

IDLE ISLAND

By
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STORY FROM THE START

On the verge of nervous collapse, due to overwork, Gay Delane, 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 Andover, "administrator." Gay finds the cottage is tenanted by an elderly lady, "Auntalmiry," who consents to move to another abode, the "Apple Tree." Awaking from sleep, Gay imagines she sees the face of a Chinaman peering in the window. On an exploration of the island, Gay, standing on the beach, 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." Gay, unable to convince her neighbors of the truth, draws a picture of the face of the dead man, intending to send it to the authorities. She meets a stranger, apparently another visitor, to whom she tells the story and shows the picture. He asks her to let him take it, but Gay refuses. Next day, after a night spent with "Auntalmiry," Gay finds the picture has been taken from the cottage. "Rand" Wallace, wanderer, and considered something of a "black sheep" by the islanders, expects to find "Auntalmiry," surprises Gay at household tasks. She likes him at once.

CHAPTER V—Continued

The days flew away like enchanted things. Gay had never been so happy, although she neglected her sacred canvases and brush. How could she work with Rand sprawling in the window-seat at her side, brown hand touching her hand, gray eyes holding her eyes? Every day he worked faithfully on the Bo's'n, Bemis' yacht, worked very hard for a few hours to spare himself more time to be with her, appearing at the Lone Pine every morning promptly at eleven o'clock, the hour of her late breakfast, which was breakfast and luncheon in one.

"So this is how one lives on nothing a year," she said to him one day, laughing. "Well, I am relieved. I know at least that you will never starve."

The next morning he handed her a pound of the best coffee obtainable at the Pier grocery store. He was very haughty. "I may be low, but I have my pride," he said. "My coffee! And when it is gone, kindly notify me. More will be forthcoming."

"Don't forget the electricity," she reminded him gayly. "It must be a nickel a week."

And laughingly she accepted the dingy coin he selected carefully from a handful to give her.

Every day he went up the slope to the Lone Pine at sunset, that sweetest hour of the day, and sat with her in the window-seat on the west, looking down to the bay where the sky burned with fresh-blown gold and flame and amethyst, burned fiercely for a while before it paled to smoking embers, pastel shades of rose and violet and cream. And when the embers had faded to gray ash, they went into the woods, and walked up and down beneath the trees that gossiped to one another above them, and breathed deeply of the intoxicating spices of the forest—pine, and spruce, and fir.

At that hour they never talked, but wandered slowly here and there, stumbling sometimes over the twisted old roots of trees or fallen logs, sliding over treacherous rocks, holding hands like children, smiling at each other.

One night they lingered long in the forest, so that dusk was blackening the shadows when they turned up behind the Little Club, to that pathless bit of the wood. As they went on, laughing softly, and stumbling, suddenly, without a sound, they came up to one who was walking toward them, swiftly, surely, toward the shore.

All feet fall softly on the thick pillowing of pine needles and dry mosses, but those feet that came to meet them made no sound at all. As they came together, Gay looked up, with keen but friendly interest to see who walked in her enchanted wood at nightfall, and then she caught her breath with a sudden startled intake.

The face that she saw in the dusk was sharply familiar, unmistakable, a thin little face that showed yellow in the gloaming, like yellow parchment, with narrow, sloping eyebrows, and beneath one of them a faint shining mark, like a seam in the parchment, where a scar seared the flesh, the face of a yellow, little old Chinaman.

In the dusk, as she had seen it before, she saw it again, and in the fraction of a moment, the dusk received him again, noiselessly, as it had received him before.

Gay had not by any means forgotten her first night on the island: when she lay alone in the cottage on the fringe of the woods in her great exhaustion of mind and physical weariness; when, sleeping, she had seemed to feel a gaze upon her, and stirred to see, or think she saw, the thin yellow face in the gloaming; and had turned again to her sleep, saying dreamily it was but a dream. She had, however, made inquiry casually, and had been told there were no resident Chinese on the island, but that,

on rare occasion, one came on errand from Portland, for the delivery of packages, perhaps, or a day's work. It was only as in a dream that she had remembered the face.

But now, with sudden fear, Gay knew it was no dream. She waited for Rand to come up to her.

"Did you see—him?" she whispered.

"The Chin? Yes. The men must be down at the club house. They always bring some one along to cook, usually a darky, but once it was a Jap. Perhaps they're giving all nations a try by turn." Then he felt Gay's intensity in her silence, the closeness of her hand on his. "Why, Gay, what is the matter? You're not afraid of him! Don't be afraid of a Chinkee, they never harm anybody.—You afraid! A woman who lives alone, and not according to nature and brags about it!"

Although Gay realized that the Females Wallace, as he affectionately called them, must no doubt long since have told Rand the story of the affair in the cove as they knew it, he had



Walked Up and Down Beneath the Trees.

never referred to it by word or by suggestion. It was that innate courtesy, that delicate New England reserve, which held sacred from reference a subject that might give pain.

Now, suddenly, Gay wished he would speak of it, would ask her what she had seen, or thought she saw. She wished greatly to talk freely with him, to tell him the surprising things that had happened to her on the island.

The closeness of her clasp on his hand relaxed. "I am not afraid," she said easily. "I just wondered who it was."

There was no sound from the wild growth of brush that lay so thickly about them, no faintest crackle of dried, dead, crumbling needles of pine, but as Gay finished speaking, a dark shadow slipped away, almost from beneath her hand, slipped away, shadow-like, and melted with the other shadows. And neither Gay nor Rand suspected one shadow more or less among the many on either side.

Even when the Bo's'n was ready at last for the trip down the coast, Rand put off his departure as long as he could, and when further delay was impossible, he sent his bags aboard, and with all in readiness for sailing, with the two men chosen for his crew aboard, he slowly climbed the hill for a final breakfast with Gay at eleven o'clock.

Gay was very wistful, very sad.

Evidence That Tigers Select Human Victims

Man-eating tigers of the Indian jungles sometimes appear to single out a certain person and go after him, ignoring all others until they get him, points out Gen. William Mitchell, the noted flying officer, in an article in Liberty. The general tells a story to illustrate his point.

"A native became separated from his companions in the jungle and was chased by a tiger," he writes. "He succeeded in climbing into a tree, while the tiger remained on watch below."

"After a while," General Mitchell continues, "his companions, noting his absence and suspecting that a tiger

Inexcusable Mistake

There is a delightful old Irish woman who keeps a corner fruit stand in a Western town. One day a gentleman disposed to be facetious took up a fine melon from her stall, and said gravely: "You have pretty good apples in this state; but where I come from we have them twice that size."

The old lady looked up from her stool, surveyed the joker coolly and replied in a tone of pity: "Ah, what for should I be wastin' me breath to talk to wan that takes our gooseberries for apples!"

She could not eat, although the breakfast tray for two was most enticingly arrayed. Over her cup of coffee her eyes clung to Rand's eyes, very large, very deep, darkly troubled.

"Rand, please eat," she begged. "You will be very hungry before night! Eat, please eat!"

"Gay, I can't. For the first time in my life, my appetite was all filled up before I began. I hate to go and leave you. Gay, you aren't thinking of going away the first of September, are you? I will make the trip as fast as I can, but I cannot be back by the first. You wouldn't go before I return, would you?"

"There's really nothing to hurry me away," she said reasonably. "I like it here, and I do need more rest, and they say—the weather is very nice in September."

"The weather! Are you staying for the weather?" Gay shook her head. No—for you.

Rand stood up suddenly, and Gay, too, rose slowly. Hand in hand they crossed the pleasant room to the door that opened down upon the bay where the Bo's'n waited for Rand, to take him away.

"I kissed you when I came the first time," he said softly, "wouldn't it rather hurt your feelings if I went away—less affectionately?"

Gay nodded. "Terribly. I should think you didn't like it."

Rand took her in his arms, and kissed her, not once, but many times. "Were you ever in love before, Rand?" Gay asked softly.

"Well—yes," he admitted hesitatingly. "Er—weren't you?"

"Well—yes," she acknowledged, smiling faintly. "But never like this, Rand, never like this."

Her cool, firm, slender fingers caressed his hair, touched his lips, cradled the curve of his chin.

"Rand," she whispered. "Rand."

At three o'clock, with smiling tremulous lips, and tears streaming down her face, but laughing, Gay stood in the highest window of the Lone Pine, and blew a kiss to the wind as Rand turned the Bo's'n east, to sea.

CHAPTER VI

With the first of September came the breaking up of the summer colony. Gay was grateful for the silence after the clamor of young voices, twanging ukuleles, whining saxophones. Adorable, waiting alone at the top of the hill, for Rand to come!

If sometimes she was troubled by a vague presentiment, a prophetic suggestion that all her future life would be something like that, waiting for Rand, she stifled it resolutely. She felt that it was doubly sweet to be alone in awaiting his return, that of all the summer colony, she alone remained, waiting.

There was a point high on the rocks to the east of the Little Club where she often sat by the hour, chin in hand, gazing dreamily off to sea. Rand would not return that way. He would come by fastest State-of-Maine express, but it was the way he had gone, and so intrigued her fancy.

Chin in hand, eyes misty with dreams, thoughts far away to sea in the south, she sat one day when a voice called up to her from a lower place among the rocks.

"Miss Delane! May I come up?" Gay turned quickly, and her eyes contracted wonderingly. She smiled. It was the man she had directed to the landing on the fateful day of her discovery in the cove.

"Come up, by all means," she said cordially.

And as he came up, climbing carefully and with a caution that spoke of little custom, she gave him her hand in greeting.

"How in the world did you know my name?" she asked interestedly.

"Oh, Gay Delane! It was on your sketch book that day. Do tell me—I have wondered about it so many times—whatever came of it all? Did the

police trace him? Did you ever get back the little sketch, and—"

Very briefly she told him of the disappearance of the sketch.

"Are—are you sure?" he asked doubtfully; almost, it seemed to her, quizzically. "It seems—very—well, unnatural, you know. Why, nobody knew about it—Didn't you drop the book? Couldn't it have fallen out? It seems—"

"Now, don't you think I am crazy," she said with some heat. "Everybody else does. But I am trusting you to trust me."

"I will trust you," he said quickly. "I do. It was bad luck all the way round, and I'm sorry. I wish I had taken the sketch from you by main force. I hate that worst of all, losing the sketch. Do you remember the hand—very fine—"

"Don't," she said. "Don't talk of it. I should have done something for that poor boy—but what could I do?"

"Don't think of it. Let's talk of something else.—Are you remaining long on the island? It seems very quiet here now. The summer people have gone, have they not?"

In spite of her best efforts, feeling the curious interest of his eyes, and his words, Gay felt her face flush for her lingering.

"I was worn out," she explained quickly. "I had to have a long rest. I shall stay a little longer—a week or two perhaps. While the weather is nice, I like it better now the summer crowd is gone. Just the nice, good, religious natives are left. And me. I like it. But I did not expect to see you here again."

"I wish I could say I had come only to see you," he said, "but I am afraid I dare not go so far. As a matter of fact, I have learned that they are anticipating rather a land boom around here in the next two or three years, and my partner and I are hoping to pick up something for a song, and sell it after a bit for a—well, a grand opera. I am scouting out the land."

"How interesting. How very interesting!" Gay stood up suddenly. "You offered me tea before, and I refused. I am bolder now. Will you tea with me? And tell me about it."

They passed back over the rocks and into the woods, skirting the Little Club, in silence.

"I shall have to take a peep at some of your private papers, I think," Gay said smilingly, as she led the way into the Lone Pine. "Or shall I call you 'Say'?"

"Ingram, Ronald Ingram—I beg your pardon, I seem to feel that I know you so well I quite forgot you did not know my name."

"Well, Mr Ingram, welcome to the Lone Pine. There is something about you—something New Yorker—that makes me tingle for Times square."

They were chatting companionably over their tea, chatting of work, of aims and interests, the big things of life, when Auntalmiry came to the door. She came intentionally, knowing there was a guest; Gay knew that at once, realized it with a vague resentment, although knowing it was not like the little old woman to intrude. She was dressed for the occasion, in her best black Sunday silk, with her coral cameo at her throat.

There was a flush of excitement in her cheeks, and as she stepped into the room, not glancing at Gay, she swept Ronald Ingram with an eager breathless gaze.

"Oh, Mrs. Bridges, this is Mr. Ingram," Gay said lightly. "Mrs. Bridges, for company," she explained laughingly. "Auntalmiry to all us home-folks. Sit down, Auntalmiry; tea's nice and hot."

"Yes—yes, I will," Auntalmiry sat down stiffly, her eyes still intent on the young man who had crossed the room to stand by her chair as she sank into it. And intent upon his face, the light faded suddenly from her eyes, the flush died in her cheeks. All in a moment she was smaller, older, very tired.

A little later Mr. Ingram went away with many warm and pleasant words, and with a last light lingering touch on Gay's hand. Their eyes met, understandingly, as they smiled farewell. When Gay returned to Auntalmiry she was sitting wilted slightly in the chair, and her face was sad.

"Gay, you will excuse me, won't you? For coming like that, when you had company. I saw him on the piazza—a stranger—and I thought maybe Buddy had come."

"Buddy? Do you mean Rand?" "No, Buddy—my son, Buddy." "Auntalmiry, your son! Have you a son? Oh, I didn't know you had a son. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Yes, Buddy, my son. I didn't tell you, dearie, because—we aren't like that. We just hold things in our hearts, sad things, and say nothing. The glad things, too, perhaps, too much. We don't scatter our feelings, good or bad; we shut them. I thought perhaps some one else had told you."

"No. No one on this island has ever mentioned your son—Buddy. I never heard of him before."

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weakness and nervousness are all gone. I feel like living again. I am still taking it until I feel strong like before. You may use this letter as a testimonial.

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That Reminds Me!

Lucile—Fred has never spoken a cross word at me since we've been married.

Louise—Oh, my dear! You folks really ought to play bridge, you'd get so much enjoyment out of it.

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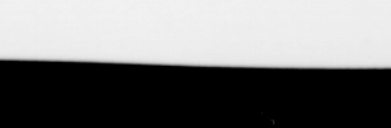
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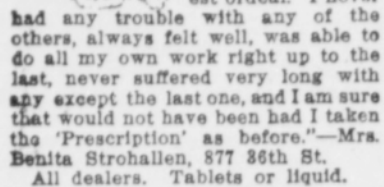
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