

HIRED HELP



Harper Bliss

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Preview

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Warning: This title contains graphic language and f/f sex.

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Olivia slipped one hand between her hot skin and the sheet. She tried to hold on to the remnants of the dream she just woke up from. A faceless woman with a pleading voice repeating the words over and over again, “Yes? Can I? Yes? Can I?” She attempted to block out the early morning sunlight by screwing her eyes shut, stubbornly ignoring the beginning of a new day alone, but she was unable to find the feverish state of half-dreaming and half-waking again. The woman was gone and so was her spell on Olivia.

Her fingers reached the part of her belly where nerves seemed to multiply, the first step on that straight path to a bliss she’d been denied for too long. She tried stroking herself, tentatively but with plenty of purpose. With two fingers she pulled her lips apart, the sudden exposure of her pussy to a rush of morning air covering her in goosebumps. She wanted to come, she needed the quick release, but the prospect of another almost mechanical and passionless climax hardly enticed her to continue. She sighed, her usual stop sign, but just in case, mentally checked her excitement levels. The string of fantasies she was used to relying on seemed buried too deep inside her mind. Imagination wasn’t cutting it anymore. She needed some real life experience, an event so exhilarating its memory could effortlessly feed her orgasms for months to come.

Véronique had disappeared four months ago, leaving Olivia’s bed cold and empty. She’d just gone, back to Bordeaux or wherever it was she came from—that particular piece of information had always remained vague between them, as if it needed to be kept secret for their transient affair to work.

“I am unattached,” Véronique would say, her words English but the sounds unmistakably French. “I’ll stay for a while, but not forever.”

She stayed for two years, certainly long enough for Olivia to get attached to her unattachedness. Véro drifted in and out of her life, sometimes lingering for days on end, days filled with smoking cigarettes while hanging out of the window of Olivia’s fourth floor flat on the Rue Madame. Olivia clung to Véro’s irrationality and all the parts of her she couldn’t tie down. Maybe it wasn’t love—at least not the kind Olivia had thought she was after— but it sure had a close resemblance to it. The way it hurt when Véro walked out of the door, usually on a Sunday night well past midnight, and Olivia could tell, just by the way Véro held herself, that she wouldn’t see her lover for days, maybe even weeks. Until one last Sunday four months ago when Véronique had curved her neck so her lips couldn’t be closer to Olivia’s ear and said, “Je t’aime.” Not something you would expect unattached people to say.

Olivia had roamed the city throughout winter, a messy wet season in Paris. She’d braved the cold and stuck her head into cafés she’d otherwise avoid, in search of Véronique. If you wanted to disappear a metropolis was easy. Olivia disappeared as well, into the streets around la Gare du Nord and their rough kind of acceptance of everyone, especially people looking for something. She could buy everything she wanted there—drugs, men, women—but she only wanted Véronique, who was nowhere to be found. After work she’d change into a pair of sneakers she used to wear to play squash in another lifetime, and face the darkness. She walked and walked through rain, sleet and the occasional melting snow storm, the icy drops on her cheeks a constant reminder of what she was missing. After two months she’d given up her quest. It wasn’t as if she hadn’t been warned.

The branches of the tree outside her window at last showed signs of spring. Olivia stirred sugar into her coffee and let her gaze wander over the puffy clouds in the Sunday morning sky. The day stretched out in front of her like a succession of desolate hours. She’d do yoga with Sam at noon, followed by lunch at Les Philosophes. An old routine they’d revived after it had finally sunk in that Véronique wasn’t coming back and a normal social life was an easy way to pass time. Olivia could choose to drink the afternoon away at a heated terrace in le Marais. It’s what she usually did on a Sunday afternoon, but she was trying to quit smoking, which was too much of a reminder, and casually consuming alcohol wasn’t the best catalyst to kill die-hard habits. She checked the length

of her raven black hair in the reflection of the window. Maybe she should cut it off and give her appearance the spring cleaning it had been lacking for years.

“I disagree,” Sam said, a glass of rosé in one hand and a lit Gauloise in the other. “Blond would only make you look more desperate. As if you know your midlife crisis is looming.”

“I’m only thirty-eight. It can’t be that obvious.” They sat huddled together, still strapped in warm winter coats, squinting into the careful midday sun.

“You have millions in the bank, Liv. You don’t need a new haircut to boost your confidence, you need a shag.” Sam stated it matter-of-factly, as if reading from one of the economical reports she specialised in during business hours.

Olivia reached for Sam’s pack of cigarettes and tapped one out for herself. There was only so much abstinence she could bear. “That’s easy for you to say.”

“The hell it is.” Sam held her gaze, a glimmer of defiance brimming underneath those long lashes. “I work ten hours a day, Saturday usually included. And the current state of the economy doesn’t seem to agree with my libido.” She sucked hard on her cigarette and made the tip glow bright orange. “A fact that pisses off my sexy French girlfriend to no end.”

“At least you have a girlfriend.” Olivia realised it sounded bitter and petulant, even a tad resentful. Sam had been single by choice for years because she wanted to focus on her career. A week after she had gotten her last and biggest promotion—the one forcing her to work even longer hours—she’d met Sylvie.

“Whom I’m not having lazy Sunday sex with because I’m listening to you whine.” They both burst out laughing—a high-pitched nasal snicker in Sam’s case, unstoppable giggle fits in Olivia’s. Sam grabbed her purse from the empty chair opposite her and delved inside it, trying to unearth a solution to Olivia’s problem judging by the sudden solemn look on her face. Sam hid something in the palm of her hand while fixing her gaze on Olivia.

“Listen to me.” Sam chewed her bottom lip which, Olivia knew, signalled a rare case of lacking bravado. “I never told you this because, well, I never told anyone.”

“A lady is allowed her secrets,” Olivia said, curiosity buzzing through her body. She watched Sam fidget with a deep red piece of paper the size of a business card.

“I was single for a long time and this service was recommended to me by a dear friend.” Sam slipped the card towards Olivia’s fingers. “I’m a satisfied customer.” Now that she was no longer holding the card, Sam seemed to have regained her confidence. As if passing it on shifted the sentiments it came with as well.

Olivia trailed her fingertips over the ridge of the card before turning it around. The other side was the same shade of sensual scarlet, and empty apart from a phone number hand-written in golden digits. She glanced at Sam, who puffed out a cloud of smoke. They’d been friends for years, years in which you get to know someone in a way that their behaviour becomes predictable, but Olivia had never expected this.

“The service is by referral only.” Even Sam’s voice, usually nasal, sounded sultry now. Olivia half-expected the cobbled streets to close up around them and transform into a private members’ club, burlesque show included. “Use your real name when you book the appointment.”

“Are you serious?” Olivia flipped the card between her fingers. “Who recommended it to you?”

“I can’t say.” Sam slanted her long wool-clad frame over the table. “And I sincerely hope you’ll do me the same courtesy when the time comes.” She stretched her body upward again, her long neck pale in the hesitant sunlight. “And yes, I’m deadly serious.”

“But—” Olivia started. I would never do that, she wanted to say. It’s repulsive. If I want it so badly I can go to a bar, get drunk on whiskey and take someone home.

“It’s not cheap, but worth every cent.” Sam had a strangely satisfied expression running across her face, as if the memories alone were enough to make her bask in delight again. “And then some.”

Olivia strolled along the Seine—a part of her still on the look-out for Véronique—and fingered

the card in her pocket. She'd never been one for one-night-stands. Even in her twenties when she'd just arrived in Paris and she wasn't shy of offers, she'd always insisted on an exploratory date first. Not that it had never happened, but mostly under the influence of too much wine and with a predictable anticlimactic outcome. Spontaneity was not in her blood. She was a woman of carefully deliberated decisions and calculated risks, indispensable character traits for the CEO of BearSoft, one of the biggest software companies in France. She'd long since resigned herself to the fact that, despite not being short of it, money couldn't buy her everything. Sure, she could get herself a dose of idolatry from bespectacled geek dykes whenever she wanted, but she never did. She had enough cash for an endless supply of women who would tell her they loved her—and probably mean it—for the rest of her life. It only made the point so much clearer that real affections were not for sale.

Véronique was different because she was so ungraspable and unavailable. Sometimes, when an unexpected work event kept her from a date with Véronique, she would deliberately not call. She'd wait until Véro texted her in a rage, demanding where she was, but Véro never did. It was as if nothing mundane could touch her, certainly nothing as common as the abrupt cancellation of a dinner date.

When Olivia arrived home she put the card on display on the mantle above the faux fireplace, the brash redness of it contrasting with the warm earth tones of her furniture. It stood there like an invitation to a party she must not forget, reminding her of its possibility. In the evening, when she watched TV, splayed out unladylike in the sofa, it seemed to transform into one of those paintings of which the subject's eyes always appear to follow you no matter your position in the room. Before going to bed she took it down and buried it in a drawer of her nightstand beneath a well thumbed-through copy of *Women In Lust* and a few hand-scribbled notes by Véronique communicating important messages like *I'll be back in an hour* and *Don't wait up for me*.

The next morning, when she woke up before her alarm clock started bleating at six, the card was the first thought that occupied her mind.

For days the presence of the card in her bedroom intrigued her. Life went its usual course and nothing had changed substantially, apart from a nagging in her gut that always seemed to return to the same question: what if?

On Thursday, when she returned home half-tipsy from a dinner with the board of directors, she cracked. She flung the drawer open with a force that catapulted three of Véro's flimsy notes onto the hardwood floor. She excavated the card and traced the meaty part of her right index finger over the golden numbers. What if?

Her heart thumped beneath her ribcage. She stupidly glanced down at her chest to check if the excessive thudding might be visible but the only thing she noticed was the blood red blouse she'd worn that day.

"Oui," a voice said, its tone no-nonsense but welcoming enough. "You've reached Scarlet."

"H—Hi," Olivia stammered, her nerves already shot to pieces. "Samantha Glorieux gave me your number. I'd like to make an appointment."

"Of course."

"What's the procedure?" Olivia composed herself. She conjured up the dozens of investor meetings she had successfully led and the hundreds of people she employed.

"Give me a time and place and I'll be there." A perplexed silence took hold of Olivia. That was it? Wasn't she supposed to choose? Maybe voice a few preferences? Tell Scarlet she preferred blondes? "I'll be discreet." She shouldn't have made this call half-drunk. She should have thought this through beforehand and picked a hotel where they could meet. Surely she couldn't let this woman come to her flat.

"The George V. Sunday. Three o'clock."

"AM or PM?" This question rattled Olivia since it brusquely reminded her of what she was setting herself up for—hardly a Sunday afternoon activity.

“PM. I’ll text you the room number.”

“Excellent. I look forward to it already.” Scarlet’s voice seemed to smile in her ear now. “I charge a thousand per hour and only take cash.”

“Okay.” Olivia hid the tremble of surprise in her voice. If Sam was right—and why would she lie?—and this woman was worth every cent, then it would be quite the treat. Or maybe her rates had inflated, just like the price of so many other luxury commodities. “See you Sunday.” Her hands shook when she put down the phone and her brain was trying to keep up with what she’d just done. And that was only the beginning.

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