

The Man Nobody Knew

By HOLWORTHY HALL

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued

"I suppose that has to be the answer. Well—"

"I'll tell Embree you didn't accept." Hilliard reached for his hat. "And I mustn't bother you any more this morning; we've both too much to do. I only wanted to see you a moment and tell you the news and get your check. But when Cullen and I come back—" His smile was glorious.

They were shaking hands at the door of the ante-room.

"That'll be before the holidays, won't it? We expect you to take Christmas dinner with us, of course. Mrs. Durant and Carol would never forgive you if you didn't—and neither would I."

Hilliard flushed with pleasure.

"Nothing would please me better . . . and you'll tell Mrs. Durant and Carol how grateful I am . . . and how sorry I am I can't even stop now to



"Surely I Will, Good-By, Good Luck—My Boy!"

say good-by, won't you?" As a matter of fact, he wasn't going to stop because he knew that if he did he might never get to Montana. And there was need of quick action against Harmon's out-throat partners in New York.

"Surely I will. And I'll also tell them what an altruist you are. I still don't feel exactly right about it—but the world's the world. . . . And I'm not going to refuse an investment? Just because there happens to be money in it? Good-by! Good luck—my boy!"

CHAPTER XV.

Already at daybreak it was a white Christmas; white underfoot, white overhead, dancing, swirling white of snow in the winter air. Hilliard, lifting himself on his elbow to watch it from the car window, was unreservedly thrilled by the appropriateness of it. Nature, which had been sulking for a week or more, had finally consented to dress the season. But the thrill dissolved, and anxiety took its place when he discovered that it was past eight o'clock, and this was only Buffalo! His watch, and the railway folder, gave him indigestible food for thought, and the snow, taking upon itself the role of a barrier to traffic, was suddenly less agreeable to look at. Wreaths in the windows of nearby houses, holly berries and red ribbon, glimpses of feathery fir boughs and tinsel through the curtains—all these awoke within him a new and a disturbing fancy that at the end of two thousand miles of visioning he might be irretrievably late! Illogically he made haste to rise; he wanted to flavor his impatience by counting landmarks.

The diner was half filled when he arrived for breakfast, and the train was still standing in the yards. As the conductor wished him a perfunctory Merry Christmas, Hilliard smiled obliquely.

"Not unless you make up some speed between here and Syracuse," he said.

"Not much chance of that," said the conductor, punching the order slip. "It's deep snow from here on, sir. Lucky if we're in time for your turkey!"

Hilliard sighed, brightened as the train dragged itself into sluggish motion, and gave his attention to the landscape. It was typically a scene from a Christmas card; all it needed, at any moment, was a few lines of engravings in the foreground to be a very fair counterpart of the cards which Hilliard had ordered sent out to all his friends. He smiled, expansively, at the conception of what the name of Hilliard on those cards now meant to Syracuse. They were undoubtedly magnifying his grandeur now; he knew enough of human nature to realize that in his home-coming he was certain to be greeted as a multi-millionaire. And it wasn't multi—it was only the possibility of a single one!

The thought of riches turned his

mind to the individuals who would share in them; Dr. Durant, who, unless he chose, need never keep office hours again—he could devote himself to the research he loved; Cullen, whose blind, bulldog faith had made him forever independent, even Rufus Waring, whose modest contribution, accepted out of spleenless commiseration, had swelled to the dignity of four figures, and given him the means to show the world to Angela. And Hilliard himself had made far more than all the other venturers combined—in money, perhaps, but in dividends payable in the medium of his self-respect.

And yet, as the realities stood, now, he was sensitive to the nothingness of his triumph, until such time as he had some one to divide it with him. For there is little pleasure in a monopoly of happiness; not even a joke is fully established until some one appears to share it; a secret is delectable only when it's repeated, a conquest is empty without the popular acclaim, or the arrival of the historian. He felt this keenly; he reflected that of all the syndicate, he alone was without a beneficiary. And today, when he had steered himself to speak to Carol . . . Like countless generations of men before him, he began vaguely to wonder what he should do if she refused him.

What would be left? Only the shell of achievement. Would he go back to France? or would he remain in America, and struggle for success by endeavoring war charities out of his glorious income-to-be? Also . . . and this was enervating . . . what should he say to her? It is given to few men to propose twice, in different characters, to the same girl.

The train plowed and panted through the thickening drifts; Hilliard's watch was coming out of his pocket at five-minute intervals; here was Rochester at last . . . three hours late . . . and there, shining dimly through banked clouds, was the sun! The train seemed warmed to greater effort by its mere appearance; Hilliard, who had measured time by weeks, then by days, and more recently by reluctant hours, began to mark the minutes from his mental calendar.

And then, after an interminable century of impatience, the outlying villages, gray and smoky; the flat wastes of Solvay; the road slowly becoming streets; the buildings adding height . . . Syracuse!

His feet were on the platform; he was hurrying forward. Ahead of him . . . and in his excitement he stumbled heavily . . . there, coming toward him . . . Carol and the Doctor, befurred and rosy . . . no question of the welcome they were bringing him!

His own initial remarks were grossly incoherent. There were no words to fit the situation; perhaps he did it greater justice by the disconnected sounds he made. And then he was entering the Doctor's closed car; they were bouncing over the cobbles of the lower city; they were attacking the grade of James street, and he was peering out in an ecstasy of memory at the houses where he had played in boyhood.

Two o'clock . . . on time for dinner to the second! A house banging with evergreen; a Christmas spirit permeating every nook and cranny; Christmas odors—not all of evergreen—drifted in tantalizing whiffs to meet him.

A joyous interlude; a gay procession; a hush; a gravely spoken blessing—Oh, that Christmas!

There came a time early in the evening when Hilliard found himself alone with Carol. He had a vague recollection that they had been sent to look for something . . . a corn popper, or some other equally futile article . . . and for an instant he marveled at their expecting to find it in the sun-parlor, where they had wandered. But the sun-parlor was happily unoccupied; and there were comfortable chairs in it; and something very green and red and reasonable in all the windows; so that they both delayed prodigiously, and exchanged a number of highly inconsequential remarks about the decorations. Presently, without so much as a transient thought for the corn-popper, they sat down with one accord. From a distance the murmur of cheerful voices in the living room was an adequate accompaniment to their thoughts.

Hilliard's head was dropped low; his reverie was so profound that not even Carol's voice could rouse him—not until she spoke a second time.

"I said—a penny for them," she repeated, amused.

"Oh!" Hilliard's awakening was explosive. "Why, that's queer . . . I was just thinking about that myself! I mean the first Sunday I ever came up here to dinner. You said the same thing then. Remember it?"

"Yes, indeed . . . and they were a wonderful bargain at the price!" He didn't seem to recall that she had ever looked so mischievous.

"They are now, then," he said. "Because it's just as it was before—I was thinking about you." Regarding her, he was transported anew by her leve-

liness. And it wasn't only her external loveliness that he adored, it was what she had of sympathy, and kindness, and sweetness of disposition. A very womanly girl she was . . . not a flaming character to blaze and die, but a steady and enduring soul . . . such as he craved . . .

She turned her head away.

"I was very angry at you this morning," she said; "I thought you'd forgotten about me entirely."

Hilliard affected alarm. "How could that happen?"

"Not even so much as a little card with 'Merry Christmas' on it," she said. "Father and mother had one from you, but as for me—" She opened her hands in emptiness. "I looked over every one of them twice."

Hilliard felt his pulses quicken.

"Doesn't my coming to you make up a little for it?"

"No, I'm afraid it doesn't—not in that way. I'm still very childish about Christmas. I have to see it—even if it's only in the tiniest little remembrances. I'm very much hurt. I've been telling myself it must be the postman's fault."

He denied it bravely. "It wasn't the postman's—it was mine. Because I didn't intend to send you a remembrance at all—I intended to bring it. I planned to give it to you before dinner, but when I was so late, and everybody was waiting—"

She turned with gratifying quickness.

"Did you bring it?"

"Yes," he said, "I brought it. I'm not quite sure whether you'll like it or not—"

"I'll like anything you brought!" The pronoun had an infinitesimal emphasis all its own.

Hilliard cleared his throat.

"When I was young—"

"I beg your pardon?"

He laughed at high pressure and began over again.

"When I was young, Mother Grundy had a very small collection to choose from—books and candy and flowers. If I'd send you anything by mail, I think I'd have had to obey the rules. My early training was pretty severe. But I thought if I brought it myself, perhaps I could be more original."

"How original?" she asked, with pretty animation.

His heart was pounding relentlessly; he had lost the elaborate recital which he carefully prepared; and it was gone without a trace. He had to depend on presence of mind.

"Since I couldn't keep to my schedule, I've been saving it up to give you when everything was propitious." He tendered her a package, tied with holly ribbon; it was smaller than a book, and smaller than any orthodox carrier of confection. "Don't open it just yet, please."

She looked at it, pinched it, dropped it in her lap, and laughed softly.

"Is there such a mystery about it?"

"Yes, there is." Hilliard felt himself begin to go with the current of his mood. He sat up awkwardly. "All that you could ever think of asking



"It's My Gift to You. But Before You Open It."

about me . . . where I've been and what I've done . . . is in that box. It's everything . . . a biography, and a history . . . and it's my gift to you, too. But before you open it—" He had to pause to collect himself. "I'll have to make an explanation." "I'll fight with it and found his lips strangely sealed.

"Is it so very hard to make?" she asked at length.

"Almost impossible . . ." He was seeing black and red. Even if "everybody" had expected him to do this thing (as Angela had long since assured him) what reason did he have to hope for pardon? "What would you think," he asked, perilously, "of a man who cared enough about you to risk everything he had in the world . . . not his valuables in the sense of money . . . but all his ambitions for

everything; all his dreams; all his ideals; all his hopes . . . on a Christmas gift? What would you?"

She frowned adorably.

"And . . . he's not just a little bit quixotic?"

"Not at all . . . suppose he did it deliberately, and after a great deal of thought. Just on the chance that it might please you? When it would either do that—or end their friendship?"

She fingered the small package over and over.

"Why, I should think that if this . . . mythical person were so very anxious to please me he wouldn't take quite so much risk."

"But when I'm the mythical person myself—that's different, isn't it?"

"Why should it be?" She gave him no opportunity to see her face.

"You've forgotten a great deal. I told you once that if you knew all that I've been . . . all that I've done . . . you might not be so willing to have my friendship, anyway."

"No," she said, subdued. "I've not forgotten, but you have! I said that I didn't believe you."

"You're holding it all in your hands," said Hilliard. His expression, as he gazed at her, was infinitely yearning; but his voice was even and low. "I spent a good many hours over this . . . wondering whether it was right for me to take such a risk on this day, above all others . . . and finally, I thought it out this way; if it pleases you, it ought to make the day better yet . . . if it doesn't, it would have been just as unwelcome to you at any other time. Understand, I'll never attempt to excuse anything . . . we're beyond that. All I can do is to wait. I'm giving you . . . will you open it now, please?"

Her fingers bungled with the knot, and he made as though to help her.

"No," she said, holding the package away from him. "I want to open it all myself!"

Hilliard, rigid, watched her. A phrase was beating heavily against his consciousness . . . one of the Proverbs . . . something about the bread of deceit, and ashes . . .

The knot gave way; and the tissue wrapping, falling aside, disclosed an oblong pasteboard box. Carol lifted the lid and Hilliard caught his breath. There were two cabinet photographs; uppermost was a very excellent likeness of Hilliard himself. She looked at him perplexedly; he was getting out of his fountain pen. His hand was cold, unsteady.

"It lacks something, doesn't it?" he said, in an undertone. "Let me have it a moment." While she followed his every movement, he wrote, with his left hand and somewhat painstakingly, an inscription and gave back the picture.

"Christmas, 1916," she read, "with love from Henry Hilliard." She flushed hotly.

"Now look!" he said, ignoring her reaction. "The . . . next one." Mechanically she took out the second photograph; it was a duplicate of the picture of Dicky Morgan on the Doctor's desk. Her cheeks were suddenly devoid of color, she stared fearfully at him without speaking.

"That lacks something, too," he said; and his voice was yielding to the tremendous strain upon him. With conspicuous care he shifted the pen to his right hand; held it poised for a moment, gave her a smile of ineffable pathos, closed his teeth hard. "I have a very useful little trait," he said; "I'm ambidextrous." And wrote his message.

She had the evidence before her—the inimitable, unmistakable, ornamental script of another personality, "Christmas, 1916—and love from Dick to Carol."

"The real gift is underneath," he said, and his diction now was foreign even to himself. "But . . . no, no; go on . . ."

Her uncertain, exploring fingers had touched a smaller box; it sprang open. In her palm; within, was a gorgeously flashing, scintillating, living gem, set in platinum. Her hands, unsteady now as were his own, closed over it as though to guard and shelter it. Her eyes sought his, and held them—fright was meeting fright.

"And in my thought," he said, "are all the sweet memories I have of you . . . and all the fragrance of you . . . and in the stone there . . . there's a story for you to read . . . bigger than any book could hold . . ." She still made no answer; she was holding her three gifts tightly, and staring at him, staring . . . not in the revelation he had imagined, not in the measureless contempt he had feared, but with the writhing of a smile trembling on her pale lips. "Only one of the photographs is to keep," he said thickly. "One of the two . . . I'm giving you the chance to say which it is . . . which one of the two you want to live . . . if you want either of those men to go on loving you . . . or if you want them both to go away—for always!"

In her eyes, there was another miracle; her eyes were soft, and indicative of a great relief, rather than of a great shock; and as he watched, spellbound, he saw that tears were creeping into

them, and not of sorrow but of great joy. In that moment his most stupefying discovery was made, and the magnitude of it, the portent of it, set his brain at naught, and left him destitute of reason.

"Carol!" he said, petrified. "Carol!"

Mute, she shook her head. Looking him full in the eyes, she flinched suddenly, and a great sob burst in her throat. The photograph of Dicky Morgan was in her hand; she held it a moment, trembling, and then, while her breath came faster and her shoulders quivered, she tore it across and across, finer and finer, until only fragmentary scraps remained—and these she let fall in her lap, unheeded. The likeness of Hilliard, the lying, radiant face of the man nobody knew—this she had seized, and this she had clutched to her breast, spasmodically, as though in fear to have it snatched away from her.

Hilliard was very close to her; and his whole being was concentrated in his eyes.

"Carol!" he said to her again in that stranger's voice. "Carol . . . You . . . you knew?" To him the fact was unbelievable.

Tardily, unwillingly, she raised her head.

"From the very first day," she said brokenly. "Both dad and I . . . and no one else; not even mother . . . your eyes told us both, and we've trusted you so . . . and waited so surely . . . we knew it would come out all right in the end, somehow . . . and . . . and . . . I do like my gift! It does make the day better." And then, in a soft whisper, "Henry!"

She had called him "Henry" and even in the spell of his confusion, he throbbled to the significance of it.

The lover was eager, but the prodigal was startled back from the very threshold of love.

"From the first day!" he breathed, electrified. "And you trusted me like that . . . when you knew what I was doing—"

She was laughing and crying at the same time; his hungry arms went out to her and found her; words were coming tumultuously to him and he said them as they came. Somehow the ring was on her finger; and she had kissed it there. Between them, partnered, a sacred understanding as imperishable as bronze had arisen; they both knew, without the necessity of prolonged speech, what his future was to be. They both knew in what capacity he was to face the world; they knew the brimming fullness of her pardon and the brimming fullness of his regret. These truths were mutually confirmed; the shabby past was indistinguishably merged with the fresh and vivid present; their pledges to this end were upon their lips. The world was lying helpless at their feet . . . the wonderful, sensitive, receptive world which had respected and honored and admired him in the days of his regeneration, and would continue, paying the reward of his request.

In an irresistible passion of humility and shame and courage, he tried to tell her the sums of his deceits; her lips prevented him.

"You mustn't!" she murmured. "Never! You let me choose—I want it this way."

Dazed, triumphant, he was re-living by-gone incidents, seeing faint clues develop into mighty revelations, comprehending at last the supreme love and supreme faith of the two who had waited for his victory, and kept his secret shut within their hearts, that he might stand the ordeal, and prove triumphant. And now, the reputation that was already his . . . the loftier reputation which he should consecrate himself to build . . . not only for the pleasure of the building, but also because there were those to whom he owed it . . .

Behind them, a firm foothold. Hilliard was on his feet, his arm instinctively protecting Carol. Doctor Durant was smiling on them from the doorway . . . grave, benevolent, paternal. He, too, became a common partner to the understanding; an interchange of glances was sufficient. He came in swiftly; his hands outstretched, his head lifted high in the pride of a father who has looked upon his children, and found them true to each other, and to him.

"What!" he said. "Have you proved it already—my son?"

THE END.

Tunis Agricultural State.

The regency of Tunis, having its northern or Mediterranean limit in the same latitudinal position as the state of North Carolina and, like North Carolina, supporting an estimated population of 2,000,000 on an area of about 50,000 square miles, is essentially an agricultural country, deriving its wealth from farm and mine.

The Sunflower in Russia.

Sunflower cultivation has become an industry in southern Russia, where the people have found the seeds a substitute for olives in making oil. The Russian eats the kernel. An acre of sunflowers yields about 60 bushels of seeds, and these in turn yield more than 50 gallons of oil.

Oxygen Device Tested.

Because of the possible disastrous failure of an airman's oxygen supply apparatus at great altitudes, the United States bureau of standards has devised a reliable method of testing the equipment in the laboratory. All the conditions of high-altitude flights are accurately reproduced, says Popular Mechanics Magazine in an illustrated article appearing in its July issue. Decreased pressure is obtained by inclosing the equipment in a bell jar connected to an air pump.

OLD BATTLE LINES

Evidences of War Thick in Vicinity of Ypres.

Shell Holes Beginning to Grow Green, but Battered Tanks Are Everywhere in Evidence on the Scenes of Slaughter.

Leaving Zeebrugge the first day's journey by motor takes the visitor something more than a hundred miles, with Ypres as the turning point and every variety of war-stricken lands and recovering countryside on the way, there and back. It was a point mooted with wearisome frequency in the real days of the place—when it was "functioning," as one would have said—and among front-line troops in the sullen, whether they would ever care to come back and see that foul place under a peaceful aspect. Agreed, there were those at home who might be taken, not without profit to themselves and the world in general, over the low ground under Kemmel, or where Passchendaele looked down on the swamps, and there were not a few of the armchair gentry whose instant presence would have been welcomed. But, for himself, it was the common verdict of the man in the mudhole that, once out of it, Wipers and he could be the best of friends—at a distance, says a writer in the Manchester Guardian.

Riding into the place from which rises the battered tower of the Cloth hall, in the high day and under a burning sun; coming, too, unscathed and unafraid from what was unmistakably the direction of "No Man's Land," one had to question such a verdict, and finally, under the stimulation of a hundred quickening memories, allow the appeal. For the interest of Ypres and of all the ground in front of it would not be denied. The place was like itself—in a degree hard to credit. And if only some mimic had been there to reproduce the shrill crescendo of an approaching shell one would undoubtedly have taken cover. Going out by the way of the Menin gate and turning up into the high road to Poelcapelle, with first Hooge and then St. Julien, with Passchendaele rolling up to the skyline as a background, is to pass into the field of an endless battle from which nothing has been cleared but the dead; and though elsewhere something has already been done of that "concentration" of graves which is to give our dead an orderly and lasting memorial, they still lie here, for the most part in the scattered resting places to which the hurried hands of their comrades consigned them.

The shell holes begin to grow green, but it is only a beginning, and if the trenches are almost unseen as one goes down the road, were they ever very clearly defined here? It is a long time before a place is reached from which no battered tanks can be seen, and now and again they stand three or four deep on the very edge of the road—ditched in their first attempt at the mud. To look back on war at its worst, with almost all its evidences but present slaughter, one could scarcely better the viewpoint of this road. A few miles farther, and the murdered forest of Houthulet, with its acres of stricken trees and not a live one, gives a new edge to terror.

There is something sound in the notion that one can see the battle fields in a day; the repetition would give no new tone, but intrinsically the same impression. As a lesson Ypres and its provinces could not be surpassed. Coming out at Dixmude, behind what was an almost permanent boche line, the car returning to Zeebrugge comes again into a country which is alive. For the hinterland of Belgium has returned quickly to itself. The army huts which serve in the broken areas as shelter for those who have returned to the shattered villages, give place here to cottages already substantially repaired, and the frugal cultivation of the soil goes forward with an energy and resourcefulness typical of no class in the world so much as the Belgian or French peasantry.

Avoiding Lily Embargo.

A new and curious industry, it is predicted, is soon to be born in Vancouver, B. C., because of the embargo placed this year by the United States department of agriculture on all Japanese nursery stock packed in Japanese soil. This decree was intended to stop the importation from the island of Formosa of lily bulbs, ordinarily brought into this country at the rate of \$25,000,000 worth a year. But the trade will not be suspended, nurserymen of Vancouver declare. The bulb traffic will be deflected northward to this seaport, just above the boundary; and here the bulbs will be removed from the soil in which they crossed the Pacific. They will then be repacked in Canadian loam, and so, free from "Japanese soil," will be qualified for entrance into the United States.—Popular Mechanics Magazine.