

"BONNY KATE,"

A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY

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CHAPTER XI.

"Not my pain,
My pain was nothing: Oh, your poor, poor love,
Your broken love."

The sun has set—that sun which, between a single rising and setting, has marked the most eventful hours of all Kate's life; which shone joyously down upon her meeting with Tarleton; which rested over her as she stood with Fenwick in the garden; which streamed into the drawing-room while Randal told his miserable story, and sent its last level rays into her eyes when she walked mechanically homeward after her interview with Mr. Ashton. It has been gone some time, now; and as she stands at her chamber window, looking westward, she sees only a pale, yellow glow remaining to mark where the glories of sunset lately burned; while, in the street below, long lines of quivering lamps are gleaming through the purple dusk.

Simply to look at her, one would hardly think that a blow had fallen upon her which banishes all brightness from her life as absolutely as the sun's rays are banished from the world. She is daintily dressed—for is not Tarleton coming to-night, and will she not faint look lovely in his eyes for the last time?—and she has fastened at her throat, and in her hair, the flowers which she remembers that he likes best. "One puts flowers on the dead," she thinks, while doing this, "so it is natural enough that I should wear them, who am to die to-night." Her hair is carefully coiled, and she has even rubbed a faint color into her pale cheeks. But her eyes! It is there one reads the change which has befallen her, for no effort of will can summon back the radiant light which has given place to ineffable sadness. There are no tears in them—the time for tears has yet to come, when they will flow in most abundant measure. At present she is like one stunned into quietude, yet retaining the keenest consciousness of pain. "If I could only die, really die, when I have said good-bye to him to-night!" she thinks, with wistful gaze fastened on the far sunset, which seems ever like a glimpse of heaven opening on this sorrowful world.

But death comes not to those to whom his arrow would be welcome, and she knows—she feels to the depths of her spirit—that many suns will rise and set for her, but that, after to-night, neither by day nor by night will she hear again the voice and the step which are like music to her ear.

"I could bear it better if I might only take all the pain," she says to herself. "But he will be sorry—oh, my love, my dear love, I fear you will be sorry!—and I can only pray God that your sorrow may be of short duration, and that you may forget me very, very soon. I am willing to remember till I die, if only you may forget!"



"My Darling! My Darling!"

So, with thoughts which are half prayers, she is still standing, watching the shining stars as they bloom out one by one, over the wide plain of the quiet sky, when the dinner bell rings, and she goes down to meet Miss Brooke and Mr. Fenwick.

Fortunately, she finds several guests—some cousins of her hosts, who have come to pay a visit, and whose presence is probably accepted as a relief by every one of the trio, who, until to-day, have stood so little in need of outsiders to afford entertainment, or prevent embarrassment.

is in exceedingly bad taste on Kate's part; but she is too proud to remonstrate, and Kate, who knows what she is thinking—is, for once, indifferent to her opinion. What does anything in the world matter compared to securing her the last time, the very last time, a meeting with Tarleton undisturbed?

So she goes, speaks to Oscar, and takes her way to the library. It is, perhaps, the prettiest, and certainly the pleasantest, room in all the luxurious house, and it has never looked prettier or more pleasant than now, with fire-light flickering over the book-lined walls and inviting chairs, while in the midst of the table, piled with the latest papers and magazines, stands a bronze Minerva, bearing aloft a light with soft-tinted shade. Kate sighs as she sinks into a large, low chair by the glowing grate, and looks around. What a haven of peace it seems!—and what a theatre of disquiet it is to be! Brave she is, her heart sinks, as her spirit quails, from that which lies before her. How can she look in Tarleton's eyes and tell him that she has pledged herself to give him up? Will not her resolution fail? Will she not, despite herself, embrace the happiness which is offered to her—the happiness for which her whole nature yearns—and let chaos come, if it will, to all the rest of the world?

It is the last struggle in which these questions are asked. "No, I am not so weak as that," the higher part of her soul makes answer. "God has put this sacrifice before me as a duty, and if I fail to make it, I shall be a coward and a traitor to my life's end."

Thus she girds up her armor—none too soon. A minute later, a peal of the door-bell echoes through the house, there is a step in the hall which she would know amid the tread of an army, Oscar opens the library door, and Tarleton enters.

She rises at his approach, and surely never did more tender eyes give greeting to a lover. She

Dinner over—and to Kate it has been like a dream, in which she sees the faces through a mist of preoccupation, and hears the voices as if they spoke from afar off—the ladies go into the drawing-room, and then the girl says to Miss Brooke:

"I am expecting Mr. Tarleton presently, and, if you have no objection, I will tell Oscar to show him into the library. You will excuse me to any one who comes in, will you not?"

"Certainly," answers Miss Brooke, coldly. She thinks, as she speaks, that this withdrawal

says not a word, nor does he utter any—but he takes her into his arms and kisses her many times.

"Sweet hands, sweet hair, sweet cheeks,
Sweet eyes, sweet mouth,
Each singly wooed and won."

"My darling! my darling!" he says at last. "It was worth going through any suffering for this! What can life give me beyond the happiness of holding you to my heart, and knowing that you are mine!"

"Are you so fond of me, then?" she asks, with a quiver in her voice, as she throws back her head to look into his face. "O my dear, men are fickle—very fickle, every one says—and you have loved before, you know. Do you not think you could forget me easily and—perhaps love some else again?"

"Forget you!" he echoes—surprised by the question, even though reading it only as a desire for an assurance of fidelity—"It does not become a man to be too confident, and I—as you say, I have been in love before. But because of that, I know with the more certainty that what I feel for you is different from what I ever felt for any other woman. I hardly think I could have forgotten you, even if you had thrown me over and married Fenwick. I fear I should, all the same, have carried in my heart to my dying day these eyes in which I found my fate the first time they ever looked at me."

The eyes of which he speaks look at him now with infinite pain and sorrow—yet, despite this pain and sorrow, there is a thrill of gladness in the heart beating so close to his own. The graceful head goes down on his shoulder again—she gives a little gasp.

"I am sure you think so," she says, "but you may be mistaken—people are often mistaken about their own constancy. But you love me now!—to-night you love me! There is no doubt of that."

"No more doubt than that I shall love you to-morrow, and all to-morrows beyond," he answers. "My bonny sweetheart, who does not love you? But I love you best of all—and I shall love you till I die, and, God willing, beyond death."

She shivers a little even in the close warmth of his embrace, for do not these tender words make still more hard the bitterness before her? "If hearts can ever break, mine will break now," she thinks—and then she draws away from him, and sinks again into the chair from which she rose at his entrance. He makes no demur—why should he, when all the future is before him, to fill with the caresses which are love's language!—but lets her go, and drawing a chair in front of her only takes into his own the slender hands which lie in her lap.

"It is kind of Miss Brooke—kinder than I fancied she would be—to let me see you like this," she says. "Have you told her?—have you given Fenwick the coup de grace?"

"Yes, I have told both of them," she answers. "Miss Brooke is so disappointed that she cannot be quite just to me, and I love her so dearly, and am so sorry to grieve her, that I cannot resent anything she does. I think I should be grateful, even if she turned me out of the house. As for Mr. Fenwick, he was everything that is kind and generous. He has the soul of a prince—no one could be more noble."

"He has not only the soul of a prince, but



Is there anything I can do for you?



"You will not be sorry to have given me this farewell."

the wealth of a prince, besides," says Tarleton. "How happy and how brilliant such a man could make your life, while I—do you know I have felt to-day like a dastard, to come between you and all that he could give!"

"Ah, how you wrong me by such a thing!" she says, in a tone of keen pain. "If all that he could give were multiplied ten times, a hundred times, a million times, it would weigh with me as less than nothing against your love. O remember, pray remember that!"

"How can I ever forget it?" he answers, quickly. "What should I deserve if I could forget it? But this day of excitement has been