

IDLE ISLAND

By ETHEL HUESTON

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STORY FROM THE START

On the verge of nervous collapse, due to overwork, Gay Deane, successful New York artist, seeks rest at Idle Island. She rents a cottage, the "Lone Pine," from an island character, the "Captain," and his sister, Alice Addover, "administrator." Gay finds the cottage is tenanted by an elderly lady, "Auntalmiry," who consents to move to another abode, the "Apple Tree." Awakening from sleep, Gay imagines she sees the face of a Chinaman peering in the window. She settles down in her new home, anticipating months of well-earned rest and recuperation. On an exploration of the island Gay, standing on the seashore, is horrified by the appearance of the drifting body of a drowned man, which she nerves herself to bring to the shore. A bullet wound in the temple shows the man to have been murdered. Gay makes her way to the "Captain" with the story. Returning with him to the shore, they find no body there, and Gay's story of the incident is set down to an attack of "nerves."

CHAPTER IV—Continued

"Is this the quiet good little place they brag about?" she asked herself. "Where they come and—steal dead bodies—from under your very eyes?" Both tears and laughter came at the whimsical notion. But in spite of her attempt to be facetious and unconcerned, she was highly nervous and quite unstrung. A sudden clear call, "Hallo there," from behind, started her into a frightened scream and she sprang to her feet. Quite beyond power of reason as she was, the call had seemed to come from the valley of death.

Glancing up, she saw on the piazza of the little club a man who leaned out over the railing and beckoned to her. He was a stranger, she knew at once, one of the summer people, no native son.

"I beg your pardon," he called pleasantly, "but will you kindly show me the way down? I cannot find the path."

"There is no path. There is no way down."

"But—I beg your pardon—you are down, are you not?" Gay smiled up at him. "Yes, but I slid right down those steep rocks, and it is hard sliding, I assure you. I am coming up. I will show you the way through the woods and the lane will lead you direct to the landing. I go that way. Wait for me."

He crossed from the piazza to the top of the rocky cliff and waited to assist her, descending with difficulty a few steps to give her a hand when she had gained that height.

"Nice little shack," he said, tapping the corner of the little club as they passed. "Were you sketching it?"

"No, I was sketching— Oh, listen!" Gay stopped short, and turned toward him eagerly. A sudden longing for sympathy, for understanding, the reaction of one of her own kind in her emotional strain, overwhelmed her.

In a torrent of words, staring darkly into his interested eyes, Gay told him the whole story: of the body that had come to her on the waves, the wound in the temple, the fine white hands; how she had gone for help, and returned to find it—gone.

"By George, what a story," he said thoughtfully. "I suppose the tide carried it out while you were away."

"Well, you see," she admitted faintly, "the tide really couldn't. I pulled the body above the water line. The tide didn't reach him. That's the strangest thing about it."

He put out his hand, deeply interested for the sketch, and she showed it eagerly, her eyes still fixed upon his sympathetic face.

"Oh, by George, that is fine work," he said warmly. "What a hand! What a face!—oh, nonsense, you could never make up such a figure, of course you saw it. What are you going to do with this?"

"I shall send it to the police department. I think that boy belongs to somebody. Perhaps the police can trace him. Perhaps it will relieve some anxious hearts—though a sad relief it will be."

They walked on together, slowly, the stranger still carrying the sketch, glancing at it often with interested wandering eyes.

"Don't you rather hate to get mixed up in such an affair? There will be an inquest—at least an inquiry, and you will be called as a witness and—"

"Oh, there will be no trouble about it. It is obviously suicide—"

"It is obviously murder," he corrected gently. "The poor chap might have shot himself, or might have drowned himself. Not both."

Gay stopped suddenly, shivering again. "True," she said faintly. "I know it. I tried so hard not even to think of murder."

Her face was white.

"I wish you would give this to me," he said persuasively. "Or sell it to me, rather, for I can see that your pencil is your profession. I should be glad to buy it. I can make a ripping story of it. I am in newspaper work, and I can do wonders with this. I will have it photographed. If you like, and send a copy to the police."

Gay reached out, quickly, and took the pad. "I cannot do that," she said firmly. "I feel responsible for the thing. I feel as though I were led

down that hard and painful path on purpose to receive it—the poor body—swept to my very feet. It seems to make me—his avenger, don't you see? I dare say you think me very childish, but I feel that this has been sent straight to me, and I cannot evade it. I am sorry. But I must do it myself."

Suddenly they had cleared the forest and stood on the brow of the hill. The Lone Pine was directly at hand. "This is my cottage," she said. "Just cross right down the slope to the lane and follow it down to the pier. I am sorry about the drawing, but you see how it is."

"Oh, you are quite right, of course. It has been very fascinating—meeting you like this. I wish there was some place we could go for tea—"

"There is a place. There are lots of places. The island is full of tea. But I shan't go, thanks. Marching off to tea with a Perfect Stranger in the Good Little Island would be even more damning than the discovery of a nonexistent corpse. Even worse, I think than living alone, which seems the very height of depravity here. It



Descending a Few Steps to Give Her a Hand.

a'n't accordin' to natur'—It makes women queer. They think that's what is wrong with me, living alone."

"What do they advise? An orphan for adoption, or a husband for attachment?"

"Heaven knows. But anyhow I shouldn't live alone." She laughed pleasantly. "Good-by. I say it with sorrow, for you seem almost one of my own."

He held out his hand, and Gay dropped hers in it.

"Good-by. The best of luck to you. For myself I wish no better luck than the joy of seeing you again."

"Now, now," she reproved him, smiling. "Don't flatter. Consider the stately pines, the rugged coast and the surging surf. Flattery doesn't go with the Good Little Island."

"It doesn't go with you, either. I assure you I mean every word of it. Come soon, good luck. Good-by."

Gay walked toward the Lone Pine smiling. He was pleasant. It had been nice, the momentary contact with one of her own kind. But the smiles died on her lips as she turned the door of the Lone Pine. The house seemed still, big, empty. Very still.

The stillness was like death. Gay thought of the sea-washed body with pale gleaming hands flung out beneath the waves, and shuddered. She did not look at the drawing on the first page of her sketch book, but thrust the pad quickly into the drawer of the desk and closed it tight.

She grew increasingly ill at ease as dusk descended, and on a sudden impulse, at last went out, quickly, ran

down the hill and called to Auntalmiry.

"Won't you keep a poor timid nervous old maid all right?" she asked pleadingly. "I don't want to stay alone. I've got the—you know—beebie jeebies! My house is haunted. I'm afraid of ghosts, and things. Do you think it was just a ghost, Auntalmiry?"

Auntalmiry gave her a cozy chair and made her a cup of tea. That was Auntalmiry's unerring resource in case of nerves.

"Now drink your tea, dearie, and don't say a word about it. We'll have a nice cozy evening, just like a party."

She was evidently determined to soothe Gay, determined to humor her, keep her quiet. She petted her, talked pleasantly of inane and pleasant things.

When at last they made ready to retire for the night, she said Gay should have the solitary bed, and she herself would sleep on the couch.

"She's afraid of me, I do believe," Gay thought to herself. "She wants the room between us, in case I turn violent." Her lips twitched with amusement at the thought as she crept between the white covers.

Auntalmiry turned out the lights, and went about the room from window to window raising the blinds. When she came to the window that showed the Lone Pine at the top of the hill she gave a sudden little exclamation.

"Did you leave a light on?" she asked.

"No!" With a bound Gay was out of bed and at her side by the window, both staring up the hill at the cottage. From the wide window of the living room there showed a round circle of misty light, pale, wavering and uncertain, but a light.

"It's no earthly light," Gay said moodily. "It's a ghost. I tell you, Auntalmiry, the spirits are abroad this night. Say what you like, queer things are going on. I feel it. I am all creepy, and—oh, look! Oh, it is the hand! Oh!"

Her voice sank away breathlessly. Watching, suddenly outlined in the misty orb of light had been the reflection of a hand, reaching out, slim, shadowy and ghastly.

"Oh," Gay murmured sickly, "oh, it is his hand!"

Auntalmiry was shaken. Her arm beneath Gay's hand trembled. But she was firm. She did not believe in ghosts.

"I saw it," she said weakly. "It was just the reflection of a leaf, or a spray of twigs, moving in the wind. Look, it is gone. There is no light, there is no hand. It was the light from a boat reflecting against the leaves. Just a reflection, dearie. They often fool me."

"Have it your own way," Gay said moodily. "Call it a leaf if you like. I call it a hand, his hand."

"I think—maybe—I will sleep with you," Auntalmiry said faintly.

Gay laughed then, and squeezed the little figure gayly as she clambered into bed beside her.

"You'd rather take a chance on me turning violent, than be by yourself when the spirits walk, wouldn't you?" she teased.

"You shouldn't say such things. 'Tisn't reverent."

They arose early, and after a quiet breakfast Gay kissed Auntalmiry, thanked her and set out for home. Auntalmiry offered to go with her, but she refused, bravely smiling.

"Oh, no. I am not afraid now it is daylight. Spirits are all nicely back in their snug little graves again."

She went up to the cottage, unlocked the door and entered the room. Over it lay the quiet little hush that broods in an empty house. But she was not afraid. Even when she saw that the window shades in the living room were lowered to the bottom, she was not afraid.

"I didn't pull them down," she said, aloud. "I don't want out before dark. Oh, well! Perhaps I did it

from habit, without thinking. Heaven knows I had other things on my mind."

She sat down at once to her desk. It was her plan to go to the city on the first boat, to relieve herself of all responsibility in the matter. And then, suddenly, she decided that she would not go at all, but write instead.

She would describe the entire incident to the last detail, enclose her sketch, and that would be an end of it. She reached into the drawer and pulled out paper, envelopes and her sketching pad. To measure for the size of envelope, she opened the pad to reveal the drawing. The page that met her eyes was virginal and white, no pencil line to mar its purity. Gay turned the pad about in her hand, studying it slowly, and then she turned every page, one after the other, and examined every one.

The page had been neatly extracted from the book, and her penciled sketch of the scene in the cove was not there.

Its disappearance settled the affair of the Little Club cove as far as Gay was concerned. With nothing to substantiate her seemingly wild story, she felt the less said of it the better. Gay knew, however, that she was the subject of endless discussion, endless neighborhood wit, in her absence, and for a few days she confined herself as largely as possible to the seclusion of her cottage.

One afternoon, perhaps a week after her discovery and betrayal in the cove, tiring suddenly of her work, she shoved the easel into the corner and decided to clean house. Hastily she bundled her slim knickered figure into a great bungalow apron that made a fat and stodge housewife of her, twisted a bright silken scarf turbanwise about her small head and fell to work. She dusted, she swept, she rearranged. With brush and pan in hand, she was on her knees at the fireplace, coughing distastefully with the dust of ashes as she cleared out the cinders of last night's driftwood, when suddenly a hand slipped beneath her chin from behind, tilting her head backward, while two firm lips pressed down on hers from above, pressed firmly, warmly, for one long breathless moment.

And then a tremendous, electrifying silence. Gay dropped pan and brush among the ashes and stood up, very tall, very businesslike even with the huge apron bulky enveloping her, deeply outraged. The man who stood before her, in a silence as great, an amazement as profound as her own, was one she had never seen before, nor seen his like before, she knew at once. Travel-worn boots he wore, travel-worn knickers. Bareheaded, his blond hair, a little tousled, showed sunburn. But in that first glance it was really his eyes she saw, eyes dark and gray, with little mocking glints that shone through his amusement, gray eyes beneath black lashes, thick and long, that curled upward, veiling the gray with black.

Amusement soon supplanted the astonishment in his face, amusement and interest. His sang froid was perfect.

"Pleased to meet you," he said, with a mockingly deferential inclination of the bare and sunburned head.

"So it seems," Gay's voice and eyes were frigid.

"Who art thou, pretty maiden, and where, may one inquire, is the revered and venerable Auntalmiry who one time made this hut her home?" There was laughter in his eyes now, the gayer for her coolness.

"Oh, you wish to see Auntalmiry," she said still with some stiffness, self-consciously, though melting surely beneath the warmth of the gray eyes. "She lives in the Apple Tree now. I live here. Will you sit down?" she asked very formally, and took off the great bungalow apron.

The daring gray eyes explored the revelation of her, slim and straight in the stout shoes, the smart knickers, and the silken blouse; came to rest, contentedly, on the sleek, dark, proud little head.

"You don't live alone, do you?" he asked with interest.

"Yes, I do." Gay's voice was curt with the defiance she felt in defense of her lone estate. "I live alone, and I like it, and I am not afraid. I know it makes women folks queer, and it's not accordin' to natur', but I do, and if it suits me, there's an end of it."

"My esteemed female relatives wished me to sit and hear the report of the island," he said thoughtfully, "and I put them off. I should have waited. I fancy they had news of vast import."

"Yes, they did. And most of it is about me. I know who you are," she said, smilingly. "You are Rand. Are you not?" Her smile was very warm indeed in joy of her discovery.

He shivered slightly, covered the dark eyes with his hand. "Danger. My prophet: sense says danger," he whispered.

"Every one has been saying, 'When Rand comes home, and now you have come. The boys wanted the old pier to make a float for swimming, and the island wouldn't give it to them, and they said, 'When Rand comes home, he'll dynamite it, and we'll salvage the remains.' And when the summer people wanted to tear down the old fishing shack to make a place to launch their boats, the natives frowned upon them, but everybody said to everybody else, 'Wait till Rand comes, he'll burn it down.'"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Science Wins Victory Over Freak of Birth

A successful operation on what might be called incomplete Siamese twins has been reported to the medical journal, Lancet, of London, by Sir John Bland-Sutton. An account of the case was sent to Sir John, himself a consulting surgeon at the Middlesex hospital, by a medical correspondent in India. Attached to a Hindu boy baby at birth was a parasitic "brother" possessed of the full complement of limbs, but minus head, lungs and heart. A month after birth the parasite was growing rapidly so that the parents sought surgical aid for the relief of the child. The operation was performed and when last heard from the child was well and developing normally. Such cases, said the British surgeon, should encourage surgeons generally to separate conjoined twins and spare the fully developed individual not only a life of bondage, but the ignominy of being exhibited in public shows.

Has Many Applications

There are three different meanings to the word "yankee." It was first applied to natives or citizens of the New England states, particularly those of old New England families. Then it was applied by people of the Southern states to all the people of the Northern states, in general. Lastly, it is applied by the people of other countries to all citizens and inhabitants of the United States.

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Relieved His Mind

When Sylvester Wronbleski of Ashland, Wis., saw what appeared to be a large wolf sneaking through the brush he shot the animal and brought it to the county seat for the \$30 bounty. The affidavit was all made out and the money was about to be paid when Dan Smith came in and said the animal was his police dog. He also said other things, which cannot be printed.—Indianapolis News.

Righting a Wrong

Keeper (speaking of new arrival at asylum)—"What's the matter with this fellow?" Superintendent—He says the air is free and goes around releasing it from people's automobile tires.—Judge.

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Sensuality Made No Appeal to Epicurus

If Epicurus could return to earthly life today he would be somewhat surprised to hear his name as an adjective applied to persons and things sensual. Impartial history represents the habits of this Athenian philosopher and his followers as exceedingly frugal and temperate.

The members of his communal school of "Epicureanism" were mostly poor, but being greatly attached to one another, they, in times of scarcity, contributed to each other's support. Epicurus himself began his philosophical career when he was thirteen years old. At that time, upon hearing a verse of Hesiod wherein all things are said to come from Chaos, he asked: "And whence came Chaos?" His teachers referred him to philosophy and to philosophy he did apply.

He sought instruction from many masters, but none could give the youth any solid conviction. He thus founded his own school of thinking and tried to teach the world by precept that poverty and are better able to enjoy the pleasures of life. He was the first

to make philosophy a basis of morals, yet, ironically enough, his fame is the perversion of one of a sensualist.—Kansas City Star.

Flowers at Weddings

It is impossible to state when flowers were first used at a wedding, since this is a very ancient custom. Orange blossoms were worn and carried by brides from the earliest times, as they portend luck and happiness. Spencer and Milton were of the opinion that the orange was the golden apple presented to Jupiter by Juno on her wedding day. It was customary for the Anglo-Saxon bride to give her friends small knots and ribbons to wear or carry on the wedding day. This custom still survives in the bouquets of the bridesmaids.

Noteworthy Immigrant

The first Rockefeller, John Peter, emigrated to America from Germany in 1723.

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