

EPISODE 14:

NARRATOR:

Before starting, I wanted to let y'all know that this episode may contain sensitive content. Please check the show notes for more information.

[OPENING THEME]

Francis Forever. Episode 14.

[RECORDER CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Diary of Francis Webb, Thursday, August 27th. I think.

Nothing has happened. I haven't left the house. Not that that really does anything—Chris could easily just break in—but at least it's comfortable here.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Thursday August 27th, 4 pm. I've been talking with Dahlia and Saturn. They're both worried about me. I don't know why Dahlia cares, but she says she does. Both of them are at work, but they text me to make sure I'm okay. I don't want to make them even more paranoid, but if Chris wanted to he could just make me give him my password. Then he could text them. It's pretty easy to replicate my typing style. Just use a bunch of smiley faces. I'm not sure if Chris is smart enough to do that, but it's a possibility.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Still Thursday, about 7 pm. I talked to my mom today. I said I wasn't feeling well. Asked her to stay home from work tomorrow. She—she looked scared. I guess when your kid only talks to you to tell you something's wrong, you start to respond badly. She smiled, but... she wasn't

happy. Obviously, she wasn't happy. I'm not a great child to have. She agreed, though, which means at least I won't be alone tomorrow. Stupid. I want comfort so badly I'm willing to put her in danger. I mean she can't help, can she? She's just another person for Chris to hurt. Still. It's nice to have her around.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Friday. August 28th. Morning. I don't even know what to say now. Am I going to spend the rest of my life hiding from Chris in this house? I've only been here for a few days, but I'm already starting to go stir crazy. I get bored so easily. I'm always bored. Always. I've tried to talk with my mom, with Saturn, Dahlia, even my dad, but nobody feels real. Saturn's the closest, but even they just... perform their tasks. Go to work. Check in on Francis. Be worried. Eat lunch. Go home. Do whatever else Saturn does when they aren't following their programming. I don't know. Nobody else has enough dimensions to even begin to feel real. So Saturn is my only reference.

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[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Friday. I forgot about Nigel and Nora. That sounds bad, doesn't it? I'm supposed to be concerned for their safety. But until a few minutes ago, they didn't even exist to me. It's weird, how when you don't remember someone, they just stop being. Like the space they filled up becomes empty. I wonder how many people I've forgotten existed? How many people have forgotten me? It's not something I like thinking about, but it's always there in the back of my mind. To some people, I don't exist.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

I forgot why I started recording last time. I remembered Nigel and Nora because Nigel texted me. It was so cryptic, it just said “You have a message.” Then about an hour later Nora texted me with some more explanation. Apparently Chris broke into their house. They were at home, heard a crash, and ran. They’ve been at their bookstore since around 3, just hoping Chris doesn’t show up. I said he probably won’t any time soon, since I think he’s looking for Nora’s notes. Well, he could always try to mind control Nora into telling him where they are, but if she doesn’t know then he’d have gone through a *lot* of extra trouble for nothing. And I doubt she does know. She seemed... very chaotic. Anyway, Nigel and Nora were at their bookstore this morning, and slept there. When they woke up, there was a message on the desk. The counter? Register? I don’t actually know what it is. But there was a note for me. Nora wasn’t too good at explaining it, and when I tried to get more info out of her all she said was “just come over.” I... don’t trust this. I’m not going alone. I’m so curious, but—but with what Chris can do, I can’t risk it. Not alone. I’m—I’m gonna call Saturn. And Dahlia. But they both have work—crap. Maybe tonight I’ll ask. If they say no... I can’t wait any longer. I’ll go regardless.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Good news! I don’t have to go alone! Both Saturn and Dahlia agreed that since they can’t stop me, the best option is to just go along with me. Harm reduction! Well, if Chris is trapping us it’s actually just more people he can harm, but Chris doesn’t seem like the type of person who would lay a trap. Then again, he didn’t seem like the type of person that can rot someone’s arm. I’d say better safe than sorry, but I’ve never believed that. Better bring two friends and have a better chance at living than die alone. Yeah, that’s a great saying. Very... me.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Dahlia and Saturn are done with work! They're coming over in a few minutes, and—oh, right. Friday, August 28th, about 6 pm. Saturn and Dahlia are coming over soon, and then we can go to First Story Books. I love that name. It's so dumb. Anyway, once we get there, I can strangle Nigel—and Nora—for being so goddamn vague. If there's a message for me, can't they just take a picture or something? Or—I don't know, explain *literally anything*? Whatever. At least they're still replying, even if they aren't giving me any important information.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Dahlia and Saturn are here. Well, Dahlia is here. Saturn is... late again, which means I have to wait for them. Which means there's no point in recording until they arrive. Hm. From now on I'm only recording important stuff, the things I can't forget. Well then again, what if something doesn't seem important now, but comes up later? Stuff like this—what I'm recording now—probably ISN'T important, but what is a diary if not a place to ramble? Well, I guess this isn't really a diary anymore. It's a plan. No, uh, a journey. Yeah. It's a record of my journey. And my journey can't resume until Saturn actually *gets here*.

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

FRANCIS:

Saturn is here!

[RECORDING CLICKS OFF]

[RECORDING CLICKS ON]

[BACKGROUND NOISE OF CAR DRIVING]

FRANCIS:

Okay, we're in the car now. Apparently Dahlia hasn't listened to my recordings, because
someone forgot to send them to her.

DAHLIA:

You know you could have just sent them to me yourself, right?

[PAUSE]

FRANCIS:

Ok, yeah, well, I didn't think of that. It's fine. She understood most things through my texts, and
Saturn and I filled her in. I think. You get what's going on, right?

DAHLIA:

Not exactly, the explanation *was* a bit confusing.

SATURN:

Yeah, uh—sorry about that.

DAHLIA:

It's fine, I get the basics.

FRANCIS:

Good. We're almost to the bookstore, which means—oh, wait, Dahlia, do you have a weapon?

DAHLIA:

I have pepper spray, is that good enough?

[PAUSE]

FRANCIS:

Sure. Saturn, I brought you your knife.

SATURN:

Thanks, I'm not exactly allowed to keep assault knives in the house.

FRANCIS:

That's stupid.

DAHLIA:

What??

FRANCIS:

Yeah, I got a machete right before we met Chris for the first time. Haven't got to use it yet.

DAHLIA: Yet—**[LOUDLY]** Turn here—

[SCREECH AS THE CAR TURNS SHARPLY]

FRANCIS:

Sorry about that, I have a bad sense of direction.

DAHLIA:

Yeah, well, I have the directions. I'm assuming it's that building right there?

FRANCIS:

Yeah, there's the parking lot.

[THE CAR STOPS, PAUSE]

FRANCIS:

Well. Let's go, I guess.

**[THE CAR DOORS OPEN AND CLOSE 3 TIMES, AND THERE ARE FOOTSTEPS ON
CONCRETE AS SATURN, FRANCIS, AND DAHLIA WALK TO THE BOOKSTORE. THERE IS
AMBIENT STREET NOISE.]**

FRANCIS, QUIETLY:

Pleasedontbeatrappleasedon'tbeatrappleasedon't—

[DAHLIA KNOCKS ON THE DOOR THRICE]

FRANCIS, QUIETLY:

What do you have to be so *loud* for?

DAHLIA:

I'm just really hoping it's not Chris. If it isn't—I don't think it is—I'm letting them know we're here.

[THE DOOR OPENS, AND THE SHOP BELLS ATTACHED RING AS IT OPENS]

NIGEL:

Oh! Oh, thank god, it's you. Come on in.

[FOOTSTEPS, THE DOOR CLOSES AND THE BELL STOPS RINGING. THE AMBIENT STREET NOISE BECOMES VERY QUIET AND MUFFLED.]

NIGEL:

So how are you? Francis, are you alright?

FRANCIS:

Where's my message?

[PAUSE]

NIGEL:

It's in the back.

[FOOTSTEPS APPROACH]

NORA:

Hello Francis. Who are your... companions?

FRANCIS:

Hey Nora. This is Saturn. That's Dahlia.

NORA:

Oh, nice to meet you.

DAHLIA:

Nice to meet you, too.

SATURN:

Hi.

FRANCIS:

Yeah, okay, now that everyone knows each other, where's my message?

NORA:

It's—it's here.

[PAPER RUSTLES AND IS SLID TOWARDS FRANCIS]

NIGEL:

We didn't read it because—well, just have a seat. Read it yourself.

[PAPER RUSTLES AS FRANCIS PICKS IT UP]

FRANCIS, READING ALOUD:

For Francis's eyes only. Chris is coming. Grab headphones, and read quickly.

[PAUSE]

DAHLIA:

WHAT?

FRANCIS:

Who did you get this from?

NIGEL:

I don't know. It appeared this morning. I haven't read past those sticky notes.

FRANCIS:

Well, yeah, but—*why?*

NIGEL:

It says "For Francis's Eyes Only."

[PAUSE]

FRANCIS:

And you listened?

NIGEL:

Yeah. If you felt the power in it, you would too.

[PAUSE]

FRANCIS:

It doesn't feel like power. It feels like home.

SATURN:

So—so are we just going to ignore the part about Chris coming?

FRANCIS:

It says wear headphones. I guess if you can't hear his commands, they can't affect you.

NORA:

I have some headphones if anyone needs them, but they're not noise-canceling, they just play music.

NIGEL:

That should be fine, as long as you can't hear what he's saying.

NORA:

I'll go get them. The rest of you, if you have anything to cover your ears, use it.

[FOOTSTEPS FADE]

FRANCIS:

Since this says "read quickly," I'm gonna, y'know, actually do that.

[FRANCIS CLEARS THEIR THROAT]

FRANCIS, READING:

Dearest Francis,

I'm happy to reach you at last. Of the people who have read my books, you're by far one of the most interesting. It's not every day someone happens upon a Great Story, much less one actively sought out. There are many of my storybooks in existence, but far fewer in this world. Many of the ones who read my works don't understand their true power, for a great deal of them operate in subtle ways. You and your associates have managed to not only realize the books' properties, but read them yourselves. That's unique. Those who read the books so rarely share them with others.

There is, however, something I'm unhappy with. Your ex-companion, Christopher Anderson, is a broken cog in my otherwise well-oiled machine. Him, and those like him, disrupt the power flow of energy to and from the stories. I place a book into your world, you read it, I give you an ability, and in return I take something from you. That is how it should be, and how the world is meant to

be run. Christopher disrupts that. He never finished reading his story, and because of that I could not fully grant him his power. He's left with a shifting, unfinished ability, and I am forced to play tug-of-war with his mind. Someone who does not finish their story is a paradox, a contradiction in a world where I try so hard to make things run smoothly. They upset me. If you start a book and are then unable to finish it, then providing the book still exists, you should wither away and, in time, die. When a story is destroyed, it leaves a loose end: whoever was reading it. Chris is a loose end, and because I do not like directly interacting with your world, I am asking you to tie it up.

Best wishes,

T.L.

[PAUSE]

[FOOTSTEPS APPROACH]

NORA:

I'm back. I actually found earplugs in my toiletry bag, so if you want those....

[PAUSE]

NORA:

What happened?

DAHLIA:

Francis read the letter.

NORA:

Oh. And what was in it?

[SATURN, NIGEL, AND DAHLIA BEGIN TALKING AT ONCE]

SATURN:

They were, like, addressed? By someone?

NIGEL:

I think they wanted Francis to kill Chris?—

DAHLIA:

Apparently I almost *died!*—

SATURN:

Yeah, Dahlia almost died?—

DAHLIA:

Might've gone into a *coma*—

NIGE:

Don't know who "T.L." is—

SATURN:

Somehow we're unique or—or special—

DAHLIA:

Murder—

SATURN:

You guys are ignoring the part where they *take something* from whoever reads the books—

NIGEL:

Chris is a loose end—

FRANCIS:

Shut up. Please.

[SHOUTING STOPS]

FRANCIS:

Just... shut up. Put some earplugs in. If whoever wrote this note says Chris is coming, then I
believe them.

DAHLIA:

If he yells loud enough, then no earplug can stop him.

[FOOTSTEPS AND FABRIC RUSTLING AS THEY EACH GRAB EARPLUGS]

FRANCIS:

We can use a speaker, too, try and drown out what he says. Without his spooky - his voice, he's a scrawny asshole with nothing going for him. Well. I guess so am I, but there are five of us. Oh, also, I have a machete. Saturn, can you pass me my machete?

NORA:

You and your—never mind. Self defense. It's alright.

[SLIGHT SCRAPING NOISE AS FRANCIS UNSHEATHES THE MACHETE]

SATURN:

Are we—are we gonna talk about what was in the, uh, in the letter? Because... some of that was. I mean, some of the stuff in that letter was...

FRANCIS:

Yeah. It sure was. I, uh, don't think we have much time to process it, though. Nigel, Nora, do either of you have a speaker?

NIGEL:

Yeah, it's pretty small though.

FRANCIS:

That's ok, as long as it can play music really loudly. Hand me the speaker, I can connect it to my phone.

[NIGEL GIVES FRANCIS THE SPEAKER, FRANCIS PLUGS IN THE CORD]

FRANCIS:

Um, Saturn, you're not willing to actually stab a man to death, I'm assuming?

SATURN:

I mean, it—

[GLASS BREAKS OUTSIDE OF THE ROOM. IT IS VERY MUFFLED]

FRANCIS:

Oh, shit, everyone put your earplugs in, I still haven't—

CHRIS, MUFFLED AND FAR AWAY:

Hello, anyone here?

FRANCIS:

Shit shit shit I'm not ready, nobody make a sound.

DAHLIA, WHISPERING:

You're making a sound.

CHRIS, SLIGHTLY LOUDER BUT STILL MUFFLED:

Hey! Hey, I'm pretty sure you're in there. Don't know where else you'd be!

[CRASHING NOISE AS BOOKSHELF IS TURNED OVER]

NIGEL, INDIGNANTLY:

My books!

CHRIS:

Hello?

[CHRIS KNOCKS ON THE DOOR]

FRANCIS:

Shit.

[RECORDER CLICKS OFF]

[ENDING THEME]

NARRATOR:

Francis Forever is a podcast created and written by Leo Zahn. This episode featured Leo Zahn as Francis Webb, Zephyrus Johnson as Dahlia Jennings, Bee Watchorn as Saturn, Juno Miller as Nigel Reed, Val West as Nora Reed, and Leonard James as Christopher Anderson. If you want to support Francis Forever, consider subscribing, telling a friend, or following it on twitter

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