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THE LOVE STORY OF ALISON BARNARD

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

(Author of "The Handsome Brando," etc.)

"She doesn't get out of it much before ten o'clock, but she goes, and then Pincher slinks in, and I give him a bit of food, and we go to bed. Only Poll's here at six in the morning, and all the children at her heels."

"She must not come to-morrow morning." The old woman looked at her with an expression made up of hope and fear on her face.

"I daren't do it, Miss," she said in a whisper. "She'd screech and clap and drive me out of my mind, so she would. You see she thinks she's doing the world and all, the poor creature."

"Is there anyone you would like in her place?" For an instant varying expressions chased each other over the nearly blind face. Then something of illumination came.

"There's one, Judy McCann Gillian. She lives in the very last house in the village. She's a red-headed northern woman, real clean and contriving, not like poor Poll that manages everybody out of their senses. Poll's hair only makes for being sandy, and the managin' is gone wrong in her. I think she'd be afraid of her life of Judy. Judy's a terribly quiet, civil-spoken woman, but has the name of a temper. I've never seen it myself."

"I'll see if Judy can't be here before six to-morrow morning. Then she can send Mrs. Murphy about her business. Perhaps you'd like Judy to stay with you for a little while till you were sure that Poll wouldn't come back. Afterwards she could just come and see to you of mornings."

"I wouldn't know Judy was in the house. She's an awful soft-spoken woman. I'd like her for a while, and till Poll was off it. Then I'd just as soon be my lone, myself and Pincher. Do you know what it is, Miss Alison, love, to like the loneliness better than anyone else when you can't have the one you like for company?"

"I know it," said Alison softly. Mrs. Donegan peered at her from her dim eyes. "Ah now, and do you know it, avourneen? And I thought it 'twas yourself had all the world could give," she said in a whisper.

"Well, I'll see Mrs. McGwillan on my homeward way," said Alison, turning away from the delicate sympathy. Now would you like her to come to you to-night? Then you'd be sure she'd be here before Poll comes in the morning."

in at the open windows of Hazelhurst. Although London was barely thirty miles away, the country about Midhurst was inhabited by a number of old-fashioned aristocratic families, who were little affected by the nearness of London. The Duchess of Forest, the Lord of the Manor at Oakhurst, Lord and Lady Sellinger at Sellinger, the Misses Wharton at the Lodge, the Rev. and Honorable Percy Montrose at the Vicarage, Sir Andrew Oliphant at the Knoll; for these London had practically no existence.

It was somewhat remarkable that Mr. John and Mr. Peter Bosanquet should have found an entrance into this very exclusive set. There were a good many smart city men who had houses in the neighborhood, who were met every afternoon at the 8.15 down from London Bridge by very smart traps and very smart grooms, with high stepping horses that put to shame the old-fashioned equipages of the Duchess and Lord Sellinger.

The city men did not attain to even a nodding acquaintance with the great folk of the neighborhood, unless it might be Mr. Montrose, and he, as Vicar, was accessible to everyone, whatever his or her station. The city men lived at Midham, but for all they belonged to Midham life they might as well have been at the north pole.

The Duchess and Lady Sellinger and Lady Margaret Oliphant and the Misses Wharton were in and out of the picturesque cottages on Midham Green all hours of the day, and called everybody by their names, and knew how many teeth the babies had and how many the old men had to eat their food with, and how the daughters were doing in service, and all the rustic concerns.

The Duchess was in the first instance responsible for the introduction of the Bosanquets into her very exclusive circle. It happened that Mr. Peter intervened when a red-faced London cabman was being rowdy to the Duchess, who in her dowdy alpaca and bonnet that certainly needed renewing, had been as far as possible in the cabman's estimation from her exalted station.

Her Grace knew as well as any woman the value of a shilling, although she could be generous when she liked. She had paid the cabman such a fare as would have made him touch his hat to a man; with a woman of the helpless elderly sort, such as the Duchess looked, it suggested that a little disagreeableness might bring an addition to the sum.

"Allow me, your Grace," said Mr. Peter at the moment when the cabman's flow of eloquence had caused people to stop and grin at the entrance to Victoria Station. "If your Grace will walk on I will settle things with the man."

"I have given him half-a-crown from Portman Square," said the Duchess. "More than his fare," said Mr. Peter. "If you have anything to say say it to me, my good man—and one of the station-policemen. Your number, I think—ah, thank you—487600—is it a 6 or a 0?"

But the cabman overwhelmed indeed by the high-sounding title which he had heard conferred on his dowdy passenger, had sprung to his box and driven away with great rapidity. "Allow me," said Mr. Peter again, relieving the Duchess of an armful of small parcels.

seemed to find them easy to endure. He might have found Midham very dull without Lady Rose. As it was in these days of later summer they were pretty constantly together, yet their companionship was so much in all men's sight that it excited little comment.

Midham was too familiar with aristocracy to stand very much in awe of them. It would have been nothing incongruous in the mating of the descendant of a hundred earls with the son of an unpedigreed city merchant. However, it had hardly the liveliness to gossip about its betters as an Irish village would have done. So Paul played cricket a couple of times a week on the village green, while Lady Rose kept the score and afterwards dispensed tea in a little tent, there were times even when Lady Rose did not scorn to play rounders with the village maidens or to captain a scratch team of them against the Midham Eleven. They cycled and rode and fished, and walked insight of the village day after day.

But if the village did not take much notice, the Duchess knew perfectly well what she was about. In those early days in August she even expected the matter to her friend, Mr. Peter. The Duchess's pride was not on the surface, at least with her friends; but she was very proud. Indeed the alliances which she would have thought befitting her niece were so few that Lady Rose's marriage must be something of a mesalliance in her aunt's eyes.

"Your nephew and my niece seem on excellent terms," she said abruptly. Mr. Peter bowed his charming old head. "Your Grace honors the boy," he said, "by the confidence you have placed in him."

The Duchess smiled, broadly human and humorous. "That is all very fine, my good man," she said; "but I don't place too much confidence in young people. I have known all about it long ago if I believe in your politics. Indeed I pair should fall in love with each other."

Mr. Peter wondered what was coming. "Thank God, I'm not one to bow the knee to mammon. I've no patience with the new ways. But if they were to take a fancy to each other I should not oppose it."

She looked at Mr. Peter as though she expected him to be overbearing; then extended her hand to him like a queen to her subject; as the subject might, Mr. Peter stooped and kissed it. The Duchess was well-pleased. There was something about the Bosanquet manners which made an elderly, plain-faced woman feel young and beautiful; and even a duchess may be pardoned for feeling the sensation pleasant.

At the moment Lady Rose and Paul Bosanquet were leaning over the bridge which crosses a little ravine in the Forest wood, a ravine through which a stream flows that supplies the lake. Lady Rose had been making a confession which had cast a veil of softness over her somewhat pronounced beauty, giving it the touch of delicacy it needed.

"You see," she was saying, "she'd have known all about it long ago if I hadn't been for you. Indeed I believe at the back of her mind she does suspect it, and wants it to be you so that it may not be he. She's been so good to me all my life that I hate to keep her in the dark. But she would show Percy the door. What am I to do?"

"If she knew your heart was in it, it will have to go on because my heart is in it; but it will be a frightful blow to her. You can't imagine her frozen disgust when poor old Mr. Denham called on her. He's such an old dear and so pathetic, for he would give his son the moon and the stars if he could; but there is no denying that he plays havoc with his h's, and looks just what he is, a homely, plain, business man."

"Perhaps there need not be any talk of lifting," said his uncle, gently. "As I happen to know, the Duchess—"

"Please do not say any more, Uncle Peter. We have no right—"

"My son," said his father, even more gently than his uncle had spoken. "Lady Rose has been permitted to be a great deal in your company. You must have known how people would regard your intimacy. We do not desire to pry into your secrets, but we must think of that very charming young lady."

"Why so I do think of her," said Paul. "As a matter of fact I am in her confidence. You will understand father, and my uncle Peter will understand that so much is said in confidence. Lady Rose and I perfectly understand each other."

For a moment the two old men looked blankly into each other's eyes. "Are we to understand—?" began Mr. Peter Bosanquet. "Please don't, Uncle Peter. I am not at liberty to let you understand anything. Only—I believe the Duchess is to pay us a visit at Dalmain on her way to Tillygowrie Castle."

"She is to honor us so far?" "Then ask old Denham of the Towers as one of her fellow-guests. Make her feel that he is a person you hold in honor."

"Why so he is," said Mr. John Bosanquet. "So does everyone who knows anything of his record," added Mr. Peter. "He has a son in the—The Lancers," went on Paul in a colorless voice. "A splendid fellow I believe. Lady Rose used to meet him occasionally visiting about the country till the Duchess discovered it, and forbade the friendship."

"Ah!" The two old men looked at each other. "You—do not mind?" asked Mr. Peter, with averted eyes. "I!" Paul's color and laughter were enough of answer. "I—left my heart in Ireland. I have been meaning to tell you. I have said nothing to her. I could not tell I had told you first. Had ever any man such a pater and such an uncle? She is—"

He paused, and they looked at him silent with expectation. "Miss Barnard. She lives at Castle Barnard, the nearest great house to Kilynoc."

"Castle Barnard!" "Something in the two voices started him. "She is everything that is beautiful and desirable," he began, as though his love were menaced. "We know, we know," cried father and uncle together. When he had left them they looked in each other's eyes. "The finger of the Lord, brother," said one. "The finger of the Lord, brother," replied the other.

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