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Hartley Lin

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After insomniac law clerk Frances Scarland is recruited by her firm's most notorious senior partner, she seems poised for serious advancement — whether she wants it or not. But when her impulsive best friend Vickie decides to move to the opposite coast for an acting role, Frances' confusing existence starts to implode...

Hartley Lin has created comics under the pen name Ethan Rilly (an anagram of his real name) for roughly 10 years, winning several awards along the way. With his first major collection, *Young Frances*, he officially retires the alias.

His acclaimed series *Pope Hats* has received a Doug Wright Award, Ignatz Award and Joe Shuster Award, as well as nominations for the Eisner Award. (From Adhouse Books)

Young Frances Details

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From Reader Review Young Frances for online ebook

Ethan says

Sometimes you finish a book and it was so Great and so Fun and so Perfect and WHY isn't it more famous and popular EVERYONE needs to read this RIGHT NOW!

But sometimes you finish a book and it's just as Great and just as Fun and just as Perfect, but you don't want to recommend it to people. Because you found it by chance at just the right time, because it feels like it might not even be real, like the cosmos opened up and dropped this book into your lap that was specifically written for you. And you keep these books to yourself and you cherish them and you re-read them even though you really ought to get through that growing-to-read pile. You can't bear the thought of someone else reading it and hating it, so you keep it to yourself. And you say to your partner, as you turn the page late at night, this is really good!, and they ask, "should I read it?" and you frown and say no, I don't think you'd like it.

I loved this, I loved this, I loved this.

Sara says

I would never want to work in a law firm in ANY capacity but if hell ever freezes over and I find myself doing just that I'd want to be just like Frances, the immensely capable if somewhat lost law clerk and a multibillion dollar law firm where your coworkers see more of you than your family does and today's bonus can turn into tomorrow's severance package in a heartbeat.

Frances is a workaholic who happens to be very good at what she does but she just doesn't know if what she does so well is what she should be doing. When not trying to grab a couple of hours of sleep between merger meetings and strategy sessions and hand delivering fruit salad to her bosses apartment she takes care of her best friend and roommate Vickie, an actress who's devil may care attitude and chronic partying are ironically the most stable part of Frances' life.

When Vickie gets an amazing opportunity across the country Frances finds herself all alone and aimless even while her bosses plan out her career track for the rest of her life. Is she trapped in a life that can never give her the happiness or is this what happiness is?

It sounds insulting to say this is deep for a graphic novel but I don't mean to be insulting. This is one of those perfect blends of art and story where you have to have both to really feel like you're a part of what's happening. If it's possible to draw a person who is both frantic and somehow simultaneously letting life pass them by Hartley Lin manages it. Frances is like the living embodiment of "hurry up and slow down!" Though Lin's drawings are very simple with emotions expressed through the tiniest laugh lines and forehead wrinkles and his settings are almost entirely the colorless landscape of a NYC cube farm he still manages to convey so much passion and life in this world.

This is a book about a woman trying to figure herself out so it might not be the most exciting story in the world but it's an incredibly relatable one. We've all been here, wondering if the thing we're good at is the thing we're meant to do or if there's greener grass somewhere else. Thinking our friends have it all figured out and we're the only one who doesn't know what the hell is going on. Realizing that the person we thought

we were taking care of was taking care of us too.

I really, really hope I see more of Frances.

Derek Royal says

This work collects issues #2, #3, and #5 of Pope Hats, a series that I've been reading for some time. I hadn't yet read issue #5, which came out last fall, so I'm glad that this text came out so close on the heels of that last issue. The story of Frances and Vicki reads even better together in one volume, giving the book a novelistic feel. You could call this a realistic or slice-of-life comic, but a better way of describing it -- as we have been doing on The Comics Alternative -- is as *verite dessinée*, or drawn truth. (And thanks to my buddy Gene Kannenberg, Jr for coining that term.) In this sense, Lin's comics remind me of what Jaime Hernandez does with his Maggie and Hopey stories, or of the kind of comics storytelling you'll find with Adrian Tomine, Alex Robinson, and Pat Palermo. But by listing these creators as stylistic examples I don't want to suggest that Lin's Frances and Vicki stories are derivative in any way. It's unique storytelling at its best, and another one of my favorites so far for 2018.

Emmkay says

A sweet, understated graphic novel. It's set in Toronto! At a Bay St law firm! Focuses on a young law clerk who's very good at her job but unsure what she really wants to be doing. Some of the details were spot-on and some a wee bit off, but this was a lovely slice of life.

David Schaafsma says

Young Frances collects issues 1-5 of Lin's much-awarded series Pope Hats, which I hadn't read, and it is a revelation, a world I found rather unique: The story of Frances, a law clerk in a big city law firm, and one of the very few nice people there. Maybe the only one not obsessed with billable hours and terrified of the axe falling or mergers and Huge Overhyped multi-million dollar Legal Events. It occurred to me as I read it that I know very little about this world, which—based on my inexperience—feels in Lin's hands authentic, with (what feels to me to be) spot-on dialogue, informed by what I know is careful research.

I was careful to look for ways in which the people working in the firm are disrespected. This is an expected trap in a lawyer project, it seems to me (at least ones written by non-lawyers). You expect the narrative equivalent of lawyer jokes, with an undercurrent of lawyer loathing. But I think Lin passes my test and creates human beings. Even the boss, Marcel Castonguay who, though he is depicted as a Daddy Warbucks pupil-less (by which I mean his eyes are just circles, vs. all the other characters's eyes!) automaton, he likes Frances, appreciates her. In every scene he seems to grow larger, twice and large as anyone else, so this seems like a satirical dismissal, but he still seems human to me.

The Comics Alternative calls slice-of-life comics *verite dessinée*, or drawn truth, which I love, and this fits, most of the way, but there're also some bizarre or surreal touches in Young Frances to keep you off guard, such as Castonguay accidentally dropping trou in an important meeting. Otherwise things are played pretty straight-up and humane, as Frances keeps connected to her rising actress friend Vicki, who lands a role in a

tv series playing an attorney. Frances also has a patient male friend who supports her and “likes” her though if you know law clerks, she rarely sees him.

Surprises happen in this tale, but the greatest surprise for me in this comics work is Lin’s accomplishment in making this strange, forbidding world come alive. I know an unhappy law clerk English teacher who I am trying to persuade to teach English. I told her about this book. It’s a pretty amazing accomplishment, reminiscent of Seth’s humane work with people working alienating jobs, but also Nick Drnaso’s *Sabrina*, which takes a hard look at the corporate world from another angle. The heart of this work is Frances’s goal to “find herself, “ to find a place for her heart in this brutal legal environment. She even goes to Vicki’s spiritual advisor, without much help, but she is trying to find her way, to attain a kind of space for nature, running, friendship, and love, in spite of an overwhelming job.

4.5, I’ll say, though if it stays with me as I expect it will, I might bump it up to 5 stars. I highly recommend it.

Hannah Garden says

Oh wow so this is stunning! The characters zum right alive from the moment you meet them, and it’s such a tidily tenderly crafted world.

I don’t really like Peter? Is my only mildly sour note. But otherwise this is just such an absorbing read, really lovely.

Laura says

I really liked this. The only major improvement could've been gayness. Art is good, story is engrossing. High recommend!

Ryan Ebling says

This is a really sweet story. I thought I knew the type of book it would be, having read and seen many stories of young, wandering millennials, but this book takes the best parts of those stories and is brave enough to find direction and resolution that doesn’t minimize or negate any conflict that came before. The characters of Frances and Vicky are lovely, and I found myself increasingly drawn to them as their friendship is fleshed out.

Davina says

I felt like this book got a little tedious at times with the quantity of legal jargon but otherwise the character of Frances drew me in and I found myself rooting for her to find happiness and fulfillment. Also, I thought it was interesting to ruminate on the difference between being good at something and deriving satisfaction

from something.

Liz Mc2 says

Frances is a clerk at a high-powered law firm, a hard-charging and competitive setting—in one of the first scenes here, she arrives at a meeting to find that the other attendees, besides her boss, have been fired. No wonder she has insomnia. She thinks of herself as a mess (“I have to get it together”) but a reader slowly realizes that she’s highly competent and moving up. Is this the life she wants, though? Doesn’t everyone else have it together? Why does she lack the “grace to dive into life” that she sees in the people around her? Lin captures really well that early-adulthood sense of waiting to feel like a grown-up, that life has not really started, and then realizing that this is maybe all there is, no magic moment will come along when everything is suddenly working and she feels in control.

I loved Frances’ relationship with her actress friend Vickie. The way they support, advise, and sometimes get mad at each other seemed very real. The office politics are also fascinating and well done.

I’m not knowledgeable enough to comment on the art, but some things I liked about it: the story is set in a recognizable Toronto, with some lovely street-scape details. The style is generally realistic, but the law firm bigwigs are drawn as caricatures—Mr. Castonguay has a bulky body, huge hands, and a tiny head, suggesting both the eccentricity he can get away with at the top (or maybe the way his rise has distorted him?) and his outsize power over others’ lives. There are interesting rhythms to this episodic story, with repeated motifs like the image of someone lying in the dark, staring at the ceiling.

Maggie Gordon says

Young Frances is a story about growing up and figuring out that adulthood isn't really quite the array of adventure and amazement one might expect, even when we achieve our dreams. But despite that opening line, this isn't a depressing work. It's about a law clerk and an actress who are best friends, but having to change a lot of things in their lives as they grow older. It's a simple, subtle, and sometimes strange tale that really spoke to me, also in my 30s and trying to figure out adulthood from an adult perspective.

Ignacio says

Esta historia sobre la aceptación de lo que viene con una vida profesional exigente funciona en la medida que se comprenden las bases sobre las cuales se sostiene: tus aspiraciones laborales pueden verse satisfechas, no es necesario sacrificar en el altar del trabajo la faceta personal, tu vida puede ser como una dramedia televisiva... Con mis tragaderas habituales lo acepto aunque se me queda un poco en tierra de nadie. Sobre todo porque la parte del estrés profesional dentro de un bufete de abogados top, la mitad del tebeo, es cianuro para mi atención. Me interesa más la faceta humana, ese retrato tan comedido de un adicto al trabajo, pero con una contención que transmite unas gotas de frialdad. Se lleva bien porque Lin apunta maneras en el dibujo.

Rod Brown says

Frances is nice. Which is not usually an attribute that will get you far in a large cut-throat New York law firm, but, hey, this is a fairy tale of sorts so anything goes. Though she struggles with insomnia, anxiety and loneliness every evening, Frances is a plugger, facing each new day with energy, intelligence and optimism. Just as her mentor vaguely resembles Daddy Warbucks, Frances is an Annie whose pluck makes you want to root for her.

Kristin says

Frances is a background character in her own story which is both frustrating and painfully realistic.

Mark says

Not bad coming of age story about a young woman who is working as a paralegal with no real ambitions to move up the ladder in the firm she's working in but discovering she's highly valued by management, who is looking to boost her career. The drama comes from her best friend moving out to be an actress for a big TV show, leaving Frances with no one to talk to and wondering if she's fulfilled in life and what she really wants. Not a lot a stake, exactly, but good storytelling with very smart observations about human behavior.
