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THE OUTLAW



By Arthur Stringer

It All Started When Cosgrave Set Out to Arrest the Girl Whose Turban Was of Forbidden Herring Gull Plumage, Topped off With a Snowy Egret.

COSGRAVE first saw the snowy egret as he turned into Fifth avenue at Thirty-third street. He had intended walking south, to his publisher's office, but he promptly headed north. For that egret was to him very much what an aniseed bag might be to a beagle or what a red rag might be to a bull.

Nor was it the snowy egret alone that awakened his anger. The thing seemed doubly offensive because the wind-tossed white feathers cascaded about a small and slightly tilted turban most unmistakably made of herring-gull's plumage. And both were interdicted; were illegal as hat ornaments. He had no knowledge as to who was wearing these forbidden decorations, but he had his own opinion of the woman who would deck herself out in such things. She was a violator of the law, an enemy of the precious wild life that her petty vanities had all but exterminated.

Yet so briskly did she walk up the early morning avenue that Philip Cosgrave was compelled to follow her for three blocks before catching up with her. When he did so he tapped her on the arm, very much as a patrolman might. She turned sharply, at that unlooked-for affront, and made her shoulder movement away from him a perceptible one. But his stern eye was fixed on the snowy egret.

"I suppose you know you're breaking the law in wearing those feathers," he proclaimed, noticing for the first time that the soft gray of the herring-gull plumage matched the soft gray of her eyes.

"What feathers?" she demanded, with open hostility on her face. It was a pretty enough face, but Cosgrave had no intention of permitting a pretty face to come between him and a moral obligation.

"The feathers on your hat there," he announced, with all the acerbity at his command.

"Is it any particular business of yours what I wear on my hat?" she challenged, resuming her walk up the avenue and compelling him to fall into step or be left behind. She was looking straight ahead of her by this time, and he noticed the quick flush of annoyance which had deepened the coloring of her oval cheek.

"It's very much my business," asserted Cosgrave, nettling under her obvious contempt. "It's my business, not only as a member of the Migratory Birds' Protective association and an officer of the Audubon society, but also as a decent citizen decently interested in seeing our laws enforced."

"From which I am to infer that I'm not even a decent citizen," she said, smiling for the first time. Her face, he noticed, was not as hard as he had expected. The head wearing the snowy egret, indeed, had just nodded gayly to an old lady in sables, stepping out of a limousine.

"That," he told the girl at his side, "is not the important point."

"Then what is?" she demanded.

"The fact that there's a law against the use of the snowy egret and herring-gull plumage as apparel and that you are at the present moment breaking that law."

Her gloved hand went up to the tilted turban, giving it, if possible, a slightly saucier angle than before.

"Would you be good enough to tell me of that law?" she said, quite solemnly. And Cosgrave explained to her the enactment of the migratory birds' convention act, after which he told her, as graphically as he could, how the dorsal plumes of the American egret, the *Ardea candidissima*, were plucked during the breeding season, and how such pot-hunting for venal milliners had almost succeeded in exterminating one of the loveliest of the native herons.

"You know, I never thought of that," she said, favoring him with her first oblique glance of appraisal.

"Too few of you do," snapped Cosgrave, determined not to be sidetracked by any last-moment parade of humility.

"But in some cases," she gently suggested, "there may be extenuating circumstances."

"That," he coldly announced, "is a matter for the court to decide."

"The court?" she echoed, sweeping him with still another sidelong glance.

"They are maintained for precisely that purpose," he announced.

"Am I to understand, then, that you insist on proclaiming me a lawbreaker?"

The peach-blow that had come into her cheeks, Cosgrave noticed, had now given way to a gardenia-white.

"Since you are breaking the law, I intend to see that you're arrested," he said, with a firmness which kept her silent for a full half block.

"Do you realize just how humiliating that might be to me?" she finally asked.

"It should be humiliating to any woman of imagination, of imagination enough to perceive how much suffering her vanity can impose on the dumb creatures of this earth!"

He spoke with more heat, perhaps, than he had intended. But in the tilted turban and the woman beside him he found something on which to center his nebulous hatred for these city peacocks who decked themselves out in feathers and furs ravaged from the bodies of God's helpless creatures of the wild.

"You accuse me of cruelty, of unthinking cruelty," the girl beside him was saying. "But don't you think that deliberate cruelty is quite as bad as the other kind? And you are being deliberately cruel with me."

"My own feelings," he announced, "are not important. The law exists, and you broke it."

"How aren't you really breaking another sort of law?" she sweetly inquired.

"What law?" he demanded.

She glanced up at his face again before she answered

him. And he resented the momentary show of timidity in her eyes.

"The law of chivalry, of tolerance," she told him, "of generosity toward the weak."

"You don't impress me as weak," he curtly informed her. "But I am a woman."

"A woman subject to the laws of your land," he corrected.

"But we have so many laws," she protested with a serio-comic little gesture.

"And an equally regrettable frequency of violation," he amended, set in his purpose that no feminine blandishments should steer him away from the straight and narrow paths of duty. And that duty seemed plainer than ever as he looked up and saw, a block ahead of him, the blue uniform of a policeman on patrol.

"Can't we go somewhere and talk this over quietly?" the girl suggested, also conscious, apparently, of the officer's approach.

"I imagine we've said about all there is to say," was Cosgrave's altogether unsympathetic rejoinder. He had been

with another none to flattering inspection of the man beside her.

Cosgrave, at that, felt that he had endured about enough.

"On the contrary, officer, I want this woman arrested!" "So yuh want her arrested?" repeated the still impassive Celtic giant. "And just why should yuh be wantin' her arrested?"

"For breaking the law in wearing those egret feathers on her hat," announced Cosgrave.

Timothy McArthur, the officer, inspected the egret feathers.

"And how'm I t'know them's egret feathers?" inquired the large bodied man in blue.

"Egret," corrected Cosgrave.

"Well, whatever you call 'em, they suit the lady fine, to my way o' thinkin'. They may be egret feathers and they may be rooster feathers. But yuh've got a devil of a lot to do, you big omadhaun, wanderin' around and pickin' your long nose into what a gerril's wearin' on her head. Yuh' letter be gettin' back to the millinery department."

"I don't care who yuh are or what yuh are. Yuh be on you way. And if yuh speak to this gerril again I'll gather yuh in so quick yuh won't know an egret feather from the tail of a Cochinchina!"

The one thing Cosgrave noticed was that the oval face under the herring gull turban was wearing the softest of smiles.

"Well meet again perhaps," she said over her shoulder.

"I hope that never happens," retorted Cosgrave, with a glance at the nightstick of the intervening Celtic giant, implacable as fate, pointing in a direction opposite to that which the girl in the snowy egret was taking.

But Cosgrave and the snowy egret girl did meet again. They met unexpectedly on the second evening after his lecture on "The Gulf Bird Sanctuaries," when he was dining at the Wolcotts'.

He was unaware of her presence there until a footman, going from group to chattering group, passed around the cocktails. She turned on him suddenly as he took a diffident sip of the amber mixture which meant so little to him.

"Doesn't your conscience trouble you?" she demanded, with an accusatory eye on the glass in his hand.

"Why should it?" he asked, noticing that she was looking lovelier than ever in her dinner gown of nasturtium red. But there was no mistaking the enmity behind her pose of levity.

"Don't you know that you are breaking one of the laws of this land?" she magisterially inquired.

"I never thought much about it," he retorted as he put down his glass.

"But there are so many who never think much about it," she pointed out with mock solemnity. He was able to laugh a little, but he could see that she was still intent on making him ridiculous.

"Few of us are perfect," he observed, though he was wondering at the time why nothing stood so devastating as the scorn of a beautiful woman.

"Yet so many of us demand perfection in others," she proclaimed. She said it light-heartedly enough, but he was not unaware of the saber sheathed in rose leaves. He stood studying her face with an impersonal intentness which brought the faintest touch of color into her cheek.

"I fancy it's going to be hard for us to be friends," she observed, with her disconcerting small smile.

"I rather imagine it's going to be quite impossible," he found the brutality to retort.

He was sorry, the next moment, that he had said it, and he was still sorrier when, a few minutes later, he found himself confronted by the ingubrious pleasure of taking her to dinner. He had no wish to nurse grudges. But he was not unconscious of the enmity which she necessarily entertained for him. And he had small liking for the type. He flattered himself that he knew it only too well, the youthfully arrogant and unchallenged, the indulgent and self-indulgent and blightingly derisive jeune fille of modern America, imperious in her pursuit of pleasure, trading casually on her beauty, and cynically persuaded that both the problems and the laws of this world were for persons other than herself. What began to puzzle him, however, was her sustained air of meekness. It reminded him, in a disturbing sort of way, of the dissimulative wounded-bird movements of the mother pheasant when frightened from the nest.

"It's a small world, isn't it?" she observed toward the end of a dinner which could still show perversely pleasant moments to him. "Especially to the evil-doer."

He asked her why she said that.

"Because I've discovered that it's on Lake Trevor you have your bird sanctuary. And I find that I'm to spend a month with the Wolcotts', almost side by side with it."

"I shudder to think of the consequences!" He was able, however, to smile as he said it.

"Your fears, I feel, are quite groundless," she countered, with her quiet smile. "I intend, in fact, to find out a great deal about bird life."

"I trust it will change your point of view," he remarked, wondering why she should sit studying him with such a meek and meditative eye. Yet his sense of triumph in scoring against a too open-handed enemy was not as enduring as it might have been. For, a few minutes later, he had the dubious pleasure of hearing her recite to a youth whom she addressed as "Kennie" the lines of a new song which she lightly asked him to set to music.

"It ends up, Kennie, something like this:

Remember, gentle neighbors, then,
Tis wrong to tease the bat;
Embrace the badger in his den,
Be friendly with the rat,
And love the little birdies when
They love you, tit for tat;
And never pluck the jenny wren
To decorate your hat!"

Cosgrave turned slowly about and looked at the girl with flushed cheeks.

"Your poem," he solemnly informed her, "is much prettier than the motive which inspired it."

She merely shrugged a slender shoulder under its slender metal strap. "Motives," she casually remarked, "are



"I loved you and wanted to be with you."

examining her with a less impersonal glance. It annoyed him, in a vague sort of way, to discover her crown of interdicted plumage perversely added to her beauty.

"And you insist on this public humiliation?" she asked, without looking at him.

"I insist that a law which I helped to frame should be respected," he maintained. And she nodded, comprehendingly, after turning that statement over for a moment or two.

"You must hate me very much," she said, with her meditative Mona Lisa smile.

He resented that essentially feminine tendency to reduce everything to the personal. His one desire, he reminded himself, was to remain judicial. And he strove to sustain that pose by staring pointedly at her headgear as he remarked: "I am a member of the Audubon society."

"Which means, I take it, that you love birds much more than you do human beings," she suggested, not without bitterness.

"I'm afraid you will be quite unable to argue me out of what I've accepted as a matter of conscience," he announced to the Philistine in silken hosiery and serge beside him. The only soul she could claim, he began to feel, was that shining shell of one which she got every morning from her milliner and her masseuse.

"O, it's conscience," she said, with a small hand gesture of enlightenment. And he flushed, in spite of himself, as she added: "That, of course, leaves it quite hopeless!"

Yet, even as she spoke, she quickened her pace and stepped slightly ahead of him. Before he could fully realize the meaning of that maneuver she stopped short before the approaching figure in the blue uniform.

"Officer," she promptly proclaimed, "this man is annoying me."

The opaque Celtic eye leisurely and none too approvingly inspected Cosgrave's person. Then it quite as leisurely and much more approvingly inspected the girl wearing the herring-gull turban.

"Do yuh know him?" inquired the policeman.

"I never saw him before he accosted me here on the street," was her spirited reply. And Cosgrave winced perceptibly at the "accosted."

"Do yuh want him arrested?" inquired the officer.

"I certainly do not want him annoying me," retorted the girl.

"Will yuh lay a charge?" insisted the arm of the law,