

Love at First Baguette

Episode 6

By Amanda Bouchet

Maxime kissed me. We were at the top of the steps at the metro station after our nice dinner date at Chez Phillippe. He leaned in slowly, a slight smile on his lips.

This should have been what I wanted, but my stomach churned, and my breath felt short. Adrien telling me that I looked beautiful tonight blared in my brain like a siren.

Maxime's mouth lightly touched mine, and I leaned away. He hadn't even gotten to pressing into the kiss or wrapping his arm around my waist, although I sensed that he was about to.

Frowning, he drew back, saying my name in the way most French people did. Sometimes, I was tempted to just introduce myself as Eddar rather than Heather. Embrace the French boycott of the letter *H* and all the sounds it can make rather than fight a losing battle anymore.

"Je suis désolée." Biting my lip, I looked up at Maxime. And I was sorry. He was pretty darn great.

"Trop tôt?" he asked.

He wanted to know if it was too soon for a kiss. Unfortunately, that wasn't the problem. A tall, dark-haired, blue-eyed artist who moonlighted as a bartender was the problem. A big, solid problem with strong sculptor's hands and...smolder.

I was still burning up from the way Adrien had looked at me tonight just before I'd left the restaurant.

But Maxime had a ton of potential. Part of me was tempted to hedge my bets. It was only human to think about keeping a great guy like Maxime around in case I was totally wrong about Adrien. But that was unfair and kind of awful. I would hate for someone to do that to me.

I shook my head. "No, it's not too soon. And you're great. I had a really nice time tonight," I said in French. "It's just...there's someone I have feelings for, and even though we're not together, I feel weird kissing someone else."

A number of different emotions flashed across his expression. Surprise, disappointment, and something a little harder. Not anger, exactly, but definitely annoyance.

"I'm sorry," I said again. He had every right to be annoyed.

"Why aren't you together?" he asked, swiping his longish, golden-brown hair back from his forehead.

"I'm not sure he's interested."

Maxime arched his brows. "Then I doubt his intelligence."

I blushed and smiled. Was I really going to let go of this man on a what-if?

At the same time, we'd only met a few hours ago and been on just one date. I felt as if I'd already been on several dates with Adrien, we just hadn't called them that. He'd been working at the bar, and Fleur and I had been hanging out for drinks and dinner at Chez Phillippe. But he and I had talked, easily and often. I knew about his sculpting and that he welded in a warehouse not far from his flat on the back side of the hill in Montmartre. I knew about his art exhibition coming up at a local gallery, and that he was nervous but looking forward to it and hoping to make some sales. I was more interested in any of that than I was in a second date with Maxime.

"*Merci*," I said, accepting his compliment. "I really did have fun tonight. Thank you again."

"I had fun, too." He fished his metro pass out of his pocket and held it in his hand. "Call me if you change your mind."

"I will," I answered with a smile, meaning it.

"And if it's that bartender who was staring daggers at me all evening, I think he is interested."

My pulse took off like a rocket. "What?" I croaked.

"Tall. Dark hair. You had your back to him, but he looked over every time you laughed."

I felt my eyes widen. "Really? That's, um, interesting."

Maxime huffed a wry laugh. "Interesting for you maybe. When he came our way with that champagne bottle, I was scared for my life."

I shook my head, laughing a little. "He's not dangerous."

“I was pretty sure he was going to at least point the cork at me when it popped, but he held on to it in the end.”

I pictured Adrien chasing off my potential suitors with projectile corks, and I *loved* it.

“Just ask him,” Maxime advised. “Make a move. If it doesn’t work out—you have my number.”

“Thank you.” I stepped closer, and we shared a not-entirely-awkward goodbye hug.

I passed by Chez Phillippe on my way home but didn’t stop in. Adrien was still working and didn’t see me as I quickly peeked in the window. Things were winding down at the restaurant. There was no reason to go back in unless it was to ask Adrien out, and I wasn’t sure I was ready for that. I also didn’t want to seem like I bounced between men, having been in there on a date not twenty minutes earlier. I went home to Fleur instead.

“Have you ever asked a man out?” I asked my roommate as she made room for me on the couch and put the TV on mute.

“No.”

Well, that was final.

“But...” she continued a moment later. “I would if I was pining for someone, and he wasn’t making a move.” Her eyes twinkled as she added, “I think Adrien is into you. You should go for it.”

My insides fluttered with what felt like the fast brush of tiny hummingbird wings. “He said I looked beautiful tonight, and apparently he was glaring daggers at my date.”

Fleur squealed. “Really? Hooray!”

“People don’t usually cheer over death glares.”

“People don’t usually bring random dates to the same restaurant every time and parade them under the nose of the guy they *actually* like.”

My jaw dropped. “Fleur!”

“Forget AmourForTwo.com. It was an experiment. Now you know: Internet dating stinks. You and I both know those dates never led to anything, and so does Adrien. He’ll make a move if you stop showing up with other men.”

I pursed my lips, wiggling my mouth around in a frown. Fleur was right. Tomorrow, I would deactivate my AmourForTwo.com account. Then I'd see if things moved forward with Adrien. If he didn't make a move soon, then I would.

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