

Up in the clouds

by Beulah Earle

FIFTH 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.

Although she discovers Monty's love for her is not sincere, Natalie admits that she loves him. She is assigned by her paper to report Monty's activities for publication. Jimmy Hale, the newspaper's photographer, becomes Natalie's co-worker.

Mont cracked his palm across that pink and white cheek. The noise of it made a little echo from somewhere and when the others had rushed onto the balcony there was deep silence while Sunny slipped limply into Mont's arms and Jimmy Hale came quickly to stand beside Natalie.

"Cripes Nat!" the photographer said in an awed voice, "that kid is wild. A few drinks and she's half nuts. We better get her out of here."

"Now, Jimmy," Natalie said slowly, "she was just hysterical. . . that's all. She sure came out of it when Monty hit her."

"Yes, and what a mistake that was. She'll never leave him alone now. He's given her the biggest thrill she's had since she was a little punk in rompers. She'll throw herself at his feet from now on."

"I'm afraid you're right, Jimmy," Natalie laughed. She tried to take Sunny's arm as she began to lead her back into the house but Sunny shook her off.

"You better keep away from her," Jimmy advised. "You only stir her up. Come on out here with me."

She turned back with him to the balcony and stood with him looking across the parapet. Her mind now was a tumult at thought of the tragedy so narrowly averted. The chasm was a great bowl of darkness. It seemed impossible that death lay surely there only a hand's-breath away from the security of the place where she stood.

That the bright-haired girl had been a witness of the sentimental passage between herself and Monty Wallace, there could be no doubt. It must have been this that had set her to the temporary madness of that climb to the parapet.

How much of that act had been true emotion and how much the prompting of her mild intoxication, Natalie could not say, but

she knew there must be some instinct of desperation in what Sunny had come near doing. It was not likely, she finally decided that Sunny actually contemplated throwing herself from the balcony. More probably she intended merely to frighten the two.

She said as much to Jimmy. "The blonde is dizzy," he rasped out in his husky voice. "I suppose you were kissing that bird of prey. Or he was kissing you, which amounted to the same thing. She's nuts anyway and a little liquor makes her more so. She took one look and shrieked. Then she had to start her dive to cover up. Anything to get his mind off you, probably."

Natalie sighed. "It was a close thing. I'm scared yet." "And no wonder. But the trouble is she'll throw her arms around his neck and make him talk up. If I know that when she's likely to put on her diving clothes now every time he takes a good look at you. Are you still knee-deep about that guy?"

"Well, not at least to the point of wanting to throw myself off anything higher than a chair." "You wouldn't be. But I'm afraid you'll crack up some other way. Will you promise me something?"

"What, please, Jimmy?" He took his eyes away from that chasm of death and darkness. With one hand he gripped her wrist until it hurt. "Give me a chance if you crack up with him."

His gray eyes were searching her face. What she saw there surprised her. "What—what do you mean, Jimmy?" "Nothing, kid," he said quickly, "except that I'm on the spot too. I'd just about jump over there—sober—if I thought it would do you any good."

"Jimmy!" the girl cried. "Now, Nat. Don't get excited. It isn't your fault. And I'm not drunk. It's really better with me when I am. I can laugh at myself easier then."

"Don't laugh, Jimmy," the girl cried. "It isn't any laughing business. Believe me, I know." "I thought that was about it," the boy said softly. "Oh, well. . ."

"Jimmy!" the girl cried again. "Don't say a word, Nat. Forget about it. But if you ever get to the point where you want to do any high jumping, promise me you'll come and—let me jump with you."

"That's a bet, Jimmy." The girl thrust out her other hand. "We'll do our high jumping together, when we do."

He caught her hand and held it closely for an instant and then they laughed together.

They went inside and found that Mont had calmed the beautiful Sunny.

"I'm sorry," she told the other two. "Too much dizzy water, I guess. I'll be all right now." Her eyes went back to the flyer's face. "But boy, what a wallop you carry in that good right hand. Aren't you ashamed of yourself—striking a helpless woman?"

Mont stammered apologies with a glance at Natalie. "It was my fault," Natalie explained. "You were hysterical and they tell me that a good jolt will always help. I told him to do it."

"Thanks a lot. But I wish after this, Monty, you'd pull your punches." They held a conference then on the trip home. Mont insisted that Natalie do the driving down the mountain road. But the girl declared she was still trembling too much to make it safe.

"We're all right now," she said. "If we take it easy, I'd rather you drove. You're used to that sort of thing."

Mont Wallace seemed entirely himself as he toiled the car carefully along the fearsome mountain road. And Natalie, taking her place beside him, found that, for the first time since their first evening together, his presence did not bring that helpless hurt that had come to be so constantly a part of her consciousness.

Her heart seemed to remember that Jimmy Hale was waiting to bind up its wound if the hurt proved too much to bear.

After that night, the foursores were dropped as though by mutual consent. Natalie saw a great deal of Mont Wallace. Sunny made it a point to keep an eye on her as much out of instinctive liking for the girl reporter as because of her recurrent suspicions.

Jimmy went on as Natalie's guide and mentor with little to say about the secret he had divulged that night. Indeed, Natalie might have taken it as a bit of unobsequious pretense if it had not been for his remarks of the next morning.

"Sorry I got lit up last night," he told her. "I'd never have caught what I did if I hadn't had a couple too many. It's all true but I didn't intend to have you know about it. You've probably got enough on your hands already."

She reminded him of their pact and declared that it helped to know he was back of her. After that they went on as before.

The other great difference in the relations of the four developed between Mont and Sunny. They were together almost constantly. It seemed, Mont was much engaged at the airport and Sunny was inevitably at hand in the bright car in which she made such a perfect picture.

Much as she tried Natalie could not entirely conquer her jealousy of Sunny and tried to make amends for it by thoughtfulness and kindness toward the girl when they were together.

She was presently convinced by the things that Sunny dropped in her conversation and by Mont's attitude on occasion that there was an understanding between the flyer and his employer's daughter.

Not until then did Natalie determine finally that she must see less of Mont Wallace. Feeling about him as she did, it was exhausting to sit beside him knowing that barriers between them held them apart. To these there was now added the fact that Sunny Marion claimed him for her own in sly ways that could not be challenged.

It did not ease the torture of his presence to find that he still battled occasionally against her philosophy of love and that her defenses seemed always in some indefinable way to be weakened afterward.

She determined to avoid self-torture by seeing him less often and had managed without seeming to do so to evade his presence several times.

learned. Then they crossed the field to the big MAC hangar of the Marion Aircraft Corporation. Mont was swathed in coveralls and elbow-deep in work on the new plane. Natalie knew an instant of alarm lest the ship be out of commission. She greeted him and waved at Sunny who sat nearby.

While Jimmy stopped to talk with the two she slipped into the small office and telephoned the Express. Mack Hanlon answered the phone.

"Listen, Mack," she said. "This is Nat. I'm out at the airport. Don't say anything to anybody till I'm gone but I'm going to see if I can get Mont Wallace to take me on the hunt for Conrad and Sturm."

"We already tried the company," he told her. "They said they couldn't do anything right now. Two of their pilots are working out of San Diego trying to find them. The outfit figures that's enough."

"Well, I'm going to try. And if you don't hear from me, that's where I've gone."

She hung up the phone and went out to talk with Mont. "How's the ship? Got it all apart?" Her first queries went to the important point.

"Just got it back together, Nat," Mont replied. "I could hop off this minute for Mexico City and come close to making it."

"Come here a minute," she told him. "I want to show you something."

Beckoning she led him into the small office and closed the door. "Mont," she almost whispered "will you do something for me?"

"Most anything," he laughed. "Well, listen. I want to find those two boys that are down the other side of the Border. It will put me on top of the heap in the newspaper business if I can pick them up. I'm going to grab some sandwiches and pop or something. You get set and we'll slip out of here in a couple of minutes."

He stared at her for an instant and then he grabbed her by both arms. "It's a bet, kid. Make it snappy. I'm ready whenever you are."

"Don't tell them out there, Jimmy and Sunny will put up a terrible holler. Just tell them you're going to take me for a little hop."

She seized the telephone again and ordered a great carton of food and a case of soft drinks. If

she found the lost pilots, something to drink would probably be their greatest need, and the fountain liquids were handiest.

Continued Next Issue

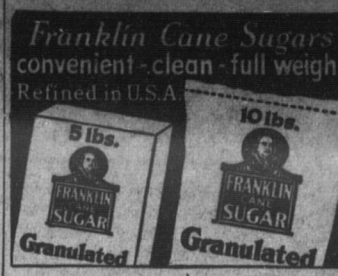
Manager (pointing to cigarette end on floor): "Smith, is this yours?"

Smith (pleasantly): "Not at all sir. You saw it first."

Flatterer Mrs. Crabshaw—Henry, dear, did you see the picture of Lawyer Slupp's pretty young wife in the papers?"

Henry—Yes. I saw it, and it is reminded me of the strange, but true fact that the biggest fools always seem to get the most beautiful wives.

Mrs. Crabshaw—Why, Henry what a flatterer you are.



REMINDERS

by Reddy Kilowatt

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