

MY DARLING TORTUE

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

- FRANÇOIS A self-absorbed tortoise who has come around looking for some romance
- JULES A tortoise local to the area who knows a hat when he sees it.

It is strongly encouraged that both tortoises speak with French accents.

SETTING

A beach in Normandy. Modern day.

SCENE

(Somewhere on the shores of Normandy, a tortoise slowly makes its way up to a lost WWII army helmet.)

FRANÇOIS

Bonjour.

(The army helmet does not respond.)

Tu es ravissante ce soir.

(Still no response.)

Perhaps English? I could not help but notice that you are looking particularly ravishing this evening. The way your shell reflects the fiery sunset... it is like you are a living work of art.

(The helmet, naturally, says nothing.)

I said that it is like you are a work of art.

(No response. No muttering to himself.)

So strange. Normally that line has them jumping out of their shell.

(Back to the helmet.)

If I may be so bold, I must confess that I have been admiring you for some time now. I was immediately attracted to your stately patience, and so I said to myself, François, *there* is a tortoise that you simply must get to know. Oh, do not get me wrong. It takes more than the sexy curve of a lady's shell to capture my interest. I think we are two of kind, you and I... that we have... a lot in common, as they say.

(During the last line, another tortoise has approached.)

I say, I think we have a lot in common—

JULES

'Allo.

FRANÇOIS

Excusez-moi, s'il vous plait. I will return in but a moment.

(He shuffles over to Jules.)

Can I help you? I am in the process of wooing this beautiful woman.

JULES

You are new here, I think, oui?

FRANÇOIS

I arrived only two days ago from Brussels—

JULES

Ahh, Belgium. I have heard that it is love!—

FRANÇOIS

No, not Belgium. Brussels. The field of sprouts just east of here. Now, if you will excuse me, I think I was beginning to capture the attention of this lovely lady.

JULES

There is something you should probably know.

FRANÇOIS

Heaven forbid, do not say she is already spoken for.

JULES

No, I would not say that.

FRANÇOIS

Then let me return to the art of romance. I am, if I may say so myself, quite the lady's tortoise.

JULES

Is that so? Then by all means, don't let me interrupt.

(François shuffles back to the army helmet.)

FRANÇOIS

As I was saying, I could not help but notice that we have quite a lot in common...

(Jules chuckles...)

FRANÇOIS (CONT)

...and that perhaps I could interest you in taking a stroll along the beach so that we might... get to know each other a little better?

(Jules chuckles again, and François turns to him, with a touch of irritation.)

Do you mind?

JULES

So sorry. Please, continue.

(François turns back to the helmet...)

FRANÇOIS

I do not mean to boast, but I am very well-traveled. Have you ever heard of... *(with a quick glance at Jules...)* Brussels? I might be convinced to take you there, *if you play your cards just right.*

(François turns back to wink knowingly at Jules, who nods back as if François is really doing well. François turns back to the helmet.)

What do you say, ma chérie? Shall we very slowly shuffle the light fantastic?

(There is no response, and François turns back to Jules.)

She does speak English, no?

JULES

One can only assume. Never has a word of French escaped her lips.

FRANÇOIS

(Turning back...)

Sprichst du Deutsch?

(No response.)

Just as well. The only phrase I know in German is 'zwei Salate mit Kiwi, Barkeeper'.

JULES

A useful phrase in a field of Brussel sprouts, I have no doubt.

FRANÇOIS

(Back to the helmet...)

So merely say the word, and I will be your guide on an adventure magnifique!

(After another bout of silence, back to Jules.)

This is... This is most unusual for me.

JULES

It is hard to understand. You are clearly quite familiar with the ladies—

FRANÇOIS

I know! *(Sidling over to talk conspiratorially with Jules.)* Is it possible that her heart already, you know, belongs to another?

JULES

I do not think so. I have always had the impression that she is... how shall I put this... from a bygone era. Abandoned by those to whom she once mattered.

(François nods slyly, like this is the insight he needed.)

FRANÇOIS

Merci, mon ami. Now stand back and watch the master at work. *(Back to the helmet.)* Ma chérie, I cannot help but notice a certain... loneliness about you. I too have felt this kind of... isolation. As if I should be... committed to a worldly cause...

JULES

(Aside to himself...)

Committed to something, anyway.

FRANÇOIS

And yet feeling mired in the mud of the mundane.

JULES

(Quietly...)

Such poetry...

FRANÇOIS

Now never would I claim that I can see clearly into your innermost nature...

JULES

(With greatly feigned sincerity...)

Nooo....

FRANÇOIS

But I can tell you what *I* have done to rise above such melancholy. If you wish to hear.

JULES

Oh I think she certainly does.

FRANÇOIS

When I am... feeling withdrawn... like I simply cannot bear to come out of my shell... what I find helps to raise my spirits is... le don de la musique!

JULES

A song? Truly I could not have imagined a better – and may I say, more entertaining – suggestion.

FRANÇOIS

(To the helmet...)

Have you ever given this a try, mademoiselle? *(Pause...)* No?

JULES

Perhaps you should demonstrate for the lady?

FRANÇOIS

An excellent suggestion... uh...

JULES

Jules.

FRANÇOIS

An excellent suggestion, Jules.

(François thinks for a moment, clears his throat, then begins singing to the tune of Bizet's Habenera.)

There was a tortoise
From outer space
An alien menace
In a carapace
He came to Earth
To conquer this— *(place)*

(Jules coughs loudly.)

What?

JULES

Maybe something more... romantic?

FRANÇOIS

Ah, but of course...

(He thinks for a moment, then begins to sing to the tune of Michelle by the Beatles.)

Your shell, my shell
Ours are shells that
Go together wells
Our two shells.

(François looks at the helmet for a reaction, and is clearly disappointed at the lack thereof.)

JULES

Perhaps something... livelier. To pick up her spirits, oui?

(François nods in appreciation, then starts singing to the tune of the Can Can. Jules bursts into laughter midway through the second verse.)

FRANÇOIS

We can
Swim to Khazakstan, Stan
Lick the marzipan pan
Bite a Corsican whose tan and just began a

Mad plan
So the Vatican can
Infiltrate Iran and—

What? Why are you laughing?

JULES

(With snorts of suppressed laughter...)

Moi? No. I most certainly was not laughing. I was... ah, sneezing.

(He emits a sound that is half laugh and half sneeze.)

A vos souhaits (*ah-vo-sway*).

FRANÇOIS

Merci.

JULES

(François looks over at the helmet, which has shown no affection resulting from the serenade.)

Jules, may I confide in you?

FRANÇOIS

But of course, mon ami.

JULES

I fear that I am at a loss. It would seem that nothing will warm the heart of this cold, recalcitrant beauty.

FRANÇOIS

Ahh, perhaps I can offer a helpful observation....

JULES

François.

FRANÇOIS

François. What an interesting name.

JULES

I am told that it means... the Wah of France.

FRANÇOIS

I never would have guessed.

JULES

You were saying?

FRANÇOIS

Ah, oui. I cannot help but wonder if...

JULES

Oui?

FRANÇOIS

JULES

If the reason why the mademoiselle is so resistant to your charms could be...

FRANÇOIS

Oui oui?

JULES

Have you considered the possibility that this beauty is...

FRANÇOIS

Oui oui oui?

JULES

Just an old hat?

FRANÇOIS

How dare you speak such harsh words about my beautiful mademoiselle!

JULES

It is only that there are some striking similarities—

FRANÇOIS

Please! You go too far! It is an affront to decent sensibilities.

JULES

So you don't think there's even a little chance that...

FRANÇOIS

That what?

JULES

That she is just... a chapeau. A relic from the past.

FRANÇOIS

None at all! Sacré bleu! You would have to be an absolute fool to even think such a thing.

JULES

Please forgive my outlandish suggestion then. I certainly wouldn't want to look foolish. Perhaps it would be best if I were to leave the two of you to... get better acquainted in private.

FRANÇOIS

I think perhaps so.

JULES

Well, I wish you the best of luck.

(Jules begins to walk off.)

FRANÇOIS

(Speaking to the helmet.)

Can you believe such effrontery? But fear not, ma chérie, I'll not permit anyone to malign your beauty and delicate nature while I still have breath to defend your honor! Now come, you have no reason to be shy with me...

(François reaches out and touches the helmet. He suddenly looks concerned, and then lifts up the edge of the helmet. He slowly puts it back, then looks around in an embarrassed way. He sees Jules looking at him.)

JULES

Everything is... bon?

(François hesitates, then moves closer to the helmet in a protective way.)

FRANÇOIS

Of course. We are... just... becoming, as you say, better acquainted.

(Jules nods, then exits. François kicks the helmet and mutters.)

Chapeau stupide.

JULES (OFF)

I heard that.

FRANÇOIS

(Overly loud and dramatic...)

What is that, my dear? Why, how sweet of you to say! And I love you as well, my darling tortue!

(François bears a look of consternation as the lights go out.)