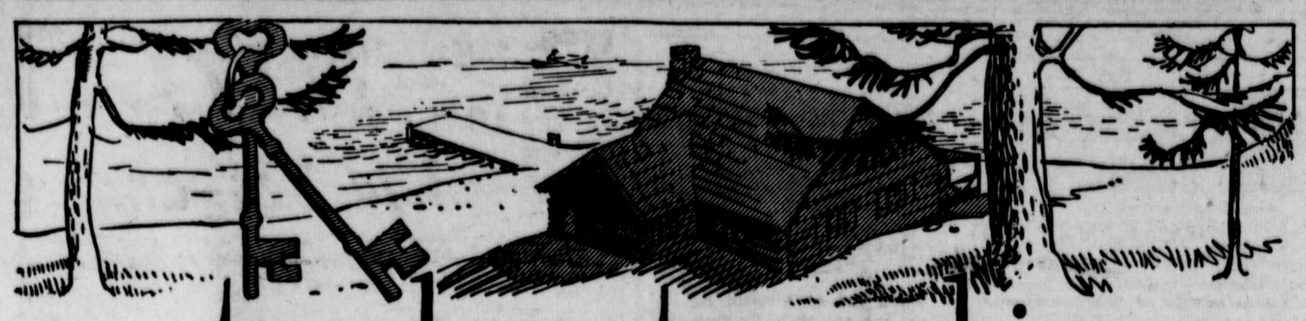

two keys to a cabin

BY LIDA LARRIMORE

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CHAPTER XI—Continued

—16—

John stood looking at a post-card from Dr. Sargeant. A crescent moon reflected itself in dark blue water. A round white tower, a lighthouse, perhaps, rose against a star-strewn sky. A slim red boat with a half-furled sail lay at anchor against a strip of land where dark trees grew. Constantinople—Phener Bagtche. The lettering conveyed nothing to his mind, but the boat reminded him of the red canoe at the lake. He stood thinking of the cabin, of Gay—

A voice addressed him. He turned to see Abbie descending the stairs, walking heavily, her hand sliding along the rail, her white apron cracking with starch, her round high-colored face wreathed in an amiable smile.

"Hello, Abbie," John said. Abbie had lived with the Sargeants for years. She was more a member of the family than a servant, as Huldah was in his mother's home.

"You in for good?" she asked, halting at the newel post.

"I hope so."

"I'll have supper on in half an hour. You sure your ears aren't frost-bitten?" she asked with kindly concern.

"It's just coming in where it's warm that makes them red."

"I'd advise you to rub snow on 'em," Abbie said. "It's a heathenish life a doctor's called on to live. I don't know why, at your age, you're so set on it. Give me the word if you're called out, so's I can set something in the oven."

The office was shadowy with dusk. John switched on a light and dropped into the chair at the Doctor's desk. Dr. Sargeant would have known how to handle that whining creature he'd called on this afternoon, he thought, lighting a cigarette. He, himself, had been unable to sympathize with the woman who had poured into his somewhat embarrassed ears a stream of self-pity and imagined symptoms. His examination had checked with notes on the case he had found in the Doctor's files. Physically, she was as sound as a nut. His sympathy had been all for her husband, poor wretch.

No, definitely, he hadn't a bedside manner. John pulled the desk memorandum toward him. There were fewer notations than usual written in the clear handwriting of Miss Sprague, Dr. Sargeant's secretary and office nurse. One notation was made in writing quite different from Miss Sprague's. It asked him to call the Congress Square Hotel, Room 201. No name was appended. A guest, perhaps, who required the services of a doctor. He should make the call. In a few minutes when he'd gotten warm and had finished his cigarette—

He would be glad when this period of marking time had passed and he could go on with the work he enjoyed. John tilted back in his chair and propped his feet on the desk. He would never be happy in a practice. He liked the stark facts of science, unconfused by human contacts, the crystal hardness of truth that could be checked and proved. He had thought that he might experiment a little on the side. Perhaps he could when he had become more accustomed to the routine of office hours and calls. For the present he was too tired when his long day had ended to do anything more exacting than read for a little or talk to Mary Adams before he went early to bed.

The crescent moon and the red boat on the postcard the Doctor had sent recalled the cabin again. He should have had a letter from Gay. She had been in Florida when last he had heard from her. It was impossible for him to imagine the life she lived there. As always, when his mind dwelled upon the dissimilarity of their separate environments, a chill of apprehension settled about his heart. He comforted himself by recalling the night she had seen him off at the station in New York. But a great many Wednesdays had passed since then and she had not come.

The memories of her which he liked best to recall went back to the time they had spent at the cabin. He found himself skipping over the visit to New York. There was, he thought, deliberation beneath that apparently subconscious evasion. When he recalled the visit to New York, incidents presented themselves which demanded clear and logical thought. It was more pleasant to feel about Gay than to think. Now, while she was so far away from him, when anything might be happening, it was disturbing to think.

He should begin again the experiment he had abandoned at the cabin. If he could become interested in something of the sort, he would stop this useless brooding over Gay. It was that, he admitted to himself with reluctant honesty, rather than fatigue or lack of time which had prevented his original plan of converting the small room in which the Doctor kept supplies into a laboratory. In his leisure moments, when he was not actively engaged in keeping together the Doctor's practice, his mind was so filled with thoughts of Gay that there was no room for anything else. It was likely to be harmful and certainly a waste of time. He must stop it.

He would call the hotel. Miss Sprague was almost terrifyingly efficient. She would be sure to ask him if he had when she returned for the evening office hours. He took his feet from the desk, sat forward, reached for the telephone—

Todd Janeway was in Palm Beach. Gay had spoken of it in a recent letter. He was attractive. There was a strong bond between Gay and him. He remembered how she had looked the night they had coasted on the Janeway estate, when she had returned to him after climbing the slope with Todd, rested, relaxed, eager to be with him again. She had broken away from Todd and come swiftly to him, smiling through the fire-light.

How strong was that bond? Had his trip to New York convinced her that she had made a mistake? He wouldn't think of it. His hand reached for the telephone again, halted, knotted into a fist—

A rap sounded at the door. He ignored it. At a second rap, he wrenched his thoughts from an imaginary scene on a moon-lit beach in Florida and made a somewhat irritable reply.

The door opened. Mary Adams, Dr. Sargeant's daughter, stood hesitantly on the threshold.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"That's all right, Mary." John's face cleared.

"Are you in a good humor?"

"Fairly so. Why?"

"I have an apology to make for my younger son." Contact with the tropical sunshine had given Mary Adams' skin a permanent tan. She was slight and worn, at thirty, from having dutifully, and gladly, followed the fleet, from having had two babies, "each in a different language" as she expressed it, from the struggle to keep up the necessary front on a naval lieutenant's pay. But her dark eyes in the sharp pixie-like brownness of her face were animated and cheerful and the stories she told of her vagrant existence were a source of amusement to John.

"What has Skippy been up to?" he asked.

"Look, John." She held out a crumpled sheet of yellow paper. "This telegram came for you yesterday afternoon. I left it on the table in the hall and supposed you'd gotten it when you came in. But Skippy must have. You know how he's always looking for letters from Nat. I found it in the pocket of the sweater he had on yesterday. I think he's eaten most of it. There isn't much left."

John took the paper from her hand. The only typewritten words which remained legible were "—NOON TOMORROW—GAY" He looked up from the paper to Mary Adams.

"Abbie took a telephone message just after noon when Miss Sprague was out for lunch. It was from the Congress Square."

"Do you suppose that was Gay?" he asked in a dazed voice.

"Abbie said it was a lady. She never gets names straight, you know. When I found the telegram I was pretty sure—"

"Then she's been here all afternoon." John ran his fingers through his hair effecting crisp disorder. "Why didn't you call the hotel?"

"I considered it, but I thought she might wonder why I read your telegrams."

"What will she think of me?" John asked still in a dazed and bewildered voice.

Mary's face twinkled with sympathetic excitement. "I've spanked Skippy if that makes you feel better," she said. "You'll bring her here, won't you?"

"May I?"

"For dinner, if you like. We can open the emergency bottle of olives. Or maybe you'd rather—"

"After dinner," he said. "Will you take care of her during office hours? Is it imposing?"

"Imposing! I'm hysterical with excitement."

John's diffident smile widened into an irrepressible grin. "Mary," he asked, "did you ever feel as though somebody had socked you in the pit of your stomach and a million stars were bursting inside of your head?"

He reached for the telephone. Mary moved toward the doorway, smiling.

"I feel that way every time Nat's ship steams into port," she said gently, and went out and closed the door.

John laid down the menu card and the waiter moved away. He smiled diffidently across the narrow table at Gay.

"A straw hat," he said. "You've torn several leaves off the calendar. This afternoon I was sure we were in for a blizzard."

"Don't you like it?" Her smile was constrained.

"I'm more polite than you were. It's nice. Looks like a halo. Have you had a pleasant winter?"

"Very pleasant, thank you. I got a little weary of palm trees and bathing suits, though. I wanted to see snow."

"Is that why you came?"

"Well, variety— You look—" Her glance dropped from his face to the table. She constructed a wigwam with a knife, a fork, two spoons. "Are you working hard?"

"You haven't forgiven me, have you?" His voice softened. He bent toward her across the table. "I don't blame you. It was dreary not to be met at the station. I can't tell you how sorry I am. What did you do all afternoon?"

He would be glad when this period of marking time has passed.

"Stayed in my room. It has matching draperies and counterpane the color of melted raspberry sherbet. There are twenty-fleur-de-lis, light gray on darker gray, running lengthwise in the carpet from the window to the door."

"Is that all you could find to amuse you?" His laugh was reluctant.

"Oh, no." Her voice was light and quick. "I read the telephone directory and the Bible. The Psalms are rather wonderful. I think I should have liked to know David. Is he the same David that killed Goliath? I wanted to ask you. I'm sure that your Biblical training was more sound than mine."

"Gay, look at me."

She lifted her eyes. A half-smile trembled across her lips.

"You had a miserable afternoon, didn't you? Alone and thinking—What did you think?"

"I spent most of the time wishing that my impulsive nature had been more rigidly disciplined in early youth."

"I'm glad it wasn't."

"Are you?" The half-smile faded.

"Do you remember the night I left New York you told me that you'd come to see me some Wednesday afternoon?"

She nodded.

"Every Tuesday night since then I've thought, 'Tomorrow is Wednesday. Maybe Gay will come.' "

"Today is Tuesday. I couldn't wait until tomorrow."

They broke into soft laughter, free from constraint. The waiter placed food before them, hovered solicitously.

"That will be all," John said in definite dismissal. "The effect you have on waiters and taxi-drivers and bell-hops," he continued to Gay when the man who had served them had stationed himself at a discreet distance, against the wall beside a thicket of potted palms. "I've been in here pretty often and no waiter ever hovered over me like a setting-hen over an egg."

"Egg! I hate you!" She laughed. "What are you going to do with me?"

"Kiss you again as soon as I get a chance."

Her eyes softened and shone. The crisp frills on her blouse ruffling out over the jacket of her dark tailored suit rose and fell with her quickened breathing. "I'm trying to be practical. You make it very difficult. Am I to stay here at the hotel?"

"Certainly not." His expression was offended.

"But I don't mind. Now that I know you're glad I came, I'm sure I'll become attached to the fleur-de-lis and the raspberry-sherbet counterpane."

"You're to stay at Dr. Sargeant's tonight. Mary sends you the invitation."

"Mary?"

"Dr. Sargeant's daughter, Mary Adams, mother of Skippy and Rear-Admiral Byrd."

Her eyes widened. "John! Are you delirious?"

"I think I am, a little. I can't get used to having you here. I was referring, however, to Mary's older son, Nat. He was being Admiral Byrd this afternoon in the swing. They're nice kids. I think you'll like Mary."

The headwaiter, patrolling, halted beside the table.

"Everything satisfactory, sir?" he asked, addressing John, but with his eyes sliding toward Gay.

"Yes, thank you," John said curtly.

"The steak is broiled as you like it?" The headwaiter's suave, discreetly interested glance was for Gay. "Not too rare or too well done?"

"It's very nice, thank you."

The headwaiter strolled off. John scowled, then grinned.

"You see," he said. "That never happened to me. The desk-clerk told him who you are."

"Oh, nonsense. You attach too much importance to my name. Nobody in Maine ever heard of me."

"I don't believe it. Well, if that's true, it's the way you look. They think you're a movie star. That golden-brown tan—"

"Don't you like it? I worked awfully hard to get it. Maybe I could have myself bleached."

"Don't you dare," he said. "I love it. You're freckles scarcely show at all."

She made a laughing grimace.

"Not that I object to the freckles," he said. His voice softened. His dark eyes, regarding her across the table, were bright but tenderly grave. "I love everything about you. You're a little breath-taking until I get used to you. I think I remember, but each time you're a shock. You have beautiful bones."

"Can't you forget your profession for half an hour?"

"Good Lord! No, I can't." He glanced at his watch. "We must go. Office hours." He halted in the process of pulling back his chair. "But you haven't eaten anything—"

"Neither have you. The headwaiter will think the steak was too well done or too rare. And all these lovely French fried potatoes?"

"I've got to go, Gay." He signaled the waiter. "You stay and finish and come up to Dr. Sargeant's in a cab."

"I will not." Her voice was indignant. "I didn't come all the way to Portland, Maine, to eat French fried potatoes."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Battleships Using Atoms Is Scientific Forecast

Operation of battleships by atomic energy was intimated as a future possibility by Dr. Arthur H. Compton, of the University of Chicago, 1927 Nobel Prize winner, during a discussion with Dr. E. O. Lawrence, Nobel Prize winner and inventor of the atom-smashing cyclotron.

"The progress being made in the smashing of atoms by the cyclotron, and which thereby releases the energy in them, is of more importance to the world today than the war in Europe," Dr. Compton declared.

"The energy in the atoms is that used in the sun and stars. It is hundreds and millions times greater than all the rest of the fuel now available in the world.

"Already the science of releasing this atomic energy has advanced to such a state that one of the greatest worries of scientists at present is what to do with it, once it finally becomes available."

Dr. Compton pointed out that one of the greatest elements to be considered in the release of atomic energy is that there can never be any corner on atoms, such as can be brought about on coal and oil, but that there can be a corner on the understanding necessary to use their power.

On this point, he declared, the United States has the greatest chance of obtaining such a corner, for the work necessary to arrive at this knowledge is now being accomplished in this country. It also is here that the progress is greatest.

President Was Hangman

Grover Cleveland, who later became President, hanged two men in 1872.

He was elected sheriff of Erie county, New York, for the years 1871-1873 and during that period Jack Gaffney and Patrick Morrissey were sentenced to be hanged. Rather than detail a subordinate to perform the unpleasant task, Sheriff Cleveland did it himself.

Aim Is First

The art of a thing is, first, its aim, and, next, its manner of accomplishment.—Bovee.

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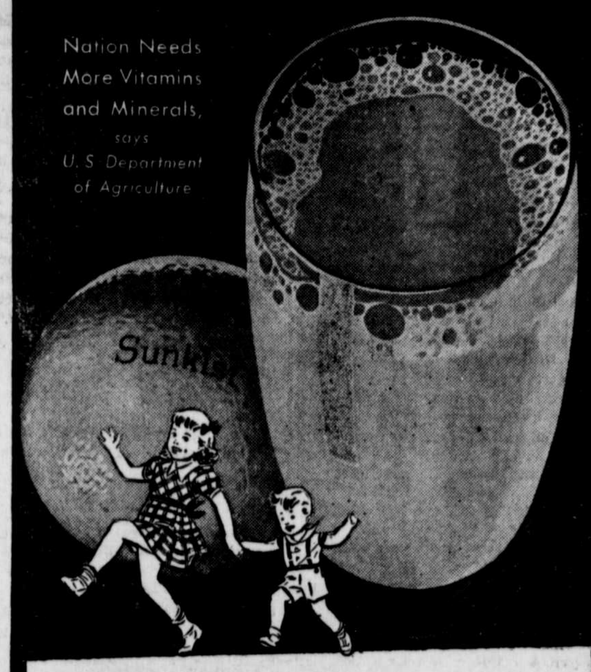
Nation Needs More Vitamins and Minerals, says U. S. Department of Agriculture



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