

"Will he be coming down by the *Chevalier* in the morning, or by the *Mountaineer* at night?" is the further question.

"I don't know."

"We will be ashore for him in the morning, whatever," says John of Skye, cheerfully; and you would have thought it was his guest, and not ours, who was coming on board.

The roaring out of the anchor chain was almost immediately followed by Master Fred's bell. Mary Avon was silent and *distracted* at dinner; but nothing more was said of her return to London. It was understood that, when Angus Sutherland came on board, we should go back to Castle Osprey, and have a couple of days on shore, to let the *White Dove* get rid of her parasitic sea-weed.

Then, after dinner, a fishing excursion; but this was in the new loch, and we were not very successful. Or was it that most of us were watching, from this cup of water surrounded by the circle of great mountains, the strange movements of the clouds in the gloomy and stormy twilight, long after the sun had sank?

"It is not a very sheltered place," remarked the Laird, "if a squall were to come down from the hills."

But by and by something appeared that lent an air of stillness and peace to this sombre scene around us. Over one of those eastern mountains a faint, smoky, suffused yellow light began to show; then the outline of the mountain—serrated with trees—grew dark; then the edge of the moon appeared over the black line of trees; and by and by the world was filled with this new, pale light, though the shadows on the hills were deeper than ever. We did not hurry our way back to the yacht. It was a magical night—the black, overhanging hills, the white clouds crossing the blue vault of the heavens, the wan light on the sea. What need for John of Skye to put up that golden lamp at the bow? But it guided us on our way back—under the dusky shadows of the hills.

Then below, in the orange-lit cabin, with cards and dominoes and chess about, a curious thing overhead happens to catch the eye of one of the gamblers. Through the skylight, with this yellow glare, we ought not to see anything; but there, shining in the night, is a long bar of pale phosphorescent green light. What can this be? Why green? And it is Mary Avon who first suggests what this strangely luminous thing must be—the boom, wet with dew, shining in the moonlight.

"Come," said the Laird to her, "put a shawl round ye, and we will go up for another look round."

And so, after a bit, they went on deck, these two, leaving the others to their *bézique*. And the Laird was as careful about the wrapping up of this girl as if she had been a child of five years of age; and when they went on to the white deck, he would give her his arm, that she would not trip over any stray rope; and they were such intimate friends now that he did not feel called upon to talk to her.

But by and by the heart of the Laird was lifted up within him because of the wonderful beauty and silence of this moonlight night.

"It is a great peety," said he, "that you in the south are not brought up as children to be familiar with the Scotch version of the Psalms of David. It is a fountain-head of poetry that ye can draw from all your life long; and is there any poetry in the world can beat it? And many a time I think that David had a great love for mountains—and that he must have looked at the hills around Jerusalem—and seen them on many a night like this. Ye cannot tell, lassie, what stirs in the heart of a Scotchman or Scotchwoman when they repeat the 121st Psalm:

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,  
From whence doth come mine aid;  
My safety cometh from the Lord,  
Who heaven and earth hath made.  
Thy foot be'll not let slide, nor will  
He slumber that these keeps:  
Behold, He that keeps Israel  
He slumbers not nor sleeps."

Ask your friend Dr. Sutherland—ask him whether he has found anything among his philosophy, and science, and the new-fangled leterature of the day that comes so near to his heart as a verse of the old Psalms that he learnt as a boy. I have heard of Scotch soldiers in distant countries just bursting out crying when they heard by chance a bit repeated of the Psalms of David. And the strength and reliance of them; what grander source of consolation can ye have? 'As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth, even forever.' What are the trials of the hour to them that believe and know and hope? They have a sure faith; the captivity is not forever. Do ye remember the beginning of the 126th Psalm? it reminds me most of all of the Scotch phrase,

"'laughin' maist like to greet"

—When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the heathen, 'The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. Turn again our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the south!'"

The Laird was silent for a minute or two; there was nothing but the pacing up and down the moonlit deck.

"And you have your troubles too, my lass," said he at length. "Oh, I know—though ye put so brave a face on it. But you need not be afraid; you need not be afraid. Keep up your

heart. I am an old man now; I may have but few years to reckon on; but while I live ye will not want a friend. . . . Ye will not want a friend. . . . If I forget or refuse what I promise ye this night, may God do so and more unto me!"

But the good-hearted Laird will not have her go to sleep with this solemnity weighing on her mind.

"Come, come," he says, cheerfully, "we will go below; and you will sing me a song—the Queen's Maries, if ye like—though I doubt but that they were a lot o' wild hizzies."

# CHAPTER XXVI.

"MARY! MARY!"

Is there any one awake and listening—perhaps with a tremour of the heart—for the calling out of "*White Dove*, ahoy!" from the shore? Once the ordinary loud noises of the morning are over—the brief working of the pump, the washing down of the decks—silence reigns once more throughout the yacht. One can only hear a whispering of the rain above.

Then, in the distance, there is a muffled sound of the paddles of a steamer; and that becomes fainter and fainter, while the *White Dove* gradually ceases the motion caused by the passing waves. Again there is an absolute stillness, with only that whispering of the rain.

But this sudden sound of oars! and the slight shock against the side of the vessel! The only person on board the yacht who is presentable whips a shawl over her head, darts up the companion-way, and boldly emerges into the moist and dismal morning.

"Oh, Angus!" she cries, to this streaming black figure that has just stepped on deck, "what a day you have brought with you!"

"Oh, it is nothing," says a cheerful voice from out of the dripping mackintosh—perhaps it is this shining black garment that makes the wet face and whiskers and hair grow redder than ever, and makes the blue eyes look even bluer. "Nothing at all. John and I have agreed it is going to clear. But this is a fine place to be in, with a falling glass! If you get a squall down from Glencoe, you won't forget it."

"A squall!" she says, looking round in amazement. Well might she exclaim, for the day is still, and gray, and sombre; the mountains are swathed in mist; the smooth sea troubled only by the constant rain.

However, the ruddy-faced doctor, having divested himself of his dripping garments, follows his hostess down the companion, and into the saloon, and sits down on one of the couches. There is an odd, half-pathetic expression on his face as he looks around.

"It seems a long time ago," he says, apparently to himself.

"What does?" asks his hostess, removing her head gear.

"The evenings we used to spend in this very saloon," says he—looking with a strange interest on those commonplace objects, the draughts and dominoes, the candlesticks and cigar boxes, the cards and books—"away up there in the north. It seems years since we were at Dunvegan, doesn't it, and lying off Vaternish Point? There never was as snug a cabin as this in any yacht. It is like returning to an old home to get into it."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," says his hostess, regarding him with a great kindness. "We will try to make you forget that you have ever been away. Although," she added, frankly, "I must tell you you have been turned out of your state-room—for a time. I know you won't mind having a berth made up for you on one of those couches."

"Of course not," he said, "if I am not in your way at all. But—"

And his face asked the question.

"Oh, it is a nephew of Denny-mains who has come on board—a Mr. Smith, a very nice young fellow; I am sure you will like him."

There was nothing said in reply to this. Then the new-comer inquired, rather timidly.

"You are all well, I hope?"

"Oh, yes."

"And—and Miss Avon, too?" said he.

"Oh, yes. But Mary has suffered a great misfortune since you left."

She looked up quickly. Then she told him the story; and in telling him her indignation awoke afresh. She spoke rapidly. The old injury had touched her anew.

But, strangely enough, although Angus Sutherland displayed a keen interest in the matter, he was not at all moved to that passion of anger and desire for vengeance that had shaken the Laird. Not at all. He was very thoughtful for a time; but he only said, "You mean she has to support herself now?"

"Absolutely."

"She will naturally prefer that to being dependent on her friends?"

"She will not be dependent on her friends, I know," is the answer; "though the Laird has taken such a great liking for her that I believe he would give her half Denny-mains."

He started a little bit at this, but immediately said:

"Of course she will prefer independence. And, as you say, she is quite capable of earning her own living. Well, she does not worry about it! It does not trouble her mind!"

"That affair of her uncle wounded her very keenly, I imagine, though she said little; but as for the loss of her little fortune, not at all. She is as light-hearted as ever. The only thing is that she is possessed by a mad notion that she should start away at once for London."

"Why?"

"To begin work. I tell her she must work here."

"But she is not anxious? She is not troubled?"

"Not a bit. The Laird says she has the courage of ten men; and I believe him."

"That is all right. I was going to prescribe a course of Marcus Aurelius; but if you have got philosophy in your blood, it is better than getting it in through the brain."

And so this talk ended, leaving on the mind of one of those two friends a distinct sense of disappointment. She had been under the impression that Angus Sutherland had a very warm regard for Mary Avon; and she had formed certain other suspicions. She had made sure that he, more quickly than any one else, would resent the injury done to this helpless girl. And now he seemed to treat it as of no account. If she was not troubling herself; if she was not giving herself headaches about it—then, no matter! It was a professional view of the case. A dose of Marcus Aurelius! It was not thus that the warm-hearted Laird had espoused Mary Avon's cause.

Then the people came one by one in to breakfast; and our young doctor was introduced to the stranger who had ousted him from his state-room. Last of all came Mary Avon.

How she managed to go along to him, and to shake hands with him, seeing that her eyes were bent on the floor all the time, was a mystery. But she did shake hands with him, and said, "How do you do?" in a somewhat formal manner; and she seemed a little paler than usual.

"I don't think you are looking quite as well as when I left," said he, with a great interest and kindness in his look.

"Thank you, I am very well," she said; and then she instantly turned to the Laird, and began chatting to him. Angus Sutherland's face burned red; it was not thus she had been used to greet him in the morning, when we were far away beyond the shores of Canna.

And then, when we found that the rain was over, and that there was not a breath of wind in this silent, gray, sombre world of mountain and mist, and when we went ashore for a walk along the still lake, what must she needs do but attach herself to the Laird, and take no notice of her friend of former days? Angus walked behind with his hostess, but he rarely took his eyes off the people in front. And when Miss Avon, picking up a wild flower now and again, was puzzling over its name, he did not, as once he would have done, come to her help with his student days' knowledge of botany. Howard Smith brought her a bit of wall rue, and said he thought they called it *Asplenium marinum*; there was no interference. The pre-occupied doctor behind only asked how far Miss Avon was going to walk with her lame foot.

The Laird of Denny-mains knew nothing of all this occult business. He was rejoicing in his occupation of philosopher and guide. He was assuring us all that this looked like a real Highland day—far more so than the Algerian blue sky that had haunted us for so long. He pointed out, as we walked along the winding shores of Loch Leven, by the path that rose and fell, and skirted small precipices all hanging in foliage, how beautiful was that calm, slate-blue mirror beneath, showing every outline of the sombre mountains, with their masses of Landseer mist. He stopped his companion to ask her if she had ever seen anything finer in colour than the big clusters of scarlet rowans among the yellow-green leaves. Did she notice the scent of the meadow-sweet in the moist air of this patch of wood? He liked to see those white stars of the grass of Parnassus; they reminded him of many a stroll among the hills about Loch Katrine.

"And this still Loch Leven," he said at length, and without the least blush on his face, "with the Glencoe mountains at the end of it, I have often heard say was as picturesque a loch as any in Scotland, on a gloomy day like this. Gloomy I call it, but ye see there are fine silver glints among the mist; and—and, in fact, there's a friend of mine has often been wishing to have a water-colour sketch of it. If ye had time, Miss Mary, to make a bit drawing from the deck of the yacht, ye might name your own price—just name your own price. I will buy it for him."

A friend! Mary Avon knew very well who the friend was.

"I should be afraid, sir, said she, laughing, "to meddle with anything about Glencoe."

"Toots! toots!" said he; ye have not enough confidence. I know twenty young men in Edinburgh and Glasgow who have painted every bit of Glencoe, from the bridge to the King's House inn, and not one of them able to come near ye. Mind, I'm looking forward to showing your picture to Tom Galbraith. I'm thinking he'll stare."

The Laird chuckled again.

"Oh, ay! he does not know what a formidable rival has come from the south. I'm thinking he'll stare when he comes to Denny-mains to meet ye. Howard, what's that down there!"

The Laird had caught sight of a pink flower on the side of a steep little ravine, leading down to the shore.

"Oh, I don't want it; I don't want it," Mary Avon cried.

But the Laird was obdurate. His nephew had to go scrambling down through the alders and rowan trees and wet bracken to get this bit of pink crane's bill for Miss Avon's bouquet. And of course she was much pleased, and thanked

him very prettily; and was it catch-fly, or herb robert, or what was it?

Then out of sheer common courtesy she had to turn to Angus Sutherland.

"I am sure Dr. Sutherland can tell us," she says timidly; and she does not meet his eyes.

"It is one of the crane's-bills, anyway," he says, indifferently. "Don't you think you had better return now, Miss Avon, or you will hurt your foot?"

"Oh, my foot is quite well now, thank you," she says; and on she goes again.

We pass by the first cuttings of the slate quarries, the men suspended by ropes round their waists, and hewing away at the face of the cliff. We go through the long straggling village; and the Laird remarks that it is not usual for a Celtic race to have such clean cottages, with pots of flowers in the window. We saunter idly onward, toward those great mountain masses, and there is apparently no thought of returning.

"When we've gone so far, might we not go on to the mouth of the pass?" she asks. "I should like to have a look even at the beginning of Glencoe."

"I thought so," said the Laird, with a shrewd smile. "Oh, ay, we may as well go on."

Past those straggling cottages, with the elder-bush at their doors to frighten away witches; over the bridge that spans the brawling Cona; along the valley down which the stream rushes, and this gloom overhead deepens and deepens. The first of the great mountains appears on our right, green to the summit, and yet so sheer from top to bottom, that it is difficult to understand how those dots of sheep maintain their footing. Then the marks on him; he seems to be a huge Behemoth, with great eyes, grand, complacent, even sardonic, in his look. But the further and further mountains have nothing of this mild, grand humour about them; they are sullen and awful; they grasp the earth with their mighty bulk below, but far away they lift their lurid peaks to the threatening skies, up there where the thunder threatens to shake the silence of the world.

"Miss Avon," Dr. Sutherland again remonstrates, "you have come five or six miles now. Suppose you have to walk back in the rain?"

"I don't mind about that," she says, cheerfully. "But I am dreadfully, dreadfully hungry."

"Then we must push on to Clachaig," says the Laird; "there is no help for it."

"But wait a moment," she says.

She goes to the side of the road where the great gray boulders and ferns and moist marsh-grass are, and begins to gather handfuls of "sourrocks," that is to say, of the smaller sheep-sorrel. "Who will partake of this feast to allay the pangs of hunger?"

"Is thy servant a baa lamb that she should do this thing?" her hostess says, and drives the girl forward.

The inn is reached but in time, for behold there is a gray "smurr" of mist coming down the glen; and the rain is beginning to darken the gray boulders again. And very welcome are those chairs, and the bread and cheese and beer, and the humble efforts in art around the walls. If the feast is not as the feasting of the Fish-mongers, if we have no pretty boxes to carry home to the children, if we have no glimpses of the pale blue river and shipping through the orange light of the room, at least we are not amazed by the appearance of the Duke of Saxe in the garb of a Highlander. And the frugal meal was substantial enough. Then the question about getting back arose.

"Now, Mary," says her hostess, "you have got to pay for your amusement. How will you like walking seven or eight miles in a thunder-storm?"

But here the Laird laughs.

"No, no," he says, going to the window. "That waggone that has just come up I ordered at the inn on passing. Ye will not have to walk a step, my lass; but I think we had better be going, as it looks black overhead."

Black enough, indeed, was it as we drove back in this silent afternoon, with a thunder-storm apparently about to break over our heads. And it was close and sultry when we got on board again, though there was as yet no wind. Captain John did not like the look of the sky.

"I said you were going to bring a gale with you, Angus," his hostess remarked to him cheerfully, at dinner.

"It begins to look like it," he answered, gravely; and it is getting too late to run away from here if the wind rises. As soon as it begins to blow, if I were John, I would put out the star-board anchor."

"I know he will take your advice," she answers promptly.

We saw little of Angus Sutherland that evening; for it was raining hard and blowing hard; and the cabin below, with its lit candles, and books, and cards, and what not, was cheerful enough; while he seemed very much to prefer being on deck. We could hear the howling of the wind through the rigging, and the gurgling of the water along the sides of the yacht; and we knew by the way she was swaying that she was pulling hard at her anchor chain. There was to be no beautiful moonlight for us that night, with the black shadows on the hills, and the lane of silver on the water.

A dripping and glistening figure comes down the companion; a gleaming red face appears at the door. Mary Avon looks up from her draughts, but for an instant.

"Well, Angus, what is the report?" says Queen Titania, brightly. "And what is all the noise on deck? And why don't you come below?"