

# KEY LIME PIE

A CULINARY MYSTERY

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DESERET  
BOOK  
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

## CHAPTER 1



Hey.” Sadie Hoffmiller looked up from where she was planting marigolds in the courthouse flower beds—part of the community service she’d been sentenced to after an unfortunate situation she’d been involved in a few months earlier. The sun blinded her, forcing her to lift a gloved hand to shield her eyes even though she knew the voice. Eric Burton had received the same sentence for the same reason—co-conspirators is what they’d been called.

“Hi there,” Sadie responded, sitting back on her heels and attempting to smooth her hair before realizing her glove was covered in dirt and therefore made whatever state her hair was in even worse. “I thought you’d finished your community service on Monday.”

The judge could have been much harder on both of them. As it was, Eric had made short work of his three hundred hours, sometimes doing up to twenty hours a week in addition to running his locksmith business. Sadie had tried to keep up with him, but she still had a few days left.

“And how would you know that?” Eric asked, giving her a playful smile. “Or have you been asking about me?”

Sadie felt her cheeks heat up for no good reason at all and went back to her flowers. “Actually I was excited to have a little peace and quiet around here. I’ve been counting down your hours more than I’ve been counting down my own.”

Eric laughed out loud, making it impossible for Sadie to feign offense at their banter. He lowered himself to the grass beside her, and Sadie found herself watching him out of the corner of her eye. Spring had just come out of hiding in Colorado and the grass was still a mottled green and brown. It was warm for April, mid-sixties, and the citizens of Garrison were taking full advantage of it.

Eric lay on his back, supporting his weight with his elbows while lifting his face to the sun that was almost directly overhead. His long hair was pulled into his usual ponytail at the base of his neck, and he wore jeans and a gray, long-sleeved T-shirt with a green alien head on the front.

Sadie watched him a little too long before going back to her marigolds. Sometimes he was flirty, and now and again he was downright brazen in his attention to her, and yet he backpedaled quickly when those moments came around, leaving a bewildered Sadie in his wake.

“I told Tami I’d keep helping with Wednesday’s food delivery until someone else breaks the law and takes my place,” Eric said, interrupting her thoughts. “Apparently Garrison doesn’t have enough of us fringe citizens.”

Us? He wasn’t calling Sadie a fringe citizen, was he? She glanced at him quickly and realized he probably was. He probably thought it was a compliment. “It’s generous of you to keep helping her out,” she said.

“It was generous of you to give her the cookies. She insisted I have one,” Eric said after a few seconds. She could feel him looking

at her, and she imagined his blue eyes were even brighter than usual, thanks to the sun. But she didn't allow herself to look at him and instead became even more intent on the flower she was patting into place.

When she didn't answer, Eric spoke again. "What kind of cookies are they?"

She still didn't answer.

"I'm not leaving till you tell me, so you may as well fess up."

Sadie squinted at him as she once again sat back on her heels and let out a breath. "No one was supposed to know they were from me," she said quietly, embarrassed to be found out. "They were an anonymous thank-you gift. I didn't want Tami to feel indebted."

"If it makes you feel better, she hasn't figured it out yet," Eric said with a wry grin. "I'll keep your secret if you give me the recipe."

Not since Sadie's late husband, Neil, had she met a man who preferred the kitchen to the La-Z-Boy, and while Eric insisted that he loved to cook, Sadie had seen his house and had a hard time believing he could cook in such a mess. She didn't like to doubt him, but there were so many ways that Eric confused her. Cooking was only one of them.

"So?"

Sadie looked up at him. "So? What?"

"The recipe," Eric said, shaking his head slightly. "Are you going to give it to me, or do I have to tell Tami she's got to find a way to thank you for the thank-you."

"You're impossible." In some ways he was like a younger brother, teasing and goading her all the time, and yet . . . in other ways he was nothing like a brother at all. Not one little bit.

"They're my Kickin' Craisin cookies," Sadie said in surrender.

“Kickin’ Craisin, huh?” Eric said, squinting thoughtfully. “Where’s the kick come from?”

“Cayenne pepper,” Sadie said, unable to hide a smile. She loved people’s reactions when she told them the secret ingredient.

Eric’s eyebrows shot up. “In a cookie?”

Sadie smiled even wider. “Just a little. You want zing not zoinks.”

Eric threw his head back and laughed before sobering instantly.

“Am I interrupting something?”

Sadie looked up. Pete Cunningham, her sorta-kind-of-boyfriend-maybe, was blocking the sun. She smiled, but felt as though she’d been caught doing something she oughtn’t. “Pete,” she said, hoping that by making her voice sound lighter she could cover up her discomfort. “Is it four o’clock already?”

“Almost,” Pete said. He was dressed in black slacks and a royal blue shirt that looked quite striking beneath his black overcoat. He cut a very different figure than Eric did, and he didn’t look all that happy to find them talking together. He turned to Eric. “Mr. Burton,” he said with a polite nod. Too polite.

“Detective,” Eric said just as coolly. He pushed himself up to a sitting position while Sadie patted another flower into place.

“I’ve only got a few more flowers to get in the ground,” Sadie said. “It’s going to get cold again tomorrow, and I want to get these planted before the weather turns. I didn’t realize it was so late.”

Pete put his hands in his pockets. “It’s all right. We’ve got a few minutes.”

“I can finish this for you, if you’d like,” Eric said, his tone suspiciously formal.

Sadie turned to look at him in surprise.

“If I hadn’t been distracting you, you wouldn’t be running late.”

Sadie sighed and gave him a reproachful look. His gallantry was

only a ploy to make the point that *he'd* been distracting her from the date she had with *Pete*. He was so not worth the thoughts she couldn't seem to get out of her head about him. However, she chose to take him at his word. To do anything else would allow him an opportunity to make even more uncomfortable comments.

"That would be great," she said, brushing off her gloves before removing them and handing them to Eric. He frowned slightly, betraying the fact that he'd hoped to draw this out a little longer. He took the proffered gloves as Sadie pushed herself up, wincing at the cramps in her knees from kneeling so long. Pete reached down to help her, and she raised her left hand toward him.

Eric put a hand on her arm. "Your shoulder?"

"Oh, right." Sadie lifted her right hand instead. As part of the unfortunate situation that had landed her with the community service in the first place, she'd torn a ligament in her shoulder. It had made remarkable progress over the last several weeks but it was still tender. Why was it Eric had remembered and Pete hadn't?

"Give me a couple minutes to clean up and I'll be ready," she said, untying the apron she'd worn to protect her clothes. She and Pete were going to Baxter's for an early dinner and then planned to catch a movie at the Capitol Theatre, which played classics on Wednesday nights. Tonight they were featuring *Out of Africa* and Sadie's best friend, Gayle, had dropped Sadie off at the courthouse for her community service so that Pete could pick her up and they wouldn't have to worry about Sadie's car.

"No need to rush," Pete said, smiling at her with those hazel eyes she liked so much. Pete was wonderful—kind, smart, supportive, and stable—everything she wanted. And yet, there was something that was either too much or too little. Because of . . . whatever it was, their relationship hadn't progressed much over the last few

months. But they were in a comfortable place and for now they both seemed okay with that. “I’ve got a few phone calls to make,” Pete continued, leaning in to kiss her on the cheek. “I’ll wait for you in the car if that’s okay.”

Sadie nodded her agreement and looked down at a quiet Eric while Pete headed toward the parking lot. “I appreciate your help finishing up,” she said to Eric, feeling bad he was digging in the dirt even though it wasn’t her fault exactly. He had chosen not to wear the gloves; they were next to him on the ground while he worked bare-handed.

“I’ll just bet you do,” Eric said in a dull voice.

“What?” Sadie questioned, sure she’d misinterpreted his tone.

Eric sat back, put his hands on his thighs, and looked up, glancing at Pete’s retreating back before making eye contact with her. “Is that really the kind of guy you want to be with?”

Sadie was instantly defensive. “Obviously,” she answered, folding her arms over her chest, embarrassed. She should have reprimanded Eric for asking such an inappropriate question, but she didn’t.

Eric studied her for a moment before turning back to the flower bed, stabbing the trowel into the dirt. “Huh.”

She frowned. “Huh, what?” she asked.

Eric shrugged and then jammed a poor marigold into the hole he’d just dug. “I pegged you as wanting someone who was a little more real, a little more—I don’t know—fun.”

“Pete’s real,” Sadie said even though she didn’t know what that meant. “And he’s . . . fun.”

Eric paused, then put down his trowel and stood slowly. “Is he?” he asked, hooking his thumbs in the belt loops of his jeans. His tone had changed dramatically. No longer hard, it was now whispery and . . . almost intimate. He took a step toward her so they were only

a foot apart. His closeness forced Sadie to look up, and although she knew she should take a step backward for reasons of propriety, she didn't want to.

"You deserve more than a safe bet, Sadie," he said. His breath smelled like cinnamon and a hint of cayenne. "You deserve someone who will enjoy life with you rather than just live it by your side."

Behind the words was the implication that *he* was the kind of man she'd enjoy life with, and that brought to the foreground all the thoughts she tried not to think about him but had a hard time avoiding. All of a sudden it was impossible to ignore the fact that she was attracted to this man.

It made her feel utterly ridiculous.

"I'm older than you," she said before realizing she'd opened her mouth. Her face instantly burned. Did she seriously say that? Out loud?

"Are you?" he asked.

Sadie narrowed her eyes. "You know I am."

Eric made an innocent face and shrugged. "I don't know any such thing."

"I'm fifty-six," Sadie said in an attempt to convince him; the words almost stuck in her throat. It was not normal for a woman to admit her age like that, but this was an emergency. She watched his face, but he showed no reaction at all. "How old are you?"

Eric shook his head. "It doesn't matter."

He *was* younger than she was! She knew it! "It *does* matter."

"Not to me," he said. "Is that your only reason for choosing him over me?"

Sadie cast a look over her shoulder, remembering that Pete was only twenty yards away. His car must be on the other side of the parking lot, though; she couldn't see it from where she stood.



Eric took her chin in his hand and turned her head back to face him. He didn't say anything, just lifted his eyebrows expectantly as he dropped his hand. He wasn't going to let this conversation just go away.

Sadie's head was still spinning, but there didn't seem to be any option other than answering.

"I—uh . . ." She stumbled to find another reason, acutely aware of the fact that there were things she *couldn't* say. She had been an educator; he was a locksmith. She was organized; he was a slob. And she was older than he was!

"You have longer hair than I do."

Eric smiled. "I'll cut it."

This was not happening! And yet it was. She was not having this conversation! And yet she was. She didn't know what to say. And yet she spoke because it had to be said. "We're too different."

"Not really." Eric took another tiny step toward her; she could feel the toe of his boot against the toe of her sneaker. "You just have a hard time admitting that I'm the kind of guy you really want to spend the rest of your life with."

Sadie stared into his eyes and when he leaned into her, she found herself steeling herself expectantly. He was going to kiss her.

And she was totally going to let him.

Inches from making contact, however, Eric paused. "Mark my words, Sadie Hoffmiller, the first time our lips meet, it will be *you* kissing *me*."

He stepped back while Sadie tried to make sense of what he'd just said, and what he *hadn't* done. Her eyes snapped to meet his laughing ones, and the expression on his face told her in no uncertain terms that she'd proved something he'd suspected all along.

Sadie opened her mouth but could find no words. She wasn't used to being made a fool of and felt instant heat rush up her spine.

The ringing of his cell phone saved her from having to respond. It was some heavy metal song she didn't want to know the title of—AC/DC she thought. He winked at her while digging the phone from his pocket.

"This is Eric," he said, turning away from Sadie who stood with her hands balled into fists at her sides. How dare he trick her into saying things she shouldn't have said!

She narrowed her eyes, waiting for him to get off the phone so she could tell him what she *really* thought of him, but then she noticed his eyes go wide. "What?" he breathed before going silent again. He glanced at Sadie, a pleading, scared look on his face that drained her of all her anger. "Yes," he continued, "I can fax them to you in about ten minutes." He pulled the phone away from his ear and stared at it for a moment before turning it off.

"What?" Sadie asked as he turned toward her. "What's happened?"

"They found a body in Florida," he said, looking away for just a moment and taking a deep breath. "They think it might be my daughter, Megan."

### *Kickin' Craisin Cookies*

1 cup butter

1 cup sugar

1 cup brown sugar

2 eggs

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 cups flour

2½ cups quick oats

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cloves  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon ground ginger  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
Dash of cayenne pepper  
 $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups Craisins  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup white chocolate chips (optional)  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped walnuts or pecans (optional)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cream butter and sugars. Add eggs and vanilla and mix until well combined. Add dry ingredients and mix well. Add Craisins, chocolate chips, and nuts, using a wooden spoon to mix (dough will be too thick for most mixers).

Drop by tablespoons or use a 1-inch scoop to make dough balls and place on an ungreased cookie sheet about two inches apart. Bake 6 to 9 minutes or until just browned—do not overbake. Allow to cool on pan 2 minutes before moving to cooling rack. Cookies should be crisp on the outside and chewy on the inside.

Makes 3 dozen.

## CHAPTER 2



Sadie gasped and raised a hand to her mouth. She instinctively reached her other hand out to Eric, who grasped it and held on tight. Eric had told her briefly about his daughter—how she'd vanished during spring break in Florida three years ago. "They found . . . a *body*?"

Not a living person.

The tortured look in Eric's eyes deepened. "I've never believed she was alive all this time," he said. He looked at their joined hands for a moment before dropping hers. "I haven't *wanted* her to be alive all this time."

Sadie was shocked. "What? Of course you've wanted her to be alive. Every parent—"

"There are worse things than death," Eric interjected. "And if she's been alive all this time but unable to contact me or her mother . . ." He didn't finish the sentence. He didn't need to.

Sadie felt her stomach drop. Three years was a long time to consider what might have happened. Sadie felt a lump rise in her throat as she glimpsed just a moment of what he'd been dealing with all these years. He held her eyes one more second before looking away.

"I've got to get home; they need a copy of her dental records. They can't find them in her file."

"The Florida police?"

Eric nodded, already turning toward the parking lot. Sadie hurried to keep up with him. "Eric," she said, running a few steps. "Where did they find Meg—uh, her . . . uh . . . the body?"

"I don't know," Eric said.

He had very long legs, and Sadie was in a full-on jog by the time they reached the parking lot. He pulled the keys from his pocket and headed for his Jeep Cherokee.

"So you fax the records, and then what?" Sadie asked, still trying to keep up, physically and mentally.

"I don't know," Eric said again. He grabbed the handle of the car door and pulled it open just as Pete called out from behind them.

"Sadie?"

"Just a minute," she threw over her shoulder before turning back to Eric, who had one foot in his Jeep but was looking at her. "I—I don't know what to say," she finally admitted.

"There's nothing you should say," Eric replied, no reproach in his voice. "I'm sorry I won't be able to finish the flowers."

"Are you kidding?" she said. She paused again, struggling to find some way to . . . what? Comfort him? Support him? Say the right thing? "Are you going to be okay?"

"I just hope it's her," Eric said, his voice soft and full of regret. "I want to know where my daughter is."

Sadie nodded her understanding even though she fully realized that she didn't understand. How could she?

A hand settled on her shoulder, and she looked up into Pete's concerned face. For an instant she thought he was worried about Eric too, then realized he was likely wondering why Sadie was

talking to Eric instead of getting ready like she was supposed to be doing.

She turned to Eric and accepted that there wasn't anything she could do to help him. They were only friends, but not exactly close friends—despite the almost-kiss. She hadn't even known his daughter's name.

“Good luck,” she finally said, offering him a sympathetic smile. “If there's some way I can help, please don't hesitate.”

“Good luck with what?” Pete asked. “What kind of help?” There was an edge to his voice that Sadie resented, a touch of envy that would have been laughable if not for the circumstances being so serious.

Eric glanced briefly at Pete, then Sadie. “Thank you,” was all he said before he got into the Jeep and pulled the door shut.

“What was that all about?” Pete asked as Eric's engine roared to life.

Sadie felt an overwhelming annoyance at the fact that while Eric was facing a horrendous discovery full of complex emotions and realizations, Pete seemed to be caught up only in his own jealousy. “He just got a call saying the police may have found his daughter's body in Florida.”

Pete was well aware of Eric's daughter's disappearance; Eric had told the Garrison police about it at the time of his and Sadie's arrest. Sadie felt sure that Eric had hoped the information would spark some new interest in his daughter's case, but as far as Sadie could tell, nothing had come of it.

“Oh,” Pete said simply. He watched Eric's Jeep disappear around the corner. After a moment he looked at Sadie. “Are you okay?”

Sadie wasn't sure. Over the last several months she'd been involved in no fewer than three murder investigations. First, her

neighbor Anne had been found dead in the field behind her house. Then, on a trip to the English country estate of Sadie's daughter's boyfriend, a servant had been murdered. And just two months ago there had been a shooting at the Garrison Library fund-raising dinner. She was like some kind of murder magnet, not a title she wanted for herself. The Library Shooting, as it had come to be known around Garrison, was what had landed Sadie with three hundred hours of community service; she hadn't exactly done what the police had wanted her to do that night. But it had all worked out for the best in the end—if "best" was the right word.

And now, here was another body. Only this body was all the way in Florida. She was glad to be on the outside of this one since there was no room in her life for more drama. But how could she not worry about Eric? As his friend, was there anything she could do to help?

"Sadie?" Pete asked.

Sadie snapped out of her thoughts and looked up into Pete's concerned eyes. "Are you okay?" he asked again.

"I'm fine," Sadie said quickly, because of course she was fine, just worried. This wasn't about her at all. "I can't imagine what this must feel like for him." Talking about Eric brought back the almost-kiss from a couple minutes earlier, and Sadie had to look away from Pete's probing gaze. She felt her face heat up all the same. Would she really have let Eric kiss her? In the more than six months Sadie and Pete had been seeing each other, they had kissed only one time—and she hardly considered it a *real* kiss due to the high-stress situation they were both in at the time.

Pete said nothing, just waited for her to look back at him. "So, no dinner and movie, huh?" he asked, sounding both sympathetic and disappointed.

Sadie opened her mouth to say, no, it wasn't a good night, and yet right on the heels of that was her own question. *Why not?* How would it help Eric for her to cancel her evening plans?

*You are not a part of this*, she told herself, ignoring the stab of disappointment she felt inside. Was she really so arrogant as to feel left out somehow? For being a woman in her mid-fifties, she still had a lot to learn about what made her do and say and think the things she did and said and thought.

"Of course we'll still go out," she said. She looked toward the street where Eric had disappeared before smiling up at Pete whose expression was unreadable. "There's nothing I can do," she said. "I know that."

"You're sure?" Pete asked, but she could hear the relief in his tone. He didn't seem to want her to choose worrying about Eric over spending a night out with him. Sadie hated that if he knew what had happened on the courthouse lawn a few minutes earlier, he'd be even more insecure. Should she tell him? Had he seen them?

She and Pete weren't serious—they'd never discussed being exclusive or anything—but neither of them were seeing anyone else either. Why did it have to be so complicated? The almost-kiss played in her mind again and she searched Pete's face, but couldn't determine what he might or might not have seen. He guarded his expressions well.

She wished there were a delete key in her brain for things she really didn't want to ponder on. And yet, even as she thought it, she felt her toes tingle at the memory of Eric's face so close to her own. Argh! The man had ruined her! "I just need to get those last two flowers in the ground, and then I'll clean up. I'm sorry."

"No apology necessary," Pete said, tucking a lock of her hair behind her ear. His hand was soft and warm against her skin and



when he opened his palm, she leaned into it, absorbing the comfort offered by his touch. Wanting his touch, however, made her feel like a hussy—*inches away from kissing Eric one minute and pining for Pete's tenderness another.* "And I'll finish planting the flowers," Pete added.

She took note of his business attire. "You'll get dirty," she said, shaking her head. "I'll do it."

"I want to," Pete said, and Sadie wondered if he was feeling competitive with Eric somehow. Just like when Eric offered his help, she chose to take it at face value.

"Okay," she said. "I'll meet you at your car in a few minutes."

"Perfect," Pete said with a nod.

He turned toward the flower beds, and Sadie turned to the back door of the city offices. As she let herself inside and headed down the hall to the bathroom, however, she couldn't get Eric out of her head. No matter how much she tried to distract herself from his situation, she couldn't help but picture Eric standing over a fax machine as he sent dental records across the country in order to see if the body the police had found was that of his only child. What was it like to face such a life-altering situation? What was it like to face it alone?