

Anna's World—Excerpts

by Wim Coleman and Pat Perrin



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Alone in the Dark

Anna clambered to her feet and held the lantern toward the long, low hut. The two doorways gaped like dark, open graves. She walked warily in that direction.

“Where *are* you?” she called.

Soon, she stood directly in front of one of the doors to the shelter. She had seen Sally and Todd disappear into this door. She was sure of it. But where were they now? The lantern light penetrated the interior of the hut ever so slightly, casting just a little light on the back wall.

“Are you in there?” Anna begged.

Again, no reply. As she inched closer to the doorway, her fear mounted with every step. Had something or someone in there snatched Sally and Todd? Would it reach out and grab her, too? Despite her fear, Anna pushed the lantern in through the doorway, then stepped inside herself.

The interior was a single, long room with a bench extending its whole length. It was probably just a shelter for worshippers in case of rain. No one at all was there now.

So where were Sally and Todd?

They went walking a bit, she tried to convince herself. *They'll be right back.*

Anna stepped outside the hut again. She felt a cold droplet of rain, then another. Quite suddenly, a steady shower began to fall. Anna was already shivering in her own cold sweat. She stepped back into the hut, sat down on the long bench, and waited.

But for what?

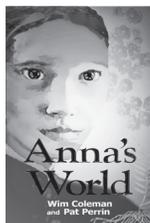
For Sally and Todd to return, of course.

But would they return?

Had something awful happened to them?

Anna's imagination was out of control now. There wasn't anything she could do to stop it. How could she even know for sure that the young man in the doorway *had been* Todd? Sally had certainly thought so. But might it have been some evil mountain spirit that took Todd's shape?

“Nonsense!” Anna whispered to herself.



It wasn't like her to go supposing such things. But then, she didn't feel like herself at all. She felt strange and unsettled and nauseous—and very, very afraid. She sat there staring out into the night toward the tall, brooding stone. She kept thinking of the stone's warnings. She felt like it was taking its revenge already.

A clap of dull thunder sounded in the far distance. Was the shower going to turn into a thunderstorm? The air around her was heavy and chilly and dank, but even so she was sweating strongly—and shivering, too.

She was so very tired! How she wanted to sleep! Her eyelids felt like lead weights. But she didn't dare close her eyes—not in this weird and frightful place. What if something or someone came to get her?

Might the same thing happen to her that had happened to Sally?

What *had* happened to Sally?

Anna had to stay on her guard.

The lantern light caught raindrops and made them flash, like sparks from flint. Staring at the glittering drops was comforting, somehow—better than thinking, anyway. It was certainly much better than letting her fears run rampant.

The light shower fell steadily for perhaps an hour, never turning into a serious downpour. Anna sat watching the raindrops, her mind quite blank and empty. Finally the rain faded away to a slight drizzle, and then even the drizzle waned to almost nothing. The display of sparkling raindrops came to a stop, and Anna's trance-like state slipped away, too. The lantern light revealed a vague, pale mist outside.

It took a good bit of effort for Anna to rise to her feet. The blood rushed from her head, and she almost fainted. Taking great care with every step, she walked out of the hut into the tall grass of the clearing. She turned slowly all around, looking for ...

What? ...

(continued in Anna's World, Chapter 13)



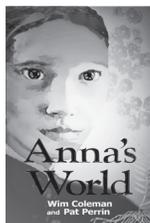
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The Poster

The hat was made of off-white plaited straw and was decorated with yellow lace. Two yellow ribbons hung down from the sides of the brim, and they were tied together in a bow under Anna's chin, so that the brim drooped down on either side of her face. Her reddish-blond puffs and ringlets hung below the brim to her shoulders and the base of her neck.

As Anna looked at herself in the mirror, her stepmother peered over one shoulder, and the milliner peered over the other. Both women were beaming happily. Anna couldn't bring herself to smile, but was trying her best not to frown.

"Oh, it's perfect, Edna!" Emily cooed to the milliner.



"I'm so glad you like it!" replied the milliner, a husky, jolly woman with rather too much rouge on her cheeks.

"Aren't you excited, Anna?" asked Emily. "Your first real hat!"

Anna didn't know quite what to say. She was certainly *supposed* to be excited. Young girls didn't wear hats in Boston society, so having a hat made especially by a milliner was supposed to be a sign of womanhood. But all Anna could think of was how *big* the thing looked, and also how decorative—especially in comparison with the little white cap or practical Shaker bonnet she used to wear back in Goshen.

"It's very nice," said Anna quietly.

"Well, you don't sound very enthusiastic, dear," remarked Emily.

"Oh, I am. I like it very much. Thank you, Miss Beasley. You've done wonderful work. It's very beautiful. It's just that—" Anna stopped in mid-sentence.

"It's just that *what*, dear?" asked Emily, with just a trace of impatience showing behind her smile.

"Well, should my hair really be hanging down in ringlets like this? The hat's so pretty. Isn't my hair kind of distracting? Maybe we could tie it back or something."

"Tush, dear," said Miss Beasley. "We're not tying your pretty hair back. Why, look at how the ribbons and lace bring out that hint of yellow in your hair! You'd spoil the effect!"

"You may think you're all grown up all of a sudden," put in Emily, "but you're not *so* grown up that you have to go putting your hair up into a bun or anything like that."

"You don't want to look like a spinster, do you?" chimed in Miss Beasley. "*Enjoy* your lovely tresses a little while longer, for heaven's sake!"

...

Emily and Anna stepped out of the shop into a bright, sunny, summer afternoon. Anna wished it weren't *quite* so bright outside. She felt awfully conspicuous in her new hat, which surely reflected the sunlight strongly. She couldn't help but feel that everybody on the busy Boston street was looking directly at her. She hoped it was only her imagination.

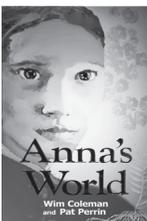
"Nod to that young gentleman, Anna," murmured Emily after they'd walked a little less than a block. "He just tipped his hat to you."

"I'm sure he was tipping his hat to *you*, Mother Emily," replied Anna—although the truth was, she hadn't noticed the young man's gesture at all.

"To *me*?" retorted Emily with a shrill laugh. "An old married woman? Oh, you're quite mistaken! No, my dear. *You're* the center of attention now. Your life is going to be very different soon. You must learn how to acknowledge gentlemen's compliments—and how to do so discreetly."

Partly to get her mind off passers-by, Anna's eyes fell upon a nearby wall covered with handbills, advertisements, and broadsides. Some were advertisements for plays and concerts, others for pills and medicines, and still others for property for sale or rent. But then Anna noticed a poster that made her stop right in her tracks.

MR. HENRY DAVID THOREAU
Poet and Transcendentalist of Concord
Will give an Informative Lecture
On the topic of the current War With Mexico
At the Thymele Theatre
On Wednesday the 25th of August at 2:00 P.M.
Donations to Charity



Anna stood and stared at the poster, her mouth agape.

“Anna, what are you doing, just standing there?” asked Emily with surprise. “Come along. We must be getting home.”

“But Mother Emily, this poster—”

“Well, what about it?”

“This lecture’s tomorrow. And look at the address. The Thymele Theatre is only a few blocks away from our house. How wonderful! We must make plans to go.”

Emily let out a gasp of horror. “Certainly not!” she exclaimed. “A lecture about the war with Mexico is no place for a lady.”

“But I know the man who’s going to speak!”

“You *what?*”

“Mr. Thoreau. I met him back in Goshen. He’s very nice.”

Emily now appeared to be quite beside herself with perplexity. “Mr. Henry David Thoreau, among the Shakers?” she replied. “My dear, I’m sure you’re quite mistaken. Mr. Thoreau is a dreamer and a vagabond. What’s worse, he’s a troublemaker and a godless transcendentalist. I’m sure that the Shakers would have nothing to do with him.”

“But he’s very interested in Shaker society. He told me so. I really did meet him, Mother Emily.”

“Be that as it may,” said Emily, heaving a long, exasperated sigh. “It’s not something you should go telling people. He’s a bad man, and he’ll come to a bad end. Why, he’s already been put in jail at least once.”

“In jail?” asked Anna with alarm. “What on earth for?”

“Why should you care what for? Really, Anna, listen to yourself! Nobody goes to jail for doing the right thing, do they? He’s no better than a common criminal, I tell you. Now come along. And let’s have no more talk about Mr. Thoreau. It’s best for you to forget all about him.”

But Anna couldn’t forget all about him—not for the rest of that day and evening, nor even after she went to bed that night. As she tried to sleep, she remembered how he’d looked at her with those piercing blue eyes that day in the West Family’s garden.

“*Tell me, something Anna,*” he had asked her. “*Do you ever feel achingly, inexplicably alone—even among your dearest friends? Perhaps especially among your dearest friends?*”...

(continued in Anna’s World, Chapter 30)

