FRAN

BY

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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 thither in search of him, laughs during the service and is asked to leave. Abbott Ashton, superintendent of schools, escorts Fran from the tent.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

The young man was astonished. "Didn't you see him in the tent, leading the choir?"

"He has a house in town," Fran said timidly. "I don't want to bother him while he is in his religion. I want to wait for him at his house. Oh," she added earnestly, "if you would only show me the way."

Just as if she did not know the way!

Abbott Ashton was now completely at her mercy. "So you know Brother Gregory, do you?" he asked, as he led her over the stiles and down the wagon-road.

"Never saw him in my life," Fran replied casually. She knew how to say it prohibitively, but she purposely left the bars down, to find out if the young man was what she hoped.

And he was. He did not ask a question. They sought the grass-grown path bordering the dusty road; as they ascended the hill that shut out a view of the village, to their ears came the sprightly Twentieth Century hymn. What change had come over Ashton that the song now seemed as strangely out of keeping as had the peacefulness of the April night, when he first left the tent? He felt the prick of remorse because in the midst of nature, he had so soon forgotten about souls.

Fran caught the air and softly sang —"We reap what we sow—"

"Don't!" he reproved her. "Child, that means nothing to you."

"Yes, it does, too," she returned, rather impudently. She continued to sing and hum until the last note was smothered in her little nose. Then he spoke: "However—it means a different thing to me from what it means to the choir."

He looked at her curiously, "How different?" he smiled.

"To me, it means that we really do reap what we sow, and that if you've done something very wrong in the past—ugh! Better look out—trouble's coming. That's what the song means to me."

"And will you kindly tell me what it means to the choir?"

"Yes, I tell you what it means to the choir. It means sitting on benches and singing, after a sermon; and it means a tent, and a great evangelist and a celebrated soloist—and then going home to act as if it wasn't so."

Abbott was not only astonished, but pained. Suddenly he had lost "Nobody's little girl," to be confronted by an elfish spirit of mischief. He asked with constraint, "Did this critical attitude make you laugh out, in the tent?"

"I wouldn't tell you why I laughed," Fran declared, "for a thousand dollars. And I've seen more than that in my day."

They walked on. He was silent, she impenetrable. At last she said, in a changed voice, "My name's Fran. What's yours?"

He laughed boyishly. "Mine's Abbott."

His manner made her laugh sympathetically. It was just the manner she liked best—gay, frank, and a little mischievous. "Abbott?" she repeated; "well—is that all?"

"Goodness!" Cried Fran, "Does It Hurt That Bad?"

"Ashton is the balance; Abbott Ashton. And yours?"

"The rest of mine is Nonpareil—funny name, isn't it!—Fran Nonpareil. It means Fran, the small type; or Fran who's unlike everybody else; or—Oh, there are lots of meanings to me. Some find one, some another, some never understand."

It was because Abbott Ashton was touched that he spoke lightly:

"What a very young Nonpareil to be wandering about the world, all by yourself!"

She was grateful for his raillery. "How young do you think?"

"Let me see. Hum! You are only—about—" She laughed mirthfully at his air of preposterous wisdom. "About thirteen—fourteen, yes, you are more than fi-i-ifteen, more than . . . But take off that enormous hat, little Nonpareil. There's no use guessing in the dark when the moon's shining."

Fran was gleeful. "All right," she cried in one of her childish tones, shrill, fresh, vibratory with the music of innocence.

By this time they had reached the foot-bridge that spanned the deep ravine. Here the wagon-road made its crossing of a tiny stream, by slipping under the foot-bridge, some fifteen feet below. On the left lay straggling Littleburg with its four or five hundred houses, faintly twinkling, and beyond the meadows on the right, a fringe of woods started up as if it did not belong there, but had come to be seen, while above the woods swung the big moon with Fran on the foot-bridge to shine for.

Fran's hat dangled idly in her hand as she drew herself with backward movement upon the railing. The moonlight was full upon her face; so was the young man's gaze. One of her feet found, after leisurely exploration, a down-slanting board upon the edge of which she pressed her heel for support. The other foot swayed to and fro above the flooring, while a little hand on either side of her gripped the top rail.

"Here I am," she said, shaking back rebellious hair.

Abbott Ashton studied her with grave deliberation—it is doubtful if he had ever before so thoroughly enjoyed his duties as usher. He pronounced judicially, "You are older than you look."

"Yes," Fran explained, "my experience accounts for that. I've had lots."

Abbott's lingering here beneath the moon when he should have been hurrying back to the tent, showed how unequally the good things of life—experience, for instance—are divided. "You are sixteen," he hazarded, conscious of a strange exhilaration.

Fran dodged the issue behind a smile—"And I don't think you are so awfully old."

Abbott was brought to himself with a jolt that threw him hard upon self-consciousness. "I am superintendent of the public school." The very sound of the words rang as a warning, and he became preternaturally solemn.

"Goodness!" cried Fran, considering his grave mouth and thoughful eyes, "does it hurt that bad?"

Abbott smiled. All the same, the position of superintendent must not be bartered away for the transitory pleasures of a boot-bridge. "We had better hurry, if you please," he said gravely.

"I am so afraid of you," murmured Fran. "But I know the meeting will last a long time yet. I'd hate to have to wait long at Mr. Gregory's with that disagreeable lady who isn't Mrs. Gregory."

Abbott was startled. Why did she thus designate Mr. Gregory's secretary? He looked keenly at Fran, but she only said plaintively:

"Can't we stay here?"

He was disturbed and perplexed. It was as if a fitting shadow from some unformed cloud of thought-mist had fallen upon the every-day world out of his subconsciousness. Why did this stranger speak of Miss Grace Noir as the "lady who isn't Mrs. Gregory?" The young man at times had caught himself thinking of her in just that way.

School superintendents do not enjoy being mystified. "Really," Abbott declared abruptly, "I must go back to the meeting."

Fran had heard enough about his leaving her. She decided to stop that once and for all. "If you go back, I go, too!" she said conclusively. She gave him a look to show that she meant it, then became all humility.

"Please don't be cross with little Nonpareil," she coaxed. "Please don't want to go back to that meeting. Please don't want to leave me. You are so learned and old and so strong—you don't care why a little girl laughs."

Fran tilted her head sidewise, and the glance of her eyes proved irresistible. "But tell me about Mr. Gregory," she pleaded, "and don't mind my ways. Ever since mother died I've found nothing in this world but love that was for somebody else, and trouble that was for me."

The pathetic cadence of the slender-throated tones moved Abbott more than he cared to show.

"If you're in trouble," he exclaimed, "you've sought the right helper in Mr. Gregory. He's the richest man in the county, yet lives so simply, so frugally—they keep few servants—and all because he wants to do good with his money. I think Mr. Gregory is one of the best men that ever lived."

Fran asked with simplicity, "Great church worker?"

"He's as good as he is rich. He never misses a service. I can't give the time to it that he does—to the church, I mean; I have the ambition to hold, one day, a chair at Yale or Harvard—that means to teach in a university—" he broke off, in explanation.

"You see," with a deprecatory smile, "I want to make myself felt in the world."

Fran's eyes shone with an unspoken "Hurrah!" and as he met her gaze, he felt a thrill of pleasure from the impression that he was what she wanted him to be.

Fran allowed his soul to bathe a while in divine eye-beams of flattering approval, then gave him a little sting to bring him to life. "You are pretty old, not to be married," she remarked. "I hope you won't find some woman to put an end to your high intentions, but men generally do. Men fall in love, and when they finally pull themselves out, they've lost sight of the shore they were headed for."

"Good Evening, Professor Ashton."

A slight color stole to Abbott's face. In fact, he was rather hard hit. This wandering child was no doubt a witch. He looked in the direction of the tent, as if to escape the weaving of her magic. But he only said, "That sounds —er—practical."

"Yes," said Fran, wondering who "the woman" was, "if you can't be practical, there's no use to be. Well, I can see you now, at the head of some university—you'll make it, because you're so much like me. Why, when they first began teaching me to feed— Good gracious! What am I talking about?" She hurried on, as if to cover her confusion. "But I haven't got as far in books as you have, so I'm not religious."

"Books aren't religion," he remonstrated, then added with unnecessary gentleness, "Little Nonpareil! What an idea!"

"Yes, books are," retorted Fran, shaking back her hair, swinging her foot, and twisting her body impatiently. "That's the only kind of religion I know anything about—just books, just doctrines; what you ought to believe and how you ought to act—all nicely printed and bound between covers. Did you ever meet any religion outside of a book, moving up and down, going about in the open?"

He answered in perfect confidence, "Mr. Gregory lives his religion daily—the kind that helps people, that makes the unfortunate happy."

Fran was not hopeful. "Well, I've come all the way from New York to see him. I hope he can make me happy. I'm certainly unfortunate enough. I've got all the elements he needs to work on."

"From New York!" He considered the delicate form, the youthful face, and whistled. "Will you please tell me where your home is, Nonpareil?"

She waved her arm inclusively. "America. I wish it were concentrated in some spot, but it's just spread out thin under the Stars and Stripes. My country's about all I have." She broke off with a catch in her voice—she tried to laugh, but it was no use.

Suddenly it came to Abbott Ashton that he understood the language of moon, watching woods, meadow-lands, even the gathering rain-clouds; all spoke of the universal brotherhood of man with nature; a brotherhood including the most ambitious superintendent of schools and a homeless Nonpareil; a brotherhood to be confirmed by the clasping of sincere hands. There was danger in such a confirmation, for it carried Abbott beyond the limits that mark a superintendent's confines.

As he stood on the bridge, holding Fran's hand in a warm and sympathetic pressure, he was not unlike one on picket-service who slips over the trenches to hold friendly parley with the enemy. Abbott did not know there was any danger in this brotherly handclasp; but that was because he could not see a fleshy and elderly lady slowly coming down the hill. As superintendent, he should doubtless have considered his responsibilities to the public; he did consider them when the lady, breathless and severe, approached the bridge, while every pound of her ample form cast its weight upon the seal of her disapproving, low-voiced and significant, "Good evening, Professor Ashton."

Fran whistled.

The lady heard, but she swept on without once glancing back. There was in her none of that saline tendency that made of Lot a widower; the lady desired to see no more.

Fran opened her eyes at Abbott to their widest extent, as she demurely asked, "How cold is it? My thermometer is frozen."

The young man did not betray uneasiness, though he was really alarmed, for his knowledge of the fleshy lady enabled him to foresee gathering clouds more sinister than those overhead. The obvious thing to be done was to release the slender hand; he did so rather hastily.

"Have I got you into trouble?" Fran asked, with her elfish laugh. "If so, we'll be neighbors, for that's where I live. Who was she?"

"Miss Sapphira Clinton," he answered as, by a common impulse, they began walking toward Hamilton Gregory's house. "Bob Clinton's sister, and my landlady." The more Abbott thought of his adventure, the darker it grew; before they reached their destination it had become a deep gray.

"Do you mean the 'Brother Clinton' that couldn't get 'through'?"

"Yes . . . He's the chairman of the School Board."

"Ah!" murmured Fran comprehendingly. At Gregory's gate, she said, "Now you run back to the tent and I'll beard the lion by myself. I know it has sharp teeth, but I guess it won't bite me. Do you try to get back to the tent before the meeting's over. Show yourself there. Parade up and down the aisles."

He laughed heartily, all the sorrier for her because he found himself in trouble.

"It was fun while it lasted, wasn't it!" Fran exclaimed, with a sudden gurgle.

"Part of it was," he admitted. "Good-by, then, little Nonpareil."

He held out his hand.

"No, sir!" cried Fran, clasping her hands behind her. "That's what got you into trouble. Good-by. Run for it!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Woman Who Was Not Mrs. Gregory.

Hardly had Abbott Ashton disappeared down the village vista of moonlight and shadow-patches, before Fran's mood changed. Instead of seeking to carry out her threat of bearding the lion in the den, she sank down on the porch-steps, gathered her knees in her arms, and stared straight before her.

Though of skillful resources, of impregnable resolution, Fran could be despondent to the bluest degree; and though competent at the clash, she often found herself purpling on the eve of the crisis. The moment had come to test her fighting qualities, yet she drooped despondently.

Hamilton Gregory was coming through the gate. As he halted in surprise, a black shadow rose slowly, wearily. He, little dreaming that he was confronted by a shadow from the past, saw in her only the girl who had been publicly expelled from the tent.

The choir-leader had expected his home-coming to be crowned by a vision very different. He came up the walk slowly, not knowing what to say. She waited, outwardly calm, inwardly gathering power. White-hot action from Fran, when the iron was to be welded. Out of the deepening shadows her will leaped keen as a blade.

She addressed him, "Good evening, Mr. Gregory."

He halted. When he spoke, his tone expressed not only a general disapproval of all girls who wander away from their homes in the night, but an especial repugnance to one who could laugh during religious services. "Do you want to speak to me, child?"

"Yes." The word was almost a whisper. The sound of his voice had weakened her.

"What do you want?" He stepped up on the porch. The moon had vanished behind the rising masses of storm-clouds, not to appear again, but the light through the glass door revealed his poetic features. Flashes of lightning as yet faint but rapid in recurrence, showed his beauty as that of a young man. Fran remained silent, moved more than she could have thought possible. He stared intently, but under that preposterous hat she was practically invisible, save as a black shadow. He added again, with growing impatience, "What do you want?"

His unfriendliness gave her the spur she needed. "I want a home," she said decidedly.

Hamilton Gregory was seriously disturbed. However evil-disposed, the waif should not be left to wander aimlessly about the streets. Of the three hotels in Littleburg, the cheapest was not overly particular. He would take her there. "Do you mean to tell me," he temporized, "that you are absolutely alone?"

Fran's tone was a little hard, not because she felt bitter, but lest she betray too great feeling, "Absolutely alone in the world."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HOLD RECORD FOR FASTING

Two Eccentric Englishmen Who Practiced Self-Denial Through Many Years of Their Lives.

The most persistent faster of all time was probably Roger Crabb, who lived in the time of the commonwealth.

In order to carry out his ideas most effectually he sold off his stock in trade, distributed the proceeds among the poor and took up his residence in a hut near Ickenham, where he lived on three farthings a week.

"Instead of strong drinks and wines," says the eccentric Roger, "I give the old man a cup of water and instead of roast mutton and rabbit I give him broth thickened with bran and pudding made with bran and turnip leaves chopped together."

Vigorous health was the result, says the London Chronicle, but his abstention from food was regarded with such suspicion that on one occasion he narrowly escaped being burned alive as a wizard.

Another famous hermit who managed to reduce diet to very simple proportions was James Lucas, with whom many of us are doubtless familiar as Mr. Mopes in Charles Dickens' "Tom Tiddler's Ground." Lucas lived mainly upon bread and penny buns, though to these were added at times eggs and herrings and gin. A basket slung from the roof out of reach of the rats served him as a larder, and he abjured washing, all furniture and clothes, wrapping himself in an old blanket.

A generosity with gin made him the friend of all the tramps in the kingdom and eventually he had to employ two armed watchmen to protect him from their attentions. A hermit with a bodyguard is something of a paradox.

Coffins Many Centuries Old.

Two tiny coffins have recently been found in the monastic burial ground of Peterborough, Northampton, England, and have been placed in Peterborough cathedral. They are said to be the coffins of the twin children of King Canute, who were drowned in Whittlesey Mere as they were crossing to be educated at Peterborough abbey.

Wrong Estimate.

"They say one per cent. of all the money in the country is put in automobiles."

"Don't you believe it. There is more scent than that in the gasoline alone."

THE KITCHEN CABINET

SOME men live near to God, as my right arm
Is near to me, and then walk about
Mailed in full proof of faith, and bear a cham
That mocks at fear, and bars the door on doubt
And dares the impossible.

MAGIC IN LEFT-OVERS.

There is such a feeling of achievement, not to speak of the virtuous feeling of economy in using up odds and ends of food and really making something good out of them. The housewife whose sense of economy will spoil good things by combining them with something unpalatable, is worse than extravagant, for she puts food above the value she has for her family.

Quick Dessert.—This is a dessert which was put together in an emergency with a few left-over bits. A piece of cake, a cup of left-over custard and a banana or two. The cake was broken in bits and the custard poured over it, then a banana was sliced and added to the dish. Whipped cream could be served with it, or simply as it is, it made a most satisfying dessert.

One cucumber and a tomato sliced into thirds, or even smaller if the tomato is good-sized, will, with lettuce, make a most palatable salad.

Peel and cut the tomato in quarters or thirds in wedge-shaped pieces, lay on a bed of lettuce with a few slices of cucumber, then add a spoonful of dressing, which may be either French, boiled or mayonnaise.

Boiled Dressing.—Use one or two eggs, or the yolks left over from a white cake, adding one white to make the dressing light and foamy. Beat the eggs well and measure, using the same quantity of mild vinegar as egg; put over the heat in a double boiler, and stir constantly with an egg whip. When cooked, remove and put away for serving. As needed, add seasonings with whipped cream, using a tablespoonful or two of the dressing. If this is kept in a glass jar it will keep fresh indefinitely on ice or in the cellar. Never add cream to the whole of it, just the amount to be used at once. Sour cream may be whipped and used as well as the sweet. Sour cream, with salt, pepper and a dash of cayenne and a drop of vinegar is a nice salad dressing for cucumbers and a sliced onion.

Behind words lie deeds, behind deeds qualities, behind qualities intentions; and the distinction between one man and another is the innermost ambition and the chosen attitude of the soul.
—John Watson, D. D.

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS.

When making pie crust, mix up enough without adding the water for several pies, and put the mixture into the ice chest, then when a pie is wanted all that is necessary is to add the water and roll out.

A glove finger cut from an old glove is a protection to the curtain when slipping it on to the rod.

To Cook Canned Corn.—Remove the paper from the can and set into the tea kettle; after fifteen minutes open, pour out and season. Corn cooked in this way is never scorched. Pour into a dish with bits of butter.

Cover the cut side of the watermelon with oiled paper and turn down on a plate.

Have baking sheets cut from sheet iron to fit the oven, with two of the edges turned a half of an inch for convenience in handling. A whole row of cookies may be baked in the oven at a time, and if using gas this is an item worth remembering.

Save stocking legs after the hose are past wearing. They make fine holders, stove cleaners and small dusters.

To relieve a scald or burn, apply equal parts of lime water and olive oil. If this is not convenient, the white of an egg quickly applied to keep out the air is soothing and cooling.

Sprinkle the top of the pie before baking with cold water; it will make the crust more flaky.

Caramel Bananas.—Peel three bananas and cut them into strips. Lay them in a baking dish, dredged with flour and a teaspoonful of cinnamon. Put in two tablespoonfuls of butter, cut in bits, and sprinkle with two tablespoonfuls of sugar, a tablespoonful of lemon juice and a little salt. Pour in half a cup of boiling water and bake quickly.

Nellie Maxwell.

Merely a Nickname.

Mrs. Handout—"You say you are called the 'colonel;' in what army have you served?" Ragged Rogers—"In de army of de unemployed, mum."

Zulu Girls Do Not Work.

The girls in Zululand are not allowed to work until they marry, because the stronger they are the more their husbands will pay for them, so until after they are sixteen they have a good time. After marriage they do all the work for their husbands, who sit about and watch them.

Preparing.

"Does your son expect to be a specialist?"

"I think so. At least I heard him say he was takin' a special course."