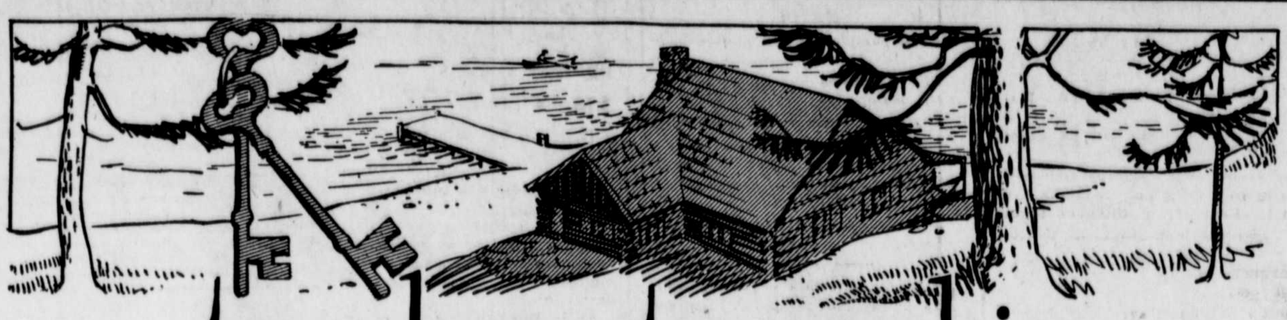

two keys to a cabin

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. John leaves temporarily and Gay tells Todd that she has fallen in love with John. Todd, understanding that it is unavoidable, tells her he is still her best friend. Christmas comes and Gay is home in New York, awaiting John's arrival for the holidays.

CHAPTER VII—Continued

—10—

"Worm!" Gay exclaimed. "I hate you. Aren't you up rather early yourself?"

"I didn't heed the ads," he said mock-tragically. "I failed to do my Christmas shopping early."

"Poor Robert!" Gay smiled. Though to her father's family it was a mystery, she understood very well why her mother had married Robert. He had, as her mother had, an ingenuous zest for living. He was no longer the handsome figure of a man-about-town he had been when he became her step-father. He was getting stout and somewhat florid and his blond hair was receding at the temples, but his spirit was buoyant, his nature restfully uncomplicated and his enjoyment of good food, good sport and gay company remained undiminished. He was kind, and fond of her. His expression, now, as he looked at her across lace and silver and crystal flowers which splintered the light into glittering sparkles, was admiring and interested.

"Go to it, kid," he said. "I'm all for romance myself. If you need moral support you can count on Uncle Robert."

He was a dear or maybe in her blissful state she felt tender toward all the world. She blew him a kiss and went on along the hall.

In the drawing-room Suki was hanging wreaths made of silvered leaves and bunches of blue glass berries. She knew it was Suki because Togo's province was the kitchen. It occurred to her that it was a little incongruous that small heathen Suki with his flat lemon colored face and black bead eyes should be decorating the apartment for a Christian festival.

What would John make of it all, of Suki and Togo who had been with Robert for years, of Mathilde whom her mother had brought back from France, of her mother, of Robert, of Christmas Eve at the apartment? What would he make of the Victorian elegance of "Dunedin" when they went tomorrow? Could he, as she did, ignore Aunt Flora's disapproval, the curious but premeditated coolness of the relatives who would be there? Panic seized her again. Her spirits sank with the descent of the elevator. She regretted, for an instant, that John was coming. Now, at this moment, while their meeting was still in the future, the feeling they had for each other was secure. Now—

But that was absurd. She shook off frightening fancies. Her spirits lifted when the Negro doorman opened the door for her.

"Merry Christmas, William."

"White Christmas, Miss Graham."

"It's nice, isn't it?"

"Luck fo' certain." The Negro's face was slit by an ivory grin. "Good times comin' pretty soon."

The train from Boston, unless it was late, was already in. Gay made her way through the concourse of the station toward the gate where John would be waiting. Expectancy gave wings to her feet. She hurried on, jostling and being jostled, heedless of admiring glances cast at her, impatient of any delay. Then through people passing, she saw him and reluctance checked her eagerness. Her flying pace slackened. She advanced slowly, caught in panic again, walking mechanically, all feeling suspended.

He did not see her. He stood beside the gate, his eyes searching through the groups that eddied past him. But was that John? She hadn't remembered—It was the overcoat he wore which made him look so tall. She'd never seen him in the winter before. The new hat he wore was not becoming. She didn't know him. It wasn't that tall young man, obviously ill at ease, whom she had come to meet. She couldn't move or speak to him: She felt paralyzed, frozen inside.

He saw her and smiled. She started toward him as he started toward her.

"Hello." He removed his hat, smiling diffidently.

"Hello." Her voice sounded thin and unnatural. She felt her mouth stretch in a mechanical smile.

He bent to kiss her. She lifted her face. A redcap, carrying luggage, bumped into them so that his lips, glancingly, touched her cheek.

"We must find a taxi." She did not look at him. "I didn't bring a car."

His hand cupped her elbow but she led the way. A porter followed with his luggage. "Did you have a good trip?" she asked after an interval of silence.

"Not bad. We were on time."

"I'm sorry I was delayed. I left the apartment in time but traffic was heavy."

"That's all right. I haven't waited long."

They stood waiting for the porter to call a taxi.

"How are you?" he asked.

She glanced up at him, then quickly away.

"Splendid, thank you. Isn't it nice to have snow?"

"If it keeps on like this the trains won't be coming in on time."

"No, probably not. Have you had breakfast?"

"No. It doesn't matter, though. I'm not hungry."

A taxi slid in beside them. The porter opened the door. John put her in, supervised the stowing of his luggage, sat beside her. The cab moved out into traffic. She glanced up at him. He was looking at her. The hurt bewilderment in his eyes, the difficult smile that moved across his lips, restored warmth and a feeling of tenderness.

"Hello!" she said softly.

"Hello!" His arms went around her. Their lips met and held. Presently she drew away.

"Is this scandalous behavior for New York?" His voice sounded happy, relieved.

"Who cares?" She winked to clear her vision. "Oh why are we always such idiots?"

"I didn't know you. You looked—I was terrified."

"So was I. Darling, that hat—"

"Don't you like it either?" He turned to open the window. "We'll throw it out."

"Idiot!" She pressed close to him, her face against the rough cloth of his coat. "It's all right, isn't it?"

"The hat? You change your mind so—"

"Us, I mean—Your being here—We're going to have fun."

"Of course we are. Breakfast first, though. I wasn't hungry when you asked me, but I'm starving now."

"Are you?" She laughed. "So am I. Let's send your luggage out to Mother's apartment and stay down town all day. We'll have breakfast at Child's and walk in the snow and drop quarters in all the Santa Claus kettles and sing carols on street corners and—"

"You darling! I'm so happy, so glad to be here."

"Are you? Darling! John!"

John got up as Gay's mother rose from the love-seat on which they sat.

"So I suppose I'll have to forgive you," she said, smiling up at him with Gay's smile and Gay's trick of crinkling her eyes. "I was prepared to dislike you intensely."

"Now, Kitty," her husband said with indulgent fondness, "you've never disliked anybody. It's your all-inclusive love for your fellowmen which keeps getting you into trouble."

"That's unkind of you, Robert." She linked her arm through her husband's. "What will John think of me?"

"I think you are very kind," he said, realizing that the reply was inadequate, seeing and resenting the amusement in her deep blue eyes, so like Gay's.

"Kindness is an endearing trait in a mother-in-law," Robert Cameron said cheerfully. He consulted his watch. "My dear, we must be on our way."

"We're going to the theater with the Davenports," she said in the way she had of seeming to share an intimate confidence. "They've just become grandparents and need cheering."

The Japanese house-boy came into the room. She spoke to him about calling for the car. John watched her pleasant manner with the servant. She was prettier than Gay, he thought, but less beautiful, smaller, softer, more rounded. Her hair which had been dark was, prematurely, turning white. Cut short and curled, it looked like a wig for fancy dress rather than a symbol of age. Her skin, in the diffused light which filled the long high-ceilinged room, had a honey-colored tint and her small pretty mouth was painted the exact shade of the coral azalea against her shoulder. She didn't look like anybody's mother. It was difficult to realize, in spite of certain points of resemblance, that she bore so close a relationship to Gay.

She turned to him as the house-boy slid noiselessly out of the room.

She felt paralyzed, frozen inside.

"We must get acquainted tomorrow," she said, laying a small jeweled hand on his arm. "But no—! You and Gay will be leaving for 'Dunedin' fairly early. Christmas dinner, there, is always at two." She glanced up at her husband, smiling through narrowed eyes.

"If we're to see any of the first act at all—" her husband said a trifle hastily.

"Yes, darling." She turned again to John. "Perhaps we'll see you later. If not, good-night. Suki will take care of you. You are very welcome here. We want you to feel at home."

He would like to feel at home. But how could he, how could anybody feel at home in this room? It was as artificial as the silvered wreaths which hung in the windows, as the Christmas tree, silvered too, reflecting its fantastic dazzle of blue lights and twisted glass icicles in a wall formed by mirrors, cut into sections by strips of chromium.

"Well, what do you make of it?"

He turned guiltily, conscious of some possible rudeness, then relaxed. Gay was walking toward him, so lovely in the dress of deep blue velvet she'd worn at dinner that his breath caught in his throat. She came up to where he stood and slipped her hand through his arm. "What were you thinking?" she asked, smiling up at him with amusement in her eyes. "You looked startled when I spoke to you."

"I was afraid someone had caught me being critical of the decorations." He turned again to the panel above the fire. "What is it?" he asked. "Flowers? Fruit?"

"It's a color note." Her smile deepened.

"Then it doesn't mean anything?"

"Not to me. Don't puzzle your head over it, my sweet. If you do, you'll go quietly mad." She led him to the davenport which stood facing the fire. He sank down beside her into soft leather upholstery. "Mother had all this done to occupy her mind when she found she hadn't a wedding to arrange. Besides Cedric needed the money."

"Cedric?"

"The earnest young man who had the brainstorm. It has made him. He has more commissions than he can handle. He regards Kitty as a cross between Lady Bountiful and a fairy with a wand, which is very flattering, of course. How did you get on with her?"

"She's lovely to look at," he said guardedly, "and very kind."

Gay looked up at him.

"But—? I want you to tell me what you think of everything. No reservations. They lead to misunderstandings." Her face was grave. "Be frank with me, John."

"I'll try to be frank. It sounds ridiculous, I know, but I think I'd feel more comfortable if she hadn't received me so courteously."

"Why?" Gay asked in surprise.

"Well, after bracing myself to face the opposition I expected, it's a little disconcerting to have your mother, figuratively, at least receive me with open arms."

She laughed in genuine amusement. "Did you want to fight dragons, darling?"

"I suppose I did." He laughed with her.

"Well, cheer up. There's Aunt Flora in the offing."

"Who is Aunt Flora? Is she a dragon?"

"She's my father's sister, a widow. She's lived with him since Mother's defection. No, she isn't a dragon. She's pathetic, really. She persists in observing the conventions of a polite world of society which is past and gone. And she expects other people to observe them. She won't receive you with open arms. Not that she blames you for the recent catastrophe, though. She tells me that I am my mother's daughter."

"You aren't like your mother, except in certain superficial points of physical resemblance."

She looked at him, considering, looked away.

"Have I offended you?" he asked, realizing that he had spoken with more warmth than the comment required. "I didn't mean—Your mother is charming. I—"

"I wasn't offended." She took his hand in hers. "I was wondering how I could explain Mother to you. No, I'm not like her. I wish I were. Mother is really very logical. When places or people bore her she sees no reason why she should pretend that they mean anything to her. She was bored with Dad and so she divorced him and married Major Summerfield."

"You mean—Mr. Cameron is her third husband? I heard her speak of a Major Summerfield at dinner, but I had no idea—"

"She's on friendly terms with both Dad and the Major," Gay said but her smile wavered a little. "She doesn't dislike them because they bored her. She was very sorry to have had to hurt them but she saw no reason in continuing a relationship which was no longer agreeable. You look horrified, John." She dropped his hand. "I don't suppose you can understand."

"I was thinking how—confusing it must have been for you," he said slowly.

"It was, until I was old enough to understand Mother's point of view. Now, it's all very simple. Mother has never cared deeply for anyone. It isn't in her nature to cling to things, though she's loyal in her way, and generous and kind. That's why she looks as she does. She has no regrets for anything that has happened.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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General land office surveyors of Louisiana have undertaken a task forced upon them by "a natural phenomenon" more than a century and a half ago.

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We doubt if those with "Ph. D." after their names are as happy as we are when we see "Pd." before the names of our creditors.

Time heals all wounds. But our time on earth is limited. That's the trouble.

With every maybe, there is a maybe not.

A "Sunny Jim" who is sunny only from policy isn't very satisfactory.

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The Questions

1. Who designed the Stars and Stripes?
2. Is propaganda spread among the enemy a new idea?
3. What salary did George Washington receive during his terms as President?
4. At what degree of latitude is the equator?
5. How many gallons of fresh water must a large liner carry in crossing the Atlantic?
6. Is a peruke worn on the head, neck or foot?

The Answers

1. Francis Hopkinson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, designed the Stars and Stripes.
2. In old-time wars, messages were written on paper and tied to arrows to be shot to the enemy.
3. Washington received no salary during his terms as President.
4. Zero.
5. Large liners require more than a million gallons of fresh water, for one trip across.
6. Head (it's a wig).

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