

two keys to a cabin

by Lida Larrimore

"You shouldn't have gone to extra trouble for me, Mrs. Houghton," Gay said, as John's mother came into the living-room with a tray.

"It's no extra trouble," Ann Houghton arranged dishes on the small table before the open fire in the living-room. "It's warmer here than in the dining-room."

John's mother smiled faintly. Her skin was dark like John's and Deb-



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by's. Her dark eyes, deeply set under straight dark brows, were as somber as John's were when he was troubled. She held her taller than average figure erect but rather, Gay thought, because some indomitable purpose, through a succession of years, had stiffened her spine, than because she realized or gave a thought to the decorative value of a fine carriage. Her hair was lovely, dark with only a sprinkling of gray. It waved back from her forehead and temples, softening the bony contours of her face. Properly dressed and with the stiffness relaxed she would have the distinction Uncle John had had. Gay wondered if she had ever had his warmth and humor, if she ever laughed aloud.

"The fire is pleasant," Gay poured coffee into a thin porcelain cup with a red sea-weed pattern. "I had no idea it could be so cold here in March."

"We're accustomed to the cold," Ann Houghton, seated in a wing-chair at the opposite side of the hearth, took a length of knitting from a bag hanging on the arm of the chair. She was never idle, Gay had observed in the two days she had spent in John's home. Her housekeeping was a ritual meticulously performed. In those moments, as now, when she was not engaged in some active task, her long hands with prominent knuckles and nails, nicely shaped but unmanicured, were busy with knitting or sewing. "It's healthy but not very comfortable, especially since you've just come from Florida."

"I don't mind at all," Gay said quickly. "Can't we go for a walk?"

"I'm afraid I can't spare the time," John's mother said in the cool deliberate tone which held Gay at an impassable distance. "But you go, if you like. Only you must wear Debby's moccasins." Her glance fell to Gay's sturdy but daintily fashioned oxfords. "It's so easy to get your toes frosted. I shouldn't want you to suffer from chilblains the rest of your life."

"You would probably enjoy a walk," John's mother said after an interval of silence during which the needles had clicked and Gay had determinedly finished her breakfast. "It's dull for you while Sarah and Debby are in school. If we had known you were coming, we might have arranged something entertaining, though everybody has been storm-bound during the past two days."

"It was inconsiderate of me to have brought a blizzard from Florida, I should have done better."

Ann Houghton's faint smile was her only acknowledgment of the pleasantry.

"I don't, ordinarily, encourage gaiety during the week," she went on. "This is Sarah's first year of teaching in the high school. She is naturally eager to make a favorable impression and she isn't very strong."

Sarah looked strong enough, Gay thought, though a little sunken and

unhappy. No, not actively unhappy, resigned. A little gaily, she thought continued, would do Sarah more good than her mother's persistent coddling. Still that was Sarah's concern—and her mother's.

"It's pleasant just to be here," Gay said. She pushed her chair back from the table, slipped her hand into the pocket that contained her cigarette case, reconsidered. "I've enjoyed my breakfast."

Ann Houghton folded the knitting into the bag, rose briskly from the wing-chair with, Gay thought, an appearance of relief. She took a tray from the window sill and began to clear the small table from which Gay had eaten her breakfast.

"Let me help you," Gay, too, rose, stood watching Ann Houghton's competent movements.

"No, thank you, I know just where everything goes," Ann Houghton's voice was gracious but chillingly reserved. "Amuse yourself if you can with our limited resources. I suppose that John will come tonight."

"He said he hoped to when he called last night."

Ann Houghton glanced at the window through which sunlight streamed in dazzlingly across a frosting of snow on the sill.

"I hope he won't attempt it unless the roads are clear," she turned to place the vase containing the ivy and geranium on the mantel above the fireplace.

Was she going to tell her that John wasn't strong? Gay wondered. As though anything, other than an emergency call would keep him from coming now that the storm was over.

"John is accustomed to icy roads, I suppose," she said, a faint note of exasperation in her voice. "He drives all winter."

Ann Houghton took up the tray. "It's foolish of me to worry," she said, "but when his work isn't involved, I don't like him to take unnecessary risks. Will you go for a walk now or wait until the sun is warmer? I do the upstairs work on Friday while Huldah is cleaning downstairs. It's tiresome for you to be exposed to all the household machinery but when there are only two of us to keep the wheels turning we must observe routine. I try to spare Sarah, and Debby hasn't a natural bent toward housework, I'm afraid."

"Let me help you," Gay urged, smiling, ashamed of the exasperation her voice had revealed. "I haven't a natural bent for housework, either, but I can learn."

Again Ann Houghton smiled faintly.

"You're far too decorative, my dear, to—"

"To be useful?"

"—to be expected to be useful," Ann Houghton finished smoothly. "Besides, it's cold upstairs. No, you stay here by the fire until it's warm enough for a walk. Have you an interesting book? There are magazines on the table."

"I'll amuse myself." The warmth and friendliness faded out of Gay's voice. She walked to a table against the wall and picked up a magazine.

John's mother went out of the room. Gay returned to the hearth, slipped into a chair, sat with the magazine unopened on her lap. Ann Houghton resented her, she thought. It was obvious, though no reference had been made to it, that she was opposed to John's marrying her. That was a little ironical. Mothers of eligible sons had courted her persistently since she was seventeen, that toothy dowager in England, the Swiss countess who was a patroness of the school she had attended, mothers in New York and Palm Beach and Southampton. She was relieved when her engagement to Todd had put an end to that form of pursuit.

It didn't matter, except just now, when she was here—except that she felt, or imagined she felt, a difference in John. The afternoon he had brought her here, at dinner later in the evening, she had felt Ann Houghton's influence working a change in John. It was nothing she could define, a feeling that he was seeing her through her mother's eyes, weighing her words, her gestures, her reactions to the family life familiar to him by some scale of values which his mother supplied.

A feeling—she had imagined it, perhaps. But when he came tonight, would she feel the same tension and strain? There was no change in Ann Houghton's manner toward her. Would John—?

But this brooding was morbid. She needed to get out of the house. The sun was shining and the sky was clear and blue. She wanted to explore the town where John had lived as a child, a boy, when he had spent his summers during the period that he had been in college and medical school. She would ask for Debby's moccasins, since that seemed so important. The magazine slid to the floor as she rose from the chair.

Climbing the stairs, she heard no sound on the upper floor, but as she walked along the hall, she caught a glimpse through the open door of John's room of Ann Houghton's brown skirt and dark red cardigan sweater. She paused in the hall outside the door, meaning to ask for Debby's moccasins and to tell Mrs. Houghton that she was going to take a walk.

The words, forming on her lips, were checked there. The position of Ann Houghton's back, seen through the doorway, seemed almost with her back to the door, the palms of her hands pressed against the wall, looking at a bare framed panel between the windows. Her shoulders sagged. Every line of her

When Canadian Army Train Visited Georgetown



Georgetown school children flock around flat cars showing a universal carrier, "jeep," searchlight and Valentine tank, which formed one of the highlights of the Canadian Army Train which visited Georgetown on February 18th.

—Photo courtesy Montreal Standard—

HALTON GARAGE OPERATORS MEET AT MILTON

The regular monthly meeting of Halton Branch Garage Operators' Association was held in the Farmers' Hall, Milton, March 3rd, at 8 p.m. with President A. C. Patterson in the chair.

After the reading of the minutes the president outlined a plan he had for zoning the county.

A motion was brought before the members to the effect that the Board of Directors be enlarged so that each and every part of the Branch be represented. After some discussion this was held over for the time being. Further discussion took place in connection with delegates to be appointed to attend Provincial Council, this too being held over to a later meeting.

Mr. Close of the Ford Motor Co. presented a very entertaining program in which he displayed some very interesting films, among them being "Tools for the Job," a film covering the manufacture of several types of war equipment manufactured by the Ford Motor Co. These films were greatly enjoyed by the largest attended meeting held in a good many months.

Sandwiches and coffee and a social half hour concluded the evening's activities.

Officer (examining recruit) — Have you any scars on you?
Recruit—No, sir, but I can give you a cigarette.

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—Photo courtesy Montreal Standard—