

# The Irresistible Blueberry Bakeshop & Café

## Chapter One

### A Cold Welcome

“Don’t move, it’s not safe!”

I heard someone yell but it was too late. The wooden planks of the dock sagged beneath me and then gave way. Boards splintered, rotted lumber snapped, and I plunged ten feet into the frigid Maine ocean.

Maybe there was a second when I could have seen the man running onto the dock, calling out for me to stop. If I had just turned twenty degrees to my right I would have noticed him racing across the beach toward the pier, waving his arms. But I had the viewfinder of my Nikon camera pressed against my eye and I was zooming in on something across the water—a statue of a woman in a ruffled dress holding what appeared to be a bucket of grapes.

As I fought my way to the surface, my arms and legs scrambling, my heart banging in my chest, and my teeth chattering from the cold water, I knew I was moving and moving fast. A strong, swift current was spinning me around and pulling me away from the dock. I came to the surface coughing, the sea around me choppy, foamy, full of sand. And I was still moving, heading away from the dock and the beach, waves hitting me, filling my mouth and nose with salt water. My arms and legs began to go numb and I couldn’t stop shaking. How could the ocean be so cold at the end of June?

I tried to swim against the current, giving the Australian Crawl my best effort, kicking as hard as I could and pushing the water away until my limbs ached. I was going into deeper water, the current still moving fast.

You used to be a good swimmer when you were at Exeter, I tried to remind myself. You can swim to shore. The little voice in my head was trying to sound confident, but it wasn’t working. Panic raced to the ends of my fingers and toes. Something had happened in all those intervening years. Too much time spent sitting at a desk, dealing with legal briefs and acquisitions, time not spent practicing the butterfly stroke.

Suddenly the current that had grabbed me stopped moving. I was surrounded by mounds of black water

and foamy whitecaps. In front of me lay the open ocean, dark and infinite. I turned and for a moment I couldn't see anything but more hills of water. Then I bobbed up to the crest of a wave and the dock and beach appeared, far away and tiny. I began the crawl again, aiming toward shore—breathing, stroking, breathing, stroking. It was tough going and my legs felt so heavy. They didn't want to kick any longer. They were just too tired.

I stopped and began to tread water, my arms so exhausted I wanted to cry. I felt a searing pain in my chin and when I touched my face there was blood on my finger. Something had cut me, probably during the fall.

The fall. I didn't even know how it happened. I had only wanted to see the town from the water, the way my grandmother must have seen it when she was growing up here in the 1940s. I had walked across the beach, opened a gate, and stepped onto the dock. Some of the boards were missing and a few of the handrails were gone, but everything seemed fine until I stepped on a plank that felt a little too soft. I could almost feel myself free falling again.

A wave slapped my face and I swallowed a mouthful of water. I felt the Nikon twist and turn against me and realized it was still around my neck, like a stone dragging me down. The camera would never work again. I knew that. With my hand shaking, I lifted the camera's neck strap over my head.

A memory of my last birthday flashed through my mind—dinner at the Mayfair in London, my fiancé, Hayden, handing me a box wrapped in silver paper and a card that said, "Happy Thirty-Fifth, Ellen, I hope this will do justice to your amazing talent." Inside the box was the Nikon.

I opened my hand and let the strap slip through my fingers. I watched the camera drift into blackness and felt my heart break when I imagined it at the bottom of the ocean.

And then I started to think that I wasn't going to make it back. That I was just too cold and too tired. Closing my eyes, I let the blackness envelop me. I heard the swooshing sound of the ocean all around me. I thought about my mother and how terrible it would be never to see her again. How would she cope with two deaths barely a week apart—first my grandmother and then me?

I thought about Hayden and how I had assured him before leaving this morning that I would be in Beacon for only one night, two at the most. And how he had asked me to wait a week so he could go with me. I had said no, it was going to be a quick trip. No big deal. *It's Tuesday*, I had said. *I'll be back in Manhattan tomorrow*. And now, just three months before our wedding, he would find out that I wasn't coming back.

I could feel myself letting go, letting the water take me, and it felt so calm, so peaceful. An image of my grandmother standing in her rose garden, holding a pair of pruning shears, fluttered through my mind. She was smiling at me.

Startled, I opened my eyes. Across the dark hills of drifting water I could see the dock and there was something—no someone—at the end of it. I watched as a man dove off into the water. He surfaced and began to do a fast crawl, coming in my direction. I could see his arms shooting out of the waves.

He's coming for me, I thought. Thank God, he's coming for me. Someone else is out here and he's going to help me. A tiny place inside my chest began to feel warm. I forced my legs to kick a little harder and my muscles began to come alive again. I put my arm out, trying to signal so he could see me.

I watched as he came closer, my teeth chattering so hard I could barely breathe. I don't think I'd ever see such a powerful swimmer. He treated the waves like afterthoughts. Finally he was close enough for me to hear him. "Hang on," he yelled, his breathing hard, his face red, his hair dark and slicked back by the water. By the time he reached me my legs had given out and I was floating on my back.

"I'll get you in," he said. He took a couple of breaths. "Just do as I say and don't hang onto me or we'll both go down."

I knew better than to grab onto him, although I had never before realized how easily a drowning person could make that mistake. I nodded to let him know I understood and we faced one another, treading water. I looked at him and all I could see were his eyes. He had the bluest eyes—light blue, almost icy blue, like aquamarines.

And then all of a sudden, despite my exhaustion, I felt overcome with embarrassment. I'd never been good at accepting help from people, and, through some strange rule of inverse proportion, the more extreme the situation, the more embarrassing it was for me to accept assistance. My mother would say it was that old Yankee stock we came from. Hayden would say it was just foolish pride.

All I knew was that at that moment I felt like an idiot. A damsel in distress crashing through a dock, getting swept away, unable to get back to shore, unable to take care of herself.

"I can ...swim back," I said, my lips trembling as a wave splashed my face. "Swim beside you," I added, my legs feeling like cinder blocks.

The man shook his head. "No. Not a good idea. Rip currents."

"I was ... on the swim team," I managed to say, as we rose with a swell. My voice was getting raspy.

“Prep school,” I coughed. “Exeter. We made it ...to the nationals.”

He was so close his arm brushed the top of my leg. “I’ll do the swimming right now.” He took a few deep breaths. “You do as I say. My name is Roy.”

“I’m Ellen,” I gasped.

“Ellen, put your hands on my shoulders.”

He had broad shoulders. The kind of shoulders that looked like they came from working, not working out. He squinted as he watched me.

No, I’m not doing this, I thought, as I continued to drive my numb hands through the water. I’ll go in on my own. Now that I know someone’s near me I can make it. “Thanks” I said, “but I’ll be okay if I just—”

“Put your hands on my shoulders,” he said, raising his voice. This time it wasn’t an option.

I put my hands on his shoulders.

“Now lie back. Keep your arms straight. Spread your legs and stay that way. I’ll do the swimming.”

I knew of this maneuver, the tired swimmer’s carry, but I’d never been the tired swimmer. I leaned back, my hair fanning out around me. I felt a spot of tepid sunshine on my face. We bobbed with the waves, our bodies suspended as we floated up and over the crests.

Roy positioned himself on top of me and I hooked my legs around his hips as he instructed. He began to do a heads up breast stroke and we were buoyant. I started to relax as I let myself be carried. My head was pressed against his chest. I closed my eyes and felt the muscles contracting under his shirt with each stroke. His legs were long and powerful, kicking like outboard engines in between my legs. His hair smelled of salt and seaweed.

I heard each stroke that cut through the water and I felt the warmth of his body. I opened my eyes and saw that we were moving parallel to the shore. I realized what had happened. I’d been pulled out by a rip current and in my panic had failed to realize it. And because of that I failed to heed the most important rule of rip currents—don’t try to swim against them; swim parallel to the shore until you’re around them and then swim in.

Soon we turned and began heading for the beach. I caught a glimpse of some people standing on the shore. We’re almost there, I thought, overwhelmed with relief. I couldn’t wait to feel the ground under my feet, to know I had stopped drifting through darkness.

Once the water was shallow enough for Roy to stand, he picked me up and steadied me, his arms around my back. He was breathing hard. From where my head rested against his chest I could tell he had to be at least six foot two, a good eight inches taller than me.

“You’ll be able to stand here,” he said, drops of water falling from his hair.

I pushed away gently, taking his hands when he offered them. I put my feet down and stood in the chest-high water. It felt like heaven to touch the sand, to be anchored again to solid ground. Behind me, the ocean swirled and dipped into darkness, but just steps ahead of me the beach sparkled like a new promise under the late-day sun. I felt my muscles relax and, for a moment, I didn’t feel the cold. I felt only the thrill of connection to the world around me. I’m still here, I thought. I’m safe. I’m alive.

A giddy feeling began to swell inside me and I started to laugh. Letting go of Roy’s hands, I began to twirl, a dizzy ballerina in the water. I laughed and turned and waved my arms, Roy watching me with a startled expression. I wonder if he thought I had lost my mind. It didn’t matter if he did. I had come from the emptiness of open water back to firm ground and there was nothing in the whole world that felt as good as that one moment.

I stepped closer to Roy and I looked into his eyes. Then I threw my arms around his neck and kissed him. A kiss for saving my life, a kiss that came from someplace I didn’t know existed. And he kissed me back. His warm lips tasted like the sea, his arms, strong and sure, held me tight as if we might both be drowning. I wanted nothing more than to collapse into that embrace. And then I realized what I’d done and quickly pulled away.

“I’m sorry,” I gasped, aware suddenly of all the people looking on. “I’ve . . . I’ve got to go.” I turned and began to stride through the water as fast as I could toward the beach. I was shivering, my clothes sodden, my eyes stinging from the salt, and the embarrassment I’d felt a few moments before was nothing compared to this. I didn’t know what had come over me, what had possessed me to kiss him.

“Ellen, wait a minute,” Roy called, as he caught up. He tried to grab my hand, but I moved out of his reach and kept pushing through the water. Pretend it never happened, I thought. It never happened.

Two men in blue jeans raced toward us from the beach. One of them wore a yellow T-shirt. The other had a Red Sox baseball cap on his head and a tool belt around his waist, with a level that flapped back and forth as he ran into the water.

“Roy, are you okay? Is she okay?” the man with the yellow T-shirt asked as he helped me toward the beach.

“I think she’s okay,” Roy said as he trudged from the water, his blue jeans stuck to his legs.

The Red Sox man put his arm around me and helped me onto the sand. “You all right, miss?”

I tried to nod, but I was shaking so hard I don’t think my head moved at all. “Cold,” I grunted, my teeth chattering.

A burly man with a beard and a buzz cut came toward me. He wore a tool belt and carried a brown leather jacket. He placed the jacket over my shoulders and zipped it up the front. It had a lining that felt thick and cozy, like a fleece blanket. I was grateful for the warmth.

The yellow T-shirt man said, “You want me to call nine-one-one? Have them take you to the hospital in Calvert or something? Won’t take long for them to get here.”

I had no idea where Calvert was, but the last thing I wanted was to check into a hospital where the staff would probably want to call my mother (not good) and Hayden (worse).

“Please,” I said, trembling. “I’d just like to get out of here.”

Roy came over and stood beside me. “I’ll take you home.”

Oh no, I thought, feeling my cheeks flush with embarrassment. Somebody else needs to take me. I can’t go with him. I looked at the other two men but neither one spoke up.

“Come on,” Roy said, touching my shoulder.

I quickly began walking across the sand. He caught up and then led the way in silence. We went to the far end of the beach, where the dock was, where a house was being built. Three men were on the roof hammering shingles. I followed Roy to a dirt parking lot in front of the house and he opened the door of a blue Ford pick-up.

“Sorry about the mess,” he said, as he moved a tool box, a tape measure, a level, and some pencils off the front seat. “Tools of the carpenter’s trade.” The water squished from my clothes as I sat down and a puddle formed on the rubber floor mat below me. I looked down at my feet, covered in a fine layer of sand.

“I don’t know what happened out there,” I said, in a half-whisper. “One minute I was standing on the dock and the next ...” I shivered and pulled the jacket collar up around my neck.

Roy turned the key and the engine coughed and sputtered and then started. “You’re not from around here, are you?” he asked. The dials in the dashboard came to life and the radio glowed with a warm yellow light.

I shook my head and mumbled, “No.”

“The rip currents can get pretty bad out there,” Roy said. “And that dock isn’t in good shape. It’s lucky I saw you.”

I closed my eyes against the memory of the current and the dock, but even more against the memory of the kiss. An image of Hayden floated through my mind—his warm smile, that lock of blonde hair that always fell onto his forehead, the little wink he gave me when he liked something, his soft brown eyes, his *trusting* eyes ... I could never tell him what happened.

“Yes, it’s lucky,” I said.

Roy looked at me and I noticed that he had a couple of tiny wrinkles on his forehead. His eyebrows were dark but there were a few flecks of gray in them.

“Thank you,” I said. “For saving me.”

He glanced through the back window and put the truck in reverse. “Sure.” He nodded, shifted into first and pulled to the end of the dirt lot, by the road. We waited while some cars went by. He tapped his fingers on the steering wheel.

“You were really something out there. Where did you learn to swim like that?” I said, after an awkward moment of silence.

Roy’s eyebrows shot up. “That’s quite a compliment coming from someone who swam in ... what was it? The nationals?”

I knew he had to be teasing me, but there was barely a hint of a smile on his face.

“Oh ... yeah, well, that was a while ago,” I said, as I watched water droplets fall from his hair onto his shirt.

His hair was thick and dark and wavy with a few wisps of gray that only made his overall appearance better. I couldn’t help wondering what he would look like in a suit.

“So ... were you a life guard?” I asked.

He pulled onto the road. “Nope.”

“So you learned it ...”

“Just around,” he said with a shrug, as he reached out to turn on the heater. “Where are you staying?”

*Just around?* I wondered how someone learned to swim like that *just around*. I put my hands in front of

the heating vent. He probably could have been an Olympic contender if he'd trained for it.

"So you're staying where?" he asked.

"I'm at the Victory Inn," I said, noticing a tiny scar on the side of his nose, just under his left eye.

He nodded. "Paula's place. And you're in town for ... how long?"

"Not long," I said. "Not long at all."

"Well, you should get that cut looked at."

"What cut?" I flipped down the visor but there was no mirror.

He pointed to my face. "Your chin."

I touched my hand to my chin. There was blood on my fingers.

Roy stopped and put on his turn signal. "That could really use a stitch or to. I know a doctor in North Haddam I could take you to—"

I felt a rush of heat in my face and I knew my cheeks were bright red. "No, no," I said. "That's not necessary, really." The idea of him taking me to another town to see a doctor was ... well, unsettling for some reason. I wasn't going to do it.

"It's no trouble," he said. He smiled and I noticed he had dimples. "I went to school with the guy and I'm sure he'd—"

"Look," I said, my hands up in protest, my face flushed. "I really appreciate your help, but maybe it's best if I just get out here and walk back. It's not far and I've taken up way too much of your time already."

The little lines in his forehead looked deeper now. "You're not walking anywhere," he said, as we waited for a car to go by. "Didn't mean to get pushy," he added. "Just thought you should have that checked."

He touched the side of my face, tilting my chin to get a better look at the cut, and I felt a tremor go through me.

"It's fine," I said, sitting bolt upright. "I'm ... um ... leaving tomorrow," I sputtered, "and ... uh ... I'll see my doctor in Manhattan when I get back."

Roy shrugged again. "Suit yourself," he said, as he made a left turn, heading for the Victory Inn.

I looked through the window, wondering if I should say something about the kiss, tell him I was sorry.

After all, I didn't want him thinking that ...I didn't want him thinking anything.

"I'm sorry about what happened back there," I said.

He glanced at me, surprised. "You don't have to apologize. Rip currents are dangerous. It's easy to get into trouble—"

"No, I didn't mean the rip current," I said, as he pulled to the side of the road next to the inn. "I meant the other ..." I couldn't say it.

He moved the gearshift to park, sat back in the seat, and ran his hand around the steering wheel. "Well, don't worry," he said, with a shrug. "It was only a kiss."

If that was supposed to make me feel better, it didn't. Now I felt insulted, as though it had had no impact on him at all.

"You know," I blurted out, "people in Maine should keep their docks in better condition," I could hear the edge in my voice but I couldn't stop it. "I might have been seriously injured falling through that thing."

Roy looked at me, startled. Finally he said, "I'm glad you weren't injured—talented swimmer like you. And I'm glad I was there to rescue you." He flipped down his visor, the late afternoon sun having filled the front seat of the car with a golden hue.

I thought he had to be making fun of me again, but then I saw that his expression was serious.

"Of course," he said, smiling now, "one thing people in Maine can do is read. Now if *you'd* read the sign ..."

What was he talking about? People in Maine reading? What sign?

"Of course I can read," I said, feeling even more defensive now, unable to control my strident tone.

"I've had four years of college and three years of law school. I've done plenty of reading."

"Law school." Roy nodded slowly as though he had just figured something out.

"Yes, law school," I said, staring at the side of his face. He had a five o'clock shadow I might have found attractive in some other circumstance, back in my single days. But right now he was really getting on my nerves.

He turned to me again. "So, you're a lawyer."

"Yes," I said.

“And what kind of law do you ...well, do?”

“I work in commercial real estate.”

“Aha.” He scratched his chin. “So do you know much about trespassing?”

Well, of course I knew *something* about trespassing, but it wasn't an area of the law I had many dealings with.

“Yes,” I said, sitting up a little straighter. “I know all about trespassing. I'm the firm's expert in the law of trespass. I handle all the trespass cases.”

A Toyota stopped across from us and Roy signaled for the driver to go. “A trespass *expert*,” he said, raising his eyebrows. “Do you have to get an extra degree for that?”

An extra degree? What a ridiculous question. “No, of course you don't have to—” I stopped because the glint in his eye told me this time he was definitely teasing me.

“Okay,” he said. “So with your background, all of your reading and being a trespass expert and all, why didn't you read the NO TRESPASSING sign by the dock? Or if you did read it, why did you go out there anyway?”

What NO TRESPASSING sign was he was talking about, and why was he cross-examining me? I felt a little stream of water trickling down my back as I vaguely recalled seeing a sign on the beach near the dock. Did it say NO TRESPASSING? Could it have said that? No, that couldn't be, I thought. Otherwise I was in big trouble here. He'd have every right to think I was a total idiot.

“I didn't see any No Trespassing sign,” I told him. “There wasn't one. I would have noticed.”

Roy picked a piece of seaweed off of the leg of his jeans and tossed it out the window. “Well, maybe you didn't notice it,” he said, “but there is a sign there. There's a new house being built. In fact, I'm working on it. And the dock and the house are on the same property. The sign was put up so people would stay off the property.” He glanced at me. “Especially the dock.”

I looked down again at my sandy feet and the puddle of water surrounding them as I attempted to put the pieces together. I tried to picture the dock again and the beach. Yes, I could see the sign. White with black lettering. What did it say? Oh God, I think it did say No Trespassing. I began to feel queasy. I must not have been paying attention at all. How could I have just walked right past the sign onto the dock? Now I was mortified. As a swimmer, I shouldn't have been caught in a riptide, and as a lawyer I shouldn't have been trespassing. I unlocked my seatbelt with a loud click. I wasn't going to tell him. I

could never admit what I'd done.

"You know what?" I said, conscious that my voice was wavering and that it had jumped a full octave at this point. "You should tell the owner to keep the property in better condition." I could feel my throat tighten as I thought about crashing through the dock. "They're lucky I didn't get hurt." I paused. "Or killed." I waved a finger at Roy. "Somebody could get sued over that dock. It ought to be torn down." There, that's telling him, I thought, just as a clump of sand dislodged itself from my hair and plopped onto my lap.

Roy's expression barely changed, but there was something in his eyes again and on the edge of his mouth that told me he thought this was all very funny. I scooped the sand off my shorts and flicked it onto his floor.

He glanced at the floor, then looked back at me. "The dock *is* going to be torn down. That's why there's a gate."

"Well the gate's not *locked*," I said, my chin starting to really burn from the cut.

"It's supposed to be."

"Yes, well it wasn't. Otherwise how would I have gotten out there?"

He looked like he was about to say something but I barreled on. "And another thing, maybe you should tell the owner to put that No Trespassing sign right *on* the dock and not in the middle of the sand."

Great point, I thought. They ought to put it where it really makes sense.

He turned to me and this time there was no mistaking it. He was smiling—a wry little smile that made me feel I'd become the mouse to his cat. "Oh," he said. "So you *did* see the sign."

Oh my God. I'd let myself fall right into my own trap! The man was obnoxious, detestable, insufferable. I felt the heat behind my eyes and I knew I was about to cry. I wasn't going to let him see that. I opened the car door and jumped out, leaving the seat oozing water.

"Thanks for the ride," I said, trying to sound tough so I wouldn't cry. I slammed the door and started up the front walk to the inn. Then I heard Roy calling me.

"Ellen. Hey, Ellen." He was leaning out the passenger window. His voice sounded serious and his eyes were solemn. There was no trace of that glint I saw when he was teasing me. All right, I thought. Let him say what he wants to say. I started to walk toward the car.

"Just thought you might be interested," he said. "They're having a sale at Bennett Marine Supply."

Now the smile appeared and I saw his eyes light up. “Life jackets are thirty percent off.”