

LBRIS

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books

Also by Laurie Gilmore

The Pumpkin Spice Café

The Christmas Tree Farm

The Strawberry Patch Pancake House

THE CINNAMON BUN BOOK
STORE

Dream Harbor Series

Book 2

LAURIE GILMORE



Chapter One

Hazel Kelly loved a good story. She just didn't have any of her own, which became abundantly clear as she stood behind the counter at The Cinnamon Bun Bookstore, in the exact same spot she'd been for the last fifteen years.

Well, not perpetually. She did get to go home at the end of each day and all that, but still, the feeling was the same. Fifteen years in the same place.

Hazel sighed as she rearranged the piles of free bookmarks in front of her. It was a slow day, bright and sunny, the type of day people wanted to be running around outside, not browsing the shelves of a bookstore. Not that Hazel understood that line of reasoning. She *always* wanted to be browsing the shelves of a bookstore.

It wasn't that she didn't love it here behind the same counter she'd stood at for her first shift at the end of her sophomore year of high school, it was just that nothing else

in her life had changed either. Same job. Same town. Same friends. In fact, the only thing that had changed, besides a slight twinge in her back when she woke up each morning, was the name of the bookstore, which her boss changed every other year or so.

Hazel was literally surrounded by amazing stories, books filled with love and adventure and *life*, but Hazel herself was stuck.

'And in two months, I'll be thirty,' she muttered to no one in particular since the shop was empty.

Thirty loomed in the distance, glaring at her menacingly. The date, September 28, was imprinted in her mind. For some people, Hazel assumed, thirty meant an end to the wild and storied days of their twenties. A time to settle down, to get serious, to be an adult.

Hazel had a different problem with thirty.

She'd forgotten to have wild and storied days. Her twenties had been ... calm? Responsible? Boring. Hazel had essentially been in her thirties since she was fifteen. Or more like her seventies if you asked Annie, without whom Hazel probably wouldn't have picked her head up out of a book at all.

And it had never bothered Hazel before. She liked her bookstore. She liked cups of chamomile tea and rainy days and the Sunday morning crossword puzzle. She liked her quiet life. Except now, all of a sudden, with thirty sticking its proverbial tongue out at her, Hazel suddenly wondered if she'd missed out on something. Maybe she'd forgotten to try some things. Maybe, shockingly, there was more life

outside of her books that she should have experienced by now.

The sun mocked her through the large front windows. She'd just put up a display of 'Beach Reads' for August, but Hazel couldn't remember the last time she'd taken a book to the beach. She had a tendency to burn if she was in the sun for more than ten minutes at a time, which was perhaps indicative of her current problem and maybe a vitamin D deficiency that she should probably look into.

Hazel needed an adventure.

And soon.

Or at the very least a good story to tell the next time she was at Mac's pub listening to Annie's latest theories about him and how he was out to get her. Or Jeanie and Logan's plans to update the farmhouse whenever she finally decided to move in. Just once, Hazel would like to shock her friends, and shock herself. Just once, Hazel would like to do something very un-Hazel-like.

But not right now. Because right now Hazel's gaze snagged on a crooked book in the Romance section and the Hazel thing to do was to straighten it. And frankly, that was her job. She wandered over to the shelf, glancing out the door on her way just in case anyone was walking by and might stop in, but the streets were empty. It was a perfect late summer afternoon and it seemed the whole of Dream Harbor was at the beach or out hiking a trail or relaxing by a pool, trying to soak the warmth in before the weather turned.

Even Annie had declared the day too beautiful to be

inside and had closed up The Sugar Plum Bakery early to set off with some of her sisters to traipse around a vineyard. Hazel sighed. She was sure she'd hear all about it tomorrow while she had nothing to contribute to the conversation except the exciting tale of this crooked book.

She shook her head. She needed to snap out of this funk. And what better way to do that than tidying? The Romance section had grown exponentially over the past few years thanks to the lobbying of the Dream Harbor Book Club and their love of the genre. Hazel blushed just looking at some of the covers, but if it was good for business then she was on board.

The crooked book was not only crooked but also shelved in the wrong place so she pulled it out, avoided eye contact with the half-naked man on the front cover, and was about to reshelve it when she noticed one of the pages was dog-eared.

'What's this?' she muttered. Did people have no respect? They hadn't even bought the book yet but they marked the page? She nearly added, 'What is the world coming to?' but she tried to catch her old lady tendencies as much as possible these days so she only thought it.

She flipped open to the marked page and found a highlighted sentence. A highlighted sentence in one of her books! How totally unacceptable! Unbelievable! Someone just waltzed in here and defaced one of her books and hadn't even bothered to buy it!

Hazel would have kept raging internally for the rest of

the day if the highlighted line itself hadn't caught her attention.

It wasn't particularly good. Not pithy or profound. But it was like the book, or whoever had highlighted it, was speaking directly to Hazel.

'Come with me, lass, if you want an adventure.'

She nearly dropped the book.

She glanced around the store and half expected someone to be watching her and laughing. Surely this was a joke of some kind. But who would have left it? And who could have known what she'd been thinking about all day?

The store was still empty. Of course it was. This was some kind of weird coincidence.

Hazel looked back to the shelf. No other books were out of order. Just this one. The one she still held gripped tight in her hand. There was a pirate on the cover, his shirt torn open from the apparently very strong sea wind that was also blowing his hair back. *Love Captive* was scrawled across the top.

She had the strange and sudden urge to curl up somewhere and read the book cover to cover, but she was at work, and this book felt dangerous. Like something she certainly didn't want to read in the middle of her workplace.

It was just that it really seemed like this man, this theoretical, fictional man could in fact take her on an adventure.

She flipped back to the highlighted line, reading it as if she could solve the mystery of who'd highlighted it and left

it crooked on her shelf just by looking at it. She was so caught up in her thoughts, she didn't hear the door to the shop open.

She didn't hear anything until a low voice rumbled right next to her ear. 'Whatcha reading?'

Hazel tossed the book across the room. It landed with a thud in the reading nook by the window. She spun to find Noah Barnett grinning at her.

Noah, owner/operator of Dream Harbor's one and only fishing-tour company. Noah who had showed up in town a few years ago, quickly became friends with Logan, and now hovered around the periphery of Hazel's life like a sexy satellite. She shook her head. Just because every woman and at least half the men in town found Noah attractive did not mean she would fall for his charms.

'That good, huh?' he said with a lazy smile.

Ugh, he was charming. Charming enough, in fact, that his exploits with female tourists were practically legendary. So why he kept hanging around her bookstore was still a mystery to Hazel.

'You scared me.'

'Clearly.'

Her heart was racing, and only partially because she'd been caught reading smut during work hours. The other reason was because ... well, because Noah was smiling at her like that again.

She couldn't really figure it out. Noah was objectively very handsome, she could admit that. And, objectively, very much not her type. She also knew for a fact that she was not

his type, mainly because she actually lived in Dream Harbor, so she found it curious that he was always smiling at her like he knew something she didn't.

Annie said he had the hots for her, but Hazel knew that was absurd. No one, not even her handful of ex-boyfriends, had had the hots for her. Hazel was cute. She could admit that. Cute in like a koala-napping-in-a-tree kinda way. Not cute in a I-want-to-get-in-her-pants kinda way. And that was fine. She'd made her peace with it.

But Noah was still staring at her like *that*.

She turned and went to pick up the book, keeping the cover carefully hidden against her chest. 'Did you need something?' she asked, ignoring the way Noah was now casually leaning against the counter watching her walk toward him.

'Uh ... maybe?'

'Maybe?'

'Yeah, I just...' His gaze flicked from her face to the shelves behind her and back again. This was a typical Noah visit. He came in every other week for a book but never seemed to know what he was looking for.

Annie said it was evidence of his having the hots for her, but Hazel still wasn't convinced. Annie said he would need to pull his pants down in the middle of the store for her to be convinced, but Hazel very much hoped that wouldn't happen.

'I just need something new to read.' He crossed his arms over his chest, his forearms flexing as he did so. Warmer weather had brought less clothing with it and now all of

Noah's tattoos were on display. Hazel's cheeks flushed at the sight of the half-naked mermaid wound around his left bicep.

This was a man with stories. So many that he'd imprinted them on his body.

Hazel cleared her throat. 'Did you enjoy the last book I gave you? *A Curse of Blood and Wolves*.'

Noah nodded, his auburn hair glinting in the late afternoon light. 'Yeah, loved it.'

'Great. We just got book two in the other day. Let me grab it.'

She'd meant to go by herself but Noah followed her down the fantasy aisle, bringing with him his heady scent of sunshine and salt. Hazel had never noticed a man's scent before. Annie would take this as evidence that Hazel had the hots for Noah.

Which would be ... silly? Futile? Adventurous.

'Here it is.'

Noah was too close when she turned around and she nearly smacked into his broad chest.

'Oops.'

'Sorry!'

Both books fell to the ground and Hazel scrambled to pick them up, but Noah was faster and he already had his hands on the half-naked pirate before she could snatch it back.

'*Love Captive*?' he asked with a cocked eyebrow.

They were both squatting in the aisle now, too close for

Hazel to avoid his eye. 'It's not mine. I mean I wasn't reading it. I was just reshelving it.'

Noah's smile grew. 'It sounds good.' He flipped to the dog-eared page. 'I thought you weren't reading it?'

'I ... uh ... well...'

His gaze landed on the highlighted line. 'Come with me, lass, if you want an adventure.'

Oh, no, that line read in Noah's deep voice was doing things to her ... hot things. What was going on today?! Hazel shook her head.

'I was just reshelving it,' she repeated as she snatched it back and stood before Noah could read any more and make everything worse.

'But someone marked it up,' he said, standing and dwarfing her in the process. Why did he have to be so big and smell so good? He was confusing her and she didn't like it.

'I know.'

'So someone just marked it up and then put it back on the shelf?'

'Yes.'

'Weird.'

'I know, and they didn't even put it back in the right spot.' She shuffled past him, avoiding contact with his large, good-smelling body and made her way back to the relative safety of the front of the store.

Noah followed. 'Almost like they wanted you to find it.'

Hazel stopped and spun to face him. They nearly

crashed again, but Noah skidded to a stop, too. 'Why would you say that?'

He shrugged. 'Don't know. Just seems like a clue or something.'

'A clue?' Hazel narrowed her eyes. 'Noah, are you screwing with me?'

'Screwing with you?' He looked genuinely confused but Hazel wasn't buying it.

'Did you mess up my books as some kind of joke? You'll have to pay for this if you did.' She waved the book in front of him as his brows lifted higher on his head.

'Of course I didn't. I wouldn't ... mess with you. And I certainly wouldn't mess with your books.' He made a little 'x' over his chest. 'Cross my heart. Fisherman's honor.'

It was Hazel's turn to raise an eyebrow. 'Fisherman's honor? I don't think that's a thing.'

'Well it is now.'

'Hmm.'

'I still think it might be a clue, though.'

'Why would someone leave me a clue?'

He shrugged again but excitement lit up the light brown of his eyes. 'For an adventure, I guess.'

An adventure.

Noah grinned and Hazel's heart picked up speed and the book in her hands called to her and maybe it was a clue.

At the very least maybe it would make a good story.

Chapter Two

Noah had the hots for Hazel Kelly. It surprised him almost as much as it seemed to surprise her, but he did. She wasn't like any of the other women he'd been with. Take today, for example. With her loose button-down shirt tucked into her high waisted pants, a string of delicate gold chains around her neck, and a pair of cute little flat shoes on her feet, she looked ... well, she looked way too good for him. She looked smart and sophisticated. And don't even get him started on that cloud of soft curls around her face, or the adorable way she pushed her glasses up her nose, like she was doing now as she stared at him like he was some kind of alien species.

He had it bad.

Like *real* bad.

Which hadn't happened to him, well, ever. Noah liked women. A lot. And at least so far in his life, he'd been pretty good at attracting them. But he'd never felt like this before.

Which was unfortunate because he was fairly certain Hazel didn't feel the same.

She usually looked at him like she was right now. Like she couldn't quite figure him out. At least that feeling was mutual. He didn't know how much more obvious he could be. He was in here every other week doing his best to charm and flirt his way into her good graces but it didn't seem to be working.

Although, he had read more books in the past few months than in his entire life, so that was a bonus.

He should probably just be honest and ask her out or something. It had worked for Logan, eventually anyway, and now he had Jeanie and they were sickeningly happy together and all that.

But they were different. Hazel was different. And Noah was completely out of his element.

'An adventure?' she asked, startling him out of his swirling thoughts about her cuteness and his ineptitude.

'Yeah. I don't know. Maybe someone is leaving you clues, like a scavenger hunt or something.'

'Hmm.' Hazel frowned, a little crease forming between her brows. 'Seems unlikely.'

'Maybe. But unlikely things happen all the time.'

Like you agreeing to go on a date with me sometime...

He almost said it, almost asked her but then she was moving briskly back behind the counter and ringing up his new book.

'Is this all?'

'Uh ... yep. That's all.'

'Twenty-one ninety-five, please.'

That definitely wasn't all but Noah handed over his card. There was no way this smart, adorable woman would want to date him. There was a reason Noah went for girls that were only here for the summer, tourists and one-night stands. Noah was good for fun, for a fling. Not for serious girls like Hazel Kelly.

She handed him his book and his fingers brushed against hers. She held his gaze for a breath and in that moment Noah could almost believe that she felt it too, the spark. But then she looked away and was saying goodbye and his feet were moving him toward the door.

Girls like Hazel Kelly were not for him. He was at least smart enough to know that.

He stepped out of the bookstore and into the heat of the day. It was the first sunny day after a wet July and the town had swung directly back into summer mode. Summer was short in New England. If you didn't dive right in, you'd miss it entirely. Even though it was August, Main Street was still decked out from its Fourth of July celebration, with red-white-and-blue banners and flags on most stores. Summer had always been Noah's favorite season. Summer meant the beach and endless ice cream and no school. Freedom. He'd never been good at school. Too much sitting. He'd never been good at sitting. Or staying in one place for too long. After he left home, he hadn't stayed anywhere for more than a month or two, picking up and leaving once he got bored. But something about Dream Harbor, had him sticking around. At least for the moment.