

CHAPTER 1



You snorkel before?"

Sadie looked up from adjusting her life jacket. Konnie was the last woman, other than herself, still in the small boat that had taken them to where the snorkeling was *nani*—Sadie hoped *nani* meant *wonderful* and not *deadly*.

"Years ago," Sadie said. "In Waikiki, when my children were younger."

"I'm not sure that even counts," Konnie said with a tinkling laugh. Her wide smile fit perfectly on her round face. Her black hair was in one long braid down her back. "Everyone knows O'ahu has the worst snorkeling in the islands. Kaua'i is amazing. Lots of beautiful coral."

"I can't wait," Sadie said, but her tone was flat. She was still trying to figure out why she'd come today. She didn't like boats or sand or swimsuits, and she wondered if she'd accepted Konnie's invitation simply because she'd refused most of the other invites Konnie had extended on behalf of the Blue Muumuus, a group of local older women similar to the Red Hat Society Sadie had seen in her hometown of Garrison, Colorado.

“The weather is perfect today,” Konnie continued. “And the tide is just right. You won’t believe the variety of fish you’ll be able to see.”

Sadie nodded, peering over the side of the boat with trepidation. The water was clear enough that she could make out the shape of the coral beneath the shifting surf, and she shivered, thinking about that hidden, undersea world. Coming to Kaua’i was supposed to cure the anxiety that had overwhelmed her after what had happened in Boston, but despite spending three months in a tropical paradise, Sadie was no better off than she’d been before. Only more isolated.

When Sadie had come to Hawai’i with her children ten years ago, she hadn’t been a big fan of being in the ocean, but the displeasure she’d felt then was nothing like what she felt now. Sadie swallowed her fear and forced a smile, determined not to let her anxiety get the best of her in front of the woman who was trying so hard to be her friend.

Konnie lived a few houses away from the condominium complex where Sadie was staying, and she didn’t care that Sadie was a *ha-ole*—Caucasian—or *malihini*—a newcomer—to an island not always welcoming to mainlanders. Konnie was big and loud and wonderful in every way, which Sadie found a little bit scary. Well, everything seemed a little bit scary to Sadie right now.

“You ready?” Konnie asked.

“It’ll be fun,” Sadie lied. They were about a quarter mile off the north shore near Anahola. The drive from the inland town of Puhi, where Sadie was staying, would have been beautiful if Sadie had been able to focus. But she wasn’t used to leaving her condo these days and felt nervous whenever she stepped out the door.

“I’m going in,” Konnie said, getting to her feet and causing the small fishing boat to rock back and forth. Sadie forgot to breathe

until Konnie sat her voluptuous self on the side of the boat and the rocking evened out. “You can lower yourself in if you’d rather not jump.”

A moment later, Konnie put on her mask and fell backward over the side just like an islander who had spent half her life in the ocean—which was exactly what she was. The ensuing wave caused by Konnie’s splash made the boat rock more than ever, and Sadie clung to the side with both hands. Konnie surfaced and yelled at her to jump in. “One of the tour companies brings tourists out here around noon—times a wastin’.”

Sadie nodded, hoping to appear confident as she sat on the side of the boat and let her flippered-feet dangle over the side. The water was the perfect temperature—not too cold, not too warm. She chose the side of the boat opposite her companions—Konnie and the five other members of the Blue Muumuus—so that if she freaked out once she hit the water, the boat would hide her from their view. Though she recognized her anxiety, so far she’d avoided the actual panic attacks she’d studied up on. But if ever there was a day for all that to change, it was this one.

“You’re okay,” Sadie said to herself under her breath, eyeing the water and keeping her breathing even as she double-checked the clasps of her life jacket. She was the only woman who had chosen to wear one. “You’ll be just fine. You can do this.”

She looked over her shoulder, where six backs bobbed in the water; the snorkeling tubes looked as though they were poking out of six heads of dark hair. The stillness of the bodies bothered her, and she turned away, pulling on her mask and putting the mouthpiece of the snorkel in place. Another deep breath filled her with just enough courage to finally plunge into the water.

She hadn’t considered that the snorkel would fill with water, and

her first attempt at breathing was salty and wet. She headed for the surface and spat out the mouthpiece and the water, coughing and sputtering. Her heart raced, and she felt a wave of nausea as she gripped her life jacket with both hands and went to work convincing herself she wasn't drowning.

After taking a minute to get her bearings, and berating herself for being so dramatic, she replaced the salty mouthpiece of the snorkel and practiced breathing for another minute. Maybe two. Or four.

Konnie rounded the boat, her mask still on while her snorkel lay awkwardly against her left ear. "You okay?"

Sadie gave her a thumbs-up, bit down on her snorkel, took a deep breath, and put her face in the water.

The coral reef was full of fascinating shapes, colors, and textures. She'd been warned that the brain-shaped coral was alive and therefore not to be touched—not that she wanted to touch it. The water was clear enough that no detail of the scene below her was lost. A school of yellow tangs darted beneath her.

It's beautiful, she told herself even as she felt her heart rate increasing. *Ethereal. Amazing.* And yet her lungs struggled to draw a breath as she watched a parrot fish lazily swimming a few feet away as though she weren't there. But she *was* there. She was in their world, trying to appreciate the resplendence while battling the fact that their world was completely creepy! Some of these things around her were probably poisonous, and there were certainly unseen creatures lurking at the bottom, ready to pull her to the depths and never let her go. She'd seen *Jaws*.

After twenty seconds, she had to lift her face out of the water. Deep relaxing breaths didn't help when they were inhaled through a snorkel. Konnie was nowhere in sight, and Sadie couldn't subdue her growing terror. With her head lifted, she was more aware of her feet

dangling deeper in the water and closer to those unseen, bottom-dwelling creatures. She tried to pull her feet up, but would that really deter the monsters lurking beneath her? She'd also seen that movie about the surfer who had had her arm bitten off by a shark. What did Sadie look like from the bottom of the sea?

Sadie spat out the mouthpiece and tried to inhale, but it was as though her mouth were no longer connected to her lungs. She couldn't get the air in. Why not? What was wrong with her?

She headed for the boat, knowing she had to get out of the water. Now. Once she reached the side, however, she couldn't figure out how to get in. The rim was too high for her to grab onto. Her gasps were ragged and noisy, making it sound like she was drowning even though her head was out of the water. She couldn't see any of the Blue Muumuus.

What if she passed out in the ocean? Would the fish eat her before anyone discovered she was gone?

You are being ridiculous, she told herself, ripping off her mask in hopes it would help her breathe. She clutched at her life jacket and closed her eyes, trying to pretend she was simply resting on a punctured water bed. After a full minute, her lungs opened up again. She took long, deep breaths and tried to clear her head. She felt oxygen returning to her brain as her body relaxed.

Then something touched her foot, and her eyes flew open in panic. She began thrashing toward the shore.

She had to get out of the water!

That the boat was *right there* or that Konnie or the other women would certainly have helped her get in it didn't cross her mind until she was crawling onto the sand, coughing and spitting up water, her lungs and arms burning from her desperate swim to shore.

The sand turned from wet to dry as she crawled out of the

ocean; the shore was littered with sticks, rocks, and broken shells left behind by the tide. This wasn't one of the groomed beaches like they had in Florida, where machines cleaned up the shoreline before the tourists woke up. This beach was natural and messy, and the sand stuck to her wet skin. Something cut her knee, reminding her that she should stand up. But she didn't want to do anything that would slow down her escape.

Finally, she collapsed, the bulky life jacket keeping her face out of the sand while she once again focused on breathing like a normal human being. It felt like forever before she felt safe. Her thoughts turned to how she would apologize to her new friends, who probably thought she was absolutely bonkers. She wasn't so sure they weren't right.

The nightmares that had plagued Sadie after her trip to Boston had led to insomnia and too many late-night infomercials that had provided her with more kitchen gadgets and exercise equipment than she could ever use. When her friend Gayle, her son, Shawn, her daughter, Breanna, and her boyfriend, Pete, had sat her down for an intervention, they told her she needed to get away for a little while. Unwind. Relax. At the time, she'd been optimistic about the change of environment—who wouldn't want to go to Hawai'i?

But, though she was no longer ordering useless items off QVC, she still stayed inside most of the time, and the only people she interacted with were the Blue Muumuus every few weeks. She slept through the afternoons and was awake most of the night, double-checking the locks at regular intervals.

The only other time she left the condo was to do her job cleaning the additional seven condos in the complex that were rented out by the week. Housekeeping in Hawai'i was very different from housekeeping at home—sand got everywhere, and mildew was a

constant battle. It was good to have something to do, though, and the cleaning job was her way of paying rent to her friend Tanya, who owned the complex but preferred her husband's ranch in Arizona this time of year.

It was because of Tanya that Konnie even knew Sadie had moved in. Konnie had said any friend of Tanya's was a friend of hers, but Sadie couldn't help feeling like she was a burden all the same. The women, all of them grandmothers—*tutus* in Hawaiian—were very nice, but Sadie had yet to really feel like she was a part of their group.

"I need help," she admitted out loud as water dripped off her long hair. She had grown it out past her shoulders, longer than it had been in decades. Before leaving Garrison, she'd had her stylist lighten it, in hopes that she'd have more fun as a blonde, but she hadn't kept up the color, and it had faded to a brassy grayish-yellow. Two inches of gray roots had grown out since her arrival. The climate seemed to accelerate how fast her hair grew, and she lacked the courage to go to a salon full of strangers. Most days, she tied her hair back with a bandana and avoided mirrors, blaming her lack of style on the humidity.

Her senses refocused, and she could hear the incessantly pounding waves. The admission that whatever she was dealing with was more than she could handle on her own washed over her and filled her with both fear and relief.

"I need help," she said again, wondering if it would be more powerful a second time she said it. It was. She *did* need help, and she needed it soon. Things had happened to her, scary things that had obviously taken their toll on her mental health. She needed to get back to who she was; she needed to feel whole again. Though she talked to her family and friends on a regular basis, she'd kept how

bad things were to herself. She didn't want them to worry. What would they say if they knew the truth?

She flipped onto her back, staring up at the blue, blue sky and wondering how her life had become so dark. Optimism had always been Sadie's foundation. It had gotten her through her husband's death more than twenty years ago. It had helped her raise her two children by herself. But in the wake of what had happened in Boston, she'd lost her confidence, and her world had been spinning out of control ever since.

Getting to her feet, she yanked off her flippers and looked out at the water that appeared so innocent now that she wasn't in it. The Blue Muumuus were back in the boat, heading toward the shore, and she felt overwhelmed by embarrassment and shame, while grateful she wouldn't have to consider swimming back to them. They had been so kind to her, and she had so little to give back. Now she'd ruined their adventure.

Konnie waved her arms, and Sadie waved back to indicate she was all right. The saltwater was beginning to dry the sand to her skin, making her feel like a big worn-out piece of sandpaper. The cut on her knee stung; she'd need to wash it out with freshwater.

A small boat dock had been built into the rocks along the beach, and Sadie headed toward it with a flipper in each hand. The floating dock moved gently beneath her feet when she stepped on it, and she froze for a moment, afraid she might fall in.

Konnie pointed the boat toward the dock, and Sadie walked slowly down the weathered boards, dreading the explanation of her bolt to the shore. What could she tell them other than the truth? *Hi, my name is Sadie, and I'm losing my mind. Congratulations on winning front-row tickets to the show!*

When she reached the end of the dock, Sadie waited for the

boat like a penitent child. Watching the water lap against the sides of the wood that was green with moss and other sea life gave Sadie the chills. Long strands of dark seaweed flowed alongside, like the hair of a mermaid from some long-ago fairy tale. Sadie watched it move, fluid and graceful, and tried to draw calmness from its easy motion.

After a few seconds, however, she realized the seaweed was black, not green. Despite her misgivings, she bent down to get a closer look into the water and was soon on her knees, peering at the underside of the dock where what she thought was seaweed was actually hair connected to a human head.

Scrambling to her feet as fresh panic descended like a hammer, she screamed for help at the same moment that she lost her balance, dropped the flippers, and plunged headlong into the sea that had already claimed one victim.

CHAPTER 2



It sounds like you've had quite a trauma."

Sadie shredded Kleenex in her lap and nodded at Dr. McKay, her new psychiatrist. Trauma sounded like too mild a word to describe what it had been like to discover the body and then fall on top of it in the water. She hadn't cried about it yet. The tissues were simply for her nerves, and they were not helping as much as she'd hoped.

Dr. McKay consulted the file in front of him. "What happened after you fell in?"

The question transported her back to that moment last week—six days to be exact—when the water had closed over her head. Wild with panic, Sadie had accidentally kicked the body, dislodging it from the dock. The body had then floated upward with her. During Sadie's frantic attempt to get away, her fingers had become entangled in the dark hair, catching her like a net and causing her to pull the body with her as she retreated from the dock toward open water.

She looked at her hands in her lap; she could still feel the hair wound around her fingers. The same deadening panic she'd felt while trying to get away from the corpse pressed in upon her in the

small office and rendered her frozen and overwhelmed as she tried to stay in *this* moment, not that one. The cut on her knee and the bumps and scrapes she'd suffered from falling into the ocean and then being pulled over the side of the boat were healing, but the things in her head had only gotten worse.

Dr. McKay said something about post-traumatic stress disorder and how it could mentally transport a person back to the moment of the incident, igniting the fight-or-flight feelings that had occurred at the time of the trauma.

"I thought that was something soldiers got at war," Sadie said. She certainly wasn't a soldier—she wasn't any kind of hero. When had she ever *saved* anyone? No, she always entered the story after the horrible things had already happened.

"That's where PTSD gets most of its attention, but it certainly isn't reserved only for war-time trauma—it can happen anytime someone encounters something psychologically overwhelming."

Sadie tried to listen to his words but she could still feel the soft impact of her feet against the bloated body as she'd finally untangled herself from the hair and kicked frantically toward the boat heading toward her. By the time the Blue Muumuus got her calm enough to talk coherently, Sadie had lost all perspective on where she was and what had happened. When her first words were about someone by the dock trying to kill her, they had shared a look that communicated their wonder of why they had invited this unstable haole on their snorkeling trip in the first place. But then Konnie had leaned out of the boat, peering toward the dock.

A moment later, she was screaming too.

What happened next was anyone's guess—Sadie certainly didn't remember it, other than she'd been taken to the hospital for an assessment; the Blue Muumuus thought she'd been hurt in the fall.

The doctors had kept her overnight and then gave her some pills to help her sleep and arranged for her to meet with someone to “work things out in her head.” Enter Dr. McKay.

“So don’t expect an instantaneous recovery,” Dr. McKay said, bringing her back to the present. “It can take time to repair the psychological injury from such an event, which is what we will work on.” He flipped through the papers in her file and paused to read something else. “It says here you’ll be in Kaua’i until the end of April, is that right? Three more weeks?”

“I fly home on the twenty-second.”

“So you’ll be back home in time for Easter—that’s nice.”

Sadie nodded.

“Do you have plans for the holiday? Time with family, perhaps?”

“My children are spending Easter with me and my boyfriend, Pete, plus his children and their families.” It would be the first time their children would meet one another. She felt more capable of building a replica of the Eiffel Tower out of cheese doodles than successfully pulling off the holiday gathering. It had seemed like such a worthy goal three months ago—the perfect reentry into a life that felt like someone else’s, now that she’d been gone so long.

“That sounds like something to look forward to,” he said, smiling in a way that made him look a little like Mr. Rogers but with glasses and a Hawaiian shirt.

“I really need to be doing better than this when I go home.”

“I understand. I can work in three visits a week during the remainder of your stay. That gives us at least six more visits—maybe as many as nine. I think we can make a lot of progress in that amount of time.”

“Okay,” she said. “So, I just come to you and talk about it and this will go away?” Maybe she’d be bright and shiny and new by the

time she returned to Garrison. She hoped so, but she didn't really believe it.

"I certainly can't make guarantees, but we'll process things together, and as your thoughts are cleared up, it will start to make sense."

"Sense?" Sadie repeated. "Really?"

"Well, a kind of sense."

"How is that possible?"

He smiled. "One step at a time," he said. He looked down at his papers again. "Do you know much about the woman whose body you found?"

"She was a drug addict." Sadie stared at the floor. She felt her throat thicken but refused to give in to the emotion. She preferred numbness. "She'd been missing for a week before anyone reported she was gone."

"That's very sad," Dr. McKay said.

Very sad? Sadie repeated in her head. She was paying this guy a hundred bucks an hour for *very sad*?

"I'm curious," Dr. McKay continued, his tone of voice changing. "What kind of support system do *you* have, Sadie?" He lifted another paper to read the one underneath. "Colorado is a long way from here."

"I have good support," Sadie said. "I have a good relationship with my children, Breanna and Shawn. And Pete—he's my boyfriend." She felt a little silly saying it like that. She wasn't a teenager after all.

"You've talked to them about this?"

Sadie shifted in her chair and settled on a shrug. Of course she hadn't talked to them about this. "My cell phone went dead while I was in the hospital, and I've been sleeping a lot since I got released."

She shredded more Kleenex. “But I sent them all e-mails yesterday telling them I was fine. My friend Gayle will be coming to stay with me for the last week of my visit—I’ll tell her before then.”

“I wonder why you’re not comfortable confiding in her now, or in any of the rest of your friends and family,” Dr. McKay said. She chose not to answer. He allowed the silence for nearly a minute then mentioned something about the cathartic healing that talking to her loved ones could invite.

“I’d like to give you a couple of prescriptions,” he said when he finished. “One’s an antidepressant for you to take on a daily basis; based on your intake evaluation from the hospital, I think it would be helpful. The other medication will give you a kind of quick fix when your anxiety peaks. Are you open to that?”

She nodded. The pills the hospital had given her to help her sleep had run out. Having another medicinal lifeline was certainly welcome.

Dr. McKay also trained her to breathe in a way that would help calm herself down—drawing in a breath while counting, then exhaling it to the same count. Sadie practiced it with him; it seemed elementary.

When her hour was up, Sadie gave him a sheepish “thank you” and agreed with Dr. McKay when he reminded her that this would be a process and that they would go at her pace. As Sadie left the office, she wondered if she would go to her next appointment on Thursday. She didn’t want to, and yet she *did* want to get better. It was just hard to think that talking to him would really give her what she needed.

The trip home was a blur of anxiety and attempts to keep from completely freaking out. If not for feeling desperate to get the prescriptions filled, she’d have gone straight home, but she tried to see

it as a small miracle that she'd gone into the grocery store, waited in line at the pharmacy counter, and ordered the medicine to be brought to her house that afternoon, all without screaming.

When she walked passed Konnie's house, less than a block away from the condo, she held her breath, then winced when Konnie called her name from the doorway. Luckily, Konnie was just leaving. She only had enough time to hand over a Tupperware of shoyu chicken and rice that Sadie could heat up for dinner. The chicken was from last night, Konnie explained, but would reheat well in the oven at 200 degrees for an hour. Sadie thanked her and then practically ran home, holding the Tupperware with both hands.

Inside the condo, she turned the lock three times to make sure it was secure. "One, two, three." Then she hurried to the back sliding door and made sure it was locked too, just in case. "One, two, three."

All the drapes were pulled, and she tugged at the curtains above the kitchen sink to smother a sliver of sunlight that was sneaking through. She took a deep breath, telling herself that she was safe now—she didn't have to leave the condo for two more days . . . assuming she'd keep that appointment with Dr. McKay. Did she feel better for having gone to the first appointment? She couldn't tell, and so she stopped thinking about it all together.

The Cap'n Crunch cereal Sadie had had for breakfast while watching *M*A*S*H* reruns at noon had worn off, but the chicken would take too long. She put it in the fridge and opened the freezer to survey her options. Turkey pot pie or a bean and beef burrito. She'd fallen so far from the woman she once was.

The Sadie she used to be cooked everything from scratch, both for nutritional reasons and because she loved to cook. The Sadie she used to be wasn't afraid of leaving her home, in fact she kept herself

very busy outside of her own four walls. The Sadie she used to be was strong and capable and self-assured.

This new Sadie was a rather pathetic version of the woman she'd been six months ago. It would be nice to blame the changes on having found a body in the ocean last week, but she'd been spiraling for months. Every day she hoped the next day would be the day something changed. Tomorrow, she'd have energy, motivation, and purpose. Tomorrow, she'd rediscover the woman she used to be. But tomorrow wasn't today, and so *this* Sadie pulled a burrito out of the freezer and dropped the frozen brick onto a microwave-safe plate.

It wasn't until she removed the burrito from the microwave two minutes later that she noticed the light blinking on the answering machine. Like everything else in the condo, the phone hadn't been updated in fifteen years. Her cute little notebook computer and cheap printer were the most modern things here, but Sadie liked that she knew how to work everything. Only a few people had the direct number to the condo though, and she pushed the button while adding a dollop of sour cream to her lunch.

"Hey, Mom, it's me," Shawn's voice said. "I got your e-mail but haven't talked to you for a while. I'm hoping that's 'cause you've taken up surfing. Call me when you get a second."

Sadie smiled sadly. Shawn was such a good boy, and though she didn't think he was struggling as much as she was, Boston had taken its toll on him as well. The old Sadie would have known how to help him. Instead, she worried his burdens would be too much for her to handle along with her own. Maybe he sensed the same thing. Their conversations had become rather shallow. She missed her boy and the relationship they used to have, but she didn't know how to fix it.

The next message started playing, and her mood fell even more. "Sadie, it's Pete." His voice was open and even—a tone she'd come

to hate because it meant he was playing police detective with her. “I talked to the Kaua’i police and am wondering why you didn’t tell me what happened. Call me, okay?”

She looked at the phone and felt her stomach drop. Pete had talked to the Kaua’i police before Sadie had left for Hawai’i, asking them to keep an eye on her. She didn’t really know if the police had done so or not—she’d hadn’t met any cops until last week—but it had been sweet of Pete to go to the trouble. Either they had informed him of what had happened or he had called them to check up on her. She should probably be grateful it took six days for him to find out, but now she would have to come up with an explanation. Would Pete buy the argument that she’d taken it in stride and therefore didn’t feel it was important enough to talk about?

The thought of being so flippant brought back the moment when her hand had pushed at the arm of the dead body. The skin had felt slimy, and the memory of it made Sadie wince. She clenched her eyes shut, and sweat broke out on her forehead.

Go away, she commanded the memories. Leave me alone.

Island Teriyaki Chicken

- 1 cup soy sauce (Aloha brand is best)
- 1 cup white sugar
- 1 cup water
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 teaspoon ground ginger (more to taste), or a 1-inch piece of ginger root
- 2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts, or 3 pounds any type bone-in chicken

Twenty-four hours before serving, combine everything but the chicken in a saucepan and bring to a boil on medium-high heat. Boil one minute. If grilling chicken, reserve $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sauce. If using chicken breasts, tenderize the meat. Combine sauce and chicken in a zip-top bag or airtight container. Allow to marinate in the refrigerator overnight. (For a quick-cook method, you can skip marinating, but the flavor of the meat won't be as strong.)

To Bake: Arrange chicken breasts and marinade in 9x13 pan. Cover pan with foil. Bake at 350 degrees for 40 minutes.

To Grill: Discard marinade. Grill chicken on medium-high heat until cooked through. Use reserved sauce to enhance grilled chicken as desired.

Slow-Cooker Method: Combine everything in a slow cooker and cook on low heat for 8 hours. If using ginger root, remove root after 5 hours.

Serve with white rice.

Serves 6.

Note: To make shoyu chicken, a Hawaiian version of teriyaki chicken, add the following ingredients to the marinade, then follow the rest of the directions as stated:

1 teaspoon black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon oregano

up to 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

up to 1 teaspoon paprika

up to 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper