

The STRANGE CASE of JULIA CRAIG

by Nard Jones

Copyright NEA 1936

BEGIN HERE TODAY
George Woodford gives a party for his guests, including Cintra Lee, dancer; Mrs. Joseph, widow; Hugo Nash, author; and Neddy Nesbitt, his friend. Julia is to become a night club singer. Julia shares an apartment with Amy Sanders.

Peter Kemp, young lawyer, is in love with Julia but they quarrel and Julia decides she never wants to see him again.

Woodford gives a party for his guests, including Cintra Lee, dancer; Mrs. Joseph, widow; Hugo Nash, author; and Neddy Nesbitt, his friend. Julia is to become a night club singer. Julia shares an apartment with Amy Sanders.

Peter Kemp, young lawyer, is in love with Julia but they quarrel and Julia decides she never wants to see him again.

Woodford gives a party for his guests, including Cintra Lee, dancer; Mrs. Joseph, widow; Hugo Nash, author; and Neddy Nesbitt, his friend. Julia is to become a night club singer. Julia shares an apartment with Amy Sanders.

Now GO ON WITH THE STORY.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NEXT day, a little after 5, Julia found herself in a taxi bound for one of the municipal wharves.

There, Cintra Lee had told her over the telephone the night before, she would find Tony Latta ready to take her to his gambling ship for her first professional engagement.

All day long her better judgment had warned against the idea—but already she had given Cintra her word. And there remained the fact that she was out of a job and must do something.

But, despite all this, she might still have sent her excuses had it not been for Amy Sanders.

"I'd do it," Amy told her. "You can take care of yourself, Julia. It's not where a girl is, but what she is. If you're sold on this Cintra Lee, and she says that Latta is all right, what more do you want?"

So, bolstered by Amy's advice, Julia kept her promise to Cintra Lee. All day long she had occupied herself furiously with small tasks around the apartment, trying not to think of her eventual appointment with Latta.

When the time came, she ordered a cab almost automatically—and now here she was, headed straight for Latta's gambling ship.

It seemed only a few minutes before the taxi had stopped before the wide gates of the municipal wharf. Trembling a little, Julia got out and paid the driver.

In her excitement she almost forgot her bag and he had to call after her. But when Julia reached out a hand for it, a low, strange voice said, "I'll take it, please."

She turned swiftly to look into dark brown eyes—enigmatic eyes that told nothing.

"I am Tony. And you are Miss Craig?"

"Yes . . . Julia faltered.

"I recognized you from what Cintra told me. You are ready to come aboard now?"

In those few seconds before she found her voice to answer, Julia examined Tony Latta.

He was rather short, and a little heavy—a man some where beyond 40.

His eyes were the eyes of his race, deep and dark and beautiful. They were his most—perhaps his only—attractive feature. But his smile was broad and friendly.

"Before we start out we must get things straight, eh?" He smiled again. "You want to sing for my customers?" He nodded quickly to his own questions. "And about the salary. I can not pay very much, even though Cintra tells me you are very good. Suppose we start at \$40 a week?"

JULIA started. Her salary at Woodford Brooks had been \$27.50 a week.

Mistaking her hesitation, Latta

added, "That includes your meals aboard the ship, if you want them. And also you can have a room—or you can come in with the last taxi boat."

"I think I'd rather stay in town," Julia said.

Latta shrugged. "Even if you do, \$40 is all I can afford to pay."

"That will be . . . quite satisfactory, Mr. Latta."

His wide smile flashed again.

"Good! . . . And one other thing. Everybody calls me Tony. Nobody calls me Mr. Latta unless they do not like me very much. I think right from the start you should call me Tony, and I should call you Julia. Is it a go?"

Julia laughed. "It's a go," she agreed, wondering what there was about this short, dark man that was so likable.

But when he led her to the end of the wharf where four sleek mahogany runabouts were moored she felt as if she were about to step into an abyss, from which a return would be difficult. At sight of Latta, a man appeared from out the sedan-top of the nearest boat.

"Ready to go, Tony?"

"All right. Put the light on the ladder, Pete."

"All right."

BELLOW her Julia saw the narrow rungs which made it possible to board the water taxi. In no time at all she and Latta were aboard, and the boat seemed to literally leap away from the dock.

Julia caught her breath at the sudden speed and Latta smiled.

"These boats are very fast," he said. "I have had them a long time."

The interior was not at all what Latta had expected. It was more like the interior of a fine hotel than of a smaller passenger vessel.

There were three large gambling rooms with cream-colored walls and furniture that just missed being in florid taste.

Most of the chairs and settees were in bright red leather, which

seemed to please Latta immensely—and the game tables were all covered with green felt, and marked for a dozen different games of chance.

"But here is where you will sing," Latta said, and pushed open a wide white swinging door.

JULIA nodded. "I believe you, Julia. You are a good girl. I can see that with only one eye. And that is what I want. Cintra says you sing like—I think she said it was like nobody's business."

"I hope she didn't build me up so much that you'll be disappointed," he said anxiously.

"It's so much nicer than I expected," she said, without thinking how her remark might sound.

"But Tony's boat gets the best people," he assured her. "Your singing will not be wasted . . . And now I will show you your room."

"I see," said Julia uncertainly.

"You know, my ship is perfectly legal?" he asked anxiously.

"I can not tell a good note from a bad one," Latta confessed. "But I take Cintra's word for anything. And anyhow, my customers will tell me if they do not like you."

He laughed uproariously at this last remark, but somehow Julia could not find it amusing. "I hope," she thought, "that I can last the week out."

But when the speedy boat had left the harbor and encountered the heavier weather outside she was not so certain that she would want to last the week out.

The runabout seemed to leap from one wave crest to the next, and each wave slapped the bottom like a giant sledge.

"Does it get rougher than this?" she asked.

"Rough?" Tony Latta seemed surprised. "This is not rough. These boats will take more than you think—and sometimes it is pretty bad."

He smiled at her. "I think sometimes you will change your mind about wanting to come back into town."

JULIA's heart beat faster. Would this job too, be virtual imprisonment as she had suffered on the Wood Nymph?

Certainly she had no desire to spend very many days and nights friendless, on a lone ship moored out from shore. But perhaps Latta was having some mild fun with her.

Fortunately it was not very many more minutes before there loomed ahead of them the outlines of a ship. It was not now fully illuminated, except for its regulation lights, and to Julia it was a black and forbidding bulk bearing down upon them.

But Latta's man maneuvered the small boat with the perfection of long experience, and Tony Latta helped Julia to the landing platform. In another moment she was on the deck of his gambling ship.

"It was not the largest ship out of the harbor that night, but neither was it very small. Latta explained that he had purchased it from a transportation company which considered the boat out of date.

"But she's fine for my purposes," he said. "I got her for a song, and I spent the engines for a good price, too."

He laughed, pleased at his own astuteness. "She don't need engines—we tow her when we want to change her position."

"But mostly she's just anchored tight, and I got plenty of weight in her hold and she don't roll much."

The interior was not at all what Latta had expected. It was more like the interior of a fine hotel than of a smaller passenger vessel.

There were three large gambling rooms with cream-colored walls and furniture that just missed being in florid taste.

Most of the chairs and settees were in bright red leather, which

seemed to please Latta immensely—and the game tables were all covered with green felt, and marked for a while

with a white

white