

# "BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY  
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## CHAPTER I.

"She was not as pretty as women I know. And yet all your best, made of sunshine and snow. Drop to shade, melt to naught in the long-trodden ways. While she's still remembered on warm and cold days—  
My Kate."

"Her air had a meaning, her movements a grace; You turned from the fairest, to gaze on her face; And, when you had once seen her forehead and mouth, You saw as distinctly her soul and her truth—  
My Kate."

"See, Janet," a girl's sweet, gay voice cries, "a four-leaved clover!"

Lying at full length on the grassy bank, across which September sunshine is streaming goldenly, and over which green boughs are drooping lovingly, the speaker lifts one small hand, and holds triumphantly aloft a sprig of clover, bearing that rare and mystical number of leaves.

"So you have found it at last," Kate, says another girl, seated more sedately with her back against a tree. "I hope you are satisfied, and now we shall see what wonderful luck it is to bring."

"I shall be greatly disappointed if it does not bring the best possible luck," says Kate, rising to a sitting posture. "I have been searching for it so long that to find it at last, when I was not thinking of it in the least, must mean that some good fortune is about to befall me—don't you think so, Janet?"

"Of course," replies Janet, with a liberal infusion of irony in her voice. "How could one doubt it? But you'd better take care of it now that you have found it—if you lose it, I believe the spell is broken."

"I shall not lose it," says Kate confidently. "Here is 'Our Mutual Friend'—taking a very battered copy of that novel from the grass by her side—"for the present I shall put the talisman safely away between its pages. Let me see!—a Venus and Werg scene won't do as association for anything so magical—neither will the Robins, nor yet the Wilfers. Ah, here is the place, where Lizzie saves Eugene—that is romantic enough; so here you go!"

She places the sprig of clover between the pages, and looks with an air of satisfaction at her companion.

"What an absurd girl you are!" says the latter.

"How am I absurd?" asks Kate. "Because I am glad to have found a four-leaved clover!—or because I believe that it will bring me good-luck! If you don't believe it, you stand convicted of vulgar incredulity."

"But what good-luck do you want! As far as I can perceive, you seem to be exceedingly well satisfied with all the present conditions of your life."

"So I am," assents Kate, cheerfully. "On general principles we all want good-fortune if we can get it; but bringing the matter down to a particular point, I cannot think of anything that I desire. Indeed, I often feel that I am the luckiest girl in the world. I have had so many good friends, everybody has always been so kind to me, and, above all, I have a home like this without—without belonging to it."

"If you dare to say such a thing as that again I will throw this book at you!" cries Janet, indignantly. "Without belonging to it, indeed! You belong to it as much as I do."

"I know that I do—now," replies the other, quickly, "and that is why I am so grateful. I did not belong to it until you kind, good people took me in and made me one of you; and I can do nothing in return, and I don't suppose that to my dying day I ever shall be able to do anything, except love you, love you, love you!"

"We don't want anything else, Kate."

"I know you don't; and because I love you I am not troubled at my inability to give you anything else. It is a mean, calculating spirit that cannot rest under an obligation, I think. I like to feel how much I owe to you all—and I would not make it less if I could."

"You owe us nothing," says Janet. "If one could calculate debit and credit in a matter of this kind—which I don't think possible—I should say that you had repaid us tenfold in simply being what you are—our bonny Kate."

It is a name Kate Lawrence has often heard before—heard spoken with just this caressing accent—but, because Janet is usually more caustic than caressing, it touches her peculiarly now, bringing a soft light to her eyes, a quick quiver to her lips.

Never was name better bestowed, for she is truly a bonny creature—fair to look upon, and even more winsome than fair. It may readily be said that one has seen lovelier faces than hers, but seldom a face which pleases so well or so long. The grace of the delicate features, the ivory-like beauty of the soft brunette skin, the deer-like carriage of the small head, and the challenging lustre of the eyes—eyes of that peculiar hazel-gray which looks black under dark lashes, and dark as midnight are Kate's—have each and all a piquant charm; but the true spell of the countenance lies deeper. At the present time it is brimful of joyousness, and

radiant with bloom, but in the varying lights and shadows of the changeable eyes, possibilities of passionate feeling are lurking, and "the sweetest lips that ever were kissed" are full of tender suggestions. One has but to look at the girl to perceive that, in little or great affairs, she feels nothing, does nothing, by halves. Her whole heart is in her candid glance and her loyal hand. She does not know—it is not likely that she will ever learn—how much wiser, according to the wisdom of the world, are those who make prudent compromises with life, who give all things cautiously, and run no risk without counting its cost. She will never count the cost of anything, but will give freely all that is hers to bestow, keeping back no secret hoard for any dark hour that may be to come. After all, such natures, though born to keen suffering, have for this suffering a compensation. It is given to them—once or twice in life, at least—to taste the full measure of that supreme happiness which is never divorced from the capability of supreme generosity, to possess for one divine hour some joy which the cautious and selfish could never know.

As yet Kate Lawrence, portionless orphan though she is, has had little experience of anything save the sunshine of existence. The last four years of her life—she is now eighteen—have been passed in one of the pleasantest of the old-fashioned Southern country-houses which still cover the fair land that stretches from Maryland to Texas. Fairfields has been the home of the Lawrences for several generations, and here, as to a spot where she had every right to be, Kate was introduced on the death of her father, a younger son of the house, and one of those men who, endowed with brilliant talents, make no other use of them than to win hearts and squander fortunes, yet who are often more liked in life and more regretted in death than infinitely better people. Allan Lawrence squandered successively two fortunes, and died leaving no provision whatever for his daughter. His wife had fortunately died soon after her marriage; so when Mr. Lawrence answered in person the message which told him that his brother was one of the victims of yellow fever during a season of epidemic in one of the gulf cities, he found only his grave and a slight girl of fourteen. By the direction of a brief will written by the dead man at the beginning of his illness, this child was left to the joint guardianship of himself and her grand-uncle on the maternal side.

"It is not just that you should be burdened by the undivided charge," Allan Lawrence had written. "Her mother's uncle should at least share the responsibility, and if he fulfills his duty by desiring to take her altogether, I beg that you will allow him to do so. He is unmarried, and she is his nearest relation and natural heir."

In view of these words, Mr. Lawrence could not fail to inform Mr. Ashton of the trust committed to him. In return for which information he received a curt letter in which Mr. Ashton informed him that he had absolutely refused to allow his nephew-in-law to impose on him during life, and he should certainly not allow him to do so after death.

"I endeavoured by every means in my power to prevent the marriage of my niece," he wrote, "and, when she persisted in opposing my wishes, I refused to take any further interest in her affairs. I must therefore decline absolutely to act as guardian or assume any control of the child she has left. And, by regarding this decision as final, you will greatly oblige me."

Needless to say that this was final, and the wail thus rejected on one side was received with double warmth on the other. Affectionate hearts opened wide to take her in, and she gave back their affection in full measure. Nor could she readily have found a brighter home than Fairfields. Surrounded by a large neighbourhood, and situated in the midst of a picturesque country, it still preserves its reputation as a headquarters of hospitality, though times have changed as much for the Lawrences as for most other members of the planting community of the South. The income from the broad fields of the plantation by no means keeps pace with the steadily increasing demands of the large family; and, as is frequently the case, the anxiety consequent upon this state of affairs falls most heavily on the feminine head of the household. Mr. Lawrence comes of an open-handed race, and though not a spendthrift, he is generous to a fault, and constitutionally averse to a consideration of economies.

His eldest son, Will, is usually spoken of as "his father's own son." He certainly possesses the frank Lawrence face, the stalwart Lawrence figure, the cordial good-fellowship and love of out-door life and sports which have always distinguished his name. There is a second son, however, who is altogether different. From his mother he has inherited certain dispositions which are not in accord with the Lawrence character. Chief of these is a decided taste for money-making, in consequence of which he was early sent to one of the seaboard cities and

placed in the business-house of a cousin of Mrs. Lawrence. Thence encouraging reports come of his capabilities, and he occasionally descends upon the family circle in the character of a condescending visitor. Next in order come two sisters, Sophy and Janet, aged respectively twenty and eighteen; while following them in close succession are several younger children, all of whom are blind adorers and devoted followers of their cousin Kate.

The latter breaks the short silence which has settled over the two girls since Janet's last speech, by saying:

"We won't grow sentimental, Janet dear; and, indeed, I cannot fancy you becoming so, bless your cynical heart! but I think you know that there is not anything, not anything on earth, I would not do to spare any one of you a moment's pain, or to show how dearly I love you. There cannot be anybody in the world with less power to benefit others than I have now; but I remember sometimes the fable of the mouse and the lion, and I think that perhaps the day may come when I can do something to show what is here."

With a graceful gesture she clasps her hands over her heart, and Janet thinks that there can be no sweeter face than the eloquent, mobile countenance as its glowing eyes meet her own.

"Love is enough," she says. "So long as you give us that, we will dispense with any wonderful benefit in proof of it; though, indeed, you may some day have it in your power to do anything you like for us. I often think that you are intended for some brilliant destiny, if only—"

"If only what?" asks Kate, as she pauses.

"If only you don't let your heart make shipwreck of your life, as I am half afraid you will."

"Do you think so?" says Kate, wonderingly. "I don't think that there is the least danger of anything of the kind—nor the least hope, I may add, of a brilliant destiny, unless that is what the four-leaved clover means. Perhaps it will bring me a princely lover on a red-roan steed, like the lover little Ellie dreamed of in 'The Romance of the Swan's Nest.'"

"And, pray, what would you do with him if he came? I should think a lover on a bay steed—I believe that is the colour of George Proctor's horse—would be enough for you."

"Bah!" says Kate, flinging herself back on the grass. "I am tired of the bay steed, and his rider, too. He may 'ride, ride, forever ride' in any direction that he pleases, so that it is away from Fairfields."

"Kate," says her cousin, severely, "you are a very ungrateful girl."

"Not a bit of it," returns Kate, serenely. "It does not at all follow that I am ungrateful because I think George Proctor is a very foolish young man, or because I wish that he would go home, and stay there."

"He is trying to screw his courage to the point of asking you to go and stay there with him."

"Which," says the young lady, flushing to the roots of her hair, "is a very great absurdity and—impertinence on his part."

"It is you who are absurd when you talk like that. Has not a man a right to ask a woman to marry him?"

"Distinctly no—when a woman shows him that she does not care a straw for him, and would not marry him if he offered her the wealth of the world."

"You don't know what you might do for the wealth of the world; and furthermore, you don't by any means always show your lovers again that you entertain such stern sentiments—sometimes you are very gracious to him."

"That is when I am penitent after snubbing him severely," says Kate with a sigh. "One can't help feeling like a culprit when somebody cares for one a great deal more than one deserves, and all that one gives him in return is to be mean and cross. I know that, to make snubbing effective, one ought to be consistent in it—but I put it to you, Janet, how can one be?"

"Don't put it to me—I know nothing about such matters. Some people are born for one thing and some for another. I was born for practical purposes. One of these days a practical man—a widower probably, with nine children—will say to me, 'Miss Janet, will you be kind enough to come and attend to my household affairs, the preserving, pickling, darning, et cetera?' And I will reply, 'Yes, Mr. Jones, if you will agree not to interfere with me more than you can help.' So, papa will say, 'Do as you like, my dear,' and that will be my wooing."

"Sooner than face such a prospect, I—I would drown myself!" cries Kate, lifting up "Our Mutual Friend" and bringing it down on the ground with emphasis.

"Oh, you need not be afraid," says Janet. "It will not be your wooing. You are made for romance, passion, raptures, and agonies. I hope you will come out of it alive—that is all."

Kate laughs—a merry, ringing sound, which is not the least indicative of an early demise.

"What an original you are, Janet!" she says.

"But you make mistakes in your prophecies sometimes. There never was a girl less inclined to be romantic than I am. When people grow sentimental I always want to laugh—and generally do. Now, such a disposition is entirely incompatible with the raptures and agonies theory."

"We shall see," says Janet. "I have very good grounds for all my opinions, and I am sure—Why, yonder is Will! What can be bringing him here?"

## CHAPTER II.

"News, news, news, my gossiping friends! I have wonderful news to tell!"

A tall young man, in a gray suit and a straw hat, is coming across the grass as Kate rises again from a recumbent to a sitting attitude and looks round.

"Don't disturb yourself," he says, smiling, as he draws near. "I see you appreciate the Arab proverb that 'man is better sitting than standing, better lying down than sitting, better dead than lying down.'"

"I have not got so far as the last," says Kate, "but I do like to lie down—especially on the grass, when I can look up through green leaves at such a sky as that. Make yourself comfortable by doing likewise, Will, and then answer, sir, for an unjustifiable invasion of property. Janet and I wanted to drive over to Oakdale this afternoon, but when we sent for the phaeton we were informed that you had taken Modoc. Now, we might have let you had him if you had asked us, but, since you did not ask us, we were naturally very indignant."

"Sorry to have inconvenienced you and deferred anything so important as a journey to Oakdale," says Will, making himself comfortable as he was bidden to do, and apparently not at all disturbed by the indignation. "I should not have taken Modoc—for he is an abominable little beast under the saddle—if there had been another horse in the stable. But Harry needed shoeing, Diana is lame, and the hunting-party had all the rest. Therefore, since I was obliged to go to Arlington on business, I ordered him out. To make amends, you shall have a fox-chase in the morning, if you like. We are going to have a run near home."

"That will be beautiful!" cries the girl, with quickening eyes. "But how can I go if Diana is lame?"

"Oh, I dare say she'll be all right by to-morrow; it was because I wanted her to be all right that I would not ride her this afternoon."

"Will, you are—you are a brick!" says Kate. "That is your own favourite term of commendation, so I suppose it will flatter you more than anything else I could say. I forgive you entirely for taking Modoc, since you were sparing Diana to carry me on a chase."

"I will soothe you by taking you down to the river for a row presently," says Will. "By Jove! how I hated to miss the chase to-day! I am sure it was a good one."

"It has certainly been a long one. The huntmen are not yet back."

"That signifies nothing. They were going to dine at Wilmer's, and of course they will smoke and talk over the run for an hour or two after dinner, and then they have nine miles to ride."

"And, of course, Mr. Wilmer will return with them," says Kate. "How much he is in love with Sophy!—and, though Sophy is so demure, I think she likes him very well, indeed."

"Does she?" says Will, with that mild degree of interest which a man evinces in his sister's love affairs. "Wilmer is a capital fellow, and I bade him go ahead with my blessing some time ago. Sophy could not well do better."

"I am not sure of that," says Janet; but I suppose she might readily do worse, and so we must be resigned. I hate this thing of marrying and giving in marriage."

"You all seem to think so," says Will, "especially when it comes to the wedding dress and the wedding-cake."

"O woman, in our hours of ease, Uncertain, coy, and hard to please—"

There can be no doubt of the "hard to please" at any rate."

"Indeed, I think we should be very easily pleased, if some people pleased us," says Kate, with an air of graceful disdain.

Will laughs, and, lying back at ease on the warm, dry grass, looks with a blending of cousinly fondness and admiration at the winsome face.

"You are unaccountable creatures regarded in any light," he says, "but we could not well get on without you, and I'll not deny that you have some right to be hard to please, bonny Kate, the daintiest Kate in Christendom!"

"Stop that at once!" says Janet, before Kate can reply. "It is not only an invidious distinction to compliment one girl while another girl is sitting by, but I don't want Kate spoiled, and she will be utterly so if this kind of thing goes on. Even I have been talking nonsense about her being intended for a brilliant destiny—and now you tell her that she has a right to be hard to please. It is all absurdity!"

"Quite so, Janet," says Kate's joyous voice. "Don't be afraid of my being spoiled; I know it is only your partiality that makes you think me anything but a very ordinary girl—Will, did you bring the mail from Arlington?"

"I brought the mail, and some news besides. Try to imagine who is coming to Fairfields."

"(Don't be provoking, Will, but tell us at once," says Janet.

By way of reply, Will draws a letter from his pocket and tosses it toward her. She lifts, opens, glances at the address and signature, and says, "Why, it is from Randall to mamma!"

"Exactly," says Will, "and mamma handed it to me to pass over to you on account of some important intelligence which it contains. Read it aloud for Kate's benefit."

Thus directed, Janet reads:

"MY DEAR MOTHER,—Your letter just received. Many thanks for the note inclosed for Miss Vaughn. I am very certain that she will accept your invitation. Somebody has been