

A long wooden table is set for a meal in a grassy field. The table is covered with white plates, glasses, and bottles. In the background, a couple is walking away from the camera, and a small dog is running. The scene is illuminated by warm string lights hanging from trees.

TOGETHER *at the* TABLE

A Novel of Lost Love and Second Helpings



HILLARY MANTON LODGE

Praise for
A Table by the Window and *Reservations for Two*

“Juliette is beautiful, smart, talented, and comes from a rich culinary heritage. She’s also lost, confused, switching careers, and unlucky in love. *A Table by the Window* is a book for anyone who’s ever dreamed of owning a restaurant or becoming a chef or falling in love with a wonderful man. This is a story of hope and renewal, of love and understanding when it’s needed the most.”

—SUZANNE WOODS FISHER, award-winning, best-selling author
of the Inn at Eagle Hill 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 not only for taking me on a beautiful journey alongside Juliette, but also for making a non-foodie like myself want to take up a new hobby.”

—KATIE GANSHERT, award-winning author of *A Broken Kind*
of Beautiful and *The Art of Losing Yourself*

“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 and Jane*

“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*

“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*

“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 also 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

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HILLARY MANTON LODGE



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*For Sandra Bishop, who remained invested in this project
and helped give Juliette a truly beautiful ending.*

And for Danny, who is my home.

A dark, horizontally-oriented decorative box with rounded ends. Each end features a circular motif with concentric lines. The box has a double-line border.

Part I



As the days grow short, some faces grow long. But not mine. Every autumn, when the wind turns cold and darkness comes early, I am suddenly happy. It's time to start making soup again.

—LESLIE NEWMAN

Dear Neil,

I've started this e-mail several times, and I know that doesn't mean a lot because you've yet to receive a completed draft, but it's true.

We celebrated the three-month anniversary of Two Blue Doors last week. We made an event of it—Nico created three glorious specials in honor of the occasion, and Clementine made this anniversary cake with figs and meringue that still brings a smile to my face. We celebrated with our diners, then celebrated afterward with the staff.

It was bittersweet for me, because any celebration of the restaurant's opening automatically makes me think of you, and the last time we spoke.

Today was Toussaint, All Saints Day. And while patrons came in—some in costume—to celebrate Halloween, I used my break between seatings to put flowers on my mother's grave.

She passed away in September, on what would have been Chloé's first day of eighth grade. "Passed away" is such a weird term, isn't

it? I was there—we all were—when it happened. And it seemed maybe less of a passing and more of a leaving. She stopped breathing and she was gone.

You were right. You were right and you knew you were right, and I yelled at you for it. I wasn't ready for the truth, not then.

I was angry for weeks after our fight, at first hoping somewhat spitefully that my mom would pull out and go into remission and I would have been able to say, "Hi, remember me? My mom is in remission."

It's petty. I'm not denying it.

But instead she faded away so quickly, and I couldn't trust myself to write.

Sandrine was here. She really is the best of my mom's cousins. Did you know she was a nurse before she became an innkeeper? I don't remember if that came up while we were in Provence together. Anyway, she was here and stayed for a month, helping when hospice wasn't at the house. I will always be profoundly grateful to her for that.

That last week, we knew it was coming. The hospice nurses warned us that she didn't have much time left. She was in good spirits throughout—at peace with her life, aware of her future. Sometimes funny, sometimes irascible in French, but never in despair. That made it easier on the rest of us, at least as much as possible.

The memorial was nice. Mario, Adrian, and Clementine catered, bless them. The Italian aunts and uncles all flew out, which was great. They cooked and cleaned and wept with my father as he said good-bye to his wife. My father sang Lucio Dalla's "Caruso," and all of us cried buckets.

My mom hadn't finished grieving her own mother's death when she died, so I'm glad they're together. They're likely in heaven making pastry—that's what I like to think about. If I focus on that image, I can smile for half of a second before my face defaults to "blank."

I felt numb for the first month, going through the motions of work. Fortunately for me, restaurant work is a good place to lose yourself, and I'm good at it. Setup, cleanup, management—there's not a lot I'm not involved in. We all work hard but the reviews have been good, with numbers to match. The restaurant has been featured in magazines and newspapers—both regional and, lately, national—as a place to visit.

But I've realized that I only ever wanted to impress three people in my life: my mom, my dad, and my grandmother. And now that we've found success, the fact that I've lost two out of the three steals much of the joy from the success we've obtained.

Is this e-mail too maudlin? I can't tell. But maybe you can't process death without being maudlin. Read it over and let me know. I didn't mean for all this to be so long.

The whole point was to say (a) my mom died and (b) I'm sorry we ended the way we did. Truly. I think we would have both moved on, eventually, but I'm sorry things ended that way. I hope you've found someone lovely (and local), ideally someone highly conversant in bacteria.

(I don't mean that to sound condescending, only that I feel deeply unqualified for such a thing, but I do recognize that bacteria is important. You can't live in Portland and not hear a great deal about probiotics.)

Don't worry about me, I think is what I'm trying to say. I learned how much I can carry on, and there's value in that. I learned that

sometimes it doesn't matter if you move on with purpose or move on without, as long as you're moving, somehow.

I hope you're well. I hope you're happy. I pray good things for you.

Juliette

I sat back and reread what I'd written, hardly a paragraph in before I rolled my eyes. I looked over to the dark blankness outside my window and sleeping Gigi on my bed. Three in the morning hadn't done me any favors.

I moved my cursor near the Send button, but once again I felt my right hand drift, saving the draft and sending the e-mail to nest with its siblings, all curled up and cozy together in my Drafts folder.

I took a deep breath and closed my laptop, then rose from my desk before crawling into bed. Gigi sighed and stood, shook herself off, and relocated to my pillow. I placed my face next to hers.

"We're going to go for a long walk soon. You and me and Adrian. A long, proper walk on the river. We'll walk fast enough to keep warm. People will stop to pet you. You'll like it a lot."

Another flutter of the eyelids, but no other indication of anticipation. I patted her curly fur and nestled into my pillow. "That's all right. You'll enjoy it later."



I shouldn't have been surprised when I woke the next morning and realized I'd been dreaming about Neil.

We were standing in the lavender field again, and it felt . . . like I was right where I belonged and terribly out of place, all at the same time. I woke up feeling disoriented, even more so when I took my first deep breath of the day and caught a fragrant whiff of lavender.

Lavender.

My eyes opened fully, and I remembered that today was the day we'd host our first wedding at the restaurant.

I reached for my phone and checked the time: 6:34. I didn't need to get up for another twenty-six minutes, but the adrenaline from the coming event and the residual memory of Neil in the lavender field were enough to encourage my feet to find the floor and get a start on the day.

Another inhale—I really was smelling lavender, but I also remembered that the bride had requested lavender-vanilla petits fours filled with vanilla *crème anglaise*.

I showered and dressed, arranging my damp hair into a sleek braided chignon and dressing in a swingy black jersey dress, the sleeves long enough to keep off the chill. *Tomorrow*, I promised myself. Tomorrow I would wear color and walk Gigi for miles.

After a brisk walk for Gigi, I settled her into her kennel and jogged down the stairs to the Two Blue Doors kitchen.

Hard to believe we'd been open for three months—some days hard to believe we'd opened at all.

I found our pastry chef, Clementine, in the kitchen, lavender sprig in hand.

"Hey! Just finishing up," she said as she set the sprig onto the top of a tiny iced cake. "The petits fours are almost done, and then I'll put them into the walk-in to keep cold."

"They look amazing," I said, leaning over to better examine my roommate's work. Each completed petit four was meticulously iced and decorated with a small sprig of lavender on top.

"Like I said, just about done," Clementine said, pouring icing over another set of bite-sized cakes. "I wanted to get these tucked away before the guys came in and made the whole place smell like onions and seared meat."

"Good plan, though I thought they'd be here by now." I pulled out my tablet. "Actually, fifteen minutes ago."

"I'm here!" came a voice from the back door. But it was our line cook Kenny's voice, not my brother's. Or, for that matter, my boyfriend's.

"Hi, Kenny. You didn't see the chef outside, did you?"

"Yeah, he's right behind me."

"What is this, roll call?" Nico asked as he walked inside.

"We're on a tight schedule with the wedding today," I reminded him. "We've got the lunch seating and then a quick turnaround for the wedding."

"It'll be fine," he said, giving me a conciliatory pat on the shoulder.

"I know. It's just . . . first wedding we've done here. This could be a great start."

"We're certainly making good money on it—hey, Adrian!"

I turned to see Adrian, my boyfriend and my brother's sous-chef, enter through the back door.

"Morning," he said with a friendly nod to Nico. "And morning to you," he said to me, dropping a short kiss on my lips.

Nico crossed his arms. "What did I say about kitchen PDA?"

"What, that applied to us?" Adrian held his palms out in a show of mock confusion. "I thought that was about keeping a respectful distance with the radishes."

"Have a good lunch service," I said. "Be extra careful with the petits fours that'll be in the walk-in."

"They're almost done," Clementine called out.

"Good, because I need your station space," Nico called back.

"You can have it when the desserts are done," Clementine retorted.

The bickering continued, of course. I wished Nico would ask her out, marry her, and be done with it. But in the wake of Mom's death, each of us grieved deeply in our own way. In recent months, Nico had spent increasingly long hours in the kitchen, often ignoring life outside of the restaurant. I stayed out of it, at least most of the time. Instead, I readied the dining room. We had a full day ahead.

The lunch rush nearly knocked us off our feet. Since our July opening, we'd made full use of the outdoor seating. I'd worked to make our garden patio as lovely as possible, and our customers agreed. Young trees in planters had graced the corners, while boxes filled with blooming annuals had lined the railing.

We'd enjoyed an Indian summer, but with the end of October came the

heavy rains and chill that found the place between my sleeves and gloves. The tree leaves had long turned to rust, setting off the mums in the boxes. White twinkle lights at the top of the trellis and wound into the trees made the dusk and evening hours truly magical, while vinyl sheeting and propane heaters still kept it just warm enough for intrepid diners.

It was great for business, especially for newcomers. People walked by and stopped just for the opportunity to eat outside.

But the business boom also meant increasingly heavy workloads for our staff—and the Saturday lunch service was no different. Nico and the rest of the kitchen staff worked to get each dish plated and perfect, while our servers, Braeden, Patrick, and Mallory, and I rushed to get the orders out quickly.

“Juliette!” Nico called to me after I dropped off an order. “We’re low on the brussels sprouts.”

“I’ll take care of it,” I said. I encouraged the staff to push the nonsprout appetizers, but my own tables were having none of it.

And to be fair, it was a dish we’d become famous for—brussels sprouts sautéed with pancetta and a hint of orange zest, served with a poached egg and parmesan on top. My own mouth watered thinking of it, and I saw fifteen of them leave the kitchen per sitting.

“I’ve got three more orders for the sprouts. Do we need to cut them off?” I asked Nico.

He looked up from his station. “It’s fine. I pulled out the sprouts reserved for the wedding.”

My eyes widened. “Yeah?” I asked cautiously. I didn’t want to contradict him in front of the staff, but . . .

He read the caution in my eyes. “It’ll be fine. I made a couple calls, and the New Seasons at Cedar Hills has the amount we need. I need to get some air anyway—I’ll just run and get them.”

“Okay,” I said, even though I hated the idea. We had too much to do for me to feel okay with Nico leaving the kitchen.

“It’ll be fine,” he repeated. “Kenny and Adrian will be starting the prep work. And I can look at their bulk dates, because I’m not happy with mine.”

I nodded. “Do what you need to do,” I said. I knew getting things at a grocery store rather than our supplier would be more expensive, but at this point the important piece was simply having the ingredient at all.

Adrian and Kenny began cleaning their stations before the last of the lunch guests left. I closed out the tabs, thanked the guests, and left Braeden and Mallory to tidy up the dining room while I ran upstairs to eat a bite and let Gigi roam free.

After another short walk to the park and back, I walked back downstairs to get ready for the wedding.

We’d received the call about the wedding two months before. The bride and groom had gotten engaged at the restaurant—an event which may have had to do with our free champagne promotion our first month in business—and called shortly after to ask if we rented out the restaurant for weddings.

We hadn’t before, but it seemed a perfect time to start. How hard could it be, anyway? It was catering—which all of us had done—and serving in our own space.

So far, the preparations had been straightforward. I’d had a sit-down meeting with the couple, Sonnet and Theo, in mid-August.

“We just want something simple,” Sonnet had said. “We’re not eloping, but we’re not having a long engagement or an elaborate wedding. No tulle, no rose petals, no topiaries. Just the two of us getting married and eating good food with family and friends.”

No rehearsal, either. “It’s a wedding,” she’d said. “Not a school play. And we’re paying for it ourselves.”

I hadn’t asked, but it sounded like punctuation in a conversation she’d had many other times with many other people.

Sonnet and Theo chose items off our menu to serve as a buffet—including the brussels sprouts—before meeting with Clementine to plan the *petits fours*. I charged enough to cover our usual take on a Saturday night and give the servers a paid night off.

Nico, Adrian, and Clementine would do the food prep and setup. I’d run the beverages and keep everything running smoothly; Adrian had volunteered to stay through the event with me and wash dishes after. It was a small enough

crowd at fifty, and a simple enough buffet, that we could comfortably run the show with a skeleton crew.

Sonnet and Theo had chosen to have a standing ceremony in the dining room, with reception overflow on the patio; I took a bucket outside and pruned off dead leaves and stray branches, then swept away cobwebs that had formed overnight. After a brisk sweep, it looked wedding worthy.

My phone rang; I pulled it from my back pocket to answer. “Nico, hi. What’s up?”

“Hey, Etta. So . . . I’m having some car trouble.”



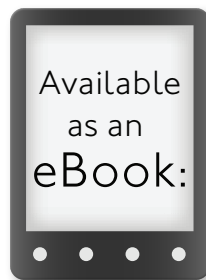
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