

Love at First Baguette

Episode 8

By Amanda Bouchet

The evening of Adrien's art show was spectacularly warm and beautiful. The long, almost golden summer twilight sipped at the brighter light of day in delicate swallows, draining it in tiny increments until the soft glow of indoor and outdoor lighting took over, turning everything more intimate. Inside, guests and patrons strolled around the artwork, admiring the sculptures and making purchases while others spilled outside the gallery's open front doors, champagne flutes in hand and delicate hors d'oeuvres leaving tiny pastry flakes on lips, only to be brushed away by more champagne or kisses hello as people pressed their cheeks together in greeting.

Adrien was in demand for explanations, attention, purchases, and even for future orders for personalized pieces. He seemed completely in his element, although that was the case everywhere as far as I could tell—on a winding street in Montmartre, in a warehouse full of sculptures, behind the bar at Chez Phillippe, or here, in a trendy art gallery full of his own creations.

I tried not to monopolize his time, but our eyes kept meeting from across the room, his gaze glittering with happiness and satisfaction, and mine probably in awe of his success and talent. Every now and then he'd seek me out, offering me a fresh drink or simply guiding me behind a sculpture so that we could exchange a few words in relative privacy.

"J'aime bien tes boucles d'oreilles." I like your earrings. He spoke softly in French, drawing me right up to a larger piece combining a darkish wood and an iron-like metal that would make an excellent wardrobe in my closet-deprived apartment. He dipped his head closer to mine and lightly touched one of the pendants dangling from my earlobe. His fingers skimmed my neck, and my shiver couldn't have been more obvious. I loved his hands: strong, big, often a little rough-skinned and beat-up. My whole body tightened like a bowstring just thinking about them on the softer parts of me.

“I thought they’d go well with your artwork,” I answered, trying to sound normal even though whenever Adrien came near me, I seemed to hold my breath while energy jumped through me, nearly uncontrollable.

“I could make you things like this,” he murmured, his blue eyes on mine, and his fingers still playing with my jawline as much as with the interconnecting, metallic loops of my earrings.

Heat spread through me that could be partially blamed on the champagne but was mostly due to Adrien, who smelled and looked delicious tonight. Whatever cologne he’d put on was literally pulling me in his direction, so I kept swaying toward him for a hint of more, and his white button-down shirt was rolled up to his elbows, showing off his strong wrists and forearms in a way I probably found unduly fascinating. I couldn’t stop looking. He was such a solid wall of Frenchman that he blocked out most of the party, making me feel as though we were alone together. Right then, I wished we were.

“*Cela me ferait plaisir.*” Still playing with my earring, he told me it would make him happy to make me something similar. His hand moved through my hair, and his fingers brushed my skin, which was turning positively feverish along with the rest of me.

I didn’t know how to answer, so I kept quiet, enjoying his closeness and the fact that he was touching me, which was new and amazing. Sensation zinged through me in heady little shocks, and none of my thoughts seemed appropriate to blurt out. *I love presents. My body’s on fire. Kiss me; I’m yours.*

I swallowed and finally settled on something totally unrelated. “I was going to buy that lamp I loved, but I don’t see it here.”

Adrien was about to answer when someone called his name. He turned, and beyond his shoulder, I recognized one of the regular clients from the boutique I helped manage. She was waiting to make a purchase.

A giddy buzz tumbled through me. I’d handed out flyers all week and talked up Adrien’s artwork to anyone who would listen. At least a dozen people had come from all over Paris to this little Montmartre gallery because *I’d* said they’d find something unique and wonderful here. With just a look or a quiet word, Adrien made me feel special in a way no one else ever had, and I was happy to have brought in a little business for him tonight.

He would gain sales and hopefully be able to do this again, more often and bigger. To follow his passion. I wanted that for him.

I grinned like a fool when my boutique client waved in my direction, and Adrien turned to me with a bemused look on his face. That look of happy gratitude turned intense for a sizzling moment, hot and heavy with a hunger that set off an explosion of butterflies inside my stomach.

Mon Dieu. Adrien was possibly the sexiest man alive. And the way he was looking at me...

My body's reaction was swift and powerful, leaving me wound up so tightly I could barely move.

Fleur popped into my line of vision. "You're bright red. Here. Have a drink." She handed me a cold soda, probably thinking I either needed to cool down or sober up.

"Thanks," I said, my eyes still on Adrien.

"If you look at him any harder, he'll burst into flames." Fleur glanced back and forth between us. "Oh... So that's why you're about to spontaneously combust."

"Why?" I asked, finally snapping out of my Adrien-induced stupor to look at her.

Fleur gave me a sly, twinkly-eyed smile. It was one of those knowing grins that a person really tries to hold back but just can't, so it comes out all weird and maniacal.

She tipped her head toward Adrien. "Lion." She tipped her head toward me. "Gazelle." Her expression was pure glee when she added, "He's so ready to pounce."

My pulse took off like a racehorse. "I'm seriously contemplating pouncing first."

Fleur smirked. "*Bonne idée.*"

It was a good idea. I was ready to take control of my own love life. Starting with Adrien.

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