



THE STORY

CHAPTER I—Charming, wealthy Gabriella (Gay for short) Graham, engaged to Todd Janeway, returns to a cabin in the Maine woods accompanied by a friend, Kate Oliver. The idea of a stay at the cabin occurred to her when she received a key to it following the death of her godfather, Uncle John Lawrence. The two girls notice immediately that someone has been, and probably is, living in the cabin. Kate suspects that Gay knows the identity of the mysterious occupant.

"Probably of no greater importance," he said with a deprecating laugh.

Kate shouldn't have, Gay thought, feeling again that reluctant but compelling sympathy for John. Kate was getting back at her. She deserved it, perhaps, but he didn't. Even six years ago when he'd barely started, he'd been very earnest about his work. Kate shouldn't have—She wanted, somehow, to make amends.

"I suggested photography," Gay said. "I thought possibly the materials in your laboratory were things Uncle John had left."

"I'm sorry. It's just that—" He ran his hand over an impatient gesture across his crisp dark hair. "It probably won't amount to anything, but I want to see it through. If I leave here now, all that I've done will be lost."

"I suppose I should be a lady and leave you in peace," Gay said quietly, quite steadily, but with a silken

thread of retaliation running through her voice. "Unfortunately, that isn't so simple, either. I'm making an experiment."

"Yes, you must make it here?" "Yes," she said, after a moment. "I came for that purpose. I must make my—experiment here."

A pause followed, not warm and intimate as the first had been. This was a truce, a break in active hostilities. John walked to the table and picked up his pipe. Gay stood half-leaning against the back of the chair, watching the movements of his hands in the yellow cone of lamp-light. She remembered them, brown and strong, against a canoe paddle, brown in lamplight as she saw them now, moving chess-men across a waxed apple-wood board, lean and brown but unsteady as they were now, on the sleeve of a white fur coat. Hands had an identity of their own. She would have recognized them anywhere. Strange and very disquieting. Her throat ached and, suddenly, humbly, she felt the hot sting of tears behind her eyelids.

Kate broke the silence. "Well, certainly no one is leaving tonight," she said practically. "It's after ten o'clock now."

Gay glanced at her in gratitude which held, as well, an element of surprise.

"You can draw straws in the



"I must make my—experiment here."

morning," Kate continued. "Or perhaps one or the other of these experiments will be completed by then."

"Of course," he said, after only a slight hesitation. "There are, unfortunately, no hotel accommodations nearer than Machias."

"And that," Kate said cheerfully, "would, I think, be carrying matters much too far."

"I agree with you," He smiled appreciatively at Kate. "There's a cot in the room I work in. You can have the larger room, there. I see you've brought blankets and there is linen, I think." He started toward the door. "I'll get my things out of the way."

"Don't bother," Kate said, starting with her tray toward the kitchen. "We can manage just for tonight."

They were ignoring her, Gay thought, making plans in which she had no voice. He was friendly enough with Kate, Gay resented that friendliness from which she was excluded. She felt, again, a compelling urge to attract and hold his attention.

"John—" she said. He stopped at the door, turned, stood waiting for her to continue. Kate, at the kitchen door, glanced back over her shoulder.

Gay held herself very erect. "I will not be leaving tomorrow," she said, conscious of and regretting the arrogance in her voice. She would have liked to reach him through friendliness. Arrogance was too obvious and too petty an approach. But whatever he felt for her it was not friendliness. The glance he exchanged, now, with Kate impelled her to add, "Kate can do as she likes, of course. I shall stay."

"Which means—" he asked. "That I will appreciate it if you'll remove your things from the room." He was silent for a moment. Then, "Certainly," he said civilly.

"Now, Gay—" Kate began with some asperity, paused, rolled her eyes upward, compressed her lips and went out into the kitchen. John remained standing in the opposite doorway. The slanting smile appeared as her eyes met his.

"The long arm of coincidence," he said.

"It is—incredible." "Not too incredible. You might have found me here any one of a number of times during the past three years."

"I had no thought of finding you."

"I know that." He had, she thought, interpreted the statement as a rebuff. The smile vanished. "I'm sorry to be a—complication."

He was a complication. He had been a complication since the night they'd driven together through Central Park, before that, even, since the summer here at the lake. She realized, now, how largely he'd been responsible for her dissatisfaction, her restlessness, her uncertainty concerning her approaching marriage to Todd. A complication? That was too unimportant a word. Looking at John, silent and unapproachable in the doorway, feeling his presence here in every tingling nerve, with every racing heartbeat, Gay knew she had found the answer to troubling questions. He was necessary to her, had always been, since she was fifteen years old. Todd was not a necessity. It was as simple, as hopelessly, frighteningly involved as that.

CHAPTER III

He'd have to clear out, now, tonight, before he saw her again. John walked, restless, in long plunging strides, along the rutted clay-shell road. The experiment was less important than what was certain to happen to him if he remained at the cabin. He'd fought that battle twice before, and he had no intention of exposing himself to the necessity of fighting it again.

But wasn't that necessity already upon him? He'd wondered how he would feel if, by chance, he should meet her again. Chance, assisted by Uncle John, had given him that knowledge. He felt as he'd felt when they parted six years ago. There was something between them which time and separation had not altered, more vital than it had been three years, six years ago, because they were more mature, now, more emotionally aware.

Not that he hadn't been emotionally aware of her that summer she'd

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