

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
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CHAPTER XIV.

"I count myself in nothing else so happy
As in a soul remembering my good friends."

The household are assembled at luncheon, when Miss Vaughn and Tarleton finally make their appearance—manifestly to the relief of Randal, whose restlessness has been exceedingly great. Even Janet, who has declared herself callous on all matters of sentiment, confides to Kate that she is sorry for him.



"I am glad to know you."

"Not that a man who is so foolish deserves for one to be sorry for him," adds that uncompromising young person. "but how can one help it! He is jealous of Frank Tarleton, and says he believes that there has been some arrangement between Miss Vaughn and Frank to meet here. Would not that be mean of Miss Vaughn—to take advantage of Randal's infatuation to come here to meet another man?"

"It would be worse than mean—it would be dishonourable," cries Kate, indignantly. "But why should you think of such a thing?"

"It is Randal who thinks it, not I. But it is very evident that Frank is one of her victims. They met as if they had known each other since the Flood, and in about half an hour they started to walk, and have not been heard of since."

This conversation takes place when Kate first returns home. A little later, the bell for luncheon rings, and she goes down, meeting Mr. Vaughn in the hall. He is probably waiting for her, since he is engaged in examining a gun, which he puts down as soon as she appears.

"I wonder if you know how unkind you have been this morning, my far cousin," he says, advancing. "I have been watching and waiting for you for hours—and bored to death, let me add, for the want of you—and all the while you were suffering yourself to be selfishly monopolized by Miss Brooke."

"I was very willing to be monopolized," answers Kate. "I have lost my heart to Miss Brooke."



Janet, Kate and Will bring up the rear.

"Indeed! Happy Miss Brooke! But do you not think you might find some one on whom to bestow your heart who would appreciate it more?"

"I am sure Miss Brooke appreciates it very much," says Kate.

"Who could fail to appreciate it! But there are degrees in everything, you know. And I hope the best part of your heart is still in your own possession," he adds, in a lower tone, as they walk across the hall.

It does not occur to Kate that this is more than a trick of flirtation, such as society men like to practise, especially on an inexperienced subject, so she flashes in reply one of her brightest glances.



"The best part of my heart is very safe," she says.

"Safe, but not out of reach, I hope," he whispers, as they enter the dining-room.

"That depends entirely upon who reaches after it," she answers, advancing to the table.

A few minutes later Miss Vaughn and Tarleton appear, the former still wearing her hat, and looking radiantly handsome with the bright glow of exercise on her face.

"Such a beautiful day, and such a beautiful country!" she says, with an air of enthusiasm. "Mr. Tarleton has been kindly acting as cicerone, and taking me to all manner of lovely places.—We were resting from our exertions when you met us," she goes on, addressing Miss Brooke.



Tarleton offers his hand with a smile.

"You looked as if you had no objection to resting indefinitely," responds that lady.

"How could one be anxious to leave such a delightful place!" says Miss Vaughn, no whit discomposed. "Probably you know it"—turning to Randal—"a deep, bosky glen, in which a pretty spring rises."

"Yes, I know it," he answers. "But the proper way to see the country is on horseback; and if you are not too tired to ride this afternoon, there is a very good lady's horse in the stable."

"I shall certainly not be too tired," she replies, graciously; for it is no part of her policy to loosen one link of her chain until she has no further need for the captive they bind.

"Will you let me make the same proposal?" says Mr. Vaughn to Kate. "If you are not too tired, will you ride this afternoon?"

"I am never tired," she answers; "but—" And here there is good reason to suppose that she meant to excuse herself, if she had not at that moment met Tarleton's eyes with the same expression which they have so often worn of late when resting on her face. Why she should resent this expression now, is not difficult to imagine. She meets the gaze one instant full and clear—no drooping of the lids—then turns to Mr. Vaughn. "But I fear there is no mount for me," she says. "Miss Vaughn, of course, must ride Diana."

"Nonsense, Kate!" says Will. "As if you are not able to ride any horse in the stable. There's Harry Lee!"

"How strange," she observes, addressing Mr. Vaughn, "that you should prefer a stupid ride with me to going with them?"

"Allow me," says that gentleman, "to correct your term. 'Stupid' is an expression which is not in the least applicable to the ride as far as I am concerned, whatever it may be so far as you are."

"Oh, I always find riding pleasant; but if I were a man, I should like sport much better."

"I like it as a diversion now and then; but I should not like to make it the staple amusement of my life, as men who live in the country often do."

"Is it more frivolous than many things which make the staple amusements of men who live in cities?" asks Kate, who has in her all the partisan spirit which often accompanies stanch loyalty.

"Perhaps not; but you will admit that there are greater possibilities of culture in a different order of amusements. I think"—here the speaker smiles—"that, when you come to know another form of life, you will wonder how you have ever tolerated these things."

"That shows how little you know of me," says Kate. "No life in the world could ever win my heart from 'these things,' as you call them."

"Pardon me if I say that you have never tried the life of which I speak."

"And in all probability never shall try it; but still I know that I should always love best the life I lead now."

"What! Can you not imagine that operas and balls are better than fox hunts, and jewels?"



"Oh" says Kate, "he is a widower?"

even more becoming than autumn-leaves!"—glancing at some of the latter which she wears in her hair.

"To many people, no doubt," she answers, "but not to me. Don't try."

To turn a country head
For pastime, ere you go to town

I know what suits me best."

"But it is exactly on that point we take issue. I am sure you do not know what suits you. Life holds a better tale than that of Di Vernon for you, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Does it?" (carelessly). "Well, we shall see. Now I must go and mend my habit, which I was so unfortunate as to tear the other day. I hope you are a good horseman. The last time I rode Harry Lee he ran away with me, and Daredevil is a horse who fully merits his name."

"I will take care of you to the best of my ability," says Mr. Vaughn; "and I hardly think Daredevil will run away with me."



"What, Pierce!" he says, "is it you?"

Having endeavoured in this kind manner to secure the discomfort of her escort, Kate retires to mend her habit. In crossing the hall, she is accosted by Mrs. Lawrence.