

OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT



two keys to a cabin

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued

—19—

"Life was simple then, maybe," Gay said. "You—"

"Fiddlesticks!" Abigail Houghton tossed her head. "It's simple enough to get married. And one male Houghton is not much different from another, I guess. They've all been as proud as Lucifer and as stubborn as mules. Don't you let that fret you. When they love you, they love you for life and that's not a bad fault in a husband. It's talking that complicates things. That, and too much considering other people. I've got the seed-pearl necklace I promised John for his bride sewed into my feather bed. It won't take long to rip out the stitches."

"You're a darling," Gay bent impulsively and kissed the russet cheek as soft as moth wing beneath her lips. "John will bring me. I'll come."

The old lady went with them to the door opening into the tiny hall. "Mind you shut the door tight, Debby," she called after them. "Good-by, Gabriella."

"Good-by," Gay turned to smile at John's grandmother. The quizzical expression still narrowed Abigail Houghton's eyes, but her smile was steadfast and encouraging. Debby opened the outer door.

They went down steps and along a shoveled path to a gate in the picket fence. The harbor lay before them, touched with the last reflection of the sunset. Why was it? Gay thought. A moment came that you knew you would always remember. This—The dove-gray house behind them muffled with snow, the harbor below, stippled with fading pink and gold. Nothing had happened. Why did her throat ache and quick tears sting beneath her eyelids? Why—?

"Granny is a darling, isn't she?" Debby asked as the gate clicked behind them with a frosty snap and they walked, arms linked, along the cleared pavement between shoveled banks of snow.

"Yes," Gay replied. The ache in her throat was still there. She wanted John desperately, urgently, to be walking here beside her. His grandmother was right. They talked too much, she and John. It was dangerous to hurt each other with words. A lovely thing was spoiled if it was only a little marred. When he came tonight—

"You aren't going tomorrow, are you, Gay?" Debby asked, after a moment.

"I think so. Yes."

"Well, I can't blame you, I suppose," Debby's voice was desolate. "It's dead enough here, goodness knows. I'll miss you, though, terribly."

"Will you?" Gay asked, drawn from introspection by the sincerity in the lovely young voice. "Why, especially, except to be polite?"

"Because I like to look at you. You're so beautiful. And I can talk to you. I can't to anybody else. Mother or Sarah, and the girls I know are pretty small town. I'm different—" She gave an embarrassed laugh. "I guess all this sounds pretty silly to you."

"No, it doesn't. How old are you, Debby?"

"Eighteen last month."

"How would you like to go back to New York with me?"

Debby stopped, checking Gay's progress, too, looked at Gay, speechless, her dark eyes wide and shining.

"Why not?" It had been an impulsive suggestion. But why not? She was an attractive youngster. It would be fun to take her to New York. "Why not?" Gay repeated.

Debby exhaled her breath in a sharp explosion. "Gosh!" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"Would you like to go, Debby?"

"Would I?"

"Come along," Gay laughed and tugged at her arm. "We're blocking traffic and probably getting frosted ears. There are your courses," she went on consideringly as they resumed progress again. "But you could go to a good business school or have a tutor. I'd like to have you. My mother and step-father are away a great deal, but the apartment is always there."

"Do you know what this means to me?" Debby asked seriously. "I've never been further than Boston in my life."

"I can imagine. Your eyes are popping out of your head. Do you think—Will your mother let you? Would she object?"

"She's got to let me," Debby said passionately. "Nothing as important as this has ever happened to me. Come on!" Clinging to Gay's arm, pulling her forward, Debby took a series of skipping steps along the sidewalk. "Let's hurry home, and ask her!"

Dusk was falling when they came in sight of the Houghton house. A car was parked at the curb.

"That's a taxi from the station," Debby said, checking momentarily a stream of breathlessly eager questions, comments, observations. "Who in heck—? Oh!" she added as a slight man in a heavy overcoat with a brief-case under his arm emerged from the car. "It's Mr. Sewall. He's writing a book about clipper ships and comes out from Portland to see the papers and logs and diaries Mother has. Oh, dear! He'll stay for supper and heaven knows how long afterward and I won't have a chance to talk to Mother."

"Not for all the rice in China. Not for all the bulls in Spain . . ."

Debby's voice, rising in contralto cadences above her improvised accompaniment on the yellowed keys of the square piano, brought to Gay's mind the musical comedy for which the song Debby sang had been written. She, Gay, had gone with Tony Merrill, Todd, in the same party, had been very devoted to Julie Lelange, that evening, Ellen's roommate at boarding school and home with her for the Christmas holidays. It was that evening she had decided, in her own mind, that she would marry Todd. She remembered, not emotionally but quite accurately, the pluck it had given her heart to watch Todd fall under the spell of Julie's soft dark eyes and Charleston accent, and the relief she'd felt when Todd, later, had confessed to her that the accent had palled and the magnolia blossom grown cloyingly sweet. Funny the things you remembered . . .

"Not for all the beans in Boston. Not for all the grapes in France . . ."

Gay, leaning on the shelf of the piano, her elbows braced on mahogany, cracked in a network of tiny lines, her chin in the palm of her hand, gave her attention to Debby. The child was radiant tonight. The flush in her cheeks matched the

deep dark red of the velveteen dress she wore.

The song came to an end.

"Can I sing, Gay?" Debby asked, looking up with anxiety in the dark depths of her shining eyes. "I don't believe you even listened." Disappointment clouded her face. "You kept looking at the clock and listening for John."

"I did listen Debby," Gay assured her. "I think your voice is very appealing."

"But can I sing?" Debby persisted.

"We're not sure whether she has a voice," Sarah said from the opposite side of the keyboard, "or whether she does it by black magic. A member of the Metropolitan Opera Company spent part of last



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summer out at the hotel and Debby managed to scrape an acquaintance."

"Did you sing for her?" Gay asked.

"Yes—"

"What was her opinion?"

"She said Debby hadn't voice enough for opera," Sarah said, "and that no amount of musical education would eliminate the huskiness. It's something about the formation of her vocal cords."

"I don't care," Debby ran a rippling chord. "I don't want to sing in opera. I don't want the husky tones trained out of my voice."

"What do you want?" The patience in Sarah's gentle voice intimated to Gay that the question had been asked of Debby many times before.

"You know. I've told you. I want to sing popular songs. On the radio or in a club. Do you think I could, Gay?"

"Maybe—I don't know," Gay added, seeing Debby's face brighten, not wanting to raise false hopes. "I have a friend who sings in a supper club."

Sarah's eyes, sherry-colored like her grandmother's but with less vivacity of expression, widened in surprise not unmixed with shock, Gay thought. Debby gave a bounce on the piano bench.

"Oh, have you?" she cried. "Will

I—" She broke off and ran a series of noisy chords.

"It's personality rather than voice which puts Enid across," Gay went on, realizing that Debby had not spoken to Sarah of the possible visit in New York. "That and the fact smart club managers are featuring debutantes this season. Debby has personality—"

"Rather too much at times," Sarah sighed, then smiled. "There'll be no question of anything of the sort for some time, anyway," she added. "Debby is too young to make independent plans."

"I'm eighteen!" Debby flashed an antagonistic glance at her sister. But her mood was too joyous to permit her to bear a grudge. She played a few preliminary chords, then sang again. The sultry negroid minors of "The St. Louis Blues" moaned incongruously in the high-ceilinged New England room, from the old square piano where another Deborah Houghton had sat at twilight playing gentler tunes, her thoughts with her husband at sea.

Through Debby's singing, she heard a door open and glanced up expectantly, hoping that John had come. His mother entered the room. Debby's voice was silenced. Her hands dropped from the keyboard into her lap.

"John hasn't come yet?" Ann Houghton asked with a glance at Gay.

"Not yet, Mrs. Houghton."

"I hope nothing has happened," Her brow cleared. "Mr. Sewall asked me to say good-night to you. He had only just time enough to make the train. Debby seems to have amused you adequately."

"Oh, very much," Gay said quickly. "She sings remarkably well."

"It's an agreeable accomplishment, though I can't always recommend her choice of songs," John's mother smiled and went to sit in the wing-chair beside the hearth. Her hands reached instinctively toward the knitting bag on the arm of the chair. Debby had been correct in her prediction, Gay thought. Ann Houghton looked subtly flattered and pleased. There was a faint color in her cheeks. The dress of knitted silk she wore, dull amber in shade, was becoming. "Mr. Sewall was delighted with the material I gave him," she went on. "I let him take your great-grandfather's diary. If anything happens to it—"

"I should imagine that Mr. Sewall is trustworthy," Sarah said.

"Of course, but with things that could not be replaced—" She took the length of knitting from the bag and her needles flashed in the firelight.

"Mother—" Debby rose from the piano bench, stood, her hands nervously clasped, irresolutely.

"Yes, Debby?" Ann Houghton raised her eyes.

"Mother!" Debby plunged across the room to the arm of her mother's chair.

"What is so important? Careful, dear. You'll make me drop a stitch."

"Mother!" Debby burst out in a breathless jumble of words. "Mother, Gay has invited me to go back to New York with her. May I please? I want to awfully."

Ann Houghton's faint smile faded. Her eyes turned to Gay who came forward across the room.

"I'd like to take her with me, Mrs. Houghton," she said.

"That's impossible. No, dear. It's very kind of Gay to suggest it, but it's quite impossible."

"Why is it?" Debby's color deepened. Gay saw her hands knot into fists as John's hands did when his fighting instinct was aroused.

"Well, there are your courses for one thing," Ann Houghton said evenly. "You were very eager to take them. You can't very well stop—"

"But Mother," Debby interrupted, "Gay says I can go to a business school or have a tutor."

"We couldn't afford that, Debby."

"But I should like to do it for—" Gay began, then stopped short, checked by the expression which had settled over Ann Houghton's face.

"No, my dear," she said, still evenly, holding her off, Gay thought, by the reasonable friendliness of her tone. "That's very generous of you, but I think Debby is better off at home."

"But Mother, why?"

"We needn't go into that, Debby."

"Yes, we will!" Debby slipped off the arm of her mother's chair, stood with her hands clenched into fists, her head defiantly lifted. "It's because you're afraid to let one of us get out of your sight for fear we'll have an idea you didn't put into our heads."

"Debby!" Sarah cried in soft protest.

"It's true. You know it is. You want to do everything for us so that people will say what a wonderful Mother you are. You are. You have been, but I want to go somewhere and see something. Oh Mother, I am sorry!" Debby dropped down on the arm of the chair again. "But can't you see—"

"I see that my judgment is correct," Ann Houghton's eyes remained fixed upon the needles. "You are far too emotional to be trusted away from home."

"I'm not. I'm not really. It's only you who makes me that way. Gay wants me to go with her. Oh Mother, can't I? I never wanted anything so much."

"You're acting like a child, Deborah," Color burned deeper in Ann Houghton's cheeks. Her voice continued to pronounce words evenly with maintained control but Gay saw that her hands clasped over the knitting in her lap trembled. "I thought you had outgrown tantrums. You're being inconsiderate as well as unpardonably rude. This can't be very pleasant for Gay."

"Oh, I guess Gay knows. I guess she's seen. You know there's no reason, Mother, except that you're afraid, except that you disapprove—"

"Debby, hush! Come with me!" Sarah crossed the room, laid her hand on her sister's arm. Her face was white. Her eyes, wide and startled, met Gay's in fleeting apology, then turned away. "You don't know what you're saying."

"I do know!" Debby wrenched away from Sarah's hand. She stood facing her mother, frightened but defiant. "This is why I wouldn't go to college. I wouldn't let you make sacrifices to send me. You wanted to so that you could keep me tied here, grateful to you, not able to do anything that I wanted. You did that with Sarah and John. Sarah wanted to go abroad with Mrs. Trumbull. You knew she did and that it would have been wonderful for her. But she had to teach here in the high school to repay you for the sacrifices you'd made. You don't want John—"

"Deborah, go to your room. When John comes, I'll ask him to give you a sedative. You're ill. You aren't yourself."

"I am myself!" Debby's voice rose hysterically. "I've been wanting to tell you—" Defiance suddenly crumpled. Debby's head drooped. Her lips quivered forlornly, like a child's. "Oh, what's the use." She gave a strangled sob and turned toward the door.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Women Flying Students Learn Easier Than Men

A blue-eyed slip of a girl, who teaches flying to six-foot engineers at Rensselaer Polytechnic institute in Troy, N. Y., believes it's safer to teach women students.

"They are more willing to do as they are told," according to Miss Barbara Kibbee, 25-year-old, 115-pound Civil Aeronautics authority flight instructor.

Despite their fear of the air, Miss Kibbee said, average women "know they know nothing about flying, or mechanics, or engineering or physics," and are consequently easy to teach.

"On the other hand," she continued, "I find that some men think they know how things should be done and sometimes are not as ready to follow instructions. This is particularly true of middle-aged men, who have been successful in business and who as executives have become accustomed to giving rather than taking orders."

Miss Kibbee, one of the few women flight instructors in the country, was already a licensed commercial pilot and instructor before her appointment to Rensselaer's pilot training program.