

# Fran's First Toy

Written in 2022, with apologies to @kmanicart and @ttothekay

Cinn stacked another handful of reference books into the cardboard box on Fran's bed and folded the lid closed. Crouching down, she braced herself and lifted from her knees, supporting the heavy box underneath as she moved it to join the others at the bedroom door.

"Okay, what's next?" she called, wiping her forehead with the back of her arm. "Surely she can't fit any more books in the new place..."

Bunn, squatting at the base of one of the bookshelves at the back of Fran's childhood bedroom, twisted sideways to consult the list that the rabbit had given her.

"So we've got all her university coursework..." she said as she ran a finger down the piece of paper. "This last lot is just going to be her project journals, and she says they're all in here..."

She opened a sliding door at the bottom of the bookcase and began pulling the binders and thick notebooks out of the cupboard one by one, stacking them beside her. Cinn took the first handful and carried it over to the bed to start yet another box, then turned back as she heard her sister gasp.

Bunn stared into the space behind the books, then reached both hands into the depths of the cupboard. "Oh, I think I've found something pretty special...!" she sang.

"What is it?" Cinn enthused, racing over to look over her sister's shoulder as she nudged a couple of other things aside to reach the hidden treasure. After feeling around, Bunn tugged sharply, then withdrew a translucent plastic box about a foot square.

"Oh my god, is that what I think it is?!" Cinn asked as Bunn held it up to look at the vague outline of a long cylindrical shape through the plastic.

"It definitely is..." she grinned. Bunn tugged the lid of the box open, and Cinn grinned down at the toy inside - a shaft about eight inches long with a wide base and a set of small suction cups underneath for attaching it to a surface. On the rim of the base was a bump that disguised the power switch hidden underneath, keeping the device waterproof and safe for its users.

"Do you remember how hard it was to get hold of one of these when they first came out?" Bunn asked.

"Heh, yeah - they were super popular..." Cinn smiled. "But it doesn't surprise me at all that a studious little rabbit like Fran would have got her hands on one!"

She reached down and picked it up, running one finger along it and feeling its ins and outs. "You could change these out, couldn't you?" she remembered as she pointed at the variously textured rings that were wrapped around its length.

"Yep, that was the whole idea - customization!" Bunn nodded. She rattled the box, which still had a few loose alternatives in it. "It looks like she was really into it..."

"Yeah, it was definitely well-loved," Cinn agreed. She rubbed her thumb on the rounded surface near the top, where some of the colouring had worn away on one side. "You think it still works?"

"Let's find out!" Bunn smiled, grabbing the device with an upward swing of her hand. "It needs a wash first..." she observed, heading out the door and then into the adjacent bathroom as Cinn followed. Turning the tap on, she rotated the toy slowly under the water, squeezing a little soap on as well to remove the sticky residue on the surface of the old plastic along with the dust that had become attached to it.

Turning the water off and shaking the device out, she pulled the hand towel off the ring next to the sink. Starting from its top, she worked her way down to dry it off with a twisting motion, Cinn only just managing to hold her childish giggle back at the sight.

"Come on - focus!" Bunn chided her, playfully whapping her with the towel on its way back to the ring. Her sister grinned, then turned and raced to the landing.

"Mrs. Cervice!" Cinn called as the two of them bounded down the stairs like excited children. "You won't believe what we found in Fran's room!"

Fran's mother Fern was sitting with a mug of tea and a crossword puzzle at the breakfast table in the kitchen. Her ears twitched and she looked up at the beaver twins as they rushed through the archway, still wearing wide smiles. Bunn pulled her hand out from behind her back to reveal the device in her grasp.

Fern gasped, first in surprise then the corners of her mouth turned up in a smile. "That's amazing! I can't believe you found it!" Fern smiled. "I thought she'd lost it ages ago - that thing used to be really special to her..."

"Tidying up old bedrooms unearths a lot of things... sometimes good, sometimes embarrassing," Bunn grinned. "Do you have any batteries for it?"

"Oh yes - let's try it out..." Fern leaned over and tipped her chair towards the drawers on her left, then thought better of it and got up fully to search through it. She withdrew three small batteries, and Bunn pulled the covering off the base of the toy to slip them inside.

After closing it up, she thumped it on to the table so that it stood on its suction cups, then touched the button on its base with bated breath. She almost squeaked in delight as colourful LEDs shone from somewhere beneath the plastic, with the lowest segment groaning only

slightly before settling into a steady rhythmic buzz. Quickly, she clicked the button again to silence it.

"Still works! They don't make them like they used to..." she laughed.

Fern smiled fondly, putting her hand around the toy and pulled it off the table, rolling it around in her hands. "You know, she was always a shy girl..." she remembered. "But I think this was the first thing she ever outright asked me for as a present."

"So you got it for her!" Cinn smiled. "What a great mum..."

"I was glad to! I think she must have seen a feature with it in one of my magazines... I remember it said it was incredibly stimulating, especially for her age..."

She turned her head as she was interrupted by the jangle of the keys hanging out of the lock as someone came in the back door.

"I'm here, bunnybu..." Evan called as he closed the door behind him, then froze as he turned and noticed the three of them. "Uh, hi there," he stammered.

"Hi, Evan!" Cinn replied. "Fran's running late, but take a look at this!"

She took the toy as Fern handed it to her, then she jumped over from the table and thrust it into his face, giggling at Evan's startled look.

"Oh, it's one of those things..." he realized, reaching a hand up to take it then turning it around in his hands. "Did you find it when you were packing up there? I didn't know many girls who had one of these..."

"Who thought you'd be so old-fashioned!" Bunn teased. "I bet all of them owned something like this - did you think we were playing house with our dolls until we went to university?"

Evan smiled awkwardly as he offered the device back. "Well... if anyone in this room had one of these, it was definitely going to be Fran," he said.

"You wouldn't believe how much fun she had with it..." Fern told them with a smile. "For a while she would never take a bath without it - she used to be in there for ages!"

"Heh, she's upgraded to a better bath toy now..." Bunn smiled, walking around Evan and looking him up and down. "How did modelling for Sam's class go?"

"Uh, it was fine," Evan said quickly, stuttering in an attempt to find something else to talk about.

"Why don't you wrap it up for when she gets here?" Fern saved him. "Then it can be a nostalgia present from you, as well as from me..."

"Oh - yeah, sure..." Evan took the toy back with both hands and turned it over as he looked at it, from the flared base to its rounded plastic top. "Just on its own? Tie a bow around the middle?"

"There's a box for it in her room - I'll show you..." Bunn said as she took his hand and tugged him in the direction of the stairs.

Fern watched them go with a smile. "Thanks for coming round to help her move her stuff..." she said as she put her arm around Cinn.

"Are you doing okay?" the beaver asked as she returned the hug.

"Oh yes - it's not like she's going far," Fern responded. "She just grew up so fast, you know?"

Cinn nodded with a smile. "I bet you giving her things like that helped her a lot..."

—

"Hi, guys!" Fran called brightly as she stepped through into the kitchen. "Sorry I'm so late..."

She stopped as she turned and noticed the four of them gathered around the table. "Oh - what's this? Did you already get everything done?"

"We did," Bunn replied. "And we found this!" She put her hand on top of the box, now hastily wrapped with a pink bow around it, and slid it across the table towards the surprised rabbit girl.

"Oh - thanks..." Fran said cautiously, turning to hang her bag on to the hooks next to the door before moving back to the table. Crouching down, she pulled the bow off and cleared the wrapping paper aside, then glanced around at them all watching her before turning her attention to the box. Curiously, she peeled one corner of the lid off, and her eyes widened as she saw what was inside.

"You...!" she started, letting the lid spring closed again as she stood up. "How did you find this?!"

"Still stashed behind your giant folders!" Cinn replied. "We thought you'd like to take it with you as well - for old times' sake..."

Fran looked back down at it and pulled the lid off the rest of the way, reaching her hands into the box and tentatively taking it in both hands. "It looks as good as new..." she marvelled.

The beaver sisters smiled proudly. "We put new batteries in - can you show us your skills with it?" Bunn bubbled.

"Oh, don't embarrass me..." Fran laughed.

"We're not! I mean, no more than usual," Cinn replied.

"All right - I think I still remember..." Fran sat down on the one unoccupied chair, pulled the toy out of the box and grasped it at the base. She pulled the sequence of colourful plastic rings off it then set it on the table.

"I remember a blue one had to come first - that set the tempo..." she thought out loud, picking one of them up and sliding it back onto the plastic rod coming up from the base. She smiled as her memory of the musical bath toy came back, and recreated the sequence of colours that had somehow stayed in her memory since she'd been four years old.

"Okay!" She sat back and put her finger on the button. "Ready?"

At a nod from the group, she turned it on and smiled with recognition as the toy began its sequence - each coloured ring lighting up in turn from bottom to top and playing a sequence of notes and electronic buzzes to form a tune.

"First time!" she grinned as the sequence started over. "I'm pretty sure that was my favourite one..."

"It definitely was - I heard that tune so much!" Fern agreed. "That's the first programmable thing she ever owned - and from that moment on she was my talented little engineer!"

She walked over and stooped to give Fran a loud kiss on the cheek, and the younger pink rabbit smiled through her blush.

The five of them stayed around the table for a couple of hours, the music maker being passed around as Fern gleefully told them stories about Fran's childhood in slightly more detail than the younger rabbit was comfortable with. Turning to Evan, she smiled as he reached forward to take it and tried to recreate one of his own recent songs on it.

Eventually, Cinn slipped her phone out of her pocket and glanced down at its screen.

"Okay, we'd better go - got to get things ready for Monday," she said as she rose from her chair.

"Thanks so much for sharing the memories!" Bunn added, and headed for the door out of the kitchen. She smiled at her sister as she joined her. "Heh, Cinn - I can't wait to see Sam's face when we tell her about this..."

"What, why?" Fran called after them. Bunn turned and stopped halfway through the door.

"Oh, nothing!" she said, not disguising her mischievous grin. "I'm just gonna give her all the details she needs to know - no more and no less!"