

The Man Nobody Knew

By HOLWORTHY HALL

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CHAPTER X—Continued.

"I'm sorry. Business worries?"

"Why—in a way, yes."

The doctor achieved a perfect circle, and beamed at it.

"Something else?"

"A good deal else," said Hilliard, abstracted. "But that's no reason for me to bother you with it. I didn't know it was so apparent."

Silence.

"It's not my habit," said the doctor presently, "to offer any advice unless I'm asked for it. Gratuitous advice never did anybody any good. And nobody takes it unless it costs something—and not often then. And I'm neither your regular physician nor your confessor." But if I had made a diagnosis at this present minute I'd say that you need a preacher a great deal more than you do a doctor.

"I . . . I do," said Hilliard, looking up sharply. "Only . . . it's out of the question. Just personal things, doctor—nothing I can very well talk about."

"Your trouble," said Doctor Durant, "isn't physical as much as it is spiritual. It's nothing but taut nerves. It's nothing but your struggle against the restraints you put upon yourself. How do I know? You've told me so . . . every time I've seen you. It's in your face, my boy. It's in your eyes. Constantly. And it looks as though the conference is about over . . . because if that isn't Carol coming up the steps, my ears aren't half as good as they used to be."

Both men were on their feet as she came in, swirling.

"Oh!" she cried to Hilliard. "I didn't know you were coming up tonight! Suppose I'd missed you!"

He merely smiled, and made no answer; nor did he speak to her until after the doctor, protesting a sudden desire for solitude, had waved them hospitably out of the study into the living room. Carol was in the old familiar corner of the sofa; Hilliard was standing by the fireplace, peering down into the empty grate. He coughed harshly, and an expression of utter helplessness crept into his eyes. He turned abruptly.

"Well," he said, "just how much would you have cared if you had?"

There was a stately old lamp standing at height behind the sofa; its shadows were gracious and its light, as it crept through a shade of painted vellum, touched Carol softly, in a delicacy of radiance which was infinitely caressing. Her hands were lying idle in her lap; she bent her head, and viewed them studiously.

"Why, I should have cared a great deal," she said. "I'm always disappointed when I miss seeing a friend of mine. What makes you so pessimistic, all of a sudden?"

Hilliard reddened, and his eyes grew brighter.

"Friendship!" he said tardily. "What an accordionlike sort of thing that is!"

"Why, Mr. Hilliard!" Her tone was at the same time interrogatory and reproachful.

"Oh, I'm not speaking of you," he said. "Only of the thing itself. . . . It's big or little, close or distant . . . and it hasn't anything to say about it . . . You'll have to excuse me—I was thinking out loud . . ."

"Please do!" she said. "You were on the way to be interesting. Think out loud some more."

Hilliard glanced sharply at her.

"Don't laugh at me!" he said, almost roughly. "For heaven's sake, don't you know that the one time you shouldn't laugh at a man is when he deserves it?"

Carol's attitude was vaguely less suggestive of ease.

"I wasn't laughing at you," she said, "truly. But what you said was so . . . so queer."

"Oh, yes," Hilliard's accent was very flat. "I suppose it was. It must have been. . . . I always seem to be more or less up in the air when I come to see you, don't I? The last time we talked about friendship."

"But that was at least a month ago," she said hastily, "and in the meantime, you've been just as nice and cheerful as anybody. I thought you were all over your troubles."

"Cheerfulness wasn't what you asked for," Hilliard swallowed hard. "I . . . I came up here, Miss Durant, to have a really serious talk with you . . . really serious. It's been delayed too long already. It took me two solid days to get my courage up to it. And . . . and now I'm here, I don't even know how to begin."

He scowled heavily into the vacant fireplace, and held out his palms with a mechanic's gesture as though to warm them at an imaginary blaze. "You know," he said absently, "your father is a very extraordinary man—very."

The compliment to the doctor had its inevitable effect upon her; she glowed under it.

"I've always known that . . . I'm glad you realize it, too."

He stood erect, and faced her. "I do . . . it came to me, when I was talking to him, what a great privilege it must be for you to have his advice—

need it. And there are so few—so incredibly few—people who make you feel like that. One in a thousand. Or, one in ten thousand. People who lift you clear of your trivial little self—and make you think in terms of principles—and not of your own selfish ideas—and still don't preach. . . . It must be a privilege."

"It isn't only for me," she said. "He has enough sympathy for anyone who asks for it. He isn't very worldly—you've noticed that? He can't believe that anybody, or anything, is really bad . . . and perhaps that's why people come to him so. Of course, it may be that just because he's my father, I—"

"No," Hilliard shook his head. "I've seen a good many fathers, and next to mine. . . . My own was a wonderful man, too, but I never appreciated him. And seeing the doctor has made me wish . . . oh, it's too childish to talk about!"

"If you were really as old as you try to be," she said gently, "you'd know that it isn't ever childish to be serious about such things as that. On the contrary! And yet there was a time when you wanted me to think you were well over thirty. Why, Mr. Hilliard, you're a boy!" Nevertheless, she regarded him . . . not as one would regard a mere youth, but with appreciably more uncertainty.

Hilliard had flushed warmly. "That was when I wanted you to think a good many things that weren't true."

"About you?" Her infection was an invitation to further confidences, and it drew Hilliard incontinently along the path he had planned—and feared—to take.

"Some of them," he admitted. "And some were about you. The fact is, I . . . I've come on a peculiar errand."

He cleared his throat violently; his eyes suddenly adored her. "I've come to straighten all that out. Please don't imagine I've suddenly gone crazy or . . . or anything . . . and please don't take anything I say tonight to mean weakness . . . because, honestly, I've thought about this so much that it's rather disintegrated me . . . but I've got to tell you some things I don't want to." His shoulders squared in resolution; and at the look of pain in his eyes, of pain and despair, her whole womanliness went out to him—and had to be crushed, because she was, after all, a woman.

Her look to him was first of astonishment at his surrender, and, after that, of swift, ineffable pity for the unnamed forces which were influencing him. Womanliness hung in the balance; and then, in a flash of perfect comprehension of his plight, she knew that she could speak to him without reserve. He had passed beyond the bounds of conventionality; she put herself, mentally, at his side.

"If it hurts you to say it," she said, "I've known you've been . . . fond of me. How could I help it? And why shouldn't you have the right to think of it? Why shouldn't you have the right to be yourself? Why shouldn't you have the right to talk to me, and to expect me to hear you, and try to understand? You haven't thought that my father is the only one of us to do that, have you?" The reproach was exquisite.

"Ever since that day . . . the time you played to me," he said. "I've



"Think Out Loud Some More."

fought against it—fought like the very devil, and—"

"I've known that, too—and you've come to see me so seldom. I'd hoped at least that you'd give yourself the chance you said you wanted."

He stiffened heroically. "You forget there was a condition . . . an imperative condition . . . and it's only fair to you to tell you that it's a condition I can't ever meet—ever. That's why I'm here. I had to tell you."

There was a profound stillness.

"Can't you explain?" she said at last. "I wish you would. You're mak-

ing me feel very bad, Mr. Hilliard. You owe it to me—"

He had to exert his utmost will to make the beginning. "All I can explain is that I've made another mistake . . . After the first great effort the words came tumbling, passionately, unchecked. 'It would have been so infinitely better for both of us if I'd never met you at all. . . . My life has been a whole series of mistakes; this is the worst. . . . The worst. . . . Of course, it would be absurdly simple if I were going away from Syracuse, if I were going to leave you here, and go—but I'm not. I'm going to stay here. And I can't think it's decent not to tell you now that if you . . . knew all I know . . . what I've been, what I've done . . . you wouldn't marry me if I were the last man left to ask you! . . .'" He gestured impatiently. "We're childishly hopeful sometimes . . . all of us . . . hoping for what we know is impossible . . . what we know always will be impossible. . . . I've been like that—and what I hoped was that you could take me on the basis of what I've been for the last few months . . . since July . . . because that's the way I take myself. Just a man—a man—like Jack Armstrong. I hoped we could simply eliminate the past, and . . . I can't get away from it. It's on my heels every minute. It's what I am, now . . . but if I went much further back than that, you and the doctor would both think just what I do about myself . . . and I'd have to say goodbye to you anyway . . . just as I'm doing tonight. I hope you can see that I'm not telling all this to you from any other motive except to be quite honest with you. Quite honest—for once. I care too much about you to let you live another day without knowing that I can't go on—it's over. . . . I'm not fit to be even your friend. That's all."

She sat motionless. Hilliard had turned back to the fireplace.

"Were you as bad . . . as that?" she whispered.

"Once," he said bitterly, over his shoulder. "I used to be a gentleman. But that was a long time ago."

She raised her head. "Nothing could ever make me believe," she said, "that you haven't always been just as I've known you—since July. Nothing can, and nothing will. What you may think about yourself makes no difference to me. I—"

"Don't!" he said, and his tone was agonized. "Don't you see—"

"I don't believe you," she said steadily.

Hilliard's voice was unstable with his great bitterness of failure. "You flatter me," he said harshly. "And besides—you're wrong."

She was up, and beside him, smiling bravely into his eyes, and he was flogging his will to keep his hungry arms from snatching her, from sweeping her close to him, and . . .

"What do you think women are?" she demanded, with sweet imperiousness. "Nothing but marble statues—or putty ones? Just made to stand around and let the world go past, without having anything to say about it?"

He retreated to the wall in self-defense. "Don't! Don't! I'm the one who's driven myself into this corner—not you!"

"But you don't have to stay in it always, do you?"

He stared at her in mystification.

"Don't be silly," she said, "and don't be unreasonable; I'm not!" She touched his sleeve; his expression was unchanged. "Don't make me think you are unreasonable!" she said compassionately. "If you're not satisfied, why can't you make yourself what you want to be? Instead of brooding over the past, that you can't help, why don't you think about things you can help? Living is about all there is to live for, isn't it?"

He drew in his breath perilously.

"But I'm letting you go," he said, dazed.

She stamped her foot in tremulous severity. "No, you're not; I won't allow it! Can't you see why? Do I have to tell you that? Well . . . because I want you for a friend even if you don't want me."

"Want you!" he cried, and remembered himself, and froze to immobility.

"Oh—as a friend!"

"Surely, as a friend—what else did you think I meant?"

The young man shook his head.

"I don't know. Only I came up here to tell you I haven't any right to your friendship. I can't tell you why . . . I haven't as much callousness as all that . . . but if I did tell you, your last atom of faith in me would be gone. And you can't afford to have me even for a friend—now that I've said that, can you?"

"Yes," she said steadfastly, "I can afford it."

"When . . . when I've told you . . . His lips were parted in amazement, his eyes roved dully. "I can't understand . . . I'm telling you I'm not worth the powder to blow me to hades!" He laughed oddly. "That's proved already, over and over again."

"Don't you understand?"

"Carol . . . His voice broke. "Why, Carol . . . I'm not fit to talk to you."

That's proved, too. . . . I'm proving it now! I'm saying it—don't you hear me? I'm saying it now. And you—"

He put his hand to his forehead, and brushed back his hair, which was strangely wet. "I can't make it any plainer," he said, with helpless finality.

"No matter what's happened," she said earnestly, "I can't believe it isn't coming out all right. So if you'll just keep on living, and working, and trying . . . and . . ." Here her eyes were so appealing that his own dimmed to behold them. "And you haven't been so very dreadful after all, have you?"

Hilliard retreated once again, not trusting those hungry, lawless arms of his.

"I'm just wondering," he said, with a terrible smile, which was entirely devoid of mirth, "if a man happens to



"Don't! Don't!"

be in a . . . a sort of transition period, you know—half-way between . . . I wonder what's coming to him. I wonder what is coming to him. . . . I wonder if the whirlwind doesn't get him both ways."

After the street door had closed behind him, Carol went slowly along the corridor to the doctor's study and knocked, out of sheer habit. His pleasant baritone came to her reassuringly.

"Yes?"

"Are you busy, dear?" Few men, on hearing her voice, with that suggestive catch in it, would have confessed to a previous engagement.

"Not when you're around," said the doctor, appearing on the threshold. His tone altered suddenly. "What's wrong?" he said.

"Daddy," said Carol, "he's gone."

"You saw him, too . . . what is it? What is it?" She was trembling violently; the big doctor gathered her up in his arms without ceremony and carried her over to his favorite leather chair.

"Fires burning," said Doctor Durant, quietly. "Burning and burning . . . like the ones you've seen down in the blast furnaces . . . white hot, and crubled steel comes out of them . . . strong enough to make permanent things out of . . . He smoothed her hair, and she sighed quivering, and lay still.

"And the steel lasts ten thousand times as long as the fires that made it. I don't know what's blowing the flames, dear, but he'll do—he'll do."

CHAPTER XI.

Half-way down James street, Hilliard, driving his runaway in utter disregard of the traffic rules, was reliving, moment by moment, and word by word, the conversations of the earlier evening. He had gone to Carol with the sturdy intention of betraying himself manfully and in detail; but in the doctor's study he had perceived another, and what seemed to him a more unselfish method of achieving the same end. He had fancied that if he could preserve intact the memory of Dicky Morgan, if he could prevent the world—and especially that part of it personal to the Cullens and Durants—from knowing what a despicable thing it was that Dick Morgan had done, he could save a modicum of pain for those who would otherwise be most affected. This conception had interfered to make his talk with Carol somewhat aimless . . . he had been under the dual necessity of damning Hilliard, without implicating Morgan. And how bunglingly he had accomplished it! How inefficiently—how unsuccessfully!

On impulse, he checked the speed of the car, and swerved to the left; he was actuated by a sudden desire to run over to the University club and see Armstrong. He had no definite plan as to what he should say or do; he merely craved to meet his rival face to face, and have it out with him. Man to man—and this time there should be no bungling.

Mr. Armstrong, it seemed, was in the

library . . . and would come down directly. Indeed, he followed almost on the heels of the messenger.

"Why, hello, Hilliard," he said, rather stiltedly. "Did you want to see me? That's too bad—I've got to leave here in just a couple of seconds to catch my train. I'm going West tonight."

"I'll take you over," said Hilliard, shortly. "That'll save you a minute or two—and give us time to chat. My car's outside."

"Why—under the circumstances . . . Armstrong's glance was diverted. "I don't think I can let you do that—take me over, I mean. I'm going West on a business trip and I don't think it would be very appropriate for you to—"

"Oh—you are!" Hilliard felt streaks of ice coursing along his spine. "How far West?"

Armstrong consulted his watch nervously.

"Hilliard," he said, "I like to do things out in the open. There are just two reasons why I don't think you really want to invite me to ride down to the station with you. If I'm wrong, it's up to you to say so. One of 'em is that Rufus Waring has asked me to stop off at Butte—I'm going a good deal further than that—and look up some matters for him. I guess you know as well as I do what they are."

Hilliard fumbled his hat. "I see. And—the other reason?"

Armstrong suddenly straightened; and his voice had a curious ring to it—a ring which electrified Hilliard and awoke the most petrifying alarms within him.

"But does one ordinarily mention—certain kinds of people—in a men's club? I don't know how it is where you come from—but here, we don't."

Hilliard smiled rapidly; it was the utmost perversity of emotion, for he knew now why Carol had been so explicit in her sympathy . . . why she had been so meticulous to let him realize that she wanted him as a friend; only as a friend . . . and here was Armstrong, concealing with difficulty the triumph he was hinting at.

"No," he said harshly. "One doesn't, but there isn't anything to keep us from mentioning anybody we like outside the club, is there?"

"Why—not that I—"

"Then I'll take you down anyway," said Hilliard. "And let's see if we can't try to understand each other."

It took a brave man to accept the offer, for Hilliard's eyes held little to recommend their owner as a prudent driver, or as a very pleasant companion. Armstrong, however, was already putting on his hat.

They had driven over to the station in silence. Hilliard, parking the runaway about carefully, turned to his passenger.

"We've got ten good minutes," he said. "Your train isn't even in yet—go ahead and talk."

Armstrong, after a momentary delay, put out a conciliating hand. "Old man," he said, "let's play the rest of this out like two sensible people. We won't get anywhere by bickering, and I suppose it won't do any harm for us to put all the cards on the table, and know exactly where we stand. Of course, you haven't known me very long, and I haven't known you . . . but suppose, just to help along the understanding, we take each other at face value."

Hilliard winced.

"Well—suppose we do. Then what?"

"Then you can't hold it up against me for stopping off at Butte on my way out. I haven't any motive in it—I promised to do it as a favor to Rufus Waring. It isn't a personal issue at all. I know exactly how it must appear to you, but . . . I'm not that sort of man, Hilliard. I wouldn't have dreamed of it myself. That's straight!"

The masquerader regarded him earnestly—and yielded to his evident sincerity.

"Way down deep," he said, at length, "I know you're not, but . . . what's that for?" He referred to Armstrong's outstretched hand. "Oh! . . . all right." They shook hands solemnly. "At the same time it would have been so perfectly natural for you to feel like getting whatever leverage you could—"

"There's no need of that—now," said Armstrong. His smile was proud and brilliant, and Hilliard withered under it.

"Well, I wasn't sure."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Evidence Stork Had Traveled.

Julia had been over to see the neighbor's new baby and upon her return was asked how she liked it, to which she replied: "Well, mother, it is all right, only the stork must have been a long time on the way with it, for it certainly is awfully tanned."

Kept Busy on Social Calls.

The wife of a member of congress can discharge her social duty in the cabinet in nine calls, but a cabinet woman must pay more than 500 if she makes only one call during the season on each senatorial and congressional household.

Know it.

"Do you know that it is more blessed to give than to receive?"

"Yes, many a girl forgives a man's past because of his presents!"—Cartoons Magazine.

CURRENT WIT and HUMOR



AN UNSOCIABLE CREATURE.

"Are the Jibbletons the kind of people you like to have about you?"

"No," replied Mr. Grumpson, "they're not. The Jibbletons are always nagging me about being unsociable. They seem to think that just because a man builds a big, broad veranda around his house he ought to keep it cluttered up with neighbors. I built that veranda to sit on all by myself and I don't mind telling you there are times when I wish it was a mile wide."—Birmingham Age-Herald.



THOUGHTFUL.

He: If we are not suited to each other, will you permit me to get a divorce?

She: Certainly, I'll even find you a co-respondent.

Sweet.

"The sweetest girl I ever kissed," said gay young Malcolm; "Used powdered sugar on her face instead of talcum."

Walk Right In.

The president of a provincial council opened the session with the following address:

"Until now, gentlemen, we have been compelled to send the patients of our province to the asylum of X. But today, at last, I have the pleasure of announcing that we have in course of construction a great insane asylum exclusively for ourselves." (Bravo! Bene!)—Bulletin of Italian Society.

Contrary Process.

"What is the difference between a man who is attending to his son and heir in the woodshed and his daughter who is in her room powdering her sunburned face?"

"I suppose the chief difference is that the father with his son is tanning his hide while the daughter is hiding her tan."

An Impossible Feat.

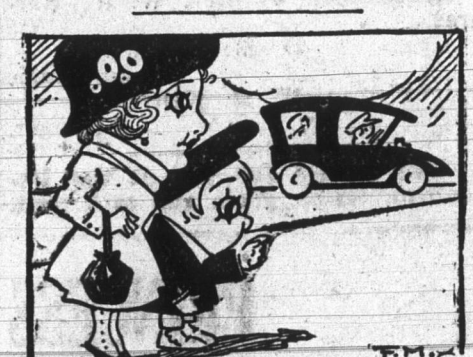
"Mr. Jones, Mr. Gobbs says he wants to see you at the telephone."

"Tell him he can't see me at the telephone. Mine has no X-ray attachment."

Soothing Reply.

She—I suppose now we have quarreled, you are comparing this to your old home.

He—Yes; this is just like the rows mother used to make.



ON THE RETIRED LIST.

"Look Mamma the Swift's have a new chauffeur."

"Yes, dear, the last one couldn't be repaired any more."

Exaggeration Even Then.

"Takes tailors nine to make a man;" Now surely that's a whopper—That is, of course, unless it means To make a man a pauper.

Adding to the Trouble.

Excited Traveler—Can I catch the four o'clock express for Birmingham? Railway Official (calmly)—That depends upon how fast you can run. It started 13 minutes ago.—London Tit-Bits.

Expert Opinion.

"No doubt you're often amused at the complexity of human nature."

"Let me tell you in confidence," replied the eminent counsel, "it's my honest opinion that most of my clients need a guardian rather than a lawyer."—Browning's Magazine.

Know it.

"Do you know that it is more blessed to give than to receive?"

"Yes, many a girl forgives a man's past because of his presents!"—Cartoons Magazine.