

V A N I T Y F A I R

September, 1921

The Flapper —a New Type

*Always on the Watch, Eager, Unafraid,
Insatiable, and Ready to Spring*

By ALFREDO PANZINI

“WHERE are they all going?”

That is the question a fellow is tempted to ask, when he sees so many girls—so many flappers—going around these days.

“Where are they going? Why, they are going . . . around!”

“Why aren’t they at home?”

“Home! Excuse me, that word is out of date. Now we say—apartment, boarding-house, moving picture theatre or hotel. . . .”

However, everywhere you look you see flappers going around. . . That is not the worst of it; you hear them talking . . . around; facing the most profound problems of life with an imperturbability that reminds you of Columbus on the quarter-deck of the *Santa Maria*, of Magellan breaking into unknown seas, of Vasco da Gama doubling the Cape of Good Hope!

Our moralists have applied their wits to the question of our flappers; and they blame our novels, our movies, the Russian ballet, the shimmy, the newspaper, the war, the tea room, the . . . what not!

Our young men, for their part, our young intellectuals, who look out unafraid upon the rising flood of proletarian civilization—seem surprised, I might even say worried, at sight of our present-day flapper. When she has left them, they really think, down in their hearts: “She is braver, pluckier, than we are!”; though, aloud, they content themselves with saying: “Our young girls are . . . rotten!”

I have used the word flapper deliberately, as meaning something more than a “girl”. Flapper is a limitless, a widely embracive term, to such a point that serious men have observed—from superficial phenomena only of course—that all women between the ages of fourteen and fifty—make it sixty, if you wish—may be called “girls”. Doubtless the short skirt that matrons wear, and the new manner of deportment they have adopted, tend to facilitate such purely visual impressions. At any rate, people consider it witty to remark nowadays that it’s hard to distinguish a mother from her daughter.

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A Portent!

IN this year of our Lord, 1921, a very singular happening occurred in a cathedral not far from my home. A venerable image, a Madonna, was lost in a fire.

The official explanation given for the catastrophe was that a thief, with little respect for religion—one of those lost souls whom Dante represents as tormented in Hell by serpents—started the blaze to cover his theft of the sacred gold and jewels.

That explanation I do not, as a Pagan, accept. I adhere to the ancient myth which said that "The city will stand so long as the Palladium remains unravished!" My mind centers on the fact that our times, precisely, have seen the disappearance of that Woman who is the symbol of Grace and of Redemption from evil Virgin and Mother in one!

Why not? In our civilization no place is left for her. The home is no more! Neither is maternity! For four walls do not make a home, nor does the bearing of children constitute motherhood!

Our flappers all seem to wear masks, masks of one general make, but varying in workmanship from the vulgar mask of the factory girl to the sophisticated mask of the society lady.

In this mask the two elements, or "places," as Dante says, "where the soul most potently worketh," are strangely disfigured. The lips have a dash of red, and the eyes a cold mischievous brightness—not because the soul, but because the pencil, or the drug, "worketh"!

Combined with a filmy, vaporous costume, this facial mask makes the flapper look like a ship cleared for action. At the critical moment will come the deadly salvo, or the destroying torpedo: thunder, flame and storm!

The Flapper Expectant

I REMEMBER one flapper, who was not just of this style, but who seemed to me typical.

The flapper I have in mind was in a portrait—at the Academy. And she was dressed, and in a long skirt, if you please!

Her picture might have borne this mysterious and alluring title: "Flapper in a Veil"!

She has been much in my thoughts, of late.

I have called her, for myself, "The Flapper on Watch for You"!, or "The Flapper that is going to get you!"

She is standing, in the picture.

She is expectant.

There is nothing particularly striking in her appearance. She is well dressed, that is all; and, as I said, in a long skirt.

She is a strong woman. Excuse me—strength is not the word I am after. Women, pretty women at least, are never "strong". I need a

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word that expresses energy, the quality that makes a man who speaks of "frail Eve"—referring to the female sex—look like a fool!

Her neck is arched and tense. Tense also her features, her whole carriage, indeed! Her demeanour is that of a duellist awaiting the attack!

Attack from whom!

From you, sir, and from me . . . from man, in general.

There is no sword in her hand, to be sure; but her arms! They are strange, enticing arms!

Her face has no trace of reverie, of illusion, nor even of artificial adornment. It is a plain face, rather than not. There is a cast of dryness, bitterness, about her lips. The eyes are defiant. The nose is slightly curved. The nostrils are a-tremble.

The old ascetics had a word for what you feel dominant in the background of her character: *Insatiabilis*!

The lady is on the watch. That firm pose, that firm poise, tells you she is about to spring.

At what? Toward what? Toward the joy of living, a boundless, limitless joy!

There is no shame, no expiation, in this flapper of mine! What does she care for home or husband? Old iron, as we say, rubbish, chips from the bone-yard, in her eyes such things are! She is the strong, the self-reliant girl of our time. She is the fighter—the flapper, in short, raising her proud expectant face in the eyes of the world and demanding her "place in the sun"!

But our flapper, otherwise so entirely self-sufficient, nevertheless lacks one thing, she cannot provide from her own resources: she needs love.

A man, to be sure, also needs love, and more insistently than a woman. As an ancient poet said: "I have two crosses to bear: poverty and love. Poverty I can endure in peace; but the flames of Venus are beyond my strength!"

A man, however, needs many other things. He needs law and order, for instance; legislatures to wrangle in; courts to quarrel in; academies to flatter his vanity and cover his coat-front with medals. When he is at home he needs a pair of warm soft slippers. Peace and quiet are as essential to a man as love.

Now a flapper can pretend she needs all these things, too. She may take part in politics; she can enter the professions; she can even preside over a congress of feminists or a convention of school teachers. But, unless she be very ugly, she cannot take such things seriously; for the simple reason that the only serious thing in her world is herself—plus the man she needs, to be herself!

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The Implacable Aphrodite

THE flapper will soon be a woman. She will be waiting for you at home! On her lips will hang a bitter reproach. "What have you been doing today? You've been at the office? You've made a million? You've discovered a comet? You've solved the problem of poverty? You've settled the class struggle? Very well—but you've been leaving me here at home alone, all day! And I won't stand it!"

For woman is astronomy, sociology, finance, revolution—everything, all in one! Woe unto the man unwise who forgets her!

The song she sings is ever the ancient song: "O, orb of day, thou risest in thy splendour even as I rise and shine! Which of us is the more divine? With thy light thou feedest the flowers and the tender grasses; but with my beauty I appease the spirits of youthful heroes!"

In ancient times, men, in self-defense, made cruel laws against women. She was absurdly veiled. She was imprisoned in the harem, in the convent, in the home. She was condemned to a life of chastity at the spinning wheel. She was burned alive on her husband's funeral pyre. All this, especially, if she was pretty!

These laws have all been repealed.

The male has recognized the equality of the sexes.

The woman will go on working, of course. She will go to school. She will talk philosophy, physiology and art with you. She will be a stenographer, a school teacher, a movie actress.

But she will not cook for you.

She will not do your washing.

She will not knit her own stockings.

"Don't expect us", she says to you, disconsolate male, "don't expect us to be like the old-fashioned girls who went to church, and did the laundry, and looked up to their husbands as to their God."

"You men are always quoting your values on exchange. Allow us to do the same with one of our values, our single priceless possession—our beauty".