

# YOLANDE.

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"DARK," "WHITE WISDOM," "SUSAN," ETC.

(Continued.)  
CHAPTER XXXVII.

## A BEGINNING.

Despite all her hurrying, however, Yolande did not manage to get away from London on the day following; it was not until early the next morning that she and her mother and the maid found themselves finally in the train and the great city left behind for good. The weather was brilliant and shining around them; and the autumn-tinted woods were glorious in color. To these, on every passing object, Yolande, in her capacity of guardian, drew cheerful attention, treating the journey, indeed as a very ordinary every-day affair; but the said-elderly mother seemed hardly capable of regarding anything but her daughter, and that sometimes with a little bit of stealthy crying.

"Ah," she said, in those strangely hollow tones, it is kind of you to come and let me see you for a little while."

"Until I go back, with a stare."

"Until you go back where, mother?"

"Anywhere—away from me," said the mother, regarding the girl with an affectionate and yet wistful look. "It was in a dream that I came away from the house with you. You seemed calling me in a dream. But now I am beginning to wake. At the station there were two ladies; I saw them looking at us; and I knew what they were thinking. They were wondering to see a beautiful young life like yours linked to a life like mine; and they were right. I could see it in their eyes."

"They would have been better employed in minding their own business," said Yolande angrily.

"No; they were right," said her mother calmly; and then she added with a curious sort of smile: "But I am going to be with you for a little while, am not going away yet. I want to learn all about you, and understand you; then I shall know what to think when I hear of you afterward. You will have a happy life; I shall hear of you, perhaps, and be proud and glad; I shall think of you always as young and happy and beautiful; and when you go back to your friends—"

"Dear mother," said Yolande, "I wish you would not talk nonsense. When I go back to my friends, I am not going back to any friends until you go back with me; do you understand that?"

"I," said she; and for a second there was a look of fright on her face. Then she shook her head sadly. "No, no. My life is wrecked and done for; yours is all before you—without a cloud, without a shadow. As for me, I am content. I will stay with you a little while, and get to know you; then I shall go away. How could I live if I knew that I was the shadow on your life?"

"Well, yes, mother, you have got a good deal to learn about me," said Yolande, serenely. "It is very clear that you don't know what a temper I have, or you would not be so anxious to provoke me to anger. But please remember that it isn't what you say, or what you intend to do—it is what I may be disposed to allow you to do. I have been spoiled all my life; that is one thing you will have to learn about me. I always have my own way, and then you find that out very soon; and then you will give over making foolish plans, or thinking that you are to decide. Do you think I have the way, and you carried into slavery, to let you say as you please? Not at all; it is far from that. As soon as we get to Worthing I am going to get you a prettier bonnet than that—I know the shop perfectly; I saw it the other day. But do you think I will permit you to choose the color? No, not at all—not at all. And as for your going away, or going back, or going anywhere—oh, we will see about that, I assure you."

For the time being, at all events, the mother did not protest, and more and more fascinated by the society of her daughter; and appeared quite absorbed in regarding the bright young face, and in listening with a strange curiosity for the slight traces of a foreign accent. As for Yolande, she bore herself in the most matter-of-fact way. She would have no sentiment interfere. And always it was assumed that her mother was merely an invalid whom the sea air would do good to; not a word was said as to the cause of her present condition.

Working looked bright and cheerful on this breezy forenoon. The wind swept yellow-gold sea was struck a gleaming silver here and there, and the floods of sunlight; the morning promenaders had not yet gone in to lunch; a band was playing at the end of the pier. When they got to the rooms, they found that every preparation had been made to receive them; and in the bay-window they discovered a large telescope which the little old lady said she had borrowed from a neighbor whose rooms were unlet. Yolande managed everything—Janet, the help, the help of the creature—and the mother submitted, occasionally with a touch of amusement appearing in her manner. But usually she was rather sad, and her eyes had an absent look in them.

"Now let me see," said Yolande, briskly, as they sat at lunch (Janet waiting on them). "There is really so much to be done that I begin to wonder where we should begin. Oh yes, I do. First we will walk along to the shops and buy your bonnet. Then to the chemist's for some scent for your dressing bag. Then we must get glass dishes for flowers for the table—round one for the middle, and two round ones. Then when we come back the pony-carriage must be ordered for us; and we will give you a few minutes to put on the bonnet dear mother; and then we will go away for a drive into the country. Perhaps we shall get some wild flowers; if not, then we will buy some when we come back."

"Why should you give yourself so much trouble, Yolande?" her mother said.

"Trouble? It is no trouble. It is an amusement—an occupation. Without an occupation how can one live?"

"Ah, you are so full of life—so full of life," the mother said, regarding her wistfully.

"Oh, I assure you," said Yolande, blithely, "that not many know what can be made of a young woman in a room, if you have plenty of things to do, and but here one mass of color; and there another. Imagine, now, that we were thirty-three miles from Inverness; how could one get flowers without going up the hillside and collecting them? That was an occupation that had a little trouble, to be sure—but it was harder work than going to buy a bonnet! But sometimes we were not quite dependent on the wild flowers; there was a dear good woman living a few miles away—ah, she was a good friend to me—she used to send me from her garden far more than was right. And every time that I passed, another handful of flowers; more than that, perhaps some fresh vegetables all nicely packed up; perhaps a pair of ducklings—oh, such kindness as was quite ridiculous from a stranger. And then when I came away, she goes to the lodge, and takes one of the girls with her, to see that I am right; and no question of trouble or inconvenience; you would think it was you who were making the obligation and giving kindness, not taking it. I can write to her when I have time. But I hope soon to hear how they are

all going up there in the Highlands."

"Dear Yolande," said the mother, "why should you occupy yourself about me? Do you make you well; that is why. And you must be as much as possible out-of-doors, especially on such a day as this, when the air is from the sea. Ah, we shall soon make you forget the London dinginess and the smoke. And you would rather not go for a drive, perhaps, when it is so warm and going to drive you?"

"Why do I occupy myself about you?" said Yolande. "Because I have brought you here to make you well; that is why. And you must be as much as possible out-of-doors, especially on such a day as this, when the air is from the sea. Ah, we shall soon make you forget the London dinginess and the smoke. And you would rather not go for a drive, perhaps, when it is so warm and going to drive you?"

"Indeed, she took the mastery into her own hand; and perhaps that was a fortunate necessity; for it prevented her thinking over certain things that had happened to herself. Wise, grave, thoughtful, and prudent, there was now little left in her manner or speech of the petulant and light-hearted Yolande of other days; and yet she was pleased to see that her mother was taking more and more interest in her; and perhaps sometimes—though she strove to forget the past altogether and only to keep herself busily occupied with the present—there was some vague and subtle sense of self-approval. Or was it self-approval? Was it not rather some dim kind of belief that if he who had appealed to her, if he who had had faith in her, could now see her, he would say that she was doing well? But she tried to put these remembrances away.

An odd thing happened when they were out. They had gone to the shop where Yolande had seen the bonnets; and she linked with the one that she chose; that she made her mother put it on then and there, and asked the milliner to send the other home. Then they went outside again; and for two was a chemist's shop.

"Now," said Yolande, "we will go and choose two for the bottles in the dressing-bag. One shall be white rose; and the other? What other?"

"Whichever you like best, Yolande," said her mother, submissively, her daughter had become so completely her guide and guardian.

"But it is for your dressing-bag, mother, not mine," said Yolande. "You must come into the shop and choose."

"Very well, then," said the mother; and Yolande glanced for a minute at the window, and then went inside. But the moment they had got within the door—perhaps it was the odor of the place that had recalled her to herself—the mother shrank back with a strange look of fear on her face.

"Yolande," she said, in a low, hurried voice, "I will wait for you outside."

Then Yolande seemed to comprehend what that dazed look of fear meant; and she was so startled that, even after her mother had left, she could scarce summon back enough self-possession to tell the shop-man what she wanted. Thereafter she never asked her mother to go near a chemist's shop.

That same afternoon they went for a drive along some of the inland country lanes; and as they soon found that the staid, fat, and placid pony could safely be left under the charge of Janet, they got out whenever they had a mind to look at an old church, or to explore banks and hedgerows in search of wild flowers. Now this idle strolling, with occasional scrambling across ditches, was highly amusing to her mother, who was accustomed to climb the hills of Athlone; but no doubt it was fatiguing enough to this poor woman, who, nevertheless, did her very best to prove herself a cheerful companion. But it was on this day that Yolande reckoned. That was why she hated her mother to be out all day in the sea air and the country air. What she was aiming at was a certainty of sleep for this invalid of whom she was in charge. And so she cheerfully consented to her mother's pretended eagerness in this search for wild flowers which was not very real (for ever, in the midst of it, some stray plant here or there would remind her of an herbaceous fair way, and of other days and other scenes), until at last she thought that she had done her duty, and so they got into the little carriage again and drove back to Worthing.

That evening at dinner she amused her mother with a long and minute account of the voyage to Egypt, and of the life on board the dahabayah, and of the life on board the dahabayah. The mother seemed peculiarly interested about Mrs. Leslie, and asked many questions about him; and Yolande told her frankly how pleasant and agreeable the young fellow he was, and how well she and his sister seemed to understand each other, and so forth. She betrayed no embarrassment in expressing her liking for him; although, in truth, she spoke in pretty much the same terms of Colonel Graham.

"Mr. Leslie was not married, then?"

"Oh no."

"It was rather a dangerous situation for two young people," the mother said, with a gentle smile. "It is a wonder you are not wearing a ring now."

"What?" Yolande said, with a quick flush of color.

"An engagement ring."

In fact, the girl was not wearing her engagement ring. On coming to London she had taken it off and put it away; other duties called for it, and she had what she said to herself, and was content that her mother should remain in ignorance of that portion of her past history.

"I have other things to attend to," she said, briefly, and the subject was not continued.

That day passed very successfully. The mother had shown not the slightest symptom of any craving for either stimulant or narcotic; nor any growing depression in consequence of being deprived of the sea air. Yolande had warned Yolande that both were probable. No; the languor from which she suffered appeared to be merely the languor of ill health; and so far from becoming more depressed, she had become more cheerful. Yolande had been watching her; and everything seemed right; and so by-and-by the girl's mind began to wander away to distant scenes and to pictures that she had been trying to banish from her eyes.

And if sometimes in this hushed room she cried silently to herself, and hid her face in the pillow so that no sound should awaken the sleeping mother, perhaps that was only a natural reaction. The strain of all that forced cheerfulness had been too much. On or twice during the evening she had had to speak of the Highlands; and the effort on such occasions to shut out certain recollections and vain regrets and self-accusations was of itself a hard thing. And now that the strain was over, her imagination ran riot; all the old life up there, with its wonder and delight and its unknown pitfalls, came back to her; and all through it was a sense of a hear a sad refrain—a couple of lines from one of Mrs. Bell's ballads—that she could not get out of her head.

"Heard he, 'My bonnie lady, were ye sweet Jeanie Grant, but ye've guessed my very name.'"

They could not apply to her; but sometimes she was so sorrow in her mind, and the tragedy of two changed lives. How could they apply to her? If there was any one of whom she was thinking it ought to have been to whom she had plighted her truth. She had put

aside her engagement ring for a season; but she was not thereby absolved from her promise. And yet it was not of him she was thinking; it was of some one she saw only vaguely, but gray-haired and aged, and with a heart that had a great yearning and pity and love in it, knew that it could not help, and what was there but a woman's tears and a life-long regret? That was a sad night, when the mother, the long sleepless hours in suffering. But with the morning Yolande had pulled herself together again. She was only a little pale—that was all. She was as cheerful, as brave, as high-spirited as ever. When did the band play?—they would walk out on the pier. But even Jane could see that this was not the Yolande who had lived at Allman-house a kind of sunlight always in her face and in her words.

Not that day but the next came the anxiously expected news from the Highlands.

"My darling Yolande, your letter has given me inexpressible relief. I was so lonely to see you. Above all, it seemed so good to hear of you alone, and I remain here; but it will be a long time before any of us can get to you; and I think of you in the meantime, it is with no great sense of satisfaction that I am conscious that I can do nothing to help you. But I rejoice that so far you have had no serious trouble; perhaps the worst is over; if that were so, then there might be a recompense to you for what must be undergoing. It would be strange indeed if this should succeed after so many failures. It would make a great difference to all our lives; sometimes I begin to think it possible, and then recollections of the past prove too strong. Let me know your opinion. Tell me everything. Even after all these years, sometimes I begin to hope and to think of our having a home at a household again for what we were used to. I would be undergirded by so many failures. 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