two keys to a cabin

by

Lida Larrimore

CHAPTER XII

Gay roused, opened her eyes, sat up in the high-posted bed. A blast of air from the open window struck her like the stinging needles of a shower. She slid back into the warm hollow her body had made and pulled the covers up under her chin. But the blast of air had wakened her as effectively as though, literally, it had been an ice-cold shower. Her eyes were wide open, her senses alert. No hope of drowsing off into sleep again.

She lay looking up at the ceiling where bars of sunlight striped the dim ivory-toned paper and miniature rainbows, reflections from glass stoppers in scent bottles on the bureau, moved quiveringly. The storm was over, then, the blizzard which John had predicted. He would be here tonight if the roads were cleared. But that would be. How many hours away?

She glanced at her watch, then groped her arm under the blankets and quilts. She should get up immediately. Mrs. Houghton had told her to sleep as long as she liked. But there was no servant except the dour angular woman she called Huldah and she didn't want to make extra work.

She must get up. The house was stirring. She heard footsteps along the hall, Debby's lovely voice raised in spirited discussion, the scrape of a shovel on the porch ment outside. Summoning all her courage, she threw back the covers, huddled her dressing-gown about her shoulders, slipped her feet into satin mules and dashed across the room to lower the window.

If John were here, she wouldn't mind. Gay assembled fresh underwear and toilet articles in preparation for a dash to the bath-room. She hadn't anticipated being marooned here three days without him. She had anticipated none of the contingencies which had arisen, nothing beyond seeing him, being with him again. He would come tonight, surely, and take her back into Portland. There was only today to get through. Feeling more cheerful, she opened the door, made a quick survey of the situation, then hurried along the hall and down two steps to the bath-room.

When she returned to the bedroom, partially clothed beneath her dressing-gown, she found Debby there.

"Good-morning." Debby turned from one of the front windows that overlooked the street. She was a vivid, restless, appealing young thing, Gay thought, dark like John, with dark eyes and crisply curling dark hair, standing slender and straight in the dress of dull red wool, her hands in the pockets of the jacket.

"Good-morning," Gay said, smiling.

"You should have waited." Debby's voice was lovely, low, with contralto cadences, spirited, alive. "I meant to come in and lower the window." She picked up Gay's dressing-gown as it fell to the floor. "This is beautiful, but you must be frozen. And that nightgown. Nothing but satin and lace."

"I've never been in Maine in the winter before." Gay opened the door of the wardrobe. "That's obvious from the clothes I brought, isn't it?" she asked, laughing.

"Wear this gray one." Debby stood beside her, interested in the contents of the wardrobe. "It's angora, isn't it?" Her slender, olive-skinned hand touched the soft material appreciatively.

"That's the warmest." Gay took the dress from the hanger.

"You'll need it." Debby went to perch in the deep sill of the window. "You can't keep this old house warm. It's as drafty as a barn and there aren't even radiators."

"It's a marvelous house, Debby." Gay's head emerged through the neckline of the grey angora dress. "I should think you'd be awfully proud of it."

Debby's dark eyes flashed. "I hate it," she said. "When I have a house of my own, there isn't going to be one old thing in it."

"You like modern furnishings and decorations?" Gay drew on gray woolen stockings, laced gray suede oxfords, crossed the lacings around her ankles.

"Do I!"

"You'd be interested in my mother's apartment in New York. It's modern."

"John told me. It's a penthouse, isn't it? I don't suppose I'll ever get to New York," she added gloomily. "I can't persuade Mother to go to Boston even."

"Would you like to live in Boston?"

"I'd like to live anywhere but here. Portland would do. But you can't pry Mother away."

This is her home. Gay said, interested in John's younger sister, sympathizing with her restlessness, thinking how unlike John she was in temperament, though physically there was a resemblance.

"I suppose it was fun to live here once," Debby went on, warming. Gay thought, her sympathy and interest. "A long time ago. I mean, when the men went on voyages and brought things back from China and India. Sometimes the women went too. My great-grandmother, who I was named for, did. I'd have liked that."

"But," Debby continued regretfully, "as they say on the radio, there's no fun except in summer. You can't make Mother leave though. She's had plenty of chances to sell the house. We could get enough for it, even in the condition it's in, to live comfortably somewhere. The summer people are all crazy about it. I don't know why, I'm thinking." She broke off with an apologetic smile. "I certainly am running on. It's fun to have someone to talk to. You're even better looking than your picture, Gay."

"Thank you. You haven't lost the matter in."

"I used to watch for pictures of you after John went to your debutante party. They [illegible] the society magazines and the Beauty Shop and Mr. Sweeney let me have them out to show to John. I thought he liked you pretty well, then, and Uncle John too. Mother—"

A clock in the hall struck a series of strangling notes. Debby slid down from the sill.

"It struck nine, didn't it? That's half past eight or I've got to scream. I wish I could stay with you."

"I wish you could."

"But since I took extra courses at High this year practically over Mother's dead body, I have to stick at them." Debby walked reluctantly toward the door. "She wanted me to go to college."

"Why didn't you want to go?" Gay asked. "If you dislike it here—"

Debby glanced away, a flush staining her olive cheeks. "I'm talking too much, I guess." She turned, came back to Gay, threw her arms around her. "I think you're lovely," she said in a rush of impulsive words. "I don't know quite how John managed it, you but I'm glad he did. Don't you listen to anything anybody says, not that they'll say much but—"

"What do you mean, Debby?" Gay asked puzzled.

But Debby did not explain. "I've got to go," she mumbled, not looking at Gay, and went running out of the room.

(Continued next week)

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