

The Dashing Viscountess Whose Gowns Have Startled Paris

The Vivacious and Versatile Mme. de Flougere's Bargain with Her Distinguished Husband to Dress as She Pleases and Maintain Her Own Separate Establishment

PARIS, Nov. 27. It remained for a French viscountess to thoroughly shock the fashionable world of Paris by her audacious taste in the selection of her gowns. After all that has happened in the fashion world during the past several years, society had become rather jaded by startling innovations in dress and had commenced to take strange things as a matter of course.

But when the Viscountess de Flougere asserted the right to dress herself as she pleased and commenced to display her gowns at the various French resorts this season a new interest was excited. The Viscountess demonstrated that, while there might have been a certain effervescence of ideas in dress, the real heights of imagination had not yet been attained.

The woman who has caused this renaissance of interest in sensational dressing is a remarkable personage. The Viscountess de Flougere is the wife of a member of one of the oldest families of France, a scion of ancestors who were famous at the court of Louis XIV. and did much for the history of France. She is displaying some of the independence and sangene that her noble husband's great-grandmother, Monique de Baralie, showed when her originality, vivacious manner, charm and beauty and utter disregard for conventionalities attracted the attention of that very appreciative monarch, Louis XIV. The King showered gifts and attentions upon her so that she was counted his favorite. The old chateau which the de Flougere family has since occupied, near Montpellier, was a gift from the king to the pretty Monique de Baralie, whom he loved so much, as well as the title which is borne by her relatives to this day.

So the Viscountess de Flougere has a precedent in her family for the strange eccentricities which she exhibits and by which she shocks the fashionable world. But, notwithstanding the Louis XIV. precedent, the Viscount, who is a distinguished looking Frenchman of the old type, whose pointed beard makes him look older than he really is, does not approve of the sensational doings of his wife. It is the one and constant bone of contention between them. He is serious and a great stickler for the conventionalities, while his wife has different views. As a result, while they are very friendly and are seen out a great deal together, they have separate apartments.

The vivacious Viscountess visits her Viscount for several days at a time, but she always retains her personal liberty in the apartment which she has installed in the Champ de Mars, while her husband lives in his apartment in the centre of the city. She has told him that when he acknowledges that she has a right to dress as she likes, no matter what the styles may be, she will come to live with him. But the Viscount has the sedate and serious breeding of centuries in his blood and, while he can readily forget the escapades of his ancient great-grandmother, he cannot suffer the trivialities of his wife.

The Viscountess believes in the first place that scanty costumes are both graceful and healthful. She holds that she has a right to wear as little as she pleases. Some of her costumes are cut away to the limit at the back, and others are correspondingly high at the bottom, while in other instances the decolletage is equally balanced at both ends. But however unconventional they may be, they are always interesting, and are worn with the distinction of a woman of high rank, quite sure of her position. She holds that nothing which is artistic can be immoral.

In the great salons of Paris, at the fashionable watering places and race courses of France, the Viscountess always creates a stir the moment she arrives. She is progressive in giving sensations. Each succeeding night at Deauville she became more audacious, and displayed a new creation every night. When she got to the seventh or eighth night of the ten nights she spent there, the crowds awaited her with misgiving, for it did not seem possible that she could go any farther than she had gone. But the Viscountess never disappointed the people. They were stunned by what she wore.

She introduced the V-shaped opening under the arm, extending down to the waist. The revelation, intermittently displayed, depending upon the position of the wearer, made a more startling effect than the peek-a-boo waist ever did in its most advanced days. Old men who had before

shown a lack of interest in life became very active when the Viscountess appeared and, jumping up, would follow her vivaciously. In fact the Viscountess was accompanied by a crowd all the time. The Viscount was bored to death with this unwanted popularity, but the Viscountess revelled in it.

At Biarritz there was almost a riot when she appeared décollete with her hair done in a novel fashion. The same thing occurred when she went to Etretat. No matter whether a dress was décollete or just the opposite, when the Viscountess wore it there was always something sensational about it. At the first nights of the theatre in Paris the Viscountess is watched for with as much interest as is the play itself. She is always making a debut in some new idea and the public expect it of her. In the Bois, in the restaurants, everywhere, you hear people asking what is the latest fad of the Viscountess de Flougere.

The Viscountess designs all her own models. She has them executed by one of the great dressmakers of Paris, but superintends the designing, draping and making herself.

It would seem as if it was not alone the element of daring or décollete in dress which interests the Viscountess. Those who have been startled by the boldness of her evening gowns were equally taken by surprise when the Viscountess demurely appeared one afternoon in the gay throngs at Monte Carlo—wearing a gown which seemed to have an undertaker's shroud for its inspiration!

This relentlessly severe black costume was relieved only by the touch of white sleeves. It swathed her form like a Mephistophelian robe, climbed above her shoulders, clasped her neck tightly and rose up to her ears, and the long black gloves at the ends of the white sleeves seemed to add another sepulchral touch. A photograph of this strange confection is printed on this page.

This woman of rank, who wears such surprising dresses, is much more than a woman of fashion who spends her time in trying and wearing new dresses. She has been the heroine of a very interesting love romance, and she has worked bravely for her country.

It was during the early part of the war, when the present Viscountess was attached to a so-called hospital train bringing the wounded from the front lines that she met the man who became her husband. These hospital trains were not the hospital trains of later times. They had no clean, well-equipped cars with beds for the wounded. They were improvised hospital trains, composed of freight cars, in which straw had been placed and where the poor wounded rested as well as they could.

It was one night while she was attending to the men in the dim light of the smoking lamps placed about the car that she came upon a soldier, severely wounded but bearing his suffering like a real hero. He was covered with mud and had just come from the front-line trenches. She was impressed by the heroic nature of the man, who would soon be taken from the train to be conveyed to a hospital, and she said:

"When you go back to the front I will be pleased to be your marraine, if you wish it. What is your name?"

He told her he was Jacques Nardou and gave her the number of his regiment. He added:

"In spite of the number of men at it, war is a most lonely business, and I will be pleased to have some one interested in me."

She wrote out her address for the soldier on a piece of paper.

The Viscountess went on caring for the others in the car and thought nothing more of her newly adopted "godchild," who was removed at the next stop and taken on to be treated. Her work kept her very busy, but one day, when a permission was granted to her, she returned to her apartment in Paris, to find a mass of mail that had accumulated, among which were three letters from her "godchild" or "fillieu," Jacques Nardou.

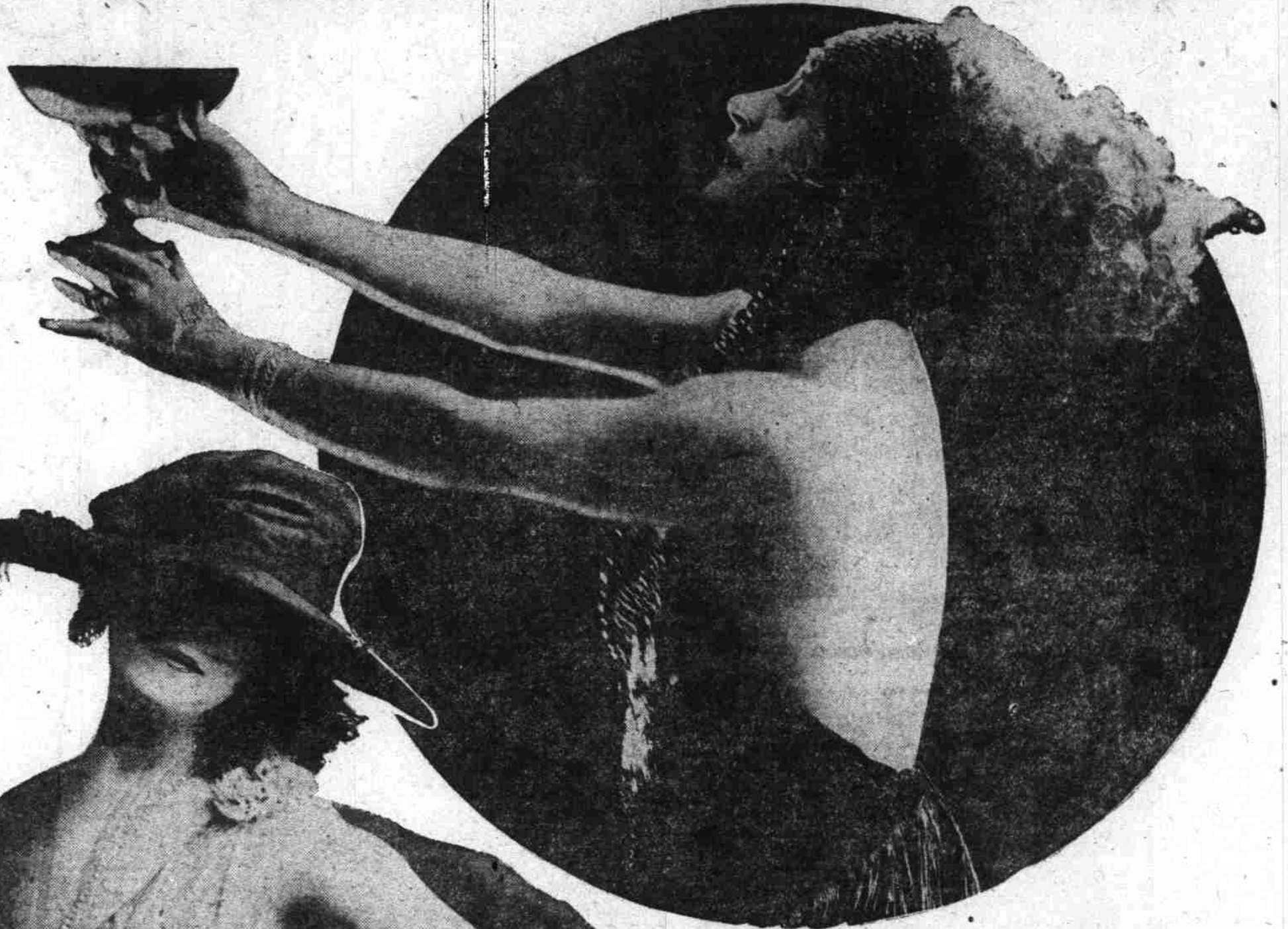
She wrote him regularly and sent packages of such necessities as were not procurable at the front, but her "fillieu" was a sort of a dream, an unreal thing to her, for she never had seen him but that one time under such strange conditions.

When she gave up her Red Cross work she returned to Paris to occupy herself with her business, for she is a very modern woman and believes in every woman having something serious to do in life. She is not only a business woman, but a most successful business woman, for she has the direction of one of the most renowned photographic establishments in Paris. Since she married the Viscount she has insisted on doing this work, in spite of all his protests, for she says:

"No man can take independence away from a woman who works."

One day, while sitting in her office on the Champs-Elysees, a man came in to see her who sent in his card reading: "The Viscount de Flougere." She did not know who it was, and he seemed much amused and kept up playing a little comedy until he said:

"Don't you know me? I'm your fillieu!" The "marraine" was much embarrassed by this sudden, unexpected meeting with her god-child of so many years and, ar-



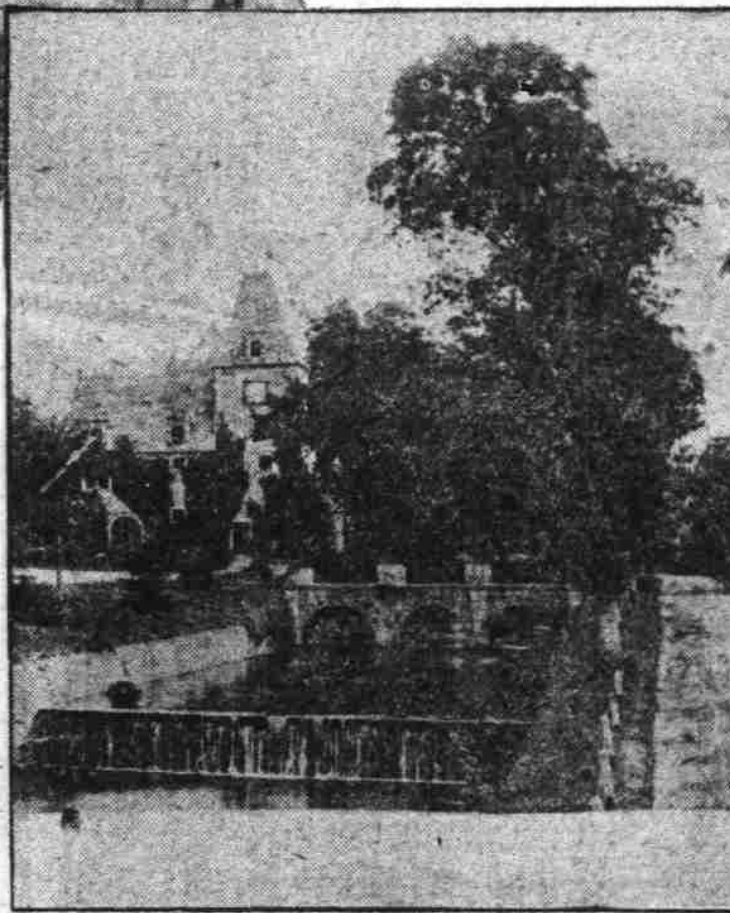
The Viscountess's Own Design for an Evening Gown.



Viscountess de Flougere in a Novel Dress Cut with a Low V Under Her Arms



In a Curious Sepulchral Gown Suggesting an Undertaker's Shroud



The Chateau de Flougere, Near Montpellier, France.

ranging her hair and discreetly using a powder rag, as every woman does under embarrassment, she said:

"But I never knew you under that name." "I purposely never told you," the Viscount replied, "for I wanted to offer it to you before you even knew it."

The Parisian business woman thought he was joking, but after having been convinced by the earnest exhortations of the Viscount that he was very much in earnest, she told him that such a thing as marriage would be impossible; that she had to have her liberty and her independence and all that. She told him that she had never even contemplated marrying for she thought her happiness and contentment could never be found in being tied to a man for life. She had to live her own life

and did not want to be interfered with.

But the more obdurate the little woman became, the more insistently the Viscount forced his arguments. But she would have none of him, and although he persisted and made daily visits endeavoring to make her change her mind, she remained firm. The Viscount's importunities began to bore her and his visits interfered with the conduct of her many interests. When she became too bored she jumped a train and went to Deauville to get rid of her love-mad Viscount.

But he found out where she had gone in some manner, and she had only been by the seaside three days when her ardent suitor arrived.

"I do not really know just how it occurred," said the Viscountess, indulging in a pleasant reminiscence. "It must have been the sea, or the glorious sunshine or something else, but when Jacques came down there I felt the foundation of my independence slipping, and I appreciated that I had not built so securely as I had thought. Everything he told me seemed to be more beautiful and had an added meaning. I found myself become actually sentimental and, what was worse, liking it, too. Well, in a week's time I was won, but with certain conditions. Those conditions were that I should have my full liberty to do as I wanted; could maintain my own apartment as I had always maintained it; should continue my career and

my husband was in no way to interfere in it.

"So, when I dress in a gown and come down to the salon to go to the theatre or dinner and I find my noble husband making faces of disapprobation when he sees me, I absolutely ignore him, for I dress as I wish and to please myself.

"I do not think that anything that is artistic could be questioned morally. I grant my gowns are sensational and extreme, but they are always artistic and pretty. It is the great passion of my life to dress well. Two things rule my life, my love for dress and my career. Outside of our many disputes about my clothes, our married life has been one of great happiness. When Jacques is very good, I sometimes invite him over to my apartment for dinner. We have great rivalry as to who runs the best establishment!"