

## Chapter One

“Molly!”

Molly Page didn't have time to acknowledge the call. She transferred the fish from the frying pan to slices of bread. She poured the rest of the smoking oil from the pan onto the fillets and put down the pan. She lifted the plate and moved it to the prep counter. She grabbed one of the lemon halves she'd prepared earlier and squeezed it over the whole concoction, added a parsley garnish, and lifted the plate to the window. Lloyd, the kitchen's expediter, took the plate with a raised eyebrow. “Blackened tilapia,” she said.

He nodded and disappeared from the window. She wiped her hands on a towel and immediately went to work on the next order. Her curly blonde hair was tied back in a bun, a tall chef's hat perched on top of it in case any strands tried to escape.

She was adding the spices when she felt a hand on her shoulder. “In a minute,” she said.

“Let Shane handle it,” Clifton Gail said.

She frowned over her shoulder at him. Clifton was the owner of the restaurant and, therefore, could fire her for two things: ignoring him and leaving her post. Finally, she decided to go with him. She stepped away from the stove and put her hand on her sous-chef Shane's shoulder. The L-shaped prep counter meant they were often pressed hip-to-hip when they were putting meals together.

Shane turned, and Molly put the order slip in her hand. “Sockeye, and they want it lightly seared, so...”

Shane waved off the rest of the instructions and took the slip from Molly's fingers. “I got it,” she said. She gestured at the door with her chin. “Go on, babe.”

“Thanks, hon,” Molly said. She reluctantly stepped away from the prep table as Shane moved to the stove to start the new order. She took off her hat and followed Clifton through the swinging door, leaving her domain behind. There was an empty area between the kitchen and the dining room, a neutral space where Lloyd passed orders from the kitchen to their respective waitresses. Molly's smile to Lloyd faded as Clifton didn't steer her towards his office as she'd expected, but rather towards the outdoor seating area.

For a moment, she thought he was literally throwing her out of the restaurant. She tried to think of any sins she'd committed recently and came up empty. When he stopped to hold the door for her, she caught a glimpse of his face and realized how sympathetic he looked. *Oh, God, this is going to be bad.*

She followed him onto the outdoor dining area, six tables under a green awning that were usually filled with tourists. The humidity and the heavy gray rain clouds hanging over the harbor were keeping them away today, however, and they had the space to themselves.

Clifton walked to the far end of the deck and leaned against the railing. Molly followed and stopped a few steps behind, watching the slope of his shoulders and finally giving up on him speaking first. “Clifton, I have to get back to the kitchen.”

“Molly, I'm just trying to figure out how to say this. Ah, I got a call from James Rausch, the funeral director?” She nodded. Most people on the island had used the Rausch family to say good-bye to a loved one. Clifton cleared his throat and said, “Apparently they tried to call you at home, and your cell phone is turned off, so...well, I guess we were the last number they could think of. Well, I...ahh. They have someone there who...whose papers list you as next-of-kin.”

“My sister.”

Clifton turned to face her. Her voice was flat, matter-of-fact. Obviously not at all what he was expecting. “Yeah,” he said. He pushed off the railing and said, “You knew?”

Molly looked out at the water and shrugged. “No.” Something was suddenly numb inside of her. She had been braced for the bad news; she had known something was wrong. Hearing the words, she felt like she was airborne. She was skydiving, plummeting toward the ground with no idea whether or not her chute was working.

“Then...”

“It was just a feeling,” she said. She blinked at the sailboats bobbing in the breeze and turned back to her boss. “Did Rausch leave his number?”

“He said it was in the book.”

She nodded. “I’ll get back to him on my next break. Speaking of which, they’re probably getting slammed right now, so...”

He gestured at the door and said, “Yeah, of course. I just...thought you should know.”

“Thank you,” she said. She turned and went back into the restaurant. She felt like she should’ve been gut-punched by the news, knew she should’ve at least taken the news as hard as Clifton. But the truth was she had already mourned her sister two days earlier.

She had jerked out of a sound sleep and lay panting at the ceiling for a good ten minutes, cradling a strange pain in her side. She eventually gave in and went to the kitchen for an ice pack when the pain suddenly faded. She leaned her head against the fridge, listening to the motor hum as it vibrated against her skull. She picked up the phone, ignoring the time, and dialed a number she knew by heart. She held her hand against her side, back to the wall, and listened to the metallic buzz on the other end of the line. After three minutes, she decided no one was going to answer. She hung up the phone, slid to the floor, and started to cry. She stayed like that until dawn, when she finally dragged herself to the shower.

So, while it was a shock to get confirmation, she had promised herself she wouldn’t cry at work. Crying was something personal, something to be done in private. There was more than enough time for tears when she was at home. She returned to the kitchen, settled the tall hat back on her head, and scanned the kitchen.

Jim Tatum and Lilly Lutz were the apprentice chefs in the kitchen. Tatum, his back to her, was stationed at the wide Southbend range and apparently busy with an order that had come in during Molly’s absence. Lilly, meanwhile, was at the far end of the prep table — well out of Molly and Shane’s way — preparing a fudge sundae. Lilly looked like she had her order under control, but Jim kept wiping at his cheek with the back of one hand. She knew the look; he was feeling rushed again. She sighed and said, “Tatum, you doing okay there?”

He lifted a hand with his thumb and forefinger curled into the “OK” signal, and Molly retook her place next to Shane. Shane looked up, her hands stilling as she arranged parsley next to a sockeye salmon. Shane lifted the plate to the window and asked Molly, “How about you? You okay?”

Molly nodded and brushed at an imagined hair hanging in front of her face. She took a new order from the window and went to the stove to cook next to Tatum. It gave her the chance to do her own meal and keep an eye on Tatum’s work at the same time.

There would be time enough to properly mourn her twin later.

Molly had been a ghost since before she was born.

She was an afterimage that the doctor didn’t believe to be anything other than April’s shadow, so their parents had set about preparing for their one little girl to arrive. A few months after the ultrasound, the doctor realized his mistake when he handed Julianne Page two very noisy, very pink bundles. April’s name had already been chosen, and there was a bit of a scuffle over naming the unexpected look-alike. Their father believed twins should have rhyming names, while their mother was vehemently opposed to that trend. “Twins should have distinct personalities,” she argued. So, while they suddenly found themselves scrolling through the names they had discarded before settling on April, Molly was known only as Baby Girl Page (2).

She remained (2) or “April’s sister” until a fortuitous visit from their grandmother. Julianne was nursing April, but the other twin refused to eat. Julianne was worried, but the nurse said, “Maybe she’ll be hungry once she knows who she is.”

While Julianne and April slept, Molly was wide awake, staring at the ceiling as if waiting for her name before she let herself rest. The girls’ grandmother bundled the unnamed twin up in her

arms and walked her to the window. She softly cooed to the anonymous infant, tickled her chin, and then looked out the window at the far waters of the island's harbor. "Molly means star of the sea, did you know?" the grandmother said. "That would do nicely, wouldn't it?"

Julianne woke shortly thereafter. When grandma handed the baby back, Julianne said, "Look, April, do you want to see your sister?"

"Her name is Molly," their grandmother said. When asked how she'd come up with that name, the older woman just shrugged and claimed the baby told her. Her parents, unable to reach a consensus on their own, decided it was as good a name as any.

Updating the nursery was nearly as stressful as trying to name the surprise arrival. A brand-new crib was purchased and slid next to the hand-me-down from their paternal grandmother. Every sign, banner, announcement, and cake had to be hastily adjusted with a sloppy, second "s" behind "baby girl".

Molly grew up knowing, without being told, that she'd been a surprise. A lot of babies were surprises, but how many parents didn't know their child was coming until they were in labor? The way had been paved for April, and Molly was a hitchhiker throwing everyone's carefully laid plans askew. She didn't take offense at these feelings, and she never felt the slightest bit neglected. She merely accepted her comfortable place in April's shadow and let herself be dragged along in her more vibrant sister's wake.

The one place Molly could get attention was in the kitchen, helping her mother with the spices and setting the table for their family dinners. By the time she was ten, she was cooking the entire dinner herself. She had to stand on a stool to reach the stove top, and someone was always watching to make sure she didn't burn herself or try to lift a too-heavy pot on her own. But she loved it. Cooking made her feel like she was Molly Page. Not just April's sister or Baby Girl Page (2), but her own person. It made her feel good.

After graduation, April and Molly both left the island for college. April studied education at University of Washington while Molly opted for Western Culinary Institute in the hopes her love of cooking would lead to a career. When they graduated, both with honors, Molly immediately moved back to Squire's Isle as she and April had planned. She began interviewing for jobs with local restaurants and rented a small apartment with two bedrooms, anticipating that April would be moving in soon.

The nature of their birth was then cruelly reversed. Molly, expecting to share a room with her sister, suddenly found herself living alone when April decided she wasn't moving back to the island after all. She argued there weren't enough teaching opportunities, and she wanted to see more of the world than the island could offer.

Molly was heartbroken; they hadn't been the closest sisters in the world the past few years, but she had been looking forward to the chance to reconnect with April. After the pain of separation passed, however, she found herself intrigued by the experience of finally being alone. College had been her first taste of life without April, so she was eager to continue the experiment into real life. In college, she'd realized that she had the choice of revealing she was a twin or withholding the knowledge. For one glorious semester, she'd told people she was an only child. There were times when she felt she was betraying her sister by lying. But after a while it became easier to pretend, and she basked in the freedom of not having her sister's shadow on her face anymore.

And now April was dead. Killed in a car accident.

Gail's closed its front door at eleven p.m. There were always a few stragglers who had arrived late or didn't finish their dinners until half-past or, on very rare occasions, midnight. These leftover diners were of no consequence to the kitchen staff. No orders were taken after 10:59, so the kitchen was officially closed.

During the last half-hour, Molly assigned Lilly to prepare a family meal for the staff. She helped Shane clean off the prep table, stowed the leftovers in the fridge, and replaced the freshly washed knives on the magnetic strip over the stove.

The family meal was eaten at a small round table at the back of the kitchen. It was squeezed in between the walk-in fridge and the center island. They ate with the work station's various pots and pans hanging over their heads. Lilly was setting the table when Molly doffed her hat and headed for the door. She spotted Shane at the sink and said, "All right, I'm out of here. Kitchen's yours."

Shane finished washing her hands and said, "You're skipping the meal?"

"Yeah," Molly said. "Sorry, guys. I'm just not hungry." She patted Shane's shoulder. "You can eat my share. You're nothing but skin and bones, hon."

Shane laughed and patted her flat stomach. "I get what I need."

Molly made a so-so gesture with her hand and waved good-bye to the rest of the staff. "Good-night, guys. Great work today." She stopped by the back door where a row of waist-high lockers stood. She unbuttoned and shed the white chef's jacket with "Gail's" stitched in red across the left breast, hanging it on a hook in her locker, then slipped out the back door.

Directly outside the back door was a staircase that led to an apartment. In years past, the owner of the restaurant had lived up there. Clifton had already had a house when he inherited the place from his father, so he rented it out to a friend of his.

Beyond the stairs was the front of a tiny, out-of-the-way pizza shop. A small sign next to the door identified the place as Joe Lack's Pizza. The front door was always open, and the smells wafting down the alley were more than enough of an advertisement to draw people off the boardwalk.

Molly walked past the spot where she and Shane smoked cigarettes on their break and went through the gate in the boardwalk railing. The kitchen and wait staff parked on Front Street, which ran in front of Gail's Seafood Shack to the ferry lanes. Trying to leave while a ferry was off-loading was next to impossible, but fortunately her schedule and the ferry schedules hardly ever matched up.

She had just unlocked the car door when Shane appeared at the boardwalk railing. "Hey, Moll." Molly looked back. Shane was backlit by the security light over Gail's back door, her short blonde hair ringed with a golden halo. With the light behind her, Molly couldn't read Shane's expression, but concern was evident in her posture and the way her fingers drummed on the railing. "You sure you're okay? You seemed a little—"

"I'm fine," Molly assured her. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"All right," Shane said. She didn't sound the slightest bit convinced, but she retreated from the railing nonetheless. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"No," Molly said. "Uh, Clifton gave me a couple of days off. There's some stuff I have to deal with. You and Lilly and Tatum—"

"Yeah, we can handle it," she said. "You're sure you're okay?"

Molly nodded. "Thanks, Shane. I'll see you in a few days."

"Okay. Good-night, Molly."

She watched as Shane disappeared and finally opened the car door. She ducked inside to get away from the muggy heat and finally took a deep breath. She gripped the wheel and stared at the blue-and-white "Chef's Parking" sign framed between her knuckles.

For two days, she'd felt alone and adrift. Now the truth, the ugly truth that her sister was dead and awaiting burial, was out and unavoidable. Her sister was dead. It explained the lost feeling, it explained why she suddenly felt cut loose from life. She felt weightless. Her anchor was gone.

But beyond the pain of knowing her entire family was now dead, April was her identical twin. They'd always had each other, even when they weren't talking to one another. No matter how lonely Molly felt, she could always count on knowing April was out there, somewhere, connected to her. But now April was a few blocks away lying in a casket, waiting to be lowered into a grave. She wasn't sure that was something she'd be ready to watch.

She pulled out of her parking space and drove in the general direction of home. The entire trip was accomplished through muscle memory and sleepwalking, for she didn't remember anything until the headlights clicked off against the flat gray of her garage door. Her house wasn't large, but it was comfortable. And far nicer than the apartment where she'd lived alone after college all those years ago.

Back then, being alone and separate from her sister had been such an adventure. Now she was wondering how she would possibly go on. She went into the house, left the lights off, and sank onto the sofa. She wanted a cigarette, but knew she couldn't sate that desire. It was far too muggy to stand outside, and she'd made a rule for herself to never smoke in the house, so she substituted by balancing a pen between her index and middle fingers. She drummed the end of the pen against the arm of the chair and stared out the window.

She supposed funeral arrangements would have to be made. She'd called Rausch during her break and let him know the gist of what she thought April would want.

Molly couldn't figure out why April had asked for the funeral to take place on the island. Their mother had died five years ago, a year after their father, so the funeral wouldn't be for their benefit. Other than a few friends and old acquaintances from their school days, April barely knew enough people on the island to fill a reunion lunch, let alone a funeral. So why arrange to have the funeral here? The family plot was on the island, but she could have had the funeral in Montana and then arranged for burial in the family plot later.

*She did it to be sure I would come, a voice in her mind said. She didn't think I would travel all the way to Montana, so she came to me.*

Molly capped the pen and rubbed her forehead. She picked up the phone, stared at it for a long minute, and then dialed a number. "Hi, this is Molly Page. April's sister? I'm sorry to be calling so late...yes, I remember. I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but April passed away a few days ago. I know, we were...we were all shocked..."

The next morning woke Molly with a slow crawl of sunlight across her face. She blinked and pushed up from the splayed position she had adopted in the night, rubbing her tired eyes with the heels of her hands. She had called a few people she knew to be night owls, and she would spend the rest of the morning calling everyone else.

She reached for the phone, but her hand shrank from the task. She would shower, get something for breakfast, maybe go for a jog...anything to postpone the calls for as long as possible. Besides, the people she had called the night before were probably already calling friends of friends, expanding the phone tree. If she waited long enough, there was a chance that the work would be done without her having any more awkward conversations with near-strangers.

She stretched, rubbed her face, and stumbled through the house to the bathroom. She turned on the shower and undressed down to her underwear as she waited for the water to get hot. She stood in front of the sink with her toothbrush and stared at her hands resting on the porcelain. Nicks and long-healed scars, remnants and mementos from her years learning the trade, dotted the flesh of her thin fingers. When she finally raised her eyes, she faced her mirror image. April. They were identical, but not to each other. April had a tiny scar over her right eyebrow, and her face was a little thinner. But that didn't matter. The woman in the mirror might as well have been April.

Molly sneered. "What the hell were you thinking? Going ninety miles an hour down a highway at night? April..." She sighed and rubbed her face.

She had learned that April had been a passenger in the car. The driver had been going ninety when a tire had blown out. The car had flipped twice. April wasn't wearing her seatbelt. Her head had impacted the side window, and her body crumpled to the ceiling of the car when it finally settled on the roof. The paramedics had done everything they could at the scene, but she was declared dead-on-arrival by the attending doctor in the emergency room.

She looked back at the mirror. Who had been driving? What had been so damned important that they were going so fast? The steam from the shower soon obscured Molly's reflection completely, so there would be no answers found in the identical blue eyes. She finished undressing and pushed aside the curtain.

Answers could wait until she'd completely woken up.

After her shower, Molly called Rausch to confirm the viewing would start that afternoon. Rausch informed her that the body was prepared, and she silently thanked him for not saying that her sister had been embalmed. She hung up, dressed in a silk blouse and a pair of black slacks, and went to pay her respects.

Rausch Funeral Home was at the outskirts of town, flanked on three sides by trees. Mount Blaine, the island's peak, seemed to rise directly behind the building and gave the impression that the funeral home was built into the side of the incline.

Molly pulled into the circular driveway and parked in the back, where mourners usually parked during services. By the time she got out of the car and walked to the front door, a thin, older man was waiting at the open double doors for her. His copper beard was full and going gray at the chin, giving him the appearance of being muzzled. He wore a black suit that managed not to look somber.

The man's eyes widened slightly when he got a good look at her face — that was to be expected — but he at least was able to cover his surprise well. "Miss Page," he said in a low voice. "I'm James Rausch. I'm terribly sorry for your loss."

She wanted to say it was a pleasure to meet him, but the words died in her throat. He didn't seem to notice her hesitation and led her inside. "Your sister is in Viewing Room One," he said, indicating a wide door directly across from them. He led her halfway across a small sitting area and stopped as if he'd hit a barrier. "I'll be in the office if you need anything."

"Okay. Thank you," she said. He stepped aside and disappeared into the glass-walled office to her right. She watched him sit behind his desk and then faced the louvered Viewing Room door. Beyond the half-open folds, she could see two plush chairs flanking a table with a small lit lamp. She walked to the edge of the door and hesitantly peered inside.

The casket was nice, as far as that went. Oak, she guessed, with gold handles. She knew nothing about caskets, but it looked nice. That was good. She took a deep breath and shoved her hands into her pockets. The casket was open, but from her angle all she could see was the white satin that lined the inside of the lid. She forced herself to step fully into the room and then turned around to face her sister.

Everyone always said it looked like the deceased was just sleeping. That was a lie; sure, her eyes were closed, but April never slept on her back. She'd slept curled up, her hair hanging in her face, mumbling occasionally and chewing on her thumbnail. Her skin was never this waxy, her eyelids never this still.

She wore a silver necklace that Molly had never seen before around her neck, disappearing into the lace collar of her blouse. The blouse itself had pearl buttons running down the center of her chest and was nothing April would have worn in life. Somehow the sight of her wearing it brought the reality of the situation home.

April was dead.

Molly stepped forward and rested her hand on the edge of the casket. She was surprised to find her fingers were trembling. "Well, Ape. I guess...God." She closed her eyes and shook her head. "How could you leave me like this? You always promised you'd be back. What...wh-what am I supposed to do now? Huh?" She sighed and brushed her sister's hair. It was like touching a mannequin, and she withdrew her hand quickly. "It's going to be weird. I keep...I keep trying to grab the phone and call you to say how crazy this all is. I'm going to miss you. I'm never going...to be the same."

She bent down and kissed April's eyebrow. She moved her lips down to April's ear and whispered, "Ail of aa." It was their language, cultivated through their pre-school days, and it had been used whenever they had something they wanted to keep "super-special secret". This time, it was a simple message: "I love you."

She kissed April's cheek again and straightened. She stroked her sister's hair to make sure she hadn't mussed the curls. She left the Viewing Room, glanced towards Rausch's office, and left without saying good-bye to him. She didn't know the etiquette, but she was sure he would understand if she didn't tell him she was leaving. She went back out into the sunny morning, the clouds of yesterday having all dispersed and left the sun to beat down on her as she searched her purse for her keys.

She didn't see the small red car parked at the edge of the driveway until she was already driving past it. Even then, she simply assumed it was another mourner coming to see someone else.

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