

so terribly hard to fathom." Cosgrave, with the advance of spring, found himself an unexpectedly busy man. He was not so preoccupied, however, that he failed to note when the over-elaborate "camp" of the Wolcott's was opened for the season. Nor was he, with his trained sharpness of vision, altogether unconscious of the arrival of an alert-bodied young lady, who in rather resplendent sweaters and peg-top breeches went paddling and tramping and angling about his beloved domain. She hailed to him once, across the bay, and he quite solemnly hailed back to her. So when he came face to face with her, while fungus hunting in a bit of woods on the mainland, she seemed reprovingly reserved in her manner and he went on his way again, oppressed with a vague sense of disappointment.

But he found himself unconsciously on the lookout for the resplendent sweaters and the alert young body which wore them. The thought of her wandering about his lonely hills added an unfamiliar touch to that familiar landscape, sending him about his devious tasks with a feeling of being immersed in a wide but undefined adventure. He tried to cooey together a claim that he disliked this intrusive young person with the perplexing mocking eyes. But he was never quite able to make out a case. And when young men arrived at the Wolcotts' for the week-end Cosgrave was indetermably jealous of those gayly-apparelled youths who disturbed his nesting water fowl and went fishing on his private reserve.

It was when returning from an investigation of certain of these depre-dations that he unexpectedly encountered Caroma Reeder. He found her beside his hilltop trail, huddled against a rock. He stopped short, disturbed by the quiescence of that customarily active figure.

"Are you hurt?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I've sprained my ankle," she replied with her fingers clasped about one of her high-laced tan brogans.

He knelt down beside her and examined the injured foot. She winced as he pressed on the leather-covered ankle.

"I'm afraid we'll have to get this shoe off," he announced, and proceeded to unlace it. And he noticed that she winced again as she carefully worked her foot out of the shoe.

"Now the stocking," he proclaimed.

But she demurred at that.

"It hurts too much," she objected, coloring a trifle.

So he re-examined the ankle through its ribbed woolen stocking. He could detect nothing alarming in its condition. There was no swelling that he could see, and there were obviously no broken bones, though she ventured a little cry or two of pain as his strong fingers explored the injured area.

"Can you walk?" asked Cosgrave, looking for the first time directly into her face. It impressed him as a singularly appealing face, with its misty gray eyes and its turkey-spotted small nose and its mobile red mouth with just a trace of willfulness about the curving line of the lips.

The girl shook her head in negation.

"I tried," she acknowledged. "But I couldn't quite manage it."

"Shall we try again?" he asked, quite impersonally.

"All right," she agreed, with no great parade of hopefulness.

They had considerable trouble in getting the shoe on again.

It was Cosgrave who laced it up, repeatedly asking if he was making it too tight. And it was Cosgrave who helped her to her feet and supported her with one stalwart arm while she essayed a none-too-promising effort to hobble along at his side.

"It's no use," she said, sitting down on a rock and nursing the injured ankle between her clasped fingers. "I think you'd better leave me here."

"And then what?" he asked.

"You might send somebody up from the Wolcotts to come and get me," she suggested, adding with unlooked-for meekness: "If you will be so kind."

Cosgrave laughed.

"I imagine I can manage you as well as anybody from the Wolcott house," he announced.

"How do you mean manage me?" she asked, massaging her foot with a meditative hand.

"I'll have to carry you," he told her, speaking as impassively as possible.

"Doesn't seem fair," she said, evading his eye.

"We can decide about that later," he told her. "The important point is to tell me when you're tired. Then we can try a new position."

He seemed very businesslike about it all. She had thought at first that he would carry her in his arms. Instead of that, however, he carried her in the approved manner of the woodsman when faced by such contingencies. He carried her "pick-a-back," with the weight of her body resting along his spine and her hands clasped about his neck and his own hands linked under her knees. It was, she supposed, a sensible and comfortable way of carrying people. But it began to impress her as deplorably lacking in dignity. She might have been a bag of meal on a miller's back or a bale of jute reposing on a stevedore's shoulder blades. And her gallant knight, as the journey proceeded, betrayed no undue tendency toward conversation.

"Would you mind letting me down a moment?" she said in a somewhat stifled tone of voice as they emerged from the wooded higher land and came within sight of the Wolcott land.

He did as she asked. He let her down as casually as though she were a child grown tired of a gambol. But his eyes were solemn as he studied her somewhat flushed face.

"I think I can manage by myself for the rest of the way," she found the courage to suggest. But Cosgrave would not hear of it.

"You're tired, of course," he admitted. "So this time we'll try another position."

"But it's you who must be tired," she protested.

"Not a bit of it," he stoutly asserted. "So take hold, and I'll have you home in 10 minutes."

The "taking hold" she found, consisted in being compelled to wrap one arm closely about his neck, for this time he was carrying her in his arms. And in this way he carried her right to the wide veranda of the Wolcott lodge, which he mounted with his silent and slightly-flushed burden amid a small chorus of ejaculations from the assembled company.

Cosgrave made it a point to ignore those jubilant and slightly-derisive cries. The one person he found it hard to forgive, however, was the knickerbockered youth with a languid smile who clicked a camera as Caroma Reeder came up the steps in his arms. That, Cosgrave felt, was going a bit too far.

"No, it's nothing serious," he solemnly assured Mrs. Wolcott. "It's merely that Miss Reeder has sprained her ankle. As you see she's not able to walk. So I'll send Dr. Angus over as soon as I can get in touch with him. I've found him a very dependable physician."

Then Cosgrave turned to the young man with the camera.

"I'd prefer," he announced with unexpected spirit, "not perpetuating the ridiculous." Whereupon he violently took possession of the camera, flung it to the floor, and crushed it with his heel.

There was a moment of silence as Cosgrave wheeled about and went down the steps.

"Isn't it amazingly like something out of the bronze-age?" murmured a young woman in a rose silk sweater.

"And a most amazing disregard for other people's property," added Kennie Fillmore, the rueful owner of the camera, as he stooped with a shrug to gather up the ruins.

It was a week later, when Cosgrave and Dr. Angus were fishing for rainbow trout in the back hills, that the man of medicine was prompted to comment on the case.

"Say, Phil, I'm afraid they've got the laugh on you down at the Wolcott cottage," he observed as he bent over a book of flies.

Cosgrave, without looking up, inquired as to the reason for this.

"You remember that city girl with the sprained ankle I went down to see?"

"Yes, I rather remember her," acknowledged Cosgrave.

"Well, there was nothing more wrong with her foot than there is with mine."

"You mean she could have walked if she wanted to?" asked Cosgrave, with deepening color.

The doctor nodded as he threaded a Coachman.

"I may be wrong, but I've got a lurking suspicion she laid a bet she'd make you carry her in."

Cosgrave sat thinking this over.

"Well, I carried her," he finally said.

"For about a mile and three-quarters, as I figure it out," commented the other, with just the ghost of a smile.

extraordinarily attractive young woman," said the man of medicine, who was left wondering why his companion of the reel should remain so morosely silent for the rest of the afternoon.

Philip Cosgrave wakened up to the fact that something was wrong with him. He was moody and abstracted and found little interest in his work. He also found himself thinking about Caroma Reeder a great deal more than he cared to acknowledge. He tried to tell himself that he disliked the girl, still doing his utmost to carpenter together a case against her. Then he found himself just as eagerly fabricating excuses for his wondering when he would have the good luck to see her again. He thought of a hundred things to say to her when that meeting should come about. And he ended up by asserting that he had no wish to see a person who had done her best to make him ridiculous.

Yet his customarily steady pulse quickened a little when he caught sight of her, one warm and lipped evening, on the sloping, sandy shore of Lake Trovor. She was sitting on a many-antlered pine root, as motionless as a beach bird, watching the sunset. And she merely smiled her Mona Lisa smile as he came and stood before her.

"I've a confession to make," she said, after a moment of silence.

"I don't want to hear it," he told



She was a violator of the law.

her, almost roughly.

"But I think you ought to know it," she asserted, with her eyes on the black fringe of the pines that brought the sunset closer.

"Ought to know what?" he asked, with an involuntary glance down at her saddle-black shoes.

"That I've contributed \$50 to the new bird sanctuary fund," she quietly announced.

"What prompted you to do that?" he inquired.

"You did," she acknowledged, turning her face to him. It impressed him as a singularly lovely face. And it also impressed him as an honest one at the moment. But he studied it long and earnestly, apparently in search for some trace of guile.

"I see you still don't approve of me," she finally asserted.

"It's your different efforts to make me appear as ridiculous as possible that I don't approve of," he amended.

"I'm sorry," she said with her barricaded smile.

"Why?" he demanded.

"Because I really wanted to know more about those things you're so interested in. I had no chance before of understanding." Then she added with just a touch of color in her cheeks: "The saints, you know, are only the sinners who kept on trying."

He sat down on the sand in front of her.

"I wonder if you'd actually let me teach you a few of the things I've learned about nature?" he questioned. The twilight was deepening slowly about them and from far out toward Thor island a bitter cry.

"On one condition," he said, with quite unlooked-for grimness, as he rose to his feet.

"What is that?" she asked, following his movement.

He looked at her with an eye which might at first glance have been accepted as a hostile one. It betrayed more of the emotional upheavals which were making a small Venusius of his heart than he imagined.

"What is that?" she repeated, with the last of the laughter gone from her lips. And they were adorable lips, he felt, with their half-poised pout of solemnity.

"That you marry me!" was his abrupt declaration. And that ultimatum seemed to surprise him almost as much as it must have surprised the young woman confronting him. It became, in fact, her turn to remain silent for a disturbingly prolonged space of time.

"I'm sorry you said that," she finally observed.

"Why?" he inquired.

"Because that's something which Kenneth Fillmore has just asked me to do!"

He felt that the bottom had dropped out of his world. But he did his best to bear up.

"Who's Kenneth Fillmore?" he demanded.

"That's the man whose camera you smashed up the other day," she casually explained.

"Then I wish I'd smashed more than the camera," he retorted, though he laughed a little as he said it. "And are you going to marry him?"

"That was what I was thinking about as I sat here. Kenneth, you see, doesn't take life very seriously."

"While I rather imagine you'd accuse me of taking it too seriously," he prompted.

"On the contrary," she quietly amended, "I'd accuse you of taking yourself too seriously!"

That seemed to give him a great deal to think over.

"Life with me has been rather a solemn business," he finally acknowledged. The unexpected note of humility in his voice seemed to disturb her.

"While with me, obviously, it hasn't been solemn enough."

"Then we each ought to have something for the other," he sturdily maintained.

She laughed, but her gray eyes were as sober as the light above the black-fringed pinelands.

"I'm afraid we've made a very bad beginning," she ventured.

"Then we ought to work hard for a better ending," he valorously informed her.

Her sigh was an audible one.

"I'm afraid," she observed, "we still don't understand each other."

"But I want to understand you," he found the courage to say.

"I imagine law breakers would never greatly appeal to you."

He winced at that. But the mere fact that he could smile seemed to imply that she had already shaken a little of the solemnity out of him.

"I break a few myself," he countered. And she rewarded him with a smile. It was plain to see that he was getting on a bit.

"But if I told you I was already engaged to Kenneth Fillmore what would you do?"

"I'd be sorry," he replied.

"Is that all?"

"What else could I do?" he demanded.

"I'm afraid," she said, and her sigh this time was an inaudible one, "that you're much better at hunting birds than human beings."

He couldn't quite catch the drift of her thought. But her allusion to bird hunting brought his none too happy mind back to nature with him. And he asked her, meekly enough, if he couldn't hope for at least one day with her in the open.

close. And he seemed unable, as he lay holding post mortems on his lost and wasted life, to cope with an emergency which called for characteristics which he did not possess. For it appeared to be only too true what Caroma Reeder had said. He had spent more time in studying the ground squirrel and the shorebird than he had in studying men and women. Especially women. And the bewildering light that could come and go in a woman's eyes. And especially when they were gray eyes, the unfathomable gray of woodland valleys and wind-stirred waters. Women, in fact, had always remained an enigma to him. He had always taken them seriously. And now

he longed above everything else to win the confidence of one particular woman, to understand her moods and the motives behind her over-paradoxical movements, he merely intimidated her with his uncouthness and antagonized her with his solemnities.

That he'd long to win Caroma Reeder's confidence became only too self-evident as he made her comfortable in the bow of his slender-bodied Lake Rice canoe and pushed off from the shore. But it was more than her confidence he wanted, he realized as he headed for Thor island, lying low on the water-riffled water, a good seven miles away. He knew then that he wanted the woman himself. He wanted her so badly that he could think of nothing more desirable than to merely keep on paddling, to keep on with her into never-ending waterways until all the rest of the world was left behind them.

"I think I like you best this way," she said as she watched his sinewed brown arms send the tilted canoe along the hooker-green surface of the lake.

"Why," he asked as he noted the odd mixture of gold and mahogany in her hair.

"Because you look masterful," she told him. "And women like masterful men."

That, like so many of her little speeches, gave him a great deal to think about. It also revived in him the impulse to keep on paddling into the ever-receding distances.

But instead of doing so they landed on the desolation of Thor island, where he beached the canoe and lifted out the carefully-packed supper things, after which he took her scrambling over rocks and briars and reed-py swales and showed her one of his precious wood duck nests.

She knelt beside him as he lifted away the screening litter of sticks and twigs and showed her the protective down plucked from the mother bird's breast and the warm eggs beneath it, explaining how that covering of down could keep the eggs from chilling for a whole day, if need be, should the mother duck be driven away from her nest. Then he adjusted his binoculars and let her study the grebes and divers and sandpipers at long range, and led her to a red-capped blackbird's nest filled with its clamorous young, over which the wondering girl emitted little cries of delight. And they wandered about the desolate little island until the sun began to slope down toward the west and Cosgrave awakened to the much more desolate discovery that his day was slipping away.

So he found a sheltered spot and gathered what wood he could and left her to feed the fire while he went back to the canoe for the supper things.

He went with a heavy heart, glancing morosely back at the vital young figure bent over the smoking campfire. He walked dourly and deliberately to the little cove where the canoe had been reached, stopping still again to look back and making note of the fact that the girl's stooping body was no longer in sight. Then, after a moment of grim silence, he did an unaccountable and inexcusable thing. He slid the canoe slowly down into the water, let it float there for a second or two, and pushed it out on the lake.

It drifted away in a languid half-circle, veered about again, and felt the impulse of the gentle offshore breeze. Then it moved less languidly. By the time he had gathered up his camp blanket and skillet and belt hatchet and hamper of provisions it was a good 50 yards away, bearing for the open lake.

Half way back to his campfire he stopped and looked again. By this time it had doubled its distance from the cove, standing high in the water and getting the full effect of the breeze. And he knew that it was gone for good.

There was a grimness to the set of his jaw as he reined Caroma beside the fire. His silence in fact, caused her to look up and sweep him with a quick glance of interrogation.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Why?" he temporized, as he turned to put more wood on the fire.

"You look so solemn," she light heartedly affirmed.

"I've just discovered how hard"

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