

A TABLE *by the* WINDOW

A Novel of Family Secrets and Heirloom Recipes



HILLARY MANTON LODGE

Praise for
A Table by the Window

“Food writer Juliette D’Alisa adores her temperamental, trilingual family of restaurateurs, but she could do without their bossy skepticism of her online love interest who’s so unlike them. Rainy, windy Portland has never felt quite as warm as it does when Juliette navigates long-distance romance, career decisions, and a genealogical mystery. A delectable tale from Hillary Manton Lodge, *A Table by the Window* includes recipes that are like a warm welcome to the D’Alisa family table.”

—MEG MOSELEY, author of *Gone South* and *When Sparrows Fall*

“Warm, witty, and a culinary delight! Hillary Manton Lodge’s crisp writing reminds me of a vintage romantic comedy but with contemporary appeal as the story unfolds with perfect pacing and recipes to make you drool. More than once I found myself wishing I had a pastry chef in my own kitchen. Wonderfully romantic in all the best ways!”

—CARLA STEWART, award-winning author of *Chasing Lilacs*
and *Sweet Dreams*

“Not since *Under the Tuscan Sun* have I read a book that I both tasted and felt to such an enchanting degree. Author Hillary Manton Lodge has woven a captivating tale of one woman’s quest to discover not only herself, but the truths behind an old-world family legacy. With a touch of whimsy, the perfect helping of romance, and a hearty sprinkle of laugh-out-loud humor, *A Table by the Window* is a delight.”

—JOANNE BISCHOF, award-winning author of the Cadence
of Grace series

“An endearing, smart, must-read novel! *A Table by the Window* is a delicious tale that had me slowing down so I could savor it longer. Major props to Hillary

Manton Lodge for not only taking me on a beautiful journey alongside Juliette, but for making a non-foodie like myself want to take up a new hobby.”

—KATIE GANSHERT, award-winning author of *Wildflowers*
from Winter and Wishing on Willows

“Hillary Manton Lodge combines a perfect voice, endearing characters, and delectable recipes into a heart-winning story. *A Table by the Window* hooked me from the first page to the very last word. Bravo, Hillary!”

—LESLIE GOULD, best-selling and Christy Award–winning author

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WATERBROOK
P R E S S

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For Danny—I'm glad we clicked.





Life is a combination of magic and pasta.

—FEDERICO FELLINI

I can't believe she left you the prep table," my brother Nico groused as he and my oldest brother, Alex, carried the piece up the stairs to my apartment. "That's a solid French oak cutting service. And that wood inlay? It's unbelievable work. Nice and tall too. Don't have to stoop. I hate that—chopping vegetables and getting a crick in my back. Too young for that. Great storage for knives and tools beneath. They don't make them like this anymore."

"Have you noticed that Nico hasn't said anything about the cameo and pearls?" I asked Alex with a wink.

Alex winked back, adjusting his grip on the table to keep it level.

"Really, Juliette"—Nico fixed me with his sincerest expression—"I'd buy it from you. I'm serious."

"I'm serious about keeping it," I said, keeping my voice light. My second-oldest brother was nothing if not stubborn. "Be careful around that corner."

One last step. "But it's the perfect prep table!"

"I know it's the perfect prep table." I held the door open while my brothers carried the piece inside. "That's why I want to keep it. Watch the back left corner; it's awfully close to the railing."

I breathed a sigh of relief once the table touched down in my kitchen without injuries.

"But I'm a chef!" my brother beseeched, splaying his hands in old-school

Italian style. “I was nominated for a James Beard award—I chop more than you do!”

“First,” I began, wishing for a moment that I wasn’t dealing with the piquant blend that was our father’s Italian persistence and our French mother’s stubbornness, “I don’t think anyone’s going to forget about your nomination anytime soon. Second, I’m not going to argue with you about who chops more,” I said, trying to keep my frustration at bay. “I like the table. *Grand-mère* willed me the table. I’m not going to argue with our grandmother’s last wishes. *C’est la vie.*”

Nico muttered something unflattering in Italian. Alex and I exchanged glances.

I breathed deep to keep my emotions in check. “I have homemade ice cream in my freezer,” I said. “I used my Tahitian vanilla beans. And I still have the lavender caramel sauce I made last week.”

As I suspected, my more tempestuous brother thawed by the time I served up the ice cream, complete with caramel sauce and a shortbread cookie for kicks.

My brothers are notoriously easy to placate.

“I’m sorry I was...insensitive about the table,” Nico said around a bite of cookie. “I like the table. But you should have it. You were *Grand-mère*’s favorite anyway.”

“No, I wasn’t,” I protested, then took a bite of ice cream myself. “I just saw her more because I worked the register at the patisserie all through high school.”

“You were also the one she taught her pastry secrets to,” Alex pointed out. “But that’s all right.”

I shook my head. “She loved all of us. I know she did. I can’t...I can’t believe she’s gone.”

Nico lifted his spoon. “This is her ice cream recipe, isn’t it?”

“Of course.”

“She’d like that.” He flipped the spoon over, consumed the contents, and held out the empty utensil. “*Salute!*”

“*Salute*,” Alex and I echoed, clinking spoons together out of respect for ice cream and ice cream makers, past and present.



I gave the prep table a more thorough inspection after my brothers left. It had been in Grand-mère’s kitchen for as long as I could remember; I used to perch beneath it as a child.

Having it in my own kitchen was bittersweet and unsettling all at once. I could be jocular with my brothers about it, but on the inside I was still heartsick from the loss. Two months had passed since she had succumbed to a stroke. Most of the grief had subsided, but a familiar ache had taken residence in my heart.

While Grand-mère had certainly been getting on in years, her death took my family by surprise. Though her estate had always been well organized legally, none of us were emotionally prepared to deal with what she had left behind: a small but profitable bakery, the apartment above, and an extraordinarily fluffy bichon frise named Gigi.

The bakery had closed and its employees quickly hired elsewhere—no one trained pastry chefs like Grand-mère. Gigi now resided with my parents, and the prep table resided with me. I redirected my focus to the table. The cutting board was four inches thick, with a spacious three-by-four-foot work surface. Half of it was oak, the other half an inset slab of marble, perfect for making pastry or candy.

After our *grand-père* passed away in 1976, Grand-mère left France and moved to Portland to be near my parents—they had, after all, created Sophie, the first grandchild. But rather than live out her golden years wrapped up in the lives of her offspring, Grand-mère opened a bakery—La Petite Chouquette—in an old house on the edge of Portland’s Pearl District. The name of the bakery roughly translated to “The Little Pastry Puff,” in reference to the small, round pastries that were used in profiteroles and croquebouches.

I knew the prep table was one of the pieces Grand-mère had brought from France. She'd used it in her apartment kitchen—I remembered her rolling out slab after slab of *pâte brisée* over its surface.

There were two drawers beneath the cutting board on either side of the table; strong legs curved into a flat base with two more deep drawers. Casters on the bottom allowed the table to roll, though it took effort. The piece was very, very heavy.

For a moment, I felt guilty for keeping the table. After all, I was the sibling who went to culinary school, got scared off by the realities of a commercial kitchen where I wasn't related to half of the staff, and hightailed it into restaurant management before migrating into food writing. I certainly spent a fair amount of time in the kitchen, but Nico was right—he cooked more.

But I remembered Grand-mère teaching me to use a chef's knife, how many turns to give croissant dough for maximum flakiness, how to pipe a *crème anglaise* filling into a *chouquette*. No, there were too many memories, too many afternoons spent bent over that table for me to be able to part with it.

Besides, Nico had inherited Grand-mère's Alsatian earthenware, as well as her copper cookware.

I pulled my thoughts away from my brother and back toward the table. The drawers were still full; inside, I found an egg timer shaped like the Arc de Triomphe, a wooden-handled French herb chopper, an assortment of keys, embroidered tea towels, cheesecloths, and a set of seven linen napkins, yellowed but intact.

So many memories.

The last drawer, however, stuck when I tried to pull it open, no matter how hard I tugged at the faceted glass knob. Curiosity got the better of me, so I reached for my metal spatula and wedged it with care into the crevices around the drawer, loosening whatever age and dust held it in place. With another sharp yank, the drawer released instantly, nearly clattering to the floor.

Inside there was a thin blue cookbook, written in French, and thirty or so recipe cards scattered at the bottom of the drawer.

The book I instantly recognized as Grand-mère's favorite—the one she referred to when she couldn't remember an ingredient or measurement from a classic recipe. I cast a longing glance at the cards. There wasn't time to look at them, not really. Not with the two articles for the newspaper I had due.

The recipes would wait. Lunch break over, I gathered my things and readied myself to get back to work, grabbing at the last moment the choker-length strand of Grand-mère's pearls from my dresser.

With her table in my kitchen and pearls against my skin, she felt just a little bit closer than before.



Marti's phone call woke me up the next morning. She was wondering if I could bring in some bagel samples from the new bakery that opened in the Hawthorne District.

I lived thirty minutes and a bridge crossing from Portland's trendy Hawthorne neighborhood in the southeast, but the fact that I'd be at least an hour late to the office would matter less than the necessary job of bagel testing. The fact that one of the other staff writers, Sam, lived much closer likely hadn't occurred to Marti, but I wasn't about to attempt negotiations.

Marti was my editor. She kept spices in her desk—some of them under lock and key—and a full-sized fridge in her office. Every restaurant manager within the Portland metro area knew what she looked like and how she liked her steak cooked. At five feet one, one hundred and ten pounds, she was the sort of force people went out of their way to please.

Working in the food department meant that every day was a Marti party—if the woman wanted bagels, bagels she would have. If she wanted to do a full-page spread on Ethiopian cuisine, we would learn everything about it, as fast as we could. Life at the paper, under Marti, could be fun. It could also be a little dizzying, if not frustrating. But for every one writer on staff, there were another twenty freelancers and journalism interns vying for one of the

positions in the Food and Dining section. More than that, I owed Marti for seeking me out and giving me a direction when I couldn't find a place within my beloved restaurant business.

She was the one who'd followed my food blog and suggested a column, which had later turned into a staff writing position with just enough benefits and vacation time to earn the title. She was the one who had passed on a cookbook ghostwriting job, which had turned into a somewhat reliable part-time job. Against the odds, I'd carved a strange little niche for myself, and leaving it all behind wasn't in my immediate future.

Restaurants may have been my first love, but that didn't mean we were meant to be.

Marti chased out my mental wanderings when I arrived at work. "Bagels!" She clapped her hands together as if I'd just brought her a surprise. "What was the shop like?"

"Like a bakery in the Hawthorne District—handcrafted goods, upcycled furniture and décor, filled with people far more hip than me."

She lifted a bagel from the bag and sniffed it. "Thoughts on staying power?"

"Judging from the bagels alone, two years. The ciabatta looked good—"

"Nobody's cared about ciabatta for five years."

"True. The place was nice, but maybe not as special as I'd hoped for. It didn't take me by surprise."

"I hear that. Let me try a bagel." She picked one out of the bag and sniffed it, then closed her eyes and took a bite. She chewed for a brief moment before her eyes widened and then narrowed. "What was that?"

"The bakery special."

"Well, the bakery special's especially...spirited. I need a drink." She shivered. "Nasty. What else have you got in there? I need to whitewash my palate."

"Orange poppy seed and sweet potato."

"Give them to me," she said, holding out her hand. "There's nowhere to go

but up. Speaking of, about your molasses article—I need more schmaltz. I want Grandma’s kitchen with a hint of mothball nostalgia.” She checked her watch. “Can you get the piece to me in a couple hours?”

“Of course,” I said, as I tried to reconcile mothballs and molasses in my head.

“And Tenth Street Bistro just changed chefs.”

“I heard. Lunch tomorrow?”

“I’m meeting with the higher-ups, but you and Linn can make a trip of it. Where are you with the organic farming piece?”

“Almost ready. One more interview should fill it out.”

“Until then, make me hungry!”

My mind continued to work over the mothball and molasses issue. Over the years, I’d become skilled at giving Marti whatever spin she wanted, even if it wasn’t my own vision for the piece. As I walked back to my desk, I reminded myself that I had a paying job as a food writer, a position about as difficult to land as prima ballerina in a paying dance company. I swallowed my pride and conjured up all the fuzzy joy I could from a white-sugar by-product. Gingerbread? Maybe gingerbread was key—everybody loves the idea of it, even if they don’t actually eat it.

After my day had finished and I’d satisfied Marti’s schmaltz craving, I packed up my things and left for home. Winds from the gorge pounded rain against my windshield. Portland, Oregon, was not famous for its good weather. Even with the spring equinox technically around the corner, there was no weather-related hope in sight.

A week before, local scientists had been wringing their hands over the season’s lack of rainfall. But in my twenty-eight years in Portland, I knew my city was plenty capable of producing enough precipitation to make up for lost time.

As much as I craved a giant pot of tea in my apartment, I stopped by my mailbox first. Inside I found the usual suspects—catalogs, bills, promotions. A reminder that my lease would be up in two months. A coupon from Sur La

Table. I thumbed a suspicious square envelope made of heavy linen paper tucked among them.

Safe in my kitchen, I opened the envelope.

I shouldn't have felt bullied by the piece of paper on my table, but there it was. A save-the-date card from an old college friend. A glance at the calendar told me I was free.

Dang.

I didn't mean that. Not really. Of course I wanted to celebrate my friend's happiness. Just like I celebrated the happiness of so many others—including my sisters, Sophie and Caterina. At two years shy of thirty, I was old hat at celebrating other people's happiness.

Before she passed, my grandmother would pat my hand and tell me that someday I would meet the right young man and that I should hold on to him with my whole heart. She'd always said it like that, from the time I worked her register with my pink and yellow braces until I was an adult at Caterina's wedding. My whole heart. For years I waited, believing that my grandmother's prediction would prove true, and for a little while, I thought it might. I was still young—barely twenty-three at the time. Nico had his own restaurant, and I was bursting with ideas for him about marketing and décor and menu. Nico, five years older, had no intention of listening to his baby sister, even if I'd successfully rebranded and revitalized three other restaurants belonging to family friends. Instead, he wanted me to keep quiet and manage the front of the house.

Nico's sous-chef and best friend, Éric, however, had listened. Originally from Morocco and seven years my senior, Éric was too old for me at the time, but I didn't care. He was handsome and talented, spoke beautiful French, and liked what I had to say about his food.

He took me to restaurants all over Portland, delighting in introducing me to all kinds of foreign cuisine. We ate pho and curry, octopus and tagine, sashimi and sopaipillas. I gained five pounds, and I'd never been happier.

Of course it couldn't last.

No man I'd met since Éric had ever measured up, whether it was to Éric himself or my memory of him. Our relationship ended four winters ago, but its echoes still resonated in my personal life.

Or lack of a personal life—echoes are the loudest in empty spaces.

I tucked the save-the-date card away and with it my own feelings of regret. Instead, I busied myself with dinner preparations. In one pot, I set the red pepper sauce to reheat gently. I filled a second pot with water, threw in some sea salt, and had just placed it on the burner when my cell phone rang.

"Etta, ya got a minute?"

I wedged the phone between my shoulder and ear while opening my pantry to look for pasta. "For you, Nico, I might even have two. What's going on?"

"Are you home?"

"Yes..."

"Can I come over?"

"Are you going to explain why you're being evasive?"

"Tell you in a minute," Nico said, just as my doorbell rang.

~ RED PEPPER PASTA ~

1 lb pasta of choice (I like campanelle and farfalle at the moment)

4 red peppers

1 large shallot

2 to 3 cloves garlic

Crème fraîche

Heavy cream (optional)

Red pepper flakes

Some sugar

Some salt

Some milk
Grated parmesan cheese (pecorino works too)
Fresh arugula, for garnish

Note: This recipe is not particularly...precise. But we're not baking here. It's okay to make things the way you want them in a sauce like this.

Roast the peppers. This can take a bit, so have handy a book or your phone or your child or something. You can use an oven, placing the peppers on a baking sheet covered with foil and placing them under the broiler, top rack of the oven. A hot grill works too. Once the tops get nice and blackened, turn the peppers and repeat until they're completely black and blistered. Using tongs, place the peppers in a Ziploc bag and let them sweat for a while. You can alternatively place them in a bowl and cover the bowl with plastic wrap.

While the peppers are sweating, chop the shallot and garlic. In a medium saucepan, heat some olive oil over medium heat. Add the shallot and garlic. Throw in a pinch or two of red pepper flakes—if you like things spicier, use more. Sauté until the shallot is golden but not dry. Remove from heat.

Pull out your blender. Slip the blackened skins off the peppers and scoop out the seeds; don't worry about having little tiny bits of charred pepper skin in there—it's good for flavor. Stick your finished peppers in your blender. Add the shallot and garlic mixture and purée.

When the mixture is quite smooth, transfer it back to the saucepan. To get every bit of sauce from the blender, add about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of milk to the blender, swirl it around, and pour the liquid into the pot. Add a couple of dollops of crème fraîche. Add some heavy

cream (or don't, if you prefer). Stir, and bring sauce to a gentle simmer.

Taste it. At this point, I added some salt and about $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon or so of sugar to bring out the sweetness of the peppers. Maybe even a whole teaspoon. Not a lot, but enough.

Let it sit on the burner on low while you cook the pasta.

Rinse and drain the pasta, and add to the red pepper sauce. Stir to combine. Serve with grated cheese and snipped arugula over the top. You could also put some extra crème fraîche on the top, if you're not afraid of the extra calories.

Serves 6





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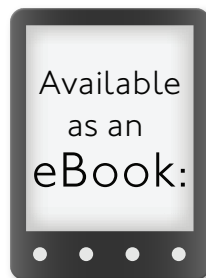
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