

# With small Steps

Joshua x Henri

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## nine first steps

### o1 : Beginning

When they met for the first time, it was Joshua's first year at the Academy. The younger boy got a room in the same student's house as he did and finally, Joshua wasn't alone anymore.

But the new housemate was quite strange. He talked little and when he did, his french accent couldn't be overheard. He was shy around other people, probably impressed by the mass of strangers around him.

Joshua assumed that he had had a private teacher before.

He was told to take care of the french boy, to make his first weeks at the school easier. So he came and greeted him.

Shortly after the boy arrived, he was placed in a room to wait for a general introduction.

The door opened and a young, green-haired boy stepped in. He seemed unsure about what he had to do, but Joshua tried as best as he could.

"Welcome at St. Alphonso's."

The other boy didn't look up, didn't even dare to move.

"I'm Joshua Grant." He offered him his hand.

Finally, the younger student looked up.

"*You* are Joshua Grant?", he asked with big eyes. Those golden eyes confused Joshua for a moment. "Uhm, yes." Then he smiled and nodded "I'm going to show you the Academy, okay?" Joshua took his hand and pulled him up from his chair.

"What's your name?" He had totally forgotten to ask him about that.

The other boy hesitated.

"Hen-... Henri-Hughues... de Saint Germain..."

Joshua looked at him. He had heard that name before.

From that day on, the blue-haired's gaze never left him.

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## **o2 : Jealousy**

"Hey, Joshua, can you help me with that?"

Yuuta handed over a book with mathematic structures.

Joshua took it. "Of course, I'll do what I can." He smiled at Yuuta and the younger boy smiled back.

"What is it that you don't understand? Come here and show me, please."

Yuuta followed his request and placed himself behind Joshua's chair, pointing at a long row of numbers and letters.

Henri looked up from his book and listened to Joshua's and Yuuta's conversation.

"The first thing is to combine all the figures that have the same letter at the end. You can do that because you're allowed to combine things that are multiplied with the same factors. It makes it a lot easier."

As Henri looked around, he saw Yuuta bending down so that he could follow Joshua's explanations even better. Their faces nearly touched and from time to time, Joshua looked at Yuuta to check if he was still listening and understanding what he tried to teach him.

Henri sighed, closed his book and rose.

"What's the matter?", Joshua asked as he caught a glimpse of Henri's annoyed expression.

"Nothing. I just don't want to disturb you two."

With these words, Henri left and Joshua went back to explaining the next steps that lead to solving the exercise.

The blue-haired remained behind the closed door for a moment, listening to Joshua's explanations. He bit his thumbnail.

Too bad he was too good at maths for needing explanations.

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## **o3 : Dead Prince**

The hall was darkened, only for a few flashy lights in every color they could imagine. People were sitting at their tables and waiting for the music to start, cocktails and snacks in front of them.

The music started, the lights focused on the little stage. Alfred started to sing, the people in the audience, a mixture of citizens and students of the St. Alphonso Academy, started showing their joy by moving their heads and feet to the music, some even sung along.

From the table with the best view to the stage, three students of St. Alphonso were watching the performance of *Dead Prince*, although only two seemed to enjoy it. Joshua turned his head to face Henri. He knew the blue-haired boy neither liked loud music nor Rock. But he had come to watch anyway and it surely made not only Joshua happy.

He tried to make it more enjoyable for his friend and took Henri's hand under the table.

Joshua knew he liked that.

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#### **o4 : Sixth of June**

A knock on his door made him look up from his desk and the work he had been doing right now. Henri stood up and answered.

Who he faced was Joshua, with a little packet in his hand. It was wrapped in paper, colorful, yet tastily chosen.

"I told you I don't need anything."

Joshua sighed. "I just wanted to show you that I didn't forget it."

Smilingly, he pushed the packet into Henri's hands.

"Joyeux Anniversaire."

Somehow Henri didn't like Joshua speaking french. He was quite good at it, but had still remained a kind of english accent. And this accent actually sounded quite cute. Maybe that was what Henri didn't like about it.

Henri took the present and smiled a bit. "Thanks."

He preferred answering in english.

Joshua took a glimpse into Henri's room and discovered a little bunny, hanging from the doorknob of the wardrobe. He had seen this thing somewhere before.

"What's that?" He pointed at the bunny.

Henri looked around. "Ah, that. I got this from Yuuta this morning."

Joshua rose his eyebrows. "He knows?" As far as Joshua knew, he was the only one who actually knew about Henri's date of birth. Or maybe he was the only one who cared.

"It was rather a coincidence."

"I see." Joshua smiled. "Well then..."

He didn't want to disturb Henri for long and turned to leave.

After Joshua had left, Henri closed the door and went back to his desk. He shoved his work away and looked at his present. It was perfectly wrapped, the paper didn't show a single fold or creak.

Joshua was not just cute, but also very skilled in everything he did. It was not the first

time that Henri realized that. For a moment, he thought about leaving it like that, just for the beauty of it.

Henri took great care in unwrapping this little packet and found two things. One thing was a book, a historical novel. Joshua knew exactly what kind of stories he preferred.

The other thing was a card. Actually, it was a simple photograph of the woods around the St. Alphonso Academy. A view out of Joshua's window. On the backside, Henri found a writing.

*"Isn't our home beautiful?  
Happy Birthday, my friend."*

Henri chuckled. Actually, Joshua was right, it was a nice place to live. For a moment, Henri thought about which side of the card he should put to the front as he placed it beneath the picture of his mother. He decided for the writing. Just for the beauty of it.

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## **o5 : Reach up**

"Henri, don't."

Despite Joshua's request to not continue, Henri pulled himself closer, mumbling a few half-hearted words of apologize as he wrapped his arms around the taller boy.

"Not here, please."

The living room was surely not the best place to become intimate, since there were at least four other people who could walk in at every time and without a warning.

He didn't care. He never cared for what others thought of him. If they would think of him as a strange pervert or anything, fine.

They wouldn't understand anyway.

"Henri, why?"

He saw Joshua blushing for the first time since they met. That was four years ago and with the time, his need to being close to him had grown and grown. Now it was at the highest point.

"Because that's how it is."

Just as Yuuta opened the door and walked in, Henri reached up and kissed Joshua.

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## **o6 : News**

The opened newspaper nearly filled the whole table and the young men stared at the two-paged article. The monochrome pictures showed people they both new well.

Henri nipped at his teacup.

"Interesting. The whole world now knows about your life."

Joshua didn't find it so interesting. In fact, he was rather angry, a rare sight.

"They didn't have any reasons to do this."

He looked at the pictures and tables. One diagram told about the last fifteen kings or Loreto, while one of the bigger photos was entitled as 'The only official picture of the Grant family' – and at the same time, it was one of the few publicly existing photos of Joshua. He was still a baby there, gently held by his mother, and somehow Joshua didn't like seeing himself like that.

One of the pictures was truly a paparazzi-shot that must have been taken not too long ago. Joshua wondered how they were able to get to St. Alphonso's private beach without being noticed.

"The Rainbow Press doesn't need any reasons.", Henri said, then took the oversized newspaper and closed it.

The colored picture on the front showed Joshua's uncle and the preview article underneath it wondered if the prince of Loreto would come home soon to success the sick king.

For a moment, just a second, Henri reached for Joshua's hand.

"Don't worry. He'll surely be better soon."

Henri didn't tell him that he didn't want him to leave, not at all.

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## **o7 : Resemblance**

As Joshua opened the door to one of the backstage rooms of the big opera house in St. Alphonso's capital, he couldn't hold himself back from laughing.

"My god, Henri!"

The other boy greeted him with a face that made the air around them freeze. He was dressed in a bright white dress with ruffles and pearls and his makeup was barely visible, yet strongly present.

"Isn't it enough that everybody else is laughing over me? Thanks for stabbing my back, Joshua."

Joshua chuckled. It was rare that Henri cared for what others thought or said about him, but now he was obviously angry over the dress that Alfred had chosen for him to wear during the last scenes of the play about King Alphonso.

"I'm sorry", he said and walked towards him, smiling. "I just wanted to see how my bride will look like."

Henri hissed. "It's the same every year. But now that there's this anniversary, the costumes have to be even more glamorous..."

Joshua wrapped his arms around his hips. The high-heeled shoes Henri had to wear with the dress made him a bit taller, something that was unusual for Joshua to see. He

laughed again.

"Alfred surely did a good job. You're really beautiful."

In the light of the setting sun, Joshua realized how much Henri looked like his mother. He had seen the picture of her the boy had in his room and now with the dress and the makeup, the already androgynous boy resembled her even more. He wondered if that was a good or a bad thing.

Joshua smiled. "Seriously, you're so beautiful."

He pulled Henri closer, but the other boy tried to pull away.

"Don't!"

Joshua smiled at him. "I'm sorry, I couldn't hold myself back." He looked at him, couldn't look anywhere else. "You're really cute."

Henri looked away, blushing slightly. A rare sight. "Don't say things like that. It's just the makeup."

He didn't want to be close to him right now. It would be the best for both of them if they never were close again.

Anything else would just be too painful.

Joshua placed a small kiss on Henri's forehead.

In the light of the setting sun, he was just too beautiful.

Henri sighed, wrapped his arms around Joshua's neck and let the young prince kiss him again.

If everything would work like it was planned, this would be the last time they did this.

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## **o8 : Accident**

This wasn't supposed to happen.

His last scream echoed in his head, as Henri's knees gave in and the boy sank down onto the ground, beneath him.

He had needed a while to get in terms with the fact that he was going to die by his hands – not exactly, but the assassin used his weapon from behind him and was ordered and payed by his family. Everybody could tell from the sign on his glove.

Henri had thought that it would be easy to get this through. August had promised him that everything would happen quickly. He even had been planning the last greeting for him for days. Shortly before the start of the play, he had come to the conclusion that "Adieu, my friend" was enough to end this quickly. Emotions would have just made it worse.

But this wasn't supposed to happen.

Nobody had told him that the last thing heard from Joshua Grant's mouth was his name.

Henri did not notice the other boys gathering around Joshua's stiff body. He did not

notice that the shocked silence of the audience slowly changed into murmurs, calls for help or the police. He did not notice Yuuta running onto the stage, tears in his eyes, fear all on his face, calling Joshua's name over and over again. All he had noticed was that Joshua had been thinking it was him who should have been attacked and that he had wanted to protect him.

Nobody had told him that Joshua cared so much for him.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

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## **o9 : End**

"Henri, don't tell me you're leaving already!"

Alfred snatched the plane ticket from the younger boy's hand and stared at it. According to it, Henri was going to leave the Academy the next day.

Haruya, Yuuta and Sylvain gathered around the two.

"Henri, is that true?" Yuuta sounded somewhat disappointed.

Henri let out a sigh of annoyance, took his ticket back and stood up to leave.

"But didn't we say we'll leave all together with Joshua to – hey!"

He ignored Alfred's shoutings and walked past the other four students. "I have some appointments, you know." A bitter smile made its way to his face. "There are a lot of things the police wants to know from me, since I'm probably the only one who will talk."

Then he left.

In his room, Henri started to pack his belongings. He didn't have too many clothes, since he mostly wore the school uniform anyway, but his books nearly filled a whole trunk. The picture of his mother was wrapped into old newspapers in the hope of keeping the glass from being shattered during the travel. The workers at the airports never took really care of the passengers' luggage.

Then he took the picture he got not a long time ago.

*"Isn't our home beautiful?"*

Henri smiled bitterly. After all what happened, the beauty had gone.

Then, there was a voice.

"Are you going to take this with you?"

"That's none of your business, August."

Henri took his mother's picture out again, unwrapped it and put Joshua's birthdaycard into the small package. Then he wrapped both this again, watching the images as they were buried under old news.

He took a deep breath, it was hard to leave it all behind. Or rather, to leave *him* behind.

He hadn't apologized yet and he wasn't sure if he should do so.  
But there wasn't much time left.

A knock on his door. It was clear who came to see him.  
"Henri, I heard you're leaving tomorrow."  
The boy didn't answer. He couldn't answer.  
Not here, not now. Not with August around him.

"Henri?"  
The door opened and who Joshua faced was not Henri but August.  
"Monssieur is busy right now. Maybe you should come back later."  
Joshua saw Henri bending over his belongings, nodded and turned to leave. But Henri found himself to speak a few words.  
"I'll come around later, okay?"  
Joshua smiled. "Sure."

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It was almost midnight when Joshua realized that he should go to sleep. He planned to take Henri to the airport and had to wake up in time. The green-haired stood up from his desk, yawned and looked around his room. All of his belongings were already packed and this empty room looked really lonely.

Then there was a knock on his door and Joshua let out a sigh of relief.  
He hadn't forgotten.

Joshua opened the door and found an Henri like he never imagined he would see him like that.  
He had his head dropped, staring at the ground like a child that knew it had done something wrong, just waiting to be scold. But there was something more.

As he closed the door and Henri wrapped his arms around the other boy's neck, burying his head into Joshua's chest, he knew what it was that he just saw. It was something that he had showed to none of them before. It was something he would probably never see again.

Henri's voice was barely audible under his tears, but Joshua knew anyway what the French tried to say.

"I'm sorry."

**Fin.**