

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

Frank, a writer, confronts Gaskell, the man she loves, with new information that could end their relationship.

GASKELL: He get's hold of you when you're alone with him, doesn't he? When he says he likes you, it sort of makes a fellow throw out his chest. What's the matter? Why do you look at me like that?

FRANK: Nothing. Was I staring?

GASKELL: Tired?

FRANK: Perhaps I am -- a little.

GASKELL: It's been rather an exciting day. Your hands are as cold as ice. Have you got nerves?

FRANK: No, no, I haven't.

GASKELL: You know the more I think about what you've done for Kiddie, the more I like you for it.

FRANK: Do you?

GASKELL: (Holding her by the arms.) Yes, I do. It begins to sink into me what the boy means to you and that you actually believe all your ideas. I begin to see how through your love for the boy and his mother's tragedy, you've sort of taken up a fight for all women.

FRANK: Yes, yes, that's it.

GASKELL: I never thought before that you actually believed that things ought to be the same for men and women.

FRANK: No, I know you didn't.

GASKELL: But I see that you believe it so deeply that you think it's a thing to go by -- live by.

FRANK: Of course.

GASKELL: You couldn't get far by it.

FRANK: Not far. No. You wouldn't have asked me to marry you if Kiddie had been my own child.

GASKELL: Oh, I don't – I -- I love you. I want you. But when I knew he was not, the greatest change came that can come to a man. A radiance went over you. I wanted to kneel at your feet and worship you. That's the way all men feel towards good women and you can't change it. No woman with that in her life could be the same to any man, no matter how he loved her or what he said or swore. It's different. It's different. A man wants the mother of his children to be the purest in the world.

FRANK: Yes, and a man expects the purest woman in the world to forgive him anything -- everything. It's wrong. It's hideously wrong.

GASKELL: It's life. Listen to me, sweetheart. I want to help you do the sensible thing about Kiddie.

FRANK: What do you mean ?

GASKELL: Don't you see that you must let it be known positively who his mother was?

FRANK: That's just what I will not do.

GASKELL Wait. You've hurt yourself by keeping still about him. What good can you do him by that? You can't take away the curse that will follow him. He'll have to fight that himself. Don't you see it would be much better to tell the whole business while he's little -- too little to know anything about it and then send him away -- put him in some good school?

FRANK: Give him up, you mean?

GASKELL: No, not at all. I don't ask you to do that. Watch over him, of course and be a sort of guardian, but clear this thing about yourself. What's the matter?

FRANK: No, turn your head that way -- sideways.

GASKELL: What are you looking at? What do you see? Gray hairs? The whole point, dear girl, is that you can't to save your life make things right for the boy.

FRANK: You mean I can't take away the shame that his father put upon him?

GASKELL: Yes.

FRANK: What would you think of Kiddie's father if you ever saw him?

GASKELL: Oh, let's not go into that again. Nobody knows the circumstances. You can't judge. Think about what I've said. We won't say any thing more about it now, (He goes to her and turns her toward him.) Do you love me?

FRANK: I shall never, never give Kiddie up.

GASKELL: I wish you'd tell me what you are looking at. You look as though you saw -- Frank! What's the matter with you?

FRANK: Nothing. Stand over there.

GASKELL: This is very funny.

FRANK: Oh, don't. (Quickly putting her hand over her eyes.)

GASKELL: (Going to her.) Frank, are you ill? For heaven's sake tell me what --

FRANK: I've got a blinding headache -- I can't see anything.

GASKELL: Do you want me to go? (She nods her head slowly staring at him) I'm awfully sorry. Why didn't you tell me before and I wouldn't have -- Frank there's something the matter. You've got to tell me. What do you think you see? (Taking hold of her.)

FRANK: Please go.

GASKELL: Are you angry? Look at me. Tell me what it is.

FRANK: Please -- Just go -- I want to think. Go now please -- please. I can't see. (Hurt and a little angry he moves backwards toward door.) Oh it can't be -- it isn't -- it can't be! It can't be! It isn't! It isn't!

GASKELL: What?

FRANK: Did you ever know a girl named Alice Ellery?

GASKELL: (After a pause.) Who told you that?

FRANK: Oh, you did.

GASKELL: Who told you? Who told you?

FRANK: No one.

GASKELL: Was it anybody here in this house?

FRANK: How did you know her? I mean -- oh, tell me!

GASKELL: Do you know the whole business?

FRANK: I don't know anything.

GASKELL: You do -- you do.

FRANK: No. I don't. I -- I'm not prying into your life. It isn't that. But you must tell me something. I've got to know. I've got to know. (She drags herself to the couch, Gaskell goes to the fire and after a long pause speaks in a low hard tone.)

GASKELL: It happened about six years ago. I never said anything about marrying her. She knew what she was doing.

FRANK: But, did you did you desert her?

GASKELL: I didn't! She went away.

FRANK: And you never heard from her?

GASKELL: Never.

FRANK: Never knew what happened to her?

GASKELL: No. She left a note saying she knew then she'd been a fool and that she couldn't face the rest. I'm not proud of it, you know. I'd give a good deal to wipe it out, but it happened. Are you going to hold it up against me? Is that one of your theories? Who told you?

FRANK: No one. I knew her. I was in Paris then. She came to me.

GASKELL: And she told you who?

FRANK: Oh, not that it was you -- no, no.

GASKELL: How did you know then?

FRANK: Her child was born in my house.

GASKELL: What?

FRANK: It was Kiddie!

GASKELL: No!

FRANK: They've seen the likeness -- I've just seen it. I had to ask you. I had to know.

GASKELL: Kiddie!

FRANK: Kiddie -- Kiddie.

GASKELL: Don't take it like that. I love you better than my life. (Trying to take hold of her.)

FRANK: Oh, don't.

GASKELL: Look here, Frank, we love each other, and we've got to face it.

FRANK: Yes, we've got to face it.

GASKELL: Nothing -- nothing can separate us.

FRANK: We are separated.

GASKELL: Only by your ideas.

FRANK: My ideas! They're horrible realities now because it's you.

GASKELL: Frank --

FRANK: Every time I've looked at Kiddie, I've cursed the man who ruined his mother and branded him with disgrace.

GASKELL: Frank, stop!

FRANK: I've loathed and despised that man, I tell you, and it's you. Before, it was someone else -- anyone -- some one unknown, but now it's you -- you -- you.