

FRAN

BY JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY O. IRWIN MYERS

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SYNOPSIS.

Fran arrives at Hamilton Gregory's home in Littleburg, but finds him absent conducting the choir at a camp meeting. She repairs "litter" in search of a job, escorts Fran from the tent. He tells her Gregory is a wealthy man, deeply interested in charity work, and a pillar of the church. Ashton becomes greatly interested in Fran and while taking leave of her, holds her hand and is seen by Sapphira Clinton, sister of Robert Clinton, chairman of the school board. Fran tells Gregory she wants a home with him. Gregory's secretary, a violent dislike to Fran and advises her to go away at once. Fran hints at a twenty-year-old secret, and Gregory in agitation asks Grace to leave the room. Fran relates the story of how Gregory married a young girl at Springfield while attending college and then deserted her. Fran is the child of that marriage. Gregory has married his present wife three years before the death of Fran's mother. Gregory explains that Fran is the daughter of a very dear friend who is dead. Fran agrees to the story. Mrs. Gregory insists on her making her home with them and takes her to her room. Fran declares the secretary must go. Grace begins nagging tactics in an effort to drive Fran from the Gregory home. Abbott, while taking a walk alone at midnight, finds Fran on a bridge telling her fortune by cards. She tells Abbott that she is the famous Nonpareil. Fran Nonpareil. She tried of course life and sought a home. Grace tells of seeing Fran come home after midnight with a man. She guesses part of the story and surprises the rest from Abbott. She decides to ask Bob Clinton to go to Springfield to investigate Fran's story. Fran enlists Abbott in her battle against Grace. Fran offers her services to Gregory as secretary during the temporary absence of Grace. The latter, hearing of Fran's purpose, returns and interrupts a touching scene between father and daughter. Fran goes after midnight with Mrs. Gregory's brother, Abbott, whose retention as superintendent, is to be decided that day, finds her sitting alone in a hazy.

CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

"She slipped her hand into his. 'Didn't I have a mother? Oh, these mothers! And who can make mother-wishes come true? Well! And you just studied with all your might; and you'll keep on and on, till you're out of my reach, of course. Which would have suited your mother, too.' She withdrew her hand."

"My mother would have loved you," he declared, for he did not understand, so well as Fran, about mothers' liking for strange young ladies who train lions.

"Mine would you," Fran asserted, with more reason.

Abbott, conscious of a dreadful emptiness, took Fran's hand again. "I'll never be out of your reach, Fran."

"She did not seek to draw away, but said, with dark meaning, 'Remember the bridge at midnight.'"

"I remember how you looked, with the moonlight silvering your face—you were just beautiful that night, little Nonpareil."

"My chin is so sharp," she murmured.

"Yes," he said, softly feeling the warm little fingers, one by one, as if to make sure all were there. "That's the way I like it—sharp."

"And I'm so ridiculously thin—"

"You're nothing like so thin as when you first came to Littleburg," he declared. "I've noticed how you are—have been—I mean—"

"Filling out?" cried Fran gleefully.

"Oh, yes, and I'm so glad you know, because since I've been wearing long dresses, I've been afraid you'd never find it out, and would always be thinking of me as you saw me at the beginning. But I am—yes—filling out."

"And your little feet, Fran—"

"Yes, I always had a small foot. But let's get off of this subject."

"Not until I say something about your smile—oh, Fran, that smile!"

"The subject, now," remarked Fran, "naturally returns to Grace Noir."

"Please, Fran!"

"I'll tell you why you hurt my feelings, Abbott. You've disappointed me twice. Oh, if I were a man, I'd show any meek-faced little hypocrite if she could prize secrets out of me. Just because it wears dresses and long hair, you think it an angel."

"Meaning Miss Grace, I presume?" remarked Abbott dryly. "But what is the secret, this time?"

"Didn't I trust you with the secret that I meant to apply for the position of secretary as soon as Grace Noir was out of the way? And I was just about to win the fight when here she came—hadn't been to the city at all, because you told her what I meant to do—handed her the secret, like a child giving up something it doesn't want."

"You are very unjust. I did not tell her your plan. I don't know how she found it out."

"From you; nobody else knew it."

"She did not learn it from me."

"—And that's what gets me!—you tell her everything, and don't even know you tell. Just hypnotized! Answer my questions: the morning after I told you what I meant to do—standing there at the fence by the gate—confiding in you, telling you everything—I say the next morning, didn't you tell Grace Noir all about it?"

"Certainly not."

Abbott tried to remember, then said casually, "I believe we did meet on the street that morning."

"Yes," said Fran ironically, "I believe you did meet somewhere. Of course she engaged you in her peculiar style of inquisitorial conversation?"

"We went down the street together."

"Now, prisoner at the bar, relate all that was said while going down the street together."

"Most charming, but unjust judge, not a word that I can remember, so it couldn't have been of any interest. I did tell her that since she—yes, I remember now—since she was to be out of town all day, I would wait until tomorrow to bring her a book she wanted to borrow."

"Oh! And she wanted to know who told you she would be out of town all day, didn't she?"

Abbott reflected deeply, then said with triumph, "Yes, she did. She asked me how I knew she was going to the city with Bob Clinton. And I merely said that it was the understanding they were to select the church music. Not another word was said on the subject."

"That was enough. Mighty neat. As soon as she saw you were trying to avoid a direct answer, she knew I'd told you. That gave her a clew to my leaving the choir practice before the rest of them. She guessed something important was up. Well, Abbott, you are certainly an infant in her hands, but I guess you can't help it."

"Self-pride was touched, and he retaliated: 'Fran, I hate to think of your being willing to take her position behind her back.'"

"She crimsoned."

"You'd know how I feel about it," he went on, "if you understood her better. I know her duty drives her to act in opposition to you, and I'm sorry for it. But her religious ideals—"

"Abbott, be honest and answer—is there anything in it—this talk of doing God's will? Can people love God and hate one another? I just hate shams," she went on, becoming more excited. "I don't care what fine names you give them—whether it's marriage, or education, or culture, or religion, if there's no heart in it, it's a sham, and I hate it. I hate a lie. But a thousand times more, do I hate a life that is a lie."

"Fran, you don't know what you are saying."

"Yes, I do know what I'm saying. Is religion going to church? That's all I can see in it. I want to believe there's something else, I've honestly searched, for I wanted to be comforted. I tell you, I need it. But I can't find any comfort in mortar and stained-glass windows. I want something that makes a man true to his wife, and makes a family live together in blessed harmony, something that's good on the streets and in the stores, something that makes people even treat a show-girl well. If there's anything in it, why doesn't father—"

"She snatched away her hand that she might cover her face, for she had burst into passionate weeping. 'Why doesn't a father, who's always talking about religion, and singing about it, and praying about it—why doesn't that father draw his daughter to his breast—close, close to his heart—that's the only home she asks for—that's the home she has a right to, yes a right, I don't care how far she's wandered.'"

"Fran!" cried Abbott, in great distress. "Don't cry, little one! He had no intelligent word, but his arm was full of meaning as it slipped about her. 'Who has been unkind to you, Nonpareil?' She let her head sink upon his shoulder, as she sobbed without restraint. 'What shams have pierced your pure heart? Am I the cause of any of these tears? An 1?'"

"Yes," Fran answered, between her

sobs, "you're the cause of all my happy tears." She nestled there with a movement of perfect trust; he drew her closer, and stroked her hair tenderly, trusting himself.

Presently she pulled herself to rights, lifted his arm about her, and rested it on the back of the seat—a friendly compromise. Then she shook back her hair and raised her eyes and a faint smile came into the rosy face. "I'm so funny," she declared. "Sometimes I seem so strange that I need an introduction to myself." She looked into Abbott's eyes feelingly, and drew in the corners of her mouth. "I guess, after all, there's something in religion!"

Abbott was so warmed by returning sunshine that his eyes shone. "Dear Fran!" he said—it was very hard to keep his arm where she had put it. She tried to look at him steadily, but somehow the light hurt her eyes. She could feel its warmth burning her cheeks.

"Oh, Fran," cried Abbott impulsively, "the bridge in the moonlight was nothing to the way you look now—so beautiful—and so much more than just beautiful."

"This won't do," Fran exclaimed, hiding her face. "We must get back to Grace Noir immediately."

"Oh, Fran, oh, no, please!"

"I won't please. While we're in Sure-Enough Country, I mean to tell you the whole truth about Grace Noir." The name seemed to settle the atmosphere—she could look at him, now.

"I want you to understand that something is going to happen—must happen, just from the nature of things, and the nature of wives and husbands—and the other woman. Oh, you needn't frown at me, I've seen you look that other way at me, so I know you, Abbott Ashton."

"Fran! Then you know that I—"

"No, you must listen. You've nothing important to tell me that I don't know. I've found out the whole Gregory history from old Mrs. Jefferson, without her knowing that she was telling anything—she's a sort of 'Professor Ashton' in my hands—and I mean to tell you that history. You know

interest in all his schemes to help folks—folks at a distance, you understand—"

She just devoured that religious magazine he edits—yes, I'll admit, his religion shows up beautifully in print; the pictures of it are good, too. Old Mrs. Jefferson took pride in being wheeled to church where she could see her son-in-law leading the music, and where she'd watch every gesture of the minister and catch the sound of his voice at the high places, where he cried and, or nevertheless. Sometimes Mrs. Jefferson could get a dozen ands and butts out of one discourse. Then comes your Grace Noir."

Abbott listened with absorbed attention. It was impossible not to be influenced by the voice that had grown to mean so much to him.

"Grace Noir is a person that's superhumanly good, but she's not happy in her goodness; it hurts her, all the time, because other folks are not as good as she. You can't live in the house with her without wishing she'd make a mistake to show herself human, but she never does, she's always right. She's so fixed on being a martyr, that if nobody crosses her, she just makes herself a martyr out of the shortcomings of others."

"As for instance—?"

"As for instance, she suffered martyrdom every time Mrs. Gregory nestled in an arm-chair beside the cozy hearth, when a Ladies' Aid, or a Italy was beating its way through snowdrifts to the Walnut Street church. Mrs. Gregory was like everybody else about Grace—she took her at her own value, and that gave the equation: to him, religion meant Walnut Street church plus Grace Noir. For a while, Mrs. Gregory clung to church-going with grim determination, but it wasn't any use. The Sunday-school would have button contests, or the Ladies' Aid would give chicken pie dinners down-town, and Mrs. Gregory would be a red button or a blue button, and she would have her pie; but she was always third—in her home, or at church, she was the third. It was her husband and his secretary that understood the Lord. Somehow she seemed to disturb conditions, merely by being present."

"Fran, you do not realize that your words—they intimate—"

"She disturbed conditions, Abbott. She was like a turned-up light at a séance. Mr. Gregory was appalled because his wife quit attending church Grace sympathized in his sorrow. It made him feel toward Grace Noir—'I'm up against a stone wall, Abbott, I haven't the word to describe his feeling, maybe there isn't any.'"

"Fran Nonpareil! Such wisdom terrifies me... such suspicions!"

In this moment of hesitancy between conviction and rejection, Abbott felt oddly out of harmony with his little friend. She realized the effect she must necessarily be producing, yet she must continue; she had counted the cost and the danger. If she did not convince him, his thought of her could never be the same.

"Abbott, you may think I am talking from jealousy, and that I tried to get rid of Grace Noir so I could better my condition at her expense. I don't know how to make you see that my story is true. It tells itself. Oughtn't that to prove it? Mrs. Gregory has the dove's nature; she'd let the enemy have the spoils rather than come to blows. She lets him take his choice—here is she, yonder's the secretary. He isn't worthy of her if he chooses Grace—but his hesitation has proved him unworthy, anyhow. The old lady—her mother—is a fighter; she'd have driven out the secretary long ago. But Mrs. Gregory's idea seems to be—'If he can want her, after I've given him myself, I'll not make a movement to interfere.'"

Abbott played delicately with the mere husk of this astounding revelation: "Have you talked with old Mrs. Jefferson about—about it?"

"She's too proud—wouldn't admit it. But I've shyly hinted... however, it's not the sort of story you could trumpet without getting mixed with chaff. She'd misunderstand the neighbors would get it first—anyway she wouldn't make a move because her

daughter won't. It's you and I, Abbott, against Grace and Mr. Gregory."

He murmured, looking away, "You take me for granted, Fran."

"Yes," Fran's reply was almost a whisper. A sudden terror of what he might think of her, smote her heart. But she repeated bravely, "Yes!"

He turned, and she saw in his eyes a confiding trust that seemed to hedge her soul about. "And you can always take me for granted, Fran; and always is a long time."

"Not too long for you and me," said Fran, looking at him breathlessly.

"I may have felt," he said, "for some time, in a vague way, what you have told me. Of course it is evident that he prefers Miss Noir's society. But I have always thought—or hoped—or wanted to feel, that it was only the common tie of religion—"

"It was not the truth that you cling to, Abbott, but appearances. As for me, let truth kill rather than live as a sham. If Grace Noir stays, the worst is going to happen. She may not know how far she's going. He may not suspect he's doing wrong. People can make anything they want seem right in their own eyes. But I've found out that wickedness isn't stationary, it's got a sort of perpetual motion. If we don't drive Grace away, the crash will come."

"Fran—how you must love Mrs. Gregory!"

"She breaks my heart."

"Dear faithful Fran! What can we do—I say we, Fran, observe."

"Oh, you Abbott Ashton... just what I thought you! No, no, you mustn't interrupt. I'll manage Grace Noir, if you'll manage Bob Clinton."

"Where does Bob Clinton come in?"

"Grace is trying to open a door so he can come in. I mean a secret in Mr. Gregory's past. She suspects that there's a secret in his past, and she intends to send Bob to Springfield where Mr. Gregory left that secret. Bob will bring it to Littleburg. He'll hand it over to Grace, and then she'll have Mr. Gregory in her power—there'll be no getting her hands off him, after that."

"Surely you don't mean that Mr. Gregory did wrong when he was young, and that Miss Noir suspects it?"

"Bob will bring home the secret—and it will kill Mrs. Gregory, Abbott—and Grace will go off with him—I know how it'll end."

"What is this secret?"

"You are never to know, Abbott. 'Very well—so be it. But I don't believe Mr. Gregory ever did very wrong—he is too good a man.'"

"Isn't he daily breaking his wife's heart?" retorted Fran with a curl of the lip. "I call that murder."

"But still!—But I can't think he realizes it."

"Then," said Fran satirically, "we'll just call it manslaughter. When I think of his wife's meek patient face—don't you recall that look in her eyes of the wounded deer—and the thousands of times you've seen those two together, at church, on the street, in the library—everywhere seeing only each other, leaning closer, smiling deeper—as if doing good meant getting close—Oh, Abbott, you know what I mean—don't you, don't you?"

"Yes!" cried Abbott sharply. "Fran, you are right. I have been—all of us have been—clinging to appearances. Yes, I know what you mean."

"You'll keep Bob Clinton from telling that secret, won't you? He's to go tonight, on the long journey—tonight, after the board meeting. It'll take him three or four days. Then he'll come back."

"But he'll never tell the secret," Abbott declared. His mouth closed as by a spring.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

More in His Line.

Signor Marconi, the inventor of wireless telegraph, was seated at dinner beside a lady who gushed.

Unfortunately, the lady had mistaken the inventor for his compatriot Mascalagna, the composer of "Covalliera Rusticana."

"Oh, signor," she exclaimed, "I would so love to hear you play your beautiful intermezzo!"

"Certainly," Marconi replied, quickly. "I shall be delighted, if you have a wireless piano."—Washington Star.

Rhythmical Criticism.

Prof. Brander Matthews was talking of certain past participles that have fallen into disuse, reports the Washington Star.

The past participle "gotten" has gone out in England, although it still lingers on with us. In England, gotten is almost as obsolete as "putten." In some parts of Cumberland the villagers still use gotten and putten; and a teacher once told me of a lesson on the past participle wherein she gave her pupils an exercise to write on the blackboard.

In the midst of the exercise an urchin began to laugh. She asked him why he was laughing, and he answered:

"Joe's put putten where he should have putten put."

FACE BROKE OUT IN PIMPLES

Falls City, Neb.—"My trouble began when I was about sixteen. My face broke out in little pimples at first. They were red and sore and then became like little boils. I picked at my face continually and it made my face red and sore looking and then I would wake up at night and scratch it. It was a source of continual annoyance to me, as my face was always red and spotted and burned all the time."

"I tried... and others, but I could find nothing to cure it. I had been troubled about two years before I found Cuticura Soap and Ointment. I sent for a sample of Cuticura Soap and Ointment and tried them and I then bought some. I washed my face good with the Cuticura Soap and hot water at night and then applied the Cuticura Ointment. In the morning I washed it off with the Cuticura Soap and hot water. In two days I noticed a decided improvement, while in three weeks the cure was complete."

(Signed) Judd Knowles, Jan. 10, 1913. Cuticura Soap and Ointment sold throughout the world. Sample of each free, with 32-p. Skin Book. Address postcard "Cuticura, Dept. L, Boston."—Adv.

Evidently Knew the Kind.

Mrs. M. left the house for a few moments one morning, telling little Hazel to answer the door bell if necessary. Presently there was a ring. The lady caller, learning that Mrs. M. was not at home, opened her card case, and in doing so a bit of tissue paper fluttered to the steps. Picking it up, Hazel remarked: "Mith, you dropped one of your tigarette papcrth."—The Delinctor.

Trouble-Maker.

"Jobs will always do his duty, no matter how irksome it may be."

"Yes, no matter how irksome it may be to other people."

Missed Nothing.

He and she arrived in the fifth inning.

He (to a fan)—What's the score?

Fan—Nothing to nothing.

She—Goody. We haven't missed a thing!

Delightful Evening.

"They tell me you are very fond of good music."

"Never mind. Continue."—Le Rire (Paris.)

5 improved Iowa farms for sale at auction, Sept. 5, 6, 8, 9 and 10th. 1-10 cash and half the crop yearly until balance is paid, or in tea payments. J. Mulhall, 430 6th Street, Sioux City, Iowa. Adv.

Apparatus for pumping an anesthetic into a person's lungs and insuring the administration of a definite dose has been invented by a Paris doctor.

Water in bluing is adulteration. Glass and water make liquid blue costly. Buy Red Cross Blue, makes clothes whiter than snow. Adv.

It is easier to break a man's will than it is to sidetrack a woman's won't.

LEWIS' Single Binder gives the smokes a rich, mellow tasting 5c cigar. Adv.

It isn't recorded that the Lord loveth a cheerful giver of advice.

"Back on the Job"

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QUEER WHIMS FOR FUNERALS

Englishman's Coffin Made of 4000 Matchboxes.—Unusual Burial at Sea.

An enormous crowd gathered at Chester a few months ago to witness the funeral of an electrical engineer, who was carried to the cemetery in a coffin that had been laboriously constructed by himself out of 4,000 matchboxes. These, with their tops visible and advertising their respective makers, were varnished over and strengthened inside with wood. On the coffin was placed an electric battery, says London Tit-Bits.

Some years ago a maiden lady died at Calais-sur-Lys, in France, who was reported to have been a champion snuff taker. She enjoyed singularly good health, retained all her mental faculties and died at a ripe old age. Her funeral was most extraordinary. Her wish was that her coffin should be filled with tobacco, the floor of the mortuary chamber carpeted with it and the hearse to be properly charged to scatter tobacco

before the hearse on the way to the cemetery.

A lady who left Liverpool some time ago by the Lucania crossed the Atlantic on a unique mission. A prominent New York business man, who died recently, directed in his will that his remains should be cremated and the ashes scattered on the waters of the Atlantic from a Cunard steamer. The Lucania, being the special favorite of the deceased gentleman, was selected, and the lady in question, at a time fixed, so that simultaneously the family could attend a memorial service in New York, cast the ashes from an urn into the ocean. A certificate was given by the captain of the Lucania stating the latitude and longitude in which the ashes were committed to the deep.

One Black Sheep Needed.

A revival of religion was in progress in a town where Peter, Paul and John were coal dealers. John was the first to come under the influence of very eloquent preaching. He was honest and sincere and it joined the church. A week later Paul was

influenced to abandon the world and the flesh, and he, to become an enthusiastic supporter of the good work. Peter, however, held aloof from the meetings. None of the invitations of neighbors or brothers seemed to have any effect. Finally the clergyman called and made a personal appeal. Peter was rough and ignorant and a little inclined to profanity, but honest and frank in speech if not in act. He finally clinched his negative arguments with the clergyman when in reply to a question he said: "John has become a Christian and Paul has become a Christian and if I join your church who the deuce me, parson, will weigh the coal?"

Correction.

The Cinnamon Scimitar will say tomorrow:

"We much regret that, in our recent article entitled, 'Ages of Celebrities,' we wrongly gave the age of the famous actor, John Drews. As Mr. Drews has pointed out to us, a transposition of figures made us say that he was thirty-six years old, whereas he is, of course, sixty-three."

MARRIAGE LAW IN ITALY

Ceremony is Only Legal When Performed by Mayor of Place Where Couple Reside.

In Italy marriage by law is a civil contract, only legal when performed by the mayor of the place in which the couple who desire to be married reside, or his assessor, and it must be performed in the city chamber.

Some hotels and not a few pensions in Rome are the constant resort of needy adventurers with titles real or spurious to their names. Duke This and Prince That, who are always on the lookout for money, says the Christian Herald. Aided, it may be, by some one in the hotel or pension, they get acquainted with a rich American family with marriageable daughters. To one of these love is made and marriage is arranged.

Such have no difficulty in finding a priest to perform their ceremony. It is done. Then the adventurer deserts the girl, and she has no remedy. Some few years ago a young girl was so treated. Her pseudo husband, having

secured her money, left her and married civilly and legally an Italian woman with whom he was in love. The victimized girl shot dead her betrayer and his wife. Recognizing the provocation she had received, she was left unpunished. Another girl similarly betrayed committed suicide.

Legal Opinion.

"A cat sits on my back fence every night and he yowls and yowls and yowls. Now, I don't want to have any trouble with neighbor Jones, but this thing has gone far enough, and I want you to tell me what to do."

The young lawyer looked as solemn as an old sick owl, and said not a word.

"I have a right to shoot the cat, haven't I?"

"I would hardly say that," replied young Coke Blackstone. "The cat does not belong to you, as I understand it."

"No, but the fence does."

"Then," concluded the light of law, "I think it safe to say you have a perfect right to tear down the fence."—New York Press

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"What's the matter? Wombat says I'm the worst liar in town."

"Don't be discouraged. You may be the worst now, but anybody who keeps at it as persistently as you do is apt to become a pretty good liar in time."

Record for Ambition.

"Cholly is an ambitious sportsman."

"How now?"

"He wants to climb the Matterhorn in an automobile."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

No Promise Maker.

"Does Hobbs keep his word?"

"I guess so. He never seems to give it."

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