

YOLANDE.

BY WILLIAM BLACK,

AUTHOR OF "SHANDON BELLA," "MACROD OF DARE," "WHITE WINGS," "JUNIOR," ETC.

(Continued.)

CHAPTER XLIII.

LOOSENED CHAINS.

"You have done well—you will succeed," Yolande read and again read that brief note, pondering over it in secret, and always with an increasing joy. He had seen; he had approved. And now when she was walking about the streets of Worthing, with her mother she found a strange interest in guessing as to which of those houses he had lived in while, as she assured herself, he was keeping that invisible guard over her. Was it this one, or that; or perhaps the hotel at the corner? Had he been standing at the window there, and regarding her as she passed unconscious? Had he seen her drive by in the little pony carriage? She had no longer any doubt that it was he who had gone to the office of Lawrence & Lang on the morning of her arrival in London; she was certain he must have been close by when she went to fetch her mother on that fateful evening.

And indeed, as time went on, it became more and more certain that that forgetfulness to which she had looked forward was still far from her; and now she began to regard with a kind of dismay the prospect of the Master of Lynn coming to claim her. She knew it was her duty to do so, and she had that had been arranged and approved by her father; she had herself pledged away her future; and she had no right of appeal. She reminded herself of these facts a hundred times, and argued with herself; but she could not get those imaginings about one who ought henceforth to be as one dead to her; and strove also to prove to herself that if she did what was right, unhappiness could not be the result; but all the time there was growing up in her a fear—almost a conviction—that this marriage was not possible. She turned away her eyes and would not regard it, but this conviction pressed itself on her when she was alone. And then she would engage herself with a desperate assiduity in the trivial details of their daily life there, and try to gain forgetfulness that way.

This was the letter she wrote to the Master of Lynn, in reply to his. It cost her some trouble, and she also here and there some qualms of self-reproach; for she could not but know that she was not telling the whole truth:

"Working, Wednesday afternoon.

DEAR ARCHIE,—I am exceedingly grieved to hear of your trouble with your family, and also to think that I am the cause of it. It seems so great a pity, and all the more that, in the present circumstances, it is so unnecessary. You will understand from my papa's letter that the duty I have undertaken is surely before any other; and that one's personal wishes must be put aside, when it is a question of what a daughter owes to her mother. And to think there should be trouble and dissension now over what must in any case be so remote—these seem a very painful and unnecessary thing; and surely dear Archie, you can do something to store yourself to your ordinary position with regard to your family. Do you think it is pleasant to me to think that I am the cause of a quarrel? And to think also that this quarrel might be continued in the future? But the future is so uncertain now in these new circumstances that I would pray you not to think of it, but to leave it aside, and become good friends with your family. And how can you do this? Well, I would consider our engagement at an end for the present; let it be as nothing; you will go back to Lynn; I am here, in the position that I can not go from; let the future have what it may in store, it will be time to consider afterward. Pray believe me, dear Archie, it is not in anger that I write, or any resentment; for I understand well that my papa's politics are not agreeable to every one, and I have heard of differences in families of smaller matters than that. And I pray you to believe that neither my father nor myself was sensible of any discourtesy—no, surely every one has the right to choose his friends as he pleases; nor could one expect one's neighbors to alter their habits of living, perhaps, and be at the trouble of entertaining strangers. No, there is neither resentment nor anger in my mind; but only a wish that you should be reconciled to your friends; and this is an easy way. It would leave you and me free for the time that might be necessary; you can go back to Lynn, where your proper place is; and I can give myself up to my mother, without other thoughts. Will you ask Mrs. Graham if that is not the wisest plan?—I am sure she must be distressed at the thought of your being estranged from your relatives; and I know she will think it a pity to have so much trouble about what must in any case be so distant. For, to tell you the truth, dear Archie, I can not leave to any one else what I have now undertaken, and it may be years of attention and service that are wanted; and why should you wait and wait, and always with the constraint of a family quarrel around you? For myself, I already look at my position this way. I have given myself over to the one who has most claims on me; and I am proud to think that I may have been of a little service already. Will you consent, dear Archie? Then we shall both be free, and the future must be left to itself.

"It was so very kind of you to look after the sending away of the dogs and ponies for All-nam-ba my papa has written to me from Daresbury that he will not tell him of what is in your letter; for it is not necessary it should be known—especially as I hope you will at once take steps for reconciliation and think no more of the matter. It was very good of your sister to go out and pay them a visit at All-nam-ba. I have had a letter from her also—as kind as she always is—asking me to go to Daresbury at Christmas; but you will understand from what I have said that this is impossible, nor can I make any engagement with any one now, nor can I desire to do so. I am satisfied to be as I am—also, I rejoice to think that I have the opportunity to do nothing more except to hear that you have agreed to my suggestion and go back to Lynn. As for my mother and myself, we shall go to the south of France when she is a little stronger; but at present she is weak, and I wish happily we find ourselves very well content with this place, now that we are familiar with it, and have found out different ways of passing the time. It is not so wild and beautiful as All-nam-ba, but is a cheerful place for an invalid: we have a pretty balcony, from which we can look at the people on the promenade, and the ships; and we have pony-carriage for the country roads, and have driven almost everywhere in the neighborhood.

"See now I will say good-by, dear Archie; and I hope you will consider my proposal; and see that it is wise. What may occur in the future, who can tell? In the mean time, I wish that it is best for those around us; and I think that is the right way. I should feel happier if I knew that you were not wondering when this service that I owe to my mother were to end; and also I should feel happier to know that I was no longer the cause of disagreement and unhappiness in your family. Give my love to your sister when you see her; and if you hear anything about the Gress people, I should

be glad to hear some news about them also.

"Believe me, yours affectionately,

"YOLANDE."

She looked at this letter for a long

time before putting it in an envelope

and addressing it; and when she posted

it, it was with a guilty conscience.

So far as it went, she had told the

truth. This duty she owed to her

mother was paramount; and she knew

not for how long it might be demanded

of her. And no doubt she would feel

freer and more content in her mind if

her engagement were broken off—if she

had no longer to fear that she might be

becoming impatient over the renewed

waiting and waiting. But that was

only a part of the truth. She could

not blind herself to the fact that this

letter was very more than a skill-

ful piece of evasion; and this con-

science haunted her, and troubled her,

and she knew it. She grew un-

easy. Her mother noticed that the

girl seemed anxious and distraught, and

questioned her; but Yolande answered

evasively. She did not think it worth

while to burden her mother's mind

with her private disquietudes.

No, she had not been true to herself;

and she knew it, and the knowledge

brought shame to her cheeks when she

was alone. With a conscience still at

ease, the cheerfulness with which she

set about her ordinary task of keeping

her mother employed and amused was

just a little bit less than of old. And

yet, and despite her, she felt into con-

tinual reveries of the arrival of the

letter of the possible consequences

of her opening it. Then, besides these

smiling of conscience, there was an-

other thing; would he consider the

reason she had advanced for breaking

off the engagement as sufficient? Would

he not declare himself willing to wait?

The tone of his letter had been firm

and unyielding. He was unmoved by

his position on the part of his own people;

it was not to gain any release that

he had written to her. And now might

he not still adhere to his resolution—

refusing to make up the quarrel; re-

solved to wait Yolande's good pleasure;

and so, in effect, requiring of her

the fulfillment of her pledged troth?

It would be difficult to say which

was the stronger motive—the shame

of conscience, or the ever-increasing

fear, that after all, she might not be

free herself from this impossible bond;

but at all events she determined to

supplement that letter with a frank

one, in which she should state that she

under some pretense or other, and

went to the post-office, and sent off this

telegram to him:

Letter posted to you this after-

noon. Do not answer it until you get

the one following. Then she went

back to the room quickly, her heart

somewhat lighter, though, indeed, all

during dinner she was puzzling to de-

termine what she should say, and how

to make her confession not too humili-

ating. She did not wish him to think

too badly of her. Was it not possible

for them to part friends? Or might

he be angry, and call her "jilt." Or

"O'love," and so forth, as she had called

herself? Indeed, she had reproached

herself enough; anything that he could

say would be nothing new to her. Only

she hoped—for she had had a

gentle kind of regard for him, had been

united up in her imaginings of the fu-

ture, and they had spent happy days

and evenings together, on board ship

or in the small lodge between the

streams—that they might part friends,

without angry words. "Yolande, there is something trou-

bling you," her mother said, as they

sat at table. She had been watching

the girl in her sad tender way. As soon

as she had spoken Yolande instantly

pulled herself together, and said:

"Why, yes, there is indeed!" she

said. Shall I tell you what it is?

"Mother? I have been thinking that

soon we shall be as tired of pheasants

as we were of grouse and hares. Papa

says we must have more; or rather it

is Mr. Shortland's; or rather it is

Mr. Shortland's; or rather it is

Mr. Shortland's; or rather it is

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sent you this afternoon I was not quite

frank with you; and I can not rest

until I tell you so. There are other

reasons besides those I mentioned why

I think our engagement should be

broken off now; and also, for I wish to

be quite honest, and to throw myself

on your generosity and forbearance,

why I think that we ought not to look

forward to the marriage that was

thought of. Perhaps you will ask me

what these reasons are—and you have

the right; and in that case I will tell

you. But perhaps you do not wish to

know; and I should never forget

your kindness. When I promised to

marry you, I thought that the friend-

liness and affection that prevailed be-

tween us was enough; I did not imagine

anything else; you must think of how

I was brought up, with scarcely any

other friends except the ladies at the

Chateau, who were very severe as to

the duty of children to their parents,

and when I learned that my papa

approved my marrying you, it was

sufficient for me. But now I think not.

I do not think I should bring you hap-

piness. There ought to be no regret on

the marriage day—thoughts going

away elsewhere. You have the right

to be angry with me, because I have

been careless, and allowed myself to

become affectionate to some one else

without my knowing it; but it was not

with intention. I now that I know,

I should be doing right in allowing our

engagement to continue? Yes, you

have the right to upbraid me; but you

can not think worse of me than I know

of myself; and perhaps it is well that

the mistake was soon found out, before

harm was done. As for me, my path

is clear. All that I said in the other

letter as to the immediate future, and I

hope the distant future also, is

correct. I do not think to look at this

other explanation to know what I am

situated. I welcome my position

and its duties—they drive away some-

times sad thinking and regret over what

has happened. You were always very

kind and considerate to me, and I

thank you for it. I kept my faith to you

strictly; and if I were to see your sister,

what should I say? Only that I am

sorry that I can make no more amend;

and to beg for your forgiveness and for

hers. And perhaps it is better for me

for all of us. My way is clear. I must

be with my mother. Perhaps some

day, if our engagement had continued,

I might have been tempted to repine.

I hope not; but I have no longer any

faith in myself. But now you are free

from the impatience of waiting; and I

—I go my own way, and am all the

more certain to give all my devotion

to my mother; and the kindness of your

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