backward. Were they angry with *her*? What for?

Shawn said something else, and the woman nodded, turned away from Sadie, and proceeded down the hall. Shawn looked after the woman for a moment, then turned back to Sadie. It took him ten feet before he managed to put a fake smile on his face.

“Who was that?” Sadie asked.

“Don’t worry about it.”

“But it seemed like the two of you—”

“Gosh, Mom,” Shawn snapped, “can you please just not worry about it?”

Sadie lifted her eyebrows in surprise. Shawn never talked to her like that. At least not since he was twelve and she’d grounded him from his GameCube for sassing her.

His expression softened and he took a breath. “Sorry. I’ve got a lot on my mind right now. Where’s the buffet?”

Sadie opened her mouth to ask what he had on his mind, but the way he was holding himself and shifting his weight from one foot to the other kept her quiet. She forced a smile of her own and tucked her wanting-to-know-everything instinct away while putting out her arms, her signal that she wanted a hug from her favorite boy. “It’s great to see you.”

Shawn wrapped his strong arms around her back, but he didn’t squeeze her quite as tight or hold on for quite as long as she’d expected. “Good to see you too, Mom.” He pulled back and headed toward the elevators. “Is the food on deck twelve, then? I’m starving.”

“Yeah,” Sadie said, following him down the hall. “One deck up.”

Just before they left the hallway, Sadie looked over her shoulder. The woman Shawn had been talking to ducked out of sight around a corner.

A heavy feeling settled into Sadie’s stomach as she and Shawn climbed the stairs leading to deck twelve. Over the last few years, Sadie had developed an extreme dislike for secrets. And now, it seemed, her son was keeping one from her.

## *Kara's Bread Pudding and Caramel Sauce*

### Caramel Sauce

1/3 cup white sugar

1/3 cup brown sugar

6 tablespoons butter

2/3 cup corn syrup (maple syrup works well, too)

3/4 cup heavy whipping cream

### Bread Pudding

1 1/2 cups sugar

4 eggs, beaten

1 1/4 cups heavy whipping cream

1 1/2 cups milk

1/2 teaspoon cinnamon (optional)

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/2 cup butter, melted

1 1/4 pounds white bread, cubed

1/2 cup Caramel Sauce

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

To make sauce, combine sugars, butter, and syrup in a pot. Cook over medium heat until ingredients liquefy and sugar is dissolved. (Caution, this sauce gets very hot, so be careful. Also, this recipe does not thicken like traditional caramel; you should have a thin sauce.)

Remove from heat and add the cream. Set aside.

To make pudding, combine the sugar, eggs, cream, milk, cinnamon (if desired), vanilla, and butter in a bowl or blender and mix together well. Put cubed bread in a very large mixing bowl. Pour milk mixture over the bread, folding ingredients together until bread has absorbed the liquid.

Pour the mixture in a greased 9x13-inch pan. Pour 1/2 cup of the caramel sauce over the top of the bread mixture. Bake for

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30 minutes; rotate pan and bake another 30 minutes until crust is golden brown and the center doesn't jiggle when you shake the pan. (Depending on your oven, the bread density, and type of pan, it could take up to an additional 30 minutes to cook through the middle.)

Serve bread pudding warm and top with leftover caramel sauce.

Serves 12.

Note: Any type of bread works for this recipe—hot dog buns, end pieces, etc. Just go by weight.

## CHAPTER 2



Sadie stood at the railing with Pete and her children at her side as the engines roared to life and confetti burst out of the chimneys at the top of the ship. She watched the Space Needle disappear behind them.

“And we’re off,” Breanna said, her long hair dancing in the wind. Though Sadie had suggested the cruise, Breanna was the one who requested Alaska as their destination. She’d never seen whales in the wild. Seeing her daughter’s excitement validated Sadie’s decision to fulfill the request despite knowing she would miss the warmer climates of the Caribbean and Mexican cruises she’d been on before.

Liam, Breanna’s fiancé, had been invited to attend, but since taking over the affairs of his family’s holdings in England, it was difficult for him to leave for long periods of time. He’d sent Sadie a very gracious thank-you card for the invite though. Sadie liked Liam quite a lot, but his responsibilities to his heritage—his father was an earl—had posed many challenges for the engaged couple. Despite the difficulties, Liam and Breanna were both working hard to make the compromises needed for a future together, and Sadie

was proud of her daughter for finding a place of independence amid the obligations.

After the pier faded into the horizon, the Hoffmillers and Pete returned for another round at the buffet. Or, rather, Shawn headed back for another round while the rest of them settled for something to nibble on. Breanna and Pete went with cookies while Sadie got another roll. The bread pudding might be subpar, but the rolls were excellent.

Shawn's lingering tension seemed to dissipate in direct correlation to how much food he ate, but the woman in the hall was never far from Sadie's mind. Each time she considered bringing it up again, however, she remembered Shawn's request to leave it alone and she recommitted to respect that . . . for now. Shawn had been through a lot the last couple of years, and she wanted this to be a true vacation for him, which meant not pushing him too much.

The mandatory evacuation drill went well—the crew didn't make the passengers put on the ugly orange life vests, which Sadie appreciated—and the first evening's entertainment was a preview of the different shows that would be playing in the ship's theater throughout the week. After the performance, Sadie and her family enjoyed a late dinner in the Tiara Room, one of the onboard restaurants, and Sadie was pleased to note that the food there was much better than at the buffet. Everyone got along well, and Sadie was relieved that Pete and her children seemed to be enjoying one another's company.

By ten o'clock, the sky was mostly dark—she wasn't sure it ever got fully dark this far north this time of year—and their bellies were full as they headed to their cabins. Breanna and Sadie were sharing a room on deck eight, while Shawn and Pete each had their own cabins; Shawn on deck seven and Pete on deck ten. Sadie had

expected all three rooms would be close to one another, but she must not have checked a box for that request when she submitted the reservation. Oh well, going up and down the stairs would be good for her glutes.

Sadie had stuck to a pretty regular exercise routine since having stayed in New Mexico last fall. Pete's cousin, Caro, had been her inspiration, and Sadie had maintained a better weight than she'd had in several years. She'd given up on ever having the word "slender" be an adjective anyone would use to describe her figure, but she could live with "curvy." It beat "round" any day of the week.

Breanna hadn't quite recovered from her transatlantic flight yesterday, and though Sadie had encouraged her all evening to go to bed early, Breanna hadn't wanted to miss anything.

Once in the room, however, she wilted fast, which meant grilling her about Shawn wasn't the best idea. Breanna managed to brush her teeth, send Liam a quick good night e-mail from her laptop—at approximately \$1.25 per minute, Sadie didn't imagine any of them would be spending much time online—and change into her kitten-print pajamas before falling into bed. Within a minute, she was out.

Sadie changed into her own PJs—plaid, not kittens—and was considering checking on Shawn when she heard a tapping at her door. She peered through the peephole and smiled to see that her late-night visitor was Pete. She opened the door quietly and eased out of the room, keeping her hand on the doorknob so it wouldn't lock behind her.

"I tried to text you," Pete said quietly, "but we must be out of cell range now that we're in open water. Did you get settled in okay?"

Sadie nodded. "Breanna's already asleep."

“Good. Then she won’t know you snuck out. I want to see what the stars look like from the Pacific Ocean.”

Sadie was sixteen all over again, although she’d never actually snuck out when she was sixteen. Still, she felt a little scandalous as she tiptoed back inside her room, put on her slippers, grabbed a jacket, and slid her room key into the pocket. Thank goodness she hadn’t taken off her makeup yet; hopefully that made up for the fact that she was in her pajamas.

“Do you mind if I stop by Shawn’s cabin to say good night on our way?” Sadie asked after she’d closed the door and tested the handle to make sure it was locked.

“Uh, sure,” Pete said.

Sadie pretended not to notice that he wasn’t thrilled with the idea. On the way to Shawn’s room, Sadie explained that she was worried about him and wanted some reassurance that he was okay.

“Why are you so worried about him?”

“I’ll tell you later,” she said, dropping her voice since they’d reached Shawn’s cabin: room 749. She didn’t want him to overhear them talking about him. She tapped on his door and waited for him to answer. His stateroom was the same size as the one Breanna and Sadie were sharing, which meant he could get to the door in about five steps no matter where he might be inside. Sure enough, a few seconds later, he pulled open the door, completely filling the doorway. Sadie smiled and was relieved when he smiled back.

“I just wanted to say good night before Pete and I go look at the stars,” Sadie said.

She put out her arms for a hug, and he complied, holding her tighter than he had that afternoon, which went a long way toward easing her worries.

“Good night, Mom,” he said when he let her go. He glanced at Pete and raised one eyebrow. “Don’t keep her out too late.”

“Well, you know what they say—what happens on a cruise ship, stays on a cruise ship.”

Shawn chuckled while Sadie shook her head and hoped her embarrassment didn’t show. The phone in Shawn’s cabin rang, and his expression instantly hardened as he glanced over his shoulder. “I better go,” he said, stepping back and closing the door halfway. “I’ll catch up with you for breakfast, okay?”

“Okay, what . . . time?” But he’d shut the cabin door before she finished. She blinked at the door for a few moments, until Pete took her hand and pulled her toward the stairs.

“Who would be calling him?” Sadie wondered. “It’s almost eleven o’clock.” But even as she asked it, she had a strong suspicion about the answer. There was only one other person on this boat whom he seemed to know besides his family—the woman with the braids.

“Stand down, Mama Bear, we’ll see him in the morning.”

Pete guided her down the hall, but Sadie kept looking over her shoulder at the closed door to Shawn’s room.

They took the elevator up to deck twelve, then followed a short hallway to the automatic doors that led to the open portion of the deck that held the swimming pools, hot tubs, and outside grill—none of which she expected would get much use since the temperature wasn’t expected to go past the low sixties all week. This late at night, it had to be in the forties. Though June was technically summer in Colorado, it seemed to still be early spring in the Pacific Northwest.

She was surprised to see a few of her fellow passengers braving the hot tubs, and she shivered at the thought of how cold they

would be once they ran for their towels. She zipped her jacket up to her chin and pushed her hands into the fleece-lined pockets as she followed Pete up a set of stairs that led to the highest deck on the ship. Thirteen-forward, like its sister deck, thirteen-aft, were partial balconies, set up with a few tables and a dozen or so deck chairs. It was a perfect place to get away from the bustle of the ship, which was still going strong despite the late hour.

Sadie and Pete had the deck to themselves, probably because it was also the coldest part of the ship with nothing to protect them from the bracing breeze coming off the ocean. Sadie had hoped to see the northern lights on this trip, but in her research prior to the cruise, she had learned they probably wouldn't be far enough north to see them, especially this time of year. But she still hoped all the same.

Though clouds covered the sky, the moonlight that filtered through lit the ocean like an undulating mirror. Sadie felt a moment of misgiving, imagining the depths below the surface of the water, but then Pete put his arms around her from behind and pulled her close. Was there a better antidote to her anxiety than Peter Cunningham's embrace?

"So this is what retirement is like," Pete said after they spent a minute just enjoying the togetherness of it all. He rested his chin on her shoulder and stared across the ocean. "I think I could get used to it pretty quickly."

"It hasn't even been a full weekend," Sadie teased. Her face was already tingling from the cold.

"But there's no desk waiting for me on Monday, and no one will be calling me at three in the morning. Just knowing that makes this a very different weekend than any other weekend I've had before. I might even learn how to sleep in again."

“You’re not going to be one of those retirees who ends up watching *Wheel of Fortune* reruns all day and showering once a week, are you?”

Pete laughed. “Somehow I don’t think you’ll let that happen.”

Sadie smiled at the inclusion of her in his life and snuggled into his chest a little more. She breathed in the scent of his cologne—something musky—mingled with the ocean breeze.

“Besides, I’ll still be doing some consulting, and there’s talk of opening up a tri-county cold case squad; I’ll put in for that. *And*, believe it or not, there are things I’ve wanted to do other than work.”

“Like what?”

“Fishing and hiking and raising chickens—I’ve got a list.”

Sadie laughed out loud and turned her head to look up at him. “Raise chickens?”

“I grew up with chickens. We had a flock when my kids were little, but they got tired of them, and I was busy and Pat never liked them. I think I’d like to start up again. They’re a fun hobby.”

“Chickens,” Sadie repeated, shaking her head and looking out across the ocean again. “I’d have never guessed you were a wannabe chicken farmer.” Fresh eggs were fabulous in baked goods, however, which offset Sadie’s qualms about supporting such an endeavor. She wasn’t keen on cleaning out the chicken coop though. They would definitely need to negotiate terms of the chicken-related duties down the road.

“I’ll have you know I took the blue ribbon in the Santa Fe county fair for my Ameraucana bantam rooster when I was twelve. His name was Elvis.”

Sadie laughed again. “Oh, Pete, you continue to surprise me.”

“That’s good. Because once you figure me out, I’ll be boring.”

“I can’t imagine that.”

He kissed the top of her head, and she turned in his arms so that they were facing one another. They went quiet, and Sadie closed her eyes and rested her head against his chest while she listened to the passengers below them and the sound of the ship cutting through the water. For a moment, Sadie pretended they were married and this was their honeymoon.

Sadie had never enjoyed waiting, but this kind of waiting was taxing her more than anything else had in her life. And it was all her fault. Pete would likely marry her next week if she said she was ready, and she *was* ready in almost every way other than wanting her daughter to get married first so as not to take anything away from that event. It was a hard decision to stick to though, and she questioned her determination on a daily basis. Breanna's wedding was still four months away. *Four!* Would it be so bad if Sadie were a married woman on her daughter's special day?

"So, why are you worried about Shawn? You've been looking at him funny all day."

"I have?" Sadie said with a frown, opening her eyes and staring out at the water once more. "I didn't mean to be so obvious."

"Did something happen?"

Sadie explained about seeing the woman in the hallway and Shawn's reaction to her questions.

"Huh," Pete said in reply. "That's strange."

Sadie looked up at him. "Did you see her when the two of you parted ways?"

Pete shook his head. "We'd come on with a big group and opted for the stairs since the elevators were packed. It was slow going. When we reached deck eleven, Shawn said he'd catch up. I didn't see where he went."

"How would he know someone on board? And why not explain

it to me if it's innocent? I think Breanna knows something, but she fell asleep before I could get it out of her."

"Sadie, Sadie, Sadie," Pete said, shaking his head. "Don't do this."

"Do what?" Sadie asked innocently. "I'm a concerned parent."

He gave her a questioning look, and she narrowed her eyes, albeit playfully—sort of. "If it were *your* son, *you'd* be concerned."

"Being concerned and getting into it are two different things, and I can guarantee that I wouldn't *get into it*. He's twenty-two years old. Let him be a grown-up."

Shawn was actually twenty-three—he'd just had a birthday—but correcting Pete wouldn't help her case, so she refrained. "I don't want to *get into it*. And I know he's an adult, I just . . ." Her voice trailed off at Pete's incredulous look. "I'm just worried about him. I told you how aloof he's been the last few months—not returning my calls and being vague when we do talk."

"That doesn't justify you poking your nose where it doesn't belong."

Sadie frowned, mostly because he was right, but partly because she really, really wanted to know what was going on. "Things have been different between us since Boston," she said. Boston had been hard for everyone—Shawn, Sadie, and Pete too. "It's been a year and a half, and I keep hoping our relationship will repair itself, but sometimes I worry that something broke in him back there."

"Regardless of whether that's true or not, all you can do is love him as your son and respect him as an adult. Let this trip be about togetherness. He's doing good things with his life, and if you can respect his boundaries, he'll be much more likely to open up to you."

Sadie took a breath and nodded. "You're right."

Pete smiled widely. "I'm glad you think so."

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“I think I’m getting frostbite in my toes.”

“Well, then perhaps we’re going to have to think of ways to warm you up.” And in fact he did, kissing her until the soles of her feet, along with most of the rest of her, were on fire. Whoever said menopause interfered with the feelings of a red-blooded woman had been terribly misinformed.