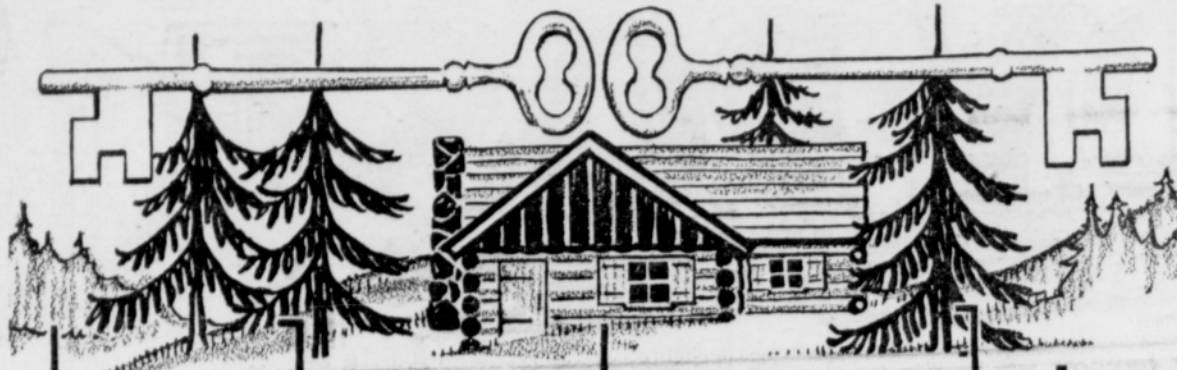


OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT



Two keys to a cabin

BY LIDA LARRIMORE
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SYNOPSIS

Charming, wealthy Gabriella (Gay for short) Graham, engaged to Todd Jane-way, 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. Katesuspects that Gay knows the identity of the mysterious occupant. While the girls talk, the mystery man returns.

CHAPTER II—Continued

"Impetuous," Kate murmured. "He seems to be in a hurry."

He appeared almost before she had completed the thought, a tall, rangy young man in corduroys and a leather coat, the brim of a dark felt hat pulled down over his eyes. He halted abruptly in the doorway, stood surveying the brightly lit room with an expression which changed, as Kate watched, from brusque inquiry to blank amazement. His face, lean and brown, with prominent cheek-bones and jaw line, was vaguely familiar. She had seen him somewhere, in a quite different setting. Somewhere—

"Hello, John," Gay's voice sounded completely natural, neither very cordial nor very aloof, certainly not at all surprised. Kate heard her rise from the chair. The young man in the door-way slowly removed his hat. His hair was thick and dark and cut short to thwart, Kate suspected, a tendency toward waves. She doubted whether, after the first quick glance, he was aware of her presence in the room. His eyes remained fixed upon Gay.

"Gay—" he said slowly, incredulously.

He had a beautiful mouth. "Beautiful" wasn't a word you used to describe a man, Kate told herself. It was beautiful, though, generous, sensitive, expressive. Wondering, recognition kindled in his dark eyes. For an unguarded moment, some strong emotion gave his dark, rather grave face a glancing brilliance. Kate found herself, in that moment of silence, almost holding her breath.

"I have the advantage, John," Gay said. "I knew it was you who was here."

The brilliance faded out of his face. Kate saw his mouth set a little grimly.

"You usually have, haven't you?" he asked quietly.

"Not always." The question seemed to have shaken Gay's composure. She turned to Kate. "Kate," she said, "Miss Oliver, may I present—Is it—Doctor Houghton now?" she asked, turning again to the tall young man in the doorway.

"Doctor Houghton," he affirmed. He smiled at Kate a little diffidently. "I've met Miss Oliver," he said.

"Certainly. How - do - you - do?" Kate remembered now. She had the answer. This was Dr. Lawrence's nephew, John, who'd come with him to Gay's debutante party. This was the young man with whom Gay had stolen away from the party that night. She, Kate, had seen them returning. She remembered now. Gay's face, soft and bright, framed in the collar of a white fur coat, upturned to the tall young man bending to speak to her in the dimly lit passage that led to a side-door of the ball-room.

She had the answer but it did not relieve her concern. There was something between Gay and this young man. Kate felt it vibrating

in the air of the room though the words they spoke were casual. This was the motive, then, whether she'd known he was here or the meeting was a coincidence. This, he, was why she had wanted to come.

Kate gave a distracted thought to Gay's family, to a blond young man with charming manners whom she liked very much.

"Heaven help us!" she said silently, the shadow of events to come lying darkly across her mind. And then, because her rectory past would pop up now and then, "The prayers of the congregation are requested," she added.

"Of course you've met Kate." The singing vibration was in Gay's voice. "I'm sorry. I had forgotten."

"I hadn't." He took a few steps forward into the room. "Miss Oliver rescued me, on one occasion, from a fate worse than death."

"I remember," Kate said. Gay glanced at her quickly. Kate was lighting a cigarette. Her eyes in the spurt of flame from the match were twinkling under the frown that knotted her brows. "You had," she added, speaking to John, "a tendency to bolt into empty rooms."

"It was my first debutante party," he said. His diffident half-smile widening into an engaging grin, excluded Gay. That studied indifference enraged her now as it had when she was fifteen. She had, she discovered, exactly the same impulse to do something, anything, to attract and hold his attention.

"You're looking well," she said. "You're looking well, too." His eyes, regarding her steadily across the space which separated them, held a faintly ironical expression which she remembered very well. "I'm relieved." The engaging grin slanted side-wise. "Your photographs have given me the impression that you'd been skipping your vitamins and losing too much sleep."

"My photographs—" Gay questioned. "The press has been giving you considerable space recently," he said in reply. The press! Had they done something stupid at home? Gay's eyes flew to meet Kate's startled glance. Kate's expression was not reassuring. She looked as though she was resigning herself to some inevitable disaster. Gay turned again to John.

"This time you have the advantage," she said. "We haven't seen the papers for two days."

She fancied, for a moment, that he, as well as Kate, knew the thought which had flashed into her mind. His expression was wholly ironical. But—

"I was referring to the rotogravure sections," he said, "and the fifty-cent magazines."

He hesitated, then, "May I wish you happiness?" he asked. "Why not?"

"I do wish that for you." He continued to regard her steadily but the slanting smile had vanished and his eyes were very grave.

"Thank you, John."

His steady gaze presently altered. He glanced around the room. "I'm a very poor host," he said. "You've had to bring in your luggage and get your supper. I've been talking politics up at the village store. Why didn't you let me know you were coming?"

The question had, for Gay, only one implication. Resentment, like a fresh breeze blowing through a room

too warm and perfumed, cleared the confusion from her mind.

"Did you think I knew you were here?" she asked quietly but with warmth kindling in her voice.

He turned to look at her in surprise.

"But if you didn't, why did you come?"

Resentment flamed into anger. But anger was stupid. She returned his glance directly, her chin unconsciously lifting, her eyes bright and scornful.

"You haven't become less—fatuous, have you?" she asked.

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded," he said quickly. "I'm not that fatuous. I meant, how did you expect to get in unless someone was here?"

Her level glance did not waver. His momentary confusion gave her



"I must make my—experiment here."

the advantage. She pressed it resolutely, still smarting from humiliated pride.

"Why should I have had the faintest idea that you, especially, should be here?" she asked.

"But who else would be?" His expression was frankly puzzled. "I've never rented it. My kid sister had a house-party here this summer. Otherwise it hasn't been occupied except when I've been here."

She pressed her advantage stubbornly, incensed by the possessive tone in which he spoke of her property. "Who gave you permission to use the cabin at any time?" she asked.

"Permission—" He stared at her in perplexity.

"Didn't you know that Uncle John left the cabin to me?"

"To you?"

"Yes." It was the granddaughter of David Graham speaking, the granddaughter of Peter Schuyler, secure in her inherited assurance, quite obviously taking pleasure in the routing of an intruder.

"But that's impossible," he said crisply.

"His lawyer sent me a key three years ago nearly," Gay said, "just after Uncle John died."

She watched him intently, expecting some attempt at justification,

explanations, an apology, perhaps. She did not expect the smile of somewhat incredulous amusement which crept slowly upward from his lips into his eyes.

"Does that impress you as being amusing?" she asked with dignity. "Uncle John was my god-father. There's no particular reason, is there, why he shouldn't have left the cabin to me?"

"I suppose there isn't," he said, as though that point was of small importance. The smile deepened. "I was just wondering how many other people are likely to pop in here with keys. You see," he continued in reply to her questioning glance, "Uncle John's lawyer sent one to me. I naturally assumed that the cabin was mine and have used it whenever I've had a chance."

She had not considered that possibility. It was true, of course. It was the only logical explanation. She felt, for a moment, in sympathy with John, who, as well as she, was the victim of some sentimentality or eccentricity contrived by a member of an older generation. But Uncle John, as she remembered him, had been neither sentimental nor eccentric. The lawyer had made a mistake, perhaps. At any rate, it wasn't John's fault any more than it was hers.

"I understand that," she said, "because I assumed that it belonged to me." Neither pride nor resentment was entirely proof against the humor in the situation, against the charm of his rare slow smile. Her eyes met John's in laughter and sympathy. Then—

"So you can't turn me out after all, can you?" he asked.

"No," she said slowly, considering. "But I can ask you to go."

His smile faded a little.

"Are you planning to stay— indefinitely?" he asked.

"Not longer than a week, perhaps."

"I have another week." She knew that he, too, was considering, choosing his words with deliberation, trying to gauge their probable effect upon her. "It's rather an important week," he went on, "my last vacation, probably, for some time."

"This week is important for me, too," Gay said with equal deliberation. My last of— She paused, then added, smiling, "—of vacation probably for some time."

The slanting smile, more mocking than amused, told her that he understood the implication of the pause and the smile.

"I should be a gentleman and clear out, I suppose," he said slowly. "Unfortunately, it isn't as simple as that. I'm making an experiment," he said diffidently. "It's just getting well under way."

"Amateur photography?" Kate asked from her position against the chimney.

"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.

"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 with 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."

"And 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.

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 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."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

U. S. Families on Relief Buy 'Protective' Foods

What do families on relief actually buy with blue stamps issued free as a practical method for distributing foods of which there is a surplus supply? What foods do they choose when they have opportunity to select as they please from a limited list of surplus foods?

It is too early to draw general conclusions, says Milo Perkins, in charge of the United States department of agriculture food-stamp program. But for a six-week period the stamp holders spent a little more than 80 per cent of their blue stamps for "protective" foods and a little less than 20 per cent for flour, corn meal, rice and beans.

For this period the stamp plan was effective in five cities. There were minor differences in administrative methods to discover which variations of the basic plan seemed to work best. In general, orange-colored stamps, which were bought by the relief family, could be used to buy any foods, and half as many blue stamps given free could be spent only for foods on the official surplus list. At that time the surplus list included butter, eggs, oranges, grapefruit, peaches, pears, cabbages, peas, tomatoes, onions, dried prunes, white flour, graham flour, corn meal and rice.