



vanessa
north

an
American Homo

IN PARIS

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

AN AMERICAN HOMO IN PARIS

By Vanessa North

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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AN AMERICAN HOMO IN PARIS

By Vanessa North

Photo Description

The Eiffel Tower looms in the background as two men kiss in the foreground of the black and white image.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

I came to Paris 9 months ago, with my now ex-boyfriend. City of Love, my ass. Now I'm sitting here in this café near the Eiffel Tower, sipping the cheapest coffee they had on the menu, heartbroken and unsure of my next steps.

Without a place to live, no job, not much money left in the bank, and speaking only a little French, I guess it's time to put my tail between my legs and head back home to Bumfuck, Idaho.

Unless...

I'd like to see the break-up, the heartbreak, and the scene in the café, leading up to a new romance with a handsome French man, that includes the picture prompt in some fashion, and a HFN/HEA. Names, ages, etc, even hometown, are all up to you. I'd like sexy times but they shouldn't be taking over the story. I'm open to pretty much anything other than hardcore BDSM. Sex can be sweet or hot or both. 😊

Thank you!!

Sincerely,

Sandra

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: teacher, writer, social media, travel, dare/bet, blogging, HFN, infidelity

Word Count: 10,579

AN AMERICAN HOMO IN PARIS

By Vanessa North

Coeur D'Alene, Idaho

An American Homo in Paris

Hello, dearest readers. Or perhaps I should say “salut!” That’s right, ladies and gentlemen, it’s time for a new blogventure!

I’m sure some of you, back when this blog was “Queering Campus” and I met Darling Dearest Love of My Life, aka Aaron, aka hottest fucking ass ever to grace a pair of blue jeans...

Where was I?

Oh yes. Back then, some of you thought we’d never make it past the weekend, let alone graduation, let alone the almost-a-reality-TV-show that was “Little Queer on the Prairie.” But we did. And last night, Aaron told me he’d gotten the job offer of a lifetime, and he asked me to go with him...

To Paris.

I know, take all the time you need. Lord knows I shrieked myself silly for a solid ten seconds before saying “yes!”

So, the blog title is changing again. Now we’re “An American Homo in Paris” and you can all go ahead and be jalouse.

I’ll still be blogging, still sponsored by the usual suspects—click the ads, people, it’s how I afford food and lube, for real—and working on a travelogue for a small queer press—can’t tell you which one yet, because the ink isn’t dry on the contracts, but it’s happening—and the tiny advance might even buy us a bottle of really good champagne.

Needless to say—I love you all, thank you for continuing to read, for subscribing to my YouTube channel, for liking the Facebook page, and in general being the awesomest people on the planet.

ALL MY LOVE

Benji

Comments:

*CarrieandMike: So excited for you guys!! Congrats, Aaron on the job! Congrats, Benji on the book deal! Love you, Benj!
Xoxo*

Le Marais

The best part of Benji's day was when Aaron got home.

He didn't realize—didn't even think it was possible to realize—until becoming an ex-pat, what the idea of homeland really meant, or how when you're far away, and you're homesick, how one word in your own language can be home.

With Aaron, he didn't have to pretend to understand things he didn't or search for words until people thought he was stupid. And he didn't have to wither under that expression of Gallic contempt when he screwed up the language.

So when the door opened, and Aaron called, "Hey, Benj? You home?" Benji ran to him like a goddamn puppy.

"Missed you." He wrapped his arms around Aaron's waist and gave him a kiss, but Aaron pulled out of it so fast Benji damn near got whiplash.

"Babe. Are you still—are those your pajamas?" He pulled off his tie and gave Benji a once over. "Not that your ass isn't cute in them, but have you been outside at all today?"

"Um, aside from lunch, no, but I was busy writing."

Aaron rolled his eyes. "Yeah? And how is 'An American Homo in Paris' coming along? What wild adventures did you blog about today?"

Ouch. Okay, maybe Benji hadn't updated the blog in a few weeks. Maybe he hadn't left the apartment much either. But there was no call for snark. The blog entry for Versailles had a ton of photos—he needed to tweak the captions and get that shit just right. When Aaron attacked the one thing Benji had in Paris that wasn't him, it stung.

"I came here because you said you needed me. This blog is a way to make this cross-Atlantic move about both of us, and not just you."

"God, Benji. Do you realize I can't even tell people at work what you do?" Aaron scrubbed a hand over his face. "I can't have this conversation with you in your pajamas."

Benji looked down at his well-worn sweats and the Hauser Lake Ice Breaker 10k T-shirt. He'd have thought nothing about leaving the house in

these back home. But here in Paris, it would ratchet up the contempt-o-meter. Didn't stop him from wandering down the street to grab a *jambon beurre* for lunch, but he probably shouldn't tell Aaron that.

"You can't tell your work friends that I'm a blogger? I can put jeans on—would that help?"

"Don't do that. I'm serious. I'm trying to have a serious conversation and you're getting all evasive."

"I'm not evading anything. You haven't *said* anything. What's up?" Benji reached for Aaron's hand, but he pulled it away. *Now who's being evasive?*

"You remember Henri?" he asked.

Benji shrugged. Keeping track of Aaron's work buddies was a full-time job in itself. "The blond?"

"He's not blond." Aaron shook his head. "You've met him three times. He's got black hair and a beard."

"The blond spoke English. He stuck out."

"They all speak English. But it's better for your fluency if you speak French as much as possible. Anyway, Henri is the gay one. He's taking me to Bourgogne for the weekend."

"Oh." In nine months, Benji had managed to figure out that Bourgogne was Burgundy, and the wine from there was some of the best in the world, but he hadn't gotten a chance to go there yet. Oh, sure he *could* have, if he'd been willing to go by himself. But it was hard to go places by himself while struggling to understand even the simplest conversations. But this didn't sound like an invitation. This sounded like—"That sounds fun."

"It's a date, Benj. I'm going away for the weekend with Henri. And when I come back, one of us is moving out."

Benji's stomach lurched like he was going to be sick.

"You're... I'm sorry, are you... is this..." *Great. Complete fail at two languages today.*

"My name is on the lease—but if you can find a way to make the rent, we'll figure something out. You were the one who wanted to live in the gaybor—"

Aaron's phone buzzing interrupted him. Glancing at the message, he smiled and sent something back.

“Listen, I gotta go. Henri is waiting for me. I’m sorry.” Aaron gave Benji’s shoulder a little squeeze, as if that could offset the words he’d just spoken. “I’ll be back on Tuesday, and we’ll sort it then.”

He’s fucking breaking up with me.

Moving out. Aaron was the one with the job, the income. He was the one with the work visa. He was the one who dragged Benji halfway around the world to play house husband while he dazzled some French tech firm with his mad programming skills.

Benji didn’t have money for rent. He didn’t have money to go home. He was completely, utterly dependent upon Aaron. *And he’s going away for a romantic wine-tasting weekend with some guy named Henri?*

He barely made it to the bathroom before he threw up the *jambon beurre*.

An American Homo in Paris:

The cheese stands alone.

Yeah, yeah. I’m sorry I haven’t updated the blog recently. I did get out to Versailles with my camera, and I’ll post the photos soon, but this entry is more personal. I renamed this blog a year ago when I was getting ready to follow the love of my life to gay Paris. You guys know how fucking much he means to me, and how excited I was to come here. You laughed with me about my language mishaps, and you drooled with me over my favorite street foods. You said the nicest things about my photos—especially the selfies, you sweet bitches you. And when I was homesick, you made me feel connected. I guess that’s why I’m writing this. I’m disconnected. And I’m hurting.

This homo’s been dumped.

I wish I could say it’s all for the best or make some pithy comment, but the fact is, being dumped sucks. Being dumped in a foreign country where you don’t have a job, can’t legally get a job, and don’t speak the language? Well that’s some extra-French flavor to the suckitude.

I don’t know when Aaron stopped typing “LOL” and started typing “MDR” instead... I don’t know when him thinking my

accent was cute turned to him being embarrassed to take me places. I don't know when I started resenting him, and I don't know when he stopped loving me.

I'm going to have to think of a new title for this blog. I sucked it up and called my mom—yeah, I know, total adulthood fail, but without a work visa, there's not much I can do here—and she's sent me money for a ticket home. I leave tomorrow and have about a million layovers, so I'll update when I can.

I'm more than homesick. I'm heartsick. No selfies today.

Benj

Comments:

Boyluvsboys: Does this mean you're single? J/k. Sorry bro, hang in there.

CarrieandMike: BENJI! OMG, I just saw your YouTube video and came straight here. CALL ME!

Au-Dessous de la Tour Eiffel

Ziri watched surreptitiously from his perch behind the café counter as the American with the laptop wiped at his eyes and jabbed the backspace key furiously. He had a thing for Americans—tourists especially. All wide-eyed and awestruck as they selfied their way through his city. And this one had a rainbow patch on his backpack, skinny jeans, and the body of a god. *Ouf*.

There was something exhilarating about seduction on a deadline—about knowing you only have a few days or a few weeks together and making the most of it. All the sweetness of falling in love with none of the long-term care and feeding of a relationship. It was more intimate than a club hookup, but about as uncomplicated. This one though—there was a fragility in his posture that was warning Ziri to handle with care. The way the chin trembled under day-old scruff. The way he alternated between glaring at his computer screen and trying not to cry. Maybe he was too fragile for the kind of whirlwind romance Ziri preferred.

But *maybe not*.

“Ah, *merci*, Ziz.” Hélène bustled into the front of the café from the back and kissed Ziri’s cheek. “Was it busy?”

“Not too bad. Your American is still crying at his computer, and a few Germans came by and cleared out the rest of the pastry. I got three papers graded, and I pocketed the tips.”

“*Bon, ben*. My American? *You* barely took your eyes off him since he walked in. Go on, go say hello.”

Ziri tugged at one of her blonde ringlets. “You shouldn’t encourage me.”

“Why not? He looks like he needs a friend. And you look like a starving man at a feast.”

Ziri shoved the papers he was grading back into his case and swung it over his shoulder. He made his way over to the American and sat down across from him. “*Ça va?*”

The American looked up, clearly startled. So handsome, but his blue eyes were rimmed in red. He really had been crying. “*Ça, um. Oui, ça va.*” He wiped at his eyes again and sniffed.

“*Canadien ou Américain?*” Ziri was pretty sure this one was American, but easing into small talk was probably the best way to handle a man who looked like he’d break down in tears any moment.

The guy swallowed. “*Américain,*” he said decisively. His lower lip steadied, and he offered half a smile. My god, what would a real smile from him look like? Suddenly, Ziri really wanted to know. He switched to English—he got the feeling “*ça va*” and “*Américain*” were probably not far from the limit of this guy’s French.

“What’s your name?”

“Benji.” He stuck out his hand, and Ziri shook it. It was smooth and firm, larger than Ziri’s hand. He held the handshake just a little too long, until the American let go.

“Um...” Benji’s eyes widened and he looked around, obviously panicked and not knowing what to say. Finally, he spoke, in English. “Am I loitering too long? I can order another coffee...”

“No, no, don’t worry about it.” Ziri smiled. “I don’t even work here. I was just helping my cousin.” He gestured to Héléne. “Like a sister to me. *Moi*, I’m Ziri.”

“Your English is really good,” Benji blurted, then blushed.

“Thank you. I teach English. So, Benji, what brings you to Paris?”

And just like that, the bravado failed and the American—non, *Benji*—Benji’s face fell. “Oh, god.” He buried his face in his hands. “He left me.”

That explained the crying. *Merde*. Ziri wondered how much of an asshole it would make him to try to hook up anyway. *A big asshole*. Okay, so sex was off limits. But he couldn’t just leave Benji sitting here, hurting, could he? That would make him a bigger asshole. He was practically obligated to cheer the guy up. He got up and fetched a handful of napkins from behind the counter and brought them back to the table, handing one to Benji, who wiped his face.

“Thanks.”

“Welcome.”

Ziri listened as Benji poured out the story of meeting Aaron in college, falling in love over a weekend, and spending the next eight years together until they came here, to Paris, where everything fell apart. His heart ached for Benji.

“Are you scared?” he caught himself asking, then wanted to kick himself. But Benji laughed and nodded. “Terrified.”

He reached out and touched Benji’s shoulder.

“Do you want to get out of here? Go for a walk?”

Benji looked up at him, eyes bright and watery with unshed tears. “Why?”

Ziri smiled. “Because there are better ways to get over a heartbreak than sitting in my cousin’s café and crying. You’re in the city of love. Let’s find something to fall in love with.”

“I can’t. I have to get home to pack. I’m flying out tomorrow.”

“All the more reason to take one last farewell tour, *non?*”

“My bag—I don’t want to lug it around...”

“You can leave your bag with Hélène, she’ll take good care of it. Besides, it will take your mind off the *mec* who made you cry.”

Benji opened his mouth like he was going to protest again, then straightened his spine and smiled, wiping at his eyes again. “You’re right. I can sleep on the plane. Let’s do this.”

Les Fontaines de la Concorde

Benji threw his laptop into his backpack while Ziri kissed the blonde on both cheeks and said something to her in rapid-fire French—no, not French, something else, something Benji didn't recognize at all. He liked the way Ziri spoke—his accent a mix of French and British. It was cute. The blonde smiled at him and turned to Benji, speaking in heavily accented English. She had always spoken French to him before, he realized, those times he'd come here to write over the last nine months.

"I'm happy to lock it in my office. Ziri has a key and he can get it for you whenever you come back, even if the café is closed."

"*Bon, ben.* Let's go." Ziri smiled at him, and Benji's insides did a funny little flop. There had to be worse things than going for a "good-bye to Paris" walk with a handsome French man.

"Hold on. Come here." Benji pulled out his phone and pulled Ziri close enough to snap a selfie of the two of them. He typed a quick caption, then sent it to Instagram.

Off on a new adventure with a new friend #AHIP

"What's that?" Ziri asked as they stepped out of the café and onto the streets of Paris. Benji almost stumbled in shock.

"You don't know Instagram?"

Ziri laughed. "Of course. I meant your hashtag." The tower loomed over them, but he steered them east along the Seine instead.

"Oh, I write a blog. It's called An American Homo in Paris. I hashtag all my instagram posts with that so my readers can find them easily."

"Nice; so you're a writer." Ziri's approving smile warmed something in Benji. "Was that what you were doing at the café?"

Benji nodded, but he didn't want to talk about the blog—he'd cried enough in front of this guy.

"What language was that, back there? It sounded like... like nothing I've heard before."

"Kabyle." Ziri shrugged. "Hélène and I, our families both came here from Algérie before we were born. My mother insisted on speaking Kabyle in the home. Hélène's insisted only French. So I teach her."

“You speak three languages?” Benji’s mind reeled. Most people he knew only spoke English. And some of them badly.

“Four, actually. French, English, Arabic, and Kabyle.”

“Wow. You must be super smart.”

Ziri just shrugged again. “Just a knack for language. You’re a writer though—you must have a knack of your own.”

Benji warmed a little at that—Aaron had never respected what he did. Never thought the blog—even when it landed him a book deal—took any talent. When had Benji started internalizing that feeling? That what he did wasn’t good enough? That he wasn’t a *real* writer?

“All I do is tell stories. About myself, about the people I meet. About being queer. Not just the blog though, back in Idaho I wrote for the local paper and freelance stuff for websites. I’d really like a staff writer position somewhere—like for one of the big gay media outlets—but I don’t know if that’s ever going to happen.”

“And you tell stories about being a gay American man in Paris?”

“Yeah, well kind of. It was supposed to be. I mean, to most Americans, Paris is more than just a city. It’s a feeling you get swept up in. It’s romance and risk and love and history.”

“And you don’t find it that way.” Ziri stopped him and gestured around. “You came here to this place—for a man you loved—romance and risk. And look around you—history.”

“Yeah, and it smells like diesel and river water.” Benji wrinkled his nose. “And sometimes pee.”

Ziri clutched his heart. “And New York doesn’t?”

The response was so unexpected, it ripped a guffaw out of Benji. “I guess it does. But I’ve never been dumped in New York.”

Ziri’s smile faded. “I think stories are how we live each other’s truth. What’s the expression in English—‘wear each other’s shoes’?”

“Walk a mile in someone else’s shoes, yeah. Wow, you totally get what I do.” Benji grinned. “That’s awesome. Aaron never—well, he never did.”

“Okay, new rule. You say his name? You have to do a—oh, what’s the word *en Anglais*? A dare.” Ziri’s eyes sparkled. “Or pay a forfeit.”

Benji laughed. “What kind of dare?”

“When we get to Place de la Concorde, you get in one of the fountains, and you sing a Lady Gaga song.”

“No way.” Just the idea of it made his stomach knot up with nerves. “First of all, I can’t sing. Second of all, I don’t know any Lady Gaga songs. Third, it’s too cold. What’s the forfeit?”

“First of all, all the better—even more embarrassing that way. Second of all, you’re a twenty-something-year old gay American. You know Bad Romance. Third, I’ll warm you up.” Ziri raised an eyebrow. “And the forfeit is a kiss.”

And *that* made Benji’s entire body go on red alert. Yeah, the guy was good-looking, and Benji was single for the first time since college, but he was not going to be the guy who gets over someone by getting under someone else. Benji started walking again, his cheeks flaring hotly. He shouted over his shoulder, “You’re crazy. *T’es fou*. See, I speak enough French for that at least.”

“Maybe I am, but you’re the one who’ll put it on YouTube.”

Benji stopped walking and turned around. Putting it on YouTube made it sound less like a punishment and more like... yeah, a dare. YouTube was the double-dog-dare of the Internet era.

“I can probably manage Bad Romance.”

Ziri pumped his fist. “*Ouais!*”

An American Homo in Paris on YouTube

Post-Aaron Dare #1

A handsome French man looks directly at the camera, smiling.

“Okay, friends and followers of Benji. I’m Ziri from Saint Denis, and I am Benji’s tour guide for today.” The camera pans left and Benji’s face appears.

“Salut, motherfuckers.” The camera pans again to focus on Ziri.

“Okay, so Benji’s boyfriend has left him, booooo, and he’s leaving Paris tomorrow. So I am giving him a farewell tour with a twist. Any time he says Aaron’s name, he has to do a dare or pay a forfeit.”

Benji's face appears again. "And by forfeit, he means I have to kiss him." Benji makes an exaggerated expression of disgust.

The camera shakes as Ziri laughs.

Benji continues, "Okay, you guys, if you're new, go ahead and click subscribe so you can see my humiliation unfold. Regular followers—I know I swore I'd never sing again after karaokegate of 2012, but I sort of already said the A-word, so, here I go..."

The camera jostles, then trains on Benji and zooms out as he rolls his pants up to his knees and takes off his shoes. He shoots the camera a playful glare, climbs into the fountain, and starts to sing.

—SHOW MORE—

BengalLad1989: My girlfriend think's you're cute, but this video is hella gay.

CarrieandMike: BENJI! WHAT? Aaron broke up with you? That fucker!

Derek A: Dude can't sing, but he's got serious stones

JennyIRead: I'm totally shipping you and this Ziri guy. Kiss him anyway!

CarrieandMike: Benji LOVES Aaron. This is serious.

JennyIRead: It's a video of a dude dancing in a fountain and singing Gaga. Please. And they're cute together. #ziji

—SHOW MORE—

Ziri wasn't even disappointed that Benji had picked the dare. He'd climbed into that fountain and belted out the chorus of *Bad Romance* like he was auditioning for *France a un Incroyable Talent*. And he'd been amazing—nowhere close to the tune, but amazing. He'd wiggled his hips and pantomimed a microphone, really selling it. You had to admire a guy who put it all on the line like that.

A crowd of tourists had stopped to watch him, taking photos and clapping when he finished, all laughing and excited. One tried to shove a few Euros in

his hand, but Benji waved her off and pulled his shoes back on, laughing. His smile lit him up inside, and it hit Ziri like a punch in the gut. One thing was absolutely certain—he needed to come up with a dare so wild, so audacious, that Benji picked the forfeit instead. But how to get him to say Aaron’s name on the Metro?

“I can’t believe I did that.” Benji groaned, but he was still grinning. “You are a bad influence.”

“You were wonderful.” Ziri meant it. “You made me want that kiss even more.”

Benji rolled his eyes. “Yeah, okay, whatever. I’m going to upload this video now.”

When he was done, they started walking north.

“What is your favorite part of Paris?” Ziri asked, hoping for a hint of where they should go next. “The clubs? The food?”

“The food is great; I’m kind of addicted to those ham sandwiches. But really I think—I think it’s just how old everything is. How much history is here. I mean, you don’t see stuff like this in Idaho. I think I’ll miss that part a lot.”

Ziri couldn’t imagine. He’d lived in or near Paris his entire life, the evidence of millennia of civilization all around him. It was in the streets he walked and the words he spoke. History was a tangible thing here. He liked that Benji appreciated that about the city. Damn, why did this guy have to be leaving tomorrow?

“And your least favorite part?”

Benji’s eyes dropped to the ground and his smile disappeared. “No one hugs here. At home, my friends, we all—it’s stupid. I don’t know why I’m telling you this.”

Ziri’s heart lurched a little. “No, it’s okay.”

“My friends at home, we’d hug. All the time. When we were happy. When we were sad. Just to say hello. My friend Carrie, she gives these *epic* hugs, just to say hi. But here, it’s all handshakes and cheek kisses. Sometimes, you just really need a hug, you know? You just need someone to...”

He sniffed and wiped at his eyes. “I’m sorry, I’m really homesick—but I also kind of wish I weren’t leaving. I can’t wait to be home, but I’d gotten really attached to the idea of living in Paris with the love of my life.”

“It’s okay.” Ziri rubbed at Benji’s shoulder, not quite comfortable with the idea of a hug, and yet wanting to offer comfort how he could.

Benji sniffed again, digging the heel of his hand into his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

“Stop apologizing.” He pulled Benji closer and wrapped an arm around his shoulders. Half a hug. But then Benji turned into him, wrapped both arms around Ziri’s waist, and *clung*, burying his face in Ziri’s shoulder. Wow, yeah, full-blown hug. The contact of that strong body pressing against his made Ziri bite back a groan. He tried to remind himself that Benji had just been left by his lover, that he was sad and just looking for comfort, but damn, it felt good to hold and be held. It was intimate—it crossed a line for him, and it made him want to cross more. As many more as he could. He squeezed Benji gently, experimentally, and Benji squeezed back and pulled away.

“Thank you.” Benji gave one last squeeze before letting go completely. “I really needed that.”

“You’re welcome.” Ziri ducked his head. “I can see why Americans like those so much.”

Benji laughed, wiping at his eyes again, and Ziri tugged his arm.

“I know where we should go next. *Allons-y!*”

Quartier Pigalle

“The Moulin Rouge?” Excitement bubbled up in Benji as he looked up at the iconic windmill sign. He turned to Ziri, who was watching him with a sly grin.

“Do you want to see the show?” he asked.

“Are you kidding me?” Benji looked at the windmill again. Yeah, he’d been wanting to see a show at the Moulin Rouge since he arrived in Paris, but it was expensive, and Aaron didn’t like theater. Thank god he didn’t say that aloud—Ziri would probably make him *audition* for a show at the Moulin Rouge for that. “I’d love to, but...”

“Then we go. I invited you, it’s my treat.” Ziri took his hand and squeezed it. “It’s too late for lunch, but we can still see the *matinée*.”

“This isn’t... it isn’t too touristy?”

Ziri raised an eyebrow. “Parisians love our city too.”

Benji followed Ziri’s lead as they were led to their seats and a bottle of champagne was poured. Ziri smiled and raised his glass. “*À la vôtre*.”

“*À la vôtre*,” Benji repeated.

During the show, Benji found his gaze wandering to his companion, and he studied him in the dark. Ziri’s close-cropped hair would be curly, Benji decided, if it grew longer. Short like this, it would be soft and spiky against his palm, and his fingers itched to touch it. Yeah, he’d felt that stuttered breath when he hugged Ziri earlier—this was no one-sided attraction. It felt strange and new to look at a man like this, to really study a man with sexual interest—a man who wasn’t Aaron. Sticky feelings, awkward and exciting, but they hurt a little too. Sure, he’d checked guys out while he was dating Aaron, but that was about fantasy.

Ziri wasn’t fantasy. He was *possibility*.

And impossibility.

Benji reached out without thinking and touched Ziri’s hand. Ziri glanced over at him, a question on his face, and that moment of surprised eye contact made something in Benji split in two, spilling out yearning and regret and desire so fierce it took his breath away. He slipped his hand into Ziri’s and mouthed the word “*merci*.”

Ziri didn't pull his hand away.

After the show, as they were walking toward the Metro, a guy with dreadlocks shouted something from across the street. Ziri looked up and grinned. "Come on."

The man kissed Ziri's cheeks and offered Benji a hand to shake.

"Alain. Are you a friend of Ziz?" he asked in heavily accented English.

"Ziz?"

"It's a nickname," Ziri explained. "My friends and family call me that. You can too, if you like." His smile was warm, and Benji blushed a little at being invited to call Ziri what was obviously an intimate name. "Alain is H el ene's boyfriend; he works in a music store near here."

"*Enchant e*." That was a word Benji knew well enough, having endured all of Aaron's tedious job-related dinner parties.

"Excuse me for just a moment, Benji."

The two Frenchmen launched into rapid conversation, gesturing with their hands and laughing. It didn't bother Benji—wasn't he used to this by now? But it did give him time to study Ziri in the late afternoon sunlight, like he had during the show. And damn, he liked what he saw.

If Aaron was a throbbing sore spot on his heart, Ziri was the best kind of balm—distracting and gentle and full of light.

As Benji watched, Ziri clapped his friend on the shoulder, leaned in and kissed his cheek, then turned back to Benji.

"Ready?"

"Where are we going next?"

Ziri cocked his head to the side and studied Benji for a moment. "Is there a place in Paris you've wanted to go, but haven't had a chance yet?"

Benji thought about it—he'd seen most of the sights, many of them multiple times. "P ere Lachaise."

Ziri raised an eyebrow and gestured to the Metro stairs. "*Apr es toi*."

They barely had to wait for a train, and the car they boarded was crowded. They stood close together, bodies brushing, and when Benji wobbled on his feet, Ziri slung an arm around his waist to steady him.

“Why haven’t you visited Père Lachaise?”

“Aaron said it was morbid.” The words popped out before Benji had a chance to think, and as soon as he realized, he clapped a hand over his mouth.

“Too late.” Ziri held out his hand. “Phone.”

Benji handed over his phone.

Ziri opened the video camera and started recording. “Benji has done it again, and now he needs to swap pants with me.” He handed the phone to a girl seated nearby, whispering something in French, and she held it up in one hand, stifling a laugh with the other.

Benji stared as Ziri unbuckled his belt. He was *serious*. The guy was going to take off his pants. *On the Metro*.

Ziri’s pants pooled around his ankles, and he stepped out of them, standing in the middle of a laughing, clapping crowd in nothing but his t-shirt and a pair of purple briefs. Teasingly, he looked up and down Benji’s body, and Benji took the unspoken hint and let his own gaze follow the lines of Ziri’s tanned skin from face to—*don’t look at—dammit*. Okay, it was a nice bulge. Benji closed his eyes. When he opened them, Ziri held out his pants with an expectant expression.

“You may still forfeit, if you like.”

Benji’s hands went to his own belt, and he channeled his inner stripper. Before today, he wouldn’t have said he had an inner stripper. He wouldn’t have said he had an inner Gaga either, but the fountain episode had proven *that* wrong too. He was half-hard from seeing Ziri in his underwear, and everyone on the train was about to see it. The thought actually kind of turned him on more.

Fuck it. He took a deep breath and tried not to think about Ziri’s muscular thighs as he kicked off his shoes. He jutted one hip and bit his lip, peering at Ziri from under his eyelashes as he dropped his zipper. Ziri bit his own lip and groaned a little, hamming it up for their audience, but hell if that didn’t go straight to Benji’s cock, now trying to push its way out of his unzipped pants.

That’s about the point it all went south. Benji tried to peel out of his skinny jeans, holding onto the pole for balance, but his feet got tangled and he spilled forward and fell into Ziri.

“This isn’t fair. My pants are harder to take off,” he muttered, face flushing.

Ziri’s eyes sparkled as he took Benji’s jeans from him. “Our stop is three stops away.”

Benji grabbed Ziri’s pants and pulled them on, then watched as Ziri struggled into his jeans. Turnabout was fair play, because Ziri was flushed and struggling to tuck his own not-so-flaccid cock into Benji’s pants. Finally finished, he thrust his hands in the air and grinned.

The thrill of public exposure and the relief of not getting caught flooded Benji’s veins like an electric current, and around them, the train car erupted in applause. He gave a little bow, then reclaimed his phone.

As he was uploading the video to YouTube, he noticed the view count on the fountain video had hit 20,000 views. He’d never had that many before. “Hey, check this out—” he showed it to Ziri. “I guess my people like you.”

An American Homo in Paris on YouTube

Post-Aaron Dare #2

In a crowded subway car, Ziri faces the camera, a mournful expression on his face.

“Benji has done it again,” he says. “And now he needs to swap pants with me.”

There’s a rush of movement as the camera changes hands and a murmured conversation in French. Then, the camera settles and Ziri removes his pants and holds them out to Benji.

—SHOW MORE—

JennyIRead: *OMG!!! #ziji*

CarrieandMike: *Benji, OMG. Call me.*

Boyluvsboys: *you guys are my heroes. I’d bottom for either of you.*

JennyIRead: *BLB, stop trying to sink the ship!*

Boyluvsboys: *Cannot with you, Jenny.*

—SHOW MORE—

Cimetière Père Lachaise

God, Ziri was nervous. He hoped he hadn't played this wrong. If he had, he could always blame all the blood in his brain going to the little head when he saw Benji in his underwear on the Metro. His cheeks heated at the memory of Benji striking that sexy pose and teasing him. He had to hand it to the American—he knew how to work a crowd.

He watched Benji's face as they approached the glass-surrounded tomb. The glass was covered with lipstick marks and messages scrawled across it. Benji's jaw dropped a little, his hands balled into fists at his sides, and then he looked at Ziri.

"That's—Ziz." The intimacy of his nickname on Benji's lips stirred Ziri, but when the look of wonder broke out on Benji's face, that's when he knew he'd gotten it right. "That's Oscar Wilde's tomb."

"*J'ai pensé—*" Ziri swallowed. Lots of Americans headed straight for Jim Morrison's tomb. And why wouldn't they? But this was Benji. And while he didn't know for sure how Benji felt about the late lead singer of The Doors, he had a pretty good idea that a man who titled his blog "An American Homo in Paris" would have some affection for Wilde. "I thought this would be why."

He stood back and watched as Benji approached the tomb and studied it. The expressions on the American's face swung like a pendulum from wonder to grief and back again. His lips moved as he read the epitaph, chin trembling as he got to "*And outcasts always mourn.*" Finally, he wiped at his eyes and returned to Ziri, pulling him into a tight embrace. "Thank you."

Ziri wrapped his arms around Benji and hugged him back. "This is a place of mourning, *oui*. But also, celebration. He's honored here in a way he couldn't have been at the end of his life."

Benji nodded into his shoulder, then let go. "Where to now?"

Ziri looked at the clock on his phone. "Dinner," he said decisively.

They lingered over dinner and then a second bottle of wine, neither of them wanting the night to end. They left the restaurant and found a quiet bar by the Seine, not far from the apartment Benji had shared with Aaron. They swapped pants again—this time in the privacy of a restroom, thank-you-very-much—and

then Ziri told him stories of his childhood in a mostly Algerian neighborhood in Saint Denis, and Benji talked about growing up in a redneck town in Idaho.

Benji found himself watching Ziri's lips move as he talked, and the way his honey-brown eyes seemed to light up when they discovered something they had in common. Every inch of Benji's skin seemed to tingle and ache, and he couldn't stop thinking about the fact that his pants had been warm from Ziri's skin. Ziri's muscular thighs had stretched the denim. Ziri's cock had pressed against this zipper. Who knew letting someone wear your pants could feel like having them under your skin?

For the first time in eight years, Benji was presented with the dilemma of wanting to take a man home, and not having the first clue how. Close to midnight, Ziri pulled out his phone and winced. "I have to catch the RER back to Saint Denis. We don't have time to get your backpack, but H  l  ne opens her caf   at seven o'clock."

The sour taste of disappointment and missed opportunity flooded Benji's mouth. "I'll get it from her in the morning. Come on, I'll walk you to the train."

They walked in silence, suddenly shy after their day together.

"Well, I guess this is it. I would say *au revoir*, but... I think tonight is more of an *adieu, n'est-ce pas?*" Ziri's eyes crinkled up in a smile as he held out his hand for a shake, and Benji's heart lurched.

He didn't know whether he wanted to stay or go. He didn't know what the hell was happening with his YouTube channel. All he knew was he didn't want to say good-bye. He didn't want Ziri to walk away.

"Aaron."

Ziri flinched, his brows drawing together in hurt.

"Aaron. Aaron. Aaron. I said it, you have to give me a dare." Benji pushed. "Give me a dare. Give me something humiliating, or impossible—just give me a dare."

"The game is over, Benji. Time for you to go home and pack so you can go back to the States tomorrow."

"Give. Me. A. Goddamn. Dare."

Ziri's nostrils flared—Benji was pissing him off. Good. He was pissing Benji off, sticking his hand out for a handshake as if this day hadn't meant anything.

“I dare you to go home and pack.” Ziri turned on his heel and started toward the turnstile.

“I forfeit,” Benji called after him. “I forfeit. I won’t accept that dare.”

Ziri spun around and was back in front of Benji in two long steps.

Benji’s back hit the wall, but his head was cradled in Ziri’s hand. Their foreheads pressed together, and Ziri’s other fist clenched his shirt. Warm, brown eyes searched Benji’s face for a long moment while both of their chests heaved. Then Ziri’s lips closed over Benji’s and everything else dropped away.

It was the dare *and* the forfeit, the fantasy and the possibility.

The kiss started rough, like they each had something to prove, but as Ziri crowded Benji back against the wall, it drew long and sweet. Hands clutched helplessly at clothing while their tongues teased and tempted, led and chased. Ziri’s cock pressed hard against Benji’s own, and he widened his legs to cradle Ziri closer.

Ziri broke away to bite and nip along Benji’s jaw, and Benji groaned. God, he wanted this. Wanted the kissing, wanted sex, not to forget Aaron, but to remember Ziri and this day. Benji dropped his head to the side and Ziri took the hint, pressing his lips to the sensitive length of Benji’s throat. His hand came up and brushed Benji’s cheekbones, soft as whisper. Dimly, Benji felt a vibration through the wall behind him, and his brain scrambled to tell him it was important.

“The train...” he whispered. “Shit, Ziz, your *train*.”

Ziri pulled away from Benji’s neck and looked behind him. “I’ll take the bus.” And then they were kissing again, and Benji laughed into the kiss, running his hands up and down Ziri’s back, loving the feel of his strong body, the scent of his skin, the brush of stubble against his own.

“Come home with me,” he pleaded as they pulled apart to catch their breath. “You made my last day in Paris unforgettable. Make my last night even better.”

Ziri shook his head, then met Benji’s eyes, then kissed him again, his hands tightening on Benji’s arms.

“You said *I* was crazy,” he whispered against Benji’s lips.

“We’re both crazy.” Benji laughed. “Come on.”

Another frantic kiss against the wall, another shaky laugh, and they were running, hand in hand, toward home.

Le Marais, Encore

Ziri didn't stop to look around when Benji opened the door to his apartment. As soon as they were through the door, he had his hands under Benji's shirt and his lips on Benji's throat, and Benji was making those noises, those sweet, needy noises that turned Ziri on so much. He couldn't remember the last time he wanted someone like this. The teasing, the dares, the entire day had been like foreplay, all leading up to a moment he hadn't dared to hope for.

He stroked up along Benji's abs to rest his hands over nipples, peaked and straining. He brushed his palms back and forth, listening for more of those strangled gasps and whimpers that told him what Benji liked. When he closed his fingers over one taut nipple, Benji's head dropped back and he groaned, low and loud.

"Feels so good."

"*Ouais.*" Ziri pulled Benji's shirt over his head and tossed it aside. "*T'es tellement beau.*"

A flush spread across Benji's chest, and Ziri spanned it with his hands, rubbing.

"Ziz. Take me to bed. Please." Benji reached for the hem of Ziri's shirt, and then lifted it up and away.

Pulling Benji close, Ziri enfolded him in a big, full body hug, skin to skin. Benji's hands fluttered against him in surprise, then he relaxed into the embrace, a contented sigh stealing over him. They kissed again, slow and sweet, a tango more than a tangle, and Benji smiled at Ziri with wide blue eyes and led him to the bedroom.

Clothes fell on the floor, forgotten as soon as they were stripped away, and Benji gave Ziri a gentle shove down on the bed. Ziri sprawled on his back and looked up at Benji, who stood over him, cock jutting proudly away from his body, and something Ziri didn't have a name for, not in any of his four languages, in his eyes. Something more than lust and stronger than friendship, that moment when a lover's body becomes known and dear for the first time. Oh, it was something like love, but even that word didn't seem big enough, or frightening enough, or powerful enough for the rush of warmth that flooded Ziri's belly when Benji lay down next to him and took his hand.

“What do you want?” Benji asked, lifting Ziri’s hand to kiss and nibble at the knuckles.

Ziri just smiled and reached for Benji’s cock, giving it a long, slow stroke.

“We can just...” he whispered as Benji arched and shuddered.

“God, yeah.” Benji’s hand found Ziri’s cock, he mimicked that slow stroke, and they found a steady rhythm together, a give and take that went beyond just getting off. A caress, a comfort, all bittersweet because Benji was leaving. Yesterday, Ziri would have thought that a good thing. Why had he ever thought seduction on a deadline was the preferred way to love someone?

Benji kissed him hard and deep and that familiar rush flooded Ziri—he was so close—too close.

“Benji...” He pushed Benji’s hand away from his cock. “Will you, um, will you fuck me?” He blushed as he asked, but he didn’t stop stroking Benji’s cock, or rubbing his nipples. He loved the way Benji’s body responded to him. “I want to feel you in me.”

Benji groaned and pressed his face into the crook of Ziri’s neck.

“Yeah,” he whispered. “Are you sure?”

Ziri nodded. “*Oui.*” The word came out breathless and raw, and Benji kissed him again.

“I’ll be right back.” He moved away from Ziri, rummaged next to the bed. Ziri took a deep lungful of air, letting anticipation stir. He rolled to his belly, his dick rubbing against the sheets and sending all kinds of pleasant sparks through him.

Then Benji was back, lips pressing into the back of his neck, hands skimming down his body. Condom-covered cock pressing against his ass.

“I want to make you feel so good,” Benji murmured, kneading Ziri’s ass cheeks. His hands moved in slow, seductive patterns on Ziri’s skin, relaxing him, making him moan and rut into the mattress. Then a finger brushed his hole and excitement ran through his veins like electricity through a circuit. The finger came back, slick and rubbing. Ziri gave up on English and babbled in a mixture of French and Kabyle.

“I have no idea what you’re saying, but having you incoherent with lust is so fucking hot.”

Benji's finger dipped inside and Ziri gripped the sheets in both hands. Sweet friction, made sweeter by Benji's whispers of praise. Ziri close his eyes and concentrated on the sensations, on the way Benji teased him into thrusting back to take the finger deeper.

"I like watching you like this," Benji whispered. "I like the way you move, like you're desperate for me—the way you're biting the sheets, like when you finally come it's going to kill you. I bet you're fucking hot as hell when you come."

Ziri's eyes rolled back and he let out a low whine of desire, then the finger disappeared and Benji's cock was a new, bigger pressure. He pushed back against it, welcoming the stretch and the sting of penetration, that sharp, slick slide as he relaxed around Benji and took him deep.

Benji's whole body covered his as he rocked into him. It was like being fucked and hugged at the same time, overwhelming in its intimacy. Ziri pushed up and back, rocking into Benji.

"God. I'm close." Benji groaned and reached under Ziri to jack him off, stopping only when his groans became the roar of a man in the throes of an orgasm.

When Benji let go, Ziri grabbed his own dick and jerked it until his own orgasm hit him hard and fast. He clutched at the sheets with his free hand, and Benji clutched at him, holding him through the shudders and that exquisite moment of the best kind of loss—the loss of words, the loss of self, the loss of sense.

Benji pulled out and disappeared while Ziri collected himself. When he came back, he pulled a blanket over both of them and kissed Ziri's forehead. "Please. Stay."

Ziri pillowed his head on Benji's shoulder, and he stayed.

Benji woke up wrapped in warm arms, a hard dick poking his thigh.

Ziri.

He ran his hand down Ziri's leg, thinking about waking him for another round.

And then he realized his phone was buzzing. He eased himself out of Ziri's sleepy embrace and went digging through the clothes they'd dropped on the floor the night before until he found it.

“Hello?”

“Benji, what the fuck is going on?”

“Allison?” His editor from the queer paper in Idaho. He looked at the clock. Ten a.m. *Fuck, ten a.m.!* “What time is it there?”

“Does it fucking matter when the biggest social media story right now is a video of my writer-on-sabbatical dancing and singing in a fountain in Paris? You’ve gone viral. You’re huge. People all over Twitter and Facebook are debating whether the name of your blog is offensive. Hundreds of thousands of hits on that YouTube video. And you in your underwear on the Metro is not far behind. I never would have pegged you as a briefs guy.”

“Me? Viral?”

“Oh yeah. And teenage girls all over Tumblr have hashtagged ‘ziji.’ They’re shipping you and that French guy. They’re writing RPF.”

“What the fuck is RPF?”

“Real Person Fic. Like fan fiction, but about real people. There are like, eighteen—no shit, twenty-two now—stories about you already on Tumblr. Oh god, you do know what Tumblr is, right?”

“Porn and grumpy cat. Yeah, I know Tumblr.”

“Baby, you can’t get on that plane. Stay in Paris. Milk this thing.”

“I’m going to be homeless on Tuesday when Aaron gets back.”

“You owe me a kiss for that...” rumbled from the bed.

“Is that...?” Allison’s voice grew shrill. “Benji! Is he there with you? The French guy?”

“Um...” Benji rubbed his eyes. “I plead the fifth.”

“I’m not a court and you aren’t even on U.S. soil. Are you having some whirlwind single-day fling? Holy shit, you’re living a *Linklater* movie. You lucky bitch. Okay, here’s the deal. You stay put. You’re going to make enough money off this YouTube thing to keep you in Paris for a while longer. I’m going to see if I can get you a regular column gig with the paper, get you some kind of salary. Minimal, of course.”

Benji snorted. *Linklater* movie? “Of course. But Al...”

“You want this, right? I mean, I can maybe set you up as some kind of French news stringer too. Might sweeten the deal with the paper. You were a journalism major, you took newswriting, right?”

Just then, the door to the apartment swung open and Aaron walked in.

Fucking hell.

“Benj? Babe, I’m so sor—” He stopped dead in the doorway to the bedroom, looking back and forth between Benji and the bed.

“Allison, I gotta call you back.”

Well, the asshole was handsome, Ziri had to give him that. Red hair, freckles, crinkly eyes that looked like he was used to smiling a lot. Charming.

Ziri wanted to punch him in the junk.

“Um...” Aaron glared daggers at him, then looked back at Benji, who was holding his phone pressed to his forehead and appeared to actually be praying, lips moving soundlessly.

“Ziz...” Benji turned to him with pleading eyes. “I need to talk to...” His cheeks flushed, and Ziri felt a wave of possessiveness. *That’s right, say his name and owe me the kiss.* “To Aaron.”

“That’s two,” Ziri said, only half-teasing. When Benji smiled in response, it made his heart sing and hurt together.

“That’s two,” he agreed. “Can you get my bag from your cousin’s coffee shop for me, and meet me by the tower at noon?”

“Of course. I—” He gestured to the blankets covering his body. “I’d like some privacy to dress.”

“Of course.”

Benji turned and gave Aaron a little shove back through the doorway, then pulled the door shut behind him.

Ziri got up, picked up his underwear, and then sat down heavily on the bed. What the hell was he going to do now?

Benji stared at Aaron, and all he could think was “asshole.” How could eight years be undone that easily? Yesterday, before Ziri’s madcap tour and the dares and the kissing, Benji would have given anything for just this—for Aaron to come back. Even if he’d fucked Henri. But now... he had to admit it was different.

“Benj, who—?” Aaron gestured to the door, where Ziri had just let himself out with a promise to see Benji at noon.

“His name is Ziri, and I met him in a coffee shop. He cheered me up.”

Aaron nodded. “Okay. That’s okay. I forgive you. I didn’t exactly handle suggesting a break well. And it’s not like…” He swallowed, and Benji saw red.

“A break? You *forgive* me? Are you fucking kidding me, Aaron?” *That’s three.* “You dumped me. You didn’t suggest a break. You suggested me being homeless halfway around the world from my family and friends, in a country where I can’t legally get a job. You’re an asshole. I gave you eight years of my life and you paid me back by cheating on me and looking down your nose at me. How long were you sleeping with Henri before you decided to go away with him?”

“It wasn’t like that. We just… you know. Working together. Late nights. Weekends busting tail on big projects. It was just a couple of hand jobs and some kissing. We thought this weekend would help us figure out what we wanted.”

“You know, the proper thing to do would be to talk to me first. Break up with me before you decide you’re going to fool around. If you didn’t want *me* anymore, why did you drag me to Paris?”

Aaron’s face grew hard, his eyebrows drawing together. “You changed, Benj. You weren’t all mopey and bitter back home. You were—god. Do you remember college? You weren’t just super hot, you were *fun*. You were like a local gaylebrity. Everyone loved you, and you picked me. And we were happy, right?”

“I thought we were.” Benji shrugged.

“Yeah, well, we get to Paris, and it’s like someone flipped a switch. That guy disappeared. You holed up in our apartment and slept all the time. We’d go to dinner and you wouldn’t speak to anyone. Sure, you went around to all the tourist sites, but dude, you aren’t a tourist. You live here.”

“I was lonely. And homesick. And depressed. We’d go to dinner and you’d ignore me to talk to people in a language I don’t speak.”

“You didn’t even try! Immersion is the best way to learn a language…”

“Actually, according to Ziri, immersion *without instruction* can make learning a language as an adult harder because of fear of failure and real-world consequences.”

“Oh, so I guess he’s an expert?” Aaron sneered. “You changed, Benji. Not me.”

And Benji was just beginning to see how true that was.

“You’re right, being lonely and depressed and homesick changes a person. I wouldn’t wish those things on anyone. But there’s nothing wrong with playing tourist. Why is blending in so damned important to you? Worth alienating me over?”

“Why did you always have to stand out? Ham it up? Take those ridiculous selfies?”

“It’s my job. And you said yourself, you liked being with the gaylebrity.” Bitterness swamped Benji. “Tell me the truth, right now. Why did you cut your romantic weekend with Henri short? Did it have anything to do with my YouTube Channel getting hundreds of thousands of hits yesterday?”

Aaron’s gaze skittered to the side, and Benji had all the answer he needed.

“Yeah, you’re right. I’ve changed. I don’t want to be your trophy anymore.”

He left Aaron standing with his mouth open.

Au-Dessous de la Tour Eiffel, Encore

Ziri held Benji's backpack slung over one shoulder, checking the clock on his phone compulsively, dying to know what was going on back at Benji's apartment.

Were they getting back together? Did it matter? Hadn't Ziri always said seduction on a deadline was the best way to conduct relationships? All the fun and none of the hurt? So why did this hurt? Why was Benji different?

Because it didn't start out as seduction.

Sure, he'd been attracted—Benji was hot—but it was actually the tears that had intrigued him the most. He hadn't been able to resist taking him around the city, showing off and cheering him up. And then last night—Ziri couldn't stop reliving that moment when Benji refused to go home without a kiss.

And now?

With Aaron home, an apology on his lips, what did that mean?

Another glance at his phone told him it was five after twelve.

“Ziz!”

His head jerked up and around. *Benji.*

Benji was walking toward him and smiling. *Smiling.*

He stood and started running.

“Hey.” Benji took Ziri's face between both hands, and then his lips were on Ziri's and all the hurt and nerves and fear fell away. *Benji.*

The kiss stretched on, earning them whistles from other people nearby. Ziri was sure he heard a couple of camera clicks. He didn't care. He had an armful of his sassy American.

Benji broke away, breathless. “I owe you two more. I said his name once after you left.”

Ziri laughed and nipped a bite at Benji's lower lip. “I'm keeping a running account.”

“Our videos went viral. My editor at the paper back home is trying to get me on some kind of salary so I can afford to stay here and keep blogging and doing the videos and everything.”

“Do you want to stay?”

Benji looked over at the tower, a look of naked longing on his face.

“I want to—I want to see. I want to explore this thing, between me and this city, and this other one.” He pulled Ziri’s hand onto his own chest, over his heart. “This thing with you. If you want to. I know we didn’t talk about any of that, and you thought I was leaving, and maybe you don’t want me to stay.”

“I want you.” It was true. It surprised Ziri, that it was that simple. “I want you to stay, and I—I just want you.”

“I don’t know where I’m going to live. I—shit, I have to call my mom. This is going to be so complicated.”

Ziri shook his head. “No, it’s really not. We’ll sort it out. In the meantime, I want those two kisses now.”

An American Homo in Paris on Instagram

The Eiffel Tower looms in the background as two men kiss in the foreground of the black and white image.

A caption reads:

Just the beginning. #ziji #AHIP

The End

Author Bio

Author of over a dozen novels, novellas, and short stories, Vanessa North delights in giving happy-ever-afters to characters who don't think they deserve them. Relentless curiosity led her to take up knitting and run a few marathons "just to see if she could." She started writing for the same reason. Her very patient husband pretends not to notice when her hobbies take over the house. Living and writing in Northwest Georgia, she finds her attempts to keep a quiet home are frequently thwarted by twin boy-children and a very, very large dog.

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