

IDLE ISLAND

By ETHEL HUESTON

WNU Service

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CHAPTER X—Continued

Rand helped with the Christmas party plans. On little white cards, gay with candles and holly, they printed the invitation.

Auntalmiry's Christmas Party at the Lone Pine Christmas Eve Five O'clock.

Just one week before Christmas, the Budlong boys waded through the snow all over the Evergreen end of the island, and delivered the invitations, one to every house. It could not have been more than ten minutes after she received the announcement that Alice Andover was to be seen sailing grandly up the hill, a sort of full-regimented majesty in her advance. Gay met her beneath the pine.

"Now don't blame me. I hadn't a thing in the world to do with it. I only lent her the cottage as she asked. She did everything herself. She sold everything she owns to pay for it, and it isn't going to cost you a cent. She has gone without jelly, gone without butter, gone without cake, gone without sugar—it's her party, and none of our business, if you ask me."

Alice Andover sank weakly into a chair. "I might have known it. That's the thanks I get. That's how folks take to good, honest, conscientious administration. And then the audacity to invite me to the party."

"Oh, please come! She'll be so disappointed if you don't come. She wants you to see how cleverly she has managed."

"Oh, I'll come. And since she's got the unmilitated audacity to have a Christmas party in spite of my orders, I'll send my presents as usual. Oh, I always give little things—people been here for years—all in the family, you know, and I being the administrator. So you can tell the foolish old woman I'll send my presents as usual. I've never missed one of Auntalmiry's parties yet, not since that first devil-cursed one fifty years ago when—"

"Oh, don't. She—she thinks maybe he's the Unknown Soldier at Washington; she—"

Alice Andover stared. She opened her mouth, closed it with great firmness and blinked hard at times.

"Unknown Soldier!—Good heavens. What next?" Then she added humorously, with a bright glint in her gray eyes. "Well, whatever he is, thank God, it is unknown. That's all I've got to say for Buddy Bridges—Unknown Soldier."

The next day Rand climbed the tall pine and strung it with Christmas lights from topmost point to lowest branches, round and round, a hundred little colored bulbs, and connected them to a switch beside the window where Auntalmiry could turn it on before the party. Auntalmiry was enchanted with the idea of wiring the tall pine; she had not dreamed of such royal welcome to her Christmas guests. For days before the party she talked of little else.

It was only three days before Christmas, the twenty-second of De-



Delivered the Invitations, One to Every House.

ember, in the thick darkness of the early evening, that Ronald Ingram came again.

He entered hurriedly, his manner for the first time showing something troubled, something furtive. He glanced over his shoulder nervously, and closed the door behind him swiftly.

"I shouldn't have come," he began hurriedly. "But I had to. I came to Portland to close up some contracts, and I simply stole the time and made the trip over on the afternoon boat to see you. I must catch the first boat back. Short—but I had to see you. Gay, I have thought of you constantly. Your face has swum before my eyes, your voice rung in my ears, the light little touch of your fingers—"

He shook his head impatiently. "Mr. Ingram," she said with pretty dignity, "please don't do that. I assure you I do not like it."

"Oh, you think I am chaffing. But I mean it. I—Miss Delane, tell me. If I should sell out—all my interests—my business connections—would you—marry me? Would you even think of it? I know it is too soon for you to know— But would you let me come where you are, let me see you, try to make you love me— Is there any chance for me at all? I would have some money. I could take care of you. We could go any place—West, or to Europe, anywhere."

There was no doubting the sincerity of his words, the eagerness of his desire.

"Don't," Gay said gently. "You will spoil our pleasant friendship, and I have liked it. It is because you have been away, you have been lonely, perhaps worried. It isn't really I you want. Why, you don't even know me. It is just—woman, companionship, sympathy, soft things. That is all."

But he shook his head, clung to her hands. "Gay, it is you. Nothing else. Nobody else. You. From the moment I saw you down in the cove— Oh, I know you don't love me now—but couldn't you? If I get things all straightened out, and—do something else— Gay, isn't there a chance?"

From somewhere down the lane sounded the low siren of a car.

Ronald listened a moment, but still clung to her hand. "Gay, don't say no. Don't say anything. Just wait, think of me a little, and as soon as I can—I will come again. But try to think of me—if not with love—at least with a little tenderness."

Quickly he lifted her hands, palms upward, kissed them passionately, one after the other, crushed them to his face and went away.

Gay sank into the big chair and buried her face in her arms. A criminal! That artless, boyish, ingenious man, with the pleading voice and the eager eyes? But even a criminal deserves some kindness of thought from the woman to whom he gives his love. Gay was very kind.

The next day, very early, Rand appeared at her door, dressed roughly for outdoor winter weather, in heavy oilskin coat and breeches. He was hurried in manner, preoccupied. He told Gay he was obliged to run down to Boston for a few days on business. "Now you sit tight while I'm gone," he cautioned her. "I'm on the trail, and I'm going through with it. I've told the folks I'm looking for a job, and they won't expect me home until they see me. You just wait here. Say nothing to anyone. Do nothing. Don't set your foot in those woods under any circumstances. And at night, Gay, please me, go down and stay with Auntalmiry. And don't worry, for I shan't be in any danger."

"You are not going to Boston," she said bitterly. "You are going into those woods, to lie under the piazza and watch the clubhouse, and try to catch those murderers. They'll catch you, first. Rand, don't, please don't. What business is it of ours if they break the law? What are their affairs to us? Why should you risk your life—"

"Oh, there's no danger, Gay, not a bit of it. I'll be careful. I promise you. Just a little weather eye out for squalls. No, I am going to Boston. I have gone to Boston. Get that in your mind, and stick to it. I shan't be able to write you, and I may not be home for several days. Just wait for me, and don't worry."

But Gay did worry, worried heart-breakingly. But she would not go to Auntalmiry. Rand might come, and she wished to be there, waiting for him where he left her. He might need her—a shot in the night, a scream of terror—Gay set her small sleek head determinedly. Nothing, nothing in the world should keep her from going to him in answer if he called for help.

She was glad for the excitement of the Christmas preparations to occupy her hands, if not her thoughts, through the dreary days that intervened.

It never occurred to her that he would not be back by the twenty-fourth of December for the party on Christmas eve. But the morning passed, and he did not come. Gay had no heart for the laughter, the young excitement of the island lovers, the flushed joyousness of Auntalmiry. Rand did not come. It would be Christmas eve, her Christmas eve, and Rand did not come.

At three o'clock Gay took Auntalmiry by the hand and led her down to the Apple Tree, where she put her bodily to bed, tucking the blankets about her and begging her to take a sadly needed rest.

So it could have been but very little after three when she softly closed the door of the Apple Tree behind her and set her feet in the path through the snow to the top of the hill. And glancing up, ahead of her in the path, saw a man walking toward the cottage. Gay almost called out to him, expecting Rand, because she wanted Rand. But before sound left her lips she silenced the call, for she saw that it was a stranger, one who seemed to make his way unsteadily to the face of the brisk wind from the sea, staggering a little.

When he reached the piazza of the Lone Pine, he did not wait to knock, but opened the door slowly and went in, closing it after him. Gay was but a little way behind, and she ran in breathlessly, but stopped short in surprise when she did not find him in the living room nor the kitchen.

"Hello," she called. "Hello! Anybody up there?" But received no answer.

Frightened by the unnatural silence, and mindful of Rand's words of warning, she went to the desk, slipped her pistol deftly into the pocket of her heavy coat, and then she climbed the stairs, watchful and alert.

And there indeed she found him, lying face downward on the soft rug of her bedroom floor.

"What are you doing?" she demanded foolishly. "What do you want?"

He neither moved nor answered. So Gay went to him timidly and bent over him that she might see his face. His eyes were closed, his lips hard set. She tried to raise him, but his head fell limply from her hands.

She shrank away from him, shuddering with fear.

CHAPTER XI

The crisp voice of Alice Andover had never sounded so sweet to Gay's ears as at that moment.

"Gay Delane! Where are you? I saw you take that foolish creature home, so I came to see if I could— What is the matter?"

Gay beckoned to her sternly from the top of the stairs. "Come up," she said, and her voice was hollow. "Come up."

Alice Andover was never one to hesitate in a crisis. She came at once, breathing hard. Gay pointed dramatically to the bedroom.

Alice Andover gave one wide-eyed glance and saw the prostrate form.

"Good heavens, oh, good heavens! Where did he come from—where did you get him—I mean—"

"He came up the hill just ahead of me. Walked right in. Came upstairs, and evidently fell down there. Or lay down. There he is."

Alice Andover crossed the room and stood above him, touching the inert body tentatively with the toe of her shoe.

"Drunk," she said disgustedly. "Dead drunk."

Gay breathed more freely, in some relief. "Oh, is that it? I—was afraid of—oh, terrible things!"

At that moment, spasmodically he moved, and his face rolled back into the light.

"Oh, oh!" Alice Andover's explanation was a startled gasp. "Oh, my God, I believe— Oh, poor Almiry. I believe it is Buddy Bridges. Come home to his poor trusting mother—dead drunk. Oh, it is all my fault. Oh, what in the world have I done? Buddy Bridges—poor Almiry. All my fault."

"Buddy Bridges? Oh, really? Oh, Auntalmiry—how happy—" Then came sickening realization of the pain it would be to the little old woman to have him come home to her like this, dead drunk. Better a thousand times for her to live on in her trusting ignorance, fondly believing him an unknown hero, pure and fine. "Oh, poor Auntalmiry! See here, Mrs. Andover, this drunken creature shall not spoil the poor dear's Christmas party. The way she has slaved, and saved, and starved herself— He shan't! Let her have one happy night—it may be her last, since Buddy came home like this. He shan't spoil it. Not if I have to poison him."

Alice Andover, trained to efficiency by years of hard administering, suddenly became practical and decided. Being in charge of things always aroused her latent cleverness.

Flint Axes of Stone Age Found in Sweden

The 4,500-year-old-stock-in-trade of a Stone age peddler in flint axes has been found by some workmen in a gravel pit in the Swedish province of Soendermanland. The peddler's hoard consisted of a number of light-gray flint axes of exquisite shape and workmanship, evidently hidden in the ground by the trader, who seems to have wandered a long way from the south of Sweden to barter his axes for the precious furs of the hunters of the Soendermanland forests. The poor peddler seems to have met his death, for he never returned for his axes, that now are said to be the best find of its kind ever made in that part of Sweden.

Almost every week new important

Sentence That "Stumps"

The spelling of this sentence is said to trip up many of the best stenographers: "It is agreeable to view the unparalleled embarrassment of an harassed saddler or peddler serenely sitting upon a cemetery wall gauging the symmetry of a perfectly peeled potato."—From the Outlook.

"We'll just roll him over in the corner out of the way," she said briskly, and cover him up with the rug, and let him sleep it off. We'll lock the door, and keep him here till it is over."

"Will he stay drunk all night?" Gay asked. "Shouldn't we give him something—"

"Whisky! I wish we had some whisky. If we had time—maybe we could keep him drunk for a week. I don't know just how long it does last, but I know the party lasts all night. He may sleep it off."

"I have a little cognac. Brought it in myself—from Paris—in the toe of my dancing slipper. Real stuff," Gay said proudly. "I was keeping it for a wedding, but he can have that."

"Good! We'll give him a big—swig—of it." She brought out the nautical term with a nautical swag.



She Shook Her Fist at the Door.

ger, both doubtless inherited from the long line of seafaring ancestors. "We'll keep him as—tight as a lord—until the party's over."

Carefully but sternly they rolled him over half out of sight beneath the window-seat, and covered him.

So Gay brought the precious smuggled bottle of cognac, never yet unsealed, and they gave him a generous swallow, forcing the bottle between his teeth not without much difficulty. He choked over it and coughed painfully, while the conspirators held their breath in a panic above him. But presently he relapsed into troubled breathing again.

"That'll hold him for a while," said Alice Andover grimly.

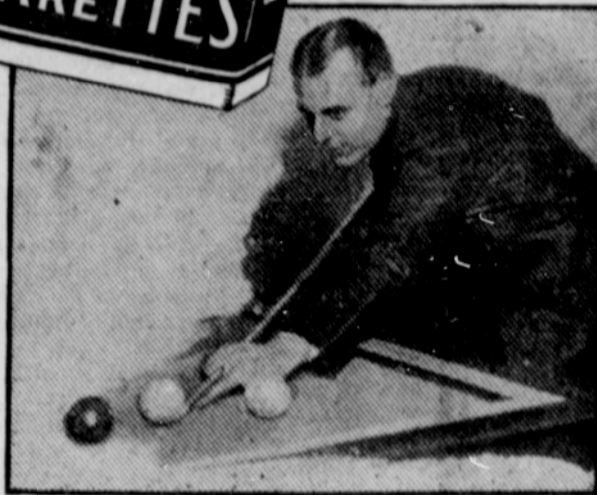
They locked the door upon him and went downstairs. But when Alice Andover moved as if to go to her own home, Gay refused to be left alone in the house with the drunken creature upstairs, and Alice Andover was obliged to remain, fixing herself up for the party as well as she could with Gay's face powder and electric curlers. They had tea to strengthen their shattered nerves, and at five o'clock tiptoed up to the bedroom to give him another potent draught of the cognac. He swallowed this time with less difficulty, and as he drank, to their horror, his eyes opened, eyes large and dark, Gay noticed even in that horrible moment, eyes now visionless, not seeing. When the muffled heavy breathing recommenced, they tiptoed from the room.

Alice Andover, because the opening of his eyes had frightened her, was freshly furious. She shook her fist at the door when it was safely locked behind her.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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Willie Hoppe

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Education by Mail

To meet educational needs of families living in remote parts of Manitoba and of children unable on account of physical handicap to attend school, a system of correspondence instruction has been inaugurated by the provincial department of education. It is estimated that about every fourth person in the province of Manitoba is seeking by study to reach a higher educational standard.

In Saskatchewan, where an outpost's correspondence school has been maintained for two and a half years, enrollment has reached 247. It is believed that about 20 per cent of the students are of foreign extraction.


Anyone can argue with a woman—but seldom with profit.

"Noted" but Ignorant

One of our "noted educators" visiting the Boston convention of the National Education association inquired at the booking office of a sightseeing service about the different historical trips in and about Boston. He wanted to know if the Lexington and Concord trip included Gettysburg. — Boston Globe.

Rebuilding Bergen

Barracks are being replaced by new buildings in the central part of Bergen, Norway, which was destroyed by fire in 1916. Shopkeepers and business men have used the temporary structures, while residents have been forced by the thousands to use some sort of improvised shelter for living places.



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