

Up in the clouds

by Beulah Earle

SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

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.

Natalie interviews Jabe Marion, a wealthy airplane builder, who decides to build a record-breaking 'round the world plane for Monty. Marion's daughter, Sunny, exquisitely beautiful, is attracted to Monty. She invites Natalie to dine with her, when they meet the aviator unexpectedly.

Natalie discovers that Sunny is jealous of her friendship with Monty, and that she is trying to prevent them from being alone. After driving to a mountain resort with Sunny and Jimmy, Monty again declares his love for Natalie.

Natalie thrilled at the sight. Her wild notion had brought suc-

cess. The missing fliers were beneath them, apparently unhurt. Monty Wallace tested the ground-currents cautiously and then put the ship into a steep dive.

Withered sandwiches and tepid pop disappeared like magic before the onslaught of the two lost pilots. Bar chocolate and candy bars helped restore their morale and their sense of humor.

They chattered of their adventure, told of the clogged oil line that had caused them to try a landing and of the treacherous air current that had whipped the plane into the ground and crippled it beyond immediate repair.

Natalie drank in the details. Monty Wallace studied his maps and marked upon them the nearest seacoast town that might have a telegraph line. Arrangements were made for the two youths to remain where they were until help had been sent and then Monty and Natalie took off for the coast in high triumph.

At the small Mexican town, Monty wired the lost fliers' home airport and Natalie began writing sheet after sheet of their story. Getting the news out was a prodigious task for the small, black-haired, black-eyed operator had little understanding of English and was forced to send the words almost letter by letter.

Before the task had been com-

pleted, radio had sent two planes to land beside Monty's ship on the beach before the town. Monty led the rescue flight and then came back for the girl.

As they winged their way north along the coast line of California Bay, Natalie was happier than she had ever been before and Monty's mood matched hers in gaily.

To their chagrin they found they had nothing to eat or drink aboard but they were determined to make port at the earliest possible moment and decided to forget the inconvenience of going without lunch.

"We'll have the biggest dinner there is on the Pacific coast," Monty declared and they planned for the evening together.

At the airport, they were received like heroes with Mack Hanlon himself, minus his eye-shade and with his suspenders hidden under a black seersucker coat, all but hugging the girl in his enthusiasm.

Jimmy Hale alone greeted her scornfully.

"After all I've tried to tell you," he reprimanded her; "going off without even a kodak. Won't you ever learn?"

But she knew that he was more pleased than he dared admit.

"I forgot everything but getting started," she told him. "It never occurred to me to try for pictures."

"Well," the boy chuckled, "I'm going to see that you never go anywhere again without taking something along that will bring back a picture."

Jabe Marion bore the pair off then for dinner at his house, and there it was that Sunny congratulated them with cold reserve entirely foreign to her usual volubility.

"I hope you had a nice time," she said cuttingly when Natalie and she were alone together before dinner.

Natalie took her firmly by the arms.

"Do I look as though I'd done anything I might be ashamed of? Just because we're both in love with Monty Wallace is no reason why we can't be decent to each other. I like you and, when you aren't thinking of me as the she-devil is taking your man from you, you like me."

"The girl closed her eyes stubbornly.

"I like you," she said, "when you don't consider it necessary to go on overnight trips into the desert with him."

Natalie's head went up then and she turned to the business of freshening herself after the dishevelment of the journey. For a long moment she did not speak. When she did it was with cold fury.

"When I stoop to the sort of tactics you mean, I will have lost not only my principles but any vestiges of good sense that may be left to me. I don't propose to be anybody's pet cat and if I find I have to degrade myself to make Monty Wallace love me, I'll choose rather to be worthy of his love than to have it."

Sunny laughed unpleasantly.

"That," she sneered, is a good line for one of your stories. But you know and I know that you'd take him on any terms."

"Don't be silly," Natalie rejoined. "What you know and I know is that either of us could have had him on his own terms long before this."

Sunny broke then. The tears came and she held out her arms to Natalie.

"I'm sorry," she sobbed, "but I am so jealous of you sometimes I don't know what I'm doing. Even then I don't know why I have to try to hurt you for I can't help being crazy about you."

Natalie comforted the girl as best she could. "And do you think I'm not jealous of you? I'd give my eyes sometimes if you weren't so good looking."

"Oh, Nat, I never thought of that. You hang onto yourself so. I didn't think you were ever silly. It's because you're such a swell person that I can't imagine anybody not loving you."

"Well, now that we've got all that out of our systems, I suppose we ought to go down for dinner. I wish I could send home for something I haven't slept in," she considered her rumpled costume ruefully.

"I'll probably die if you look well in it, but won't you wear something of mine?" Sunny offered and presently Natalie surveyed herself in a long glass wearing one of Sunny's stunning gowns.

"I knew I oughtn't to have done that," Sunny laughed. "Now I'll never get Monty to look at me again."

"It's just too bad about you," Natalie bantered.

And together the two went down the broad stairway in search of the man they loved.

But when they reached the library door, they found that he and Jabe Marion were too deep in conversation to pay any attention to feminine company.

When dinner was announced a few minutes later, both sprang up with apologies for having failed to notice that the two girls waited for them.

The four moved into the spacious dining room without pairing and there Jabe Marion stood in his place to propose a toast.

"Let us drink," he said, "to the success of the greatest flight ever proposed. To the plane 'Sunny Marion,' to her non-stop refueling flight around the world, and to her pilot, Mont Wallace."

Natalie gasped. Sunny squealed with delight. Mont lifted his glass.

"Success to the flight and to the man who conceived the plan," he amended.

"Success," cried Natalie, and the glasses drained.

"Breaks kid," exulted Jimmy Hale. "You sure got 'em. And may you never miss."

Natalie's story of the proposed flight was rolling on the great presses of the Express. The first ink copies lay before the two as they stood in Jimmy's cluttered office.

Coming on the heels of her rescue story out of Lower California, it was world news, and Mont Wallace was again a hero, not only for what he had done but for what he was about to attempt.

In a dozen world capitals, betting odds were to be posted that same night on the chances of success.

The plan was simplicity itself, with Mont Wallace's flying accuracy as the key.

Ten refueling stations were to be established. Ten pilots were to stand ready, linked by short wave radio with the control station at Mineola, Long Island, where the start was to be made.

Wallace was to fly with the newest automatic control equipment.

Everything depended on the plane and on Wallace's ability to keep to the course. Proven methods of refueling would be used and the plane would be altered at once to make refueling easy for the lone flier.

Natalie was already assigned to cover preparations at the home port.

Plans were under way for the christening of the ship by Sunny Marion and Jimmy had sold pictures of the girl to half a dozen national picture agencies.

Sunny's glee was not hard to fathom, for the christening of the plane would link her name with that of Mont Wallace. The world would see romance there. There was at least a chance that Mont had suggested the naming of the ship though Natalie held to the hope that her father had been responsible for the suggestion.

Inspired by the magnitude of the project, Natalie was nevertheless not without her misgivings. She knew that a thousand dangers lurked along the path of the plane and that Mont would crowd his luck for the last chance of success.

More than this, she found that Mont had suddenly become almost a stranger to her. So engrossed was he in the preparations for the flight that he would not leave the field except for sleep and though her assignment threw the girl with him constantly, there were few moments when they regained any of the easy intimacy they had known.

Natalie's only consolation was that Sunny suffered from the same neglect and yet there were occasional conferences at the Marion home when Sunny must be present while Natalie was busy with her copy or otherwise left out.

As time for the flight drew near, the girl reporter found she had fewer and fewer moments to think of the dangers of the plan or to try for the favor of the man she loved.

She knew at last that she was jealous of the flight as well as of Sunny Marion and when Jimmy found her hiding in his dark room one evening in tears he guessed what the trouble was.

"You're just naturally bound to love that guy, aren't you?" he chided. "Well, don't break your heart and we'll see what can be done."

"The girl poured out her troubles into his willing ear. He took her in his arms as though she were his sister instead of the girl he adored and promised her that he would do "his best damndest" to fix things up for her.

He took her home and made her promise to get into bed and forget all about it.

Sleep came to her rescue then but she woke in the middle of the night, apparently awakened by some noise at the door.

For an instant she was terrified but she knew that help was within call and so she went to the door and opened it. A man lay there, sprawled on the hall carpet and when she bent above him she found it was Jimmy Hale, unconscious and clearly very drunk.

Her heart went out to him as it had never done before. She bent to lift him up and got him into the room. With the door swiftly closed so that he was safe from arrest for his condition and his midnight visit, she helped him to her own bed, stilled his mutterings and watched over him the rest of the night.

She fell asleep in the big chair where she sat and the sun was high when she waked the next morning to find the boy still slumbering heavily.

In the very small cabinet kitchen where she prepared her breakfasts, she brewed for him some very strong coffee and broke out a can of tomatoes, remembering that he had spoken of their efficacy after much drinking.

Continued Next Issue



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