

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
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CHAPTER XXXII.

"Oh, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes!"

Two more weeks have passed, when one evening—as the short winter day is dying into dusk,

Now, visitors not being in the least unusual—indeed, an evening without any constituting a decidedly remarkable event—Kate looks surprised at the tone of the announcement.

"Who is it?" she asks. "Surely a very distinguished person for you to speak like that."



He takes her hand and leads her to a mirror.

and Susan has entered Kate's room and lighted the gas, preparatory to assisting at that young lady's toilet for dinner—Miss Brooke makes her appearance, with an expression of mingled amusement and annoyance on her generally serene countenance.

"I don't know whether to call him distinguished," says Miss Brooke, with a smile. "It is your grand-uncle, Mr. Ashton. Yes, I supposed you would be surprised. I was astonished when his card was brought to me while you were out this afternoon. He has come specially to see you. What do you think of that?"

"I think he had much better have stayed away," answers Kate, whose sentiments with regard to Mr. Ashton are not those of an affectionate niece. "Dress becomingly! Why should I? I don't care—"

"Susan," interrupts Miss Brooke, "go to my room and bring me a box of laces which you will find on my toilet-table. You must remember, my dear," she goes on, addressing Kate as Susan leaves the room with an air of understanding fully why she is sent away, "that your uncle is a thorough man of the world, and

to do you justice, you never are—he would congratulate himself on his wisdom in leaving you unnoticed all these years. But if you surprise him with graceful manners and charming looks, you may be sure he will be as sorry as he can be for anything which does not affect his own personal comfort."

"Very well," answers Kate. "I do not care in the least what Mr. Ashton thinks, but I will do as you say. Does he dine here?"

"No. I asked him to do so, but he declined—some friends with whom he was staying at the hotel would expect him, he said; but he will call this evening."

"What a pity he should give himself so much trouble for nothing! However, it is settled that I shall look my best in order to make him appreciate too late what a treasure he has lost."

This kindly intention is carried into effect. Kate spends half an hour longer than usual over her toilet, and when she enters the drawing-room, Miss Brooke's exclamation and Fenwick's eyes assure her, as her mirror and Susan have already done, that she never looked better.

"Will I do?" she asks, smiling—though the question is an arrant hypocrisy.

"Do!" repeats Miss Brooke. "I should think so indeed!"

"Allow me to satisfy you on that point," says Fenwick. He takes her hand and leads her to a mirror that gives back her reflection from head to foot.

Surely it is not strange that as the girl gazes on this reflection, her color should glow, her eyes shine like diamonds. The medieval style of costume has just come out into fashion, and the clinging drapery and cuirass jacket (so trying to the majority of figures) are eminently suited to her slender, graceful proportions. She wears an armor-like dress of jet over amber silk, with a knot of crimson at her throat, and a crimson rose in her dark hair. The details of her costume are all perfect, and the combination of glitter and richness is marvellously becoming. So Fenwick thinks when he says:

"I would give anything for a painting of you as you look this minute."

"How vain of me to stand admiring myself!" she says with a laugh. "But is not dress a wonderful adornment? Who would have fancied, before Miss Brooke waved her magic wand over me, that I could look so—so well?"

"I have seen some people that dress could not adorn," Fenwick answers. "But you are satisfied!—you think Mr. Ashton will be sufficiently impressed?"

"Of course I am satisfied," she says. "Do you want me to pretend that I am not? How can one help being glad to be—"

"Beautiful," he says, as she hesitates for a word. "It is not at all necessary that one should help it. Fair looks are something for which a woman may be grateful."

The rose-glow deepens still more on her cheeks, as she draws her hand out of his arm and turns away.

"I can't afford to be complimented by you as well as the mirror," she says. "I only hope Mr. Ashton will agree with your verdict."

"There is no doubt of that," says Miss Brooke. "Yes, we must have your portrait painted," she adds, looking with admiration at the radiant face and graceful form.

Kate feels as if the net of circumstance is closing round her. These people seem to take it for granted that she will belong to them, while she is still only a tormenting puzzle to herself. It is a relief that she is spared reply—for at this moment dinner is announced.

From her cosmopolitan life, Miss Brooke has acquired a fancy for dining at a much later hour than is the general custom; so it chanced that evening visitors, unacquainted with her habits, often call before she has risen from table.

This is the case at present. A peal of the door-bell echoes through the house, and makes Kate start, while they are still lingering over the dessert. There is the delay of a minute or two—then the door is opened, steps are heard in the hall, some one is ushered into the drawing-room, and finally Oscar appears with a card which he carries to his mistress.

As she looks at it, her change of expression strikes both Fenwick and Kate. It is one of surprise, of concern, almost of consternation. She stares at the card for a moment as if she were galvanized, while they stare at her. Then Kate says:

"Is it Mr. Ashton? He is early."

"No, it is not Mr. Ashton," answers Miss Brooke, with a start. "It is—some one whom I must see. Kate, will you stay here until I send for you?"

She rises abruptly, and before Kate can answer leaves the room, taking the card with her. The two, so unceremoniously left behind, look at each other in surprise.



Oscar appears with a Card.

"How very mysterious!" says Kate. "I wish she had left the card—do not you?"

"It would be gratifying, certainly, to know who the visitor is," answers Fenwick. "Shall I ring, and question Oscar?"

"Oh no, Miss Brooke would have told us if she had cared for us to know. When Will was a child, Aunt Margaret asked him once what was the golden rule, and he answered, 'Mind your own business.' I think we had better mind ours now. But there is something tantalizing in mystery—is there not?"

"Eve thought so."

"Ah, how unkind that is! Whenever a man wants to be provoking and uncomplimentary, he always mentions Eve."



"Excuse me."

"I have not the least desire either to be provoking or uncomplimentary. On the contrary, I wish to be particularly agreeable, so that you may not regret being obliged to remain here."

"Which reminds me that I must not remain and keep you from smoking. I can go into the sitting-room and meditate, like the old canoness in 'Nathalie.' Did you ever read 'Nathalie'?"

"I never did—but I object strenuously to the meditation. You have no idea how little I care for smoking—in comparison with your society. If you go, I shall be constrained to follow you, and in that case I must leave this glass of wine unfinished."

"But you know that if I was not here, you would smoke."

"Very likely. A man must do something to when he is so unfortunate as to be alone."

"Unfortunate! Most of you seem to consider it very good fortune, indeed, as far as smoking is concerned. I will stay if you will light a cigar—not otherwise. Indeed, I don't mind it in the least."



"Uncle Ashton, how do you do?"

"You must look your best, my dear," she says to Kate. "Put on your most becoming dress. We are to have a visitor this evening."

a great connoisseur of beauty. If you should appear plainly dressed, looking as ill as you can look, and shy or awkward in manner—which,