



FAMILY PATTERNS



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DEDICATION

I am so grateful to my editor, Beth Adams, for believing in this series and bringing it to life. Thank you, Beth, for your gentle guidance, wisdom and support. I'd also like to thank author Carolyn Greene, a good friend, fantastic plotter, and a blessing in my life. I couldn't have done this without her.





PROLOGUE

Maple Hill, Massachusetts • December 1920

Molly Drayton rose silently from her warm bed, the frigid night air biting into her bare feet as she crept across the wooden floor. She hadn't taken the time to slip a robe over her long flannel nightgown, afraid she might awaken her young husband. She couldn't let Noah discover her.

Not if she wanted to survive the night.

Shivering, Molly stepped into the front parlor before lighting a candle. The flickering flame cut through the darkness and illuminated the small quilt crumpled on the settee. She picked it up and wrapped it tightly around her shoulders as the frightful howl of the wind drew her to the front window.

She parted the heavy drapes just far enough to see through the frosted windowpane. A light snow had begun to fall, swirling around the bare tree branches and dusting

the front walk with a fine white powder. There were footprints in the snow. Molly let the drapes drop from her hand, hastened toward the long staircase, and began her quiet ascent. She was careful to avoid the squeaky spots on the steps. Her six-year-old son, William, slept on the second floor of the house. William had fallen asleep on the settee shortly after supper and hadn't stirred when Noah carried him up to bed.

When she reached the top of the stairs, Molly paused by William's bedroom to make sure his door was tightly closed, then she walked to the room at the end of the hall. She turned the glass doorknob, wincing at the loud creak of the door. Molly sucked in a deep breath, listening closely for any movement from her husband in the bedroom below.

All was quiet in the house. She hurried over to the mahogany desk and opened the top drawer, lifting the candle higher. She pulled out a sheet of notepaper and a pencil, her hand shaking as she began to write.

That's when she heard it. The sound of a footstep on the stairs. Then another. A heavy, deliberate step.

She blew out the candle. The darkness only amplified the sound of the approaching footsteps. He was at the top of the stairs now and moving toward her. She backed into the far corner of the room, clutching the quilt tightly around her shoulders, praying for a miracle.



CHAPTER ONE

Maple Hill, Massachusetts • Present Day

Sarah Hart had been twelve years old the last time she'd set foot in the rambling Victorian house on Bristol Street. Familiar scents of cedar and cinnamon seemed to still linger in the air, bringing back memories of her grandfather, whose blue eyes would twinkle with delight whenever she and her brother came tumbling through the front door.

"Hey, Mom," Jason said as he entered the front parlor. "You're right on time."

"Hope you don't mind that I let myself in," she said, leaning up to kiss his clean-shaven cheek. At thirty-six, Jason was a handsome man, with a square jaw and short, dark hair. "The door was standing wide open."

"That's Maggie's doing." He smiled. "She already loves living in a place where you can leave your doors open in the middle of the day."

Jason and Maggie had recently purchased the old family home and moved here from Los Angeles. Sarah was still pinching herself. She couldn't believe they were really living so close after all this time.

"Just be sure and lock the house up at night," she said, setting her purse on the marble top parlor table. She probably worried too much, but something still unsettled her about this house, even after all these years.

"We'll be fine, Mom."

Sarah looked around the parlor, which was filled with many of Maggie's treasured antiques. A pale blue camel-back sofa sat in the corner next to an upright piano with elaborate scrollwork on the front and beautiful inlaid wood trim. A mahogany phonograph stood in the opposite corner near an antique brass floor lamp. "Your grandpa didn't believe it when I told him you bought this place."

"He remembers it?" Jason asked.

"At times." Sarah said. Her father, William Drayton, lived at Bradford Manor Nursing Home in Maple Hill. "His memory comes and goes. You'll visit him soon, right? I know he'd love to see you."

"I will," Jason said. "I've just got a lot on my plate right now."

Jason was going to practice family law in Maple Hill. He'd bought out the practice of a retiring lawyer and was now in the process of sorting through outdated files and putting the office back into shape.

Footsteps sounded in the hall and a moment later Jason's wife Maggie appeared in the arched doorway. She was a year older than Jason, but in her denim shorts and lime green shirt, it didn't show. Her shoulder-length auburn hair was swept back into a messy ponytail and there was a spot of white paint on her chin.

"Hi, Sarah." Maggie walked over to give her a hug. "Isn't it a gorgeous day? I've been painting the back porch."

"I can tell." Sarah pointed to her chin. "Looks like you missed a spot."

"Oh, dear." Maggie's eyes flashed in amusement as she reached up to rub her chin. "I seem to get more paint on me than on the porch rails." She looked up at her husband. "Maybe I should go upstairs and freshen up before we leave."

"No time, Magpie," he said. "It's at least a thirty-minute drive and we don't want to be late to the contractors."

"All right." Maggie smoothed back her hair as best she could and turned to Sarah. "I'm not sure what time we'll get back. We'll try not to be gone too long, but as you can see"—she pointed at the strips of water-stained wallpaper on the ceiling—"there's a lot to go over."

Jason and Maggie were in the process of restoring the old Victorian to its original condition. The previous owner had modernized the house, removing much of its charm in the process; he'd lowered the ceilings, installed cheap shag carpet over the beautiful hardwood floors, and removed the gingerbread trim from the exterior of the house.

Sarah knew that Jason and Maggie had a huge task in front of them, but they seemed excited about bringing Grandpa Noah's house back to life and were working hard to restore it faithfully. She'd lent them all of Grandpa Noah's old photographs of the house, taken both inside and out, so they could see the place in its original condition.

"I can stay until six," Sarah told them. "Then I've got to interview a new boarder. She called just this morning and sounded desperate to find a place."

"We should be home well before then," Maggie slipped her purse over her shoulder. "Thank you for doing this. I hope it's not too much bother."

"Of course not." Didn't Maggie realize how much she relished the time with her granddaughters? For so many years she had hardly seen them at all, and now she intended to savor every moment.

"The girls are upstairs," Jason said. "They're a little homesick today, so I'm afraid they might not be very good company."

Sarah assured him that they'd manage. "Good luck with the contractor."

"Thanks." Maggie sighed as she looked up at the ceiling. "We're going to need it."

As soon as the door closed behind them, Sarah went in search of her twelve-year-old twin granddaughters and found Audrey upstairs, lying sprawled on top of her bed, her long, sandy blonde hair spread out around her. The charcoal

pencil in her hand moved slowly over the sketch pad in front of her.

“Hello there.”

Audrey didn't look up from her drawing. “Hi Grandma.”

Sarah approached the bed. “What are you drawing?”

“Me and my best friend.”

Sarah looked down at the small photograph next to the sketch pad. A ginger-haired girl with a wide smile had her arm wrapped around Audrey's shoulder. “You're doing a wonderful job.”

“No, I'm not.” Audrey scribbled over the page, then closed the sketchbook. “I can't even draw here. I can't do anything here. It's so boring.”

“Maybe we can make cookies this afternoon.”

Audrey rolled onto her back and stared up at the cracked, white plaster ceiling. “Whatever.”

“Where's your sister?” Sarah asked. She would ignore Audrey's attitude for now.

“I'm right here, Grandma,” said a muffled voice behind her.

Sarah turned around, but she didn't see anyone. “Amy?”

“Yes,” a voice answered, but from close to the corner of the room now.

Audrey sat up on the bed. “Hey, where are you?”

Sarah was wondering the same thing. She looked around, hoping to catch a glimpse of Amy's freckled face.

“Here I am.” Amy replied. Her voice was now coming from a spot near the bed.

Audrey hopped off the bed with a delighted squeal. “You’re freaking me out! Are you in the wall or something?”

The sound of Amy’s giggles filled the room. “Hold on, I’ll be there in a minute.”

A few moments later, Amy appeared in the doorway, her cheeks flushed. She looked identical to her sister, but her blond hair hung in two long braids down her back. “Hey, Grandma.”

“Hello, dear.” Sarah reached out to pull a cobweb from Amy’s T-shirt. “So tell us the secret to your vanishing act.”

Amy grinned. “I’m not sure I want to tell. It could come in handy if I want to do a little spying.”

“Oh, come on,” Audrey peered past Amy. “This is like the only interesting thing that’s happened since we moved here. You can’t keep it to yourself.”

“Okay.” A mischievous twinkle gleamed in her blue eyes. “I found a secret passageway.”

Sarah gasped. As a child, she’d explored all the hidden nooks and crannies in her grandfather’s house, but she’d never found anything like that. “Where is it?”

“In the weirdest place.” Amy moved out the door. “Come on, I’ll show you.”

The twins raced out of the room and Sarah followed a step behind. It couldn’t really be ... could it? A secret passageway?

Jason and Maggie had already been hard at work in Amy’s room. The wallpaper had been scraped off and they’d

removed the orange shag carpet, although small pieces of the foam padding were still stuck to the hardwood floor.

“It’s in here.” Amy led them to the walk-in closet, where strips of carpet tack still lined the floor. “I was hanging up some of my clothes”—she gestured toward the half-full boxes on the floor—“when I noticed one of the floorboards was loose.”

Amy knelt down to demonstrate, removing the loose floorboard to reveal a small metal wheel underneath. When she turned the wheel, a creaking noise sounded beside them.

Sarah turned to see a narrow panel in the closet wall slide open to expose a dark passageway behind it.

“Cool,” Audrey said, stepping inside the passageway.

“Wait a minute, girls,” Sarah said, reaching for Audrey’s arm. “You never know what could be in here. It could be dangerous.”

But the girls didn’t stop, and, if Sarah was honest, she was as curious as they were about what lay hidden behind the wall. Hesitantly, she took a step into the passageway behind them.

Amy led the way with a flashlight, the beam stretching just far enough ahead to light their way. “There are lots of cobwebs. Probably lots of spiders, too.”

Audrey stopped in her tracks. “Gross. Let me hold that thing so I can see them before I run into them.”

Amy handed the flashlight to her sister, and they moved slowly along the corridor. Dust tickled Sarah’s nose, and she inhaled a faint, musty odor. The passageway was still

and dark, almost smothered in darkness except for the narrow beam of the flashlight, which revealed glimpses of bare wood walls and a thick layer of dust on the wood floor.

“I hope the batteries don’t go out,” Audrey whispered as they shuffled along. “How far does this thing go, anyway?”

Sarah wondered the same thing. She’d lost her sense of distance in the darkness. The passageway seemed narrower now, and she reached out one hand to feel her way along the rough-hewn wall.

“I don’t know,” Amy replied. “I was exploring it when I heard you and Grandma talking in the bedroom. I couldn’t resist trying to scare you.”

Sarah glanced behind her into the endless blackness.

“You know, girls,” she whispered, “I bet nobody has been inside this passageway for over fifty years. I used to play in this house all the time when I was a little girl and I didn’t even know about it.”

“Maybe we should go back.” Audrey halted in her tracks. “What if we get lost in here?”

“Don’t be such a baby.” Amy turned and plucked the flashlight out of her hand. “There’s nothing here that can hurt us, right, Grandma?”

“That’s right,” Sarah said. She tried to sound confident, but a part of her wondered if Audrey was right. An odd chill filled the small passageway.

“Why is it cold in here?” Audrey asked, wrapping her arms around herself. “It shouldn’t be so cold, should it?”

Sarah moved closer to her. “We’re probably near an air conditioner vent that’s blowing cold air into this part of the passageway.”

“Or, it’s a ghost,” Amy whispered, holding the flashlight under her chin in a way that made her sweet face look distorted. “I’M COMING TO GET YOU, AUDREY MARIE HART,” she howled.

“Stop it,” Audrey said, grabbing the flashlight. “That’s not funny!”

The flashlight beam dropped to the floor, illuminating something by the wall. Sarah crept closer to the spot. “Hey, shine the light over here again.”

Audrey aimed the flashlight at her as Sarah cautiously reached out to pick up what looked like an old blanket. “What is it, Grandma?”

Sarah’s heart began to pound as she looked down at the bundle in her arms. It was a child-sized quilt made of vintage fabrics. She moved the quilt closer to the light, startled to see three letters stitched into one of the corner fabric pieces.

It couldn’t be . . . She’d heard about her father’s baby blanket that had disappeared, a small quilt he had lost when he was only six years old on the same night that Sarah’s grandmother, Molly, had vanished, but . . . “It’s an old quilt.”

“That’s weird.” Amy said. “I wonder what it’s doing in here.”

Sarah was wondering the same thing. She smoothed her fingers over the vintage fabrics as she admired the workmanship. It had been up here for a very long time. Dampness

had stained some of the fabrics, and there were a few small holes here and there.

As she looked more closely at the quilt, she noticed something odd sticking out from a small opening in the seam between two square patches. She eased one finger into the loose opening, then carefully slid out a brittle, yellowed piece of paper.

Audrey leaned over her shoulder, shining the light on the slip of paper. "What's that?"

"Something I've never dreamed existed," Sarah breathed, as she read the faded, handwritten scrawl. "It's a clue. The only clue to the disappearance of Molly Drayton."