

Up in the clouds

by Beulah Earle

THIRD INSTALMENT

Monty Wallace has just arrived in California, having broken the East-West cross country airplane record. Natalie Wade, mistaken by him for a newspaper reporter, writes the exclusive account of Monty's arrival, and succeeds in securing a trial job with a paper in exchange for the story. Natalie becomes attached to Monty.

"Listen, kid—you ring the bell. I'm with you, see? You ask for the old man and flash that smile at the butler. Tell this Marion guy you hear he's going to build a special plane for Wallace. To beat his own record. He likes publicity and, even if he hasn't thought of it, he'll probably go for it."

Instinct told the girl to give only her own name when the butler appeared and she gasped when the manufacturer presently appeared and ushered them into his library, for there sat Monty Wallace surrounded by a dozen beautiful women.

Monty came at once to Natalie's side. "This," he told the manufacturer, "is the young lady who wrote my story for me. You'd better tell her all, for she'll get it out of you anyway."

The sleek, gray-haired elderly man promised he would do that, and Jimmy set about at once posing the flier and the plane maker at the library desk.

"Wait," the photographer suddenly spoke. "Where's the woman interested?"

He turned to a gorgeous blond girl of remarkable beauty and demanded that she become a part of the picture.

In the introductions that followed, Natalie learned that this was the stunning daughter of the house, Sunny Marion.

"Her name is Sonia," Marion explained, "but she turned out not to be the Sonia type and so we call her Sunny."

Natalie saw at once that the girl had eyes only for Monty Wallace, though she said little and treated the others with quiet courtesy. She was so splendid a creature that Natalie felt quick jealousy of her, as though an instinct had warned her the flier could not resist her charms.

The story was much as Jimmy had guessed. Marion's company had seen the possibility of capitalizing Monty's gift. Marion had taken the matter in hand for himself and had rushed agreement through.

By good luck and Jimmy's uncanny hunch, the two had another exclusive story but it was not a big smash. The business office would see publicity in it and hold back the editorial department. But it meant big stuff later and they were in on the ground floor, he pointed out.

The two were hurrying back to the office in Jimmy's car.

"Boy, did you see that little blonde go for Wallace?" Jimmy rambled on. "She'll let him walk over her any minute now. What is there about these avy-ators?" Natalie laughed in spite of herself. The boy was uncanny. He had missed nothing in that brief interview.

"I saw," she said. "She's only one of a couple of million women that will be dreaming about Monty Wallace for the next few weeks. It's really too bad for him. Nothing spoils a man so."

"You kind of go for him a little yourself, don't you, kid?"

Natalie colored helplessly. There seemed nothing this amazing youth could not guess. She

felt a surge of anger at him, but realized that anger was foolish.

"One of the two million," she parried, "let it go at that."

That afternoon on another assignment they passed Mont Wallace in the Marion girl's handsome car.

Natalie was surprised at the quick slash of pain her jealousy struck through her. It was not possible that this one man in all the world held so terrifying a power to hurt her by casual action.

And yet the very sight of him, whom she had never seen until the day before, was enough to stir her, and to see him in the innocent company of the little blonde beauty was exquisite torture.

Turning quickly to Jimmy Hale, Natalie covered her emotions with a scornful laugh at her own vulnerability.

"Now, now!" Jimmy chuckled. "Don't get catty. It won't do any good to cut the girl's throat."

For once the photographer had misunderstood, but his guess was close enough. She laughed again but this time in better spirit and Jimmy was satisfied.

But the girl realized she had a battle to fight with herself even yet. She hadn't counted on the lash of jealousy, hadn't believed the hateful emotion possible to her.

She went about her work with Jimmy and hurried back to the office.

Mack Hanlon was again on duty. He paid little or no attention to her when she came in to write her late story, but when she had turned it in and was wondering if she might then leave the office for her own devices he called her to the desk.

"That was a good job you did last night, Miss Wade," he said, "and you turned out another one for the afternoon paper. But this thing is a mess of tripe. Don't worry about it, but do it over again and remember that a newspaper story is one thing and a

signed article is another. When you are signing your stuff there are no rules. But when it comes to writing straight news there are plenty of them. Throw the yarn at them in the first paragraph and then clean up around the edges."

It was good advice and she was quick to see it. Though her cheeks flamed a little, she went back to her typewriter, patterned the story she was to write on those that appeared in other copies of the paper scattered about and finished it quickly.

"That's better," the suspended little editor told her and she knew a triumph out of all proportions to the importance of the matter.

He slashed the copy a couple of times with quick pencil, thrust it into a basket and turned to her as she was about to leave for the night.

"Here's another little tip," he said, putting the flame of a match to the small straight pipe he smoked. "You've got this guy Wallace eating out of your hand. Keep him that way. He's the kind of an egg that is likely to make news any time. You'll go a long way if you can string him along enough to keep the edge on his stuff."

The girl sat for a moment on the corner of a desk and listened to what he had to say. He was friendly and unselfish, at least as far as she was concerned. She sensed somehow that he wanted her to do well, perhaps because it was he who had given her a trial.

"Dad used to tell me a lot of things about this business," she said, "but I wasn't interested then. Now I'm beginning to find out how fascinating it is. I'll be glad if you'll give me all the help you can."

"I'll do that. But watch out for this game," he cautioned. "It's a fool business. You get so after awhile you can't quit and you can't afford to go on. But maybe it won't get you the way it does a man."

He turned back then to his desk, his soiled suspenders, conspicuous across his lean shoulders. Vaguely she was sorry for the little man.

Now she went out into the dingy hall. She glanced at Jimmy's office but it was empty. He was probably in the dark room unless he had left his prints to dry and gone home.

She walked down the single

flight of stairs and out into the street.

It was well on to dinner time. The glow of sunset on the harbor and distant ocean had turned the town for a few minutes into an enchanted land.

Natalie turned with a curious exhilaration to walk toward her hotel. Surprisingly, though she had worked hard, she was not tired. She had been much too deeply interested in her work to suffer weariness.

Now she walked briskly and it was not till the musical chime of an automobile sounded twice that she looked up to find the blond Sunny Marion beckoning to her from the big machine she drove.

They sat across from each other in the town's one exotic restaurant, Sunny Marion and Natalie Wade. And they made a picture of contrasts.

The daughter of the airplane maker had hair like white ash. She wore no hat, yet the vivid color of her fair complexion was unmarked by the sun. A light-white motor coat seemed to emphasize the rounded slimmness of her figure.

Natalie had slipped her own small hat from her lustrous dark hair. For that first day at her work she had worn a linen suit of cream and brown. It set off the velvety ivory of her skin and seemed to deepen the color of her large, dark eyes.

She was vastly curious at this sudden attention from Sunny Marion. For the girl had offered not only a lift in her car but had pressed upon her an invitation to dinner.

"I'm mad about writing," she was saying now. "I'd give anything to do newspaper work. Won't you tell me about it?"

Natalie laughed. She glanced at her small wrist watch, which the loan agent had refused to take from her even for a fifty-cent piece.

"You are flattering," she said quickly. "Do you realize that, even nominally, I have been in the newspaper business only about twenty-six hours? I haven't the first idea what it's all about."

She told this girl the story of what had happened.

"I read your story this afternoon," the girl told her. "It was splendid. I can't understand how you could do so well when you have just begun."

"You mean about dancing with Mr. Wallace?" Natalie responded. "I think I was just thrilled by everything and I didn't try to do it in newspaper style. I wrote it just as if I were writing to a friend whom I didn't know very intimately."

"And can anyone do that?" "Of course. But then there is another kind of newspaper writing. I made a mess of a piece like that this afternoon and got a quick lecture on it and had to do it over."

They talked on. Natalie liked the lovely Sunny but she was shortly aware that the girl was merely making conversation. She had no interest whatever in news-writing. She was mildly interested in Natalie herself. But there was something more than this behind the dinner invitation and the talk.

"I wonder," she heard the girl ask finally, "if I might go with you sometimes on assignments. I would love it and we could use my car."

"Why, of course. Any time. That would be very grand for a reporter."

As she spoke, Natalie saw a mingled look of delight and annoyance cross the other girl's face. Something had happened which was both pleasing and displeasing to Sunny Marion and she had not been able to keep from revealing it.

A moment more and she knew what that something was, for Monty Wallace stood beside the table. He was smiling down at them. He was speaking to them both, asking if he might join them.

Natalie smiled in response but there was a secret meaning in her smile for she knew now why she had been given an invitation to dinner. This gleaming child was jealous of her. She had feared that Monty intended spending the evening with Natalie. She had planned to circumvent the invitation and she had made sure of success as far as she could.

Now Sunny was delighted to see the flier once more but chagrined to find that she must share him with this dark girl.

Natalie left most of the conversation at first to Monty and Sunny. The girl was quietly eager for talk and Natalie's heart was too full for the effort at light banter. Monty's eyes came to hers at intervals in a manner that seemed more eloquent than his words. But they were mostly on this blond girl with the ash hair, and she knew that Sunny would find fuel there for the fire of her adoration.

As calmly as she could in the turmoil of her heart, Natalie tried to study the two. In fact, she included herself in the lesson and made a valiant effort to cast up the values that each of the three represented.

Continued Next Issue

Sales Tax Problem

The state sales tax has been a problem for Rev. V. J. Smith of Dodge City, Kansas. Recently he had lunch in a cafe with a member of his congregation. As he paused at the cashier's desk, the girl inquired:

"Do you have any tokens?" "Oh, yes," replied the minister. "The collection plate is full of them, every Sunday."

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