

# TAKEN AT HER WORD

By JOANNA SINGLE

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John Mason did not slam the gate simply because he knew that this manifestation of rage would surely delight Rosalie. She was watching his departure from the window, and he was angrily conscious that she knew he would, as usual, return in a few days, although she had said she hoped she would be rid of him for awhile. She was so young and so beautiful—and so provoking!

At the entrance to the little park, already growing green in the April sun, he met her sister. He did not know Anne very well—he had been too busy with Rosalie. He wished now that he had made friends with her; her blue eyes were so like and still so unlike Rosalie's. Anne stepped in front of him and stopped him unceremoniously. "Been trampled upon again?" she observed. "John Mason, for so clever a man generally you're sometimes an awful fool!" She submitted this thoughtfully, in a voice too gentle to be insulting.

"Then you and Rosalie are agreed, and I suppose you are expert testimony. May I turn and walk with you?"

She nodded and then asked a matter of fact question. "How many times has she refused you?"

"I had not thought to keep count. Rosalie just now informed me that this was the last time. I didn't know it had been the same sort of a fool so often. But don't you think she ought to give me credit for my persistence? Not every man proposes so many times—to the same girl."

Anne laughed dryly as he continued: "I would have given up long ago if I were not unexplainably sure that she does—care for me. In fact, she never has said directly that she does not. She simply says she won't marry me. What's the matter with me? Am I too rich? I can give away the stuff if she likes. Am I too successful? I might lose a case to please her. Should I be as ugly as Satan? Perhaps she would like a Beauty and the Beast effect! What does she want? I've said and done everything under heaven, and she walks on me—she trails me!"

"Precisely! That's why I called you—what I did. A girl likes to trail a man, but hates the man that will be trailed. Not logical, is it? To use her own words, you are always around underfoot. You give her no time to want you or miss you or think about you. She's too sure of you. She knows just where you'll be. You never let her want anything bad enough to appreciate it when it comes. She has always had her own way. She needs to be a bit afraid of you. She needs to be bullied!"

He frowned. "I am not a brute. That is not my way."

"No? Well, what has your way accomplished?"

He tried to laugh. "Oh, I'll take your advice. I'll do anything you say. It can't be worse than it is now."

"Well, I hate the responsibility. If you get her you'll fight, if you don't, you'll both be miserable anyhow. You must get her—and then work out your own salvation. In the first place, you must give her a shock. Write her a note and accept your dismissal. Tell her you begin to see that she is right and that you wish to be friendly with her and the family. Then call sometimes—on the father or on me. Don't stay away. Absences of that sort are flattering; you must be quite unaffected by her presence."

"You know that is impossible. You know how the sight of her!"

"You've got to do it! And you must take another girl out occasionally. Being naturally modest, I dislike to suggest that you send me flowers sometimes and come for a walk with me. That will bring things home to her. A girl hates to have an admirer transfer himself bodily to any one, but especially to her sister."

When they had planned their campaign and he left Anne at the gate she had him laughing. Rosalie saw them and shrugged her shoulders. While removing her hat in the hall Anne remarked to her sister:

"Well, dear, John tells me that you have dismissed him for good. You know I never would have interfered if you had wanted him, but I am glad you do not. Now you may find time for your music. Your talent is too marked to be neglected. It will be a relief for you to have him out of the way awhile. You're too young to leave father and me, and, after all, I think you're right about his not being the right man for you."

Rosalie shrugged her shoulders. The next day Rosalie, without comment, handed Anne this note:

Dear Miss Carleton—I want to thank you for your frankness of yesterday, and I assure you that I shall not annoy you again as I have in the past. Can you forgive me for having troubled you so much and so long? You are probably right in deciding that I could not make you happy, as I hoped to be able to do. May I hope to continue my present friendly relations with you and the rest of the family? If I may, I will not again trespass on your kindness. It will be as you said, the last time you shall hear from me. Refusing. Yours sincerely,

JOHN MASON.

"Well, I like a man to know when he's had enough," remarked Anne. Again Rosalie shrugged her shoulders and made a wry little face.

from her, and flowers and drives and theaters were less frequent. She had to time to miss him.

In the fourth week he called—while she was out. Of course she could not know that Anne had phoned him to come. He was leaving just as Rosalie entered and shook hands with her cordially. He did not look broken hearted, and he seemed to be on very good terms with Anne, to whom next morning he sent some violets. Rosalie saw him out walking with Mary Dye. Then he took Anne driving. She began to realize that Anne was very pretty if she was a year or two older than John.

Rosalie's irritation reached its climax one morning at the breakfast table when her younger brother Ted remarked in a teasing drawl:

"John seems to be taking his medicine like a man, Rosy! He's all right, and I am glad Anne seems inclined to keep him in the family. He probably appreciates being treated like a human being after the way you always walked on him. The fellows say he's the best young lawyer in town. But I should think you'd hate to have him take his punishment so cheerfully, Rosy!"

By this time Rosalie had reached the limit of endurance. She sprang up and, before any one could interfere, had boxed Ted's ears soundly and fled to her room. No one made comment on the scene save that Mr. Carleton amusedly met the laughter in Anne's eyes and told Ted that he would have no more of his teasing. Rosalie's capricious treatment of John had long been disapproved of by her family, and, while they were all sorry for her, they thought it time she should come to her senses.

Time had been slow and torturing to John. He wanted to tell Rosalie that he loved her and her only. He wanted to send her flowers, to give her every desire of her heart, and he found it a misery to see her or not to see her. Meantime he was very attentive to Anne, who was becoming vastly bored with his raptures and sorrows and was longing for him to win his Rosalie and let her go back to her old peaceful ways.

At last one night Anne waked and heard Rosalie sobbing to herself. In the morning she pleaded headache and stayed in her room till nearly evening. Anne had a long conference by telephone with John and took pains to have her father and Ted spend the evening elsewhere.

After dinner she went to Rosalie's room and pleaded being tired. She coaxed Rosalie to arrange her pretty hair and don a pretty gown so she could go down if any one should come. While Rosalie was sulking doing as her sister wished, Anne heard the bell and slipped down to answer it. She came back saying it was some one for her father and asked Rosalie if she would mind going to the library and bringing the book she had left on the table.

Rosalie, in her trailing blue dress went downstairs and through the hall into the library. She had half crossed the room before she saw John sitting in a great chair in dim twilight. She wanted to flee from him, but some how her feet would not move, nor did she find a word to say. Then to her dismay she knew that a slow tear was falling down her cheek. John came quickly toward her. It seemed very comfortable to be leaning against him. After awhile he held her off and looked at her. She tried to smile.

"Well," he questioned, "how shall it be? You know you said you hoped you would never have to refuse me again. I hope you will not. Just for variety suppose you—take me."

After the little minutes had cunningly slipped away and it was time that he should leave her, Rosalie exclaimed in dismay:

"Oh, Anne's book! She will be waiting for it!"

"I hardly think so," John asserted dryly. "Your sister Anne is wise. She knew better than to expect you in a moment when she sent you down to me!"

"Sent me to you?" Rosalie echoed.

"Yes, my lady! Do you imagine your sister has been trailing me about for her pleasure? She is more glad to be rid of me than—ever you were!"

"Then—it was not—Anne—ever?"

John laughed and bade her good night.

"If you were not perfectly sure that it was not—Anne—ever," you would never, never have asked me!" which both of them knew to be true.

Add Anne went to bed and slept the sleep of one who has successfully performed an arduous duty.

**Separations.** Why do everlasting farewells chill our hearts, and the fading away of lost joys fill us with bitterness?

"Be not the slave of words," says Carlyle. "Is not the distant, the dead, while I love it and long for it, and mourn for it, here in the genuine sense, as truly as the floor I stand on?"

And are not all good experiences thus forever a part of our lives? Can we therefore regret or mourn any past joy, any lost friend? Nothing is lost or gone from us that we have the spirit and capacity to appropriate and make our own forever. It is not the touch of body that makes presence. Have we not all known times when presence in the flesh brought no nearness, and when the absent one seemed more nearly near in spirit? So not to be within the actual physical sense, but to be able to appropriate and love the spirit of another, is the true association and communion. Hence our friends need never die, nor need we ever be parted from them. Hence our joy is not in the body, but in the living spirit, the real self. Exchange.

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