

The MAN NOBODY KNEW by HOLWORTHY HALL

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DICK CLOUD & CO., INC.**"OH, MY GOD!"**

Synopsis.—Dick Morgan of Syracuse, N. Y., a failure in life, enlisted in the Foreign Legion under the name of Henry Hilliard, is disfigured by shrapnel. The French surgeons ask for a photograph to guide them in restoring his face. In his rage against life he offers in derision a picture postcard bearing the radiant face of Christ. The surgeons do a good job. On his way back to America he meets Martin Harmon, a New York broker. The result is that Morgan, under the name of Hilliard, goes back to Syracuse to sell a mining stock. He is determined to make good. He tells people of the death of Morgan. He finds an Angela Cullen, a loyal defender of Dick Morgan. He meets Carol Duran, who had refused to marry him. She does not hesitate to tell him that she had loved Morgan. Hilliard finds he still loves her and is tempted to confess. Hilliard tempts Cullen, his former employer, with his mining scheme. He discovers a rival for Carol's love in a nice young fellow named Armstrong. Hilliard betrays his love to Carol and is told he has "one chance in a thousand." He sells large blocks of mining stock to Cullen and others. Harmon unexpectedly arrives in Syracuse.

CHAPTER IX—Continued.

—10—

"Thank you. And you might take these drafts now; three of 'em. Right? Good. Well—any developments?"

"What?" Harmon tapped his cigarette case in the palm of his left hand. "Oh, you mean the mine?"

Hilliard nodded. "Yes. Have you gone any further with the shaft yet? Two or three of the more cautious men are holding back until something happens with that."

"Shaft?" Harmon was puzzled. "What shaft?" He placidly stowed away the drafts. "I'm not sinking any new shafts at this stage of the game." It was Hilliard's turn to be puzzled.

"Why, I mean the old shaft on Silverbow No. 1. Have you gone any further with it? I've told these people we were just starting. That's right, isn't it?"

Harmon laughed noisily.

"Oh, that shaft! Don't you think it's a little early to begin on that? Say, about ninety thousand dollars too early!"

As Hilliard sat gazing at him in profound bewilderment a waiter slid up alongside him and coughed for his attention.

"Gentleman wants to speak to you outside, Mr. Hilliard. In the lobby. Says it's important."

"Oh!" Hilliard drew the back of his hand across his forehead. "Tell him I'll come right out. Will you excuse me a moment, Mr. Harmon?"

"Sure! Go ahead." The promoter sat back comfortably and gave him a wave of dismissal. Hilliard, his pupils narrowing, went out to the doorway. A pace or two distant one of the vice presidents of the Trust and Deposit company—a friend of Cullen's and a very good man to know—was loitering restively.

"Hello, Hilliard," he said, wrinkling his forehead. "How are you? Look here, it's none of my business, of course, but I couldn't help wondering how much you know about that chap you're sitting with. Don't be offended; it's a friendly question. Simply my interest in you as one of our clients."

"Why, I know a good deal about him."

The banker continued solemnly: "You probably know a lot more about him than I do, then, but just the same, I wanted to make sure. That's all." He turned, but Hilliard stopped him.

"Well, what do you know about him?"

"Before I answer that—is he a friend of yours?" The question was too blunt to be diplomatic, and too suggestive to be disregarded.

"Not exactly that; he's a rather good acquaintance, though. In a business way only—what he is socially I don't know, and I don't think I much care."

"So you don't need any advice about his business connections?"

"Why, I think not." He was nettled by the banker's manner.

"The only thing about it," said the vice president, netted in his turn by Hilliard's brevity, "is that if you'd said you didn't know him very well, I'd have offered you some suggestions. I'd have expected you to thank me—I really would. Under the circumstances, I can't very well go any further than this. Sorry I interrupted you."

"No, but wait a minute! I—"

The vice president's refusal was firm and definite.

"I can't say another word. Not another one. If you know him, that's sufficient." And he strode away across the lobby, leaving Hilliard dumbfounded.

Mr. Harmon, smiling broadly, half arose from his chair as the masquerader came slowly back to the table and sat down hard.

"Well," he said. "More business?"

Hilliard shook his head.

"On the contrary." His voice had in it a curious dullness which the broker was quick to catch.

"No bad news, I hope?"

"I'm not sure. Let's go on discussing the mine."

"Not much else to discuss, is there? It's the same old mine." He looked intently at Hilliard. "What's got into you, anyway, in the last couple of minutes? You've lost all your pep. You look as though you've seen a ghost."

"Maybe I have," said Hilliard, with a short laugh.

"Well?"

Hilliard regarded him with an odd intermingling of respect and alarm. The respect was a holdover from the past—from the early impression he had formed from Harmon's respondent offices in New York, and Harmon's contempt for money. He had considered his employer, at worst, a weak-principled vendor of legitimate securities.

"Mr. Harmon," Hilliard said reluctantly, "I'm in a mighty awkward position. . . . We can't afford to let anything spoil this campaign, can we?"

"Not if we can very well help it. What's bothering you?"

"For over ten weeks now, I've been building up a reputation—you know what I've been doing; you know how much depends on it. Your name hasn't been mentioned once; I've been selling this thing on my own personality—holding myself out as the principal. Well, the man who called me outside just now—and he's one of the solid banking crowd up here—he spoke of you as though he knew you. In fact—to be perfectly frank—he called me out there to ask me about you. Now, I don't know what dealings you've ever had with him, or with anyone else up here, but it struck me that if there is anything between you and Syracuse, or any of its fairly big men, perhaps it would be better if I knew it. You see, this thing I'm selling is so darned personal!"

"Who was he?" Harmon's voice rasped.

"Embree—of the Trust and Deposit company."

"Oh, yes." Harmon smoked reflectively. "Yes, we know each other. What did he have to say?"

"It wasn't so much what he said as the way he said it. I suppose you've had some disagreement with these people?"

"Some disagreement," admitted Harmon, grinning. "These up-state farmers and I love each other like a couple of strange bulldogs. Still—"

"If it isn't objectionable to you," said Hilliard, hesitating. "I'd rather like to know a bit about it, Mr. Har-

mon."

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"Not exactly. The company was too

much like Silverbow, I guess—an float and no lode."

For a moment, Hilliard thought that he hadn't heard aright.

"What was that you said?" he managed.

Hilliard reiterated it.

"Too much Silverbow. Only they pumped the water out of it sooner than we will. That was five years ago."

At first, Hilliard was untouched by the shock; the force of it seemed to pass over him entirely; then all at once as he was caught by the drift of it, his hands began to tremble violently; and his palms were clammy with sweat. His stomach seemed to drop out of him, and he was nauseated by the tremendous purport of his employer's cynicism.

"Mr. Harmon!" he panted, under his breath, "Mr. Harmon!"

The New Yorker looked at him in genuine surprise.

"What's the matter, Hilliard? You look sick! Or . . . d—n it, man, if that's another one of your bluffs, you're wasting your time. You haven't worked up such a holy disposition you believe in this mine, have you?" He moved uneasily. "I wish you'd wipe that plausory expression off your face—or is it glued on?"

"Hilliard's voice shook uncontrollably. "This . . . this mine!" he stammered. "You told me—"

"I'll stand by everything I've ever told you, Hilliard. I'll prove it. It's an area of mineralized schist with disseminated copper values. And we've got over a hundred acres of it. And part of the shaft, too!" He laughed noiselessly. "Of course, altogether there's about five hundred square miles of that same sort of land in the same state, but what's the odds as long's you're happy? Tell me you aren't wise? Rot! Why, you knew all about it when we were on the boat!"

Hilliard's muscles were working in hysterical jumps, and his face was distorted.

"Y-you . . . y-you're saying . . . y-you're saying I've been selling . . . s-selling to my friends a piece of d—n worthless property? Are we?"

"Shut up!" The big man was dominant, ugly. "Understand me? You keep your mouth shut if you know what's good for you! Didn't you come up here to get square with your friends? Your friends!" His accent was superlatively contemptuous. "You knew it wasn't a producing mine, didn't you?"

"You told me it was a wonderful prospect! I knew it was a long shot, but I thought there was some value there . . . a lot of it . . . and you said the shaft . . . you always said the shaft was—"

Hilliard reached for another cigarette; there was undisguised perplexity on his face.

"Son, if you aren't a mighty good actor, you're . . . are you going to claim you didn't know what this mine is? After all that whining and squalling of yours about your getting even? Then what in thunder did you want to come back here for?"

"To make some money—to get some fun out of it. I wanted to make fools of people; I didn't want to swindle anybody! I thought I was giving 'em something for their money! I—"

Hilliard lighted his cigarette, none too complacently.

"The funny part about it," he said slowly, "is that I don't honestly believe you're bluffing. . . . But you knew it was only a prospect."

"But I thought it was a good prospect! Never mind—" He made as though to rise. "You've said enough. I'm through with you!"

The big man's jaw thrust out beligerently, and he caught Hilliard by the arm.

"Now, stop right there! Sit down! Sit down! Maybe you thought it was a good prospect and maybe you didn't, but you're not through with me yet—not until I say so. Don't you make any mistakes like that, my boy. Don't you go off half-shot—not yet! Remember our contract? Ever heard of promoter's liability? I'd certainly hate to see you get into trouble, but if you've made any wild statements about material facts—"

Hilliard was straining half across the table.

"You told me the ore was there! And I thought the worst that could happen would be to tie up this money for a few years—that's why a prospector's so hard to sell! I knew darned well it wasn't any whirlwind right now, but I did think they'd . . . they'd at least make something good out of it. . . . eventually . . . even if it . . ."

"Ah!" said Harmon, sneering, "but you had every opportunity to learn the facts—ev-e-ry opportunity. It's not my fault if you went off half-cocked. I don't know what you've represented to your gang up here. I'm not responsible. All I know is that you've collected sixty-two thousand dollars, and turned it over to me, and I'm to give you stock for it, and pay you a rebate in cash. Maybe you call it a commission . . . it's a rebate! Read the contract. Read it carefully, while you're about it. Take it to a lawyer: I don't care. Any lawyer you like. If you've gone beyond the facts I'm mighty sorry for you, but I don't see how it affects me any. Do you?"

Hilliard had slumped wretchedly into his chair; his thoughts were running aimlessly about the grim axis of his chicanery.

"And . . . and after all I've done!" he said thickly. "After all I've said! Oh, my God!" His chin sank low, and his grip on the table relaxed.

Harmon was less at ease than he pretended. "Well, if you aren't bluff-

ing," he said presently, "you sure are the biggest baby for a man's-sized man I ever saw. Brace up, there! You—"

Hilliard pulled himself erect with a final effort, and his fist gestured his accusation.

"You know what I'm going to do about it, don't you?"

"Yes." Harmon nodded, as he drew the smoke deep into his lungs.

"I'm going straight back to those four men, and—"

"No." Harmon wagged his head.

"No, you can't very well do that, either—even if you're as shocked as you look. Look at it just a minute . . . look at our contract. There's some loopholes for me you could drive a motortruck through; but you haven't got one as big as a knitting needle. No, son, the best thing for you to do is to take a brace, and go get another sixty thousand while the getting is good."

"Not necessarily!" Hilliard's high-pitched laugh was brittle.

Harmon allowed the smoke to eddy gently from his nostrils. "Yes—necessarily."

"You think I'll raise my finger after this, except to . . . what do you take me for?"

"I take you," said Harmon deliberately, "for a short-sighted young man in a mighty bad spot. You don't want these folks up here to know the whole truth, do you? It wouldn't hurt me any—but after the record you made

Harmon, who had been inspecting him critically, took out his fountain pen.

"I'll write you your check for commissions—shall I?" He held the pen poised insinuatingly. "And then we'll forget this little misunderstanding, and start fresh. Shall I? Let's see," with great attentiveness to the figures.

"Your twenty per cent is twelve thousand four hundred, and that, less half expense . . . call 'em five thousand even . . . that's seventy-four hundred."

He tore a sheet from his pocket check book, dried the ink by waving it in the air, and flirted it over to Hilliard. "Put it away and let's have some lunch. I'm not sensitive, son; it don't pay."

"No," said Hilliard, dully, "and I guess it never will."

"That's the idea! Now you're talking sense! Come on, son, buck up and let's have some lunch . . ."

At eight o'clock in the evening, when Rufus Waring knocked at Hilliard's door, it was opened by a man with a face to remember afterward. There were deep-cut lines—almost furrows—by the mouth and eyes; and the eyes themselves were startlingly luminous, and drawn. The man's complexion was chalk-white.

"Why, Mr. Hilliard!" exclaimed Waring. "What on earth's the matter with you?"

"Come on in," said Hilliard, and his smile was ghastly. "I've been waiting for you."

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