

The STRANGE CASE of JULIA CRAIG

By Nard Jones
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HIGH SCHOOL TODAY
JULIA CRAIG, pretty young secretary employed by the law firm of Woodford and Brooks, is discouraged about her job. She confides this to AMY SANDERS with whom she shares an apartment. Amy works in an exclusive dress shop.

PETER KEMP, also employed by Woodford and Brooks, is in love with Julia and has asked her to marry him. But she discourages his attentions. Amy and Julia have been talking about love, marriage and their plans for the future. Amy says, "All right. You don't like the way things are. What are you going to do about it?"

CHAPTER II

JULIA said, without hesitation, "You know me well enough to know that if I didn't have some ideas for changing things I wouldn't be kicking." She took a long breath, then went on, "Amy, I'm going to try to do something with my voice. I don't mean anything fancy. But I know I have a knack for singing these modern songs."

Amy's tone was comically astonished. "You—you don't mean one of these female crooners?"

"Call it whatever you like," said Julia. "That's my plan."

"I guess I'll have to get a radio," Amy said, aloud as if to herself. "I saw a perfect honey yesterday for \$5 down."

"I'm not kidding, Amy. But I don't mean radio singing. I know perfectly well that I haven't the best voice in the world, and that maybe I'll have to use my face and figure, too." She laughed. "Assuming I have them. You're always telling me I have."

"You know perfectly well you have. Did you ever look at a man's face when you were singing one of these modern torch songs?" Julia took a cigarette of her own, tapped its end against the table, then put it down without touching it to her lips. "I'm going to try to get a job singing, Amy. It's my only chance to be something and to meet the right man. I won't work at Woodford and Brooks' until I'm old—until I get panicky and marry the first man who comes along!"

Amy started toward the kitchen. "Well, let's forget it now and see what we can make of the groceries you brought home."

Julia started to put on a kitchen apron over her black dress, but she had hardly tied the knot at her waist when the telephone rang. It was Peter Kemp. "I'm sorry, but I haven't had the chance to call you before this. I worked late at the office. Hope you haven't started dinner yet, because I'd like to take you out."

JULIA was hesitating at the telephone when Amy Sanders came in from the kitchen. "Tell him you'll go to dinner with him," she advised quickly. "Royal Nesbitt is coming to take me out after dinner, and I'd have to hurry through it, anyhow."

"All right," said Julia into the mouthpiece. "I'd like to come, Peter."

When she replaced the instrument in its cradle she was facing Amy's amused smile. "I'm not weakening," she told Amy. "I happen to know that Peter has a friend who leads an orchestra. Maybe he can get me a chance to sing."

"Okay, darling. Go change your clothes while I have a cup of coffee to strengthen myself against Royal Nesbitt."

Julia Craig left the telephone and walked toward Amy. "You've been giving me some advice, Amy."

What about this Royal Nesbitt?

"What do you mean?"

"I mean— he has money, and everybody in town knows he's got very serious-minded. Why is he giving you a run?"

"Why not?" asked Amy. "He likes me, and I think he's a lot of fun."

Julia's glance met that of Amy Sanders, met it squarely. "You'll watch your step won't you?"

Amy grinned. "I always do, Julia. There's something funny about a dizzy blond giving advice to a brunet. But I get your point, all right."

"I may be blond," said Julia. "But I'm not dizzy . . . yet."

"You're telling me!" asked Amy, and went to see to the percolator while Julia went into the dressing room which was also the hiding place for the fold-down bed. In that confined space, under a rather feeble electric light, she changed her clothes and prepared herself for Peter Kemp's call.

HE rang the bell promptly a half hour later. He was a well-set-up young man, neatly dressed and alert—and his eyes showed plainly that he worshiped Julia Craig.

"Sorry to creep up on you like this," he said when she let him in.

"But a—"

office, and it suddenly occurred to me that I ought to stay down town and have dinner with you—if you'd let me."

"I'm glad you thought of it to night," Julia said, a smile in her eyes. "Amy's all in a stir to get out for a date—so I don't think she'd be much company at dinner."

Amy emerged from the dressing room, looking a flowered print dress. "Hello, Peter. I warn you about Miss Craig tonight. This is one of her moody days."

Peter and Julia exchanged glances which told Amy that Peter Kemp was all too familiar with Julia's "moody days."

"Is that right?" he said lightly. "I'm afraid I'm in for it, then."

"I'm afraid you are," said Amy and disappeared into the dressing room again. "However," she called out, "I hope you have a good time."

When Peter and Julia were out side to the hall, he said, "Amy didn't really seem very hopeful that we would have a good time. What's wrong, Julia? Got the blues again?"

Julia nodded. "I'm afraid so, Peter. But they're not so bad this time. At last I've decided to do something about them."

He pressed the button for the automatic elevator, and said quietly: "I don't suppose that means you'll marry me?"

"No, no, Peter. I— Julia bestated. "I'll tell you all about it at dinner."

THEY ate in a little restaurant near the apartment, for it developed that Peter had to complete his work at the office. It was on the big public utilities case that Julia had mentioned to Amy, and Peter had to prepare a brief for a phase of it. When the coffee came Peter offered his cigarette and said "All right, Julia. Let's have it."

"I want to quit Woodford and Brooks, Peter."

"Yes? What then?"

Julia looked at him. "I—I've decided to try to sing, Peter."

"You've decided to try?" exclaimed Kemp. "Say, right now you're better than nine-tenths of these dames who get paid for it in the night clubs!"

"You really think so?"

"I know it, Julia."

"Then will you give me a note of introduction to your friend Henri Lamb who leads the band at the Green Club?"

The directness of her question surprised Peter. "Why—I—"

"Will you, Peter?"

"Why, of course, if you're really serious. But I don't see—"

"My mind's made up, Peter. And you can help me, if you will. You've known Lamb a long time."

"I'd do anything in the world for you, Julia. You just say what I'll write the note tonight and give it to you tomorrow morning at the office."

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