

WHITE WINGS: A YACHTING ROMANCE.

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CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

After dinner, in the lambent twilight, we set out with the gig; and there was much preparation of elaborate contrivances for the entrapping of fish. But the Laird's occult and intricate tackle—the spinning minnows, and spoons, and India-rubber sand-eels—proved no competitor for a couple of big white flies that Angus Sutherland had basked. And of course Mary Avon had that rod; and when some huge lithe dragged the end of the rod fairly under water, and when she cried aloud, "Oh! oh! I can't hold it; he'll break the rod!" then arose Brose's word of command:—

"Haul him in! Shove out the butt! No scientific playing with a lithe! Well done—well done!—a five pounder, I'll bet ten farthings!"

It was not scientific fishing; but we got big fish—which is of more importance in the eyes of Master Fred. And then, as the night fell, we set out again for the yacht; and the doctor pulled stroke; and he sang some more verses of the *biolin* song as the blades dashed fire into the rushing sea:—

"Proudly o'er the waves we'll bound her,
As the stagbound bounds the heather!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together,
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Through the eddying tide we'll guide her,
Round each Isle and breezy headland,
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together,
Ho, ro, clansmen!"

The yellow lamp at the bow of the yacht grew larger and larger; the hull of the boat looked black between us and the starlit heavens; as we clambered on board there was a golden glow from the saloon skylight. And then, during the long and happy evening, amid all the whist-playing and other amusements going forward, what about certain timid courtesies and an occasional shy glance between those two young people? Some of us began to think that if the Laird's scheme was to come to anything, it was high time that Mr. Howard Smith put in an appearance.

CHAPTER IX.

A WILD STUDIO.

There is a fine bustle of preparation next morning—for the gig is waiting by the side of the yacht; and Dr. Sutherland is carefully getting our artist's materials into the stern; and the Laird is busy with shawls and waterproofs; and Master Fred brings along the luncheon-basket. Our Admiral-in-chief prefers to stay on board; she has letters to write; there are enough of us to go and be tossed on the Atlantic swell off the great caves of Canna.

And as the men strike their oars in the water and we wave a last adieu, the Laird catches a glimpse of our larder at the stern of the yacht. Alas! there is but one remaining piece of fresh meat hanging there, under the white canvas.

"It reminds me," says he, beginning to laugh already, "of a good one that Tom Galbraith told me—a real good one that was. Tom had a little bit of a yacht that his man and himself sailed when he was painting, ye know; and one day they got into a bay where Duncan—that was the man's name—had some friends ashore. Tom left him in charge of the yacht; and—ah! ha! ha!—there was a leg of mutton hanging at the stern. Well, Tom was rowed ashore; and painted all day; and came back in the afternoon. *There was no leg of mutton!* "Duncan," says he, "where is the leg of mutton?" Duncan pretended to be vastly surprised. "Iss it away?" says he. "Away?" says Tom. "Don't you see it is away? I want to know who took it!" Duncan looked all round him—at the sea and the sky—and then says he—then says he, "Maybe it was a dog,"—ha! ha! hee! hee! hee!—"Maybe it was a dog," says he; and they were half a mile from the shore! I never see the canvas at a yacht without thinking of Tom Galbraith and the leg of mutton!" and here the Laird laughed long and loud again.

"I have heard you speak once or twice about Tom Galbraith," remarked our young Doctor, without meaning the least sarcasm; "he is an artist, I suppose?"

The Laird stopped laughing. There was a look of indignant wonder—approaching to horror—on his face. But when he proceeded, with some dignity and even resentment, to explain to this ignorant person the immense importance of the school that Tom Galbraith had been chiefly instrumental in forming; and the high qualities of that artist's personal work; and how the members of the Royal Academy shook in their shoes at the mere mention of Tom Galbraith's name, he became more pacified; for Angus Sutherland listened with great respect,

and even promised to look out for Mr. Galbraith's work if he passed through Edinburgh on his way to the south.

The long, swing stroke of the men soon took us round the successive headlands until we were once more in the open, with the mountains of Skye in the north, and far away at the horizon, a pale line which we knew to be North Uist. And now the green shores of Canna were becoming more and more precipitous; and there was a roaring of the sea along the spurs of black rock; and the long Atlantic swell, breaking on the bows of the gig, was sending a little more spray over us than was at all desirable. Certainly no one who could have seen the Doctor at this moment—with his fresh-colored face dripping with the salt water and shining in the sunlight—would have taken him for a hard-worked and anxious student. His hard work was pulling stroke-oar, and he certainly put his shoulders into it, as the Laird had remarked; and his sole anxiety was about Mary Avon's art-materials. That young lady shook the water from the two blank canvases, and declared it did not matter a bit.

These lonely cliffs! becoming more grim and awful every moment, as this mite of a boat still wrestles with the great waves, and makes its way along the coast. And yet there are tender greens where the pasturage appears on the high plateaus; and there is a soft ruddy hue where the basalt shines. The gloom of the picture appears below—in the caves washed out of the conglomerate by the heavy seas; in the spurs and fantastic pillars and arches of the black rock; and in this leaden-hued Atlantic springing high over every obstacle to go roaring and booming into the caverns. And these innumerable white specks on the sparse green plateaus and on this high promontory; can they be mushrooms in millions? Suddenly one of the men lifts his oar from the oarlock, and rattles it on the rail of the gig. At this sound a cloud rises from the black rocks; it spreads; the next moment the air is darkened over our heads; and almost before we know what has happened, this vast multitude of puffins has wheeled by us, and wheeled again further out to sea—a smoke of birds! And as we watch them, behold! stragglers come back—in thousands upon thousands—the air is filled with them—some of them swooping so near us that we can see the red parrot-like beak and the orange-hued web-feet, and then again the green shelves of grass and the pinnacles of rock become dotted with those white specks. The myriads of birds; the black caverns; the arches and spurs of rock; the leaden-hued Atlantic bounding and springing in white foam; what says Mary Avon to that? Has she the courage?

"If you can, put me ashore!" says she.

"Oh, we will get you ashore, somehow," Dr. Sutherland answers.

But, indeed, the nearer we approach that ugly coast the less we like the look of it. Again and again we make for what should be a sheltered bit; but long before we can get to land we can see through the plunging sea great masses of yellow, which we know to be the barnacled rock; and then ahead we find a shore that, in this heavy surf, would make matchwood of the gig in three seconds. Brose, however, will not give in. If he cannot get the gig on to any beach, or into any creek, he will land our artist somehow. And at last—and in spite of the remonstrances of John of Skye—he insists on having the boat backed into a projecting mass of conglomerate, all yellowed over with small shell-fish, against which the sea is beating heavily. It is an ugly landing-place; we can see the yellow rock go sheer down in the clear green sea; and the surf is spouting up the sides in white jets. But if she can watch a high wave, and put her foot there—and there—will she not find herself directly on a plateau of rock at least twelve feet square?

"Back her, John!—back her!"—and there-with the Doctor, watching his chance, scrambles out and up to demonstrate the feasibility of the thing. And the easel is handed out to him; and the palette and canvases; and finally Mary Avon herself. Nay, even the Laird will venture sending on before him the luncheon-basket.

It is a strange studio—this projecting shell-crusted rock, surrounded on three sides by the sea, and on the fourth by an impassable cliff. And the sounds beneath our feet—there must be some subterranean passage or cave into which the sea roars and booms. But Angus Sutherland rigs up the easel rapidly; and arranges the artist's camp-stool; and sets her fairly agoing; then he proposes to leave the Laird in charge of her. He and the humbler chronicler of the adventures of these people mean to have some further exploration of this wild coast.

But we had hardly gone a quarter of a mile or so—it was hard work pulling in this heavy sea—when the experienced eye of Sandy from Islay saw that something was wrong.

"What's that?" he said, starting.

We turned instantly, and strove to look through the mists of spray. Where we had left the Laird and Mary Avon there were now visible only two mites, apparently no bigger than puffins. But is not one of the puffins gesticulating wildly?

"Round with her, John!" the Doctor calls out. "They want us—I'm sure."

And away the gig goes again—plunging into the great troughs and then swinging up the giddy crests. And as we get nearer and nearer, what is the meaning of the Laird's frantic gestures? We cannot understand him; and it is impossible to hear, for the booming of the seas into the caves drown his voice.

"He has lost his hat," said Angus Sutherland; and then, the next second, "Where's the easel?"

Then we understand those wild gestures. Pull away, merry men! for has not a squall swept the studio of its movables? And there, sure enough, tossing high and low on the waves, we descry a variety of things—an easel, two canvases, a hat, a veil, and what not. Up with the boat-hook to the bow; and gently with those plunges, most accurate Hector of Moidart!

"I am so sorry," she says (or rather shrieks), when her dripping property is returned to her.

"It was my fault," our Doctor yells; "but I will undertake to fasten your easel properly this time!"—and therewith he fetches a lump of rock that might have moored a man-of-war.

We stay and have luncheon in this gusty and thunderous studio—though Mary will scarcely turn from her canvas. And there is no painting of pink geraniums about this young woman's work. We see already that she has got a thorough grip of this cold, hard coast (the sun is obscured now, and the various hues are more sombre than ever); and, though she has not had time as yet to try to catch the motion of the rolling sea, she has got the colour of it—a leaden gray, with glints of blue and white, and here and there a sudden splash of deep, rich, glassy, bottle green, where some wave for a moment catches, just as it gets to the shore, a reflection from the grass plateaus above. Very good, Miss Avon; very good—but we pretend that we are not looking.

Then away we go again, to leave the artist to her work; and we go as near as possible—the high sea will not allow us to enter—the vast black caverns; and we watch through the clear water for those masses of yellow rock. And then the multitudes of white-breasted, red-billed birds perched up there—close to the small burrows in the scant grass; they jerk their heads about in a watchful way just like the prairie-dogs at the mouth of their sandy habitations on the Colorado plains. And then again a hundred or two of them come swooping down from the rocky pinnacles and sail over our heads—twinkling bits of colour between the gray-green sea and the blue-and-white of the sky. They resent the presence of strangers in this far-home of the sea-birds.

It is a terrible business getting that young lady and her paraphernalia back into the gig again; for the sea is still heavy, and, of course, additional care has now to be taken of the precious canvas. But at last she, and the Laird, and the luncheon-basket, and everything else have been got on board; and away we go for the yacht again, in the now clearing afternoon. As we draw further away from the roar of the caves, it is more feasible to talk; and naturally we are very complimentary, about Mary Avon's sketch in oils.

"Ay," says the Laird, "and it wants but one thing; and I am sure I could get Tom Galbraith to put that in for you. A bit of a yacht, ye know, or other sailing vessel, put below the cliffs, would give people a notion of the height of the cliffs, do you see? I am sure I could get Tom Galbraith to put that in for ye."

"I hope Miss Avon won't let Tom Galbraith or anybody else meddle with the picture," says Angus Sutherland, with some emphasis. "Why, a yacht! Do you think anybody would let a yacht come close to rocks like these? As soon as you introduce any making up like that, the picture is a sham. It is the real thing now, as it stands. Twenty years hence you take up that piece of canvas, and there before you would be the very day you spent here—it would be like finding your old life of twenty years before opened up to you with a lightning-flash. The picture is—why, I should say it is invaluable, as it stands."

At this somewhat fierce praise, Mary Avon colours a little. And then she says with a gentle hypocrisy—

"Oh, do you really think there is—there is—some likeness to the place?"

"It is the place itself!" says he, warmly.

"Because," she says, timidly, and yet with a smile, "one likes to have one's work appreciated, however stupid it may be. And—and—if you think that—would you like to have it? Because I should be so proud if you would take it—only I am ashamed to offer my sketches to anybody—"

"That!" said he, staring at the canvas as if the mines of Golconda were suddenly opened to him. But then he drew back. "Oh, no," he said; "you are very kind—but—but, you know, I cannot. You would think I had been asking for it."

"Well," says Miss Avon still looking down, "I never was treated like this before. You won't take it? You don't think it is worth putting in your portmanteau?"

At this the young Doctor's face grew very red; but he said boldly—

"Very well, now, if you have been playing

fast and loose, you shall be punished. I will take the picture, whether you grudge it me or not. And I don't mean to give it up now."

"Oh," said she, very gently, "if it reminds you of the place, I shall be very pleased—and it may remind you too that I am not likely to forget your kindness to poor Mrs. Thompson."

And so this little matter was amicably settled—though the Laird looked with a covetous eye on that rough sketch of the rocks of Canna, and regretted that he was not to be allowed to ask Tom Galbraith to put in a touch or two. And so back to the yacht, and to dinner in the silver clear evening; and how beautiful looked this calm bay of Canna, with its glittering waters and green shores, after the grim rocks and the heavy Atlantic waves!

That evening we pursued the innocent lithe again—our larder was becoming terribly empty—and there was a fine take. But of more interest to some of us than the big fish was the extraordinary wonder of colour in sea and sky when the sun had gone down; and there was a wail on the part of the Laird that Mary Avon had not her colours with her to put down some jottings for further use. Or if on paper; might not she write down something of what she saw; and experiment thereafter? Well, if any artist can make head or tail of words in such a case as this, here they are for him—as near as our combined forces of observation could go.

The vast plain of water around us a blaze of salmon-red—with the waves (catching the reflection of the zenith) marked in horizontal lines of blue. The great headland of Canna, between us and the western sky, a mass of dark, intense olive green. The sky over that a pale, clear lemon-yellow. But the great feature of this evening scene was a mass of cloud that stretched all across the heavens—a mass of flaming, thunderous, orange-red cloud that began in the far pale mists in the east, and came across the zenith overhead, burning with a splendid glory there, and then stretched over to the west, where it narrowed down and was lost in the calm, clear gold of the horizon. The splendour of this great cloud was bewildering to the eyes; one turned gratefully to the reflection of it in the sultry red of the sea below, broken by the blue lines of waves. Our attention was not wholly given to the fishing or the boat on this lambent evening; perhaps that was the reason we ran on a rock, and with difficulty got off again.

Then back to the yacht again about eleven o'clock. What is this terrible news from Master Fred, who was sent off with instructions to hunt up any stray crofter he might find, and use such persuasions in the shape of Gaelic friendship and English money as would enable us to replenish our larder? What! that he had walked two miles and seen nothing eatable or purchasable but an old hen? Canna is a beautiful place; but we begin to think it is time to be off.

On this still night, with the stars coming out, we cannot go below. We sit on deck and listen to the musical whisper along the shore, and watch one golden-yellow planet rising over the dusky peaks of Rum, far in the east. And our young Doctor is talking of the pathetic notices that are common in the Scotch papers—in the advertisements of deaths. "*New Zealand papers, please copy.*" "*Canadian papers, please copy.*" When you see this prayer appended to the announcement of the death of some old woman of seventy or seventy-five, do you not know that it is a message to loved ones in distant climes, wanderers who may forget but have not been forgotten? They are messages that tell of a scattered race—of a race that once filled the glens of these now almost deserted islands. And surely, when some birthday or other time of recollection comes round, those far away

Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe,

must surely bethink themselves of the old people left behind—living in Glasgow or Greenock now, perhaps—and must bethink themselves too of the land where last they saw the bonny red heather, and where last they heard the pipes playing the sad "*Farewell MacCruimin*," as the ship stood out to sea. They cannot quite forget the scenes of their youth—the rough seas and the red heather and the islands; the wild dancing at the weddings; the secret meetings in the glen, with Ailasa, or Morag, or Mairi, come down from the shieling, all alone, a shawl round her head to shelter her from the rain, her heart fluttering like the heart of a timid fawn. They cannot forget.

And we, too, we are going away; and it may be that we shall never see this beautiful bay or the island there again. But one of us carries away with him a talisman for the sudden revival of old memories. And twenty years hence—that was his own phrase—what will Angus Sutherland—perhaps a very great and rich person by that time—what will he think when he turns to a certain picture, and recalls the long summer day when he rowed with Mary Avon round the wild shores of Canna?

CHAPTER X.

"DUNVEGAN!—OH! DUNVEGAN!"

Commander Mary Avon sends her orders below: everything to be made snug in the cabins, for there is a heavy sea running outside, and the *White Dove* is already under way. Farewell, then, you beautiful blue bay—all rippled into silver now with the breeze—and green shores and picturesque cliffs! We should have lingered here a day or two, perhaps, but for the