

## Anna



“On the sloping roof over the kitchen lay an egg. Oh, what a tiny little egg it was! It was much, much smaller than a button and only a storyteller could have seen it. But fortunately, the storyteller did see it. He was looking for his glasses; just then the egg opened, and Anna came out. She walked across the left lens and looked at her reflection.

“Oh, is that me?” she cried in surprise. “How very nice!”

Yes, she was a mayfly. Anna took a deep breath and stared up at the church clock. It was eight o’clock in the morning.



“This is a precious day,” said little Anna. “Today I must grow up, get engaged, marry, have children, and die. By eight o’clock this evening all that must have happened. I feel rather short of courage, with so many things ahead of me. But nothing ventured, nothing gained!”

She spread her wings and fluttered bravely over the sundial. Here she met with a nice gentleman called Simon Upandown. He looked rather old, half a day at least, but well preserved. In fact, Anna thought him very smart. And he was so discreet.

“Ah, young lady. . . .” was all he said.

Anna blushed.

“I have just been born,” she said.

“Come, come,” he said impatiently, “we mustn’t talk our time away. Yes or no?”

“Yes,” said little Anna.

They embraced one another hastily and wandered off among the lettuces.

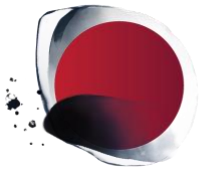
“Is this the wedding?” asked Anna shyly.

“Yes, this is it,” said Simon.

He too glanced at the church clock.

“It is half past nine now,” he said.

He turned pale and gave Anna a kiss. Then he lay down on his back, his feet in the air. He was dead. Anna was more surprised than depressed. She would really have liked to bury her head in the sand and have a good cry, but that was no way for a middle-aged woman to behave. Anna had grown up now and took a broader view of life. She was still thinking about it when her brothers passed: born in shadow, they had come into the world a little later. Anna stayed to watch the rest of the eggs hatching from a distance. She felt kindly towards them, even a little bit blasé.



“Life,” she announced, “life, young people, is rapid disillusionment. Faster! Faster! That is all that is required of you.”

But the little mayflies did not answer. They spread their little wings and flew straight up towards the sun. Anna took courage as well, jumped up and flew over the dovecote; there she met her second husband.

They became acquainted quite practically; poetry is ridiculous at their time of life.

“Have you been married before?”

“Oh, yes,” said Anna, “it was a very nice marriage, but he passed away. It was the wrong time of day.”

“Good. Do you feel inclined to marry again?”

“Whom?” asked Anna.

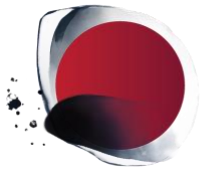
“Me.”

“Oh, yes,” said Anna.

With that they married. No, it could not have been quicker. And yet it was a long process, for a mayfly.

Was it a happy marriage? No. She suspected that he had a share in the affair of the ant-egg swindle, but there was no proof. However, he was caught smuggling a scrap of horse dung and arrested. The law is strict.

Anna did not grieve; she laid a couple of hundred eggs in the cup of a primula and allowed herself to float off on the wind.



Higher and higher she went. It was so blissful, this carefree drifting . . . suddenly Anna felt tired, terribly tired. She quickly spread her wings and alighted. Was this to be the end? Tears sprang into her eyes; she drank some water from a cabbage leaf and fell asleep.

When she awakened the sun was red and gloomy and everything in the garden had grown old and silent. Anna too was an old woman. She walked slowly across the cabbage leaf and sat down on the edge. From here she could watch the sun setting. Anna sighed and stared down over the edge of the leaf at the life going on beneath her.

Snails, bugs and beetles, creatures of all kinds were hurrying home. There was falling and getting up again, climbing and dropping, creeping, and scrambling.

Only Anna did not move.”

## Reference

Bomans, Godfried. (1977). *The Wily Witch: And all the other fairy tales and fables*.  
Owings Mills: Maryland.

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