

LEMON TART

A CULINARY MYSTERY

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DESERET
BOOK

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

CHAPTER 1



The first police car went by at 9:23 according to the clock on the microwave. Sadie leaned forward, but the black walnut tree in Jack and Carrie's yard obstructed her view to the west. She scowled at the tree and went back to coring the last of the apples she'd spent all morning making into applesauce. She waited for the police car to turn around in the cul-de-sac and pass by her window on its way out. That's the only reason police cars ever drove into Peregrine Circle.

Except this time.

A second police car sped past less than a minute after the first, and Sadie stopped thinking about apples altogether. Living in the house on the corner, Sadie considered herself a sort of sentry standing guard over Peregrine Circle—her lack of view to the west notwithstanding—and her curiosity was piqued.

After putting the last of the apples into the pot and setting it to simmer, Sadie removed the jars that had just finished processing and put them on a dish towel next to the sink so they

could cool properly. She then rinsed her hands and dried them on the hem of the Colorado State hoodie she wore—a birthday gift from Breanna last year—and turned off the Paul Simon CD that had kept her company all morning. Before stepping outside, she inspected herself in the small mirror she'd hung by the front door. She frowned at her reflection and removed the stretchy headband that held back her hair. She ran her fingers through her hair in an attempt to shape it into some semblance of order. Usually she was quite well put together, but today she was canning which meant she hadn't showered, which meant she hadn't blow-dried her hair, which meant the chunked-out sections hadn't been lifted and flipped to perfectly frame her face. But she didn't have time for that right now, so she gave her hair a final finger comb, coaxing her bangs to the side as best she could, grabbed her jacket, and pulled open the front door.

Her flip-flops smacked against the front steps beneath the frayed hem of her work jeans—paint-splattered denim washed so many times they felt like flannel. Never mind that the knees were nearly worn through or that she'd had to sew one of the pockets back on after an unfortunate incident involving a chain-link fence last summer. The jeans were comfort themselves and the perfect company for a day spent putting up applesauce.

She reached the sidewalk and shot another hateful glance at the tree as she approached it. Someday she was going to accidentally chop it down or light it on fire or something.

When Sadie and her late husband, Neil, had designed the house twenty-seven years ago, Sadie had insisted on a big window above the kitchen sink and facing the street. She liked to watch the comings and goings of the neighborhood, and with the inordinate amount of time spent at the sink since then, doing all the things a mother of two uses a sink for, the window had been a good investment. Sadie's baby brother, Jack, and his family, had bought the lot next door a few years later and the black walnut tree had been a housewarming gift Sadie wished she'd considered with a bit more care back then. She hadn't expected the tree to grow so big as to block much of the view she had insisted on. However, it didn't take long to walk past the tree and see which home had been the cause of alarm.

Anne Lemmon.

The two police cars were parked next to the curb. Sadie increased her pace and cut across the cul-de-sac—looking both ways, just in case.

"What's happened?" she asked an officer posted on the front walk next to the mailbox decorated with little lemon decals—Anne loved capitalizing on her last name even though she spelled it with two M's. Before he could answer her question, another officer, older—but not by much; thirty-five tops—came around the side of the house. His eyes locked onto hers and he came toward her.

"Do you know the occupants of this house?" he asked when he reached her. The name on his gold badge read Malloy. She swore there was a TV cop with the same name, but she couldn't remember which show.

Sadie nodded. “Anne Lemmon and her two-year-old son, Trevor. Is everything okay?” Anne and Trevor had moved into the Tillys’ rental house about nine months earlier. She’d come from back East with practically nothing but her determination to change the wild ways that had landed her as a twenty-five-year-old single mom in the first place.

Both of Sadie’s kids were away at college, and Sadie had taken early retirement eighteen months ago in order to care for her father who’d been diagnosed with colon cancer. Dad had passed away last December, and since then Sadie had enjoyed mentoring Anne—helping to quell her own loneliness—and they’d developed a wonderful friendship despite a nearly thirty-year age difference. Sadie was proud of the way Anne had taken to the changes in her life.

“Two-year-old son, you say,” Malloy repeated, writing something down in a little notebook he held in his hand.

“What’s happened?” Sadie asked for the second time.

“I’m afraid I can’t give you that information, ma’am,” he said, his tone blank and unsympathetic.

Sadie looked at Anne’s front door, wondering what could have mustered this amount of attention. A third officer came around the corner of the house—he was chubby, with thick legs and a neck that disappeared between his head and shoulders.

Don’t you have to be in good shape to be a police officer these days? Sadie wondered. Apparently not.

“It’s locked up tight. We’ll have to bust in—”

"Shut up, Harris!" Malloy yelled as he spun around, silencing the other man who seemed to have just noticed Sadie.

"I can let you in if you like," Sadie said, smiling sweetly and ignoring Malloy's gruffness. Surely the officers would give her more information if she helped them—and she *desperately* wanted more information.

Officer Malloy lifted an eyebrow. "You have a key?"

"Of course," Sadie said, her smile widening. "Just last week I let the furnace repairman in while Anne was at work. I retired a year or so ago, see, and even though I substitute now and again I'm home more than anyone else."

Every family in the circle had asked her, at one time or another, to keep their spare keys and she'd eventually put them all on the same ring that she always kept in her jacket pocket. Well, everyone had asked her to keep a key except for Mr. Henry, the house just next to Anne on the west side. All the same, Sadie knew he kept his spare key in one of those fake rocks you can buy online. She'd spotted that rock within days of his purchase.

She pulled the smiley-face key ring from her pocket and took a step toward the house, excited to be part of whatever they were doing.

"You'll need to wait out here," Malloy said arrogantly, stepping in front of her to block her progress. He was only a couple inches taller than her five-foot-six, and although she had a smaller build, she was strong thanks to three visits a week to the gym. If she wanted to, she could probably take him. But instead she reluctantly separated Anne's key from the others

and handed it to him, the other keys dangling on the ring. He didn't even say thank you, and she frowned at his bad manners. The chubby cop hurried to catch up with Malloy and the two men climbed the steps.

The officer who'd been posted on the walk came to stand next to her and together they watched Malloy unlock the door, get into position, and then push open the door.

"Garrison police!" Officer Malloy yelled, taking Sadie by surprise and making her jump just a little. She looked at her guard, glad he didn't seem to have noticed her reaction or at least was too polite to smirk about it. By the time she looked back to the door, Malloy and the chubby officer had disappeared inside.

It was a long wait as she imagined what could have necessitated three police officers to investigate Anne's house. She really wished she knew what was going on. Officer Malloy finally came out after a few minutes and said it was all clear. As he descended the steps, he spoke into the speaker clipped to the shoulder of his uniform. "There's nothing here," he said. "What *exactly* did the tip say?"

When he reached Sadie's position on the sidewalk, he said, "I'd like to ask you some questions about Ms. Lemmon." He pulled a tiny notebook out of his shirt pocket just as something crackled on his walkie-talkie that Sadie couldn't understand. She'd always wondered about those tiny police notebooks. It seemed as though they'd fill one every single day, and she imagined boxes and boxes of filled notebooks shoved into closets at the police station. She hoped they recycled.

“Just a minute,” he said to her before turning away and talking into the speaker again.

She looked toward the front door, and tucked a lock of hair behind her ear, her anxiety growing as her imagination ran away from her. So the police had received some kind of tip. Had there been an accident? Was Trevor okay? Anne’s car was still parked in the carport. But the officer said the house was empty—how could that be?

Malloy was still talking on his walkie-talkie when Sadie noticed a familiar smell. She sniffed the air a second time. *Lemon tart*, she thought as she identified the aroma.

Anne was baking!

Sadie immediately relaxed, all the horrible possibilities taking a backseat to simple common sense. Nothing had happened to Anne at all; the tip that brought the police to her house had been some kind of mistake. Sadie smiled to herself and took a deep breath, almost feeling foolish for letting her mind run on ahead as it had.

“Um, officer,” she said, tapping Officer Malloy’s arm, eager to share her discovery with him. He scowled at her and took a step away, continuing his conversation on the speaker. He seemed to be having some kind of argument with a dispatcher—something about the whole thing being a waste of time and wanting permission to write up the tip as unsubstantiated.

Sadie couldn’t make heads or tails out of what the fuzzy voice coming from the walkie-talkie was saying. She looked at the front door of Anne’s house again. Everyone knew that once

you could smell whatever had been set to bake, it was nearly finished. Was she really expected to stand out here while the tart burned?

Her guard went to get something out of his car, and Sadie assumed the chubby officer was still inside the house. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other, her anxiety growing again. Taking a step toward the house, she thought better of it and retreated, tapping Malloy on the arm again. He didn't even look at her, but took two steps farther away from her.

Fine, she thought as she headed up the steps.

"Hey!" she heard Officer Malloy call out as she reached the door. But she was too far into this to go back now.

"Lemon tart!" she shouted back, then quickened her pace and hurried into the kitchen, not wanting him to catch up and stop her. "Can't you smell it?" she yelled over her shoulder, flying past the chubby officer, Harris, who was standing in the living room writing down notes.

Sadie had shown Anne how to cook all kinds of things over the last several months, but Anne had been particularly studious about learning to bake the perfect lemon tart—she'd wanted it to become her signature dessert.

"She's baking," Sadie explained when she reached the stove.

Harris was right behind her and reached around her to grab the handle of the oven. He seemed to be repeating what she'd just said in his mind—as if he knew the difference between a lemon tart and a quiche.

On second thought, he might, Sadie thought after taking a second look at the belly hanging over his pants. He had a certain appreciation for food, it seemed. Sadie quickly put her hand on the door to keep it closed. "Every time you open an oven you lose five minutes of baking time," she said to Harris, her eyes narrowed.

"Let go of that, Harris," Malloy said from the kitchen doorway. Harris dropped the handle, looking flushed and uncertain. Officer Malloy turned to Sadie—his face was red too, but she doubted it was for the same reason as Harris. She lifted her chin in defiance and tried to stand as tall as she could, bringing herself almost to eye level with him.

"I told you to wait outside," he said, his eyebrows pinched together and his eyes angry. She couldn't be sure but he seemed to be pulling himself up taller too—perhaps to look down on her a little better. She was not impressed.

"And let the tart burn?" she asked with exaggerated incredulity. What she wanted more than the salvation of the tart was to look around the house herself, but for the moment she kept her eyes locked on Malloy's, not wanting to appear the least bit intimidated. She had at least twenty years on this kid and she wasn't the type of woman who let herself be pushed around.

He let out a breath as if she were a child and that got her back up even more. He might know how to investigate some tip and enjoy bullying the neighbors, but Sadie knew Anne and she knew this house. If something wasn't right, she'd be the one who would notice—not him. He narrowed his eyes and

took a deep breath. Sadie mimicked his expression, narrowing her eyes even more.

"Please return outside," he said slowly, calculating. "Harris, turn off the oven."

"Turn it off?" Sadie said in disbelief, stepping back to block the oven door. "No way."

Malloy's expression faltered and she saw his uncertainty, which only strengthened her resolve.

"Excuse me?" he asked as if he hadn't heard her correctly.

"Most people vastly underestimate the satisfaction of good homemaking skills and I won't have anyone sabotage Anne's attempts. There are"—she turned her head to look at the timer—"three minutes left. This oven will not be opened a minute sooner."

"You're interfering with a police investigation," Officer Malloy said as he took a step toward her, his jaw clenched.

"And you're interfering with a woman's kitchen." Sadie lifted her chin even higher—partly because he was now only ten inches or so from her face. Malloy seemed to be trying to find a reply, but she continued before he had the chance. "You said yourself it was all clear and that whatever tip brought you here was unfounded," she said. "And Anne wouldn't have been baking if she weren't going to be right back. In case she isn't, I'll remove it." Yet even as she said it, the unease in her stomach grew. There were too many questions in her mind now.

Why would Anne put a tart in the oven and then leave? Sadie had been at her kitchen window all morning, how could she have missed Anne leaving? Why was the house locked up

if she were only going to be gone a few minutes? What about Trevor?

The officer clenched his jaw even tighter; she thought she heard his teeth grind as he seemed to consider her words. "Harris, make sure she doesn't touch anything but the oven. McKesson and I will widen the exterior sweep."

Apparently Malloy was in charge because Harris folded his beefy arms and glared at her while Malloy went back out the front door.

While the tart finished baking, Sadie looked around the kitchen and the part of the living room in her range of vision. Everything looked normal—right down to the lemon-themed placemats on the table. The sink held an assortment of dishes, the counters were mostly cleared, and Trevor's shoes were by the back door. She'd hoped to get some idea of what had brought the police here, but she was starting to admit maybe Officer Malloy had been right—everything looked clear.

When the timer dinged at exactly 9:40, Harris wouldn't let her open the drawer next to the oven to get a set of hot pads. Sadie had to pull her hands into the sleeves of her jacket to keep from burning her fingers as she removed the tart. He also wouldn't let her find a cooling rack, so she was forced to set the pan on the stovetop, which was not the optimal way to cool baked goods. She kept that information to herself, however.

It's perfect, she thought as she set the tart down. The crust underneath the bronzed filling was golden brown, and pride welled in Sadie's heart to realize how far Anne had come. About the only thing Anne knew how to make when she had

moved in was Belgian waffles—an odd item to perfect, but at least it meant she had some basic culinary knowledge. Now she was well on her way to becoming a superior cook. But the worry for her young friend returned as Sadie looked at the steaming confection. No one worked this hard on a lemon tart and treated it like it was any old frozen pie. Something was very wrong.

She turned to Harris to share her suspicions—but he was looking out the patio door, watching something. Sadie followed his line of vision and froze when she saw the other two officers gathered around something in the field of weeds behind Anne's house. Harris hurried out the back door and Sadie followed. She was stepping over the threshold when she heard Officer Malloy say, "Tape off the area. I'll call homicide."

Mom's Lemon Tart

*Jack's favorite!

Crust

1 cup all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup powdered sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ Pinch of salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter (cut into smaller pieces)

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. In a food processor or mixer, combine ingredients for crust. Pulse together until a dough starts to form in clumps. Press into greased tart pan, making sure to cover bottom and sides evenly. Pierce the bottom of the crust with a fork and place in freezer for 10 to 15 minutes.

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Place tart pan on a cookie sheet and bake until crust is a golden-brown color, approximately 12 minutes. Remove from oven and let cool.

Filling

5 oz. cream cheese

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar (Breanna likes an extra $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar in the filling)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh lemon juice (about 2 large lemons—**DO NOT** use concentrated lemon juice)

2 large eggs

Zest from one lemon (get zest from lemon before juicing)

Reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees. Mix cream cheese with electric beaters until smooth. Add sugar. Mix until well blended. Add the eggs one at a time, mixing thoroughly after each egg. Stop and scrape bowl halfway through. Add the lemon juice and zest and mix until smooth.

Pour filling into tart crust and bake on cookie sheet for 20 to 30 minutes or until filling is set. Let tart cool on wire cooling rack. Cover and refrigerate until well chilled.

Use whipped cream as an optional topping. It can be piped on in stars or served on top with each piece. For extra flavor in the whipped cream, add a teaspoon of lemon zest.

CHAPTER 2



Sadie made it to the top of Anne's back patio stairs before the word "homicide" finally sank in and her feet would go no further. She had forgotten to breathe and when her brain realized it, she took a deep breath that sounded like a vacuum sucking up a tablecloth.

Officer Malloy was walking toward the house, talking into his speaker-thing, and the sound of her desperate breath caught his attention. He hurried up the steps of the patio, catching her as she fell backward. They landed in a jumbled heap, but he'd kept her from hurting herself.

"Wha-at, what's out there?" she mumbled as he straightened himself and helped her up, leading her to a patio chair. She tried to look over her shoulder at the field but he quickly turned the chair so it faced the sliding glass door of the house instead of the backyard. She could barely register what was happening. *Homicide?* she said in her mind once more. That meant they'd found a body. The chill in the autumn air became decidedly colder and her hands began to shake.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. . . ." Officer Malloy trailed off.

"Hoffmiller," she said, choosing to focus on a fall-themed wreath Anne had hung on her kitchen wall—she could see it through the glass of the door.

"Mrs. Hoffmiller. Is there someone I can call to come and help you back home? A friend? Your husband?"

"I'm a widow," she said automatically, her foggy thoughts beginning to clear. There was Ron, her boyfriend, though the term sounded juvenile and besides, they were engaged. But Ron was at a real estate convention in Denver all week—he couldn't come. She turned and looked at Officer Malloy. "Who's out there? Is it Anne?" She swallowed the threatening tears. "Trevor?" she squeaked.

Officer Malloy quickly shook his head. "Not the child," he said.

"But Anne? She's out there? She's dead?"

Malloy took a deep breath. "The body will need to be identified for us to be sure."

Sadie tried to stand, but Malloy's hand on her shoulder pushed her back into the chair. "Not you," he said, sounding more irritated than sympathetic. "Next of kin."

The tears started to fall then, but she didn't even try to brush them away. This was Anne he was talking about—a girl trying to find her way. A friend. A neighbor. A mother. "I don't know of any kin, certainly no one local. I can identify her as well as anyone else," she said, her voice shaking as she rubbed the two stones of her mother's ring on her right hand. The feel of the smoothly cut stones—one diamond and one amethyst,

her children's birthstones—helped her find her center once again and she pushed down the shock. “The sooner you know if it's her, the sooner you can move forward, right?”

Malloy hesitated, but finally nodded.

“Besides,” she added. “It might not be her.” Though she knew that was a ridiculous idea. The police had received a tip of some kind and found a body. What were the chances that a completely unrelated murder had taken place behind Anne's house?

Murder.

The very idea made her knees wobble—she was glad she was still sitting. *Then again, maybe it wasn't murder*, she thought as she took a breath and followed Malloy down the back steps. Maybe it was some kind of accident. Accidents happened all the time. Why, her friend Gale had a neighbor who'd gone out Christmas morning to set up a new satellite dish. His metal tape measure had crossed the electrical wires leading to his house. Killed him instantly. Though an accidental death would still be tragic, at least it would be less disturbing. Accidents were normal, practically expected. That had to be it. Some kind of accident.

They met Officer McKesson, who was blocking the body from view. Harris was wrapping a band of yellow tape around the perimeter of the house. Sadie heard a siren in the distance growing closer.

“She's going to identify the body,” Malloy said. Officer McKesson hesitated, but after a few moments he moved aside. Sadie closed her eyes, letting Officer Malloy lead her the last

few steps. The brittle grass and weeds of the field crunched beneath her feet once they left the back lawn.

"Okay," he said quietly. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

In answer to his question, she opened her eyes.

Anne's pale blue eyes stared at nothing, her blonde hair tangled in the weeds, and her mouth hung slightly open as if she were about to say something. Her head was at an unnatural angle to her body and her face and neck were a bluish-purple color. It looked like there was some matted blood in her hairline.

So it had been murder.

The thought hit Sadie like a cold bucket of water and she forgot to breathe again. Anne's arms and legs were sticking out in odd directions and her clothing was torn as if she'd put up quite a fight. *Good for her*, Sadie thought, wiping at her eyes. *Good for her*.

She looked away for a moment to get control of her emotions and noticed Anne's purse in the weeds not far away, the top of a sippy cup barely visible. Anne was always trying to avoid taking a separate diaper bag by cramming Trevor's things in her purse. Sadie stared at the cup and thought of the little boy with sandy blond hair and bright blue eyes. If Anne was here, like this, where was Trevor? It was almost too much to think about.

"Is this Anne Lemmon?" Officer Malloy asked, reminding her that she was supposed to be making an official identification.

She looked back at Anne's broken body—one of Anne's hoop earrings was missing and she wondered if that was

important. Sadie sniffed. "Yes, that's her," she said, her voice shaking. She leaned down, wanting to straighten out Anne's head or pull her shirt down so her stomach wasn't exposed to the autumn air. She was dead, but was it necessary that she look so uncomfortable?

Officer Malloy pulled her up. "You can't touch her. We'll need to take photos and measurements of the crime scene."

Sadie nodded and gratefully turned away, though it felt like a betrayal somehow. It made her feel horrible to not want to look at the evidence of how Anne's life had ended.

"Can you get home on your own?" Malloy asked as they walked away from the body, toward the driveway.

Sadie watched the grass bend beneath her shoes. The grass was going dormant and was a muddle of brown and yellow and a few determined green blades.

"I'm fine," Sadie lied, numbness taking over.

"Because this is still considered an active crime scene, we'll be patrolling the neighborhood and canvassing the area. When you get home, lock your doors and don't leave. A detective will be coming around to ask you some questions. You might want to call someone to be with you."

Sadie stopped and turned to face him. "So I'm just supposed to go home? Do nothing?" How was that possible?

"I'm sorry," Officer Malloy said. "That's all you can do."

"I'll try," Sadie said under her breath. Doing nothing was not her strong suit.

"What?" the officer asked.

"Never mind."