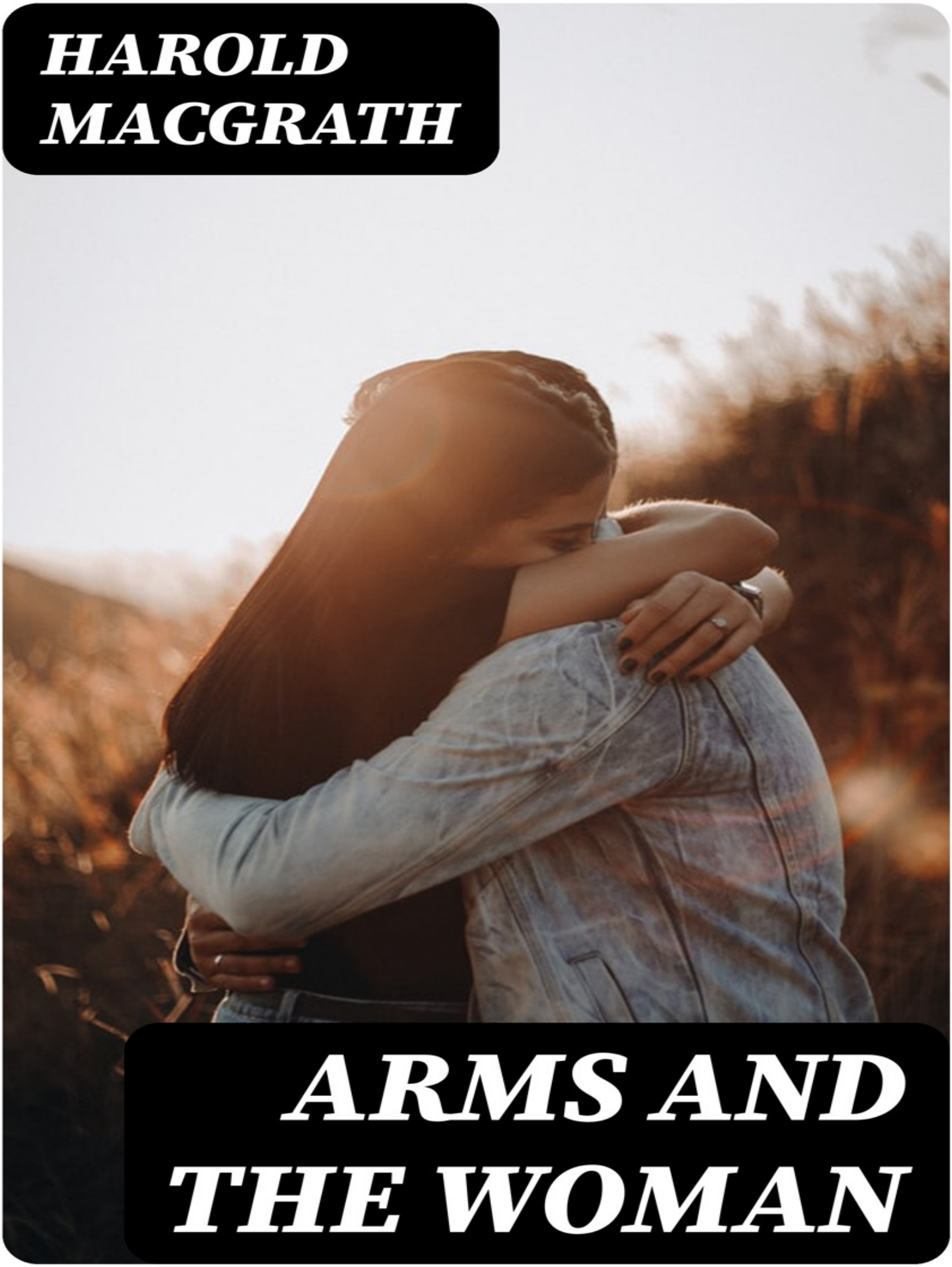
HAROLD MACGRATH



ARMS AND THE WOMAN

Harold MacGrath

Arms and the Woman

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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CHAPTER II

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In my bedroom the next morning there was a sad and heavy heart. The owner woke up, stared at the ceiling, then at the sun-baked bricks beyond his window. He saw not the glory of the sun and the heavens. To his eyes there was nothing poetic in the flash of the distant church-spires against the billowy cloudbanks. The gray doves, circling about the chimneys, did not inspire him, nor the twittering of the sparrows on the window ledge. There was nothing at all in the world but a long stretch of barren, lonely years. And he wondered how, without her at his side, he ever could traverse them. He was driftwood again. He had built upon sands as usual, and the tide had come in; his castle was flotsam and jetsam. He was drifting, and he didn't care where. He was very sorry for himself, and he had the blue devils the worst kind of way. Finally he crawled out of bed and dressed because it had to be done. He was not particularly painstaking with the procedure. It mattered not what collar became him best, and he picked up a tie at random. A man generally dresses for a certain woman's approval, and when that is no longer to be gained he grows indifferent. The other women do not count.

My breakfast consisted of a cup of coffee; and as the generous nectar warmed my veins my thoughts took a philosophical turn. It is fate who writes the was, the is, and the shall be. We have a proverb for every joy and misfortune. It is the only consolation fate gives us. It is like a conqueror asking the vanquished to witness the looting. All roads lead to Rome, and all proverbs are merely sign posts by which we pursue our destinies. And how was I to get to Rome? I knew not. Hope is better than clairvoyance.

Was Phyllis right when she said that I did not truly love her? I believed not. Should I go on loving her all my life? Undoubtedly I should. As to affinities, I had met mine, but it had proved a one-sided affair.

It was after ten by the clock when I remembered that I was to meet the lawyer, the arbiter of my new fortunes. Money is a balm for most things, and coupled with travel it might lead me to forget.

He was the family lawyer, and he had come all the way North to see that I received my uncle's bequest. He was bent, gray and partially bald. He must have been close to seventy, but for all that there was a youthful twinkle in his eyes as he took my card and looked up into my face.

"So you are John Winthrop?" he said in way of preliminary. You may hand a card case full of your name to a lawyer, and still he will insist upon a verbal admission.

"I have always been led to believe so," I answered smartly, placing my hat beside the chair in which I sat down. "How did you manage to locate me in this big city?"

"Your uncle had seen some of your signed articles in New York papers, and said that in all probability I should find you here. A few inquiries set me on your track." Here he pulled out a lengthy document from his handbag. "I confess, however," he added, "that I am somewhat disappointed in your looks."

"Disappointed in my looks!" was my cry. "What sort of a duffer were you expecting to see?"

He laughed. "Well, your uncle gave me the idea that I should find a good-for-nothing hack-writer, a dweller in some obscure garret."

"If that is the case, what under the sun did he send you up here for?"

The merriment went out of the old man's face and his eyes became grave. "Of that anon. Let me proceed with my business and read the will to you. You will find it rather a remarkable document."

I settled back in my chair in a waiting attitude. To tell the truth, I was somewhat confused by all this preamble. To his son my uncle left the bulk of his property, which amounted to more than a million. I was listless. The head overseer received the munificent sum of $50,000; to the butler, the housekeeper and the cook he gave $10,000 each. I began to grow interested. He was very liberal to his servants. Several other names were read, and my interest assumed the color of anxiety. When the lawyer stopped to unfold the last flap, I spoke.

"And where in the world do I come in?"

"In the sense you understand, you do not come in."

I stared at him in amazement. "I don't come in?" I repeated vaguely.
"Ah," reaching down for my hat, "then I go out, as it were;" as
brilliant as a London yellow fog. "What the devil does all this mean?"
I started to rise.

"Wait!" he commanded. "'To my nephew, John Winthrop, I bequeath the sum of $1,000 to be presented to him in person immediately after this will is probated, and with the understanding that he shall make no further demand upon my son and heir in the future.' That is all," concluded the

lawyer, folding the document. "I have the check in my pocket."

"Keep it," said I, rising. A hot flush of indignation swept over me. I understood. It was his revenge. To have a man make sport of you after he is dead and gone, leaving you impotent and with never a chance to retaliate! "Keep it," I said again; "throw it away, or burn it. I understand. He has satisfied a petty revenge. It is an insult not only to me, but to my dead parents. You are, of course, acquainted with the circumstances of my mother's marriage. She married the man she loved, disregarding her brother's wishes."

"I knew your mother," said the lawyer, going to the window and looking out and beyond all that met his gaze.

"To think," I went on, cooling none, "that my mother's brother should die in this manner, nourishing so small and petty a spite! When he did this he knew that I should understand his motive. In the first place, I never dreamed that he would remember me in his will; never entertained the least idea of it. I am independent; I am earning a livelihood, small, but enough and to spare. I'll bid you good morning." I took a step toward the door.

"Young man, sit down," said the old man, coming back to his chair. "I want to talk to you for a few minutes. Your uncle was a peculiarly vindictive man. What he considered a wrong he neither forgot nor forgave. His son pleaded with him not to put in that final clause. He offered even to share with you. Your uncle swore he would leave it all to the stablemen first. This journey was forced upon me, or I should not have taken it. This is my advice to you: Accept the check, in the privacy of your room tear it up, or light a cigar with it; that's about all it's worth. You will feel no little satisfaction in lighting a cigar with it, that is, if you are

anything like me. Think of it! a thousand dollars to light your cigar. It is an opportunity not to be missed. When you grow old you will say to your grandchildren: 'Once I lit a cigar with a thousand-dollar check.' The oldest inhabitant will be silenced forever; it may become history. And then, too, if there are spirits, as Scripture says there are, your uncle's will writhe at the performance. I trust that you will forgive me my part in the matter. I have taken a fancy to you, and if you will accept my friendship I shall be happy to accept yours. Your uncle's revenge will not be a marker to the restitution his son will make."

"Restitution?—his son?"

"Yes. To my sincere regret he is an invalid who may or may not live the year out. He has already made a will, in which he leaves all to you. The will is in my safe at home. I return to-night, so I may not see you again in this world of sin and tribulation." The merry twinkle had returned to his eyes. "I am very old."

"It is worth all the trouble to have met you," said I. "You should have made the jolt very easy."

So we shook hands, and he gave me a cigar, around which was wrapped the check. He winked. Then he laughed, and I joined him, though my laughter resembled mirth less than it did the cackle of a hen which was disturbed over the future of her brood.

I left him and went down into the wine room and ordered a stiff brandy and soda. When that disappeared I ordered another. I rattled the ice in the glass. "Ha, ha, ha!" I roared, as the events of the past twenty-four hours recurred to me. There must have been a suicidal accent to my laughter, for the bartender looked at me with some concern. I called for

another brandy and shot the soda into it myself. I watched the foam evaporate, "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hard luck?" the bartender asked sympathetically.

"Yes," said I. I seemed to be speaking to several bartenders who looked at me with several varieties of compassion.

"Have another on me," said the bartender.

I had another, and went out into the street. I walked down Broadway, chuckling to myself. What a glorious farce it all was! My fortune! Phyllis my wife! What if she had accepted me? I laughed aloud, and people turned and stared at me. Oh, yes! I was to travel and write novels and have my pictures in book reviews, and all that! When I arrived at the office I was on the verge of total insanity. I was obliged to ask the paragrapher to write my next day's leader. It was night before I became rational, and once that, the whole world donned cap and bells and began capering for my express benefit. The more I thought of it, the more I laughed. What a whimsical world it was! And was there anything in it so grotesque as my part? I took the check from my pocket and cracked it between my fingers. A cigar was in my mouth. Should I light it with the check? It was for $1,000. After all, it was more than I had ever before held in my hand at once. But what was a paltry thousand, aye a paltry ten thousand, to a man's pride? I bit off the end of my cigar, creased the check into a taper, and struck a match. I watched it burn and burn. I struck another. I held it within an inch of the check, but for the life of me I could not light it.

"The devil take it!" I cried. I flung the cigar out of the window and laid the check on my desk. Courage? Why, it needed the courage of a millionaire to light a cigar with a $1,000 check!

The office boy, who came in then, was salvation. The managing editor wanted to see me. I sprang up with alacrity; anything but the sight of that figure 1 and the three demon eyes of that $1,000 check!

"Winthrop," said the managing editor to me as I entered his office, "you've got to go to London. Hillars has gone under ——"

"Not dead!" I cried.

"No, no! He has had to give up work temporarily on account of drink. If it was any other man I'd throw him over in short order. But I feel sorry for Hillars, and I am going to give him another chance. I want you to go over and take care of him if possible. The London work is not new to you. You can handle that and Hillars too. If you can keep him in check ——"

I shuddered. The word "check" jarred on my nerves.

"What's the matter?" asked the editor.

"A temporary chill," I said. "Go on."

"Well, if you can manage to keep him in check for a month or so he'll be able to get on his feet again. And it will be like a vacation to you. If anything happens to Hillars you will be expected to remain permanently abroad. Hillars suggested you in his letter. Will you be ready to go next Monday?"

"To-morrow if you like," I answered readily enough. Here was an opportunity not to be missed. To see new scenes and faces is partially to forget old ones.

"Very well. I'll give you some letters which will help you. Our office is in the Strand. Hillars will find you lodgings. He has

bachelor quarters in the west end of the town, where congenial spirits congregate. Come in to-morrow and we'll talk it over."

I was much pleased with the turn of events. If I could get away from New York I might forget Phyllis—no, not forget her; I loved her too well ever to forget her; but the prolonged absence would cure me of my malady.

Before going to bed that night I lit a cigar, but not with the check. On sober second thought I calculated that the sum would pay up all my debts and leave me a comfortable margin. A man can well pocket his pride when he pockets a thousand dollars with it. And why not? I was about to start life anew and might as well begin on a philosophical basis. Who knew but my uncle had foreseen the result of his bequest; my rage, my pride, and finally lighting a cigar with his check? It really might make his spirit writhe to better effect if I became benefited. Sober second thought is more or less a profitable investment.

On the morrow everything was arranged for my departure. I was to leave
Saturday morning.

It was a beautiful day, crisp and clear, with a bare ground which rang to the heel. In the afternoon I wandered over to the Park and sat down on a bench, and watched the skaters as they glided to and fro. I caught myself wishing that I was a boy again, with an hour's romp on the sheeny crust in view. Gradually the mantle of peace fell upon me, and there was a sense of rest. I was going to forgive the world the wrong it had done me; perhaps it would feel ashamed of itself and reward me for my patience. So Hillars was "going to pieces." It is strange how we men love another who has shared and spent with us our late patrimonies. Hillars and I

had been friends since our youth, and we had lived together till a few years back. Then he went to Washington, from there to Paris, thence to London. He was a better newspaper man than I. I liked to dream too well, while he was always for a little action. Liquor was getting the best of him. I wondered why. It might be a woman. There is always one around somewhere when a man's breath smells of whisky. A good deal of this woman's temperance business is caused by remorse. I was drawing aimless pictures in the frozen gravel, when I became aware that two skaters had stopped in front of me. I glanced up and saw Phyllis and Ethel, their eyes like stars and their cheeks like roses.

"I was wondering if it was you," said Ethel. "Phyllis, where is my cavalier?"

"I believe he has forsaken us," said the voice of the woman I loved.

"Will you not accept part of the bench?" I asked, moving along.

The girls dropped easily beside me.

"I was just wishing I was a boy again and was in for a game of hockey," said I. "I am going to London on Saturday. Our foreign correspondent has had to give up work on account of ill health."

"You haven't——" Phyllis stopped suddenly.

"Oh, no," said I intuitively. "I am growing rusty, and they think I need a vacation." I was glad Ethel was there with her voluble chatter.

"Oh, a foreign correspondent!"' she cried.

"Yes."

"You will have a glorious time. Papa will probably return to B —— when the next administration comes in. It is sure to be Republican." There are a few women who pose as Democrats; I never met one of them. "You know papa was there twenty years ago. I suppose you will be hob-nobbing with dukes and princes."

"It cannot be avoided," I said gravely. "I do not expect to remain long in London. When my work is done perhaps I shall travel and complete my foreign polish."

"Oh, yes!" said Phyllis. "I forgot to tell you, Ethel, that a fortune has been left to Jack, and he need not work but for the love of it."

I laughed, but they thought it a self-conscious laugh. Somehow I was not equal to the task of enlightening them.

"It is jolly to be rich," said Ethel, clicking her skates together. "It's a bother at times, however, to know what to do with the money. I buy so many things I do not need just because I feel compelled to spend my allowance."

"It must be very inconvenient," I observed.

"And now that you are a man of leisure," said Phyllis, "you will write that book you have always been telling me about?"

"Do you wish it?" I asked.

"I do. What I have always found lacking in you is application. You start out to accomplish something, you find an obstacle in your path and you do not surmount it; you do not persevere."

My pulse beat quickly. Was there a double meaning to what she said? I could not tell, for her eyes remained averted.

I sighed. "It would be nice to become a successful author, but when a man is as rich as I am fame tarnishes." I took out an envelope from my pocket.

"What is that?" asked Phyllis.

I turned over the back and showed it to her.

"Figures!" she laughed. "What do they mean?"

"It is what I am going to do with my fortune," said I. I was holding out my vanity at arm's length and laughing at it silently.

"Your air castles will be realized now," said Phyllis.

"I shall build no more," said I. "The last one gave me a very bad fall."

Phyllis looked away again. A vague perfume from her hair wafted past my nostrils, and for a space I was overwhelmed with sadness. Soon I discerned Mr. Holland speeding toward us.

"I shall not see you again," I said, "so I'll bid you good-bye now. If you should chance to come abroad this summer, do not fail to look me up."

"Good luck to you," said Ethel, shaking my hand. "You must bring home a Princess or a Duchess." Then she moved off a way, thoughtfully.

"You must write to me occasionally, Jack," said Phyllis, "if only once a month. I shall always be interested in your

career."

The smile faltered as she put out her gloved hand.

"You will make some man happy, Phyllis," I said.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

And then—and then they sped away, and I followed them with dimming gaze till I could see them no more. I trudged home….

I stood on the upper deck. The spires and domes of the city faded on my sight till all merged into a gray smoky patch on the horizon. With a dead cigar clenched between my teeth I watched and watched with a callous air, as though there had been no wrench, as though I had not left behind all I loved in the world. And yet I gazed, the keen salt air singing past my ears, till there was nothing but the sea as far as the eye could scan.

Thus I began the quest of the elusive, which is a little of love, a little of adventure, and a little of all things.

CHAPTER III

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Hillars hadn't been down to the office in two days, so the assistant said.

"Is he ill?" I asked, as I carried a chair to the window.

"Ill?" The young man coughed affectedly.

"Do you believe it possible for him to come in this afternoon?"

"It is quite possible. One does not use the word impossible in regard to Hillars. It is possible that he may be in St. Petersburg by this time, for all I know. You see," with an explanatory wave of the hand, "he's very uncertain in his movements. For the last six months he has been playing all over the table, to use the parlance of the roulette player. I have had to do most of the work, and take care of him into the bargain. If I may take you into my confidence——," with some hesitancy.

"Certainly," said I. "I want you to tell me all about him. He was my roommate at college. Perhaps I can straighten him up."

"The truth is, the trouble began last September. He came back from the Continent, where he had been on an errand, a changed man. Hillars always drank, but never to an

alarming extent. On his return, however, he was in a bad shape. It was nearly November before I got him sobered up; and then he went under on an average of three times a week. I asked him bluntly what he meant by it, and he frankly replied that if he wanted to drink himself to death, that was his business. When he isn't half-seas over he is gloomy and morose. From the first I knew that something had gone wrong on the mainland; but I couldn't trap him for a farthing. No man at his age drinks himself to death without cause; I told him so, but he only laughed at me. I'd give a good deal to know what the truth is; not from curiosity, mind you, but to find the disease in order to apply a remedy. Dan's father died of drink."

"No," said I coldly; "he was shot."

"Oh, I know that," was the reply; "but give a conditioned man the same wound and he will recover, nine times out of ten. The elder Hillars was so enervated by drink that he had no strength to fight the fever which came on top of the bullet-hole. Something happened over there; and it's pounds to pence there's a woman back of the curtain. It is some one worth while. Hillars is not a man to fall in love with a barmaid."

I began to respect the young man's wisdom.

"So you believe it to be a woman?"

"Yes. The wind blows from one point at a time. There are four points to the vane of destiny; there is ambition for glory, ambition for power, ambition for wealth, and ambition for love. In Hillars's case, since the wind does not blow from the first three, it must necessarily blow from the fourth. You know him better than I do; so you must certainly know that

Hillars is not a man to drink because glory or power or wealth refused to visit him."

"You are a very discerning young man," said I, whereat he laughed.
"Did he get my cable?"

"No. I thought that it was some order from headquarters and opened it myself. I put it in his desk. I spoke to him, but he was too drunk to pay any heed to what I said. Well, I must be going. I am getting out a symposium of editorials from the morning papers on the possibility of a Franco-Russian alliance. It must be at the cable office in half an hour. If you are going to wait, you'll find the Berlin and Paris files in the next room. I'll see you later," and he departed.

It was five of the clock. The Strand was choked. Here and there I saw the color of martial attire. Save for this, and that the buildings were low and solid, and that most of the people walked slower, I might have been looking down upon Broadway for all the change of place I saw. There is not much difference between New York and London, except in the matter of locomotion. The American gets around with more rapidity than does his English cousin, but in the long run he accomplishes no more. It is only when one steps onto the Continent that the real difference in the human races is discerned. Strange as this may seem, it is not distinguishable in a cosmopolitan city. My eyes were greeted with the same huge wearisome signs of the merchants; the same sad-eyed "sandwich men;" the same newsboys yelling and scampering back and forth; the same rumble of the omnibuses, the roar of the drays, and the rattle of the cabs. I was not much interested in all I saw. Suddenly my roving eyes rested upon a familiar face. It was Hillars, and he was pushing rapidly across the street. Any one would have instantly marked him for an American by the nervous stride,

the impatience at being obstructed. I went into the fire-room, intending to give him a little surprise. I did not have long to wait. The door to the main office opened and he came in, singing a snatch from a drinking song we used to sing at college. The rich baritone that had once made the old glee club famous was a bit husky and throaty. I heard him unlock his desk and roll back the lid. There was a quiet for a moment.

"Dick!" he called. "Hi, Dick! Well, I'm hanged!"

Evidently he had discovered my cable.

"Dick isn't in," said I, crossing the threshold.

In a moment our hands were welded together, and we were gazing into each other's eyes.

"You old reprobate!" I cried; "not to have met me at the station, even."

"Bless my soul, Jack, this cable was the first intimation that you were within 3,000 miles of London. But it does my heart good to see you!" pumping my hand again. "Come out to dinner with me. Now don't begin to talk till we've had something to eat; I'm almost famished. I know all the questions you want to ask, but not now. There's a Bohemian joint a block above that'll do your heart good to see. We'll have chops and ale, just like we did in the old days, the green and salad days, I would they were back again"—soberly. "Oh, I've a long story to tell you, my son; time enough when we get to my rooms; but not a word of it now—not a word. It will all be forgotten in ten minutes with you. We'll rake up the old days and live 'em over for an hour or so. I'm glad that I suggested you in my letter. What did the old man say about my nervous prostration?"—with half a laugh.

"He put quotation marks around it," I answered. "I wanted to see you particularly. They told me that you were rolling downhill so fast that if some one did not put a fulcrum under you, you'd be at the bottom in no time at all. I'm going to be the lever by which you are to be rolled uphill again."

He smiled grimly. "If any one could do that—well, here we are;" and we entered the chop house and took a table in one of the side rooms. "Woods," he said to the waiter, "chops for two, chipped potatoes, and fill up those steins of mine with ale. That will be all. I brought those steins from across, Jack; you'll go crazy over them, for they are beauties."

A college-bred bachelor, nine times out of ten, has a mania for collecting pipes or steins, or both. Dan and I had been affected this way. During the year I had studied at Heidelberg I had gathered together some fifty odd pipes and steins. I have them yet, and many a pleasant memory they beget me. As for the steins of Dan, they were beyond compare.

"I'll tell you a story about them," said Dan, after he had taken a deep swallow of the amber ale. "Few men can boast of steins like these. Not many months ago there was a party of men and women, belonging to the capital of a certain kingdom, who attended a dinner. It was one of those times when exalted personages divest themselves of the dignity and pomp of court and become free and informal. There were twenty of these steins made especially for the occasion. By a circumstance, over which I had no control, I was the only alien at this dinner. The steins were souvenirs. How I came by two was due to the lady whom I took down to dinner, and who presented hers to me after having—after having—well, kissed the rim. Do you see the crest?" pointing to the exquisite inlaid work.

"Why," I said eagerly, "it is the crest of——"

"Yes, a noted King," Dan completed. "And these were made by his express command. But never mind," he broke off. "It's merely a part of the story I am going to tell you when we get to my rooms. I am always thinking of it, night and day, day and night. Talk to me, or I'll be drinking again. This is the first time I've been sober in a month. It's drink or morphine or something like. Do you ever see anything of the old glee boys?"

"Once in a while. You know," said I, lighting a cigarette, "all the fellows but you and I had money. Most of them are carrying on the business of their paters and ornamenting dinner parties and cotillions."

"I thought that you had a rich uncle," said Dan.

"I did have, but he is no more," and I told him all about the bequest.

He laughed so long and heartily over it that I was glad for his sake that it had happened. Already I was beginning to look wholly upon the humorous side of the affair.

"It is almost too good not to be printed," he said. "But his son may square matters when he dies."

"I do not want matters squared," I growled. "I can earn a living for a few years to come. I shan't worry."

"By the way, is that Miss Landors whom you used to rave about in your letters married yet?"

"No." Miss Landors was Phyllis only to her intimate friends. I called the waiter and ordered him to replenish my stein, Dan

watching me curiously the while. "No, Miss Landors is not married yet."

"I have often wondered what she looked like," he mused.

"When do you go on your vacation?" I asked irrelevantly.

"In a week or ten days; may be to-morrow. It's according to how long I stay sober."

I was sorry that he had recalled to me the name of Phyllis. It dampened my sociability. I was not yet prepared to take him into my confidence. The ale, however, loosened our tongues, and though we did not talk about our present affairs we had a pleasant time recounting the days when we were young in the sense that we had no real trouble. Those were the times when we were earning fifteen and twenty the week; when our watches were always in durance vile; when we lied to the poor washerwoman and to the landlady; when we would always be "around to-morrow" and "settle up" with our creditors.

"There was no ennui those days," laughed Hillars.

"True. Do you remember the day you stayed in bed because it was cheaper to sleep than work on an empty stomach?"

"And do you remember the time I saved you from jail by giving the Sheriff my new spring overcoat to pay a washerwoman's bill of six months' standing?"

"I hung around Jersey City that day," said I. And then there was more ale; and so on. It was nine when at last we rose.

"Well, we'll go back to the office and get your case," said Dan.
"Where's your trunk?"

"At the Victoria."

"All your luggage must be sent to my rooms. I will not hear of your going elsewhere for lodging while in town. I have a floor, and you shall share it. It's a bachelor's ranch from basement to garret, inhabited by artists, journalists, one or two magazine men, a clever novelist, and three of our New York men. There is no small fry save myself. We have little banquets every Friday night, and they sometimes last till Saturday noon. I've taught the Frenchman who represents the Paris *Temps* how to play poker, and he threatens to become my Frankenstein, who will eventually devour me." Hillars laughed, and it sounded like the laughter of other days. "Jack, I think you will do me good. Stay with me and keep me away from the bottle if you can. No man drinks for pure love of liquor. My father never loved it, and God knows what he was trying to forget. For that's the substance of it all, to forget. When you start out to the point of forgetfulness, you must keep it up; regret comes back threefold with soberness. It seems silly and weak for a man who has been buffeted as I have, who is supposed to gather wisdom and philosophy as a snowball gathers snow as it rolls down hill, to try to drown regret and disappointment in liquor. A man never knows how weak he is till he meets the one woman and she will have none of him."

And somehow I got closer to Hillars, spiritually. There were two of us, so it seemed, only I was stronger, or else my passion did not burn so furiously as his.

The apartments occupied by Dan were all a bachelor could wish for. The walls were covered with photographs, original drawings, beer steins, pipes, a slipper here, a fan there, and books and books and books. I felt at home at once.

I watched Hillars as he moved about the room, tidying up things a bit, and I noticed now more than ever how changed he was. His face had grown thin, his hair was slightly worn at the crown and temples, and there were dark circles under his eyes. Yet, for all these signs of dissipation, he was still a remarkably handsome man. Though not so robust as when I last saw him, his form was yet elegant. In the old days we had called him Adonis, and Donie had clung to him long after the Cambridge time.

"Now," said he, when we had lighted our pipes, "I'll tell you why I'm going to the dogs. I've got to tell it to some one or go daft; and I can't say that I'm not daft as it is."

"It is a woman," said I, after reflection, "who causes a man to drink, to lose all ambition."

"It is."

"It is a woman," I went on, holding the amber stem of my pipe before the light which gleamed golden through the transparent gum, "who causes a man to pull up stakes and prospect for new claims, to leave the new country for the old."

"It is a woman indeed," he replied. He was gazing at me with a new interest. "If the woman had accepted him, he would not have been here."

"No, he would not," said I.

"In either case, yours or mine."

"In either case. Go on with your story; there's nothing more to add to mine."

Some time passed, and nothing but the breathing of the pipes was heard. Now and then I would poke away at the ashes in my pipe bowl, and Dan would do the same.

"Have you a picture of her?" I asked, reaching for some fresh tobacco.

"No; I am afraid to keep one."

To me this was a new phase in the matter of grand passions.

"A likeness which never changes its expression means nothing to me," he explained. "Her face in all its moods is graven in my mind; I have but to shut my eyes, and she stands before me in all her loveliness. Do you know why I wanted this vacation? Rest?" His shoulders went up and his lips closed tighter. "My son, I want no rest. It is rest which is killing me. I am going across. I am going to see her again, if only from the curb as she rolls past in her carriage, looking at me but not recognizing me, telling her footman to brush me aside should I attempt to speak to her. Yet I would suffer this humiliation to see that glorious face once more, to hear again that voice, though it were keyed to scorn. I am a fool, Jack. What! have I gone all these years free-heart to love a chimera in the end? Verily I am an ass. She is a Princess; she has riches; she has a principality; she is the ward of a King. What has she to do with such as I? Three months in the year she dwells in her petty palace; the other months find her here and there; Paris, St. Petersburg, or Rome, as fancy wills. And I, I love her! Is it not rich? What am I? A grub burrowing at the root of the tree in which she, like a bird of paradise, displays her royal plumage. 'Masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass.' The father of this Princess once rendered the present King's father a great service, and in return the King turned over to his care a principality

whose lineal descendants had died out. It was with the understanding that so long as he retained the King's goodwill, just so long he might possess the principality, and that when he died the sovereignty would pass to his children. The old King died, and his son sat upon his father's throne. The father of the Princess also died. The King of to-day made the same terms as his father before him. The Princess Hildegarde accepted them, not counting the cost. Last spring she was coronated. Shortly before the coronation, Prince Ernst of Wortumborg became a suitor for her hand. The King was very much pleased. Prince Ernst was a cousin of the Princess Hildegarde's father, and had striven for the principality in the days gone by. The King, thinking to repair the imaginary wrongs of the Prince, forced the suit. He impressed upon the Princess that it was marry the Prince or give up her principality. She gave her consent, not knowing what to do under the circumstances. Prince Ernst is a Prince without principality or revenues. In marrying the Princess he acquires both. I shall tell you how I became concerned."

Hillars laid his smoking pipe in the ash pan. He got up and roamed about the room, stopped at the window and stared at the inken sky, then returned to his chair.