



Two KEYS to a CABIN

LIDA LARRIMORE

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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, it is his 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 he is necessary to her happiness.

Gay—! Steady, Janeway. The thing to do was to concentrate on getting there. He'd know soon enough what the trouble was. Or maybe there was no trouble. Kate hadn't made her reason for his coming very clear. Maybe Gay wanted him to drive them back to New York. The trip up in Kate's coupe couldn't have been too comfortable. That was something to tie to. But Kate had told him Gay didn't know she was calling—

He was too weary, now, to think clearly. Perhaps she'd just been tired, as she said, worn out with preparations for the wedding, exhausted by all the demands upon her vitality and patience. She'd wanted it, though. He'd been a little surprised, last June when the engagement had been announced, that she had agreed to the hue and cry both families raised for a wedding. She'd told him she wanted everything to be right and proper



She'd told him she wanted everything to be right, and in accordance with tribal traditions. He'd been surprised but

touched and pleased, though he hated the fuss. He hadn't realized, then, that she was substituting the symbols of marriage for something that was lacking, the one thing that made it right. That was before he had watched her grow more and more remote, not sharing her thoughts with him, making excuses for not being alone with him, shutting him off behind a wall of light mockery through which he could see her but could not touch her, not actually, not the Gay herself, whom he loved.

This must be Northfield. Better ask directions from here. He pulled in at a filling-station at the side of the road. A gangling boy with buck teeth and a shock of sunburned hair appeared in response to the beat of his horn.

"Can you tell me how to get to the Lawrence camp?" Todd asked. The boy was lost in admiration for the car.

"How far do I follow this road?" Todd asked brusquely.

"Oh, yeah. 'Bout a mile and a half. You'll see the name on the mail-box."

"Thanks."

Todd tossed a coin to the boy, released the brake and pressed the accelerator.

A mail-box. Todd slackened the speed of the car. A figure detached itself from the vines and underbrush at the side of the road. A long arm waved in greeting. Kate!

"Hello!" he called and brought the car to a stop. No other figure to greet him. He felt his heart thud painfully. "Where's Gay?"

Kate stood in the road beside him. "Out on the lake," she said. Kate's expression was composed. She looked quite natural, a little tired, perhaps, but serene. "Fishing," she added. "You took a time getting here."

"I was arrested." His spirits lifted. Kate looked as he was accustomed to see her, lanky and rakish in a tweed skirt and green wool blouse, her expression a characteristic blending of wry humor and casual friendliness. He opened the door. "Get in, Kate. You look like a slightly sardonic wood-nymph. How's your generator, my friend?"

"My what?" she sat beside him and he turned the car into the lane. He laughed. "I heard, a few minutes ago, that you'd had trouble with it."

"That boy with the teeth!" Watching her in a side-long glance, he saw her expression change. She looked, though he could scarcely credit it, as if she was about to burst into tears.

"It isn't that bad, is it?" he asked but the laughter had gone out of her voice.

"It's as bad as can be," Kate said with difficulty.

"Is Gay ill? Has she been hurt?" "Worse than that."

He stopped the car in the lane. "What is it? What has happened?"

She turned to him, her face working queerly. "I meant to break it to you gently," she burst out. "I've been sitting out there by that mail-box for hours thinking of what I should say. There isn't any way to say it except to tell you the truth and I'd rather be chopped up and thrown to the wolves. I shouldn't have called you last night."

"Why shouldn't you have called me?"

"Because it's none of my business. Yes, it is. I love her and I know it's all wrong."

"What's all wrong?" "Gay has fallen in love," Kate said wildly. "He was here when we came."

"Who was here?"

"John Houghton, Dr. Lawrence's nephew. Do you remember him at Gay's debutante party? Nice looking. Dark and rangy."

"I remember." He slumped back behind the wheel. "Did she come here to meet him?" he asked.

"No. He just happened to be here. The long arm of coincidence." She gave a crack of nervous laughter.

"Don't ever say anything is impossible. But she came here because she's been in love with him since the summer they spent here with Dr. Lawrence six years ago. Would you have thought Gay was romantic? She's fairly wallowing in it. Little fool!"

"You aren't very convincing, Kate." He smiled wearily. "Do you like him?"

"I do. That's the trouble. He is attractive. And so in love with her. But it's all wrong."

"Why is it—wrong?" he asked quietly.

She glanced at him in relief and admiration.

"Did you expect me to go melodramatic?" he said. "I'm afraid that's a little out of my line. Why did you call me?"

"I hoped we might get her away from here—in time."

"And there isn't—time? It's too late, now?"

"I'm afraid so. Last night—" She hesitated for a moment then plunged on. "They haven't told me anything. But the way they act is enough. I've tried all day to tell them you were coming. I couldn't. I feel like a traitor until I think of—Todd, what do they think of all this at home?"

"It's been pretty awful. Funny, though—None of that seems important—now."

CHAPTER VI

In the hidden inlet the sunset dimmed to a honey-colored dusk. The canoe, moored beneath low hanging branches, was motionless. The wind in the pine trees made a whispering sound.

"It's like listening to a sea-shell," Gay said. Her head, resting against John's shoulder, lifted so that their eyes met and held.

"You're crying," he said. "Am I?"

"Why do you cry?" "Because I'm so blissful. Because sometime you may die or I may."

She laughed softly. "I don't know." "Darling! Sweet! Are you sure?" "Oh John, yes!"

"It might be because we're here. The lake, the cabin—This is the setting that's most—" He broke off with a diffident laugh, then continued. "The setting that's most—becoming to me. Will you love me in—"

"September as I do in May."

"I meant it—when we're together in New York?"

"Oh darling, yes! In Venice or Shanghai or—Baltimore."

"Why Baltimore?" "We're going to live there."

"Oh, are we?" "You've been telling me for a week that you want to do research at Johns Hopkins. Well—?"

"You're a practical young lady, aren't you? I haven't been able to think beyond this moment, now. I may not be able to get in at Hopkins."

"I think you will. My grandfather gave the hospital an endowment. He had an operation there. It can be arranged."

His arms relaxed. His head turned. She gave a little cry.

"I know what you're thinking. Oh, John, don't! Why shouldn't I help you? I love you. Everything will be not for you nor for me but for us."

He turned to her. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's just that—I can't believe any of it—you, us, being here. I can't realize that there's no need to fight against loving you. I have for so long."

"It doesn't matter, does it? There aren't any words. Just being here with you—I feel—"

"How do you feel?" "Safe and peaceful." "Peaceful?"

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The honey-colored dusk paled, deepened to the mauve of twilight. Darkness fell. One by one the stars pricked a brightened pattern across the sky. Gay stirred in John's arms.

"What?" he asked. "We should go back, I suppose. Kate has probably gotten supper."

"Supper?" She laughed. "I'm not hungry either." Her face, as he watched, became grave. "We'll have to tell Kate."

"I don't think Kate needs to be told."

"She has something on her mind, certainly. She's been cross all day."

"Kate doesn't like me."

"Oh, no, John. It isn't that. She's thinking of the fuss there'll be at home."

"Aren't you?" "I haven't been."

"I am. Do you want me to go with you? I should be in Portland day after tomorrow. But if it would help—"

"It wouldn't. You aren't used to cataclysms. I am." She sighed, then smiled and pressed closer to him.

"Don't think of it now. Let's keep this time for ourselves. It's going to be all right. Don't think. Just love me."

"Gay—" he said barely audibly. "Yes—?"

"I wanted to hear your voice. I felt as though you had gone."

"I'm here."

"Don't leave me." He dropped his hand gently upon her head.

"I can't leave you." She caught

his hand, pressed it against her cheek. "I'm part of you."

Darkness lay over the landing. He stepped out and fastened the tie-ropes. Bending, he took her hands to pull her up to the planking beside him. His arms went around her, held her there close against his breast.

"I can't let you go."

"Let's stay here."

"Oh, Gay, if we could—!"

"It's going to be all right. Nothing can spoil it, except ourselves. We must be very careful."

"You're so lovely. I can't think when I'm with you like this. What you say—That's not very flattering. I meant, I just hear your voice. I've loved you so long, so hopelessly—"

"Not hopelessly now."

"I can't believe it."

"We'll go in and tell Kate." Her voice was gay and confident. "That will help you to believe."

"I'm afraid of Kate. I'm afraid to go in."

"Silly. I'll hold your hand tightly. Like this."

They walked, hands joined, up the path from the landing to the cabin. As he opened the porch door for her, she halted.

"Someone is here!" She dropped his hand.

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