

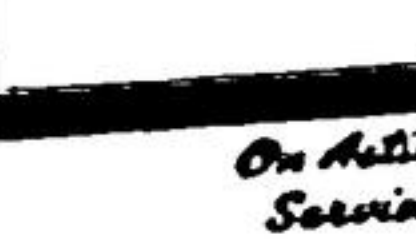
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SAMPLE COPY ON REQUEST

two keys to a cabin
 by Lida Larrimore

"I don't feel that it would be wise," John said. "Then it's settled, isn't it? Debby doesn't go back to New York with Gay. Now may we talk of something else? Food, for instance. I'm starved. Did Huldah make chocolate doughnuts? Come out to the kitchen with me, Gay."

Ann Houghton rose from her chair. "If you please, John, I'd like you to go to Debby with me."

"Oh, let her alone. You know now she is when she's had a tantrum. Don't play up to her and she'll get over it."

"I don't think she's well. She's not been herself these past few days."

"You'll turn her into a neurotic if you don't stop coddling her."

"Debby is sensitive in a way which I think I understand better than you."

John turned to Gay in smiling exasperation. "What was the use of my spending four years in medical school and two years interning when mother, by instinct, knows more than I do about my profession?"

Again a faint chilling smile touched Ann Houghton's lips. "I should like you to go with me, John," she repeated. "Debby is nervous and excited. She'll probably need a sedative to put her to sleep. The doctors will wait and Gay will excuse you for a few minutes. I'm sure."

"Certainly, Mrs. Houghton."

"Back in a minute, Gay." John's eyes were pleading. His smile was strained.

"Good night, Gay."

"Good night, Mrs. Houghton."

John went out of the room with his mother. The door closed. Gay stood leaning against the back of the chair, staring into the fire.

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thing of which you would disapprove. Mrs. Houghton."

"I don't question that, but your life is so different from our life here. I'm afraid that the contrast—"

"You know Debby is a chameleon, Mother. She adapts herself easily to any environment."

"That's just why I don't—" she broke off, glanced quickly at John, at Gay. "I'm not presuming to criticize your mode of living, Gay, but I'm convinced that for Debby just at this time— if it were Sarah, that would be a different matter."

"I shouldn't think you would want me for a visit after the scene you've just witnessed. I feel that she, that I owe you an apology."

"No, please, Mrs. Houghton. She was terribly disappointed. It was my fault. I should have consulted you. It's all right. I understand how you feel, but I'm disappointed too."

John made a restless movement on the hearth. "Then it's settled, isn't it? Debby doesn't go back to New York with Gay. Now may we talk of something else? Food, for instance. I'm starved. Did Huldah make chocolate doughnuts? Come out to the kitchen with me, Gay."

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Gay did not turn when the door opened. She remained seated in the chair beside the hearth, looking up at the painting above the mantel. "Were you asleep?" John asked, coming to the chair. "I'm sorry I've been so long."

"No, not asleep. I've been getting acquainted with the gentleman up there. It's your great-grandfather, isn't it?"

"Abner Houghton—yes."

"You don't look like him. In an hour of intensive study I haven't been able to find a trace of resemblance."

"I'm sorry it's been an hour. I wanted to get back to you." He bent to lift her hands lying in her lap. "Come over here where we can be close together. I haven't kissed you for three days."

"Has it been only three days?"

"Darling, have you been miserable?"

She drew her hands from his, and looking down at them, silent.

"What is it? What are you thinking?"

"I want to go with you tomorrow."

"Into Portland? I meant to take you."

"And then on to New York—tomorrow."

"But Mary expects you to stay. And the kids. Nat made me promise to bring you."

"That's dear of them, but—"

"Look at me, Gay."

She raised her head. Seeing his grave and troubled face, she gave a little cry. He bent toward her. Her arms went around his neck. Their lips met and clung. Presently he drew away, straightened, took her hands to pull her up from the chair. "Did taking Debby to New York mean so much to you?"

"I should have enjoyed having her, but that isn't important."

"That act she pulled must have been unpleasant for you."

"It wasn't an act." She sat beside him on a sofa with a high back curled at one end like a snail. "Debby meant every word she said."

He looked searchingly into her eyes.

"Do you believe that, Gay?"

"Of course I believe it. I've been here for three days."

"Mother told me. I hadn't realized—"

"I don't want to discuss your mother, John."

"But you can't believe the things Debby said were true."

"They are true. I'm sorry if it offends you but you asked for it."

He drew a little away from her. "Mother is only thinking of what is best for Debby. She is emotional and immature, and she has this notion about singing—"

"Why shouldn't she have a chance?"

"That isn't what Mother wants for Debby."

"What does she want for Debby?"

"She wants her to go to college."

"So that Debby can spend the rest of her life being grateful to her?" Her voice softened. "Oh, I am sorry, John. I shouldn't have said that."

"You can say what you like to me, what you think, how you feel."

"No, I can't. When I do, we quarrel. Debby isn't important insofar as we are concerned. But your mother is. She doesn't want Debby to go to New York with me because she's afraid of me, of the things I can do for her. She wants to be everything to all of you."

"That's natural, isn't it?"

"Natural, perhaps, but selfish. Yes, selfish, John. Can't you see?"

"If you knew what Mother's life has been. Her every thought has been for us."

"It would have been better for her, for you, if she had to plan for you. Gay. There wasn't much money. You can't understand, I suppose."

"No, frankly I can't."

"That's because you have the protection of wealth," he said stiffly.

"Oh, money! Because my grandfathers left a trust fund for me, weicker and quarrel." Antagonism sharpened her voice a sense of the distance widening between them. "You attach too much importance to what I have—"

"It isn't because you have it now," he said slowly, with measured deliberation. "It's because you've always had it. From the hour you were born every thought you've had, every move you've made, has been colored and shaped by the fact that both your grandfathers were wealthy men. Your mother—"

"How absurd we are!" She gave a short strained laugh. "In New York we quarrelled because my mother did not display a properly maternal attitude. Now we quarrel because your mother is a model of maternal devotion. Oh, is it important, John?"

"We are each of us the product of our separate environments," he said carefully, thoughtfully. "You had nurses and governesses. You were sent to camps, to schools, to the sea-shore in summer, to dancing class. For your birthdays magicians were hired to entertain you and your guests. When you were sick there were nurses. Mother did everything for us. When we were sick, she couldn't afford to engage a trained nurse. There was no amusement, no entertainment. Mother made fun for us at home. She scolded and saved to send me to college, to send Sarah. She managed it in ways you couldn't understand, hamburger instead of steak, never quite enough heat in the house, dried vegetables instead of fresh ones in winter. Sarah's dresses made over for Debby—"

"And with all of that she has tied you to her for the rest of your lives, you and Sarah, at least. Oh, of course she's been splendid. I mean that sincerely. But it's a sort of selfishness, too. She resents me because I can do things for you which she can't. She's afraid of

sat with shoulders drooping, his hands swinging between his knees. "It's just biology, isn't it?" she asked with a little brittle laugh. "I hoped there was more than that. I had the naive notion that biology was only a part of it, that there could be companionship, too, and faith and security."

"Gay—!" He groaned.

"I'm beginning to understand. No, not that. I guess I've known but I wouldn't admit it. Do you remember Christmas Eve in New York when Suki announced callers? You asked me what you should say to them. I think I asked you what you said to me. You said 'I tell you I love you.' That's the only thing we can say to each other without quarrelling. What will we talk about when—?"

"But if—when we're together, we won't be here or in New York. There won't be people getting in the way, your family, mine—"

"I've told myself that, but it isn't true. We can't escape our environments. We'll take them with us wherever we go. We'll quarrel and make up and quarrel again, but each quarrel will leave a scar. Let's not spoil it, John."

He started up from the sofa.

"Gay! Do you mean—?" he asked hoarsely.

She held him off with an instinctive gesture. "Uncle John may have known," she said steadily, her hands grasping the back of the chair. "But he was—dying. We must live, John, you and I. We can't let something that was beautiful become tarnished and scarred. Let's stop hurting each other. Let's end it now, neatly and definitely."

He stood beside her, at a little distance, his lips moving, his eyes searching her face. She glanced away.

"Do you want to do that?" he asked quietly.

"Yes—!" Her reply was as controlled as his question had been. "I want to go home tomorrow and start to forget you. It will be difficult but I'll manage it. You forget anything don't you in time?"

"Do you mean that? Look at me, Gay."

Her head turned. She looked up at him through a film of tears.

"I mean it—!" Her voice faltered. Clinging to the back of the chair, she swayed as though her strength was gone.

He caught her, held her. For an instant they clung together, urgently, despairingly, then she broke away.

"That doesn't change anything, John."

"Doesn't it? Oh, can't we, Gay? I love you so."

His arms held her again. Her face, streaming with tears, lifted to his face. "When I'm with you like this—Darling! How can we? I don't know—"

(Chapter XV — Next Week)



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"Oh, of course she's been splendid."

me, for you, for your work, for Debby, mainly because she wants to be the source of all giving, like God, like—"

"You're uncharitable, Gay."

"I'm honest. I've seen. If I weren't Gabriella Graham, if I had no money, she would welcome me for your sake. I being who I am, she fears and resents me."

"Lack of security breeds fear. When you are obliged to consider the possible result of every move you make, you are cautious."

"You're afraid, too," she said, barely audibly, as though the words had been forced through her lips. "You don't trust me."

He turned to look at her miserably.

"You needn't tell me. I know." Her voice steeled. "The things I've been thinking are true, the things I thought tonight while I was waiting here for you."

"What things, Gay?"

"That it isn't possible. We hurt each other. Love isn't enough."

"Oh, Gay! I do love you!" His arms reached for her. Passion flamed through the dark misery in his eyes. "I adore you. Since I first met you, when you were fifteen years old, I've worshiped you."

"Not! Don't touch me!" She slipped away from the sofa, went to stand, leaning, against the wing-chair beside the hearth. He half rose to follow her—dropped back.



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