

**BOTH OVER 21**

By Samuel Hopkins Adams

She contemplated him with open suspicion. "What does being an amiable little wonderguest let me in for?"

"Program. We've got to see the sights sometime, you know. The authorities won't let you off the island unless you have."

"Oh, very well!" But it was not with too good grace. "Now you run along while I get things and we'll meet on that balcony for luncheon."

He nodded. "By the way, where's Waring?"

"Some friends of his are here with their boat," she answered carelessly.

The deserted suitor was, in fact, at that moment on the Ballantine's boat, drowning his sorrows and perplexities in appropriate liquors and composing a cablegram which should cover the situation without saying too much.

Slack tide is a minor phase of that major phenomenon known as young love. To shift the metaphor, mutual attraction between people of opposite sex reaches a point where the emotional engine is likely to stall on a dead center. The initial excitement, which is typically an external appeal, is prone to pall and the affair to fade out unless more stable interests are established.

Maida, summing up matters as they stood between Wallis Kane and herself, was conscious of a discontent which, far from being the "divine discontent" of the poet, was a definitely human impatience. She was by no means sure what to do about it. Did she wish to go on? Or was it better to draw back? That she was finding a new enjoyment in the easy comradeship that she was never for an instant wearied or bored, she had to admit. But if there were a score of points at which their two minds excitingly touched, there still spread between them that broad and dim gulf of a past provocatively obscure and no future at all.

At times she wondered whether

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she was not beginning to cool off. She rather approved the idea, as flattering to her sense of sufficiency and restored balance. But if she were cooling off, was it not a fair inference that he, too, might be? Somehow she did not like this corollary so well.

Anyway, she decided, she wasn't in love with him. Not seriously. How could she be? And if he were more deeply involved, that was not too serious, either; he was of firm enough fiber not to let a nine-day flirtation really get to him. Furthermore, she had given him fair warning. Her conscience was perfectly clear. Well, if it was so damned clear, why couldn't it keep quiet?

Happily he was one of those men to whom a girl could talk without petty reservations. She had a restless desire that they should see eye to eye in the matter of their temporary and anomalous relationship.

Mr. Metzger opened the way for her. One of Bermuda's impetuous downpours had delayed their morning start, and the three of them were waiting in Maida's suite for it to pass. The theater man brought out his notebook. "Might as well get a few facts about you now," said he, very businesslike.

"For what?" the girl wanted to know.

"The Lex-Lohengrin Spotlight. It's our house organ. The patrons will want to know all about the personality of the winners."

Within Maida stirred a malicious impulse toward the truth. Why not? It certainly would not be credited, and after so much constraint it would be a relief and a luxury. "I don't tell you," she began with an air of being trustfully confidential, "that I was born in the lap of luxury."

"That's a snappy phrase," murmured Mr. Metzger whose literary tastes had been formed upon simple standards. He set it down.

Well, if he liked that one he could have some more. "Wealth and elegance surrounded me from birth," recited Maida. "I was brought up to associate only with the select. Many men competed for my hand and the fortune it would bring them." She sighed elaborately. "You can't imagine what a burden a girl in my position carries."

Mr. Metzger was a literal minded person, but not to that extent. "I s'pose you took up secretarialy as a sideline," he sniffed.

"Yes, I wanted to learn how the other half lives."

"Well, here we are," said Wallis. "Take a look. Me, I was educated for an eremite, if you know what that is."

"Sure. It's an ant," said Mr. Metzger.

"You're thinking of a termite," said Maida. "An eremite," she continued leniently, is a hermit who has withdrawn from the world to find peace and refuge in a crossword puzzle." She gazed upon Wallis like an adoring disciple. "Do tell us how you came to select that calling, Mr. Kane."

"It seemed less overcrowded than other lines. I was all set when a subtle feminine influence entered my life and changed everything."

"How romantic! Who was the lady?"

"It wasn't a lady. It was a cow. The impulse was too strong for me; I became a milkman. It is now my ambition to become the premier milkman of New York."

Mr. Metzger gave a violent start, but controlled himself. "You two make me sick," he snarled, and stalked out.

"Porr Metz!" said the young man. "Suffering from lack of the red corpuscles of cooperation again."

His companion was not immediately interested in the Metzger woes. "What if we did know more about each other?" she propounded.

"I don't think so much of volunteer autobiography. You find people out by association with them."

"And there isn't much more time."

"We've done fairly well in five days."

"Have we? Not too far to turn back."

"Do you want to turn back?"

"No; No; I don't want to turn back. But I don't want to go ahead, either."

To be continued

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