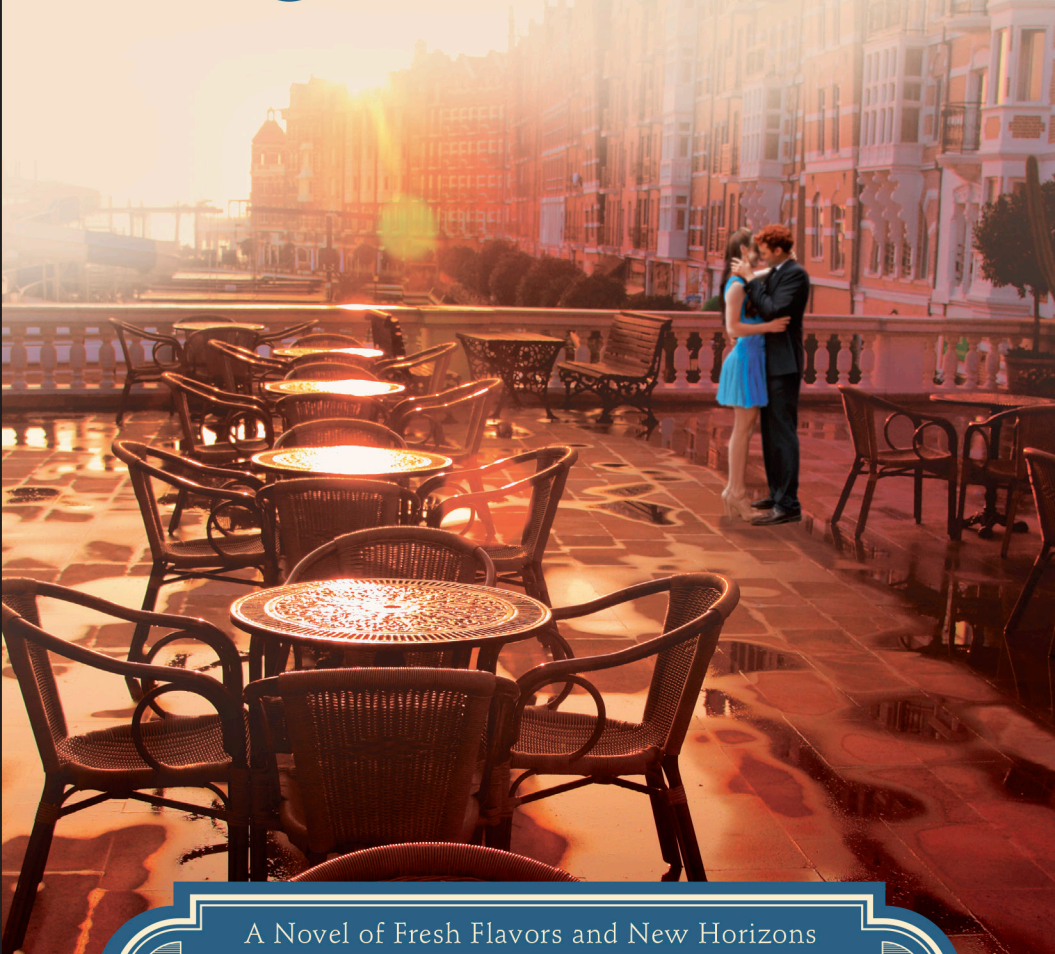


RESERVATIONS *for* TWO



A Novel of Fresh Flavors and New Horizons



HILLARY MANTON LODGE

Praise for
Reservations for Two

“Lodge has created yet another sumptuous story—full of intrigue, humanity, tantalizing tastes, and true love, in its myriad forms. She gracefully leads us into kitchens, restaurants, and hearts, not to mention sensorial visits to France, Italy, and the tensions of WWII Paris. Poised on a knife’s edge, Lodge left me yearning for her next story and for time in the kitchen to test some of her tempting recipes.”

—KATHERINE REAY, author of the critically acclaimed
Dear Mr. Knightley and *Lizzy & Jane*

“*Reservations for Two* is a foodie’s delight, peppered with great dishes and references to European culinary landmarks. Lodge’s sparkling dialogue adds levity to the book’s more serious moments and kept me flipping pages well into the night. But fair warning . . . readers will be hard pressed to choose between turning to the next chapter and running to the kitchen to try one of the many delectable recipes.”

—CARLA LAUREANO, RITA Award–winning author
of *Five Days in Skye* and *London Tides*

“Endearing, witty, delectable. Hillary Manton Lodge’s second installment in the Two Blue Doors series is as delicious as her first, even for a non-foodie like me! I especially appreciated the seamless transition from Juliette’s current life and travels to her grand-mère’s WWII past, a captivating angle that added the perfect hint of mystery.”

—MELISSA TAGG, author of *From the Start*

“Through a clutch of discovered letters, which I read as compulsively as did our heroine, Juliette D’Alisa, and her large Franco-Italian family, we discover that circumstances can be as bitter as baking powder or as delightful as powdered sugar. Both, however, are required to produce the very best madeleines, as well as a deeply satisfying life. *Reservations for Two* is a touching, page-turning

novel, which brings home that each day, no matter its troubles, can be filled with good things, especially *chocolat et bisous*, chocolate and kisses, if we freely offer them to those we love. I read, wanting happiness, ultimately, for the delightful Juliette, as much as she wanted it for everyone else.”

—SANDRA BYRD, author of *Let Them Eat Cake*

“Hillary Manton Lodge has done it again! From the exquisite prose to the twists and turns of a delicious—pun intended—plot, *Reservations for Two* is a complete delight. Though this story picks up where Lodge’s freshman novel *A Table by the Window* left off, this book easily stands alone as a do-not-miss treat! From the lavender fields of Provence to Paris, Memphis, and the Pacific Northwest; from recipes for Rosemary Fig Focaccia to Nasturtium and Spring Greens Salad; from the 1930s to the present . . . this novel is a delight for the senses, a trip through time and kitchens, far and near. Kudos to Lodge.”

—KATHLEEN Y’BARBO, best-selling author of *The Secret Lives*
of Will Tucker series and *Firefly Summer*

“With a palate of rich characters, vibrant flavors, and vintage-inspired romance, Hillary Manton Lodge’s *Reservations for Two* is a feast for the senses. From the fragrant lavender fields of Provence to Tuscany’s golden hills, Lodge takes the reader on a journey that is about both discovery and coming home. It’s *très chic* and enchanting—a recipe of *amour* for the reader’s heart!”

—KRISTY CAMBRON, author of *The Butterfly and the Violin*
and *A Sparrow in Terezin*

“Hillary Lodge has done it again! Picking up where *A Table by the Window* left off, *Reservations for Two* is another delectable story filled with romance, intrigue, witty dialogue, exquisite prose, and delicious recipes. This one is sure to charm readers every bit as much as the first!”

—KATIE GANSHERT, award-winning author of *A Broken*
Kind of Beautiful

RESERVATIONS
for TWO

BOOKS BY HILLARY MANTON LODGE

A Table by the Window

RESERVATIONS *for* TWO

A Novel of Fresh Flavors and New Horizons



HILLARY MANTON LODGE



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For Danny, who is constant.



While there is tea, there is hope.

—ARTHUR WING PINERO

*T*he Provençal breeze tousled the ends of my hair as I tried to organize my thoughts. “I’m beginning to figure out what I want,” I told Neil, my voice echoing slightly over the cell connection.

“Oh?”

“When you hang up and listen to the message I was leaving, you’ll hear all about it.”

He chuckled, and my heart squeezed in my chest. Neil McLaren had the best laugh I’d ever heard—low and warm. If I closed my eyes, I could see the way his eyes crinkled at the corners, the way his lips turned up.

Not that I’d gotten to spend that much time looking at his eyes during our on-again, off-again long-distance relationship, but his short visit to Portland had left a lasting impression.

It was a laugh I never thought I’d hear again.

“You want me to hang up?” he asked.

“Nope, never.”

“So why don’t you tell me what you want?”

I shrugged and looked out onto the lavender waving in the breeze. “I want the impossible. I want my job at the restaurant, and I want to be with you.”

“Cool.”

“Cool?” I lifted an eyebrow. “What are you, fifteen?”

Neil sighed. “Sometimes I feel like it.”

“The restaurant—I gave up my job, my normal, stable-ish job at the paper

to open this restaurant with my brother. I've always, always wanted to run a restaurant, and I'm not ready to give that up."

"I wouldn't want that for you."

"But—," I started, ready to remind him that he worked in Memphis and that instantaneous travel remained a figment of *Star Trek*'s imagination.

"Here's the thing," Neil said, interrupting me. "I have vacation days I haven't taken because all I've done for the last few years is work. I have thousands of frequent flyer miles built up, just sitting around."

"Aiming to get your name on the side of a plane?"

"Not yet. I'd rather use them. And I'm at a good place to pause at work. Do you want company?"

All of my counterarguments about work, travel, and romance dissolved in an instant. "What?"

"I'll fly out there. You want us to be together? So do I, and spending time in Europe doesn't sound so bad."

"It's not a vacation," I told him. "It's a trip to see family, when I'm not meeting with investors or poking around in my grandmother's history—though I suppose that's still family related. There will be family dinners and people with opinions. And if you decide to come with me to Italy, those opinions will get even louder."

"Do you want me to come?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then I'll see you there."

I snorted. "You don't even know where I am."

"I know you're at Chateau de l'Abeille. I also know how to use Google."

"Well . . . fine. Be all smart like that."

"I love you, Juliette. I want you to know that."

Joy blossomed inside my heart. "I love you, Neil."

"Guess what?"

"What?"

"I'll see you soon."



From: Letizia Adessi, ladessi@cucinadiletizia.it

To: Me, jdalisa@twobluedoors.com

Ciao, Juliette!

Can't wait to see you! You must remind me when you are arriving on the train. Nonno and the rest of the family are delighted to see you, though we're very sad that your parents won't be able to make the journey. How is your mother? And when does your new restaurant open?

Letizia

From: Me, jdalisa@twobluedoors.com

To: Letizia, ladessi@cucinadiletizia.it

Dear Letizia—

Looking forward to seeing you as well! I'll be a few days with my mother's cousin here in Provence, then planning to take the train to Rome. I have a few scheduled meetings with suppliers for the restaurant, but the rest of my time is all yours. The plan is still to travel together to Montalcino for Nonno's party, yes?

My parents are doing okay for the time being. Mom's cancer was diagnosed at stage three, so she's had surgery as well as chemo, with radiation planned next. With my mom's health we're hopeful, but the doctors have warned us that ovarian cancer is usually chronic, and never really goes into remission. But we have hope.

My father is having a difficult time, but he's a wonderful caretaker, and the rest of us are filling the gaps as we can, both at home and at D'Alisa & Elle. Business is doing okay at the restaurant, at least.

The preparations at Two Blue Doors (the new restaurant) are going well—we're looking to open on July 25th. It's been a few

years since his last restaurant closed, so Nico's excited to have his own place again, though if he changes the menu one more time, I might have to murder him (just kidding—they're always great changes. He really is a talented chef. It's just that the ordering budget is something Nico views as an abstract idea, rather than a hard and fast set of numbers).

I've been living above the restaurant in the apartment, along with my friend Clementine, who's the pastry chef—that's been fun, and waking up to pastry experiments has been lovely. With everything on my to-do list for the opening, I haven't had time to miss working at the newspaper, though I do wish I saw work friends more often.

I just got to Montagnac, where I'll be staying with my mother's cousin Sandrine, her husband Auguste, and my great-aunt Cécile for a few days. It's a lovely spot—the family chateau where my grandmother was raised and my mother grew up. Now it's an inn as well as a lavender farm—Sandrine and Auguste run the place. I'll be sure to take pictures to share. And if my plans shift at all, I'll let you know as soon as possible. There are a couple variables here (one in particular) that I'm not entirely sure about.

Can't wait to see you! Is there anything I can bring from here for Nonno's party? Give my love to everyone!

Juliette



I spent the next thirty-six hours expecting to get a phone call, an e-mail, or a carrier pigeon telling me that it wasn't going to work out, that Neil wouldn't make it for any number of wholly practical reasons.

There was no denying the chemistry we'd felt when we were together, but the distance had taken its toll, and we'd broken up.

But now we were back together, or as together as two people who had bro-

ken up over the phone and gotten back together over the phone could be. Our breakup before my flight to France still felt fresh—fresh enough that I expected news that Neil had come to his senses more than I expected the man himself.

As the hours passed, though, my phone didn't buzz with a text or e-mail revealing that he'd changed his mind, that some immunology crisis had emerged, that an unexpected summer tornado had hit Memphis.

And I knew, because I'd checked.

Instead, I was setting the table for lunch when I saw a moving cloud of dust come down the long road toward the chateau.

"Either that's the German guests who haven't checked in yet," said my cousin Sandrine, watching the window from over my shoulder, "or your *copain* has arrived."

"Eh?" her husband Auguste intoned, setting aside the radio he'd been tinkering with to have a look out the window for himself.

We watched together as Neil—all six feet and three inches of him—unfolded from his tiny rented Fiat.

"*Ah, c'est l'Américain,*" Auguste noted, turning to me. "*Bonne chance.*"

"Oh, *la.*" Sandrine pressed a hand to her heart. "*Très beau.* How did you meet?"

My heart fluttered with happiness. "The Internet," I said, my eyes trained on Neil. The moment he spied me through the window, a grin spread across his face.

I raced out the door and into his arms. "You came!"

Neil pressed a kiss to my forehead and held me close. "I told you I would," he said. "All you had to do was ask."

I looked up at him, taking in his gold hair, his gingery beard.

We returned to discover that the lunch table set for three had become a table set for two; Sandrine and Auguste had disappeared. Two candles flickered at the center of the table.

"I think Sandrine and Auguste feel invested in our having a happy reunion," I remarked dryly.

"I can live with that." Neil tipped my chin upward and placed a gentle kiss at the corner of my mouth.

My fingers wove into his hair as I kissed him back.

We might have stayed like that forever if the sound of Neil's stomach hadn't broken the moment. "Sorry," he said. "I ate a croissant after landing. That was a few hours ago."

"Do you want to eat lunch?"

"It smells really good," Neil admitted sheepishly.

We sat and portioned food onto our plates; Neil poured the wine Sandrine had left open, a rich, full-bodied Bordeaux. I told Neil about my time with Sandrine's mother, *Grand-tante* Cécile, how she'd remembered the war years just long enough to tell me about Gabriel Roussard, *Grand-mère's* first husband, my grandfather.

"That's incredible." He shook his head. "Really, Juliette—all of this because you found a photo in your grandmother's cookbook."

I nodded. "So now we know for sure who he was, and why he looked like a clone of Nico. And Cécile confirmed that he was a Jew. That's why their family wasn't happy about it." I shrugged. "And then Cécile got up to make tea, and when she came back—it was gone. She was gone, at least the version of her that remembered her teens."

"It'll come back."

I shot him a wry glance. "I don't want to bank on her Alzheimer's feeling cooperative. She may well not remember, at least not before we leave." I shrugged again. "I shouldn't be greedy—I still found out more in that conversation than I would have on my own. Anything more is gravy."

Neil lifted an eyebrow. "I think I know you pretty well, and I doubt you'll be satisfied with just a slice of the story. You won't stop working until you know it all, from the filling to the crust."

"That's very poetic of you."

"Thought you'd like that."

"I'm impressed." I smiled flirtatiously. "And you're right, I'm just . . . trying to pace myself. Set realistic expectations."

"Fair enough. Tell me more about who all lives here. Your great-aunt and your cousin?"

"Technically Sandrine is my mom's first cousin. Auguste is her husband,

and they manage the chateau together. Cécile is Sandrine's mother—she was Grand-mère's younger sister."

"I'd like to meet them."

I grinned. "Let's tidy up and go find them."

"Let's," Neil said, leaning in for another kiss. "But maybe not just yet."

We spent the day together, catching up on the details surrounding Two Blue Doors, my mother's health, and Neil's latest research. We explored the chateau grounds and simply enjoyed spending time together, in person.

That evening I baked a batch of lemon-scented madeleines for our evening visit with Grand-tante Cécile. Neil and I brought the cookies to her sitting room on a tray, as well as a pot of strong black tea and an appropriate number of cups and saucers.

"*Bonjour*," said Cécile, putting her paperback novel down when she saw us.

"Bonjour," I echoed back, showing her the tray. "Would you like some tea?"

"Oh yes," she said, and I stilled in cautious anticipation. Cécile's English came and went along with her memories. If she spoke English, she was more likely to remember a time when she'd used it.

We made small talk, and I gently reminded her who Neil and I were. After Cécile and I had each enjoyed a madeleine and Neil had eaten four, I ventured a question. "Where exactly did Mireille and Gabriel meet?"

"Paris," Cécile said, setting down her teacup. "Mireille wrote me letters, but kept him a secret from our parents as long as she could."

I sat up straight. "Letters?"

"*Naturellement*. Mireille and Gabriel wrote letters too, after she returned to the chateau. How else would they continue their attachment?"

"Um . . . a telephone?"

"Too expensive, calls from Paris. And besides, Papa wouldn't have it. Mail—she pretended to be writing a girlfriend she'd met in the city."

"Letters, then." I pleated my skirt between my fingers and tried my best to sound casual. "Tell me about them."

Cécile's eyes widened. "They were *very* romantic," she said, leaning forward. "Passionate. I traveled to Paris after she went back, telling our parents that I needed new clothes when really Mireille wanted me to meet him. She

married him just a couple weeks later. Everyone was shocked, of course, but not me.”

Neil squeezed my hand.

“What happened to him?” I asked. In all likelihood, I already knew the answer. “How did he die?”

“Die?” Cécile’s face went blank. “Who told you that?”

“Well . . .” My voice trailed off. Come to think of it, I had no records. I opened my mouth to say as much but Cécile interrupted.

“I had a letter just last week from Mireille. She’s with child, you know. They’re so excited. He’s dead? Are you sure?”

“No.” I patted her hand. “I must have been mistaken.”

“Never speak lightly about such things! And Mireille with child . . .” She shook her head. “*Ce serait un désastre*. They love each other so much.”

“So—Mireille and Gabriel are happy?”

“*Très joyeux*.” She shook her head. “My heart longs for a man to look at me the way Gabriel looks at her. Or,” she added, her voice coy, “the way this gentleman looks at you.”

My face turned pink. Neil winked at me.

So many emotions fought for dominance—relief, happiness, frustration. Cécile remembered Gabriel for the first time in days, but only half the story.

I crossed my legs together at the ankle and tried to reorganize my mind into a new line of questions. “So what is Gabriel’s occupation?”

“He is a pastry chef. Mireille assured Papa that he is a very important pastry chef, working at Maxim’s. Not that Papa cared.”

“What is he like?”

“Handsome—*très beau*. They look well together, he with his dark hair, Mireille with her blond curls.”

I smiled. From what I’d seen in the photo of Gabriel I’d found in Grand-mère’s cookbook, his resemblance to my brother Nico was uncanny. “And they wrote letters. Did Mireille keep them all, you suppose?”

“She kept all of the letters I wrote to her in Paris—she showed me. All tied up with a pink silk ribbon. She read them when she was lonely, she told me. I can’t imagine she would part with Gabriel’s letters.”

"Where do you think they might be?"

"I imagine she has them with her in Paris."

"Of course," I said. "When you were girls here, did she have a hiding place for things in the chateau?"

"The window seat in the north garret, of course," Cécile answered without pause. "It's where we kept all of our secrets away from Papa. The seat sticks until you know how to lift it just right."

"How is that?" Neil asked.

"I couldn't say," she said with a coy smile.

One last try. "Is there room for me to hide something? In the window seat, I mean?"

She patted my hand. "I'm sure you can find a new place to hide something, dear. And besides, you wouldn't want me to find it, would you?" Cécile leaned forward and took another madeleine from the plate. "These are very good. Mireille is such a good baker—I'd know her madeleines anywhere."

"She's very good," I agreed, while a mixture of pride and frustration stirred in my heart.



Neil and I tidied up Cécile's sitting room before we left; Sandrine arrived to assist her mother to bed. We wished them both a good evening and slipped out of Cécile's rooms and toward the rooms my grand-mère had used in her youth.

The garret above Grand-mère's rooms had been designed for use as servants' quarters, but had since become the storage nook for stray linens, pillows, lamps, and old clothes.

Neither Neil nor I spoke as we picked our path to the window. "Do you think this is it?" I asked.

"If it opens easily, I imagine not," he said. "But don't worry, I brought this." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a sturdy flathead screwdriver.

My eyes widened. "I don't want to damage anything—do you think that'll help?"

"It's a screwdriver. They can open lots of things."

"You're referencing *Doctor Who* again, aren't you?"

He winked at me. "Let's take a look."

We knelt in front of the ledge, and I removed the chintz cushion. I tried to lift the seat and it didn't budge.

"I think we've got the right one at least," Neil said, reaching for it. He jiggled the lip of the seat back and forth, and then side to side.

As he shifted it to the left, the hinge seemed to loosen. We looked at each other and grasped the seat together, pushing it to the left and then up.

"Oh," I breathed as the lid raised without argument and revealed its contents.

Letters. Bundles and bundles of letters.



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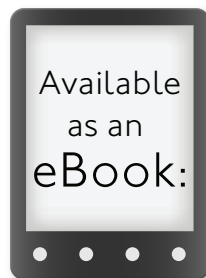
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