

## HARPER BLISS

# FRENCH KISSING: EPISODE TWO

### **Preview**

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Warning: This title contains sensual language, ladies making love, escalating lesbo drama and even more cliffhangers.

# ATTENTION! SPOILER ALERT IF YOU HAVEN'T READ EPISODE ONE!

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Steph woke to the sound of someone rumbling around in her bedroom, which wasn't technically a room, but an area cordoned off from the living room by a curtain hanging from the ceiling.

"Morning." Dominique's voice triggered memories of what had happened the night before. The unexpected visit. The wine. The dirty little secret they had created. *Oh fuck*.

"Hey." Steph, normally not an easy riser, shot up from under the duvet, only to realise she was stark naked. She clumsily covered her torso with her arms.

"Nothing I haven't seen before." Dominique, already half-dressed, crashed down next to her, making the mattress dip.

"What time is it?" A rush of adrenalin chased the last remnants of sleep from Steph's brain. The first light of dawn already made its way beneath the curtains.

"Six. Sorry I can't stay for breakfast." Dominique sat stock-still for an instant regarding Steph, that million-dollar-smile on her lips.

Steph didn't know whether to touch her, or to run away. She leaned towards the latter, but she had nowhere to go.

"I'm really rather sorry we can't do this again." Dominique inched closer until her lips hovered over Steph's. "But that would really be breaking all the rules." She pecked Steph lightly on the mouth. "I'm not sure whose rules exactly, but either way, we can't have that." She leaned in again, this time for a lingering kiss, the tip of her tongue slipping in between Steph's lips. She broke off the intimate contact abruptly, leaving Steph wanting more. "Good thing you don't do seconds."

Steph was too stunned to speak. Too stunned with Dominique's effortless power over her, mostly.

"I have to go." Dominique rose and looked around for her trousers.

"We have a meeting tomorrow at Barbier & Cyr."

Dominique turned around and faced her, staring into her eyes. "I look forward to it already." She winked and disappeared behind the other side of the curtain.

Steph tried to wrap the duvet around her, but it was too heavy and big, so she dashed behind Dominique naked, suddenly desperate to see her out.

"Hey, um..." She watched Dominique as she fumbled with a button of her blouse. She looked so on top of everything. Steph felt strangely privileged to have seen her with her head tilted back and all of her exposed. "I really enjoyed last night." She tried the crooked grin she used for flirting, but somehow, it felt more like a lame grimace.

"Yeah." Dominique just nodded and made for the door, scooping up her bag in the process. "See you."

Steph stood looking at the door for long minutes after it had fallen into the lock, Pierrot rubbing himself against her shins with mounting effort. She ducked down to pet him.

"Some ladies have something special, don't they, little man?" She picked him up and deposited him on the bed before curling back up under the covers for a while. Dominique's presence had filled

her tiny studio with some sort of magnetic force she couldn't explain. She'd come here to get what she wanted, and she had received. And given. Now all Steph had to do was keep her mouth shut, which wasn't that much of a problem for her.

The real issue was that, just like Dominique, she felt sorry they couldn't do it again. What would the consequences be if they did?

No. No. No.

Steph forced her way of thinking into a different direction and started summing up all the reasons why they couldn't. It helped for a little while.

She also knew that one of the main reasons for wanting Dominique back in her bed was that it absolutely couldn't happen.

\* \* \*

"Morning sunshine," Fred craned his head into the open door to her office. "Are we still on for lunch?" He arched up his eyebrows and quickly closed the door behind him. "Oh my." He sat down in the visitor chair, crossing one leg over the other. "You have that tired too-many-orgasms-too-little-sleep glow going on, sweetie. Do tell."

Was she really that much of a giveaway? "You're just projecting, dear. Just because you found love in the Raidd of all places doesn't mean you have to come rub it in."

"Ooh, going on the defensive, are we? You must like her then." He rose from his chair. "I'll take you somewhere special and discreet for lunch." He blew her a kiss and exited her office.

Steph could deal with Fred. What was harder to deal with was his mention of the word 'discreet' and how inviting Dominique to the discreet place that was her home had probably started all of this.

Steph rubbed her temples and focused on the screen in front of her. On it flickered a blank document which had to become the action plan to safeguard Dominique's image during and after her divorce.

It was all well and good picking someone up at Les Pêches and only risking a run-in with them on the weekend when off work, but this, this having to face a one-night-stand at the office, and soon on TV and any other possible media outlet, was something Steph had entirely forgotten to take into account.

### **CLAIRE**

Claire's thoughts started drifting towards her first kiss with Margot again when a knock on the door interrupted her. Before she had a chance to respond, Juliette barged in.

"So?" Juliette stood with her legs slightly apart, her arms crossed over her chest—full interrogation mode.

Claire eased herself against the back of her chair, a big grin pulling on her lips. "How was *your* night, Jules?"

"Not nearly as good as yours if that smirk on your face is anything to go by."

"Let's just say the doctor really surprised me."

Juliette shuffled closer, resting her palms on the back of the chair opposite Claire's desk.

"Details, please."

Claire grinned and shook her head lightly. "Do you know how long it has been since we've had a conversation like this?"

"Months? Years? I lost track." Juliette marched to the front of the chair she'd been leaning on and sat down. "So don't keep me in suspense."

Claire remembered the flex of Margot's biceps as she'd brought the bottle of wine to her mouth. "It was lovely. Really lovely."

"Just lovely?"

Claire contemplated the question for a moment. "Thoroughly lovely. I mean, it's not every day someone surprises me with a motorcycle ride through Paris, a picnic at le Champs de Mars and a kiss beneath the Eiffel Tower."

Juliette whistled through her teeth. "You've been wooed."

"I believe I have and it feels so good."

"Anything else? What happened after the kiss?" The impatience in Juliette's voice was a good reflection of how Claire felt.

"We talked some more. She drove me home. We kissed again. I woke up with a bit of a hangover because I drank most of the wine, but I didn't care, because, well, she's a really good kisser."

"Did you invite her up?"

"We both agreed it would be better not to." Even if Claire hadn't been looking directly at Juliette, she could have predicted the quizzical look on her face.

"Any particular reason?"

"I think this could be something. We have chemistry and I want to do it right. I want to take it slowly." Claire rubbed two fingers over her chin. "She also doesn't strike me as the type to dive into bed with someone on the first date."

"Fair enough." Juliette painted a big smile on her face. "I'm happy for you, Claire. I hope it works out."

"Thanks." Claire briefly eyed the wall clock above the door. She had a few minutes to spare. "How was your night? More earth-shattering sex?"

"Yes, but apparently this has now become a problem as well." The smile quickly faded from Juliette's face. "I asked her to come home and she refused. I just—" Juliette hesitated for an instant. "I know we need to talk more, but I get the feeling there's more going on. That there's something she's not telling me."

"Like what?" Claire leaned forward, placing her elbows on the desk. The sad state her friend's relationship appeared to be in was not exactly the best advertisement for long-term affairs.

"I have no idea." Juliette shook her head.

"Have you asked her?"

"It's a bit difficult when you don't know what you're asking for and are simultaneously scared to death of the possible response."

"Maybe you should go on holiday. Just the two of you for a few days—"

A knock on the door reminded Claire that they were still at work and not at Le Comptoir having another difficult conversation over a cosmopolitan—which would probably be the case tonight if Juliette was going home to an empty apartment.

"Oui," Claire said. Juliette's brand new assistant Sybille appeared in the door frame.

"Sorry for interrupting." Sybille really was a stunner, her intelligent eyes staring into Claire's briefly before landing on Juliette. Claire made a mental note to keep an eye on the newcomer. "Madame Du Bois is here for you, Juliette. She's early. I've put her in the conference room."

Juliette stood up and headed for the door. "Best get some work done," she said before leaving with Sybille and closing the door behind her.

Claire wondered if, soon, they'd have to start coming into the office even earlier to get their ever lengthening personal conversations out of the way before starting the work day.

She allowed herself another brief moment of remembering the soft touch of Margot's lips against hers before dialling Steph's direct number for an update on Dominique Laroche.

### **NADIA**

"A holiday?" Nadia sat across from Juliette at a tiny table at La Grande Bouffe, their favourite restaurant, still recovering from the shock that Juliette had invited her here after she'd left their home last night.

"You know, little getaways people go on to relax." Nadia picked up easily on the frustration in Juliette's tone.

"I'm open to the idea." She put her fork over her plate, indicating she was done with her only half-finished meal of escalope de veau and green beans. "Can you take time off work?"

"In case you missed it, I own half of the company and am my own boss. It's not as if I need to ask someone for permission."

Nadia swallowed the snide remark she could have made. It wasn't difficult to deduct that Juliette was upset about Nadia's refusal to move back home. Still, Nadia was impressed by her partner's continued efforts to reconcile their differences—even going as far as suggesting they take time off work to go on holiday together.

"It would give us the time and opportunity we need to talk things through." Juliette's tone grew milder again. "I was thinking of Barcelona."

Nadia couldn't suppress a smile. Their first real holiday together had been in Barcelona. Ten years ago. They'd barely been together for two months but she'd already known that it was serious —the real deal. Barcelona would always remind her of that. "Quatorze Juillet is a Monday. If we take the Friday before off, we can go for four days."

The expression on Juliette's face mellowed even more, her eyes narrowing and sparkling at the same time. "I'll arrange everything first thing tomorrow. Do you want to stay in the same guesthouse as last time?"

Up until about five years ago, they'd returned to Barcelona frequently after that first time, always staying in the same decent but very reasonably priced hotel. "I could see the romance in that, but I think we can do better now."

"Thank god." Juliette sighed, a relaxed smile taking hold of her face—a smile that melted Nadia's heart and racked her with a fresh onslaught of guilt. "I'll book something near the beach. Haven't seen you in a bikini in way too long."

Nadia wanted to ask for the bill there and then. The smouldering glare in Juliette's eyes was enough to make her knees go weak, but she couldn't ignore the distance between them. Despite their physical re-connection, emotionally, they were still far removed from each other. She remembered Margot's words. *Baby steps*.

And then there were the things she hadn't told Juliette yet. If she ever did.

"I look forward to it already." Nadia snaked her fingers across the table in search of Juliette's hand. "I really do."

"What we're doing now, is it sort of like dating each other again?" Juliette trapped Nadia's fingers with hers.

"No, babe. I already know you through and through." Nadia gazed into Juliette's blue eyes. *Did she, though?* Did she still know her? And did Juliette still know her?

"Let's do something this weekend. Something we haven't done in a long time."

Nadia giggled. "I'd love that."

Juliette's eyes lit up. "Let's pretend we're still in our early thirties and go dancing. We'll ask Steph and Claire, maybe even Margot, and go to Les Pêches."

It wasn't exactly what Nadia was expecting as a suggestion. She was thinking more along the lines of something romantic like roller skating or a visit to the Musee d'Orsay—both activities that belonged to their past—but she was at a point where she'd say yes to everything Juliette suggested. "Sure. I still have moves."

"There's no doubt in my mind." Juliette bit her bottom lip. She looked as if she were about to start salivating at the mere thought of Nadia swaying her hips.

"Not sure about Margot's attendance, though. Maybe she and Claire will want to go somewhere a bit more quiet," Nadia said.

"You can persuade her. You're good at that." Juliette squeezed Nadia's palm between her fingers. "I'll work on Claire, and Steph practically lives there during the weekend so that shouldn't be a problem."

"Let's ask them to do it for us." *And hope it doesn't turn into a disaster like last time we were all together.* 

"Claire really likes her, you know. Have you spoken to Margot today?"

"Briefly, but you don't need to have made her acquaintance long ago to know she's hardly an open book. I'll ask her all about it tonight when I get home, though." As she spoke the words, the atmosphere changed instantly, all the carefully built-up good vibes deflating all around them.

Juliette let go of Nadia's hand and called for the waiter. *Baby steps*.

## **JULIETTE**

Despite barely coping with the constant collision of hope and disappointment in the process of

rekindling her relationship with Nadia, and having the distinct feeling she was making all the effort and Nadia was deciding to go along with it or not on a whim, Juliette contacted her travel agent and booked a trip for the two of them to Barcelona first thing in the morning. If she didn't do it now, Nadia may still change her mind—and Juliette needed something to cling to.

She had come into the office early, unable to stay in bed any longer after another night of tossing and turning. Only Fabio in HR was already there, but he was on some special seven-to-four timetable Juliette had never really agreed to. But, in this instance, Claire had somehow managed to put her foot down.

A knock on the door surprised her. Before she had the chance to reply, Sybille entered carrying a double espresso.

"Bonjour, Madame Barbier."

A headache, caused by sleep deprivation and an all-encompassing feeling of discontent with her life in general, throbbed behind her temples. "I appreciate you knocking, but please wait for my reply before coming in." Juliette's tone of voice sounded much harsher than she had intended.

"Sorry." Sybille looked her straight in the eyes, gaze unwavering. She always did that. Not that Juliette expected her assistant to be demure and humble, but a little respect always went a long way.

"Gosh, no *I'm* sorry. I shouldn't have snapped."

Sybille deposited the cup of coffee on Juliette's desk. "Rough night?"

"Something like that." The scent of coffee hit Juliette's nose and had a positive effect on her mood. "Thanks. You're in early."

"I always arrive before eight, just in case. This is the first day you beat me to it." Sybille stood leaning against the visitor chair, her hips slanted against the arm rest.

"Oh." Juliette had been too preoccupied of late to pay much attention to her new assistant's habits. "Sit down for a minute, will you?"

"Bien sûr." Sybille, dressed as if she were running the place in a tailored light-grey pencil skirt and matching blazer, sat down opposite Juliette, crossing one particularly smooth leg over the other, thus pushing the hem of her skirt up over what looked like rather toned thighs. *Nothing like Nadia in that department then.* Juliette immediately regretted the thought.

"Are there any rumours going around about me in the office?" Juliette thought it was about time to test where Sybille's loyalties lay. Somehow, though, she suspected Sybille would always be firmly in her camp.

"Some." Sybille rested her dark eyes on Juliette. She didn't blink once.

"Please elaborate." Juliette sipped from her coffee. "I'm not interested in who's doing the talking, I just want to get the gist of what's being said."

"Well," Sybille said, pulling the hem of her skirt down just a fraction of an inch—but not nearly as much as she could have with some real effort. "I am the new girl so certain people feel the need to bring me up to speed on things." She flashed Juliette a cunning smile. "I hear your relationship is on the brink. Your partner moved out and it's turning you into a bit of a bitch. Although, I must add, I haven't had that experience."

Maybe because you only arrived after it all went to hell. "That's very frank, Sybille."

"That's what I'm here for, right? Being your eyes and ears where you can't be..."

It wasn't exactly in the job description, but Juliette certainly appreciated the initiative. "Nadia and I will work it out." Juliette said it more to convince herself, but the words sounded hollow and weak.

"I'm sure you will, boss." Sybille's voice grew a bit hoarser when she pronounced the word 'boss', or maybe it was just Juliette's imagination—or the lack of sleep again.

"Speaking of which, I'll be taking the Friday before the Quatorze off. Please reschedule anything I may have had on the books for that day."

"Certainly." Sybille stood up and, this time, pulled her skirt all the way down. "Anything else?"

Juliette shook her head. "No, thanks."

"Just a quick reminder, Dominique Laroche will be here in an hour."

Dealing with someone else's divorce was not something Juliette looked forward to, and she hoped Steph had things firmly under control on that front. Juliette nodded, emptied the cup of coffee and handed it back to her assistant.

She couldn't help sneaking a peek at her swaying hips as Sybille exited her office, and couldn't shake the feeling that a sway that lush was not purely accidental.

#### **STEPH**

"I'd like to speak to Stéphanie in private if that's all right," Dominique said, her gaze firmly planted on Steph.

Steph had kept a straight face throughout the meeting, admiring Dominique's matter-of-factness about it all, but now her nerve was crumbling.

"She's all yours," Juliette said, a wide smile glued to her lips. Obviously, she didn't have a clue. Claire knew Steph better, and in a more intimate way, though. Steph glared at her from under her lashes.

Claire shot her a quick glance, her face expressionless, but didn't say anything. She just shook Dominique's hand and exited the conference room, hurrying to her next meeting.

"Shall we go to your office?" Dominique directed her attention back to Steph before turning to Juliette and offering her hand. "Thank you for all your help, Madame Barbier."

"Our pleasure." Juliette stood there beaming for a while.

"Stéphanie has been such a delight through all of this. Her support has been invaluable."

"Glad to hear it." As Juliette made for the door, she shot Steph a quick wink.

"Shall we?" Dominique held the door open for Steph, as if she was the one working at Barbier & Cyr and inviting Steph into *her* office.

They walked to Steph's broom closet of an office—a far cry from Claire and Juliette's corner offices with magnificent views—in silence. Steph felt as if all the other employees were looking at her as they walked past, suspecting, their stare burning into her flesh, branding her as the person who, no matter what the stakes, simply couldn't keep it in her pants.

"Almost as fancy as your flat," Dominique said with a smirk, closing the door behind her.

"With the accounts I've been getting lately, I believe I may be on my way up." *But not if anyone ever finds out.* Steph leaned against the side of her desk.

"I have a problem." Dominique stayed glued with her back against the door, keeping her distance from Steph.

You're not the only one. "What's that?"

"I can't seem to get you out of my head." The expression on Dominique's face didn't change.

"Oh," Steph said, her heart thundering beneath her chest.

"I guess what I'm saying is..." Dominique's voice had dropped an octave. "I wouldn't say no to doing *that* again."

"Really?" The throbbing in Steph's chest seemed to be travelling downwards.

"I'll be at l'Avenue Foch after nine tonight." She inched even closer. "You know where to find me if you want an encore."

"But, I thought the whole point—"

Dominique was so close to Steph she could put a finger on her lips. "Shht." She shook her head. "Let's not talk about it." She pressed her finger into the flesh of Steph's lips and dragged it down.

Steph squeezed her fingers around the edge of her desk, holding on tightly for support. She had to swallow before she could speak. "I—"

Dominique kissed her gently on the lips. "Shht," she repeated. After one last stare into Steph's eyes, she turned on her heels and was out of the door.

Steph stood leaning against her desk for long seconds after. She'd only just held it together to make it through that meeting with her bosses. This account had such potential to make her career. Was she really willing to give that up for another romp, no matter how good, with a totally unavailable woman?

If only she could ask someone—anyone—for advice. She dug out her phone from her blazer jacket and called Nadia.

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