

BOTH OVER 21

By
Manuel Hopkins Adams

Chapter IX

Those who by night go down to the streets in milk carts are not prone to pacifism. Young Mr. Kane, having been unduly rasped by previous events of the day, was feeling not averse to trouble. He checked the big man's third attempted evasion by interposing his lesser, though by no means contemptible bulk.

"All right, I'll throw you out, too," proclaimed the battler. He made a grab, only to get a clip on the chin that bumped his head against the partition, followed by a neat jab and a sound whang across the ear.

Thus far Wallis was doing nicely, but the restricted space was in favor of the superior weight. He could not avoid his opponent's rush. The going became more difficult. It was anybody's fight with damage accruing to each side when a shrill and steady whistle was followed by a rush of deck hands led by an officer, ship's discipline is sharp and prompt on the Stover Line. The belligerents were pinned. "Throw 'em into their cabins and lock 'em in."

The order was carried out. Swearing, writhing and fighting uselessly, Simms found himself stretched upon a bunk in stateroom quarters. More philosophical, Wallis offered no resistance on being propelled through a door, which was then locked from outside. His head whirling, he sat down until his vision should clear. It cleared upon an unexpected object. Gently swaying against the opposite wall hung a filmy nightgown. "Hi," said the disconcerted Mr. Kane. "This isn't my room."

"No, it's mine," said a voice from the dressing alcove. "Who are you?"

Wallis Kane, what there is left of me.

"Oh! The man-about-town." "And you're the little wonder-guest, I suppose?"

"Before we call each other any more names would you mind going away?"

"Not in the least, if you'll tell me how they locked me in."

"That's nice. What for?"

"Fighting with a wild man."

"Oh! It was you. You seem to be always fighting."

"That's good, from you," retorted Wallis with excusable annoyance. "Every time you come up for breath there's a battle and I'm in the trenches. If that's the face you'd better have it altered."

"I have," said the girl placidly. The draperies parted. The other wonderguest got his first view of his traveling companion in her natural aspect. He gazed and gasped.

"I looked again and saw it was the middle of next week," he chanted. "Pare Mr. Metzger. The Lex-Lohengrin has hatched a changing."

The propellers churned. The attendants tugs shrieked farwells. The Wondertrip had begun.

After a sharp lecture from the captain which Wallis accepted philosophically and Simms sulkily, the combatants were set free. Simms took to his cabin, pending restoration of his limited wardrobe. Acquiescent to Mr. Metzger's wishes, Wallis in a fresh outfit, set about getting acquainted with the other wonderguest.

He found plenty of competition. Miss M. McCabe was kept busy from the first. There is inevitably a touch of romance attached to a prize winner, the glamour surrounding one favored by the gods of chance. When that one has charm and to spare in her own right, the combination is formidable. Maida's first appearance as a semi-public character exhilarated her. Where all these busy young men sprang from, or how they came to know her, was not quite clear. But she had not been on deck for half hour before it became evident that Miss M. McCabe was a hit.

"There's a ship's pet on every voyage," observed Wallis to Mr. Metzger. "Our little pal seems to be it."

"She might show a little more cooperation," complained the manager.

"She's only a kid," said Wallis tolerantly. "What do you expect?"

"Pictures."

"How are you going to get 'em?" "I brought along my pocket machine gun. Will you help?"

"Let me size up the situation first. What about you coming in late to dinner and giving me a chance at her?"

It was so agreed. Not being a party to the understanding, the girl was so late, herself, that the unfortunate manager went short-rationed in a good cause. She was glowing when she sat down.

"Having yourself a good time?" asked Wallis.

"Unbelievable. I've never done anything like this before."

"It seems to come natural to you."

"It's like crawling out from under a cloud where you've been ever since you were born," she mused. "A cloud? You? You were born under a rainbow."

"In a pot of gold." She laughed at him. "Is there a set program for wondertripping?"

"Plenty of it. One item, Metzger wants some pictures of us two."

The cloud which she had ascribed to herself dimmed her jubilation. "Pictures. Oh, no! Please! It would spoil the whole trip. I hate it."

"So I seem to recall from the mix-up on the pier. I could understand it then. But since your miraculous cure—he considered her with frank appreciation—"I don't get it at all. Why be stingy with a face like yours?"

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