

Ezekiel in the Quartier Montparnasse

Originally published in the 12 August 1908 issue of Vanity Fair (UK edition).

The other morning, as I lounged along the boulevard who should I meet but my old pal Jeremiah? The dear old boy, who is really as straight and strong as the best, was pretending, as usual, to limp and totter. "Jerry," I said, "I've been reading your wail in *Vanity Fair*. What a fool you are!"

"Because Ninon is grown grave and beautiful and Greek, do you think that youth is dead? Good spirits follow climometer—the barometer, I should say. Come along to the Dome!

And sure enough as we came to the famous little café, that delicate indicator went to "Set Fair." Even Jerry could only just groan "Long foretold, long last; short notice, soon past" but before surrendering himself to rapture.

For who was there between the Poet and the Moon-calf, but delicious Doris?

Doris of the golden hair, Doris not yet twenty, Doris like what Botticelli's Madone du Magnificent ought to have been, Doris the child, with the faith of a child, and the laugh of a child, Doris with the moon in her face and the stars in her hair, Doris of the lithe white limbs, Doris of the pomegranate mouth—nay! for what shall be said about her mouth?—exquisite Doris, Irish Doris, innocent as Iphigenia, fiery as Faustine—a phoenix in lambs clothing! The blue eyes, and the dawn—blush, and the dancing dream of gold!

Jeremiah pulled himself together with a jerk.

"A transient phenomenon!" he groaned.

"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!" I retorted.

"We are no poorer for Doris, and we are richer by Ninon.

You go and stand outside the Taverne Omar—and drink. I see Art everywhere winning the battle; it does not even see the Taverne Dumisnil. You see that curly headed young giraffe? He told me that: you wouldn't think it, would you?—But listen!"

The Poets voice was audible above the clatter. His face at once ascetic and sensual—the face of a god and of a beast!—was earnest, eager, and his words came with the solemnity of an apostle—"It is the eternal glory of Marcus Stone," he was saying, and the Moon-calf hung on every word with rapt attention, while Doris secretly delighted in the jester, not one quiver

of whose eye-lashes revealed his infinite irony—oh! never mind what he was saying.

"You must know the poet Jerry!" I broke in. "He claims to be the great god pan; he has the Ancient Comedy that they played when the gods lived with men."

"I have seen the victim" growled Jeremiah.

"He and Doris have been playing for a week," I said. "Why, it's wonderful! There was a Dragon (in lunch, and after lunch took Doris to look for the Moon-calf, came to Paris Doris pretended to fall in love with him, silly lad!" It was then that the Poet took the reins. By his subtlety he sent the Dragon and the Moon-calf (who had meant to lunch with her) off to browse; and came with much courtesy and apology to Doris, and explained ever so nicely why they hadn't turned up, and took Doris to look for the Moon-calf.

But they weren't at the Moon-calf's rooms at all; and when he looked at her, she understood. But it was all over—I give you my word!—before she found out the subtlety, of him. She thought it was an accident!

And that is only the first act. I should like to tell you more, but you write for English papers, and I don't want to give you unusable information! Yes, Jeremiah, we've all been laughing our ribs sore except you and the Moon-calf; and he'll laugh too, when he understands, and is crowned as the Bull of Diana. You'd better go to Chelsea; there's room for a growler there, where life is serious and Art its *apanage*. As if Art was not self-conscious, selected, quintessential Life! Go to Chelsea, Jeremiah! John Tweed's the only artist there, and he's too busy with his sculpture—and the Comedy—to heed your croakings.

"Well," said Jeremiah, "there is much in what you say; but I wish I had your clinom—barometer!"

"My dear ass," I replied, "do leave something for Doris to do!"

More cheerfully: "Right, Ezekiel, but what's the matter with Ninon?"

We smiled, sun-bright, as he marched away whistling.

I lighted another pipe and settled down to look at Doris—at Doris—at Doris.

I should like to learn the Ritual of the Comedy. But it was joy enough, surely, only to look on at it. I swooned in an ecstasy of contemplation, while the Poet still thundered, urgent, flaming, insistent—

"It is not his supreme technical excellence that places Gustave Dore so high above all souls of painters, living or dead;

it is not even his miraculous feeling for the spiritual, the mystic, the Unknowable—for in these things he is rivalled by Bougureau on the one hand and the Hon. John Collier on the other; but—.”

Oh, Doris, Doris, not a muscle quivers!