

Pont Des Arts

Characters:

Amy. 22. An American tourist.

Matthieu. 26. A street vendor.

Setting:

The *Pont des Arts*, a famous pedestrian bridge that spans the river Seine. Located in the heart of Paris, it is a romantic, picturesque crossing that is quite popular for lovers and tourists alike. The sounds of faraway music and lapping water drift through the air. It is an early evening in summer.

At Rise: It is almost sunset. The last light of day is washing over the bridge, which includes a bench. MATTHIEU is packing up his merchandise and preparing to leave. His wares consist of several pairs of cheap lockets, which are spread over a plain bed sheet. He is on his knees, carefully putting the lockets in a cardboard box so as to avoid tangling them. AMY enters, slowly, carrying a map and staring in wonder around her. She addresses him in poorly pronounced French.

AMY

*Excusez-moi, est-ce que je suis à la pont des arts?*

Like any Frenchman, Matthieu is proud of his native language and is not impressed by her poor pronunciation. Still, he attempts to be cordial while emphasizing the correct way of speaking.

MATTHIEU

Yes, this is the Pont des Arts.

AMY

*Merci! Donc, c'est ici ou on peut acheter les... les...*

MATTHIEU

Save yourself the trouble. Stick with English, I can't understand you.

AMY

Shit. Um, ok, well-

MATTHIEU

You want to buy a padlock.

AMY

Yeah! Yeah I do. This *is* the bridge, isn't it? The one where everyone hangs the padlocks?

MATTHIEU

Do you see any other bridges covered with padlocks?

AMY

No- Well, ok, I know it sounds stupid but there are so many bridges on this river that I wanted to make sure. So can I buy one here? A padlock, I mean. Can I buy one?

MATTHIEU

Why?

AMY

Well, I heard about the tradition. The one where you write the initials of you and your beloved and you hang it up here, with all the other locks. And you throw the key into the Seine River so that the moment is locked in time.

MATTHIEU

I don't sell padlocks. And I'm finished for the day.

AMY

*(Looking at his lockets.)* Oh. You only sell those little necklaces... Yeah, I needed a *padlock*, for sure. So...

*She takes a drink. Matthieu begins folding his sheet.*

AMY

I'm sorry, do you know anyone else who sells any?

MATTHIEU

Sometime. But they leave.

AMY

Why don't you sell any?

MATTHIEU

Because my idea is better.

AMY

That's a little... um, ok, what's your idea?

MATTHIEU

So, with the padlock, like these padlocks you see here, you write your initials and your lovers initials, you lock it, you throw the key into the river. Your love is, uh, frozen in time, yes?

AMY

Immortalized, Yeah.

MATTHIEU

Well, this is the same idea. (*He pulls out two lockets.*) You write your initials on both lockets, you tie one around the bridge, you throw the other one into the Seine, voilà. The same idea. But, better because it's more true.

AMY

What do you mean? How is it more true?

MATTHIEU

Well, the padlocks can last a long time, but uh... the lockets, like the ones I sell here? They are cheap. Easy to break. Just like love. So it's more honest to sell these.

AMY

I don't believe that.

MATTHIEU

Hm?

AMY

That love is weak. Thanks for being honest. But I'm gonna go find someone who sells padlocks.

MATTHIEU

As you want. You know, the padlocks, they weight the bridge.

AMY

Yeah, I know, but-

MATTHIEU

You see that section over there? The new section without all of the locks? It was this summer, it got heavy from these padlocks and...

*He makes a gesture/splashing sound to show that the section fell.*

MATTHIEU

Voilà, into the Seine. So, they are trying to stop tourists from putting them there. Did you know?

AMY

Yes, I knew. I'm not a tourist. I live here.

MATTHIEU

For someone who lives here, you speak terrible French. And do you always carry a map to get home?

AMY

It's a big city. Please don't smirk like that. I'm not a tourist. Tourists are temporary. They come in, they take their pictures, they tell you the food's good, buy a locket from you, and then they leave. And then you never see them again, so it's like they weren't even here. Like ghosts.

MATTHIEU

O-k... Well, many of them are nice. It's not always a bad thing, to be a tourist.

AMY

You know what really pisses me off about you people?

MATTHIEU

'You people?'

AMY

The French. It's like, being French automatically makes you right.

*MATTHIEU looks around, shrugs.*

MATTHIEU

Well, we do seem to be in France.

AMY

We sure do.

MATTHIEU

And that's nice coming from you, an American.

AMY

Actually, unlike most Americans, I'm aware that I can be wrong.

MATTHIEU

Which is why you are impolite with a complete stranger who is trying to feed his family.

AMY

You're trying to feed them by selling shitty little lockets?

MATTHIEU

Tourists will buy anything.

AMY

I am not a tourist! I am trying to hang onto the one good thing that I have in my life and I... Never mind. Shit...

*She grabs her water and starts chugging. She coughs.*

MATTHIEU

You are sick?

AMY

I'm not sick. I have to keep drinking water so I don't cry.

*MATTHIEU says nothing, he is confused.*

AMY

*Je ne veux pas pleurer, dammit!*

MATTHIEU

No, no, I understand the words. But, uhh... why does drinking water help?

AMY

I read somewhere that it's biologically impossible to cry while you're drinking water.

*She drinks.*

MATTHIEU

Really?

AMY

Yep, it's true. You can't. (*A thoughtful sip.*) Do you know how long it is until sunset?

MATTHIEU

Uh... Not long. Why?

AMY

I'm supposed to meet someone at sunset. And it's really important that I buy a padlock.

MATTHIEU

Miss...uhh... If it's really very important to you, and, uh, your lover. Maybe you can think of another way to keep this memory.

AMY

I'm not buying—

MATTHIEU

No, no, it's ok. You don't need to buy one. I'm not trying to profit from you, I mean. At sunset I will go to the Sacre-Coeur and sell beers to the tourists there. You buy a case of Heineken for twenty Euros, sell the beers for twice as much. So I'll scam them, not you. It's nice.

AMY

That doesn't sound nice at all.

MATTHIEU

What I want to say is, normally I just let people go by on this bridge. They kiss, they laugh, they put the lock on, they throw the key in, they kiss, they leave. So careless. But for you... I have advice.

AMY

Would you take advice from a complete stranger?

MATTHIEU

You took advice from an article that said it's impossible to cry while drinking water. So, take some advice from another stranger—they cut the locks off the bridge. From time to time.

AMY

Oh.

*She takes another long drink.*

MATTHIEU

You didn't know.

AMY

No. See, I lied. I don't really live here. But I like to blend in, and I don't like being thought of as a tourist. Because being here matters to me. I don't want to be a ghost.

MATTHEIU

Ah.

AMY

I was supposed to meet him here. We broke up right before I left. But then I sent him a letter saying what weekend I was coming and what time he should meet me here. Pretty stupid, right?

MATTHIEU

Maybe. But it's not completely your fault.

AMY

It kind of is. I'm the idiot who wrote him the letter, got on a plane, and came to this stupid bridge just to prove that I actually meant something to him.

MATTHIEU

Did you ever wonder if maybe you could put the same effort into loving yourself?

*Amy looks out across the water and considers this.*

MATTHIEU

Look at the view. The lights. The river. These locks. It's like a dream, no? But eventually, for us who live here, the dream fades away. Like a ghost. Lovers break their promises, the rusty locks get cut down, and new tourists come to hang new locks. It's not romantic, but it's realistic.

AMY

Did someone break their promise to you?

MATTHIEU

Sort of. But I broke promises too. So it's ok. (Beat.) You'll find another love. I'm sure you loved someone before him.

AMY

Maybe I did.

*MATTHIEU pulls out a locket, considers it for a moment.*

AMY

Do you think if I rode my bike fast enough I could watch the sunset forever?

MATTHIEU

Hm.

AMY

These rusty locks have probably lasted a lot longer than the lovers who put them there. I guess that's the point.

MATTHIEU

Probably. But, you know, I always find it a little bizarre. It's a nice idea, to want to lock the moment in time. But when you really consider what love is... you can't lock that. It's supposed to be free.

*They gaze across the water in a moment of silence.*

MATTHIEU

So... what if he's not here at sunset?

AMY

I don't know. I guess I could hang it by myself... but would that be weird?

MATTHIEU

We see some weird people here. It's ok. (*Beat.*)

AMY

Can I borrow a cigarette?

MATTHIEU

You think because I'm French I smoke?

AMY

Sorry! I didn't mean-

MATTHIEU

I'm kidding. I don't have any with me. Sorry.

AMY

That's ok. So... what are you going to do after you go scam the tourists?

MATTHIEU

Go have a good beer, with friends, probably.

AMY

You're not going to go home to your family?

MATTHIEU

I lied about having a family.

AMY

(*A little disappointed*) Oh. Well, I lied about not being a tourist. (*Pause.*) I think it's almost time.

MATTHIEU

Yes, almost.

AMY

You know, if this were a movie, we'd fall in love and walk away and I'd forget about Alex.

MATTHIEU

True.

AMY

So will you walk me to the metro?

MATTHIEU

Uhh...

AMY

I'm kidding. Thank you. For the advice. You should go sell your beers to gullible tourists. I'm going to wait just a little longer. Have a good night.

MATTHIEU

And you as well.

*He grabs his box and is about to leave. Amy stops him.*

AMY

Wait! Can I buy a pair? I changed my mind. Just in case he shows up.

MATTHIEU

You can have this pair. For free. But remember what it stands for.

*He hands her a pair and exits. She sighs. Stares as the pair hangs from her hand and revolves, reflecting the changing light. She closes her hand around the pair and rests her hand in her lap. She takes another long drink of water.*

END