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THE LOVE STORY OF ALISON BARNARD

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

(Author of "The Handsome Branded," &c.)

CHAPTER XVII. The Clue.

Ballycushla starts from either side the river and climbs two steep hills out of its valley. In its growth it has acquired certain venerable patches not really belonging to it, which give some of its outlying suburban roads a factitious age as well as a factitious beauty. It has in fact made its own of some old country-houses in their gardens, whose dead-and-gone owners would have shuddered at the unbelievable thought that they could one day be a portion of that objectionable, dissenting, noisy, pushing little Scotch town whose slated roofs they could see from their windows.

"Good morning, my child. You wished to see me. What is there that I can do for you?"

there might be a frame of mind in which a call to the Carmelites might not be too hard. But Sister Veronica stood up, and Alison followed to the open air.

"The kitchen garden," asked Alison. "The convent cemetery," Sister Veronica replied. "Won't you step into it? It is a cheerful place. It is nice to know that one will end just there."

She held open the gate, and Alison passed through. The afternoon was beginning to close in and the day had been sunless. The little enclosure was clean and neat, with tidy paths, and grass that had not been allowed to grow over long.

"I wish it would shed all the leaves at once," said the Sister, shaking her head. "It keeps the graves so untidy."

The little mounds were marked each by a plain iron cross sunk in the earth bearing only initials, a date, and "Requiescat in Pace."

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CHAPTER XVIII. Sympathy. Again the voice at the grille. "You have enjoyed your coffee, I hope," it said.

"It was delicious, Reverend Mother," Alison answered, recognizing suddenly that it had been.

"The butter was good. The rules of order do not permit us to eat butter, but it is made from the milk of our own cows by Sister Jane, who had a great reputation as a dairymaid when she was out in the world."

"And now about our business. I have spoken to one or two of the old nuns who have the traditions of the house in their keepings. They think we may teach the embroidery. It is not as if our convent flourishes. If there were postulants I might hesitate, but perhaps they will never come."

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"I should like it very much," Alison said. "I would send the Sister to you."

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