

Here We Go Again:

Let's Just Try To Not Screw It Up.

Russell Collins

The original prologue and first chapter of my adult romance novel 'Here We Go Again' sent to the editor Maggie Barker. This was the version I had after 'editing' it myself 6 times

I thought I had done a good job of self-editing. Obviously not.

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THE PROLOGUE

It's not quite an 'Enemies to Lovers' story. It isn't a 'Friends to Lovers' story. It's more an 'Untrustworthy and Unreliable Ex To Reinvented Love She Wants To Be' story.

A rocky start, but a happy ending.

Peter's View.

How the hell did I, Peter, get into this position with Francesca? A woman I never wanted to see again, and I showed I could live without. She's now standing on the coffee table in front of me. I'm sitting on the couch, looking up at her, like Jack Vettriano's painting, 'Devotion'. Like 'Devotion' she's standing astride, and unlike 'Devotion', her knickers have dropped onto the floor. I wouldn't say she's showing subjugation but certainly surrender and submission. Her hands are holding the front of her skirt up a bit, so that I'm nearly getting the full view. She's asking me, no, almost begging me, to make love to her, though being rather cruder than that.

Well, it was a process that covered subjects as diverse as a survey of American sexual fantasies, the sexual frustrations of a First Lady of the USA from the 1920s; the fact that it appeared that more American women fantasised over Batman than Superman; and nearly seventy percent of customers who went to first screenings of the '50 Shades of Gray' film were women. Other subjects included a near divorce related to the film 'Love Actually', a hooker screwing Fireman; The Addams Family (yes, Morticia, Gomez, Wednesday and Thing); the film 'The Other Guys'; a sexual attraction to ducks (Anasaphilia); a sexual attraction to sharks (Galeophilia) and a lot of other 'philiias.

Let's not forget either the 'When Harry Met Sally' noises that came forth as a result of a brain freeze generated in a rather unusual way.

Nineteen months ago, I ended our relationship; no-one else was involved. I just thought we were going nowhere. A month after, I realised my mistake in ending my relationship with the most wonderful creature that ever entered my life. I asked for forgiveness and for another chance. I thought I had that chance, but two weeks later she dumped me in the most humiliating and degrading way possible.

Three months ago, I had a birthday card from her. A couple of days later I rang her to say thank you. We met up a few times, and she told me what she had been up to. Once you got through the outer gloss and bullshit, she was lonely, fed-up, drifting and miserable. She'd been made redundant in a reorganisation, was almost broke, and in negative equity. She had also 'enjoyed' a few useless relationships with men from the shallow end of the dating pond. Initially, her attitude was 'Hello Peter, it's me, Francesca, I'm back, let's meet and I can allow you to breathe in the air I exhale'. But when it came down to it, she was bluster and bullshit hidden behind a glossy, brittle exterior.

She came over to mine for New Year, and we spent the night together. It was a very pleasant night as well. It wasn't 'till after, that I realised I never asked her if she was on the pill. She went off to see her friend Jeanette who is getting married later in the year, and that was that. I was going to call her after a couple of days, but she beat me to it two days ago.

Two days ago, I ended up at her place, ripping her into little pieces. Not only did I reduce her to tears, I loved every minute of doing it. Then I felt guilty, went into reverse thrust and started putting her back together again before I went home. Back to hers again yesterday morning and out for breakfast where we had a serious talk about us, and where and what we could go and do in life. Back to hers AGAIN this evening and out to dinner, where we talked through various issues. Dinner went beautifully well, apart from the issue of the brain freeze.

I think we might just have a future together. as long as we just try to not screw it up.

So here we are, almost acting out a Jack Vettriano painting, with her desperate for me to bring some stability, romance and decent sex into her life. I'm prepared to do so as long as it's done my way. It could be a fun journey as long as it's done my way.

Read on for the full story. This is book one of four, or maybe more.

Fran's View.

How the hell did I, Fran, get in this position with Peter? I didn't think he'd acknowledge my birthday card, never mind seeing me again. I guess I'm just lucky to have a third chance with him, never mind a second chance.

Basically, I'm 'On Approval' for three months. If it's not working at the end of that three months, we go our separate ways. We'll part on good terms, and there might be yet another way back in the future. I want it to work. I've had so many bad experiences and I'm fed up with it. I treated the most reliable, honest, loyal and decent man I've ever met like a piece of dirt, and I now know what I've been missing.

It was a lovely evening, far more than I deserve. Now we're back at mine and I'm standing here in front of him, on my coffee table. He's stroking the backs of my knees, looking up at me. Next time our positions will be reversed, and I should be at just the right height.

My friend Jeanette said, "Tell him to sling his hook".

"Why?" Said I. "I've struck lucky. It was my fault. I've got another chance. I mustn't screw it up this time."

FURTHER INFORMATION

This series of books has its own Web Page:



<https://russellstthewriter.com/peter-and-fran/>

If you like the book, please give it some stars and leave a review.



<https://mybook.to/HereWeGoAgain>

If you don't like it, or have some comments. I'd love to know them. Please email me at:



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Contents

1 In the Beginning	1
2 Red Hot Anger	13
3 Calming It Down	30
4 The WORLD-FAMOUS Sausage Sandwich	42
5 The Pleasure Palace.....	49
6 Tomorrow	59
7 On Time	68
8 Apéritif – Course 1.....	73
9 Cold Antipasto – Course 2	81
10 Warm Antipasto – Course 3	89
11 Primo Pasta – Course 4	99
12 Granita – Course 5	111
13 Secondo Piatto & Contorndo – Course 6 & 7	114
14 Formaggio – Course 8	122
15 Dolce & Caffè – Course 9	125
16 Home – I’m Course 10 - Fran.....	130
17 Dreaming.....	137
18 James Bond – Hunting Spectre	142
19 Some Love Letters	150
20 Bonus Chapter – I’m Susie.	154
The Epilogue	160

1 In the Beginning

POV PETER

The phone rang and I picked it up. "Peter Janes," I said.

"Hello Peter, it's me, Francesca, how are you?" Francesca is a former girlfriend of mine from a couple of years back. I stupidly ended our relationship thinking it wasn't going to go anywhere, and after a few weeks regretted it. I realised I loved her dearly and wanted to see if we could try to make a life together. She had other thoughts though and left me rather bruised, hurt and bitter. I ended our relationship in a way that respected her and (*I think*) left her with her dignity intact. She led me up the garden path, humiliated me and laughed in my face.

She got back in touch with me back in October, after a few dates we ended up spending New Year's Eve in my house and in my bed.

A couple of Francesca's Great Grandfathers were Italian Prisoners of War who met in a Welsh Prisoner of War camp at a place called Capel Eidalwyr, in Henllan, Ceredigion during the last war. They were given a fair amount of freedom working on the farms and in some of the factories as they'd no interest at all in escaping. They'd be let out in the morning and had to be back at a certain time in the late afternoon for rollcall, inspection and food. They were usually then given time out, in the evening, to go down to the pub for a drink or two.

In The Beginning - Peter

There were a few problems with them. They complained about the quality of the food they were being given and insisted on cooking for themselves. The local Roman Catholics also complained that they could never get into church on a Sunday because it was packed with Italians. There was also the odd problem with the parents of some of the local girls complaining to the Camp Commandant about the attention that their daughters were getting and not liking the situation; the daughters weren't complaining though.

The Camp Commandant dealt with the first complaint by allowing the prisoners to cook their rations themselves, with the quality of the prisoners' meals improving dramatically. The camp guards then decided that they would rather eat with the prisoners than in their own cookhouse, and the prisoners ended up cooking for the entire camp. The food in some of the local pubs improved as well, with the good people of Wales being introduced to Italian delicacies such as Garlic and Chilli.

The complaint about church services was resolved by the Italians building a church in one of their huts. They were supposed to hand back the empty tins their rations came in for re-use (they didn't use the word recycling in those days), but several of them kept going missing. Some building materials went missing from a local builder as well, replaced by some sort of head blowing home brew Italian alcohol, presumably as payment. The Italians then built a church in one of their Nissan Huts.

They asked the Camp CO that the hut be exempt for inspection for a few months. They gave their word that there was no illegal activity going on and all would be revealed after a few weeks. The Italians converted the Nissan Hut into a church, not just a little village type church, but something like a miniature Vatican.

They used building material to build an altar and rebuild the inside of the Nissan Hut. They cleaned and flattened the tins

and painted them with religious images. Then they put everything together.

From the outside it looked like a bog-standard corrugated-iron Nissen Hut. But inside it looked like the Sistine Chapel, with vaulted ceilings, imitation stained-glass windows, and every surface lined with the flattened tins painted with religious themes. The Nissen Hut was consecrated by the local Bishop in 1943, and the first service was a combined prisoner and local resident service. As well as the Italian Chapel in Ceridigon, there's another Italian Chapel in the Orkney Isles off Scotland.

The issue of the attentions 'unwanted' by the parents but not objected to by their daughters was a little trickier. The Camp CO called the POWs together and gave them a stiff lecture about proper behavior to the local young ladies, as they needed to keep the parents happy. He also made available condoms 'just in case'. He pointed out that a country associated with sheep devised the first condoms and used sheep intestines. The British improved upon the condom by taking it out of the sheep first and tying a knot in one end. Catholic strictures about birth control were conveniently ignored by the men and they adopted this new item with enthusiasm.

After the surrender of Italy in 1943, the Italians were technically no longer prisoners, and the church saw a number of marriages to local women. Once the war was fully over, a lot of the Italians went home, married and a number of them came back with their Italian brides. Others, whether they were married or single stayed in the UK.

And that is where Francesca gets her looks. She's about five foot four inches in bare feet, of Mediterranean appearance. She has copper-brown coloured hair that comes halfway down her back. A figure reminiscent of a slightly slimmer Sophia Loren. She fills a pair of jeans and a bra nicely too. I wouldn't say she has a pair of lips like a younger Sophia Loren, but a French kiss from her would encompass Spain, Portugal, Germany, Northern Italy and part of Poland.

So, that's where Francesca Abertini comes from. Part of her is English and the other part pure Italian. The English got the better part of the deal.

"Hi Francesca, fine thank you, how about you and how did you get on with Jeanette's wedding preparations?"

"It went well, lots of walking around, making choices, then unmaking them, then going back and making the same choice again."

"Sounds like a typical day of great shopping," I said. "I've always wondered how women could go shopping, spend all day walking around the shops, buy nothing, come home and say they had a great day's shopping. Then I thought about men who go fishing and catch nothing."

"Yes" she laughed lightly. "But at least she bought something, even if it was the first thing she tried on. I was wondering if you would like to come over and we could do something over the weekend?"

I paused for a few seconds. I could sense her apprehension over the phone. "I'm not sure Fran," I said slowly. "I've been thinking about what has happened between us over the past couple of years, and especially the past few weeks. I was going to call you but wanted to leave it a few days to think more. But you've called me so I will take it from here. I've some questions for you. The first one is what do you want from me?"

"What do you mean?" she replied quietly.

"Think about it. The last time we saw each other was well over a year ago. It was after you took me to a party where I didn't know anyone. You left me whilst you went and spent most of the evening chatting up some other guy.

“Fast forward fifteen months or so and you send me a birthday card. I call you to say thank you. We meet up a couple of times. You come over on New Year’s Eve and we spend the night together without doing much sleeping. On New Year’s morning, before we went out, I suggested that we go upstairs and do it again, and all I got a squeaky little ‘No’. I would have thought that if you were that enthusiastic about me, you would have said something like ‘why waste time going upstairs’?”

“What’s happening Fran? You’re unemployed. You’ve had a string of lousy relationships. You’re broke. Did you need some sort of validation to boost your ego? A one-night stand? Did you go through some sort of little black book you have somewhere looking for the most pliable person you could think of? Did you contact me thinking that I’d collapse on the floor grateful that you’d grace me with your presence and allowed me into your personal space?”

“Don’t get me wrong, I am pleased you got in touch with me again and I do want to see you again. But I want to know why you did contact me, and what you want from me? What were you hoping to get, and I want you to answer the questions. If you don’t then I will probably put the phone down and I won’t want you contacting me again until you can give adult answers to adult questions.”

A long silence on the phone.

“It’s not like that Peter. Yes I’ve chosen too many crap men who just want me for sex, and let the few good ones go. I was sitting at home getting pissed on brandy and stuffing my face with chocolate, and I realised that out of all the men I’ve had in my life, you were the most reliable, loyal, considerate and trustworthy of them all.”

“Thank you Fran,” I said after a pause. “When did you realise that?”

“Back in June, July time.”

“So why did you leave it so long to contact me again – just in case Mr. Perfect arrived? You say that I’m the most trustworthy person you have been out with. I think you’re the least trustworthy woman I’ve been out with, and at the moment I wouldn’t trust you as far as I could throw you.”

Silence on the line except for some shaky breathing. “Why wouldn’t you trust me. You’re the one who broke us up out of the blue,” she said.

“Yes, I ended our relationship. As soon as I realised what a fool I had been I came back. I apologised, it wasn’t just a few meaningless words. I gave a full apology where I took the full blame for it. I made it clear that it was my fault. It was my stupidity and my failure to talk about it, to communicate it. I said I realised you were the most wonderful creature I had ever met, and I wanted to be given a second chance.

“I almost on my knees begging you for a second chance and you lead me to believe that I had one. Then you took me to a party where I didn’t know anyone and left me there whilst you went chatting up your next potential boyfriend. You ignored me the whole evening except when you turned around every so often and smirked at me, to show how wonderful you were.”

“I’m sorry, that was wrong of me, I shouldn’t have done that. Remember though, that I said you were one of the best guys I ever met, then you ended our relationship. You just wanted me for sex. You got what you wanted and then you humped and dumped me. Then you came back.”

“Er, no Fran. If I just wanted you for sex then I wouldn’t have ended it I would have kept it going until you realised that all I wanted was sex. You would have got rid of me. As I said at the time, I didn’t think our relationship was going anywhere. I realised what a fool I had been. I came back to you. I said I

was sorry. I said I realised that you were the best thing that happened to me. I wanted to try to make amends.

“You gave me the impression that you were happy for me to try, and what happened? You led me up the garden path and left me there. I’ll repeat it. You took me to a party where I didn’t know anyone and left me. You then spent all evening chatting up some guy you thought might be your next boyfriend. You didn’t talk to me once and blanked me, except for a few times when you turned round and just smirked at me.”

“I hate that word. Everyone tells me I smirk.”

“Everyone says you do it. You hate the word. Why do it? Why do you keep smirking then with your tight-lipped little smirk. You don’t smile much but you smirk a lot. Show your teeth when you smirk and it turns into a smile, it’s not difficult. You have a fantastic smile when you do it. But when you smirk, you look smug and untrustworthy, like all smirkers. You also look like a frog that has had its head trodden on.

“I guessed we weren’t going anywhere when I took you back to your parents. When I phoned you the next day to make plans, you made it clear that we weren’t going anywhere. I said that I thought we were giving it another go, and what did you say?”

“I said that I never said yes.”

“Not quite Fran. I imagined you pulling a funny face and you squeaked ‘I never actually said yeeeeesss’ and then you gave a little chortle. You knew I was hurt, and you just took the piss. I asked you why you did it, and you said that you liked teasing men. All I wanted to do was make up for the hurt I caused you and see if we could try to make a life together. All you wanted to do was laugh in my face.”

“Peter, I said I wanted to remain friends, and you said no.”

“Not quite Fran. It was rather more than saying no. I asked how that would work, seeing as we had no reason to go into each other’s necks of the woods. You didn’t answer the question. I said wanting to remain friends is one of the most meaningless things a woman can say to a man. A woman says it to a man at the break-up of a relationship it means nothing. A man says it to a woman it means he wants to keep them hanging around and hopefully shag them whenever he’s nothing better to do.

“I said I wasn’t hanging around you pretending I didn’t have strong feelings for you and told you it was all or nothing. Your immediate response was, in a squeaky little voice. ‘It’s nothing then’. Then what happened?”

“You said you could live with that. You said to me ‘have a happy life’, and put the phone down.”

“How would we have remained friends Fran?” Silence on the phone.

“Good for you Fran. You’ve spent the last year and a bit dribbling and drooling over useless guys who saw you as a big-breasted bit of fun, nothing more than a place to dump their semen. A Fireman who you caught screwing a hooker on your couch; a financial advisor who, when on the third time of staying over, went out on Sunday morning to get the papers and forgot to come back, then blocked your calls. Let’s not forget the live-in relationship you had with a manager of a German company who went home to see his mother every six weeks. Maybe he did see his mother, but he also saw his wife and kids.

“By the way, did you get yourself checked out after your hooker screwing fireman?”

“Bastard, I knew you were going to throw that in my face.”

“Did you get yourself checked out – yes or no?”

“Yes, I did. I told you about what I’d been doing because you asked what I had been doing, and I gave you honest answers. I didn’t intend giving you stuff you could use against me. I’m beginning to wish I never got back in touch with you now.”

“Problem for me though Fran; it seemed that you were proud of those guys. You smiled as you told me about what they did. If you don’t like the way I speak to you, put the phone down.” *I paused and softened my voice.* “I’m not throwing it in your face. I’ll be throwing it in your face if I keep going on about it. The way I feel now about it, is that the best I can say about you is that I’m neutral about you. Considering the way I’ve had a go at you, I can’t see you wanting to get together again very soon. I’ve got nothing to lose by going at you like this.

“I’m just using your description of some of the useless men you dribbled and drooled over. As I said earlier. I’m glad you got in touch with me. I’m happy to talk. But do I have to ask the question again – what do you want?”

“Look Peter, I’m sorry. You’re right, I let you think you’d another chance and I wish I’d given it—”

“Glad to hear that. If you had, we could be talking about marriage and kids now. We could even be looking forward to the first one.”

“My life has been shit!” She shouted down the phone. “I’ve been let down by all the men I’ve been involved with over the last year, and I’m fed up with it. All men want is sex, sex, sex. and those that get it have been crap at it. Just interested in satisfying themselves. I thought you were different.”

“Do you mean your life has been shit, or shit since me? You chose the men Fran.

“You’re a woman Fran. Women are supposed to be able to suss out ninety percent of men in ten minutes. It then takes them another ten minutes to suss out the remaining ten percent. After that, you make the decision about what you do. You made the choice to go out with those guys, and you must have known what most of them were. I’m sure one or two of them were very good liars. They can’t all have fooled you and lied to you, unless you wanted to be lied too. You also made the choice to get rid of the good ones. Have you ever made any good decisions relationship-wise? I just can’t believe that you’ve never met at least a few good ones.”

“Okay Pete, you’ve made your point. What did I want from you when I called? I was hoping that we might be able to try again, you know, a fresh start. I’m so sorry you feel the way you do, and I should never have behaved like that. You did though end our relationship, and you were the first man to end a relationship with me. I was angry about that.”

“Okay. A bit of revenge on me then? I hope you enjoyed it. Did make you feel fulfilled as a woman. As for me being the first man to end a relationship with you, how many first dates have you had in the past year and a bit? How many second dates, and third dates and fourth dates? I bet they dropped off after the third date when they realised you wanted to wait two or three months before sleeping with them. Those guys also ended their relationship with you, but you didn’t see it that way”

“Probably, and I wish I could turn back the clock. Look, I’m shallow ok. Immature. Pathetic at times. You name it. I know it. I’m nothing like you. You’ve depth and integrity that most other guys lack. You’re the best guy I’ve been out with. But I’ve realised now that you have what I’ve been missing and need, and yes, my life’s been shit since you.”

“Really? You shouldn’t have left it so long to get back in touch then.”

"I'm crap at making decisions about my life. I overthink things. I prevaricate. I didn't know what you'd say?"

Nope. I think it was because you kept fighting your feelings for me as you still expected Mr. Wonderful Hunky to suddenly turn up. I think you are still waiting for him and I'm a time filler. I'm a safety net for you until the 'one for you' arrives."

Silence reigned on the phone.

"What are your plans for the next few days?" I said.

"My parent's tomorrow afternoon, seeing Jeanette again at mine on Friday until the afternoon, nothing planned after that."

"I'll think about it," I said. "I'll think about it over the next couple of days and get back to you, and I will get back to you okay."

"Peter, please."

"Too late for that Fran. I'll get back to you soon, and you know I mean it. You've just told me I'm the most reliable and trustworthy guy you've ever been out with. Remember?. That means you can trust me to do what I say I'll do. Speak to you soon. Bye." And I put the phone down.

I spent an hour or so thinking, then dialed her back. "It's me."

"That's quick."

"I can make decisions and get on with them. I'm willing to see if we can give it another go. It'll be under my terms and conditions and not yours and there's no argument about that. I want to come over to yours now. We can talk about things face-to-face and see what we do from here. I'm not expecting to stay over. In fact, I WON'T be staying over. I can be with you in just over an hour, yes?"

“I don’t know, yes okay. You going to have another go at me?”

“I’m going to have my say and I won’t be singing your praises. Look Fran, I haven’t contacted you now for well over a year and that should tell you that I’ve no problems living without you. I’m willing to give it a go though. What I need to do is see if I can live with you.

“Do I come over now, yes or no? I want to discuss the situation, and one way or another, see if it can be put behind us. I will tell you now that I don’t want to start again with you, but I could be prepared to try to pick up where we left off. There must be a serious discussion between us – an adult discussion around adult subjects, YES OR NO?” as I raised my voice slightly.”

“Okay yes. What is the difference between starting again and picking up where we left off?”

“Starting again means that I forget about the differences between the way I behaved to you, and the way you behaved to me. I’m not prepared to do that. When I ended our relationship, I did it face-to-face with you. I didn’t go out to get the papers and not come back. I treated you with respect.

“You didn’t like what I did, but I left you with your dignity intact. Many women would think what I did was a very brave way of ending a relationship. You publicly humiliated me. Picking up where we left off means that I can throw that in your face again if I feel I need to. Believe me, I will. I don’t want to do that, but I want to be able to.

“I want to drag everything out it into the open and then put it behind us. See you in just over an hour.”