

YOLANDE.

By WILLIAM BLACK.

AUTHOR OF "SHADOWS OF THE PAST," "THE WHITE WINGS," "THE SILENT VOICE," ETC.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER VI.

They were indeed cut off from the rest of the world, as they went plunging their way through these blue Mediterranean seas. Day after day brought its round of amusements; and always the sun shined on the white decks, and the soft winds blowing; and now and again a swallow, or dove, or quail, or some such herald from unknown coasts, taking refuge for a while in the rigging, or fluttering along by the vessel's side. There was an amateur photographer on board, moreover; and many were the groups that were formed and taken; only it was observed that when the officers were included, the captain generally managed to have Yolande standing on the bridge beside him—a piece of favoritism that broke through all rules and regulations. There was a good deal of "bull" played; and it was wonderful how, when Mrs. Graham was playing, there always happened to be a number of those young Highland officers about, ready to pick up her quots for her. And always, but especially on the bright and breezy forenoons, there was the constitutional tramp up and down the long hurricane-deck—an occupation of which Yolande was particularly fond, and in which she found no one could keep up with her so untravelling as the Master of Lynn. She was just as well pleased, however, when she was alone, for then she sang to herself, and had greater freedom in flinging her arms about.

"Look at her," her father said one morning to Mrs. Graham—concealing his admiration under an air of chagrin. "Wouldn't you think she was an octopus, or a windmill, or something like that?"

"I call it a rattling good style of walking," said Colonel Graham, interposing. "Elbows in; palms out. She is a remarkably well-made young woman—that's my opinion."

"But she isn't an octopus," her father said, peevishly.

"Oh, that is merely an excess of vitality," her champion said. "Look how springy her walk is! I don't believe her heel ever touches the deck—all her walking is done with the front part of her foot. Gad, it's infectious," continued the Colonel, with a grim laugh. "I caught myself trying it when I was walking with her yesterday. But it ain't easy at fifteen stone."

"She need not make herself ridiculous," her father said.

"Ridiculous? I think it's jolly to look at her. Makes one feel young again. She don't know that a lot of fogies are watching her. Bet a sovereign she's talking about dancing. Archie's devilish fond of dancing—so he ought to be at his time of life. They say they're going to give us a ball to-night—on deck."

Mrs. Graham was a trifle impatient. There were none of the young officers about, for a wonder; they had gone to have their after-breakfast cigar in the smoking-room—and perhaps a little game of Nap therewithal. This study of Yolande's appearance had lasted long enough, in her opinion.

"It is clever of her to wear nothing on her head," she said, as she took up a book and arranged herself in her chair. "Her hair is her best feature."

But what Yolande and her companion young Leslie, were talking about, as they marched up and down the long white decks—occasionally stopping to listen to a small group of lascars, who were chanting a monotonous sing-song refrain—had nothing in the world to do with dancing.

"You think, then, I ought to speak to your father about the moon? Would you like it?" she said.

"If" she said. "That is nothing. If my papa and I are together, it is not any difference to me where we are. But if it is so wild and remote, that is what my papa likes."

"Remote?" said he, with a laugh. "It is fourteen miles away from anywhere. I like to hear those idiots talking who the Highlands! Well, you've got the railway to Oban, I suppose that's pretty bad. But this place that I am telling you of—why, you would not see a strange face from one year's end to the other."

"Oh, that will exactly suit my papa—exactly," she said, with a smile. "Is it very, very far away from everything and every one?"

"Isn't it?" he said, grinning. "Why, it's up near the sky, to begin with. I should say the average would be near three thousand feet above the level of the sea. And as for remoteness—well, perhaps Kingussie is not more than twelve miles off as the crow flies; but then you've got the Monale mountains between it and you; and the Monale mountains are not exactly the sort of place that a couple of old ladies would like to climb in search of wild flowers. You see that is the serious part of it for you, Miss Winterbourne. Fancy the change between the temperature of the Nile and that high mountain!"

"Oh, that is nothing," she said. "So long as I am out-of-doors the heat or the cold is to me nothing—nothing at all."

"The other change," he continued, "I have no doubt would be striking enough—from the busy population of Egypt to the solitude of All-nam-Ba."

"What is it? All-nam-Ba?"

"All-nam-Ba. It means the Stream of the Cows, though there are no cows there now. They have some strange names up there—left by the people who have gone away. I suppose people did live there once, though what they lived on I can't imagine. They have left names, anyway, some of them simple enough—the Fair Winding Water, the Dun Water, the Glen of the Horses, the Glen of the Gray Loch, and so forth—but some of them I can't make out at all. One is the Glen of the Tomb-stone, and I have searched it, and never could find any trace of a tomb-stone. One is the Cairn of the Wanderers, and they must have wandered a good bit before they got up there. Then there is a burn that is called the Stream of the Fairies—Uge na Sille-na—that is simple enough; but there

is another place that is called Black Fairies. Now who on earth ever heard of black fairies?"

"But it is not a frightful place?" she said. "It is not terrible, gloomy?"

"Not a bit," said he. "These are only names. No one knows how they came there, that is all. Gloomy? I think the strath from the foot of the moor down to our place is one of the prettiest straths in Scotland."

"Then I should see Lynn Towers?" she said.

"Oh yes; it isn't much of a building, you know."

"And Mr. Melville of Monaglen—that would be interesting to me."

"Oh yes," said he; "but—but I wouldn't call him Monaglen—do you see—he hasn't got Monaglen; perhaps he may have it back some day."

"And you," she said, turning her clear eyes toward him, "sometimes they call you Master; is it right?"

He laughed lightly.

"Oh, that is a formal title—in Scotland. Colonel Graham makes a little joke of it; I suppose that is what you have heard."

"Must not call you so?"

"Oh no," and then he said, with a laugh: "You may call me anything you like; what's the odds? If you want to please my brother-in-law you should call him Inverstry."

"But how can I remember?" she said, holding up her fingers and counting. "Not Monaglen; not Master; but yes, Inverstry. And Mrs. Bell, shall I see her?"

"Certainly, if you go there."

"And the mill-wheels, and the electric lamps, and all the strange things?"

"Oh yes, if Jack Melville takes a fancy to you. He doesn't to everybody."

"Oh, I am not anxious," she said, with a little dignity. "I do not care much about such things. It is no matter to me."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times!" he said, with much earnestness. "Really, I was not thinking of what I was saying. Of course he'll be delighted to show you everything—he will be perfectly delighted. He is awfully courteous to strangers. He will be quite delighted to show you the whole of his instruments and apparatus."

"It is very obliging," she said, with something of coldness, "but there is no need that I should be indebted to Mr. Melville."

"Not of Monaglen," he said, demurely.

"Of Monaglen, or not of Monaglen," she said, with high indifference. "Come, shall we go and find my papa, and tell him about the ball, fair place and the Stream of the Fairies?"

"No, wait a moment, Miss Winterbourne," said he, with a touch of embarrassment. "You see, that shooting belongs to my father. And I look after the letting of our shootings and fishings when I am at home, though of course we have an agent. Now—now I don't quite like taking advantage of a new friendship to—to make such a suggestion. I mean I would rather sink the shop. Perhaps your father might get some other shooting up there."

"But not with the Glen of the Black Fairies, and the strath, and Lynn Towers near the loch where the char are, and all that you have told me. No; if I am not to see Mrs. Bell—if I am not to see—" She was going to say Mr. Melville of Monaglen, but she waved that aside with a gesture of petulance. "No, I wish to see all that you have told me about, and I think it would be pleasant if we were neighbours."

"You really must have neighbours," said he, eagerly, "in a place like that. That is one thing certain. I am sure we should try to make it as pleasant for you as possible. I am sure my father would. And Polly would be up sometimes—I mean Mrs. Graham. Oh, I assure you, if it was any other shooting than All-nam-Ba I should be very anxious that you and your father should come and take it. Of course the lodge is not a grand place."

"We will go and talk about it now," she said, "to my papa, and you can explain."

Now, as it turned out, although Mr. Winterbourne was rather staggered at first by Yolande's wild proposal of suddenly changing the idle luxuries of a Nile voyage for the severities of a moorland home in the North, there was something in the notion that attracted him. He began to make enquiries.

The solitariness, the remoteness, of the place seemed to strike him. Then 850 beds of grouse, a few black game, a large number of mountain hares, and six stags was a good return for nine weeks' shooting; and the last tenant had not had experts with him. Could Yolande have a piano or a harmonium sent to her away in that wilderness?—anything to break the silence of the moors. And Mr. Winterbourne was unlike most people who are contemplating the renting of a moor; the cost of it was the point about which he thought least. But to be away up there—with Yolande.

"Of course it is just possible that the place may have been let since I left," the Master of Lynn said. "We have not had it vacant for many years back. But that could easily be ascertained at Malta by telegram."

"You think you would like the place, Yolande?" her father said.

"I think so; yes."

"You would not die of cold?"

"Not willingly, papa—I mean I would try not—I am not afraid. There is no snow anywhere, papa; and there is no Parliament there; you are fond of shooting; and there will be many days, not with shooting, for you and me to wander in the mountains. I think that will be nice."

"Very well. I will take the place, Mr. Leslie, if it is still vacant; and I hope we shall be good neighbours; and if you can send us a deer or two occasionally into the ravines you speak of, we shall be much obliged to you. And now about dogs, and gillies, and ponies."

But this proved to be an endless subject of talk between the two, both then and thereafter; and so Yolande alone away to look after her own affairs. Amongst other things she got hold of the purser, and talked so coaxingly to him that he went and ordered the cook

to make two sheets of toffee instead of one, and all of white sugar; so that when Yolande subsequently held her afternoon levee among the children of the steerage passengers she was provided with sweet stuff enough to make the hearts of the mothers quake with fear.

It was that evening that she had to put the flowers overboard—on the wide and sad and uncertain grave. She did not wish any one to see her, somehow;—this compliance with the pathetic futile wishes of the poor mother. She had most carefully kept the flowers sprinkled with water, and despite of that they had got sadly faded and shrivelled; but she had purchased another basketful at Malta, and these were fresh enough. What mattered? The time was too vague; the vessel's course too uncertain; the trifles of flowers would soon be swallowed up in the solitary sea. But it was the remembrance of the mother she was thinking of.

She chose a moment when every one was down below at dinner, and the deck was quite deserted. She took the two little baskets to the rail; and there, very slowly and reverently, she took out handful after handful of the flowers and dropped them down on the waves, and watched them go floating and floating out and out on the swaying waters. The tears were running down her face; but she had forgotten whether there was anybody by or not. She was thinking of the poor woman in England. Would she know? Could she see? Was she sure that her request would not be forgotten? And indeed she had not gone so far wrong when she had trusted to the look of Yolande's face.

Then, fearing her absence might be noticed, she went quickly to her cabin, bathed her eyes in cold water, and then went below—where she found the little coterie at their end of the table all much exercised about Mr. Winterbourne's proposal to spend the autumn among the wild solitudes of All-nam-Ba.

He, indeed, declared he had nothing to do with it. It was Yolande's doing. He had never heard of All-nam-Ba.

"It is one of the best grouse moors in Scotland, I admit that," Colonel Graham said, with an ominous smile; "but it is a pretty stiff place to work over."

You talk like that, Jim," said his wife (who seemed anxious that the Winterbournes should preserve their fancy for the place), "because you are getting too stout for hill work. We shall find you on a pony soon. I should like to see you shooting from the back of a pony."

"Better men than I have done that," said Inverstry, good-humouredly.

They had a concert that night—not a ball, as was at first intended; and there was a large assemblage, even the young gentlemen of the smoking-room having forsaken their Nap when they heard that Mrs. Graham was going to sing. And very well she sang, too, with a thoroughly trained voice of considerable compass. She sang all the new society songs, about wild melancholies and regrets and things of that kind; but her voice was really fine in quality; and one almost believed for the moment that the pathos of these spasmodic things was true. And then her dress—how beautifully it fitted her neat little shoulders and waist! Her curly short hair was surmounted by a coquettish cap; she had a circle of diamonds set in silver round her neck; but there were no rings to mar the symmetry of her plump and pretty white hands. And how assiduous those boy-officers were, although deprived of their cigars! They hung round the piano; they turned over the music for her—as well as an eye-glass permitted them to see; nay, when she asked, one of them sent for a banjo, and performed a solo on that instrument—performing it very well too. None of the unmarried girls had the ghost of a chance. Poor Yolande, in her plain, pale pink gown, was nowhere. All eyes were directed on the pretty little figure at the piano; on the stylish costume; the charming profile, with its outward sweep of black lashes; with the graceful arms and white fingers.

For a while from those clear dark eyes there was not one of the tall youths standing there who would not have sworn to abjure sporting news, papers for the rest of his natural life.

There was only one drawback to the concert, as a concert. To keep the saloon cool the large ports astern had been opened, and the noise of the water rushing away from the screw was apt to drown the music.

"Miss Winterbourne," some one said to Yolande—and she started, for she had been sitting at one of the tables, imagining herself alone, and dreaming about the music—"you can hear far better on deck. Won't you come up and try?"

It was the Master of Lynn.

"Oh yes," said she; "thank you."

She went with him on deck, expecting to find her father there. But Mr. Winterbourne had gone to the smoking room. What mattered? All companions are alike on board ship. Young Leslie brought her a chair, and put it close to the skylight of the saloon, and he sat down there too. They could hear pretty well, and they could talk in the intervals. The night was beautifully quiet, and the moonlight whiter than ever on the decks. These Southern nights were soft and fitted for music; they seemed to blend the singing below and the gentle rushing of the sea all around. And Yolande was so friendly—and frank to plain-spokenness. Once or twice she laughed; it was a low, quiet, pretty laugh.

Such were the perils of the deep that lay around them as they sailed along those Southern seas. And at last they were nearing Malta. On the night before they expected to reach the island Mrs. Graham took occasion to have a quiet talk with her brother.

"Look here, Archie, we shall all be going ashore to-morrow, I suppose," she said.

"No doubt."

"And I dare say," she added, fixing her clear, pretty, shrewd eyes on him, "that you will be going away to the club with those young fellows, and we shall see nothing of you."

"We shall be all over the place, I suppose," he answered. "Most likely

I shall lunch at the club. Graham can put me down; he is still a member, isn't he?"

"It would be a good deal more sensible like," said his sister, "if you gave us lunch at a hotel."

"I?" he cried, with a laugh. "I like that! Considering my income and Inverstry's income, a proposal of that kind strikes one with a sort of coolness."

"I didn't mean Jim and me only," said Mrs. Graham, sharply. "Jim can pay for his own luncheon, and mine too. Why don't you ask the Winterbournes? This was a new notion altogether."

"They wouldn't come, would they?" he said, diffidently. "It is not a very long acquaintance. Still, they seem so friendly, and I'd like it awfully, if you think you could get Miss Winterbourne to go with you. Do you think you could, Polly?" Don't you see, we ought to pay them a compliment—they've taken All-nam-Ba."

"Miss Winterbourne," said Mrs. Graham, distantly, "is going ashore with me to-morrow. Of course we must have lunch somewhere. If you men like to go to the club, very well. I suppose we shall manage."

Well, perhaps it was only a natural thing to suggest. The Winterbournes had been kind to him. Moreover, women do not like to be left to walk up and down the Strada Reale by themselves when they know that their husbands and brothers are enjoying themselves in the Union Club. But it is probable that neither Mrs. Graham nor the young Master of Lynn quite fully recollected that attentions and civilities which are simple and customary on board ship—which are a necessity of the case (people consenting to become intimate and familiar through being constantly thrown together)—may, on land, where one returns to the conventionalities of existence, suddenly assume a very different complexion, and may even appear to have a startling significance.

(To be continued.)

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