

From A MAN'S WORLD by Rachel Crothers
Excerpt from Act I
1 M, 1 F

Malcolm Gaskell, a newspaper editor in love with Frank Ware, a female writer, challenges Frank's belief in the independence of women.

GASKELL: You ought to look out for the stiletto under that Italian cloak. I am sure she's got it ready for you.

FRANK: Don't laugh.

GASKELL: *(Rising and going.)* Why not?

FRANK: It isn't a joke-- poor girl.

GASKELL: It is decidedly a joke to see that big tempestuous Lione bow down to the little pink and white Fritz.

FRANK: You're decidedly off when you call Fritz pink and white.

GASKELL: He couldn't be that and love you, I suppose?

FRANK: What did you come for?

GASKELL: Your book. I want to read it again. You haven't given me a copy.

FRANK: Why don't you buy one and help the sale?

GASKELL: I did buy one but I threw it away-- it irritated me.

FRANK: Then you don't need another one.

GASKELL: No, I don't need it I admit, but I want it. I want to read it again. I want to see why people are talking about it.

FRANK: You don't see then?

GASKELL: I don't see why they say it's so strong. It's clever as the deuce and it's got a lot of you in it but it isn't big. Our paper gave you a darned good criticism. Did you see it? *(Handing her a paper from his pocket.)*

FRANK: *(Taking paper and getting scissors from desk she goes to couch.)* Yes, I saw it. Much obliged to your paper.

GASKELL: Your story s all right-- a man couldn't have done it any better-- your people are clean cut as a man's.

FRANK: Oh, thank you.

GASKELL: But it's only a story. You haven't got at the social evil in the real sense. You couldn't tackle that. It's too big for you. You've taken the poverty and the wrongs of the woman on the East Side as an effective background for your story, and you've let your dare-devil profligate girl rail against men and the world. She says some darn good things-- more or less true-- but you don't get at the thing. You keep banging away about woman, woman, and what she could do for herself if she would. Why-- this is a man's world. Women'll never change anything.

FRANK: Oh! (*Smiling.*)

GASKELL: Man sets the standard for woman. He knows she's better than he is and he demands that she be and if she isn't she s got to suffer for it. That's the whole business in a nutshell and you know it.

FRANK: Oh, don t begin that again. I know your arguments backwards.

GASKELL: How did you happen to come here anyway? This isn't a good place for you to live.

FRANK: Why did you?

GASKELL: Oh, this is all right for a man.

FRANK: Rather good for me too. The house is filled with independent women who are making their own living.

GASKELL: And you also have a little court of admirers here-- all more or less in love with you-- all curious-- most of them doubting--and all of them gossiping about you to beat the band. Don't you know that?

FRANK: Let's talk about something else for a change.

GASKELL: Hang it! Somebody's got to tell you. You can't live the way you do and do the things you do without running your head into a noose-- just as any other woman would.

FRANK: I don't know why you take the trouble to say all this.

GASKELL: I don't know why I do myself, for Lord knows, I wouldn't stop you in anything you're trying to do. I like your pluck. I say go on. I understand you-- but you

needn't think for a moment anybody else does. I don't question you. I take you just as you are. I suppose you think this Dutchman understands you?

FRANK: He isn't impertinent to say the least.

GASKELL: No, I suppose not. He wouldn't dare to disagree with you.

FRANK: Oh, yes he would. Fritz has a mind of his own and a very strong character. He is a genius beside. If he only had a chance to be heard. I wish you'd do something for him, you know so many people. You've got a lot of influence in that direction. Don't you want to?

GASKELL: Do you really want me to?

FRANK: Oh, awfully. He has the real thing-- you know he has. Don't you know it?

GASKELL: Oh, I suppose so, the real thing is riddling-- but that's not much for a man.

FRANK: He's here without friends --without money. He ought to be heard.

GASKELL: What do you want me to do?

FRANK: Talk him up to somebody. He can't do that sort of thing for himself. He's too sensitive-- and too fine.

GASKELL: Sensitive and fine be hanged. That won't get him anywhere.

FRANK: (*Rising to go back to desk with the clipping.*) I hate you when you say things like that.

GASKELL: (*Catching her hand as she passes him.*) Do you hate me! Do you?

FRANK: Then don't be so--

GASKELL: So what? Don't you think I'm-- What do you think of me? Tell me.

FRANK: I think you don't mean half you say.

GASKELL: Oh, yes, I do. And a good deal more. You don't mean half you say-- they're only ideals.

FRANK: Oh!

GASKELL: You'll acknowledge it some day when you care for a man. You won't give a hang for anything you ever believed then.

FRANK: Oh, yes, I will-- and I'll care what he believes.

GASKELL: (*Bending close to her.*) You'll believe that you've got to live while you are young-- and you'll believe that love is the only thing that counts much for a woman.

FRANK: No--no-- no!

GASKELL: It is. Women are only meant to be loved and men have got to take care of them. That's the whole business. You'll acknowledge it some day when you do love somebody.

FRANK: It would only make me feel more-- more than ever-- the responsibility of love of life.

GASKELL: (*After a pause.*) Come out after while and have a bite of supper with me. Will you?

FRANK: Oh, couldn't possibly.

GASKELL: Please.

FRANK: No-- really I can't. I have to work.

GASKELL: Well get to work and I'll come back for you any time you say.

FRANK: Can't. I'm going out at twelve anyway.

GASKELL: Oh, that's different-- if you're going out to supper anyway.

FRANK: I'm going to have supper with a girl from the East side.

GASKELL: Why in the name of heaven are you going at 12 o'clock?

FRANK: She is going to bring her sweetheart for me to see and he can't get off any other time.

GASKELL: I'll go with you.

FRANK: No, you--

GASKELL: Yes, I will.

FRANK: Indeed you won't. I want them to be natural and talk. She's had a tragic story-- and this fellow knows all about it and is going to marry her. She is helping me a lot in my club for girls over there-- she can get at them because she's been through it all-- and has come out a fine, decent woman.

GASKELL: I can't see for the life of me why you go banging around over there-- wasting your time-- getting into all sorts of disagreeable things. What's the use?

FRANK: What's the use? I call it some use to get hold of about a dozen girls a year and make them want to lead decent lives.

GASKELL: *(After a pause.)* Are you going to let your Fritz go with you?

FRANK: Of course not.

GASKELL: Thought perhaps you would. He makes a pretty good watchdog-- trotting around after you. Doesn't he?

FRANK: He makes a pretty good friend. You must skip now. I've got to get to work!

GASKELL: I don't want to go.

FRANK: Come on.

GASKELL: You're awfully hard on me.

FRANK: Poor you!

GASKELL: That's right. You don't know how nice I could be if you didn't fight with me.

FRANK: You always begin it.

GASKELL: Will you come to dinner tomorrow night and see a show? Will you-- will you? *(After a pause she nods smilingly.)* Good. *(Taking her hand.)* And we won't fight? *(She shakes her head.)* Not a bit?

FRANK : *(Drawing her hand away.)* Not a bit.

GASKELL: If you were only as kind to me as you are to everybody else—I'd be--

FRANK: You wouldn't like me at all.

GASKELL: Try it.

FRANK: I couldn't. Nobody could get on with you without fighting.

GASKELL: Oh, don't say that.

FRANK: It's the truth. You're a head-strong, domineering--

GASKELL: Just because I don't crawl at your feet the way the other fellows do. Do you hate me?

FRANK: You said that before. Skip now. Good night.

GASKELL: *(Taking book out of pocket.)* Are you going to give me this?

FRANK: I said no.

GASKELL: But I've got it.

FRANK: *(Putting her hand on the book.)* But I haven't given it to you.

GASKELL: You'll never give me anything. I'll have to fight for it. *(He snatches her hand and kisses her wrist and arm and goes out closing the door. Hesitating she puts her hand over the arm where he kissed it and puts her arm on the door hiding her face in it.)*