

OLD CAPULET'S DAUGHTER

By James Branch Cabell

"BY Jove!" said Mr. Townsend, in a voice that shook a little. "She—she—she's a stunner!" he jolted out, as he proceeded to applaud, vigorously, with both hands and feet. "And who'd have thought it—good Lord, who'd have thought it!"

Mr. Charteris smiled, in a rather patronizing fashion. "A beautiful woman," he conceded, with his customary drawl—"a very beautiful woman, in fact, but entirely lacking in temperament."

"Temperament!" scoffed Mr. Townsend, hotly; "what's temperament to two eyes like that? Why, they're big as tennis-balls! And her voice—why, a violin—a very superior violin—if it could talk, would have just such a voice as that woman has! Temperament!—oh, you make me ill, Charteris! Why—why, man, just look at her!" said Townsend, conclusively.

Mr. Charteris looked. The Juliet of the evening stood before the curtain, smiling, bowing to right and left. The citizens of Fairhaven were applauding her with a certain conscientious industry, for they really found "Romeo and Juliet" a rather dull couple. The general opinion, however, was that Miss Montmorenci seemed an elegant actress, and that in some interesting play, like "The Two Orphans" or "Lady Audley's Secret," she would be well worth seeing. Upon those who had witnessed the opening evening, she had made a most favorable impression in "The Lady of Lyons;" and, at the Tuesday matinée, as Lady Isabel in "East Lynne," she had wrung the souls of her hearers, and

had brought forth every handkerchief in the house. Moreover, she was very good-looking—quite the lady, some said; and, after all, one cannot expect everything for twenty-five cents; considering which things, Fairhaven applauded her with fervor, and made due allowance for Shakespeare as being a classic, and, therefore, of course, commendable, but not necessarily interesting.

"Well?" queried Mr. Townsend, when she had vanished, speaking under cover of the orchestra—a courtesy title accorded a very ancient and very feeble piano—"what do you think of her—of her looks? Hang her temperament!" he ejaculated, hastily.

Mr. Charteris assumed a most virtuous expression. "I don't dare tell you," said he; "you forget I am a married man."

Townsend frowned slightly. He rather resented Charteris's flippant allusion to his wife, whom he considered, with some reason, to be vastly too good for him. However, Charteris was his host, and it was Charteris who had suggested, as a lark, their walking over from Willoughby Hall, where he was entertaining a house-party, to witness this performance of the Imperial Dramatic Company. Oh, beyond doubt, Charteris had his good points, thought Mr. Townsend.

To think he had come near remaining with the others—for bridge! He decided he had never cared for bridge. How on earth could presumably sensible people be content to coop themselves up in a drawing-room on a warm June evening, when not two

miles off there was a woman with perfectly unfathomable eyes and a voice that was a love-song? Of course, she couldn't act, but, then, who wanted her to act? Mr. Townsend demanded, indignantly, of his soul. One simply wanted to look at her, and hear her speak. Charteris, with his prattle about temperament, was an ass; when a woman is born with such eyes and with a voice like that, she has done her full duty by the world—all one has a right to expect of her. It was impossible, of course, that she was really as beautiful as she seemed—probably no woman was quite so beautiful as that; most of it was undoubtedly due to rouge and rice-powder and the foot-lights; but one couldn't well be mistaken about the voice. She was apparently not very intelligent—naturally not; what could one look for in a third-rate actress—in a barn-stormer? Off the stage, she was probably forty and partial to brandy.

Mr. Townsend consulted his programme. It informed him in large type at the end that Juliet was "old Capulet's daughter," and that the part was played by Miss Annabelle Alys Montmorenci.

Townsend sighed. He admitted to himself that from a woman who wilfully assumed such a name little could be hoped. Still, he would like to see her off the stage—without all those gaudy fripperies and gewgaws—merely from curiosity. Oh, of course, merely from curiosity, he hastily assured himself.

Yet how out of place she seemed among those tawdry, ranting people yonder!—and, oh, how hopeless her acting was!

"A most enjoyable performance," said Mr. Charteris, as they came out of the opera house. "I have always had a sneaking liking for burlesque."

Thereupon, he rather maliciously paused to present Townsend to Mrs. Felix Rabbet, wife to the rector of Fairhaven.

"Such a sad play," she chirped, "and, I fear, sadly demoralizing in its

effects on young people. No, of course, I didn't *think* of bringing the children, Mr. Charteris—Shakespeare's language is not always sufficiently obscure, you know, to make that safe. Ah, poor Shakespeare!" she went on, secure in the knowledge of the four pages she had read that afternoon, preparatory to the evening's outing; "so sad to think of his having been a drinking man! It quite depresses me to think of him hobnobbing with Dr. Johnson at the Tabard Inn, and making such irregular marriages, and stealing sheep—or was it sheep, now? Well, at any rate, it was something extremely deplorable and characteristic of genius, and I quite feel for his wife. Ah, if he had only taken a more serious view of life!—as it is, one absolutely cannot trust him." She sighed pityingly, and endeavored to remember whether it was "Ingomar" or "Hamlet" that Shakespeare wrote. She was not quite certain. "However," she concluded, "they play 'Ten Nights in a Bar-room' on Thursday, and I shall certainly bring the children then, for I am always glad for them to see a really good and uplifting play. Little dears!—I really must tell you what Tom said about actors the other day——"

And she did. This led naturally to Matilda's recent clever comments on George Washington, and her observations as to the rector's dog, and her personal opinion of Elisha. And so on, in a manner not unfamiliar to fond parents. Mrs. Rabbet said afterward that it was a most enjoyable chat, though to Townsend it appeared to partake rather of the nature of a monologue. It consumed perhaps a half-hour, and when the two gentlemen at last relinquished her to her husband's charge, it was with a feeling not altogether unakin to relief.

They walked slowly down Fairhaven's one street. Willoughby Hall lies some little distance out from the village proper, and the nearest route from the opera house led through the major part of Fairhaven, which, after

an evening of unwonted dissipation, was now largely employed in discussing the play, and turning the cat out for the night. The houses were mostly dark, and the moon, nearing its full, silvered row after row of blank windows. There was an odor of growing things about, for in Fairhaven, the gardens are many.

Then it befell that Mr. Townsend made a sudden exclamation.

"Eh?" said Mr. Charteris.

"Why—why, nothing," his companion explained, lucidly. And for all Mr. Charteris could see, this might have been the case.

It may be mentioned, however, that they were, at this moment, passing a tall hedge of box, set about a large garden. The hedge was perhaps five feet, six, in height; Mr. Charteris was also five feet, six; whereas Mr. Townsend was an unusually tall young man, and topped his host by a good seven or eight inches.

"I—I say," Townsend observed, after a little, "I—I'm all out of cigarettes. I'll go back to the drug-store," he suggested, seized with a happy thought, "and get some. It's still open. Don't think of waiting for me," he urged, considerately.

"Why, great heavens!" Mr. Charteris ejaculated; "take one of mine. I can recommend them, I assure you—and, at any rate, there are all sorts, I fancy, at the house. They only keep the rankest kind of Virginia tobacco yonder, you know."

"I prefer it," Townsend insisted—"oh, yes, I really prefer it. So much milder and more wholesome, you know. I never smoke any other sort. My—my doctor insists on my smoking the very rankest I can get. It—it's so much better for the heart, he says—you don't smoke so much of it, you know. Besides," he concluded, virtuously, "it's so much cheaper; you can get twenty cigarettes for five cents at some places. I—I really must economize, I think."

Mr. Charteris turned, and with great care stared in every direction. He discovered nothing unusual. "Very

well!" assented Mr. Charteris; "I, too, have an eye for bargains. I will go with you."

"If you do," quoth Mr. Townsend, honestly, "I'll be—something unpleasant."

Charteris grinned. "Immoral young rip!" said he; "I warn you, before entering the ministry, Mr. Rabbet was accounted a good shot."

"Get out!" said Townsend.

And the fervor of his utterance was such that Mr. Charteris proceeded to obey. "Don't be late for breakfast, if you can help it," he urged, kindly. "Of course, though, you are up to some new form of insanity, and I shall probably be sent for in the morning, to bail you out of the lock-up."

Thereupon, he turned on his heel, and went down the deserted street, singing sweetly.

Sang Mr. Charteris:

"Curly gold locks cover foolish brains,
Billing and cooing is all your cheer,
Sighing and singing of midnight strains
Under Bonnybells' window-panes.
Wait till you've come to forty year."

"Forty times over let Michaelmas pass,
Grizzling hair the brain doth clear;
Then you know the boy is an ass,
Then you know the worth of a lass,
Once you have come to forty year."

II

LEFT to himself, Mr. Townsend began to retrace his steps. Solitude appeared to have mitigated his craving for tobacco in a very surprising manner; indeed, a casual observer might have thought it completely forgotten, for he now walked with a curious leisure. When he had come again to the box-hedge his pace had degenerated, little by little, into an aimless lounge. Mr. Townsend was, to all appearances, rapt in admiration of the beauty of the night.

Followed a strange chance. There was only the mildest breeze about; it was barely audible among the leaves above; and yet—so unreliable are the breezes of still, Summer nights—with a sudden, tiny, almost imperceptible

outburst, this treacherous breeze lifted Mr. Townsend's hat from his head, and wafted it over the hedge of trim box-bushes. It was very strange and very unfortunate, for, as has been said, the hedge was a tall and sturdy one. Townsend now peeped over it, with disconsolate countenance.

"Beastly awkward," said he, meditatively; "I'd give a great deal to know how I'm going to get it back without breaking down the da—blessed thing, and rousing the house, and being taken for a burglar or a madman. I wonder if there's a gate?"

"It is terrible," assented a contralto voice; "but if gentlemen *will* venture abroad on such terrible nights——"

"Eh?" said Mr. Townsend. He looked up quickly at the moon; then back toward the possessor of the voice. It was rather peculiar that he had not noticed her before, for she sat on a rustic bench not fifteen feet away, and in full view of the street. It was, perhaps, the strangeness of the affair that was accountable for the great wonder in Townsend's face, the little tremor that woke in his speech.

"—so windy," she complained.

"Er—ah—yes, quite so!" he agreed, hastily.

"I—I am really afraid"—with a suspicious gurgle—"that it must be a tornado. Ah," she continued, some strong emotion catching at her voice, "heaven help all poor souls at sea! How the wind must whistle through the cordage, how the—the marlingspikes must quiver, and the good ship reel on such a night!" She looked up at a cloudless sky, and sighed. Then she gurgled.

"Er—h'm!" observed Mr. Townsend.

For she had come forward and had lifted his hat toward him, and he could see her very plainly now; and his mouth was making foolish sounds, and his heart was performing certain curious and varied gymnastics that could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be included among its proper duties, and that interfered sadly with his breathing.

"Didn't I know it—didn't I know it?" Mr. Townsend demanded, of his soul, and his pulses sang a riotous pæan; "I knew, with that voice, she couldn't be a common actress—a vulgar, raddled creature out of a barn! You, not a lady! Nonsense! Why—why, you're unbelievable, unthinkable! Oh, you great, wonderful, lazy woman, you are probably very stupid, and you certainly can't act, but your eyes are black velvet, and your voice is evidently stolen from a Cremona, and as for your hair, there must be pounds of it, and, altogether, you ought to be set up on a pedestal for men to worship! There is just one other woman in the whole wide world as beautiful as you are, and she is two thousand years old, and is securely locked up in the Louvre, and belongs to the French government, and, besides, she hasn't any arms, so that even there you have the advantage!"

And, indeed, Miss Annabelle Alys Montmorenci was of much the same large, calm type as the Venus of Milo, nor were the upper part of their faces dissimilar. Miss Montmorenci's lips, however, were far more curved, more buxom, and were, at the present moment, bordered by an absolutely bewildering assemblage of dimples which the statue may not boast.

"I really think," said Miss Montmorenci, judicially, "that it would now be far better for you to seek some shelter from this—this devastating wind. It really isn't safe, you know, in the open. You—you might be swept away, just—just as your hat was." Ensued another gurgle.

"The shelter of a tree—" began Mr. Townsend, looking doubtfully into the garden.

"The very thing," she assented. "There is a splendid oak yonder, just half a block up the street," and she graciously pointed it out.

Townsend regarded it with disapproval. "Such a rickety old tree," he objected, sulkily.

Followed a silence. She bent her head to one side, and looked up at him. She was grave now. "A strolling ac-

tress isn't supposed to be very particular, is she?" asked Miss Montmorenci, slowly. "She wouldn't object to a man's coming by night and trying to scrape acquaintance with her—a man who wouldn't think of being seen with her by day? She'd like it, probably. She—she'd probably be accustomed to it, wouldn't she?" And Miss Montmorenci smiled.

And Townsend saw, with a great pang, that there were tears in her eyes, and, of a sudden, was abjectly ashamed of himself. "Why—why, you can't think that of me!" he babbled. "I—oh, don't think me that sort, I beg of you! I'm not—really, I'm not, Miss Montmorenci! But I admired you so much to-night—I—oh, of course, I was very silly and very presumptuous, but, really, you know—" He paused for a little, and a new light came into his eyes. "My name is Robert Townsend," he said, simply; "I'm staying at Mr. Charteris's place, just outside of Fairhaven. So now, you see, we've been quite properly introduced, haven't we? And, by the way," continued Mr. Townsend, after a moment's meditation, "there's a very interesting old college here—old pictures, records, historical associations and such-like. I should like to see it, vastly. Can't I call for you in the morning? We can do it together, if you don't mind, and if you haven't already seen it. Won't you, Miss Montmorenci? You really ought to see King's College, you know," he added, severely; "it's quite famous—no end of interesting things have happened there, I'm told."

She had drawn close to the hedge. "You—you really mean it?" she asked. "You'd really walk through the streets of Fairhaven with me—with a barn-stormer, with a strolling actress? You'd be afraid!" she cried, suddenly; "oh, yes, you talk bravely enough, but you'd be afraid, of course, when the time came! You'd be afraid!"

Mr. Townsend had taken his hat, but his head was still uncovered. "I don't think," said he, reflectively, "that I am afraid of many things, somehow. But of one thing I am cer-

tainly not afraid, and that is, of mistaking a good woman for—for anything else. Their—their eyes are different, somehow," Mr. Townsend explained, slowly, as to himself; then smiled. "Shall we say eleven o'clock?"

Miss Montmorenci laid her hand upon his shoulder. "I believe you," she said, in flushed haste, "oh, I believe you, and I trust you, Mr. Townsend! But—but we rehearse in the morning, and there is a matinée every day, you know, and—and there are other reasons—" She paused, irresolutely. "No," said Miss Montmorenci, "I thank you, but—good night."

"Oh, I say," he pleaded, "am I never to see any more of you?"

A century or so of silence now. Her deliberation seemed endless.

At last: "Matinées and rehearsal keep us busy by day. But I am boarding here for the week, and—and I rest here in the garden after the evening performance. It is cool and—yes, soothing. And—and you aren't a bad man, are you? No; you look too big and strong and clean, Mr. Townsend. A—even a strolling actress would trust you," she ended, handsomely, and gurgled once more.

"In that case," cried Mr. Townsend, "I shall say good night with a light heart." And he turned to go.

"A moment—" said she.

"An eternity," he protested.

"Promise me," she said, almost harshly, "that you will not come again to the opera house."

Townsend raised his brows. "I adore the drama," he pleaded.

"And I loathe it. And I act very badly—hopelessly so," said Miss Montmorenci, with an indolent shrug; "and—and, somehow, I don't want you to see me do it."

He promised. "At least," he implored, "you don't mind my—remembering Juliet?"

"No"—doubtfully, though.

"In that case," quoth Mr. Townsend, promptly, "Juliet shall be remembered—always." He smiled, and waved his hand. "Adieu, Signorina Capulet," said he.

And Mr. Townsend took his departure. His blood rejoiced, with a strange fervor, in the Summer moonlight. It was good to be alive.

III

"AND, oh, but it's good to be with you again, signorina!" cried Mr. Townsend, as he came with quick strides into the moonlit garden. He caught both her hands in his, and laughed like a boy. There was nothing subtle about Townsend; just at present, he was vastly pleased with the universe, and he saw no possible reason for concealing it.

It was characteristic, also, that she made no pretense at being surprised by his coming. She was expecting him very frankly, and she smiled very frankly at seeing him; also, in place of the street dress of Tuesday, she wore something that was white and soft and clinging, and left her throat but half concealed. This, for two reasons, was very sensible and praiseworthy; one being that the night was warm, and the other that it really broadened Townsend's ideas as to the state of perfection which it is possible for the human throat to attain.

"So you don't like my—my stage-name?" she asked, as he sat down beside her. "Well, for that matter, no more do I."

"It doesn't suit you," he protested—"not in the least. Whereas, you might be a Signorina Somebody-or-other, you know. You're dark and stately and—well, I can't tell you all the things you are," Mr. Townsend complained, "because the English language is so limited. But, upon the whole, I'm willing to take the word of the playbill—yes, I'm quite willing to accept you as Signorina Capulet. She had a habit of sitting in gardens, at night, I remember. Yes," he decided, after reflection, "I really think it highly probable that you're old Capulet's daughter. I shall make a point of it, to pick a quarrel with that impertinent, trespassing young Mon-

tague as soon as possible. He really doesn't deserve you, you know."

Unaccountably, her face saddened. Then: "Signorina, signorina?" said she, at length. "It's rather a pretty name. And the other is horrible. Yes, you may call me signorina, if you like."

She would not tell him her real name. She was unmarried—this much she told him, but of her past life, her profession or of her future she never spoke. "I don't want to talk about it," she said, candidly. "We play for a week in Fairhaven, and here, once off the stage, I intend to forget I am an actress. When I'm on the stage," she added, in meditative wise, "of course, every one knows I'm not."

Townsend laughed. He found her very satisfying; she was not particularly intelligent, perhaps, but, then, he was beginning to consider clever women rather objectionable creatures. There was a sufficiency of them among the Charteris house-party—Alicia Wade, Margaret Hugonin, Gabrielle Anstruther—he thought of them almost resentfully. The world had accorded them—well, not exactly what they most wanted, but, at least, they had its luxuries; and they said sharp, cynical things about the world in return. In a woman's mouth, epigrams were quite as much out of place as a meerschaum pipe.

Here, on the contrary, was a woman whom the world had accorded nothing save hard knocks, and she regarded it, upon the whole, as an eminently pleasant place to live in. She accepted its rebuffs with a certain large calm, as being all in a day's work. There was, no doubt, some good and sufficient reason for them; however, not for a moment did she puzzle her handsome head in speculating over this reason. She was probably too lazy. And the few favors the world accorded her she took thankfully.

"You see," she explained to Townsend—this was on Thursday night, when he found her very contentedly eating sweetmeats out of a paper bag—"the world is really very like a large

chocolate-drop; it's rather bitter on the outside, but when you've bitten through, you find the heart of it sweet. Oh, how greedy!—you've taken the last candied cherry, and I'm specially fond of candied cherries!" And, indeed, she looked frankly regretful as Townsend munched it.

Townsend thought her adorable.

In fact, the moon seemed to shine down each night upon that particular garden in a more and more delightful and dangerous manner. And being a perfectly normal, healthy young man, the said moonshine affected Mr. Townsend in a fashion that has been peculiar to moonshine since Noah was a likely stripling; and Mr. Townsend's blood appeared, to him, to leap and bubble in his veins as if it had been some notably invigorating and heady tippie; and his heart was unreasonably contented, and he gave due thanks for this woman who had come to him unsullied through the world's gutter—unsullied, look you; there was no questioning that. He pictured her as the Lady in "Comus," moving serene and unafraid among a rabble of threatening, bestial shapes. And he rejoiced that there were women like that in the world—brave, wholesome, unutterably honest women, whose very lack of cleverness—oh, subtle appeal to his vanity!—demanded a man's protection. As has been said, Townsend was a tall man, but when he thought in this fashion, he seemed to himself, at a moderate computation, ten feet in height—just the man, in short, to make an ideal protector.

Thus far, Mr. Townsend. His course of reasoning was perhaps faulty, but then, there are, upon the whole, certain incidents in life more interesting and desirable than the perfecting of a mathematical demonstration. And so, for a little, his blood rejoiced with a strange fervor in the Summer moonlight, and it was good to be alive.

Friday.

"And why not?" Mr. Townsend demanded for the ninth time.

But she was resolute. "Oh, it's dear of you! it's dear of you!" she cried; "and I—I do care for you, Bobby—how could I help it? But it can't be—it can't ever be," she repeated, wearily; and then looked at him and smiled a little. "Oh, boy, boy! dear, dear boy!" she murmured, half in wonder, "how foolish of you and—and how dear of you, Bobby!"

"And why not?" said Mr. Townsend—for the tenth time.

She gave a sobbing laugh. "Oh, the great, brave, stupid boy!" she said, fondly, and, for a moment, her hand rested on his curling hair; "he doesn't know what he's doing—ah, no, he doesn't know what he's doing! Why, I might hold you to your word, Bobby! I might sue you for breach of promise! I—I might marry you, Bobby! Think of that!" and her eyes grew big and moist as she herself thought of it. "Why—why, I'm not even a lady, Bobby! I'm only a strolling actress—a barn-stormer, Bobby, and—and fair game for any man—any man who isn't particular," she added, with the first trace of bitterness he had ever heard in her great voice. "And you'd marry me—you! You'd give me your name, you'd make me your—your wife! You—you've actually begged me to be your wife, haven't you, Bobby? Ah, my brave, strong, stupid Bobby, how many women must love you—women who are your equals, women who have a right to love you! And you'd give them all up for me—for me, you foolish Bobby, whom you haven't known a week! Ah, how—how dear of you!" and she caught her breath swiftly, and her voice broke.

"Yes," confessed Mr. Townsend; "I really believe I'd give them all up—every blessed one of them—for you." He inspected her, critically, and then smiled. "And I don't think," added Mr. Townsend, "that I'd be deserving any very great credit, either, signorina."

"Ah, my dear," she answered, "it pleases you to call me old Capulet's daughter—but if I were only a Capulet, and you a Montague, don't you

see how much easier it would be? But we don't belong to rival families, Bobby—we belong to rival worlds, to two worlds that have nothing in common, and never can have anything in common. They're too strong for us, Bobby—my big, dark, squalid world, that you could never sink to, and your gay little world that I can never climb to—your world that would have none of me, even if—even if—” The condition was not forthcoming.

“The world,” said Townsend, in an equable tone, “may be—my dear, I may as well warn you I'm shockingly given to short and expressive terms, and, as we're likely to see a deal of each other for the future, you'll have to be lenient with them—accordingly, I repeat, the world may be damned!” Townsend laughed, in unutterable content. “Have none of you!” he cried. “My faith, I'd like to see the world that would have none of you! Ah, signorina, it's very plain to me you don't realize what a beauty, what a—a—good Lord, what an unimaginative person it was that invented the English language! Why, you've only to be seen, heart's dearest—only to be seen, and the world is at your feet—my world, to which you belong of rights—my world, that you're going to honor by living in; my world, that in a little will go mad for sheer envy of blundering, stupid, lucky me!” And Mr. Townsend laughed her to scorn.

There was a long silence. Then: “I—I belonged to your world once, you know.”

“I know,” said Mr. Townsend, gravely.

“And yet—you never asked——”

“Ah, signorina, signorina!” he cried; “what matter? Don't I know you for the bravest, tenderest, purest, most beautiful woman God ever made? I doubt you—I! My word!” said Mr. Townsend, stoutly, “that would be a pretty go! You're to tell me just what you please,” he went on, almost belligerently, “and when and where you please, my lady. And I'll thank you,” he added, with some sternness, “to discontinue your pitiful and transpar-

ent efforts to arouse unworthy suspicions as to my future wife. They're wasted, madame—utterly wasted, I assure you.”

“Oh, Bobby, Bobby!” she sighed; “you are hopeless! Give me time,” she pleaded, weakly.

Townsend scowled his disapproval.

“Only till to-morrow—only a little, little twenty-four hours. And promise me, you won't speak of this—this mad scheme again to-night. I—I must think.”

“Never!” said he, promptly, decisively. “I couldn't be expected to keep such an absurd promise,” he complained, in indignation.

“And you look so strong,” she murmured, with evident disappointment—“so strong and firm and—and—admirable!”

Mr. Townsend promised at once. And he kept his promise—that is, he did subsequently refer to the preferable and proper course to pursue under divers given circumstances “when we are married;” but it was only on six occasions, and then quite casually—and six times, as he himself said, was, all things being considered, an extremely moderate allowance and one that did great credit to his self-control.

My dear Mrs. Grundy, I grant you it is utterly impossible to defend Mr. Townsend's behavior in this matter, and, believe me, I don't for an instant undertake the task. To the contrary, I agree with you perfectly—his conduct is most thoughtless and reprehensible, and merits our very severest condemnation.

For, look you: here is a young man, well-born, well-bred, sufficiently well endowed with this world's goods, in short, an eminently eligible match, preparing to marry an obscure actress of whose past he knows nothing—absolutely nothing. Don't you shudder at the effrontery of the minx? Is it not heart-breaking to contemplate the folly, the utter infatuation of the misguided youth, who now stands ready to foist such a creature upon the very circles of which your ladyship is a distin-

guished ornament? I protest, it is really incredible. I don't believe a word of the story.

But, you see, he loved her. You and I, my dear madame, blessed with a wiser estimation of our duties to society, of the responsibilities of our position, of the cost of even the most modest establishment, and, above all, of the sacredness of matrimony and the main chance, may well shrug our shoulders at such a plea. For, as you justly observe, what, after all, is this love?—only a passing madness, an exploded superstition, an irresponsible *ignis fatuus* flickering over the quagmires and shallows of the divorce-court. People's lives are no longer swayed by such absurdities; it is quite out of date.

And I protest, loudly, my hand upon my heart, that it is true: people no longer do mad things for love, or ever did, in spite of lying poets; nor do the birds mate in the Spring, nor the sun rise in the morning; popular fallacies, my dear madame, every one of them. You and I know better, and are not to be deceived by appearances, however specious they may be.

Having attained this satisfactory state, we can afford to laugh at our past mistakes. Let us be candid. Wasn't there a time, dear lady, before Mr. Grundy came a-wooing, when, somehow, one was constantly meeting unexpected people in the garden, and, somehow, one sat out a formidable number of dances during the evening, and, somehow, the poets seemed a bit more plausible than they do to-day? It was very foolish, of course—but, ah, madame, there *was* a time—a time when even our staid blood rejoiced with a strange fervor in the Summer moonlight, and it was good to be alive!

IV

TOWNSEND approached the garden on Saturday night, with an elated heart. This was the last evening of the engagement of the Imperial Dramatic Company. To-morrow the troupe was to leave Fairhaven; but

Mr. Townsend was very confident that the leading lady would not accompany them, and by reason of this confidence, he smiled as he strode through the village, and hummed under his breath an inane ditty of an extremely sentimental nature.

As he bent over the little wooden gate, and searched for its elusive latch, a man came out of the garden, wheeling sharply about the hedge that, until this, had hidden him; simultaneously, Mr. Townsend was aware of the mingled odor of bad tobacco and of worse whiskey. Well, she would have done with such people soon! Townsend threw open the gate, and stood aside to let him pass; then, as the moon fell full upon the face of the man, he gave an inarticulate, startled sound.

"Fine evening, sir," suggested the stranger.

"Eh?" said Mr. Townsend; "eh? Oh, yes, yes! Quite so!" Afterward, he shrugged his shoulders, and went into the garden, looking a bit puzzled.

He found her beneath a great maple in the heart of the enclosure. It was a place of peace; the night was warm and windless, and the moon, come to its full glory now, rode lazily in the west through a froth of clouds. Everywhere the heavens were faintly powdered with star-dust, but even the planets seemed pale and ineffectual beside the splendor of the moon. The garden was drenched in moonshine—moonshine that silvered the unmown grass-plots, and converted the white rose-bushes into squat-figured wraiths, and tinged the red ones with dim purple hues. On every side, the foliage blurred into ambiguous vistas, where fireflies loitered; and the long shadows of the nearer trees, straining across the grass, were weird patterns scissored out of blue velvet. It was a place of peace and light and languid odors, and Mr. Townsend came into it, laughing, the possessor of an over-industrious heart and a perfectly unreasoning joy over the fact that he was alive.

"I say," Townsend observed, as he

stretched himself luxuriantly on the grass beside her, "you put up at a shockingly disreputable place, signorina."

"Yes?" said she.

"That fellow who just went out," he explained—"do you know, the police want his address, I think? No," Townsend continued, after consideration, "I'm sure I'm not mistaken—that's either Ned Lethbury, the embezzler, or his twin-brother. It's been six years since I've seen him, but that's he. And that," said Mr. Townsend, with proper severity, "is a sample of the sort of associate you prefer to your humble servant! Ah, signorina, signorina, I'm a tolerably worthless chap, I admit, but at least I never forged and embezzled and then skipped my bail! You'd much better marry me, my dear, and say good-bye to your peculating friends. But, deuce take it!" he broke off, suddenly, "I forgot—I ought to notify the police or something, I suppose. I wonder if there *are* any police in this dear old sleepy place?"

She caught his arm, quickly. Her mouth opened and shut again before she spoke. "He—he's my husband," she said, in a toneless voice. Then, of a sudden, she wailed; "Oh, forgive me! Oh, my great, strong, beautiful Bobby, forgive me, for I am very unhappy, and I can't meet your eyes—your honest eyes! Ah, my dear, my dear, don't look at me like that—you don't know how it—it hurts!"

The garden noises lisped about them in the long silence that fell. Then the far-off whistling of some home-going citizen of Fairhaven tinkled shrilly through the night, and Townsend shuddered a bit.

"I don't understand," he said, strangely quiet. "You told me——"

"Ah, I lied to you! I lied to you!" she cried. "I didn't mean to—to hurt you, Bobby. I didn't know—I couldn't know—I was so lonely, Bobby," she pleaded, with wide eyes; "oh, you don't know how lonely I am. And when you came to me that first night, you—why, you spoke to

me as the men I—I once knew used to speak. There was respect in your voice, and, oh, Bobby, Bobby, I wanted that so! I hadn't had a man speak to me like that for years, you know, Bobby. And, boy dear, I was so lonely in my squalid world—and it seemed as if the world I used to know was calling me—your world, Bobby, the world I'm shut out from. And I thought for a week—just to peep into it, to be a lady again for a little seven days—oh, it didn't seem very wicked, then, and I wanted it so much! I—I knew I could trust you. And I was so hungry—so hungry for a little respect, a little courtesy, Bobby, such as men don't accord strolling actresses. So I didn't tell you till the very last I was married. I lied to you. Oh, you don't understand!" she babbled; "this stupid, honest man doesn't understand anything except that I've lied to him!"

"Signorina," said Townsend, and smiled, resolutely, "I think I understand." He took both her hands in his, and laughed a little. "But, oh, my dear, my dear," he said, "you should have told me that you loved another man; for you have let me love you for a week, and now I think that I must love you till I die."

"Love him!" she echoed. "Oh, boy dear, boy dear, what a Galahad it is! I don't think he ever loved me; and I—why, you have seen him. How could I love him?" she asked, simply as a child.

Townsend bowed his head. "And yet——" said he. Then he laughed again, somewhat bitterly. "Don't deceive me, Mrs. Lethbury," he said; "it's kindly meant, I know, but I remember you now. I even danced with you once, I think, a long time ago. You're Alfred Van Orden's daughter—your father is a wealthy man, a very wealthy man—and yet, when your—your husband disappeared you followed him to—to become a strolling actress. Ah, no, a woman doesn't sacrifice everything for a man in the way you've done, unless she loves him." Mr. Townsend caught his breath

sharply. Some unknown force kept tugging down the corners of his mouth, in a manner that hampered speech; moreover, nothing seemed worth talking about. He had lost her. That was the one thing that mattered.

"Why, of course, I went with him," she assented, a bit surprised; "he was my husband, you know. But as for loving—no, I don't think Ned ever really loved me," she reflected, with puckering brows. "He—he took that money for—for another woman, if you remember. But he's fond of me, and—and he needs me." After a little, she went on, with a quick lift of speech. "Oh, Bobby, Bobby, what a queer life we've led since then! You can't imagine it, boy dear. He's been a tavern-keeper, a drummer—everything! Why, one Summer we actually sold rugs and Turkish things in Atlantic City! But he's always afraid of meeting some one who knows him, and—and he drinks too much. So we haven't got on in the world, Ned and I—and now, after six years, I'm the leading lady of the Imperial Dramatic Company, and he's the manager. I forgot, though—he's advance-agent this week, for he didn't dare stay in Fairhaven, lest some of the people at Mr. Charteris's should recognize him, you know. He came back only this evening." She paused for a moment; a wistful little quiver came into her speech. "Oh, it's queer, it's queer, Bobby! Sometimes—sometimes when I've time to think, say, on long Sunday afternoons, I remember my old life, every bit of it—oh, I do remember such strange little details, Bobby! I remember the designs on the bread-and-butter plates, and all the little silver things on my desk, and the plank by my door that always creaked and somehow never got fixed, and the big, shiny buttons on the coachman's coat—little trifles like that. And—and they hurt, they hurt, Bobby, those little, unimportant things! They—they grip my throat!" She laughed, not very mirthfully. "Then I'm like the old lady in the

nursery-rhyme, Bobby, and say, surely, this can't be I. But it is I, boy dear—a strolling actress, a barn-stormer! Isn't it queer, Bobby?"

Mr. Townsend was remembering many things. He remembered Lethbury, a gross man, superfluously genial, whom he had never liked; he even remembered his young wife, not come to her full beauty then, the bud of girlhood scarce slipped; and he remembered very vividly the final crash, the nine days' talk over Lethbury's flight in the face of certain conviction—by his father-in-law's advice, as some said, who had furnished and forfeited heavy bail for him. Oh, the brave woman who had followed!—oh, the brave, foolish woman! And he was content to exhibit her to the yokels of Fairhaven!—to make of her beauty an article of traffic! Oh, it was foul!

Then hope blazed in his heart. "Your husband," he said, quickly, "he doesn't love you? He—he isn't faithful to you?"

She was all one blush. "No," she answered; "there's a—a Miss Fortescue—she plays second parts——"

"Ah, my dear, my dear!" he cried, with a shaking voice; "come away, signorina—come away with me! He doesn't need you—and, oh, my dear, I need you so! You can get your divorce and marry me. And you can have your old world back again—the world you're meant for, the life you hunger for, signorina! Ah, signorina, come away—come away from this squalid life that's killing you! Come back to the clean, light-hearted world you loved, the world that's waiting to pet and caress you just as it used to do—our world, signorina! You don't belong here with—with the Fortescues. You belong to us." Townsend sprang to his feet. "Come now!" said he. "There's Anne Charteris; she's a good woman. She knows you. Come with me to her, dearest—to-night! You shall see your father to-morrow. Your father—why, think how that old man loves you, how he has longed for you, his only daughter, all these years. And I?" Townsend spread out his

hands, in a little impotent gesture. "I love you," he said, simply. "I can't do without you, heart's dearest."

Impulsively, she rested both hands upon his breast; then bowed her head a little. The nearness of her seemed to shake in his blood, to catch at his throat, and his hands, lifted for a moment, trembled with desire of her. "You don't understand," she said. "I am a Catholic—my mother was one, you know. There is no divorce for us. And—and besides, I'm not modern. I'm very old-fashioned, I suppose, in my ideas. Do you know," she asked, with a smile on her face that lifted confidingly to his, "I—I really believe the world was made in six days, and that the whale swallowed Jonah, and that there is a tangible hell of fire and brimstone? You don't, do you, Bobby? But I do—and I promised to stay with him till death parted us, you know, and I must do it. He—I'm all he has. He'd go all to pieces without me. I—oh, boy dear, boy dear, I love you so!" And her voice broke, in a great, choking sob.

"A promise—a promise made by an ungrown girl to a brute—a thief!"

"No, dear," she answered, quietly, "a promise made to God."

And Townsend, looking into her face, saw love there and anguish and determination. It seemed monstrous, but of a sudden he knew with a dull surety; she loved him, but she thought she had no right to love him; she would not go with him. She would go with that drunken, brutish thief. And Mr. Townsend suddenly recalled certain

clever women—Alicia Wade, Margaret Hugonin, Gabrielle Anstruther—the women of the world he knew; beyond question they would raise delicately penciled eyebrows to proclaim this woman a fool—and wonder. They would be right, Townsend thought. She was only a splendid, tender-hearted, bright-eyed fool, the woman that he loved. But he loved her very folly—oh, the brave folly, the sacred stupidity! His heart sickened as it rose between them, an impassable barrier. He hated it; he revered it.

They stood silent for a time. The wind murmured above in the maples, lazily, ominously. Then the gate clicked, with a vicious snap that pierced the silence like a pistol-shot.

"My husband," she said, wearily. "Good-bye, Bobby. You—you may kiss me, if you like."

So, for a moment, their lips met. Afterward, Townsend caught her hands in his, and gripped them close to his breast, looking down into her eyes. They glinted in the moonlight, deep pools of sorrow, and tender—oh, unutterably tender and compassionate. But he found no hope there. He lifted her hand to his lips, and left her alone in the garden.

He found Lethbury fumbling at the gate.

"Such nuisance," he complained, "havin' gate won't unlock. Latch mus' got los'—po' li'l latch," murmured Mr. Lethbury, plaintively—"all 'lone in cruel worl'!"

Townsend opened the gate for him, and stood aside to let him pass.



FROM CUPID'S QUIVERS

ROMANCES of two worlds are not uncommon—the beau monde and the demi-monde.

When a girl's eyes fall, it is time for the man to take a tumble.

In most men's lives, as in most women's, there is but one real love; the difficulty is to decide which.

Love is blind—so long as there's no money in sight.

L. DE V. MATTHEWMAN.