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ARMS AND THE WOMAN

BY HAROLD MACGRATH.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

"Phyllis," said I, "do you remember the day we first met?"

We were in the morning room of the Wentworth mansion at B—, Phyllis, Pembroke and I sat before the warm grate, while Mrs. Wentworth and Ethel stood by one of the windows comparing some shades of ribbon. My presence at B— was due to a wire I had sent to New York, which informed headquarters that I was on the track of a great sensation. The return wire had said "keep on it."

"When first we met?" echoed Phyllis. "Why, it was at Block Island."

"Oh," said I, "I do not refer to the time when you had shouldered the responsibilities of a society bud. I mean the time when the introduction was most informal. You were at the time selling lemonade without license and with very little lemon."

"Selling lemonade?" cried Pembroke. "Never mind him, Mr. Pembroke," laughed Phyllis.

"It was a long time ago," I went on. "I was a new reporter. Mr. Wentworth had to be interviewed. It was one of those hot days in May. The servant at the door said that Mr. Wentworth was in the back yard—he called it the garden—where I soon found myself. You had a small table, a glass and a pitcher. I suppose every time your uncle got thirsty you sold him a glass. You wore short dresses?"

"Terrible!" cried Phyllis, shielding her face with the hand screen.

"And looked as cool as the ice in the pitcher and as fresh as the flowers which lined the walls. I thought that if I bought a glass of you I might make my approach to your uncle an easier task. So I looked at you and smiled, and you giggled."

"Giggled!" cried Phyllis indignantly. Pembroke was laughing.

"Yes, actually giggled," I went on. "I laid down a 25 cent piece, and you poured out some water which had nothing more than a mild flirtation with a lemon, and I gulped it down. I held out my hand, and you said that there wasn't any change. I smiled a false smile. Let me make a confession."

"Well?" mockingly from Phyllis.

"It was my last quarter. It was very pathetic. I had to walk four miles down town. I did not know your uncle well enough, or I should have borrowed car fare from him."

"And I took your last penny?" said Phyllis gently. "Why did you not tell me then?"

"I was 22 and proud," said I. "Where are you going?" she had risen.

"I'll be back in a moment," she said as she left the room. When she returned, she put out her hand. On the palm lay two bright American dimes.

"What's this?" I asked.

"The change."

"Very good!" laughed Pembroke. I said nothing, but took up my wallet. In opening it to put in the dimes something fell to the floor. It was Gretchen's rose.

"What is that?" asked Phyllis, as I stooped to pick it up.

"It is the end of a story," I answered. I busied myself with the fire till the poker grew too hot.

"How many romances commonplace wallets contain?" said Pembroke sentimentally.

"I have two in mine," said I.

Pembroke looked at Phyllis, but the fire seemed to be claiming her attention. Then he looked at me, but I was gazing at Phyllis. He was in a puzzle.

"Do you know, Miss Landors," he said, "that I never dreamed to meet you again when I saw you in Vienna last year?"

"Vienna?" said she. "I have never been to Vienna."

I suddenly brought down my head on Pembroke's toes.

"Ah, a curious mistake on my part. I suppose the ball at the ministry tonight will be your first on the continent?"

I gazed admiringly at him. He had not even looked at me. He was certainly clever.

"Yes," said Phyllis, "and already I believe I am going to have what they call stage fright, though I cannot understand why I should feel that way."

"Possibly it's a premonition," said I absently.

"And of what?" asked Phyllis.

"How should I know?" said I mysteriously.

"What in the world is going on?" she demanded. "You step on Mr. Pembroke's toes, you prophesy and then you grow mysterious."

My glance and Pembroke's met. He burst out laughing. A possible contretemps was averted by the approach of Mrs. Wentworth, who asked us to have a cup of chocolate before we went out into the chill air. Finally we rose to make our departure. While Pembroke was bidding Ethel a good morning, Phyllis spoke to me.

"The last flowers you sent me were roses," she said softly.

"Were they?" said I. "I had forgotten. Shall I send you some for this evening?"

"It was something in her eyes that I did not understand."

"Thank you, but Mr. Pembroke has promised to do that." And then she added, "So you have really had two romances?"

"Yes," said I, "and both ended badly."

"Let us hope that the third will be of happier termination," she smiled. The smile caused me some uneasiness. "There never will be a third," I said. "It is strange, is it not, when you

think that there might have been—but one? You will give me a waltz tonight?"

"With pleasure. Good morning."

Pembroke and I passed down the broad stairs. On the street we walked a block or so in silence.

Finally Pembroke said: "What the deuce made you step on my foot? And why does she not want me to know that she was in Vienna last winter?"

"Because," said I, "Miss Landors never was in Vienna."

"But, man, my eyes!"

"I do not care anything about your eyes."

"What makes you so positive?"

"Knowledge."

"Do you love her?" bluntnly.

"No."

"Because—"

"There is another. Pembroke, tonight will be pregnant with possibilities. You will see the woman you love and the woman I love."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you ever heard of her serene highness the Princess Hildegarde of Hohenphalla?"

"So high?"

"Yes."

"Then the woman I saw in Vienna?"

"Was the princess?"

"But this remarkable likeness?"

"Perhaps I had best tell you all. And when I had done his astonishment knew no bounds."

"Great George, that makes Miss Landors a princess too!"

"It does, truly. Herein lies the evil of loving above one's station. In our country love is like all things—free to obtain. We are in a country which is not free. Here those who appear to have the greatest liberty have the least."

"And she knows nothing about it?"

"Nothing."

"Why tell her?" he asked, fearful of his own love affair now.

"It is a duty. Some day she might learn too late. This afternoon I shall visit the chancellor and place the matter before him and ask his assistance. He must aid me to find the proofs."

Pembroke began kicking the snow with his toes.

"I wish you had not told me, Jack."

"It is for the best. You and I are in the same boat. We ride or sink together."

At luncheon his mind was absent, and he ate but little, and I ate less than he. It was going to be very hard for me to meet Gretchen.

The chancellor waved his hand toward a chair. We were very good friends.

"What is it now?" he asked, smiling.

"I dare not stir up the antagonists against the government to give you a story, and, aside from the antagonists, it is dull."

"I will find the story in the present instance," said I. And in the fewest words possible I laid before him the object of my visit.

"This is a very strange story," he said, making a pyramid of his fingers

and contemplating the task with a careful air. "Are you not letting your imagination run away with you?"

"Not for a moment. I ask you to attend the ball at the American ministry this evening, and if the likeness between the two women does not convince you the matter shall drop so far as I am concerned."

"Has Herr Wentworth any idea of the affair?"

"It is not possible. What would be his object in keeping it a secret?"

"Still it is a grave matter and without precedent. We must move carefully. You understand that there was no knowledge of another child, only rumor, and then it was believed to be a hallucination of the mother, whose mind was not very strong."

"Do you believe," I asked, "that two persons born of different parentage in different lands may resemble each other as these two do?"

"No, I shall let you know what stand I'll take when I have seen them together. And what will his majesty say?" he mused. "I'm afraid the matter will assume many complications. And I might add that you seem particularly interested."

A slight warmth came into my cheeks.

"Your excellency understands that a journalist always takes great interest in affairs of this sort," was my rejoinder.

"Yes, yes," pleasantly. "But this so-called sister—has she not lived most of her life in America, your own country?"

"Your excellency," said I honestly, "whether she regains her own or not is immaterial to me from a personal standpoint."

"Well, one way or the other, I shall decide what to do tonight. But, mind you, there must be proofs. Though they may look enough like to be two

peas in a pod, that will give your friend nothing you claim for her. The fate of your princess rests in the hands of Herr Wentworth. Have the two met?"

"No, but during the short time they have been in the city they have been mistaken for each other. And why do you call her my princess?"

"She is not ours yet. It was a strange story, as I remember it. In those days we had our doubts, as we still have, of another child. By the way, you suggested the matter to you?"

I recounted my interview with the prince.

"Ah," said the chancellor, "so it was he? He is a greedy fellow and careful. I can readily understand his object. He wants all or nothing. I shall help you all I can," he concluded as I reached for my hat.

"I ask nothing more," I replied. And then I passed from the cabinet into the crowded anteroom. It was filled with diplomats and soldiers, each waiting for an audience. They eyed me curiously and perhaps enviously as I made my way to the street. "Yes, indeed, what will the king say?" I mused on the way back to my rooms. What could he say?

That night Pembroke and I arrived at the ministry a little after 10. I was in a state of extreme nervousness. "I'm in a regular funk," said Pembroke. "Supposing your princess does not come?"

"It is written that she will come."

"Well, I'm glad that I looked you up in London. I would not have missed this adventure."

"We found Phyllis in a nook under the grand staircase. I gave a slight exclamation as I saw her. I had never seen her looking so beautiful."

"Come and sit down," said she, making room for us. "I have had a curious adventure."

"Tell us all about it," said Pembroke.

"I have had the honor of being mistaken for a princess," I triumphantly.

"Who could doubt it?" said I, with a glance I could not help, which made her lower her eyes.

"Moreover," she continued, this time looking at Pembroke, "the gentleman who committed the error was the Austrian ambassador. What a compliment to take home!"

"And who was the princess?" I felt compelled to ask, though I knew perfectly well.

"The Princess Hildegarde. Do you recall the night in London," to me, "when the same thing occurred? I am very anxious to meet this princess who looks so like me."

"You will have that pleasure immediately after the opera," said I.

Pembroke's eyes said something to me, and I rose.

"There is Mr. Wentworth. I wish to speak to him. Will you excuse me?"

"With pleasure!" laughed Pembroke. I threaded my way through the gathering throng to the side of Mr. Wentworth.

"How do you do, Winthrop?" he said, taking me by the arm. "Come into the conservatory. I want you to see some of the finest orchids that ever came from South America. The girls are looking well tonight. I suppose you noticed?"

"Especially Phyllis." Our eyes met.

When we entered the conservatory, he suddenly forgot all about the orchids.

"Jack, I'm worried about her—Phyllis. You see, she is not my niece. There's a long story. This morning a gentleman visited my department. He was Prince Ernst of Wortumburg. He began by asking me if Phyllis was my niece. That started the business. He proceeded to prove to me, as far as possible, that Phyllis was a princess. I could not say that it was all nonsense, because I did not know. Some 20 years ago a strange thing happened. I occupied the same residence as to-day. It was near midnight, and snowing fiercely. I was looking over some documents, when the footman came in and announced the presence of a strange woman in the hall who demanded to see me. The woman was young and handsome, and in her arms she carried a child. Would I, for humanity's sake, give a roof to the child till the morning? The woman said that she was looking for her relatives, but as yet had not found them, and that the night was too cold for the child to be carried around. She was a nurse. The child was not hers, but belonged to a wealthy family of the south, who were to have arrived that day, but had not.

"The thing seemed so irregular that I at once consented, thinking to scan the papers the next day for an account of a lost or stolen child. She also carried a box which contained, she said, the child's identity. Now, as I am a living man, there was nothing in that box to show who the child was—nothing but clothes; not a jewel or a trinket. And the woman never appeared again. Much against my will I was forced to keep the child. I am glad I did, for I have grown to love her as one of my own. I had a married sister who died in Carolina, so I felt secure in stating that Phyllis was her daughter, therefore my niece. And that is positively all I know. And here comes a fellow who says he knows who she is and, moreover, that she is a princess. What do you say to that?"

"What he said was true," gloomily. Without proofs Gretchen remained as far away as ever. I told him what I knew.

"I must see this princess before I move. If they look alike, why, let things take their course. As a matter of fact, Phyllis is to share equally with Ethel. So, whether or not she proves to be a princess, it will not interfere with her material welfare. And, by the way, Jack, isn't there a coldness of some sort between you and Phyllis?"

"Not a coldness," said I; "merely an understanding. Let us be getting back to the ballroom. I am anxious to see the two when they meet."

I left him in the reception room. As I was in the act of crossing the hall

which led to the ballroom I was stopped. It was the prince.

"Well," he said, smiling ironically, "the matter is, sadly for you, definitely settled. Your friend may in truth be a princess, but there are no proofs. In the eyes of men they are sisters; in the eyes of the law they are total strangers. I shall not ask you to congratulate me upon my success. I shall now wed the Princess Hildegarde with a sense of security. Come—have you seen her yet? She does not know that you are here. It will be a surprise and a pleasure. As to that other matter, I shall send a gentleman around to your rooms in the morning to arrange the affair."

I shivered. I had forgotten that I had accepted a challenge.

"Take me to her," said I. "She will be happy indeed to see me, as you know." I laughed in his face. "How convenient it would be for both of us—her and me—should my bullet speed to the proper place! Believe me, I shall be most happy to kill you. There are many things on the slate to wipe out."

"I see that you are a gentleman of spirit," said he, smoothing the scowl from his brow. "Ah, there she stands. Look well, my friend; look at her well. This is probably the last night you will see her save as my wife."

The sight of that dear face took the nerves from me and left me trembling. Even in the momentary glance I detected a melancholy cast to her features. She was surrounded by several men who wore various decorations.

"Your highness," said the prince, mockingly predominating his tones, "permit me to present to you an old friend."

It was because her soul instinctively became conscious of my presence and nerved her for the ordeal that she turned and smiled on me? The prince appeared for a moment crestfallen. Perhaps the scene lacked a denouement. Oh, I was sure that implacable hate burned under that smile of his, just as I knew that beneath the rise and fall of Gretchen's bosom the steady fire of immutable love burned, burned as it burned in my own heart.

"Ah, here you are!" said a voice behind me, giving me an indescribable start. "I have been looking high and low for you. You have forgotten this dance."

It was Phyllis.

And then a sudden hush fell upon the circle. The two women stood face to face, looking with strange wonder into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER XIX.

Phyllis and I were sitting in one of the numerous cozy corners. I had danced badly and out of time. The music and the babel of tongues had become murmurous and indistinct.

"And so that is the Princess Hildegarde?" she said after a spell.

"Yes; she is your double. Is she not beautiful?"

"Is that a left handed compliment to me?" Phyllis was smiling, but she was colorless.

"What do you think of her?" suppressing the eagerness in my voice.

"She is to be envied," softly. And I grew puzzled.

"Jack, for a man who has associated with the first diplomatists of the world, who has learned to read the world as another might read a book, you are surprisingly unadept in the art of dissimulation."

"That is a very long sentence," said I in order to gain time enough to fathom what she meant. I could not. So I said, "What do you mean?"

"Your whole face was saying to the princess, 'I love you!' A glance told me all. I was glad for your sake that no other woman saw you at that moment. But I suppose it would not have mattered to you."

"Not if all the world had seen the look," moodily.

"Poor Jack, you are very unlucky!" Her voice was full of pity. "I feel so sorry for you, it is all so impossible. And she loves you too."

"How do you know?"

"I looked at her while she was looking at you."

"You have wonderful eyes."

"So I have been told. I wonder why she gave you that withered and worm eaten rose?"

"A whim," I said, staring at the rug. I wondered how she came to surmise that it was Gretchen's rose? Intuition perhaps.

"Do you love her well enough," asked Phyllis, plucking the lace on her fan, "to sacrifice all the world for her, to give up all your own happiness that she might become happy?"

"She never can be happy without me—if she loves me as I believe." I admitted that this was a selfish thought to express.

"Then why is it impossible, your love and hers? If her love for you is as great as you say it is, what is a king, a prince or a principality to her?"

"It is none of those. It is because she has given her word, the word of a princess. What would you do in her place?" suddenly.

"I?" Phyllis leaned back among the cushions, her eyes half closed and a smile on her lips. "I am afraid that if I loved you I should follow you to the end of the world. Honor is a fine thing, but in her case it is an empty word. If she broke this word for you, who would be wronged? No one, since the prince covets only her dowry and the king desires only his wife obeyed. Perhaps I do not understand what social obligation means to these people who are born in purple."

"Perhaps that is it. Phyllis, listen, and I will tell you a romance which has and will not yet been drawn to its end. Once upon a time—let me call it a fairy story," said I, drawing down a palm leaf as if to read the tale from its blades. "Once upon a time in a country far from ours there lived a prince and a princess. The prince was rather a bad fellow. His faith in his wife was not the best, and he made a vow that if ever children came he would make them as evil as himself.

Not long after the good fairy brought two children to her godchild, the princess. Remembering the vow made by the prince, the good fairy carried away one of the children, and no one knew anything about it save the princess and the fairy. When the remaining child was 2 years old, the prince died. The child from then on grew like a willow flower. The prince did his best to spoil her, but the good fairy watched over her just as carefully as she watched over the child she had hidden away. By and by the wicked prince died. The child reached womanhood. The good fairy went away and left her. Perhaps she now gave her whole attention to the other." I let the palm leaf slip back and drew down a fresh one, Phyllis watching me with interest. "The child the fairy led was still a child for all her womanhood. She was willful and capricious; she rode, she fenced, she hunted; she was as unlike other women as could be. At last the king, who was her guardian, grew weary of her caprices. So he commanded that she marry. But what had the fairy done with the other child, the twin sister of this wild princess? Perhaps in this instance the good fairy died and left her work unfinished, to be taken up and pursued by a conventional newspaper reporter. Now this item, fairy ascertained that the good fairy had left the lost princess in the care of one of a foreign race. Having a wife and daughter of his own, he brought the princess up as his niece, not knowing himself who she really was. She became wise, respected and beautiful in mind and form. Fate, who governs all fairy stories, first brought the newspaper reporter into the presence of the lost princess. She was a mere girl then and was selling lemonade at—25 cents a glass. She—"

"Jack," came in wondering tones, "for mercy's sake, what are you telling me?"

"Phyllis, can you not look back, perhaps as in a dream, to an old inn where soldiers and mistletoes in a hurry and confusion moved to and fro? No; I dare say you were too young. The Princess Hildegarde of Hohenphalla is your sister." I rose and bowed to her respectfully.

"My sister, the princess? I a princess? Jack," indignantly, "you are mocking me! It is not fair!"

"Phyllis, as sure as I stand before you all I have said is true. And now let me be the first to do homage to your serene highness," taking her hand despite her efforts to withdraw it and kissing it.

"It is unreal! Impossible! Absurd!" she cried.

"Let me repeat the words of the French philosopher who said, 'As nothing is impossible let us believe in the absurd,'" said I.

"And does she know—the Princess Hildegarde? My sister? How strange the word feels on my tongue."

"No; she does not know, but presently she will."

Then Phyllis asked in an altered tone, "And what is all this to you that you thrust this greatness upon me, a greatness, I assure you, for which I do not care?"

I regarded her vaguely. I saw a precipice at my feet. I could not tell her that in making her a princess I was making Gretchen free. I could not confess that my motive was purely a selfish one.

"It was a duty," said I evasively.

"And in what way will it concern the Princess Hildegarde's affairs—and yours?" She was rather merciless.

"Why should it concern any affair of mine?" I asked.

"You love her, and she loves you. May she not abdicate in my favor?"

"And if she should?" with an accent of impatience.

Phyllis grew silent. "Forgive me, Jack!" impulsively. "But all this is scarcely to be believed. And then you say there are no proofs."

"Not in the eyes of the law," I replied. "But nature has written it in your faces." I was wondering why she had not gone into raptures at the prospect of becoming a princess.

"It is a great honor," she said after some meditation, "and it is very kind of you. But I care as little for the title as I do for this rose." And she cast away one of Pembroke's roses. It boded ill for my cousin's cause.

The next person I saw was the chancellor.

"Well?" I interrogated.

"There can be no doubt," he said, "but—with an expressive shrug.

"Life would run smoother if it had fewer 'buts' and 'ifs' and 'perhapesses.' What you would say," said I, "is that there are no proofs. Certainly they must be somewhere."

"But to find them!" cried he.

"I shall make the effort. The pursuit is interesting."

The expression in his eyes told me that he had formed an opinion in regard to my part. "Ah, these journalists!" as he passed on.

Everything seemed so near and yet so far. Proofs? Where could they be found if Wentworth had them not? If only there had been a trinket, a crest key even, with the Hohenphalla crest upon it! I shook my fists in despair. Gretchen was so far away, so far!

I went in search of her. She was still surrounded by men. The women were not as friendly toward her as they might have been. The prince was standing near. Seeing me approach, his teeth gleamed for an instant.

"Ah," said Gretchen, "here is Herr Winthrop, who is to take me to supper."

"It was cleverly done, I thought. Even the prince was of the same mind. He appreciated all these phases. As we left them and passed on toward the supper room I whispered:

"I love you!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

To a Chattanooga firm has been awarded the contract for the manufacture of 200 cast iron artillery gun carriages for the Shiloh battlefield park. There were many competitors.

Miscellaneous Reading.

TILLMAN DENIES IT ALL.

Characteristic Explanation of Strange Senatorial Proceedings.

Clemson special of Saturday to the Greenville News: When Senator Tillman, who