

The Frosty Filly

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1. Gone Away

Dear Aunt Letitia,

I am going away to a friend. Please do not try to make me come back. I will be safe. I have enough money.

*Very truly your niece
Frances D'Affrey*

FRANCES propped the note in front of the mirror on her dressing table and stood looking at it with a deep frown on her brow. Then she took it up again and added at the bottom, *Thank you very much for all you have done for me.* As she returned it to the table, a clock far down below in the house chimed three times. Quickly, she switched off the light and made her way in the darkness to the open window.

The night was close and starless, a heavy smell of gasoline, mingled with melting asphalt drifted up to her nostrils, and for a moment she hesitated to leave the familiar room. Then, taking a deep breath, she put her legs over the sill and climbed out onto the tin roof of a lower storied section in the rear of the building. Resolutely she walked the length of the roof with the black bulk of the neighboring New York houses frowning down upon her and at one corner, let herself down with the aid of a rain spout to a low shed beneath. From this, she jumped to the ground, landing easily on the hard clay of the yard and fumbling her way in the darkness to the back of the shed, she lighted a flashlight. She covered the light with her hand so only a faint beam could be seen and moved it slowly along the foundations and when she came to the spot she was searching for, got down on her stomach and crawled part way under the house. Presently, she emerged with a large canvas bag in her arms. Taking it by the straps, she quietly opened the unlatched door of the shed and carried it inside, closing the door behind her.

With the aid of her flashlight she spread out the contents of the bag on the floor. She found a small hand mirror which she stuck up against the wall on a keg of nails and, putting her flashlight on a box so that the rays were directed at the glass, she proceeded with a pair of scissors to cut off her long, black hair.

It was a difficult job as the glass was small and she could only see a part of her head at a time, but finally her hair lay in a neat pile on a piece of paper, while she surveyed herself ruefully in the mirror. Her head had a rough, tousled, terrier-like appearance and her face looked very thin and white with large black eyes that stared back at her underneath fierce brows. She felt frightened for the first time since she had embarked upon this adventure. She no longer had even herself in this big unfriendly world. She was running away with a complete stranger.

“I will go to a barber as soon as I can,” she said aloud to reassure herself by her own voice.

But even her voice sounded unfamiliar, loud and harsh in the deathlike stillness of the shed and she looked fearfully over her shoulder almost expecting some other occupant.

“This won’t do at all,” she said, laughing nervously. “If I get frightened before I start I won’t get very far. Now for male attire.”

She took off her dress and got into a blue cotton shirt, spotted blue necktie and a worn pair of tweed trousers with coat to match. Her own brown loafers and white socks completed the costume. It was as well that the mirror was small, for she would have been more dismayed if she could have seen what a strange, forlorn little boy she made in her ill-fitting suit and with her wild, dark hair.

She repacked the knapsack with several cotton shirts, a wool checked shirt, dungarees, riding breeches and boots, sneakers, wool sweater, yellow tie with fox heads on it, some miscellaneous possessions and her toilet articles.

She gathered up her hair in the piece of paper, even sweeping the floor carefully with an old broom so as to leave no traces. This, together with her brown cotton dress, she wrapped in a package and stuffed into the top of the canvas bag.

“I must leave no clues,” she breathed.

She buckled the straps of the bag and picked up a shapeless reversible raincoat which would not go into it. Then she opened the shed door quietly and crept out into the dark night.

She left the yard by a gate at the back, falling awkwardly over a row of cans filled with trash and ashes awaiting collection. Hurrying down several dark alleyways, she finally emerged out onto a main street. Here, she paused a moment and peered around the corner of a house. The coast was clear so she scuttled out onto the pavement and commenced running down the street. But after a few strides, she brought herself abruptly to a walk.

“This is all wrong,” she thought in dismay. “I must give the appearance of a person out for a midnight stroll.”

But this is difficult with a heavy knapsack on your arm and a heart pounding like a drum because you have left your only home and aunt behind, all unsuspecting. So when a boy darted out of an alley beside her, she gave a faint ungentlemanly shriek and almost started to run again.

“Where are you going, young feller?” demanded the boy.

Frances, marching steadily forward, made no reply but her heart ceased being an ordinary drum and became a tom-tom, beating wildly in an African jungle, for she recognized the boy as Cagey Hatch, the bad boy in her class at school, who had told her where to pawn her gold wristwatch and other possessions to raise money for her flight. He was often out at night, she knew, but

what bad luck that she should meet him now. Would he know her in this disguise?

“What ya got in that old gunny sack?” said the boy, grabbing at it.

“You let me alone and mind your own affairs or I’ll call the police,” cried Frances, pushing him away desperately. Surprised at her ferocity, the boy fell back and she scurried off.

“That’s a funny way for a feller to talk,” shouted the boy after her. “Sorta high, ain’t it, old chappie?”

Oh dear, oh dear, she thought, as she bundled around a corner out of sight; that’s done it. He recognized my English accent. Do you suppose he’ll tell everyone?

In the subway a few minutes later on her way to the Pennsylvania Station, she recovered herself. She was relieved to find that no one seemed to notice her. The handful of people in the car were mostly laborers half-asleep.

Maybe, thought Frances, Cagey Hatch didn’t know me really and anyhow, he couldn’t be mean enough to tell Aunt Letitia. But I must try to get rid of this blasted English accent and talk lower, more like a boy. But how difficult it is not to make slips the way they do in detective stories. I always thought they did such stupid things, putting sleuths on their trails immediately. One thing though, I must think up a good name for myself; not Mary Smith or Jane Jones. Those are the sort of names the criminal uses in books and, of course, everyone knows in a moment they are fakes.



“I will call myself Frank,” said Frances as the Pennsylvania train glided out of the tunnel on its way south. She had a seat to herself in the day coach which had not filled up yet. It was hardly six o’clock but the July sun had long risen above the flat smoky plains of New Jersey.

She looked less wild now, as she had had plenty of time in the waiting room to tidy herself up, even clip her elfin locks more evenly and part them neatly on the side. The casual traveler saw only a rather shabby little boy, in a suit too large for him. A more discerning person might have noticed something out of the ordi-

nary in the thin delicate face, the aquiline nose, wide expressive mouth and large eyes that were not black by daylight, but an unusual shade of blue, almost violet.

Franky is what Daddy called me sometimes, thought the girl. If I call myself that, it will make him seem closer to me.

The sun met a dark patch of cloud and the world grew bleak but Frances did not notice. The remembrance of her father shed radiance and warmth about her. Her handsome, light-hearted, wonderful, half-French father who had been killed in the war. Her American mother she could not recall at all. She had died when she was a baby. Frances and her father had always been the greatest friends. What fun they had had all those years in Europe. The winters in England for the fox-hunting where they had sometimes stayed with friends, or the darling little house in Warwickshire, which they rented year after year so Frances could take lessons from the same governess. But she had learned more from her father who knew everything, and from their summers on the Continent. They had been to France, Germany, Italy, Spain and even Greece. The summer the war broke out they were in Scotland.

But she loved the fox-hunting in England best. Her father had often said jestingly that if anything happened to him, she could get a job as whip with almost any pack in England. When war came, he had just bought her a gray pony to school for her very own.

The war! It had taken everything. The gray pony, the house in Warwickshire—England, but most of all, Daddy. Her father had joined the army, of course, and she had stayed with friends of his in the country, and gone to school with their daughters. There had been those times in London with Daddy home on leave, looking younger and handsomer and merrier than ever, in uniform. Dinner at exciting restaurants. Walks in Kensington Garden, trips to Hampton and then—“Killed in Action”. No more Daddy.

She had been sent to America, of course. She had no relations in England and an aunt in New York had agreed to take her. With the terrible bombing and food shortages, she was a lucky girl to be able to go, but Frances had not felt the least bit fortunate since she came to live with her Aunt Letitia, her mother’s older sister.

Aunt Letitia was a stony-faced spinster who lived in a brown-stone house. She did not care for girls, but she knew her duty and that was to bring up her poor foolish sister’s child properly. It was

a hard job after the heathenish life the girl had led with her dissipated father, among all those rich, sport-loving English people, but Aunt Letitia did not shirk her duty. She saw that Frances was neatly and sensibly dressed, and attended a good public school. Frances' life with Aunt Letitia was dreary enough but school was almost worse. Although she could speak some Italian, French and German and had read Dickens, George Eliot, Jane Austen, Shakespeare and a score of others, she was very backward in mathematics, had a poor and childish handwriting, and entirely her own idea about spelling.

So Frances was put two grades below her age and, conspicuous in a class of younger and smaller children, she quickly became the butt of all the other pupils' humor. She made no friends and she made very little headway with her lessons. The hard-worked teacher with forty or so obstreperous pupils had no time to bother with the sullen little English girl with the large, resentful eyes. And so it went. The first winter over, spring came, then summer with Germany defeated and soon another weary winter. The war was over, but Frances would not go back to England. There was no one to go back to. She decided to run away!

She might not have done it, though, if it hadn't been for one incident. She had found a starved, mongrel puppy, half collie, half police dog, and brought him home. He was an ill-favored beast but, after a bath and a few square meals, he became very jolly and attached himself blindly to Frances, who felt that she had found a friend at last. She had kept him in the shed in the back yard, and had fed him the choicest scraps. She called him Warwick in memory of the pleasant past. Then, one day she came home from school and Warwick was not there! Aunt Letitia had sent him to the S.P.C.A.! Then Frances knew that she must run away. So she laid her plans very carefully.

Aunt Letitia kept all her money for her, giving her only the most meager of allowances. By dint of saving every penny of it, pawning her gold wristwatch and some jewelry of no real value that belonged to her mother (her aunt having kept all the expensive pieces), she had realized the large sum of forty-five dollars.

She decided to run off to Dinky. Dinky was an American friend of her father's. When the United States came into the war he had joined the Army and been sent to England. She had seen him sev-

eral times the last winter in London. Once her father had said laughingly: "If anything happens to me, Dinky will take care of you. He has the best pack of fox hounds in America." She wished she could remember what his real name was, but she knew that he lived in Virginia and anyone with the best pack of hounds in America ought not to be hard to find. Dear old Dinky, he was so nice and big. She could see him plainly with his round rosy face, and shiny glasses on top of his enormous form.

She made up her mind to disguise herself as a boy. It would be much easier to travel about and no one would be looking for a boy. She only had to buy a second-hand tweed suit and a few shirts. She had some shirts of her own that would do. She did not dare to take much of her wardrobe, as Aunt Letitia kept such a close check of everything in the house. She thought her riding breeches, oxfords, sneakers and a dark pullover sweater would not be missed. But even the few articles she had to purchase and the canvas bag made quite a hole in her capital. After buying her ticket to Washington, D. C., she had barely twenty-five dollars left.

But she was off! She had done it! She, Frances D'Affrey, was actually escaping in her disguise from her harsh relative. The train had left the plains and was rocking past farmlands and scrubby woods. They went through a tunnel and Frances saw her face mirrored in the window pane. That unfamiliar changeling face with the straying elfin locks. Fear again clutched her heart. Who was this person? Who was she? Hadn't she better get off and take the first train back to New York and Aunt Letitia before it was too late? Cold and heartless as she had been to her niece, there was the tie of blood between them. She was not a stranger like all the people in the coach around her.

"Franky," said Frances bravely through her fears, nodding to her image in the window, "Franky D'Affrey. No, not D'Affrey. I must change that. But not Smith or Jones or Brown. I might spell it backwards. How about F-R-E-Y-D-A, Freyda or Friday? That has rather a jolly sound. Yes, Franky Friday it shall be."

"Sammiches, sammiches, ice cold milk and sammiches," cried the vendor.

Franky bought a minced ham sandwich and a carton of milk. When he came back, she bought a cheese sandwich. Even then she was still hungry.