

THE LOVE STORY OF ALISON BARNARD

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

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

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

When Tessa came back in her stealing, gliding way she found Bosanquet on the lawn which he had reached by opening one of the windows. She had put on a big honey-colored straw with blue ribbons that tied under her chin. Over the brim of the hat pink roses nodded against the bronze hair. It was such a contrast as grieved her mother and sisters, who thought Tessa lacking in taste, and knew no better than to call her hair red; but young Bosanquet's eyes showed another feeling. They found a boat that suited their purpose excellently, and having given Tessa the tiller ropes, and taken the oars himself, he sent the boat away from Castle Barnard with a few steady strokes.

For a little while the river ran darkly under overhanging boughs. Presently they were almost clear of the trees and their way was among meadows. Again they passed the gable of a ruined church and a little graveyard; the lawn of a house sloped down to the river, and there was the figure of old Mrs. Tyrrell with a basket on her arm, nipping off her overgrown roses.

The Rance is a tributary of the Dan which flows through Ballycushia, and has locks and weirs all in manner of fine contrivances. Hardly anyone uses the Rance except those who live on its banks, so that except for a clear way in the middle it is much choked by water weeds of all kinds, and the debris of the woods that line it. This morning they had the Rance to themselves.

Presently, after a hot, unsheltered stretch, they ran the boat under the shade of trees, and Bosanquet, asked if he might smoke, and leaning back in the shade of the boughs he watched Tessa through a dreamy haze of blue smoke.

They began to talk, fitfully and intermittently, while the wood-cock moaned in the woods, the cuckoo called, and Tessa sat dabbling her little brown fingers in the water. It was a morning for poetry and it was not long before the young fellow fell to murmuring verses. Tessa looked at him with parted lips that forgot to be shy.

Her eyes were like the wave within, Like water-reeds the poise Of her small body, dainty-thin, And like the water's noise Her plaintive voice.

"What is it?" she breathed rapturously. "It is Rossetti—'The Staff and Scrip'—don't you remember?" "I have barely heard of Rossetti," she said sorrowfully. "I love poetry very much, but mamma does not approve of it. I have only Moore and Mrs. Hemans, and Longfellow and Pope, and some little books of Frances Ridley Havergal's, and Chambers' Encyclopaedia of English Literature."

"Not really?" he said in amazement, and then added, forgetting his manners—"What a scratch lot to be sure!" Tessa blushed as though he had hurt her, and a sudden rush of tears filled her eyes.

"They aren't like Rossetti," she said humbly, "but I like some of them very much—especially Longfellow. And the Encyclopaedia gives some beautiful things."

"Of course it does," he said hastily, anathematising himself for his brutality as he called it. "I'm afraid I've hurt you, and I'm so sorry."

Somehow he got possession of her hand. Somehow he kissed it. Then with the air of one who put temptation away from him he laid it back reverently on her knee. He stole one look at her face; then he gave her a distraction, and time to recover herself.

"I am going to say the whole of that poem to you," he said. "I can say reams of Rossetti by heart."

He began in a simple musical voice, with a manner quite free from affectation, to recite the ballad. The color ebbed and flowed in Tessa's cheek. Her eyes began to shine. She lifted her face and gazed up through the green-gold branches, and her expression became transformed and spiritual, so that the youth's mind wandered from the poem, and he was obliged to look away from her.

The first of all that rout was sound. The next was dust and flame, And then the horsemen shook the ground. And in the midst of them A still band came.

"Uncover ye his face, she said, O changed in little space! She said: O white that was so red! O God, O God of grace! Cover his face!"

Tessa was looking at him with parted lips and eyes of wonder. When he had finished she put a hand over her eyes, and sat silent for a minute or two.

"So that is poetry," she said at last, looking at him. "I wonder if one ever dares to try to write." "You have written?" he said. "I tried to write, and mamma was angry. I shall burn all the things, though I used to like them."

"You will let me see them?" he asked. "Oh, no!" "Ah, yes. I have tried to write myself, and I know all the tricks of it. I have the grace to be humble about it. Anything you showed me would be a subject for the greatest reverence."

as "a nice play boy." He was talking to a friend, and had not noticed the priest. "He'll let his seat slip from under him, so he will. His supporters are terribly discouraged. If he wins we won't have the heart to chair him. I never seen such an election, never. Glory go to the time Kelly hate Tweedy for the Cratloe Division of Clare. The stories we put out on Tweedy, and the placards and the speeches, and the personations, and the way we weited the faces of everyone that as much as shouted: 'Hurroo for Tweedy'; and the way they bate the faces of us! 'Tis as true as I'm tellin' you that we'd only one eye between five of us to read the papers with after we put Kelly in."

The priest smiled faintly. The result was too much in suspense for him to enjoy this reminiscence as he might otherwise have done. "The personation and the intimidation and the trating!" went on the lugubrious voice at his elbow. "That was an election if you like. Sorra bit of me 'ud be surprised if this was to be declared invalid, for it's like no election that I ever seen."

At this moment the popular candidate came into the room. He was smoking a cigarette, and the usual extreme neatness of his attire had undergone no change. He greeted his supporters and then sitting down by the centre table began to partly fill up a number of telegraph forms which were to be sent out as soon as the result was declared. He apparently had no doubts, for the telegrams ran—"In by a majority of," with a blank space for the numbers. Presently the priest came behind him, and Sir Gerard, still writing, handed him one of the uncompleted telegrams.

Father Tracey's face lit up. He went over to Barney, who was standing dispiritedly by the window, and put the telegraph-form into his hand. Brady took it, read it, looked over at the quiet dark bent above the blotting-pad and pile of forms, and slapped his knee.

"Begorra, he's great!" he said in a hoarse whisper. "They couldn't bate the likes of him, no matter how many chances he gave them. And sure, look here, your Reverence—'Elimination coming over his face'—'He gives them chances because he's so sure of bating them; begorra, he's no such fool at all, at all.'"

It was quite evening when the result of the poll was declared from the windows of the Court House. The candidates were at the Sheriff's elbow; the street was full of a swaying mass of their admirers. The blue sky was between the high old house, spangled by yellow gas-lamps, and the light of which fell on the eager, up-turned faces.

At the moment of the declaration the windows of the Molyneux Arms, of the poll Sir Gerard looked towards the old-fashioned hotel just opposite the Court House, and lifted his hat ever so slightly. Anyone who noticed and was curious enough to follow the direction of his glance would have seen nothing but the dark front of the hotel. A moment later, John the waiter, who was always deploring the changed state of things in the country, being a trusted Conservative, lit the chandelier in the drawing-room of the Arms, as the hotel was abbreviated by the townspeople, and there were two ladies standing at the window.

The ladies were Alison and Tessa Barnard. They had been seen at the window at various moments during the day. When the canvassing was all done, and the driving about from one polling-station to another, and the last day of all had come with only the counting of the votes, Alison had confessed, with a little laugh at her own folly, that she could not wait for the result at home. So she and Tessa had driven over and lunched at the hotel, and got through the afternoon somehow or other, with now Sir Gerard himself, again Mr. Bosanquet and Father Tracey, or young Maurice Tyrrell, or some other of Sir Gerard's supporters to bring them word of how things were going.

Alison had turned round for a second to smile at John's lamentations. "Sure why should he be taking up with the like of them at all? He kept asking as he lit the chandelier, and set all its diamonds sparkling. 'Why isn't he True Blue like them that went before him? Sorra thanks he'll get when he's done. I never knew any good to come of the gentry taking up with the commonalty. God be with the time they'd step in the road if they seen quality on the side-path. An' ud get a cut of a whip if they didn't, and was well used to it. Sure, I'm like a poor old ghost in these quiet times that is coming over the country, and never a one in the house except maybe a commercial, and the ball room shut up the year round.'"

"A little less light, John," pleaded Alison. "We can't see what is happening outside."

The lights were immediately switched low, and John came to the window and looked out. "Look at him paying compliments to Lindsey," he groaned. "A man that made his money in a shop. Isn't he the quare Molyneux, Miss Barnard?"

"And yet you voted for him, John."

"Ay, did I, even though he scandalises me, and well he should. 'Tis doing a bit of good for the gentry he ought to be. What good is the people ever going to do to the Arms? A lot o' dirty commercials shouting for their boots and ordering a chop and a glass of stout with the finest wine lying below in the cellar?"

"What are they going to do, Cousin Alison?" asked Tessa, as John went off with his tablecloth over his arm, his lamentations dying away in the distance. "They are all around Sir Gerard."

"I'm afraid they are going to chair him," said Alison. "How he will hate it!"

In a second or two they saw Sir Gerard hoisted on the shoulders of the crowd. "It is a position in which it is well nigh impossible to look dignified, but Sir Gerard achieved the almost impossible. He cast a glance towards the hotel windows as he was carried past by the shouting crowd, and Alison knew that if she could read the expression it would be a humorous and appealing one.

Afterwards there were shouts for a speech, and Sir Gerard responded with a few words, and with a look that delighted the crowd. It delighted someone else, too, for the cousins, having drawn the heavy curtains behind them, so that the light of the chandeliers should not make them visible to the street, had stepped out into the balcony, and were listening with all their might.

"Isn't he splendid, Cousin Alison?" whispered Tessa, when something he said had caused the crowd to break into roars of joy.

Yes, he was splendid. Alison's heart swelled within her to think that he was her friend, and that she lay nearest to his regard of all the women in the world.

It had been quite late when at last he broke away from his admirers and joined the two ladies at the hotel. Paul Bosanquet and the priest came in with him, and Maurice Tyrrell and one of the workers in the cause, a young man bearded like the pard, with deep benign eyes looking from under a shock of hair, of whom Alison had heard as Mr. Grace. Sir Gerard had come to her as though they two were alone.

"Congratulations me, Alison!" he said. "You are pleased?" Her face of delight assured him. After she had spoken to the others, she rang the bell and John appeared. "We are quite ready now, John," she said.

"I never thought about a meal," Sir Gerard confessed. "It was like you to have ordered it. Now that I do think about it I confess I am uncommonly hungry." "I wonder when you had a meal," Alison said, gentle reproachful. "I tried to get hold of you at lunch-time, but you were gone off on that quixotic hunt after the Larcy ballot-boxes."



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