

Desire, Baby by Taylor Essem

What the hell are you doing here, Ella?

It's three in the morning. Pitch black. Bloody cold.

Breaking and entering, that's what.

Miles away from my warm bed, and completely out of my depth, I'm frantically trying to scale a wall into the grounds of a mansion house in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea; and I'm falling headfirst into the unknown with no safety net.

This will end in tears.

Usually, I'm very respectful of private property, especially private property plastered with signs such as *No Entry, Keep Out, Trespassers will be Prosecuted, Danger of Death*, etcetera. But on this occasion, I've made an exception for the love of art: Art Deco.

At the other side of the wall is Luxe House—an abandoned hidden gem I simply have to see in the flesh before its destruction. This Art Deco beauty has just been given the death sentence. In a month's time, it's a demolition site. Its golden guts ripped out. The bold masculine lines and the sweeping feminine curves of its stunning figure smashed to smithereens. The Art Deco spirit bulldozed to kingdom come.

Architectural rape and pillage.

I've worked long and hard on the campaign to save this national treasure from some faceless, heartless American real estate magnate hiding behind the name of *Hunter International Property Enterprises*. But now the battle's over. The mercenary bastard won. Planning permission rubber-stamped to replace a magnificent Art Deco mansion resplendent in two acres of parkland with a gazillion dollar plot of characterless penthouse skyscrapers for the seriously tasteless uber-rich.

For a man like Hunter, this masterpiece of design is simply a blip on the landscape of prime real estate. He can purchase and destroy at will. His greed makes my blood boil and my heart weep.

Editor's Critique:

The opening paragraphs are gripping and pique the reader's interest from the word "Go." We loved the way readers are thrown into the heart of the action – we could almost feel ourselves on the wall next to Ella! Introducing her character in this moment of action and change allows the reader to get a real sense of her independent and feisty nature and sets us up to be rooting for her from start to finish.

One thing that we would caution you to be wary of is the tone of the language. The combination of phrases such as "death sentence", "destruction", "golden guts ripped out", "smashed to smithereens", "bulldozed to kingdom come", "architectural rape and pillage", "mercenary bastard" and "destroy at will" risks making this first page feel a bit too drastic and stark and doesn't leave the reader with the uplifting, aspirational feel we would hope to see. We would encourage you to look for opportunities to scale back some of the more negative language and ensure that you're showing the reader how Ella feels rather than telling them. This will allow you more of an opportunity to hit that uplifting note that will encourage readers to read on.

In addition, the last line is of great significance as this is what will or will not spur your reader to turn the page – so make sure it counts! "His greed makes my blood boil and my heart weep" risks falling a bit too close to melodrama and doesn't capitalise on the opportunity to hint at the romance or (positive) tension still to come. At their heart, Harlequin stories are romances and are escapist destinations for readers, so use your opening page to reel them in and leave them desperate to find out what happens next!