

Up in the clouds

By Beulah Earle

FOURTEENTH INSTALLMENT

"Sign my autograph-book, mister?" shouted all four in unison. Four books were thrust into Monty's hands, three pens dangled in front of him. More people broke through, more books, more pens. In an instant, Monty and Natalie were being literally torn to pieces by insistent admirers and autograph seekers. It seemed like a free-for-all fight. Natalie and Monty stood back to back, trying desperately to hold the pushing crowd. Suddenly Monty's coat was literally ripped off his back, his belt went next. Natalie's jaunty sport jacket was being torn to ribbons. Souvenir-hunters clawed the air, each pair of hands strove to grasp a memento of the world flight in the shape of a fragment of clothing torn from the two helpless victims.

At last, Monty could hold back no longer. His shirt in shreds, he knew that only a few seconds more elapsed between now and complete nudity for both himself and the girl. Natalie struggled to preserve her modesty by clasping the remaining ribbons of her dress close to her bosom. Monty struck out savagely with both fists. The startled crowd recoiled. Then a hoarse voice in the forefront could be heard above the din of scuffling humanity.

"Who does he think he is? Sock him, somebody!"

A second voice: "Yeah—punch him in the nose!"

A third: "High hattin' the home folks, eh?—lemme at him!"

The shouts became a menacing chorus. Monty half-turned to Natalie.

"Looks like we're in for something. Hold on—I'll do my best till the police get through the mob. Stay close to the ground!"

Fists flailed the air. Monty's burly arms worked like pistons and at each stroke could be heard the sickening sound of flesh thudding against flesh. A clanging of bells and shriek of sirens announced the coming of the police. Monty pursued his task grimly. Fighting furiously, he knew he couldn't last forever against a score of antagonists.

"Get down!—Get down!" he kept shouting to Natalie. Suddenly the mob seemed to melt away. A confused blur shimmered before Monty's eyes. He staggered, turned to find Natalie. His last vision

was her prostrate form huddled beneath him on the ground.

Monty opened his eyes to look into the kindly face of a huge Irish policeman.

"Sure, and ye'll be after goin' out to clean up what's left o' th' bunch!" were the policeman's hearty words as Monty strove to clear his aching brain.

"Where's Natalie?" he demanded, sitting upright.

"Now, there, lay back and take it easy!" commanded the policeman.

"The lady is restin' comfortably."

Another voice broke in: "How is he?—did he get hurt very badly?"

"Oh, good morning, Mister Mayor!" exclaimed the policeman, jumping to his feet. "Thank you, and he's not much the worse for wear, your Honor."

"That's fine—and the young lady, how is she?" asked the Mayor.

"Begging your pardon, your Hon, she's feeling pretty good but her clothes ain't what you'd call er—er adequate, sir!" the policeman replied, blushing.

"Get a couple of blankets for her, then, and have the boys escort them both to my car. I'll drive them home—that is, if they can travel."

The Mayor turned to the Chief of Police at his elbow.

"Do you think they can travel in my car—or shall we call an ambulance?"

The giant of a man fidgeted nervously.

"Why, of course, of course they'll travel—of course," stammered the Chief, nervously, adding, "Shall I get an ambulance?"

"Never mind!" grunted the Mayor. "I don't suppose you have one anyhow. If you'd been watching your job this wouldn't have happened!"

"Oh, yes sir—I mean no sir—I mean—"

"Shut up and get busy," was the Mayor's angry retort. "I'll see you about this in the morning!"

He turned to a group of policemen.

"Come, boys—follow me." He led them to Natalie's side.

"Allow me to introduce myself, Miss Wade—I am Mayor O'Sloan. I've come to offer my car to take you to your home, together with Mr. Wallace, of course!"

"Oh thank you!" acknowledged

Natalie, smiling faintly. But how is Monty?" was her anxious inquiry.

"Mr. Wallace is slightly—only slightly—the worse for wear," the Mayor beamed with admiration. "He put up a splendid fight! The police had to give first aid to more than twenty of the mob! And outside of a few bruises, Wallace is as good as ever, but a little tired!"

Monty appeared in the doorway, supported by two burley men in uniform.

"Hello, Nat!" he called out cheerily. "The war is over and we're going home!"

"Indeed you are," put in the Mayor, "right in my car with a police escort in true conqueror style!"

Quickly Monty and Natalie were made comfortable in the roomy back seat of a huge limousine. A chorus of sirens smote the air. The car glided off amid a cavalcade of motorcycles and accompanying autos. The procession quickly gathered speed along the highway. Monty laughed. Natalie's heart beat faster. The Mayor sat in silence until the car slowed to a stop in front of Natalie's apartment.

"A note from Mack Hanlon tells me the private celebration begins here," announced the Mayor, with a twinkle. "But don't take too long—we are all dining together at the Traveller's Club tonight—I'll send my car at seven."

A moment later the arms of two policemen had borne Natalie to her door. Monty had followed under his own power. Before he could press the buzzer, the door was opened from within.

"Surprise!" chorused the voices of Jimmy Hale and Sunny Marion. Their eyes stared at uniformed men, the tattered clothes of Monty and Natalie. Sunny rushed forward.

"What's happened?" she demanded.

"Yes, what's the matter?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"It's all right," assured Monty, catching Natalie in his arms.

"Just a little accident at the airport."

He turned to the policemen.

"Thanks, boys," he said—but even as he said it, his escorts had left.

"Let me help," insisted Jimmy catching Natalie from the other side. Sunny was equally concerned. Only when both the girl and the flier were seated comfortably did Sunny venture to ask what had happened.

In a few words, Monty recounted the experiences of the earlier morning. When he had finished, Jimmy leaped to his feet.

"Didn't I tell you!" he shouted at Sunny. "We should have stayed instead of trying to pull a surprise by being here first when they arrived. Then turning to Natalie, he added:

"I'm sorry, Nat. We thought it would be a good trick to pull on both of you—to leave you to meet each other out there in the field and still be able to surprise you here."

"Forget it," Monty protested. "Nothing serious has happened. Why should a few overly-insistent autograph hunters spoil our party?"

"Looks as though you fell into the hands of your irate creditors," ventured Sunny, as they all laughed.

"Creditors or no creditors, I owe myself a little repairing," were Natalie's words as she rose from her chair.

"Of course," Sunny exclaimed. "How stupid of us to keep you sitting here, Jimmy—take care of Monty, while I help Nat."

Meanwhile, Jimmy had fixed a drink for Monty and himself.

"Here's our first toast to the returning hero," Jimmy laughed, proffering the glass.

"I'd hate to go through a day like this for every drink," replied Monty, chuckling grimly. "I'll confess it looked pretty bad for a while—and the worst of it is I went out in the end."

"What did you expect?" asked Jimmy. "You can't fight an army single-handed. And looking at your face, I don't think they caught you very often off your guard."

"They tell me I put about twenty of them away," was Monty's dry observation, sipping his drink.

"What, only twenty?" asked Jimmy in mock surprise. But as he spoke Sunny returned to the room.

"Have one?" offered Jimmy rising to fill another glass.

"Keep sitting," said Sunny. "I'll fix it."

"It was a close shave for Natalie," remarked Sunny, pressing the siphon into her glass. "Three more grabs and that gang would have had more than their money's worth!"

Though Sunny's casual conversation was obviously designed to ease the tension of the situation, her own strain was apparent.

Monty had been engaged to Sunny, though by now both Jimmy and Natalie knew that the flier had disowned his promise made under the pressure of Sunny's scheming. That Sunny was now prepared to give up Monty could not be doubted. Had she not openly avowed her love for Jimmy, at least her matrimonial intentions?

But Monty had not yet been told of this later development. As far as he knew, Sunny could claim

that he fulfill his promise of marriage, even though they had privately agreed that the successful accomplishment of his round-the-world flight would free him from her. Would Sunny live up to her word now? Or would she resort to trickery again and demand marriage?

These were the thoughts racing through Monty's mind as Sunny seated herself opposite. Natalie had withdrawn. Only the three were together, Monty, Sunny and Jimmy. Sunny spoke first.

Continued Next Issue

BETHEL

Ronda, Route 2, Jan. 11 — The forest, hills and valleys are beautiful this morning with their blanket of white.

We had fine services here at Bethel both morning and evening last Sunday with the pastor preaching, assisted by Rev. Mr. Gilley at the latter meeting. Also a good Sunday school.

Mr. Hemric and family moved to this community from Clingman last week.

Rev. and Mrs. Gilley had as their guests recently Mrs. Gilley's mother, Mrs. David Nixon, Miss Dora Nixon, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Fowler and children of near Mt. Airy.

Little Miss Rebecca Pardue is able to be out again after being confined to her home several weeks with scarlet fever.

Mrs. D. S. Gilliam recently spent a day with Mrs. W. F. McBride of Jonesville, who has been ill, we regret to learn.

Mr. N. E. Burchett, who has been suffering a paralytic stroke for several years, has not been so well for several days.

Mrs. C. L. Morrison is spending several weeks in Iredell county, with relatives near Harmony. This is Mrs. Morrison's old home and she has many girlhood friends as well as kin folks there.

This correspondent received news from her sister, Mrs. J. B. Armstrong and Mr. Armstrong of Winston-Salem who are spending a week at Sea Island, Georgia. They report a very pleasant stay at this beautiful place.

Mrs. Robert Adams of near this

place, is seriously ill at this time, we are sorry to note.

Miss Sadie Matthews visited her cousin, Miss Vesta Mathis and Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong Gray at Clingman last Thursday night.

Mrs. Mollie Ann Osborne is visiting her niece, Mrs. Walter Morrison at Roaring River.

SHADY GROVE

Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Evans are moving this week to their new home recently completed on Stars Peak mountain.

Mrs. Nancy Swaim and family returned to their home in Virginia Thursday, following a visit here. They were accompanied by Odell Winters, who visited his sister, Mrs. Gaynell Lewis, in Danville.

The many friends of "Uncle" Newt Brown in this community were saddened to hear of his death.

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