

# The Straight Girl on the Crooked Path



By Juanita Hamel

*At a moment when D'Aubrey's attention was claimed by the waiter, June relaxed. She did not try to analyze her concern for his opinion, but she realized that she had suddenly become very miserable.*

On the occasion of his last call there had been more tenderness and concern in his voice and in his words than there had been since the night when June had last seen him, and his attitude had caused her such mental anguish.

"Good-by, little girl," he had said. "Don't forget me while I am gone. As soon as I return we are going to have a long talk. I have much to say. It may be surprising to you and I hope—pleasing."

When she bent over her work again she had smiled through her tears as she speculated on the meaning of his words. But the memories of pleasantries and tender words are fragile things. Short lived are they in a world of doubts and fears.

June received but one short letter. It told of delayed arrival and a trying journey. Then followed a silence that was filled with anxious days of expectation and nights of wakefulness and tears. Her lips ceased to curve in a smile at the memory of some act of solicitude or unconscious word that had given her a thrill of pleasure because it had seemed to indicate that he cared.

She would vow to herself that it mattered not, and toss her head as though the action dismissed all thought of him. She found a measure of forgetfulness in her work. The days grew into weeks and with the improvement in her financial condition came the yearning for her father and the home in Louisiana. While in such a mood she wrote a letter—the letter she had long intended writing but had delayed because she could not send good tidings.

She reckoned the months that had elapsed, months that must have been filled with anxiety for her father. She realized that she had been incapable of fully comprehending until now. In a fever of suspense she awaited the message of forgiveness.

On her return home from an afternoon in the shops one day June found the expected letter awaiting her. When she read its contents she bowed her head and sobbed with remorse.

A few moments later she called Hilda on the phone.

"I'm going home," she announced.

"Come over and help me pack my trunk."

As she made her preparations she thought of D'Aubrey's words to her. What would he say—what would he do when he learned that she had departed with no word of farewell? Perhaps he had not been sincere in his statements? Perhaps he would never so much as learn of her departure? June's heart was filled with bitterness, her mind with one intent—to forget!

(To be continued next week)

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IT DID not take June long to learn that she had been correct in her supposition that Hargraves would be seen and recognized as he left her room. D'Aubrey made no mention of the fact, but his actions proclaimed it clearly enough for June to understand. He appeared to be strangely preoccupied when she met him, and as the evening wore on she became aware of a noticeable coolness in his attitude. To her his manner was indicative of distrust. A more experienced girl than she would have tactfully guided the conversation around to the point of an explanation, and so, too, would June have attempted to do had it not been for the resentment she felt that D'Aubrey should regard her with suspicion.

In so distraught a frame of mind was she that she scarcely saw or comprehended the show they attended. Afterward when he suggested dinner at the L'Italy Cafe she readily assented.

She had decided that if she could do so without placing herself in a conciliatory position she would explain Hargraves' visit and his presence in her room. She was not sure that it was a matter of any concern to D'Aubrey; perhaps it was not this that ailed him. It would be indelicate, to say the least, if she boldly approached the subject, she felt, so she awaited an opportunity. But the dinner drew to a close without the desired opportunity presenting itself, and June's heart grew heavier. In her efforts to show no sign of the uneasiness

that was hers she had been unusually frivolous, but in a moment when D'Aubrey's attention was claimed by the waiter she relaxed. She did not try to analyze her concern for D'Aubrey's opinion; she only realized that she had suddenly become very miserable. She seemed incapable of surmounting the barrier that had been erected.

At the door of her home D'Aubrey left her abruptly instead of lingering for the usual chat and pressure of hands. At times when they had stood thus and he had leaned close as though about to kiss her June's heart had fluttered violently, and now it took all of her womanly restraint to leave him and give no indication of the desire which predominated her every thought.

How she yearned to feel his arms about her and his kisses on her unresisting lips! To have heard from him the words that Hargraves had uttered would have made her esthetically happy. But she did not think of love or marriage; she was conscious only of an aching, yearning feeling which his tenderness alone would have banished. With an attitude of indifference that matched his own she bade D'Aubrey adieu. That night her pillow was wet with her tears.

June had at last solved the living problem. She found that she could get more work than she could do. By the time Dolores' dress was completed she was besieged by different members of the Highlights company to "come to

their assistance," as one of the girls expressed herself. June was the medium through which they could obtain "clothes that were different," which is the desire of nearly every woman's heart, and the price for practically the same garment which the shops were offering was not so exorbitant. But her work was not confined to those who were forced to economize.

She was given a commission by one of the principals of the company to duplicate a certain lace and frilled chiffon negligee, the original price of which that individual could have well afforded. The money which June estimated would be required for the buying of materials and the making of the garment was given her. By making her purchases at a store where she was allowed a modiste's discount she was enabled to make a neat little sum on the undertaking. Her expenses were smaller than they would have been had she been employed away from home and her income averaged far more than her work in the chorus would have brought her. Her savings were mounting as the busy days sped by. But with all of this June was not happy.

D'Aubrey had telephoned daily, as had been his custom, for a time. But always his business was pressing; he did not suggest an appointment. Then came the day when he announced that it was necessary for him to leave New York for a time. His presence was required in Oklahoma, where the headquarters of the oil company of which he was a stockholder and the chief New York representative was located.