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THE LOVE STORY OF ALISON BARNARD

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

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

CHAPTER XIV. The New Neighbors.

The golden week was over. September had kept up its traditions, and smiled on them all the time. It was the very last evening of Sir Gerard's stay. All the week he had not once rejoiced Mrs. Maguire's heart by sitting to a meal of her contriving, except only the breakfasts; and he complained laughingly that she served him with such breakfasts as he had never known except on a Transatlantic steamer, by way of making up for the other opportunities denied her.

Even during that week it must be confessed that a good deal of Sir Gerard's talk ran on his work. Alison was an adorable listener. Tessa was no more in the way than a kitten. This evening she sat with her drawn as usual at the piano, playing over to herself a berceuse which no more disturbed the other two persons in the room than the song of the thrush outside.

"When shall we have a week like this again?" Alison asked. She was looking very beautiful in her gown of thick white silk with its train of white velvet from the shoulder. A collar of rubies was like a trail of fire about her neck. He had upbraided her many times during the week that her splendour put his unmanly roughness of attire to shame. She had answered, smiling and wistful, that she must do her best to do honor to this one week. As she stood upon the hearth, her head flung back a little so that he could see the golden reflection of it in the glass behind, her dog, the great, rough greyhound, Bran, came and thrust a slender muzzle into her hand. She was like her picture painted more than half a dozen years ago, the years had but added to the sweetness of her beauty. She had a thought that she would be beautiful even if she lived to be very old. Noble thoughts and aspirations, kindness and self-forgetfulness had gone to the making of such beauty.

"When?" he repeated sadly. "I confess I see no prospect of it. When my work succeeds, Alison, or when it fails."

"It will not fail," she said in a startled way.

"I do not think it will. Yet if it should it would be but history repeating itself. The history of Ireland is a history of the rise and fall of movements. I should but follow greater names than remem never fails, and if my hands let the work done someone else's more capable would take it up."

With an impulse of tenderness she caught at his hands, and held them between her own, soft as silk.

"They will never let it drop, not so long as there is life in them," she said.

"I don't think they will," he answered.

"It is not like you to be despondent. I do not remember that you have ever been despondent before. You remember five years ago when you began, and for a whole year you would listen to you? Do you remember how you were right through your speeches, while the crowd shouted so that not one word of what you said could be heard?"

"I remember. A bit of the bulldog went to the making of me. I have found it uncommonly useful."

"Yet you can talk about failure, now that you have the ball at your feet, now that they know their friend and his power to help them?"

"In six months they will be blessing my name. In six months they may perhaps be cursing it. Mr. Carfax is prepared to go further than the most sanguine of us dared to hope. The question is whether they will stand it on the other side. If the Government should be defeated—"

"They would only have to wait till a friendly government was in again."

"They would have the cup of hope dashed from their lips. In the moment of their disappointment it would be natural for them to believe that they had been cheated and betrayed."

"By you!"

"I should but share the fate of better men."

The evening was far advanced when he left them. Unlike his usual quick, decisive self he lingered on irresolutely as though he could not bring himself to go.

"I am like the schoolboy," he said, "who has come to the end of his holidays. Now I come to think of it it has been my first holiday since I came to manhood."

At last he was gone. When the door had closed behind him Tessa came out from behind a window curtain to which she had retired when her berceuse was finished. So soft had been the playing, so soft the cessation, that Alison had not noticed when the music ceased, and the little figure left the piano.

She came to Alison's side, and put an arm about her.

"I have been on the terrace," she said. "It is a beautiful night. Tomorrow will be a beautiful day. Come and see."

They went out together by the window pulled up to half its height. The grassy lawn was white as snow in the moonlight. A great white moon rode high in heaven. The tree shadows were black as blackest velvet. The Rance was a stretch of white silk where it was free from the overhanging boughs. The air breathed softly. The night was very still.

"As they stood there came up to them from the avenue the thud of a horse's gallop as he carried away the guest of the evening."

"It will be a beautiful day tomorrow," said Tessa softly.

Across the park they could see the woods of Kynlinoe. A star against the turret like a star against the milky moonlight sky. The light was set there against the master's return. In the morning the new tenants were to arrive. He would stay to welcome them—no more. A train at noonday would carry him back to the world and his work. For a week longer Paul Bosanquet was to enjoy his holiday, making the strange place less strange to his father and uncle.

Alison had an intuition of what it was that gave the little note of rapture to Tessa's voice.

"Beautiful days go," she said, "and beautiful days succeed them. If it is not beautiful for one it is beautiful for another. We have a week of September left, and September is the most beautiful month of the year in Ireland."

"I might be a woman in love," she said to herself, half in mockery and half in earnest, "and I understood Tessa's fear lest any disposition of their afternoon should be made which should take them away from home. Only a lesser fear, that of discovery, prompted her to suggest some impossible expeditions, and to give a reason for not undertaking others. It was the day of the week she usually visited Ballycushla, but then her mother and sisters were going out of the town to Donard, the seaside place mainly visited by Ballycushlaites. And again she might have gone to see Mrs. Lang; but that afternoon the lady was to have her first drive after her illness."

"Never mind, Tessa," Alison said, when she had suggested half a dozen things that might be done and the reason for not doing them. "I dare say we shall do very well at home. I have a good many things to attend to after our week of picnicking. Stopping we stay on the lawn! I have to go into the estimates for the new cottages which are to replace those old uninhabitable ones at Laraghmore. We can have our tea there and be very happy."

She was not surprised when about half-past four o'clock she saw Paul Bosanquet with two elderly gentlemen cross the lawn to where she and Tessa were sitting.

She stood up and came to meet them with an air of graciousness. She was very fond of Paul Bosanquet, who had the manner towards herself which appeals to women, as though she were a goddess and nothing mortal. And from Sir Gerard's report of the Bosanquet brothers she felt she loved these two elderly gentlemen already.

The boy made the introductions with the air of exquisite deference to herself which always suggested foreign blood to her; it is not a characteristic of insular manners, however good.

"I am very pleased to welcome you," she said warmly, "and so much obliged to Mr. Paul Bosanquet for bringing you to see us so soon. I hope that you had a pleasant journey, and that you are comfortably established at Kynlinoe."

Over the two kind brown old faces passed the oddest quiver of emotion. For a moment the two pairs of serene, bright old eyes were clouded as by memories. Alison was startled. What had she said? What had she done?—to excite that emotion.

In a flash of time it was gone, and she was not certain that it had ever existed.

"My dear young lady!" said one. "My dear young lady!" echoed the other, as they bent above her hands. "We have heard from our boy—"

Brother John gave up the attempt to speak, and brother Peter spoke for both. The "boy" had left them, and gone on to where Tessa sat, an image of shyness, in the shade of the golden chestnut.

"We are so glad to see you and Castle Barnard. Our boy has made warm friendships here, none stronger or warmer than his admiring friendship for Miss Barnard. It is really a privilege for us to see you at last."

"It is a privilege for me," said Alison. They were charming old men, and her heart went out to them. Why even Sir Gerard had not prepared her for their sweet gracious old faces and manners. She had always bestow her liking royally like a queen, whenever she felt it; and had not been deterred as lesser persons might have been by ordinary considerations of timidity. They were old men, and she was a young woman. She could use the privileges of youth towards age, of her compassionate beautiful youth to their charming age.

"I am so glad you are at Kynlinoe," she said. "It will be a privilege to have you as neighbors. And I mind there are few people I should like to see at Kynlinoe in the place of Sir Gerard Molyneux and Mr. Bosanquet. We shall hope to see so much of you at Castle Barnard, and I trust you will permit me to do the honors of the county towards you so far as I may. And now as a preliminary may I give you some tea?"

A footman at this moment was setting a teatable in front of where Tessa and young Bosanquet were sitting. She turned and walked between the two old men who looked at each other across her golden head with their thoughts in their eyes. Admiration, pleasure, relief from some sort of doubt, congratulation, were in their expressive glances.

"And the child?" said Mr. John, as they were coming up to the chestnut tree. "Your little sister? I adore little girls."

"My young cousin," said Alison, introducing Tessa.

Now it was characteristic of Tessa that though she had obviously looked forward to the visit, she got up at the very first moment she possibly could and glided away towards the house. Paul Bosanquet's half-movement to follow her did not escape Alison.

"My little cousin is shy," she said explanatorily to the two old men. "I always think it best to let her go, when her shyness is overpowering as I think it is at this moment. Presently she will get over it and come back."

"She will not be afraid of us long; pretty creature," said Mr. John; while Mr. Peter murmured something about shyness becoming a girl-child.

However, Tessa did not return; and when tea was over Mr. Paul Bosanquet, who had been biting the end of his little moustache in a dissatisfied way, suggested that he should go and look for her.

"I think you will find her not so far off," said Alison. "Perhaps in the morning-room. I dare say she would find it difficult to return under all our eyes. I am going to show your father and uncle the picture-gallery; bring her there to us."

The young man sped off like a hound released from the leash. "He loves to do your bidding," said Mr. Peter in an absent-minded way. "He will not be long away," said the father in the same tone.

They returned to the house, and ascended the broad flight of stairs that led to the picture-gallery with its many treasures. Paul Bosanquet had mentioned to Alison that his father and uncle had a taste and some knowledge of pictures, and had begun to form a collection. There were not so many Barnards in the picture gallery. Indeed the family portraits did not begin further back than the early part of the eighteenth century; but they were unimportant compared with the collection which Anthony Barnard's taste and judgment had gathered together.

"My father was very proud of this," said Alison, stopping before a Raeburn. "To her surprise the two old men had moved on without her. They hardly glanced at the Raeburn. The Meissonier, the Millet, the Gorot, shared the same fate."

"And this," said Mr. John, stopping before the picture of the French wife, and pointing a finger at it—"Who is this, Miss Barnard?"

Allison noted with surprise that his hand trembled. He placed it over his eyes as though he got a better view, and peered at the picture from under it. Mr. Peter had gone nearer, and was putting on his spectacles.

"It is my grandfather's first wife," said Alison. "She was a French lady—"

Down went Mr. Peter's glasses with a crash and were split into innumerable fine fragments. Alison stooped to pick them up with an exclamation of concern, but he extended his hand for his brother's glasses.

"Please, for a moment, John," he said. "I want to see the picture. Ah, what a sweet creature! And that—that is your grandfather, my dear?"

There was something tense in the moment. What it was Alison could not explain. She began to think the brothers Bosanquet a little strange. Was it the collector in them that struck them dumb before the portraits of Robert Barnard and the French Wife? Yet they had scarcely glanced at the gem of the collection.

"That is your grandfather," went on Mr. Peter. "And he was married twice; and that sweet lovely creature was his first wife."

Was it possible that he trembled? There was something that for a moment impelled Alison to tell the story of the French Wife, the story which everyone knew, yet of which she had spoken only with her father and Sir Gerard Molyneux, the story which was never long absent from her thoughts. Then she remembered with a half smile at the remembrance how Mrs. Quinn, the housekeeper, would rebuke the curiosity of the stranger respecting the French Wife with stony silence. To think that she had been about to break through her life-long habit of reticence to those two old men, strangers in reality, although she felt towards them so kindly.

Then Tessa came in and things resumed their ordinary course. Mr. Paul Bosanquet had not been successful in his search apparently, for she came in without him. Alison was obliged to smile as she came towards them over the long stretch of shining dark floor. Tessa had put on a hat, a big, pink-lined, daisy wreathed sunhat, under which she could retire from eyes that embarrassed her as into a fortress. Alison had seen that hat in play before, when the most diligent observer could discover nothing of Tessa beneath its shadow except a round white chin.

"I have been looking for you in the garden," said Tessa, in a small, sweet voice.

"And you have discovered us," said Alison, taking her hand, and holding it.

But it was not until they had left the picture gallery behind and returned to the garden that the two old men became quite their cheerful, thoughtful, polite selves again.

CHAPTER XV. The Returned Emigrant.

A few days later Alison remembered Mrs. Donegan with some remorse and wondered how things were going with her. She wondered if Mrs. McQuillan, the silent woman, had been able to rout the "industrious" woman, Mrs. Murphy, and her troop of quiet children. Even during her work she had not altogether forgotten Mrs. Donegan. Sir Gerard had written to the friends in New York, to whom he had given Mrs. Donegan in charge. It would be some time yet before the answer could come. Meanwhile it was more than possible that Kitty had written.

She went up alone to the Glen. In the evening she expected the new arrivals at Kynlinoe to dinner. Tessa had the arrangement of the flowers for the dinner table to see to; it was one of the innumerable small tasks of which she had relieved Alison. She had gone off with a basket and scissors to carry out a design in briar leaves, the thought of which was making her eyes absent as she stood on the steps to see Alison ride away.

"I'm afraid I shall not keep Tessa for very long," Alison said to herself as she rode down the avenue. "Then my loneliness will have only just begun."

She remembered the time when she had not been lonely, when Castle Barnard and its affairs, and the dogs and the horses, and the people round about her had sufficed to fill her mind to the exclusion of loneliness. Indeed the feeling of loneliness had been a thing of slow growth; but it had been there before Tessa came, nor had the child quite banished it. She wondered how she was going to endure the many hours she would be alone when Tessa had left her.

She remembered then the loneliness of the nearly-blind woman at the little cottage in the Glen, and how she had sighed after the desirability of her loneliness when it had been taken from her. To sit in a clean house, with only the old dog for company, and his trouble the same as hers; to know by the brightness beyond the shadow of her eyes, when the sunlight crept up the wall in front of her; to hear no sound but the chirp of the birds, the ticking of the clock, the sighing of the dog while he was awake, his deep breathing when he was asleep; these things and the privilege of her thoughts had appeared enough for the nerve-tortured



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