

MAN MADE THE TOWN

by RUBY M. AYRES



NINTH INSTALLMENT

Donald Rathbone had dined alone that night.

He had heard Diana's car drive up but had merely thought it was one of his own returning from the village to which he had sent his chauffeur with a message.

The dining room was on the far side of the house, and the heavy oak door was shut, so he heard nothing more till Diana's terrified scream rent the silence, followed by that piteous cry upon his name.

"Donald . . . !"

Rathbone was out in the hall almost before he had died away, but even then, for an instant, in the dim light he could hardly understand what was happening.

Servants were rushing from other parts of the house, but it was Rathbone who dragged Nero away, almost throttling him in his iron grip, Rathbone who, throwing the dog aside into someone else's custody, lifted Diana in his arms.

"Oh, my—God!"

She looked up at him, her eyes half mad with terror, then with a little convulsive gesture she put her lacerated arms around his neck, clinging to him desperately for one heartbreaking moment before she fainted.

He carried her into the study and laid her on the couch; his face was gray, and his breath came tearing from him as if it were he who was suffering and not she.

The chauffeur was in the room now, and the housekeeper, a middle-aged woman with a quiet, capable face; and seeing that for a moment at least Rathbone was utterly unnerved, she fetched water and brandy and gently bathed Diana's face and bleeding arms.

It seemed an eternity to those around before she stirred a little and then opened her eyes; eyes still so terrified and wild that it was almost unbearable when she started up, crying and moaning afresh:

"Donald . . . Donald . . . Save me!"

He went on his knees beside her.

"It's all right . . . I'm here . . . don't be frightened . . . you're quite safe . . . it's all right . . . I'm here . . . you're quite safe with me."

He put his hand over her eyes for an instant as if to wipe the terrible moments from her memory, but she pushed him away, crying out like a frightened child—

"He tried to kill me . . . he tried to kill me . . . oh, why didn't you come? . . . He tried to kill me . . . And then, with a shuddering sob:

"Oh, my arms . . . look at my arms!"

It was a relief to them all when she slipped back into unconsciousness, but when Mrs. Farmer tried to force brandy between her lips, Rathbone prevented her.

"No, leave her alone."

He dressed and bandaged her arms while she lay unconscious; he was as gentle as a woman, thorough and capable, but the sweat was standing in great beads on his forehead, and his curious hard breathing alone broke the silence.

When at last he had finished, Mrs. Farmer gave a little sob.

"Thank God her face isn't touched sir."

Rathbone said nothing. He stood looking down at Diana with a queer blank look in his eyes.

Mrs. Farmer spoke again, hesitatingly:

"Shall we put her to bed, sir?"

"Here?—in this house?—No, I'll take her home."

When they brought the rug he wrapped Diana in it and lifted her in his arms, carrying her out to the car himself.

He laid her on the seat with a cushion beneath her head and let down the windows to the cool night air.

"Drive carefully," he said.

The car moved slowly away.

Rathbone sat opposite Diana, leaning a little forward, his hands gripped between his knees, staring at her.

It was like some monstrous nightmare from which he could not free himself.

How had it happened? Why had she come? Why, in God's name, had she come, alone and at this time of night?

cottage, and the chauffeur came to the door.

Rathbone got out. "Don't touch her," he said briefly.

Rathbone went back into the passage and called the Creature's name, but there was no reply, and with a muttered imprecation he returned to the car.

"The place seems deserted. I'll carry her in. Go in the kitchen and get some hot water—and bring it upstairs to me."

He laid Diana on her bed, clumsily pulling the quilt aside and then gently covering her with it, before he pulled the curtains back and opened the window wide.

She stared up at him piteously for a moment before she whispered:

"Am I going to die?"

"No, my dear—no!"

He went on carefully, as if realizing the importance of every word.

"You've got to be brave and try never to think about it again. You've got to be very brave and trust me to look after you. Can you do that?"

She nodded, slow tears falling down her face.

"It—hurts so," she said.

"Yes." She made a little movement to wipe the tears from her face, but the pain in her arm was too great, and Rathbone took his own handkerchief and gently wiped them for her before he drew his arm from beneath her head and laid her back on the pillows.

Her eyes sought his with fear.

"I suppose, when I'm well—you'll go again?"

"Go?—Where?"

"Not see me any more, I mean."

He put his hand on hers for a moment; it was like her to touch his tenderness when he had been trying harshly to condemn her.

"No, not if you still want me," he said.

She said suddenly, with a ghost of her old childish impertinence.

"Poor Dr. Rathbone—you can't quite escape me can you?"

"Have you thought I wished to?"

She sighed. "I have thought so—yes."

Away in the distance the church clock struck eleven.

He asked, "Does that mean that I am still—a wall for you to lean against? Wasn't that what you called me?—a safe harbour, Diana?"

She pressed his hand in assent, the old sweet smile crossing her face as she looked up at him.

The garden gate creaked, and Rathbone went over to the window.

"That is Miss Starling," he said.

"I'll just go down and see her; you don't mind being left now for a moment?"

Downstairs she could hear him talking to Miss Starling, and presently they came up together. Diana wondered if the creature could possibly have been crying, or if it was just the night air had reddened her lids.

She bent over Diana and rearranged her pillows and the bedclothes with capable hands.

"I'll make you nice and comfy presently," she promised.

day in Harley Street, you told me that if I went on as I was going then, I should kill myself, and now you are telling me to go back to it all."

"But not at the same breakneck pace. Besides, you are so much better in every way than you were then, in spite of this last."

"You cannot go on living here indefinitely, you know that, Diana, so the sooner you make a start the better."

She took a step towards him.

"Do you want to get rid of me?" she asked very directly.

"Is that a fair question, do you think?" he asked. "Besides, it won't

be 'getting rid of you,' as you put it. I shall see you in London sometimes."

"Only—sometimes?"

He smiled rather constrainedly.

"I know what is best for me," she said wilfully.

He checked a smile.

"And what is best for you?" he asked.

"To be where I am happiest," Diana said with troubled eyes.

"And I am happiest where I know I shall see you most often."

And then there followed a profound silence which seemed as though it could never be broken, till Rathbone said with an effort:

"We must be very frank with each other this once, Diana, and then we'll never talk about it again. I know you won't misunderstand me when I say that my life was settled for me—or perhaps I settled it myself, whichever way you prefer—many years ago, when you must have been only a schoolgirl. I can't go back on it, even if I wanted to. I've always felt that when a man takes certain responsibilities upon himself he should stand by them, whatever his inclinations, whatever comes between. I can't explain more

definitely. I haven't the right to. I can only hope you will understand."

He broke off, as if for a moment he had lost himself in the wistful beauty of her face.

"She stood helplessly silent for a moment before she broke out with something of her old impetuosity."

"I wish I knew what it really is I feel about you; I wish I could explain, but I can't, and if I did, you wouldn't understand. Nobody would. But if I go back to London, as you say you want me to, there'll be other men again. I know that. You see—"

she submitted rather pathetically—"I must do something—go about with someone. Aunt Gladwyn is kind, but we're not really friends. I know lots of girls like myself, but we don't any of us really care about each other. Then there's

Dennis . . . he arrives in England today you know. I didn't tell you before, but he does."

There was a sharp silence which Rathbone broke.

"Are you glad, Diana?"

"I don't know," she said almost in a whisper, and then, as he said nothing, she went on: "Everything is so different since I came here, I don't understand why. I've never had one single cocktail since I came here—no wonder my skin looks so nice."

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CHAPTER XIV
The day Dennis Waterman was due to arrive at Southampton Rathbone took the bandages from Diana's right arm.

"And now there's something I want to say to you," Rathbone said briskly.

Diana turned round, the old scared look creeping into her eyes.

"Something nasty?"

"Nothing in the least nasty," he assured her. "Quite the contrary, in fact. It's just this—I want you to start going about again, to take an interest in your old life."

She said slowly, her eyes on his face:

"When I went to see you that first