# FRAN

BY

## JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS

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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. 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, resulting from the interplay of their souls called for the soft pedal.

"What is to be done?" Grace inquired. Her attitude of reserve toward Gregory which Fran's presence had inspired, melted to potential helpfulness; at the same time her dislike for the girl solidified.

"What to you advise?" Gregory asked his secretary gently.

Grace cast a disdainful look at Fran. Then she turned to her employer and her deliciously curved face changed most charmingly. "I think," she responded with a faint shake of rebuke for his leniency, "that you should not need my advice in this matter." Why should he stand apparently helpless before this small bundle of arrogant impudence?

Gregory turned upon Fran with affected harshness. "You must go." He was annoyed that Grace should imagine him weak.

Fran's face hardened. It became an ax of stone, sharpened at each end, with eyes, nose and mouth in a narrow line of cold defiance. To Grace the acute wedge of white forehead, gleaming its way to the roots of the black hair, and the sharp chin cutting its way down from the tightly drawn mouth, spoke only of cunning. She regarded Fran as a fox, brought to bay.

Fran spoke with calm deliberation: "I am not going away."

"I would advise you," said Grace, looking down at her from under drooping lids, "to go at once, for a storm is rising. Do you want to be caught in the rain?"

Fran looked up at Grace, undauntedly. "I want to speak to Mr. Gregory. If you are the manager of this house, he and I can go outdoors. I don't mind getting wet. I've been in all kinds of weather."

Grace looked at Gregory. Her silences were effective weapons.

"I have no secrets from this lady," he said, looking into Grace's eyes, answering her silence. "What do you want to say to me, child?"

Fran shrugged her shoulders, always looking at Grace, while neither of the others looked at her. "Very well, then, of course it doesn't matter to me, but I thought it might to Mr. Gregory. Since he hasn't any secrets from you, of course he has told you that one of nearly twenty years ago—"

It was not the rumble of distant thunder, but a strange exclamation from the man that interrupted her; it was some such cry as human creatures may have uttered before the crystallizing of recurring experiences into the terms of speech.

Fran gave quick, relentless blows: "Of course he has told you all about his Springfield life—"

"Silence!" shouted Gregory, quivering from head to foot. The word was like an imprecation, and for a time it kept hissing between his locked teeth.

"And of course," Fran continued, lifting up her chin as if to drive in the words, "since you know all of his secrets—all of them—you have naturally been told the most important one. And so you know that when he was boarding with his cousin in Springfield and attending the college there, something like twenty years ago—"

"Leave us!" Gregory cried, waving a violent arm at his secretary, as if to sweep her beyond the possibility of overhearing another word.

"Leave you—with her?" Grace stammered, too amazed by his attitude to feel offended.

"Yes, yes, yes! Go at once!" He seemed the victim of some mysterious terror.

Grace compressed her full lips till they were thinned to a white line. "Do you mean forever?"

"Oh, Grace—I beg your pardon—Miss Grace—I don't mean that, of course. What could I do without you? Nothing, nothing, Grace—you are the soul of my work. Don't look at me so cruelly."

"Then you just mean," Grace said steadily, "for me to go away for a little while?"

"Only half an hour; that's all. Only half an hour, and then come back to me, and I will explain."

"You needn't go at all, on my account," observed Fran, with a twist of her mouth. "It's nothing to me whether you go or stay."

"She has learned a secret," Gregory stammered, "that vitally affects—affects some people—some friends of mine. I must talk to her about—about that secret, just for a little while. Half an hour, Miss Grace, that is all. That is really all—then come back to me. You understand that it's on account of the secret that I ask you to leave us. You understand that I would never send you away from me if I had my way, don't you, Grace?"

"I understand that you want me to go now," Grace Noir replied unresponsive. She ascended the stairway, at each step seeming to mount that much the higher into an atmosphere of righteous remoteness.

No one who separated Gregory from his secretary could enjoy his toleration, but Fran had struck far below the surface of likings and dislikings. She had turned back the covering of conventionality to lay bare the quivering heartstrings of life itself. There was no time to hesitate. The stone ax which on other occasions might be a laughing, elfish face was now held ready for battle.

"Hadn't we better go in a room where we can talk privately?" Fran asked. "I don't like this hall. That woman would just as soon listen over the banisters as not. I've seen lots of people like her, and I understand her kind."

"My God!" Groaned the Man.

### CHAPTER V.

#### We Reap What We Sow.

If anything could have prejudiced Hamilton Gregory against Fran's interests it would have been her slighting allusion to the one who typified his most exalted ideals as "that woman." But Fran was to him nothing but an agent bringing out of the past a secret he had preserved for almost twenty years. This stranger knew of his youthful folly, and she must be prevented from communicating it to others.

It was from no sense of aroused conscience that he hastened to lead her to the front room. In this crisis, something other than shuddering recoil from haunting deeds was imperative; unlovely specters must be made to vanish.

He tried desperately to cover his dread under a voice of harshness: "What have you to say to me?"

Fran had lost the insolent composure which the secretary had inspired. Now that she was alone with Hamilton Gregory, it seemed impossible to speak. She clasped and unclasped her hands. She opened her mouth, but her lips were dry. The wind had risen, and as it went moaning past the window, it seemed to speak of the yearning of years passing in the night, unsatisfied. At last came the words, muffled, frightened—"I know all about it."

"All about what, child?" He had lost his harshness. His voice was almost coaxing, as if entreating the mercy of ignorance.

Fran gasped, "I know all about it—I know—". She was terrified by the thought that perhaps she would not be able to tell him. She leaned heavily upon a table with hand turned backward, whitening her finger-tips by the weight thrown on them.

"About what?" he repeated with the caution of one who fears. He could not doubt the genuineness of her emotion; but he would not accept her statement of its cause until he must.

"Oh," cried Fran, catching a tempestuous breath, uneven, violent, "you know what I mean—that!"

The dew glistened on his brow, but he doggedly stood on the defensive. "You are indefinite," he muttered, trying to appear bold.

She knew he did not understand because he would not, and now she realized that he would, if possible, deny. Pretense and sham always hardened her. "Then," she said slowly, "I will be definite. I will tell you the things it would have been better for you to tell me. Your early home was in New York, but you had a cousin living in Springfield, where there was a very good college. Your parents were anxious to get you away from the temptations of a big city until you were of age. So you were sent to live with your cousin and attend college. You were with him three or four years, and at last the time came for graduation. Shall I go on?"

He fought desperately for self-preservation. "What is there in all this?"

"You had married, in the meantime," Fran said coldly; "married secretly. That was about nineteen years ago. She was only eighteen. After graduation you were to go to New York, break the news to your father, come back to Springfield for your wife, and acknowledge her. You graduated; you went to your father. Did you come back?"

"My God!" groaned the man. So she knew everything; must he admit it? "What is all this to you?" he burst forth. "Who and what are you, anyway—and why do you come here with your story? If it were true—"

"True!" said Fran bitterly. "If you've forgotten, why not go to Springfield and ask the first old citizen you meet? Or you might write to some one you used to know, and inquire. If you prefer, I'll send for one of your old professors, and pay his expenses. They took a good deal of interest in the young college student who married and neglected Josephine Derry. They haven't forgotten it, if you have."

"You don't know," he gasped, "that there's a penalty for coming to people's houses to threaten them with supposed facts in their lives. You don't know that the jails are ready to punish blackmailing, for you are only a little girl and don't understand such things. I give you warning. Although you are in short dresses—"

"Yes," remarked Fran dryly, "I thought that would be an advantage to you. It ought to make things easier."

"How an advantage to me? Easier? What have I to do with you?"

"I thought," Fran said coldly, "that it would be easier for you to take me into the house as a little girl than as a grown woman. You'll remember I told you I've come here to stay."

"To stay!" he echoed, shrinking back. "You?"

"Yes," she said, all the cooler for his attitude of repulsion. "I want a home. Yes, I'm going to stay. I want to belong to somebody."

He cried out desperately, "But what am I to do? This will ruin me—oh, it's true, all you've said—I don't deny it. But I tell you, girl, you will ruin me. Is all the work of my life to be overturned? I shall go mad."

"No, you won't," Fran calmly assured him. "You'll do what every one has to do, sooner or later—face the situation. You're a little late getting to it, but it was coming all the time. You can let me live here as an adopted orphan, or any way you please. The important fact to me is that I'm going to live here. But I don't want to make it hard for you, truly I don't."

"Don't you?" He spoke not loudly, but with tremendous pressure of desire. "Then, for God's sake, go back! Go back to—to wherever you came from. I'll pay all expenses. You shall have all you want—"

"All I want," Fran responded, "is a home, and that's something people can't buy. Get used to the thought of my staying here; that will make it easy."

"I Don't Want to Follow You Anywhere. This Is Where I Want to Stay."

Gregory paused irresolutely. He did not know what course to pursue, so he repeated vacantly, "I am willing to pay—"

Fran interrupted flippantly: "I have all the money I want." Then she passed swiftly into the hall, rudely brushing past the secretary.

Gregory could only follow. He spoke to Grace in a low voice, telling all he knew of the night wanderer. Her attitude called for explanations, but he would have given them anyway, in that low, confidential murmur. He did not know why it was—or seek to know—but whenever he spoke to Grace, it was natural to use a low tone, as if modulating his touch to sensitive strings—as if the harmony

"Easy!" he ejaculated. "Then it's your purpose to compel me to give you shelter, because of this secret—you mean to ruin me. I'll not be able to account for you, and they will question—my wife will want to know, and—and others as well."

"Now, now," said Fran, with sudden gentleness, "don't be so excited, don't take it so hard. Let them question. I'll know how to keep from exposing you. But I do want to belong to somebody, and after I've been here a while, and you begin to like me, I'll tell you everything. I knew the Josephine Derry that you deserted—she raised me, and I know she loved you to the end. Didn't you ever care for her, not even at the first, when you got her to keep your marriage secret until you could speak to your father face to face? You must have loved her then. And she's the best friend I ever had. Since she died I've wandered—and—and I want a home."

The long loneliness of years found expression in her eager voice and pleading eyes, but he was too engrossed with his own misfortunes to heed her emotion. "Didn't I go back to Springfield?" he cried out. "Of course I did. I made inquiries for her; that's why I went back—to find out what had become of her. I'd been gone only three years, yes, only three years; but, good heavens, how I had suffered! I was so changed that nobody knew me." He paused, appalled at the recollection. "I have always had a terrible capacity for suffering. I tell you, it was my duty to go back to find her, and I went back. I would have acknowledged her as my wife. I would have lived with her. I'd have done right by her, though it had killed me. Can I say more than that?"

"I am glad you went back," said Fran softly. "She never knew it. I am so glad that you did—even that."

"Yes, I did go back," he said, more firmly. "But she was gone. I tell you all this because you say she was your best friend."

"A while ago you asked me who I am—and what—"

"It doesn't matter," he interjected. "You were her friend; that is all I care to know. I went back to Springfield, after three years—but she was gone. I was told that her uncle had cast her off, and she had disappeared. It seems that she'd made friends with a class of people who were not—who were not—respectable."

Fran's eyes shone brightly. "Oh, they were not," she agreed, "they were not at all what you would call respectable. They were not religious."

"So I was told," he resumed, a little uncertainly. "There was no way for me to find her."

"Her?" cried Fran; "you keep on saying 'her.' Do you mean—?"

He hesitated. "She had chosen her part—to live with those people—I left her to lead the life that pleased her. That's why I never went back to Springfield again. I've taken up my life in my own way, and left her—your friend—"

"Yes, call her that," cried Fran, holding up her head. "I am proud of that title. I glory in it. And in this house—"

"I have made my offer," he interrupted decidedly. "I'll provide for you anywhere but in this house."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## CAT ENJOYED THE COMEDY

### But of the Four Principals Involved, Tom Was the Only One That Had a Laugh Coming.

This is the tale of a cat with a sense of humor.

Mrs. Youngwife went to an east end butcher shop the other day. When she entered, the greeting was a high-pitched shriek. Naturally she shrieked, too, and then looked to see what the trouble was. Mrs. Butcher, in charge of the shop in her husband's absence, stood on a small box. Before her stood a large black cat, a gleam of fun in his yellow eyes and a mouse in his mouth.

A moment the tableau held. Then the cat walked away and Mrs. Butcher started fearfully behind the counter. The cat followed her and dropped the mouse at her feet. Two screams, the flutter of skirts, and Mrs. Butcher again was safe on the box, and Mrs. Youngwife sat on the counter, her feet sticking straight out, her skirts gathered tightly about her ankles.

The mouse ran a foot or two and the cat had it again, and again walked away. Mrs. Butcher stepped off the box, picked it up and, carrying her ark of refuge with her, again tried to go behind the counter. Again the cat followed, and the play was enacted as before.

It went on that way for about ten minutes, when the delivery boy came whistling in. He was hailed as a deliverer.

"Huh!" he grunted. He seized the cat and cast it out the feline jaws still gripping her prey.—Indianapolis News.

### Bluebottle Heaven.

In the American Magazine there was an amusing story entitled "The Honor of the Bluebottles." Aunt Lucinda Bluebottle of Boston ran into a young man, who used a bad word. Aunt Lucinda goes on:

"The young man's language was not refined. He said he'd be damned, and that is exactly what will happen to him, I am sure, for whatever else heaven may be, I am convinced it will not be vulgar."

### To Be Rigidly Exact.

Regstaff—I hear you are doing some writing for one of the popular magazines.

Percollum—That's slightly exaggerated; I haven't been able to get my stuff into any but the—er—unpopular ones yet.

**Constipation Vanishes Forever**
Prompt Relief—Permanent Cure
CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS never fail. Purely vegetable — act surely but gently on the liver. Stop after dinner distress—cure indigestion, improve the complexion, brighten the eyes.
SMALL PILL, SMALL DOSE, SMALL PRICE.
Genuine must bear Signature
Brent Good
CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS.

## WHILE THERE WAS YET TIME

### Mean Man Made His Suggestion and Departed in Some Haste From Meeting of Indignant Women.

With tense, eager faces, the great audience of women leaned forward in their seats, eagerly drinking in the noted speaker's every word.

"Mere man," she was saying, "is wont to belittle woman's ability to enter the fields already usurped by him. As a matter of fact, she is capable of filling any post of public or private office now held by man, and if appointed to it, could even perform man's tasks with greater faithfulness and greater daring.

"Name, if you can, one post for which she cannot fit herself! Name one office to which she would not, could not, give the greatest measure of capability, the highest degree of courage, the—"

A mere man, who had slipped unnoticed into a back seat, rose at this point, and the light of sudden inspiration gleamed in his eye.

"Rat catcher!" he shouted. And then he fled.

### Need of Sun and Air.

"A certain morbidness among girls and women, which rests so heavily on modern life, is due to lack of sun, air and sunshine, according to Professor Manjon of Nice.

"Sun-bathing, air-bathing and frequent physical exercise in loose garments, are indispensable to good health and good temperament in women," declared the lecturer.

### Hunts Hares With Auto.

Sport in a new form now appeals to a New Zealand farmer. Driving in a motor car with two powerful headlights, he bags nightly between six and a dozen hares, the animals being so fascinated by the glare of the lamps that they become stationary targets.

### Naturally Indignant.

"Did you tell your troubles to a policeman?" "Yes," said the man who had been robbed. "And I tell you that policeman was indignant. The hold-up man hadn't even asked his permission to operate on his beat."

### Retort Courteous.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could have our brains cleaned out now and then?"

"You would have to have yours done with a vacuum cleaner."

### No Wonder.

"Why did you order that well-dressed lady out of the store?"

"She's a well-known kleptomaniac."

"Did she take anything here?"

"She took umbrage."

A pessimist is a man who thinks that when he gets to heaven it will be a waste of time for him to look around for his earthly neighbors.

### HER "BEST FRIEND"
A Woman Thus Speaks of Postum.

We usually consider our best friends those who treat us best.

Some persons think coffee a real friend, but watch it carefully awhile and observe that it is one of the meanest of all enemies, for it stabs one while professing friendship.

Coffee contains a poisonous drug—caffeine—which injures the delicate nervous system and frequently sets up disease in one or more organs of the body, if its use is persisted in.

"I had heart palpitation and nervousness for four years and the doctor told me the trouble was caused by coffee. He advised me to leave it off, but I thought I could not," writes a Wis. lady.

"On the advice of a friend I tried Postum and it so satisfied me I did not care for coffee after a few days' trial of Postum.

"As weeks went by and I continued to use Postum my weight increased from 98 to 118 pounds, and the heart trouble left me. I have used it a year now and am stronger than I ever was. I can hustle up stairs without any heart palpitation, and I am free from nervousness.

"My children are very fond of Postum and it agrees with them. My sister liked it when she drank it at my house; now she has Postum at home and has become very fond of it. You may use my name if you wish, as I am not ashamed of praising my best friend—Postum." Name given by Postum Co., Battle Creek, Mich.

Postum now comes in new concentrated form called Instant Postum. It is regular Postum, so processed at the factory that only the soluble portions are retained.

A spoonful of Instant Postum with hot water, and sugar and cream to taste, produce instantly a delicious beverage.

Write for the little book, "The Road to Wellville."

"There's a reason" for Postum—