

**FRAN**

By JOHN BRECKENRIDGE ELLIS  
Illustrations by O. Irwin Myers

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The lady who was not Mrs. Gregory was so pleased to see the gentleman who was Mr. Gregory—they had not met since the evening meal—that, at first, she was unaware of the black shadow; and Mr. Gregory, in spite of his perplexity, forgot the shadow also, so cheered was he by the glimpse of his secretary as she stood in the brightly lighted hall. Such moments of delighted recognition are infinitesimal when a third person, however shadowy, is present; yet had the world been there, this exchange of glances must have taken place.

Fran did not understand—her very wisdom blinded her as with too great light. She had seen so much of the world that, on finding a tree bearing apples, she at once classified it as an apple tree. To Gregory, Grace Noir was but a charming and conscientious sympathizer in his life-work, the atmosphere in which he breathed freest. He had not breathed freely for half a dozen hours—no wonder he was glad to see her. To Grace Noir, Hamilton Gregory was but a benefactor to mankind, a man of lofty ideals whom it was a privilege to aid, and since she knew that her very eyes gave him strength, no wonder she was glad to see him.

Could Fran have read their thoughts, she would not have found the slightest consciousness of any shade of evil in their sympathetic comradeship. As she could read only their faces, she disliked more than ever the tall, young, and splendidly formed secretary.

"Oh!" said Grace with restraint, discovering Fran.

"Yes," Fran said with her elfish smile, "back again."

Just without the portal Hamilton



"Good Evening, Professor Ashton," 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 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 do 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, undaunted. "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, tilting up her chin as if to drive in the words, "since you know all 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 would 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 dislikes. 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.

"Hahn'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."

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

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—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."

"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—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—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."

Fran regarded him with somber intensity. "I've asked for a home with you on the grounds that your wife was my best friend in all the world, and because I am homeless. You refuse. I suppose that's natural. I have to guess at your feelings because I haven't been raised among 'respectable' people. I'm sorry you don't like it, but you're going to provide for me right here. For a girl, I'm pretty independent; folks that don't like me are welcome to all the enjoyment they get out of their dislike. I'm here to stay. Suppose you look on me as a sort of summer crop. I enjoyed hearing you sing, tonight—"

"We reap what we sow. We reap what we sow."

I see you remember."

He shuddered at her mocking holy things. "Hush! What are you saying? The past is cut off from my life. I have been pardoned, and I will not have anybody forcing that past upon me."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**Bird Robbed Hen Nest.**

Orangeburg News.

Hen nests have been known to have been robbed by men and animals, but the first instance where a nest was robbed by a bird has just been reported. The robber upon this occasion was a woodpecker, and the robbery was committed in this city a few days ago. In fact the robbing of the hen nest had been kept up for sometime before the discovery was made that the culprit was a bird.

Several days ago at a home in this city, eggs began to disappear from one of the hen nests in the yard. Close investigation failed to reveal how the eggs were being taken. Nevertheless as fast as the eggs were laid they would as soon disappear.

One afternoon one of the occupants of the home was sitting on the rear porch, when a woodpecker was noticed to fly in the direction of the fowl house. An investigation of what had attracted the attention of the bird in this direction, revealed the fact that the feathered visitor was robbing the hen nest.

The woodpecker first pierced a hole in the shell of the egg and then drained it of its contents. As many as two and three eggs at a time would be treated in this manner at one time by the woodpecker.

It was afterwards found that the woodpecker would perch upon a nearby building, and as soon as the hens began cackling, he would go on a tour of investigation of the fowl house.

**INCREASE EFFICIENCY OF SERVICE.**

**Bank of Sumter Now Operate Receiving and Paying Tellers Windows.**

It is just a sign of the increased business activity in Sumter that the Bank of Sumter has just added another teller to its force to expedite business, thus having a paying teller and a teller for deposits. This is the first bank to have two teller's windows and the installment of this new man makes the service of the Bank of Sumter the quickest in the city. Mr. E. H. Rhame, Jr., is paying teller and his quickness is well known in banking service. The new receiving teller is Mr. E. Murr Hall, one of the most popular bank men in this city. Mr. C. A. Witherspoon is added to the force as bookkeeper.

The enormous increase of the bank's business has necessitated this increase in the banking force.

**NEW PLANTS DISCOVERED.**

**One Hundred New Species of Plants Growing on Grazing Lands.**

In making a study of grazing lands on the national forests, 125 entirely new species of plants have been discovered by the government's experts, and will be named and classified by the botanists of the department of agriculture.

Their discovery came about through the collection of some 9,000 different plant specimens, with notes as to their habits of growth and forage value. This work is part of a comprehensive plan to determine the grazing value of every acre of national forest land; in which the capacity of the soil to grow certain forage crops is to be determined and an effort made to decide for which class of stock, sheep, cattle, or goats, the range is best suited.

The men who have made the studies have combined the qualities of practical stockmen and trained botanists. They divided the areas into such small

subdivisions that maps have been prepared which show exactly the kinds of feed which grow on each acre, and the time of year it is ready for grazing. The maps also show the stock's water supply and indicate the kind of stock best suited to the area.

The investigation also showed the examiners many areas covered with flourishing plants which apparently should furnish excellent grazing, but which were not of a character relished by stock, these areas, therefore, had little or no stock carrying capacity.

As a result of the study, the forest service announces that it will be in a position to perfect its system of grazing management to bring about still better conditions for both stock and range.

**HUMAN RECIPE**

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Add tattered clothes, a bright red nose—  
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