



He lost his heart to a girl who sang as
she flew through the air on a swing

From down under the stage, all the bull fiddler could ever see was her legs

LOVE SONG *for a Bass Viol*

A Short Short Story

by Matt Taylor

Illustrated by James Schucker

I AM glad enough to land this job when they are putting together the orchestra for the new musical show of Vincent, the big producer, so I do not gripe too much. But I get the bass viol's usual lousy break.

The Blenhouse Theatre, where we are to open, has an overhanging stage, and they put me and the French horn at the very back of the pit — we can't see a thing of what goes on overhead; I have to stand there wrestling with my oversized fiddle — and look out at rows of seats. I feel a little bitter, especially when the flute tells me the showgirls have the neatest set of Grables he sees in years.

I tell my friend Herman about it after the dress rehearsal. Herman is a bass viol player like myself — when he can find a job; we share an apartment and are very good friends indeed. "If the comedian looks as funny as he sounds," I state, "he'll do. The star has a fine voice. And there's a kid who does a specialty. She could carry the show all by herself. What a honey!"

"How do you know?" asks Herman. "They keep you *under* the stage."

"Well," I tell him, "they put her on a rope swing and push her while she sings her second chorus. She comes shooting out right over my head, and if I look up and stretch my neck at just the right time I can see — well, she sits on the swing with her legs sticking straight out."

"Blonde or brunette?" Herman wants to know.

"They don't push her that far," I state. "I'll have to ask the cornet."

THE show is a mild hit. The first-night audience seems to like it, and they laugh heartily at some pantomime overhead that I wouldn't know about. They give the kid on the swing a big hand, and when I think what I must be missing I get plenty sore. Legs are all very well, but sometimes the face above them is highly interesting, too.

I read all the reviews the next morning. A couple of critics single out the kid. One of

them writes: "In her specialty number she is the darling of the evening. I didn't see enough of her."

"He should complain!" I tell my friend Herman.

"I'll see the show tonight and give you a full report," says Herman. "Anything for a pal."

That evening I look out at Herman in the fourth row, enjoying what goes on over my head. And later he tells me about the kid. "A honey, all right," he says. "One gorgeous babe. A blonde."

"I know," I say. "They got her photo in the lobby."

"You can't tell anything from that photo," says Herman. "You should see her smile, and the way she flashes those lamps! I never saw — what are you groaning for?"

"I'll twist my neck tonight trying to see her above the waist," I tell him.

"If you got it that bad," says Herman,

"you ought to go backstage and see her, or send in a note."

"I'm only a bass viol player," I remind him.

"Now and then you meet a girl who don't mind," says Herman.

"But she's big-time," I state. "Watch the gossip columnists give her a play. And the doorman tells me there are a dozen guys hanging around all the time trying to get notes through to her. What chance have I?"

"I see the point," says Herman. "You'd better forget it."

"I won't forget it. I'm in love."

"A guy can't fall in love with a pair of stems," says Herman.

"A guy can — with the right stems."

A WEEK later, crowding too far forward during the swing number, I knock over the saxophone's music stand. And the next week I try to do it with mirrors. But nothing works. The show runs for six weeks, and to me she is still just a pair of legs and a voice. Then closing notice is posted, and I risk all and write to her.

"I tell her everything," I explain to Herman. "I say I am just a bass viol player, and I know she has all the big-money playboys to pick from; but I love her more than any of them, and I ask her to go out with me after the last performance. If she says yes, I want to be out in the audience that night. You can take my place in the pit, Herman. I can arrange it for one evening."

And darned if the kid doesn't accept! She writes a note, and says she's deeply touched by my devotion to the lower half of her. Then she says I have been too bashful. She loves bass viols. Her dad used to play one at Hammerstein's Victoria years ago.

Herman takes my place with his giant fiddle that night, and I sit in the third row, feasting my eyes. She is the sweetest little eyeful I ever see, and the upper half of her tops the lower half of her, and I am not just gagging when I say it.

SHE swings out a couple of times. And at the end of the third swing she leans far forward. She thinks — bless her little heart! — that I'm down there in the pit and she wants to see what I look like. The next time she leans far back, trying to see over her shoulder. Then far forward again. Then she tries to wave. And on the next swing she tries to blow the bass viol kisses with both hands. That's when it happens: she takes a pretty header.

I see Herman leap forward, spilling over a couple of first violins.

She falls into his arms and they both go down with a crash.

I try to get to them in the pit. Then I try to get to them at the stage door as they are being packed away in the big town car that belongs to Vincent, the producer.

"I got to see her!" I tell the cop who holds me back. "I'm the bass viol player in the orchestra."

"Oh yeah?" says the cop. "The bass viol player is in the car with her, and he's got a lump on his head as big as an egg from saving her life."

"Where are they going?" I yell at him. "The producer's taking the little dame to his place on Long Island to recover from the shock." He chuckles as the car pulls away from the curb. "Look at her snuggle up to that guy in there!" he says. "And him just a bass viol player."

"Now and then you meet a girl who don't mind," I tell him sadly.

And this kid don't, I guess. Vincent stakes them to a Bermuda honeymoon. I read about it in the paper, and I go out to find an oboe player to room with. Him and me can go nuts together.

The End