

# The Romantic Surprise of New York's Artist Studios

The Pretty Artists' Models Who Knew So Well Their Millionaire Patron and His Luxurious Studio Never Gussed That Mr. Breese, the Hero of the Famous "Girl-in-the-Pie" Dinner, Had Fallen in Love

IT is not easy to send a thrill of surprise through New York's artist colony. The Bohemian dwellers in the studios are a very sophisticated lot.

But Mr. James L. Breese has accomplished the feat twice. First, when he staged the famous Girl in the Pie dinner at his studio many years ago, and, again, the other day, when he announced that he was about to be married.

Mr. Breese is unusual in many ways. Most artists who live in the merry studio buildings have to work for a living. But Mr. Breese is very wealthy and he lives in a studio because he loves the life. He is rather a patron than a daily-bread worker, and so the busy artists and the somewhat unconventional models look upon him as friend, admirer, patron, rather than a fellow wage-earner.

Mr. Breese is sixty-four. All his life he had been a familiar figure in the studio world of New York. Every worth while artist he has known, and all the best models. Always he has been known as "Jimmy" Breese. No one entered into the Bohemian ways of the artist colony more freely than he. But not one of them ever dreamed that Jimmy Breese was in love.

It was not in a studio that Cupid did his work. It was on a sunny day in June that Mrs. Ralph Isham, a member of the Long Island Smart Set, drove a half dozen house party guests to Southampton for a look at Mr. Breese's famous gardens.

One of the party was a lovely young girl of an old Southern family, Miss Grace Lucille Momand.

Mr. Breese personally led the party about the grounds and watched the girl's brown eyes glow softly at the beauty of the scene.

"Wonderful hair," mused Mr. Breese, as he contemplated his fair young visitor closely with artistic appreciation. "The only hair I have ever seen in three colors. Looking at it in different lights it is brown, it is golden, it is red."

Miss Momand's enthusiastic approval of his gardens, his stables, his horses awoke a response in his heart and next day Mr. Breese motored over to the girl's country home at Southampton and met her mother.

The romance progressed rapidly and the other day Mr. Breese made application for a marriage license—and the surprise of the art world was complete.

Mr. Breese, as has been said, is sixty-four years old. His fiancée is twenty-three. But Mr. Breese is very young for his years and Miss Momand is quite mature for her youthful age, so the prospects of happiness are not dimmed by what would seem to be an important disparity in their ages, their friends agree.

Mr. James Lawrence Breese is easily the most interesting figure in the upper Bohemia of New York. Millionaire, scientist, sportsman, connoisseur of all the joys, he combines inherited wealth and ability in a remarkable degree. His vitality for his years is astonishing.

He comes from an old New York Colonial family, and owns, among other desirable possessions, a great slice of downtown New York real estate. He was educated at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a noted scientific place of education, and graduated there in 1875.

Mr. Breese was too rich to follow any calling for profit. After knocking about in many places and enjoying strange experiences for a few years, he decided to devote his talents to artistic photography. He had an equal interest in science and in the fine arts.

He built the most beautiful and the best equipped studio, at No. 5 West Sixteenth street, that New York had ever known up to that time. It was called "The Carbon Studio."

Mr. Breese's personal apartments were as wonderful as the rest of the establishment. The Oriental rugs and draperies were especially rich, and some very rare old armor gave distinction to the place.

The society photographer understood to perfection the art of making a woman's face soft, charming and attractive.

The most beautiful women in the country thronged his



Mr. Breese Chatting Earnestly with Miss Swanson, an Attractive Artists' Model, While Penrhyn Stanlaws, the Well-Known Artist, Sits Holding a Dog.

studio and almost fought for the privilege of being photographed by him.

With his talents, his wealth, his numerous admirers and his many accomplishments, Mr. Breese was able to make his studio the scene of many remarkable social affairs, where art and pleasure were gracefully mingled.

And it happened that the famous "Girl in the Pie" dinner, an event that has become memorable in New York's society, was given at the Breese studio. This is commonly associated with the memory of Stanford White, that noted architect whose career in upper high life Bohemia was ended by Harry Thaw's pistol. White, one of the most prominent guests, was especially attentive to poor Susie Johnson, whose appearance as the "pie girl" was one act in her little tragedy.

Susie Johnson was a pretty, sweet faced, innocent looking child of New York tenements. Her home was on the top floor of No. 104 Eighth avenue. Her father, an honest mechanic, occasionally drank "a drop too much" and at such times made life hard for Susie and her mother and the other children.

At twelve years of age, Susie went to work in a braid factory.

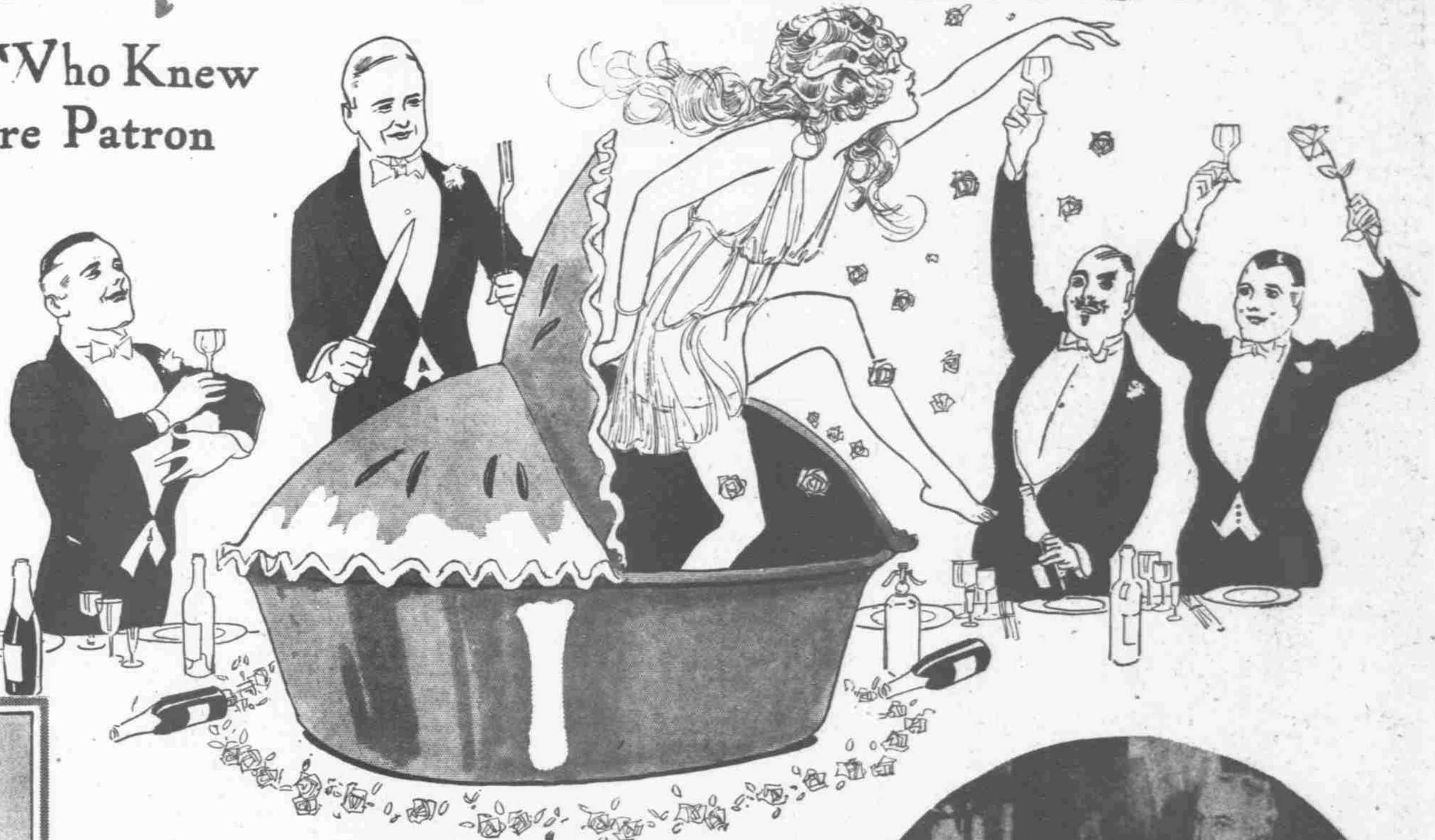
She stayed there three years, when the dispensary doctor informed her that she would have to find other and lighter work, or her days would be ended by consumption.

At this moment a prominent New York artist happened to be in need of a model. He wanted a slight, frail figure to pose for a nymph in a forest—in a state of nature, of course, as nymphs always are. He inserted this advertisement in a newspaper:

"Wanted—a young girl model to pose in the nude. Experience not necessary. Thirty cents an hour."

Little Susie Johnson answered the advertisement and was accepted, and so began her life in the studios. She was quickly seen and appreciated by several of the noted artists of the day.

A few weeks later she was engaged for the famous "pie girl" stunt in the dinner at Mr. Breese's studio. This was in the Winter of 1895. The occasion of the dinner was the tenth anniversary of the wedding of a man prominent in New York society. His wife happened to be away in Europe and his friends thought the event could be most fittingly commemorated by a stag dinner. Mr. Breese, whose wife also had interests elsewhere, volunteered the use of his studio, his professional talents and other expert services.



It Was Mr. Breese Who Undertook to Give a Dinner in His Studio Which Should Surprise Even Such Sophisticated Art Patrons as Stanford White. As the Piece de Resistance of the Dinner Mr. Breese Conceived the Happy Idea of Having an Enormous Pie Brought in on the Shoulders of Four of the Waiters. Out of the Pie Stepped Miss Susie Johnson, Graceful Young Artist's Model, Unencumbered with Much If Any Drapery.

The banquet was of Lucullan luxury. The cost is said to have been \$3,500, or \$110 a plate, a surprising sum in those days of lower prices. Nothing but champagne was drunk.

The guests included thirty-two of the men most prominent in New York's financial, professional and fashionable life.

The studio was transformed into a bower of roses, and here and there peeped forth gay posters boldly reminiscent of Parisian scenes. Four banjo players and as many jubilee singers helped to enliven the feast with music.

The dinner was over. The four and a half bottles of champagne allotted to each person had been consumed, and a certain somnolence was setting in. Something was needed to jolt the revellers into a wide-awake condition.

Suddenly the old-fashioned lullaby "Four and Twenty Blackbirds" broke forth from banjoists and singers. Four waiters came in bearing a surprisingly monstrous object, something that looked like an impossibly large pie. They set it carefully in the

middle of the table. The negro chorus swelled louder—"Four and Twenty Blackbirds Baked in a Pie."

The guests, startled into curiosity, began to poke their noses against the pie. They detected a movement in it like a chick's pecking against the egg. A quicker movement and the crust burst at the top. A flash of black gauze and delicate flesh showed within. A cloud of frightened yellow canaries flew out and perched on picture frames and even on the shoulders of guests.

But what drew the eyes of all the revellers was a slender, girlish figure amid the broken crust of the pie. The figure was covered with spangled black gauze, the girl's white limbs gleamed like ivory. She rose from her crouching posture and timidly stepped forth to the table.

An architect lifted her to the floor. A banker led her to a chair. An artist held a glass of champagne to her lips. Susie Johnson was the great success of the evening. She transformed the distinguished gentlemen present from a party of tired

diners into a throng of gay revellers eager to make her acquaintance.

Susie Johnson's life after the revel in the studio was a rapid descent. She disappeared from her home and for a year circulated in the studios. Then the wife of an artist, who had been touched by her winning face, took pity on her, and she spent two years as a governess in a quiet Brooklyn home. Then she married a respectable young man, but he left her when he heard of the pie dinner and its consequences. After that she was for a time a chorus girl in a road show.

Finally she paid a visit to her former home. Her father, in his anger at her conduct, threatened to strike her, but desisted when he saw her pitiful expression.

Susie Johnson, in a statement about this time, said: "I was fifteen years old when I answered the advertisement and had been earning \$2.50 a week in the braid factory. Thirty cents an hour for posing seemed a fortune to me. My mother used to ac-



Lunch Time for Artists' Models in the Studio Building. Mr. Breese Is Seated Between the Two Ladies.

Miss Grace Lucille Momand, to Whom Mr. Breese Has Announced His Engagement.

company me at first and help me to disrobe.

"After the pie dinner I left my home for finer quarters. To any girl who is poor I should say, stay in the factory or kitchen. She who enters the studio leaves innocence behind."

A year after the "girl in the pie" dinner another little affair at Mr. Breese's studio excited interest. It was called a "costume masque."

Some of the men wore bartender's costume and stood behind a real bar, where they served beer and champagne and other drinks. During the dancing one woman's filmy dress caught fire from a match thrown on the floor, and she might have been burnt to death had not her partner thoughtfully drenched her with champagne.

Mr. Breese was a great racing automobilist in the early days of the sport. In 1904, while racing with W. K. Vanderbilt in his car at Havana, he was severely injured and nearly killed.

His country home, "The Orchards," at Southampton, L. I., is one of the finest examples of modern Colonial architecture in America. It was built and furnished by the late Stanford White. The furniture and contents are worth many hundreds of thousands of dollars. The great music room is furnished with authentic sixteenth century Italian furniture. Magnificent Flemish Gothic tapestry adorns some of the apartments. The vast garage attached to the house includes a complete machine shop, where Mr. Breese can have every repair made.

Mr. Breese's present New York home is a three-story studio in the magnificent Hotel des Artistes, at No. 15 West Sixty-seventh street. The living room is sixty by thirty feet. Its furniture includes some enormous pieces of old English silver. Mr. Breese finds comfort on a divan covered with old Spanish brocade. One of his many fancies is to have the fire screen decorated with live smilax, fresh every day, all the year round.

Mr. Breese was first married about thirty years ago. His wife, a daughter of General Robert B. Potter and a niece of Bishop Potter, died two years ago.

In his younger days Mr. Breese wore a beard and prided himself on his resemblance to King Henry VIII. Now he is clean-shaven and with face more wrinkled, but not less interesting.