

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

milt montague
Minskys

It was a bright and sunny thursday morning in Brooklyn, USA as Milt walked to the IRT subway station, Sutter Avenue, on his way to school [City College of New York]. It was on a Thursday and Thursday was a light day at college for Milt. He had only one course. It was a three hour lab that always seemed interminable. The train arrived in a few minutes and Milt got in the first car of the train and sure enough there was his friend, Henry, waiting for him, as they had previously planned.

The big news of the week, Henry announced breathlessly, was that Minskys was going to close in only one more week. Minskys was a theatre in downtown Brooklyn that featured the only real Burlesque Show on the entire east coast of the USA.

Here they were, two red blooded American boys, each seventeen years old, in the year 1941, and they had never even seen a single Burlesque Show. Now that Minskys was about to close, they might never see one..... ever. They commiserated with each other about the unfairness of their unseemly plight and how they both disliked spending the next three hours of such a gorgeous day locked in a dull and tedious lab performing dull and tedious lab work.

Above the noise of the train, Henry casually mentioned that they would be at the Nevins Street station in a few minutes, which just happened to be only a couple of blocks from the Minskys theater. He smiled innocently. Milt quickly picked up on his smile and when the train stopped at Nevins Street station, motioned and they were both off and on an exciting new adventure.

It was 11:30 AM, as they sat down in the theater. The first live show started at 1:00 PM. In the interim they were shown old film shorts, mostly comedies. The last half hour before the Live Show began was devoted to sing-a-longs. A popular song was played and as the words appeared on the screen, a white ball bounced above the words to indicate the correct word to sing and the tempo, as everyone in the theatre sang aloud to the music.

By the time the show began, Henry was so hungry that he took out his sandwich and ate his lunch just as the girls came out. The opening act was composed of six young women, dressed in brief costumes, dancing in unison, suggestively [seductively ?] to recorded music. They were followed by a couple of comedians in a noisier and raunchier version of standard night club comedy. [This was before the invention of television.] By this time many more customers, all men, had entered and they all began stamping their feet, clapping their hands rhythmically and calling out loudly,

“BRING OUT THE GIRLS!!.... BRING OUT THE GIRLS!!.....BRING OUT THE GIRLS!!”

“The girls” then arrived as the curtain rose to reveal four well endowed [topless] women dressed only in G-strings and elaborate head-

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dresses, positioned around the stage. The girls stood perfectly still and never moved even a muscle because if they did, the city could close the theater for having a "lewd show" instead of the "Art Show" which it now professed to be. This was the slim legal pretense that allowed Minskys to exist in New York. After several minutes and loud verbal innuendos by some of the men in the audience the curtain fell and there were more comics.

The highlight of the show and the stars were the strippers. Several young ladies [and some not so young] in elaborate costumes, one at a time, danced to recorded music as they took their clothes off, very slowly and deliberately until they were wearing only pasties, that barely covered their areolae, and a tiny G-string, while moving their hips very suggestively. The audience, all men, clapped, hooted, whistled, and chanted, in unison,

"Take it off.....Take it off.....Take it off....."

Of course, everyone knew that this was as far as the girls could go if they wanted Minskys to stay in business.

Yet.....Hope grows eternal in the male breast.

This was the much vaunted Burlesque Show that titillated multitudes of men {and even some women} especially two virginal seventeen year old, young men in the pre-sexual revolution days, in Brooklyn, New York, circa 1941.

Minskys did close forever shortly thereafter in New York, but re-opened across the river in Union City, New Jersey where the show ran for years.