

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
CHRISTIAN REID.

CHAPTER VI.

"I have no ambition
To see a goodlier man."

"Can that be Kate coming in the gate?" says Sophy, looking out of the window. "And, if so, who is that with her?"

The persons whom she addresses—to wit, Mr. Proctor and Janet, who are practising a duet with piano and flute, without the faintest prospect of accord in the matter of time or harmony—rise, and, approaching the window, also look out, one over her shoulder, the other over her head.

"It is Miss Kate," announces Mr. Proctor. "I recognize her, and I recognize Lightfoot; but I don't recognize the man with her—not at all."

"It must be some one whom we know," says Janet. "Kate would never allow a stranger to accompany her. Is there any new arrival in the neighbourhood? Eureka!" she cries, suddenly, "it is Frank Tarleton!"

"Tarleton!" echoes Mr. Proctor, in a tone altogether devoid of pleasure. "Do you think so? But where would Miss Kate have met him? He was not with the hunt."

"I don't know where she could have met him," says Janet; "but I am ready to wager anything that it is Frank Tarleton."

"You are right," says Sophy, who has been looking intently at the approaching horseman; "it is Frank Tarleton, and he has changed scarcely at all."

As she utters the last words, she passes out on the veranda; so Kate and Tarleton find her standing at the head of the steps when they ride up, apparently as much at ease with each other as if their acquaintance had been of weeks, instead of hours.

"Sophy," cries Kate's gay voice, "do you know who this is? I have promised not to introduce him."

"As if there was any need for you to do so!" Sophy replies. "Frank, I am delighted to see you back again."

fingers sends a thrill to Mr. Proctor's inmost heart. With herself, the sources of the impulse which thus result in action are so complex, that it is difficult to trace them. Chief, however, is a remorseful sense of having totally ignored and forgotten, in her "delightful ride," the man who sacrificed his own pleasure for hers, and a sense, for the first time, of the pain which she may yet be forced to inflict upon him. Why it is that she realizes for the first time that his love for her is not merely matter for a jest, she does not



"Dear Janet, don't mention it."

to be oddly conscious of astonishment and resentment. He looks at Proctor, and, as Proctor meets his glance, they, at least, understand each other from that moment.

A little earlier, the heart of the former would have sunk within him at the thought of such a formidable rival; but Kate's sweet tones, and above all that involuntary familiar action, have given him a new hope and courage. So he says, quickly:

"I will not think anything you don't wish me to think; and I am truly glad your ride was pleasant, though I could not be with you. If you like Lightfoot, pray remember that he is at your service whenever you choose to command him."

"Thanks—you are very kind," she answers; but a slight tone of constraint has come into her voice, and, saying, "I must change my dress," she enters the hall and goes up-stairs.

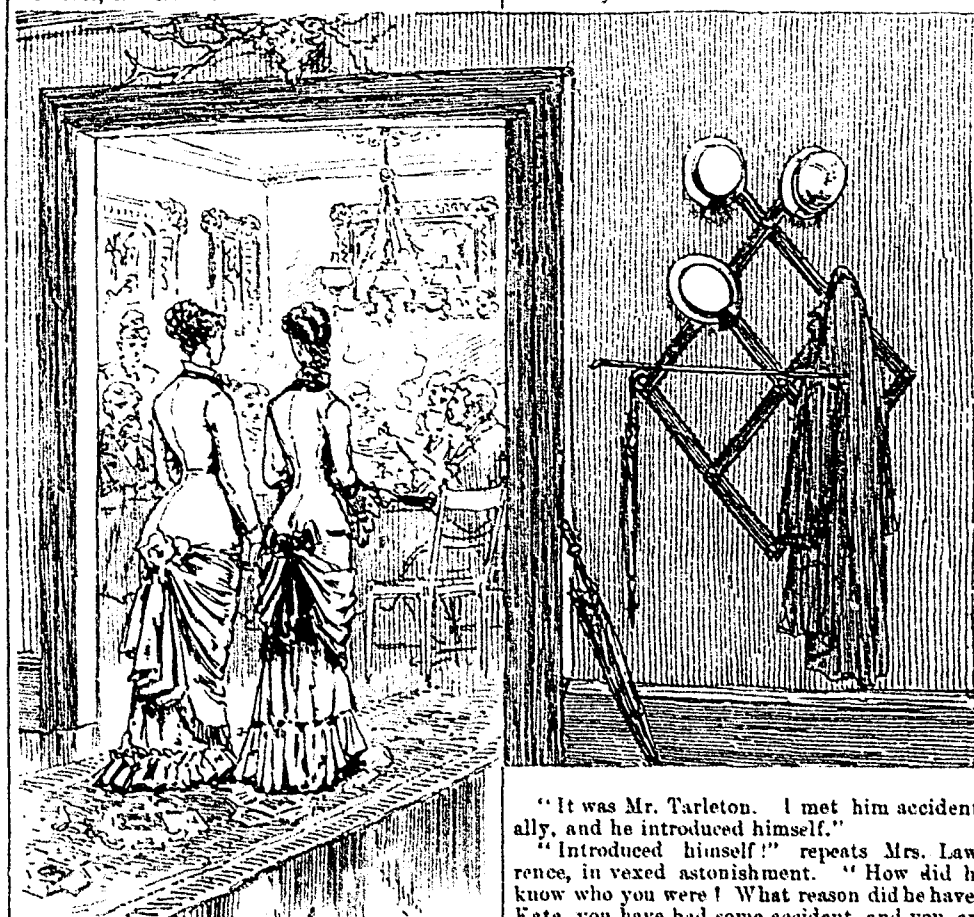
She is not allowed to gain the haven of her chamber without another delay. In the hall above she meets Mrs. Lawrence, and that lady stops her.

"What is this I hear, Kate, about your taking Mr. Proctor's horse, and going after the hounds alone?" she asks. "You must know that such conduct is very rash, and not what your uncle would approve. I disapprove of your going hunting at all, as you are aware; and, at least, I insist upon your keeping within certain bounds."

"I did not suppose there was any harm in taking Mr. Proctor's horse," Kate answers. "He insisted upon coming home with me in any case, and I saw no reason why we should both miss the chase because Diana fell lame. So I took Lightfoot, and followed the rest of the party."

"Did you find them?"

know; but she does realize it, and hence she is inclined to an unusual consideration of his feelings. The consequence of this consideration, however, is a trifle awkward. Her hand falls



Kate and Janet enter the dining-room.

light as thistle-down on his coat-sleeve, and does not rest there an instant; but that instant is long enough for her to read her mistake in his face, for Sophy to be surprised, and for Tarleton

"It was Mr. Tarleton. I met him accidentally, and he introduced himself."

"Introduced himself!" repeats Mrs. Lawrence, in vexed astonishment. "How did he know who you were? What reason did he have? Kate, you have had some accident, and you are trying to deceive me."

"How suspicious you are, Aunt Margaret!" cries Kate. "Lightfoot behaved beautifully, and Mr. Tarleton will tell you that it was my unprotected condition which alone appealed to his chivalry. He saw me riding rather fast, and



"Eureka! It is Frank Tarleton."

"Neither do I," says Janet. "Who can he be? He is dressed well, and mounted well—he looks well, altogether, but I don't know him."

"It is odd that he should be a stranger to all of us; and yet Kate is riding with him," says Sophy, craning her neck for a better view. "She is such a madcap, that I am never quite certain what she may or may not do—though she means no harm."



Clasped in both of his.

"Not half so delighted as I am to be back," Tarleton answers, springing from his horse. It is the work of an instant to lift Kate down, and then he mounts the steps, and Sophy finds the hand she extends clasped in both of his. "How glad I am to see you," he says, "and how familiar you look!—only changed a little, and prettier than ever. An old friend may say as much as that, may he not?"

"An old friend has no license to become a new flatterer," Sophy responds, shaking her head with a smile. "Where did you two pick each other up? We have been wondering over the question ever since you came in the gate."

"Oh, it is a long story," says Kate. "I lost the hounds, and found Mr. Tarleton—that is the sum of it. Have the huntsmen come in yet?"

"Nobody except Mr. Proctor," Sophy is beginning, when that gentleman appears on the scene to speak for himself.

"I hope Lightfoot carried you well, Miss Kate," he says, solicitously; for he entertains a suspicion that something unusual must have occurred to bring Kate back before the rest of the party.

"Oh, very well—very well, indeed!" she replies, glibly. "It was not Lightfoot's fault that the saddle turned," she says to her conscience. "But I lost the hounds completely," she goes on; the first time I ever did such a stupid thing. I might have lost myself, too, if I had not found Mr. Tarleton; and he brought me home."

"I am sure we are very much obliged to you," says Sophy to Tarleton, who looks a picture of innocence and virtue. "I felt uneasy when Mr. Proctor reported that he had mounted Kate on his horse, and left her alone."

"It was wrong," says Mr. Proctor, in a self-convicted tone. "I felt that after we parted, and wished very much that I had not suggested the exchange."

"It was not wrong," says Kate, in her pretty, imperious way. "You must not think so for a moment. It was kind and obliging, and unselfish, and if I did not find the hounds, I had a delightful ride—for which I must thank you," she adds, involuntarily laying her hand on his arm.

It is the first time she has ever done such a thing, and the slight momentary touch of her