

Written for the Critic.

"YSONDE."

TOLD BY AN OLD WOMAN.

Continued.

It was with feet and trembling that I saw Clement was going to look at Ysonde. It was full of love I thought I saw Hugh the next spring, even the first night before being

sed so bright and noble that I said Ysonde, and was I not? Perhaps it was so when he came and sat on the bed, his gloves had a hole against my hand, his shirt, silky hair, while I told him to go back to London and forget me.

He finished, then he turned his head to me, he said, "I have just seen your wife, I was with her, she was so well, she was so happy, and if they should all have to go to the

land, he thought it honorable to take his betrothed wife from him. I couldn't let Clement think I was wrong, no consideration on earth for people who care for each other as

much, but there was nothing to be said to the old people, or Clever had it wishes.

I was sitting on a little balcony window from my balcony. She knew she would usually find me there on summer mornings, so she found her own way up. She got a little wicker chair and came and sat close beside me. How slim and willowy she was, yet stately withal, with a certain dignity of her own that became her well. I could see the bright color ebbing and flowing under the dark transparent skin, and her eyes, that were very like Clement's, dark and deep, were glowing with a deeper light than usual.

There was not a shade of embarrassment in her manner, though I must confess I had a slightly uncomfortable feeling myself, though I hope I did not betray it.

"Clement has told you," she said, with a slight inquiry, accent, when she had seated herself.

"He told me last evening," I answered, without further comment.

"If I were not so entirely happy," she went on, "I should feel troubled about Hugh. I am going to write to him to-day and tell him all about it. He will understand that I cannot marry him now and probably he will soon console himself with some one who will make a better clergyman's wife than I."

I noticed that she wished no comparison on Hugh as any girl would have done. She never overheard her talk, and my own belief is that she expected Hugh to accept her as a prize, and she was the reflection that there are as good fish in the sea as ever were caught. But I do not think any man could have loved her and given her up easily. There was an indescribable charm about her stately, yet winning manner. To strangers and mere acquaintances she was frigid as ice, but among the few whom she knew well and loved, she was all brightness and sweetness.

It is hard to fathom entirely some characters. She was puzzling at times. Probably that was one reason why she had such an influence over us all. Anything that we completely understand soon ceases to be interesting.

She stayed about an hour with me and when she rose to go she put one hand on each of my shoulders. I caught her bright dark face now and her deep eyes that always had about a magnetic effect upon me, gleaming so near my own.

"Good-bye," she said, "I may call you my mother now, may I not? I shall always think as much of you as if you were really my mother."

"My dear I am more pleased than I can tell you to have you for my daughter," I said. "I have never had one of my own and you shall take her place."

Then she laughed, said something about us both becoming mordinately vain if we continued this mutual complimentary strain. I smiled too. I told her we happy animals would never know whether we really appreciated one another or not if we were not informed of it occasionally.

Then I watched her as long as I could, as the dinner-table was dressed through the trees in the garden.

The next week Clement returned to town. He had been away a month and it would not do to let his business suffer now that he was going to set up an establishment of his own, and he was not rich yet.

We had long rambles through the green bags of lanes and park, Ysonde and I. By the way, I do not think I ever told you her family name. It was Hugo—Ysonde Hugo—a quaint name was it not? Her family was a branch of the same from which the first old Hugo is descended. Her christian name was an ancient one in Brittany I believe. So Ysonde was of French descent, her mother had been an English woman, but she was dead, and Ysonde's home in the winter was now with her father in a villa

on the Riviera, not a great many miles from Monte Carlo, which place rumor said old Colonel Hugo had got into the habit of visiting too often for his own or his daughter's peace of mind.

Lady Kedston had been a great friend of Ysonde's mother, and had invited her to spend this summer at Ellersley. She usually travelled with her father in the summer time. The season before they had crossed to America. They had already travelled over the greater part of Europe. This summer Clement came down for a day whenever he could get away, till the season was on and the leaves began to turn yellow and fall, and the air to grow chilly, and my daughter, for as such I had grown to think of Ysonde, was to return to her father.

It was a raw gusty day when she went, and George Kedston drove her to the station. They passed my solitary gates on the way to the station, and Ysonde came up to bid me good-bye. She had started early on purpose she told me, so I should be the last person she said good-bye to. I asked her if she meant to omit that civility with George. "Sh," she said, "I do not believe he would notice whether I omitted it or not, except merely as a civility. I meant the last person who cared about me at all, but I must not keep George waiting so long," and she was off. I saw him help her into the trap beside him and drive off. Her father was to meet her at Charing Cross, it was not much more than a two hours journey by rail, so George put her in a compartment, took her hat in his hand for an instant, bowed, she would have a pleasant journey, raised his hat, and the train shrieked and glided off like a huge jointed reptile.

If Ysonde had seen his face with the furrow between his brow as he drove home through the gusty air, she would have wondered what disturbed the usually serene heir to Ellersley.

The pulse of life beats slowly here at best and after Ysonde left the days dragged rather wearily for a time. In about a week I heard that she had arrived at her home safely.

The next time I heard from her she seemed to be troubled about her father, he spent so much of his time at Monte Carlo. He was tolerably wealthy now, but how long would it take for him to lose perhaps all he possessed if he still yielded to the fascination of the gaming tables. George Kedston had left home too, to travel on the continent for a time, and had found his way to the alluring rouge et noir au cabaret, and Ysonde told me when her father was not absent he came over for a game of cards after dinner, and though the colonel was no mean player, still he was not a match for the skill and acuteness of the younger man.

Still, though George found that the old man almost always lost, he kept up the play with diabolical persistence, and the colonel would not cry "enough" till he had his revenge or lost all his money.

I had a letter from Ysonde about this time, it was very short, I still have it and will let you read it for yourself.

My Dear Mr. Weymouth:—I don't know how I can write you this letter when my heart is simply broken. Papa told me this morning that he had played away everything he possessed and that we were positively without a sou in the world. The consequence is that I am to marry George Kedston next month and papa's debt will be forgiven. Papa thinks it is a very satisfactory way to settle it, because George is wealthy and he thinks can make me happy by giving me everything I want, and it is not in my heart to let papa leave his home when he is old and has no way of getting more money when I can prevent it. But I can't realize it just yet, I cannot even think of it, my life will all be so different I sometimes think I cannot bear it and at the last I shall refuse to do it after all. Surely some thing will happen before the time comes, but don't think too badly of me, indeed I sometimes hardly know what I should do. Good-bye dear Mrs. Wyvill. I have written to Clement and told him about it.

That was all. She had forgotten to sign it.

George had never been a favorite of mine, he was very clever, but very subtle and rather more unscrupulous. I always thought there was consistency with a gentleman when his own ends were to be served and certainly his latest escapade savored of fiendish unscrupulousness.

The next day Clement came home, his face was white and haggard, it was late when he arrived, so I did not talk to him much but made him go to bed. I thought the rest might make him feel better.

He came to my boudoir about eleven the next morning, he knew he was always welcome there. It was a small holy of holies to which no one was admitted but my very particular friend. His face looked calm and composed in the bright morning light, and he sat on the little ottoman by my feet in the old boyish way.

"I have something very odd to tell you," he said. Then he paused a moment and went on, "do you believe in the supernatural?"

"Of course not," I replied, "if you mean do I believe in ghostly visitants or anything of that kind, what makes you ask me?"

"Mother," he said, "last night when I went to my room I did not sleep. I lay watching the moon streaming in at the window. I had been awake for hours, I did not know how long, when suddenly I saw a figure standing between me and the window. I thought you had come into my room for something with me having forgotten, and I spoke. The figure turned, the back was toward me when I spoke, and it was—his breath came in a little gasp—"it was Ysonde." She stood there for about one minute and looked at me very earnestly but did not speak. I was about to speak again. I had been too much astonished at first when her form seemed to melt away into the no man's land and there was nothing but the light streaming in at the window."

"My dear boy," I said, "Your mind was occupied with Ysonde and your imagination conjured up her form. You have heard of such vivid conceptions being formed in the mind that they appear to the vision."

But he would not alter his belief that it was her spirit that he had seen. In the afternoon we received a telegram from her father saying that she