

# THE CAKE WALK

By  
**ZOE ANDERSON NORRIS**

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THE programme at an end, the manager, advancing to the footlights, announced the cake walk. There was a hushed moment. Then those who had stood tirelessly throughout on chairs made a mad rush for the seats giving upon the aisles down which the participants were to pass.

On the platform the judges had ranged themselves in a formidable row importantly solemn. The cake stood before them, a square of flaky pink, upon which rose a giant pyramid, prismatic in the snowy brilliancy of its icing.

The music commencing, the great curtain at the left swung aside, and the drum major appeared. Dancing daintily forth, he flung his baton to the roof—or nearly—caught it again and received the attendant burst of applause after the fashion of one to the manner born and accustomed.

Close on his heels followed the first couple.

Jasper Jefferson Jones occupied a seat above the row of boxes at the extreme right, where an excellent view was to be had of the walkers as they rounded the curve and pranced down the broad aisle facing the entrance, but from which, because of the dense crowd intervening, only a parasol or two could be seen as they passed from beneath the curtain to this aisle. In order to see, therefore, he rose, the whites of his eyes gleaming in the excited dusk of his countenance.

The effort proving fruitless, he forced himself to sit again with the rest, occupying himself with consulting his programme, running a dark and trembling forefinger restlessly down throughout the list of names and finally stopping at "47—Maggie Malone—Frog Eyed Pete accompanying."

He raised his head in time to see the first couple come mincing around the curve, the girl looking seriously into the face of the man as she bowed, pirouetted once or twice and passed serenely on.

Other couples, trusting to the splendor of their attire and appearance rather than to their nimbleness of toe, walked sedately by. The dignity of their walk verged upon statelyness, but they failed to interest him.

Again he looked across toward the curtain through which others thronged. He caught sight of a bobbing white parasol. His heart bobbed with it. It approached the bend of the aisle, and the girl holding it faced him. On the heels of the man with her shone a broad white placard, upon which was his number.

"47—Frog Eyed Pete and Maggie." The couple ahead of her, hurrying on and left some considerable space in which to cavort. Maggie leaped to the occasion. Jasper's head whirled with the turns she made, his glowing eyes drinking in the coquetry of her filmy skirts of delicate white, contrasting well with the olive of her skin, the tender mold of her ankles, the droop of her picture hat heavy with pink roses, the roundness of her cheek and the innocent look of her narrow eyes set not upon him, but upon her partner, Frog Eyed Pete, whose costume, containing her colors, matched hers in way very pleasing to behold. In like manner the wonderful variety of their attractions coincided with the grace of their pirouettes.

Maggie had paused effectively in the center of the aisle. With a whirl she

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Though the evolutions of the eight other couples were well worth watching, Jasper failed to watch them. Except for the alert policemen, formidable in brass buttoned uniforms, stationed here, there and everywhere, he would have left his place in the gallery and lagged hungrily along in the shining wake of Maggie Malone.

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A lump rising in his throat at the thought of Pickaninny's triumph and his Maggie's defeat threatened to choke him.

The clarion voice of the manager broke in on his distress.

"The judges so far have been unable to arrive at any decision," it said. "Now, five will be picked from the ten, and these will walk directly in front of them upon the stage."

The judges conferred ten minutes or so in moving haste to make room for those who were to walk, and Jasper contrived some way or other to live through this and on into that of the appearance of the first three couples who came forward from the wings, bowing to the judges.

The fourth arrived—Pickaninny, the blaze of her spangles further augmented by the flare of the footlights. The welkin rang. Hats were hurled ceilingward.

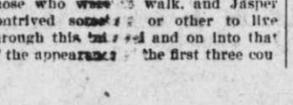
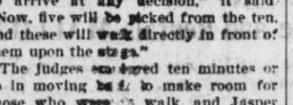
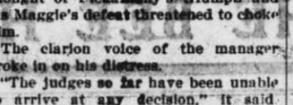
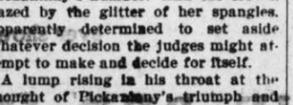
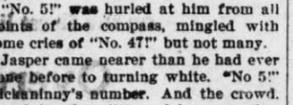
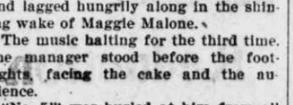
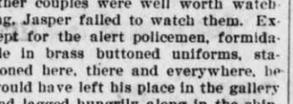
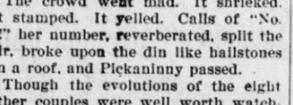
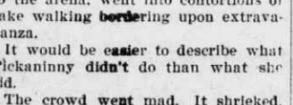
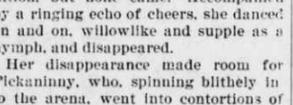
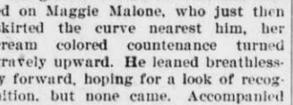
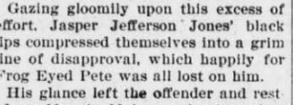
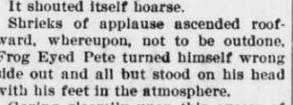
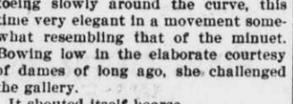
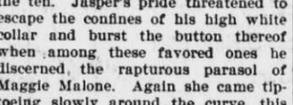
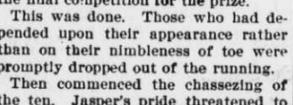
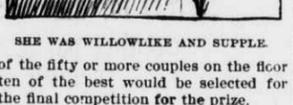
She took her place with the rest, and Maggie, ravishing in the filmy cloud of her white apparel, advanced and bowed low amid shrieks of cheering, but not shrieks of so exaggerated a character as had greeted her rival of the spangled skirts and parasol.

Involuntarily he shaded his eyes from the blaze of their coloring. Gorgeous in pink skirts profusely bespangled Pickaninny flourished a pink parasol above a splendid hat of the same rich color as she twirled halfway round, then twirled back again, persistently repeating this performance until the wonder of it was that her body did not rebel at the tremendous measure of the exertion and separate at the hinge of the waist line where it was joined.

If Maggie had been greeted with approbation the applause ensuing upon the accomplishment of this feat was stupendous. The rafters rang.

The couple saluted triumphantly on and the music stopped.

Then the manager, again advancing announced in stentorian tones that out



of the fifty or more couples on the floor of the best would be selected for the final competition for the prize.

This was done. Those who had depended upon their appearance rather than on their nimbleness of toe were promptly dropped out of the running.

Then commenced the chattering of the ten. Jasper's pride threatened to escape the confines of his high white collar and burst the button thereof when among these favored ones he discerned the rapturous parasol of Maggie Malone. Again she came tip-toeing slowly around the curve, this time very elegant in a movement somewhat resembling that of the minuet. Bowing low in the elaborate courtesy of dames of long ago, she challenged the gallery.

It shouted itself hoarse. Shrieks of applause ascended roofward, whereupon, not to be outdone, Frog Eyed Pete turned himself wrong side out and all but stood on his head with his feet in the atmosphere.

Gazing gloomily upon this excess of effort, Jasper Jefferson Jones' black lips compressed themselves into a grim line of disapproval, which happily for Frog Eyed Pete was all lost on him.

His glance left the offender and rested on Maggie Malone, who just then skirted the curve nearest him, her cream colored countenance turned gravely upward. He leaned breathlessly forward, hoping for a look of recognition, but none came. Accompanied by a ringing echo of cheers, she danced on and on, willowlike and supple as a nymph, and disappeared.

Her disappearance made room for Pickaninny, who, spinning blithely in to the arena, went into contortions of cake walking bordering upon extravaganzas.

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The music commenced. A girl drifted lightly along the stage flanked by a partner so nimble of limb as to seem to be double jointed. They danced and whirled and rotated and stood aside. Two others walked, and it came to be the turn of Pickaninny. Yells of "No. 5!" greeted her. With some difficulty the manager quieted the house, and she danced.

Jasper was filled with dismay as he saw the grace of her former antics multiplied manifold. She twisted backward, this way and that and sidewise, the whirl of her pink parasol serving, like the parasol of the rope walker, to steady her. Light Foot Sam, now near, now far, aiding and abetting her to the threatening of serious detriment to the safety of his spinal column.

Roars ensued. The judges changed color. Evidently in the event the cake was not given to Pickaninny anything might be expected, mob riots perhaps, followed in all probability by a lynching or two.

Jasper's heart sank within him. He gave a long drawn sigh as she retired, and Maggie tilted forward with a bow.

All his soul sprang to his eyes as he watched her drift, light as a will-o'-the-wisp, across the glimmer of the faroff stage, Frog Eyed Pete following after, and fling her chocolate arms aloft in an attitude of supplication.

A mild murmur of applause resulted. With distended orbs Jasper followed her movements. They could hardly be called movements. She floated. She swam. She rested upon nothing, as it were—in other words, on air.

The excitement of the moment suddenly rushed to Jasper's head. Framing his mouth in two black hands, he shouted across the breadth of the intervening space:

"Maggie, Maggie! Oh, go on! Keep it up, Maggie! For de Lawd's sake, keep it up!"

Maggie, carried away by sheer ecstasy of motion, was keeping it up. She drifted, she pirouetted, she lost herself in the rhythm, the madness and the whirl.

Jasper's distended eyes gleamed. The dusky hands about his wide mouth trembled. He shouted again:

"Maggie, Maggie! Give 'em de toe turn, Maggie! Oh, Maggie, give 'em de toe turn! De toe turn!"

Whether or not she heard or by some species of telepathy the intensity of his

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THE GIRL FACED HIM.  
Apparently upon either, though as matter of fact she rested on the tip of small pointed toe.  
Jasper gave a shout of delight.  
"No. 5!" cried he.  
The burst of applause brought by this maneuver he once more panting with pride, following the girl's slight figure until it disappeared and the wave of her white parasol above the heads of the crowd as it retreated before the ravished eyes of the judges alone presented it-  
was brought back to earth by a