

The Straight Girl on the Crooked Path



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By Juanita Hamel

JUNE fled from the theater. The chagrined director's words of denunciation at her abrupt resignation were still ringing in her ears when she reached her room. With an air of abstraction she removed her coat and hat and sat down in the nearest chair. Her head sank down on her two hands and rested there as she tried to assemble her scattered thoughts.

The questions which confronted her were: What sort of work would she be able to obtain? Could she, on her own accord, manage to get work? Did she wish to continue with this sort of work? She did not know.

Her reverie was interrupted by the landlady's voice calling her to answer a telephone call. D'Aubrey's mellow tones came over the wire. June made an appointment to take dinner with him, but she said nothing of having given up her work in the chorus. She knew of the reputation which landladies had acquired for casting an eye of suspicion upon the girl who was out of work.

"The price of one dinner saved," mused June on returning to her room. She added all of the money she had just drawn, with the exception of a little change for her immediate use, to her savings and locked it away in her trunk. "Be merry today, for tomorrow—or next week—I may be sad if I don't eat," quoth she.

A glance at the little round faced clock on the dresser told her that she had six hours to spend before seeing D'Aubrey. Six long hours that must not be spent in idleness in her present frame of mind. With sudden inspiration she hurried to the wardrobe and laid out the dresses she had worn while singing in the cabaret.

They were showy, gaudy and extreme

in style; suitable only for the purpose they had served. But the material was good and showed no sign of wear.

Choosing two of the gowns, one with a velvet bodice, the other having a full gathered skirt of chiffon and a low cut waist of tulle, June set to work to remodel them into one practical dress. She drew up the neck of the velvet bodice and edged it with a band of fur, converted the velvet peplum into half sleeves, below which dropped a full sleeve of chiffon bordered with fur. To the chiffon skirt she added a band of velvet to match the bodice.

June was truly feminine, for even in her hour of distress she did not forget her desire to be pleasing and attractive. She worked with feverish haste to finish the garment in time to wear that evening, and wondered as she worked if D'Aubrey would find her more attractive.

She was startled from her task by the sound of a rap at the door. At her bidding the frowzy head of the landlady appeared.

"There's a gentleman downstairs to see you, miss," she announced.

So absorbed was June in her work that the hours had slipped by without notice.

"See that he is comfortable—give him a paper or something to read—and tell him I'll be down in a few moments," she instructed as she took the finishing stitch, then severed the thread with her strong, white teeth.

The sound of the landlady's retreating footsteps had scarcely died away ere June had disrobed and hastily bathed. Her hair, naturally wavy and easily arranged, needed but a few strokes of the brush, and then was

quickly pinned in place. Swiftly she completed her toilet.

Arrayed in the stunning little frock, she stood for a moment before the mirror and studied the effect. She was satisfied that had she spent hours instead of minutes in dressing she would not have looked better. When she descended the stairs a few moments later and noted the gleam of admiration in D'Aubrey's eyes she felt that her efforts had not been in vain.

With an indulgent smile he accepted her apology for having kept him waiting. As he assisted her to slip into her coat he said:

"I'm going to ask you to name the place where we shall dine tonight."

"Let us go some place where it is quiet. I don't feel in the mood for gay crowds or ragtime music," June answered without hesitation. "There's a quiet Italian restaurant just around the corner from the Clark Theater where Totsie and Dolores and I often go. I could sit for hours and listen to the little hunchback tenor sing. He sings 'La Donna e Mobile,' from 'Rigoletto,' with the ardor of one who was thoroughly convinced of woman's infidelity. I'm sure you will find it interesting."

She mentioned the name of the street as D'Aubrey helped her into the waiting machine. He gently tucked the robe around her, then found her hand and held it between two gloved palms. June offered no resistance; she felt a pleasing thrill in his touch. They found no end of things to talk about. She told of having given up her work, and experienced a sort of "what-did-it-amount-to-after-all" feeling as he reassuringly patted her hand. She would manage somehow!

They were scarcely seated at the white covered table to which they were ushered at the L'Italy Cafe when June heard her name called, and turning found Dolores standing beside her.

"Well, ain't you the big sport!" she said when she had acknowledged the introduction to D'Aubrey and took the chair he set for her. "Why, you're so dolled up I didn't recognize you at first. Totsie and a friend of hers are over there." She nodded her head toward a table in back of June. "Her friend, he says, 'Gee, look at that swell lookin' Jane comin' in,' and me and Totsie both says, 'Why, that's June.' I didn't think you really meant to quit this morning, and then you left without seein' me. I thought I never was going to see you any more, 'cause I didn't even know where you lived. While I think of it, suppose you give me your address. I am coming out to see you as soon as we get through rehearsing. In the meantime, I'll be glad to tip you off if I hear of anything in the way of a job."

June gave her the desired address, and after chatting for a while watched her rejoin her friends. When she turned her attention again to D'Aubrey she noticed an amused smile lingering on his countenance.

"Queer little girl, isn't she?" he remarked. "Rather amusing, I thought, and pretty, too." A grave expression came over his face as he leaned across the table and looked deep into June's eyes and added, "But I hope you won't be interrupted again. I want you all to myself for the rest of the evening."

June lowered her eyes. She did not wish D'Aubrey to read in them the fact that the sentiment he had just expressed was mutual.

(To be continued next week)
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