

PROLOGUE



It was the cold that woke her.

Sadie reached out to pull the plush, soft-as-kitten's-fur blanket to her chin and settle back in for a couple more hours of sleep; the fire she lit in the evenings always burned out in the early-morning hours, inviting the autumn chill back in. But instead of finding the comforting softness she expected, her hand brushed across rough stone and rubbed gritty sand beneath her fingers. A breeze passed over her, rippling the silky fabric of her blouse that afforded no protection from the cold night air.

She wasn't in her apartment. Why not?

Then she began to remember.

Her body tensed as equal amounts of confusion and memory swirled together, like two children trying to talk over each other as they both explained their version of events. From the bits and pieces of her recollections, she knew she was in the New Mexican desert. She'd been at the Balloon Fiesta, the annual hot air balloon festival in Albuquerque. She had been selling cupcakes there—Lois's tres leches cupcakes to be exact—but then . . . then something had

happened. Someone had brought her here, far away from the tourists and balloonists and anyone else whom she could call to for help.

The Cowboy.

But he'd been sent by someone else. Langley? Standage? She wasn't sure. But she knew the Cowboy had brought her here to kill her. He said she'd crossed a line.

What line?

Why couldn't she remember?

She must have made a run for it. How had she gotten away? They'd come after her—the Cowboy and the man she didn't know. And then . . . then . . .

What had happened then?

Sadie attempted to sit up, but her head spun, convincing her to lie still again and catch her breath. Then she rolled to her side and used a large rock, gray against the blackness behind it, to pull herself up, though her joints and muscles screamed in protest. As her eyes traveled up the side of the hill above her, she could make out the scraggly silhouette of brush against washed-out desert dirt. Had she fallen? She looked toward the bottom and saw that the hill she was on continued for several more yards, ending in an arroyo. She'd come to a stop at a ledge of sorts near the middle of the incline. Perhaps the rock she'd used to help her sit up had stopped her descent. None too gently, it seemed.

Once sitting, she put a hand to her throbbing forehead and gasped in pain at her own touch. She pulled her hand back. Even in the minimal light of the crescent moon, she could see the contrast between her pale skin and the dark stain on her fingers. Knowing the stain was blood made Sadie's throat tighten and her hand shake from something other than the cold.

Where was she? What would happen next?

TRES LECHES CUPCAKES

Fear began to take over. It was hard to breathe, and her body seemed to curl in upon itself involuntarily though her back and hip protested. Everything hurt. *What had happened?* How long had she been here?

“She went this way,” a voice said from somewhere above her, the words carrying on the wind. Another voice answered the first, but Sadie couldn’t make out what was said. She didn’t need to. What she needed to do was hide. Quick. Though she couldn’t remember everything, she knew that if they found her—whoever *they* were—she’d never make it back to Santa Fe.

Sadie knew firsthand how well the desert could hide a body.

Tres Leches Cupcakes

Cupcakes

1½ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons cornstarch

1 teaspoon baking powder

¼ teaspoon salt

5 eggs

1 cup granulated sugar

½ cup butter, softened

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Mix flour, cornstarch, baking powder, and salt in a small bowl. Set aside. In a separate bowl, beat butter for 1 minute until very smooth. Add sugar and mix well. Add eggs one at a time, beating until yellow and frothy. Add vanilla. Add flour mixture in three batches and beat an additional minute. Fill cupcake liners halfway. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until tops are lightly browned and an inserted toothpick comes out clean. Do not overbake. Cool completely.

Makes approximately 24 cupcakes.

Glaze

1 (5-ounce) can evaporated milk (or half of a 12-ounce can)
1 (11-ounce) can of sweetened condensed milk
1 cup cream, coconut milk, half and half, OR whole milk

Mix milks together. When cupcakes are cool, carefully slice off the top crust to expose the sponge cake. Drizzle the milk mixture one spoonful at a time over the cupcakes, allowing the cake to soak up the milk in between additions. (Cupcakes typically hold between 1 and 2 tablespoons of glaze.) Once milk seems to be pooling at the top of the sponge cake, cover the cupcakes and refrigerate for at least six hours.

Note: An easy way to add glaze is to use a medicinal syringe. (You can find them in the pharmacy section of your local grocery store.) Instead of slicing off the tops of the cupcakes, simply inject the milk one syringe-ful at a time.

Cinnamon Buttercream Frosting

1 cup butter, softened
3½ cups powdered sugar
3 teaspoons vanilla
1 to 1½ teaspoons cinnamon
½ teaspoon nutmeg
Dash of salt
Milk, as needed

In a mixing bowl, whip butter until smooth. Add 2 cups of powdered sugar and mix well, scraping the sides of the bowl as needed. Add vanilla and mix well. Add remaining powdered sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, and salt. Mix; add milk as needed to create a smooth, but thick frosting. Pipe frosting onto cupcakes using a 1A tip, or spread frosting over cupcakes with a butterknife or spatula.

See page 328 for additional recipes and ideas for tres leches cupcakes.

CHAPTER 1



Ten Days Earlier

I've got a visual through the sliding glass door of the apartment," said Caro's voice through the static of the walkie-talkie. "Copy, Churrochomper?"

"Copy, Dunebuster," Sadie said while depressing the button on her hand unit. "Can you identify the occupants?"

"Hold on." Caro was an exercise buff, an excellent cook, the wife of an engineer, and trying to adjust to her empty-nest lifestyle. She was also a cousin to Pete Cunningham, Sadie's boyfriend. Sadie had known all those things about Caro when she moved into Caro's mother-in-law apartment in Santa Fe six weeks ago. Sadie had also expected she and Caro would get along well. She *hadn't* expected Caro would also be a wannabe CIA operative. But if Sadie had learned anything over the last couple of years, it was that circumstances brought out parts of people's personalities even they didn't know existed.

"Two males," Caro continued, "mid-twenties, eating Cheetos and . . . wait . . . not Cheetos. Stand by, Churrochomper."

"Ten-four, Dunebuster." Sadie could see Caro from her vantage point on an obliging rock beside a cypress tree, but just

barely—Caro’s black hoodie and yoga pants blended well with the darkened landscape.

It hadn’t taken long for Sadie to settle into New Mexico. She had needed to stay under the radar due to an unresolved threat that had been haunting her after a near-deadly trip to Boston almost a year ago, and Santa Fe was turning out to be the perfect place to hide. What made it even better was that Pete had lined up an opportunity for Sadie to act as an undercover informant for the Bureau of Land Management. Caro was helping her with the paperwork portion of the job tonight.

“Cheese doodles,” Caro said over the walkie-talkie. “I repeat, the subjects are eating cheese doodles.”

That wasn’t really the type of information Sadie needed to collect, but she could remember her own naïve overexcitement on her first few cases so she didn’t bother saying anything to Caro about observing insignificant details.

“Can you confirm subject sixteen?” Sadie asked while looking at the clipboard in her hand and finding number sixteen on the list. She tapped the point of her pen over the name Kyle Langley. His address was apartment number 28 at the Colonial Hills complex.

“Affirmative,” Caro replied. “Definitely sixteen. Lizard tattoo on right forearm is in view.”

Sadie smiled to herself and wrote a big, fat check mark next to Kyle’s name. “And the other subject?”

“Might be subject nineteen. Can’t confirm . . . wait . . . what’s his hat preference?”

“Braves,” Sadie said, scanning down to number nineteen on the list. “Atlanta Braves.”

“Confirmed. Yes, I do believe it’s subject nineteen. I’ve taken photos for further verification.”

“Perfect,” Sadie said into the speaker before checking Cesar Montoya off the list as well. Seventeen of the twenty-six names on the list were checked off now, meaning she was closer than ever to completing her assignment.

“I’m moving away from the lookout point,” Caro said. “Repeat, I’m moving *away* from the lookout point and will rendezvous at predetermined location in oh-three minutes. Dunebuster over and out.”

“Churrochomper over and out,” Sadie said. She got up from where she’d been sitting, but remained in a crouch as she headed back down the embankment that acted as a natural barrier between the elementary school parking lot where they’d left Caro’s car and the apartment complex they were staking out.

It really should have been Sadie who made the visual verifications—she was the official informant after all—but Caro liked the trench work so much that Sadie couldn’t tell her no. It was fun to share the experience with someone else and, seeing as how this was Sadie’s first foray back into the world of private investigating, having Caro at her side made all the difference in keeping Sadie’s anxiety at bay. Sadie wasn’t the woman she used to be before Boston, but she was making progress. Caro was helping more than she knew. She made Sadie feel safe, and needed—two things that were very important to Sadie right now.

Sadie reached Caro’s royal blue Neon—a *terrible* car for investigative work; it was so conspicuous—several seconds before Caro appeared over the berm and used the button on the key fob to unlock the doors. Once Caro reached the driver’s side door, they both entered the vehicle on their respective sides, pulled the doors closed in tandem, and buckled their seat belts as though following a well-rehearsed choreography.

Caro pushed back the hood of her sweatshirt, then started the

engine and smoothly reversed out of the space before exiting the parking lot altogether. She sat up straight with both hands on the steering wheel, pulled her shoulders up to her ears, and squealed. “That was so fun! Where to next?”

“We’re done for the night,” Sadie said with a laugh at Caro’s enthusiasm.

Caro’s shoulders slumped, and she leaned back against the seat with a frown. “Really? Already?”

“I’ll have more work tomorrow night,” Sadie said. “Can I see the camera?”

Caro, pouting slightly, reached into the kangaroo pocket of her hoodie and handed over Sadie’s compact design DSLR camera with 12x stabilized zoom, 1/2000 shutter speed, and face-recognition technology. Sadie compared the pictures on the camera to the pictures she’d taken with her cell phone on the sly at the dig site. The men were, in fact, subjects sixteen and nineteen.

“Why can’t we just track down the whole list right now?” Caro asked. She used her fingers to smooth her chin-length bob. Caro’s mother was a Mexican immigrant who came to the US in the 1950s with her family to work and fell in love with a gringo—Pete’s uncle, Wynn. Caro had inherited her mother’s features: light brown skin, dark eyes, envious curves. She took pride in both cultures, never having chosen one above the other in order to define who she was. “I’m not tired,” Caro assured her. “And we’re on a roll. This was the quickest verification we’ve done yet.”

“That’s because Mr. Langley owns his own apartment.” A lot of the other crew members were somewhat nomadic, living with friends and family while they moved around to different job sites. That was likely why subject nineteen was there; he was probably sleeping on the couch. “Regardless of that, I don’t have photos of the rest of the

people on the list yet.” Sadie lifted her phone as a visual reminder of her process. “I have to talk to the subjects first, *then* get their photo, *then* confirm their address, and *then* get additional photos, if possible.”

Caro continued pouting, and Sadie couldn’t help but laugh again. “What did you ever do for fun before I got here?”

“I can’t even remember,” Caro said, looking thoughtful. “Watched TV mostly, I guess, and nagged my husband to take me places. But playing private investigator is so much better.”

“You’re not playing at anything,” Sadie said with a shake of her head. “You’re doing it, for real.”

“It’s so exciting,” Caro said with a contented sigh. “Have I convinced you yet to stay in Santa Fe forever so we can open up a PI business together?”

“You know I can’t do that,” Sadie said, ignoring the pang of envy she felt for Caro’s normal life. “But you ought to look into it for yourself. You’re a natural.”

Sadie was a natural too, but living underground like she was meant she couldn’t own a business. The car she’d been driving since coming to New Mexico was even in Caro’s name, though Sadie paid the lease payment. Officially, Sadie lived . . . nowhere, and it would stay that way until Pete felt certain it was safe for Sadie to return to Garrison, Colorado. He was tracking the person who made the threat on Sadie’s life, but he had yet to uncover an actual lead that led to an actual arrest. Until he did, he wanted Sadie far away from anywhere that could put her in danger of being attacked again—which meant anywhere she’d be expected to go.

After nearly a year of hiding, and a debilitating battle with anxiety and depression, however, Sadie was beginning to feel that it wasn’t worth the toll it took on her and her family and friends. She

missed her hometown and her friends and the purpose she'd once had. But Pete didn't feel she was safe and, although the situation was far from ideal, Sadie trusted his judgment more than her own. And Caro was wonderful. That helped immensely.

"Maybe I *will* start my own company," Caro said with a jaunty shake of her shoulders. "It's got to be more interesting than working in a dental office, I'm sure. Then I'll hire you under your other name, *Sarah*." She gave Sadie a sidelong look, and Sadie rolled her eyes at Caro's reference to the name Pete had chosen for her: Sarah Worthlin. Sarah *was* Sadie's legal first name—Sadie was short for Sarah Diane—and Pete felt it would make it more natural for Sadie to answer to a name already familiar to her. Caro and her husband, Rex, called her Sadie though, which Sadie preferred.

Caro's phone rang, and she fumbled for her earpiece on the dashboard. "Hello," she said brightly. Her voice was flatter when she spoke again. "Hey, Rex, yeah, we're on our way home."

Sadie squirmed; she hadn't ever come right out and asked, but she suspected Rex didn't know what they were really doing on their evenings "out." Not that Sadie would accuse Caro of lying to her husband, but Sadie couldn't imagine that Rex would be okay with his wife sneaking around Santa Fe and Los Alamos, confirming addresses of the people Sadie worked with.

While Sadie had hit it off with Caro as though they were life-long friends, Rex hadn't been nearly as personable. In fact, Sadie sometimes worried that he resented her being there at all. She hoped it wasn't true and that Rex's quiet demeanor and tendency to leave the room when Sadie entered was a type of chivalry. Pete thought a great deal of Rex, and so Sadie tried to keep her opinion of the man who owned the home where she was staying more in line with Pete's opinions. She found Caro and Rex to be a rather odd couple. Caro

was vivacious, outgoing, and engaged in multiple pursuits. Rex did little other than watch sports on TV, fish on the weekends, and go to work every day.

Work.

Sadie stifled a groan and glanced at the dashboard clock as her thoughts shifted. It was 8:52 P.M. which meant that in just over seven hours she would be parking her car in the vacant lot on Airport Road, loading up into the D&E Salvage vans, and heading out to the desert again. She knew it was important to start early in the day, when the ground was still cold and moist, and it was sort of nice to end before the day got too hot and dry, but it would be day nine of this horrible job.

When Pete had presented her with the opportunity to do a little undercover work for the Bureau of Land Management in New Mexico, she could not have been more excited. She'd been in Santa Fe for about a month by then, and growing increasingly bored. She'd been flattered to be offered the job, and she'd stepped out of the van on day one brimming with enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, working as an amateur digger at an ancient burial site hadn't lived up to her Indiana Jones expectations. It was hot, it was dirty, it was tedious, her back was killing her, and no one working at the dig looked like Harrison Ford. Thank goodness there were only two workdays left in this week; at least she'd have the weekend to recover before going back out again.

The other part of the job—the undercover informant part—was fairly straightforward. She was supposed to get to know the crew members and develop profiles for each one of them. She hadn't been told why she was developing these profiles, which drove her a little crazy. Pete felt the secrecy was necessary so that she wouldn't have

any biases. Even so, she had a theory that her job had something to do with artifacts being sold on the black market.

The BLM was the agency charged with enforcing the laws regarding antiquities, and there just didn't seem to be many other reasons for the BLM to want information about a crew working an archeological site. Regardless, she was determined to prove to the faceless BLM people that she was the right person for the job. Who knew what it could lead to in the future?

The actual archeological work, though, was awful. Day after day she chipped pieces of broken pottery out of the ground for hours on end, stopping only now and then to sneak a picture of her fellow crew members. The days seemed to last forever, and by the time she left the site each afternoon, she was coated with dust, her fingers were raw, and she was completely exhausted. The only relief was coming home to a hot shower.

"Okay," Caro said, sounding irritated as she spoke to the invisible voice in her ear. "We'll be home in less than ten minutes. Bye."

Caro took off the earpiece and tossed it back on the dashboard before glancing at Sadie. Her face brightened immediately. "Want to stop at Keva and get a smoothie or something?"

"I'd love to," Sadie said sincerely, "but I've got to get up in seven hours." She didn't point out that Caro had told Rex they'd be home in ten minutes.

Caro frowned. "I don't know how you stand that job."

"Me neither," Sadie said with a shake of her head. Caro had been the sounding board for all of Sadie's complaints, which were plentiful.

"How many more days?"

"I should be done by Monday," Sadie said, scanning her

TRES LECHES CUPCAKES

paperwork, and making a note of the nine people she hadn't talked to yet. Three people a day for the next three workdays should finish it off.

She hoped that once she'd turned in the profiles, she could stop working at the site; unfortunately, no one had told her as much. She needed to believe it for her own emotional stability, but deep down she feared she'd have to stay on the crew throughout the duration of the job in order to maintain her cover. If it came to that, she might have to break her own leg to get herself out of the work.

She took a breath and tried not to fantasize about broken bones. *One day at a time*, she reminded herself. *One hot, dirty, dry, miserable day at a time*. Then, with a little luck, she'd wow the people who'd hired her and be extended better opportunities in the future. They couldn't get much worse . . . at least she hoped not.

CHAPTER 2



You brought these cookie bar things?” Sadie looked up from where she was digging Thursday afternoon to see who’d spoken to her. It was Margo Kauffman—one of the nine names left on Sadie’s list.

“I did,” Sadie said. Bringing baked goods every morning had helped her make friends at the site, especially with the young men who treated her like a favorite aunt, and therefore told her pretty much everything she wanted to know. Margo was in her late thirties or early forties, Sadie guessed, and she kept to herself enough that Sadie hadn’t been able to connect with her yet.

“They’re really good,” Margo said. She popped the last bite of the dulce de leche bar into her mouth and wiped her hands on her pants, which would only make her hands dirtier since she’d been digging for hours.

“Thank you,” Sadie said, not sure whether she should take a break to talk or finish the jar she was uncovering. It was the first intact piece she’d worked on so far, and she was being extra cautious in hopes of keeping it in one piece. A lot of the pottery the crew uncovered was as fragile as eggshells, often victims of hairline fractures.

If handled too roughly, the item often crumbled in the hand of the digger attempting to preserve it. She decided to talk and dig, unwilling to abandon her project when it was so close to being out of the ground. “I love to bake.”

“And I love to eat,” Margo said with a smile. “We’re a match made in heaven.”

Sadie looked up at her and smiled while hiding her surprise at the inclusive comment.

“Is this your first dig?” Margo continued as she sat down in the dirt next to where Sadie was working; a little puff of dust plumed when her bottom hit the ground. She pulled a crushed pack of Camel cigarettes from one of the pockets in her khaki cargo pants—basic uniform for diggers—removed a cigarette and lighter out of the crumpled cellophane, and lit up.

Sadie was glad the breeze took the smoke away from her; if she had to be around cigarette smoke, she preferred it to be outdoors.

“It’s my second dig,” Sadie said, sticking to the story Pete had helped her create. Her hands were getting sweaty inside the latex gloves she was required to wear. She considered taking them off until she was ready to pick up the pot but she didn’t do it for fear she’d forget to put them back on and touch the pot with her fingers; she didn’t want to get any oils from her skin on the artifact. “I went on a tourist dig near Phoenix last summer. I guess you could say I fell in love with it.” *That* was an absolute lie.

“So now you’re an official dirt geek like the rest of us, huh?” Margo took a long pull off her cigarette and let it out slowly. Margo’s too-yellow-blond hair hung behind her shoulders in two braids. A turquoise bandana was tied kerchief-style over her head, and she wore a men’s white dress shirt unbuttoned over a green tank top. She was slender and strong, and her overly tanned skin testified to a lot

of time spent in the sun. “Dirt geek,” the nickname assigned to those who dug for a living, was a very good title for Margo.

“I guess so,” Sadie said, feeling just a little bit proud to claim the title even if she despised the actual work. “Do I get a T-shirt or something?”

Margo laughed as she exhaled another lungful of smoke. “We’ll have to talk to HR about that. Until then, the perpetual squint, uneven fingernails, and dust that never fully washes off will have to do.”

Sadie smiled. Margo had seemed intimidating from afar, but talking to her now showed her to be more personable than Sadie had expected. “How long have *you* been digging?” she asked, chipping away at the solidified dirt clinging to the jar.

“Eighteen years,” Margo said after exhaling again. “I graduated from ASU with a few years of fieldwork under my belt and never looked back.”

“How long have you been with D&E?” D&E Salvage was a privately contracted salvage archeology company hired to clear archeological sites in the Southwest area of the United States—Arizona and New Mexico, mostly. Once hired, they were responsible for properly removing, cataloging, and warehousing the artifacts or repatriating them back to the tribes claiming contemporary heritage. This particular job was to clear out a burial site recently discovered by a construction company when they attempted to put in a road leading to a new Ranchette community northwest of Santa Fe.

“I’ve been with D&E about two years,” Margo replied. “Since I moved to Santa Fe.”

“And do you like working for them?”

“Sure,” Margo said with a slight shrug. “They pay pretty well, and they let me do the bodies.”

Sadie looked up quickly, surprised by the flippant comment. It had taken her by surprise to learn that so many members of the crew regarded this as just another job—like landscaping or washing cars. It was disappointing to think that Margo might be equally callous toward the work, especially since she'd just said how much she loved it.

“Those monkeys aren't careful enough for bones, and D&E knows I'll do the job right.”

Sadie felt better about that explanation and moved forward with the conversation. “Is that why you don't work with the rest of the crew?”

Margo nodded but her gaze drifted to a mesa in the distance. “I get priority for the women and children. You can usually identify the gender by what funerary is buried with them. The crew gives me my space so that no one gets in the way of my work.” She nodded toward Sadie's jar, one of the many items buried with the people interred there. Sometimes there were jewelry or weapons, but Sadie was new and so she was given the pottery, something most of these diggers regarded as a dime a dozen. “The other crew members might end up doing more bone work if I can't get it done on my own. But I'm fast. I like to be the one who brings people up.”

“You take it pretty seriously, then,” Sadie commented, stealing glances at Margo while she kept working. She picked up her spray bottle and gave the jar a few squirts of water to remove the dust layer hiding the black-and-red design someone had hand painted almost a thousand years ago. It was like bringing the item back to life.

“These were real people with real lives,” Margo explained, a bitter edge to her voice. “And their loved ones never expected them to be dug up in order to make way for some rich person's swimming pool.”

“So you make sure they’re treated right,” Sadie summarized. It seemed silly to compare her approach to the jar to what Margo did with the skeletons, but Sadie felt the same kind of reverence. She also had to admit to a little jealousy toward Margo’s work. Would she ever get to do a body? Maybe she’d enjoy the work more if she could do something that important.

Margo took a final drag of her cigarette before snubbing it out in the dirt and rolling the butt into a tissue from her pocket. D&E had been very clear during orientation that no one was to leave anything at the site. Margo put the tissue back in her pocket and then looked hard at Sadie. “I could use an extra set of hands today.”

It took a few moments to realize what Margo meant, but once Sadie understood, she sat up straighter—no small feat for her poor back that felt fused into a slouchy curve. “With the bodies?” she said quietly but with an eager tone she hoped wasn’t inappropriate.

“I found a family plot,” Margo said. “They probably all got sick at the same time and were buried together. The bones are mixed in and it’s going to take me the rest of the day to separate them for proper cataloging. Bill said I could ask a crew member to assist me and, quite frankly, I don’t want to work with any of those guys.” She nodded toward a group of guys who’d taken a break to play hacky sack outside of the dig area. “I’ve been watching you. You do good work, even if you’re slow.”

Sadie tried not to let the comment sting and instead focused on the compliment. “I’d love to help,” she said. “I’ll be over as soon as I finish this.”

Margo nodded, thanked her, and then stood, not bothering to brush off her pants—what was the point when they all left the site covered in dirt anyway?

When Sadie stood up fifteen minutes later, she *did* brush the dirt

off her sleeves and pants, creating a miniature dust cloud in the process. Most of the dirt settled right back into her clothes, but she felt better for having at least tried to get clean. The shower she'd take once she got back to Caro's was sounding better by the minute.

She pulled a plastic bag out of one pocket of her cargo pants and a Sharpie out of another. Using her thigh as a solid surface, she wrote the grid number, time, and her name on the outside of the collection bag—all part of the cataloging process. She put the intact jar into the bag, removed the paper strip that exposed the sticky fold-over, and sealed the bag, satisfied with her work.

It was a lovely pot, about four inches in diameter and six inches tall, the neck barely narrower than the body. She couldn't help but think about what a fun conversation piece it would be if she could take it home and display it on her mantel—her very first intact pottery jar from the time she played archeologist. That would be illegal, of course, but it was still just a tiny bit tempting. She continued to admire the pot as she headed to the converted camp trailer where the artifacts were stored.

Roberto, a big fan of her baked items, was in charge of cataloging. He typed all the information she read off from the bag into his computer before reaching down for the item—his workspace was a few feet above her.

Sadie was handing it up, sad to see it go, when Cesar, one of the more boisterous members of the crew and number nineteen on her list, came around the corner of the trailer fast and bumped her shoulder. The slick plastic slid through her still-gloved hands. She fumbled to catch the pot. Roberto grabbed for it too, but to no avail. The pot crashed to the ground at her feet.

Dulce de Leche Bars

1½ cups flour
1½ cups quick oats
1 cup brown sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
1 cup butter, softened
1 (13.4-ounce) can dulce de leche
1 cup Heath toffee bits or chocolate chips
½ cup chopped nuts (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Combine dry ingredients. Cut in butter with pastry blender or fork until crumbly. Reserve ¼ cup for the topping, then press remainder of the mix into an ungreased 9x13 pan. Bake for 10 minutes.

While crust is baking, soften dulce de leche in a small saucepan over low heat (about 5 minutes). Spread dulce de leche over hot crust. Sprinkle with toffee bits and the rest of the crumb mixture. Add nuts if desired. Return to oven and bake 25 to 30 minutes.

Let cool 15 minutes and then run a knife around the edges of the pan to loosen.

Let cool completely and cut into bars.

Makes 24 bars.