

CHAPTER ONE

“Need some help pretty lady?”

I was standing in the back of a pickup truck knee deep in fertilizer with a shovel in my hand. I was dressed in a pair of dirty cargo shorts, a light blue tank and a pair of muck boots and I was drenched in sweat. If this guy thinks I look good, he’s got to be seriously deranged or he needs a trip to the eye doctor to get his peepers checked. I lowered my sunglasses and gave him a once over. He was tall and lean with broad shoulders. His handsome face was sporting a sexy three-day stubble and his reddish brown hair was just long enough to be able to run your fingers through. His best feature was his big green eyes. Talk about peepers. He looked like trouble but not the threatening sort. Just in case, I stood up straight, shoveled up a big load of fertilizer and tossed it into the garden right in front of his feet. He leaped away. I leaned on the shovel and said, “Do I look like I need help?”

He held up his right hand and chuckled, “No, no, not at all. I was just trying to be nice. I was trying to be a good neighbor.” He pointed across the street. “I live in the cottage across the street at the marina. I’m Charlie Quinn.”

“Well, Charlie Quinn, friendly, helpful, neighbor, I’m Ivy Stone and thank you for the offer of help, but I think I’ve got this covered.”

He glanced around the front of the cottage and asked, “Do you live here?”

“Just for the summer.” I took out a bandana from my back pocket, took off my Red Sox baseball cap I had bought at the airport when I arrived and wiped my forehead. “I’ve got a contract to redo the landscaping for all five cottages.”

“What you’ve done so far looks great. I always thought the cottages on this side of the street needed some sprucing up. My family owns the marina. I’m just here helping my sister out for the summer, I’m a travel writer. I’m hoping in my time off this summer I can finish the book I’ve been writing.”

“What’s it about?”

“It’s a book about my pub crawl through New Zealand and Australia. I have a contract with a publisher and it’s to be released in December. So, I need to finish it, ASAP.”

“Sounds fascinating. I’ll have to put it on my ‘to be read list.’” (*Yeah right!*)

“You should. Besides being full of useful travel tips, it has some amusing stories.”

“I bet.”

“So, I guess you’re working for Big H. He’s a great guy. I think he owns half of Cozy Harbor. Are you related to him?”

This guy is a little too nosy. My heart sped up and I knew it was time to end this conversation before I went into a full panic attack. I’ve only been here a few days and I would really like to make it through the summer without being outed. “He’s a friend of the family. If you would excuse me, I need to

get back to work.”

Charlie smiled and said, “Well, I guess I’ll be seeing you around, Ivy. Great name for a gardener by the way.”

I waved him off. “My parents must have had a premonition. Nice to meet you, Charlie.”

I watched him cross the street and walk into the marina store. I took a deep breath, shook off my feeling of anxiety and got back to work. Gardening has always been a relaxer for me. My grandmother Molly raised me since the age of thirteen when my parents were killed in a small plane crash. She taught me everything I know about plants, flowers, and soil management. I’m so excited about doing this project. It’s been a long time since I had the time to get my hands dirty. I’ve been on location filming for most of the past year, so I haven’t had the chance to work on my own gardens at my house in Bel Air. When I’m home I’m Manny’s assistant. He and his wife Maria live in my guest cottage. He does all the maintenance and gardening, and Maria takes care of my house. They’ve been with me since I bought the house seven years ago and they’re like family to me. I just hope I can stay here long enough to finish all the cottages.

My Godfather Howard, also known around here as Big H, was my dad’s best friend growing up. When my parents died, Big H was the executor of their wills, and he has always been there for me during every crisis in my life. My grandmother passed when I was twenty and still in college. I went away to college for my first semester and then when my grandmother got sick, I moved home and finished up at a local college. I was a theater major and after college I moved to LA to follow my dream to be an actress. Big H helped

me make all the arrangements for my grandmother's funeral and when I moved to LA he helped arrange for the sale of her house. He invested my inheritance for me and when my career took off and I started making some serious money, he invested that for me too. I've known a lot of people in the entertainment industry who have gotten burnt by money managers. I know I can trust Big H completely to have my best interests at heart. We've never lived near each other, so I don't get to see him as often as I would like, but I always knew who to call when I needed sound advice. That's how I wound up in Cozy Harbor. I knew I needed a change of scenery and a come to Jesus meeting with myself after an incident with the paparazzi. I called Big H and told him I needed to run away for a bit and hide. He told me Cozy Harbor, Rhode Island was a perfect place to fade into the woodwork. So far, so good, I just hope it lasts for a while.

The next day, I washed up at lunchtime, grabbed the vase of daisies I had picked up at the nursery and went across the street to the shack for lunch. Mo, Big H's wife, runs the Snack Shack at the marina. I had only met her once before I came here for the summer. I was doing a movie last year and we filmed some scenes in Boston. They drove up and we had dinner one night. I never thought I'd see the day when Big H got married, but he couldn't have found a more down to earth woman than Mo. Mo is from Alabama, and she is a southern woman through and through. She's cute and curvy and there isn't a phony bone in her body. They're crazy about each other and I'm happy for them. When I showed up last week, I spent the first two nights at their house. I had the first two decent nights of sleep I had in a long time. Between the two of them,

they've had enough life experience to give me some sound advice. They came up with this plan for the summer for me, helped me move into the cottage and frankly I couldn't ask for two more loyal people to have my back.

When I walked in, Mo was filling salt and pepper shakers, and Big H was sipping a cup of coffee.

Mo looked up, gave me a warm smile, and said, "Hey, sugar. Are those for me?"

I put the daises on the counter. "Yes. I thought they would look nice here and I wanted to thank you again for everything."

She said, "Aren't you a sweet girl. Thanks honey. Sit yourself down and I'll make you some lunch. You got a hankerin' for anythin' special?"

I looked up at the menu board. "You know, I can't tell you the last time I had a cheeseburger and fries. The camera puts at least ten pounds on a person, and I've had to count calories for the last ten years."

Mo slammed her hand down on the counter and said, "Then, a burger and fries it is."

She turned around and got busy with my lunch.

Big H asked me, "You settling in okay? Everything okay with the cottage? I hope you feel safe there."

"Everything is great. I'm loving it. I've been to all the nurseries you recommended, and I have to say I'm impressed with the selection of shrubs, not to mention the annuals and perennials. I've been feeling like a kid in a candy store."

"Did you make it to the Earth Farm?"

"I did. I can see why they call their fertilizer black gold. I've been there twice already and loaded up the truck. I've got

the soil all prepared in the gardens at my cottage and I'll start to plant the shrubs this afternoon."

"My friends all swear it's the best. Has anyone bothered you?"

"So far so good. I don't think anyone has recognized me. The neighbors in the other cottages have been friendly, but not in my face friendly."

Big H told me, "I informed them that you'd be working on the landscaping, and I docked a little off their rents for their inconvenience."

"They told me and thanks for that," I said.

Big H put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You know sweetheart you don't have to do any landscaping if you don't feel like it. I just figured you might be bored here and would like something to do. I remembered that you always loved to garden when you were little."

I said, "Are you kidding, I'm loving every minute of it. It's a nice change and I get to see the fruits of my labor instantly. When I do a movie, it usually doesn't hit the theaters for over a year after filming. Plus, I think the gardening is a good cover. No one would believe Hailey Devereux, the current Hollywood It Girl, would be shoveling fertilizers out of a pickup truck."

Mo served me my burger and fries. They smelled so good, my mouth started to water. I put some ketchup on the burger and put some next to the fries for dipping. I took a big bite of my burger. It was like a religious experience, better than sex. Who needs a man when I can have one of Mo's burgers? Yum.

Mo asked me, "Do you think you'll give up actin' for good?"

I shrugged, "Never say never, right. But right now, I

have to say I'm done for a while. Maybe in a couple of years I'll change my mind, but right now I need some normal in my life. The paparazzi have become relentless. I literally felt hunted and that is so far from normal. Some of them are decent people just trying to make a living and they respect boundaries, but some of them are ruthless pigs and I can't do it anymore. I don't feel safe."

Mo shook her head, "That's a cryin' shame sweetie, but I don't blame you after they hurt your little doggie."

"Thank God, Honey wasn't seriously hurt. Who kicks a 5 pound dog?"

Big H grumbled, "A scum bucket, that's who."

I agreed. "It's pretty bad when you can't even take your dog for a walk around the block without getting harassed. That photographer kicking Honey was a wakeup call. I haven't been happy in quite a while, and I need to make some changes in my life. I love acting but I can't handle the fame that goes with it. I never could. I know it comes with the territory and I'm very grateful for all my success, but it sucks the life out of me. The only people I get to associate with are in the industry and that is because of work, and I feel like everyone wants a piece of me. I can't go anywhere without people recognizing me, and a trail of paparazzi in tow. I want to be myself again. The person I was before the fame. I want to make real friends, have conversations about everyday things. I want people to know me and like me for myself and not because I'm a famous movie star. I need this break from the crazy train I've been on. I know a lot of people would roll their eyes and say I'm rich and famous, what do I have to complain about?"

Mo patted my hand, "You never really know what anyone's

life is like until you walk in their shoes. Don't worry about what other people say. Big H and I are circlin' the wagons and we'll keep you snug as a bug. You must miss Honey," Mo said.

"I do. I know my assistant, Lance, is taking good care of her for me. He's also my stylist and he's probably dressing her up in little dog outfits covered in Rhinestones. He told me since he couldn't dress me up for a couple of months, the least I could do is let him dress Honey up. I would have brought her with me but she's almost as famous as I am."

I had always preferred large dogs, but I was asked to be a celebrity guest at a fundraiser for the local rescue league and wound up bringing Honey home with me. She looked at me with sad eyes and I scooped her up.

Big H asked me, "Have you met any of the marina people yet?"

"I met a guy named Charlie Quinn yesterday. He came over and introduced himself when I was shoveling black gold out of my truck. He was asking me too many personal questions for my liking, but I think I handled it well."

Big H shook his head. "Don't worry about Charlie. The Quinns are all good people. It wouldn't hurt you to make some friends while you're here. The people you'll meet around here are real good people. Nothing like what you're used to out there in La La Land."

I laughed, "I'm sure. I never felt like I fit in there. My whole life has been like that. When I was a kid, I was the 'orphan girl.' When I was in college everyone was partying all the time and that just wasn't me, plus I had my Gram to take care of. In LA, I never got into the whole scene out there. It would be nice to finally feel like I fit in somewhere."

Big H hugged me to his side and said, "You'll fit in just fine here sweetheart. Just you wait and see."

Mo leaned on the counter and said, "She sure will. I must say, between the black hair and the brown contact lenses on your peepers you look like a different person. I don't think anyone is gonna' recognize you."

I wiped my mouth. "I hope you're right, Mo. Lance almost fainted when he saw my hair. He's a riot. You'll have to meet him sometime. He arranged my getaway. He told me he felt like James Bond smuggling me out of the house." I ran my fingers through my short hair and said, "I'm going to have to keep on top of the blonde roots."

She said, "I can dye it for you. No problemo. I used to do my own luscious locks all the time." She patted her neat blonde bob. "It was too expensive to go to a beauty parlor. Big H here can't stand the smell of the dye though, so he insisted I go to a salon, his treat. Now I go to Miss Kate. She does everyone's hair around here. I'll come over to your cottage and do yours when you need a touchup. That way, the big guy here won't be bothered and we can have a good girl chat."

I said, "I'd go to a salon but it's too risky."

Big H nodded, "I agree."

"Plus, they have all the gossip rags at the salons, and I can just picture someone reading an article about me and looking at me funny and putting two and two together. The hairdresser would also wonder why I was dying my hair," I said.

"It's a damn sin you have to cover up that beautiful natural blonde hair of yours, darlin. Makes a girl want to cry," Mo said.

Big H nodded at me, "You're right, best to keep all that

on the QT.”

I winked at Mo and said, “I was thinking I should also put a little black gold in my pockets, that would definitely keep people away.”

We all laughed.

The door opened and a tall, busty blonde in a tank top and daisy dukes wiggled in.

Mo said, “Hey, Lolly. Come meet Big H’s goddaughter Ivy.”

Lolly smiled at me. “Hello, Ivy.” She then put her arm around Big H and pouted. She said, “I’m jealous, I wish Big H was my godfather.” She kissed Big H on the cheek and asked him, “Will you be my godfather too Big H?”

Big H turned beet red and said, “I’m sorry Lolly, but between Ivy and my niece and nephew, I met my godfather quota.” He put his cap on his head, stood, and said, “I’m going down to the boat. Got some maintenance to do. I want to go fluking tomorrow.”

Mo, Lolly, and I all smiled at each other.

Mo said, “Catch some for me and I’ll put fish and chips on the menu.”

Big H said, “If I catch some big enough to be legal, they’re all yours.”

I asked, “How big to they need to be?”

He shook his head, “This season, eighteen inches. Anymore catching a keeper is like finding a needle in a haystack. See you ladies later.”

Lolly plopped down on the stool next to me, and said, “Sorry, Mo. I didn’t mean to run off your big hunk of love.”

Mo shrugged, “That’s okay. Now that I have him all to

myself full time, sometimes I need a break. A girl can only take so much heat.” She picked up a menu and started fanning herself. “Speakin’ of hotness Lolly, how’s Don?”

A big smile crossed Lolly’s face. “He’s down on the boat getting it ready for our trip. Now that I found my sea legs, he’s taking me over to Block Island for the night.”

Mo said, “Good for you. Have a swell time. No pun intended.”

We all laughed.

Lolly asked Mo, “Can you make me a couple of your veggie wraps for the trip?”

“Sure thing,” Mo said.

Lolly turned to me and asked, “Are you here visiting? I’ve never seen you around here before.”

I swallowed the last bite of my burger and held up a finger. I took a sip of my iced tea and answered, “I’m here for the summer. I’m staying across the street in one of Big H’s cottages and I’m doing some landscaping work for him while I’m here.”

Lolly leaned into me and said, “Well, you’re going to love it here. Instead of being called Cozy Harbor they should call it Hunkville. I met Don here. My whole life changed for the better when I came here. I used to be a dancer at a Gentlemen’s Club in Providence, and I won’t go into it, but I came down here and got a job as a Dance Teacher at Dancing Kathy’s dancing school and met Don and now we’re living together. I couldn’t be happier with my life. Cozy Harbor has good mojo. Are you single?”

“Yes, but I’m not looking at the moment.”

She nodded, “That’s when it happens my friend. By the

way, I love your hair. I've had this long blonde hair forever. I'd love to chop it off and get a nice short haircut like yours. I don't think Don would be too happy though. Oh well, one of these days."

Mo handed Lolly her lunches, and she got up and settled-up with Mo. Lolly turned to me and said, "It's nice to meet you, Ivy. You'll have to come to girls night out sometime."

I smiled and said, "I'd love that."

Lolly left and I said to Mo, "She's a character."

Mo laughed. "Lolly's a hot shit. She's got a heart of gold that one. She loves to embarrass Big H, but I think he secretly loves it."

I was thinking I should get back to work when the door opened and in walked Charlie holding the most adorable baby. She had a pink onesie on that said, "Where's the Lobstah?"

Charlie announced, "Uncle with the queen of all things has arrived."

Mo ran around the other side of the counter and held out her arms. Charlie handed the baby over.

Mo smothered the baby's face with kisses and held her up. She said, "Ivy, meet Miss Lizzie Brady, the most beautiful baby on the planet."

The baby was laughing, and I couldn't help but smile. "She's precious," I said.

Mo said to Charlie, "I understand you've met Ivy."

Charlie sat on a stool and said, "I had the pleasure yesterday. Nice to see you again."

Mo informed him, "She's Big H's goddaughter, so be extra nice to her."

He mocked looking offended and said, "Of course."

Mo asked, "Where's Meggie?"

Charlie said, "In the office double checking everything I did so far this morning. She has major control issues where the marina is concerned. Ivy, have you met my sister?"

I shook my head no.

He said, "Meggie's ran the marina for the last two years and she asked me to take over for the summer so she could spend more time with Lizzie. Being the wonderful brother and uncle that I am, I said I'd be happy to. The problem is, she's having a little trouble letting go. She stops in at least twice a day to make sure I haven't screwed things up. She walked in a little while ago and handed me Lizzie and told me to take a break. I'm fine with it though because I get to spend time with my favorite girl. Mo, do you think I could get a cup of your chowder?"

Mo handed Lizzie back to Charlie.

He looked very natural holding the baby. Like he's done it for years. He asked me, "Don't you think Lizzie looks like her Uncle Charlie?"

I took a long look at the two of them and joked, "She has your baby face."

He raised his eyebrows and smirked. "I have a manly face thank you very much. I was talking about our dimples." He gave me a big wide smile. "She has dimples just like mine."

I took another look and humored him, "You're right, I definitely see the resemblance now."

He nodded and his face broke into a smile. Mo served him his chowder. Lizzie kept reaching for his spoon.

Mo came around the counter and took her from him so he could eat his soup. She took Lizzie over to the window

and proceeded to point out all the boats and tell Lizzie their names.

Charlie devoured his soup, wiped his mouth, and turned to me. He said, "Ivy, I was wondering if you would like to go out sometime?"

He took me by surprise. I must have looked stunned because he waved his hands around and said, "No big deal, just a friendly meal or something."

I pulled myself together and said, "Thanks for asking, but I'm not dating right now."

He hung his head and said, "Shucks. I'm disappointed, I thought Lizzie was going to be a chick magnet for me."

I laughed, "I'm sorry but I'm sure your strategy will work on someone else."

The phone rang and Mo gave Lizzie a kiss and handed her back to Charlie. Charlie started bouncing her on his knee.

He looked at me and then his eyes went wide. He held Lizzie away from him and said, "Thunder down under. Time to get her back to momma for a diaper change."

I teased, "Uncle Charlie doesn't do diapers?"

"I'm in training. I'm learning front to back. See you around, Ivy."

I laughed and waved goodbye to Lizzie as they walked out the door.

Mo hung up the phone and said, "I love that baby. Whenever I see her, she makes my day."

I agreed, "She's a cutie."

"You want babies, honey?"

"Sure. I always have but I've never met a guy I felt I wanted to have one with."

“Not even that hunky actor you dated?”

“God, no. No, having kids with him never crossed my mind. Which proves things work out the way they’re supposed to. I found out he just got engaged.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“Frankly, I think I was more upset when Adam Levine got married and I’ve never even met him. I wasn’t in love with Damian. I knew it and I think he did too. He enjoys the spotlight, and it frustrated him that I didn’t. I’m glad he hooked up with Bella, and I wish them both well. They’re two birds of the feather.”

“Well, you’re young. You’ve got time to meet your prince charming.”

“I’m approaching thirty, Mo, but I haven’t given up on the thought of having a baby. First, I need to get myself on track and then I’m hoping everything will fall into place. Coming here is the most positive move I’ve made in my personal life for a very longtime and it feels right.”

“That’s a girl. Takin’ care of yourself is important.”

“I’m trying with a little help from my friends.”

I stood up and leaned across the counter and gave Mo a hug. “Thanks for lunch. I better get back to the gardens.”

“See you soon Hail.... Ivy. Geez, I better not blow your cover. Big H will skin my hide.”

“Don’t worry, Mo. Somebody will figure out sooner or later who I really am. When it happens, it happens. I decided not to worry about it. Meanwhile, I’m going to enjoy my anonymity while I can. I’ll see you later.”