

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
CHRISTIAN REID.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him who bears the strong offence's cross."

Despite Fenwick's generous intercession in Kate's behalf, it is impossible for Miss Brooke to extend anything like cordial forgiveness to that culprit. Indeed she would be a remarkable person were she able to do so, since a woman can much sooner forgive a wrong done to herself than she can forgive another woman for rejecting her son, or any man who takes the place of son in her affection. Apart from the natura

It does not take her long to decide that she will write to Janet—Janet, who will understand and sympathize, and break the news to the rest—and she sits down, draws pen and ink toward her, and has written the date at the top of her page, when the door opens and Susan enters with a card.

Kate has no doubt whose name that bit of pasteboard bears, and her heart rises like mercury exposed to the sun—only to sink, like the same substance when visited by a cold blast, when she looks at it and reads: "Randal Lawrence."



He sinks into a chair, and covers his face with his hands.

resentment, Miss Brooke's disappointment is so keen that she cannot be patient or reasonable with Kate. She is so fond of the girl that this very fondness turns to bitterness against her. "But for her mad and selfish folly, we might be so happy!" she thinks—and to surrender all the bright dreams of the future which she has been weaving, costs her no slight pang.

This is very evident to Kate, and pains her deeply. It is no sacrifice to put away wealth and ease for Tarleton's sake, but it is very hard to inflict disappointment on those to whom she is so much attached, and who have been so kind and generous to her.

"I cannot remain here—that is very certain," she says to herself, after an interview with Miss Brooke, which is constrained and painful on both sides. "I must go back to Fairfield's until—until Frank is ready to take me. What will they all think, I wonder? What will uncle say? But, though they may blame me about this, I know they will be glad to see me, and I—O how glad I shall be to see them!"

The mere fancy of such a thing lights her face up brilliantly, and her mouth dimples into its softest smile as she opens her writing desk and takes out Janet's last letter. "Janet, at least, will not be sorry," she says, with a laugh—for on one page of her epistle this is what Janet says:

"It is reported in Arlingford—you know how such things get about on the wings of gossip—that you are engaged to Mr. Fenwick. Of course I know that you are not engaged, or you would have told us of it, but I can imagine exactly how matters stand. He is in love with you, you like him very much, and Miss Brooke is straining every nerve to make it a match. Well, if you are certain enough of your own heart to marry him, do so in Heaven's name, and nobody in the world would be gladder to know that you are happy than I—but, if you are not certain of your heart, O Kate, take care! I cannot help giving this warning, though I know that the right and proper thing to say under the circumstances would be, 'Put the past behind you and do the best you can with your life, trusting that your heart will come out all right after a while.' Acting on this philosophy, multitudes of women marry men for whom they care little or nothing, and, as far as one can judge, are happy enough. But I should hate to see you make such a compromise. I dare not say anything more—I fear I have said too much now. I hope I have not done any harm. Madame de Stael says: 'You must marry the man who loves you the best'—but I think that is poor advice."

Kate laughs again, and kisses the letter as if it was Janet herself. "Yes, it is poor advice, my dear," she says. "One must marry the man whom one loves the best—as I mean to do."

"What can possibly have brought him here?" she thinks. "Has he followed Miss Vaughn?—or has he come from Mr. Vaughn about that duel?"

The last thought makes her rise to her feet with alacrity. If that be so, and if there is any appeal which can move Randal to act as peace-maker, she is prepared to make such an appeal. She goes down-stairs quickly, enters the drawing-room, and is shaking hands with the young man, who advances to meet her, before she observes how strangely haggard he looks. Then she says:

"Have you been ill, Randal? You are not looking so well as when I saw you last."

"I have not been ill," he answers, "but worried and harassed—by Jove, Kate, you look well!"

"So every one tells me," says Kate.

Then they sit down, and in the course of the conversation during the next few minutes—conversation which follows the beaten track of inquiries answered and reciprocated—Kate becomes aware of a change in Randal, at once more subtle and more deep than the change in his appearance. What are the signs of it she can hardly tell farther than that the air of self-assertion and the condescending patronage against which she has often rebelled are conspicuously absent, and there is an effort underlying his manner, a wandering of his attention, both of which strike her forcibly. What can it mean? While she is asking herself this question, her cousin leaves the commonplaces which they have been talking, and says, abruptly:

"You must be surprised to see me, Kate. Don't you wonder what has brought me here?"

"I was just wondering," answered Kate, with her accustomed frankness, "for I know, of course, that you did not come to see me."

"There you are mistaken," he says. "I came for no other reason than to see you. I have not seen any one else—I shall not see any one else. If you cannot help me, Kate, there is no help for me on earth."

"What do you want me to do for you?" she asks, startled and amazed. That Randal, the sublimely patronizing man of the world, should appeal to her for aid of any kind seems incredible and absurd. Again she thinks of Miss Vaughn. It must be—it can only be—that he wishes her to plead his cause with that hard-hearted syren; and yet how strangely unlike Randal is such a desire.

While she considers this, and reflects how she can best express her conviction of the uselessness of anything of the kind, Randal rises and walks to one of the windows, then turns and comes back—his face paler than it has been, his eyes full of an expression which Kate has never seen in them before. A sense that something terrible

has befallen him—something far worse than any love-trouble—comes over the girl. She rises quickly, and lays her hand on his arm.

"Tell me what is the matter," she says. "I will do anything that I can for you—surely you know that."

"But you don't know what it is that I have come to ask of you!" he says. "You can't imagine what I have to tell you. Kate, you know how high we Lawrences have always held our heads, you know how proud my father is of his stainless name. Well, it will not be stainless much longer! Unless I can raise twelve thousand dollars within three days, I am ruined and disgraced."

"Randal!"

Kate can say no more—but her face adds everything which is to be added, as the dilated eyes gaze at him with incredulous horror.

"Yes," her cousin goes on recklessly, "and the disgrace will fall on those who are innocent, while the person who should suffer is the woman who threw my heart away as you might throw away a worn-out glove. I knew that she would never marry any but a rich man, and I was determined to win riches in order to win her, so I have been speculating deeply with money which I had no right to touch—until this is the end."

He sinks into a chair, and covers his face with his hands, while Kate stands beside him as if transfixed. What can she say? She can hardly realize that she is not in a dreadful nightmare, from which she will wake to cry: "Thank God, it was a dream." But it is no dream. The sunlight streams into the room, the notes dance up and down in it, the clock ticks with painful distinctness, she feels her pulses beating with a sickening rush, she sees Randal lift his face—and she knows that it is true.

"Why don't you say something?" he asks, sharply. "Don't you understand—I never meant to do it. Have you no pity for the most wretched man on earth?"

"I am thinking of one who will be more wretched when he hears this," she says, slowly. "O my uncle, my dear, dear uncle!"

She lifts her arms, as if in appeal against the bitterness of fate, then lays them on the low mantel, and buries her face upon them.

A minute passes in silence. It seems an age to Randal, whom this silent reproach cuts more keenly than any spoken words could do, and at last he rises and walks up to her.

"I don't ask anything of you for my sake, Kate," he says. "I know you have never cared for me—I know you have never had any reason to care for me—but for my father's sake will you help me?"

She raises her face—almost as pale now as his own—and looks at him with steady, tearless eyes.

"For his sake—to spare him this terrible blow, this great anguish—there is nothing under heaven that I would not do," she says; "but, in all the wide world, who is there more powerless to help you than I? You say you must have money, and I have not a dollar which is not given to me."

"But there are those who would give if you asked," he says hoarsely. "I have heard that you were engaged to Fenwick. Surely he—"

dearly from this dark cloud of ruin and disgrace. If she had yesterday spoken the words which would have made her Fenwick's promised wife, she could now go to him with implicit confidence in his generosity, and say, "Do this for me!"



After Randal's departure she goes to her room and puts on her hat.

but since she did not speak those words, since, instead, she is pledged to marry a man as powerless as herself to help others, what remains for her to do?

"Let me think," she says, in a stifled voice. "Let me think! That of which you speak, is impossible; but if there is any way—any way which is honorable, no matter what suffering it may cost—to serve you, and to spare them, I will do it."

"Whatever is done, must be done quickly to be of service," he says. "Mr. Elliott has been in the West Indies for some time, but he will be back in three days, and then—"

No need to say what then. Kate has heard often of Mr. Elliott—the distant cousin who took Randal into his business house—of how sternly just, how inflexibly upright, he is. To base a single hope on him would be folly—this she knows, even if Randal's face did not express as much. Everything is dark before her, yet her nerves are strung like steel with the realization that all depends on her. She thinks of Fairfield's, of the simple, generous lives led therein—of her uncle, of Will, of the girls—and she cries to Heaven in the depths of her soul that she will count no sacrifice, flinch from no suffering, to spare them.

But where does the road to serve them lie? She turns and walks down the long, rich room, with her hands clasped so tightly that the fingers leave their prints on the soft, white flesh, while



"You have a right to make your own terms."

She stops him by a gesture, and her face grows paler still, for she sees now on what hope he has been counting.

"I am not engaged to Mr. Fenwick," she says, "and I never shall be. There is nobody—nobody in the world—of whom I could not sooner ask such a favor as this, than of him."

Silence again—a silence of blank, utter disappointment on one side, of keenest suffering on the other. As a flash of lightning brings out with vivid distinctness every feature of a landscape, so Kate sees clearly the position in which she stands. On her—on her alone—rests the hope of shielding those whom she loves most

she asks again, and yet again, "How is it to be done?"

Such agonized questions are often asked, to which no answer comes—but an answer does come here. Suddenly Kate stops, like one thrilled by the shock of a sudden thought, and gazes at nothing more remarkable than a low, deep, easy chair. But this chair, though empty now, is filled with a visionary presence. In imagination she sees Mr. Ashton in it, as she saw him last night, and her heart almost stands still, as she says to herself, "I will go to him!"

Randal, who remains motionless where she left him, is fairly startled by her face when she