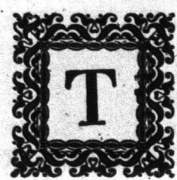


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## The Matinee Idol

"Rosalie! Don't joke. It's serious. I get twenty a week now."

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Edith G. Bayne

**R**OSALIE Duprez leaned against the balcony-rail of the shabby little rooming-house and mischievously tossed a red rose—the mate of the one that nestled in her dark, curly hair—down to Pierre Latupe, who stood below. He caught it deftly, and then hesitated a bit before fastening it on his coat. He repeated his question.

"Who gave you it, Rosalie?"

"Are they not beauties, Pierre!" she countered. "I have half-a-dozen, each as large as a teacup."

The frowning Romeo frowned harder than ever. He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands in a characteristic gesture.

"Red roses like these cost five piastres a dozen," he remarked. "Some fool and his money must have kissed a long goodbye."

"Everybody doesn't squeeze the nickels till the king yells," said the girl, with or without malicious intent.

"But make haste and come down," Pierre pleaded.

"Are we going to the Jazzatorium?" asked Rosalie in a pretty, coaxing voice, as she descended the steps slowly, the better perhaps to display her dainty, silk-clad ankles.

"Let's go to the park. It's too nice to be inside anywhere to-day, Rosalie."

"You're not broke, Pierre!" chaffed the girl, taking his arm. "If you are, I'll stand for the tickets. I got my bonus to-day."

"It's not that. We could go to the lake if you like."

"Why not the Jazz—"

"On a day like this? The Bond Dieu doesn't often send such a Saturday afternoon. Such air, such sunshine! And the bird-songs—"

"What are bird-songs when you can listen to that melting tenor who sings to charm the heart of a stone? Ah, what a voiced" and she sighed rapturously.

Pierre Latupe frowned again.

"That pig!" he growled.

"He's a gentleman and an artist!" retorted the girl. "An Italian aristocrat."

"He an Italian?" I'll wager he never saw Italy!"

"Oh, be contrary then! But I tell you he's a great star not yet discovered. And his figure—"

"Too much stomach!"

"His handsome coal black hair—"

"Dyed."

"His smile—"

"Rosalie, don't be buffaloed. His words, his voice—they are not the soft, Southern quality. His consonants are harsh. An ear for music, no doubt, he has, but he's often out of key and falsetto in the high notes. He couldn't carry a tune in a valise! A fifth-rate vaudeville actor. That's what Signor Whatyoucallum is."

"Signor Bertini, Pierre. And—there's no Signora Bertini they say," Rosalie added softly.

She sprang away from him, pirouetted along the pavement for a few steps humming a gay air, and then challenged Pierre to a race as far as the corner. Breathlessly they came to a halt further down, and the pretty vivacious French girl laughed with the sheer joy of living. She was always happy on Saturday afternoon, that short and fleeting breathing-space in the long week. It was like an oasis in the great desert of toil to her and so many others. To-day, released from the factory at noon, she had snatched a scrappy lunch and hastened to her room to dress in her very finest, and now chic, alluring, scented faintly with violet, she was wearing a new frock made by herself, a cheap and simple costume, but enhanced by many deft touches, the sort that only a daughter of the French knows how to impart.

"Here we are!" she announced as they approached the corner where gaudy posters set forth the attractions within the vaudeville theater.

Pierre, shrewd with the shrewdness of his race, knew that to oppose a woman

was wrong tactics and got you nowhere. But he made one more feeble protest.

"You seem to have developed a sudden passion for music, Rosalie," he complained. "I can't understand it. The Lyceum further up has a much better bill to-day. Let's go there."

"But look! The Signor stars to-day in Her Shattered Heart. Oh, we mustn't miss it!"

She seized his arm and impatiently steered him over to the waiting line in the near-marble foyer. The patrons were swarming in a dense mass about the entrances and Pierre shrugged with a distaste at the very thought of the heat and suffocation inside the house. The front rows had all been taken and they found themselves quite near the dead-line known as row N.

"And a good thing, I'll say!" said Pierre. "Now we won't see the rake-up on the ballet like the last time."

But Rosalie pouted and kept craning her neck toward the stage.

"I can hardly wait," she whispered. "He sings six times I see by the program. Isn't he generous?"

"He ought to be arrested. Generous? He's hogging the limelight."

"You mean the spotlight. Well, and who better I'd like to know? There's the orchestra tuning up."

"That orchestra ought to be deported. It's crazy with the heat."

"Bah! But you are in a bad humor to-day!"

"Well, anyhow, I'm not mashed on a punk actor," said Pierre.

At last the curtain went up on Her Shattered Heart and a great volume of oh's attested to the beauty of the setting of the first act, a drawing-room scene with furniture rented from a nearby upholstery store. One could see a large price-ticket still hanging from the Morris chair. It was the usual type of melodrama, opening up with a monologue by a pert housemaid, who flicked dust, real or imaginary, from the furniture while she discoursed about her employer's affairs. The hero is wrongfully accused of murder in the second act, but cannot clear himself, for some obtuse reason, and so the lurid tale went on. Signor Bertini was the hero, of course. Rosalie's are not the only eyes that sparkle. Row upon row of adoring maidens gaze enraptured and half forget their bon-bons. Married women who have raised large families see in Bertini a soul-mate. What does he sing? Ah! He can sing almost everything that was ever set to music. Now it is an Italian love-song, then a Spanish serenade, again a French chanson, or an English lullaby. But chiefly he sings rag-time. Rosalie doesn't understand much of it, but she hears his liquid voice and thrills to the core of her being when he presses a hand upon his heart and trills on the highest register. He seems to be singing to her alone. That is sufficient. He has gay abandon, his arpeggios are like Caruso's, his staccato notes are like dainty trickles of water. Rosalie sighs happily and closes her eyes.

"A man his size ought to sing bass," growls Pierre.

Suddenly he sees the Signor's bold eyes searching the audience. Ciel! It is for Rosalie! Or can it be? No! Yes! He distributes a special smile or two, but reserves for Rosalie a kiss tossed lightly across the footlights.

Pain and anger grip Pierre.

"Rosalie! Do not notice him!" he whispers harshly.

He clutches her arm. She shakes off his hand.

"Don't be silly," she whispers back. "I know him slightly."

The sun has retired behind a bank of clouds when the matinee lets out. There is a bit of chill in the air. Rosalie and Pierre are silent as they walk homeward. But at last the boy breaks the silence.

"Rosalie, when shall we get married?"

The girl returns to earth, dazedly.

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