

¶Where dancing is taught—

ON WITH THE DANCE

I HAVE long been fascinated by the elegant advertisements of a certain New York dance studio. "Improve Your Dancing" is the arresting heading, and below are listed the advantages of perfect ballroom performance, which seemingly include the acquiring of every amenity, from a good figure to the man of one's dreams. Lured by the promise of special winter rates, which, I notice, change to "special spring rates" or "special fall rates" as the seasons shift, I betook myself to this terpsichorean academy.

The reception room was an impressive salon with a flowered carpet, gilt furniture, and some ornamental nymphs. Alcoves opened off this, and in one of them I could see a slim gentleman struggling with a large lady in a manner that caused me to avert my eyes. I approached a desk of rococo splendor at which two young women were poring over appointment books. Before one stood a mother and son, and before the other a bobbed-haired old beldame of 60-odd, dressed like Janet Gaynor.

The first sibyl of the appointment books flashed on me a professional smile and asked

if there were anything she might do for me. I remarked that I was interested in taking a few dancing lessons.

"Ballroom or tap?" she inquired.

"Ballroom," I answered. The word sounded elegant. "I'm not a beginner," I hastened to add.

She gave me the look one gives a boasting child and said, "You'll have to be examined first."

"I beg your pardon?" I was startled. "I thought one merely engaged an instructor and danced for an hour."

"Mr. Archer is the headmaster here," she said. "He examines your dancing first and diagnoses what's wrong with it." It made me feel my dancing was nothing short of material for the Rockefeller Institute. "Please be seated, and Mr. Archer will take you presently." In a low voice she dispatched a message over the phone.

I sat on a golden love seat, and after a time was told that Mr. Archer would see me. Timidly I entered the small office, and at once recognized the gentleman whose photographs I had seen in the advertisements.

He rose and pleasantly but seriously motioned me to a chair. The situation was so reminiscent of a medical consultation that I had to restrain myself from calling him "Doctor."

"You are interested in dancing, Madam?" he inquired with the reverent tone of someone questioning a true believer.

"I thought I might be getting a bit rusty," I confessed.

"We shall see," he said, and rose. I was somewhat nervous. He turned the switch of a loud-speaker, and the gramophone music from the adjoining rooms filled the office.

"Shall we dance?" he inquired, in such an "Invitation to the Waltz" manner that I sprang rapturously to my feet, forgetting that my lap held three parcels and my purse. They clattered to the floor, and one parcel burst open, ejecting a toothbrush, which the maestro returned to me. After this sordid beginning, he again bowed, and we started. Normally, I am able to start dancing as well as anyone, but the falling-parcel episode had unnerved me. Furthermore, I suddenly realized I had not removed my gloves and was clutching Mr. Archer's immaculate hand in a best English pig-skin clasp. This threw me off my emotional as well as physical balance, and I led off with the wrong foot. We be-

gan all over again, and for some time twirled solemnly around the small office. Suddenly, to my horror, I discovered that I was trembling with tension. Would Mr. Archer think this a sign of love at first sight? There was no telling what Mr. Archer thought. After a time he released me, sat down, and made out a sort of history of my case.

"Madam," he said, "you *could* be a very beautiful dancer, but you are definitely in need of practice. Our Mr. Winkle is excellent for your kind of trouble. Take a course from him and you will be a different person."

Meekly I made out my check for the course and the maestro bowed me out, at the same time telling one of the young women to give me Mr. Winkle. I followed her into an inner region partitioned off by curtains into cubicles. The most distant one contained Mr. Winkle and, discreetly drawing the curtain, the young woman left us to ourselves. He was a tall young man with considerable brilliantine, and he smiled a great deal. Waiting for no preliminaries, he held out his arms and I melted into them.

"How is your chassis?" he asked, referring, it developed, to an elemental dance step. "Why, I don't know," I stammered. "I never knew I had one," he showed me. It was a

trick of turning, bringing the heel in front of the toe—quite useful if it doesn't cause you to trip yourself.

With Mr. Winkle, I fared better than with Mr. Archer, nor did I experience any attacks of trembling. The chief difficulty seemed to be to find topics for conversation. The weather and the fact that there was nothing like dancing only took up a couple of chassis. And so the half hour passed a little awkwardly. Fox trots, tangos, rumbas, waltzes followed one another on the amplified gramophone. At the end of each tune, we would break apart, I would thank him, we would smile shyly at each other, then reembrace and start again. Occa-

sionally, Mr. Winkle would stop to expound the intricacies of some pretty fancy step. I hadn't the heart to tell him that none of the men with whom I am likely to dance would, even in their most plastered moments, attempt such exotic *pas de ballet*.

All this was several months ago. Twice I returned to the dance studio and the impeccable arms of Mr. Winkle; then I let it drop. As a matter of fact, I haven't felt the need for any more lessons. Not that my dancing is so perfect, but I know no one sufficiently affluent to take me out to night clubs, and from the looks of things I doubt if I ever shall.
—*Cornelia Otis Skinner, condensed from The New Yorker.*

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Paying Creditors

MARK TWAIN lost thousands of pounds in unwise investments. When the crash came, instead of victimising his creditors, he embarked on a lecture tour and paid off his obligations.

Sir Walter Scott went into the publishing business in his later years. It collapsed and ruined him utterly. Undaunted, he set to work to write his way out of his financial difficulties. "I will start over again," he said. "I won't accept defeat." Heartbroken by the death of his wife, suffering severe physical pain, he wrote incessantly and completed two novels which helped to pay his debts.—*Parade.*