

A MAN'S WAY

By RUBY M. AYRES

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THIS BEGINS THE STORY
John Harden is a successful business man, so large, so young, and a member of the aristocracy. He is being lavishly in Little Helpton, and his secretary, a charming young girl, Molly Dangerfield, is his private secretary. She is the daughter of a wealthy family, and she is a woman of a certain type. She is a woman who has had a long and successful career in the business world. She is a woman who is not only beautiful, but also intelligent and capable. She is a woman who is not only a secretary, but also a friend and a confidante. She is a woman who is not only a secretary, but also a friend and a confidante.

She was a woman of whom one would have said at first sight that she was plain, but after a moment's conversation with her one realized that there was something better than mere beauty of feature in her face. Her eyes were gray and open; eyes that could belong to a small-souled woman—that were so frank and sweet as the woman herself; her mouth calm and good-tempered.

CHAPTER XVI
Lillith Hears the News
"Molly is a dear child," she said; "I can't understand her myself. I am sure you will be able to, as you must love her very much to wish to marry her. I have no illusions. I know how my children and I are looked on in Little Helpton."
Harden ran a finger round his collar; he felt stifling. Molly was not in the least like her mother. He could not understand how any man had managed to live with such a woman so long; he found himself finding excuses for the conduct of the departed beauty.

"I suppose we may all call you by your Christian name?" Mrs. Dangerfield asked. "What is your Christian name, the way?"
"My name is John."
"I had a brother named John," he informed. "But we always called him Jack. She is laughing at me. I cannot imagine you being called Jack."
Harden could not imagine it either; he rose as if to intimate that the conversation was at an end; the callousness of the whole interview struck him; Molly's mother had asked no questions as to his position or his relatives; he supposed she was like all the rest of the Little Helptonites, and considered that Manor Dyke and his banking account were a sufficient reference; he resented more freely now when he and Molly were downstairs again.

"You don't like her?" she said.
"My dear child, I don't know her."
"That isn't an answer," said Molly. She felt hurt, without knowing why; it was certainly a very disappointing thing, this getting engaged.
"I suppose you have heard the latest?" Alice Fernald said, looking up from a book as his wife came into the room.
He was lying full length on a sofa by the open window, his face turned toward it to catch what faint breeze there was on this hot summer afternoon.
"The latest?" Lillith echoed lightly; she bent and kissed him. "No, I haven't heard anything. What do you mean?"
"That your friend Harden is to marry the little girl next door?"
Lillith stood still; there was a look of blank incredulity in her beautiful eyes as then she laughed.
"What rubbish! John isn't a marrying man; he's a confirmed bachelor; whoever told you such a story?"
Fernald frowned; he was a delicate, frail-looking man with petulant lines round his mouth.
"Miss Dangerfield told me herself," he said impatiently. "She came into the garden a moment ago to look for a kitten that had strayed, and she told me."
Lillith stared; she was rather pale, and she moistened her dry lips before she spoke.
"I simply don't believe it!" she said again.
She went over to the window and looked out across her own picture-garden to the discouraging tangle of straggly flowers and weeds next door.

"You must have made a mistake," she said. "I never heard anything so preposterous; why John is?" She stopped.
"What about John?" her husband asked; he looked at his wife jealously. "Go on," he said. "Finish what you were going to say."
Lillith laughed.
"You old silly! I believe you're deluding him."
She came back and sat down on the side of his couch; she leaned over and kissed him with sudden passion. "I've never loved any other man," she said, and her voice softened wonderfully. "You know that, don't you?"
"He raised his hands to his lips."
"It's such a poor thing for a woman to do to you," he said, "but I'll give you a life to be chained to a sick man's couch, my dear."
"It's the only life possible for me—because I love you," she told him. "She let her hand lie cozily in his; she sat staring down at the floor. Presently:
"But I simply don't believe it!" she said again. "Molly must have been joking—why, she's only a child. John would never dream of marrying a girl like that! She's half a boy, I believe!"
She laughed. "My dear Alec, think of me as the mistress of Manor Dyke."
"She told me she was simply dying to go and live there," Fernald said drily; he moved his hand away. "You seem very positive that Harden is a confirmed bachelor," he said, "but she shrugged her shoulders.
"I have known him a long time; he would have got married over and over again if he had wished; and you would have jumped at him with all that money."
"Perhaps Molly Dangerfield realizes that also," he took up his book again. "But though he kept his eyes on the pages he never saw a word written there; he was naturally a very jealous man; all the more so on account of his own delicacy and his incapacity to get about with his wife as much as he wished. But for once Lillith hardly noticed her husband; presently she went up to her own room.
She looked at her beautiful face in the glass, and a smile of triumph curved her lips.
"I don't believe it!" she said again. "Why, it was only the day before yesterday that—" But she did not finish the thought; somehow she was ashamed of it.
She was sure in her heart that John Harden still loved her; she read it in his eyes; in the tone of his voice; in the way he had kissed her; still loving her then, was it likely that he would engage himself to Molly—half-formed, tomboyish Molly—only one of the respectable Dangerfields.
She turned away from the mirror; her own beauty had convinced her as no other argument could have done; and what exactly Molly had said to make Alec believe anything so improbable.

She was pouring out tea for her husband when the vicar's wife was announced. Mrs. Ashford was one of those women who, married to the clergyman of a decidedly clique parish, managed to be friends with every one; she had been very kind to Lillith since they met in Little Helpton; she brought a

basketful of lovely roses with her now. "I wondered whether I should be in time for a cup of tea," she said as she shook hands. "I'm so thirsty, and your tea is always so good, Mrs. Fernald. No, please don't get up! This is to Alec, who had made an effort to rise."
She put her hand on his arm, preventing him.
"I shall be sorry I came if you're going to make a stranger of me," she insisted. "I do so like to feel that I can drop in and see my friends without any formality. Now I'm going to sit here beside you and have my tea."
She drew a chair up to his couch.
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