

chance meetings

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chance meetings

by [lamp_of_hetalia](#)

Summary

Francis is an author with very little hope left in publishing his novel and Arthur is a publisher who drinks every night. By chance, they meet in a cafe one night, and a budding friendship develops. Could there be something more? Maybe if they'd stop bickering.

Notes

This fic has been in progress since my junior year of high school and I'm like....I should probably post this at some point. It's not admittedly on par with my current writing, but the later chapters will be. Finishing this has been a dream of mine since I was 16 and I'm now 21. Comments are appreciated!

when you pick up an englishman at a bar

Love is blind. Love is forever. Love is painful. Love is hard. Love is forgiving. Love is everything.

In the end, love is as it always has been: vague.

Love is inevitably different things to different people and it has the power to destroy some and save others.

Arthur was never one for love. The ambiguous air that surrounded the concept always kept him at bay. He had *liked* and he had *adored* but he had never *loved*. It was a foreign notion that registered more with mainstream ideals than with his own life. And he was content. His job at the publishing company in town kept him busy, the articles, books, and poetry he read in accordance with his job kept him from boredom, and the company of alcohol in his den on late nights kept him from being lonely. Every morning he would get up, go through his morning routine, head off to work, come home, continue to work, and then retire to his bed. It was comfortable and it was stable. He liked it that way. In short, he thought he had no need for the idea of love.

Francis was always in the light of love. From the day he was born he was breaking hearts. Sometimes it was intentional, others...not so much. He had *loved* and he had *lost* but he never really *cared*. Everyone was a conquest and no one really mattered because they would never love him the way that he would them. Love was something coveted and secret to be showered on those who deserved it. He was restless. With a job at a local bakery, he was tied down and fretful. A pile of forgotten love letters from previous lovers awaited him at home and the affection of a current lover kept him from loneliness. Most mornings he would wake up to another person in bed with him. He would go to the kitchen and cook breakfast, watch them leave, and then head off to work. In the evenings, he would make his way back home after a short trip to a local bar and head straight for his bed (whether he had another person on his arm or not). He was anxious and he drowned in instability. It was terrifying. In summation, he thought that love was a problem to be solved.

They met one night when Arthur had run out of alcohol and decided to go to a local pub rather than a liquor store. Francis smiled that winning smile and marked him as his newest challenge when he saw Arthur downing glass after glass of whiskey. He'd sat beside him at the bar and bought him a drink and *smiled*. Arthur looked up at him and glared, but at least he'd taken the drink. They'd talked, bickered mostly, but in the end, Arthur had ended up on Francis' arm. It was a regular day for Francis, on the edge of insanity. Francis woke to Arthur beside him, and went to make breakfast. A few minutes later, a dazed and confused Arthur had stumbled in, displaying an even angrier scowl than the one he had started out with last night.

“Who in the bloody hell are you and where the fuck am I?” He’d gotten dressed, and looked about as hung-over as one could get. Francis gestured to the table and placed a plate of crepes on it.

“I’m Francis and you’re in my apartment. Eat.” He placed his own plate of crepes on the table and sat, once again motioning toward the seat across from him.

“What the hell am I doing here?” Arthur sat down, rubbing his eyes.

“You accompanied me home last night, and I think the rest is explanatory.”

“This is why I stay at home.” Nevertheless, Arthur picked up the fork next to his plate and cautiously took a bite.

“So you don’t end up in stranger’s apartments, eating their food?”

“Exactly.”

It was silent the rest of the meal. Francis was never the curious one when it came to his one-night-stand’s personal lives and Arthur, well, he just didn’t want to be there. When they finished, Arthur left, and Francis continued the rest of his day as per usual. Nothing was out of the ordinary and everything was falling apart.

Francis was going to be late to work, but he didn’t care, he hated his job anyway. If he didn’t need the money, if he could support himself on just his writing, if he could live the way he wanted to, he wouldn’t need this dead-end job. But those were just *ifs* and he’d gotten too many rejection letters to even justify having a strand of hope. The last publishing house he’d been to hadn’t even looked at his manuscript, he was sure.

.Walking into the bakery, he could see his manager was ticked off just by the sight of him.

“Late again, Bonnefoy.” He tisked and headed back into his office, most likely to write Francis up for the second time. One more, and he’d be fired. Francis went into the back of the shop and put on his apron, the smell of baking bread surrounding him. Today was going to be a long day.

It had been a slow night, with only two customers coming in after three. His shift had ended five minutes ago but his boss was making him stay over ten minutes for being late. He wouldn’t have minded if there were something to do. Without anything to keep his mind busy, it wandered, and without anything to keep his hands busy, they shook. Anxiety liked to wash over him during times like these, taking hold of his instability and doubts and pulling them out into the open. Hardly anything could stop them when they came out, wracking his brain and assaulting his thoughts. It had been an awful day if you took that into consideration. Francis was now sitting at the counter, fiddling with the hem of his apron to try to keep his hands busy and counting the spots in the pattern that ran across the bottom of it in an attempt to busy his mind. The shop bell rang as the door opened, presenting a customer. A very familiar customer.

Arthur walked up to the counter, his eyes focusing on the menu, though he knew what he wanted. He hadn't bothered to look in the direction of the counter-worker, it didn't really matter to him who served him. He'd run out of tea at home and didn't want to drive to the other side of town to get more, so he would have to settle for tea from a shop on his side of town. Human interaction was not his favorite thing in the world, but going without his evening cup of tea was worse than talking to other people. It had been a busy day and he needed something to calm him down, and he knew a nice cup of herbal tea would do the trick. It seemed the only tea they served, however, was black tea. Arthur considered getting back in his car and driving to another cafe, but he was too tired. So, black tea, caffeinated or not, would have to do. He turned toward the man attending the counter and he nearly dropped his wallet.

"Hello, Arthur." Francis had never had one of his one-night-stand's come into the shop. It was either going to turn into an interesting night, or continue to be an awful one. The scowl that sprung onto the Englishman's face genuinely frightened Francis.

"Hello," Arthur strained to make out his name tag, "Francis."

"Well, this is a bit awkward. What can I get you?"

"Just a...cup of vanilla black tea."

"Alright, it'll be a minute. I'll bring it to one of the tables." The Frenchman twisted around, moving to make the tea. Arthur pulled off his coat, sat down at the table furthest away from the counter and vaguely remembered that he intended to get the cup of tea to go, but was too embarrassed to say anything now. There was a reason he never got drunk in public, and this was it. He always ended up going home with a stranger and then meeting them under some other circumstance later on, creating a very awkward situation. This situation was something he tried desperately to avoid, but it always ended up happening. Nothing could convince him that these meetings were coincidence, and he promptly avoided the shops and cafe's in which he met his one-night-stands afterward. In fact, there were currently ten coffee/tea shops he had stopped going to, to make sure he avoided the awkward glances and twitching smiles of someone with which he'd shared a drunken night.

Arthur was focused on the wood grain of the table when Francis brought his tea over. The Englishman didn't look up as Francis placed another mug on the table across from him. This was about to get really awkward and Arthur was going to regret not going home immediately after work.

"Aren't you supposed to be working?" Hopefully, the man would get yelled at by his boss and leave Arthur in peace.

"My shift's about over and there are no other customers. My boss left an hour ago, and I've already locked everything up." The Frenchman took a sip of his drink, cupping his hands around the mug when he set it back down.

"Oh." Arthur was content to sit in silence for the rest of the time he felt obligated to be there, but Francis apparently wasn't one for silence.

“What do you do? For work, I mean.”

“I’m an editor.” He didn’t really want to have this conversation, he wanted to leave but his damned politeness kept him from doing so.

“An editor? That seems like a boring job.”

“Not as boring as being a cafe worker.”

“My job is eventful enough.”

“As is mine.” Arthur wanted to bring this to a close, but he was only halfway done with his tea. He contemplated abandoning it, or just gulping down the rest of it so he could leave.

“Read any interesting manuscripts today?”

“No, none were particularly interesting.”

“I’m guessing you’re in non-fiction then.”

“No.” His eyebrow twitched. This man was coming to conclusions about him and Arthur couldn’t possibly be more uncomfortable. Usually when people came to conclusions about him and assumed things about him, he ended up yelling at them and he was too tired to do that tonight.

“Any particular genre then?”

“No.”

“But not non-fiction, so definitely fiction.” Francis took another sip of his drink, smiling at Arthur, who was glaring into his mug, staying silent. “How do you become an editor?”

“I worked hard. Went to college. Learned things. Became an editor.”

“So the first time you applied to be an editor, you got the job?”

“No. The first twenty jobs I applied for rejected me or did not call me back. After about a year of doing odd jobs, I got hired at a publishing company as what basically was a secretary. I worked my way up from the bottom and dug out my own place in the company. Eventually, I was promoted to editor.” This was getting more irritating by the moment.

“How many years?”

“Why are you so interested in this?” Arthur was on the verge of snapping. This always happened and he always let it happen. It was better to get their initial curiosity out of the way, and have them realize that Arthur was someone that no one willingly called their friend.

“I’ve never met one of my one-night-stand’s after they leave.”

“That's fortunate.” The Englishman took the last swig of his tea and stood, pulling on his coat. “I'll be going now.” Another cafe he'd have to avoid now. That meant he could only go to one of the twelve cafes in his area. Wonderful.

“Come back soon. I'd like to share another one-sided conversation with you.” Francis smiled and winked at Arthur, taking both of their cups to the kitchen.

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Francis was at the bar, his arm around a rather tipsy blonde woman who was chatting up a storm. She wasn't really asking him anything, and she was more talking *at* him rather than talking *with* him, so he just stood next to her and nodded, anxiously waiting to get on with the inevitable. It was more than likely she would go home with him tonight and leave in the morning as so many had before; all Francis had to do was close the deal and get her out the door with him. Whether she went home with him really didn't matter to him, but waking up next to a stranger was better than waking up alone. So he smiled that winning smile and her mouth gradually stopped moving, a drunken smirk appearing on her lips.

“My place or yours?” She asked, fingers now trailing Francis's neck.

“Mine.” He didn't even know why she asked. Every one of them always ended up going to his apartment, though he realized she was not aware of that. She grabbed her coat and he grabbed his, pulling them on, and stepping out into the frosted London air. His apartment was two blocks away from the bar, walking distance. As they made their first few steps out the door, Francis quickly realized that the woman was much more intoxicated than he'd previously thought. She was stumbling and slurring out her words, blacking out at some points and when she wasn't trying to amble around like a newborn deer, she was on the ground crawling. Really, it didn't matter to him whether or not she came home with him. He caught her arm and pulled her to him, wrapping an arm around her waist for support.

“Where do you live?” He was tired now and he wasn't sure why.

“Louaeghton.” Her slurred speech was getting worse.

“Loughton?” That was a good 18 miles from here and he wasn't in any shape for driving. He would just have to take her back to his apartment and wait for her to sober up enough to get her home. She was smiling, and he was pretty sure she was in another world. Perhaps one much better than this; one where she didn't go to bars and drink herself into a state of stupidity. Though he could be wrong, he liked to think that when people drank they did so with causality. One shouldn't just get blindingly drunk for frivolous reasons, as he always said. Not when they had things to lose.

He unlocked his apartment door and carried her inside. She had passed out on the way there, greatly complicating their trip up three flights of stairs. He placed her in his bed, taking off her outer coat, and pulling the blanket up to cover her. He would sleep on the couch.

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It was Saturday, Francis' day off from work. He'd watched the embarrassed and extremely apologetic woman leave this morning, after they'd had breakfast. She'd explained that she was angry at her husband, and so she went out drinking, not intending to get entirely wasted, but she apparently had a history of alcohol abuse and she was very grateful that Francis hadn't left her in an alley somewhere. He was tired of this, of her. She was too grateful and nice to be thanking him. His intentions hadn't started out pure the night before, so she shouldn't be thanking him. He was only thinking of himself.

His days off were few, cherished, and despised. When they came around, he sat down and worked on his novel, trying to make it better, trying to make it something that someone would want to publish. Usually, after an hour or two of staring at his computer, he hadn't made much progress. A sentence was rewritten or a comma was added. He could never come up with a good ending, and while none of the publishing companies he'd submitted his work to had told him why it had been rejected, he was sure that the endings were a majority of the reason. The other reason, he theorized, was that his novel was about love: something Francis himself had never truly experienced. He'd deleted the novel several times, and rewritten the entirety of it, hoping for a better outcome than the last, but always coming up with nearly the same prose and ideas. His main character was always a Byronic Hero, and the love interest was always condescending and sarcastic, and they always ended up getting together *somehow*. In some versions, they got to live happily ever after, in others, they were separated, and in the last version, they'd died by each other's sides, whispering about hope when the light left their eyes.

The story lines were unstable, bordering on impossible, and they resembled a somewhat grandiose version of what Francis wished his life was like: adventure and a kind of love that wouldn't be gone when the sun rose the next morning. It seemed that his dreams were too far from reality, even for a fantasy novel. He was ready to give up, trash the novel and just resign himself to working at the cafe for the rest of his life. Maybe one day he'd pick up someone at the bar who he would take a liking to and they'd start a relationship, *maybe*. Or maybe he'd die destitute and alone, one never knows.

The paragraph he was reading was getting on his nerves, he'd made the main character too whiny. He deleted the entire paragraph, closing out his word program and opening up a blank page, his mind drifting to thoughts other than a new plot. "*I worked hard.*" Francis could hear it echo in the back of his mind. "*The first twenty jobs I applied for rejected me...I worked my way up from the bottom...*" It was unlike Francis to take (albeit indirect) advice from an Englishman, but he supposed it was better than giving up his dream. He began to write, trying to keep in mind the things he was trying to leave out this time around (the sobbing hero and the annoying love interest).

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There were twenty publishing companies in Francis' area and he'd been to nineteen of them. The only one he hadn't tried was "McAllistar's Publishing", the company furthest from Francis' apartment. McAllistar was by far the smallest publishing company he had seen. It was a small house near the outskirts of town with a sign that had the publishing company's name printed on it. He was standing on the sidewalk outside, pacing back and forth, trying to get up the courage to go inside. This was his last chance. After this, if it didn't pan out, he

would give up and look for another job somewhere else. Maybe he'd go back to France and get out of this awful city. He just wanted to get it over with.

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The secretary's heels clicked over the tile as she led him to one of the back offices in the publishing house. He'd come on a whim, without an appointment, and he would most likely have to wait around for a few hours before anyone got to him, *if they even got to him at all*. At the time, the direct route, going in himself and physically handing them his manuscript, seemed like the best idea. He had been ignored too many times when he'd just sent the darn thing in. The secretary turned to him and gestured toward a waiting room, "Mr. Kirkland will be right with you."

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When he had arrived in the morning, it was sunny and there was no one in the waiting room with him. It had been about four hours now, and people had come and gone. There were two men sitting across from him, whispering to each other and glancing around the room, each with a thick stack of papers on their laps and a nervous glint in their eyes. It was their first time in a publishing house, Francis could tell. He was like that his first time too: full of nerves and bottled up excitement. When he looked closer, he could see they were younger and the one on the left had trousers on that were a little too small for him. Young, fresh faces, who were probably much better at what they did than Francis could ever hope to be.

The door opened again, and the two men across from him got up and went inside. He wondered what 'Mr. Kirkland' looked like. He was probably another middle-aged man with a dirty cigarette hanging out of his mouth, tired and greasy. Francis had only met one publisher that hadn't met at least one of those qualifications, and she had been nice to him, but ended up rejecting his book. Kirkland sounded like an old man name. The door opened again and the two young men exited, looking more nervous and scared than when they had gone in.

"Natalia! Those were all of my appointments today, right?" The publisher yelled. Francis knew that voice. Where did he know that voice from?

"Yes, Mr. Kirkland, but there was one walk-in. I told him you would deal with him after your appointments."

"Well why in the bloody hell did you do that?" 'Mr. Kirkland' stepped out from behind his open door and glared at 'Natalia'. Then, his eyes landed on Francis. It was Arthur. Francis hadn't taken into account that Arthur worked in publishing, let alone that he would happen to work at the one publishing house he chose to make his last ditch attempt at publishing his book.

"What in bloody hell are *you* doing here?" Arthur looked as if he nearly had a heart attack. The secretary—Natalia—walked back to the front room and closed the door behind her.

"Ah, you've caught me, I've been stalking you." Francis stood, manuscript in hand, "I thought you said you were an editor."

“It's a small publishing company.” He glared at the Frenchman and made no move to go inside his office.

“I'm here to try and publish my book, *mon ami*.”

“I am not your friend,” Arthur turned toward his office and started walking, “Come this way.”

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It was odd, while Arthur had met his one-night-stand's at their places of work, they had never managed to find him at his work. And then there was this man, who he'd met not only once, but twice now. Hopefully this man's—Francis'—intentions were really to publish his supposed book. Arthur sat down at his desk and Francis sat in the chair in front of his desk, looking oddly nervous. He hadn't imagined that a man like Francis, who seemed to radiate confidence, could *be* nervous.

“Book.” Arthur extended his hand and Francis handed him the manuscript. Arthur smiled. It was always somewhat empowering knowing that you held what was probably someone's life work in your hands. The fact that you could also make or break their dreams was a nice added bonus. While Arthur hadn't outright rejected anyone because he wasn't fond of them, he would admit to going out of his way to find mistakes in their manuscripts in order to reject them. He had every intention of doing that to Francis, even if by some miracle the Frenchman had written the next bestseller.

He opened to the front page, reading a few sentences here and there. It wasn't exactly prime prose, but it was alright. He'd have to work to find problems with it, unless the plot was complete trash. Arthur could tell Francis was nervous: he was shifting slightly in his chair and avoiding eye contact, two classic signs of someone who either had never tried to publish anything or someone who had been rejected one too many times.

“It looks alright so far, but I'll have to read it through to make sure the plot is feasible and knowing the French, it won't be.” Arthur tucked the manuscript into his briefcase and smirked. He could see a spark in Francis' eyes, as if he weren't expecting to hear that. He had been rejected before, Arthur would bet on it. That would only make rejecting him more satisfying.

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Arthur was settled peacefully at his desk a few days later, just going through the week's maybe-to-be-published novels. There were only a few this week: a horror story that was roughly 300 pages too long, a fantasy novel that hadn't really interested Arthur to begin with, and Francis' novel. He was putting the last one off, expecting the work to be an over-exaggerated love story. Love was something he'd never been fond of and love stories were something that added to the mass mania of silly things like 'love at first sight', so he tried his best to stay away from them. But, he had to get to it eventually, so with a scowl and a cup of fresh black tea, he cracked open Francis' manuscript.

He was forty pages in when he realized he hadn't been marking mistakes and when he looked back through, he found quite a few typing errors and nothing else. While he wouldn't say he was enthralled in the story, he would admit to being vaguely interested in what was going to happen next. It was a love story, as he had expected, and he had groaned when the two characters first met: predicting how it would turn out. But the romance was sparse and bitter: most of the time it seemed as if the two were rivals or even enemies rather than story-book lovers. Arthur found the arguments interesting and grew to like both of the characters respectively: the main male for his charm and confidence, and the main female for her sarcasm and wit. The book was good, but the ending was rushed. It was like Francis had finished it without knowing what to do and therefore just tried to tie up all the loose ends somehow.

As much as Arthur would hate himself later, he decided the book needed to have a chance on the market (after fixing the ending, that is). He wasn't so un-fond of the man as to deny him a chance at his dream. Apparently Arthur had a heart after all. Unfortunately, the ending was a problem that needed to be fixed, which meant that Arthur would have to contact the Frenchman about fixing it. E-mail seemed to be the most effective way of getting in to contact with someone without actually seeing them, so Arthur got up and found his laptop, quickly wrote out an e-mail stating that Francis needed to fix the ending, and sent it. Francis would hopefully fix up the ending without needing additional assistance (if he did, Arthur might drop the book and forget about trying to publish it) and they would both go on their merry ways, never seeing each other ever again.

dancing in the dark in the pale moonlight

Chapter Summary

Crazy shit my dude.

Chapter Notes

This chapter is unfinished. It is also unedited. I'm probably never going to finish it, so if anyone wants to take it over feel free to email me at hannamarie1818@gmail.com.

Unfortunately I am no longer that into Hetalia, for a variety of reasons, and while it's very sad for me to abandon this project that I've been working on for close to 7 years, it's definitely not something I see myself finishing.

Thank you to everyone who has given me nice comments about this, particularly @icicle223. Thank you for supporting this story and my writing!

That was how they ended up here, 3 months later, sitting in the small cafe where Francis worked. They met frequently now, three days a week after Francis' boss left for the day. Arthur would have tea, Francis would have coffee and they would sit and argue about how to end Francis' book. Lots of “that's stupid”, “not as stupid as your face”s were thrown about, inevitably getting them no closer to their goal than when they had started. Eventually, they would give up for the day and Francis would let Arthur out, waving goodbye before locking up the shop.

They exchanged phone numbers on week seven after Arthur couldn't make a meeting because he was sick and didn't tell Francis, making the Frenchman wait at the shop for thirty minutes before angrily stomping home and sending the Briton a not-so-nice e-mail about keeping one's plans. This gave them the ability to call one another at all times of the day with various excuses as to why one was bothering the other. It was the third meeting of week 15 when they finally agreed on something.

“What if they ended up going back to his hometown and meeting his mother? And his mother treats them like a couple, but they're still denying it?” Francis sipped his coffee, throwing out another far-fetched idea as to how they might end his novel.

“No, no. That doesn't solve anything. They have to end up together somehow, and that's just drawing it out more, frog.” Arthur set his tea cup down and picked up a biscuit.

“Well, how about...they get back from the other dimension and decide to go their separate ways and they say goodbye to each other but neither of them move,” Francis paused, looking up at Arthur for approval. The Brit nodded for him to go on. “And Kurogane asks Fai where she's going to go, you know, because she has no family, and she says she doesn't know. So Kurogane says something along the lines of, 'Why don't you come home with me?' and she glares at him but goes with him anyway and they walk off holding hands?” He took another sip of his coffee before setting it down and locking eyes with Arthur.

“It's a bit sappy...but...I like it.”

“Have we agreed on an ending?”

“We've agreed on something.”

“Shall I write it out?”

“Of course you should write it out, twat. How else are you going to finish this book?”

“Alright, I'll have it on your desk by the end of the week.” Francis smiled at him, chuckling lightly.

“E-mail me the rough draft so I can read it through beforehand. You make a lot of typing mistakes.” There was a tint of red to Arthur's cheeks and Francis was tempted to ask about it. But it was particularly hot this evening and Francis wasn't in the business of asking his publisher if he was blushing.

“I do not make typing mistakes.”

“Yes, you do. And you make a lot of them.” Arthur grinned, picked up his cup and took another sip of his tea.

“Well you have a very cynical outlook on love.”

“I do not!”

“You do, *mon ami*. Every idea I threw out was undeniably romantic and you shot them all down saying they were too 'unbelievable'! Really, what is your idea of love?”

“What's with that question?” And Francis swore that the room was now at least fifty degrees hotter and Arthur's face showed it. The Brit was now a nice shade of red.

“Is there something wrong, Arthur?” It was odd, he must say, to find Arthur—the man who had bested him at both chess and sometimes conversation—seemingly flustered. Arthur laughed, albeit a bit oddly, and took another sip of his tea.

“Yes, you idiot. What is it with you and these invasive questions tonight?” He refused to meet Francis' eyes and after downing the rest of his tea in one gulp, he stood and thanked Francis for the tea. “Have that draft to me soon, Bonnefoy.”

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When Arthur finally got home he was exhausted and freaking himself out. He quickly showered and settled down into bed, running everything that had happened through his mind over and over again. There was nothing out of the ordinary, really, until Francis inquired about his outlook on that thing the Frenchman seemed to fawn over. That silly thing that Arthur had no need for. That stupid, little, completely irrelevant thing. And then his heart had started to pound and he couldn't give him an answer. 'What is your idea of love?' What kind of question was that? Arthur's idea of love was non-existent. That was the answer and he couldn't say it. That was the answer and it hadn't even come to his mind when the question was asked. His mind had been focused on Francis: his idiotic blue eyes, his stupid hair, and the way his awful lips curved into a smile after he took a sip of his coffee. He could still see Francis when he closed his eyes, the image of him haunting Arthur every time he tried to settle down and fall asleep. An hour of restless tossing and turning passed and Arthur glanced at the clock. There was still plenty of time to hit the pub.

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There was something touching Arthur's waist. He shifted, trying to see if the thing touching his waist was just his tangled sheets. The thing tightened around his waist. Arthur twisted harder, still convinced it was his sheets.

“Arthur, *mon chou* , what's wrong?” Arthur froze. “Arthur?” A hand covered his own. Someone was in his bed. At least, he assumed it was his bed. A quick scan of the room revealed his assumption to be correct. There was a lump in his throat and his hands were trembling and he didn't want to turn around to see what he knew was already there. Those hands were just as soft as he'd imagined. He'd let it happen again. He couldn't remember getting drunk yesterday but he had to have been drunk to let this happen. He couldn't remember yesterday at all, now that he thought about it. And here he was, in his own bed with Francis. The one man he didn't want in his bed. The one man he couldn't bear to have in his bed.

The hand squeezed Arthur's and he could feel someone nuzzling into his back.

“You're never this quiet in the morning, *lapin* .” Francis pulled Arthur closer and kissed the Briton's shoulder. Arthur shivered, his face growing red. He started to turn over and Francis let him, backing off just enough to let the smaller man shift to face him.

“What do you mean 'never this quiet in the morning'? How would you know, frog?”

“Well, I have been sleeping with you for quite a bit now. You're always loud, even when you try to be quiet.” The blonde smiled, circling his arms back around Arthur. “And you've been unnaturally quiet this morning, which begs the question: what's wrong, *mon cher* ?”

“You've not been sleeping with me at all. What the hell are you talking about?”

“I have. What are *you* talking about?”

“I've only...we only...once.”

“Are you feeling alright?” Francis' thumb smoothed over the skin in Arthur's shoulder blade, massaging in small circles.

“I'm fine. You're the one that's in *my* bed, you idiot.”

“Of course I'm in your bed. We live together. Do you have a headache? Is it one of the bad ones? Do you need your medicine?”

“We do not live together.”

“Yes, we do. Really, what's going on with you this morning?” The Frenchman's hand moved to cup his cheek and Arthur pulled away. He jumped out of bed and backed out of the room, his eyes on Francis. “It's too early for this, Arthur. Get back in bed. It's Sunday.”

Arthur's hands were shaking harder than they were before and his heart was nearly pounding out of his chest. He made his way through his house, noticing little things switched around: the red chair was in the right corner, not the left, there were new pictures on his walls, pictures of Francis and pictures of Francis and himself. And all Arthur could think about was how this was never supposed to happen. He looked happy in those pictures. He was smiling and he was laughing in those pictures. He was laughing with Francis, holding hands and hugging in those pictures. It was everything that Arthur had found to be useless and cheesy and he could feel the tears forming at the back of his eyes. He couldn't remember any of those photos. He couldn't remember going to Hawaii, he couldn't remember traveling around France, he couldn't remember anything and he wanted to. He wanted to remember everything that he and Francis had done in those photos. Yesterday, what Arthur remembered as yesterday, he and Francis had been something akin to strangers and today they were more than that--much more than that--and he couldn't handle it.

“Arthur.” Francis was standing in the doorway adjoining the living room and the kitchen, wearing one of Arthur's shirts that had always been too big for him.

“We went to France?” Arthur picked up the small frame containing the photos of them in front of the Arc de Triomphe. The Frenchman smiled and took a step toward Arthur.

“Yes, last summer. Alzheimer's cannot be setting in this early, *lapin* .”

“I don't remember.” He turned to Francis and he could feel a tear break free, running a path down his face, “I don't remember this.” Arthur closed his eyes, clutching harder at the picture. He didn't want this. He didn't want this life, he didn't need this life. Everything was alright before: when it didn't matter if he remembered yesterday. Nothing had mattered and now everything mattered. He wanted to know what they had done in France, everything they had done in France, and how they had come to be. Had he asked Francis or had Francis just shown up one day with no explanation and confessed to Arthur? Or maybe it had been a mutual decision where they both agreed that they had 'feelings' for each other. He wanted to remember everything and it wasn't there.

There was a long pause before Francis came to him and carefully took the picture from him. The Frenchman set the picture down, a bit confused and amused at the same time.

“Why don't I make you some tea? Does that sound alright? We can talk about this over tea?” His hands were on Arthur's and they led him to the kitchen.

“Your tea...you make awful tea...” Arthur sat down, his hands clasped together under the table, his eyes following Francis as he moved around the kitchen. The Frenchman turned and smiled at him.

“There's my Arthur.”

After a cup of what Arthur deemed to be 'alright' tea, he started asking Francis questions. Francis was calm, unbelievably calm.

“How long have we been...whatever this is?” Arthur swished the last bit of his tea around in the cup, bringing it to his lips a final time.

“Three years.”

“And...living...together?”

“One year.”

“Who...” Arthur stopped, his eyes darting back and forth from Francis to his empty teacup, “Who initiated...this?”

“Ah, you did.”

“...how?”

“You showed up at the cafe the Wednesday after my book went on the market. We celebrated and when it was time for you to go you got all quiet and told me you had to tell me something. I remember my heart beating very fast and not knowing why. And then you took a deep breath and your eyes were--”

“Get on with it.”

“You told me you would like to continue coming to the cafe every week. Which was a very roundabout way of asking me out, if I do say so myself. The next week you showed up to the cafe with a box of my favorite coffee, I'm still not sure how you figured that one out, and a rose. You asked me to dinner and after a bit of teasing I said yes.”

“That seems too romantic.”

“Yes, it was very romantic for a cynic such as yourself.”

“I couldn't have done that.”

“But you did. And aside from our weekly quarrels, we've had a wonderful relationship for three years.” Francis smiled and took Arthur's teacup, rising from the table. He put their cups in the sink and turned back around to Arthur, clapping his hands together to seemingly end

their conversation there. "It's Sunday and you promised to help me clean the house. Are you feeling well enough?"

"I'm fine. I can help." Francis' smile turned into a grin and he lead Arthur back into the bedroom, sitting him down in front of the bookshelf in the back left corner.

"All I need you to do right now is organize the books by author." The smile still firmly in place, Francis gave him a wink and a small peck on the cheek, "I'll be in the kitchen with the dishes if you need any help. If you need headache medicine just yell, alright?"

The bookshelf was in a state of disarray. There were novels haphazardly stacked every-which-way in front of other stacks of books that were a bit more in order and there were several magazines stashed in the back of the top shelf. Arthur took to his work quickly, his mind focusing on the arrangement of the books rather than his current situation. He took them all from the shelves and set them to the side, going through each book to find it's author and sort it out accordingly. Lots of plays by Shakespeare and novels by various authors and a few hard-covered books by Francis. Francis had published more books. Arthur had published more of Francis' novels and they sold well. His first book was a best-seller. And Arthur had missed all of it.

An hour later he was done sorting out the books and had put them all back in the bookshelf in the correct order. He was leafing through one of Francis' newer books when he was called to the kitchen.

"Arthur! Could you come here?" Arthur marked the page he was on and set the book on his nightstand, quietly getting up and making his way to the kitchen. He stood in the doorway, watching Francis move between the stove and the refrigerator. Everything seemed alright and in it's place—as if this were normal and he saw it everyday. And there was this pulse in his veins that made him want to go along with it, to just wrap his arms around Francis and kiss his cheek and smile like he did in those pictures in the front room. But impulses were not something Arthur gave in to willingly.

"Yes? You needed me?" Arthur announced himself.

"I'm almost finished with lunch." Francis took the pot from the burner and poured some liquid into two bowls.

"And?"

"And that means sit down at the table, idiot. It's time for lunch."

"Why the hell would I have lunch with you? Your cooking has to be awful."

"Hey, you love my cooking. I even made your favorite stew because you were upset."

"I've never eaten your cooking."

"You have. We wouldn't have survived otherwise. You cooked for me on my birthday our first year together and I nearly had to go to the hospital."

“My cooking is wonderful.”

“I beg to differ, dear. Eat your stew.” The Frenchman set the bowl in front of Arthur and handed him a spoon.

Lunch was spent mostly in comfortable silence with the occasional question from Arthur about the happenings of the past three years. Francis would frown every time he was asked something and Arthur felt guilty for still not remembering anything. After lunch Francis left, saying something about heading out to the market to get groceries. And then Arthur was alone. Alone in a world he didn't remember. With no one to call, no one to write, and nothing to do.

Arthur stepped into his living room, looking it over once more. Some things had been moved around and almost all of his pictures had been replaced, but other things were still the same. He ran his hand over his recliner and leafed through the magazine on the coffee table and wondered if he should have accompanied Francis to the market. Maybe he needed help carrying things but was too stubborn to ask for help. Eventually Arthur came to the conclusion that if Francis needed help, he would have asked for it and with that issue put to rest, he made his way to the bedroom again. He searched through that room too and found there were a lot of new things: new clothes, new sheets, new furniture, and new books. And then he checked the bedside stand on the side Francis was sleeping in that morning. Inside were several hair ribbons, hair bands, a brush, and a small book with no title or author on the cover. The first page was blank and the second had large, handwritten French scrawled across it: “Amour”. Love. Arthur turned the page to find more scribbled French and a picture of himself looking embarrassed while dressed in rather formal clothing. The page after that was the same: more hand-written French and another picture of himself. This time he was glaring at the person taking the picture. He flipped through the rest of the pages, finding each of them to be a variation of the first few: some of them had pictures of both himself and Francis and others were of just himself, all accompanied by notes in a language he couldn't understand. There were a few words he could make out here and there, with his rudimentary knowledge of French. “Amour” was repeated often, as well as Arthur's name.

Arthur had made it halfway through the scrapbook when he heard the front door squeak open.

“Francis?”

“Yes?” He could hear footsteps go through the kitchen and move around, presumably putting the groceries away.

“Could you come here?”

“May I put dinner in the oven first?”

“Yes.” The book felt out of place in his hands, and he could feel his stomach turn when the footsteps began to get closer to the bedroom. Francis stood in the doorway a few seconds later, his hair down and his apron on.

“What is this?” Arthur held the small book up and he expected Francis to get angry at him for looking through his things, to hit him or to yell at him, but the Frenchman just smiled and

untied his apron.

“That might be a good way to get you to remember things.” Francis sat down on the bed and pulled Arthur into his lap, situating the Brit in between his legs with Arthur's back resting against Francis' chest. Arthur put up no fight, deciding he would rather find out what the notebook said rather than fight the Frog. But he couldn't ignore the light fluttering of his heart when Francis' arms circled around him. The Frenchman rested his chin on Arthur's shoulder and took the book from him, turning to the second page.

“This book is about you. And me too, but really, mostly about you.” Francis turned to the third page and began to read the scribbled French aloud, “Arthur took me to 'Clos Maggiore' in London for our 6 month anniversary. He tried very hard to be romantic but ended up yelling at the waiter for always coming at the 'wrong time' and almost got us kicked out. After the fight with the waiter he was embarrassed and wouldn't speak to me until we got back to my apartment. He told me he loved me before he kicked me out of his car and drove away. Do you remember any of that?” Arthur shifted uncomfortably in between Francis' legs, his face heating up.

“I did not do...any of that.”

“You did.” He turned to the next page, revealing a picture of Arthur, flowers in hand, once again red as a tomato. “After telling me he loved me, Arthur avoided me for nearly two weeks, then showed up crying and drunk on my doorstep with flowers at midnight proclaiming that he was very sorry for 'putting me in this predicament'. When he sobered up the next morning he was very surprised to find himself in my bed and tried to sneak out without me noticing,” Francis stopped for a moment and laid his head against Arthur's, “Really, *mon cher*, you screwed things up awfully that time.” The taller man chuckled before continuing, “I caught him before he could leave and made him explain himself. He wouldn't say anything and just sat on my couch staring at the floor. After a while he tried to leave again and I wouldn't let him so he told me: “I don't love you.” And I asked him why he told me he did if he actually did not love me, and he said: “Because I do love you.” I was royally confused and I had a feeling he was too. So I asked him how he could love me and not love me at the same time and he told me it was because 'he'd never loved anyone before, at least, not like this.' There was a long silence and I took his hand in mine and told him that it was alright, for I had loved every day of my life and I could teach him what it meant to love. And then he laughed at me. He laughed and squeezed my hand and told me that was the sappiest thing he'd ever heard.”

“That *is* the sappiest thing I've ever heard.”

“Even without your memories, you retain your attitude,” Francis turned to the next page and told him the next story, and then progressed on until they were a good three-fourths of the way done with the entries. When they hit the entry dated to around 1 year ago, the buzzer for the oven started ringing and Francis sighed. “I have to get the roast out of the oven. Can you wait a bit?” Arthur nodded and Francis smiled and kissed his cheek. “I'll be right back, cher.” He climbed out of bed and walked out of the bedroom toward the kitchen. Arthur listened to the faint shuffling coming from the kitchen and all he could think about was how cold he felt without Francis pressed against his back.

It was odd, to say the least: to see himself through Francis' eyes, to hear of himself doing things he couldn't remember doing. But at the same time , it was a relief. It was a relief to know that , for once , he'd managed to cope with change and attain a sense of stability with another person. Arthur could feel a bit of pride swell into his chest when Francis walked back into the room, his brow creased and mouth set in a straight line. He plopped back down onto the bed, his forearm shielding his eyes.

"I set the alarm for the wrong time. It still has another hour to cook." Arthur grinned and poked his forearm.

"I knew you were a bad cook."

Francis glared up at him and flipped himself over, lying on his stomach. He grabbed the book and turned back to the page where they had stopped.

"Arthur and I have been discussing moving in together. He feels that it would be the most cost-effective choice and that it's 'about damn time that he stopped having to drive to the other side of town just to see my frog-face.' But I don't know. Moving in together lends a sense of commitment to this," Francis stopped suddenly but continued on when Arthur scooted closer to him, "And I've never been so afraid of losing someone." Arthur's chest tightened. Francis flipped the page, revealing another photo of Arthur ; this time he was smiling while surrounded by books in his bedroom.

"A-are you sure--" Arthur started, but was interrupted.

"I caught Arthur rearranging his bookshelf so that all of my books were in the front. He denied that that was what was going on, but I found him smiling while leafing through my first book a few hours later, the rest of the books left forgotten on the floor." Arthur tried to interrupt again, but Francis continued on. When they reached what seemed to be the last page, Francis paused and looked at Arthur out of the corner of his eye before flipping to the final page of the notebook. It was dated as August 15th , two days before the current day. The page had a small photo of a ring attached to it, "I found an engagement ring in Arthur's underwear drawer today." Francis' voice seemed unstable and airy, "It had our anniversary date engraved on the inside of it. Half of me fears that Arthur is going to propose and the other half fears that he won't." Francis slowly closed the notebook, his fingers lingering on the back cover before placing it gingerly on the bedside table.

"Oh." That's all Arthur could think of right now. He was going to *propose*. Or was he? He had no way of knowing.

"Oh?"

"Oh." Arthur's legs felt like they were non-existent. He swept them over to the side of the bed and stood up, taking one shaky step after another until he reached his dresser. His fingers dug through the top drawer, slowly trying to find what he knew would be in there. When his fingertip hit something cold and metallic, he knew he'd found what he was looking for. He pulled the ring out, looking it over and finding the small engraving, "1.9.2016." His hands were jittery and his heart was racing and all he wanted to do was run, like he always did. Run away from this, run away from the memories he couldn't recall, run away from the ring and

everything it represented. He was afraid , and when he turned to look at Francis he could see that he was afraid as well.

“Arthur, you don't remember getting that ring, do you?” Arthur's throat tightened; he couldn't breathe; he couldn't breathe.

“I do. Of course I do.” He would make it up to him.

“You remember?” Francis propped himself up and came to sit at the edge of the bed, hands beckoning for Arthur to join him. “Where did you get it?”

“Rolly's, just around the corner.”

“When is our anniversary?”

“The first of September.” Arthur sat down next to Francis, taking his hand and slowly sliding the ring onto his finger. He vaguely recalled the date being at the top of the first entry and the only ring shop he knew of was Rolly's. It would do for now.

“So you remember everything now? How...convenient.” Francis smiled and laid his head on Arthur's shoulder, awkwardly pulling the smaller man into an embrace. “Thank you.”

Francis didn't let him go until the buzzer rang for a second time. Even then, Arthur had to reluctantly peel Francis from himself before following him to the kitchen. Their fingers occasionally intertwined over the table while they ate. Overly affectionate and cheesy, Arthur would have said any other day. But today was different, today was a series of odd and confusing events, and so he would allow it.

After dinner, Francis led him back to the bedroom. Arthur knew what was coming. This is where he would draw the line. With a tug and a smile, Francis brought Arthur flush against him, his hands resting lightly on Arthur's hips. The Brit felt his breath leave him and his hands readied themselves to push Francis away, to tell him that this had gone too far and that he needed some space and some time—perhaps a lifetime—to think some things over. But his mouth couldn't form the word, and his hands stayed hanging at his sides. He wasn't in control of his own body, it seemed. He could feel Francis's fingers leave his hips, trailing up his body and sending an unwanted and unnerving shiver up his spine. One hand cradled Arthur's cheek, the other found itself tangled in messy, dirty-blond hair. The shiver subsided, giving way to a warm feeling in the pit of Arthur's stomach that grew with every breath he took. Francis smiled and leaned in, pressing a slow, soft kiss to Arthur's lips. They parted after a few seconds and Francis smiled: genuine and warm and Dear Lord, it could only be rightfully compared to a lowly-set sun dancing over the horizon. Francis placed a kiss on his forehead before dropping his hand and getting ready for bed.

And here they were again: Arthur's back pressed snugly against Francis's chest, circled in his arms, and thinking about his smile. Maybe he could get used to this: the soft warmth in the pit of his stomach, the light pink tinting his cheeks, the small tug of a grin at his lips. Francis's breath tickled the back of his neck, sending a small shiver through Arthur's body. He could get used to this, he thought, as he closed his eyes and dreamt of the sunset.

Arthur woke with a fright, palms clammy and forehead damp with perspiration. It was odd waking up with someone wrapped around you, he thought. Though he supposed it wasn't *that* bad. And he was curious, oh so curious, about so many things. How had he lost his memory? How had he gotten here? How had he fallen in love? What made him like Francis, of all people? What did Francis's face look like when he was sleeping? He imagined it would be pretty: hair lightly draped over his face, blonde eyelashes tickling pale, pink tinted cheeks. Arthur closed his eyes and sighed, he knew the answer to the fourth question.

Slowly, he entwined Francis's fingers with his own, tracing, memorizing the pattern of grooves on his palm. And he could vaguely recall them feeling different last night at dinner.

"Mornin', sugar." A voice from behind him asked, considerably higher pitched than he'd been expecting and noticeably *not French*. Arthur let go of the hand and turned to face the person who had stopped holding him. A man, a very large, muscled, and tanned man. Shirtless and, from what he'd felt, pant-less, and in his bed. Arthur's eyes widened as he scrambled backwards, effectively falling out of bed in the process.

"You're not--" Arthur stopped himself, composing what little dignity he had left before continuing, "Who are you?"

The man simply chuckled and ran his hand down his face, "I am apparently a one-night-stand, despite everything you said last night." He pulled himself up into a sitting position, the comforter falling, exposing a surprisingly tan patch of stomach, tight and defined and— *so* not what he wanted to see. The man—the boy, now that he got a good look at him, he couldn't be more than 20 years old—was similar to the point that Arthur couldn't have chosen him by mistake, really.

"I'm sorry..." Arthur managed to choke out, cheeks now a bright shade of red. *Just what had he said last night? He really had to stop drinking...*

"Ahhh, it's no problem, really. It's partly my fault too. I shouldn't have believed ya." A quick smile and the man was up, dressed, and out the door. And Arthur just sat there, still trying to piece together what had just happened. Where was Francis—his now fiancée-- and why wasn't he in his bed, snuggled up next to him like he apparently had been for three years now?

A buzzing noise brought his attention to the nightstand, followed by the start of the Lord of the Rings theme song. His phone was ringing. Scrambling to pick it up, he took a quick look at the caller ID—Bonney. His stomach dropped, throat suddenly parched, dry, cracking. His thumb seemed to have a mind of its own: clicking the "answer" button before he could think of what he wanted to say. *Where were you?* He stayed silent, choking on the words even before he tried to form them.

"Arthur?" French-accented English, drawling from grogginess.

"Francis, yes," His voice cracked halfway through. Francis paused, Arthur could feel it, he could hear the other man's slow intake of air through the phone. He was thinking.

“Are--” Another pause, shorter this time, “I sent you the draft of my new ending.”

New ending? New ending. Oh. “Alright. I'll read it and have my corrections in tonight. Are you working tonight? We can discuss them over tea.”

“Ahhh, no, I leave around noon today.” Another pause, longer, followed by a sigh, “You can come by my house if you want. I'll give you the address this time.”

And that's how Arthur found himself standing in front of Francis's apartment door, nerves on edge, running his hand through his hair every few seconds, a bottle of wine resting in the crook of his arm. He had knocked already, had knocked twice actually. 12:30pm, he may be a bit early. Arthur shifted his weight and began to fiddle with his hair. The sound of water shutting off. He knocked again. A loud crash.

“Just a minute!” A few more crashes, the sound of someone running toward the door, and then the door was open and he was being greeted by a frazzled Francis whose hair was still very wet.

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