

YOLANDE.

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Author of "SANDOR BELLA," "MADRID OF DARE," "WHITE WINGS," "SERPENT," ETC.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER XIII.

INTERVENTION.

Mrs. Graham saw clearly before her

the difficulties and danger of the task

she had undertaken, and she approached

it with much circumspection and caution.

Time and abundance of opportunities

were on her side, however.

Moreover, she and Yolande were like

sisters now; and when the men-folk

were smoking together in some other

part of the dahabayah, and talking

about public affairs or their chances of

having a little shooting in the neighbor-

hood of Merhadj, these two were

most likely seated in the cool shade of

the Belvedere, having a quiet and con-

fidential chat all to themselves, the

while the slow-moving panorama of the

Nile stole stealthily by.

And gradually Mrs. Graham got Yo-

lände to think a good deal about the

future, which ordinarily the girl

was loath to do. She had an ad-

mirable capacity for enjoying the present

moment, so long as the weather

was fine, and her father not a long way

off. She had never experienced any

trouble, and why should she look for-

ward to any? She was in perfect

health and consequently her brain was

free from morbid apprehensions. Some-

times, when Mrs. Graham was talking

with the sadness begotten of worldly

wisdom, the younger woman would

laugh lightly, and ask what there was

on earth to depress her—except, per-

haps, the absence of dear Baby. In

short, Yolande could not be made an-

xious about herself. She was content

to take the present as it was, and the

future as it might come. She was far

more interested in watching the opera-

tions of this or that African kingfisher,

when the big black and gray bird, after

fluttering in the air for a while in the

manner of a hawk, would swoop down

and dive into the river, emerging with

a small silver fish in its beak.

But if she could not easily be made

anxious about herself, she very easily

indeed could be made anxious about

her father; and Mrs. Graham quickly

discovered that anything suggested

about him was instantly sufficient to

arouse her interest and concern. She

played upon that pipe skilfully, and

yet with not the faintest notion that

her siren music was anything but of

the simplest and honestest kind. Was

it not for the welfare and happiness of

every one concerned? Even Jim, with

his faculty for looking at the sardonic

sides of things, had not a word to say

against it. It would be a very good

arrangement, that oracle had declared.

"Do you know, dear," said she, one

morning, to Yolande, "what Jim has

been saying?—I think he would not

be surprised if, sooner or later, your

father were offered some place in the

Government."

Yolande opened her eyes wide with

surprise. But then she laughed, and

shook her head.

"Oh, no. It is impossible. He is

not good friends with the Government.

He has too many opinions to himself."

"I don't know," said pretty Mrs.

Graham, looking at one of the little

French mirrors, and smoothing her

curls. "I don't know. You should

hear Jim, anyway. Of course I don't

mean a post with a seat in the Cabinet;

but office of some kind—an Under-

Secretaryship or something of that sort.

Jim says he heard just before he left

town that the Government were going

to try to conciliate the Radicals, and

that some member before the gangway

would most likely be taken in. It

The girl made a little gesture by

turning out the palms of her hands ever

so slightly.

"I will tell you, my dear child, of

one place where you could go. If you

came to us at Inververy—now, or then,

or at any time—there is a home there

waiting for you; and Jim and I would

just make a sister of you."

She spoke with feeling, and indeed,

with honesty; for she was quite ready

to have welcomed Yolande to their

northern home, wholly apart from the

projects of the Master of Lynn. And

Yolande for a second put her hand on

her friend's hand.

"I know that," said she, "and it is

very kind of you to think of it; and I

believe it true—so much that, if there

was any need, I would accept it at once.

And it is a very nice thing to think of;

that there are friends who would take

you into their own home if it were

needed. Oh, I assure you, it is pleasant

to think of, even when there is no need

at all."

"Will you come and try it? Will

you come and see how you like it?"

said pretty Mrs. Graham, with a cour-

teousness. "Why not? Your papa

wants to be back in time for the Budget,

or even before that. They say that it

will be a late session—that if they get

away for the twelfth they will be lucky.

Now you know, dear Yolande, between

ourselves, your father's constituents are

very fickle. It is all very well for

you to make a joke of it here; but really

—really—really—"

"I understand you very well," said

Yolande, quickly; "and you think he

should remain in London till the twelfth,

and always be at the House? Yes; yes;

that is what I think too. Do you

imagine it is I who take him away on

voyage after voyage? No! For me, I

would rather have him always at the

House. I would rather read his

speeches in the newspaper than see any

more cities, and cities."

"Very well; but what are you going

to do, Yolande dear, between the time

of your getting back and the twelfth?"

"Oh," said Yolande, with her face

brightening, "that will be a busy time

—no more of going away—and I shall

be all the time in the hotel in Albe-

marie Street—and papa and I dined

together every night, and having a chat

before he goes to the House."

"I am sure you are mistaken there,"

said Mrs. Graham, promptly. "Your

father won't let you stay all that time

in town. He hates the very name of

town. He is too fond of you, too care-

ful of you, Yolande dear, and too proud

of the roses in your cheeks, to let you

staid yourself up in a town hotel."

"But look at me!" the girl said in

dignity. "Do I not look well? Am I

not looking? Why should I not live

in a town hotel as well as others? Are

all unwell who live in London? No;

it is folly to say that. And if

anything were likely to make me un-

well, it is not living in London; but

it is the fretting, when I am away from

London, that I can be of no use to my

papa, and that he is living alone there.

Think of his living alone in the hotel,

and dining alone there—worse than

that still, dining at the House of Com-

mons! Why, it was only last night

Colonel Graham and he were speaking

of the bad dinners there—the heat and

the crush and the badly cooked joints—

yes, and I sitting there, and saying to

myself, 'Very well, and what is the use

of having a daughter if she cannot get

for you a pretty dinner, with flowers on

the table?"

"I understand you so well; when

you speak it is like myself thinking,"

said Mrs. Graham, in her kindly way

one in a proper position."

She said neither yes nor nay; there

was an affectation of maiden coyness;

no protest of any kind. But her eyes

were distant and thoughtful; not sad

exactly, but seemingly filled with

memories—probably memories of her

own futile schemes and hopes.

That afternoon they came in sight of

some walls and a minaret or two, half

hidden by groves of palms lying along

the high banks of the river; and these

they were told, belonged to Merhadj;

but the Reis had had orders to moor

the dahabayah by the shore at some

short distance from the town, so that

the English party should not be quar-

relled about the confusion and squalor

further along. The consequence of this

was that very soon they found them-

selves the practical owners of a portion

of Africa which seemed to be uninhab-

ited; for when the whole party got

ashore (with much excitement and

exciter interest), and waded across the

thick sand, and then entered a far-

stretching wood of acacia-trees, they

could find no trace of human occupa-

tion; the only living things being an

abundance of hoopoes—the beautiful

red-headed and crested birds were so

tame that one could have flung one's

cap at them—and wood-pigeons, the

latter of a brilliant blue and gray and

white. But by-and-by, as they wan-

dered along—highly pleased to be on

shore again, and grateful for the shelter

of the trees—they met a slow proces-

sion of Arabs, with donkeys and camels,

wending their way through the dry

rushes and hot sand; and as the men

were heavily laden, they made no

doubt that the natives were carrying in

farm produce to sell at Merhadj.

When they returned to the dahab-

yeh, they found a note from Ismat

Efendi, written in excellent English,

saying that his father had just returned

from the interior, and that they both

would do themselves the honor of pay-

ing a visit the following morning.

But what to do till dinner-time—now

that the dahabayah was no longer

moving past the familiar features of the

Nile? Ahmed came to the rescue.

The chef was anxious to have some

meat and shoot some for him? The gen-

tlemen flitted refused to go and kill those

half-tame creatures; but they discovered

that Ahmed could shoot a little; so

they lent him a gun, and offered to

beat the wood for him. It was an

occupation, at least. And so the two

young men were left by themselves again,

with nothing before them but the

choosing of a costume for dinner, and

the donning of the same.

It was an opportunity not to be mis-

sed; and yet Mrs. Graham was terribly

nervous. She had an uncomfortable

suspicion all day that she had not been

quite ingenious in her conversation of

the morning; and she was anxious to

confess and clear her mind, and yet

afraid of the effects of her confession.

But Yolande had spoken so reasonably

and sensibly; she seemed to recognize

the situation; why should she be start-

led for good or ill, she determined to

plunge in medias res; and she adopted a

gay air, though her fingers were

rather shaky. She put her arm within

Yolande's arm. They were slowly

walking up and down the upper deck,

under the awning. They could just

see the gentlemen of the party, along

with Ahmed, disappearing into the

grove of dark green acacias.

"Yolande, I am a wicked woman,"

she said, suddenly. "Hear my con-

fession. I was not quite frank with

you this morning, and I can't rest till I

have told you. The fact is, my dear

child, when I spoke to you about the

you happily married? I wouldn't say

that he would be more free to attend

to public affairs; I wouldn't say that

his reason, though it might be one of

several reasons; but I can very well

understand his being pleased at the

notion of seeing you married and com-

fortably settled among people who

would make much of you, as I really

and truly think he should. Now, dear

Yolande, don't say anything in haste.

I am not asking you on behalf of Archie;