

From A MAN'S WORLD by Rachel Crothers
Excerpt from Act III
2F

Clara, a painter, shares with her friend Frank her frustration and disappointment in her efforts to be an independent woman.

CLARA: Here's your coat. I am so much obliged. I wore it, but I must say I was rather ashamed to after what happened.

FRANK: I don't care now what happened.

CLARA: Why?

FRANK: Because something else has happened that makes that affair this afternoon seem very insignificant.

CLARA: Does it? I thought you'd be so furious with every one of us that you'd never speak to us again. I was really afraid to come up, but I did.

FRANK: I am glad you did.

CLARA: But I want to tell you, I wasn't in it. I didn't --

FRANK: Let's not talk about it. Sit down. How was the exhibition?

CLARA: A fizzle. A perfect fizzle.

FRANK: Oh, no. I am so sorry.

CLARA: Cousin Mabel didn't come at all. Some people she'd asked were there, and of all the snippy snobs I ever saw! They only stayed a minute and were so out of breath and asked me how I could possibly climb two flights. Only two, mind.

FRANK: Good thing they didn't have to come to see me.

CLARA: One woman asked me why I didn't have one of those lovely studios on 57th St. Oh, dear, what's the use? (Bursting into tears.) I'm so discouraged, I don't know what to do.

FRANK: Oh, no, you're not. You're tired and nervous.

CLARA: Yes, I am too discouraged. I've tried just as hard as I can for ten years and scrimped and scraped and taken snubs and pretended I was ambitious and didn't care for anything but my work, and look at me -- don't even know how I am going to pay my next month's rent. I'm so sick and tired of it all, I don't know what to do. I'd marry any man

that asked me.

FRANK: Now, you're not going to lose your nerve like this.

CLARA: I would. I'd marry anything that could pay the bills. Oh, I am so tired -- so tired of it all.

FRANK: Poor little girl. It is a hard fight, isn't it?

CLARA: It doesn't pay. I've been too terribly respectable and conventional all my life to succeed. If I were like you -- you're so strong and independent -- you believe in women taking care of themselves.

FRANK: I believe in women doing the thing they're most fitted for. You should have married, Clara, when you were a young girl and been taken care of all your life. Why didn't you? Don't you believe in that?

CLARA: No man has ever asked me to marry him. I've never had a beau -- a real beau -- in my life. I -- I've always been superfluous and plain. Absolutely superfluous. I'm not necessary to one single human being. I'm just one of those everlasting women that the world is full of. There's nobody to take care of me and I'm simply not capable of taking care of myself. I've tried -- God knows I've tried and what is the use? What under Heavens do I get out of it? If I were a man -- the most insignificant little runt of a man -- I could persuade some woman to marry me and could have a home and children and hustle for my living and life would mean something. Oh, I can't bear it, Frank. I can't bear it! I often wish I were pretty and bad and could have my fling and die. (Sobbing she falls on the couch huddled and helpless.)

FRANK: Life has been dull and commonplace and colorless for you, but there are worse things than that. You've learned that life is easier for men than for women -- you know what it is to struggle for existence. Come and help me in some of the things I'm trying to do for girls. I'd like to have you teach drawing and modeling in this new club we're opening.

CLARA: Oh would you?

FRANK: Would you be willing to live there? To be one of the women in charge and help the girls in a personal way?

CLARA: Oh do you think I could help anybody?

FRANK: Come over and try it, Clara, and see. You'll never wish again that you were pretty and bad after you've seen a girl come off the streets and get to be a decent woman.

CLARA: I don't think I could actually do anything, but -- Oh, heavens, Frank, I would like to get hold of something.

FRANK: You-- (A ra-ta-tat-tat at the door.) That's Fritz.

CLARA: (Wiping her eyes and blowing her nose.) Oh dear, I don't want to see anyone. I am going out through your bedroom. I -- I am so, awfully grateful, Frank, but I can't -- (She chokes with tears and hurries out.)