

# Too Drunk to Dance, Some Swagger, Boast and Quarrel During Dance Hall Orgies

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Everybody was drunk again. Or if they weren't drunk, they looked as though they were. The scene this third night of the writer's employment in the free dance halls of New Orleans, was the Roseland, a hall on the second floor of 318 St. Charles Ave. under the same management as the Arcadia. It was a cold night, but nevertheless the hall was crowded with men who hung over the railing which extended the length of the dance floor. On the whole the men were better dressed and better looking than those who frequented the Arcadia and Danceland.

It was one of those bitter cold nights when there were no loiterers below the open windows to listen to the strains of jazz from the hall above. The hall was unheated and draughty but nevertheless those who were there preferred to stay rather than go out in the cold night. From the aroma on the breath of those we danced with, we judged they were impervious to the cold. "You're shivering, kid," sympathetically. "Y'oughta have a bracer to keep you warm. What do you say should I slip my bottle under your cupe so you can take it out to the dressing room and have a little nip." Offers of this sort were many.

## **Enters With Lugger**

About ten o'clock a tall blond young man whose friends called him Mert, entered the hall with swagger and assurance and started to dance. "Feel this," he boasted, slapping his pockets one by one. "Pound se'sugar—And this. Bottle of milk. And this. Bottle of booze. And in this pocket I have a glass and a spoon. I'm my own bartender and I carry my toddies around with me. Only thing to do on a night like this."

With Mert was a little short fellow who seemed to have some difficulty navigating around the floor. When he lurched against the railing and dropped a ticket over it, he couldn't reach it, nor did it enter his mind to walk around the railing to get it. Being a direct actionist, he knocked the railing down, retrieved his ticket and went on with the dance, much to the amusement of the multitude, but not of the tall, gaunt, red-headed woman who stood like a sentinel at one end of the hall. She strode over to him fiercely, seized him by the shoulder and started to shake him.

The young man looked at her blankly, but Mert rushed to the rescue. "Tha's mah friend," he bellowed. "Do you know who I am? I'm the guy that supplies booze to the guy that owns this place. And do you know who mah friend is? He's the son of the man who owns the

B\_\_\_\_\_ H\_\_\_\_\_ cafe. You jus' try getting fresh with mah frien' and I'll give yuh a sock in the toot,' you red headed \_\_\_\_\_."

### **Appeals to Policeman**

Although Mert's friend wasn't known, Mert was, but nevertheless the red headed woman's dignity had to be assuaged by an appeal to the policeman. Other policemen, summoned from goodness knows where, entered the discussion, but Mert was triumphant, retiring from the scene of battle to the dance hall with greater assurance than before. His little friend swung with painstaking precision into a waltz.

Much cheered and refreshed by the disturbance, the girls danced with renewed vigor.

Mert and his friend were not the only uplifted guests of the dance hall. A crowd of young boys, none of whom looked to be over seventeen came in staggeringly and danced. When they weren't dancing with the girls on the floor, they danced with obscene posturing with one another, disregarded by the policeman, the manager or two women who acted as cashier and assistant managers. When the girls danced with them, they had to hold them to keep them from falling and ward off the objectionable advances towards intimacy which they fumblingly tried to make. Finally, late in the evening, assisting one another they staggered out giggling maudlinly.

### **"To Drunk to Dance"**

To dance or not to dance? Dancing meant keeping warm, but it also meant submitting to the embrace of a staggering youth who took it for granted that his ten cent ticket entitled him to far greater intimacy than the dance demanded. To avoid this we stood behind the cashier's desk, behind a pole shiveringly most of the evening, content to be an observer rather than a participant of the so-called festivities. But finally we were confronted by a genial young drunkard who fumblingly poked a ticket at us, and clutching us around the waist, tried to dance.

He believed himself to be possessed of rare gifts in the way of dancing and painstakingly held us off at arm's length while he gazed at his feet and executed strange and complicated steps. Realizing finally that we were not gifted as he was, he contented himself with strolling rhythmically around the floor simpering inanely.

"Whereupon," he kept saying with a grin, "four hundred concupines uttered a very vulgar expression."

"Surely you mean porcupines," we told him. But no, he assured us gravely. "Four hundred, or was it five hundred concupines uttered a very vulgar expression. Whereupon—"

But the dance was over and our partner, forgetting that we hadn't heard the rest of the story, lurched against the railing and watched the other dancers with half-shut eyes.

"Drunk again," he kept murmuring sadly, as he watched the others. "All of 'em drunk. Too drunk to dance."

And most of them were.

**(Continued Tomorrow)**