

# The Thrills of 1924, February 25, 1924

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## **The Thrills of 1924**

**The rest, lost to all thoughts of home and family, regardless of many things of beauty and comfort money will buy were slowly, but steadily losing dollars by the hundreds.**

Hour after hour, the impersonal dialogue continues, the player's voice sibilant with anxiety, the gamekeepers' response, dull and colorless. There is the little chinkle of chips, the tiny sound of dice being raked across the board and the antiphony goes on and on till dawn.

At the next table, there is the soft whir of the roulette wheel and the knock-knocking of the ivory ball as it spins around the wheel seeking a resting place. The players are silent for the most part, speaking in murmurs for chips, only the banker or his companions calling the lucky number.

The chips are piled row upon row, ivory, red, green, blue, lavender pink and under the banker's hand is a pile of bills half a foot high. We noticed that when one of the men behind the table was called away, he did not move from the side of his partner until another had come to take his place. There is something sleepily sinister about these two men with their pleasantly impassive faces.

## **Tensity About Patrons**

This room full of people, concentrating all their attention on objects which are animated only by a turn of a wheel or gesture of a wrist is uncanny. The players seek to preserve a bland expression but there is a tensity about them which is felt and a set look about their mouths.

The woman sitting next to us with sweet drooping eyebrows and a hard mouth, lost thirty one-dollar chips and turned to her purse hastily so that she shouldn't lose a minute of the play. She was beautifully gowned in jade green and her golden sandalled feet were tucked up on the rungs of her chair. The woman next to her played with an air of amused indifference, with five dollar chips and the movement of her arm as she reached out to place her bet, made the diamonds flash in the huge crucifix which she wore at her breast.

At the roulette table, the women were younger on the whole, although there was one woman who did not even make pretensions to youth or even middle age. She was almost shabbily dressed, and sat unashamed with a ragged handbag out of which she kept extracting bills for piles upon piles of chips.

## **Half Dozen Young Girls**

A half dozen young girls, immaculately dressed, kept their wraps about them as though they had just dropped in for an hour's play although they were just as intent as the rest.

Nobody paid any attention to anybody else. Sex interest was so completely lacking in this room that when a new feminine arrival joined the group around the table, no one looked her way to size up either her clothes and her attractions. They abstractedly made way for her, their eyes upon the table.

This was a relief to us, for although our excitement craving companion had come well gowned, we wore street clothes. But nobody cares what you wear and nobody cares how you bet. Unless, of course, you're winning. That's human nature.

We'd like to tell how we took the \$50,000 and staked it all on our lucky number (we were under the delusion that we have one, and that it's fifteen) and after waiting nonchalantly for the ivory ball to fall in the pocket, raked in \$1,750,000. For that's what you'd win if you had \$50,000 to stake and if they let you do it.

## **Bought Quarter Chips**

But truth compels us to confess that we bought five dollars worth of quarter chips and kept them in front of us for a while in order that we could study the table, and also because we knew we wouldn't have them long and wanted to enjoy the sensation of having a stack whether they were won or paid for, while we could.

The banker's proficiency in raking in the chips, stacking them and passing them around again to winners and purchasers, engaged our attention for a while. Then we discovered when the chips had been swept off that we really knew nothing about roulette, either the layout or the methods of betting.

0-32-15-19-4-21-2—25-17-34 6 27 13 36-11-30-8-23-10, etc.

The above line is not a typographical error nor yet a secret code. It's the way the numbers run on the roulette wheel, every other letter being black or red until there are 36 numbers identifying the pockets. Just to make it harder, the zero pocket is green.

The Monte Carlo and the New Orleans wheels have 36 pockets and a zero, but many other American wheels have only 27, 30 or 33 numbers, giving a larger percentage.

The wheel spins slowly on its axis like a large flat top in a sort of hollow dish round the inner edge of which the little ball is thrown, always in the opposite direction to which the wheel is turning. The center of the green table is marked out in numbered squares and it's on these you place your bet.

## **Combinations Puzzling**

It would take too long to enumerate all the ways of betting, by columns, by the first twelve, second twelve or third twelve numbers, odd or even, red or black being only a few of them. We didn't realize them ourselves until we got at home and drew diagrams and started figuring out.

The thing we couldn't understand was how anybody could evolve what are known as "systems" or "combinations," from the numbers listed above. Our only attempt at a combination was to

place one chip on 15, one on each line between 15 and three other numbers. If the ivory ball landed in pocket fifteen, we stood to win \$21.50 for the dollar we had staked. Unfortunately we kept losing until we had one chip left, staked it stubbornly on 15 and won \$8.50 instead of the \$21.50 we'd been working for. But we couldn't stop there. We had to go on, trying other fascinating combinations until we relinquished our seat, a ruined woman.

### **Woman Broke Bank**

Haven't we heard that there is such a thing as beginner's luck? Another delusion shattered. What a moment it would have been to have continued winning and placing neat little stacks of chips on various numbers with that mysterious and assured air peculiar to one whose stacks of counters are increasing, until others followed our bets, as the custom is. Of course the situation wouldn't be complete unless you actually "broke the bank."

One woman had that enviable experience, lacking the climax of course which should have been ours. For this woman was not a beginner. She had the cold and glittering eye which all true gamblers should have but don't. Time after time she staked half a dozen chips or so and won. She did it seemingly without system and we wondered how she could remember on which numbers she had placed bets, and how many chips on each. But she remembered and the banker remembered and she kept right on winning. Gradually she had collected a following. Everybody watched what she did with breathless interest. She was beloved by the gods of chance just now, and everybody else wanted any crumbs which might fall from her table. They surrounded her on all sides with their chips, and they won and she won, but the banker remained imperturbable.

### **Luck Didn't Last Long**

We didn't see the bank busted, and we couldn't help wondering whether the banker and his companion would retain their expression of Buddhist indifference.

But the little flurry of luck didn't last long, and pretty soon everybody was betting on their own again, and there was no longer the same place atmosphere as before.

It was two o'clock when we left the roadhouse, refusing the proprietor's hospitable invitation to wait for dinner. But afraid of the lure of the tables, and having lost between us all that my companion had said she was going to allow herself to lose, we strong-mindedly dragged ourselves away. In the two hours we were there, we had not been able to keep exact track of the losses of others. We only knew that of all the women who were there, only two were winning. The rest, lost to all thoughts of home or family, regardless of the many things of beauty and comfort that money will buy were slowly, but steadily losing dollars by the hundred. There may be a thrill in it, but the two delusions of "lucky number" and "beginner's luck" being shattered, we've decided we won't play roulette again. \_\_\_\_\_

Tuesday's *Item* will continue this series of stories about women excitement seekers in New Orleans.