

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
CHRISTIAN REID.

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Continued.)

Mr. Proctor sits in his saddle as if transfixed—as he certainly is by amazement—until roused to action by the closing adjuration. Then he springs to the ground as quickly as if he had been shot himself.

"Good Heavens, Miss Kate!" he says, "is it you? I had no idea—"

and starts towards Lightfoot, who stands a few steps off. "Would it not be better to take him in the boat? We should lose less time."

"Of course it would be better," he answers quickly. "I forgot that you had the boat here. Where is it?"

"A few yards lower down. Break a direct path from here where he lies to the river, and I will bring the boat just there."

mailed knight could have felt a purer chivalry of sentiment than is his at this moment toward the woman he has loved and failed to win. "Poor girl! poor girl!" he says to himself, and then aloud he says:

"That will do now, I think. With your assistance I can bring him to the boat, and then—"

He pauses, and she says: "Then what? I can row to Fairfields, while you ride there and have everything made ready."

"I am thinking that perhaps it would be better the other way," he says, hesitatingly. "Nearly two miles against the current will be very hard on you, while Lightfoot will carry you swiftly to Fairfields, and you can have everything made ready."

"Oh, I cannot!—I cannot!—I must go with him!" she cries. "What does the current matter! I am strong, oh, very strong! Don't say I must not do it!"

Unconsciously she clasps her hands, and her passionate, pathetic face looks at him through the dusk with an entreaty which touches his heart to its depths.

"You shall do what you please—exactly what you please," he answers.

"But remember this—I am stronger than you, and I can, therefore, bring him within reach of help more quickly."

There is an instant's pause, but it is long enough for a sharp struggle with Kate. Then she says, "You are right—it is you who must take the boat. I will ride to Fairfields."

"You will be doing as much service in that way as in the other," says Mr. Proctor. "Now let us bring him and put him in the boat."

This they do together—bearing him as carefully as possible, and laying him down, with Kate's shawl as a pillow for his head. Night

has fallen by this time, but the young moon is shining above the western hills, and pours a flood of faint radiance over the scene. By this light, Kate takes her last look at Tarleton's unconscious face—a face which she will carry photographed on her memory for many a long day. Then stepping back, she says to Mr. Proctor, "Go!"

He hesitates for a moment. "But you?" he says. "I must see you mounted—do you think you can ride on my saddle?"

"Don't stop to think of me!" she answers. "I can mount alone, and, if there were need, I could ride without any saddle. Go!"

This time he goes—pushing out into the stream, and bending so vigorously on the oars, that the boat seems to fly through the water.

"O my God," she cries, in agony too deep for tears, "save him, spare him, and do what Thou wilt with me! I am willing never to look on his face again—I am willing to resign every hope of happiness that life may hold for me—or, if life may purchase life, I am willing to die in his stead—if Thou wilt only save him! All



But he takes her hand and kisses it.

that I am, or have, I pour out before Thee as a sacrifice, only beseeching Thee to save him, to save him, to save him!"

The last words—full of a passion which transcends description—have hardly passed her lips, when she falls forward on her face, as if the death which she invoked had come upon her. But she is not dead—neither has she lost consciousness. She hardly knows what is the sensation which has prostrated her—she is only aware that a great and terrible pain, like a violent contraction of the heart, is mingled with a faintness which only escapes insensibility by a strong effort of the will. As one who struggles with a mortal foe, she fights the physical weakness which threatens to overwhelm the dauntless soul—and, so fighting, conquers. Presently the pain ceases, the heart, with a strange sense of labor, resumes its action, the awful sickness passes, the black mist clears away from before her eyes—she lifts her head and sees the hills, the sky, the faint moonlight, and delicate shadows. She has not gone into that dark, mysterious land which we call unconsciousness—she is still here in the familiar world, with something yet to do for the man she loves.

That thought brings her to her feet, and she goes to where Lightfoot is quietly and contentedly cropping grass by the road-side. What are the tragedy of hate and the drama of love, just enacted, to him? God pardon and pity us, that we are so often driven, through sheer stress of misery, to envy the soulless brutes that live in calm serenity around us! He suffers Kate to take his bridle, lead him to a stone, and mount. She is too good a horsewoman to let the masculine saddle inconvenience her; and when she is seated, she gives him a stroke which starts him

on as fast a gallop as that which Tarleton followed on the morning of their first meeting.

As long as life and memory last, will she ever forget this ride! The spreading fields, the dark woods, the placid river—all fit past her like the features of some dream landscape. Her hat flies off, and is picked up by Rex, who follows at the top of his speed, carrying it in his mouth; her long, rich hair, shaken loose from all confinement, floats on the wind which her rapid motion creates, and so—a strange sight, indeed, were there any to see—she gallops on, faster and yet faster, until the gate of Fairfields is reached. A moment's pause to bend from the saddle and open it—then, at the same thundering pace, along the avenue to the door of the house. This, as usual, stands wide open, with



Her hat flies off and is picked up by Rex.

He breaks off abruptly, for, stooping down beside Tarleton, he sees, even in the dim light, that there is no time for words. With two energetic jerks he takes off his gloves, then throws open the coat, the vest, the blood-stained linen, until he comes to the wound—the first sight of which draws from him an exclamation of dismay, for he has been a soldier, and has seen men shot before. Putting one of his thumbs on the wound, he says, hurriedly:

"Give me your handkerchief. We must stop this bleeding at once. Fold it—fold it in two; now double it again; now give it here. Can you get my handkerchief out of my pocket? It is in the breast pocket on the left side—yes," as Kate, bending over him, puts her hand into the pocket indicated and draws forth a handkerchief. "Now double it for a bandage."

She is quick in obeying, and almost immediately has the bandage ready. Then Mr. Proctor, still holding with one hand the pad which he has placed over the wound, puts his other arm under Tarleton's shoulders and raises him slightly from the ground. It requires considerable muscular effort—for he is at the disadvantage of being on his knees, and has the use of only one arm for lifting—but he is a strong man, and has an able assistant. Kate comprehends what is to be done—and does it without the delay of a second; while Mr. Proctor, dull as he has proved himself in the character of a lover, displays in this emergency all the promptitude and energy of what he really is at bottom, a thoroughly sensible and kind-hearted man.

After the bandage has been tightly fastened around the wound, he looks at Kate and says:

"How did this occur? Who shot him?"

"I don't know," she answers. "I was on the river, rowing alone, when I heard the shot, and then I saw his horse dash by riderless, and then I heard the dog howl, and then I came and found him—so!"

"But when you came, did you see no one? Have you no idea who did it?"

"I did not look for any one," she replies. "I think I should hardly have seen any other person—even if he had been standing by him. That is, at first—afterward I looked for somebody because I needed help, but there was nobody to be seen then."

"It is very strange!" mutters Mr. Proctor. "However," he adds, "we are not so much concerned now about who shot him, as about what to do for him. It is fortunate I was delayed in Arlington, and was so late in passing along the road. I was not going to Fairfields, but to Woodlands, so I should not have passed here at all if your voice had not called me. It reached me just in time—barely in time."

"Thank God!" she says, more fervently than ever she uttered the words before. "If we can save him—if we can only save him! What are you going to do now?"

"I am afraid I shall have to leave you with him while I go for help. I am sorry, but it can't be avoided, and Fairfields is only two miles away. I'll return as soon as Lightfoot can carry me there and back at his best speed."

"Stop!" cries Kate, as he rises to his feet

She turns and darts away, as she speaks—disappearing through the close growth which borders the stream. Before Mr. Proctor has finished making the path she directed, he hears the quick dip of her oars in the water, and the next instant she has pushed the boat close to the shore and sprung out again. The young man, who is breaking willows and alders to right and left, looks at her with half-unconscious wonder as she comes and begins to assist him. His idea of women, in connection with such an emergency as this, is an idea of helplessness and distress. He could have imagined a girl sobbing or fainting over the wounded form of the man she loved, but he could never, until this moment, have imagined her working for his safety with almost the strength and five times the quickness of a man. In the light of

Kate's shawl as a pillow for his head. Night has fallen by this time, but the young moon is shining above the western hills, and pours a flood of faint radiance over the scene. By this light, Kate takes her last look at Tarleton's unconscious face—a face which she will carry photographed on her memory for many a long day. Then stepping back, she says to Mr. Proctor, "Go!"

He hesitates for a moment. "But you?" he says. "I must see you mounted—do you think you can ride on my saddle?"

"Don't stop to think of me!" she answers. "I can mount alone, and, if there were need, I could ride without any saddle. Go!"

This time he goes—pushing out into the stream, and bending so vigorously on the oars, that the boat seems to fly through the water.



A dark object comes in sight on the stream.

this revelation, he reads all the secrets of Kate's heart, and realizes with an absolute certainty how entirely she has set that heart on the man who lies so pitifully near death. The knowledge touches and lifts him out of himself completely. In the days of his somewhat clumsy wooing, Kate would have smiled if any one had ever called George Proctor "chivalric," but no

Kate turns, then, and, with Rex following her, goes back to the place where Tarleton was lying. For a minute she kneels again by the spot where his heart's blood was poured out on the ground, and lifts her clasped hands and anguished face to the sky, where the stars, like pitying angels' eyes, are shining down upon her.