



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.

CHAPTER II—While the girls talk the mystery man returns. Gay, surprisingly enough, introduces the man to her. He is John Houghton, a young doctor whom Gay had known in previous years. Soon after arriving at the cottage Gay discovered his identity through an old monogrammed sweater. Immediately aggressive, Gay asks him by what right he is in the cabin. His right, she finds, is greater than her own. He, too, possesses a key, but more than that, is heir to it from his Uncle John, Gay's godfather. Gay is high handed with him, and he states courteously that he will leave. Looking at him in the doorway, her old feelings return. She knows that he is more necessary to her than is Todd Janeway, the man she is to marry.

CHAPTER III—Before he leaves, John goes for a walk. When he returns he finds Gay sitting before the fireplace. They begin talking on a more friendly basis, and she asks him to reconsider his decision to leave. The next morning brings a different feeling, and John decides to remain for his vacation—one more week.

CHAPTER IV—The night before Gay and Kate are to return home to New York John gets an urgent request to call at a nearby farm. Gay accompanies him while he cares for the patient. Returning to the cabin at a late hour, John stops the car. He tells Gay that he loves her, and she admits that it is necessary to her happiness.

The windows were raised. Through the screening came a murmur of voices inside the cabin. Gay took a few steps away from him, glanced in, then turned. In the light flooding through the window he saw that her face was grave and startled.

"Who?" The question caught in his throat. He took a step.

"Todd is here," she said and was silent.

He caught her arm, drew her close to him.

"Gay," he asked, "you're all mine?"

Her face relaxed. She smiled up at him.

"All yours," she said.

Gay took a cigarette from a box on the table. Todd, seated in a chair beside the hearth, snapped a lighter. John, standing, half leaning against the chimney, struck a match. Both made a movement toward her.

"Thank you, but never mind." Her bright strained glance went from one to the other. She rose from the couch. "I'll do it my way. They taste better." She held the cigarette over the lamp chimney until its tip glowed red. "Do you remember, Todd? I learned that trick at Tory Wales' camp, the week-end we were there and a storm cut off the electricity."



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"Tory knows plenty of tricks." Todd sat back in his chair. "By the way, she's going to marry her Englishman."

"Do you hunt here?" Todd asked John, breaking a lengthening silence.

"Not often, now," John replied civilly. "I used to when I was in school. That head there on the wall was my first trophy."

"It's a good one," Todd rose, walked across the room to examine the deer head on the wall. John joined him. They talked of hunting, diffidently at first and then with increasing interest.

Yes, Todd was attractive. He wore his well-cut clothes with a nonchalant air and his manner, even in this difficult situation, was poised, considerate, assured. In comparison John seemed a little clumsy, diffident, unsure. What was it in him that aroused a more devastating emotion than, in all the years of knowing him, she had ever felt for Todd? Her eyes moved along the back of his leather jacket to his crisp dark hair. One lock, blatantly waving, stood erect at the crown of his head. Looking at it her brief resentment melted and in the emotion which swept through her further comparison was impossible. John! she called silently, John!

He turned as though she had spoken his name aloud. His expression softened. His mouth quivered. His thin dark face brightened at whatever it was he read in her eyes. Their long glance asked and answered before he turned again to Todd.

"If you'll excuse me," he said very courteously, "I'll go out and get in some wood."

"Can I help you?" Todd asked. "No, thank you," John picked up the wood-basket and went out of the room.

Silence followed. Gay tossed her cigarette into the fire. Todd walked to the hearth, stood looking at Gay through the lamplight. Her eyes rested on her hands, clasped tightly in her lap.

"It's pleasant here," he said, presently.

"Yes, isn't it?"

"Have you rested?"

"Oh, yes—"

"You look very well."

"I'm feeling—" She glanced up at him. "Todd—" she said and was silent.

"I know all about it, Gay," he said steadily. "You love him. You want to be free."

She nodded, then cried softly, "Todd dear, I'm so sorry."

His composure was shaken. An expression of pain darkened his bright hazel eyes. "What is it?" he asked in a low strained voice. "What have I done or not done?"

"Nothing. Come, sit here," she said gently. "You look so tired."

He sat beside her on the couch. His head dropped back against the cushions. His eyes closed. She took his hand, ran her fingers across the smooth tanned skin, the slender fingers. Presently he opened his eyes.

"Don't think I came to interfere," he said. "Kate called me—was it last night? I feel as though I'd lived a full life-time since then and died and—been buried."

"I supposed Kate had. She's looked so guilty all day. I don't care, except for you. I—we had intended to leave for home today but there were repairs to be done on the car."

"We?"

"Kate and I."

He sat forward.

"Then you aren't—?"

"I'm going home. You don't sup-

pose, do you, that I'd let you face the—cataclysm alone? Besides, a promise is a promise and if you—" "No!" His quick protest brought her to a stop. "God, no! I don't want you to marry me from a sense of duty or pity or kindness." He bent forward, his face in his hands. "But Gay, dear, why couldn't you have—"

"Did it—does it mean so much to you?" she asked wonderingly.

He sat erect, stared at her as though she were a stranger. "Don't you know—haven't you known what it's meant to me?"

"But it was all so—casual."

"I thought you wanted it that way. You've always ridiculed sentiment. I was glad that you wanted a church wedding. Not that I've enjoyed the clatter and fuss. But I wanted you to want all the old enchantments. Something old and something new—Isn't that the way it goes? And choir-boys and brides-maids and confetti. I wanted us to do all the silly things people went to before romance and sentiment went out of style. I thought that after we were married—"

"How little I've known you," she marveled.

"And how little I've known you. You've never spoken of this place, of John. I had no idea that when he came to your debutante party,



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you, he—Kate told me you didn't expect him to be here when you came—How long have you known him, Gay?"

"Since I was fifteen. Since the summer I spent here with Uncle John."

"Then that's the answer. I've known all along that you weren't as certain as I was."

"I tried. Forgive me—Oh, what must you think of me?"

He took her hands in his, looked at her steadily, very seriously. "I've always thought you were the loveliest person I've ever known. It's the habit of a lifetime. I can't break it now."

Tears streamed down over her cheeks. She made no attempt to check them.

"I want you to know," she said, "that I feel toward you now, at this moment, just as I've always felt. This—this thing that has happened hasn't changed it. I love you as my best and my dearest—friend."

"But you love John more?"

She nodded. "I'm so sorry," she cried pitifully. "I'm too fond of you to tell you less than the truth."

He laid her hands gently in her lap, rose, walked to the fire-place, stood with his back to her, lighting a cigarette. When he turned, his face was peaceful.

"I like him, you know." He smiled wearily through the smoke from the cigarette. "That put me at a disadvantage. I can't offer to knock his head off. I couldn't anyway. He's bigger than I am. It's all right, Gay."

"Is it?" Her voice was wistful. "I'm so fond of you. I think of riding our ponies together and Miss Kitty's dancing class and your first sail-boat and tea-dances and football games and skiing and house parties at Princeton."

His smile wavered. "And it doesn't

do any good?"

Her eyes fell away from his face, less peaceful now, drawn with fatigue and pain.

"It only makes me more certain," she said scarcely audibly.

He drew a long shaken breath. "Well, that's that." Glancing up she saw the corners of his lips lift in a difficult smile. "I should say, now, in a husky voice but with a smile, that I'll always love you, little girl, and if you ever need me or want me—" His voice altered. "I do say it, Gay. I've had considerable experience getting you out of scrapes. If you ever need me—"

"You're a dear, Todd. I wish—" He flung the cigarette into the fire, went to the couch, dropped down beside her, drew her close in a strong embrace.

"Gay, darling, can't you?" his lips whispered against her cheek.

She put aside his eager arms. Her hands lifted to his face. Her eyes met his, bright, now, with a sort of despairing hope that moved her to pity, gentleness, poignant regret.

"Todd, Todd, darling," she said. "I wish I could."

Gay opened the kitchen door, stepped outside, closed the door cautiously. John's figure detached itself from shadows at the edge of the clearing. She ran to meet him coming to meet her. Her arms caught her, lifted her, set her feet on the ground.

"I hoped you would come," he

said, his lips against her cheek.

"I shouldn't have. Kate heard me, I know, though she pretended to be asleep. And Todd feels so badly. I can't think of them. I can't think of anything except being with you." Her eyes lifted above his shoulder. "The moon," she cried softly, breathlessly.

"It's so peaceful." She sighed. "I can't imagine being in the city."

"Will you be?"

"I don't know. Mother and Robert, my step-father, are still in Southampton, I suppose. They'll be moving into the city, though, now that there isn't to be a wedding. Dad and Aunt Flora may not open the town house this winter. They're thinking of staying on at 'Dunedin.' I want to be where time will pass quickly. I don't know—"

"When you talk of your family—" John paused.

"What?" she asked quickly. "You sound—"

"I lose you," he said diffidently. "Here we are so close. When you go away—I can't even imagine what your life is there. If I could say every hour during the day, now Gay is waiting for the post-man, now she's playing tennis, now she's having lunch, now she's walking down town to get a soda at the drug-store, I would feel closer to you. But I can't imagine your life. It wouldn't be more difficult if you were a Chinese princess. It's just—I've nothing to go by," he finished lamely.

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