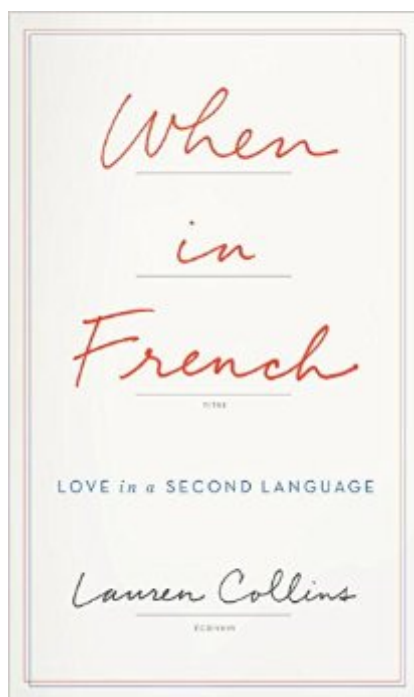


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# When In French: Love In A Second Language



## Synopsis

A language barrier is no match for love. Lauren Collins discovered this firsthand when, in her early thirties, she moved to London and fell for a Frenchman named Olivier—a surprising turn of events for someone who didn't have a passport until she was in college. But what does it mean to love someone in a second language? Collins wonders, as her relationship with Olivier continues to grow entirely in English. Are there things she doesn't understand about Olivier, having never spoken to him in his native tongue? Does "I love you" even mean the same thing as "je t'aime"? When the couple, newly married, relocates to Francophone Geneva, Collins—a fearful of one day becoming "a Borat of a mother" who doesn't understand her own kids—decides to answer her questions for herself by learning French. When in French is a laugh-out-loud funny and surprising memoir about the lengths we go to for love, as well as an exploration across culture and history into how we learn languages—and what they say about who we are. Collins grapples with the complexities of the French language, enduring excruciating role-playing games with her classmates at a Swiss language school and accidentally telling her mother-in-law that she's given birth to a coffee machine. In learning French, Collins must wrestle with the very nature of French identity and society—which, it turns out, is a far cry from life back home in North Carolina. Plumbing the mysterious depths of humanity's many forms of language, Collins describes with great style and wicked humor the frustrations, embarrassments, surprises, and, finally, joys of learning—and living in French.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The book can be divided into two parts -- the first part is Lauren Collins telling of her struggles to learn French and not being able to make any progress. There she is, stuck in Switzerland with her French husband who is at work long hours and she is helpless because she can't speak the language. Even when she tries to speak French, she is thwarted by well-meaning people who recognize her accent and switch to English. This part of the book is gloomy and you want to give her a nudge and say "Get out there and take a language class, talk to strangers, it'll get better!" The second part is where she actually does these things and soon she is speaking and understanding French and finding a different dimension to her husband when he speaks in his native language and she can understand him. She finds a new dimension to herself as well and the story picks up and becomes more upbeat. Meanwhile Collins takes us down many side roads, discussing linguistics and language learning and the history of French. I found these diversions very interesting and if you've read any Steven Pinker, Guy Deutscher, or Julie Barlow and Jean-Benoit Nadeau, you'll enjoy hearing her take on their theories. Also of interest on the subject of the difficulty of learning French is *The Philosopher's Demise* by Richard Watson.

I loved this book. I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that the author and I learned French for similar reasons and around the same time in our lives, so I was able to relate to so many of her experiences. The other reason I really enjoyed it is because Collins is a journalist by trade - she asks and researches questions about the French language that I would never even think to ask. I learned a lot while reading and also was able to laugh and enjoy her personal account. A thoughtful, interesting and fun read!

This book started out as a memoir about Lauren Collins attempting to learn French after marrying a Frenchman and moving to his home country. Then it became a history of the French language. Then it turned back into a memoir. This switching back and forth continued through the rest of the book. While both the memoir and the history were interesting, she needed to focus on one aspect or the other for the entirety of the book so we could get a full story, rather than just snippets of two different ideas.

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