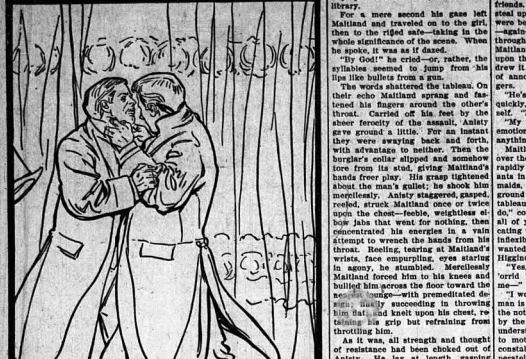

For an Instant They Were Swaying Back and Forth.

The BASSWELL PICTURES

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

A. Weil

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SYNOPSIS.

"Mad" Dan Maitland, on reaching his New York bachelor club, met an attractive young woman at the door, Janitor O'Hagan assured him no one had been within that day. The young woman left Mad's finger print on the door of his desk, and Mad left for his home, his attorney, Maitland, dined with Bassnerman, his attorney. Dan set out for Greenfields, to get his family jewels. During his walk to the country seat, he met the young woman in gray, whom he had seen leaving his bachelors' club. For auto he hailed Bassnerman, who had followed him. Back at home, Maitland, on reaching home, surprised lady in gray, cracking the safe containing his jewels. She, apparently, took him for a well-known crook, Daniel Anisty, Half-hypnotized, Maitland opened his safe, took therefrom the jewels, and gave them to her, first forming a partnership in crime.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

The interior of the safe was revealed in a shape little different from that of the ordinary household strongbox. There were several account books, ledgers and the like, together with some packages of docketed bills, in the pigeon holes. The cash box, in itself a safe within a safe, showed a blank face broken by a small combination dial. Behind this, in a secreted compartment, the Maitland heirlooms languished, half forgotten of their heedless owner.

The cash box combination offered less difficulty than had the outer dial. Maitland had it open in a twinkling. Then, brazenly lifting out the inner framework bodily, he thrust a fumbling hand into the aperture thus disclosed and pressed the spring, releasing the panel at the back. It disappeared as though by witchcraft, and the splash of light from the hallway discovered a canvas bag squatting humbly in the secret compartment: a fat little canvas bag, considerably soiled from much handling, such as is used by banks for coin, a sturdy, matter-of-fact, every-day sort of canvas bag, with nothing about it of bauteur, no air of self-importance or ostentation, to betray the fact that it was the repository of a small fortune.

At Maitland's ear, incredulous: "How did you guess?" she breathed.

He took thought and breath, both briefly, and prevaricated shamelessly: "Bribed the head clerk of the safe manufacturer who built this."

Rising, he passed over to the center table, the girl following. "Steady with the light," he whispered, and closed the string around the mouth of the bag, pouring its contents, a glittering, priceless, flaming, fridescent treasure horde, upon the table.

"Oh!" said a soft, small voice at his side. And again and again: "Oh, Oh! Oh!"

Maitland himself was moved by the wonder of it. The jewels seemed to fill the room with a flashing, amazing, coruscant glamour, rainbow-like. His breath came hot and fast as he peered upon the trove; a queen's ransom, a fortune incalculable even to its owner. As for the girl, he thought that the wonder of it must have struck her dumb. Not a sound came from the soul where she stood.

Then, abruptly, the sun went out; at least, such was the effect; the light of the hand lamp vanished utterly, leaving a partly-colored blur swimming against the impenetrable blackness, before his eyes.

His lips opened; but a small hand fell firmly upon his own, and a fearful, tremulous whisper chilled in his ear:

"Hush—ah, hush!"

"What—?"

"Steady . . . some one coming. . . . the jewels."

He heard the dull musical clash of them as her hands swept them back into the bag, and a cold, sickening fear rendered him almost blind with the sense of trust misplaced, illusion resolved into brutal realities. His fingers closed convulsively about her wrists, but she held passive.

"Ah, but I might have expected that!" came her reproachful whisper. "Take them, then, my—my partner that was." Her tone cut like a knife, and the touch of the canvas bag, as she forced it into his hands, was hateful to him.

"Forgive me—" he began.

"But listen!"

For a space he obeyed, the silence at first seeming tremendous; then, faint but distinct, he heard the tinkle and slide of the brazen rings supporting the smoking room portiere.

His hand sought the girl's; she had not moved, and the cool, firm pressure of her fingers steadied him. He thought quickly.

"Quick!" he told her in the least of whispers. "Leave by the window you opened and wait for me by the motor car."

"No!"

There was no time to remonstrate with her. Already he had slipped away, shaping a course for the entrance to the passage. But the dominant thought in his mind was that at all costs the girl must be spared the exposure. She was to be saved, whatever the hazard. Afterwards—

The tapestry rustled, but he was yet too far distant to spring. He crept on with the crouching, vicious attitude, mental and physical, of a panther stalking its prey.

Like a thunderclap from a clear sky the glare of the light broke out from the ceiling. Maitland paused, transfixed, on tiptoe, eyes incredulous, brain striving to grapple with the astounding discovery that had come to him.

The third factor stood in the doorway, slender and tall, in evening dress and was Maitland—a light, full coat hanging open from his shoulders; one hand holding back the curtain, the other arrested on the light switch. His lips dropped open and his eyes, too, were protruding with amazement. Feature for feature he was the counterpart of the man before him; in a word, here was the real Anisty.

The wonder of it all saved the day for Maitland; Anisty's astonishment was sincere and the more complete in that, unlike Maitland, he had been unprepared to find any one in the library.

For a mere second his gaze left Maitland and traveled on to the girl, then to the rifled safe—taking in the whole significance of the scene. Whom he spoke, it was as if dazed.

"By God!" he cried—or, rather, the syllables seemed to jump from his lips like bullets from a gun.

The words shattered the tableau. On their echo Maitland springing and fastened his fingers around the other's throat. Carried off his feet by the sheer necessity of the assault, Anisty gave ground a little. For an instant they were swaying back and forth, with advantage to neither. Then the burglar's collar slipped and somehow tore from its stud, giving Maitland his hands free play. His grasp tightened about the man's gullet; he shook him mercilessly, since staggered, gasped, reeled, struck Maitland once or twice upon the chest—feeble, weightless blows like those that now nothing, that concentrated his energies in a vain attempt to wrench the hands from his throat. Nothing, tested at Maitland's wrists, face empurpling, eyes starting in agony, he stumbled. Mercilessly Maitland forced him to his knees and bullied him across the floor toward the nearest lounge—with premeditated design, finally succeeding in throwing him flat, and knelt upon his chest, retaining his grip but refraining from throttling him.

As it was, all strength and thought of resistance had been choked out of Anisty. He lay at length, gasping painfully.

Maitland glanced over his shoulders and saw the girl moving forward, apparently making for the switch.

"No!" he cried, peremptorily. "Don't turn off the light—please!"

"But—" she doubted.

"Let me have those certain cards, if you please," he requested, shortly.

She followed his gaze to the windows, hesitated a moment, and was very quick to carry them out. In a trice she was offering him half a dozen of the heavy, twisted silk cords that had been used to loop back the curtains.

Soft yet strong, they were excellently well adapted to Maitland's needs. Unceremoniously he swung his captive over on his side, bringing his neck and ankles in juxtaposition to the legs of that substantial piece of furniture, the lounge.

His hands, the first to be secured, and tightly, held his neck. Anisty lay helpless, glaring vindictively the while gradually he recovered consciousness and strength. Maitland cared little for his evil glances; he was busy. The burglar's ankles were next bound together and to the lounge leg; and, an instant later, a brace of half-hitches about the man's neck and the nearest support could be eliminated him as a possible factor in subsequent events.

"Those loops around your throat," Maitland warned, "are very tight, and loose enough now, but if you struggle they'll tighten and strangle you. Understand?"

Anisty nodded, making an incoherent sound with his swollen tongue. At which Maitland, reflecting, was thoughtful with a new consideration.

"You mouth't talk, you know," he mused half aloud, and, tearing off his handkerchief, gagged Mr. Anisty.

After which, breathing hard and in a mass of disordered hair, he to his feet. Already his hearing, quickened by the emergency, had appriesed him of the distinctive footfalls of one who needed not the girl's hurried whisper, "The servants!" to warn him of their approach. The sound came of the mansion the sounds of hurried steps were distinctly audible, as, presently, were the hurry, excited voices of men and the more shrill and frightened cries of women.

Heedless of her displeasure, Maitland seized the girl by the arm and urged her toward the open window: "Don't hang back!" he told her nervously. "You must get out of this before they come. Do as I tell you, please, and we'll save ourselves yet! If we both make a run for it, we're lost. Don't you understand?"

"No. Why?" she demanded, reluctant, spirited, obstinate—and lovely in his eyes.

"If he were anybody else," Maitland indicated, with a jerk of his head towards the prone figure, "but didn't you see? He must be Maitland—and he's my double. I'll stay, brazen it out, then, as a possible, make my escape and join you by the gate. Your motor's there—wait! Be ready for me!"

But she had grasped his intention and was suddenly become pliant to his will. Her wonderful eyes, she told him with a little low laugh; and was gone, silently as a spirit.

The curtains fell behind her in long, straight folds; Maitland stilled their swaying with a touch, and stepped back to the room. At a glance he caught the eye of the fellow on the floor; it was upturned to his, admonishingly intelligent. But the lord of the manor had little time to debate consequences.

Abruptly the door was flung wide and a short stout man, clutching up his pajamas with a frantic hand, burst into the library, brandishing overhead a rampant revolver.

"A-hah!" he cried, leveling at Maitland. And then, with a fallen countenance: "G-o-ood 'eavins, sir! You, Mister Maitland!"

"Ah, Higgins," his employer greeted the butler blandly.

Higgins pulled up, thunderstruck, panting and perspiring with agitation. His fat cheeks quivered like the waltzes of a gobbler, and his eyes bulged as, by degrees, he became alive to the situation.

Maitland began to explain, forestalling the embarrassments of cross-examination:

"By the merest accident, Higgins, I was passing in my car with a party of friends. Just for a joke I thought I'd steal up to the house and see how you were behaving yourselves. By chance—again—I happened to see this light through the library windows." And Maitland, putting an incautious hand upon the bull's-eye on the desk, withdrew it instantly, with an exclamation of annoyance and four scorched fingers.

"He's been at the safe," he added quickly, diverting attention from himself. "I was just in time."

"My wor-ord!" said Higgins, with emotion. Then quickly: "Did 'e get anythin', do you think, sir?"

Maitland shook his head, scowling over the butler's hairy shoulders at the rapidly augmenting concourse of servants in the hallway—lackeys, grooms, maids, cooks, and what-not; a back ground of pale, scared faces to the tableau in the library. "This won't do," considered Maitland. "Get back all of you!" he ordered, sternly, indicating the group with a dominant and inflexible forefinger. "Those who are wanted will be sent for. Now get Higgins, you may stay."

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir. But wot an 'orrid 'appenin', sir, if you'll permit me—"

"I won't. Be quiet and listen. This man is Anisty—Handsome Dan Anisty, the notorious jewel thief, wanted badly by the police of a dozen cities. You understand? . . . I'm going now to motor to the village and get the constables; I may," he invented, desperately, "be delayed—may have to get a detective from Brooklyn. If this scandal stirs, don't touch him. Let him alone—he can't escape if you do. Above all things, don't you dare to remove that gag!"

"Most certinly, sir. I shall bear in mind wot you says—"

"You'd best," grinned, "Now I'm off. No; I don't want any attendance—I know my way. And—don't—touch—that—man! I'll return."

"Very good, sir."

Maitland stepped over to the safe, glanced within, contemplated a little bundle of papers which he did not recall disturbing, closed the door and twirled the combination.

"Nothing gone," he announced. An inarticulate gurgle from the prostrate driver drew a black scowl from Maitland. Recovering, "Good morning," he said politely to the butler, and striding out of the house by the front door, was careful to slam that behind him, ere darting into the shadows.

The moon was down, the sky a cold, opaque gray, overcast with a light drift of cloud. The park seemed very still, very dreary; a searching breeze was sweeping inland from the sound, soughing sadly in the tree tops; a chill humidity permeated the air, the precursor of rain. The young man shivered, both with chill and reaction from the tension of the emergency just passed.

He was aware of an instantaneous loss of heart, a subsidence of the elation which had upheld him through out the adventure; and to escape this, to forget or overcome it, he hurried on his way, scampering madly for the road, oppressed with fear lest he should find the girl gone—with the jewels.

That she should prove untrue, faithless, lacking even that honor which is proverbially common in the society of criminals—a consideration of such a possibility was inadmissible to such as the suspense of ignorance. He could not, would not, believe her capable of ingratitude so foul, and fought fiercely, unreasonably, against the conviction that she would have follow him the rear vicinity of the mansion the sounds of hurried steps were distinctly audible, as, presently, were the hurry, excited voices of men and the more shrill and frightened cries of women.

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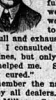

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WELL DEFINED.

De Quis—What's your idea of the difference between optimism and pessimism?

De Whis—O! the optimist says it is spring when it isn't and the pessimist says it isn't when it is.

The Happiest.

In the smoking-room of the Finland, discussing a June wedding, Andrew Carnegie said:

"And talking goodness it wasn't an international marriage, though the bride did have 18 millions.

"No!" repeated Mr. Carnegie, "that I object to international marriages wherein the two parties are good and blameless and well matched. But as many of these marriages are like one that a Boston cynic described to me.

"Was it a happy marriage?" I asked the Bostonian.

"Oh, quite," said he. "The bride was happy, her mother was overjoyed. Lord Lacland was in ecstacies, and his creditors, I understand, were in a state of absolutely delirious and uncontrollable bliss."

Another Step Needed.

"I like my house all right," said Luschman, "except for one thing. I guess you'll have to fix it."

"What is it?" asked the architect.

"Several times lately I've nearly broken my neck reaching for another step at the head of the stairs when I got home late, so I guess you'd better put another step there."—Catholic Standard and Times.

There's a rich, satisfying quality in Lewis' Single Binder that is found in no other 5c cigar.

The softer a man's head the more he is inclined to butt in.

Hospitals a Benefit to Property.

The National association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis has recently concluded an investigation, which shows that 67.5 per cent. of the tuberculosis sanatoria and hospitals of the United States have been a benefit to the property and health of the communities in which they are located. In the case of more than 62 per cent. of the sanatoria the presence of the institution has helped to increase the assessed value of surrounding property.

Burning String in the Sick-Room.

Months spent by invalids have taught me many things for the comfort of an invalid, one of the simplest being a piece of string which is burning a string to purify the atmosphere. Take a soft string and stick it in with a pin to the back of a chair; after lighting, blow it out gently, leaving the tiny spark, which will cause smoke enough to make a decided difference in the atmosphere.—Harper's Bazar.

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Camden, N.J.—"It is with pleasure that I add my testimonial to your already long list, hoping that it may induce others to avail themselves of this valuable medicine, Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound. I suffered from terrible headaches, pain in my back and right side, was tired and nervous, felt so weak I could hardly stand. Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound restored me to health and made me feel like a new person, and I think it always has my praise."—Mrs. W. P. Valentine, 902 Lincoln Avenue, Camden, N. J.

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