

MAN MADE THE TOWN



by RUBY M. AYRES



THIRTEENTH INSTALLMENT

She could not quite fathom the relationship between Diana and the good-looking man whose voice made her own lonely heart turn over with such wistful memories. She had once thought . . . but, of course, that was absurd; Rathbone would never seriously consider a child like Diana, though it was quite possible that she might have taken a wilful fancy to him. The Creature had known other cases where patients had temporarily fallen in love with the doctor who looked after them, but seldom came to anything.

Diana went out into the garden. She was full of curiosity to know what Dennis would say to her; she supposed cynically that there would be more lies and pretense.

He came quite early. The smart two-seater raced up the road and came to a standstill at the gate where last night . . . Diana could not pursue that memory. Last night was like some live creature waiting to pounce upon her directly she was off her guard and tear her in pieces.

She opened the gate and greeted Waterman with a smile. "You're an early bird," she said calmly.

She led the way and as soon as they were in the sitting room Waterman broke out:

"What became of you last night, Diana? I was worried to death. I thought something dreadful had happened. They told me at Palmeiro's that you had been there and had left suddenly."

Diana met his eyes serenely. "Yes. I ran away," she said.

"Ran away? . . ."

"Yes, I found out that I didn't want to see you after all."

"What do you mean?"

"While I was waiting, Linda came in. It was quite an accident—she was not spying on us."

"Linda? She went to Paris yesterday morning."

"She didn't; she was at Palmeiro's last night, and we had quite a little talk together."

She was quick to see the sudden suspicion in his eyes.

It was Linda who made you change your mind," he said savagely.

Diana nodded. He stared at her for a moment; then he broke out:

"I've told you again and again that you cannot pay any attention to what Linda says. She is a jealous woman."

"Oh, no; she's not in the least jealous of you or of me, if that is what you mean," Diana said calmly.

"I am not at all sure Dennis, that you don't really like her a great deal better than she likes you."

"I don't understand what you mean. Whatever Linda told you, you can take it from me it is not the truth."

"Isn't it? Not when she said that she had offered to divorce you and that you had refused? I think it is the truth, Dennis."

He took a step towards her. "It's a damned lie, Diana. You know I've told you scores of times that I would give anything I possess if only she would give me my freedom."

Diana smiled faintly. "I know you have," she agreed.

"But that is the damned lie—not what Linda said."

She saw the dull colour rise slowly to his face, and she turned her eyes away.

She felt sick and ashamed; not for her own sake, but for his. She had once thought this man so splendid; there had been a time when she would have given him everything she possessed—body and soul—and it hurt her unspeakably to know that he was so unworthy—even of her! she told him whimsically.

After a moment she looked at him again; in the last few minutes he seemed in some unaccountable way to have lost stature—to have grown ordinary.

"So I ran away," she said again. "And I shall never run back any more, Dennis."

She saw his lips move as he tried to speak, but he could find no words.

Then suddenly he went down on his knees, encircling her with his arms, hiding his face against her.

"Don't send me away, Diana . . . I love you so . . . I'll do anything you want—anything in the wide world—if only you don't send me away."

Diana tore his hands from about her.

"It's too late," she said again, and then, breathlessly, "Don't make me hate you, Dennis."

He stood up, his face convulsed with agitation, but now she no longer pitied him; she was only conscious of that sick, ashamed feeling that was almost physical.

He went on pleading, imploring, reminding her of all they had been to one another—all they would yet be.

Diana put her hands over her ears. She felt that it was more than she could bear; she felt as if he were trying to strip her naked instead of trying to cover and protect her, as Rathbone would have done.

She said at last, brokenly: "If you only knew how you're hurting me."

He misunderstood that, eagerly grasping it as a sign that he was to be forgiven; he made the fatal mistake of trying to take her in his arms.

Diana fled away from him, putting the width of the little room between them, staring at him with wild eyes.

"Don't touch me—don't ever dare to touch me again," she stammered.

They stood looking at one another as if they had been mortal enemies; then Waterman said thickly:

"If I go away now, Diana . . . I shall never come back."

Diana felt her lips twitching into a smile, but she repressed it and answered gently:

"I'm sorry, Dennis—good-bye."

Waterman left the cottage with as much dignity as he could command. His conceit refused to allow him to admit defeat; he and Diana had quarreled so often before, and she had always been sorry. Soon—tomorrow or the next day—there would come a letter from her. He knew so well what its contents would be.

Her last night there, she received a letter from Dr. Rathbone.

"My dear Miss Gladwyn:

"I saw Shurey this evening, and he tells me you are returning to London on Wednesday, so in case we do not meet again before then, and it is unlikely, seeing that during the next few days I shall be very busy, I want to impress upon you to take great care of yourself and not to overtax your strength. I am afraid this will read rather like a homily, but you must put it down to my poor powers of expression rather than to any other cause. I want you always to look on the bright side and believe that life is very largely what we choose to make it, in spite of disappointments and sacrifices. I am preaching to myself as much as to you, seeing that we both have to learn our lessons in the same hard school."

"If I were an eloquent man there is so much I could say, but I know you will understand. Keep a brave heart, and keep well. Good-night—once again, Diana."

"Yours ever,

"DONALD RATHBONE."

"P. S. I have added the postscript you spoke about on the other side."

Diana turned the page with a hand that trembled; her heart seemed to be turned to water, and there was a mist before her eyes so that for a little while she could hardly make out the last words he had written.

They were:

"I love once I live once. What case is this to think or talk about?"

I love you."

CHAPTER XX

Diana's maid Anne, drew the curtains back with a sharp little rattle, letting in the morning light.

She was still in London with Mrs. Gladwyn, as that lady had developed a sciatic pain and at the same moment had discovered a wonderful German masseuse, who, so she declared, alone could cure it; so after all they had not gone to Scotland.

Six weeks . . .

Diana lay back on her pillows, letting the tea grow cold.

Six weeks—six months—six years—it was all the same.

Already she felt as if London separated her so completely from Miss Starling and her cottage that it seemed as if she could never really have been there, and at other times it seemed as if she were just in London marking time for some miracle to happen that would give her back the happiness for which she longed.

She had heard nothing of Rathbone since his letter; the letter to which she had written a dozen—twenty replies and destroyed them all.

What was the use of writing to him. He would not answer.

Miss Starling had departed for her pilgrimage to Normandy with fifty pounds in her pocket. She had written a pathetic note of gratitude to Diana and had sent her a picture postcard after her arrival, of the sea beating against a gigantic rock.

The Creature had shed a few tears when she said good-bye to Diana, and Jenny had wept copiously.

Diana had felt like weeping herself when she looked from the window of Mrs. Gladwyn's big Rolls to wave good-bye to her little group of friends: Mr. Shurey, Jonas, Miss

Starling, Jenny, and one or two women from the neighboring cottages.

Since then life had gone on very much the same as before.

She had not seen Dennis Waterman again, but she had been told that he had followed his wife to Paris. Poor Linda!

Diana had heard who the gray-haired man was for whom she had been waiting that night at Palmeiro's: Mrs. Gladwyn had got the whole story complete before she had been back in London a couple of days.

"His name is Anthony Jevons," she informed Diana. "Apparently he and Linda Waterman have known one another for years."

"A married man?" Diana asked without much interest.

"His wife has been in a lunatic asylum for fifteen years," Mrs. Gladwyn said with relish. "I always think it is iniquitous, tying a man to a lunatic. That is a case where divorce is really justified—if it ever is," she added righteously.

"Perhaps he didn't want to divorce her," Diana said.

"Well, he is free at last, poor man," her aunt went on. "She died

about two months ago, when the Watermans were in America, so I suppose the next thing we shall hear will be that there is a divorce there."

She looked at her niece sharply as she spoke, but Diana's face was indifferent.

Diana and Mrs. Gladwyn were dining at the Fosters' that night.

Diana had only consented to go under extreme pressure. She disliked Mrs. Foster; she was a "climber" of the most flagrant type who shamelessly "collected celebrities," and who scandalized them as soon as they left her house.

Jonas had written her that Rathbone's house was up for sale, and Donald was going to live in America. Diana permitted herself one moment of anguish.

"Oh, God, I can't bear it any longer," she said aloud.

She greeted her hostess with a vague smile and discovered her aunt comfortably seated in a big chair with a large cocktail and a plate of caviare at her elbow.

Diana looked around the room without interest. The same old crowd one always met everywhere. Diana spoke to one or two of them

and refused a cocktail. People were still arriving, a starchy footman announcing their names at the door in stentorian tones.

"Sir William and Lady Marley," Lady Marley had been a chorus girl, and there had been a violent love affair with a minor prince to her credit before she caught old Sir William on the brink of the grave and suddenly became respectable.

"Dr. Donald Rathbone—"

Continued Next Week

The invention of dice is attributed to Palamedes in 1244 B. C.

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