

Francis Vs. The Future

When the world comes to St. Louis in 1904, a young man has to decide between exploring the future or living in the past. While he buries himself in his work, a loved one tries to remind him why the future is so important.

Francis Allen was surrounded by the future, and he hated it. In St. Louis, the world was eagerly devouring the spectacle that was the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, or as it would be known decades later, the 1904 World's Fair. The president was celebrating the anniversary of the land acquisition by throwing a tremendous party, and Francis Allen wanted no part of it.

He was just beginning his second year of law school at Washington University and in his opinion, the ballyhoo in the city was unnecessary and simply made it harder for him to get around. He had no interest in celebrating, no matter how amazing the exhibits on display.

He walked to the Washington University library, avoiding any contact with the revelers on the campus grounds. The building was deserted but the endless shelves of academic missives reassured Francis that some people still cared about preserving the past.

"Why aren't you at the Expo?" the librarian asked. "They just added twenty new attractions this morning." She gathered her things and put on her hat.

"No," he said, immediately realizing his abruptness. "I- I have much work to do, Ms. Reilly, and would like to stay if that's alright."

She smiled. "Oh, Francis. You work too hard. But I understand. Just please lock the door when you're finished."

"I will. Thank you."

Ms. Reilly left and Francis began scouring several law journals. Hours passed before another voice sang through the halls.

"Frankie? Are you in here, Frankie?"

Francis sighed. Any other time, he'd be thrilled to hear Veronica's angelic voice, but he knew what she wanted. She had been swooning over the Exposition for months and begging

Francis to take her through the exhibits. Of course, he had denied each request, and he was prepared to deny another.

“Frankie, are you still studying?”

“Yes, my dear.” Frankie said, not raising his head from the books. “I am indeed.”

“Won’t you come with me to the Expo?” Veronica asked. “I hear it’s absolutely fantastic! ‘A Celebration of the Future’ is what they’re calling it.”

“Mm, hmm.”

“Where’s the librarian?” Veronica asked.

“Celebrating the future, I imagine.”

“So cynical. I wonder why I’m marrying you.”

“Must be for my money,” Francis said.

Veronica stifled a giggle, prompting Francis to close the journal he was reading and glare at her. That made her laugh even more. Francis began to smile and soon they were both laughing so loud that had anyone else been in the library, they would have been sternly shushed.

“Well, poor man, why are you studying now anyway?” she asked. “The school year has just started.”

“Veronica, I started this research last year and it will likely take another year before I can feel like I’m making even a bit of progress.”

“My, that sounds terrible. I wonder if those people at the Expo worked as hard as you. Did you know there’s a man making a mint by selling ice cream you can enjoy without a spoon? It’s on a cone shaped container that you EAT!”

“Sugar is bad for you,” Francis replied.

“What about the inventions?” she insisted. “There are inventors presenting work that will change the world.”

“Change the world? I sincerely doubt that.”

“My friend told me about a metal box that can carry your voice via electricity. They call it a ‘microphone’ and they’re letting people try it. My friend talked to her mother in another room using it. Amazing.”

“Why was her mother in another room?” Francis asked. Veronica stared at him for a moment then stood up and walked toward the window.

“It’s all just outside these walls. And you want to stay here with these dusty books.”

“These ‘dusty books’ are full of facts. Facts based on events that actually happened.”

Francis pointed at the commotion outside. “All of that is fantasy. Those things may never happen and if they do, it probably won’t be before we’re dead and buried together in Bellefontaine.”

“Maybe,” Veronica mumbled.

“What?” Francis said.

“It’s just...”

“What, my darling?”

“‘All of that’ isn’t fantasy,’ Veronica said. “It’s the future. Sure, it may not all come to be, but how exciting to explore. That’s what marriage is too. It’s you and I moving together without knowing exactly what will happen.”

“Yes, and I am ready to spend my life with you,” Francis said. “Do you doubt that?”

Veronica sat down across the table from Francis. She flipped open one of the law journals.

“These books. These books that you can’t pull yourself from are all about the past. The past is just for you. The future is for us. Which matters more?”

At that moment, Ms. Reilly returned through the front doors.

“Oh! I’m sorry, Francis. I didn’t think you’d still be here. Hoo! You’re missing quite the party out there.”

Veronica started to cry, turning her face from the librarian.

“Veronica, what’s wrong?” Francis whispered. “I promise. We’ll go to the Expo.”

“Oh, Frankie,” she sighed. “I wish that was all I needed.”

“I’m just here to pick up the mail,” the librarian said. “Don’t pay me any mind.”

“What can I do?” Francis insisted.

“I’m pregnant!”

The librarian was frozen in place as Francis stared at his sobbing fiancée. She grabbed the mail, quickly turned around and left.

“Veronica,” Francis said. “That’s wonderful. You have made me the happiest man in St. Louis.”

“But...the future.”

“Listen, these books are helping me become the best lawyer possible so I can support my family. Just because I’m not jumping up to see a giant ferris wheel doesn’t mean I’m not excited about the future. Our future.”

Francis ran his hand through his hair. He looked out the window.

“Come on,” he said.

He grabbed Veronica's hand and they ran out of the library, right into the thick of the Expo. Francis bought Veronica her first ice cream cone and they tried out a microphone before riding the giant ferris wheel as the sun set.