

Ballad: Gentle Alice Brown

In the humorous ballad "Gentle Alice Brown" from **The Bab Ballads**, we follow the tale of Alice Brown, the daughter of a feared robber in a small Italian town. Unlike the grim nature of her family's profession, Alice's tale takes a whimsical turn when she finds herself enamored with a handsome young gentleman she spies from her window, a sorter in the Custom-house, who innocently passes by her home each day. Despite the initial innocence of her crush, the narrative unfurls Alice's confessions to the village priest about her involvement in a series of shockingly mischievous deeds, ranging from theft and forgery to more alarming crimes, all presented with a light-hearted, satirical tone.

The priest, rather than admonishing her severely, takes a lenient view, humorously quantifying her sins in monetary terms, highlighting the satirical critique of ecclesiastical pardon practices at the time. Alice, expressing gratitude for the priest's affordable absolution rates, reveals yet another 'sin'—her flirtatious interactions with the handsome sorter, which leads to a comically exaggerated sense of moral outrage from Father Paul, who then relays this distressing love interest to Alice's father, emphasizing the potential loss of a criminal livelihood for the family and, humorously, the priest himself.

Robber Brown's reaction to his daughter's infatuation is as outlandish as the rest of the story. He decides to confront the sorter in a bizarre mix of paternal protectiveness and professional criminality, planning to terrify him into submission and then dispatch him in a manner so grotesque that it's meant to deter any remaining affection Alice might hold. The narrative closes on a dark yet absurd note as Mrs. Brown, Alice's mother, takes a direct hand in resolving the situation in an over-the-top conclusion that solidifies the ballad's critique of societal, familial, and moral expectations through exaggerated dark humor and whimsy. The ballad skillfully navigates between satirizing

the seriousness with which society regards crimes of high and low morals while indulging in the melodramatic to elicit both reflection and laughter.

