

What's French for Oops? - Sample

Have Heart, Will Travel

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WHAT'S FRENCH FOR OOPS? - SAMPLE

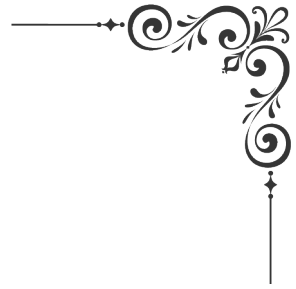
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Written by Amy Paulussen.

For Luuk

What's French for Oops?



Chapter 1

Jean Carr was hungry. She wanted the wrong meal, thanks to jet-lag, and she wanted the wrong man... thanks to blissful ignorance.

It was after eleven at night, she didn't much like her chances of finding anything resembling dinner, but maybe things were different in London. Hopeful, she followed Kate through the reverberating mass of people, out to the back of the pub. Trailing after other people, hoping what she needed would fall in her lap, that was basically Jean's M.O.. While her friends left high school with direction, vision, a Dream, capital D, Jean had meandered through university, choosing courses based on their reading lists, and hoping a career would jump out at her from behind a lectern.

Kate was shouting something indecipherable in the soup of sound and waving toward her colleagues from the theatre. She shoved her on-stage lover and he moved down a bench seat to make room for them. "Keep an eye for a table we can drag over."

That seemed unlikely, but so long as there was food and soon, Jean would happily sit in Kate's lap, if necessary. Oh, it was so good to have a friendly face among the masses of strangers.

One of the crew guys slid menus down the table. "Kate said you just arrived from New Zealand."

"Yeah, my stomach wants brunch." Jean tried to do the time-zone math in her head then abandoned the effort. Food. Priorities.

A jug of beer was plonked down on the table, and a clattering stack of glasses followed. This was going to go straight to her head, but when

in London, right? Well, until her job started. As a live-in nanny she'd be generally sober and in bed before ten. The thought of her job made her nervous—she hadn't met her new boss, or the children. She really didn't know what she was in for. Flying around the globe on little more than a whim suddenly seemed nuts.

Kate flung her arm out, pointing. "Table."

Jean slid off the end of the bench seat to grab it and found herself facing off with a rival table-grabber.

Rolled-up shirt sleeves revealed toned forearms and strong-looking hands gripping the table top. "Oh, pardon me," he said and straightened. He had the top button of his shirt open, his tie tugged loose. His jaw looked to be carved from marble and his eyes were black as Guinness.

The music rose above the hubbub of conversation and Kate was singing along, top of her lungs. Jean turned to see her pointing both finger-guns at her. "Yoooooouu!"

Jean shook her head, laughing, but she was not about to join in.

"Your sex is on fi-ire!" Kate jumped up out of her seat and helped haul the table over.

The guy looked vaguely trapped.

"Join us?" Jean said, pushing two chairs into place: one for herself, and one for this gorgeous man in his deliciously rumpled suit.

Kate was singing the verse now: *their* version of it, rewritten at age fourteen-or-so. "You gotta be careful," Kate gave Jean a significant look. "Maybe see a doctor."

If there was a girl-code, it definitely said that joining an old friend in impromptu karaoke, reliving a shared adolescence, was more important than making a good impression on even the most mesmerizing of men. Jean gave in and, avoiding eye contact with the sexy stranger, sang her heart out. "Get yo' self tested."

Beat.

"Not infected."

They had an audience now. "It could be herpes. Or something more serious. Could be a U.T.I... Just an Ooo-ti."

And then, all together, every actor at the table joined in. "Yooooooooou!"

Someone started clapping and Kate took Jean's hand, plunging them both into a theatrical bow. "We're here all week."

The stranger was laughing now, but he looked over his shoulder—was he here with someone? Apparently not, because he sat down in the chair Jean had pushed across.

"That song must have come out just as our Sex Ed classes got to the nitty gritty." Jean offered an almost explanation.

"Oh, I've missed you." Kate leaned over and pulled Jean into a hug. She lifted her beer glass. "To old friends!"

Jean clinked her glass to five or six others, not including the suited stranger, because he didn't have a glass. "I'm Jean."

He said a name, but it got lost in the noise.

"Mac?"

"Ooh, he's Scottish." Kate gave Jean a nudge. "Mac, have a drink."



MATT CLARK WAS UNDECIDED. His mates had been egging him on for some time, hassling him for not putting himself out there. At long last, he'd snapped. "You want me to chat up a total stranger? Just spin me around and point me at a warm body and—"

"Yes!" A chorus had answered. "Well, get us a table first."

"Front row seats so we can watch you make your move."

And then, not five minutes, later he'd seen a table empty, gone to save it, and got himself chatted up. Sort of.

His mates were at the bar, still watching. If he played this right, perhaps they'd get off his case. Jean didn't seem like his usual cup of tea, dishevelled and loud and... crude, quite frankly. But he wasn't planning on marrying her, just flirting.

She brushed her unruly hair off her shoulder and he caught a whiff of her scent. He couldn't put his finger on what it was and leaned in, without really meaning to.

"You alright?" she said.

"I... I can't place your accent."

"New Zealand. Just arrived."

The music was loud and with all the people talking over the top of it, even two word sentences were liable to get lost.

She had a long silver necklace, disappearing into the deep V-neck of her t-shirt. She caught him looking and sat up straighter. Was that code for *eyes up, mate*, or was she nervous? Good nervous or bad nervous? It had been far too long since he'd done this.

He twisted his glass in his hand. "How do you know so many people already?"

"Oh, I only know Kate. We went to school together and she's letting me stay with her for a few days."

"Are you travelling?" he asked.

Kate clapped and leapt up, almost knocking over what little remained of the jug of beer. "I love this song! Dance with me, Jean. Everything's taking me back tonight."

Jean stood and squeezed past, brushing her thighs against his arm in the crush. Curvy thighs in tight black jeans and hips that twisted to the beat and for a while he'd forgotten all about his friends at the bar. They were still watching. One of them held out his hands, open in a shrug, as if to say, *are you even trying?*

Matt could get up and join them, sure. It wasn't exactly his style, but perhaps it was time to consider a change in style. Sleek, put-together women with serious careers and stable lives... it hadn't exactly worked out brilliantly for him so far. Chaotic, uninhibited women with no fixed abode were uncharted territory. He downed the last of his beer and stood up.

Ignoring his mates' cheering, he joined Jean and Kate. Why did he have to be so self-conscious, even after two and a half beers? Jean and Kate looked so wild and free, but he felt awkward, out of kilter. Hyper-aware.

Kate gestured that she needed a drink, leaving him on his own with Jean—well, on their own but surrounded by fifteen-or-so other people.

She took his hand and pulled him in, still winding her hips, side-to-side, hypnotic. He met her gaze and she gave a broad grin. She looked like she was having fun. That was all this was: fun. Not his speciality—that's what his ex-wife would say, but it was past time he stopped caring what she would say.

He found the rhythm, mirroring Jean. Her hip bumped against his and he lost the beat for a moment, but caught it again. They were close now, brushing arms, and if he let his eyes drop he'd see just how long that necklace was.

Resisting that temptation, his gaze fell to the curve of her neck, the wavy mass of hair, the silver zig-zags hanging from her earlobes like lightning strikes or crossed-out mistakes.

Was this a mistake? Not yet, it wasn't.

In the moving crowd she was suddenly closer, her breasts pressed to his chest for a moment, then not. Her hand was on his arm. He let his fingers curl around her waist, soft and firm at once, warm fabric shifting against her skin and just like that he was imagining taking her clothes off.

One of the bar staff wended past them with plates of food and Jean broke away from him—probably good timing, though he hated to admit it. He was going too fast.

"Sorry," she said. "My body clock is all out of whack. I'm starving."

"I'll get a round." He went to the bar to order a couple of jugs.

"Looks like it's going well." His mates surrounded him while he waited for the barman to take his money. "She's hot."

Matt nodded, all-but flinging his credit card at the guy behind the till.

"You looked like you were having fun."

"You do remember what goes where, I presume?"

Someone rewarded that comment with a shove, just as Matt got his jug of beer. "Thanks," he said, and ducked around the shover and shovee.

Back at the table, Jean was cutting up a steak with gusto. He filled the empties and topped up the others.

"So, Mac, which part of Scotland are you from?" the guy beside Kate asked.

"I'm not. I'm..."

"Definitely a London accent." A guy in a black shirt said.

Matt nodded.

"Shakespeare fan?"

"Sure."

"You should come to our play."

"Okay," Matt said. Why not? "Comedy or Tragedy?"

"Comedy."

"Ah."

"You prefer the tragedies?" Jean said.

"Definitely."

"Everybody dies."

"Yes, but first, there's an entire story."

She laughed, a brilliant musical laugh and waved her fork in acknowledgement, if not agreement.

"So they're all actors—what about you?" he said.

"Audience, mainly. Oh, you mean career-wise." Jean dipped a chip in some ketchup then licked it off, tongue curling, soft and pink.

He groaned, but thankfully for the loud bar she wouldn't likely hear it. Then she bit into the chip. He was as bad as when they'd been dancing, and she wasn't even half way through her chips.

"I dunno what I want to do."

Matt knew *exactly* what he wanted to do. Taste the salt and ketchup on her lips, and pull her onto his lap.

"I've never really had a clear career path."

Kate stole a chip. "I thought you wanted to do real estate."

"Nah, that was Phil's thing. I was just, you know, young and stupid."

"In love."

"Possible. Who knows. What's love?" Jean and Kate stared at each other, silent a moment, then burst into song: "Got to do, got to do with it. What's love..."

Kate finished the line but Jean cracked up laughing. Shaking her head, she met Matt's gaze.

He felt bold then. If she hadn't had half of a meal in front of her, he might have asked her to leave with him, right then.



THEY ALL LEFT TOGETHER, in the end. Jean kept waiting for Mac to return to his friends, the ones she'd seen wave to him from the bar.

But he stayed with Jean, walked out into the fresh night air, the street lights and shadows, behind Kate and her friends.

They walked along the side of the Thames, looking out at the river reflecting the city lights, the bridges and buildings, all so familiar and yet new—new to her. "I still can't quite believe I'm actually here."

"Long way from home?" He wasn't looking at the view; his focus was all on her.

"Inside the bar, it could have been anywhere, you know, but out here, there's no denying, we are definitely in London. I can't quite get my head around it. But then my head is all jet-lag and beer and..." She felt his hand brush against hers. Her head was all flustered and fired-up and full-of-him.

"You, ah," he slowed to a stop. Jean looked to see how far Kate was ahead of them, then turned back to Mac as he said, "We could go to my place."

They could. They so could. Except... "Oh, um, I'm staying with Kate."
"She won't mind."

"No, I know, but..."

"It's okay, you can say no."

Could she though? He was so damn gorgeous, and basically asking her to say no, which was weirdly, but wonderfully, sexy. "It's not that I don't want to, it's just, I've only been in this hemisphere for like twelve hours."

"Fair enough." He turned and kept walking. Even in this half light those suit-pants hugged a fine arse. He was *fine*. And sweet. And just a tad awkward. Temptation in shiny shoes, and that accent... delicious.

Jean jogged to catch up. "Maybe in a couple of days." She took his elbow and he stopped walking again.

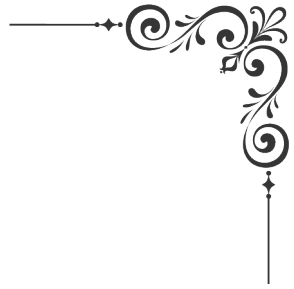
He cocked his head to the side, a dare in his dark eyes, *tell the truth*.

She had her hands on his forearms and rocked forwards. It'd be so easy to kiss him. Her body was aching for it, to brush against his again, like they had dancing. He'd teased her just right, got her all hot and thinking about it, so easily. Like he wasn't even trying. "Another night," she said.

He leaned in, like he was going to kiss her.

Someone whistled. One of Kate's theatre friends.

Mac smiled and shook his head. "Another night." He cleared his throat. "Go on, I better go find my friends."



Chapter 2

One month later...

Watching a seven-year-old try to stir cake mixture had to be one of the most frustrating things in the world. Jean balled her fists behind her back to keep from taking over. "Scoop it up from the bottom."

"Like this?" Harry twisted the spoon, bursting a pocket of dry cocoa and flour, which sprayed across the marble counter top and up onto his pale cheek.

"Better." Jean went to the sink for a cloth. Something to do with her hands might help her not to take over.

"Can I lick the spoon, Jean?"

"Just let me give it one last..." She swiped the cloth across the bench and took the spoon. The mixture folded into itself, absorbing the last of the dry ingredients.

Harry planted his hands on the counter, his Spiderman t-shirt flapping forward to collect a little spilled egg-white. He kicked off the chair and swung side to side.

"Alright, let's get this baby in the oven." Jean held out the spoon for him to lick.

"Who gets the bowl?"

Elise came in from the hall, hand raised in salute. "Reporting for duty." Her nails were bright blue, which really popped against her dark skin.

Harry, craned to see how much mixture his sister was getting. "Not fair."

"There won't be much left in this bowl when I'm done." Jean swiped the spatula around the edges.

Elise perched on a barstool, rocking back onto two legs. No hands.

Jean couldn't bear to watch. And she definitely couldn't say anything. The trick with nannying a teenager was to pick your battles and, with any luck, lull them into thinking they didn't have a nanny at all. This was not Jean's first week on the job.

Harry pointed his chocolatey spoon at Jean, like a sword. "You should get the spatula."

"She can't. Coeliacs. Unless..." Elise grabbed the counter—for dramatic effect, not balance. "It better not be gluten-free."

"No, it's all yours." Jean handed over the spatula and bowl, with little more than a smear of mixture left on them.

"When's Mum due?" Elise licked the spatula.

"You're going out?" Harry's voice got higher on every word. "But it's family movie night."

Elise shrugged. "I'll go after. What are we watching?" She pushed off, balancing—then wobbling—and balancing again. The bar stools were sturdy, hardwood, a little worn with age, but so solid they'd likely outlive the entire family. Elise saw Harry's expression. "What? It's holidays. Not like I have to get up for school in the morning."

"We're sorting out your uniforms tomorrow." Jean set the timer on the oven, a brushed-steel monstrosity, which didn't at all match the warm, earthy décor of the open kitchen-dining-living room, but did its job like a dream.

"I still fit my uniform from last year," Elise said.

"You have to get a longer skirt." Harry put the spoon in his mouth, the handle sticking out like a tongue. "Mum thaid."

"No, she didn't."

"She thaid you had to thow her how thort it ith."

Jean held up a hand. "We'll just ask her when she gets—"

They all heard the front door open. "Bloody hell, umbrellas hate me." Nicky's voice carried through from the hall.

Harry sprung as if from a starting block, sprinting to the door. "Elise is ditching family movie night."

"You wanna go out in this?" Nicky stepped through to the living room, finger-combing her dark blonde hair so it fell mostly to one side of her head. Her mouth was slightly crooked, as was her nose, and maybe pulling her hair all to one side was meant to detract—but she carried herself with so much confidence, she made asymmetry seem like fashionable edge.

Elise had the spatula in her mouth and didn't take it out to argue. No, she was much too smart for that. She might look like her dad, with her thick dark hair and Indian complexion, but she had Nicky's emotional intelligence. Borderline-manipulative smarts.

And it was T-minus-six days. Six days till the kids went to Matt's—Harry's biological and Elise's adoptive father. Six days for Nicky to make sure the kids knew *she* was the cool parent. Elise's plans for the evening were safe.

Not that there was any kind of actual competition over who was the cool parent. Nicky was, a thousand times over, the cool parent. She was totally unflappable; put it down to being a doctor in Accident and Emergency. Nothing shocked her.

Somehow she juggled schedules and sleep deprivation and special occasions. She even squeezed in lazy mornings and bi-weekly movie nights. She wasn't just a great Mum; she was a good boss too. And she could pick a decent bottle of wine at fifty paces.

Nicky ruffled Harry's ash-blond hair. "What have you been eating?"
"Triple chocolate cake."

"Of course." She thumbed his cheek. "Normally I'd applaud dessert first, grab life with both hands, *carpe diem*, but timing could be better."

"Dad's coming over?" Elise spun around on her barstool.

"Dad's coming over!" Harry vaulted over the back of the sofa. "Dad can try my cake."

Elise joined Harry on the couch and flicked the TV on, browsing possible movies for the evening.

Nicky came to the kitchen. "Can you stay for a bit?"

"Sure. For a bit?" Jean had been planning to meet Kate and her friends, but they wouldn't miss her if she was a tad late.

"So that you're in the loop and all." Nicky grabbed a bottle of wine from the rack. "It'll only take half an hour. Matt is, if nothing else, punctual." She put the bottle back and pulled out another for consideration.

Jean had yet to actually meet Matt, but she'd gathered quite a lot of recon from passing comments and it sounded like the guy had a serious stick up his arse.

"How many glasses?" Jean opened the cupboard.

"Glasses?" Nicky pretended to bite the cork out, spit and scull.

"Change of plans for next week?" All Jean's fingers and toes were crossed for a delay. A day, a week longer at Nicky's—she'd take whatever she could get. This was the perfect nannying job. Not only had it given Jean a ticket out of her post-university rut, to the other side of the world no less, but they were all getting on so well together. Sure, the kids had to go to Matt's *eventually*, but it could only go down hill from here.

Nicky looked grim. Was Matt going to bail completely? Fuck. Harry would be gutted. This week alone, he'd mentioned his dad in passing more times than Jean could count.

Even Elise would be disappointed. She didn't idolise Matt in the same way Harry did—for one, she was fifteen and had both feet firmly planted in the adults-are-idiots phase—but she had called Matt 'Dad' since she was eight years old. Her own father—her first father—had long since signed over all parental rights. Matt was her Dad. She loved him.

"Surely you have a say," Jean said.

Nicky opened her mouth to reply as the doorbell rang.

Harry scissored his legs over the back of the sofa, more elastic band than human, and ran to open the front door.

Elise turned to Nicky. "What's going on?" She could be unnervingly perceptive at times.

"Are we going to your house early?" Harry said. "We can bring my cake I made!"

"Cake?" That had to be Matt's voice. "You shouldn't have." Like a cartoon villain: the English accent, rumbly, severe, vaguely James Bond-ish. The kind of villain that seemed like a good guy for the first half of the movie. Careful or you'd be fooled by his charming exterior.

"I have plans." Elise stood up. "You guys can't just change everything on me without warning."

"Hello to you too, Elise." Matt stepped into the lounge, folding his navy woollen coat precisely and laying it over the back of the sofa. "This must be the new nan—."

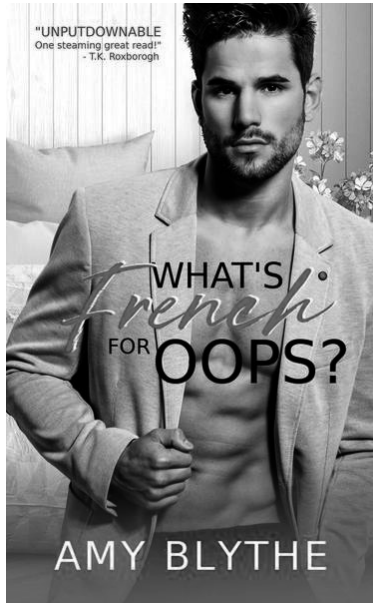
It was him. The guy from the bar.

Jean had given him her number that night, but a few days later, she hadn't heard from him, and she had to switch to a UK number. If he'd tried to get in touch after that, no luck—and thank fuck! Mac was Matt.

Matt was Harry and Elise's dad.

Fuck.

Did you love *What's French for Oops?* - *Sample?* Then you should read
What's French for Oops? by Amy Blythe!



Meet Jean: a nanny with a plan... that just went out the window of the taxi cab headed for Heathrow. So long, London!

Bonjour, Paris! is the sum total of Jean's French, but her maths is fine and this apartment does *not* have enough bedrooms.

Jean has a brilliant nannying gig in London, but when the kids' up-tight father suddenly ups and takes them all to Paris, everything starts to go wrong.

Read more at amyblythe.com.