

# The Wrong Drawers

an Ivy Morris Mystery

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Misty  
Simon



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Misty Simon

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## Dedication

As always, to my biggest fans and supporters,  
Daniel and Noelle.

And to Rida, for the Yw Dance and so many other things.

## Acknowledgments

The enthusiasm for this book is due in large part to my daughter, Noelle, who screamed and danced with me throughout the entire process, even when she didn't know what exactly we were celebrating. And Daniel, who may not know all the main characters, but parts of him are in every book.

Francesca Hawley for slogging through the chapters with me.  
Thank you so much!

And last but never least—my girly whirlies on MTW—I never would have finished if you hadn't all been boiling water. Love you all.

# Chapter One



Tonight started my favor repayment to Bella. Her house needed cleaning, especially the living room and the guest bedroom, for a party she planned to host.

Why the bedroom, you ask? Good question. Did I mention the party was an all-girls party and kind of like Tupperware? The exception being that, unlike Tupperware, the merchandise from Play It Up! was not something you stored leftovers in or let your neighbor borrow. The company carried all manner of toys (though I was still unclear as to what these toys actually were) and clothes intended for the bedroom, hence the need for the cleaned guest bedroom. Not to play with the toys, but to buy them in privacy. It had something to do with being able to joke and laugh with everyone during the demonstration, but when it came time to order, you didn't have to share your most intimate items with others.

Due at Bella's in twenty minutes, and not yet ready, I hustled to get things together and leave before my dad, Stan Morris, aka the bane of my existence, found some other reason for me to stay with him tonight.

"See you later, Dad. You have Bella's number and my cell phone number if you need me. I won't be too long."

“Sounds great, Ivy, have a good time. Oh, hey, remember to go by the grocery store on your way back, will you? I was hoping maybe you’d make your famous beef stroganoff for me tomorrow.” His tan face was hidden behind the newspaper, or he would have seen me curving my hands around his imaginary throat and making choking motions.

I waved my way out the door, holding in a frustrated groan until I climbed into my car. Beef Stroganoff? Argh. I didn’t even like the stuff and had hoped to say goodbye to it forever when I left my dad’s house in California. Now, I’d have to stop at Food Lion on the way home after a long night of panty partying. I kept telling myself my dad wouldn’t be here much longer. Surely, he’d go home, once I convinced him I had no intention of giving up my new life. The one I was making for myself 3,000 miles away from him. With this hope firmly lodged in my mind, I could make some allowances. Apparently, beef stroganoff would be one of them.

The majority of the leaves had fallen from the trees and lay on the ground—a multicolored carpet created by nature. The short drive to Bella’s took more time than usual. The day after Thanksgiving, or Black Friday, as I’d heard it called, and everyone and their favorite dog was out shopping, picking up all those bargains advertised in the *Martha’s Herald*. *Martha’s Point* wasn’t a very busy town, normally, but at six-thirty in the evening on this day, busy was an understatement. I didn’t even know we had this many people in town.

I pulled into Bella’s driveway and sat with the car idling for a minute, admiring her beautiful little cottage with its natural flowerbeds and fairy statuary. As in everything else, Bella’s flare for taking what she had and making it more shone through. Even though most of the flowers had gone to sleep for the winter, chrysanthemums sprouted out of big wooden buckets along with poinsettias wrapped in fancy red bows to spruce things up. Sadly, my own house lacked any sort of decoration—holiday or not. I wanted to make sure I was rid of the browns before I started any kind of garden.

Let me explain. My whole life used to be brown—clothes, car, etc.—until I’d nearly suffocated in it and my mousy attitude. Bella, being the friend she was, helped me pull myself out of the abyss

and started introducing new color into my life. Another friend, and (cross your fingers for me) future lover, Ben Fallon, helped, too. The result was a new, improved Ivy; one I hoped I wasn't losing during my dad's extended stay at the house. My problem: I felt thrust back into my old role with him here and hadn't figured out how to blend the old Ivy with the new one. Sometimes it felt easier to go along with what Dad wanted rather than show off my new independence. It frustrated me to no end.

Bella came clattering through the door and down the front steps, interrupting my moping. Her big, contagious smile beamed. I had really been blessed the day I'd gone into her salon for a trim and came out with the best friend ever.

"You going to sit in there all day, dreaming about Lover Boy or are you going to come in and help me?" Hands on her hips, mahogany hair perfectly done, she stared at me through the open car window and waited.

"I'm coming, I'm coming. Sheesh!"

She laughed when I got out of my brown (gah!) Santa Fe. The full, robust sound I never quite got used to rolled out of her as she linked arms with me. "Just you wait and see what I have you doing today. You're going to wish you were back with Stan the Tanned."

"I highly doubt it. I can't think of anything that would make me wish for a night of *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*, then straight to bed."

Of course, like anything else in my life, I shouldn't have said those words. I'd laughed in the face of fate and fate bit me in the butt for my impertinence, because about an hour later, I found myself desperately wishing for anything but my currently thankless job. Cleaning toilets would have been better. I would have gladly waded into sewage instead of this.

"They look so pretty," Bella said over my shoulder, laughing at my shudder.

I had never considered myself to be a prude. I liked doing the deed as much as anyone else and was fairly salivating at getting my hands on Ben again sometime soon. We hadn't actually done it yet, but I had high hopes. I don't even have a problem ordering lingerie for my little back room at The Masked Shoppe. Some

of the furry handcuffs and role-playing costumes were even cute. And if my dad would just go home, I might think about taking a few things home to play with.

But this, this was a little too much for me. Make that a lot too much. “Did you have to make the icing so realistic in color?”

“Come on, Ivy, it took me a long time to get this particular shade of peach right. Besides, would purple be any better?” Her light brown eyes widened. If she was going for innocent, I wasn’t falling for it.

“I don’t think it matters what color they are.”

“Don’t be such a party-pooper. They’re cookies, like chocolate chip or gingerbread.”

“But really, Bella, cookies shaped like men’s parts? Are you sure?” I sucked some icing off my finger and waited.

She patted me on the shoulder like I was a slow child, and irritation rose to flash briefly in my brain. I checked my first reaction, barely refraining from smacking her. I wasn’t normally a violent person, but lately my ability to deal with crap had progressively deteriorated as the days my dad stayed with me piled up.

“Yes, I’m sure, Ivy. They’ll be the life of the party. The icing on the...um, cookie.” I jumped when she laughed again. The sound always startled me because it was so disproportionate to her size. We were nearly the same height, but she weighed several (read many) pounds less than me. I don’t know why I always expected less robust people to have little tinkling voices, but there you had it.

Suddenly, the laughter stopped and I watched Bella pace around the homey kitchen. Something I was familiar with, despite the fact we’d only known each other for a little over a month. For whatever reason, the friendship seemed to have lasted a lifetime already. In a good way, of course.

“What’s bugging you?” I asked on her fifth lap around the room.

“I don’t know. I feel itchy for some reason, like something is about to go wrong, and I don’t know how to prepare for it.”

I had this theory Bella was actually psychic and trying to keep it to herself. So, when she mentioned a feeling, I took it seriously. “What feels like it’s going to go wrong?”

“Like I said, I don’t know. Something big. We’ve already had one murder around here and the person responsible is behind bars, thank goodness, but I can’t help feeling something is hovering on the horizon.” She waved her manicured hand in the air.

I shoved my own ragged hands back into the cookie dough waiting to be shaped into her idea of good party cookies. It was one of the problems with having beautiful friends, you compared and sometimes found yourself lacking. Bella never intentionally made me feel inferior, but it lurked nonetheless. She’d taken me in hand, changed my whole wardrobe, and saved me from a misguided closet full of brown. She accepted me for who I was, ragged nails or not. I had the problem. One more thing to add to my list of things I needed to work on. Damn. Oops, swearing, too.

Anyway, back to Bella. She was still talking and I had missed the whole thing. “Can you repeat that? I got lost in a haze.”

“Yeah, a sexual haze probably.” She smirked. “Ben still coming around?”

“If you mean is he stopping by the house, no; by the shop, yes. And we have a date Tuesday at an estate sale in Kilmarnock. I need to get away from my father, even for a little while.”

“It sounds like it. So, what kind of estate sale are you going to?”

“It’s one of those antique things. Ben said they always have good deals, and I’m looking for some new pieces to put into The Masked Shoppe. I can’t believe how much business that little back room gets.” Since Halloween was over now, I was grateful for the other side of the costume shop I’d inherited after my Great Aunt Gertie passed away.

Bella smiled and it made me feel better, like she was over her angsty pacing. “That little back room has been our only link with the lingerie world for years. More people are coming in now, though, because you started carrying more variety.” Which took us off into another discussion about the toys I had no intention of carrying, and some of the more risqué role-playing outfits I had made available. All this talking distracted me from the cookies and the reason I was making them in the first place. A Play It Up! catalog on the counter abruptly brought back the party due to start

in a few hours and *The Favor*—as I'd started thinking of it.

"Okay, you've gone off topic long enough," I said. Bella was in mid-sentence about where she got her antiques and what to look out for when I was at the estate sale. "What kind of responsibilities are we talking with this party? And please remember all I asked you to do was sit through dinner with my dad and Ben, which I paid for." I'd asked her to be a buffer during last week's fiasco since Stan had had some weird notion to ask Ben what his intentions were towards me. Intentions! I'd only known the poor man for a little over a month and already he'd had to go through the Dad talk. To Ben's credit, at least he'd stuck around after the horrid experience.

"It's simple, really. I want you to help me get food together, then sit in and look really thrilled with all the things my friend, Tarrin Daniels, is showing."

"Uh-huh. And what exactly will I be oohing and ahing over?"

"Well...hmmm..."

"Is it really that bad?" I asked, not used to Bella hemming and hawing.

"No, it's not that bad, but it may be a little uncomfortable for you."

My knife stopped in mid-air. "How uncomfortable are we talking?"

"Remember your fear of that really old guy who came in and bought the tiny banana hammock bikini suit for himself?"

I nodded, scared and disgusted all over again. It was not one of the crowning moments of my career as a proprietress.

"Well, probably a little more than that."

"How much more?" I asked, suspicious that I had made a deal with the devil and her name was Bella.

"Let's just say there will be toys."

"Toys?" I knew this, but the way she said it made me cringe.

"Don't be dense. *Toys*." She waggled her perfectly plucked eyebrows at me. I guessed you had to be a showcase of your profession when you owned a beauty salon, even if it was in one of the smallest towns in the Northern Neck of Virginia.

I continued wielding my knife over the cookies, using the

peach icing on her Life of the Party cookies, and shut up.

“Oh come on, you’re not mad, are you?” She came around the end of the tiled counter.

I grumbled.

She bumped her shoulder into mine a couple of times, snickering. I couldn’t hold out against her for long. This party might be weird for me, but with everything else going on, toys were the least of my worries. Besides, I wasn’t angry with her, I was angry with me. I’d worked hard since moving here the month before to gain confidence in myself—grow the backbone I never had before. But something about my dad being here, in my house, for so long, was eroding my hard-won self-confidence.

So I snickered, too, and launched a spoonful of the flesh colored icing at her. She didn’t duck fast enough and it lodged in her mane of dark hair.

She shrieked and tried to retaliate, but the doorbell rang before she could wrestle the spoon from me. There were times when being bigger had its advantages.

“That must be Tarrin. I’ll be right back and those cookies better look good enough to eat when I do.” She flipped me the finger—her own little classy interpretation of a wave—and went to answer the door.

Two things occurred to me at this point. One, I hadn’t had a good look at any man’s parts in more time than I cared to remember. Stan’s extended visit, beyond driving me crazy, also nixed my burgeoning (oh, good word, Ivy—I adored big words) love life with the very sexy and yummy Ben.

The other thought dealt with Tarrin. Bella had few people in town who didn’t look down on her because of her past. The whole town pretty much blamed her for her disastrous marriage and the divorce that sent their hometown hero off to parts unknown. I was her only friend besides Ben, and I had gotten used to not sharing her with anyone. Now I walked this Tarrin woman and I wasn’t so sure where I stood. Bella was my friend, but could I compete with someone who had so much more history with Bella. Someone who knew her “when” and was still friends with her? I’d have to wait and see. In the meantime, if Tarrin was beautiful, I might have to kill her for that alone.

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The sound of clicking heels and female chatter came closer to the kitchen. When they rounded the corner, I got my first good look at my competition. She was tall, blonde, and beautiful. But in the interest in my friendship with Bella, I tried to overlook those flaws. What really stood out for me, though, was the cool look of calculation and disgust on her face when she deigned to glance my way.

Yowza! What was that? I had no doubt I was about to find out.