

Here We Go Again:

Let's Just Try To Not Screw It Up.

Russell Collins

Fran Abertini and Peter Janes

I sent the prologue and first chapter of my adult romance novel 'Here We Go Again' to Maggie Barker for editing work. This is what she returned. It shows the extend of the detail, editing notes and work carried out by Maggie.

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~~~~enemies-to-lovers~~' story. It isn't a '~~Friends to Lovers~~~~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~~~~had shown~~ 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 ~~the~~ first screenings of the '~~50 Shades of Gray~~~~Fifty Shades of Grey~~' film were women. Other subjects included a near divorce related to the film 'Love Actually', a hooker screwing ~~Fireman~~~~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 ~~phili~~~~phili~~as.

Commented [MB1]: I love this opening - however, the terms 'Enemies to Lovers' and 'Friends to Lovers' are usually written as 'enemies-to-lovers' and 'friends-to-lovers', especially when used as trope labels. This technically isn't wrong if you're treating them as named tropes as such, but hyphenation would certainly make them cleaner.

Commented [MB2]: Editorial/feedback note:

I get the joke, however, the line itself is grammatically foggy and a little clunky, which can trip readers. The main issue is 'Love She Wants To Be'. Does it mean lover she wants to be, love he wants her to be, or love she wants it to become?

I wouldn't say there's a hard mistake here, but more of an editorial clarity issue. If the clunky joke is intentional, a light fix could be:

"It's more of an 'untrustworthy and unreliable ex-to-reinvented-love' story."

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Commented [MB3]: Editorial/feedback note:

Just a quick comment on the formatting - the gaps between the paragraphs are too large for usual formatting. The ... [1]

Commented [MB4]: Headings/sub-headings don't usually need full stops, and are cleaner on their own 😊

Commented [MB5]: I enjoy this characters clipped voice - the only thing is that this line reads slightly off - "I showed I could live without" needs a clearer object. ... [2]

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Commented [MB6]: Editorial/feedback note:

Commented [MB7]: Unless 'Fireman' is a character name or nickname, it shouldn't be capitalised. If it's just referring to the job title in this context, it should be lower case 😊

Commented [MB8]: Editorial/feedback note:

Commented [MB9]: This looks a little odd because the apostrophe is facing the wrong way/being used as a cli ... [5]

Commented [MB10]: Editorial/feedback note:

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's 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,

Commented [MB11]: Editorial/feedback note:

This is correct grammar, however the most common spelling is 'no one'. This is more of a style choice, but if you're using no-one I'd just make sure that it remains consistent throughout 😊

Commented [MB12]: This phrase would only usually be hyphenated to act as a single unit when describing a noun directly. E.g (He gave a fed-up sigh and left the room)

However, you wouldn't use a hyphen when the phrase comes after a linking verb. E.g (The team got fed up and quit)

In this instance, a hyphen wouldn't be required for this phrase.

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Commented [MB13]: Adding a contraction here reduced the clunkiness of the sentence and makes the read a little smoother

Commented [MB14]: Editorial/feedback note:

As the next paragraph begins with 'Two days ago', it's already clear to the reader that she called Peter. Removing this repetition makes for a smoother read.

Otherwise, you can keep this here, and start the new paragraph with 'I ended up at her place', but I do believe this way around makes it clearer.

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 don't 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 those 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."

Commented [MB15]: Editorial/feedback note:

There was a typo putting a full stop where a typo should've been. I shortened the sentence to 'as long as we don't screw it up' as I think it makes for a smoother read - but the other way works as well, if a little clunky.

Completely optional to accept 😊

Commented [MB16]: Editorial/feedback note:

Just remember that if there's a new scene/POV that there's no indent 😊

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Commented [MB17]: No edit notes - I just really like the parallel opening between Fran & Peter's POV. Love it!

Commented [MB18]: If Fran is using this term as a named arrangement, then the capitalisation works. However, if not, or if it's just a quote, then lower-case would be more natural

“Why?” sSaid I. “I’ve struck lucky. It was my fault. I’ve got another chance. I mustn’t screw it up this time.”

Commented [MB19]: Editorial/feedback note:

One thing I would say about this section is that Fran’s voice could maybe use one or two more specific thoughts/images so she doesn’t feel like she’s only summarising the situation Peter already explained.

FURTHER INFORMATION

This series of books has its own Web Page:



<https://russellsthewriter.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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In the Beginning - Peter

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 ~~ex-former~~ girlfriend of mine from a couple of years back. I stupidly ended ~~our relationship things~~, 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 ~~againback~~ 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~~ Great Grandfathers were Italian ~~p~~Prisoners of ~~w~~War who met in a Welsh ~~p~~Prisoner-of-~~w~~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 ~~roll-call~~, inspection and food. They were usually then given time out, in the evening, to go down to the pub for a drink or two.

There were a few problems with them. They complained about the quality of the food they were being given and insisted

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Commented [MB20]: This line was feeling a little comment-heavy. By having that end question on its own, it reads a little better.

Also, having the dialogue have its own line helps with the clunkiness - Peter's explanation of Fran after can feel a bit heavy, so a new paragraph is perfect for this section.

Commented [MB21]: Editorial/feedback note:

'former girlfriend' reads quite formal compared to Peter's overall voice. I've made an edit to 'ex-girlfriend', but this is completely optional and not necessarily an error. It just initially seems like awkward phrasing which could use a little tweaking.

Commented [MB22]: Editorial/feedback note:

This change is totally optional. It works as is, but you later in this paragraph say 'I ended our relationship' which can seem a bit repetitive. Doing a light change to 'I stupidly ended things' gets rid of the repetition, but keeps it clear for readability.

Commented [MB23]: Editorial/feedback note:

I do like this line to show how Peter felt about the breakup. However, I do feel that the words 'bruised' and 'hurt' overlap slightly. It might be worth removing one, as they both do the same work.

However, if the bitter pile-up is purposeful for Peter's voice, keep it.

Commented [MB24]: This repetition of 'in my house and in my bed' really works for this line. It has a dry, pointed rhythm which I very much like!

Commented [MB25]: This line was a little comma-heavy but reads better broken up.

There were two uses of the word 'back' here, making it a little clunky. Replaced the first word with 'again' for readability.

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Commented [MB26]: This can also be 'roll call'

In The Beginning - Peter

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 ~~g~~Garlic and ~~c~~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 ~~home brew~~aleohol, presumably as payment. The Italians then built a church in one of their Niss~~can~~ ~~h~~Huts.

They asked the Camp CO that the hut be exempt ~~from~~~~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 Niss~~can~~ ~~h~~Hut into a church, not just a little village type church, but something like a miniature Vatican.

They used building material~~s~~ to build an altar and rebuild the inside of the Niss~~can~~ ~~h~~Hut. They cleaned and flattened the tins and painted them with religious images. Then they put everything together.

Commented [MB27]: This line is slightly clunky - rearranging the words here reads much smoother. Head-blowing should also be hyphenated

Commented [MB28]: Editorial/feedback note:

Using 'a few months' when describing the exemption then later saying that all would be revealed 'after a few weeks' reads slightly contradictory. You might want to rewrite this line to give some clarity.

In The Beginning - Peter

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 Ceredigion, 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 behaviour 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 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.

Commented [MB29]: Editorial/feedback note:

This line reads a little clunky - you could change it to:

"the first service was attended by both prisoners and local residents"

Or:

"the first service was a combined for prisoners and local residents."

This removes the 'service' repetition but keeps the voice and read smoother

Commented [MB30]: Editorial/feedback note:

The joke works here but the wording feels a little tangled and needs some spacing.

You could try:

"The issue of the attentions, 'unwanted' by the parents but not objected to by their daughters, was a little trickier."

Or:

"The issue of the attentions, 'unwanted' by the parents but apparently not objected to by their daughters, was a little trickier."

This keeps the cheeky tone but makes for smoother reading.

Commented [MB31]: Just watch for UK spelling consistencies throughout. You can use US or UK, but it should be consistent 😊

Commented [MB32]: 'Copper-brown hair' already tells the reader the colour of her hair without having to add the word 'coloured'. Unless it was intentional to show that her hair is dyed, I'd remove it.

Commented [MB33]: Editorial/feedback note:

I like his voice here because you can see that he's fixated on the image, however I'd be a little cautious with the repetition of 'Sophia Loren' here as it's noticeable.

In The Beginning - Peter

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, ~~E~~fine, thank you, ~~L~~how about you and how did you get on with Jeanette's wedding preparations?"

"It went well, ~~L~~ots 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." ~~S~~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.

Commented [MB34]: Editorial/feedback note:

I enjoyed this section overall and feel that the anecdote has charm and character.

The only point I would make is for you to consider whether every detail is needed at this exact point.

If the scene needs pace, this could be trimmed.

If the intention is to establish Peter's rambling, old-storytelling voice, it works.

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Commented [MB35]: This line was a little comma-heavy. Splitting the sentences up a little helps with smoother reading.

Commented [MB36]: This line was also a little comma-heavy. There was a small repetition of 'there' which made it feel a bit clunky - so removing one of them makes for smoother reading.

Commented [MB37]: As this is more of a remark of sarcasm, adding quotation marks around 'great shopping' adds to his voice showing the humorous bite here

In The Beginning - Peter

“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 *was* a squeaky little ‘*nNo*’. 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.”

Commented [MB38]: Repetition of ‘again’ here is noticeable. Removing one makes the line smoother and less clunky

In The Beginning - Peter

“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 ~~was~~ 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

Commented [MB39]: Editorial/feedback note:

Using ‘she/he said’ can become a little repetitive in long parts of dialogue like this. As you’ve added ‘Silence on the line except for some shaky breathing’, the reader already know this line was Fran’s without ‘she said’.

Alternatively - you can make this dialogue line a new line, as you’ve used this technique for other beats of silence previously in this chapter, keeping ‘she said’. You can mix it up also by using other dialogue words such as ‘she whispered, breathed, crooned, jibed, screamed, asked’ etc...

Commented [MB40]: Editorial/feedback note:

Changing this comma to a full-stop helps with showing Peter’s anger a bit better - it helps to show bite and dryness in the words much more than commas do in conversations like this.

In The Beginning - Peter

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 ~~that~~ 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."

Commented [MB41]: Editorial/feedback note:

I like the idea of repetition here as it shows his anger, however, I'd watch out for actually rewriting the points again. The reader already knows the story, so they don't need to read it being repeated more than once.

A trick for this would be to give a brief overview. i.e:

"I repeated it. I told her what she did to me - I had to make her understand."

You don't have to use this exactly, but it just provides an example of how you can shorten this section without removing the aspect of the argument itself.

Another way is just referencing it briefly in the dialogue like:

"You know exactly what you did at that party."

Commented [MB42]: Editorial/feedback note:

Again I like the bite here from Peter - you definitely have a good way of showing the emotion that he's feeling.

The only thing I would say is that the repetition here is very clunky and needs cutting down. Think about how you can reduce this line while keeping the bite.

I will say I like the line: "You also look like a frog that has had its head trodden on."
That has personality.

Maybe keep a one or two good lines, cut the rest.

In The Beginning - Peter

“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?”

Commented [MB44]: Editorial/feedback note:

Peter’s anger is believable, but the length and intensity of this attack throughout the chapter may push him from wounded into cruel. Check whether that is the intended reader response.

Commented [MB45]: Editorial./feedback note:

This piece is a little heavy.

The fireman, financial advisor, and German company manager details are colourful, but all together they slightly overwhelm the emotional centre of the scene.

The point is that Fran has chosen unreliable men and now wants Peter back.

You probably don’t need every example in this conversation. If you’re wanting to keep them, then maybe save some for later?

Commented [MB46]: Editorial/feedback note:

This is fine but it looks a little awkward on page - maybe consider rephrasing this slightly?

In The Beginning - Peter

“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~~ and those that get it have been crap at it. ~~Just~~ 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.”

Commented [MB47]: I don’t think italics are necessary for this line. Italics are good for internal thoughts or emphasis for specific words.

As this is just an action mid-dialogue, it shouldn’t be italicised.

However - side-note - italics can be used in a variety of ways based on the author voice. If you want to use italics in this way, it’s fine as long as it’s clear why its being used and it’s consistent across the entire manuscript.

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In The Beginning - Peter

“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 to. 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 it 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, okay? 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.”

Commented [MB48]: Editorial/feedback note:

The spelling ‘ok’ is fine, but you’ve used the spelling ‘okay’ several times throughout. Just ensure you’re being consistent with the spelling you use

In The Beginning - Peter

"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 over the next couple of days and get back to you," 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 dialled her back. "It's me."

"That was 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

Commented [MB49]: Editorial/feedback note:

I just rearranged some of the wording here - this line came off a little clunky but this lightly edited version reads much smoother.

Commented [MB50]: Editorial/feedback note:

As this chapter is slightly on the longer side and has a lot of information and dialogue, I think this line here actually serves as a great chapter end.

The current ending of chapter 1 is already a good cliffhanger - but this is also a good option. It means that chapter 2 has instant momentum.

However, if you do prefer the current ending, I'd recommend trimming the phone argument heavy after this point.

Commented [MB51]: Editorial/feedback note:

This whole chapter has very long dialogue with little to no internal thoughts or feelings described. I feel that this is a good point to show Peter's spiral. A few questions to help:

Why does Peter put the phone down?

What does he think about for an hour?

How is he feeling internally?

What does he do for an hour? (i.e watching TV? Going for a walk? Etc.)

What, ultimately, makes him decide to dial Fran back?

This helps the reader to understand what happens for Peter, rather than him immediately deciding to give it another go, right after the barrage of anger.

In The Beginning - Peter

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.²²

"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."

Commented [MB52]: Editorial/feedback note:

Capitalisation is fine for emphasis, however it should be used sparingly.

When reading, capitalisation often comes across as sudden yelling or screaming, which I don't think is happening in this scene.

Maybe consider using italics to emphasise words and show a change of pitch, without the reader thinking Peter is suddenly screaming at Fran. i.e

"I'm not expecting to stay over. In fact, I *won't* be staying over."

"There must be a serious discussion between us - an adult discussion around adult subjects. *Yes or no?*"

In The Beginning - Peter

Commented [MB53]: Chapter feedback:

Overall, I liked the conflict in the chapter. There are definitely some areas that need work, but the points of this chapter are clear:

Fran wants to reconnect.
Peter does not trust her.
He still feels humiliated by the party.
Fran admits she treated him badly.
Fran admits she wants another chance.
Peter agrees to talk, but not easily.

Personally, I'd be looking at completely cutting, or trimming, these parts:

The full repeated party retelling.
The extended smirk critique.
The full list of failed relationships.
The broad "women are supposed to suss out men" generalisation.
The repeated explanation of "starting again" versus "picking up where we left off".

These points don't appear to add much other than show a level of history to Fran and Peter.

Another point I would make is that if you were to do a rewrite, perhaps think about adding some more actions into the dialogue. Peter's on the phone, so you can't describe exactly what Fran's doing, but it's not clear at all what Peter's doing or even where he is.

Even small details could help ground the scene. If he's at home, you might describe a fire truck roaring past outside, him pacing the room, or putting Fran on loudspeaker while he moves around. These details would show his emotion physically, rather than relying only on dialogue and tone, and would help avoid the risk of it feeling like two characters talking in a blank white room.

You could also show Fran's emotion through sounds on the phone. When you're having a phone call with someone who is angry or upset, you might hear a sigh, a pause, shaky breathing, or dishes clashing together as they angrily load a dishwasher. Details like that make the conversation feel more grounded and real, while also showing emotion

... [7]

Editorial/feedback note:

Just a quick comment on the formatting - the gaps between the paragraphs are too large for usual formatting. The indents are great - but the paragraphs should be closer together for Amazon KDP Publishing 😊

Side-note that it's not a hard rule - but having large paragraph gaps *and* indents can make reading feel a bit choppy.

I enjoy this characters clipped voice - the only thing is that this line reads slightly off - "I showed I could live without" needs a clearer object.

This light edit keeps Peter's clipped, blunt voice, but reads smoother.

Editorial/feedback note:

I do love this explanation here of Francesca and Peter's position. It's full of wit and I especially like the reference to the painting.

One thing I did pick up on is the repetition of 'Devotion'. It's not an error, but it reads slightly clunky.

You may wish to make a light edit of this to:

'I'm sitting on the couch, looking up at her, like Jack Vettriano's painting, 'Devotion'. She's standing astride me, though unlike 'Devotion', her knickers have dropped onto the floor.'

This edit would keep the bite of the joke, but remove one repeated beat, making it a cleaner read.

Editorial/feedback note:

I'd recommend that you double-check whether these are intended coinages/comic terms, as they may not be standard terms.

This looks a little odd because the apostrophe is facing the wrong way/being used as a clipped word marker. If you want it there, you might want to change it to:

“philiās “

But it may look much smoother as:

“and a lot of other philiās.”

Editorial/feedback note:

This long paragraph is funny because it's so absurdly specific, but it's also quite a heavy list. The flow starts to blur because there are so many items stacked together.

I wouldn't cut it heavily, because the chaos is the point. But I'd suggest breaking or tightening the list slightly so the jokes can land individually.

For example, the Addams Family aside works. The Batman/Superman bit works. The duck/shark philiias work because they're so strange. But all of them in one sentence makes the reader slightly breathless and can be a little clunky.

You could try breaking it up a little for rhythm and easy reading - especially this early in the book it's imperative for hooking and getting readers to keep going!

Page 13: [7] Commented [MB53]

Maggie-Rose Barker

09/06/2026 16:10:00

Chapter feedback:

Overall, I liked the conflict in the chapter. There are definitely some areas that need work, but the points of this chapter are clear:

- Fran wants to reconnect.
- Peter does not trust her.
- He still feels humiliated by the party.
- Fran admits she treated him badly.
- Fran admits she wants another chance.
- Peter agrees to talk, but not easily.

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These points don't appear to add much other than show a level of history to Fran and Peter.

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You could also show Fran's emotion through sounds on the phone. When you're having a phone call with someone who is angry or upset, you might hear a sigh, a pause, shaky breathing, or dishes clashing together as they angrily load a dishwasher. Details like that make the conversation feel more grounded and real, while also showing emotion through action rather than only through what the characters say.

Page 17: [8] Commented [MB63]

Maggie-Rose Barker

10/06/2026 21:45:00

Editorial/feedback note:

One thing I would say about this section of dialogue is that I do like the levels ideology and I believe it's really in character for Peter as it feels like he's trying to intellectualise his anger.

However, it does feel a little lecture-like. I'd keep the concept only if it matters to the character/plot - but if it doesn't, I'd definitely consider at least trimming it.

Page 17: [9] Commented [MB62]

Maggie-Rose Barker

10/06/2026 21:20:00

Editorial/feedback note:

I wanted to give some feedback on this chapter so far. I do see the purpose of the chapter is that Peter goes to Fran's house and confronts her - however I don't feel the chapter, so far, is taking full advantage of that.

A lot of the dialogue here is already covered in the previous chapter.

I'd recommend some trimming to be done in these first two chapters. If you want to keep the phone call as long as it is, then definitely trim some of the dialogue here. If you want the face-to-face confrontation to be the main event, then I'd recommend heavy trimming of the phone call before. This just stops the repetition of the argument and points that are being made. While it does reflect a real life argument, readers may get bored reading this amount of dialogue.

A hard rule I abide by is to ensure that every single line of dialogue is adding to the plot. I also have a hard rule that the reader should be hooked from chapter 1. If the first chapter isn't polished, many readers won't finish the rest, even if the rest of the story is very good.

That being said, there's a lot to like here so far. With some trimming and polishing, it'll be a perfect read!

Page 17: [10] Commented [MB64]

Maggie-Rose Barker

10/06/2026 21:48:00

Editorial/feedback note:

This is a really strong point of the chapter. This is where Fran finally gives Peter new information and it raises the stakes, giving Peter a new reason to feel betrayed.

Some trimming prior to this point would be useful, or at least heavily trim the phone call in chapter 1 to prevent further repetition.

Page 17: [11] Commented [MB66]

Maggie-Rose Barker

10/06/2026 21:53:00

Editorial/feedback note:

Here would be a good opportunity for some internal thoughts and feelings for Peter.

'I snapped' and 'I softened' are two very different reactions. Perhaps try adding some sensory and emotion here - why does he soften?