

OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT



two keys to a cabin

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SYNOPSIS

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 I—Continued

"I shall never forget," Kate removed her hat. "When I'm eighty, I'll tell my grand-nieces and nephews, the reason your old auntie is an invalid, my dears, is because once upon a time she drove twenty miles along a road in the state of Maine. No, I couldn't," she concluded. "I'd rather face unknown terrors than jounce over those twenty miles again tonight."

"Idiot!" Gay was placing the fluted china shade on the lamp. She was lovely-looking, Kate thought, feeling as she frequently felt when she consciously considered Gay's features and coloring, a slight shock of surprise and wonder. The light from the lamp striking up into her face accentuated the high cheekbones, the faint depressions beneath them, the line of her jaw and rounded chin, the curve of her brows above her long, very deep blue eyes. Certain endearing flaws redeemed her face from the still perfection of authentic beauty, the straight thick lashes, the dusting of freckles across her nose, her wide, sweetly curved mouth, the way her eyes narrowed and crinkled when she smiled . . .

"Do you know what I think?" Kate said darkly.

"I'm breathless," Gay said through a mouthful of apple.

"Those jars and the smell in the room over there," Kate gestured. "I think he's a mad genius inventing a poison gas to annihilate the world."

"Can I depend on that?" Gay moved away from the table. "It would be a let-down to discover that the smell was moonshine brewing." She bit again into the apple. "Our cabin-mate reads," she observed.

"That's encouraging," Kate said as Gay picked up a book which lay face-down upon the couch. "Your home is known by the books you own. What is it?"

"Something about — hormones." Gay stood looking quizzically down at the book in her hand.

"Hormones!" Kate repeated, then lowering her voice dramatically, "Gay! He's planning the perfect murder. He's one of those educated criminals you read about with a keen analytical mind. A doctor, perhaps, who—"

"A doctor—?" Gay's altered voice arrested Kate's attention. She glanced quickly toward the couch at the far side of the hearth. Gay's eyes were lowered over the book. She was turning pages with a quick fluttering motion of her fingers through the leaves. Kate heard a sound like a quickly drawn breath, faint but authentic.

"No name?" she asked, as Gay lifted her eyes.

"Nothing." The sound had been authentic, Kate thought. Gay had made a discovery.

Gay's eyes were, presently, aware of Kate. They dropped self-consciously before Kate's questioning glance. She placed the book on the

couch, tossed the remains of the apple into the fire.

"Let's investigate further," she said, after a moment. Her voice was only a little shaken but the peach-colored flush deepened and her eyes were very bright.

"That's a sensible idea," Kate said serenely. "Leave no stone unturned. Here, I'll carry that," she added as Gay turned to take the lamp from the table.

Gay did not demur. She walked to one of the doors leading onto the porch, opened it, stepped out into darkness. Kate followed with the lamp. The screened porch which extended across the front of the cabin disclosed nothing of importance. There were built-in bunks at either end covered with blankets and tarpaulins. There were fiber rugs, a table, chairs. The glass windows above the bunks were lowered but the front of the porch stood open to the night. Kate followed Gay's heels, clicking with a muffled sound on the rugs, more sharply on the floor between, stopped when she stopped at the long table in the center of the porch.

"The rain is over," Gay said. "Nice weather tomorrow."

Kate looked out through the screening. The yellow glow of lamp-light blurred her vision. She placed the lamp on the table and returned to stand beside Gay. Moonlight lay on the clearing in front of the cabin, marked the path sloping down a gentle grade to the edge of the lake. Beyond, the water stretched silver-gray, motionless, barely distinguishable from the land.

"I'm going to like this place," she said, breaking the silence.

"Of course you are," Gay's voice was hushed, as though the serenity of the scene before her had stilled her excitement. "I've never liked any place I've ever been as well."

Kate did not question her sincerity. It was curious, though, she reflected. She would not have supposed that Gay would find pleasure in the silence of the woods. Gay, she had thought, loved gaiety, lights, the theater, supper-clubs, dancing, moving from one scene of festivity to another with her smart young intimates. Her visits at "Dunedin," her brief stays at her father's town house, were quite obviously motivated by duty and endured with boredom. She had given every indication of preferring to be with her mother and step-father on Long Island, at their apartment in the city, in Florida or Bermuda, now that cut dividends and deflated values had closed to them the playgrounds of Europe. She, Kate, had scarcely seen the child since her engagement had been announced at "Dunedin" late in June until three days ago when she had turned up there and had proposed this trip to Maine.

What had happened the summer she'd spent here to make so lasting an impression upon Gay? Why, after six years, should she have wanted to return just at this time? Kate's thought continued as Gay, standing beside her, remained silent. She spoke frequently, and with affection, of Dr. Lawrence whom she called "Uncle John," her god-father, her father's life-long friend, who had, at his death, left the cabin to her. Kate remembered him very well. He'd had a brilliant mind and great charm of manner. She knew that Gay's father had not understood why his friend should have

been content to remain the Dean of a small college in his native state of Maine when wider and more remunerative opportunities were constantly being offered him. That was explained at his death. Dr. Lawrence had had a serious heart condition which had restricted his activities.

"It's the harvest moon, isn't it?" Gay stirred with a rousing motion at Kate's side.

"About half of it," Kate replied. "It should be full toward the end of the week."

"I hadn't counted on that," Gay laughed and slipped her arm companionably through Kate's arm. "I



Tipped the shade of the lamp so that the light shone directly into the closet.

wasn't thinking of moons. It's nice when the sun shines, too."

"I'm sure it is," Kate said. "Feeling as cool as I feel now was worth the trip."

"I thought you'd like it. You understand now, don't you, why I wanted to come?"

Kate was silent for a moment. Then, "Not entirely," she said.

She knew that the meaning behind the words was perfectly clear to Gay. The brief intimacy was shattered. Gay withdrew her arm. She was not resentful now, though, as she had been when Kate had first questioned her motives.

"Come along," she said, laughing, that shaken note of excitement trembling in her voice. "We have things to do. There are stones we have left unturned."

Gay walked directly to a closed door in the wall opposite the kitchen at the far end of the room.

"This is the master-bedroom," she said and opened the door.

Kate followed her into the room. It was considerably larger than the room off the kitchen and more comfortably furnished. The lamplight, bright where she stood, fading into shadows at the rim of the cone of light, disclosed a built-in bed at each end of the room. The mattress of one was covered with newspapers and upon it lay paper-wrapped bundles which might contain bedding. The other, beneath windows which overlooked the porch, was obviously

prepared for use. Between the windows in the side wall on a square of scenic linoleum stood a small stove with a length of jointed pipe.

"That looks familiar," Kate said. "It's called a chunk-stove, in case you're interested. There's one in the rectory study at home."

Gay gave no evidence of being interested in the stove. She stood looking down at the top of a low chest of drawers. Kate approached with the lamp.

"He shaves," she said, making note of a razor-socket, a shaving brush, a wooden soap-bowl. "Do you suppose he dresses for dinner?"

Gay ignored the question. She turned the brushes arranged with precision on the pine top of the chest. There were no monograms.

"There's the closet," Kate suggested.

Gay turned from the mirror, walked quickly halfway across the room and opened a door. Kate, following, tipped the shade of the lamp so that the light shone directly into the closet. A brown tweed suit, a top-coat, two pairs of khaki trousers, tan pajamas striped in wine-color, a wool dressing-gown which had seen service, a dark sweater with a letter stitched to the heavy ribbing, hung in a row from the hooks. A tan felt hat rested where it had been flung on the shelf above, and on the floor below a pair of brown oxfords stood beside brown leather moccasins laced with thongs. Nothing here, surely, Kate thought, and was about to voice the thought in words.

A sound held her silent, a quickly drawn breath audibly and slowly exhaled. Gay's hand touched the sweater. As Kate watched, her forefinger tipped with an almond-pink nail traced the letter stitched to the ribbing.

She turned after a moment.

"A completely anonymous person," she said and closed the door.

But Kate was not deceived. The gesture of the finger with the pink-tipped nail had been very revealing. If she had not known before, Kate thought, again both concerned and amused, Gay knew now, at least, who was here.

CHAPTER II

She couldn't force Gay to tell her. Kate regarded with satisfaction a bun on a long toasting-fork which she held over the bed of embers in the fireplace. She would be obliged to bear with her curiosity until the owner of the sweater appeared. He was taking his time about it. She and Gay had unpacked the rumble of the coupe. They had found a can of kerosene beside the back steps and had filled and lit every lamp in the cabin. They had brought two pails of water up from the lake. Preparations for a late supper were well under way, now, and still he had not appeared.

Gay was in the room which she'd called the master-bedroom changing her clothes. She'd gotten herself pretty wet bringing water up from the lake. Was it deliberate? Kate wondered, not without just reason for suspicion. What effect was she creating, now, before the mirror above the chest of drawers? She sounded very blithe and gay. Her voice, sweet and husky, influenced, no doubt, by the night-club singer who was the latest enthusiasm of Gay and her intimates, floated out through the open door. She was singing with the radio.

Appropriate, Kate thought. Whew! A smell of scorching recalled her attention to the bun. She removed it from the fork, placed it with three others on a plate keeping warm on the hearth. The coffee was boiling over. Kate rose from the foot-stool on which she sat and bent forward to lift the pot from the bed of embers. Pale brown bubbles foamed down over her hand. The exclamation she gave, sharp and unstudied, stopped the singing. Gay came into the room knotting a scarf around her neck.

"Salty language, my friend," she said. "Oh, you've burned your hand. Here, let me take it." She unknotted the scarf and wadded it around the handle of the pot. "Does it hurt terribly, Kate?"

"I'll probably survive," Kate flapped her injured hand. So the

key-note was to be simplicity, she thought, considering Gay's appearance with a quizzically lifted brow. She wore a dark wool skirt, a white wool jumper, ghillies and white angora socks. She had brushed her red-brown hair into a softly curling halo tied with a bright blue ribbon. Her face had a scrubbed and shining look. The freckles across her nose, undisguised by powder, were young and endearing. Kate smiled. "Isn't the lip-stick out of key?" she asked.

"It points the contrast," Gay, unabashed, returned Kate's smile. "The coffee smells marvelous." She poured the dark brown liquid into cups from the picnic-hamper arranged with plates and forks and spoons on the low table beside the hearth.

"Does it? I hadn't noticed," Kate returned to the foot-stool. "I can't smell anything except that perfume. It's certainly off-key."

"No it isn't," Gay pulled an arm chair close to the table, settled herself, bit into a sandwich. "It breathes of the great out-of-doors, crushed ferns, mossy dells, moorland heather. I bought it especially for the occasion."

Kate made a derisive gesture. "It breathes of Fifth Avenue and the Silver Room at the Ritz."

"Maybe you're right," Gay said amicably. "I adore hamburgers. I'm starved."

But she ate scarcely anything. She was listening, waiting, Kate thought, preoccupied with heaven only knew what thoughts, memories, anticipations. The continuing ripple of irrelevant comment was a smoke-screen deliberately raised. In the intervals of silence when she lay back in the chair, her arms crossed under her head, Kate observed her warily. She was excited. That was obvious. But, though she smiled, her face in repose reflected some more tender emotion.

"Don't you think—" she began and stopped short. There were sounds outside the cabin, an expiring exhaust, a motor suddenly silenced, a brake jerked on, a door resoundingly slammed. Kate, watching Gay, saw her start forward, saw the bright trembling expectancy, unrelieved by humor or bravado which, for an instant, illuminated her face. Then, conscious of Kate's intent and somewhat disconcerted gaze, she slowly relaxed. Composure slipped like a mask across her face. She sat back in the chair.

"Arriving in a cloud of dust," she said, her voice only a little shaken, her eyes turning from Kate to the door.

"Mud, which must certainly spoil the effect," Kate rose from the foot-stool. "Well, let us be brave. Me, I feel braver standing." She walked to the end of the hearth and stood leaning against the chimney, her arm on the low mantel shelf.

On the radio a baritone sang meltingly of a rendezvous on the Isle of Capri. Through the music came the sound of a door explosively opened, resolute footsteps thudding across the kitchen floor. Kate's eyes turned from Gay's profile to the door.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Building Survey Reveals American Idea of Home

When you suggest owning a new home to the average American, he or she thinks in terms of a house costing less than \$6,000, and contemplates between 10 and 15 years to pay off the debt.

These are some of the things that the committee on trends of the United States Savings and Loan league has learned from a questionnaire on public attitudes. Surveys were made of the attitudes of people selected at random, including 5 per cent factory workers, 7 per cent proprietors of businesses, 20 per cent housewives, 16 per cent professional workers and 12 per cent salesmen and miscellaneous employed others.

Results of the last six years emphasis by government agencies on the monthly repayment home mortgage, which is a century-old heritage from the savings and loan institutions, show prominently in the survey. Nine out of every 10 persons would prefer an amortized mortgage in financing their homes.