



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 Andover, "Administrator." Gay finds the cottage is tenanted by an elderly lady, "Auntalmiry," who consents to move to another abode, the "Apple Tree." 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." 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, to whom she tells the story and shows the picture. He asks her to let him take it, but Gay refuses. Next day Gay finds the picture has been taken from the cottage. "Rand" Wallace, wanderer, and considered something of a "black sheep" by the islanders, surprises Gay at household tasks. Gay's acquaintance with Rand ripens into affection. Rand leaves the island on business. Gay determines to stay for the winter.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

"Didn't he ever come back?"
"He died, dearie. Died away. But I had Buddy then. But Buddy went, too. Could I have a little more sugar, dearie?"
That was all. They talked of other things. Auntalmiry's gentle interest was just as it had always been, her easy amiability, but after that flush of feverish hope she seemed pale and worn with her age.
The next day Rand came, and they two, Gay and Rand, drifted into a routine of joyous companionship and love. Frankly and trustfully they professed full sympathy and understanding in each other's whims. Gay joyed to be in love, but brooked no thought of marriage, demanding freedom, she said, freedom for work. Rand, too, admitted satisfaction in the arrangement, craving freedom from the very thing that she desired, freedom for freedom's sake, he called it. If sometimes Gay wondered if love built on foundation so slight could long endure, she hushed her doubts. She was very happy, and she dreamed of long years of this same happiness for both, freedom for each for the things that each desired. She would come to him, he would come to her, they would summer together in this cool and lovely place.
September drew swiftly, goldenly toward its close. September is the death of summer in the northland. The hotels on the island were already closed for the season, the summer shops locked into their storm windows, the shore cottages deserted. Still Gay lingered. Between herself and Rand had been no suggestion of parting, no hint that the season was over, the time of separation at hand. The island was lovely in September, lovely and vital and willing. Gay would not let herself think of leaving.
She sat alone in her window-seat one afternoon and watched the sunset as it faded swiftly and darkness crept over the land. An hour passed, two hours. The dusk had deepened to night. And then, with one of her impulsive changes, she sprang to her feet, wanting brightness, wanting light. With her hand outstretched to press the button, she stopped, suddenly motionless, holding her breath.
Pressed hard against her window on the eastern side, the side of the forest, she saw it again, that face of yellow parchment with the seamed scar beneath the slanting eyes. As she looked it faded away into the darkness from which it had come.
With its disappearance came sudden activity, flaming anger.
She ran to the window and flung it wide.
"Hello," she called. "Hello there!"
There was no answer to her call, but, staring intently, she saw among the shadows of the wood one shadow that moved silently farther into the recesses of the forest, and merged at last into black. She closed the window thoughtfully, locked it and lowered the blinds.
Gay had a pistol, a handsome monogrammed one, which it was her pleasant conceit to keep loaded, well conditioned, ready for emergency use in the drawer of her desk near at hand. She had bought it during that memorable year abroad on one of her venturesome visits to London pawn

shops, and with a sort of boyish vanity had carried it with her ever since. But it is indicative of the absolute confidence of her nature that in an emergency she always entirely forgot the weapon, reverting to the more feminine defense of screaming, calling or locking doors.
When she saw the yellow face at her window she did not so much as think of the loaded pistol, which she affectionately dubbed the Baby, until she was safe behind the lowered blinds. Then she opened the drawer and looked at it.
"You're a useless old thing," she said impatiently. "Why don't you go off when there is some occasion for you, and scare the Peeping Toms?"
Expecting Rand, who came at his own caprice and kept her alert with expectation, she was not startled when, an hour later, there was a light knock at her door. It was past nine o'clock, but as his hours always suited his convenience, she only smiled tolerantly at his tardiness as she opened the door. But when she saw in the shadow, not Rand, but Ronald Ingram, she was startled into a little frightened cry, for which she quickly apologized with friendly laughter.
"Oh, you startled me. I—I was expecting some one else. Do come in. I am glad to see you again."
"What luck to find you," Ronald Ingram said with a warmth there was no mistaking. "I had no idea you would still be here. You are rather outstaying the summer, are you not?"
"Well—yes—a little, perhaps. But I was—quite ill, and I need—oh, a great deal of rest." Her face flushed with her feverish explanations, and Ronald Ingram studied her keenly.
"So many of the summer people have gone," he said slowly. "I should think you would be afraid to stay on alone. Especially after your experiences here. Was it in this room you saw the light—that night after you found the body in the cove?"
"Yes. In that window, right there."
"And the hand? Are you sure of that hand? Stretched out—"
"Of course I am sure. And when I came up in the morning, the sketch was gone. It was here, in this drawer." She lightly pulled out the drawer of the desk. Her pistol, businesslike, important, lay in full sight.
"It was here. And the next morning it was gone. Doors locked, windows barred, just as I left them. But the sketch was gone. So I knew the poor dear wished to be left in peace and undisturbed."
"By George, you make my hair stand on end. And after all that, you stay on here, alone, unprotected—"
"Oh, he was a gentle spirit. He would not harm me."
He smiled and dropped the subject. He said he had come to Portland on business, and had come to the island with only a faint hope that he might find her, or, failing to find her, to get her address in the city. He said he could not bear to drop the little acquaintance, which to him had proved so sweetly charming.
Then he went quickly away, waving back to her as she stood in the lighted doorway beneath the tall pine.
Gay waited about for a while, hoping still that Rand would come, but

Character Shown in Likes and Dislikes

If you are ever in doubt as to whether an acquaintance would prove a good companion, there is one infallible sign by which you can make sure of the matter. When you talk to him notice whether he tells you first of something he likes or dislikes. If he is prone to air his dislikes you may be sure he will not prove a very cheerful companion. His mind is destructive. He is more concerned with pulling to pieces than with building up. Such a person has a tendency to shut up one's mind or put it on its guard against impulses and innovations. He has a sensitive nature that withdraws itself into its shell on the least impact of the common things about him. One will get nothing from him but grumblings and annoyances.
The person on the other hand who quickly makes you acquainted with

Too Much for Ostrich

The digestion of an ostrich is said to be about as powerful as that of a goat, yet there are some things that an ostrich cannot digest. This was proved by a recent post mortem examination of one at a zoo. The bird, it was discovered, had swallowed a can opener and this had caused its death. Among other articles found in the ostrich were two staples, a cent and a see attendant's hat badge.

finally she went upstairs and kicked off her slippers rather crossly. When, a little later, she heard his quick knock on the door below, and his blithe whistle above it, she caught up her slippers in her hand and ran downstairs, laughing, to let him in.
"Oh, good!" she cried. "A minute later and I'd have been in bed."
"I'd have been earlier, but—I was detained. You are all right, are you? Nothing has happened—y—haven't seen anything unusual?"
Gay sensed an undertone of anxiety beneath the lightness of his voice.
"Why, of course I'm all right. Of course nothing has happened. Why not? Or why?"
"Well, I saw a chap hanging about in the woods near your windows, sort of spying, sneaking around. I started up to see who it was, and he ran. Of course I chased him, and the two of us have hot-footed it all over the island. He was playing with me. Got me down to the city landing, and dropped me like a hot cake. You haven't—"
"Oh, that must have been the Chinaman!"
"The Chinaman!" Rand's amazement was unbounded. "The Chinaman! What under heaven—"
"Oh, I must have told you about the Chinaman," she said evasively.
"You know darned well you never have. What about him?"
"Well, come and sit down. It's a long story— You are quite sure I haven't told you?"
Rand laughed. "Quite sure, you little liar, and so are you."
"Well, you weren't here when I came in. I was so tired, and sick. I was a perfect wreck. Auntalmiry was here, and while she packed up I lay down on the couch here, and slept.



"Didn't He Ever Come Back?"

Slept! It was the sleep of death for weariness.—She wakened me for dinner, and I ate, and went to sleep again. So she went away and left me sleeping.—Well, it was evening. And I felt— You know how one feels things in one's sleep?—I felt eyes looking at me. I could hardly squeeze a look out beneath my lids, for the weariness. But I did. And in the dusk, faint and yellow, I saw the face of a Chinaman, thin pinched features, slanting eyes and a small seamed scar beneath one eye. As I looked, the face just melted backward into the darkness, so I knew it was a dream, and went to sleep again."
Rand lighted a cigarette hastily but said nothing, and Gay went on.
"Well, you know how sometimes I sit, just dreaming, as the sun sets, until it is dark.—I did tonight. And I jumped up suddenly to light the lights, although it was not entirely dark, and I saw it at my window, that window—same face, the very same. So it could not have been a dream."
"When was that?"
"Oh, hours ago! Just before the final darkness."
"But it was late when I found him—about an hour ago.—In the

meantime, what? Any noises? Were you afraid—"
"No, Mr. Ingram was here."
Rand flicked the ashes from his cigarette thoughtfully. "Ah, Mr. Ingram.—Mr. Ingram.—I suppose you told me all about him, too. May one inquire, who is Mr. Ingram?"
"He is the man who— It was he who— It was Mr. Ingram who—"
Gay closed her lips stubbornly. She had often wished to tell him of the affair in the cove, but resentment had always forbidden the confidence. He should have asked her. She glanced at him furtively. His chin was set, and his eyes were anxious. Gay relented.
"Well, Rand, I suppose the family females told you—what happened in the cove?"
Rand smiled faintly, his fingers caressed her arm. Gay hardened again.
"I know they thought I was out of my head, but you surely do not believe any such nonsense."
"They thought you saw driftwood, a log or a barrel."
"How about my handkerchief? Did they think I put it on a piece of driftwood?"
"They thought— Now, remember, Gay, you did not mention the handkerchief until they reported there was no body. They thought—well, they thought you made it up to sort of carry out your story, make it hold water."
"What did you think?"
"I thought," he said tenderly, "that some time, in a moment of great confidence, my Gay would tell me about herself, and then I should know all."
Gay laughed, then suddenly and kissed his hand. "You work me, outrageously," she said.
"And Mr. Ingram—" he prompted softly.
"Well, then.—No, the cove comes first.—The reason I like Mr. Ingram is because if he is interested in anything, he talks about it. If he wants to know anything, he asks. He doesn't think other people are crazy just because they happened to see something he didn't happen to see himself.—Like the state of Maine," she said vindictively.
"And the cove—"
"Well, then. I slid down the rocks into the cove."
"Why, Gay, why? With a whole island full of accessible shore, why slide down the worst cliff in the bay?"
"Because I thought I couldn't," she answered promptly. "Because everybody said one couldn't get down.—So I did."
Rand rolled his eyes heavenward.
"A woman," he said devoutly, "is heaven's greatest miracle.—She did, because she couldn't.—Go on.—Like your Mr. Ingram, I understand perfectly."
"Well, I tried to get into the clubhouse, and I couldn't. And into the boathouse, and I couldn't."
"You should have burned them to the ground.—If you couldn't get in, you should have—"
Gay laughed. "Don't be silly.— Well, it was lovely in the cove, and I stood there and saw—It—coming in.— Rand, it was a man. He came in and with my two hands I pulled him up on the sand. There was a rope about one ankle, a stout rope, with one end dangling loose. He had been shot in the temple—here." She touched her brow with a slender finger. "The blood was washed away, but the hair was clotted about it. I laid his hand upon his breast, and put my handkerchief over his face. I called for help, but of course nobody heard me. So I went for the Captain. You know what happened."
Rand was impressed. She could see that.
"It sounds very—reasonable."
"Oh, Rand! When I went back the sand was wet where the body had lain. I showed it to the Captain, and he said it had splashed there. It couldn't have splashed. It hadn't splashed anywhere else."
"And Mr. Ingram—"
Gay smiled at his persistence.
"Well, I sent the captain away. I could see every line of the poor, tired, anxious face, and the long fine hand, and the drenched hair. I took my drawing pad, and drew it, line for line. I was going to send it to the police department, so they could try to trace him.—Mr. Ingram was looking for a way down to the shore, and I went up and took him back through the woods the other way. I showed him the sketch, and he was greatly interested. He wanted it. He is a newspaper man."
"And now he comes again—"
"Oh, he came before—"
"Oh, I see." Rand's voice was quizzical.
"Oh, no, you don't see. Well, I met him on the rocks beyond the Little Club one day—he is very nice, so gentle, gentlemanly, sympathetic—so I brought him home, and we had a long talk. He was thinking of buying up part of the island for exploitation, to build and sell, you know, things like that. He is very nice."
Rand's face was very stern. "Why didn't you tell me all this before?" he demanded curtly.
"Because if you want to be so darned close about everything, I will be darned close myself," she said smartly. "Rand, he felt terrible about the sketch.—Oh, I didn't tell you about that."
"What? What about it? What did the police—"
"Now, Rand, now is your chance to decide once and for all that I was entirely out of my head—am still per haps— But Auntalmiry can swear to part of it. If she will, though she made me promise not to tell. So said folks would think queer of it."
"Gay!"

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