

On the Screen

A SERIAL STORY

BY OLIVER SANDYS

Continued from Last Week

Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Daphne Greening, an Australian girl, married to an Englishman, leaves her husband because of a quarrel caused by his foolish jealousy. She resolves to become an actress and, under the name of Daphne Barry, seeks a position on the London stage. The first successful actress she succeeds in interviewing advises her to keep off the stage, and tells her of the difficulties and temptations of stage life.

It would have comforted poor Jameson Greening as he paced his own room up and down, up and down, desperately anxious, conscience-stricken and worried, if at that moment he could have seen Daphne at her prayers and heard her including him in them. It would have comforted him still more had he known about that cup of cocoa.

In the morning Daphne set out on her pursuit of an engagement with renewed energies. Mrs. Glenister had given her the names of five reliable theatrical agents. She went to Seymour in Garrick Street first and stood among the crowd in the waiting-room for a good two hours without avail.

Presently an inner door marked "Private" opened and a little dark man hurried out. Instantly he was besieged by a dozen men and women; women, anxious-faced and hard-eyed for all the set smile that comes so easily to theatrical lips.

The little man eluded them and their demands with practised ease. His quick glance singled out one here, another there.

"No, nothing for you today, dear. Call again tomorrow, old chap. Yes, yes, I haven't forgotten. I'll let you know. Good-by. Good-by."

And he had gone. The room began to clear. Daphne turned to a woman who was passing her on her way out.

"Who was that?" she asked.

"That? Oh, Seymour," she laughed. "He's as slippery to catch as an eel. He won't be back any more today. I'm going on to Benton's. Coming?"

Benton was the next name on Daphne's list. The woman and she went out into the street together.

"Been out of a shop long?" the woman asked.

The meaning of the term began to dawn on Daphne at last.

"I've never had an engagement," she confessed. "I'm new to this."

The woman stood still on the pavement.

"You poor kid!" she said commiseratingly.

"Why, don't you like the stage?"

"Like it? Of course I do. I love it—when I'm on it. I'm professional born. It's my life. But it's rough on shoe leather when you have to go trotting about for a shop, and now I'm not so young as I was. I'm beginning to feel it," she went on with the frank loquacity of her class. "I've been 'resting'—doing nothing, you know—for the last eight weeks. Not a sign of a job and three little kiddies and a husband, who's willing to work but won't, to keep. This is Benton's."

She preceded Daphne up the narrow staircase. At the top she was stopped by a managerial-looking person.

"Hulloa, Minnie," he said. "I was just asking Benton about you. Are you fixed up for the autumn?"

"All but signing the contract," lied the woman with sudden gaiety. "Three pounds a week. If you can go one better—"

"It appeared that the manager could."

"Come downstairs and we'll talk it over," he said.

As the woman turned she remembered Daphne, and, with the quick generosity of stage-folk, brought her forward.

"Got anything for my friend?" she asked.

The man shook his head. "Full up," he answered, and began to descend.

The woman caught hold of Daphne's hand and gave it a sympathetic squeeze.

"Good luck, dear," she whispered. "You see, I've hit it at last."

She nodded brightly and followed the

provincial manager into the refreshment room on the ground floor.

At Benton's Daphne was told to "look in again," and the same laconic advice was handed out to her at the other agencies. She got quite used to the stereotyped interview. The questions and her answers were always the same.

"What's your line of business? Any experience? No, nothing today. Look in again."

She looked in again every day for a fortnight until hope grew faint within her. She had all but reached the end of her resources. Thirty shillings only remained to her out of her five pounds. It was then that she began to feel definitely afraid.

The world, whose bright side had only faced her until now, seemed a hard place for a woman who had to make her way alone. That fortnight had taught her more about the battle of life than all she had ever read or heard of the subject. She knew what it meant now by personal experience; and it was worse than anything she had ever dreamed of.

She had always associated man with the economic struggle, overlooking the fact that it touches womankind just as frequently and more hardly. Another

Had she had time to look at the newspapers, she would have seen in the agony columns of several of them:

DAPHNE. So sorry. Implore you to come back. J.

She began to wonder whether she ought not to look for some other form of employment. The stage seemed closed against her. In the end she decided to try at the agencies once more, and spent a whole fruitless day dividing her time between them.

In the late afternoon, as she was coming away from Benton's, an alert-looking man with a lined face stared so hard at her that she could not help noticing it. Something about him suggested the American. She walked on quickly. He followed. She had eaten very little that day. She felt tired and faint, and now the unpleasant attentions of this man looked like prolonging her walk indefinitely.

She jumped to the conclusion that he must be something obnoxious, or else a detective. In either case, he must be shaken off. She slowed down, letting her pursuer gain on her, and then turned and faced him unexpectedly.

"What are you following me for?" she angrily demanded.

The man was not in the least dis-



She was lying on a horsehair sofa by the window.

concerted. He faced the indignation in her flushed face with complete composure.

"I shouldn't follow you unless I had a very good reason," he said consequentially. "I'm Houghton Hughes."

"I don't know you," she said, and turned away.

But her curt tone had no effect on him. He kept up with her.

"See here, young lady," he said pertinaciously. "I've come all this way after you to ask a question, and I reckon I'm going to ask it. Can you ride?"

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In spite of the brusqueness of his speech and the undeniable vulgarity of his looks, there was something about the American that convinced Daphne of his good faith.

True, he might be a lunatic or a harmless crank of some kind, in which case it would be best to humor him. At any rate, there could be no harm in answering his questions.

"Yes, I can ride," she said. "But I don't see why that should be of the slightest interest to you."

"You will when I'm thru," he answered. "If you knew my name—and I can't understand how it is you don't—you wouldn't look as if you were talking to a guy that follows girls. Mean to say you've never heard of Houghton Hughes, of the Delta Cinema

Company?"

The blank incredulity in his voice made Daphne feel inclined to laugh.

"No, I really have not," she smiled; "but, now that I know you are the Houghton Hughes, and you are satisfied that I can ride, isn't it time you let me go on in peace?"

"But, Je-hosaphat, young lady! Don't you want an engagement?" exploded the picture-play man. "You came out of Benton's, didn't you? And you looked kind of peeved, anyhow."

"Yes, of course I want something to do very badly," said Daphne. "And I dare say I looked depressed. I've been trying to get work for over a week."

"Then come right in here and I'll tell you what I'm driving at. I'm a busy man, and I hate wasting time. Say, you were a fool-skirt to keep me running around these blocks for twenty minutes on end."

He took Daphne into an adjacent restaurant and ordered coffee for two.

"Now," he said, "answer me straight. You've got the walk of the girl who's lived in the open and been reared among horses. Am I right?"

"I'm an Australian," said Daphne. "Nerve?"

"Plenty of it."

"Ride astride?"

"I've never ridden any other way."

"Good hands? Strong seat? Cabbage Tree's a handful."

"I'm not afraid of any horse. If Cabbage Tree is one, you'd better tell me what you want."

"I will. Cabbage Tree is the hardest mouthed bronco I've got. He'd unseat a leech if he'd a mind that way, and he's pesky tempered into the bargain." He was watching her narrowly. "Shall I go on?"

Daphne nodded. She adored horses, "pesky tempered" or lamblike, and the obviousness of the fact that she was going to be asked to ride the bronco did not deter her. She began to feel pleasantly excited.

"Cabbage Tree," pursued Hughes, "is the big screech in the show I'm rehearsing now down at Hatch Heath. It's an Australian story called 'Cabbage Tree's Last Ride'; and, by jinks! it's riding, riding, first-class riding all thru. See? Now, the girl I've engaged for the leading part can't ride worth a hot-ter. She can only act with her face, which is one of the essentials for this business. To cut it short, she's scared of Cabbage Tree. Cabbage Tree knows it, and gave her a nasty fall yesterday. Fact is, he's about as difficult to manage as a conceited leading lady. It amounts to this: Miss Fuller will be ready to play in the final show in ten days if all goes well, but, meanwhile, the horse has got to be rehearsed. Will you take on the contract? I'm not asking you to act, because I don't suppose your pantomime's up to the mark—tho' if the worst came to the worst, I could bill you as Miss Fuller, just the same. You're almost her double in appearance. That's what made me catch on to you. As to salary, Miss Fuller's getting a fancy price, but she's a star Cinema woman. I'll give you three pounds if you'll rehearse Cabbage Tree for a week. It's no soft job, I allow. I wouldn't take it on myself for thirty; but I'm no cowboy, anyhow."

"I'm not afraid," said Daphne. "I'll come."

"Right you are. Hatch Heath is twenty-five miles from London. Take a ticket to Grasmere. There's a train from Euston at nine-fifteen tomorrow morning. You'll have time to look around then before rehearsal at three. I'll meet you there. Here's my card. And here's your salary. Don't fail me."

"But—is it usual—to pay salary in advance?" asked Daphne doubtfully.

"Where Cabbage Tree's concerned, it's the only way to settle a square