

The Man Nobody Knew

By HOLWORTHY HALL

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"LET 'EM MAKE ME LOOK LIKE THAT!"

Everyone knows about the Legion Etrangere—the famous Foreign Legion of the French army. Well, Richard Morgan of Syracuse, N. Y., enlisted in the Foreign Legion in the great war under the name of Henry Hilliard. So you can guess that the hero was not in love with himself or with life. The Hun sent him to the hospital with a wounded knee and arm and a face pretty much shot away with shrapnel. The surgeons fixed up his knee and his arm. When they proposed to restore his features, he lied and said he had no photograph of himself. And in his rage against life he caught up a picture postcard bearing the radiant face of Christ and cried:

"Let 'em make me look like that! Or anything else, either—I don't give a d—n!"

The French surgeons were interested and did a good job. And presently "The Man Nobody Knew" is back in Syracuse, telling of the death of Dick Morgan and selling mining stock and falling deeper in love with Carol Durant, the "only girl" of his old life who had refused to marry Dick Morgan, the failure.

Complications! Well, rather—especially when the mining stock apparently turns out to be worthless and the only man in the world who knows Hilliard's secret dies of apoplexy and the hero finds out that the heroine did love Dick Morgan. And Holworthy Hall handles these complications and these real, human characters and this American community in the masterly way that makes him read from one end of the country to the other these days. Good reading!

CHAPTER I.

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In the beginning of things, he was merely a number; but even that was creditable, because his number was low enough to signify that he had responded pretty promptly to the rallying call. After that, and with the cataclysmic suddenness which marked all changes of military status on the western front, he became, one frosty morning, a Case, and got himself roughly classified (and tenderly handled) as a Stretcher Case, a Grand Blesse, and, in consequence, a proper temporary inmate of a field hospital on the Belgian plains.

There was he unofficially known as Joyeux, or Joyous One; not because he displayed a very buoyant disposition—far from it—but because he belonged to the Foreign legion; and in the course of another day or two he was routine-ticketed as an Evacue, and provided with a lukewarm hot-water bottle and a couple of evil-smelling cigarettes to console him on the road to the base hospital at Neuilly.

At Neuilly he became, for the first time since his enlistment, an Individual, and at the very outset he was distinguished by certain qualities which had passed unnoticed in the frying pan and fire of the trenches. For one thing, he was obviously immune to kindness; and for another, he was apparently immune to hope. He was a man of inveterate silence; not the grim silence of fortitude in suffering (which is altogether too common a virtue in base hospitals to earn any especial merit), but rather the dogged reticence of black moods and chronic bitterness. To be sure, speech was physically difficult to him, but other men with similar misfortunes spoke blessings with their eyes, and gave back gratitude in voiceless murmur. Not so the Joyous One. From the day of his arrival he demanded nothing, desired nothing, but to brood sullenly aloof; and so, when he became an Individual, he also became a mystery to the nursing staff. It was rumored that he was an implacable woman hater, and there seemed to be something in it.

Regardless of the care of the American nurses (all hoveringly attentive to one of their own nation who had fought for France), his spirit remained abysmal and clouded in gloom. Only twice, in the initial month of his confinement, did he betray the weakness of an ordinary emotion; on each occasion a gold-laced general had come to salute, in the name of the republic, one of the Individual's neighbors, and to deliver a bit of bronze which dangled from a ribbon striped red and green. It was said (and doubted by those who hadn't seen it) that at these ceremonies the Individual had grown feverish, and let tears come to his eyes, but subsequently he had reigned into still greater depths of stoicism than before; his own bed-jacket was innocent of cross or medal, and his depression was apparent, and acute. The nurses, arguing that perhaps his pride was wounded as seriously as his flesh, offered quick condolence and got themselves rebuffed with shrugs of the Individual's shoulders, and inarticulate sounds which had all the earmarks of suppressed profanity. He didn't even soften when Pierre Dutout, a hard-hit territorial in the next bed, squandered a day's supply of energy to lean across and whisper sympathetically to him: "Old man . . . Vieux espoir de choucroute . . . I know how it is . . . and I haven't got any friends either."

I want you to take my Croix de Guerre . . . When I go nowhere."

Even when speech returned to the Individual he was a man of curt responses and stinging monosyllables—a problem to the surgeons, a problem to the nurses and (if the expression in his eyes meant anything), an overwhelming problem to himself. It appeared that, after all, it wasn't simply women that he hated—it was the universe.

His military book implied that he had no parents, no close relations, no friends to notify, no fixed abode. He received no visitors, no letters, no packages freighted with magical delight. But to those who pitied him in all his loneliness he was utterly contemptuous; he even went so far as to fillip sidelong to the floor a religious post card tendered him by a devout and sentimental passer-by, and he did it in her presence, unashamed. Later, when smiling orderly picked up that post card and tucked it under his pillow he was no less contemptuous in permitting it to remain. But the one stupendous fact which, more than all else combined, made him an object of bewildered curiosity was this—that of the scores and scores of men with head-wounds who were reborn at Neuilly that spring and summer, he was the only one who had never asked for a mirror.

This, of itself, wouldn't have been astonishing as long as he delayed in the preliminary stages of recovery, for now and then a man with head-wounds proves to be super-sensitive; but in the second stage it was remarkable, and in the third stage it was unique. The staff held it to be extraordinary from a social as well as from a pathological viewpoint, that a man so terribly disfigured should have no interest—not even a morbid interest—in his own appearance. And it wasn't that the Individual was simply indifferent to the mirror; on the contrary, his aversion to it was active and energetic; he flinched, and motioned it frantically away as though the mere conception of seeing himself as others saw him was too repellent, and too unthinkable to endure.

There came a day in April when a photograph was requested of him. Surely he knew where there was a likeness of himself, didn't he? His old passport photograph, which had mysteriously disappeared, or—

The Individual glanced up from his present task; the wound in his arm was still annoying and he was absorbed in learning to write with his left hand.

"What for?" he muttered.

"Why," said the nurse, cheerfully, "for a model. To help the surgeons. They'll take your picture for a guide and make you look almost exactly the way you did before."

The Individual from America sat up straight, so that the nurse was startled by his animation, which was without a parallel in his local history.

"What?" he said.

"Certainly!" The nurse spoke in the tone one uses to an ailing child. "You've known that, haven't you?"

The Individual's voice was queerly unmanageable and strained. "You mean to say they're going to make me look the way . . . Could they do that? Could they? Even now?"

"Why, of course," she assured him.

"You never told me that!" he said, passionately. "Why didn't you? Why couldn't you have told me? And here I've been . . ." He put his hands to his bandaged face and seemed to shrink within himself. Then all at once

he burst out: "Well, there's nothing to prevent . . . Then they could make me not look like it, if they wanted to! Isn't that so?"

She regarded him in vast perplexity, and thought of summoning a surgeon, for the man had begun to quiver as though from shell shock—which he hadn't undergone.

"Why, I don't understand what you mean," she said soothingly. "But if you'll just be calm and—"

The Individual gestured with fierce impatience.

"If they can do what you say, and make me look like any old thing they choose to, then what in the devil are they asking for a photograph for?"

"Why, to go by," she said helplessly. "You want to look like your old self, don't you?"

"No, I don't!"

The nurse gasped. His tone had been churlish, but the echo of it vaguely suggested triumph and relief. His symptoms had subsided . . . could it be that he actually was relieved? Dumbfounded, she made another effort to convince him.

"But you want to look just as nearly like—"

"Don't you suppose I know what I want?" he interrupted rudely.

"But haven't you a photograph, anyway, that I can—"

"No, I haven't!" he snapped. "I haven't." It was a lie; the passport photograph was in the lining of a certain wallet, and he had hid it there for reasons of his own. But now that one great danger was definitely past, and a still further bulwark of protection offered, if the nurse spoke truth, the Individual could afford to come out from ambush. "And I don't want to look the way I did before, and what's more I never did! But if your doctors are half as smart as they think they are let 'em make me look like that! Or anything else either—I don't give a d—n!"

Shocked and horrified, she was gazing at a picture postcard he had snatched from under his pillow and thrust upon her. It was a reproduction of a religious painting by Rembrandt. It was the radiant face of the Christ.

CHAPTER II.

Nine o'clock on a night in June—not a June evening, heavy-starred on velvet, but a furious June night, with Stygian blackness looping overhead, and Stygian water battering and bolling against the hull plates. The ship was dark as the night itself; blind dark, without a single ray to play the traitor. On deck a solitary venturer hugged the rail, and apathetically watched the waves tear past.

Out of the warmth and cheer and the vitiated atmosphere of the smoking room came Martin Harmon, big, florid, exuberant. A heaving lift of the deck sent him lurching sidewise; he saved his balance by struggling



"Let Them Make Me Look Like That"

toward the rail, when suddenly the slope was reversed, and he slipped and slid to the barrier of safety, clutched it, and found himself at arm's length, from the lonely watcher, who hadn't stirred, or even turned his head.

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he burst out: "Well, there's nothing to prevent . . . Then they could make me not look like it, if they wanted to! Isn't that so?"

"What is your line?" he inquired after a pause.

The other man laughed queerly.

"The first . . . if it makes so much difference to you."

"Beg pardon? I don't quite get you. You said . . ."

"I said the first line. I meant the first-line trenches. I've been in it."

Harmon jerked his head upward in comprehension.

"Oh, I see! You mean the war! And you've been right on the spot where the fighting is? Pretty lively up there, isn't it? Something stirring most all the time!"

"I imagine so." The other man's accent was amazingly diffident, and Harmon peered at him, incredulous.

"Good Lord, don't you know?"

"Not a great deal. I happened to get hit the first day I was in the trenches."

"But you got in it again afterward, I suppose? I'll bet you did!"

"No."

"What? You never got back at all? Just one day, and you're through?"

"Yes. After I was discharged from hospital I was discharged from the army too. Permanently unfit."

"English army?"

"No—French."

"Well, that's some record!" said Harmon appreciatively. "That certainly is some record! Not to say tough luck—the toughest kind. Going back home, I take it?"

"Looks that way, doesn't it?"

Harmon ignored the sarcasm.

"Back to work, eh? What did you say your line is?"

"I didn't say. I haven't any just now."

Harmon pondered a second.

"Oh! Gentleman of leisure? Soldier of fortune, eh? Well, I wouldn't worry if I were you. You're disappointed; that's natural . . . but the world hasn't come to an end yet. Of course it is something of a come-down to leave the army and get into harness again, but after all there's plenty of excitement right in the United States. Big work to be done, son! Big money to make. And it helps the war along, too. I tell you there never was a bigger opportunity to make money than there is right this minute. The hard job isn't to find the scheme; it's to find the men to run it. Don't you worry . . . you'll land something right off the bat!"

"Thanks for the compliment!"

"Oh, it's no compliment! Anybody can make money these days. It's a plain statement of fact . . . Say, let's go in and have something. Come in and be sociable. What you want's a drink. Am I right or am I wrong?"

"Well—"

"And that's what the doctor ordered! Come on! It's on me."

The other man hesitated, and at last succumbed, out of sheer unconcern, to a companionship he realized in advance would be distasteful.

"All right," he consented briefly; and together, arm in arm, they stumbled and tacked across the treacherous deck, and presently crossed the threshold into the hazy light of the smoking room. Harmon, smiling broadly, wiped the brine from his smirking eyes.

"Now, then," he said, "what particular brand of poison do you—" And broke off short and stared, fascinated, at the extraordinary young man in front of him.

He was anywhere from twenty-five to forty, thin American from the distant trenches, and his age was as hard to guess as a clever woman's; there was something about him peculiar to youth, and yet when his face was in repose, he might easily have claimed two score of years and gone undisputed. It was a face which suggested both the fire of immaturity and the drain of experience; there was breathtaking gravity about it, a hint of the dignity of marble, of ageless permanence. It was a slightly thin face, scarred by a heavy line or two, and indelibly stamped with the evidence of intense thought and inward suffering; but it lacked the hollows which, at the first glance, should have supported the evidence. It was a thin and oval face, with a mouth of large and sympathetic sweetness, a forehead white and high, a prominent, delicate nose, and irises of clear, luminous gray. It wasn't altogether an Anglo-Saxon type of countenance, nor was it definitely European; it seemed rather to have taken all the better qualities from several races. It was a face to inspire immediate trust and confidence and respect, and Harmon, despite his lack of practice in all three of these reactions, was evidently attracted by it.

"Vichy-Celestins for me," said the old-young man indifferently.

"I'll . . . I guess I'll have vichy too," said Harmon, relaxing. "If it wasn't for something I can't just describe I'd say . . . well, never mind. Er . . . what business have you been in, by the way?"

The younger man's reply was tardy and not particularly gracious.

"Why, the longest time I ever put in at any one business was selling insurance. The last thing I did was to sell bonds. Why?"

Harmon stiffened.

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