

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY

CHRISTIAN REID.

CHAPTER IV.

In the morning, born of huntman, hoof of steed and laugh of rider, read out sherry from the court-yard till we lost them in the hills."



The door opens and Kate comes out.

The next morning is all that the heart of huntman can desire, and between four and five o'clock—while not a single star has yet paled out of the brilliant sky, nor a streak of daylight appeared in the east—the winding blast of a horn in the rear of the house is followed by the yelping voices of many hounds.

Within, several doors open and shut in rapid succession, and several masculine figures issue therefrom and descend the stairs. Will pauses at one door which has not unclosed, and knocks.

"Kate!" he cries, "are you ready?"

"In a moment," answers an eager voice. The next minute the door opens and Kate comes out. She looks very slender in her close-fitting habit, and is drawing on a pair of large gauntlets, while a tartan shawl hangs over her arm.

The coffee is quickly made, and as quickly drunk; then Kate pins her shawl over her shoulders, takes her whip, and goes with her uncle and cousin to the starlit world outside. There are dark figures of men and horses dimly visible, horns are sounding, dogs are answering, horses are neighing and stamping, men are talking. It is a scene such as every fox-hunter knows well.

"Good morning, Miss Kate—very glad to see that you are coming with us," says Mr. Proctor's voice out of the obscurity. "Can I put you on your horse?"

"No thank you; I am accustomed to Will," answers Kate. She puts her foot, as she speaks, into her cousin's hand, and springs lightly to the saddle. After this there is a little more delay, and much more blowing, when it is ascertained that all the dogs have reported for duty; so the cavalcade forms, and they ride away.

"Where are we going?" Kate asks, as they file out of the gate, and it is Wilmer's voice which answers:

"We are first going to beat the nearest cover; that is beyond the creek. Though it lies so near, it's a capital place; we hardly ever fail to start a trail there."

The creek in question is a small stream which flows in the rear of Fairfields, coming down in haste from the hills "to join the brimming river." They cross it, and the dogs are soon busily at work in all directions, animated by the huntsman's voice; nor does any great length of time elapse before, from a thicket on the right, comes the welcome note which tells that a trail has been struck.

"There it is!" cries Will, and he gallops forward, harking the other hounds to the signal.

"Is that a reliable dog?" asks General Murray.

"Reliable!" answers Wilmer. "I should think so! That's old Trailer—eh, Mose?"

"That's him!" answers Mose, who is the huntsman of the pack. "There ain't no mistake when Trailer opens.—Hi, Muse! Hi, Grace! Hi, Silver! Hark to him!"

The dogs obey, dashing from all directions toward the leader, and opening a running chorus, as they, too, strike the trail. It is a "warm" one, so they easily trace it through the undergrowth, and emerge into an open field. There the horsemen pause, while the hounds follow all the winding turns of the scent, and finally take a tolerably straight course parallel with the river for a mile or two. Then comes an old field very much grown up with broom-straw and young pines, where the huntsmen think that Reynard himself will be started.

"The stars are gone, the rose-bloom comes: No blush of maid is sweeter."



"There it is" cries Will.

"It is a perfect morning for a chase," she says; "but we shall find it chilly at first. Let us go down and get some coffee."

They run as gayly as a pair of children down to the hall below. Here a lamp is burning, and a tray, bearing a coffee-pot and half a dozen cups and saucers, stands on a table. To this Kate goes, pours out and makes a cup of coffee for her companion and one for herself.

"I hope I am not too late to make uncle's," she says, while they drink standing. "He never can make it to suit himself. Yonder he comes now.—Are the horses ready, uncle?"

"All ready," answers Mr. Lawrence, who has entered the hall from the outer door. "I have come for my cup of coffee, Kate. You know how to make it."

but, although the east has been glowing with all manner of lovely tints for some time, nobody has heeded them, and only Kate utters a cry of admiration when the sun mounts in flashing splendour above the horizon and sends his first

level rays of gold over the mist-hung valley to the rolling hills and soft woods that belt the prospect. At this moment the pack breaks into a crashing cry which tells that the fox is "up," and there is an end of dallying. The horses know the sound as well as their riders, and prick up their ears as they start forward.

Then comes the time of glorious excitement. The pack are in full cry—that best of music to a huntsman's ear, the men are shouting themselves hoarse; the horses are fresh, and full of spirit; the physical exhilaration attendant upon a chase is at its best. The fox proves to be one of the staunchest of his kind, and as he makes for the hills, the tremendous pace before very long begins to tell on the horses. To Kate's dismay, Diana is the first to drop behind, and presently she falls lame. When this fact becomes apparent, the girl's face is a picture of distress.

"Oh, Mr. Proctor, what shall I do?" she says to that faithful squire, who is heroically restrain-

"I know you are inclined to think too little of danger," he responds, "so I would not offer you a horse who had any bad tricks; but Lightfoot can be trusted. He loses his head sometimes, and tries to run away, but he means no harm, and a firm, steady rein soon checks him. Now let me take you down and change the saddles."



"That is not to be thought of."

ing his steed and his own impatience, in order to remain at her side. "Diana is so lame, that I shall have to give up the chase and go home."

"That is not to be thought of," says Mr. Proctor. "I'll examine her foot—perhaps she has a stone in it."

The foot is examined, but there is no stone in it, and, as they proceed a little farther, it is evident that the lameness is in the shoulder. The limp in her gait becomes so painful, that Kate perceives the hopelessness of attempting any longer to follow the chase, and, with tears in her eyes, turns the mare's head around.

"There is no good in keeping on like this," she says, in a despairing tone. "The idea of following a chase on a limping horse is too absurd! Besides, I am detaining you behind with me, so I will go back. I hope you will find the dogs again without much trouble."

"Do you suppose I will let you ride back by yourself?" inquires Mr. Proctor, turning his horse's head. "Of course, I shall go with you."

"But I insist that you do not," she says. "There is no need for such a thing. Why, I think nothing—none of us think anything—of riding all about the country alone."

"That may be," replies the young man, determinedly, "but you are not alone now; and if you think I would go on with the chase and leave you, on a lame horse, to get home as best you could, you must have a very poor opinion of me—that's all."

"Indeed, I have not a poor opinion of you," she declares; "but it is so useless for you to give up the hunt in order to go with me. Please don't think of it—please don't!"

The dark-lashed eyes look at him entreatingly, and, meeting them, his resolution wavers; in fact, it is doubtful whether he could form any resolution upon any subject whatever that Kate's "Please don't!" would not be powerful to change. He hesitates a minute, then, with the air of one whom a bright idea has struck, says quickly:

"I'll tell you what we can do; it is too bad for you to lose the chase, so I will put you on my horse and let you follow the others, while I take Diana home."

Her face lights up with a flash of pleasure, and then quickly clouds again.

"It is very kind of you to think of such a thing," she says, "but I could not possibly take your horse, and leave you to go home."

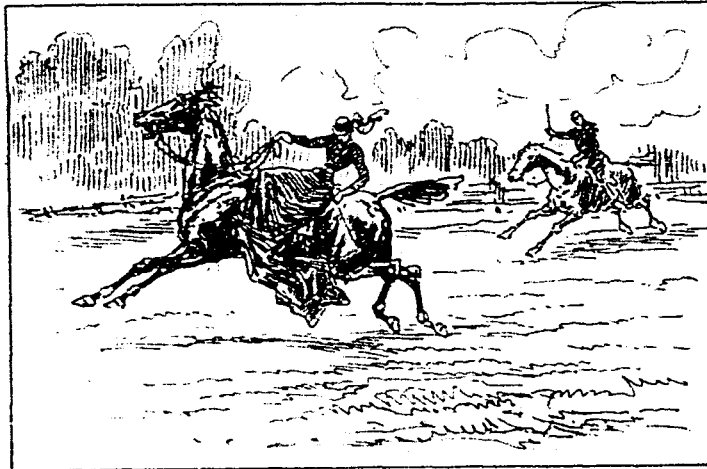
"But why not?" he asks. "I don't care for the hunt—on my word, I don't; and if I did, it would give me more pleasure to know that you were enjoying it, than to be in it myself. I insist that you let me change the saddles—that is, unless you are afraid to ride my horse."

The last hint is well thrown in. Kate's color rises and her eyes brighten; she feels that such a question puts the matter on a new footing at once.

"Afraid!" she says; "I afraid to ride your horse! That is not likely!"

He has alighted, and stands on the ground beside her, with Lightfoot's bridle over his arm, while Lightfoot himself neighs anxiously for his vanished companions. For a minute Kate sits irresolute, then the temptation proves too much for her powers of resistance. She puts her hand on Mr. Proctor's shoulder, and springs lightly to the ground.

"I fear it is very mean of me to take your horse," she says; "but, since you insist, I will do it, for I may never have such a chance again. Neither uncle nor Will can be induced to let me mount any horse except Diana, and the conse-



She is conscious of falling and knows no more.

quence is that I am always a mile behind the hunt. It will be charming to amaze them by riding up on Lightfoot; and if you would go home in any case—"

"Yes, I should go home in any case," says Mr. Proctor. "Set your mind at ease about me. I am in twenty fox-hunts where you are in one."

He does not add anything more, but, having lifted her down, goes to work and changes the saddles with quick dexterity. Holding the reins of the horses, Kate watches him, and thinks what a good fellow he is, and how pleasant it makes people to be obliging. Her bright smile and grateful glance, after she is mounted again, would reward him for a much greater sacrifice.



Cut off one curling end.