

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
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CHAPTER XLII.

"Tired out we are, my heart and I.
Suppose the world brought diadems
To tempt us, crusted with loose gems
Of powers and pleasures? Let it try.
We scarcely care to look at even
A pretty child, or God's blue heaven,
We feel so tired, my heart and I."

It is decided that the Ashtons are to leave Rome immediately after Easter, and Kate is very sorry for the decision. She thinks with a shudder of the glittering brilliancy of Paris, of the stately magnificence of London, as she saw it under the sun of an English June, and even of the deep blue lakes and snowy peaks of Switzerland; but she loves the sombre and sacred glory of Rome, as all sorrowful hearts do love it. Over the threshold of almost every church within its limits her feet have passed, before almost every shrine she has prayed for peace and patience; and in the dusky shadows of immemorial arches, before altars where faith has made its home for centuries, she has gained all that she asked. In the struggle which has drained the blood away from her cheeks "to grieve the poor heart," and wasted her to a frail shadow of the joyous girl who was the sunshine of Fairfield, more natural sweetness of character has given place to the higher charm and more tender grace which are the fruits of combat and the crown of victory.

Holy Week has come, and, as usual, the number of strangers in Rome begins to increase. Kate feels little interest in this increase—for who, she thinks, can arrive that she cares to see?—until one day she comes out of one of the churches to find Mrs. Ashton's carriage waiting for her, and in the carriage, beside Mrs. Ashton, a familiar and dearly-loved face. For a moment the girl stands incredulous, then she springs forward, and throws her arms around Miss Brooke.

"Oh, is it indeed you, my dear, dear friend!" she cries. "How happy it makes me to see you!"

"And me to see you, my Kate, my bonny Kate," says the elder lady. "I could not bear to be in ignorance about you any longer—I felt that I must come to see you. Let me look at you! Why, my child, my child, what has come over you! You told me" (to Mrs. Ashton) "that she was changed, but I did not think—"

"That I could be changed so much?" asks Kate, as she pauses. "Ah, never mind about that—what does a little flesh more or less matter! You are not changed, you are as lovely as ever; and I am so glad, so glad, so glad to see you!"



Janet meets the post boy

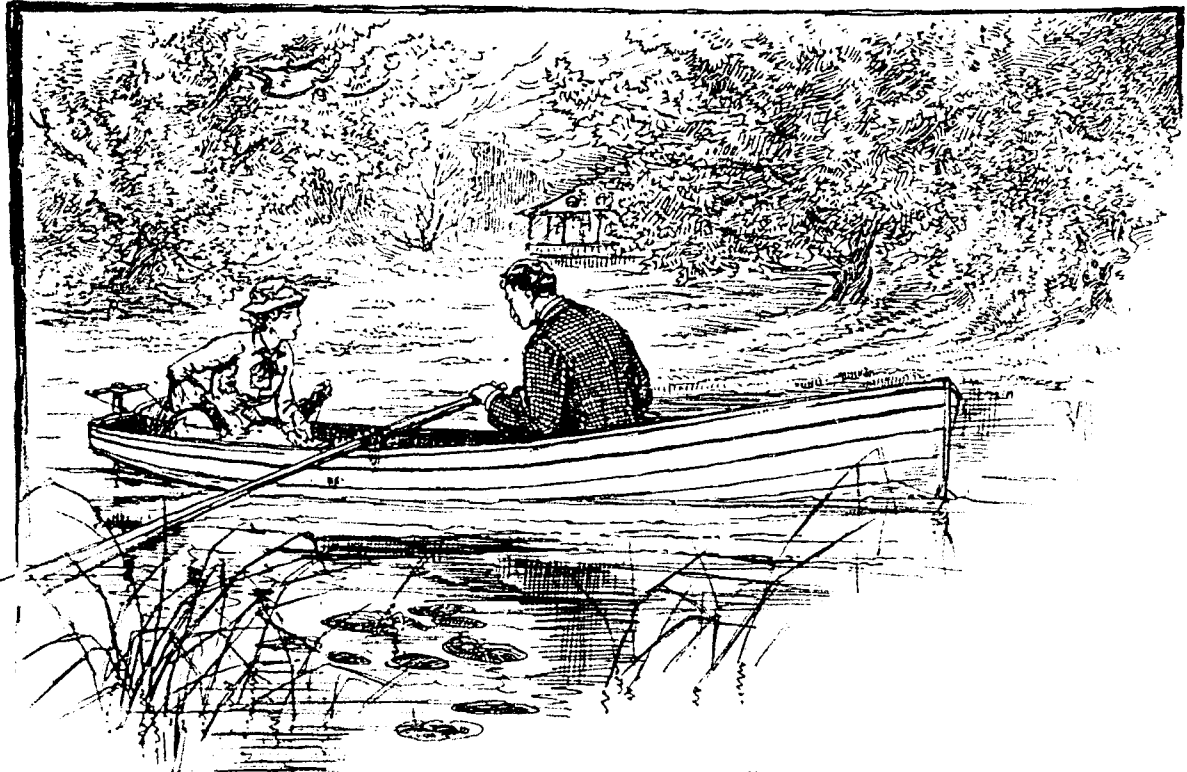
No doubt of the gladness, for her face is almost transfigured by it, her eyes shine, her lips smile, into her pale cheeks a faint color rises. Mrs. Ashton regards her with surprise, and says to herself, "If Miss Brooke thinks her changed now, what will she think when she sees her look as she does usually!"

Miss Brooke, meanwhile, is recognizing more and more the alterations in the face and figure before her, and they fill her with a consternation which she finds it hard to dissemble. Can this be Kate, the Kate she found at Fairfield, the Kate who left her to go away with the Ashtons? She can hardly credit such a transformation; and she feels like turning fiercely to the woman beside her, and saying, "What have you done to her? How wretched have you made her life that she should look like this!"

That such a charge would be unjust, we know; but Miss Brooke does not know it, and her heart burns within her as she gazes at the girl, who looks at her and feels how good, how

very good, it is to have a fragment of her own old world with her once more.

"You must come with me to my hotel, Kate," she says, after they have exhausted the common-places into which people naturally fall on meeting after long absence. "I cannot let you out of my hands. I must see you and talk to you with a comfortable sense of possessing your society without fear of interruption."



"Do you want to hear what it was?"

"Of course I will come with you," says Kate. "In fact, I fear you will not be able to shake me off when you wish to do so. I shall probably haunt you as long as you are in Rome—or we are."

"You are thinking of leaving Rome soon, then?" says Miss Brooke to Mrs. Ashton.

"Next week," the latter answers.

"You will return to America?"

"Oh, no" (with a slight shrug). Neither Mr. Ashton nor myself have any desire to return to America. We go to Paris."

"Do you think my heart is broken?" says Kate. "I do not, I only think it is tired—very tired—and homesick, as I said. Don't think that any one has been unkind to me. Mr. and Mrs. Ashton have both done all they could for my pleasure—and I often feel that I am very ungrateful not to be pleased. Indeed I have tried to be; but I am tired—just tired—that is all."

Her voice drops with a pathetic cadence which goes straight to her listener's heart—as, indeed, Kate's tones had a trick of going to all hearts—and her head sinks on the knee beside her. "It is so pleasant to be with you again!" she repeats, with a long, soft sigh.

Miss Brooke cannot control her voice for several minutes; but Kate is quite content with the silence, quite content to sit motionless, with a tender hand upon her head, and drink in rest as one drinks wine. Presently, however, the elderly lady speaks.

bound to stay with Mr. Ashton unless he chooses voluntarily to send me away."

"You are bound to stay with Mr. Ashton!" repeats Miss Brooke. "Why are you bound? For heaven's sake, has he bought you, body and soul?"

"Something like it," answers Kate, quietly. "He has bought me—never mind how or why—not in the soul, thank God, but certainly in the body. It is but a poor shell to be esteemed worth buying, is it not?" she says, holding up one thin hand which the light shines through. "But every one to his taste, and, as I said before, I am bound to stay with him as long as he chooses to keep me. So, you see, I can no more think of going home than I can think of going to heaven."

"But this cannot be!" says Miss Brooke, passionately; and then a sense of discretion comes over her, and she stops. Why waste words on Kate if it is true that the girl is in

"Kate," she says, "this life is killing you—do you know that? It is simply killing you, and, unless you wish to die, you must end it. I do not understand—I have never understood why you cast your life with the Ashtons; but I think that you must recognize now that the the experiment has been an unfortunate one. I have never in my life been so shocked by any one's appearance as by yours. You are shadowy as a spirit, and Mrs. Ashton tells me that both her husband and herself are seriously alarmed by your want of strength. What must the state be which even they perceive! I speak to you plainly, because you must understand that this is no matter for trifling. Your malady is plainly more of the mind than of the body; but maladies of the mind can kill, and I do not believe that you will recover unless you come to me and let us together sail next week for home."

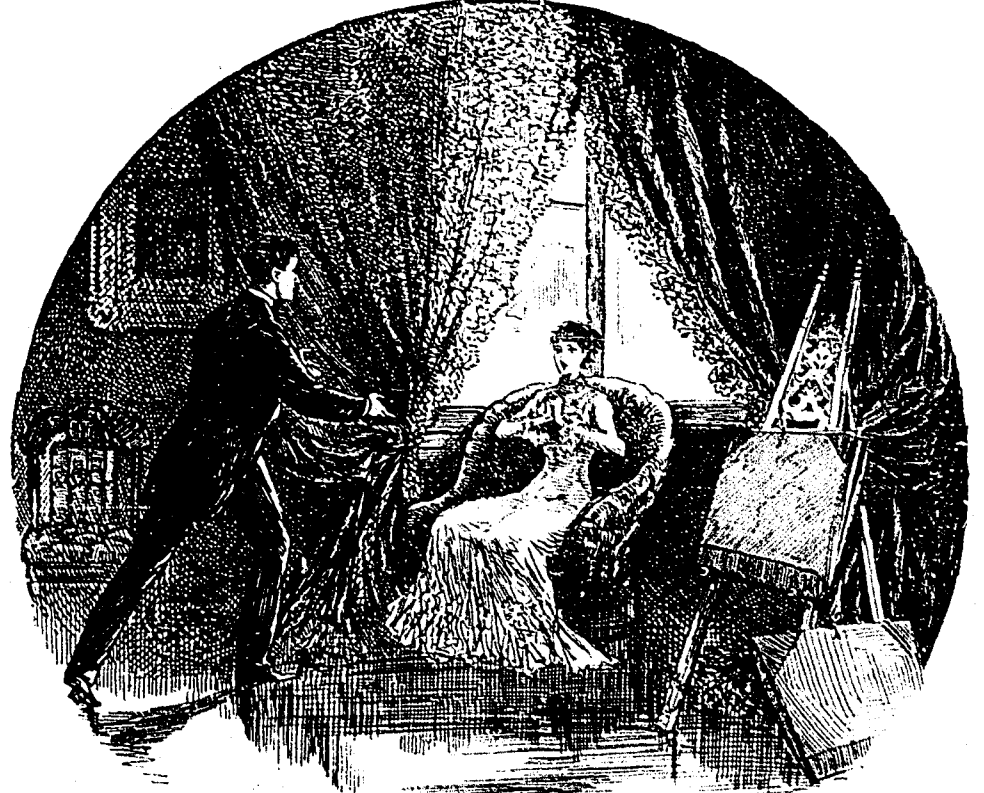
The girl looks up with a smile as sad as it is grateful. "Time makes no change in you," she says, "You are as kind as you ever have been, and I like, oh, I like very much to hear you say such things, because they prove that

some manner bound to abide by Mr. Ashton's decision? Miss Brooke feels within herself the courage necessary to beard that lion in his den, and she determines that she will do so, while deciding to say no more to Kate about the matter. So silence falls again, and it is Kate who breaks it next.

"I am ashamed to think that I have not yet asked about Mr. Fenwick," she says. "I hope he is well. Is he not with you?"

"No," answers Miss Brooke, with some reluctance. "He could not come with me—at least not conveniently. He is—he is engaged to be married."

"Indeed!" says Kate. She starts; and, if the words stab her, it is not in any manner that Miss Brooke can understand. Through her mind there flashes like lightning the thought: "If he, why not another?" But, after an instant's pause, she goes on quietly: "That is certainly news, and if he is happy, I am very glad. Is he engaged to any one whom I know—and are you pleased, dear Miss Brooke?"



"My Kate! my Kate! will you come to me now?"

you love me still; but, dear friend, it cannot. "I am as pleased as I could expect to be. If I die, I die—that does not matter at all. But it matters to keep one's faith, and I am—enigmatically. "No; he is not engaged to