

# The Man Nobody Knew

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## CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

—14—

And Hilliard had all a metropolitan's sensitiveness to the spirit and to the ethics of a men's club. He faltered on the very threshold; and if any other man than Dr. Durant had been his sponsor, he would have fled incontinently, so as not to disturb that rare, indescribable atmosphere which only clubmen understand and respect.

The Doctor was scrutinizing the menu; Hilliard, who faced the window, threw a glance over his shoulder. As he had fancied, the eyes of the room were upon him. They reminded him, oddly enough, of machine-gun batteries.

When at length the pair had gained the table nearest the window, Hilliard felt that he had undergone a strenuous ordeal; he was consumed by gratitude to his implacable host, but he had no inclination to repeat it.

"The table d'hôte's good enough for me," said the Doctor presently. "And you?"

"And for me, too," said Hilliard.

"Anything to drink?"

"No, thanks."

The Doctor dropped the card and sat up straighter.

"Well, I won't keep you in suspense—I want some advice. As I said, I'm the worst business man in the world, Hilliard. I'm a mere child in your hands—so please treat me tenderly." He regarded his companion with mingled humor and seriousness. "James Cullen has been telling me about a wonderful plan of yours to make a nice shiny gold eagle grow where only a silver quarter grew before. In fact, he talked so enthusiastically that he's got me thinking about it, too. . . . I rather resent your not telling me about it yourself."

Hilliard receded.

"You shouldn't do that!" he said. "I . . . I wouldn't have tried to interest you in it, Doctor, because—"

"Oh, I can see your reasons," depreated the Doctor, smilingly. "You didn't want to trespass on a purely social relationship. I appreciate that. But the point is, I've got a few thousand dollars I don't exactly know what to do with. It's a rather extraordinary situation for a professional man, isn't it? I'll have to admit I'm puzzled about myself. And the novelty might lead me into temptation. So I thought I'd ask your advice."

"You can have the best I've got," said Hilliard, averted. "But I'm not guaranteeing that it has much value, Doctor."

The Doctor nodded; drummed on the table.

"Do you ever let friendship interfere with business?"

"Often, sir."

"Will you let it interfere now—if you think you're justified?"

"Yes, Doctor. . . . I can promise that much, anyway."

The Doctor showed his approval.

"Well, tell me perfectly frankly—is yours the sort of proposition you'd let a man invest in, if you knew he had precious little money to lose? But if you also knew that he were quite willing to take the same chance as the rest?"

Hilliard shook his head slowly, and continued to shake it as he replied.

"I can't say that it is, Doctor. On the contrary—I don't think it's that sort of proposition at all." Dr. Durant's brows were contracted.

"But in the ordinary run of commerce, Hilliard—suppose the question of friendship didn't enter into this, and I hadn't brought up that subject—would you, in choosing your list of subscribers, and selecting the people you'd like to have share the plan with you, put a man like myself on any different footing than James Cullen? Or wouldn't you?"

"Doctor Durant," Hilliard's voice was slow, "is it possible you haven't heard me . . . the criticism that's been flying around town about this syndicate of mine? Haven't you heard that there's some question whether it's quite sound?"

"I've heard it—yes." The Doctor was amazingly indifferent.

"Well—do you still think this is any time to discuss the possibility of your coming in with us?"

The Doctor's voice was strong, encouraging.

"I think it's the best time, and the only time—for me, that is. I've lived too long to be affected by chance rumors. And besides, I've got the money now."

"But are you sure you know what it's all about? The criticism, I mean?"

"I don't know anything about it at all. That's exactly why I'm coming to you for advice. You certainly ought to know more about it than any one else does. And, therefore, I'd take your word for it before I'd take the rumor. I want to know if you'll accept me as one of the members of your syndicate."

Hilliard gasped and pushed himself back from the table.

"Doctor!"

"In a way," said Dr. Durant genially, "I'm putting you at a great disadvantage—I know that. But, as I said, I'm not a business man. I have to be guided more or less by instinct. Your business is to know all about these

things. So I'm coming to you for your honest opinion, and I know you'll give it to me . . . do you think I'm quite eligible?"

Hilliard's heart was in his mouth. "Why," he stammered, "at this particular time—I can't advise you—"

"Now, don't be too cautious," warned the Doctor. "I'm not asking you if this is the best investment the world has ever seen—I'm asking if it's reasonably safe, as such things go, with a chance of something really good if your best expectations work out as you hope."

Hilliard's throat was dusty, and his reply came with some difficulty.

"In spite of . . . everything, you'd . . . you'd take my word for it, Doctor?"

"Yes, I would, and I've got Cullen and my own daughter to agree with



"You're Retiring Under Fire—Are You?"

me. Certainly I'll take your word for it. Would you let me invest say . . . seventy-five thousand dollars?"

Hilliard gulped.

"Not now—no, sir."

"Suppose I'd asked you a week ago—before this miserable story began to go the rounds?"

"I'd have taken it then—perhaps."

The Doctor's eyes snapped.

"You're retiring under fire—are you?"

"No, sir—digging in."

"Simply because of a fatherless report?"

"No, its parents are pretty lively. And the . . . the recent developments haven't been what we . . . expected. It isn't on account of the rumors that I can't let you in, Doctor—it's on account of the facts."

The Doctor remained silent until the waiter had served them, and departed. Then he looked keenly across the table.

"Cullen isn't going to lose his money, is he?"

"Not all of it, anyway."

"Some of it?"

"You never can tell."

"And are you obligated in any way to make good his loss? You, personally, I mean? Either legally or morally?"

Hilliard sighed dispiritedly.

"Why, seeing that not one of these men ever saw the property, or knows anything about it, or about copper mining in general, except what I told them, I feel morally responsible for every cent that's lost, whether I've any legal responsibility or not. That is, I'd make it good—if I could. Of course, I'm hoping that nothing will be lost, but—"

The Doctor's eyes brightened.

"Do Cullen and his friends understand that you hold yourself responsible?"

"I think not. I haven't said so to them yet."

"It isn't a part of your bargain?"

"No, sir."

"They're paying you a brilliant compliment, then."

"I realize that fully," said Hilliard, writhing. The Doctor toyed with his fork.

"You'd do the same for me, I suppose, if I were one of your group?"

"Why, of course—if you had been."

"You wouldn't advise me to go into it, you say, under present conditions?"

"No, sir. I wouldn't. I wouldn't permit it."

"I thought you wouldn't." The Doctor sipped a glass of water thoughtfully. "And that leaves me with seventy-five hundred dollars. I still don't know what to do with it. Well, if you can think of any reasonable use for it within the next few weeks, let me know, will you? I'll keep it intact until I hear from you."

Something in his tone smacked at Hilliard's heart; he went white as paper.

"Doctor Durant!"

The Doctor smiled slightly. "Any reasonable use, I said. Any form of investment that—"

"Not yet. But I've left word at his house for him to call me at the hotel.

Hilliard was practically tongue-tied.

"Doctor Durant . . . if I . . . if I see what you mean . . . I . . . if you're willing to take my advice, why—"

"I'm sixty-three years old," said the Doctor calmly, "and I've made a fool of myself in every conceivable way but one. . . . That's in my own field; I'm a diagnostician. I've watched you very carefully, young man. . . . I think perhaps you need as much advice as I do, of a different variety. So here it is—when you—want encouragement, or a medical prescription, or a good cigar and a chat, or a quiet evening with an old man and a girl who plays the piano rather pleasantly, or seventy-five hundred dollars which you've already shown you won't let me invest unwisely, come and see me. Now, let's drop business. Not another word: I'm tired of it. You're through as an expert; let's get back to old-fashioned friendship. Speaking of coming to see me—Carol's wondering if you're trying to slight her. We've seen very little of you lately? It's a week now, isn't it?"

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When, sustained and soothed by the peaceful hour, by the Doctor's trust in his integrity, and by the sedative of a long and untroubled stroll out over the hills to eastward, Hilliard returned to the hotel, the room clerk greeted him with faint superciliousness.

"Somebody's been keeping after you on the telephone all morning," he said loftily. "New York call. Couldn't locate you. And here's some telegrams for you. . . ."

There were three of them; at sight of the signature of the first, Hilliard's eyes narrowed.

"Arriving Syracuse 4:15. Please meet me at train and stop all work in the meantime. Imperative."

"HARMON."

Hilliard's eyelids fluttered; this was evidently the initial result of Rufus-Waring's efforts, and of those many letters he had written. Harmon. He tore open the second envelope; the message was again from the broker, sent obviously from the Grand Central terminal just before train-time.

"Most important news received. Am just leaving, having wired you meet me at station 4:15. Find out who Bob Waring is and what he wants. Do all you can to stave off further inquiry. Absolutely imperative not talk to anyone until I see you. Have contract and all other data with you. Shall have to leave on short notice."

"HARMON."

And the third was from Albany: "Locate Bob Waring if possible and arrange meeting seven tonight. Urgently imperative."

Hilliard folded the three sheets methodically and put them in his pocket. He glanced at his watch; it showed a quarter to four. He had no dependence on Harmon, and no fear of him; he felt no obligation to Harmon, no sense of duty. To be sure, he had a cynic's curiosity to see what was in the middle of the whirlwind, but that of itself wasn't strong enough to send him to a rendezvous with a man he despised and loathed.

"If I go," he said to himself, "I'll be sorry; and if I don't go . . . why, if I don't go, I'll always wonder if it would have done any good!"

For himself, there was nothing promising in the situation. But on the millionth chance that something of benefit to his subscribers might come out of it—on the millionth chance that Harmon might be frightened or persuaded into compromise—

So he went.

The very first passenger to reach the platform was Harmon; indeed, he had been fretting in the vestibule for half an hour, intent on saving a useless fraction of a second when the train stopped. At sight of Hilliard, he beamed Beneficently—all his earlier belligerence forgotten.

"Hello!" he said. "Glad to see you, son. Got all my messages, did you?"

He shook hands with great urbanity; Hilliard's grasp was hardly responsive.

"I got three," said Hilliard, dignified and noncommittal; and he continued to inspect his employer with ill-concealed disfavor and distrust.

"Well, that's all I sent. Now, where can we go sit down and talk, for a couple of hours? There's a lot to go over, but I want to take the 9:40 West. Not to the Onondaga—I'd rather go somewhere quieter. How about the Kirk?"

"Suits me all right if it does you."

"Any luggage?" They were crossing the tracks to the waiting-room; and Hilliard, in spite of himself, couldn't refrain from the solicitude which any right-minded resident of a city feels for the transient just arrived.

"Only this Gladstone. I can check that here, I guess. Well, I'm certainly glad to see you. Say, were you able to make a date with this Waring person? It was pretty short notice, but you're such a live wire!"

Hilliard, fully comprehending the nature of the compliment, smiled faintly. The person of the broker was physically repulsive to him; unconsciously he edged further away.

"Not yet. But I've left word at his house for him to call me at the hotel.

Hilliard was practically tongue-tied.

and I'll telephone to the information clerk from the Kirk where he can reach me. He's sure to be in around five or half past."

"I hope so." Harmon swung his heavy bag to the brass-lined counter, and tossed out a dime with a philanthropic gesture which made the attendant glare at him. "Who in thunder is he, anyhow?"

Hilliard had reason to be reticent with his facts, and he preferred not to be too specific at the outset.

"He's a law student—an old friend of the Cullens. He's looking after some of their interests, in one way and another."

"Oh! Working up a practice! Well! the way he's bombarding me with fresh letters, you'd think he was on a congressional investigating committee! Say! There's one thing I'd like to find out—how'd he know I'm in the thing? You didn't tell anybody, did you? Our agreement—"

Hilliard was guiding him to the street.

"Why, he probably got hold of your name when he wrote to some law correspondents of his in Butte about the property; and they looked it up for him. I'd judge they must have gone into it rather thoroughly."

"They did! Humph!" The broker's tone held less of rancor and more disappointment than Hilliard would have expected. "And they made an unfavorable report on it, did they?"

"Unfortunately, for you, they . . . as you very well know."

Harmon turned on him sharply. "What do you mean 'unfortunately for me'?"

Hilliard turned into a wide doorway.

"We go in here . . . Why, it puts the quietus on any last hope of yours that there's still some business to be done in Syracuse, doesn't it? I should think that's about as plain as daylight."

Harmon's brows went up.

"Wh-a-t?" he said, and then, promptly, "Oh, yes—of course. But you've been such a live wire from start to finish, I thought the harder the proposition, the better you'd—"

"Oh, don't make me wish I hadn't taken the trouble to meet you!" snapped Hilliard. He slipped into the first unoccupied booth; Harmon followed him stupidly. "The thing's done, and you know it. Don't act so innocent, Mr. Harmon—it isn't becoming to you, and it isn't helpful to me. We shall have to talk English, I should imagine."

Harmon's eyes were very small and bright.

"What's he been saying around here?"

Hilliard folded the three sheets methodically and put them in his pocket. He glanced at his watch; it showed a quarter to