

**if i got one thing right, it was you and me**

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# if i got one thing right, it was you and me

by [norvegiae](#)

## Summary

Francis wants someone to say yes to him, and James will be that person – but Francis needs coaxing and reassurance that it would be a good thing – that it would be good and happy and *right*.

It's not even just James doing the coaxing, which on the whole probably makes things a bit easier.

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

James' phone starts to ring just as they're sitting down to an hour or two of mundane Wednesday evening television. Francis makes a grumbly noise of annoyance.

"Let it go to voicemail," he says, adjusting the way James' feet lay across his lap, settling back into the sofa, as if to declare that he has left the normal world and is now in one that consists solely of the sofa and the TV and the half empty packet of digestives on the coffee table – absolutely no phone calls allowed.

James pushes himself up off the cushions. "It's Henry – might be important. Give me a minute," he says as he gets to his feet. "Don't start without me," he gestures at the TV as he steps out into the hallway.

Francis makes that grumbly noise again.

When James finally answers the phone, it's hard to make out what Dundy's saying – there's a lot of *oh my god* and *James!!* and *I can't believe it* – and when James tells him to stop and take a breath and speak sensibly, for fuck's sake, Dundy just laughs and tries again. James can hear his girlfriend Yasmine in the background, laughing too, clearly also on the phone; he can just about make out her quick-fire French. Now, Dundy seems capable of proper words, and finally gets to the point – James hears *proposed* and *she said yes* and *bloody had me going for a minute there though* and finally *best man, obviously*.

It's all a little strange and over almost as soon as it began; Dundy needs to hang up to ring his parents in St. Helier and then they need to ring Yasmine's parents down in Algiers, not to mention all the siblings and grandparents and cousins – so James lets them both go. Congratulates them, tells them he loves them both, and lets them go.

He comes back into the living room, and he must have a strange enough expression on his face for Francis to raise his eyebrows and ask if he's alright.

"Dundy's getting married," he says, and it feels weird to hear himself say the words.

"Blimey," Francis says, and then he grins, which always makes James feel warm inside. "Well, good for them."

"Yeah," James says, sitting back down. It *is* marvellous news, and he suddenly feels so happy for his best friend that he might cry, and yet there is something surreal to it, a shock or a surprise; not unpleasant, just unexpected. As if sensing this strange emotional confusion, Francis puts an arm around him, pulls him close to press a kiss to his temple before pressing play on the remote, and BBC Two springs into life.

It hits James properly later when he's in bed, trying to drift off, with Francis snoring lightly beside him.

Dundy, engaged?

Dundy, who was famous at Uni for throwing up in taxis after nights out, Dundy who once tried to get away with having a cigarette in their Val d'Isère hostel and instead set the fire alarm off at 3am, Dundy who – well, James can't quite remember if that whole ridiculous cheetah thing had been Dundy's idea or his own, but the point still stands.

Dundy – *that* Dundy, stupid, brilliant Dundy – is getting married, and James is not, and James turns it over and over in his mind until it doesn't add up.

They've never talked about it, he and Francis, which slightly surprises him.

It was one of the first things he was told on his first day at his job; all about the sullen Irishman and his rocky relationship with the boss's niece, the two rejected proposals, the bottle of whisky that took up residence in Crozier's desk drawer shortly thereafter.

Once they'd been introduced it had been months – years? – of mutual dislike and distrust, and James remembers earnestly wondering how *this* man thought he ever had a chance of winning the hand of John Franklin's dazzling niece. Getting turned down and proposing *again* – what on earth had Crozier been thinking?

A lifetime has passed since all that. Francis is different, changed, better – they both are, James will freely admit that – but James knows that Francis is still the same man at heart; the insecure romantic, eager to belong to someone and have someone in return, eager to be someone's husband.

Given all this, James had once thought that once they got together, it would only be a matter of time until a proposal, but five years have passed and it hasn't happened.

They have a house, a dog, a battered Ford Focus that James would love to trade in for something sleek and electric, they love each other so much that James can tell it gets on people's nerves sometimes, but they are not married.

And, as he still reels from Dundy's news, he realises that he would very much like to be.

He's never really felt much of an urge to get married before, hasn't spent much of his life thinking about it. The story he always used to tell himself was that he was too busy for proper relationships, always on the go, with things to do and places to move on to. And ultimately, underneath everything, he'd always told himself he didn't deserve that sort of thing anyway, wasn't built for it, wasn't destined for it.

Marriage couldn't be that holy of an institution anyway, if he thought about how his real father had disregarded it – he a lowly and doubtless ineffective diplomat in Brazil, a drunk with a wandering eye, sneaking around and getting another man's wife pregnant, keeping the gossip mill in the Foreign Office running for another nine months at least.

This uninspiring tableau was the mess James came out of. He feels tainted by it, sometimes, as if it is written across his forehead, and as soon as he could he sought to distance himself from it, to ally himself with powerful, successful, established individuals, to hide his origins and pretend he was just like them.

Francis saw right through it from the beginning. He was unimpressed by all the impressive parts of him, and then came the snide comments, the passive aggression – and sometimes just actual aggression – the arguments, the increasing levels of discomfort of their colleagues.

And then things seemed to reach a fever pitch; Tom Blanky had his accident and it was enough for Francis to realise he had to get sober before it was too late. It was then that James started to know him properly and let himself be known in return, and it had all gotten a lot better very quickly.

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James still remembers the night he realised that things had changed for the better between them, the first office social since Tom had come back to work, in some trendy bar just off Brick Lane. James had been exhausted after a long week, hadn't really wanted to be there, but Dundy and Graham had dragged him along and promptly abandoned him to talk to someone else at the bar.

James had been on the verge of leaving when he noticed that Francis had approached him, standing nervously before him like a schoolboy about to be told off by the headteacher.

Francis was different now that he was sober; he had this quiet, abashed look on his face, kept to himself, but all the same he turned up to work on time, he was proficient, competent, and his eyes were kind.

James had never wanted him more, without ever really realising he wanted him at all.

"Have you got a cigarette?" Francis asked, his eyes meeting James' and then flitting to some non-descript point on the wall. He was nervous, and it makes James smile, later, when he thinks back on it.

James patted at his jacket until he made contact with the carton in his pocket.

“D’you want to—?” Francis said, nodding his head in the direction of the door, the stairs leading up to the roof terrace.

“Oh,” James said. “Yeah, sure.”

It was a bit surreal being on this dark terrace alone with Francis, nestled in this busy pocket of East London, which seemed to press in on them from all sides.

Still, it was much quieter out here and the air was blessedly cool. They sat on a low wall, cigarette butts and crumpled plastic cups littering the floor around them. James could still hear the music but it no longer felt like it was pounding through his skull. Instead, he could hear himself think, hear himself fiddling with his lighter, trying to light the cigarette perched between Francis’ lips.

Their eyes met as it finally caught light, Francis’ mouth twitching up into a smile as he straightened up again, took a drag, exhaled a cloud of smoke into the clear night sky.

They didn’t talk, didn’t seem to have the need for it. James glanced at him from the corner of his eye now and again, but mostly he looked out across the city, this strange city so full of potential and heartbreak, and here James was, smoking next to the man who until very recently had hated him utterly.

It wasn’t like that now, though. Maybe it was never hatred in the first place, and now the alcohol was gone, it couldn’t pretend to be anything like that. Instead, it was this – this strangely tender politeness, all hesitant, kind gestures and sweet little smiles that made James feel warm all over.

“It’s going to be hot again tomorrow,” Francis commented after an unclear amount of time, looking up at the sky as if he was reading the forecast in the stars.

James nodded. “Yes,” he said, and couldn’t think of anything witty to say, so he didn’t bother.

Francis was quiet too, but suddenly James felt the warm weight of Francis’ hand coming to rest on his own, on the wall between them.

James tensed, feeling heat creep up the back of his neck, but he allowed himself a small, private smile, turned his hand over so that he could hold Francis’ properly, and they finished their cigarettes in peaceful silence.

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James thinks about that night as they're making dinner one evening, while Francis is complaining about work and how the stress is making him kill for a fag. They've both packed it in now – a team effort – but the memories of that night, of the two of them smoking on the roof of that stupid trendy bar still make James smile.

“What?” Francis asks from across the kitchen, where he's finished his ranting and is now at the stove, putting water on to boil and getting frying pans out of the cupboard.

“Hm?” James replies, half zoned out, cutting up an onion at a leisurely pace.

“What are you smiling at?”

“Nothing. Just – thinking.”

“Well, when you're done thinking, could you hurry up?” He says, gesturing with a saucepan lid at James and his chopping board. “I'd like to eat *before* midnight.”

“Alright, keep your wig on.” James grins, sees a smile faintly mirrored on Francis' face too. “Didn't realise this was bloody Masterchef.”

“It's not, but we'll starve to death at the rate you're going.”

He's still thinking about it that night when they're in bed – he likes thinking about it, which is probably why it happens so often – and it makes him roll onto his side and press up against Francis' back, pressing kisses to his shoulder, winding an arm around him.

“I love you,” he murmurs, continuing with his kisses, breathing in the scent of Francis' hair, nuzzling at his neck until Francis groans a little, mumbling something incoherent which is probably *I love you too*.

“Are you awake?” James asks as his body starts its inevitable reaction to having Francis in such close proximity.

“I am now that you've woken me up,” Francis says gruffly, but all the same he reaches behind him to lay a broad hand on James' thigh and pull him closer.

In the morning, Francis wants a lie in but James drags him out of bed so that they can walk the dog.

Neptune snuffles along curiously, his heavy tail wagging, his nose disturbing the morning dew on the grass. Francis is yawning at James' side with his hands shoved into the pockets of his coat, and James ends up musing – he's been in a very philosophical state, lately – about how he deserves this, this dog walk and the bacon butties they'll have when they get home, and any of the other things they'll do together on this lazy Sunday.

Maybe he is, after all, the sort of person who deserves these things, and over the years it is Francis and *only* Francis who has done so much to help him believe it.

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It was half past five on a drizzly Thursday evening, John Franklin had just announced his retirement following a sudden illness, and James felt like he might pass out in the middle of the staff kitchen.

He'd done well in the actual meeting, looked suitably saddened and had shaken John's hand and thanked him for all his work over the years, wished him a speedy recovery, and sat back down in his chair without causing a scene. Next to him, Francis had worn an expression which suggested shellshock. James hadn't been hugely surprised – Francis was going to be the one clearing up the mess John was leaving in his wake.

James had left the meeting as soon as he could, and now, alone in the kitchen, he felt the anxiety taking hold of him, a horrible trembling numbness as his mind raced.

He'd always known this day would come, the day he had to stop pretending to be capable and actually *be* it. He just hadn't thought it would come so soon, didn't think that he was anywhere near ready.

He heard the door open behind him, and somehow knew it was Francis before he even turned around.

"Are you alright?" Francis asked, standing across the room with an awkward amount of space between them. It's not a question he'd ever even have thought of asking, a few months ago.

James stared at him, trying to put together words for what he was feeling, though he could barely make sense of it himself. "We've – lost him."

Francis nodded slowly, staring at nothing. "It was bound to happen sooner or later."

"I might resign." James said suddenly, at which Francis physically flinched and stared at him, bewildered. "Go work somewhere else, or something."



“What for?” Francis asked. “You’re one of the best people we’ve got. If I have to...take over, I need you to be here.”

*I need you, I need you.* The words rang in James’ head like a bell.

“You’ll find someone better. Someone real.”

“Real?” Francis said, taking a step or two closer. “And what are you, a robot?”

“That’s not what I mean,” James snapped, and regretted it. “I’m just - I’m *nothing*, I’m a *fraud*. I shouldn’t be here.”

Francis stared at him as if he’d just starting speaking ancient Greek. “How on earth have you come to that conclusion?”

James didn’t really want to have to say it, but he wanted Francis to understand. He’d never wanted anyone else to understand like he wanted Francis to.

So, he said it, told him everything – the whole tedious, shabby story: the inventions on his application that got him into Cambridge, the inflation of the grades he got there, the experiences he invented in job interviews to get him where he was today.

He even told Francis about his fucking father; now that he’d started talking, he couldn’t stop, and this was something that no one in the world knew, save for his parents and his brother – and now Francis knew it too.

Finally, he was done, and the expression on Francis’s face is one he’d never seen before. James wanted to kiss him, quite urgently.

“Your past doesn’t define you, James. None of it matters,” Francis said, resting a hand on James’ shoulder, and James almost shivered. “What you’ve achieved here speaks for itself. All these years, all that you’ve done...you’re brilliant, you really are.”

James shook his head. “You can’t mean that, not compared to you, when you’re so—”

“This isn’t about me, this is about you. I’m not overstating it, James, you really are brilliant. The way you talk to people and solve problems in ways I’d never even think of. Everyone loves you here, and with very good reason.”

James was surprised he could hear Francis over the sound of his heart pounding in his ears. “And – do you?”

“Do I what?”

“Do you – love me?”

Francis’ flushed face suddenly went quite pale, his tongue darted out to wet his lips, his mouth opened to speak –

The door suddenly swung open, making them both jump. Ned Little stood in the doorway, and his expression clearly showed that he knew what sort of moment he'd just interrupted.

"Oh, sorry," he said, looking like he wished the earth would suddenly open up below him. "Didn't think anyone was in here—"

"It's fine, Edward," Francis said, with one of those understanding smiles that he had now. "I should be going, anyway. I'll see you tomorrow?" He asked James, who nodded, incapable of words.

Francis squeezed his shoulder again, his thumb brushing along the neckline of James' jumper, and then his hand was gone. He left, and Ned followed him out, and when James was alone in the room, he finally let out the breath he'd been holding.

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James wants to get married, he knows that now, tells himself with certainty as they're sitting on the sofa together watching University Challenge one night.

He knows that he wants it, but only if it's with Francis, who has done so much to turn his life into something he never could have hoped for alone.

He thinks about just doing it, just asking Francis to marry him over the dinner table, or maybe he could take him out to a posh restaurant and then for a walk in Regent's Park, and ask him there in the rose garden. It fills him with a giddy sort of nervousness to think about it, and he wonders if this is how Francis felt with Sophia, bless him, he wonders what Francis had planned.

And then – he's not sure if it's a good idea; what if it cuts too close to the bone for Francis, what if it seems like a mockery – what if it just brings up all his bad memories and puts him off the idea completely? Being soundly refused on two separate occasions is probably enough to have scared him off for life, unless James can convince him otherwise.

If James can convince Francis enough to the point that he thinks proposing is a good idea – well, that's a happy ending for everyone.

He puts his arm around Francis' shoulders, pulling him close, running his fingers through the short hair at the nape of Francis' neck, scratching lightly at his scalp which makes Francis sigh and close his eyes, calm and relaxed until someone on TV gives a very silly answer to one of Paxman's questions, and Francis feels obliged to correct them –

“Stephenson’s Rocket, built in the 1780s? I thought they had to be clever to get on this show.”

“Yes, darling,” James says indulgently. “You’re just jealous you never got the chance to do this when you were a student. Or had the show not been invented when you were an undergrad?”

That sets Francis off, all indignant spluttering, but James just pulls him closer and laughs into his hair, kissing his ear and his temple and his cheek and his mouth until he calms down again.

Francis *deserves* a chance for things to go right, James thinks, to make a proposal a happy memory that will tamp down the bad ones he’s already got. Christ, James can see it sometimes, the insecurity it’s given him. Francis seems to walk on a knife-edge, all too aware of the rejection and heartbreak that seem to lurk around every corner for him.

He doesn’t deserve that; this sweet, gentle, earnest man who never feels anything in half measures, never says anything he doesn’t mean. James wants to make him happy, blissfully happy, to fill his head with happy memories and hopeful dreams for the future.

Francis wants someone to say yes to him, and James will be that person – but Francis needs coaxing and reassurance that it would be a good thing – that it would be good and happy and *right*.

It’s not even just James doing the coaxing, which on the whole probably makes things a bit easier.

“Good man!” James Ross proclaims when Francis tells him Dundy’s news, a few nights later when they’re all down the pub, their pints and glasses of wine and of orange juice and empty packets of crisps and peanuts littering the table between them all. “I’ll drink to that. It’ll be you two next, eh?” Ross adds, with a conspiratorial smile at Annie, who tries to hide a grin behind her hand, her dark curls shuddering as she tries to contain a chuckle.

“Not before time,” she says, and Ross laughs like she’s said something particularly hilarious.

“Yeah, very good,” Francis replies with a wry smile and a roll of his eyes before drinking what’s left of his orange juice and markedly not looking in James’ direction.

James has to smile too or it’d look odd, and he laughs – perhaps a little too loudly, perhaps from too many drinks – and tries to steer the conversation onto something else, anything else.

He remembers it again when they’re driving home, when it’s dark and the roads are quiet and James has time to go over what happened.

“It was funny, wasn’t it,” he says, “what James said about...getting married, and all that.”

He sees how Francis’ hands tighten on the steering wheel, how he glances over for a second before he looks back at the road.

“He’s an idiot,” he says. “Just ignore him.”

James doesn’t *want* to ignore him, that’s the thing. It’s not just James and Annie; other people have said it before as well, it inevitably happens when they go out with Harry and Silna, or Tom and Esther – even Dundy and his new fiancée have already taken on that smug married couple vibe.

James knows that he and Francis have become a bit of a running joke; they’re *that* couple, the will-they-won’t-they couple, the ones that people place bets on to try and guess when it is that they’ll finally ‘make it official’. James wouldn’t be surprised if there’s a WhatsApp group chat dedicated to that very thing.

Not that it isn’t ‘official’ already – this is by far the most serious relationship James has ever had, and he still wakes up some days a bit dazed, confused as to how he’s managed to become so well-functioning, to become such a proper adult, with a job and a house and – and Francis.

He’s happy, blissfully happy, in a way he never dreamed he could ever be. Sometimes he wishes he could go back in time and speak to himself at sixteen: gangly and awkward and insecure, uncomfortable and unwilling to face the truth of who he is and where he comes from. *You’re going to have it all*, he would say, if he could. *Everything you ever dreamed*.

He likes it best at night, when the house is dark and they are in bed, when it is late and the world outside their bedroom window is quiet and still. He likes it when they are tired after sex, or after a busy day, or both, when they are tired and comfortable and settled under their sheets. He likes it when Francis is asleep next to him, the worry gone from his face, his expression gentled, his breathing soft and regular. He likes it when he reaches out to take Francis’ hand, likes to feel Francis’ fingers curl around his own, likes to fall asleep like that.

He likes the quiet mornings when Francis makes them both a mug of tea, and they drink it in bed, Francis in his reading glasses, scrolling through the Guardian app on his phone. James likes to close his eyes, sit still and take it all in, the smell of his tea, the pleasant warmth of it, the comforting heaviness of sleep still in his limbs, the sound of Francis asking for help with a cryptic crossword clue.

He loves it, loves all of it, every boring, mundane little part of having a life together, every argument, every apologetic kiss afterwards.

But still, he wants more; he’s made a career out of wanting more, of grasping and holding on tight to anything that came his way. It’s a thankless task, however, waiting for Francis to realise that being married is a possibility for them, and eventually James can wait no longer.

They are having dinner in the garden, because it is one of those rare May evenings: warm still, the sky blue, birds singing in hedgerows. They sit in the golden glow of the sunset; Neptune prefers to lie on the shaded lawn.

“Francis,” James begins, absently swirling the white wine in his glass; casual, despite the clawing of nerves in his stomach. “Have you ever thought about getting married?”

Francis almost chokes on a mouthful of spaghetti. “Well,” he says once he has recovered, once he has had some water and the coughing has stopped. “Well, yes, in the past, with – when I was with–”

“Yes,” James cuts in. “I know *that*. I meant – with me. Married to me.”

Francis gapes at him, and it puts James in mind of a goldfish, the way his mouth opens and closes helplessly without ever finding any words. Eventually, he seems able to speak again. “What’s wrong with how we are now?”

James frowns. “Well, nothing, but–”

“There you are, then.” Francis says, and before James can say anything else he’s on his feet, gathering up his empty plate and James’ own, taking them back into the kitchen. James hears the sound of leftovers being scraped into Neptune’s bowl, he hears the dishwasher being opened and closed again.

Neptune scrambles to his feet to go and investigate this new offering, and James follows. He leans against the counter, crosses his arms across his chest, watches Francis busy himself.

“What’s the matter?” He asks, when he can’t stand this strange silence anymore.

“Nothing,” Francis says firmly, though he can’t look at him. “It’s just – why mess with a good thing?”

“It’s not *messing*, it’s making it better.”

Francis doesn’t reply as he goes through the motions of clearing up after dinner, rinsing out the saucepans, putting the parmesan back in the fridge, lingering there with the door open. “Have we run out of yoghurts?” he asks, searching among jars of jam and mustard and the homemade chutney that Harry and Silna gave them last Christmas.

“*Francis*,” James says sharply. “Don’t change the subject.”

Francis sighs, and finally emerges from the fridge. “Don’t you – I mean, I already consider us married, sometimes.”

Something in James’ heart melts at that. It’s a gift Francis has – a knack for these unexpectedly sweet sentiments that catch you by surprise and disorientate you, make you lose

your train of thought. It's lovely, but it's also a bloody nuisance at times.

James crosses the room to him. "So do I, of course. But wouldn't you like a wedding?" He winds his arms around Francis loosely, leans in to press a kiss to Francis' forehead. "Wouldn't you like a honeymoon?"

Francis tenses slightly, or perhaps it's a shiver. "I'm sure that'd be nice, but it's not a reason to—"

"Not a reason," James says, tightening his arms around him. "It's a bonus. A treat."

Francis doesn't answer, doesn't respond to the hands rubbing slowly over his waist and back. Eventually James gives up, lets his arms fall away, takes a step back from him.

"Tell me what the matter is," James says as Neptune, clearly sated and longing to return to whatever he had been dreaming about on the grass, trots past them, back out into the garden. Francis watches him go as he considers his words.

"I don't want to ruin it," Francis eventually says, looking up at James with an uncertain expression. "Like I ruined it last time, with—"

He clearly can't say her name, which is a little silly considering that they're friends now, that they send each other Christmas cards and meet for coffee when she isn't jetting around the world.

"But this isn't the same as that," James says. "It's completely different. It's *good*."

They have had this particular discussion before. James can't count the times he's had to convince Francis that their relationship isn't a disaster, that it isn't about to blow up in their faces, that he isn't about to walk out the door and leave Francis in the lurch.

Something in him thinks that Francis enjoys this sort of catastrophising. He's always been a pessimist, and he does like to be proved right. James is glad he's around to prove Francis wrong.

"Yes," Francis says. "It's good, exactly. I don't want to mess that up."

"But you won't – I want it!" James cries, a little exasperated. "*She* didn't want it! That's what was wrong!"

Francis doesn't seem to have anything to say to this. He stares at the floor, the muscles in his jaw working as if he is trying to speak, but clearly, he finds it beyond him. He clears his throat, shifts his weight from one foot to the other, sticks his hands in his pockets.

James lets out a long, slow breath. He regrets this whole thing; he regrets ever opening his stupid bloody mouth at all. He turns on his heel and goes back out into the garden, sinking back into his seat and reaching for his wine.

He stares at the sky and waits for Francis to join him, knows he will, before long.

A hand brushes the back of his neck as Francis does, after a few moments, come into the garden again. He doesn't sit down, instead stepping onto the lawn to kneel beside Neptune's sprawling form, reaching out to scratch lazily behind his ears. Neptune lets out a happy little huff of breath.

"I have thought about it, you know."

James stares at him, sees the earnest look in his blue eyes, waits for him to continue.

"Thought about it all the time, for a while...but then I was scared – scared that you'd say no, scared that you'd admit that you've been unhappy, all this time. That's how it was before."

"I wouldn't say no," James tells him. Neptune squirms and shifts around until he's lying on his back, and Francis rubs his tummy. "I'd say *yes*, as I've been trying to tell you."

He thinks he sees a glimmer of a smile on Francis' face, but it is gone almost as soon as it appears.

"It wouldn't be a disaster," James goes on. "No melodramas. It'd be so *good*. It'd be wonderful. I love you so much, Francis, and I know you know that. As the years go on, I'm finding fewer and fewer reasons why we shouldn't do it."

There's a definite smile there now, though Francis is staring down at Neptune, whose tongue lolls from one side of his mouth.

"Come here," James says, and Francis sits back on his heels.

"Help me up," he says, holding a hand out. "My bloody knees."

James obliges, getting up and closing the distance between them, taking Francis' hand, bracing himself to pull Francis to his feet.

But Francis doesn't stand, not fully. He just gets a foot underneath him, so that he's still down on – on one knee –

"*Oh*," James says, with more than a little surprise.

Francis grins up at him, sweet and gap toothed, and really the loveliest person James has ever seen. "I'm an idiot," Francis proclaims, and cuts in before James can disagree. "I'm sorry. I think you're right, like you usually are. These things just...stick with me, for longer than they probably should."

James nods. Francis squeezes their clasped hands.

"But you're right, and I love you so much, and I never want to spend a day away from you. So, hell - marry me, James."

James feels something bubble up inside him. He lets out a laugh so that it doesn't come out as a sob. "That's more like it," he says, surprised at how his voice wobbles, surprised by the

intensity of what he's feeling. He grins, and Francis smiles and squeezes his hand again, and James drops down onto his knees, grasps Francis' face with both hands and kisses him hard.

In the flurry of all this movement, Neptune forgets whatever reverie he was enjoying, wriggles until he is upright and leaps at them both, his tail wagging enthusiastically.

James tries to catch his feet and push them away, conscious of mud and of Neptune's claws catching in the fabric of his jumper. Francis doesn't help, seeming content to watch and laugh.

"Stupid animal," Francis murmurs affectionately, rubbing at the dog's neck. Neptune lets out a little *boof* in response.

There is silence for a while. A bird is singing in a nearby tree, and in the distance, James can hear the faint tones of an ice cream van. It is the first one he's heard so far this year, he thinks. Summer isn't far away.

"That's a yes, then, I take it." Francis says with a smile, lifting a hand to cup James' cheek gently, like he's something delicate and precious.

James laughs. "I suppose it has to be, after going on and on about it for so long."

"I'd be pretty pissed off, yeah."

James grins and shoves at him playfully. Francis grabs his wrists and pulls him closer, and the whole thing sets Neptune off again.

When James wakes up the next morning, blinking in the dim light, he briefly worries that yesterday had been some marvellous dream. He rolls onto his side to press up against Francis' back, winding an arm around his waist, unable to fight the smile that comes when he remembers that it'd been marvellously *real*.

"Francis," he murmurs, which provokes a grunt. Francis turns his head to bury his face in the pillow. "We're engaged."

"I know," Francis says blearily. "I was there when it happened."

"We're *engaged*," James says again, because he likes how it sounds and it fills him with warmth to say it. He squirms even closer to Francis, his hand rubbing at Francis' chest through the material of his t-shirt, dipping underneath the duvet, running down the length of his body.

Francis grunts again when he realises its destination. "Jesus, James, let me wake up first."



“You already are.”

James kisses at his shoulder, his neck, his lovely sleep-warm skin, until he is suddenly pushed away.

“Let me use the loo first, at least,” Francis grumbles, pushing back the duvet and clambering out of bed. “I’m an old man,” he says as he disappears into the bathroom.

James smiles and sits up, peering through the small gap in the curtains, looking out at the sun-washed street, at the brilliant blue of the sky. They are engaged, James thinks, and that’s why the world is so beautiful today.

They’ll go out for dinner tonight, he decides, somewhere special. Some exorbitant restaurant at the top of a London skyscraper. Francis will grumble about having to put on a nice suit and about having to brave central London at the weekend, but James knows he’ll like the food and the views and James’ company and eventually he’ll be able to admit that he enjoyed himself – that he and his fiancé went out for dinner and they enjoyed themselves.

James is so lost in this train of thought that he doesn’t notice Francis climbing back into bed, shifting close to run a hand up and down James’ back.

“Come here,” Francis murmurs, gathering James into his arms, drawing him close for a kiss.

James settles against him happily, reaching up to curl his fingers in Francis’ soft, mussed hair, stroking the shell of his ear, the curve of his jaw. He smiles when he tastes the unexpected sharpness of mouthwash on Francis’ tongue.

“Tastes awful, doesn’t it,” Francis says.

“Not so bad,” James murmurs, combing the hair back from Francis’ face. “Not when it’s on you.”

Francis laughs. “Shut *up*,” he says, kissing him again.

They go on like that for a long time, with nothing in the world to hurry them. Francis settles back against the pillows and James climbs atop him, feeling one of Francis’ hands in his hair, the other running down his back to squeeze his arse with a familiar, delicious possessiveness.

Eventually, their breaths are coming harsh and quick and the roving of their hands has reached a certain grasping urgency, and James sits up a little and surveys his work; Francis, well kissed – his lips wet and red, his face flushed, his eyes shining. James wishes he could capture this sight and store it behind his eyelids, see it everywhere, all the time.

Francis grins up at him, and although James dearly wants to stick his tongue up against the gap in his teeth, he instead shimmies out of Francis’ arms to push up his t-shirt and lay kisses along his collarbone, his chest, laving at one pink nipple.

He keeps going, his mouth meandering over the plush softness of Francis’ stomach, his lips tickled by the soft, greying hair leading down into his boxers. Above him, Francis sighs, pushing James’ hair back out of his face.

James can feel Francis' eyes on him as he finally takes out his cock, stroking it gently, lazily, pressing wet, open mouthed kisses along the length of it until Francis squirms and makes a sound of impatience. James grins, but takes pity on him, and when he takes the head of Francis' cock into his mouth, Francis whimpers beautifully. It's followed swiftly by a soft thud as his head falls back against the headboard.

James hums, satisfied, letting his eyes close as he settles into bobbing his head and plying his tongue around Francis' prick, managing a smile when he takes it particularly deep and hears a shaky sigh above him.

Oh, but he could spend hours like this, devoting himself to drawing these sounds from Francis, relishing the taste and feel of him, the weight of him on his tongue, the feel of the soft, downy skin of his thighs and his balls under his wandering fingertips, the way Francis gasps and groans and murmurs sweet, filthy little nothings that make James blush to remember them.

James wonders why he bothers leaving the house at all, when he could have this, all day, every day – Francis below him, flushed and groaning and his, his, *his*.

"James," Francis eventually murmurs, his eyes screwed shut, his whole body rigid and trembling. "*James*—"

James does not slow or pull away, instead he digs his fingers into Francis' thighs and hums, his mouth vibrating around him. *Come on, come on*. Francis groans, and groans again, higher this time, and with a sudden violent clutch of James' hair he comes down his throat, and at last sinks back against the pillows, trembling.

"Christ," Francis gasps as James sits up, stretching out his neck and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Your mouth's a menace to society."

"A menace to *you*," James says, arranging himself against the pillows after downing the glass of water that last-night-James was so good as to leave on his bedside table. "No one else is getting it."

Francis chuckles. "Quite right."

He seems to glow, almost, flushed and relaxed in the aftermath of an orgasm, happy and comfortable in their bed, in this room. A wonderful thing, really, their bed in their little house; the set of rooms where they eat and sleep and fuck and argue about whose turn it is to take the bins out.

James stares at him, stares hard as his mind runs through a number of emotions at once, and then has to turn his head to look at the ceiling, blinking quickly to stem the tears that are suddenly threatening to spill over.

Francis notices, of course. A warm hand lands on James' chest, a thumb rubbing at his collarbone. "What's wrong? My cock's not *that* awful."

James laughs, he can't help himself, his face creasing as he grins, a tear or two escaping after all. "Piss off," he says without much bite. "Nothing's wrong. I'm just happy. Of course I'm happy."

"Good," Francis says, looping an arm around James' waist to pull at him, so they're both lying on the sides, so close that their noses almost touch. "That is all I want, you know. For you to be happy."

James sniffs, smiles. "I *am*. We're getting *married*."

Francis kisses his nose, his forehead. "We are, but first things first. I'm going to suck you off, and then I fancy a fry up. How does that sound?"

"That sounds excellent," James says with a laugh, and he's about to say something else when he hears the lumbering sounds of a large dog climbing the staircase, and he knows what's coming next, as it's a fairly common occurrence whenever they have the temerity to have a lie in; Neptune scratches at their bedroom door and lets out a plaintive whine, with all the urgency of a dog who is clearly starving to death.

Francis groans.

"He wants his breakfast," James says.

"He can bloody well *wait*," Francis replies, grabbing James by his upper arms and pushing him down onto his back. James goes easily, pliable, laughing, happy to be lying amidst their tangled sheets, happy to be weighed down and warmed by Francis' body on top of his own, happy that they can share this bright and brilliant morning, happy knowing there is a lifetime of these mornings ahead of them.

## End Notes

i just think they should be Married?? married fitzier exists in all realms. sorry for this like.....unadulterated fluff-fest but i just want them to be happy

title from window by still woozy

thanks for reading! hope you enjoyed, and you can find me on twitter @ norvegiae\_

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