

"BONNY KATE," A TALE OF SOUTHERN LIFE.

BY

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CHAPTER XVII. (Continued.)

The redoubtable Drummer—one of the crack dogs of the pack—is himself well assured that it is all right, and, as the other hounds dash from all directions in answer to his voice and the harking shouts of the hunters, the sport fairly begins; and by the time the red sun peeps over the eastern verge, the fox is up and away. After him sweeps the pack in full cry, the hunters following, and shouting themselves hoarse. Tarleton and Will are in the van, and draw rein for no obstacle in their course. "It is to be hoped that those fellows have their lives insured," remarks one of the men who follow. Kate watches them wistfully whenever they are in sight. How she would like to go headlong over fences and ditches with them, instead of being compelled to choose comparatively safe and unadventurous ways! But, besides Mr. Vaughn's suggestion of caution, she has Mr. Lawrence to keep a sharp eye on her, and prevent her risking her neck.

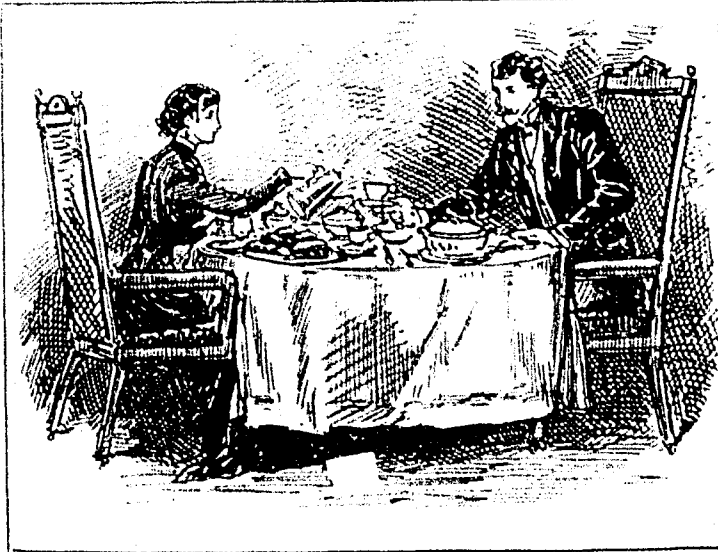


An ebony imp, in a white apron.

An opportunity for what she desires comes at last, however. Directly across their way intervenes the marshy bottom of a small creek which feeds a mill-pond, and here Raymond, practising some of his most cunning tactics, doubles so cleverly that most of the dogs are thrown off the scent. Only Drummer still gives mouth valiantly, and presses eagerly forward. The hunters draw rein—the pack being scattered, the ground miry, the prospect far from inviting in any way, a division of opinion takes place, while the dogs nose in and out among the rank growth of grass and weeds, and seem completely puzzled.

"Drummer is right—I'm convinced of that!" says Tarleton. "Hark the dogs after him, Mow, and you'll see whether or not he's on the trail of the fox."

"If he is, we shall have to go round the pond," says some one in a tone of disgust. "The horses would mire in there."



"With pleasure," says Kate, gayly, sitting down and beginning to pour the coffee.

"I'm going through," says Tarleton. "Does nobody else intend to come?" To his surprise it is a feminine voice which answers.

"I do—if you will take me!"

He wheels round quickly. Kate is near his side, while Mr. Vaughn is at least a hundred



"I love you! I love you!"
"I loved you since the first hour we met."

yards away, one of a group who are intent on some of the dogs who are endeavoring to recover the lost scent. The situation is a tempting one, and Frank Tarleton is not the man to resist the temptation.

"Certainly I will take you, if you are not afraid of mud and water," he says.

"Not in the least," she replies. "But let us start before uncle sees and stops me."

This is enough. Tarleton rides into the marshy bottom, and she follows. Two or three shouts of warning and expostulation are uttered, but neither heeds them. The dogs by this time have waked to a sense of their mistake, and are coming through also—running along half-decayed logs, splashing into water, struggling through mud. Far ahead is heard the voice of Drummer and his two or three supporters, whom Reynard has not baffled. The bottom is an absolute swamp, owing to the late heavy rain, and before Tarleton has advanced a hundred



"Horses ready, Mass. Frank."

yards he regrets his temerity. But to turn back, with the dogs in front and lost time to be made up, is something he cannot decide to do.

"I am sorry I brought you into this place," he says to Kate, as they splash through the black mud, with the horses sinking nearly to their knees, and threatening every moment to mire. "Are you willing to go through?"

"Oh, yes; I think we can do it," answers Kate, who is secretly a good deal dismayed. "If Mignon does not mire with your weight, surely Diana will not mire with mine—but we must not stop a minute. Here is the creek—I hope it is not deep."

"I will see," says Tarleton. He rides in as he speaks, and Kate, without waiting for a report, follows. Luckily the stream is not deep, but it is only part of a network of water intersected by islands of treacherous bog. It is no trifling matter to struggle safely through this, and by the

time the riders have accomplished it, their horses and themselves are covered with mud, and the dogs, though dear to memory, are altogether lost to sight and sound.

Finding themselves on firm ground once more,

they look at each other, and, yielding to an irresistible inclination, burst into a peal of laughter.

"Oh, if you could see yourself!" cries Kate. "There is a dab of mud on your nose, and a large splash on your cheek, and your coat is transformed into a spotted garment."

Presently they emerge in a field where two men are at work. "Can you tell us which way the hounds went?" asks Tarleton.

Both men pause at once. "Haven't seen any hounds," they answer, simultaneously. "They haven't come by here this mornin'."

"They must have kept along the creek,"



"May I inquire when this little arrangement was made?"

"My appearance must be handsome in the extreme," says Tarleton, making a futile effort to remove the dab of mud from his nose. "I will not be unkind enough to describe with such cruel exactness your appearance."

"I can imagine what I cannot see," says Kate, looking at her habit, which is spattered with mud and water. "What a dreadful place that was, and what a mercy that we did not mire outright! Now, what have we gained? Where are the dogs?"

Where, indeed! The question is easily asked, but by no means easily answered. If the earth had opened and swallowed up both fox and hounds, all sound and trace of them could not have vanished more completely. After listening intently for several minutes without hearing the faintest echo of the familiar cry of the pack, Tarleton exercises his throat and lungs by uttering several of the hunting-halloos which are so unmistakable. No answer is returned from any quarter. There is not a human being in sight, from whom information can be obtained, and the two who have come through so much in order to follow the dogs, look at each other again, a little blankly, as it begins to appear that they have lost them.

"By Jove, this is a fine state of affairs!" says Tarleton. "We are so shut in by woods that we can see nothing. But the dogs must have come to a loss, else we should hear them."

"I don't know," says Kate, doubtfully. "We were in that miserable bottom a long time trying to find the best way out. If the dogs are going at anything like good speed, they may be a mile away by this time."

says Tarleton, turning to Kate. "We had better go back."

So they go back and skirt along that stream; but no sign of the dogs do they find. That Tarleton has any throat left is almost miraculous, for he shouts till the echoes ring, without eliciting any response from anything but the echoes. After a while they reach a mill, and here they make inquiries, only to receive the discouraging assurance that nobody has seen or heard of the dogs. There is a bridge crossing the creek at this point, and over it they ride in a somewhat despondent frame of mind—conscious that their woful plight is calculated to impress any wayfarers whom they may meet.



"May I hope for pardon?" he asks, lifting his hat.

Indeed they have already run a gantlet of stares from a knot of men and boys loitering round the mill.

"They seem to have bin doin' pretty hard ridin' for to lose the dogs at last!" one of the stagers is heard to remark.

"I think," says Kate, "that this adventure



"O Mr. Proctor, how glad I am to see you!"

"We won't give them up without an effort, at any rate," says Tarleton. "Let us ride in this direction."

Accordingly, they ride on through the woods, stopping every few minutes to listen for some sound of the chase—only to be disappointed.

must be specially intended to teach us that 'the more the haste the less the speed.' That is what Aunt Margaret has been preaching to me for many days; but I never realized the truth before."

"I think it is intended to give me an oppor-