

# BUSINESS GIRLS' NOONDAY DIVERSION

A Novel Amusement That Is Gaining in Popularity Downtown.

**G**RACIOUS, May, you don't want any ice cream; we haven't time."

"Yes, we have. I'll eat it fast. It's only 12:30. We can get in two waltzes and a two-step easy."

This is what you are beginning to hear in downtown New York every noontime nowadays, wherever young, bright-faced "business girls" gather. For a new delight has been prepared for that energetic, youthful person. In the very heart of things, where girls in the middle of the day crowd the sidewalks as thick as roses in a rose garden, just where the jewelry, financial, insurance, and legal districts join, where now, it seems to the bystander, there are at the luncheon hour more feminine personalities than masculine, a ballroom has been provided in her behalf. She may dance, to the music of a capital orchestra, any time from 12 to 1:30.

A few years ago such an idea would have been laughed at. The girl downtown was serious. Her work among so many men made her feel dignified, and she has a little terror of "business." Besides, she was older on the average, and there were not nearly so many of her. To-day thousands of girls barely out of short skirts and bringing their giggles with them from uptown or over from Brooklyn or Jersey, throng the streets three times a day. There are shops specially for them—one so complete that it calls itself on its circulars "the only department store downtown"—and restaurants that no man may enter. Why not dancing, particularly as there is hardly a girl that gets her luncheon alone, this part of New York being each noon one array of lunching parties?

So downtown New York has thought, for up on the third floor of a recently built building there has been "laid down" as pretty a little dancing room as one can imagine. Nor is it so very little. It takes up the entire third or upper story of a small structure about the size of an old-fashioned uptown residence. A good floor has been put in, and the long room is bright and pleasant. A piano and two violins play the newest, catchiest music.

The girl downtown grows younger and younger. But a short time ago she averaged more than twenty. Now she is well under that. The typewriter and stenographer is no longer the whole thing. There are regiments of girl clerks and assistant bookkeepers. The office boy is no more the figure he was downtown. The

office girl has taken his place in great measure, and whatever else may be said of her, she runs the errands promptly, and makes record time in going to and from the Post Office.

With nearly a half hour at her disposal each day, why should the young business girl not like to dance instead of walk? There has been nothing of philanthropy in the idea. The business girl downtown is so numerous these days that she is worth a good deal of catering to. Her purse is generally slim, though there are many who can use all their wages for clothes and pin money, but, at the worst, in every little pocketbook there are stray nickels and dimes. The dancing idea has been originated by a large downtown medium-priced restaurant, the greater part of whose patrons are girls for blocks around. Originally it had tables on this third floor as well as the second. Now dancing rules the whole third floor.

Any one theoretically may go there and dance. There is nothing to prevent a girl and a man or a pair of girls from walking in and up the stairs without stopping on either floor of the restaurant. The proprietors would not object, for the charms of the third floor ballroom might prove so potent that they would come regularly to luncheon there later on. But, in general, this dancing room is supposed to be only for the restaurant's patrons.

That it is there is evident. Enticing strains of dance music creep down even to the first floor. The business girl eats her ple à la mode to the swing of the latest waltz. Her little feet tap, tap in time. Oh, yes, she danced last night. But, my!

Sadie, half way through her rice pudding, has thought of just the same thing. A few moments of fun appeal to Sadie, because at 1 sharp she must be back in the office and file letters under the eye of a cross department head. Her friend has it very little better. She is the single clerk of a young business man who is out nearly all day, and before her is a quiet, dull, lonely afternoon, with nothing to do but tend office and read a library book that hasn't proved interesting at all.

"Let's," says Sadie, as the melody of the violins grows more enticing.

"We'll," answers Emily, undecidedly, as she finishes her last dab of chocolate ice cream.

Fate fixes it so that there is no question. Out near the door a "dandy fellow," who has spied Emily, comes up to

her. He lives just around the corner from her in Jersey City. Fred, too, is due back at the office at 1. He motions toward the stairs, introducing his friend, John. Twenty minutes later Sadie confides to Emily that John is "grand."

Upstairs many girls are dancing together, caring nothing for partners so long as they can exercise in time to the gay music. There are not a very large number of men. The dancing at midday idea has not tempted them yet, and as a matter of fact not a great number have heard of it. Unless a man knows some girl beforehand and actually goes up with her he is not likely to have much luck with partners.

The business girl downtown is a particular little person. If she is a typical dancing girl and just likes the exercise instead of walking, largely because of the bright music and the pretty room so different from all her other surroundings downtown, she is not apt to care about dancing with strange men. But now and again the attractive youth with the right pair of eyes, who looks as if he knew how to dance, may lead the prettiest girl to surrender.

There is an eye to the young fellow's comfort and convenience, however. Downtown youth can do much to popularize an idea like this, if they will. It is undeniable that the budding clerk or salesman of nowadays wants his smoke after his luncheon. Generally this smoke comprises one or two cigarettes in the open air. This dancing hall has, up front, close to the windows, a series of comfortable chairs. Over them is a sign, "Smoking Only in This Part of the Room." It is an invitation that has many merits. The "young lord of creation," if he does not care to dance himself, or has no partner, can sit in one of these chairs most agreeably and watch the girls twirling and gayly two-stepping.

But dancing downtown will not stand or fall because of the young men. They will add to its pleasures with many girls, but the idea is really feminine, and in a large proportion of cases Mamie and Flossie would rather take a turn around together than be bothered by the boys.

Strictly speaking, this dancing at midday is not wholly a new idea. It was tried on a small scale some months ago. A downtown store that had a thriving trade in shirtwaists, neckwear, and many other things for girls, and also sold music, thought of it, cleaned out their cellar, and had dancing regularly to the

music of a piano. But the place was not agreeable, and the idea did not attract. It is one thing for a business girl to be fond of dancing, and quite another for her to be so crazy about it that she will enjoy it in a cellar.

A graybeard bore, above his head,  
A signboard with this word in red,  
"Dancing."

These lines (with apologies to Longfellow's "Excelsior") tell a truthful story of New York's downtown streets at the moment. Rain or shine, every day, an old man with a rusty gray beard trudges along the busiest thoroughfares east of Broadway, carrying a signboard with the word "Dancing" in brilliant scarlet letters. Below it tells where this ballroom of the business girl is to be found.

Will the new idea of dancing at midday, founded under such favorable auspices, succeed? There are girls that nod their heads delightedly and say yes, especially in the Fall and Winter, when the streets are not pleasant for extended promenades during the luncheon hour. There are others who have little faith in its future. They point out that the great trouble is that the average girl does not want to dance for as short a time as fifteen or twenty minutes; that she would lose all pleasure in it if she had it on her mind that she might be late in getting back to the office.

"No," say these girls. "Let's dance when work is over, not in the middle of it."

But—should they hear violins and piano start playing, say "The Glow Worm," at 12:40, playing it very seductively, Alice, Emily, May, Flossie, and all the rest would very likely change their minds, forget about old Mr. Moneybags and Mr. Scred, the chief clerk, around in the next street for these few precious moments, and run up.