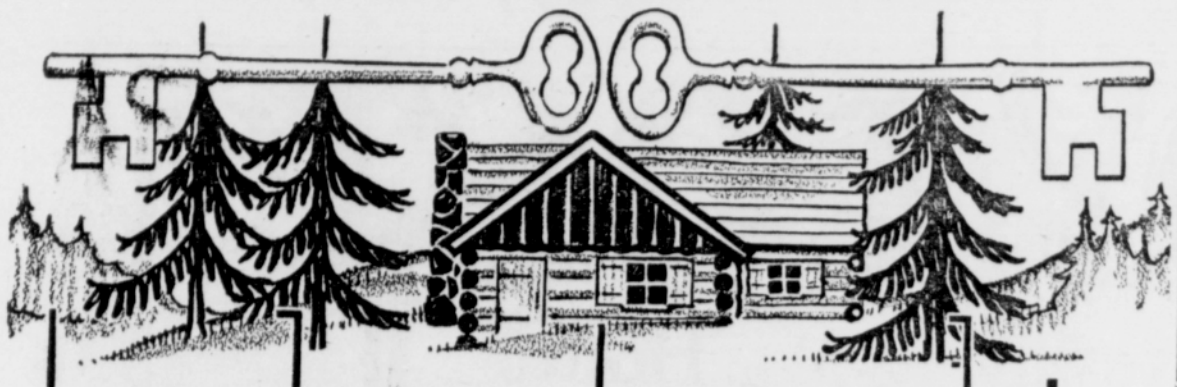
OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT



two keys to a cabin

BY LIDA LARRIMORE

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THE STORY THUS FAR

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 that someone is living in the cabin. Kate suspects that Gay knows the identity of the mysterious occupant. The mystery man returns. He is John Houghton, a young doctor whom Gay had known in previous years. 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. Gay asks John to reconsider his decision to leave. The next morning brings a different feeling, and John decides to remain for his vacation—one more week. 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 he is necessary to her happiness. Meanwhile, worried by their absence, Kate has called Todd Janeway in New York. She knows that Gay and John feel a strong attachment for each other, and wants Todd to come to Maine where he can talk to Gay. Todd arrives while Kate is alone. She breaks the news to him. Todd, warmhearted and generous, is heartsick but refuses to become melodramatic. Gay and John, who have been canoeing, return to the cabin, there to find Todd.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

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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 suppose, 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 used 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, 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 pityingly. "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 foot-

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

ball 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. His 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.

"You still resent me, don't you?" she asked.

"Not you as you are here with me."

"My life, then. I saw it tonight, when Todd and I talked of mutual acquaintances, of things that were happening in New York."

"But I was afraid—Seeing him here with you—He's known you always. You have things in common. And he is attractive. I was jealous and I despised myself for being jealous." He gave a short mirthless laugh. "I was—stuffy, wasn't I?"

"You were and it was silly of you."

"I know. I'm sorry and ashamed."

"I can't discard the years before now all at once as a snake sheds its skin."

"Of course you can't. I'm unreasonable. But when I've nothing to go by—"

"I'll give you something. Every hour of every day we're apart you can say, Wherever Gay is she's loving me and thinking of me and wanting time to pass quickly."

"Sweet!" His voice trembled. "I love you so."

"And I love you. Remember that and nothing can spoil it. Nothing!"

CHAPTER VII

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Gay roused at a touch on her shoulder. She opened her eyes and blinked up into the pleasant placid face of Mathilde, her mother's middle-aged maid. For an instant she lay drowsily smiling, not fully awake, then her eyes widened, she sat erect.

"What time is it?" she asked.

"Half past seven, Miss Gay," the woman said, smiling. "You asked to be wakened."

"There'd have been murder done if I hadn't been." Gay tossed back the covers and swung herself into a sitting position on the side of the bed.

"It's snowing." Mathilde held a blue silk negligee embroidered with daisies, knelt with blue satin mules for Gay's feet.

"Grand! A white Christmas." Gay drew the negligee around her, wriggled her feet into the mules. "That makes everything practically perfect."

"Your bath is ready." Mathilde smiled at Gay's excitement. "Will you have a breakfast tray?"

"Orange juice and coffee." Gay disappeared into the bathroom. "I won't have time for anything else."

On the walls of the bathroom wild orchids grew lush among tropical trees. The alcove in which the tub was set was paneled with mirrors. Gay, splashing vigorously, made none of her customary mental observations upon the results achieved by the young interior decorator who was her mother's latest protegee. All of her attention was centered upon the fact, incredible but excitingly true, that John was arriving in New York on this the morning of Christmas Eve, for a holiday visit.

"Noel, Noel," she sang, rubbing herself with a soft warmed towel. For an instant the song recalled the Christmas Eve she'd spent at school in Switzerland. She'd like to go into a Catholic church this evening, at twilight, a French Catholic church, where candle-light would shine on brightly painted figures in the manger scene and a choir-boy with the voice of an angel would sing the carol, running now, through her mind. That symbolized Christmas for her, had as far back as she could remember, before the school in Switzerland, since Mademoiselle Dupin, the governess of whom she'd been fondest, had taken her, as a child, to her church on succeeding Christmas Eves.

Back into the bedroom again. Mathilde had laid out her underthings.

"Noel, Noel
Noel, Noel—"

she sang dealing hurriedly with chiffon and silk. She stood before the row of hangers in the wardrobe. "So the keynote is simplicity." How long ago that seemed! She selected a wool dress the silver gray of a kitten's fur, the darker gray fur coat, the fur cap to match it which made her look like a Russian princess. As she sat at the dressing-table pinning red-brown curls in at the nape of her neck Mathilde came in with the tray.

"Would you like me to ring for Carl?" she asked, placing the tray on a low table beside the windows looking out over the river.

"No, I'll use a taxi." She didn't want her first moments with John to be spent under the discreet but interested scrutiny of Carl's lively blue eyes, behind Carl's attentive whip-cord back. The servants both here and at "Dunedin" were curious about John. No wonder, after what they'd heard and seen when she and Kate returned from Maine. Not that she cared, especially, but if it could be avoided—

"It's eight o'clock, Miss Gay," Mathilde, hovering, said.

"It is? Good Heavens! I must fly." She slipped into the coat Mathilde held, tilted the fur cap over one eye, caught up purse and gloves, paused for an instant to admire her reflection in the mirror and went hurrying out of the room.

Lights glowed in the hall of the apartment. Her step-father called to her through the open door of the dining-room.

"Good-morning," she said, standing poised for flight in the doorway.

"It's the early bird that catches the worm." Robert Cameron, in a silk dressing gown with a scarf knotted under his chin twinkled at her somewhat sleepily over a section of melon.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Pollen Carried Seaward By Strong Air Currents

Pollen knows no 12-mile limit, according to a survey recently completed in the air above the Atlantic ocean. Traces of pollen were found 275 miles at sea.

The tests showed no pollen above 8,000 feet over land or water. The survey was made by O. C. Durham, chief botanist of the Abbott laboratories in North Chicago, in co-operation with the Pan-American airways. Forty-seven slides were exposed on a specially designed "skyhook" on a 7,000-mile round trip made by the Yankee Clipper.

The slides were exposed every 30 to 60 minutes by J. W. Etchison, engineer of the Clipper, and then carefully packed in containers and returned to Durham. Durham said certain wind conditions might carry ragweed and smut spores as far as 1,000 miles from shore, although none was found at that distance in the survey.