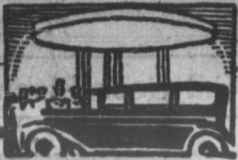


# MAN MADE THE TOWN

by RUBY M. AYRES



## TENTH INSTALLMENT

And then, as there was no answering smile on his face, she sighed and went on.

"I wish I understood about myself. Sometimes I think that you understand, that you know all about me, only you won't explain to me. Why won't you?"

"Perhaps because I'm not clever enough. Perhaps because I know I should only hurt you."

Diana was looking down at the little three-cornered scar on her slender arm.

"Well, I've got this to remember you by, anyway," she said ruefully. He made a swift movement, as if of protest, then stood still again.

"Nothing more than that?" he asked.

She raised her eyes.

"Yes, much more," she said. "I shall always remember you as the dearest, best—"

"Don't make me conceited."

She sat down in the chair in which he had sat to dress her arm, leaning her chin on its high back and looking up at him.

"Well, that's that," she said in a puzzled sort of way. "When do you want me to go?"

He smiled at the question.

"Well, not to-day or to-morrow," he said whimsically. "I only thought that before Mrs. Gladwyn comes back . . . ?"

"Supposing she never comes back?"

"We won't suppose anything so unlikely, and besides, I must see that left arm a great deal better before I let you out of my sight."

"Then I hope it never gets better," Diana said.

Dennis had come down for one last visit before Diana returned to London.

He was full of plans for their future but Diana found herself cold to all of them. His caresses failed to thrill her as they had before her illness.

Finally Dennis had flung away from her and had gone back to London. His angry departure had failed to stir her, although it left her with the feeling her world was falling away from her.

She wondered if her love for him had died. And the thought, strangely, carried with it no regret.

And then suddenly came the revelation that it was Donald she loved, maddening, distractingly. She knew then she could never be happy with any other man.

"Tomorrow," Diana said to herself, "tomorrow I am going to London."

She was glad because it was Rathbone whom she loved; a man surely worthy of the best life could give him, and in some strange way that gladness outweighed the knowledge that, even supposing he cared for her in return, he would never tell her so. But she could not believe that he cared—why should he? There were so many women in the world more deserving of happiness than she—noble, unselfish women—not just selfish, spoilt—useless. Then she was conscious of a great fear; fear because all her life

she would have to do without him; that would be hardest of all to bear.

When morning came she found that out of the mass of confused thought only one fact had struggled; she must keep her pride whatever happened. Nobody must ever know, nobody must ever dream that she had loved him and her love had not been returned.

"I may as well go away with Dennis, or anybody else who wants me," she told herself recklessly, as she watched the creeping daylight. "I can't ever have the man I want, so nothing matters."

### CHAPTER XV

Diana made a quick trip up to London to do some shopping. She had lunch with Dennis, who told her Linda was going to Paris and begged her to run away with him.

She kept putting him off with indecisive replies to his urgent begging and he finally drove back to the country. She promised him, as she was kissing him good-bye, that she would give him an answer in a few days.

Miss Starling told her, when Dennis had left:

"Dr. Rathbone came just after lunch."

"Oh," Diana's voice was studiously indifferent.

"He left a message for you."

"Oh," Diana said again. "What was it?" she asked as Miss Starling kept silence.

"He asked me to tell you that he did not consider there was any real need for him to call any more—that he had arranged with Dr. Finlay to look after you regularly, and that he hoped you would approve. He asked me to say that, of course, if you wished to see him again particularly, he would be pleased to arrange to call or for you to go to his consulting room in London."

The Creature was knitting so rapidly now that the needles flashed dazlingly in the afternoon sunlight.

Diana closed her eyes.

"Thank you. That will do nicely," she said, uncertainly.

When a little later, Miss Starling had gone for her usual constitutional, Diana sent a telegram.

It was addressed to Dennis Waterman at some West End Club, and consisted of only two words:

"Yes, Diana."

Diana left the cottage very quietly on the Friday afternoon. She told the Creature she was going to dinner and a theatre with Dennis Waterman and would not be home until late.

Diana drove straight to Mrs. Gladwyn's house when she got to London. She was not expected, and the maids seemed rather flustered by her sudden arrival.

She intended to pack a small suitcase for which Dennis would presently send his chauffeur, and after that—well, after that her mind was a blank—after that nothing would matter very much. Nothing mattered very much now, if it came to that, Diana was amazed because she felt so cold and unconcerned.

Even the thought of Rathbone hardly distressed her. That episode, precious as it had been, was definitely ended.

She did not know what plans Dennis had made, and she hardly cared. Since the afternoon she sent that wire she had often wondered why she had done it. It was not because she had wanted to go with Dennis except that deep down in her heart was a foolish, feverish hope that perhaps he could help her to forget—could drug her senses and take away the endless pain of loneliness and longing.

Dennis was the one creature in the world of whose love she was confident, and so she had turned to him as a half-frozen outcast would turn to the first fire that gleams through the night.

She had no regrets—nothing mattered.

At seven o'clock she sent the maid for a taxi and put on her cloak. She would be a little early for Dennis, perhaps, but the silence and memories of this room worried her—it would be better to get out and mingle with the noise and bustle again.

She went down to the waiting taxi, leaving orders about the suitcase. She did not care if her aunt's maids suspected anything; she knew it would be the first time she had set them all talking. It was only really genuine people like Miss Starling and Jonas who made one feel ashamed.

The cab stopped, and a commissionaire hurried to open the door. Dennis had chosen to meet her at this small, rather unpretentious restaurant because he said they would be unlikely to meet anyone they knew, and it was Diana herself who had suggested the theatre.

"It's so long since I saw a play," was the excuse she made, but that was not the real reason. It was be-

cause she felt the desperate need of excitement to help her—of stimulant to give her courage; if Dennis offered her champagne tonight she would certainly not refuse. She walked into the little lounge and sat down by the fire. It was very quiet—just the kind of place runaway people would choose. Diana thought cynically.

The swing door moved noiselessly, and Diana turned. If it was Dennis—Diana stared blankly for a moment at the woman who came in—stared, and thought herself mad or dreaming, for the woman was Linda Waterman.

She was alone, and their recognition was mutual before Linda came across the Lounge with easy confidence, beautifully gowned and looking young and untroubled.

"How strange—that you should be here," she said. "Dennis tells me you have been very ill. I hope you are better."

"Yes—yes, thank you."

Linda held her hands to the warmth. There was a large diamond on one finger that caught the light and sparkled into cold white flashes of fire.

Diana was very pale, and the vivid blue of her gown intensified her pallor. She was wondering vaguely what would happen when Dennis arrived. Something seemed to tell her that of them all he would be the only one seriously disturbed. With an effort she forced herself to speak.

"Did you have a good holiday in America?"

"It was hardly a holiday. I had so much business to attend to. Dennis hated it—he was longing to get back all the time."

Her eyes dwelt on Diana's face with half-amused interest.

"Are you waiting for him now?" she asked abruptly.

Diana's lips moved, and she flushed crimson, but no words would come, and Linda said with an unconcerned laugh:

"You need not mind telling me if you are—it's just bad luck that we should both have chosen the same rendezvous. I am waiting for a friend myself."

Diana rose to her feet.

"I thought you were in Paris," she stammered, and then wondered why, of all the things she might have said, she should have chosen words that were surely an admission.

Linda shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose Dennis told you so? Well, I wanted him to believe I was going to Paris," she said quietly.

"It suited me for him to think so." She laughed again. "It's very odd, but it never seems to occur to my noble husband that perhaps I too have my secret orchard."

She held out the hand that wore the big diamond and stared at it meditatively.

"I'm rather glad you and I have

met again," she said. "I intended to write to you soon, anyway."

"To write to me?"

The burning colour rose again to Diana's face—she felt utterly at a disadvantage. Linda was so assured, so cool—she was sure at last that Linda no longer cared for Dennis.

"You need not look so angry," Dennis's wife said calmly. "I know you hate me, but you need not. I quite like you, Diana; if it were not for Dennis, I believe we could be good friends."

She moved suddenly, coming a little closer to the girl.

"I suppose Dennis never told you that I offered to divorce him, did he?" she asked interestedly. "I assure you I did—before we went to America, the night you dined at the flat."

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