

HIGH RISE NOVELLA TWO

*Undisclosed  
Desires*



Harper Bliss

HARPER BLISS

# UNDISCLOSED DESIRES

*High Rise Novella Two*

**Preview**

**Copyright © Harper Bliss 2012**

Cover picture © Depositphotos / beerkoff1

Published by LadyLit Ltd - Hong Kong

All rights reserved. This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance of characters to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. The author holds exclusive rights to this work. Unauthorized duplication is prohibited.

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

[www.harperbliss.com](http://www.harperbliss.com) \* [www.ladylit.com](http://www.ladylit.com)

## ISABELLA

“Claire was a proud serial monogamist.”

Isabella had found Nat waiting for her, sunk to the floor, an almost empty bottle of Scotch in hand, in front of her door after she returned from Maddie’s apartment. She now sat across from Isabella, her back slouched against the sofa cushions, her speech slurred and her eyes droopy. All it did was make her even more attractive, in that lost child bohemian kind of way Isabella found so hard to resist. She believed in causes and rescuing people from themselves. She was convinced Nat needed her. Even at well past midnight on a Sunday evening.

“Just like every other fool who came before me, I thought I could change her.” Nat eyed the glass of water on the coffee table, but didn’t reach for it. As if she had a point to prove. She shook her head. “Obviously, I couldn’t.”

Isabella had done her research months ago, after first recognising Nat in the elevator. It was all over the internet. How Nathalie Orange had left her native Brooklyn for Hong Kong to be with Claire. How she’d fallen for the neon-lit city and the peace she found in its crowded, anonymous streets. How the warm winters agreed with her night time wanderlust.

“She said she believed in relationships, just not forever.” Nat’s chuckle hesitated between pained and disdainful. “At least she was always honest. As if she warned me beforehand that, surely, at one point she’d lose interest.” She pushed some hair away from her forehead. “It didn’t hurt any less when she finally did.”

Isabella had to lean forward to catch the next words tumbling from Nat’s lips.

“Only more.” She sagged down a little lower, the muscles of her back giving way to the alcohol, slackening her posture. “She just left. Dumped me and went back to New York within a month. Moving on as if I’d never even existed. That’s when I decided...” Nat’s blue eyes glistened, a sudden tear moistening them. “That no one would ever do something like that to me again.” She didn’t bother brushing away the teardrop rolling down her cheekbone. “And guess what? They haven’t.” She balled her fists in mock victory.

Isabella ignored her shrink instincts. This wasn’t a therapy session after all, more like a drunk friend letting it all out on her couch—no doubt because she was, in fact, a psychiatrist by profession—but professional rules didn’t apply. She got up and sat down next to Nat, offering her the glass of water.

“Drink this.”

Nat held up her hands. “I’d prefer something with a bit more colour and bite.” She fixed her eyes on the liquor cabinet flanking the opposite wall.

“Do you have any idea how the Chinese treat alcohol poisoning?”

“Do you?” Despite the mistiness of her gaze, Nat was quick to respond.

“Not really, but I’m fairly certain it involves a concoction including donkey testicles.”

“You’re the doctor.” Nat grinned, a boyish, brazen smirk taking over her face. “I suppose I have to take your word for it.”

“At last, she accepts my authority.” Isabella held out the glass of water again. “Drink.”

Nat sipped carefully at first, then knocked it all back in greedy gulps. Licking the last drops from her lips, she stared into Isabella's eyes. "Can I have some more?"

Those eyes, Isabella thought as she refilled the glass from a bottle of Evian. Who can ever refuse them anything? The clearest of blue, like the Hong Kong sky after a cleansing tropical storm, hiding oceans of pain and lifetimes of running away.

After downing another glass of water, Nat repositioned. She slung one leg over the other and folded her fingers behind her head, as if settling in for a long night of deep conversation.

"What's your story, Doc? Why are you single?"

Isabella wasn't used to being on the receiving end of a probing question. This one was easy though, and she had a well-prepared answer. "I was married for fifteen years. I felt like a change." It was the truth.

Nat smiled and sucked her bottom lip into her mouth briefly while fixing her gaze on Isabella. "Fair enough, but you know, everyone needs a little tenderness now and then."

"Is that what you call it? Tenderness?" Isabella wondered what was tender about bringing home a new girl every Saturday night.

"I have a lot of respect for my elders. I refrain from using crass language in front of them."

"At least it excludes me from your advances. Being old and such." It stung more than Isabella had expected.

"A dog like me?" Nat spread her elbows wide, pushing her chest forward. "No one's safe as far as I'm concerned."

"I'll remember to double lock my door at night." Isabella reluctantly peeled her eyes away from the cleavage peeking through the V of Nat's t-shirt. "Now, can I give you some friendly advice?"

"I thought you'd never ask, Doc." Nat let her hands fall into her lap, fatigue suddenly conquering her face—that and the amount of Scotch she'd ingested.

"For the next two weeks, don't give in to your baser instincts. Don't pursue *tenderness* as if there's no tomorrow. Focus on something else. For instance, why after three years, you still feel the need to get shit-faced in remembrance of Claire leaving you."

"I get shit-faced on a much more regular—"

"I don't need arguments," Isabella cut her off. "I only need a yes or a no."

"Fine. No sweat." Nat uncrossed her legs and rested her elbows on them, her breath so close Isabella heard it sing in her ears. "But quid pro quo, Doc. It's the least you can do."

"What do you have in mind?" Intrigued, Isabella leaned in a little closer.

"You let me set you up with a friend of mine."

A small pang of disappointment flared in Isabella's stomach. "Deal," she said anyway.

NAT

Nat wasn't completely oblivious to Isabella's interest in her. She noticed it in the twitch of her muscles as she restrained herself from putting a hand on Nat's thigh. In the widening of her pupils

when Nat shed that tear earlier. In the way her features deflated when Nat suggested she'd set her up with a friend. For a shrink, Isabella had a really bad poker face.

"Sophie's a class act, I'm sure you'll like her." All this banter of other women—and the sudden promise of abstinence—had gotten Nat's mind off Claire. She had to give Isabella that. Truth be told, her yearly pilgrimage into complete drunkenness because of Claire was bordering on ridiculous, but one day a year of self-pity wasn't too bad. Nat cursed herself because she was the last person to believe her own lies. "When are you free?"

"I'll let you know." Isabella massaged her temples. "What will you do with all this time freeing up in your schedule?"

"What I always do when I have some time on my hands." Nat straightened her back, getting ready to leave. "Dream of a better future."

"I'd love to know what that entails." Isabella's eyes flashed with intensity again, one last sparkle before the day ended.

"Let's save that for the next session, Doc." Nat winked at Isabella and stood up. "I'll let myself out."

Later, alone in bed—and in the flat, as Alex spent most nights at Maddie's—Nat wondered if this was what an existential crisis felt like. Or if it was all still down to Claire. Claire, the one woman she couldn't have, who, out of the blue had turned up on her doorstep and told Nat she'd broken up with Amy and that she was available now. Claire Foster and Amy Perez, banker and literary agent, New York's ultra-power lesbian couple, at least throughout 2005 and a good chunk of 2006. You couldn't find a woman more loyal than Claire, until she was done with you. Then you might as well not have existed anymore.

Nat had managed to keep hold of her for three years. "Longer than anyone else that came before you," Claire used to tease, in better days, before her heart programmed to serially kill relationships prevailed again.

It has been three years since those three years, was the last thought drifting through Nat's mind before she dozed off. Maybe it was time to get her act together.

\* \* \*

The next day, while crafting an elaborate email to Sophie in which she raved about Isabella—an easier task than expected—Alex stormed in.

"You're up early. Date with the muse?" She joked. She had that satiated look about her only young lovers display during the first months of courtship.

"You know me too well, Pizza." Nat flipped the lid of her laptop down. "Actually, I'm working on a master plan plotting the happiness of one Miss Isabella Douglas."

"Really?" Alex settled on a chair opposite from Nat. "Are you making arrangements to offer yourself to her on a silver platter?"

"Nice try." Nat pouted her lips. "But we both know I'm in no state to fit into anyone's plans during their pursuit of happiness."

"You'd be surprised." Nat noticed scratches—old and fresh ones—on Alex's shoulder. "And don't sell yourself short like that."

“I’m arranging a blind date with her and Sophie from my book club.”

Alex raised her eyebrows and wolf-whistled. “You’re setting yourself up with some stiff competition there. Sophie’s gorgeous.”

“That’s the whole point. And let’s leave me out of the equation, please. I know you and Maddie are desperate to go on double dates with us once the novelty of your affair wears off, but it’s never going to happen. I like her, just not in that way.”

“Whatever you say, Orange. But remember, I know you too well.” Alex shoved her chair back and rose. “Want to grab some lunch?”

“Not today. I’ll be living a more indoor lifestyle for the next two weeks.” Nat opened the lid of her laptop again, the email to Sophie brightly flickering on the screen.

“What the hell is going on here?” Alex planted both her hands on the wooden table top. “What have I missed?” She fixed her eyes on Nat.

“I made a deal with Isabella last night.” Nat hesitated a split second too long and Alex jumped in.

“Last night? When? I thought you went out?”

“I ended up having a late night conversation with Isabella and we agreed that I could organise a date with Sophie if I refrained from picking up girls for two weeks.”

Alex sank back down into her chair. “This is a historic moment, Orange.” Alex reached across the table and grabbed Nat’s arms. “It took her one conversation to get you to do what I’ve been trying to accomplish for months.”

“Apparently you don’t seem to have the same powers of persuasion.” Nat shook Alex’s hands off her. “And don’t go making more out of it than it is. I’d like to keep Isabella as a friend.”

Alex held her hands up in defence. “You have my word, roomie, I swear. If Isabella’s friendship has this effect on you, who am I to question something so powerful?” Alex’s eyes glowed, maybe with hope or compassion, but most probably satisfaction.

“If you will excuse me, Pizza. I have a blind date to arrange.”

## ISABELLA

When it came to picking other people’s dates, Nat had impeccable taste. The woman sitting across from Isabella at Le Petit Duc, another brand new French restaurant catering to the ever-growing French population of Hong Kong, was a real stunner. Milk chocolate skin stretching tautly around almond-shaped eyes. An Irish accent to die for, curls for days and not half bad at conversation either.

“This city is not exactly littered with eligible bachelorettes of our persuasion,” Sophie said, before taking another sip of the Bordeaux Isabella had chosen.

“About that.” Isabella cleared her throat before continuing. “I don’t know what Nat has told you about me but I may not be the full-time lesbian you take me for.”

Sophie smoothed the napkin in her lap before speaking. “She told me you were enough of one to risk going on a blind date.” She flashed Isabella a small smile. “And that’s a quote.”

A loud laugh escaped Isabella. She wasn't in the habit of discussing her sexuality at length—like all the youngsters did these days. “All my significant relationships have been with men. I was married to one for fifteen years. But I've had my fair share of...” Isabella racked her brain for the least offensive words.

“Experiments?” Sophie asked, a sudden tightness around her mouth.

“Same-sex affairs involving enough feelings to merit the label relationship.”

“But not enough to be significant?” Sophie reached for the bottle, refilling her empty glass.

For all her degrees and years of studying human interaction, Isabella always had trouble explaining, which was why she usually chose not to—and shied away from blind dates.

“My ex-husband and I had an open relationship the last five years of our marriage.” Isabella tried hard to not sound like a professor explaining a math problem. “During that time I started a relationship with a woman that lasted almost three years, but my marriage always came first. After my divorce I made the conscious choice to stay single for a while.”

“Jesus Christ.” Sophie snorted. “And I thought lesbians were champions at complicating things.”

“It's not complicated anymore. I'm single, available, and into women.” Despite that last statement, Isabella was well aware she was sabotaging the date. She hadn't set out to do so, not really, but most sane women looking for a relationship—thus going on blind dates—would not go for someone with her complex past.

“Just not significantly,” Sophie shot back. “I'm sorry.” She regrouped, taking a sip of water. “I don't mean to be rude. I'm old and wise enough to know love is more fluid than girl meets girl.”

“It's my fault entirely.” Isabella leaned over the table. “I shouldn't have mentioned my messy marriage before the main course.”

A waiter approached with two plates. Duck breast salad for Sophie and bouillabaisse for Isabella. They halted conversation until he left.

“Let's chalk it up to blind date nerves,” Sophie whispered. “And please excuse me for my über-lesbian reaction.”

“Shall we start afresh over our mains?” Isabella extended her hand. “Hi, I'm Isabella and I'm your complicated date for tonight.”

Sophie chuckled and shook her hand. “Sophie, your judgemental dinner companion.”

“Glad we got off on the right foot.”

“Better than any date I've been on this past year.” Sophie speared a piece of duck on her fork. “Let's see.” She found Isabella's eyes. “There was a completely self-obsessed French woman who could not stop talking about herself and all her wonderful accomplishments. A very cute Chinese woman with whom I got totally lost in translation. And a Canadian who was really only after a job at my firm, including a work visa.” Sophie nibbled her duck like someone brought up with a lot of emphasis on table manners.

Isabella giggled, amused by Sophie's candour. Maybe Nat had found her a good match. And perhaps she owed it to herself to give Sophie a fair chance, seeing as Nat clearly had no interest in her. “Can I ask you something personal?”

“That’s what I’m here for, right?” Sophie shot her a smile bordering on flirtatious. Isabella responded by chewing her bottom lip.

“Have you and Nat ever, you know…” Isabella’s pulse picked up speed as she waited for the reply, as if this was the million dollar question and everything depended on its answer.

“God no, you know what she’s like.” Sophie rolled her eyes. “She’d flirt with your grandmother for hours, but would end up taking your impressionable teenage niece home.”

“How long have you known her?” Isabella realised Sophie could be a valuable source of information.

“About four years. She joined our book club after we invited her to read for us. A year before it all went south with Claire.” Sophie put down her cutlery and continued in a conspiring manner. “Dreadful that was. Nearly destroyed her. She didn’t show up for months. Until one day she re-appeared with a twenty-year-old English Lit student on her arm. The ladies were not impressed, but they let it go because she’s Nathalie Orange.” Sophie sought Isabella’s glance. “Have you?”

“Have I what?” Isabella’s brain was too busy processing all the data on Nat to follow Sophie’s train of thought.

“You know, you and Nat? Two single women living in the same building.” Sophie scrunched her eyebrows together twice in quick succession.

Heat flared on Isabella’s cheeks. Just the assumption was enough to awaken long-sleeping butterflies in her stomach. “No, no,” she stuttered, a mere shadow of the confident psychiatrist she believed to be. “Of course not.”

“I see.” Sophie nodded, her lips bunched in a knowing pout. “I do like you, Isabella, but it seems to me that you have some issues to work out.”

Isabella wondered what the right thing to do was. What would she, as an objective sounding board, advise someone else to do next? Full disclosure, of course, but it was much harder to practice than to preach.

“Look, it’s—” She started.

“Complicated?” The smile on Sophie’s face was much friendlier than Isabella had expected. “You don’t have to explain. Just tell me this… if you have a thing for Nat, what are you doing here?”

“We’re going to need another bottle of wine.” Isabella raised her hand and called for the waiter.

## NAT

Nat punched the air with more vigour than usual.

“Final round, team,” Alex shouted from the front. “Time to empty that tank.”

Nat balled her fists tighter and slammed them into nothing. She focused on Maddie and Isabella’s rhythmically bouncing shoulders in front of her. They boxed against their invisible enemy in perfect sync, as if they had practiced it beforehand.

“Well done, guys.” Alex slapped her hands together. “Give yourself a well-deserved round of



applause.” A smile graced her flatmate’s lips, the same smile Nat had been forced to watch for days. Not that she wasn’t happy for Alex, but after years of self-chosen singlehood and loose midnight encounters, their flat seemed to burst with early romance hormones. It was her flat—and Alex was hardly ever there—but somehow Nat felt as if she belonged there less now that a different vibe had taken over.

They gathered outside the studio, the four of them, a tangled-up blend of neighbours, friends and lovers. A few months ago they’d barely nodded in recognition and now Alex was sleeping with Maddie and Isabella knew more about Nat than she felt comfortable with.

“A decaf at The Bean before bed?” Maddie asked.

New friends, new habits. On any other Wednesday Nat would have either holed up in her office with a bottle of Scotch or ventured out into the night in search of distraction. Now she spent her evenings in brightly lit coffee shops in the company of self-assured lesbians with well-rounded personalities. “Sure, I have a certain esteemed psychiatrist to grill on a blind date, anyway.”

“There’s really not that much to say.” Isabella’s head was flushed red, sweat dripping from every pore. For a woman her age, she had spectacular arms. “I possibly made a new friend and that’s it.”

“Come on. How can you look at Sophie and not want to ravage her? She’s by far the hottest Hong Kong has to offer in the more mature lesbian department” They made their way to the changing rooms. “And anyway, that’s not what I heard.”

All three of them turned to Nat with an inquisitive look on their face. Isabella was the only one who spoke.

“Oh really? Do share your information.” She brushed a drop of sweat from her forehead, hiding her eyes behind the towel.

“Sophie said that, provided some kinks got worked out, there could be something.” Nat yanked Isabella’s towel from her hands. “I presume the kinks are most persistent on your end?”

“I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about.”

Scottish skin is so revealing, Nat thought. She didn’t say it out loud so as not to embarrass Isabella, whose neck and ears had turned a deep shade of crimson, while the blush of their workout should have receded by then.

“Whether you’re expecting it or not, you should prepare for a second date invitation. Apparently you made quite the impression on Sophie. Of course, she’s a sucker for lesbian drama. She can’t help herself.”

Nat wisely left out what else Sophie had told her. That is was clear Isabella had the hots for her. That throughout the date she had displayed a subtle but stubborn interest in details about Nat’s life, quizzing Sophie on her friend’s most obvious psychological shortcomings. “Nevertheless,” Sophie had said to Nat, “she needs as much rescuing from herself as she believes that you do from yourself. I think I’m the right woman at the right time.”

To have it spelled out like that by Sophie had confused Nat. She knew Isabella was interested in her, but she’d thought it to be more in a professional way—the save the poor-little-rich-girl routine.

“Thanks for the heads-up,” Isabella mumbled and clumsily headed for her locker. She was so damn cute when she lost composure.

Still, despite the banter between them, and the deeper connection established the previous Sunday night, Nat couldn't picture them together at all. Isabella was almost fifteen years older than her. She'd been married to a man for a decade and a half and had no proven track record of successful lesbian relationships. They were from a different generation—and world—altogether. Isabella probably didn't know what dubstep was. She'd probably never set foot in Volt or Fortune or Munchies, Nat's favourite hang-outs.

Later, in The Bean, Isabella was uncharacteristically quiet, like a child caught stealing cookies, not exactly a gloomy silence, more a guilty one.

“Why don't you join our book club?” Nat focused her attention on Isabella. Maddie and Alex were wrapped up in their own little loved-up world. “That way you can get to know her better, but from a distance. With less pressure.”

“Which book are you reading? *Fifty Shades of Grey*?” Isabella immediately went on the defence. “I have more classic taste in literature.”

“You'll fit in perfectly then.” Nat ruffled through her bag and dug up a battered copy of Camus's *The Stranger*. “I've read it a dozen times, so you can have this one if you want. The next meeting is on Tuesday, if you're a fast reader.”

Despite having her own copy at home, Isabella accepted the book and thumbed through it. “It's one of my favourites.” Her eyes glistened with recognition, like they do when people find unexpected common ground.

“It's a deal then?” Nat glanced at Isabella, unable to predict her reply.

“Can we talk in private for a minute?” She held the book close to her chest before rising out of her chair. “My place in half an hour?”

***Undisclosed Desires* is available from [Amazon US](#) & [Amazon UK](#)**