

Excerpt from *Mulligan's Dream* ©

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A distinct thud repeated itself and finally roused Laura from sleep. In her dream, she'd been doing home repairs, hammering a nail into the wall, the thud of the hammer banging the nail home in perfect time with the thud that awakened her.

A repeat of the pattern, and then a muffled shout, as if someone was calling her, was enough to wake her fully. Turning on the light and throwing a robe over her nude body, she quickly descended the stairs to the main part of the cabin. A glance at the long case clock in the corner showed it was not quite three in the morning. Hardly a time for visiting. So if not a visitor, then who? The clock's ticking was the only sound in the cabin. It echoed off the hardwood floor and briefly, she heard the wind blow snow at the window, grainy bits like pebbles on the frozen glass. Otherwise, there was no other sound. Maybe it was her imagination, run amok on a cold winter night?

Just in case it wasn't, she needed a weapon. Too bad she'd never owned a gun. She could sure use it now. The poker by the fireplace was the closest thing she had to hand, and Laura grabbed it as she made her way to the door on shaky legs.

A muffled shuffling on the deck could be heard through the door and another thump on said door was proof enough of someone outside.

"Who's there?" she called through the thickness separating her from the possible intruder.

"It's me, Hank Mulligan, from up the road. Can I come in?"

"Hank?" What on earth would Hank be doing pounding on her door at 3 a.m.?

"Please, I think I'm hurt."

Hank the Hunk, hurt? Laura couldn't believe it. He was a mountain of a man, all brawn and Irish good looks with a head of black, curly hair and a grin that went from ear to ear. Not to mention his eyes, as blue as night, and that included the stars.

A grunt came from the other side of the door and then the unmistakable sound of someone falling against it. Laura dropped the poker and with fumbling fingers, undid the lock and swung it wide.

Hank fell sprawling onto the floor, flat on his face before giving way to another grunt.

"Up. You have to get up and move so I can close the door," gasped Laura, her bare feet registering the cold from the snow being deposited on her floor. It blew in gusts around her toes, the cold draft making its way up her body, naked beneath the flimsy robe she'd thrown on.

The mound that was Hank moved slightly but it was obvious he needed help. Grasping him beneath his arms, she slid him rather easily for all his bulk along the polished wooden floor until she could close the door and keep the snow and winter cold at bay. The fact that it was snowing harder than ever barely registered as she took in Hank's appearance.

His head was bare but for the curls frozen in place and quickly melting, depositing small chunks of liquefying ice on her hardwood floor. His bomber style

jacket was torn and so was his pant leg. And was that blood she saw through the gap?

Leaning over to help him up, she met his eyes, those midnight blue eyes, and was lost. How on earth was she supposed to maintain any kind of composure and help him out if all she could think of was jumping his bones? Her "ex" hadn't been able to help himself, he'd said in his defense at their divorce hearing. He just had to have those women. *Maybe this is what he felt*, she thought as her nipples hardened in response to her mind's wanderings.

"Laura? Can ye help me a wee bit? Me arm's stuck and I haven't the strength to move it."

She saw instantly that he'd fallen partially on his side and his arm was indeed stuck at a funny angle, not to mention that every time he tried to help himself, he slid on the polished wooden surface. "Oh, sorry. Here." Laura grabbed his arm and heaved, rolling him over in the process and landing flat on his chest. "Oh..."

His head hit the floor and Hank emitted an involuntary grunt, first of pain and then of pleasure as his lovely neighbour landed flat on his chest, her eyes, those lovely green gardens filled with golden lights staring into his. Even closer was her mouth, the perfect rose coloured lips, ripe for kissing, shaped in the "oh" of her expression.

Hank didn't move other than to peel off his gloves. He needed to warm his hands, they were so cold and stiff. But more than that, he wanted to touch her.

It was a mistake. As soon as his cold hands connected with her skin through the thin robe she wore, she shot off his chest as if propelled by a cannon ball.

"I'm sorry," she exclaimed, pulling her robe more tightly about her nude body. Hank could tell she was nude. Not even a thong could be hidden beneath that robe. The silken fabric with its glossy sheen fitted her smoothly, every delicious curve outlined for his benefit, whether she intended it or not.

"Warm. I need to get warm. I'm so cold...been out there for hours...". It suddenly dawned on him that he was cold, a thought punctuated by the involuntary chattering of his teeth. "Christ, I'm beginnin' to sound like a feckin' woodpecker."

Laura laughed and then, her face showing the compassion he somehow knew her capable of, said, "I'll go run a bath for you. Are you badly hurt anywhere?"

She'd been gazing at the gap in his pants. Through the thawing process inside her house, he was only just coming to the realization that he'd cut his leg. But just how badly it had been cut, he didn't know. Maybe it was just a scrape. "I don't think I'm badly hurt. I'm too bloody cold to tell."

Nodding, and giving his body a cursory glance, she folded her arms around her waist as if that movement could protect her from his curious eyes, and went up the stairs to where he presumed the bathtub was.

Her absence gave him a moment to take stock of his surroundings. He'd never been inside the cabin before but the windows that went from the floor of the living room to what he surmised, and now knew to be the ceiling of her bedroom, provided a spectacular view to the outside world. And due to the sun on the windows, it was often impossible to see inside. With no one around, she needn't fear any light from within exposing her. The drapes he'd

seen across the top floor ensured her privacy when she wanted it.

He could hear water running and so began unzipping his coat and peeling it off. It was ruined but still serviceable for the time being. Both sleeves bore the evidence of crawling through the busted out window of the truck, showing several small rents in the fabric and a large tear that ran from the shoulder down the side seam of the right arm. He vaguely remembered feeling it catch and then hearing it rip but he hadn't reckoned on the resulting damage being so extensive and at the time, hadn't cared. He just needed to get out of the truck.

Tossing it over by the boot rack, he then struggled to pull off his laced up boots, but the laces were tightly tied and wet, difficult to undo with half frozen fingers.

He was still fumbling with them when Laura came back down the stairs to tell him his bath was ready.

"That'll be lovely, Darlin', but my feet are still stuck in my boots."

"We could cut the laces," she offered. "I think I have spare boot laces here somewhere. I keep spares of almost everything."

"Well, I'm not so sure I want to cut these. I'd hate it if ye didn't have more and at any rate, I think I can get these..." His voice trailed off as a waft of her perfume invaded his senses as she bent down to inspect them herself.

"Here, let me give it a try. I have skinnier fingers and longer nails. You never know."

Her long, wavy locks fell over her shoulder, several shades of gold and light red mixed in and creating the most gorgeous mosaic he'd ever seen. And why had he not

noticed before? Was he blind? In all the years he'd been coming up here, this delectable dish was in his grasp and he'd been blind to it all!

Not really, he corrected himself, remembering that up until last year, that sleazebag of a husband of hers was here, too. He didn't know the full reason for her divorce but he'd seen Erik Foster in the bars in town, seen how he'd sidle up to whatever lady happened to be by herself and in nine out of ten cases, walk away with the woman on his arm. It didn't take a rocket scientist to know what was going on. What Hank couldn't understand was why any man would want to leave someone like Laura? If you were looking for a goddess come to life, she was surely it.

Her hands were sure and capable as they struggled with the wet laces, lovely manicured nails and delicately tapered fingers working their magic.

"There," she said, spreading the laces so he could pull his foot out.

He bent over to ease his foot from the boot and couldn't help but notice the creamy line of her breast, exposed as it was as her robe shifted with her movements. There was an immediate response in the region between his legs and despite the chill that had engulfed him, he began to sweat.

"Here Luv, if ye wouldn't mind...I'd appreciate ye holdin' my boot while I pull."

She did as he asked, leaning over and holding his boot with one hand at the top and the other at his heel while he slid his foot out. Her breasts swung freely beneath the robe, the two globes almost within arm's reach and certainly within line of sight.

"And the other, too, if ye wouldn't mind."

"Of course not," she said, looking up and smiling as she took hold of his other boot in the same fashion.

A moment later, his feet were clear and he was rewarded with a view of her heart shaped face, the long milky column of her throat, the cleavage of her breasts as she sat like a geisha in front of him, the belt of her robe loose and exposing more of herself than he was certain she was aware.

"How's your leg," she asked, as if suddenly aware of the silence that had ensued.

His eyes instantly averted, he glanced at his leg, at the tear in his pants running midway between his knee and his hip. "Can't say for sure 'til I've got my jeans off."

Nodding, she said, "Well, upstairs and into the bath with you then. We'll get you warmed first and then see what it's like."

As if it knew it was the subject under discussion, his leg began to throb as did the bump on his head. "Have ye any pain killers?"

"Pain killers?" She thought a moment. "I might have something. How about acetaminophen?"

"Aye, that'll do. Anything to stem the pounding in my head."

"Your head? Oh, I didn't notice."

"Nah, it's in my hairline, not that ye'd see it. But it's there." He rubbed the spot and felt the goose egg sized lump. "Yeah, it's there alright."

As if he'd invited her to do so, she leaned over and reached out her hand and he felt her fingers lightly work through the damp hair until they came across the lump. "It's pretty big, alright. If you think you can stand,

we'll get you that bath and something for your head, too."

Her position was nearly his undoing. Were he a less sturdy man he would have swooned at the sight of her breasts. An inch more and they'd be in his mouth.

It was almost too much. Hank wasn't sure he could stand at the moment. The effect of her on his libido had his penis visibly standing at attention, straining at the zipper on his jeans. Said jeans were also damp and clung coldly to his skin, reminding him that he was rather in need of that hot bath. It was uncomfortable in many ways. "Right. I believe I can stand if ye'll give me a hand up."

She stood at the same time as he made his attempt but he hadn't been aware of the puddle his boots had left and as he put his foot flat on the floor, it slid out from under him. Since he was holding tightly to her hand, she followed the downward motion of his body, the result of which was Hank back on the floor, and Laura landing on top.

It was the loveliest sight, he thought as his mind replayed in slow motion her robe falling away, the silk belt finally losing its tenuous knot, allowing the robe to fly open as she fell.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd had a naked woman on his chest and that meant that it had been far too long.