

# Hangers-On Scramble to Gain Dance Hall Girls, Then Offer Them Whisky, Dope Smokes

Dorothy Day

*The New Orleans Item* Tuesday; February 5, 1924 (Pp. 1, 4)

**Hangers-On Scramble to Gain Dance Hall Girls, Then Offer Them Whisky, Dope Smokes**

**This is the third of a series of articles on the “free” dance halls of New Orleans, written by a girl reporter for *The Item* who worked in them.**

Whether it is the customary thing for the hangers-on around the dance halls in the business section to offer doped cigarets to the girls with whom they make dates, we will not say. We only know that the second evening we spent working at the Arcadia dance hall, on the corner of Burgundy and Canal street ended up by our finding ourselves stranded in the middle of City Park at one-thirty in the morning, not appreciating the whiskey, Marrawanna cigarets and other attentions which our escorts tried to force on us.

The long evening had finally come to an end. Owing to the fact that Danceland, another rival hall around the corner on Canal street, closes at twelve, the Arcadia keeps open until twelve-thirty or one every night to catch stray customers. The music becomes wilder and wilder, the drummer in a last spurt of enthusiasm becomes more and more entertaining to the onlookers, the piano player becomes more frenzied. The girls are tired out and keep shaking their heads at the manager. “Make this the last one,” they plead, their feet throbbing, their backs aching, their necks stiff from holding their heads up.

## **“Last Dance”**

At last there is a shout, “Last dance,” everybody rushes for the floor, the girls’ faces light up, and there is a last abandoned fling. This last dance is perhaps the only joyous one of the evening. Everyone becomes gay and care free. Business is over until seven-thirty the next evening, and the girls are looking forward either to bed, or to regular hilarity and dancing, for which they are not paid, but for which someone else will pay.

The men crowd around the railing and entrance to the dance floor, trying to get a word with the girls. “Are you going home alone?” is the question, and if one already has an escort, it makes no difference, the question is again asked of the next one. “Can’t I see you home?”

From the chatter of the girls in the dressing room, we have learned that if you haven’t a steady, the place to find one is on the dance floor. If your regular “fella” is not calling for you or waiting for you at the door downstairs it is customary to accept the offer of escort

from anyone who asks you, provided he is young and passable looking. Then, too, there is always a chance to get a bite to eat, or to go cabareting. And if the fellah who asks to take you home says he has a car waiting downstairs, why all the better.

### **Would Be Very Nice**

As we waited for our friend who had been grabbed for the last dance and left us standing by the railing, a young man leaned over and said, "Are you going home alone?"

"No," we replied. "We've got a girl friend here with us."

"Oh, that's fine then, because I've got a friend with me in the car downstairs." The tone implied that we had already accepted the offer. "What do you say we wait for you at the door and take you home?"

"That would be very nice of you," we reply, and proceed to the dressing room for our wraps.

"The dance halls in themselves might be all right," we had heard. "But it's what they lead to. Cabareting and drinking and all that sort of thing." So it was up to us to size up those who offered their escort. The two young men looked quiet and well mannered enough, we ruminated, and put on our things with no misgivings.

Down on Canal street a big car was parked. We gave our address and piled in, stiff and tired but nevertheless alert. Throwing in the clutch and shifting the gears, the driver started down Canal street, but in the wrong direction. A few block[s] passed, and we off-handedly reminded him that we lived in the other direction.

### **Need a Little Air**

"Aw, that's all right, you girls need a little air after dancing for so long," they assured us. There was no mention made of having a bite to eat though it was now six hours since dinner time. We wondered what the girls did about it—whether they hinted delicately, "Say, what about something to eat out at the Moulin Rouge?" Or perhaps a little more frankly, "Hey, you cheap skates, we get plenty of rides. What about grub?" Not knowing the technique, however, we chattered brightly as is the manner of flappers.

At least the boys were going in the direction of the cabarets, we thought and did not take it amiss when the car entered City Park. The next move on the program, however, was to park in a shady lane of trees. Whereupon, the driver reached into a pocket and brought out a pint bottle of whiskey, and a little glass.

Thinking of all the stories we had heard or read of doped liquor, we pretended to take a drink. This was the signal for a greater show of geniality on the part of our escorts. Then, "You don't act as though you liked the stuff, so what do you say we have a cigaret? Did you ever smoke a Mary Warner?"

### **Have great Kick**

That was the name of the cigarets as we understood them, never having heard of Mary Warner. When the cigarets were lit, a heavy, pungent odor, quite different from the smell of tobacco, filled the car. Since we had made no objection to smoking them, our escorts began to expatiate upon the virtues of the new weed.

“These cigarettes have a great kick if you just draw it way down in your lungs. . . Hey, that ain’t the way to smoke them—draw the smoke in. You’re wasting it, kid. We were out on a party one night and the liquor was running low, and everybody smoked these. We had a great time. Say, that was some party, wasn’t it?”

By this time we realized that we had pulled what the girls at the Arcadia would call blanks in the way of escorts, since no food or cabaret parties seemed to be forthcoming. As we pretended to sip the whiskey, we puffed at the cigarettes, careful not to inhale, and trying to let the cigaret burn itself out as fast as it could. When ours was down to a stub, we put it out against the side of the car, and in an effort to save the “snipe” for evidence, if necessary, secreted it in the top of our stocking, which after the manner of young women was rolled.

### **Too Many Cigaretts**

When it was noticed that we had ditched the Mary Warner, our escort showed what would seem to be undue anxiety about it. “Gosh, what did you do with it? Say, give me a match so I can see if I can find it? Threw it out the side of the car, did yuh? What did you do that for?”

It took several moments to divert his attention from the cigaret. He seemed for the moment to be irrationally anxious about it. Then, forgetting the cigaret he dropped his head over the wheel and began to murmur to himself. As far as we could make out, he was trying to recite the face on the bar room floor. To all appearances, he was drunk, and since he had had not more than a sip of the whiskey, and there had not been the smell of liquor on his breath when we accepted the invitation to ride home, we came to the conclusion that he had been smoking too many of the cigarettes which he recommended so strongly. Indeed, his further actions and remarks made this a certainty.

### **Auto Followed**

Resisting importunate advances as long as we could—we took it for granted that all girls had to resist them enough to show that they were in earnest—we soon saw that it was no use. Our escorts were full of dope, and stubborn. Releasing ourselves from restraining arms, we slipped out of the car, and started to walk. Having an Indian’s sense of direction, we fortunately aimed in the right direction, and with the automobile following us through the park, we gained the streets, and started in the right direction home. For half a dozen blocks our would-be escorts followed us slowly along the curb, pleading with us to get back in and ride. But we had seen enough to know that they were indeed half crazy with the cigarettes they had been smoking, and preferred walking if we couldn’t get a street car or a cab.

Luckily it was a fine night, just before the cold spell, so we struck out briskly and made the thirty blocks home in some forty-five minutes. How many times was it we had heard the slang term, “Get out and walk!” Well, we had done it at last. If we had not been on an assignment, we would have been both mad and ashamed. As it was, it was all in the night’s work.

**(Continued Tomorrow)**