

WHITE WINGS: A YACHTING ROMANCE.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAIRD'S PLANS.

Who is first up to thrust aside those delusive yellow blinds that suggest sunshine, whether the morning be fair or foul? But the first glance through the panes removes all apprehensions; the ruffled bay, the fluttering ensign, the shining white wings of the *White Dove*, are all a summons to the slumbering house. And the mistress of Castle Osprey, as soon as she is dressed, is up-stairs and down-stairs like a furred flash of lightning. Her cry and potent command—a reminiscence of certain transatlantic experiences—is, "All aboard for Dan's!" She will not have so fine a sailing morning wasted, especially when Dr. Angus Sutherland is with us.

Strangely enough, when at last we stand on the white decks, and look round on the shining brass and varnished wood, and help to stow away the various articles needed for our cruise, he is the least excited of all those chattering people. There is a certain conscious elation on starting on a voyage, especially on a beautiful morning; but there also may be some vague and dim apprehension. The beginning is here; but the end? Angus walked about with Captain John, and was shown all that had been done to the yacht, and listened in silence.

But the rest were noisy enough, calling for this and that, handing things down the companion, and generally getting in the way of the steward.

"Well, Fred," says our facetious Laird, "have ye hung up all the game that Mr. Smith brought back from the moor yesterday?" and Master Fred was so much tickled by this profound joke that he had to go down into the fore-castle to hide his grinning delight, and went covertly smiling about his work for the next quarter of an hour.

Then the hubbub gradually ceased; for the boats had been swung to the davits, and the *White Dove* was gently slipping away from her moorings. A fine northerly breeze, a ruffled blue sea; and the south all shining before her. How should we care whither the beautiful bird bore us? Perhaps before the night fell we should be listening for the singing of the mermaid of Colonsay.

The wooded shores slowly drew away; the horizon widened; there was no still blue, but a fine windy gray, in the vast plain of the sea that was opening out before us.

"Oh yes, mem," says John of Skye to Miss Avon. "I was sure we would get a good breeze for Mr. Sutherland when he will come back to the yat."

Miss Avon does not answer; she is looking at the wide sea, and at the far islands, with somewhat wistful eyes.

"Would you like to tek the tiller now, mem?" says the bearded skipper, in his most courteous tones. Mr. Sutherland was aye very proud to see ye at the tiller."

"No, thank you, John," she says.

And then she becomes aware that she has—in her absent mood—spoken somewhat curtly; so she turns and comes over to him, and says, in a confidential way:

"To tell you the truth, John, I never feel very safe in steering when the yacht is going before the wind. When she is close-hauled, I have something to guide me; but, with the wind coming behind, I know I may make a blunder without knowing why."

"No, no, mem; you must not let Mr. Sutherland hear you say that, when he was so proud o' learnin' ye; and there is no dancier at ahl of your making a plunder."

But at this moment our young doctor himself comes on deck; and she quickly moves away to her camp-stool, and plunges herself into a book, while the attentive Mr. Smith provides her with a sunshade and a footstool. Dr. Sutherland cannot, of course, interfere with her diligent studies.

Meanwhile our hostess is below, putting a few finishing touches to the decoration of the saloon; while the Laird, in the blue-cushioned recess at the head of the table, is poring over "Municipal London." At length he raises his eyes, and says to his sole companion:

"I told ye, ma'am, he was a good lad—a bidable lad—did I not?"

"You are speaking of your nephew, of course," she says. "Well, it is very kind of him to offer to turn out of his state-room in favour of Dr. Sutherland; but there is really no need for it. Angus is much better accustomed to roughing it on board a yacht."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," says the Laird, with judicial gravity. "Howard is in the right there too. He must insist on it. Dr. Sutherland is your oldest friend. Howard is here on a kind of sufferance, I am sure we are both of us greatly obliged to ye."

Here there was the usual deprecation.

"And I will say," observes the Laird, with the same profound air, "that his conduct since I sent for him has entirely my approval—entirely my approval. Ye know what I mean. I would not say a word to him for the world—no, no—after the first intimation of my wishes; no coercion. Every one for himself; no coercion."

She does not seem so overjoyed as might have been expected.

"Oh, of course not," she says. It is only in plays and books that anybody is forced into a marriage; at least you don't often find a man driven to marry anybody against his will. And indeed, sir," she adds, with a faint smile, "you rather frightened your nephew at first. He thought you were going to play the part of a stage guardian, and disinheriting him if he did not marry the young lady. But I took the liberty of saying to him that you could not possibly be so unreasonable. Because, you know, if Mary refused to marry him, how could that be any fault of his?"

"Precisely so," said the Laird, in his grand manner. "A most judicious and sensible remark. Let him do his part, and I am satisfied. I would not exact impossibilities from any one, much less from one that I have a particular regard for. And, as I was sayin, Howard is a good lad."

The Laird adopted a lighter tone.

"Have ye observed, ma'am, that things are not at all unlikely to turn out as we wished?" he said, in a half-whisper; and there was a secret triumph in his look. "Have ye observed? Oh yes; young folks are very shy, but their elders are not blind. Did ye ever see two young people that seemed to get on better together on so short an acquaintance?"

"Oh yes," she says, rather gloomily; "they seem to be very good friends."

"Yachting is a famous thing for making people acquainted," says the Laird, with increasing delight. "They know one another now as well as though they had been friends for years on the land. Has that struck ye now before?"

"Oh yes," she says. There is no delight on her face.

"It will jist be the happiness of my old age, if the Lord spares me, to see these two established at Denny-mains," says he, as if he were looking at the picture before his very eyes. "And we have a fine soft air in the west of Scotland; it's no' like asking a young English leddy to live in the bleak parts of the north, or among the east winds of Edinburgh. And I would not have the children sent to any public school, to learn vulgar ways of speech and clipping of words. No, no; I would wale out a young man from our Glasgow University—one familiar with the proper traditions of the English language—and he will guard against the clipping fashion of the South, just as against the yawning of the Edinburgh bodies. Ah will wale him out maself. But no' too much education; no, no, that is the worst gift ye can bestow upon bairns. A sound constitution; that is the first and foremost. I would rather see a lad out and about shooting rabbits than shut up wi' a pale face among a lot of books. And the boys will have their play, I can assure ye; I will send that fellow Andrew about his business if he does na stop netting and snarling. What do I care about the snipping at the shrubs? I will put out turnips on the verra lawn, jist to see the rabbits run about in the morning. The boys shall have their play at Denny-mains, I can assure ye; more play than school hours, or I'm mistaken."

"And no muzzle-loaders," he continues, with a sudden seriousness. "Not a muzzle-loader will I have put into their hands. Maun's the time it makes me grue to think of my loading a muzzle-loader when I was a boy—loading one barrel, with the other barrel on full cock, and jist gaping to blow my fingers off. I'm thinking Miss Mary—though she'll be no Miss Mary then—will be sore put to when the boys bring in thrushes and blackbirds they have shot; for she's a sensitive thing; but what I say is, better let them shoot thrushes and blackbirds than bring them up to have white faces ower books. Ah tell ye this: I'll give them a sovereign apiece for every blackbird they shoot on the wing."

The Laird had got quite excited; he did not notice that "Municipal London" was dangerously near the edge of the table.

"Andrew will not object to the shooting o' blackbirds," he said, with a loud laugh—as if there were something of Homesh's vein in that gardener. "The poor creature is jist daft about his cherries. That's another thing: no interference with bairns in a garden. Let them steal what they like. Green apples?—bless ye, they're the life o' children. Nature puts everything to rights. She kens better than books. If I caught the school-master lockin' up the boys

in their play-hours, my word but I'd send him flein'!"

He was most indignant with this school-master, although he was to be of his own "waling." He was determined that the lads should have their play, lessons or no lessons. Green apples he preferred to Greek. The dominie would have to look out.

"Do you think, ma'am," he says, in an insidious manner; "do ye think she would like to have a furnished house in London for pairt of the year? She might have her friends to see—"

Now at last this is too much. The gentle, small creature has been listening with a fine, proud, hurt air on her face, and with tears near to her eyes. Is it thus that her Scotch student, of whom she is the fierce champion, is to be thrust aside?

"Why," she says, with an indignant warmth, "you take it all for granted! I thought it was a joke. Do you really think your nephew is going to marry Mary? And Angus Sutherland in love with her?"

"God bless me!" exclaimed the Laird, with such a start that the bulky "Municipal London" banged down on the cabin floor.

Was it the picking up of that huge tome, or the consciousness that he had been betrayed into an unusual ejaculation that crimsoned the Laird's face? When he sat upright again, however, wonder was the chief expression visible in his eyes.

"Of course I have no right to say so," she instantly and hurriedly adds; "it is only a guess—a suspicion. But haven't you seen it? And until quite recently I had other suspicions too. Why, what do you think would induce a man in Angus Sutherland's position to spend such a long time in idleness?"

But by this time the Laird had recovered his equanimity. He was not to be disturbed by any bogie. He smiled serenely.

"We will see, ma'am; we will see. If it is so with the young man, it is a peety. But you must admit yourself that ye see how things are likely to turn out."

"I don't know," she said, with reluctance: she would not admit that she had been grievously troubled during the past few days.

"Very well, ma'am, very well," said the Laird blithely. "We will see who is right. I am not a gambler, but I would wager ye a gold ring, a sixpence, and a silver thimble, that I am no' so far out. I have my eyes open; oh, ay! Now I am going on deck to see where we are."

And so the Laird rose, and put the bulky volume by, and passed along the saloon to the companion. We heard

"Sing tantara! sing tantara!"

as his head appeared. He was in a gay humor.

Meanwhile the *White Dove* with all sails set, had come along at a spanking pace. The weather threatened change, it is true; there was a deep gloom overhead: but along the southern horizon there was a blaze of yellow light which had the odd appearance of being a sunset in the middle of the day; and in this glare the long blue promontory known as the Rhinus of Islay, within sight of the Irish coast. And so we went down by Easdale, and past Colipoll and its slate quarries; and we knew this constant breeze would drive us through the swirls of the Doruis Mohr—the "Great Gate." And were we listening, as we drew near in the afternoon to the rose-purple bulk of Scarba, for the low roar of Corrievechan? We knew the old refrain:

"As you pass through Jura's Sound
Bend your course by Scarba's shore;
Shun, oh, shun the gulf profound
Where Corrievechan's surges roar!"

But now there is no ominous murmur along those distant shores. Silence and a sombre gloom hang over the two islands. We are glad to shun this desolate coast; and glad when the *White Dove* is carrying us away to the pleasanter south, when, behold! behold! another sight! As we open out the dreaded gulf, Corrievechan itself becomes but an open lane leading out to the west; and there beyond the gloom, amid the golden seas, lies afar the music-haunted Colonsay! It is the calm of the afternoon; the seas lie golden along the rocks; surely the sailors can hear her singing now for the lover she lost so long ago! What is it that thrills the brain so, and fills the eyes with tears, when we can hear no sound at all coming over the sea?

It is the Laird who summons us back to actualities.

"It would be a strange thing, says he, "if Tom Galbraith were in that island at this very meenit. Ah'm sure he was going there."

And Captain John helps.

"I am not like to go near Corrievechan," he says, with a grin, "when there is a flood tide and half a gale from the sou'west. It iss an ahfu' place," he adds, more seriously—"an ahfu' place."

"I should like to go through," Angus Sutherland says, quite inadvertently.

"Ay, would ye, sir!" says Captain John eagerly. "If there was only you and me on board, I would tek you through ferry well—with the wind from the norrd and an ebb tide. Oh yes, I would do that; and may be we will do it this year yet."

"I do not think I am likely to see Corrievechan again this year," said he, quite quietly—so quietly that scarcely any one heard. But Mary Avon heard.

Well, we managed, after all, to bore through the glassy swirls of the Doruis Mohr—the outlying pickets, as it were, of the fiercer whirlpools and currents of Corrievechan—and, the light breeze still continuing, we crept along in the

evening past Crinan, and along the lonely coast of Knapdale, with the giant Paps of Jura darkening in the west. Night fell; the breeze almost died away; we turned the bow of the *White Dove* toward an opening in the land, and the flood tide gently bore her into the wide silent, empty loch. There did not seem to be any light on the shores. Like a tall gray phantom the yacht glided through the gloom; we were somewhat silent on deck.

But there was a radiant yellow glow coming through the sky-light; and Master Fred has done his best to make the saloon cheerful enough. And where there is supper there ought to be other old-fashioned institutions—singing, for example; and how long was it since we had heard anything about the Queen's Maries, or "Ho, ro, Clausmen!" or the Irish Brigade? Nobody, however, appeared to think of these things. This was a silent and lonely loch, and the gloom of night was over land and water; but we still seemed to have before our eyes the far island amid the golden seas. And was there not still lingering in the night air some faint echo of the song of Colonsay? It is a heart-breaking song; it is all about the parting of lovers.

CHAPTER XXX.

A SUNDAY IN FAR SOLITUDES.

Mary Avon is seated all alone on deck, looking rather wistfully around her at this solitary Loch-na-Chill, that is, the Loch of the Burying-Place. It is Sunday morning, and there is a more than Sabbath peace dwelling over sea and shore. Not a ripple on the glassy sea; a pale haze of sunshine on the islands in the south; a stillness as of death along the low-lying coast. A seal rises to the surface of the calm sea, and regards her for a moment with his soft black eyes; then slowly subsides. She has not seen him; she is looking far away.

Then a soft step is heard on the companion, and the manner of the girl instantly changes.

"I don't think you have anything to regret, sir," said our young doctor, as he carelessly worked the oar with one hand, "that you did not bother the brains of John and his men with any exposition of the Sermon on the Mount. Isn't it an odd thing that the common fishermen and boatmen of the Sea of Galilee understood the message Christ brought them just at once? and nowadays, when we have millions of churches built, and millions of money being spent, and tons upon tons of sermons being written every year, we seem only to get further and further into confusion and chaos. Fancy the great army of able-bodied men that go on expounding and expounding, and the learning and time and trouble they bestow on their work, and scarcely any two of them agreed; while the people who listen to them are all in a fog, Simon Peter, and Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, must have been men of the most extraordinary intellect. They understood at once; they were commissioned to teach; and they had not even a Shorter Catechism to go by."

The Laird looked at him doubtfully. He did not know whether to recognize in him a true ally or not. However, the mention of the Shorter Catechism seemed to suggest solid ground; and he was just about entering into the question of the Subordinate Standards, when an exclamation of rage on the part of his nephew startled us. That handsome lad, during all this theological discussion, had been keeping a watchful and matter-of-fact eye on a number of birds on the shore; and, now that we were quite close to the sandy promontory, he had recognized them.

"Look! look!" he said, in tones of mingled eagerness and disappointment. "Golden plovers, every one of them! Isn't it too bad! It's always like this on Sunday. I will bet you won't get within half a mile of them to-morrow."

And he refused to be consoled as we landed on the sandy shore and found the golden-dusted, long-legged birds running along before us, or flitting from patch to patch of the moist green-sward. We had to leave him behind in moody contemplation as we left the shore and scrambled up the rugged and rocky slope to the ruins of this solitary little chapel.

There was an air of repose and silence about these crumbling walls and rusted gates that was in consonance with a habitation of the dead. And first of all, outside, we came upon an upright Iona cross, elaborately carved with strange figures of men and beasts. But inside the small building, lying prostrate among the grass and weeds, there was a collection of those materials that would have made an antiquarian's heart leap for joy. It is to be feared that our guesses about the meaning of the emblems on the tombstones were of a crude and superficial character. Were these Irish chiefs, those stone figures with the long sword and the harp beside them? Was the recurrent shamrock a national or religious emblem? And why was the effigy of this ancient worthy accompanied by a pair of pincers, an object that looked like a tooth-comb and a winged griffin? Again, outside, but still within the sacred walls, we came upon still further tombs of warriors, most of them hidden among the long grass; and here and there we tried to brush the weeds away. It was no bad occupation for a Sunday morning, in this still and lonely burial-place above the wide seas.

On going on board again we learned from John of Skye that there were many traces of an ancient ecclesiastical colonization about this coast, and that in especial there were a ruined chapel and remains on one of a small group of islands that we could see on the southern horizon. Accord-