

two keys to a cabin

by Lida Larrimore

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"Then I shall be obliged to stay as your guest," she said and walked toward the closed door into the room she was to share with Kate.

"You win again, Gay." Strange that it was less difficult to renew his resolution now that he realized he'd been a presumptuous fool. Odd that now, when her manner expressed indifference, he was impatient to go. "I won't be here. I'm leaving."

But flinging off at this hour was unnecessarily dramatic and so he added, "—tomorrow."

"You're being pretty—stuffy about this, aren't you?" she asked.

"Possibly." The knowledge of what he had seen in her face was



"You're being pretty stuffy about this, aren't you?" she asked.

sustaining. He felt himself relaxing as though, by some agency, a strain had been relieved. "Worse than that," he continued responding to the humor and the friendliness in her smile. "I'm being. I've been, unpardonably rude."

"You have," she agreed cheerfully. "I understand, though. The shock was, is, mutual. We've neither of us behaved very well. Let's not make—decisions tonight."

"But my decision is made."

He knew that his voice lacked conviction. He saw her smile widen and deepen. "Irrevocably?" she asked.

"What big words you use, Gabriella!"

"Shocks are wearing," she said. "I'm going to get some sleep."

"You'd better. You look all in."

"Thank you. Aren't you afraid you'll turn my head?" She stood smiling back over her shoulder, her hand on the knob of the door. "Good-night."

"Good-night. Pleasant dreams."

"I know I shall have them. Remember. No decisions. We'll draw Kate's straws—tomorrow."

Gay lay on the float in front of the cabin, her face buried in the hollow between her crossed arms. The sun shone warmly on her back and legs and the wind, ruffling her hair, was refreshingly cool. The float moved gently, rocked by waves which hurried before the wind across the surface of the lake. The warmth, the gentle motion, the whispering sound of the water, induced a state of drowsy contentment. She found it increasingly difficult to concentrate upon problems and eventualities though that was what she had gone there to do.

Not that problems were pressing. They seemed to retreat farther into the hazy distance with each day that she spent at the lake. She was active from the hour of their early breakfast until the inevitable moment when her eyes dropped over a magazine the parched board of the word games which Kate instigated to while away the after-supper interval when darkness fell over the woods and the lake. She slept soundly without dreaming.

now, lying warm and drowsy in the sun on the rocking float, if he were not there in the cabin pottering with his test-tubes and microscope in the room that had been Mrs. Dill's?

But he wasn't there. At a cheerful hall from the shore Gay rolled over and then sat up. He stood on the boat-landing in swimming trunks and jersey, an arm raised in salute.

"Is the water cold?" he called.

"Frigid. I have icicles in my ears."

"Think I'll paddle over," "Sissy!" she taunted. "I swam."

"You were showing off." He dipped his toes into the water and withdrew them with a grimace.

"Pure exhibitionism."

"Superior stamina."

"Oh, yes?"

Thank heavens they'd gotten over being so terribly polite, she thought watching him take a shallow dive from the end of the landing. The first day after she and Kate had arrived it had been pretty dreadful. They'd watched each other warily suspicious of the meaning behind every gesture, all defenses stoutly guarded. It was different now. Each day that passed brought them closer together in an impersonal companionship, based on experience—shared, household chores squabbled over and gaily performed, a great deal of laughter. Kate's presence was a safeguard. Her wry humor, her resourcefulness, her energy and enthusiasm kept them occupied in an amused. Gay, sitting on the float, her arms hugging her knees, wondered what would have happened if Kate hadn't been there. She was glad, really glad, that Kate was

"Perishing?" she asked as John's head bobbed along the side of the float.

"Practically." He pulled his body up on the planking, shook his self, scattering a shower of droplets.

"Hey!" Gay said, ducking.

"Sorry." He sat beside her, opened the pocket on the back of his trunks, produced matches and a cigarette.

"Will you light one for me?" he asked. "My hands are wet."

She lit a cigarette, placed it between his lips. The brief contact was closer to intimacy than they had been during the past five days. For an instant their eyes met and then Gay glanced away.

"Are your germs bearing well?" she asked, when the light flickered and her heart had subsided.

"Abominably." He stretched on the float beside her, his hand supporting his head. "I've just buried the whole lot under a pine tree. The odor of the cabin is vastly improved."

"Oh, what a shame!" she said in sympathy, surprised that he seemed so cheerful.

"That's the way it goes," he said. "You've got to have the patience of Job."

"Aren't you?" An altered tone in his voice caught her straying attention.

"Mmm?" she hummed on a rising inflection.

"I asked you if you were bored."

"Certainly not."

"You weren't listening."

"I was."

"Don't be polite." He sat up to light a cigarette. "There's no reason why you should be interested. It must seem very dull and, as you said, unrewarding."

"I can think of gayer subjects," she said, wanting to hurt him, because he had hurt her.

"Such as—?"

"Well, aquaplaning, for instance."

"All right. Talk away. I'll be a sinner."

"I shan't be able to add anything to the conversation. I've had rather the time nor the opportunity for luxury sports."

"Skiing, then?"

"You're good at that, aren't you?"

"Fairly. It was included in the curriculum of the school at Georgetown."

"I can't add much to that subject," he said. "I've done a little skiing on the hills at home. Not sensational. You'd consider my exploits amateurish. I'm afraid."

There was no humility in his voice. His obvious intention was to imply that an interest in sports was trivial in comparison with his more serious aspirations. Gay turned her head and looked out across the water toward the shore. If it was a dense, she could break through it, she thought. But was it a defense? Didn't he, hadn't he always, considered her interests trivial? Heavens knew, she thought they were. If in justification, she could talk to him, tell him why she'd returned to the cabin—

"I can't talk about polo, either," he said, breaking a lengthening silence. "Or horse shows or yacht races or the Costume Ball at Southampton."

"Well," she said, presently. "I suppose we can talk about the weather."

"You're filled with disapproval."

"I'm not." His smile softened the contradiction. "I'm filled with suppressed curiosity."

"Scientific curiosity?" She sat back on the float, her arms around her knees.

"No, purely human." He hesitated, then asked, "Your experiment? Is it working out? Or have you buried it under a pine tree?"

His question caught her off-guard. Her eyes turned, again, to the canoe tied to the landing.

"It isn't so easily disposed of," she said.

"Are you—working at it?" His voice was very persuasive.

"Not seriously. I never seem to find time. I'm always sleepy or hungry or interested or—contented."

A shout hailed them from the shore. Gay turned to see Kate gesturing from the landing.

"Hello!" she called in reply to the hail. Kate eased herself down into the canoe, unfastened the tie-rope and picked up a paddle.

"The marines are coming." Gay looked at John, not knowing whether she felt more relieved or annoyed by the interruption. What he felt was obvious.

"Tell them to shoot an Indian," he said.

John caught the side of the canoe. It wobbled, then steadied against the float. Kate dropped the paddle.

"Are you landing?" he asked.

"No, thank you." Something had disturbed her, he thought. Her plain clever face, usually serene, looked both irritated and concerned. She glanced up at him as though he was the cause of her concern and irritation.

"I'm going back in a minute," she said.

"Then, why had she come? He thought he was sure, that Gay would have answered his question if they had remained undisturbed. He asked Kate. He'd been glad, at first, that she was here. Lately, though—this morning—"Have you robbed the mail-man again?" he asked.

"You'll land in jail. All those papers—"

"New York papers?" Gay scrambled to the edge of the float. "Where did you get them?"

"I sent for them," Kate said.

"Is there—?" Gay asked quickly. Then, more deliberately, "What's the news?"

"Your father sailed three days ago," Kate said in reply to Gay's question.

"But he wasn't to have returned until—"

"Exactly." His eyes turned to Kate. She sat with compressed lips looking up at Gay through slightly narrowed eyes. "He missed the auction in London," she said.

"That's bad. That's really very bad." Gay gave an exclamation, half dismay, half exasperated rage.

"Aunt Flora probably cabled him," she said.

"Your mother has not been idle," Kate reminded her grimly, "not to mention a varied assortment of relatives."

"They're such an articulate family."

"Yes," Kate said dryly, "and, unfortunately, cable rates are no deterrent."

"But why couldn't they have waited?" The humor that had brightened her voice was gone. Though he saw her only in profile, John knew that her eyes were dark and mutinous. "Why must they jump to conclusions? Aunt Flora would, of course. But I thought Mother had more sense!"

"It's been five days," Kate pointed out. "They probably think you've been kidnapped. You can't wonder that they're anxious," she added in a tone of increasing exasperation.

"I've been away longer than that."

"But not at a time like this when something has been arranged for you practically every hour. Think of the excuses, the questions, the evasions."

"You think of them. I haven't the strength."

"You haven't communicated with anyone?"

"No. Why should I? Todd—understood. I told both Mother and Aunt Flora in the notes I wrote them that I would return at the end of the week."

"And will you?"

She remembered him, then. John's heart leapt as his eyes, for a moment, met her shadowed glance. It sank again as she replied with unconscious arrogance.

"I usually keep my promises, don't I?"

"In that case," Kate said, and he thought she sounded considerably relieved, "we'll be obliged to start in the morning. And I think we should both apologize to John. He isn't have enjoyed having this discussed in his presence. And he didn't escape." He added, humorously, "I'm sorry, but I'm a bit tired and irritated." He held a steady, very serious, gaze on her. "I don't like to see you so tired. Think of the trouble it will make you."



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