

# The Thrills of 1924

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*Summary: (DDLW 22)*

**—Other society women have been asked to join this little group but most of them are afraid. The stakes are too high.**

Women may go to the races and bet with men, they may play around the roulette wheel and the dice table with them in amicable intercourse, but they may not play poker with them. Whether it is because men think that this is a game which requires special skill, rather than luck, and cannot sit at the same table with a woman without arguing the age-old argument of the sexes, we don't know. Of course bridge is a gambling game, often for high stakes. But it is also a social and parlor game whereas poker is a "he-man" game, associated with the Klondike, the gold fields and the great open spaces where men are men—and they want to keep women out of it. But women won't be kept out. There is an intensity about this form of gambling which other games lack, a "kick" and a feeling of suspense which they must have. So they've gone ahead and formed clubs of their own at which they play day after day, and often far into the night.

## Hates to See Bonehead Plays

"A man doesn't mind standing by seeing his wife, or the women he is with losing money at roulette," one man summed it up. "That's a chance. But he hates to see her making bonehead plays in poker, raising on a pair of jacks, trying to bluff. He hates to have his money thrown away, and he hates to have his wife making a fool out of herself and incidentally him by showing how little she knows about the game, and what bad judgment she has. A man and wife can never take part in a game, because if one throws down the hand, the other will always pick it up to see what was being discarded, and to see if he or she couldn't have played it better. More divorces have been caused over poker!"

## Excluded from Clubs

Women are excluded from all the clubs where poker is played about the city, but the truth of the matter is, they don't mind. And that's because alone, among their own sex, they can play as recklessly and as intuitively as they like.

To begin at the top and go down, there is in this town, at the present time, a little group of six or eight women, the elite, the creme de la creme, most exclusive of society women who meet day after day and night after night for poker. “The sky’s the limit,” would be the motto of this club, if they called it a club, but they don’t. So lost are they to all else but poker, that they take their afternoon and evening game for granted and make few other engagements. Sometimes the games start early in the afternoon and last until early the next morning and when you consider the game is stud poker, and there is betting on every card, and no limit to the betting, you can realize how enormous are the stakes.

## **Changes in Group**

Of course the little group changes. A woman will lose her allowance, even her household money. She will pawn her jewelry, or having paste made even go so far as to sell it. And eventually she will tear her self away from the glittering vice, and someone else will step in to take her place. Or her nerves will become ragged, her face will take on lines and she won’t be able to sleep at night. All through her troubled dozing, she will see the cards being dealt out and she will bet and bet, and then when she looks at the buried card, she will find that it wasn’t the ace she thought it, but a deuce, and she’ll realize again that she has lost everything.

Other society women have been invited to join this little group, but most of them are afraid. The stakes are too high.

## **Prefers Slower Game**

“I’m something of a fiend at poker,” one woman told us, “but I couldn’t play with them. I content myself with the little club I belong to which meets Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. It’s stud poker, of course. Draw poker is too slow for women nowadays, though sometimes I wish they’d stick to draw. You have more of a chance to break even, and I prefer a slower game so that I have time to enjoy myself. Our husbands all think that we play a nickel limit but we’ve made it a 15-cent limit game. But even so I’ve lost \$50 in an afternoon, and when you figure out we play twice a week, you can see what a few weeks of steady losing will do to your allowance.”

So much for society women—those who can afford to lose.

For those who haven’t entree to these New Orleans homes—for those whom the upper 10 would consider the bourgeoisie, the demi-monde, and the transient there are clubs, the dues of which are from \$15 to \$25 worth of chips with which to enter a game.

## **Clubs for Women**

The chips bought, you are given a card which informs you, that having paid your dues for the coming year, you are a member in good standing and are entitled to the privileges of the

club. There are hundreds of these clubs for men and some half dozen for women, through the city—in back of pool rooms, cigar stores, billiard parlors, and nominally they are social or athletic clubs. But the club consists of a bare room, with a few tables and chairs, and the privileges mentioned on the membership card consist in sitting in a game and paying the house a cut of 10 to 25 percent from every pot.

There are club rooms in Gretna, Southport, Jefferson parish and in the heart of the city where women who have never seen each other before sit in a game. It isn't the companionableness or desirability of the women you are playing with; the game's the thing.

The fact that you don't know from Adam whom you are playing with, sometimes leads to disastrous consequences.

## **Woman Intoxicated**

There is the story one club tells, how a well-dressed, and apparently refined woman sitting in the game showed, little by little, that she was under the influence of liquor. Although it is true of women of New Orleans that they drink very little, fearing the ravages not only of the climate but of games of chance, they are not the ones to judge too harshly those transients and weaker sisters who drink too much. Others in the game pretended to pay little attention to the signs of her condition, although every now and then she returned from powdering her nose a little more unsteady. It was an unsteadiness which would be noticeable only to the others who had an opportunity to watch her closely as she played. Of course she was losing steadily, and betting recklessly.

It is the custom at these games to drop out when you feel like it. There are usually only three games going on, and the clubrooms are often full. Many times there are other women sitting around, or watching the game, waiting for a chance to sit in.

## **Player Without a Conscience**

On this afternoon, one of the women dropped out and another entered and the party became more exciting. Up to this time, the other women in the game with consideration, refused to take advantage of the other's condition to clean her up. But the newcomer had no conscience. From the moment she started to play, the others could see that she had been observing the condition of the other and was thinking to profit by it. The result was that the others threw scruples to the wind, and every one was out for herself. The game ended with the newcomer cleaning out not only the woman who was drinking, but the others as well. There was good feeling on all sides, however, for all agreed it had been a good game.

But opinion differed the next day. Rumor had it that the weak sister and the unscrupulous one had been working together and they had left town the night before, and that it was their practice to travel from town to town making their living by their wits.

In any city where there are clubs like those of New Orleans, one of the pair deliberately got dunk and entered the game. With no sign of recognition, the other would play, taking

advantage of the fact that the others in the game would pay little attention to the sober one, while they were attempting to win from the drunken one.

This incident led to a little flurry among the clubs, however. Gamblers, whether they are men or women, are a philosophical lot and women are more so than men. Although men occasionally shoot each other over the card table, there is no record in New Orleans of a woman having done so yet.

(To Be Continued)