

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY
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CHAPTER XXXVI.

"Love me with thine open youth,
In its frank surrender;
With the vow of thy mouth
With its silence tender."

That Tarleton is astonished is not remarkable. It is seldom in real life that things occur in this comedy-like fashion, and it is by no means desirable that they should. He looks at the card with surprise.

"What is the meaning of it?" he asks. "How does Florida Vaughn chance to be here? I could not possibly desire anything better than such an opportunity—but it seems almost too fortunate to be true."



"I am getting apart from the subject."

"She came with Mr. Ashton to see me," says Kate. "They are to be married—did you know that? But there is no time to talk of it now. Will you come?"

"Surely the question is unnecessary," he replies.

He rises as he speaks, and she rises also. As they walk side by side, Kate feels a sensation of absolute bewilderment. It seems incredible that her doubt and irresolution of the morning should have such an unforeseen end as this! Am I dreaming? she says to herself—and then she glances at Tarleton. How changed he is!—how pale, how thin, and just now how grave! But there is no need to ask ever again whether she can forget him, whether she can marry another man. His presence has set that question forever at rest. No other face under the wide arch of heaven could be to her what his is; no other voice could sound like music in her ears; the touch of no other hand could thrill to the centre of her soul. For good or ill, for happiness or sorrow, she knows that her heart has found its king, and that it can never rest again—save in one shelter.

The walk is short, and few words are spoken. Both feel that during these minutes of uncertainty there is little to be said. To talk of ordinary common places would be impossible, and how can they speak of that which lies nearest the heart of both while Florida Vaughn is waiting for them?

That young lady does not wait long. As she sits by one of the drawing-room windows, with a stream of sunshine falling on her, and an edition de luxe of some popular book in her lap, the door opens, and she looks up with an air of relief. The room is large, and somewhat dim, but there is no mistaking Kate's graceful figure as it crosses the floor quickly. She is not expecting any one else, however, and who is this following?

Florida Vaughn is thoroughly trained in the ways of the world; so she does not utter a cry, as Kate did, but there can be no doubt that her pulses beat with an accelerated rush as she recognizes Tarleton. It is a trying position, but she acquits herself well. She rises and advances toward Kate.

"You see I am back again, like a bad shilling," she says, with a smile. Then, with a gracious air, she holds out her hand—not to the girl, but to the man on whose face a full light has fallen.

"Mr. Tarleton," she says, "this is a great surprise, but I must beg you to believe that I am very glad to see you well again."

"Thank you," answers Tarleton, briefly. In all his life he has never compelled himself to a

harder thing than to touch for an instant that daintily-gloved hand. Even her beauty has grown odious to him, and as he gazes at her face he is filled with a fierce sense of self-contempt to remember how its fairness thrallied him once.

"I was not aware that you were here," Miss Vaughn goes on, gazing from one to the other, with surprise and an uneasy sense of fear. "Kate did not mention it yesterday."

"I did not mention it yesterday because I did not know it," Kate's bell-like voice says. "We met accidentally—half an hour ago. It seemed strange that we should do so, and that you should be here at the same time, for I have been repeating to Mr. Tarleton all that you were kind

enough to tell me on that—that night at Fairfields."

"Indeed!" says Miss Vaughn, calmly,—but, despite this calmness, her heart sinks. It is no trifle to be arraigned on such a charge as this which she plainly foresees, with Tarleton standing by. Yet, like her brother, though she lacks principle, she does not lack courage, and she holds herself unmoved. In fact, she has sufficient presence of mind to send a shaft in return.

"I spoke on that occasion entirely for your good—I gave you merely a friendly warning," she says. "But I should hardly fancy that you would care to reopen the subject, since it must have lost its interest for Mr. Fenwick's fiancée."

"I am not Mr. Fenwick's fiancée," answers Kate, with a blaze of crimson on her cheeks, a flash of light in her eyes. "I told you that yesterday."

"But you also told me yesterday that you soon would be."



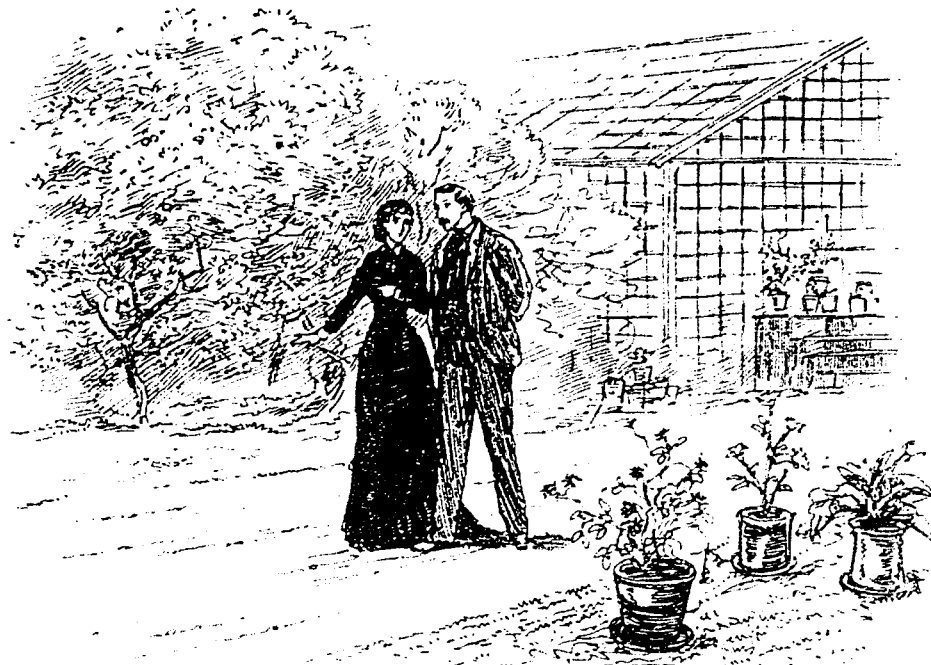
"Am I forgiven?"

"That has nothing to do with the matter—that is quite apart from the subject."

"It is altogether apart from the subject,"

says Tarleton, taking a step forward, and, as it were, putting Kate aside. "This matter rests between you and me. If Miss Lawrence were doubly engaged to Mr. Fenwick, I should still have the right to ask you why you led her to be-

The other, who has reached the door by this time, looks round with her hand upon the lock. "You have nothing for which to thank me," she says in a quick voice, "but do you mean to ruin your life at last by trusting him?"



"I have something to tell you, Mr. Fenwick."

here at Fairfields that I was your lover, and why you substituted, for an unimportant note which I sent from Southdale, another letter altogether."

For once in her life a blush of shame, which has its origin in detection, burns on Florida Vaughn's face. But she gives no sign of faltering as she meets steadily the indignant glow in Tarleton's eyes.

"You have improved in courtesy since I had the pleasure of meeting you last," she says, in her crisp, clear accents. "I have already said that I gave Miss Lawrence a warning. In that warning I uttered nothing which was not true. You have probably forgotten the trifling fact that you were my lover for a long time." Tarleton answers, "but did I ever, directly or indirectly, fill that role after we parted last March—when our engagement was broken by your own act?"

"I decline to answer such a question," she says. "Do you fancy that I—I have any need to claim homage which was not rendered to me?"

"Then," says Tarleton, quietly ignoring the last remark, "since you will not answer my question, you must allow me to make the assertion that, after we parted last March, I never spoke or wrote one word of love to you, I regret the necessity which forces me to say this, but you have placed me in a position in which I have no alternative. With regard to the letter, I have assured Miss Lawrence, and I hope you will be kind enough to corroborate my statement, that the note which I sent from Southdale merely contained a few lines respecting a trinket which you had requested me to return."

"I remember nothing about it," she says, haughtily, "and I am unable to see what connection it has with the letter which I showed her. She doubted that you were—or, it seems, I should say, had been—my lover; and, to convince her of the fact, I showed her one of your letters. It was no fault of mine if she imagined that it had been written from Southdale. I certainly did not assert the fact."

"But you implied it when you gave me the letter in an envelope which you knew that I would recognize," cries Kate, breathlessly.

The other looks at her with an expression of scorn in her eyes. "If I had been childish enough to have my faith shaken by such a trifle as that, I should be ashamed to acknowledge it," she says. "I know nothing of the envelope; I only assert distinctly that I gave you no reason to believe that the letter had been written at Southdale. Your inferences were your own affair. Now," she draws herself up and makes a movement toward the door as she speaks—"this has gone far enough. You have insulted me by charges made, and accusations implied, which I decline to notice. In the warning which I gave, I desired sincerely to serve you. That I have never had other than kind feelings toward you, my presence here this morning is a proof. I came to beg you to make some definite arrangement to be present at my marriage. Of course, after what has passed, I shall not press that point, but will simply say good-morning."

As she sweeps across the floor—a beautiful, stately figure, carrying herself as proudly as a queen—Kate glances with an involuntary appeal to Tarleton. Has she been guilty of injustice?—after all, was it only a mistake, a misconception? A generous nature is quick to imagine things like this—quick to shift blame from others to itself. She stands motionless for an instant, then, with an impulsive movement, follows Miss Vaughn.

"If I have done you any injustice, pardon me," she says. "No doubt I took things too much for granted. You have taught me one lesson, for which I thank you—hereafter I shall know better how to trust."

A look comes into Kate's face which answers the question before her lips do. "There is not anything with which I would not trust him!" she says. Then she holds out her hand, and says, gently and simply, "Good-bye."

As Florida Vaughn takes it, she looks at the fair, frank young face with an expression more wistful than any one has ever seen her face wear.



"I suppose I may congratulate you."

before. "You are mad," she says, "but—who knows!—you may be happy if there is such a thing as happiness. Good-bye."

So they part. Oscar, who is in the hall, opens the front door, the richly-attired figure passes out, the door closes again. That episode in life is over.

Kate thinks this as she turns back to the drawing-room. Over!—yet episodes as slight have wrecked unnumbered other lives! Her whole heart rises up in gladness and gratitude. It is characteristic of her that she does not look beyond the present moment—she does not consider any of the troubles and complications of which the future is full. It is enough that Tarleton is here, and that she loves and trusts him with all her heart.

When she enters the room, he meets her in the centre of the floor—holding out both hands, with one of the gestures which she knows so well. "Do you believe me now?" he says.

"Am I forgiven?"

"Forgiven!" she cries. "O Frank!"

The next moment his arms are round her, and it is only after a minute or two has passed that, with her face hidden on his shoulder, she says:

"It is I who must be forgiven. If I had trusted better, if I had waited more patiently—O, I don't deserve, I don't half deserve that you should care for me like this!"

"And I—what do I deserve?" he says. "My bonny Kate, what have I to offer you? Nothing but the heart against which I hold you—and against which I have no right to hold you! I cannot—I dare not—ask you to link your life with my ruined fortunes. You have not a friend in the world who would not cry shame upon me if I did."

"I have but one friend in the world for whose opinion I care, and that is my uncle," she says, lifting her flushed face and shining eyes. "You