



The Sight of a Young and Attractive Woman Coming Out of a Home for Confirmed Bachelors.

The BRASS BOWL

PICTURES BY A. WEIL LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

CHAPTER I.
Dust.

In the dull hot dusk of a summer's day a green touring car, swinging out of the East drive, pulled up smartly, trembling, at the edge of the Fifty-ninth street car tracks, then more sedately, under the dispassionate but watchful eye of a mounted member of the traffic squad, lurched across the Plaza and merged itself in the press of vehicles south bound on the avenue.

Its tonneau held four young men, all more or less disguised in dust, dusters and goggles; forward, by the side of the grimy and anxious-eyed mechanic, sat a fifth, in all visible respects the counterpart of his companions. Beneath his mask, and by this I do not mean his goggles, but the mask of modern manner which the worldly wear, he was, and is, different. He was Daniel Maitland, Esquire; for whom no further introduction should be required, after mention of the fact that he was, and remains, the identical gentleman of means and position in the social and financial worlds, whose somewhat sober but sincere and wholehearted participation in the wildest of conceivable escapades had earned him the affectionate regard of the younger set, together with the sobriquet of "Mad Maitland."

His companions of the day, the four in the tonneau, were in that humor of subdued yet vibrant excitement which is apt to attend the conclusion of a long, hard drive over country roads. Maitland, on the other hand (judging him by his preoccupied pose), was already weary of, if not bored by, the hare-brained enterprise which, initiated on the spur of an idle moment and directed due to a thoughtless remark of his own, had brought him 100 miles (or so) through the heat of a broiling afternoon, accompanied by spirits as ardent and irresponsible as his own, in search of the dubious distraction afforded by the night side of the city.

As, picking its way with elephantine nicety, the motor car progressed down the avenue—twilight deepening, arcs upon their bronze columns blossoming suddenly, noiselessly into spheres of opalescent radiance—Mr. Maitland ceased to respond, ceased even to give heed, to the running fire of chaff (largely personal) which amused his companions. Listlessly engaged with a cigarette, he lounged upon the green leather cushions, half closing his eyes, and heartily wished himself free for the evening.

But he stood committed to the humor of the majority, and lacked entirely the shadow of an excuse to desert; in addition to which he was altogether too lazy for the exertion of manufacturing a lie of serviceable texture. And so abandoned himself to his fate, even though he foresaw with weariful

lences and luxuries which have of late grown to be so commonly regarded as necessities. It boasted, for instance, no garage; no refrigerating system maddened those dependent upon it; a dissipated electric lighting system never went out of nights, because it had never been installed; no brass-bound hall boy lounged in desuetude upon the stoop and took too intimate and personal an interest in the tenants' correspondence. The inhabitants, in brief, were free to come and go according to the dictates of their consciences, unpersuaded by neighborly women folk, unhindered by a parasitic corps of menials not in their personal employ.

Wherefore was Maitland astonished, and the more so because of the season. At any other season of the year he would readily have accounted for the phenomenon that now fell under his observation, on the hypothesis that the woman was somebody's sister or cousin or aunt. But at present that explanation was untenable; Maitland happened to know that not one of the other men was in New York, barring himself; and his own presence there was a thing entirely unforeseen.

Still incredulous, he mentally coned the list; Barnes, who occupied the first flat, was traveling on the continent; Conking, of the third, had left a fortnight since to join a yachting party on the Mediterranean; Bannister and Wilkes, of the fourth and fifth floors, respectively, were in Newport and Buenos Aires.

"Odd!" concluded Maitland.

So it was. She had just closed the door, one thought; and now stood poised as if in momentary indecision on the low stoop, glancing toward Fifth avenue the while she fumbled with a refractory button at the wrist of a long white kid glove. Blurred though it was by the darkening twilight and a thin veil, her face yet conveyed an impression of prettiness; an impression enhanced by careful grooming. From her hat, a small affair, something green, with a superstructure of gray ostrich feathers, to the tips of her russet shoes—including a walking skirt and bolero of shimmering gray silk—she was distinctly "smart" and interesting.

He had keenly observant eyes, had Maitland, for all his detached pose; you are to understand that he comprehended all these points in the flickering of an instant. For the incident was over in two seconds. In one the lady's hesitation was resolved; in another she had passed down the steps and swept by Maitland without giving him a glance, without even the trembling of an eyelash. And he had a view of her back as she moved swiftly away toward the avenue.

Perplexed, he lingered upon the stoop until she had turned the corner; after which he let himself in with a latch key, and, dismissing the affair temporarily from his thoughts, or pretending to do so, ascended the single flight of stairs to his flat.

Simultaneously heavy feet were to be heard clumping up the basement steps; and surmising that the janitor was coming to light the hall, the young man waited, leaning over the balusters. His guess proving correct, he called down:

"O'Hagan? Is that you?"

"Th' saints preserve us! But 'twas yerself gave me th' shairt, Mither Maitland, sor!" O'Hagan paused in the gloom below, his upturned face quaintly illuminated by the flame of a wax taper in his gaslighter.

"I'm dining in town to-night, O'Hagan, and dropped around to dress. Is anybody else at home?"

"Niver a wan, sor. Shure, th' house do be quiet's anny tomb?"

"Then who was that lady, O'Hagan?"

"Liddy, sor?"—in unbounded amazement.

"Yes," impatiently. "A young woman left the house just as I was coming in. Who was she?"

"Shure an' I think ye must be dr'amin', sor. Divvie, a female—raysplets to ye!—has been in this house for many a many th' wake, sor."

"But, I tell you—"

"Belike 'twas some wan jist stepped into the vestibule, mebbe to tie her shoe, sor, and ye thought—"

"Oh, very well," Maitland relinquished the inquiry as unprofitable, willing to concede O'Hagan's theory a reasonable one, the more readily since he himself could by no means have sworn that the woman had actually come out through the door. Such had merely been his impression, honest enough, but founded on circumstantial evidence.

"When you're through, O'Hagan," he told the Irishman, "you may come and shave me and lay out my things, if you will."

"Very good, sor. In wan minute."

But O'Hagan's conception of the passage of time was a thought vague; his one minute had lengthened into ten before he appeared to wait upon his employer.

Now and again, in the absence of the regular "man," O'Hagan would attend one or another of the tenants in the capacity of substitute valet; as in the present instance, when Maitland, having left his host's roof without troubling even to notify his body-servant that he would not return that night, called upon the janitor to understand the more trained employe; which O'Hagan could be counted upon to do very acceptably.

Now, with patience unruffled, since he was nothing keen for the evening's enjoyment, Maitland made profit of the interval to wander through his rooms, lighting the gas here and there and noting that all was as it should be, as it had been left—save that every article of furniture and bric-a-brac seemed to be sadly in want of a thorough dusting. In the end he brought up in the room that served him as study and lounge—the drawing room of the flat, as planned in the for-

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