

Safe and Sound

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When sweet young Matthew Bonnefoy is suddenly a terminal cancer patient, he doesn't expect anyone to notice or care. But sometimes, love comes from unexpected places. (Hetalia AU, Human names used, PruCan, FACE Family.)

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1 - A Dodgeball Catastrophe

CHAPTER ONE: A Dodgeball Catastrophe

"Hurry up, Mattie! We're going to be late!"

Alfred slung his backpack over his shoulder, already walking towards the door. He grabbed a waffle and managed to get half of it into his mouth before Matthew called from upstairs, "Wait for me!"

Hurried footsteps hammered on the floor above as Matthew scampered around, trying to get everything together before the school bus came. Impatient as ever, Alfred rolled his eyes, finishing his waffle in another two bites. He leaned against the wall, pulling out his phone and scrolling through his text messages.

He didn't notice his dad come in until he spoke, which made Alfred jump.

"Are you all ready to go?"

"Dad!" he gasped. "Why don't you give me a heart attack?"

Arthur sighed. "Put the phone away and socialize for once." He sat down at the kitchen table and looked at Alfred with his stern green eyes.

"Well, are you?"

"Am I *what*, Dad?"

"Ready to go."

"Yeah, I've been ready." Alfred said. "Mattie is taking his sweet time, though." He shot an annoyed look at the ceiling.

"Did you remember to feed the dogs?"

"The bus is going to be here in five minutes!"

"You'd better hurry up, then."

"Da-ad!" Alfred whined. Arthur opened a newspaper.

Sighing dramatically, Alfred sprinted back through the house to the laundry room, where their two German Shepherds stayed while they were away.

The moment he opened the door, he was greeted by an overexcited wall of fur.

"Ack!" he sputtered. "Down, Tony! Get down!"

Tony returned to all fours with a yip of protest. Kuma, the other dog, stood calmly behind Tony, wagging his tail.

After managing to get the food into the bowls with minimal loss of limb, Alfred dashed back out to the kitchen. He grabbed another waffle and glanced at the clock on the stove. 6:43. Two minutes until the bus came.

"*Mattie!*" he shouted.

Footsteps pounded across the second floor and down the stairs. Matthew ran into the kitchen a moment later, still in the process of putting on his backpack. His glasses were askew and his honey blond hair stuck out in all sorts of places. He stopped by the table, putting his hands on his knees, trying to catch his breath. Alfred could hear him wheezing from where he stood.

"S-sorry..." he panted. "I couldn't find my History book."

"Whatever, man," Alfred said. "We're going to be late."

"Matthieu! Don't forget your coat!" Matthew's dad, Francis, said as he walked into the kitchen. He paused as he reached to hand Matthew his brown jacket.

"Are you wheezing?"

"I'm fine, Papa," Matthew said quietly.

Francis did not look convinced. "Is your asthma acting up?" he asked, concerned. "Perhaps you should take your inhaler-"

"I said I'm fine, Papa." Matthew's voice was soft, but firm.

"Are you sure?"

He nodded, looking embarrassed.

"Alright." Francis straightened, still not looking thoroughly convinced.

Alfred glanced outside. Though he couldn't see any vehicles, he heard an approaching engine. The bus was coming.

"Mattie! We gotta go!"

Matthew must have heard the engine too. He stuffed the notebook into his backpack, put on his coat, and gave Francis a hug. Then, he dashed out the door behind Alfred.

They almost didn't make it.

Luckily, the bus driver saw them at the last moment, and hastily halted the bus to wait for them. Alfred dashed up the stairs as soon as the door opened. Matthew followed at a slower pace, murmuring a quick "thank you" to the bus driver before joining Alfred in a seat near the back of the bus, which lurched into motion as soon as he sat down.

Being one of the first stops on the route, they had a long ride ahead of them. Alfred took that opportunity to pull out his neglected algebra homework and scribble down a few answers. Matthew closed his eyes and leaned against the window, trying to catch his breath.

"Matt? You okay?"

He cracked open an eye to see his brother looking worriedly at him.

"Yeah," he murmured. "Just tired."

"But you were panting..."

"I'm fine."

Alfred looked like he wanted to protest, but decided to drop the subject. He went back to scratching down random answers on his homework.

The bus ride felt longer than ever.

Matthew tried to sleep through it, but his aching chest kept him awake. He tried to keep his breathing even so as not to worry Alfred, but it wasn't easy. Perhaps he should have brought his inhaler after all...

He must have eventually dozed off, because a moment later, Alfred was shaking his shoulder. "Mattie, wake up. We're here."

Opening his eyes once more, Matthew was greeted with the all-too-familiar sight of the looming red brick walls. There was still mist rising eerily off of the barren front yard. No teachers or students were in sight; in fact, there was hardly a living thing in sight, save the yellowed grass that stuck up through cracks in the faded sidewalk. If Matthew was honest with himself, the place looked more like a prison than a school.

The bus doors sluggishly creaked open. Students streamed out, anxious to be free of the stuffy vehicle. However, Matt was in no hurry. He'd rather be stuck in the unbearable yellow monstrosity than within the walls of the abuse centre so laughably called a school. But nonetheless, he picked up his backpack and trudged outside, Alfred in tow.

The morning classes were always the biggest struggle, mostly because it was a challenge for one to simply keep their eyes open.

As soon as he sat down for his first class, chemistry, Matthew felt himself nodding off. The teacher's voice droned on about dimensional analysis, and orbitals of electron clouds, and quite a bit of other jumbled tomfoolery that had Matt dozing. He only came to his senses when his lab partner elbowed him roughly in the ribs.

"You're going to miss the lab instructions," Lovino hissed. "I'm not doing the whole damn thing by myself."

"Sorry," Matthew whispered back, rubbing his chest where Lovino had prodded him. Had he always been that rough?

Matt dragged himself through the rest of the morning, escaping with only a few minor scoldings from teachers. Now it was midday. Only a few more classes before he could finally go home.

Next was Phys Ed. At least it was something he couldn't fall asleep in.

Upon arriving at the gymnasium, Matthew entered the locker room, where he changed out of his jeans and into a pair of sweatpants. On his way back out to the gym, he nearly ran smack into Gilbert Beilschmidt.

The tall albino let out a quiet gasp of surprise. Matthew immediately darted around him and out of the locker room, feeling awkward. An average kid like him couldn't just get away with nearly knocking one of the school's most popular jocks onto his backside. He couldn't let Gilbert see his face. If he did, he'd probably end up with a black eye, at the very least.

Back out in the gym, the coach announced that day's activity: dodgeball. Matthew inwardly groaned. He was always the target in dodgeball. His only strategy was to run like crazy and hope he wouldn't be hit.

After splitting the students up into teams, the coach blew the whistle to announce the beginning of the game. Rubber balls went flying at light speed. Matt took off.

As he sprinted back and forth, trying in vain to stay out of the line of fire, he felt his chest begin to ache again. It was worse than usual, each intake of breath stinging like he'd inhaled an icepick. But he forced himself to keep running.

It wasn't until his vision started to grow fuzzy that he halted, putting his hands on his knees to try to catch his breath. His lungs screamed in agony with each inhalation.

The room was spinning... was it supposed to be spinning?

He heard his name somewhere off to the right, but the voice sounded as though it was speaking through several layers of plastic. His frantic heartbeat echoed in his ringing ears. The spinning was becoming laced with black.

A hand was on his shoulder. Someone was calling his name. Alfred? Matthew blinked in confusion. Alfred wasn't in his class...

He felt his face hit something hard and cold... the floor? The voice grew louder and more frantic, but it was drowned out in Matthew's echoing heartbeat as he lost consciousness, and everything faded into nothing.

2 - Monotone

(A/n) Time to start posting all the finished chapters!

CHAPTER TWO: Monotone

"Would Alfred Kirkland please report immediately to the main office?"

Alfred, who was in the middle of a chemistry test, froze when he heard his name over the loudspeaker. He never got called down to the office unless he was in trouble.

He shot his teacher a questioning look; after seeing her nod, he stood and collected his books before exiting the classroom and making his way towards the office. As he walked, he racked his brain trying to think of what he'd done that was disobedient enough to warrant a trip to the office.

Oh, god, had they finally found him out about the potato incident?

As he reached the end of the hall, he entered the office expecting a detention, or something.

But the principal didn't look angry.

Maybe he was misinterpreting her glare, but her expression was one of an emotion that she had never directed at Alfred before.

Concern.

"Alfred," she began (which scared Alfred a little; she always referred to him as "Mr. Kirkland"), "I've been informed that your father is coming to pick you up."

Alfred blinked. "Huh? Why?"

"It is not my place to say. But he should be here soon. Please have a seat.=13px"

Confused, Alfred sat near the window, which faced the parking lot. What was going on? His dad never picked him up early from school on such short notice.

Before long, a familiar black car pulled up to the curb. A few seconds later, Alfred's dad stepped out, and approached the school. Upon entering the office, he signed Alfred out without a word, then motioned for Alfred to follow him.

Alfred stood and walked quickly behind him, a pit of worry starting to form in his stomach. Why was his dad acting so... tense?

When he opened the car door, Alfred noticed with a jolt that the ignition was still running. Were they in a hurry?

He got in quickly and buckled up, while Arthur practically leapt into the driver's seat next to him. Five more seconds, and they were leaving the school behind them.

"Dad," Alfred inquired after a pause, "what's going on?"

Arthur grit his teeth before responding:

"Your brother collapsed earlier. He stopped breathing."

Alfred's stomach dropped.

"They had to call an ambulance. He's lucky one of the other students knew CPR."

There was another pause as Alfred let it sink in.

After a moment, he managed to choke out, "I-is Mattie...?"

"From what I've been told, they got him breathing again... but they still had to hospitalize him."

"Is he gonna be okay...?"

Arthur didn't look at Alfred. "I'm sure he will."

They were silent for the rest of the ride.

* * *

It only took them a few minutes to reach the hospital, but it felt like an eternity to Alfred.

As soon as they entered the white-washed building, Arthur approached the front desk. "Excuse me?" he said to the woman at the computer. "Could you tell me where I can find Matthew Bonnefoy's room?"

The woman nodded, and after a few clicks of her mouse, she said, "Room 213. On the second floor, left side of the hallway if you're coming out of the elevator."

"Thank you," said Arthur, voice even more tense than it had been in the car. He led Alfred to the elevator without another word.

The two of them were on the second floor in a matter of moments, where they wasted no time in finding Matthew's room.

Alfred hesitated at the door, but after a moment, he took a cautious step inside.

He was greeted with the soft hum of machines and the beeping of a heart monitor. Francis was there, in an uncomfortable looking chair next to the bed. He looked up as they entered. His face was tear stained. He softly held the hand of the silent figure on the bed.

Alfred's eyes strayed to his unconscious brother. Matthew's face was very pale, his eyes tightly closed, his breaths seeming painful and erratic. He had a clear plastic oxygen mask covering his nose and mouth. His glasses had been removed and placed on the table beside him.

"Mattie..." Alfred whispered, approaching the bed. He pulled up a chair and sat next to Francis, who was looking back down at his sleeping son's face again.

Arthur approached Francis slowly, putting a hand on his shoulder. "Are they telling you anything about this, Francis? Did they say what caused this?"

The Frenchman shook his head forlornly. "Not a word," he whispered, his voice thick with tears.

Arthur gave his shoulder a comforting squeeze. "He'll be okay. They managed to revive him, didn't they?"

He sounded like he was trying to convince himself more than Francis.

"I suppose..." Francis murmured, rubbing his thumb in gentle circles on the back of Matthew's hand.

Before anyone else could speak, a nurse entered, holding a clipboard. "Are you his..." She looked up and saw the two men. "...um... parents?" she finished cautiously.

"Yes," Arthur said, paying no heed to her obvious discomfort.

Francis looked up at her, his eyes filling with tears. "What is wrong with my son?" The distress in his voice was evident.

"At the moment, we have no clear cause. However, we're running some tests, and we should know as soon as we get the results. Until then, it's probably best that he stays here."

Francis gave a slight nod, the tears threatening to spill over.

"Thank you," said Arthur, giving her a nod of his own as he squeezed Francis's shoulder again.

The nurse excused herself from the room, quietly closing the door behind her.

Francis had to excuse himself as well not five minutes later, unable to hold in the tears any longer, unable to see his son looking so ill any longer. Arthur followed him with the intent of comforting him, leaving Alfred alone with his brother.

Alfred sat in silence for a while, listening to the monotone beeping of the heart monitor as it echoed in his eardrums.

Matthew whimpered softly in his sleep.

Leaning forward, Alfred softly brushed Mattie's blonde bangs from his eyes. He glanced at the door, making sure he was alone, then bent over the bed and kissed his twin gently on the forehead.

"Mattie," he whispered, "please be okay."

3 - Phone Calls

CHAPTER THREE: Phone Calls

The look in those wide, frightened violet eyes would not leave Gilbert's mind.

As he dragged himself through the school day, he found himself unable to focus during his lengthy classes, preoccupied with thoughts of the events that had occurred earlier that day.

Thoughts of the shy, petite blonde boy who had nearly knocked him over in the locker room. The same boy who the violet eyes belonged to. The same boy who had stopped breathing in Gilbert's arms.

Matthew Bonnefoy.

Gilbert didn't know what had driven him to rush over and try to help the small teen. Maybe it was because no one else had even noticed him collapse.

Why does that make me so... angry? Gilbert wondered.

Even so, he'd felt the kid's breathing stop, and had tried to revive him with what little CPR he knew. Luckily, paramedics had shown up soon after. All of the students had been kicked out of the classroom. Gilbert had no idea what had happened to the kid. I hope they could save him... I hope-

"Gil?"

He was snapped out of his thoughts at his friend's voice. "Huh?"

"You okay, Gil? You spaced out there." Antonio's hazel-green eyes were trained on his face with concern.

Gilbert tried for his usual grin. "Course, Toni. It is the awesome me you're talking to, after all!"

Antonio folded his arms, looking incredibly unconvinced. "What happened, Gil?"

"Nothing!" Gilbert was still grinning.

"Gilbert Beilschmidt, you tell me right now or I'm never doing your trig homework for you again."

Finally accepting defeat, Gilbert sighed, letting his grin slip. "You remember hearing sirens earlier today?"

Antonio thought for a moment before nodding. "I think so."

"Well... I was in gym class... and Matthew Bonnefoy was—"

"Wait, wait, wait," Antonio interrupted. "Who?"

Gilbert gave him a look. "Matthew Bonnefoy. He's in our grade."

The brown haired teen looked rather confused. "I don't know a Matthew Bonnefoy."

"He's one of the Kirkland-Bonnefoy twins."

"Huh?"

"He's Alfred Kirkland's twin brother!"

Antonio blinked. "Since when does Alfred Kirkland have a twin?"

"He's always had a twin!"

"Oh... never met the guy."

"Obviously," Gilbert sighed, rolling his eyes.

"Anyway..." Antonio urged, clearly growing tired of the argument.

Gilbert retold the whole story to him, his worry more evident with every word he spoke. By the time he was finished, Antonio was wide-eyed.

"Poor kid," he said. "And nobody knows why he just stopped breathing like that?"

"I'm not sure," Gilbert admitted. "I told you, they kicked us all out as soon as the paramedics got there, and you know how schools get about stuff like that."

"Still," Antonio said with a frown, "it seems a little unfair for them to expect you to just continue on with your life and forget the whole incident."

"Ja, I know..." the albino muttered. "I hope the kid's okay."

"I'm sure he is," Antonio said, trying to reassure him. "Now, we should probably finish this worksheet before Mr. Braginsky throws a fit."

"Right," Gilbert sighed. "Can you show me how to do dimensional analysis again?"

* * *

It was growing dark outside when the nurse came in again and told Alfred that visiting hours were ending.

Matthew hadn't woken up. The whole time, Alfred talked to him, telling him how everyone was worried, how he was there for him, how everything was going to be okay. For hours he spoke to his sleeping twin, while trying to ignore the painful noises Matthew made every time he took a breath.

Arthur had been in and out. Alfred didn't know where where his dad went when he wasn't in the small hospital room, but his best guess would be off trying to comfort Francis, who was apparently still quite distraught over the whole thing.

Alfred was alone with Matthew when the nurse reentered.

"Sir? Visiting hours are about over for today."

With an almost invisible nod, Alfred stood. He kissed Matthew on the forehead again. "I'll be back tomorrow," he whispered. "Promise." He straightened, and silently exited the room.

He found his parents in the lobby, standing near the desk. Arthur appeared to be talking to a doctor. When he saw Alfred approaching them, he gave the doctor a nod and thanked him, then turned to meet Alfred.

"Ready to go?"

"Yeah," Alfred muttered. "They're gonna make me, anyway. They said visiting hours are ending."

"Right," was all Arthur responded with. Turning his head, he called quietly, "Francis?"

The Frenchman was standing against a wall. He slowly raised his head upon hearing his name, then walked over to join them.

"Are we leaving?"

Arthur nodded. "They said they'd call us if there's any news on a diagnosis."

"Diagnosis? They think Matthieu is sick?"

"They do have to consider everything," Arthur reminded him. He took Francis's hand. "Come on, Francis, we can come back tomorrow," he murmured gently. "Matthew will be fine until then."

Francis nodded, blinking back more tears as he followed them to the car.

* * *

The ride home was silent, save Francis sniffing every so often. Arthur's knuckles were white on the steering wheel, his green eyes fixed on the road ahead. His expression was unreadable.

Alfred sat quietly in the back seat, staring at the floor. His thoughts were running a mile a minute as he tried to grasp the situation.

Matthew's breathing had stopped. He had almost been clinically dead only a few hours ago. Now that he was considering it, Alfred realized that his brother's asthma attacks had been particularly nasty lately. Everyone had figured it was just the season; winter had been blowing in strong for months now, and simple respiratory infections, like colds, hit Matthew harder than the others due to his weaker lungs.

Maybe this is nothing to worry about, Alfred thought. Maybe it's just his asthma. We've been dealing with that since Mattie and I were three, we can certainly handle it now...

But something deep down told Alfred that there was another underlying cause to Matthew's brush with death, and it would not be so simple to deal with.

Even so, he remained hopeful that everything was fine, that things would be taken care of and his brother would be home by the end of the week.

He didn't know how wrong he was.

* * *

Alfred hardly remembered arriving home and getting into bed. It felt like it had been a straight shot from the backseat of the car to the next morning.

It was the telephone ringing that woke him.

After sitting up and stretching, Alfred swung his legs over the side of the bed and stood to go answer the phone when the ringing stopped and he heard his father's heavy English accent. He must have answered.

Alfred walked sluggishly over to his dresser, still fighting drowsiness as he dug through his drawers for something decent to wear.

His task came to an abrupt halt at the sound of shouting.

Curious, he walked quickly into the living room to see that Arthur had yelled something into the phone; his face was noticeably paling as he listened to the voice on the other end.

"Alright," he said shakily after a moment. "Th-thank you." He hung the phone up.

"Dad?" Alfred said. "Who was that?"

Arthur was silent. Francis came running in a few seconds later. "Did I hear someone shout?" He paused, seeing Arthur's face. "Arthur? What is wrong?"

"That was the doctor on the phone," Arthur said finally, his voice still shaky. "He was calling about Matthew."

"What did he say?" Francis asked, starting to pale himself.

Arthur bit his lip before offering a nearly inaudible response.

"They found advanced stages of cancer in Matthew's lungs."

Everyone in the room froze.

"What...?" Alfred could hardly hear his own voice.

Arthur closed his eyes. "Matthew has lung cancer."

4 - Empty Promises

CHAPTER FOUR: Empty Promises

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Matthew couldn't decide if he was awake or dreaming.

He was in and out of consciousness all day, (or was it two days?) and what he saw when his eyes were open felt random and senseless, as though he was seeing short clips from several different movies.

First came the bright lights, the shouting voices, the sensation of fast movement. Hands reached out and touched his face, hands that were abnormally white, and when they made contact, it felt like they were underwater. Masked faces leaned in. The lights got brighter. Frightened, he had closed his eyes again.

Next came the crying. This time, Matthew had kept his eyes closed, mostly because he did not have the energy to open them. It was one voice, only one person was crying. Matthew felt like he should recognize who this person was, but he had drifted back off into the darkness of unconsciousness before he could figure it out.

Last came the promise. That was the one part of all the tomfoolery that Matthew remembered perfectly clearly. A whisper in the voice he could never mistake:

"I'll be back tomorrow. Promise."

And then silence and black oblivion once more.

Matthew wasn't sure how long he had been sleeping before he awoke again, this time, much more alert. He blinked, trying to clear the fuzziness from his brain.

"Dad... Dad! He's awake!"

There was the sound of footsteps.

"Matthew? Open your eyes, there's a good lad."

Matthew's vision soon cleared enough to reveal Alfred sitting on the edge of his bed and Arthur standing behind him, both watching him with worry clear on their faces.

"A-Al...?" Matthew whispered, surprised at how hard it was to speak. "Where..."

"Shh, Mattie, don't talk," Alfred urged. "You're in the hospital."

He gave Alfred a questioning look. Al must have gotten the message, because he glanced at Arthur as

though asking permission.

Arthur shook his head at the blue-eyed teen. He didn't want to scare Matthew after he'd just woken up. Before Alfred had the chance to say anything else, Arthur stepped closer to the bed.

"How do you feel, Matthew? Does your chest hurt at all?"

Matthew gave a slight nod, feeling the ache in each breath. The feeling wasn't foreign, though he struggled to remember when he's felt it at this particular extreme before.

"What happened...?" Matt managed in a breathy whisper.

"You don't remember?"

A silent shake of the head.

Arthur was silent for a few heartbeats before murmuring, "You collapsed at school. One of the teachers told us you stopped breathing."

Matthew's eyes widened as the memory came rushing back to him. Gym class. Dodgeball. The pain. The feeling that no air was coming in. A voice. Then darkness.

At the thought of it, he must have started to hyperventilate. Arthur put a hand on his shoulder. "Shhh, Matthew, you're okay now... shhh..."

Matthew whimpered softly as he tried to calm his breathing. He closed his eyes and laid his head back down, feeling his father's hand gently squeeze his shoulder.

"Where... where's Papa...?" he managed softly.

A pause.

"He... he had to step out for a moment," Arthur said, speaking as though he was thinking carefully about what he said.

"Why...?"

No response.

In the near-silence of the room, Matthew found himself remembering the sound of tears while in his dream state. The familiarity of the sobs...

Realization hit him like an eighteen-wheeler.

"He was crying... wasn't he?"

Another silent pause.

"D-don't hide things from me," Matthew pleaded. "What's going on?"

Alfred gave him a sad look. "Matt..."

"No," Matthew said. "Don't, Alfred. Don't tiptoe around it... just tell me."

His brother looked away, staring at the floor, before he offered a murmured, hardly audible answer.

"They found cancer in your lungs, Matt."

The words took a moment to sink in.

"C-cancer?"

Alfred nodded, blinking hard. "I'm sorry..."

Matthew could hardly look at his family as fear started to build in his chest. He could hardly voice the question, "They can cure it... right?"

Alfred's mouth pressed into a tight line.

"R-right...?"

Arthur offered the ill twin what he hoped was a comforting smile. "Of course they can. We're looking into treatment options now." He squeezed Matthew's shoulder again, then stood. "Alfred and I are going to go check on your papa. We'll be back soon. Try to get some rest, okay?"

Matthew didn't think he'd ever be able to sleep after news like that, but nonetheless, he nodded. "Okay." He tried to sound brave, he tried to push down the fear, but as soon as Alfred and Arthur had gone, he began to tremble. Tears pricked in his eyes.

Cancer was one of those things he'd always expected to happen to someone else. He had heard stories of the disease, he had been taught about it in school, but he was always sure that that was all the experience he would have on the matter.

He had never once imagined being a victim.

In the emptiness of the darkening white room, he cried himself to sleep.

"You left mon fils alone?"

Francis, who had stepped out to bring his emotions under control, seemed to be losing his calm again.

"Do you have any idea how scared he must be? Do you have any idea—"

Arthur gripped his husband's shoulders. "Francis. Pull yourself together."

"You cannot tell him something like that and just leave!"

"Francis! Enough." Green met blue as the Briton held the hysterical Frenchman's gaze in an attempt to calm him. "The poor boy is exhausted; we left so he could get some sleep. If he's going to have any sort of fighting chance, he needs to rest." Arthur's voice was firm, lacking any hint of emotion.

"But if you had just stayed until—"

"Maybe I was worried about you."

Francis paused. The statement was so abrupt that he seemed to be at a loss for words. "What...?"

Arthur grit his teeth. "You heard me." His tone did not stray from its firmness, but the slightest bit of emotion leaked into his voice, whether he was aware of it or not. "This is hard on all of us, and from what I've seen, you especially." He broke his gaze with the taller man. "Dammit, I just don't like seeing you so bloody distraught..."

A moment passed.

"I am... sorry..."

"Stop with the damn apologies. Matthew needs you to be strong.

"Francis took a deep breath. "Oui... I will be strong for my son." He hastily wiped his eyes.

Arthur gave a stiff nod. He kept his gaze lowered.

Neither of them noticed the approaching doctor until she spoke, which caused them both to startle slightly.

"You're the family of Matthew Bonnefoy?"

The two men nodded simultaneously.

The doctor glanced at the clipboard in her hand before speaking further. "After some examination, we determined that your son's cancer is too advanced to be removed surgically. Right now, his best option is probably chemotherapy."

Arthur nodded again. "When would this begin, then?" He managed to remain completely calm and collected (quite unlike his spouse).

"As soon as possible."

Francis finally spoke up: "This treatment will help him? It will make him better?"

"We cannot assure you of the results. But as it stands, it's his best chance."
She spoke as if Matthew was a chemistry experiment.

"So even if we go through with it, there's still a chance that..."

Arthur left the question hanging.

The doctor gave a wordless nod.

There was a long moment where no one spoke; in fact, nothing was audible aside from the quick, heavy ticking of a large analogue clock hanging on the white wall.

An unexpected voice broke the silence.

"Do the chemo."

The three turned to face the source of the voice, which happened to be a familiar bespectacled teen.

"Alfred?" Arthur said in a gentle voice.

"Do the chemo," Alfred repeated. "Mattie has to live."

Only those who knew him well could tell that he was on the brink of tears.

"Alfred..."

Before anyone could react, Alfred turned and walked quickly out of the room.

Arthur found his blue-eyed son in the entrance lobby.

Alfred was slouching in one of the uncomfortable blue plastic chairs, his eyes half closed and not focused on anything. To a stranger, he would seem expressionless. But as Arthur sat in the chair next to the teen, and Alfred looked up at him, he saw the tears welling up. He saw the sadness and fear in those blue depths.

"Mattie can't die..."

Arthur's heart clenched. "He's not going to die."

The tears spilled over, and Alfred was hugging Arthur. "Dad... I'm scared..."

"It's okay, Alfred..." Arthur murmured in what he hoped was a soothing manner. "It's going to be okay..."

They sat there for what felt like an eternity. As Alfred's tears began to slow, Arthur pulled back from the

hug and gripped the boy's shoulders.

"They're going to do everything they can for Matthew, alright? Lung cancer is survivable."

"But what if it doesn't work?" Alfred whispered, seemingly fearful of voicing the question. "What if he..."

"I forbid you from thinking like that," Arthur said firmly. "Think positive. And keep Matthew thinking positive. It will help him heal."

"Really?" A nod. "I promise, you will not lose your brother."

Alfred offered a nod in return. "Okay."

"Now, why don't we get back to your papa before he works himself into hysterics again?"

"Okay."

5 - Ascension of Change

CHAPTER FIVE: Ascension of Change

Alfred was not looking forward to going back to school.

He gathered his supplies at a delayed pace, trying to stall the process as much as possible before his parents realized what he was doing.

A full week had passed since Matthew's hospitalization, and Alfred had spent as much of that week as possible at his brother's bedside. He would come in as early as they would let him, and would only leave if they found him after visiting hours and kicked him out. And Arthur and Francis allowed this, because they knew how distraught the whole thing had made both of their sons.

But they also knew that Alfred had to keep up with his education, lest he wanted his grades to crash and burn. And if he wanted to graduate, he couldn't allow that to happen.

So, at a familiar yet ungodly hour on a rainy Monday morning, he was packing his bookbag... at least that's what Arthur and Francis were led to believe. However, if they had bothered to check on him, they would find him hiding in the bathroom.

He did not want to go back to school.

Eventually, as the minutes ticked by, Arthur got the hint, and went upstairs to investigate.

He did, indeed, find his son in the bathroom, brushing his teeth for what was perhaps the tenth time in an effort to stall.

"Alfred, you're going to be late," he prompted from the doorway.

The teen looked up, face smeared with toothpaste. He didn't say anything, but Arthur didn't need him to.

"Yes, you have to go to school. Now, finish up and get your bag packed." His tone left no room for argument.

Alfred let a small groan escape, but he spit out the toothpaste and returned to his room, hastily wiping his face off with his sleeve on the way.

Ten minutes later, he was walking out the door and down the driveway, where his bus was just pulling up. After climbing on and sliding into his seat, he felt the large yellow vehicle lurch into motion again. As the bus pulled away from his house, he looked at the empty space on the seat next to him and heaved a sigh.

There was no way he'd be able to focus today.

Gilbert stifled another yawn as he thoughtlessly scribbled down the countless formulas from the chalkboard in front of him. He blinked a few times, trying to keep alert, but with nothing to focus on (save the teacher's monotone voice), he was having quite the difficult time staying awake.

He glanced at the clock yet again, cursing time for moving so slowly. He wanted nothing more than to be out of the stuffy classroom. But with the way the clock's hands were crawling, he wouldn't be escaping for quite a while.

He was starting to doze off again when the bell had the mercy to ring, which snapped him out of his daze and sent him flying out of the classroom like he had a rocket up his butt.

He was moving so fast that his jet powered hind end sent him barreling straight into another person.

An object at rest tends to stay at rest, while an object in motion tends to stay in motion... unless acted upon by an outside force.

fracking brilliant, Newton.

Gilbert sent the kid bowling over, and unintentionally followed him down, hitting the floor along with the him, and all of their textbooks.

Moaning, Gilbert began to gather up the remains of his poor, shattered ego when the boy snapped, "Jeez, man, can you watch where you're going?"

The albino paused. "Alfred... Kirkland?"

The blonde sat up, brushing his shirt off. "The one and only," he muttered. He didn't look at Gilbert; instead, he glanced at the floor to assess the damage done to his belongings. After a moment, he growled, "What, don't even have the decency to apologize?"

Slightly put off, Gilbert mumbled an apology as he gathered up his books. He stood and Alfred followed him up a second later. After standing in awkward silence for a short eternity, Alfred's blue eyes narrowed. "Don't you have somewhere to be?"

"Your brother. Is he okay?"

Alfred blinked as if Gilbert had hit him between the eyes with a small rock. "Excuse me?"

"Your brother... Matthew? Is he okay?"

"And why the hell does my brother's wellbeing concern you?"

Gilbert held up a hand in defense as Alfred's angry gaze bored into his like he was trying to burn holes there. "Don't get all hostile on me."

"Answer the question, then."

"I was there when... it happened," Gilbert said cautiously, not sure if he wanted to tell the fuming blonde before him that he'd had his mouth on Matthew's, even if it was to save his life.

Alfred gave a huff of annoyance before saying, "He's in the hospital. That's all I'm willing to say. Now, if you'll excuse me..."

Without waiting for a response, he shoved past Gilbert and stormed back down the hallway.

The rest of the day was more or less a blur, and before long, Gilbert was on his way home.

He never took the bus, since seniors with licenses were allowed to drive themselves to and from school. He always drove his "Awesome Prussian blue car."

As he guided the car down the familiar route home, his thoughts drifted back to the conversation he'd had with Alfred.

So Alfred's brother had been hospitalized? That obviously meant that the whole episode in the gym hadn't been caused by some once-off faintness, or some shoot. It was serious.

And Alfred was clearly no closer to telling him what was really going on than he was to being a millionaire.

Gilbert considered his options, made a split second decision, and changed destinations.

"Can you tell me what room Matthew Bonnefoy is in?"

The woman behind the desk looked up as he spoke. She seemed to give him a once-over before nodding slightly and typing something into the computer.

"He's on the second floor," she said after a short moment. "Room 213." Looking back up at Gilbert, she inquired, "Family?"

"Um... friend," he replied.

The woman gave another nod, indicating an elevator nearby. After an awkward, muttered, "Thanks," Gilbert walked quickly to the elevator, which opened upon his pressing the button. He slipped inside, punched the round button that said "2," and felt the metal contraption begin its ascent.

As the elevator slowly crawled upwards, Gilbert realized, perhaps a bit too late, that he had no idea what to say to the kid. When he'd decided to come, he had planned on asking what exactly was going on... but now that he considered it, who the hell would march into a hospital room demanding to know what was wrong with the person?

He almost didn't get out of the elevator.

Almost.

Little did he know, making the decision to step out onto the second floor, and not turn back around and go home, would change his life forever.

He located room 213 fairly easily. The door was open a crack.

Before he could change his mind, he opened it the rest of the way.

There was Matthew; he was leaned back against the pillows, eyes closed, as though sleeping. Gilbert almost turned around and left, when the blonde stirred.

Violet eyes cracked open, taking in their surroundings before landing on Gilbert and widening in surprise. Matthew sat up, looking slightly wary as Gilbert stepped inside the room.

"Matthew, right?" Gilbert asked.

The curly haired boy nodded. "Y-yes..." He paused, blinked, and spoke again. "I recognize you... you're... you're Gilbert, right...? You... you go to my school..."

"That's right, kid," Gilbert said, stepping closer to the bed. "Gilbert Beilschmidt." He gave Matthew a sideways grin. "And I'm here because I saved your life."

6 - Speak the Mind

CHAPTER SIX: Speak the Mind

"That's right, kid. Gilbert Beilschmidt. And I'm here because I saved your life." Matthew couldn't help but stare as the newcomer slowly approached him, with a goofy sideways grin plastered on his face. After a few awkward seconds of silence, Matthew stuttered out, "W-what...?" His head swam with confusion. Saved my life? Gilbert's grin dropped a bit. "In the gym... when you, ah... passed out..." Matthew felt his heart speed up at the memory, and forced his breath not to follow suit. His head tilted slightly in confusion. Before he could speak, Gilbert continued: "I was the one who gave you CPR." Matthew's eyes shot wide open. He remembered hearing someone saying his name, someone catching him... he had assumed, perhaps, his brother... but Gilbert Beilschmidt? He hadn't even been sure whether Albin had actually known he existed. "That... was you...?" Gilbert nodded silently, not knowing how else to respond. The blonde's lips parted slightly, as if he was going to say something more, but after a moment they met once again; the violet eyes above them were still wide, but now were directed at the foot of the bed as a rather uncomfortable silence fell over the room like the beginning of a chilly rain. Gilbert shifted his feet. He broke the silence with, "It made me mad... no one else even saw what was happening until I did something..." He immediately knew he'd said the exact wrong thing when Matthew sucked in a breath suddenly, turning away from him. "Shoot." "Hey, hey, I'm sorry!" Gilbert said immediately. "I didn't mean to upset you!" He received no response from the smaller boy. The albino mentally kicked himself. Why hadn't he thought that through...? It was obvious the kid wasn't noticed very often at school. And Gilbert had just rubbed it in his face. Feeling terribly guilty, but not knowing what to do, Gilbert began to slowly back out of the room. His foot had just crossed the threshold when a new presence startled him into nearly wetting his awesome self. "What the hell do you think you're doing here, Beilschmidt?!" The white-haired boy snapped his head around to find none other than Alfred Kirkland, arms harshly crossed, glaring at him from the hall. "Well?!" the golden blonde snarled when Gilbert didn't respond right away. The albino narrowed his ruby eyes at Alfred, before pushing past him and exiting the room. He strode back down the hallway, having decided against responding to Matthew's fuming twin. Alfred watched him go, sneering at his back before entering the stark white room and approaching the bed. "Mattie?" Al murmured, sitting down next to his brother. "What'd he do to you?" Matthew simply shook his head, not looking at his brother as a tear escaped and rolled down his pale cheek. Alfred grit his teeth. He glared at the open door, all but daring the big stupid albino to march back in. This dude, this... Gilbert Beilschmidt... he had hurt his brother. And Alfred was not about to let that go. ***

The front door of the Beilschmidt household banged open exactly forty-seven minutes later than it normally did. It was followed by the usual, "THE AWESOME ME HAS ARRIVED!" which was also forty-seven minutes late. Having Gilbert as an older brother would drive anyone else up the wall; but Ludwig Beilschmidt had his obnoxious elder sibling down to a science. He knew Gilbert came home from school, like clockwork, at 2:50 every day, loudly proclaiming his awesomeness. Just because he was obnoxious didn't mean he hadn't inherited some of their father's punctuality. Today, however, was different, too different for Ludwig not to pick up on it. Gilbert entered the kitchen, finding Ludwig at the table, bent over his homework. He smirked at the familiar sight, lightly elbowing his brother in the arm. "Hey, bruder, you focus any harder on that and your brain will implode." Ludwig didn't so much as blink. "Why are you so late coming home?" "Well, that was direct. No 'Welcome home, dear bruder,' or, 'how was your day, dear bruder'?" "Shut up and answer the question." Gilbert snorted. "I think someone needs a nap." Ludwig glared at him. "Alright, alright. If you must know, I was... visiting a friend." "Who?" "Jeez, Lud, you're acting like you think I was out molesting someone!" "I wouldn't put it

past you." "Goooooott, you sound like Dad." "And you sound like a small child." Ludwig had turned back to his homework. Gilbert sighed. "Look, you wouldn't even know the dude if I told you his name." "It shouldn't be a problem, then." "Luuuuuuud..." The blonde raised an eyebrow, still not bothering to make eye contact with Gilbert. "Why do you even care? I'm here now, aren't I?" Ludwig turned a page in his notebook. "Oh, so now you're ignoring me?!" A textbook was opened. "Fine. Fine. The guy's name is Matthew Bonnefoy. Are you happy?!" Ludwig snapped his book shut again. "Yes. And I didn't have to say a thing." He then stood, gathered his things, and went upstairs. Gilbert sighed overdramatically to no one in particular. At times, Ludwig could be so insufferably mature.***Matthew was confused, to say the very least. Alfred was all but ready for war with Gilbert. That much was very easy to see. But Matthew wasn't sure how he felt about the elusive albino who had just entered his life. The only thing he was sure of was the fact that he couldn't get Gilbert's face out of his head. That, however, was hardly his first thought the next morning. It was his first day of chemotherapy. His papa was sitting with him as they waited for a nurse to come help him get ready. The two of them were making light conversation, but Matthew was very unfocused, and kept losing track of the topic. "Matthieu? Is something bothering you?" Francis asked, noticing how distracted his son was. Matthew blinked. "Huh? Oh... yeah, I'm fine... I'm a little nervous, I guess..." Francis gave Matthew what he hoped was a comforting smile. "The doctor said it is normal to feel nervous, oui?" The teen nodded slightly, pale purple eyes downcast. "I will be right there the whole time," Francis promised, wrapping an arm around Matthew's slim shoulders and hugging him gently. "Everything will be alright." "I-I know... merci, papa..." A moment later, there was a swift knock on the closed door, followed by the click of the door opening as the nurse let herself in. "Hello, Matthew," she said, as she entered. Noticing that Matthew looked a bit nervous, she softened her voice and smiled. "I'm Nurse Héderváry, but you can just call me Elizabeta, alright? I'm here to help you prep for chemo. Just let me know when you're ready, okay sweetie?" Matthew nodded again, looking up at her. "Okay... th-thank you..." He glanced at Francis, who smiled and nodded, then returned his gaze to the nurse. "I... I think I'm ready now..." The more he thought about it, the more he wanted the process to be over with as soon as possible. Elizabeta swung the door back open. "Alright then, honey, you and your dad can follow me."***In what Matthew deemed to be a short while later, though he couldn't be sure, he realized how unready he really was. His stomach heaved again, and he sobbed miserably as he emptied it into the bowl in front of him. Francis gently rubbed his back, murmuring comforting words and holding his hair out of the way. It felt like an eternity, but Matthew was finally able to lean back from the bowl, panting and trembling, only when his stomach ran out of things to force up his throat. Francis set the bowl aside, still rubbing gentle circles on Matthew's back. "Shh, shh, Matthieu... it's over, shh..." He whimpered, resting his head on his father's shoulder and taking shaky breaths. After a few moments of waiting for the smaller blonde to relax, Francis inquired, "Are you still nauseous at all?" All the exhausted teen could muster was a weak nod. "The doctor might have something to help with it. I will go ask. Are you alright by yourself for a little while?" "Y-yeah..." Francis helped him lie down, situating his arm so the IV line wouldn't be disturbed, and kissed his sweaty forehead. "Okay. The bowl is on the table if you think you need to throw up again. I will be back soon, oui? Try to get some rest." Matthew answered by closing his eyes and relaxing against the pillows. He listened as Francis left the room, closing the door softly behind him, and tried to let himself sleep in the near silence of the room. However, as he drifted off, he let his mind wander, and the last thing he thought of before he fell asleep was Gilbert's face.

7 - When Words Fail

(A/n) I'm sorry to say that this is the end of my rapid fire chapter updates. I've done all this writing after I vanished back in December. XD So you'll have to wait for the next update! ^^

Well-worn tires squealed in protest as the car they belonged to was urged quickly out of the driveway by a rushing albino. Completely preoccupied by the previous day's events, Gilbert had forgotten all about his date with Roderich.

As one of the more popular students of his high school, not much was private about Gilbert's social life. However, his homosexuality and his raven-haired boyfriend were his two best kept secrets. Only his closest friend, Antonio, knew, and he wanted to keep it that way.

That wasn't to say Roderich did, though. Gilbert could tell the bespectacled boy was growing tired of all the secrecy, and he knew he was really pushing it by being late.

Pulling up to the restaurant and combing hasty fingers through his tangled silver hair, Gilbert sprinted inside and glanced breathlessly around the vast room. After catching his breath, he managed to spot the familiar black hair and pair of glasses of a lone figure sitting in a booth near the back.

Gilbert hastily made his way over, not being entirely careful, which resulted in him nearly knocking an old lady out of her chair and receiving an evil look from said old lady.

By the time he reached the booth, he had enough glares on his back to burn a hole in his shirt.

Unlike all of the fuming people Gilbert had left in his wake, Roderich had an interesting way of showing his anger. Being polite and proper, he rarely ever yelled or lost his calm. Instead, he'd let his emotions show through his eyes.

Although he didn't make eye contact with Gilbert upon saying, "You're late," Gilbert could tell his irises were aflame.

"Sorry, got held up in traffic," Gilbert said lamely, sliding into the seat across from Roderich.

Deep blue eyes peered at Gilbert over the top of the menu for half a second before returning to the words printed on the laminated page. "For twenty minutes?"

"You know how people get," the albino muttered, hiding his own face behind a menu and pretending to read it.

"That's the third time you've used that excuse," Roderich said curtly. "Try again."

Gilbert lowered the menu and offered his boyfriend a sheepish smile. "My dog ate my homework?"

A sigh. "I don't want to get upset over something like this. But it's been happening so often, I'm beginning to think you forget about our dates altogether."

"I don't!" Gilbert cried, quick to defend himself. "I was just... busy."

Roderich set his menu down and met his eyes for the first time since his arrival. "You forgot." It wasn't a question.

All of a sudden, Gilbert was desperate for something to focus on besides Roderich's eyes. The stain on the corner of the table, the fly buzzing about the light above them, the scuff marks on the floor, anything but those flaming blue eyes.

"Gilbert."

Crimson was forced to meet blue at the firmness in the Austrian's voice.

"I don't want things to be like this every time we go out."

"Look, Roddy, it was an accident. It won't happen again."

"Really, Gilbert? Because considering how punctual you've been these past few times, I am inclined to believe you're making up excuses."

"I swear... I'll try harder," Gilbert replied, trying to hold eye contact. Roderich could be quite intimidating at the best of times.

There was a long silence, which may have, in reality, only lasted a few seconds. But it felt like an eternity and a half to Gilbert. Finally, Roderich nodded. "Alright."

Gilbert grinned. "That's my Young Master," he said, winking. "Now, let's order. I'm starving."

"So... how did he do?"

Francis gave Arthur a pained look as he arrived at the waiting area at the end of the long hall. Tears still glistened his blue eyes as he took a seat next to the Briton.

"It made him sick," Francis said in a shaky voice. "Physically sick." He met green eyes as he continued, voice growing ever softer as a sign of his distress, until he was nearly whispering. "I know the doctor said it was normal... but Arthur... he was crying... he was in so much pain..."

Arthur glanced at Alfred, making sure he was out of earshot, before turning back to his distraught husband. "I know it's hard to see him like this," he murmured. "But if he doesn't endure it now, he'll never get better."

Arthur would never admit it aloud, but he was trying to convince himself just as much as Francis.

"I-I know," Francis whispered. "I just... hate seeing him in pain."

"So do I. I hate it more than anything." Arthur paused to look Francis in the eyes again. "But we can't keep wishing it away. Because it won't just go away." He drew in a breath. "No matter how hard it is, we have to endure it with him. We need to be supportive."

"I know," Francis said again, sounding exhausted. "I know..."

Glancing at the window, Arthur saw the deep red of sunset and wondered when it had gotten so late. He looked at Francis sympathetically, knowing the Frenchman had to be worn out from all the stress.

When Francis began to nod off, Arthur spoke up: "Close your eyes, Frog. I'll wake you if we get any news."

Francis did not need to be asked twice. He leaned his head on Arthur's shoulder and promptly fell asleep. They sat like that for a while, undisturbed by the small stream of people that still remained. Arthur was beginning to doze off himself when his eyes caught movement and he snapped awake.

Alfred was moving towards the elevator, steps direct and unwavering. However, before he could reach it, Arthur spoke up. "Where do you think you're going?"

The teen hardly hesitated. "To go sit with Mattie."

"Alfred," his father said firmly, and this time, Alfred did pause to turn and face Arthur. "Your brother isn't feeling well. Let him sleep for a while." When Alfred looked like he wanted to protest, Arthur interrupted him. "I know you're worried. We all are. But chemo is tough, and he needs as much rest as possible."

"We've been waiting for hours, Dad."

"Well, it's not exactly a quick process."

"I just wanna make sure he's okay..."

Arthur sighed, not at all oblivious to his son's emotion, despite the facade the boy was putting up. He held out an arm. "Come here."

Alfred stood stubbornly where he was for another few seconds before giving in and returning to his parents. He slid into the seat next to Arthur, wordlessly accepting the one-armed hug.

"Why don't you try to get a little sleep?" Arthur suggested. "You'll feel better."

Upon hearing those words, Alfred was hit with a wave of exhaustion that he hadn't known was waiting to crash. He nodded sleepily, eyes beginning to slip closed.

Soon, Arthur was left with a sleeping face on each of his shoulders. This time, there was nothing to stop him from dozing off.

Matthew was, in fact, not asleep.

His thoughts kept him awake, wandering wildly and preventing him from properly relaxing. His stomach churned and his chest was sore, but his mind was far too preoccupied to care.

He thought of his family.

His brother, he had noticed, was being uncharacteristically overprotective. Alfred, who abandoned him in the school hallways at school in favour of talking to more interesting peers, Alfred, who left him home alone to attend parties, Alfred, who was probably seen as a sort of superhero to everyone... was worrying about him.

His fathers, too, were not themselves. Arthur seemed to have become less irritable. His papa hardly smiled, and when he did, it did not carry all the way to his eyes, like his smiles normally would.

He already missed Papa's smiles.

His mind wandered to school, where he thought about Gilbert's words: no one had noticed him collapse.

Even if his family cared... his classmates did not.

But as he considered it... one did.

One person had cared enough to run over and save his life.

Once again, Gilbert Beilschmidt's face was what finally lulled Matthew to sleep.