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. 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. Grace Noir, Gregory's private secretary, takes 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 had married his present wife three years before the death of Fran's mother. Fran takes a liking to Mrs. Gregory. Gregory explains that Fran is the daughter of a very dear friend who is dead. Fran agrees to the story. Mrs. Gregory insists in her making her home with them and takes her to her arms. It is decided that Fran must go to school. Grace shows persistent interest in Gregory's story of the dead friend and hints that Fran may be an imposter. Fran decides that the secretary must go. Grace begins nagging tactics in an effort to drive Fran from the Gregory home, but Mrs. Gregory reminds Grace of her friendship. Fran is offered before Superintendent Ashton to be punished for insubordination in school. Chairman Clinton is present. The affair ends in Fran leaving the school in company of the two men to the amazement of the scandal-mongers of the town. 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 lion tamer, Fran Nonpareil. She tired of circus life and sought a home.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

As he looked into her eyes, all sense of the abnormal disappeared. "I have the imagination, Fran," he exclaimed impulsively, "if it is your life."

"In spite of the lions?" she asked, almost sternly.

"You needn't tell me a word," Abbott said. "I know all that one need know; it's written in your face, a story of sweet innocence and brave patience."

"But I want you to know."

"Good!" he replied with a sudden smile. "Tell the story, then; if you were an Odyssey, you couldn't be too long."

"The first thing I remember is waking up to feel the car jerked, or stopped, or started and seeing lights flash past the windows—lanterns of the brakemen, or lamps of some town, dancing along the track. The sleeping car was home—the only home I knew. All night long the was the groaning of the wheels, the hissing off of steam, the calls of the men. Bounder Brothers had their private train, and mother and I lived in one Pullman car. After a while I knew that folks stared at us because we were different from others. We were show-people. Then the thing was to look like you didn't know, or didn't care, how much people stared. After that, I found out that I had no father; he'd deserted mother, and her uncle had turned her out of doors for marrying against his wishes, and she'd have starved if it hadn't been for the show people."

"Dear Fran!" whispered Abbott tenderly.

"Mother had gone to Chicago, hoping for a position in some respectable office, but they didn't want a typewriter who wasn't a stenographer. It was

"Poor Little Nonpareil!" Murmured Abbott. Wistfully.

winter—and mother had me—I was so little and bad! . . . In a cheap lodging house, mother got to know La Gentzeti, and she persuaded mother to wait with her for the season to open up, then go with Bounder Brothers; they were wintering in Chicago. It was such a kind of life as mother had never dreamed of, but it was more convenient than starving, and she thought it would give her a chance to find father—that traveling, all over the country. La Gentzeti was a lion-tamer, and that's what mother learned, and those two were the ones who could go inside Samson's cage. The life was awfully hard, but she got to like it, and everybody was kind to us, and money came pouring in, and she was always hoping to run across a clue to my father—and never did."

She paused, but at the pressure of Abbott's sympathetic hand, she went on with renewed courage:

"When I was big enough, I wore a tiny black skirt, and a red coat with shiny buttons, and I beat the drum in the carnival band. You ought to have seen me—so little. . . . Abbott, you can't imagine how little I was! We had about a dozen small shows in our company, fortune-tellers, minstrels, magic wonders, and all that—and the band had to march from one tent to the next, and stand out in front and play, to get the crowd in a bunch, so the free exhibition could work on their nerves. And I'd beat away, in my red coat . . . and there were always the strange faces, staring, staring—but I was so little! Sometimes they would smile at me, but mother had taught me never to speak to anyone, but to wear a glazed look like this—"

"How frightfully cold!" Abbott shivered. Then he laughed, and so did Fran. They had entered Littleburg. He added wickedly: "And how dreadfully near we are getting to your home."

Fran gurgled. "Wouldn't Grace Noir just die if she could see us!"

That sobered Abbott; considering his official position, it seemed high time for reflection.

Fran resumed abruptly. "But I never really liked it because what I wanted was a home—to belong to somebody. Then I got to hating the bold stare of people's eyes, and their foolish gaping mouths, I hated being always on exhibition with every gesture watched, as if I'd been one of the trained dogs. I hated the public. I wanted to get away from the world—clear away from everybody . . . like I am now . . . with you. Isn't it great!"

"Mammoth!" Abbott declared, wafting her words with liberal imagination.

"I must talk fast, or the Gregory house will be looming up at us. Mother taught me all she knew, though she hated books; she made herself think she was only in the show life till she could make a little more—always just a little more—she really loved it, you see. But I loved the books—study—anything that wasn't the show. It was kind of friendly when I began feeding Samson."

"Poor little Nonpareil!" murmured Abbott wistfully.

"And often when the show was being unloaded, I'd be stretched out in our sleeper, with a school book pressed close to the cinder-specked window, catching the first light. When the mauls were pounding away at the tent-pins, maybe I'd hunt a seat on some cage, if it had been drawn up under a tree, or maybe it'd be the ticket wagon, or even the stake pile—there you'd see me studying away for dear life, dressed in a plain little dress, trying to look like ordinary folks. Such a queer little chap, I was—and always trying to pretend that I wasn't! You'd have laughed to see me."

"Laughed at you!" cried Abbott indignantly. "Indeed I shouldn't."

"No?" exclaimed Fran, patting his arm impulsively.

"Dear little wonder!" he returned conclusively.

"I must tell you about one time," she continued gaily. "We were in New Orleans at the Mardi Gras, and I was expected to come into the ring riding Samson—not the vicious old lion, but cub—that was long after my days of the drum and the red coat, bless you! I was a lion-tamer, now, nearly thirteen years old, if you'll believe me. Well! And what was I saying—you keep looking so friendly, you make me forget myself. Goodness, Abbott, it's so much fun talking to you . . . I've never mentioned all this to one soul in this town . . . Well—oh, yes; I was to have come into the ring, riding Samson. Everybody was waiting for me. The band nearly blew itself black in the face. And what do you think was the matter?"

"Did Samson balk?"

"No, it wasn't that. I was lying on the cage floor, with my head on Samson—Samson the Second made such a gorgeous and animated pillow!—and I was learning geology. I'd just found out that the world wasn't made in seven United States days, and it was such surprising news that I'd forgotten all about cages and lions and tents—if you could have seen me lying there—if you just could!"

"But, I . . . can!" Abbott declared. "Your long black hair is mingled with his tawny mane, and your cheeks are blooming—"

"And my feet are crossed," cried Fran.

"And your feet are crossed; and those little hands hold up the book," Abbott swiftly sketched in the details; "and your bosom is rising and falling, and your lips are parted—like now—showing perfect teeth—"

"Dressed in my tights and fluffy lace and jewels," Fran helped, "with bare arms and stars all in my hair . . . But the end came to everything when—when mother died. Her last words were about my father—how she hoped some day I'd meet him, and tell him she had forgiven. Mother sent me to her half-uncle. My! but that was mighty unpleasant!" Fran shook her head vigorously. "He began telling me about how mother had done wrong in marrying secretly, and he threw it up to me and I just told him . . . But he's dead, now. I had to go back to the show—there wasn't any other place. But a few months ago I was of age, and I came into Uncle Ephraim's

It Was as If Abbott Had Suddenly Raised a Window in a Raw Wind.

property, because I was the only living relation he had, so he couldn't help my getting it. I'll bet he's mad, now, that he didn't make a will! When he said that mother—it don't matter what he said—I just walked out of his door, that time, with my head up high like this . . . Oh, goodness, we're here."

They stood before Hamilton Gregory's silent house.

"Good night," Fran said hastily. "It's a mistake to begin a long story on a short road. My! But wasn't that a short road, though!"

"Sometime, you shall finish that story, Fran. I know of a road much longer than the one we've taken—we might try it some day, if you say so."

"I do say so. What road is it?"

Abbott had spoken of a long road without definite purpose, yet there was a glimmering perception of the reality, as he showed by saying tremulously:

"This is the beginning of it—"

He bent down, as if to take her in his arms.

But Fran drew back, perhaps with a blush that the darkness concealed, certainly with a little laugh. "I'm afraid I'd get lost on that road," she murmured, "for I don't believe you know the way very well, yourself."

She sped lightly to the house, unlocked the door, and vanished.

CHAPTER XII.

Grace Captures the Outposts.

The next evening there was choir practice at the Walnut Street church. Abbott Ashton, hesitating to make his nightly plunge into the dust-clouds of learning, paused in the vestibule to take a peep at Grace. He knew she never missed a choir practice, for though she could neither sing nor play the organ, she thought it her duty to set an example of regular attendance that might be the means of bringing those who could do one or the other.

Abbott was not disappointed; but he was surprised to see Mrs. Jefferson in her wheel-chair at the end of the pew occupied by the secretary, while between them sat Mrs. Gregory. His surprise became astonishment on discovering Fran and Simon Jefferson in the choir loft, slyly whispering and nibbling candy, with the air of soldiers off duty—for the choir was in the throes of a solo.

Abbott, as if hypnotized by what he had seen, slowly entered the auditorium. Fran's keen eyes discovered him, and her face showed elfish mischief. Grace, following Fran's eyes, found the cause of the odd smile, and beckoned to Abbott. Hamilton Gregory, following Grace's glance—for he saw no one but her at the practices, since she inspired him with deepest fervor—felt suddenly as if he had lost something; he had often experienced the same sensation on seeing Grace approached by some unattached gentleman.

Grace motioned to Abbott to sit beside her, with a concentration of attention that showed her purpose of reaching a definite goal unsuspected by the other.

"I'm so glad Fran has taken a place in the choir," Abbott whispered to Grace. "And look at Simon Jefferson—who'd have thought it!"

Grace looked at Simon Jefferson; she also looked at Fran, but her compressed lips and reproving eye expressed none of Abbott's gladness. However, she responded with—"I am so glad you are here, Professor Ashton, for I'm in trouble, and I can't decide which way it is my duty to turn. Will you help me? I am going to trust you—it is a matter relating to Mr. Gregory."

Abbott was pleased that she should think him competent to advise her respecting her duty; at the same time he regretted that her confidence related to Mr. Gregory.

"Professor Ashton," she said softly, "does my position as hired secretary to Mr. Gregory carry with it the obligation to warn him of any misconduct in his household?"

The solo was dying away, and, sweet and low, it fell from heaven like manna upon his soul, blending divinely with the secretary's voice. Her expression "hired" sounded like a tragic note—to think of one so beautiful, so meek, so surrounded by mellow hymn-notes, being hired!

"You hesitate to advise me, before you know all," she said, "and you are right. In a moment the choir will be singing louder, and we can all talk together. Mrs. Gregory should be consulted, too."

Grace, conscious of doing all that one could in consulting Mrs. Gregory, "too," looked toward the choir loft, and smiled into Hamilton Gregory's eyes. How his baton, inspired by that smile, cut magic runes in the air!

"Mrs. Gregory," Grace said in a low voice, "I suppose Professor Ashton is so surprised at seeing you in church—it has been more than five months, hasn't it? . . . that I'm afraid he isn't thinking about what I'm saying."

Mrs. Gregory could not help feeling in the way, because her husband seemed to share Grace's feeling. Instinctively she turned to her mother stretched her hand on the invalid's arm.

"They ain't bothering me, Lucy," said the old lady, alertly. "I can't hear their noise, and when I shut my eyes I can't see their motions."

"I have something to tell you both," Grace said solemnly. "Last night, I couldn't sleep, and that made me sensitive to noises. I thought I heard some one slipping from the house just as the clock struck half-past eleven. It seemed incredible, for I knew if it were anyone, it was that Fran, and I didn't think even she would do that."

It was as if Abbott had suddenly raised a window in a raw wind. His temperature descended. The other's manner of saying "That Fran!" obscured his glass of the future.

Mrs. Gregory said quickly, "Fran leave the house at half-past eleven? Impossible."

"How do you know," Abbott asked, "that Fran left the house at such a time of the night?" The question was unfair since it suggested denial, but his feeling for Fran seemed to call for unfairness to Grace.

"I will tell you," Grace responded, with the distinctness of one in power. "At the time, I told myself that even Fran would not do that. But, a long time afterward, I heard another sound, from the yard. I went to my window. I looked out. The moon was bright, but there was a very dark shadow about the front gate. I heard voices. One was that of Fran. The other was the voice of—" her tone vibrated in its intensity—"the voice of a man!"

"It was not Fran's voice," Mrs. Gregory declared earnestly.

"What man was it?" Abbott inquired, rather resentfully.

"I do not know. I wish now, that I had called out," responded Grace, paying no heed to Mrs. Gregory. "That is where I made my mistake. The man got away. Fran came running into the house, and closed the door as softly as she could—after she'd unlocked it from the outside! I concluded it would be best to wait till morning, before I said a word. So this morning, before breakfast, I strolled in the yard, trying to decide what I had better do. I went to the gate, and there on the grass—what do you suppose I found?"

Abbott was bewildered. Mrs. Gregory listened, pale with apprehension.

"It was a card," Grace said, with awful significance, "a gambling card! As long as I have lived in the house, nobody ever dared to bring a card there. Mrs. Gregory will tell you the same. But that Fran. . . . She had been playing cards out there at midnight—and with a man!"

"I cannot think so," said Mrs. Gregory firmly.

"After making up my mind what to do," continued Grace evenly, "I took her aside. I told her what I had seen and heard. I gave her back her card. But how can we be sure she will not do it again? That is what troubles me. Ought to I to tell Mr. Gregory, so a scandal can be avoided?"

Abbott looked blankly at Fran, who was singing with all her might. She caught his look, and closed her eyes. Abbot asked weakly: "What did she say?"

Grace answered: "She denied it, of course—said she hadn't been playing cards with anybody, hadn't dropped the card I found, and wouldn't even admit that she'd been with a man. If I tell Mr. Gregory about her playing cards with a man at that hour, I don't believe he will think he ought to keep her longer, even if she does claim to be his friend's daughter."

"But you tell us," Mrs. Gregory interposed swiftly, "that she said she hadn't been playing cards."

"She said!" Grace echoed unpleasantly, "she said!"

"That card you found," began Abbott guiltily, "was it the king of hearts?" Possibly he had dropped it from his pocket when leaning over the gate to— But why had he leaned over the gate?

Grace coldly answered, "I do not know one card from another."

"Let me try to describe it."

"I hope you cannot describe the card I found," said Grace, the presentiment that she was on the eve of discoveries giving her eyes a starlike directness.

"I suspect I dropped that card over the fence," he confessed, "for I had the king of hearts, and last night about that time I was standing at the gate—"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

PETRIFIED FALLS IN ALGERIA

Remarkable Mineral Formation Which Puzzles Scientists Called "The Bath of the Damned."

With all the beauty of a cataract of living water, there is in Algeria a remarkable petrified waterfall which recently has been engaging the attention of scientists.

This is the Hammam-Meskhutin, which means "The Bath of the Damned," and is located 52 miles from Constantine, on the site of the ancient town of Cirta. This solidified cascade is the production of calcareous deposits from sulphurous and ferruginous mineral springs, issuing from the depths of the earth at a temperature of 95 degrees Centigrade.

"The Bath of the Damned," even from a near viewpoint, looks for all the world like a great wall of water dashing into a swirling pool at its foot, yet its gleaming, graceful curves and the apparently swirling eddies at its base are as fixed and immovable as if carved from the face of a granite cliff.

Many centuries have, of course, gone to the making of the deposits, and the springs were well known to the ancient Romans. The name Hammam-Meskhutin was given to the stone cataract in an allusion to a legend that the waterfall was petrified by Allah, punishing the impiety of unbelievers by turning all the members of a tribe into stone. At night, so the story runs, its stone dwellers of the remote past are freed from their strange fetters, come to life and resume their normal shapes.

Queer Uses for the Crocus.

The crocus is nowadays held to justify its existence by its beauty, but in bygone centuries it was cultivated with an eye to profit—its saffron being in high demand both as an aromatic and as a flavoring for cakes and pies. A distinction of crocus blossoms, also, was held to be good for strengthening the lungs and heart, and as a preventive of plague. Evidence of the flower's commercial value survives in the name of the chief center of its cultivation. Saffron Walden, but saffron nowadays is appreciated only by the sparrows, who wreck the crocuses to obtain it.

Ammonia water that has been used for washing may be used for plants. It is an excellent fertilizer.

GENEROUS AT SMALL COST

Philanthropist's Right to Have His Name on List of Those Who Go About Doing Good.

At a banquet at San Francisco recently William F. McCombs told of a conversation in a club in which several philanthropic personages were mentioned and lauded to the skies. The conversation had gone to some length, Mr. McCombs said, when a man who was sitting in a corner arose with a merry smile flitting over his features and broke into the gabfest. "Your philanthropists are all right," he remarked, "but I think it is only just that my next-door neighbor should be included in the kindly disposed bunch." "We are willing to add him to the list," responded one of the others, "but is he really so generously inclined?" "Well, I should say that he is," was the emphatic declaration of the first. "Dozens of tramps hammer at his back door and I have never known him to send one away empty-handed." "You don't mean it?" returned the second a trifle incredulously. "That's right," rejoined the first; "he always gives them a letter of introduction to me."

ECZEMA BURNED AND ITCHED

203 Walnut St., Hillsboro, Ill.—"My child had a breaking out on the lower limbs which developed into eczema. The eczema began with pimples which contained yellow corruption and from the child's clothing they were greatly irritated. They seemed to burn, which made the child scratch them, resulting in a mass of open places. They made her so cross and fretful that it was impossible to keep her quiet. They caused her to lose much sleep and she was constantly tormented by severe itching and burning.

"I tried several well-known remedies, but got no relief until I got a sample of Cuticura Soap and Ointment, which did so much good that I got a large quantity that cured her in ten days after she had been affected for two months." (Signed) Mrs. Edith Schwartz, Feb. 28, 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.

Whom She Preferred.

A lady suspected her two sons of carrying on a mild flirtation with one of the servants, a bonny Scottish lassie. In order to arrive at the truth of the matter she pressed the bell, and when the girl answered it spoke to her.

"Tell me, Jane," she said quietly, "which of my two sons do you prefer—James or Albert?"

"Weel, ma'am," replied the blushing Jane, "they are both nice, though I think of the two I prefer James; but for a real guid spree gie me the master."—London Tit-Bits.

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