



Part One

To Catch a
Billionaire
Dragon

Hannah Kane

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Editing: Lee Burton, Ocean's Edge Editing

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Chapter One

The elevator cage descended slowly towards the lobby with no regard to the sentiments of its sole passenger. It had served the residents of the Upper West Side high-rise with dignity and decorum since the 1930s and it wasn't about to start speeding now. Sixteen floors took exactly the same time to descend as it always had, despite the modern engine powering the art deco cage.

To Laurel Maynard, the ride felt eternal. She was ravenous, having lost track of time and working past a few meals—again. She wasn't sure of the time now, but this was New York. Surely she could find something to eat at any time of day. And preferably fast. She needed to get back to her book.

The cage finally came to a halt and the brass-plated doors opened to a small lobby. As always, the golden marble floors and columns, inlaid wood decorations, and gleaming brass detailing made her blink a few times in wonder. She sure wasn't in Kansas anymore. Or Brooklyn, as it was.

She hurried across the lobby, past the old doorman in a red uniform. She nodded at him and saw his eyebrows shoot up. She was wearing clothes, wasn't she? That wasn't always a given when she was distracted with writing.

She glanced down as she went through the revolving doors. She was decent, wearing her comfiest sweats, a T-shirt that had seen its best days a decade ago, and slippers with teddy bears on them. It wasn't exactly high fashion, but she was only headed for takeout. No one cared what she looked like.

At least, no one in Brooklyn did. But as she turned the corner to Amsterdam Avenue she noticed a few puzzled looks shot her way. Ignoring them, she walked to the nearest café.

The place was packed full and she stared at the crowd in dismay. She would starve to death before she reached the counter. A glance at the large clock behind it revealed that it was the worst peak of the evening rush hour. No wonder she was hungry, she hadn't had anything since breakfast. Maybe she should find a place that sold something more substantial than bagels and salads.

But by then the line behind her was blocking the door and pushing her forward, and she resigned to her fate. Eventually it was her turn and she got a salad, and a large bagel filled with

lox too. She gritted her teeth paying for them. She might be living for free in her agent's apartment, but she was paying a king's ransom in food.

The moment she was back on the street she bit into the bagel and closed her eyes in bliss. Hungry or not, she would savor the first bite.

Someone bumped into her from behind and the food shot out of her mouth, only barely missing the person walking in front of her. "Hey!" But whoever it had been had already disappeared in the crowd. Annoyed, she guarded her food and hurried back to her building. She would eat the rest in the safety of four walls and a roof.

The doorman shook his head when he saw her, but she didn't pay attention to him as she ran across the lobby. A man had just entered the elevator and the doors were already closing. "Hold it!" She could not wait for the damned contraption to ride all the way up and back down again.

It seemed the man had not heard her; the doors were almost closed. But just as she was about to grudgingly resign to her fate, a hand shot through the gap, blocking the door sensor. The doors opened again and she got in.

And came face to face with the sexiest man she had ever laid eyes on.

The scent of food filled the cage, making Logan Avery's stomach rumble quietly. The day he'd had, it was a wonder he had managed a long enough break to eat a sandwich, despite his secretary's best efforts to keep him properly fed. He had better eat something before he headed out to his dinner date or he would embarrass himself.

Immediately at the heels of the mouthwatering scent came another, more delicate and pure, which made an altogether different part of his body take interest. The woman it belonged to suited exactly the wood nymph mental image the scent conjured—albeit an eccentric one. He stared at her, baffled.

Average height, which meant she reached to his chest instead of his chin, slender and small-breasted. Dressed in sweats and a tee so worn his cleaning lady wouldn't wear them to work, let alone in public, and slippers of all things. Were those teddy bears?

A mass of hazel curls was pulled into a haphazard ponytail, and on her forehead she wore not one but two pairs of glasses. And was that a pen in there too?

What on earth was she doing here?

"You know, servants use the back entrance."

She turned to him and he realized she wasn't fully aware he was there. Her gaze focused on him only slowly, and the reaction wasn't the usual interested flash of eyes followed by a slow, inviting smile he would then answer with his own. He wasn't used to being ignored by women and didn't know whether to feel amused or miffed.

“Hmmm?”

“I said, the servants use the back entrance.”

“Do they?” She blinked, as if trying to figure out the reason for the remark. “Fascinating.” And she actually sounded like she did find it fascinating.

Logan suppressed an exasperated smile and soldiered on. “Are you delivering food?”

She glanced at the paper bag she was carrying and smiled, delighted, as if she had forgotten all about it. She had a beautiful smile, the kind that lit her whole face and eyes too. It mesmerized him. Too many women in his acquaintance only pretended to smile, their eyes as cold as their hearts.

Her eyes were light blue, with a hint of hazel in the middle. Her brows were slightly arching and darker than her hair. Her nose was straight and lightly dusted with freckles. And her mouth...

He swallowed as he watched her bite into the bagel she had fished out of her bag. The look of bliss on her face was as unaffected as everything else about her. She savored the bite before swallowing it. Then she licked her lips—and his erection shot to life.

The sensation was staggering with its suddenness. He leaned against the wall of the cage to gain his balance. Closing his eyes, he breathed deeply, trying to gain control of his body. But it didn't help. All he saw in his mind's eye was her pink tongue sliding around her sensuous lips. He had to get out of here before he did something stupid.

Just then, the lights flickered and the cage came to an abrupt halt, pushing them both out of balance. Alarmed, they glanced at each other, and for once the woman was fully focused on him.

“Please tell me we're not stuck.”

Chapter Two

Laurel leaned against the cage wall, the sudden upset jolting her mind back to reality. Her imagination had transported her to other spheres the moment she saw the man. He was exactly what her book had been missing and her story had taken flight in her mind, making her forget everything else around her.

She couldn't ignore the surroundings now. She so didn't need this. She had to get back to her computer so she could write everything down while it was still fresh in her mind. She wanted to pound the door and demand it open right this instant, but the man had already taken charge. He pressed the intercom button on the control panel and the doorman's voice came through the small loudspeaker, metallic and small.

"Yes?"

"Edwards, this is Mr. Avery. I'm stuck in the elevator between the thirteenth and fourteenth floors. Please call the service company. Or failing that, the fire department." Edwards promised to get right to it and the man, Mr. Avery, turned to her. "This could take a while."

Laurel sighed. "I guess there's nothing to it but wait." She glanced at the floor, and finding it clean enough, sat down in one corner. Mr. Avery leaned against the opposite corner. Since she was still hungry, she picked up her bagel again, but it didn't taste as good anymore.

"Are you visiting the building?"

She turned her attention back to him. She had a vague recollection of him talking about servants' entrance. Did he think she was one? He was looking at her with curious interest. It was at odds with the imagined character she had just based on him—aloof, arrogant and disinterested—and she frowned.

"I'm staying at Mr. and Mrs. Braddock's apartment for the summer."

His eyebrows shot up. "I would have thought they wouldn't let anyone house-sit after last year's fiasco."

She smiled ruefully. "They made me sign a contract assuring that I wouldn't let anyone in, not even my family." Violating it would mean losing not just her accommodation but her agent too, but it had been an easy paper to sign, since she didn't have any family.

But even if she'd had, the opportunity had been too good to miss. Every year the Braddocks moved to Martha's Vineyard for the summer and one of Mrs. Braddock's clients would stay in their New York apartment. It was a good arrangement that gave the author a quiet place to work in and the Braddocks peace of mind knowing their home was looked after.

Last year, however, the man they had trusted the place with had held parties so riotous that more than once the police had been called in to shut them down. It truly was a wonder Ellen had given Laurel a chance this year. But she wanted Laurel to write the follow-up to her bestseller as fast as possible, and that wasn't easy when she shared a place in Brooklyn with four people, three of whom were artists who all worked at home.

Mr. Avery smiled, which softened his strong features. Her character wouldn't smile with such warmth, but it suited him. "I take it you're one of Ellen's clients, then."

"Yes."

"Have I read anything you've written?"

His interest seemed genuine, but she rolled her eyes. "I doubt it."

He stiffened, affronted. "I do read."

"Not what I write."

"What, sappy historical romances with barely enough plot around sex scenes?"

"No," she answered, but she sounded defensive. A girl had to eat, and ghostwriting anything that paid had seen her through a dry period after college. "I write high fantasy."

"With elves and whatnots?"

And a dragon who stood at least six foot two tall, had broad shoulders and long legs, strong features and a proud nose. His dark brows above his deep, dark eyes were straight, and his black hair was cut in Roman style, short and combed towards his face.

"And whatnots." She had to get out of here. If she didn't start writing soon, she might forget the impression he had made on her.

Yeah, like that was going to happen. Her insides were still mushy and her heart was fluttering.

"I love elves and whatnots."

She gave him a slow look. He was dressed in a suit that was as well-fitting as it was expensive. Men who looked like that were too busy to read anything but the latest stock market reports. "Do you now?"

"Yes. Maybe I've read yours. What's your name?"

“Laurel Maynard.” And despite bracing for it, she felt disappointed when he shook his head.

“No, I’m sorry. I’ve never heard of you.”

“The book’s only been out for four months.” And was only a fricking New York Times bestseller. Ellen didn’t offer her apartment to just any of her clients.

“Maybe I’ll check it out.”

“Hmmm.” She couldn’t take it anymore. “Do you have a pen and paper I could borrow?”

“Sorry?”

“Pen and paper. I need to write or I’ll go mad.”

Logan had never met a woman who would rather write than spend time with him. “You know, most women would sell their grandmother for an opportunity like this.”

“Like what?”

“Being locked in the elevator with me.”

She stared at him, blinking slowly. “Really?” Her dubious tone grated him.

“I happen to be one of the most sought-after bachelors in this city.”

“You are?” She was showing slightly more interest now, but for the wrong reasons. “So what makes you that?”

The question took him aback. He had no idea how to answer it without sounding like a self-centered jerk. “I’m the CEO and owner of a Fortune 100 company. I’m worth billions.”

“And that’s enough?”

“I—” He paused. For the women he dated, that was plenty. “I’m generally thought to be pleasing to the eye.”

She gave him a critical onceover, as if seeing him for the first time. “I guess there’s that.” It wasn’t exactly unequivocal praise. He tried to come up with more to recommend himself with, but his mind was blank. He hadn’t had to go beyond the first two in almost a decade. What was it that women looked for in a man?

“I’m trustworthy.”

That finally caught her interest. “Always, or only when it suits you?”

He was about to state he was always trustworthy, but her open interest made him reconsider. “In business, always. With people, well...” He let it hang and she drew her own conclusions.

“I see.” Her disappointment made him wish he hadn’t been honest after all.

“The women I date aren’t always worth the trouble.”

“Then why do you date them?”

Good question. “They’re ... convenient.”

“Of course they are.”

“Hey! I’m a busy man. I barely have time to date as it is, but that’s no reason to be alone all the time.”

“So you’re not looking for a companion for life?”

He shuddered. God forbid him from marrying any of those women. “No.”

“Well, you get exactly the kinds of women you deserve, then.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” He was getting a little angry with her.

She shrugged. “If you only offer money, looks and untrustworthiness, that’s what you’ll get in return. Isn’t that how it goes?”

He stared at her, stunned. “I guess so.”

She smiled, happily, as if they had solved the matter. “Now, do you have the paper and pen or not?”

Still reeling from her words, he reached into his briefcase and took out an unused notepad. He offered it to her. “You can keep it.” He had plenty of them. He did all his planning in them, needing the tactile feel of pen and paper to make his brain function the best possible way.

She looked pleased, the first time he had conjured the look on a woman’s face with so little. “Thank you. And the pen?”

He smiled and nodded towards her. “There’s one in your hair.”

She patted her hair and found the pen and the glasses, both pairs. She didn’t look even slightly embarrassed. “Brilliant.” She put one pair of glasses on her nose and started to take out the pen. It was stuck in the tangles of her hair and wouldn’t come out no matter how hard she tugged. He reached to help her before she pulled out all her hair.

Her hair was softer than it looked, luscious and thick, and he had the urge to sink his fingers in it as he worked the pen free. Resisting his baser instincts, he managed to extricate it, and giving it to her, he returned hastily to his corner.

She shot him a glance over the rims of her glasses and he wanted to sink slowly on the floor as sudden arousal made his legs feeble.

“Please, don’t disturb me.”

“Yes, ma’am.” If she noticed the strained note in his voice, she didn’t say anything. She just opened the notepad and began to write.

Chapter Three

They were rescued an hour later by a harried-looking fireman. About time too. Logan had read all the reports he had taken with him, written the e-mails he needed to, and composed a to-do list for his secretary for the next day.

Laurel had been writing the whole time, barely pausing to take a bite of her bagel she would then forget again, holding it in her hand. Looking at the remains of it, Logan became aware of his hunger. He had just about time for showering before he had to head out to his date. He would have to forget eating.

The fireman was on the floor above them, waiting to lift Laurel out of the cage that was trapped between the floors, but she hadn't even noticed. Logan shook his head, exasperated and amused. "Come, Laurel, we're free."

She gave him an absentminded glance. "Hmm?"

"Let's go." He pointed at their rescuer and she turned to look. And damn, if her eyes didn't light in interest.

"I don't mind if I do."

Logan rolled his eyes. What was it with women and firemen? So the guy was beefy and strong enough to lift her out of the cage, with only one hand if needed. Plenty of men were muscular. Logan wasn't exactly a weakling himself. Regular exercising was the only hobby he made time for in his busy schedule.

Laurel got up and tiptoed toward the opening to push all her things through the door first. Then she offered her arms to the fireman who took a good hold of them and easily pulled her up. Without thinking, Logan stood behind her and gave her a push. The buttocks he was holding were surprisingly round and firm for such a slender woman. They distracted him, and he almost fell on his face when she was yanked through the opening.

Gaining his balance, he reached to push his things out of the door first too. But he'd be damned if he'd accept help. He took a hold of the edge of the floor above him and pulled himself level with it with his arms. It didn't strain him much, but he should have removed his jacket first. He could feel the lining tear at the shoulders. He ignored it as he dove through the opening. A

moment later he was standing. He glanced at Laurel to see if she'd noticed his show of strength, but she was ogling the fireman. Shaking his head, he turned to offer his hand to their rescuer.

"Thanks for getting us out."

The guy shook his hand, the contact brief and firm—a man secure in his masculinity who didn't feel the need to show off his strength. "Just doing my job. Will you be all right from here?"

"Absolutely," Logan said, just as Laurel said: "No." The men both turned to her.

"I think I sprained my ankle. Suppose you wouldn't carry me up?" She actually fluttered her eyelashes at the fireman. The guy smiled, amused, but then leaned into her, as if prepared to carry her.

Logan snorted. "You did no such thing. Stop harassing the poor man."

"I don't mind," the guy said.

"It's two floors up. You'll mind. Come, Laurel, thank the man and we'll be on our way." He went to the stairs that circled around the elevator well. When he turned to see if she'd followed, the damned woman was writing her phone number on the notepad and giving it to the fireman. Never in his life had a woman arranged a date with another guy when she was with him.

"What is it with firemen that get women all worked up?" he asked when they were on their way up.

She gave him a dreamy look. "There's just something about a man who risks his life for others on a daily basis."

There really was nothing to add to that.

"So, what were you writing about so intently?"

"You."

Logan froze, mid-step. "What?"

She glanced at him, clearly puzzled by his sudden anger. "Who else? I was stuck in the elevator with you."

"I forbid you."

"You forbid me?" she said, affronted. "You can't do that. I'm an author. I have an artist's freedom to write whatever I like."

She continued to their floor and he followed. "And I'm one of the most powerful men in this city. I'll have my lawyers descend on you with full force if you don't remove me. You'll never get published once they're done with you."

Laurel stared at the furious man. They had paused on the landing outside their apartments and he was looming over her, arms akimbo on his hips, his eyes blazing and his nostrils flaring. He looked magnificent.

“Perfect. I have to remember that.”

He startled. “Remember what?”

“The way you look right now. It’s exactly how my character will look when he’s angry.”

“Didn’t you hear me? You will not use me in your book.”

She went to her door and fished out the key from her pocket to open it. “Oh, relax. No one will know it’s you.” She went in and he followed her.

“What do you mean, no one will know?” Was it just her or did he sound disappointed? She didn’t turn to look but headed to the kitchen to put her salad in the fridge. He walked in after her and she had to face him.

“For one, it’s not you I put in it, just my first impression of you and how it affected me. For another, he’s not human.”

“Not human? What is he then?”

“A dragon.”

“A ... what?” He was standing in the middle of the kitchen floor, looking like a majestic storm. Her fingers itched to start writing again, but she had to calm him down first.

“If you could see yourself now you’d know exactly what I mean. I’ve been trying to describe him the past two days and coming pitifully short. And then there you were, arrogant and aloof. I knew instantly you were my dragon. You’re even better now that you’re angry.”

“I’m not arrogant.” She rolled her eyes in response and he continued. “And anyway, if you make him look like me and put my name on him, everyone will know it’s me.”

“Don’t be daft. Of course I won’t use your name. I don’t even know what it is.”

He looked baffled, as if everyone should know his name. “It’s Logan. Logan Avery.”

“Logan? Whoever has heard of a dragon named Logan? No, his name is Drust.”

“You just came up with that?”

“No. I’ve had the name for days. It’s old Celtic word for riot. Suits my dragon perfectly.”

“I’m not riotous.”

She sighed. “For the last time, he’s not you.”

“Then why did you say he is?”

“Because...” She searched helplessly for an explanation. “Because he wouldn’t exist without you.”

He stared at her for a long time, but at least he wasn't angry anymore. "Fine. But I want to read the manuscript before it's published."

"Fine." He could want all he liked.

He headed back to the hallway. "I have to go. I have a date tonight."

She had wanted him to go these past ten minutes, but now his words stung. "That's okay. I have a date too."

"With your fireman?"

She couldn't quite determine his tone. "No. With my dragon."

A slow, amused sneer spread on his face. "Have fun dreaming of me, then." With that he left, closing the door quietly behind him. She stood transfixed, staring at the closed door for a long time. She would most definitely dream of ... her dragon.

Shaking herself out of the reverie, she shot to action. She had a book to write.

Chapter Four

Logan's date wasn't a success by any measure. After showering and grabbing a quick sandwich, he had been late leaving for it. The elevator hadn't been fixed yet, so he'd had to walk seventeen floors down to the parking lot underneath the building. The restaurant was close to his building and he had hoped that a little speeding would make him catch the time, but an accident blocking traffic in his direction, and thereby a couple of blocks around it, had made that wish futile.

Perversely, he would have felt better if his date, Serena something or the other, a gallery worker he had met when purchasing art, had been angry with him, but she had been sympathetic to a fault. What kind of woman didn't throw a hissy fit after being made to wait in a restaurant for an hour?

Throughout the dinner she was attentive, hanging on to his every word. After being ignored by Laurel in the elevator it should have felt refreshing. What it felt was exhausting. He had to keep up the conversation practically by himself, until he couldn't anymore, midway through the main course. He wasn't upset when she didn't want dessert.

Tired and annoyed, he didn't feel inclined to take her to his home, even though sex was the only thing he had wanted from this date to begin with. But when he began to hint that he would take her straight home, she showed the first signs of animation the whole evening and got slightly angry.

Stifling a sigh, he walked her to his waiting car and tipped the valet before helping her into the passenger seat. The door closed, he was about to round the car to the driver's side when he noticed a familiar figure walking down the sidewalk.

"Laurel!" She was still wearing the same sweats, T-shirt and slippers, but there was only one pair of glasses on her forehead this time. The other pair was hanging from the neck of her shirt. Her gaze was focused, so she hadn't accidentally wandered out.

She turned to his voice and her brows shot up. "Hello?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I need coffee." Her tone indicated that the answer should be self-evident.

"At this hour?"

She glanced around, as if looking for a clock to check the time. “I need to work and I ran out.”

He shook his head. “So you just went out, without checking the time or what you’re wearing?”

“What’s wrong with my clothes?”

“Everything.”

“Not all of us can afford tailored clothing.”

“I’m sure you own proper shoes, at least.” He hadn’t even come to think that her clothing might have to do with lack of funds, but new authors didn’t really make anything. Ellen didn’t even usually pay the house-sitters.

She shrugged. “They’re comfortable.”

“Well, hop in. I’ll give you a lift home.”

She was taken aback. “I’m not going home. I haven’t got my coffee yet.”

“Surely there were places open closer to our building where you could have found coffee?”

She grimaced. “Yeah ... I sort of became distracted with my book and walked past the first couple of places. Then I thought to just walk on to find the next one.”

He closed his eyes and prayed for strength. “You ... Christ, how are you still alive?” He opened the back door for her. “Get in. I’ll make you coffee.”

Grumbling, she began to climb into the back seat, only to come to an abrupt halt. “You’re on a date.”

“So?”

“So I’m not so absent-minded I wouldn’t understand that it’s bad form to intrude.”

“It’s also bad form to let you be mugged or ran over because you’re too distracted to pay attention to your surroundings.” He placed a hand on her buttocks, and for the second time that day gave her a boost. Her behind felt as good against his hand as the first time.

The ride back to his building was uncomfortable. Serena kept staring out of the side window and tapping her high-heeled foot against the floor, but her anger didn’t delight him as much as he had thought it would.

Laurel was fully aware of her surroundings for a change, and she didn’t look happy about it either. Her attempts at conversation with Serena were met with icy silence and she gave up, staring out of the window too.

“There’s an open café,” she exclaimed when they reached their block. “You can let me out here.”

“I’m not letting you go out alone again tonight. You’re a hazard to yourself.”

You’re a hazard to yourself, she mimicked silently.

“I can see you in the mirror.”

“I am not a child. I can take care of myself.”

“The evidence proves otherwise.” She didn’t look old enough to live alone, and she definitely shouldn’t.

“I’m twenty-seven.”

Her age was a surprise, as he had thought she was at least a decade younger than his thirty-two. “Maybe in years.”

“Hey!”

Chuckling, he drove the car into the lot underneath their building. They exited and headed to the elevator, all three of them. Riding up with two angry women would be unpleasant, to say the least, but at least they didn’t have to climb the stairs. He stifled a smile when Laurel hesitated entering the cage.

“I’m sure it won’t get stuck twice in a day.” He couldn’t be that unlucky.

Laurel stood on the doorstep to Logan’s apartment, reluctant to go in. “I can make do without coffee,” she said. She would wait until Logan and his date were firmly indoors. Then she would head out again. But the knowing look on Logan’s face told her he wasn’t buying it.

“Until the moment you forget it and go out again, in the middle of the night this time. No, I’m making you a Thermos of coffee. Now, come in.” His tone left her no choice but to comply.

His date had already walked in and was lounging on a tan leather couch that looked so soft Laurel wanted to wrap herself in it. The woman didn’t look as soft. She was tall and leggy, beautiful, if with an overly made-up face, wearing a red dress that didn’t leave much to imagination but was still tasteful enough to prevent her from looking cheap. Her impressive pair of breasts barely wiggled when she walked. Surely they were able to make more natural-looking breasts these days?

What she did look was angry. “What the fuck are you doing here,” she hissed the moment Logan disappeared in the kitchen.

The language took Laurel by surprise. Not so classy after all. “I don’t know. I don’t even know the guy and all of a sudden he’s dictating what I can or cannot do.” She would have been miffed by it, but it fit the dragon’s character perfectly. It felt good to get that part right.

Not wanting to sit next to the angry woman, she circled the large room, looking curiously around. It was tastefully decorated with heavy fabrics in neutral colors and golden wood, with a few carefully selected accent colors. Not for a moment did she think he had furnished it himself.

The walls were filled with art and photographs. Most of the latter were by professionals, but some were clearly taken by him. She studied those more closely. They were taken on hiking and fishing trips. So her dragon had hobbies after all.

What were curiously absent were family photos. Her heart skipped a beat. Was he an orphan too?

One wall was taken by a huge bookshelf full of books. He hadn't lied about liking to read. She was studying the titles when he emerged from the kitchen with a large Thermos. Her mouth watered when she saw it. She really needed coffee.

"On any other woman I would think that look was for me," he said with a grin when he handed her the Thermos.

"You can always dream." But her mind wasn't in it anymore. She needed to get back to her book.

"The door's the other way."

"Hmm?" She turned to him. He was pointing at the opposite direction to where she was going, an amused smile on his handsome face. She headed down the hallway and out the door and he followed, probably to make sure she could find her own apartment.

And she could, thank you very much. But did he believe it? No. He walked her right to her door. "I hope I don't have to rescue you a second time tonight."

"You didn't need to rescue me the first time. I had it covered."

"Of course you did," he drawled. "Well, I hope the coffee keeps you awake. And if it doesn't, I hope this will." And before she realized what he was about, he leaned over and kissed her.

It started as a light brush of his lips against hers, but the effect was electrifying. Blood surged in her veins, forcing her heart to beat faster to keep up. Or was it the other way round? She didn't know or care, especially when he deepened the kiss.

He pushed her against the door and leaned into her heavily, his arms propped on both sides of her head. She was having trouble breathing, but she didn't care. His strong body felt wonderful pressing against her and she wriggled to make him fit better. In response, he dipped his tongue into her mouth and she inhaled sharply as arousal shot through her. He tasted wonderful, and his tongue was causing exciting sensations to surge through her body.

Her mind was about to shut down completely when her brain reminded her of the woman who was waiting for him. Her blood froze and she put her free hand on his chest and pushed. He let go instantly, not even a little out of breath.

“Thank you. I’m sure the coffee will be enough.” Hugging the Thermos against her chest, she hurried into her apartment and closed the door firmly behind her. Then she leaned against it for a long time.

When her legs felt strong enough to walk, she headed to her computer. She was angry with him for kissing her and with herself for letting him—and for enjoying it. Then again, it had been a good kiss and she hadn’t been kissed in a long while. But underneath all the anger was fuel that fed her dragon and she needed to get it down as fast as possible.

As she wrote, the dragon began to take a much larger part of her book than she had intended.

Chapter Five

Logan had trouble concentrating on his work next day, which almost never happened. He blamed it on not getting laid the previous night. Serena had been willing but he hadn't, so he had put her in a taxi and sent her on her way.

He needn't bother calling her again. Just as well. There were plenty of willing women in this city.

It wasn't until he had returned to his floor and his eyes had shot to the door of Laurel's apartment that it had dawned on him why he hadn't wanted to sleep with his date. His mind had been on Laurel and their kiss.

He shouldn't have kissed her, but he hadn't been able to resist. He had wanted to wipe away the fog that had descended on her when her book filled her mind. The challenge of making her see him had been irresistible.

At first he seemed to have succeeded. She had answered beautifully, allowing him to deepen the kiss and take it much farther than he had intended. And when she put a stop to it, as if the kiss had meant nothing, and he had been left standing, staring at the closed door.

A lesser man would have admitted defeat, but he hadn't gotten where he was by giving up. He had arrived in New York ten years ago with a business degree and empty pockets—but with a head full of ideas and determination to see them through. During the past decade he had built his business to what it was today. It hadn't always been easy and he had faced treacherous business partners and the volatility of the mobile app industry. Compared to those, a woman wasn't much of a challenge.

But she would be much more pleasurable to conquer.

Instead of working, he spent the day devising and discarding plans for how to make her see him—and not her dragon. What had she called him, arrogant and self-centered? He would have to prove otherwise.

If only he could make her stop thinking about her book for five minutes.

The answer that came to him was perfect in its simplicity. He would have to engage her mind with things that would make reality seem more fascinating than her imaginary world. Luckily, New York was the perfect place to make it happen.

He left home earlier than usual, shocking his stalwart secretary, Mrs. Lincoln, badly. But he needed to make some preparations on his way home and he couldn't trust her to do them. Or, actually, the middle-aged woman, who had worked for him almost from the start, could have done everything and probably better. He simply didn't want her to know.

At home, he made a quick change into less formal clothes. Laurel hadn't been impressed with his suit, so he wore jeans and a T-shirt instead. They weren't clothes he wore in New York often, but he liked them. And the shirt had the added benefit of showing that the fireman wasn't the only guy with upper body mass.

Taking a deep breath to calm his erratically beating heart, he walked to Laurel's door. She answered his knock so fast she must have been standing in the hallway. "Were you headed out?"

She looked baffled for his unscheduled appearance—or his altered appearances. "Yes, I need to eat."

"Good. I was hoping that. Come." Not giving her a chance to refuse, he hooked her arm around his and guided her to the elevator. She didn't resist.

He wasn't the only one with altered looks. Her hair was brushed, falling in a shiny brown cascade of curls down her back. She was wearing a light yellow summer dress that left her shoulders and arms bare and accentuated the soft mounds of her tiny breasts. On her feet she wore dainty sandals instead of slippers. There was even some makeup on her face. But she was still the same wood nymph he had met yesterday.

"You look beautiful."

She startled. "Umm. Thanks?"

Her inability to take the compliment amused him. "You're welcome. Don't men usually tell you that?"

"No, it's just that I think you don't often say that to women."

"Or your dragon wouldn't?"

She shrugged. "Perhaps."

It annoyed him that she had mixed the two of them again, but the evening was young. He guided her to a taxi he had asked the doorman to hail down, and she gave him a surprised look.

"Where are we going?"

He gave her a slow smile. "It's a surprise."

"Will I like it?"

"Absolutely."

She studied his face and he tried to look trustworthy. He must have succeeded, because she nodded and got in the car. The game was afoot.

Laurel had written through the previous night until she had collapsed. She'd then slept a couple of hours by the computer and started again, until her mind was empty and she couldn't write anymore.

Knowing that she needed to recharge, she had showered and dressed up in her prettiest summer clothes. She would have something to eat and then stroll around Manhattan, staring at its wonders until her mind was fresh again.

She had been about to leave when Logan had arrived, taking her completely by surprise. She hadn't thought she would see him again, unless they happened to get in the elevator at the same time. Considering that she had lived in Ellen's apartment for over a month already and had had no idea that Logan lived next door, she hadn't thought that would be likely.

He looked different in jeans and a T-shirt, and during the slow descent to the lobby she had stolen glances at him, committing everything to memory so she would be able to describe it later. She liked how the jeans rode low on his hips, accentuating his long, lean legs, and how the T-shirt followed the contours of his shoulders and sculptured chest. And she most especially liked the finely muscled arms that the shirt left bare.

She had no idea where he was taking her, but she didn't fear it would be something she couldn't handle. He wouldn't take her to a five star restaurant dressed like that. And she had to admit she was curious. Men like Logan didn't usually pay attention to her. She wanted to know what he was up to.

And this would be the perfect opportunity for her to deepen the character of her dragon. She hadn't taken him to be considerate. Perhaps she would have to change that.

They cut through Central Park and were at their destination. "That's the Metropolitan Museum!"

He smiled. "Surprise." He helped her out of the taxi and paid the fare, and they made their way up the steps and into the museum. "I thought we'd have dinner here."

She had nothing against the plan—until he led her to a restaurant on the fourth floor. "This is for members only." She stared in dismay at the elegant room with a view over the park.

"I'm a member." He noticed her hesitation and placed a warm hand on her shoulder. "You look perfect." The people dining there weren't exactly wearing summer dresses and sandals

bought secondhand from a church flea market, but she allowed him to guide her to a table when the maître d' came for them.

Their table was at an excellent place by the windows, so Laurel could stare out and ignore the other people. It was more difficult to ignore the man with her. He looked relaxed and like he belonged here, even in his jeans and T-shirt. This wasn't a corner café where one could pop in wearing slippers, but if he could do it, so could she.

He had ordered for them both when he reserved the table, so they didn't have to wait the food for long. Generally, she didn't like such managing manners, but the menu was excellent and she was too hungry to care. She wasn't entirely sure she had eaten anything that day. The salad was still untouched in the fridge—or was it? She had a vague recollection of eating it during the night. She had definitely drunk the coffee.

“Thank you for the coffee. I'll give the Thermos back when we return.”

“Did it help?”

“Absolutely.” But the kiss had helped more. And the knowing smile on his face indicated he knew it.

They dined at a leisurely pace. He turned out to be interesting company, once she had sated her hunger enough to pay attention to the conversation. They had read many of the same books and could talk about those. He asked about her writing and she was happy to tell him about the one already published. But for all he had a starring role in its sequel, she didn't want to talk about it with him.

The dinner finished, she was sure he would take her back home, but he had another surprise planned for her. “I thought we would see the exhibition on dragons they have here.” His eyes danced in merriment. She smiled in return, thrilled by the prospect.

“Absolutely.”

The exhibition of medieval illustrations and Chinese sculptures wasn't large, but they spent over an hour going through it, pouring over the details, arguing about how her dragons should look.

“I can't change it now. This is the second book in the series.”

“All I'm saying is that the snake is such an unflattering form. I much prefer those bulkier dragons with huge wings.”

The exhibition left her liking him more than the fancy dinner, and they were very much in accord with each other as they headed home. But in the taxi, already her mind began to wander, ready for work. Drust needed to have little alterations made to his character.

It wasn't until they were standing at her door that she noticed her absentmindedness had offended Logan. It wasn't the first time that had happened with a date, the reason she had stopped dating altogether. "Thank you for the lovely evening," she said hastily. "I had brilliant time. But I have to write now."

He nodded, rather curtly. "I'll leave you to it then." And he headed to his own apartment, leaving her to stare after him. She wouldn't have minded a good-night's kiss tonight.

Then she huffed, annoyed with herself. He hadn't kissed her because he was interested in her. He had done it to prove a point. It would be better if he didn't try to kiss her again.

But as she settled down in front of her computer, she couldn't help feeling disappointed.

Chapter Six

Persistent ringing of her cell phone interrupted Laurel's work the next afternoon. Irritated, she picked it up. She didn't recognize the number and thought not to answer, but the prospect that it might be Logan made her heart skip a beat in excitement and change her mind. The strange voice at the other end disappointed her.

"Hi, this is Paul Dunn. The fireman from the other day?"

"Hi..." She had forgotten all about him, but she had given him her number.

"I was wondering if you're free tonight."

She didn't know what to answer. It had been so long since she had been on a date, if she didn't count the previous evening with Logan, which she didn't—she had no idea what it had been about, but date it hadn't been. She should go out ... but she needed to work. She glanced at her computer screen, where the manuscript glared at her accusingly.

But she also needed to have a social life. "Yes, I'm free. What do you have in mind?"

They agreed to meet in a pub near the fire station where Paul worked, and hung up. Two hours later, when her phone beeped as a reminder of the date, she had no idea why it was doing so. When she suddenly did—half an hour later—she had to rush to get herself ready.

She hurried out of her apartment and to the elevator that luckily arrived just then, almost colliding with Logan, who was exiting the cage.

"Where's the fire?"

She grinned at the appropriate question. "Hopefully nowhere. I have a date with the fireman."

"You have a date?"

His incredulous tone made her pause. "I do date, occasionally. Some men find me attractive, even."

"I didn't mean it like that. You're very attractive." He studied her clothing. "Although the dress you wore yesterday was much better than jeans and a blouse, no matter how many pretty flowers it has."

“We’re meeting in a pub.” With that, she got in the elevator and pushed the button. As the doors closed, she saw Logan staring after her, a frown on his face. The clothes weren’t that bad, were they?

Paul didn’t seem to think so. His eyes lit when she arrived, only a couple of minutes late. It was an Irish pub filled with off duty firemen and cops, relaxing after a long day. She studied the place and the people curiously, committing everything to memory to be used later.

Paul was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt with the logo of his department on it, his wet hair combed back after showering. He smelled nice and looked even better, a large man with steely muscles and open face. She could do much worse.

Unfortunately they had nothing in common, which they soon discovered. He shuddered in barely suppressed horror when she told him she was an author. “I don’t have time to read,” he confessed, almost sheepishly.

She took that to mean he didn’t like to read, but she hid her disappointment and nodded. “You have such a hectic job. What do you do on your free time?”

“I hang out with my family. I have three brothers, two of them firemen, and one a cop.” He looked happy as he told stories about them and all his nephews and nieces. Laurel listened, acutely envious. She had lost her parents when she was four and had grown up in an orphanage in Brooklyn. She didn’t remember her parents and had no recollection of family life. Paul made it sound wonderful.

“Do you want a large family?”

His question threw her. “I…” She had no idea. Growing up, she had always wanted a family of her own, but that was before she became an author. As one of almost thirty children, she knew a large family would demand her attention, and she wasn’t sure she could afford to give it. “Maybe later,” she settled with, and saw his disappointment. They were neither of them happy with the other.

He saw her home at the end of the evening and said goodbye outside the building. He didn’t even suggest they would meet again or try to kiss her goodnight. She didn’t mind. She had been on a date and wouldn’t have to go again until her book was finished. Happy with the thought, she rode up to her floor. She was still smiling when she pulled out the key to open her door, only to be frightened senseless by Logan.

“Where the hell have you been the whole evening?”

Logan had spent a miserable evening thinking about Laurel and the fireman on a date. Nothing he tried had diverted his mind. He had spent an hour at his home gym, pushing his body to its limits, but even exhaustion hadn't distracted him for long. After showering, he had tried working, but the numbers had jumbled on the screen and he had abandoned it, disgusted.

TV hadn't helped either. Did people actually watch that garbage? There weren't even any interesting sports on. As the evening wore on, he found himself again and again at his door listening to the elevator, trying to determine if it was coming to his floor.

When it finally did, he was out of the door before he had time to reconsider. Laurel exited the elevator, a smile on her face. After the evening he'd had, it only served to fuel his anger.

"Where the hell have you been the whole evening?"

She jumped in fright. "Jesus. I didn't see you there at all."

"Answer me."

"On a date. You know that."

"I know perfectly well where you've been. The question is, why." He walked to her, forcing her to move backwards until she hit her door. Her eyes widened and she shrank against it.

"He asked me."

He leaned down, crowding her. "And you went? With a complete stranger? That's dangerous."

"What?"

"You didn't know the first thing about him."

"I didn't know the first thing about you, yet I went out with you."

He smiled slowly at her defiant words. "Oh, I think we both know that's not true. I'm your dragon."

Her eyes flashed in heated interest and that was all the encouragement he needed. Leaning his arms against the door by her head, he claimed her mouth with his. If she wanted her dragon more than she wanted him, he would indulge her. But when he was done, she had better see the real man.

Her mouth was soft and delicious against his. He savored the taste, a unique blend of her and the red wine she had drunk that evening. Remembering the man she had been with made his anger rise anew and he deepened the kiss, determined to drive out the last memory of her date from her mind.

She moaned against his mouth, opening to him. He inhaled sharply and, cupping her face in his hands, pushed his tongue against hers almost violently. He wanted her to forget everything but this moment, his mouth on hers, their tongues brushing against each other.

Her hands curled on his chest where she had lifted them for support. It made his insides tighten and he pressed against her, driving her against the door. Her body felt amazing under him and his erection stirred to life.

She reached her arms around his neck and pulled herself up, wrapping her legs around his waist. Taking a hold under her buttocks, he pressed her tighter to the door and ground his hardening cock against her, sparks of pleasure shooting through him with every rolling motion. She moaned softly.

Without breaking the contact, he turned around and carried her to his apartment. He barely noticed the surroundings as he made his way to his bedroom and lowered her onto his bed. She sat on the edge and he stood between her legs, opening the small buttons of her blouse, cursing every one of them as her fingers dug into his buttocks, urging him on.

She let go of him long enough for him to take the blouse off. He got a good look at her breasts, cupped by a black lace bra, and then she was already opening his jeans, one torturing button at a time. He wore nothing underneath, and he gave a satisfied moan when his erection sprang free, the sound cutting abruptly when she wrapped her fingers around it. They felt cool against his heated flesh, but soon warmed up when she squeezed tightly and began to pump.

He held onto her shoulders for support, letting her pleasure him with her hands. He watched her watching his cock as she worked it, a rapt look on her face. Then she leaned down and took him in her mouth. As the warm, moist softness engulfed him, he threw his head back, barely containing his pleasure.

His hands moved into her hair and dug in, pushing the length of his cock deeper into her mouth and then allowing her to slowly pull out, only to sink deep around him again. She began to suck and his knees almost buckled, the pleasure of her tightening mouth on him unbearable. His fingers moved in her hair, but he let her have her own pace.

Then he couldn't allow it anymore. He took a tight hold of the back of her head to keep it steady, and pumped, once, twice, three times into her mouth until his release surged, nearly blinding him with ecstasy. Not wanting to suffocate her, he barely managed to pull out in time.

She leaned her forehead against his stomach, breathing heavily like him. Then she leaned backward on the bed and he followed her there. They had only begun.

Chapter Seven

Laurel still tasted Logan when he kissed her again, could feel the silky strength of his cock in her mouth. She was hot and wet, and she wanted him to take her, like she had taken him. “Enough of kissing.”

She began to pull down her jeans and he was there, pulling them off for her, removing his own jeans too; she hadn’t got past opening the buttons earlier. His eyes shot at her damp panties and he smiled, slowly and knowingly, and the look heated her. He leaned over her, propping himself with one arm and pressing the other lightly on her abdomen. Her muscles tightened in anticipation as he glided his fingers down between her legs, rubbing her over-sensitive flesh over the wet panties.

She squirmed against his hand, wanting more, and he obliged with a little laugh. He pushed his hand inside her panties and she spread her legs for him. He found her sweet spot unerringly and rubbed it with his thumb, gliding the rest of his fingers down her wet folds and dipping two of them inside her. She was tight, but he was patient and soon the steady motion of his fingers made her orgasm build. She pushed her hips against his hand, forcing him to move faster, and in a blinding surge she came.

He didn’t give her time to recover. In a few economical moves, he had pulled her panties off, put on a condom and placed himself between her legs. As her hips rose in the aftermath of her orgasm, he took a firm hold of them and glided in. He was large and hot, and filled her completely, the sensation exactly what she needed. She came again.

He began to move inside her, the motion strong and sinuous. She had trouble breathing, her orgasm still shaking her, and she clung to his shoulders, letting him set the pace. Leaning down, he claimed her mouth and sharpened his thrusts. They were both out of breath now, but breathing was overrated anyway. All that mattered was his hard flesh moving inside her, pushing her body towards another orgasm.

Abruptly, he pulled out and turned her on her stomach. Taking a hold of her hips again, he pushed back in. Her face pressed to the bed as he pumped furiously, his strong body hitting hers in an impossibly quickening pace. Her insides tightened and she bit the bed cover to keep from crying out in pleasure, and then she couldn’t hold it in anymore.

As her body shattered in yet another orgasm, he let out a deep groan and with a couple of thrusts came too. He collapsed on her and they lay there for a long time, breathing heavily. It had been the absolutely best sex of her life, and one thing was sure: “I need to give Drust a much larger role in my book.”

He stiffened and rolled off her. The loss of his warmth made her shiver. “What?”

“You’re so amazing. How could I make him anything less?”

“After all this, you’re still thinking of an imaginary man instead of me?”

She turned to him and saw him looking angry. “Why would I think of you? You said yourself that you’re one of the most sought after bachelors in town. You’re not for the likes of me. But my dragon ... no one can take him from me.”

He stared at her coldly for a few, pregnant moments, and she held her breath. Then he got up and walked to the bathroom. “I think it’s best you go now.”

Holding back her tears, she got up, gathered her clothes and left. Once back in her apartment, she took a long, hot shower, put on her comfiest clothing, and curled up in her bed. She cried the whole night.

Logan was still furious the next morning. He had no idea what had happened with Laurel. The sex had been amazing and she had been fully present. She had known it was him ... yet her dragon was never far from her mind.

He tried to feel flattered that she found him an inspiration, but he was past that. He wanted her to see the real man. So many women saw him only as a walking money machine. Laurel didn’t care about his wealth and position, but she was no better than those women. She didn’t want him, just her version of him. She wanted the dragon. She wanted Drust, not Logan.

And he didn’t want to be Drust anymore.

He should admit defeat and put her out of his mind. If he didn’t see her again, it should be easy. He had never wasted a moment pining after women.

But judging by how much he thought about her that day at work, she might be an exception in more than one way. No matter how hard he tried to concentrate on running his empire, her face just wouldn’t go away from his mind. He remembered her smile, her quirky little habits, even the way her eyes glazed when she thought about her book.

If this continued, he would run his business into the ground. He had to take decisive action, and only one thing would banish her from his world for good. He had to make sure she went back to where she had come from.

Picking up his phone, he made the call that would see it happen.

* * *

Logan had barely returned home that evening when there was a loud banging on his door. He went to open it and a slap hit him directly on his cheek. Staggering back, he stared at Laurel's furious face.

"I hope you're happy, ruining my life." Her eyes shone in anger and barely suppressed tears.

"I did no such thing!"

"Oh, so it wasn't you who called my agent, telling her he wasn't comfortable with me living next to you, using you in my book."

"Yes, but—"

She interrupted him. "Do you really think that a man like you can say something like that and people don't do their utmost best to please you?"

"That's kind of the point."

"So you think it's a proportionate punishment for not falling at your feet in awe like all other women that I've now lost my agent?"

His stomach fell uncomfortably. "No, it's nothing like that."

"Then what is it? It was fun for a while, but now it's back to normal life, and women who aren't the perfect specimen should be cleaned out of sight?"

"Of course not. I just—"

"Save it. I hope you feel happy in your ivory tower with all your money, looking down at us who barely scrape a living, knowing you've managed to make it that much harder for one of us. And don't worry about being in my book, I will remove Drust. He's not worth writing about."

With that, she swirled around and stomped to the elevator she had propped open with a large back bag. She pushed it in with her foot as she entered, and the doors closed behind her.

He felt utterly sick. This wasn't what he had meant to happen. "I'm sorry," he said out loud, but it was too late. She was gone. And he didn't even know where she lived.

How could things have gotten so out of hand? He had simply wanted to put distance between them. Well, he had succeeded there. But not like this. He hadn't wanted to hurt her. How was he supposed to know her agent would terminate her contract?

Now that he had achieved his other objective, being removed from her book, he was disappointed. She had only cut the character because she hated him. And he found he didn't want that. He wanted her to like him, wanted to be her inspiration.

He owed her to make things right. It wouldn't be easy, but he would try his best. He would get back into her life and make her see he was worth writing about. He would make a good dragon after all.

Coming up in **To Catch a Billionaire Dragon, Part Two**

After Logan's thoughtless act causes her an agent and a quiet place to write, Laurel doesn't want to see him again. She swears to cut the dragon Drust from her book too, so that she won't be constantly reminded of him—as if that would work. To top it all, she has to take a job, even if it practically prevents her from writing.

Logan is desperate to apologize to Laurel, and make amends, but he can't find her. He didn't know a person could disappear so completely, even in New York. But he won't give up, no matter how difficult things look. He wants Laurel back—and her to see him worthy of being her dragon again.

A chance encounter brings the estranged lovers back to each other's lives again. But are Logan's attempts to make amends enough for Laurel? And will their rekindling relationship freeze for good when he learns that she has betrayed his trust?

About the Author

Hannah Kane writes contemporary romances with heroes who are at the top of their game and heroines who are more than mere props. She also writes paranormal romances as Susanna Shore. Check out her Two-Natured London series on [Amazon](#).

You can find more about Hannah's (and Susanna's) books at www.crimsonhousebooks.com. For everyday news, follow her on twitter [@crimsonhouseboo](#).

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