

A MAN, A GIRL, AND A BOAT

“HERE we are at last, Bess,” said I, as I gave the oar a deft twist and shot the light skiff into a little bay completely overshadowed by the tall pines along the banks and almost indiscernible from the outer lake on account of a natural screen of creeping vines at its entrance.

“Oh, how charming,” cried Bess, rapturously. “Tell me, Jack, what fay has made you her confidante?”

“None,” said I, “but I wish one would,” and I looked at her admiringly.

“And have you christened it yet?” she asked, all unconscious of my ardent glance.

“Not until this very moment. Henceforth it is Cupid’s Cove.”

She glanced up then. I smiled saucily at her.

“Didn’t I warn you that I should propose when we got here?” I said.

“Please don’t be so foolish, Jack. At least not until we’re ready to leave,” said she.

“Why not?” I asked. “Didn’t you tempt fate by coming? And now would you wish to shirk the consequences? That is what I call cowardice.”

However, contrary to expectations, Bess did not seem to resent the implied slur.

“Oh, what lovely lilies,” she cried enthusiastically, utterly ignoring my last words. “And just beyond my reach, too. Row over a little, Jack, so I can get them; there, that will do,” in response to a slight pressure on one oar.

Then up went the ruffled sleeves to the elbows, revealing arms as white and graceful as the ideal, and the curly head bent over the lilies. But as she leaned forward her kerchief fell from her belt to the bottom of the skiff. I reached down quickly and picked it up, managing to transfer it to the breast pocket of my jacket without being observed. I always had a failing for those little linen and lace affairs.

“Ugh!” said Bess, as her fingers touched the water. “It’s so cold.”