

WHITE WINGS: A YACHTING ROMANCE.

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CHAPTER XLVIII.

"A GOOD ONE FOR THE LAST."

"Ah, well, well," said the Laird, somewhat sadly, to his hostess, "I suppose we may now consider that we have started on our last day's sailing in the *White Dove*."

"I suppose so," said she; and this was before breakfast, so she may have been inclined to be a bit sentimental too.

"I'm thinking," said he, "that some of us may hereafter look back on this sailing as the longest and grandest holiday of their life, and will recall the name of the *White Dove* with a certain amount of affection. I, for one, feel that I can scarcely justify myself for withdrawing so long from the duties that society demands from every man; and no doubt there will be much to set right when one goes back to Strathgovan. But perhaps one has been able to do something even in one's idleness."

He paused here and remained silent for a moment or two.

"What a fine thing," he continued, "it must be for a doctor to watch the return of health to a patient's face—to watch the colour coming back, and the eyes looking happy again, and the spirits rising; and to think that maybe he has helped. And if he happens to know the patient, and to be as anxious about her as if she were his own child, do not ye think he must be a proud man when he sees the results of what he has done for her, and when he hears her begin to laugh again?"

Despite the Laird's profound ingenuity, we knew very well who that doctor was. And we had learned something about the affection which this mythical physician had acquired for this imaginary patient.

"What a sensitive bit crature she is!" said he, suddenly, as if he were now talking of some quite different person. "Have ye seen the difference the last few days have made on her face—have ye not observed it?"

"Yes, indeed I have."

"Ye would imagine that her face was just singing a song from the morning till the night. I have never seen any one with such expressive eyes as that bit lass has; and—and it is fairly a pleasure to any one to look at the happiness of them."

"Which she owes to you, sir."

"To me!" said the Laird. "Dear me! not to me. It was a fortunate circumstance that I was with ye on board the yacht, that is all. What I did no man who had the chance could have refused to do. No, no; if the lass owes any gratification to anybody or anything, it is to the *Semple* case."

"What?"

"Just so, ma'am," said the Laird, composedly. "I will confess to ye that a long holiday spent in sailing had not that attraction for me it might have had for others, though I think I have come to enjoy it now with the best of ye; but I thought, when ye pressed me to come, that it would be a grand opportunity to get your husband to take up the *Semple* case, and master it thoroughly, and put its merits in a just manner before the public. That he does not appear to be as much interested in it as I had reason to expect is a misfortune—perhaps he will grow to see the importance of the principles involved in it in time; but I have ceased to force it on his attention. In the meanwhile we have had a fine, long holiday, which has at least given me leisure to consider many schemes for the advantage of my brother parashioners. Aye; and where is Miss Mary, though?"

"She and Angus have been up for hours, I believe," said his hostess. "I heard them on deck before we started, anyway."

"I would not disturb them," said the Laird, with much consideration. "They have plenty to talk about, all their life opening up before them—like a road through a garden, as one might say. And whatever befalls them hereafter, I suppose they will always remember the present time as the most beautiful of their existence—the wonder of it, the newness, the hope. It is a strange thing that. Ye know, ma'am, that our garden at Denny-mains, if I may say so, is far from insignificant. It has been greatly commended by experienced landscape gardeners. Well, now, that garden, when it is just at its fullest of summer colour, with all its dahlias and hollyhocks and whatnot—I say ye can not get half as much delight from the whole show as ye get from the first glint o' a primrose, as ye are walking through a wood, on a bleak March day, and not expecting to see anything of the kind. Does not that make your heart jump?"

Here the Laird had to make way for Master Fred and the breakfast tray.

"There is not a bairn about Strathgovan," he continued, with a laugh, "knows better than myself where to find the first primroses and bluebells and the red dead-nettle, you know, and so on. Would ye believe it, that poor crature,

Johnny Guthrie, was for cutting down the hedge in the Coulter-burn Road, and putting up a stone dyke!" Here the Laird's face grew more and more stern, and he spoke with unnecessary vehemence. "I make bold to say that the man who would cut down a hawthorn hedge where the children go to gather their bits o' flowers, and would put in its place a stone wall for no reason on the face of the earth, I say that man is an ass—an intolerable and pernicious ass!"

But this fierceness instantly vanished, for here was Mary Avon come in to bid him good-morning. And he rose and took both her hands in his, and regarded the upturned, smiling face and the speaking eyes.

"Ay, ay, lass," said he, with great satisfaction and approval, "ye have got the roses into your cheeks at last. That is the morning air—the 'roses weel wi' dew.' It is a fine habit that, of early rising. Dear me! what a shipit bit thing ye were when I first saw ye about three months ago! And now I dare say ye are just as hungry as a hawk with walking up and down the deck in the sea-air—we will not keep ye waiting a moment."

The Laird got her a chair, next his own, of course; and then rang Master Fred's bell violently.

"How's her head, skipper?" said Queen T., when the young doctor made his appearance—he had roses, too, in his cheeks, freshened by the morning air.

"Well," said he, frankly, as he sat down, "I think it would be judicious to have breakfast over as soon as possible, and get the things stowed away. We are flying up the Sound of Raasay like a witch on a broom, and there will be a roaring sea when we get beyond the shelter of Skye."

"We have been in roaring seas before," said she, confidently.

"We met a schooner coming into Portree Harbour this morning," said he, with a dry smile. "She left yesterday afternoon just before we got in. They were at it all night, but had to run back at last. They said they had got quite enough of it."

This was a little more serious, but the women were not to be daunted. They had come to believe in the *White Dove* being capable of anything, especially when a certain aid to John of Skye was on board. For the rest, the news was that the day was lovely, the wind fair for Stornoway, and the yacht flying northward like an arrow.

There was a certain solemnity, nevertheless, or perhaps only an unusual elaborateness, about our preparations before going on deck. Gun-cases were wedged in in front of canvases, so that Miss Avon's sketches should not go rolling on to the floor; all such outlying skirmishers as candle-sticks, aneroids, draught-boards, and the like were moved to the rear of compact masses of rugs; and then the women were ordered to array themselves in their water-proofs. Water-proofs!—and the sun flooding through the skylight. But they obeyed.

Certainly there did not seem to be any great need for water-proofs when we got above, and had the women placed in a secure corner of the companionway. It was a brilliant, breezy, blue-skied morning, with the decks as yet quite white and dry, and with the long mountainous line of Skye shining in the sun. The yacht was flying along at a famous pace before a fresh and steady breeze; already we could make out, far away on the northern horizon, a pale, low, faint blue line, which we knew to be the hills of Southern Lewis. Of course one had to observe that the vast expanse of sea lying between us and that far line was of a stormy black; moreover, the men had got on their oil-skins, though not a drop of spray was coming on board.

As we spun along, however, before the freshening wind, the crashes of the waves at the bows became somewhat more heavy, and occasionally some jets of white foam would spring up into the sunlight. When it was suggested to Captain John that he might set the gaff-topsail, he very respectfully and shyly shook his head. For one thing, it was rather strange that on this wide expanse of sea not a solitary vessel was visible.

Further and further northward. And now one has to look out for the white water springing over the bows, and there is a general ducking of heads when the crash forward gives warning. The decks are beginning to glisten now, and Miss Avon has received one sharp admonition to be more careful, which has somewhat damped and disarranged her hair. And so the *White Dove* still flies to the north—like an arrow—like a witch on a broom—like a hare, only that none of these things would groan so much in getting into the deep troughs of the sea; and not even a witch on a broom could perform such capers in the way of tumbling and tossing, and pitching and rolling.

However, all this was mere child's play. We

knew very well when we should really "get it"; and we got it. Once out of the shelter of the Skye coast, we found a considerable heavy sea swinging along the Minch, and the wind was still freshening up, inasmuch that Captain John had to take the mizzen and fore sail off her. How splendidly those mountain masses of waves came heaving along—apparently quite black until they came near, and then we could see the sunlight shining green through the breaking crest; then there was a shock at the bows that caused the yacht to shiver from stem to stern; then a high springing into the air, followed by a heavy rattle and rush on the decks. The scuppers were of no use at all; there was a foot and a half of hissing and seething salt-water all along the lee bulwarks, and when the gangway was lifted to let it out, the next rolling wave only spouted an equal quantity upon deck, soaking Dr. Angus Sutherland to the shoulder. Then a heavier sea than usual struck her, carrying off the cover of the fore-hatch and sending it spinning aft; while, at the same moment, a voice from the fore-castle informed Captain John in an injured tone that this last invader had swamped the men's berths. What could he do but have the main tack hauled up to lighten the pressure of the wind? The waters of the Minch, when once they rise, are not to be stilled by a bottle of salad-oil.

We had never before seen the ordinarily buoyant *White Dove* take in such masses of water over her bows; but we soon got accustomed to the seething lake of water along the lee scuppers, and allowed it to subside or increase as it liked. And the women were now seated a step lower on the companionway, so that the rags of the waves flew by them without touching them; and there was a good deal of laughing and jesting going on at the clinging and stumbling of any unfortunate person who had to make his way along the deck. As for our indefatigable doctor, his face had been running wet with salt-water for hours; twice he had slipped and gone headlong to leeward; and now, with a rope double twisted round the tiller, he was steering, his teeth set hard.

"Well, Mary," shrieked Queen Titania into her companion's ear, "we are having a good one for the last!"

"Is he going up the mast?" cried the girl, in great alarm.

"I say we are having a good one for the last!"

"Oh yes!" was the shout in reply; "she is indeed going fast!"

But about mid-day we passed within a few miles to the east of the Shiant Islands, and here the sea was somewhat moderated, so we tumbled below for a snack of lunch. The women wanted to devote the time to dressing their hair, and adorning themselves anew; but Purser Sutherland objected to this altogether. He compelled them to eat and drink while that was possible; and several toasts were proposed—briefly, but with much enthusiasm. Then we scrambled on deck again. We found that John had hoisted his foresail again, but he had let the mizzen alone.

Northward and ever northward—and we are all alone on this wide, wide sea. But that pale line of coast at the horizon is beginning to resolve itself into definite form—into long, low headlands, some of which are dark in shadow, others shining in the sun. And then the cloud-like mountains beyond; can these be the far Suainabhal and Mealasabhal and the other giants that look down on Loch Roag and the western shores? They seem to belong to a world beyond the sea.

Northward and ever northward; and there is less water coming over now, and less groaning and plunging, so that one can hear one's self speak. And what is this wagging on the part of the doctor that we shall do the sixty miles between Portree and Stornoway within the six hours? John of Skye shakes his head; but he has the main tack hauled down.

Then, as the day wears on, behold! a small white object in that line of blue. The cry goes abroad: it is Stornoway light!

"Come, now, John!" the doctor calls aloud; "within the six hours, for a glass of whiskey and a lucky sixpence!"

"We not at Stornoway light yet," answered the prudent John of Skye, who is no gambler. But, all the same, he called two of the men aft to set the mizzen again; and as for himself, he threw off his oil-skins, and appeared in his proud uniform once more. This looked like business.

Well, it was not within the six hours, but it was within the six hours and a half, that we sailed past Stornoway light-house and its outstanding perch; and past a floating target with a red flag, for artillery practice; and past a bark which had been driven ashore two days before, and now stuck there with her back broken. And this was a wonderful sight—after the lone, wide seas—to see such a mass of ships of all sorts and sizes crowded in here for fear of the weather. We read their names in the strange foreign type as we passed—"Die Heimath," "George Washington," "Friedrich der Grosse," and the like—and we saw the yellow-haired Norwegians pulling between their vessels in their odd-looking double-bowed boats. And was not John of Skye a proud man that day, as he stood by the tiller in his splendour of blue and brass buttons, knowing that he had brought the *White Dove* across the wild waters of the Minch, when not one of these foreigners would put his nose outside the harbour?

The evening light was shining over the quiet town, and the shadowed castle and the fir-tip-

ped circle of hills, when the *White Dove* rattled out her anchor-chain and came to rest. And as this was our last night on board, there was a good deal of packing and other trouble. It was nearly ten o'clock when we came together again.

The Laird was in excellent spirits that night, and was more than ordinarily facetious; but his hostess refused to be comforted. A thousand Homebushes could not have called up a smile. For she had grown to love this scrambling life on board; and she had acquired a great affection for the yacht itself; and now she looked round this old and familiar saloon in which we had spent so many snug and merry evenings together, and she knew she was looking at it for the last time.

At length, however, the Laird bethought himself of arousing her from her sentimental sadness, and set to work to joke her out of it. He told her she was behaving like a school-girl come to the end of her holiday. Well, she only further behaved like a school-girl by letting her lips begin to tremble; and then she stealthily withdrew to her own cabin, and doubtless had a good cry there. There was no help for it, however; the child had to give up its plaything at last.

CHAPTER XLIX.

ADIEU!

Next morning, also: why should this tender melancholy still dwell in the soft and mournful eyes? The sunlight was shining cheerfully on the sweep of wooded hill, on the gray castle, on the scattered town, and on the busy quays. Busy was scarcely the word; there was a wild excitement abroad, for a vast take of herring had just been brought in. There, close in by the quays, were the splendidly-built luggers, with their masts right at their bows, and standing up in them their stalwart crews, bronze-faced, heavy-bearded, with oil-skin caps, and boots up to their thighs. Then, on the quays above, the picturesquely costumed women busy at the salting; and agents eagerly chaffering with the men; and empty barrels coming down in unknown quantities. Bustle, life, excitement pervaded the whole town; but our tender-hearted hostess, as we got ashore, seemed to pay no heed to it. As she bade good-bye to the men, shaking hands with each, there were tears in her eyes. If she had wished to cast a glance in the direction of the *White Dove*, she could scarcely have seen the now still and motionless craft.

But by-and-by, when we had left our heavier luggage at the inn, and when we set out to drive across the island to visit some friends of ours who live on the western side, she grew somewhat more cheerful. Here and there a whiff of the fragrant peat smoke caught us as we passed, bringing back recollections of other days. Then she had one or two strangers to inform and instruct; and she was glad that Mary Avon had a bright day for her drive across the Lewis.

"But what a desolate place it must be on a wet day," that young person remarked, as she looked away across the undulating moors, vast, and lonely, and silent.

Now, at all events, the drive was pleasant enough, for the sunlight brought out the soft ruddy browns of the bog-land, and ever and again the blue and white surface of a small loch flashed back the daylight from amid that desolation. Then occasionally the road crossed a brawling stream, and the sound of it was grateful enough in the oppressive silence. In due course of time we reached Garra-na-hina.

Our stay at the comfortable little hostelry was but brief, for the boat to be sent by our friends had not arrived, and it was proposed that in the meantime we should walk along the coast to show our companions the famous stones of Callernish. By this time Queen Titania had quite recovered her spirits, and eagerly assented, saying how pleasant a walk would be after our long confinement on shipboard.

It was indeed a pleasant walk, through a bright and cheerful piece of country. And as we went along we sometimes turned to look around us—at the waters of the Black River, a winding line of silver through the yellow and brown of the morass; and at the placid blue waters of Loch Roag, with the orange line of sea-weed round the rocks; and at the far blue bulk of Suainabhal. We did not walk very fast; and indeed we had not got anywhere near the Callernish stones, when the sharp eye of our young doctor caught sight of two new objects that had come into this shining picture. The first was a large brown boat, rowed by four fishermen; the second was a long and shapely boat like the pinnacle of a yacht—also pulled by four men in blue jerseys and scarlet caps. There was no one in the stern of the big boat; but in the stern of the gig were three figures, as far as we could make out.

Now no sooner had our attention been called to the two boats which had just come round the point of an island out there, than our good Queen Titania became greatly excited, and would have us all go out to the top of a small headland and frantically wave our handkerchiefs there. Then we perceived that the second boat instantly changed its course, and was being steered for the point on which we stood. We descended to the shore and went out on to some rocks, Queen Titania becoming quite hysterical.

"Oh, how kind of her! how kind of her!" she cried.

For it now appeared that these three figures in the stern of the white pinnacle were the figures of a young lady, who was obviously steering,