

Anna's Whim

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

“Now just look at that!” cried a young lady, pausing suddenly in her restless march to and fro on one of the wide piazzas of a seaside hotel.

“At what?” asked her companion, lazily swinging in a hammock.

“The difference in those two greetings. It’s perfectly disgraceful!” was the petulant reply.

“I didn’t see any thing. Do tell me about it,” said Clara, opening her drowsy eyes with sudden interest.

“Why, young Barlow was lounging up the walk, and met pretty Miss Ellery. Off went his hat; he gave her a fine bow, a gracious smile, a worn-out compliment, and then dawdled on again. The next minute Joe King came along. Instantly Barlow woke up, laughed out like a pleased boy, gave him a hearty grip of the hand, a cordial ‘How are you, old fellow? I’m no end glad to see you!’ and, linking arms, the two tramped off, quite beaming with satisfaction.”

“But, child, King is Barlow’s best friend; Kitty Ellery only an acquaintance. Besides, it wouldn’t do to greet a woman like a man.”

“Yes, it would, especially in this case; for Barlow adores Kate, and might, at least, treat her to something better than the nonsense he gives other girls. But, no, it’s proper to simper and compliment; and he’ll do it till his love gets the better of ‘prunes and prisms,’ and makes him sincere and earnest.”

“This is a new whim of yours. You surely wouldn’t like to have any man call out ‘How are you, Anna?’ slap you on the shoulder, and nearly shake your hand off, as Barlow did King’s, just now,” said Clara, laughing at her friend.

“Yes, I would,” answered Anna, perversely, “if he really meant it to express affection or pleasure. A good grip of the hand and a plain, hearty word would please me infinitely better than all the servile bowing down and sweet nonsense I’ve had lately. I’m not a fool; then, why am I treated like one?” she continued, knitting her handsome brows and pacing to and fro like an angry leopardess. “Why don’t men treat me like a

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reasonable being?—talk sense to me, give me their best ideas, tell me their plans and ambitions, let me enjoy the real man in them, and know what they honestly are? I don't want to be a goddess stuck up on a pedestal. I want to be a woman down among them, to help and be helped by our acquaintance."

"It wouldn't do, I fancy. They wouldn't like it, and would tell you to keep to your own sex."

"But my own sex don't interest or help me one bit. Women have no hope but to be married, and that is soon told; no ideas but dress and show, and I'm tired to death of both; no ambition but to outshine their neighbors, and I despise that."

"Thank you, love," blandly murmured Clara.

"It is true, and you know it. There *are* sensible women; but not in my set. And I don't seem to find them. I've tried the life set down for girls like me, and for three years I've lived and enjoyed it. Now I'm tired of it. I want something better, and I mean to have it. Men *will* follow, admire, flatter, and love me; for I please them and they enjoy my society. Very well. Then it's fair that I should enjoy theirs. And I should if they would let me. It's perfectly maddening to have flocks of brave, bright fellows round me, full of every thing that is attractive, strong, and helpful, yet not be able to get at it, because society ordains twaddle between us, instead of sensible conversation and sincere manners."

"What shall we do about it, love?" asked Clara, enjoying her friend's tirade.

"*You* will submit to it, and get a mental dyspepsia, like all the other fashionable girls. I won't submit, if I can help it; even if I shock Mrs. Grundy by my efforts to get plain bread and beef instead of confectionery."

Anna walked in silence for a moment, and then burst out again, more energetically than ever.

"Oh! I do wish I could find one sensible man, who would treat me as he treats his male friends,—even roughly, if he is honest and true; who would think me worthy of his confidence, ask my advice, let me give him whatever I have that is wise and excellent, and be my friend in all good faith."

"Ahem!" said Clara, with a significant laugh, that angered Anna.

"You need not try to abash me with your jeers. I know what

I mean, and I stand by my guns, in spite of your ‘hems.’ I do *not* want lovers. I’ve had dozens, and am tired of them. I will not marry till I know the man thoroughly; and how *can* I know him with this veil between us? They don’t guess what I really am; and I want to prove to them and to myself that I possess brains and a heart, as well as ‘heavenly eyes,’ a ‘queenly figure,’ and a ‘mouth made for kissing.’”

The scorn with which Anna uttered the last words amused her friend immensely, for the petulant beauty had never looked handsomer than at that moment.

“If any man saw you now, he’d promise whatever you ask, no matter how absurd. But don’t excite yourself, dear child; it is too warm for heroics.”

Anna leaned on the wide baluster a moment, looking thoughtfully out upon the sea; and as she gazed a new expression stole over her charming face, changing its disdainful warmth to soft regret.

“This is not all a whim. I know what I covet, because I had it once,” she said, with a sigh. “I had a boy friend when I was a girl, and for several years we were like brother and sister. Ah! what happy times we had together, Frank and I. We played and studied, quarrelled and made up, dreamed splendid dreams, and loved one another in our simple child fashion, never thinking of sex, rivalry, or any of the forms and follies that spoil maturer friendships.”

“What became of him? Did he die angelically in his early bloom, or outgrow his Platonics with round jackets?” asked Clara.

“He went to college. I went abroad, to be ‘finished off;’ and when we met a year ago the old charm was all gone, for we were ‘in society’ and had our masks on.”

“So the boy and girl friendship did not ripen into love and end the romance properly?”

“No, thank Heaven! no flirtation spoils the pretty story. Frank was too wise, and I too busy. Yet I remember how glad I was to see him; though I hid it properly, and pretended to be quite unconscious that I was any thing but a belle. I got paid for my deceit, though; for, in spite of his admiration, I saw he was disappointed in me. I should not have cared if I had been disappointed in him; but I was quick to see that he was

growing into one of the strong, superior men who command respect. I wanted to keep his regard, at least; and I seemed to have nothing but beauty to give in return. I think I never was so hurt in my life as I was by his not coming to see me after a week or two, and hearing him say to a friend, one night, when I thought I was at my very best, "She is spoilt, like all the rest."

"I do believe you loved him, and that is why you won't love any one else," cried Clara, who had seen her friend in her moods before; but never understood them, and thought she had found a clew now.

"No," said Anna, with a quiet shake of the head. "No, I only wanted my boy friend back, and could not find him. The fence between us was too high; and I could not climb over, as I used to do when I leaped the garden-wall to sit in a tree and help Frank with his lessons."

"Has the uncivil wretch never come back?" asked Clara, interested in the affair.

"Never. He is too busy shaping his life bravely and successfully to waste his time on a frivolous butterfly like Anna West."

An eloquent little gesture of humility made the words almost pathetic. Kind-hearted Clara was touched by the sight of tears in the "heavenly eyes," and tumbling out of the hammock she embraced the "queenly figure" and warmly pressed the "lips that were made for kissing," thereby driving several approaching gentlemen to the verge of distraction.

"Now don't be tragical, darling. You have nothing to cry for, I'm sure. Young, lovely, rich, and adored, what more *can* any girl want?" said Clara, gushingly.

"Something besides admiration to live for," answered Anna, adding, with a shrug, as she saw several hats fly off and several manly countenances beam upon her, "Never mind, my fit is over now; let us go and dress for tea."

Miss West usually took a brisk pull in her own boat before breakfast; a habit which lured many indolent young gentlemen out of their beds at unaccustomed hours, in the hope that they might have the honor of splashing their legs helping her off, the privilege of wishing her "*Bon voyage*," or the crowning rapture of accompanying her.

On the morning after her "fit," as she called the discontent of a really fine nature with the empty life she led, she was up

and out unusually early; for she had kept her room with a headache all the evening, and now longed for fresh air and exercise.

As she prepared the "Gull" for a start, she was idly wondering what early bird would appear eager to secure the coveted worm, when a loud and cheerful voice was heard calling,—

"Hullo, Anna!" and a nautically attired gentleman hove in sight, waving his hat as he hailed her.

She started at the unceremonious salute and looked back. Then her whole face brightened beautifully as she sprang up the bank, saying, with a pretty mixture of hesitation and pleasure,—

"Why, Frank, is that you?"

"Do you doubt it?"

And the new-comer shook both her hands so vigorously that she winced a little as she said, laughing,—

"No, I don't. That is the old squeeze with extra power in it."

"How are you? Going for a pull? Take me along and show me the lions. There's a good soul."

"With pleasure. When did you come?" asked Anna, settling the black ribbon under the sailor collar which set off her white throat charmingly.

"Last night. I caught a glimpse of you at tea; but you were surrounded then and vanished immediately afterward. So when I saw you skipping over the rocks just now, I gave chase, and here I am. Shall I take an oar?" asked Frank, as she motioned him to get in.

"No, thank you. I prefer to row myself and don't need any help," she answered, with an imperious little wave of the hand; for she was glad to show him she could do something besides dance, dress, and flirt.

"All right. Then I'll do the luxurious and enjoy myself." And, without offering to help her in, Frank seated himself, folded his arms, stretched out his long legs, and placidly remarked,—

"Pull away, skipper."

Anna was pleased with his frank and friendly greeting, and, feeling as if old times had come again, sprang in, prepared to astonish him with her skill.

"Might I suggest that you"—began Frank, as she pushed off.

"No suggestions or advice allowed aboard this ship. I know what I'm about, though I *am* a woman," was the severe answer, as the boat glided from the wharf.

"Ay, ay, sir!" And Frank meekly subsided, with a twinkle of amusement in the eyes that rested approvingly on the slender figure in a blue boating suit and the charming face under the sailor hat.

Anna paddled her way dexterously out from among the fleet of boats riding at anchor in the little bay; then she seated herself, adjusted one oar, and looked about for the other rowlock. It was nowhere visible; and, after a silent search, she deigned to ask,—

"Have you seen the thing anywhere?"

"I saw it on the bank."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I began to, but was quenched; so I obeyed orders."

"You haven't forgotten how to tease," said Anna, petulantly.

"Nor you to be wilful."

She gave him a look that would have desolated most men; but only made Frank smile affably as she paddled laboriously back, recovered the rowlock and then her temper, as, with a fine display of muscle, she pulled out to sea.

Getting into the current, she let the boat drift, and soon forgot time and space in the bewildering conversation that followed.

"What have you been doing since I saw you last?" she asked, looking as rosy as a milkmaid, as she stopped rowing and tied up her wind-tossed hair.

"Working like a beaver. You see"—and then, to her utter amazement, Frank entered into an elaborate statement of his affairs, quite as if she understood all about it and her opinion was valuable. It was all Greek to Anna, but she was immensely gratified; for it was just the way the boy used to tell her his small concerns in the days when each had firm faith in the other's wisdom. She tried to look as if she understood all about "investments, percentage, and long credit;" but she was out of her depth in five minutes, and dared say nothing, lest she should betray her lamentable ignorance on all matters of business. She got out of the scrape by cleverly turning the conversation to old times, and youthful reminiscences soon absorbed them both.

The faint, far-off sound of a gong recalled her to the fact that breakfast was nearly ready; and, turning the boat, she was dismayed to see how far they had floated. She stopped talking and rowed her best; but wind and tide were against her, she was faint with hunger, and her stalwart passenger made her task doubly hard. He offered no help, however; but did the luxurious to the life, leaning back, with his hat off, and dabbling his hands in the way that most impedes the progress of a boat.

Pride kept Anna silent till her face was scarlet, her palms blistered, and her breath most gone. Then, and not till then, did she condescend to say, with a gasp, poorly concealed by an amiable smile,—

“Do you care to row? I ought to have asked you before.”

“I’m very comfortable, thank you,” answered Frank. Then, as an expression of despair flitted over poor Anna’s face, he added bluntly, “I’m getting desperately hungry, so I don’t care if I do shorten the voyage a bit.”

With a sigh of relief, she rose to change seats, and, expecting him to help her, she involuntarily put out her hands, as she passed. But Frank was busy turning back his cuffs, and never stirred a finger; so that she would have lost her balance and gone overboard if she had not caught his arm.

“What’s the matter, skipper?” he asked, standing the sudden grip as steadily as a mast.

“Why didn’t you help me? You have no more manners than a turtle!” cried Anna, dropping into the seat with the frown of a spoiled beauty, accustomed to be gallantly served and supported at every step.

Frank only added to his offence by laughing, as he said carelessly,—

“You seemed so independent, I didn’t like to interfere.”

“So, if I had gone overboard, you would not have fished me out, unless I asked you to do it, I suppose?”

“In that case, I’m afraid I shouldn’t have waited for orders. We can’t spare you to the mermen yet.”

Something in the look he gave her appeased Anna’s resentment; and she sat silently admiring the strong, swift strokes that sent the “Gull” skimming over the water.

“Not too late for breakfast, after all,” she said graciously, as

they reached the wharf, where several early strollers stood watching their approach.

"Poor thing! You look as if you needed it," answered Frank. But he let her get out alone, to the horror of Messrs. Barlow, King, & Co.; and, while she fastened the boat, Frank stood settling his hatband, with the most exasperating unconsciousness of his duty.

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning?" she asked, as she walked up the rocky path, with no arm to lean upon.

"Fish. Will you come along?"

"No, thank you. One gets so burnt. I shall go to my hammock under the pine," was the graciously suggestive reply of the lady who liked a slave to fan or swing her, and seldom lacked several to choose from.

"See you at dinner, then. My room is in the Cottage. So by-by for the present." And, with a nod, Frank strolled away, leaving the lovely Miss West to mount the steps and cross the hall unescorted.

"The dear fellow's manners need polish. I must take him in hand, I see. And yet he is very nice, in spite of his brusque ways," thought Anna, indulgently. And more than once that morning she recalled his bluff "Hullo, Anna!" as she swung languidly in her hammock, with a devoted being softly reading Tennyson to her inattentive ears.

At dinner she appeared in unusual spirits, and kept her end of the table in a ripple of merriment by her witty and satirical sallies, privately hoping that her opposite neighbor would discover that she could talk well when she chose to do so. But Frank was deep in politics, discussing some new measure with such earnestness and eloquence that Anna, pausing to listen for a moment, forgot her lively gossip in one of the great questions of the hour.

She was listening with silent interest, when Frank suddenly appealed to her to confirm some statement he had just made; and she was ignominiously obliged to confess she knew too little about the matter to give any opinion. No compliment ever paid her was more flattering than his way of turning to her now and then, as if including her in the discussion as a matter of course; and never had she regretted any thing more keenly

than she did her ignorance on a subject that every man and woman should understand and espouse.

She did her best to look intelligent; racked her brain to remember facts which she had heard discussed for weeks, without paying any attention to them; and, thanks to her quick wit and womanly sympathy, she managed to hold her own, saying little, but looking much.

The instant dinner was over, she sent a servant to the reading-room for a file of late papers, and, retiring to a secluded corner, read up with a diligence that not only left her with clearer ideas on one subject, but also a sense of despair at her own deficiencies in the knowledge of many others.

"I really must have a course of solid reading. I do believe that is what I need; and I'll ask Frank where to begin. He always was an intelligent boy; but I was surprised to hear how well he talked. I was actually proud of him. I wonder where he is, by the way. Clara wants to be introduced, and I want to see how he strikes her."

Leaving her hiding-place, Anna walked forth in search of her friends, looking unusually bright and beautiful, for her secret studies had waked her up and lent her face the higher charm it needed. Clara appeared first. The new-comer had already been presented to her, and she professed herself "perfectly fascinated." "Such a personable man! Quite distinguished, you know, and so elegant in his manners! Devoted, graceful, and altogether charming."

"You like his manners, do you?" and Anna smiled at Clara's enthusiasm.

"Of course I do; for they have all the polish of foreign travel, with the indescribable something which a really fine character lends to every little act and word."

"Frank has never been abroad, and if I judged his character by his manners I should say he was rather a rough customer," said Anna, finding fault because Clara praised.

"You are so fastidious, nothing ever suits you, dear. I didn't expect to like this old friend of yours. But I frankly confess I do immensely; so, if you are tired of him, I'll take him off your hands."

"Thank you, love. You are welcome to poor Frank, if you can win him. Men are apt to be more loyal to friendship than

women; and I rather fancy, from what I saw this morning, that he is in no haste to change old friends for new."

Anna spoke sweetly, but at heart was ill pleased with Clara's admiration of her private property, as she considered "poor Frank," and inwardly resolved to have no poaching on her preserves.

Just then the gentleman in question came up, saying to Anna, in his abrupt way,—

"Every one is going to ride, so I cannot get the best horses; but I've secured two, and now I want a companion. Will you come for a good old-time gallop?"

Anna thought of her blistered hands, and hesitated, till a look at Clara's hopeful face decided her to accept. She did so, and rode like an Amazon for several hours, in spite of heat, dust, and a hard-mouthed horse, who nearly pulled her arms out of the sockets.

She hoped to find a chance to consult Frank about her course of useful reading; but he seemed intent on the "old-time gallop," and she kept up gallantly till the ride was over, when she retired to her room, quite exhausted, but protesting with heroic smiles that she had had a delightful time.

She did not appear at tea; but later in the evening, when an informal dance was well under way, she sailed in on the arm of a distinguished old gentleman, "evidently prepared to slay her thousands," as young Barlow said, observing the unusual brilliancy of her eyes and the elaborate toilette she had made.

"She means mischief to-night. Who is to be the victim, I wonder?" said another man, putting up his glass for a survey of the charmer.

"Not the party who came last evening. He is only an old friend, she says."

"He might be her brother or her husband, judging by the cavalier way in which he treats her. I could have punched his head this morning, when he let her pull up that boat alone," cried a youthful adorer, glaring irefully at the delinquent, lounging in a distant doorway.

"If she said he was an old friend, you may be sure he is an accepted lover. The dear creatures all fib in these matters; so I'll lay wagers to an enormous amount that all this splendor is for the lord and master, not for our destruction," answered

Barlow, who was wise in the ways of women and wary as a moth should be who had burnt his wings more than once at the same candle.

Clara happened to overhear these pleasing remarks, and five minutes after they were uttered she breathed them tenderly into Anna's ear. A scornful smile was all the answer she received; but the beauty was both pleased and annoyed, and awaited with redoubled interest the approach of the old friend, who was regarded in the light of a successful lover. But he seemed in no haste to claim his privileges, and dance after dance went by, while he sat talking with the old general or absently watching the human teetotums that spun about before him.

"I can't stand this another moment!" said Anna to herself, at last, and beckoned the recreant knight to approach, with a commanding gesture.

"Why don't you dance, sir?"

"I've forgotten how, ma'am."

"After all the pains I took with you when we had lessons together, years ago?"

"I've been too busy to attend to trifles of that sort."

"Elegant accomplishments are not trifles, and no one should neglect them who cares to make himself agreeable."

"Well, I don't know that I do care, as a general thing."

"You ought to care; and, as a penance for that rude speech, you must dance this dance with me. I cannot let you forget all your accomplishments for the sake of business; so I shall do my duty as a friend and take you in hand," said Anna, severely.

"You are very kind; but is it worth the trouble?"

"Now, Frank, don't be provoking and ungrateful. You know you like to give pleasure, to be cared for, and to do credit to your friends; so just rub up your manners a bit, and be as well-bred as you are sensible and brave and good."

"Thank you, I'll try. May I have the honor, Miss West?" and he bowed low before her, with a smile on his lips that both pleased and puzzled Anna.

They danced the dance, and Frank acquitted himself respectably, but relapsed into his objectionable ways as soon as the trial ended; for the first thing he said, with a sigh of relief, was,—

"Come out and talk; for upon my life I can't stand this oven any longer."

Anna obediently followed, and, seating herself in a breezy corner, waited to be entertained. But Frank seemed to have forgotten that pleasing duty; for, perching himself on the wide baluster of the piazza, he not only proceeded to light a cigarette, without even saying, "By your leave," but coolly offered her one also.

"How dare you!" she said, much offended at this proceeding. "I am not one of the fast girls who do such things, and I dislike it exceedingly."

"You used to smoke sweet-fern in corn-cob pipes, you remember; and these are not much stronger," he said, placidly restoring the rejected offering to his pocket.

"I did many foolish things then which I desire to forget now."

"And some very sweet and sensible ones, also. Ah, well! it can't be helped, I suppose."

Anna sat silent a moment, wondering what he meant; and when she looked up, she found him pensively staring at her, through a fragrant cloud of smoke.

"What is it?" she asked, for his eyes seemed seeking something.

"I was trying to see some trace of the little Anna I used to know. I thought I'd found her again this morning in the girl in the round hat; but I don't find her anywhere to-night."

"Indeed, Frank, I'm not so much changed as I seem. At least, to you I am the same, as far as I can be. Do believe it, and be friends, for I want one very much?" cried Anna, forgetting every thing but the desire to reestablish herself in his good opinion. As she spoke, she turned her face toward the light and half extended her hand, as if to claim and hold the old regard that seemed about to be withdrawn from her.

Frank bent a little and scanned the upturned face with a keen glance. It flushed in the moonlight and the lips trembled like an anxious child's; but the eyes met his with a look both proud and wistful, candid and sweet,—a look few saw in those lovely eyes, or, once seeing, ever forgot. Frank gave a little nod, as if satisfied, and said, with that perplexing smile of his,—

“Most people would see only the beautiful Miss West, in a remarkably pretty gown; but I think I catch a glimpse of little Anna, and I am very glad of it. You want a friend? Very good. I’ll do my best for you; but you must take me as I am, thorns and all.”

“I will, and not mind if they wound sometimes. I’ve had roses till I’m tired of them, in spite of their sweetness.”

As he spoke, Frank had taken the hand she offered, and, having gravely shaken it, held the “white wonder” for an instant, glancing from the little blisters on the delicate palm to the rings that shone on several fingers.

“Are you reading my fortune?” asked Anna, wondering if he was going to be sentimental and kiss it.

“After a fashion; for I am looking to see if there is a suspicious diamond anywhere about. Isn’t it time there was one?”

“That is not a question for you to ask;” and Anna caught away her hand, as if one of the thorns he spoke of had suddenly pricked.

“Why not? We always used to tell each other every thing; and, if we are to go on in the old friendly way, we must be confidential and comfortable, you know.”

“You can begin yourself then, and I’ll see how I like it,” said Anna, aroused and interested, in spite of her maidenly scruples about the new arrangement.

“I will, with all my heart. To own the truth, I’ve been longing to tell you something; but I wasn’t sure that you’d take any interest in it,” began Frank, eating rose-leaves with interesting embarrassment.

“I can imagine what it is,” said Anna, quickly, while her heart began to flutter curiously, for these confidences were becoming exciting. “You have found your fate, and are dying to let everybody know how happy you are.”

“I think I have. But I’m not happy yet. I’m desperately anxious, for I cannot decide whether it is a wise or foolish choice.”

“Who is it?”

“Never mind the name. I haven’t spoken yet, and perhaps never shall; so I may as well keep that to myself,—for the present, at least.”

“Tell me what you like then, and I will ask no more

questions," said Anna, coldly; for this masculine discretion annoyed her.

"Well, you see, this dear girl is pretty, rich, accomplished, and admired. A little spoilt, in fact; but very captivating, in spite of it. Now, the doubt in my mind is whether it is wise to woo a wife of this sort; for I know I shall want a companion in all things, not only a pretty sweetheart or a graceful mistress for my house."

"I should say it was *not* wise," began Anna, decidedly; then hastened to add, more quietly: "But perhaps you only see one side of this girl's character. She may have much strength and sweetness hidden away under her gay manner, waiting to be called out when the right mate comes."

"I often think so myself, and long to learn if I am the man; but some frivolous act, thoughtless word, or fashionable folly on her part dampens my ardor, and makes me feel as if I had better go elsewhere before it is too late."

"You are not madly in love, then?"

"Not yet; but I should be if I saw much of her, for when I do I rather lose my head, and am tempted to fall upon my knees, regardless of time, place, and consequences."

Frank spoke with sudden love and longing in his voice, and stretched out his arms so suggestively that Anna started. But he contented himself with gathering a rose from the clusters that hung all about, and Anna slapped an imaginary mosquito as energetically as if it had been the unknown lady, for whom she felt a sudden and inexplicable dislike.

"So you think I'd better not say to my love, like the mad gentleman to Mrs. Nickleby, 'Be mine, be mine?'" was Frank's next question, as he sat with his nose luxuriously buried in the fragrant heart of the rose.

"Decidedly not. I'm sure, from the way you speak of her, that she is not worthy of you; and your passion cannot be very deep if you can quote Dickens's nonsense at such a moment," said Anna, more cheerfully.

"It grows rapidly, I find; and I give you my word, if I should pass a week in the society of that lovely butterfly, it would be all over with me by Saturday night."

"Then don't do it."

"Ah! but I want to desperately. Do say that I may, just for a

last nibble at temptation, before I take your advice and go back to my bachelor life again," he prayed beseechingly.

"Don't go back, love somebody else, and be happy. There are plenty of superior women in the world who would be just the thing for you. I am sure you are going to be a man of mark, and you *must* have a good wife,—not a silly little creature, who will be a clog upon you all your life. So *do* take my advice, and let me help you, if I can."

Anna spoke earnestly, and her face quite shone with friendly zeal; while her eyes were full of unspoken admiration and regard for this friend, who seemed tottering on the verge of a precipice. She expected a serious reply,—thanks, at least, for her interest; and great was her surprise to see Frank lean back against the vine-wreathed pillar behind him, and laugh till a shower of rose-leaves came fluttering down on both their heads.

"I don't see any cause for such unseemly merriment," was her dignified reproof of this new impropriety.

"I beg your pardon. I really couldn't help it, for the comical contrast between your sage counsels and your blooming face upset me. Your manner was quite maternal and most impressive, till I looked at you in your French finery, and then it was all up with me," said Frank, penitently, though his eyes still danced with mirth.

The compliment appeased Anna's anger; and, folding her round white arms on the railing in front of her, she looked up at him with a laugh as blithe as his own.

"I dare say I was absurdly sober and important; but you see it is so long since I have had a really serious thought in my head or felt a really sincere interest in any one's affairs but my own that I overdid the matter. If you don't care for my advice, I'll take it all back; and you can go and marry your butterfly as soon as you like."

"I rather think I shall," said Frank, slowly. "For I fancy she *has* got a hidden self, as you suggested, and I'd rather like to find it out. One judges people so much by externals that it is not fair. Now, you, for instance, if you won't mind my saying it, don't show half your good points; and a casual observer would consider you merely a fashionable woman,—lovely, but shallow."

"As you did the last time we met," put in Anna, sharply.

If she expected him to deny it, she was mistaken; for he answered, with provoking candor,—

"Exactly. And I quite grieved about it; for I used to be very fond of my little playmate and thought she'd make a fine woman. I'm glad I've seen you again; for I find I was unjust in my first judgment, and this discovery gives me hope that I may have been mistaken in the same way about my—well, we'll say sweetheart. It's a pretty old word and I like it."

"If he only *would* forget that creature a minute and talk about something more interesting!" sighed Anna to herself. But she answered, meekly enough: "I knew you were disappointed in me, and I did not wonder; for I am not good for much, thanks to my foolish education and the life I have led these last few years. But I do sincerely wish to be more of a woman, only I have no one to tell me how. Everybody flatters me and"—

"I don't!" cried Frank, promptly.

"That's true." And Anna could not help laughing in the middle of her confessions at the tone of virtuous satisfaction with which he repelled the accusation. "No," she continued, "you are honest enough for any one; and I like it, though it startles me now and then, it is so new."

"I hope I'm not disrespectful," said Frank, busily removing the thorns from the stem of his flower.

"Oh, no! Not that exactly. But you treat me very much as if I was a sister or a—masculine friend." Anna meant to quote the expression Clara had reported; but somehow the word "wife" was hard to utter, and she finished the sentence differently.

"And you don't like it?" asked Frank, lifting the rose to hide the mischievous smile that lurked about his mouth.

"Yes, I do,—infinitely better than the sentimental homage other men pay me or the hackneyed rubbish they talk. It does me good to be a little neglected; and I don't mind it from you, because you more than atone for it by talking to me as if I could understand a man's mind and had one of my own."

"Then you don't quite detest me for my rough ways and egotistical confidences?" asked Frank, as if suddenly smitten with remorse for the small sins of the day.

“No, I rather fancy it, for it seems like old times, when you and I played together. Only then I could help you in many ways, as you helped me; but now I don’t seem to know any thing, and can be of no use to you or any one else. I should like to be; and I think, if you would kindly tell me what books to read, what people to know, and what faculties to cultivate, I might become something besides ‘a fashionable woman, lovely but shallow.’”

There was a little quiver of emotion in Anna’s voice as she uttered the last words that did not escape her companion’s quick ear. But he only smiled a look of heartfelt satisfaction to the rose, and answered soberly:

“Now that is a capital idea, and I’ll do it with pleasure. I have often wondered how you bright girls *could* be contented with such an empty sort of life. We fellows are just as foolish for a time, I know,—far worse in the crops of wild oats we sow; but we have to pull up and go to work, and that makes men of us. Marriage ought to do that for women, I suppose; but it doesn’t seem to nowadays, and I do pity you poor little things from the bottom of my heart.”

“I’m ready now to ‘pull up and go to work.’ Show me how, Frank, and I’ll change your pity into respect,” said Anna, casting off her lace shawl, as if preparing for immediate action; for his tone of masculine superiority rather nettled her.

“Come, I’ll make a bargain with you. I’ll give you something strong and solid to brace up your mind, and in return you shall polish my manners, see to my morals, and keep my heart from wasting itself on false idols. Shall we do this for one another, Anna?”

“Yes, Frank,” she answered heartily. Then, as Clara was seen approaching, she added playfully, “All this is *sub rosa*, you understand.”

He handed her the flower without a word, as if the emblem of silence was the best gage he could offer. Many flowers had been presented to the beauty; but none were kept so long and carefully as the thornless rose her old friend gave her, with a cordial smile that warmed her heart.

A great deal can happen in a week, and the seven days that followed that moonlight *tête-à-tête* seemed to Anna the fullest and the happiest she had ever known. She had never worked so

hard in her life; for her new tutor gave her plenty to do, and she studied in secret to supply sundry deficiencies which she was too proud to confess. No more novels now; no more sentimental poetry, lounging in a hammock. She sat erect upon a hard rock and read Buckle, Mill, and Social Science Reports with a diligence that appalled the banished dawdlers who usually helped her kill time. There was early boating, vigorous horse exercise, and tramps over hill and dale, from which she returned dusty, brown, and tired, but as happy as if she had discovered something fairer and grander than wild flowers or the ocean in its changeful moods. There were afternoon concerts in the breezy drawing-rooms, when others were enjoying siestas, and Anna sang to her one listener as she had never sung before. But best of all were the moonlight *séances* among the roses; for there they interchanged interesting confidences and hovered about those dangerous but delightful topics that need the magic of a midsummer night to make the charm quite perfect.

Anna intended to do her part honorably; but soon forgot to correct her pupil's manners, she was so busy taking care of his heart. She presently discovered that he treated other women in the usual way; and at first it annoyed her that she was the only one whom he allowed to pick up her own fan, walk without an arm, row, ride, and take care of herself as if she was a man. But she also discovered that she was the only woman to whom he talked as to an equal, in whom he seemed to find sympathy, inspiration, and help, and for whom he frankly showed not admiration alone, but respect, confidence, and affection.

This made the loss of a little surface courtesy too trifling for complaint or reproof; this stimulated and delighted her; and, in striving to deserve and secure it, she forgot every thing else, prouder to be one man's true friend than the idol of a dozen lovers.

What the effect of this new league was upon the other party was less evident; for, being of the undemonstrative sex, he kept his observations, discoveries, and satisfaction to himself, with no sign of especial interest, except now and then a rapturous allusion to his sweetheart, as if absence was increasing his passion.

Anna tried to quench his ardor, feeling sure, she said, that it

was a mistake to lavish so much love upon a person who was so entirely unworthy of it. But Frank seemed blind on this one point; and Anna suffered many a pang, as day after day showed her some new virtue, grace, or talent in this perverse man, who seemed bent on throwing his valuable self away. She endeavored to forget it, avoided the subject as much as possible, and ignored the existence of this inconvenient being entirely. But as the week drew to an end a secret trouble looked out at her eyes, a secret unrest possessed her, and every moment seemed to grow more precious as it passed, each full of a bitter sweet delight never known before.

"I must be off to-morrow," said Frank, on the Saturday evening, as they strolled together on the beach, while the sun set gloriously and the great waves broke musically on the sands.

"Such a short holiday, after all those months of work!" answered Anna, looking away, lest he should see how wistful her tell-tale eyes were.

"I may take a longer holiday, the happiest a man can have, if somebody will go with me. Anna, I've made up my mind to try my fate," he added impetuously.

"I have warned you; I can do no more." Which was quite true, for the poor girl's heart sunk at his words, and for a moment all the golden sky was a blur before her eyes.

"I won't be warned, thank you; for I'm quite sure now that I love her. Nothing like absence to settle that point. I've tried it, and I can't get on without her; so I'm going to 'put my fortune to the touch and win or lose it all.'"

"If you truly love her, I hope you will win, and find her the wife you deserve. But think well before you put your happiness into any woman's hands," said Anna, bravely trying to forget herself.

"Bless you! I've hardly thought of any thing else this week! I've enjoyed myself, though; and am very grateful to you for making my visit so pleasant," Frank added warmly.

"Have I? I'm so glad!" said Anna, as simply as a pleased child; for real love had banished all her small coquetries, vanities, and affectations, as sunshine absorbs the mists that hide a lovely landscape.

"Indeed, you have. All the teaching has not been on my side, I assure you; and I'm not too proud to own my obligation

to a woman. We lonely fellows, who have neither mother, sister, nor wife, need some gentle soul to keep us from getting selfish, hard, and worldly; and few are so fortunate as I in having a friend like little Anna."

"Oh, Frank! what have I done for you? I haven't dared to teach one so much wiser and stronger than myself. I've only wanted to, and grieved because I was so ignorant, so weak, and silly," cried Anna, glowing beautifully with surprise and pleasure at this unexpected revelation.

"Your humility blinded you; yet your unconsciousness was half the charm. I'll tell you what you did, dear. A man's moral sense gets blunted knocking about this rough-and-tumble world, where the favorite maxim is, 'Every man for himself and the Devil take the hindmost.' It is so with me; and in many of our conversations on various subjects, while I seemed to be teaching you, your innocent integrity was rebuking my worldly wisdom, your subtle instincts were pointing out the right which is above all policy, your womanly charity softening my hard judgments, and your simple faith in the good, the beautiful, the truly brave was waking up the high and happy beliefs that lay, not dead, but sleeping, in my soul. All this you did for me, Anna, and even more; for, in showing me the hidden side of your nature, I found it so sweet and deep and worshipful that it restores my faith in womankind, and shows me all the lovely possibilities that may lie folded up under the frivolous exterior of a fashionable woman."

Anna's heart was so full she could not speak for a moment; then like a dash of cold water came the thought, "And all this that I have done has only put him further from me, since it has given him courage to love and trust that woman." She tried to show only pleasure at his praise; but for the life of her she could not keep a tone of bitterness out of her voice as she answered gratefully,—

"You are too kind, Frank. I can hardly believe that I have so many virtues; but if I have, and they, like yours, have been asleep, remember you helped wake them up, and so you owe me nothing. Keep your sweet speeches for the lady you go to woo. I am contented with honest words that do not flatter."

"You shall have them;" and a quick smile passed over Frank's face, as if he knew what thorn pricked her just then, and was

not ill pleased at the discovery. "Only, if I lose my sweetheart, I may be sure that my old friend won't desert me?" he asked, with a sincere anxiety that was a balm to Anna's sore heart.

She did not speak, but offered him her hand with a look which said much. He took it as silently, and, holding it in a firm, warm grasp, led her up to a cleft in the rocks, where they often sat to watch the great breakers thunder in. As she took her seat, he folded his plaid about her so tenderly that it felt like a friendly arm shielding her from the fresh gale that blew up from the sea. It was an unusual attention on his part, and coming just then it affected her so curiously that, when he lounged down beside her, she felt a strong desire to lay her head on his shoulder and sob out,—

"Don't go and leave me! No one loves you half as well as I, or needs you half so much!"

Of course, she did nothing of the sort; but began to sing, as she covertly whisked away a rebellious tear. Frank soon interrupted her music, however, by a heavy sigh; and followed up that demonstration with the tragical announcement,—

"Anna, I've got something awful to tell you."

"What is it?" she asked, with the resignation of one who has already heard the worst.

"It is so bad that I can't look you in the face while I tell it. Listen calmly till I am done, and then pitch me overboard if you like, for I deserve it," was his cheerful beginning.

"Go on." And Anna prepared herself to receive some tremendous shock with masculine firmness.

Frank pulled his hat over his eyes, and, looking away from her, said rapidly, with an odd sound in his voice,—

"The night I came I was put in a room opening on the back piazza; and, lying there to rest and cool after my journey, I heard two ladies talking. I knocked my boots about to let them know I was near; but they took no notice, so I listened. Most women's gabble would have sent me to sleep in five minutes; but this was rather original, and interested me, especially when I found by the names mentioned that I knew one of the parties. I've been trying your experiment all the week. Anna, how do you like it?"

She did not answer for a moment, being absorbed in swift retrospection. Then she colored to her hat-brim, looked angry,

hurt, amused, gratified, and ashamed, all in a minute, and said slowly, as she met his laughing eyes,—

“Better than I thought I should.”

“That’s good! Then you forgive me for my eavesdropping, my rudeness, and manifold iniquities? It was abominable; but I could not resist the temptation of testing your sincerity. It was great fun; but I’m not sure that I shall not get the worst of it, after all,” said Frank, sobering suddenly.

“You have played so many jokes upon me in old times that I don’t find it hard to forgive this one; though I think it rather base in you to deceive me so. Still, as I have enjoyed and got a good deal out of it, I don’t complain, and won’t send you overboard yet,” said Anna, generously.

“You always were a forgiving angel.” And Frank settled the plaid again more tenderly than before.

“It was this, then, that made you so brusque to me alone, so odd and careless? I could not understand it and it hurt me at first; but I thought it was because we had been children together and soon forgot it, you were so kind and confidential, so helpful and straightforward. It *was* ‘great fun,’ for I always knew you meant what you said; and that was an unspeakable comfort to me in this world of flattery and falsehood. Yes, you may laugh at me, Frank, and leave me to myself again. I can bear it, for I’ve proved that my whim was a possibility. I see my way now, and can go on alone to a truer, happier life than that in which you found me.”

She spoke out bravely, and looked above the level sands and beyond the restless sea, as if she had found something worth living for and did not fear the future. Frank watched her an instant, for her face had never worn so noble an expression before. Sorrow as well as strength had come into the lovely features, and pain as well as patience touched them with new beauty. His own face changed as he looked, as if he let loose some deep and tender sentiment, long held in check, now ready to rise and claim its own.

“Anna,” he said penitently, “I’ve got one other terrible confession to make, and then my conscience will be clear. I want to tell you who my sweetheart is. Here’s her picture. Will you look at it?”

She gave a little shiver, turned steadily, and looked where he

pointed. But all she saw was her own astonished face reflected in the shallow pool behind them. One glance at Frank made any explanation needless; indeed, there was no time for her to speak before something closer than the plaid enfolded her, something warmer than tears touched her cheek, and a voice sweeter to her than wind or wave whispered tenderly in her ear,—

“All this week I have been studying and enjoying far more than you; for I have read a woman’s heart and learned to trust and honor what I have loved ever since I was a boy. Absence proved this to me: so I came to look for little Anna, and found her better and dearer than ever. May I ask her to keep on teaching me? Will she share my work as well as holiday, and be the truest friend a man can have?”

And Anna straightway answered, “Yes.”