

# THE MASTER MAN

BY RUBY M. AYRES  
Author of "The Phantom Lover," "The Girl Next Door," etc.

Michael learned the whole story in broken incoherence.

Patricia, it appeared had not been so happy as she had said.

"She seemed to be worrying about something all the time," Mrs. Smith said tearfully.

"She was so quiet—and she was always so anxious for the postman and so disappointed when there were no letters. I'm sure she spent hours at the window watching for him to come up the road. I asked her if there was anything worrying her and she always said no, but I am sure there was, Mr. Rolf."

Michael stood clutching Patricia's little note in his hand and wondering what on earth he could do. Useless to look for her at Mrs. Flannagan's again, he knew. She would keep far enough away from any spot that had known her before. He broke out angrily:

"Why weren't you more careful. I told you what would happen if she ever got to know. She never liked me. It was the most disastrous thing. . . . Then he saw the distress in her face and hurried to apologize:

"I am sure you did your best. Never mind! It's bad luck! But it can't be helped. But how did she really get to know?"

"She went to my desk for some envelopes and your cheque was lying there. I was out, so she went to her sister for an explanation. She demanded to know how we knew you and why you were sending us money—"

Michael laughed ruefully. "And then, of course, she was furious."

"She didn't say a great deal. She took it very quietly; even when I came in and she spoke to me about it, she did not say much, and I thought perhaps she was not so angry, after all. I should have written to you, Mr. Rolf, and she—this evening we found this in her room."

"When do you suppose she went?"

"It must have been this afternoon—before tea time."

This afternoon! And now it was eleven o'clock.

Too late to do anything to-night.

Mrs. Smith followed him to the door.

"I know you will never forgive us," she said sadly. "It was not my fault, and, anyway, I think it is cruel of Patricia to have left me like this." Her voice broke into tears.

Michael said what he could to comfort her, but he was worried and occupied with his own thoughts.

He went half way down the road, and then came back again to ask if Chesney had called to see Patricia.

Mrs. Smith said yes; he had been each day, and that once he had taken Patricia out to dinner.

Michael scowled. Had Patricia gone to Chesney? The thought gave him an uncontrollable pang of jealousy.

He rang up Chesney's rooms, but he was out, and he had to get through the night as best he could.

At nine o'clock he was round at Mr. Philips. The lawyer listened to him with the ghost of a smile in his eyes.

"I thought we had got her safely this time," he said. He knew all about Michael's elaborate plans and the arrangement made with Mrs. Smith.

"I doubt whether you've ever got a woman safely unless you marry her," Michael said bluntly. "And, even then, it's no good sometimes."

Their eyes met and he flushed a little.

"And what do you want me

to do?" Mr. Philips asked kindly.

"Good heavens, man!—find her," said Michael irritably. "I don't hope to have any luck this time as I did last. But, when I do find her, I'll take good care she doesn't play me this trick a third time," he added darkly.

"I sincerely hope not," said Mr. Philips.

In his own mind he thought Michael would have been far better advised if he had married Patricia in the beginning, and so put an end to all this nonsense.

Michael went back again to Chesney, and Chesney declared that he knew nothing about Patricia.

"You look as if you're speaking the truth, I admit," Michael said nastily. "And if you are, perhaps you'll lend a hand to find her; though how on earth we're to start about it—"

"How did you start before?" Chesney demanded.

"It was luck before," Michael admitted. "We can't expect it to be luck again."

But they called at Mrs. Flannagan's, and as Michael expected, she knew nothing of Patricia.

"If you hear anything, this is my address," Michael said. "And you shall be well paid if you can help us to find her."

Mrs. Flannagan declared she'd do anything she could for the love of the pretty lamb, that she would, and expressed her intention of then and there starting out in her best bonnet, to see what could be done about it.

But for days there was no sign of Patricia. Michael began to look thin and worried. He could not sleep at night, and he wandered about London all day.

He wore Chesney out and still showed no sign of giving in himself.

"She may be out of the country," Chesney said. "How do you know that she isn't?"

"Because I know she isn't, and that's all about it," Michael answered obstinately.

He went down to Clayton Wold and made inquiries there. Nobody had seen Patricia, and he realized with a sort of chagrin that very few people were in the least interested in her.

She was no longer either rich or amongst them, and so had ceased to matter.

In desperation he went to the Shackles and asked Effie to help him.

"You must know a list of her friends, or, at least, of some people where she might have gone," he insisted.

Effie looked at his haggard face and a little pang shot through her heart.

The loss of Patricia's money did not matter to this man evidently, she realized, as she shook her head and answered that she knew very little of Patricia or how she used to spend her time in the old days.

"I thought you were her friend," Michael was stung to retort, and Effie answered that dear Patricia had hardly been the sort of girl of whom one could ever really make a friend.

"She was always so proud—she always kept so much to herself," she said. "And she really was rather selfish, you know, Mr. Rolf."

Michael flushed angrily, and Effie's eyes narrowed as she looked at him.

"You seem very interested," she submitted sweetly, "and yet I never knew that you and Patricia were great friends." Michael shot her a furious glance.

"When I find Patricia, I shall hope to have the honor of asking you to our wedding," he said.

engineer, had had a job in Australia, and was returning to San Francisco. He was to leave immediately for China to take up another position, so called his fiancée, Lou Henry, that he wished to be married without delay. The cable message miscarried, and upon his arrival quick action was necessary. There being no other clergyman in the town of Monterey, Cal., where the marriage was to take place, they persuaded a Catholic missionary priest, Rev. Raymond Maria Mestries, who was also a civil official, to perform the ceremony, after he had obtained a special dispensation from his bishop, as neither

## CHAPTER X

A week slipped away.

"She must be ill," Michael told Patricia's mother. He had gone over to Kensington to ask if there was any news, and as usual had been disappointed.

"If she were not ill she would write or come back, I am sure," he insisted restlessly.

Patricia's mother did not think so. She knew Patricia better than Michael did, and in her own mind she believed he had more to do with her disappearance than anyone else.

One day she spoke to him about it.

"I have tried to say this to you for so long, Mr. Rolf," she said nervously, "but I have thought—I mean—oh, can't you throw any explanation on Patricia having gone away?"

Michael stared at her.

"I know it was because she found out about my paying for her," he said grimly. "I know of no other reason. . . . What do you mean?" he asked conscious of a curious expression in her eyes.

Mrs. Smith flushed agitatedly.

"I only thought—only wondered," she stammered. "Patricia seemed to be so sure that you would come here to see her. She told me so many times that she was sure you would come, and she seemed so disappointed when each day went by and you did not. . . . Oh, I hope you are not angry or offended with me!"

It was impossible to mistake her meaning, and Michael answered her appeal unhesitatingly—

"I asked Patricia to marry me—the day before she came here to you—and she refused."

Mrs. Smith looked frankly disappointed and astonished.

"Then, of course, I must be mistaken," she said quietly. "I beg your pardon for having spoken of it, Mr. Rolf."

Michael went back to his rooms. He hated them, and yet he was afraid to stay away for too long in case some news of Patricia should come.

Had she really wanted him to go and see her he wondered. It did not seem at all likely. She had only to ask him to go if she wished him to do so.

She had been gone ten days now—a lifetime it seemed! He leaned his elbow on the mantelshelf and stared down into the fire with unhappy eyes.

Would he ever see her again? Sometimes he believed that he never would. One heard of such complete disappearances—people going out for an ordinary walk in the London streets and never being seen or heard of again.

And he wanted Patricia. As he stood there in the silent room he knew how much he wanted her. With all her faults and follies, she was the only woman for him in the world.

Life at Clayton Wold would mean nothing to him if she were not there to share it. He wondered why he had only just discovered that he loved her and been shy of admitting it.

He looked back to their first meeting at the Chesney's river party. He had pretended that he disliked and despised her then, and all the time he must have cared for her.

If he had been indifferent her arrogance and pride could not have affected him at all. It must have been because he recognized the depths of which she was capable that he had been jealous for her to show him of her best.

Always loved her—of course he had! There had been no time in their acquaintance when a line could have been drawn that marked the border between friendship and love. The thing had never commenced because it had always been there.

He took his hat and wandered outdoors again. He hated the house; he felt as if he could not breathe unless he were in the fresh air.

It was a cold, starry night that seemed to speak only of Patricia as he walked along, head a little down.

What was she doing? Where

was she? It tortured him that he did not—and perhaps might never—know. In an aching imagination he had pictured her so often—alone and unhappy—with the tears running down her cheeks as he had tried not to see them that first night when he left her at Mrs. Flannagan's.

She had been kind to him that night. He liked to think of the way she had tried to thank him for what he had done for her and of the little spontaneous way in which his Christian name had escaped her.

He called on Chesney, but Chesney was taciturn and would not come out. He blamed Michael for everything that had happened to Patricia.

"If we never see her again you've only got yourself to thank," he said savagely. "No body but a clumsy fool would have attempted to pay a woman like Mrs. Smith to have Patricia in the house."

Michael turned round on him angrily:

"I suppose you'd be surprised to hear that Mrs. Smith is Patricia's mother, wouldn't you?" he said sharply. "Yes, I thought so. Well, put that in your pipe and smoke it, my friend." He went out again, banging the door behind him.

Out on the street again, to tramp on once more. He had given up staring at every woman whom he passed now. He had given up his belief that Patricia was in London, but because he did not know where else to look for her he stayed there doggedly, hoping and praying that chance would be kind to him again, as it had been before. He walked on, hands deep thrust into his pockets, head down.

What was the use of going back to his rooms? He hated their silence and loneliness. One might as well stay outdoors and pass the long hours away.

He turned to cross the road. He would go and look Philip up. Philips was a decent little chap, Philips—

"Look up, there," yelled a voice, and Michael woke from his dejected reverie to the fact that a motor-lorry was bearing down upon him.

He leapt to one side and safely out of its way, but as he tried to gain the pathway he slipped on the curb and fell heavily, twisting his foot badly. A policeman who had seen what had happened came to his assistance and helped him to rise.

"Any damage, sir?" he asked cheerfully. "Narrow squeak that was."

Michael was rather pale.

"I've sprained my ankle, I think," he tried to put his foot to the ground, but gave a stifled groan, clutching at the constable's arm helplessly.

Another man was coming along the path. He looked at Michael sharply, then came forward.

"My dear boy, what has happened?" he asked anxiously. It was Mr. Philips himself. Michael explained as best he could—he was in considerable pain.

"I was on my way to see you. I don't know how it happened. I shall have to have a taxi. Can you see me home?"

"Why, of course! It's most unfortunate—most unfortunate."

"Might have been worse, sir," the constable said stoically. "Gent was nearly run over."

They took Michael back to his rooms and found that he had sprained his foot and ankle badly.

"You'll have to have a doctor," Mr. Philips insisted. "Nonsense! I say you must!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

### NO CHANCE FOR GOLD STREET

New York — (AP) — Wall street can not be paved in gold for there is not enough of the yellow metal. Scott Turner, director of the United States bureau of mines, has computed that the entire world production of gold since Columbus discovered America, if melted together would form a cube only 38.5 feet long.

literature preserved on scrolls of papyrus. These were gathered and burned by the Spanish invaders. Despite the fact that the Mayas had evolved a complex civilization and had developed astronomy and mathematics to a stage not surpassed by the ancient Egyptians, the source of this civilization is unknown.

### SAVING FOR PACKERS

Washington — (AP) — Savings for the packing industry are expected by use of the quick-freezing process of preserving fresh-cut meats, according to reports to the department of commerce.

Q. Where did the Mayas come from? N. A. L.

A. This is one of the world's ancient mysteries. Research is now going on in the Vatican library in the hope of tracing manuscripts of priests who visited America at the time of the Spanish conquest. It is hoped that these may prove a key to the Mayan hieroglyphics which have been found. At the time of the conquest the Mayas had a vast

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### JAPANESE DELEGATE NAMED

Tokio—(UP) — Toshichi Tachibana, an official of the insurance division of the ministry of commerce and industry, will represent Japan at the international insurance conference to be held in Stockholm in June, according to the vernacular press. Later Tachibana may tour Europe and the United States.

Q. Please give the religious affiliations of President and Mrs. Hoover, and explain why they were married by a Catholic priest. D. C. S.

A. In 1939 Mr. Hoover, a young

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"The country is more virtuous than the town. The words 'fast' and 'slow,' for instance, have one meaning in the town, while in the country their meaning is more virtuous.

"A city girl on her vacation was trying to flirt with a young farmer. "I suppose," she said, with a wink—"I suppose the girls around here are pretty slow."

"Slow?" said the young farmer solemnly. "By heck, no. Why, my sister Samantha milked 27 cows and churned 14 pounds of butter this morning before breakfast."

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