

WHITE WINGS: A YACHTING ROMANCE.

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CHAPTER XXIV.—(Continued.)

"Oh, well," says he, with a sort of carelessness, "every one to his liking. If he cares to accept so valuable a present, good and well."

"You don't suppose he asked me for it?" she says, rather warmly. "I gave it him. He would have been rude to have refused it. I was very much pleased that he cared for the picture."

"Oh, he is a judge of art, also? I am told he knows everything."

"He was kind enough to say he liked the sketch; that was enough for me."

"He is very lucky; that is all I have to say."

"I dare say he has forgotten all about such a trifle. He has more important things to think about."

"Well," said he, with a good-natured laugh, "I should not consider such a picture a trifle if any one presented it to me. But it is always the people who get everything they want who value things least."

"Do you think Dr. Sutherland such a fortunate person?" says she. "Well, he is fortunate in having great abilities; and he is fortunate in having chosen a profession that has always secured him great honour, and that promises a splendid future to him. But that is the result of hard work; and he has to work hard now. I don't think most men would like to change places with him just at present."

"He has one good friend and champion, at all events," he says, with a pleasant smile.

"Oh," says she, hastily and anxiously, "I am saying what I hear. My acquaintance with Dr. Sutherland is—quite recent, I may say; though I have met him in London. I only got to know something about him when he was in Edinburgh, and I happened to be there too."

"He is coming back to the yacht," observes Mr. Smith.

"He will be foolish to think of it," she answers, simply.

At this stage the yacht begins to wake up. The head of Hector of Moidart, much dishevelled, appears at the fore-castle, and that wiry mariner is rubbing his eyes; but no sooner does he perceive that one of the ladies is on deck than he suddenly ducks down again—to get his face washed, and his paper collar. Then there is a voice heard in the saloon, calling:

"Who has left my spirit lamp burning?"

"Oh, good gracious!" says the Youth, and tumbles down the companion incontinently.

Then the Laird appears, bringing up with him a huge red volume entitled "Municipal London"; but no sooner does he find that Miss Avon is on deck than he puts aside that mighty compendium, and will have her walk up and down with him before breakfast.

"What?" he says, eyeing the cup and saucer, "have ye had your breakfast already?"

"Mr. Smith was so kind as to bring me a cup of tea."

"What," he says again—and he is obviously greatly delighted. "Of his own making? I did not think he had so much gumption."

"I beg your pardon, sir?" said she. She had been startled by the whistling of a curlew close by, and had not heard him distinctly.

"I said he was a smart lad," said the Laird, unblushingly. "Oh, aye, a good lad; ye will not find many better lads than Howard. Will I tell ye a secret?"

"Well, sir—if you like," said she.

There was a mysterious but humorous look about the Laird; and he spoke in a whisper.

"It is not good sometimes for young folks to know what is in store for them. But I mean to give him Denny-mains. Whish! Not a word. I'll surprise him some day."

"He ought to be grateful to you, sir," was her answer.

"That he is—that he is," said the Laird; "he's an obedient lad. And I should not wonder if he had Denny-mains long before he expects it; though I must have my crust of bread, ye know. It would be a fine occupation for him, looking after the estate; and what is the use of him living in London, and swallowing smoke and fog? I can assure ye that the air at Denny-mains, though it is far from Glasgow, is as pure as it is in this very Loch Speliv."

"Oh, indeed, sir?"

Then they had another couple of turns in silence.

"Ye're very fond of sailing," says the Laird.

"I am now," she says. "But I was very much afraid before I came; I suffered so terribly in crossing the Channel. Somehow one never thinks of being ill here—with nice clean cabins—and no engines throbbing—"

"I meant that ye like well enough to go sailing about these places?"

"Oh, yes," says she. "When shall I ever see such a beautiful holiday again?"

The Laird laughed a little to himself. Then he said, with a business-like air:

"I have been thinking that, when my nephew came to Denny-mains, I would buy a yacht for him, that he could keep down the Clyde somewhere—at Gourlock, or Kilmun, or Dunoon, may be. It is a splendid ground for yachting—a splendid! Ye have never been through the Kyles of Bute?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have been through them in the steamer."

"Aye, but a yacht; wouldn't that be better? And I am no sure I would not advise him to have a steam yacht—ye are so much more independent of wind and tide; and I'm thinking ye could get a verra good little steam-yacht for £3,000."

"Oh, indeed?"

"A great deal depends on the steward," he continues, seriously. "A good steward that does not touch drink is just worth anything. If I could get a first-class man, I would not mind giving him two pounds a week, with his clothes and his keep, while the yacht was being used; and I would not let him away in the winter—no, no. Ye could employ him at Denny-mains, as a butler-creature, or something like that."

She did not notice the peculiarity of the little pronoun; if she had, how could she have imagined that the Laird was really addressing himself to her?

"I have none but weemen-servants in-doors at Denny-mains," he continued; but when Howard comes, I would prefer him to keep the house like other people, and I will not stint him as to means. Have I told ye what William Dunbair says—

"Be merry, man, and tak not sair in mind—"

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"There's fine common sense in that. And do not ye believe the people who tell you that the Scotch are a dour people, steeped in Calvinism, and niggardly and grasping at the last farthing—"

"I have found them exceedingly kind to me, and warm-hearted and generous—" says she; but he interrupted her suddenly.

"I'll tell ye what I'll do," said he, with decision. "When I buy that yacht, I'll get Tom Galbraith to paint every panel in the saloon—no matter what it costs!"

"Your nephew will be very proud of it," she said.

"And I would expect to take a trip in her myself, occasionally," he added, in a facetious manner. "I would expect to be invited—"

"Surely, sir, you cannot expect your nephew to be so ungrateful—"

"Oh," he said, "I only expect reasonable things. Young people are young people; they cannot like to be hampered by grumbling old fogys. No, no; if I present any one wi' a yacht, I do not look on myself as a piece of its furniture."

The Laird seemed greatly delighted. His step on the deck was firmer. In the pauses of the conversation she heard something about—

"tantara! Sing tantara!"

"Will ye take your maid with ye?" he asked her, abruptly.

The girl looked up with a bewildered air—perhaps with a trifle of alarm in her eyes.

"I, sir?"

"Ha, ha!" said he, laughing. "I forgot. Ye have not been invited yet. No more have I. But—if the yacht were ready—and—and if ye were going—ye would take your maid, no doubt, for comfort's sake?"

The girl looked reassured. She said, cheerfully:

"Well, sir, I don't suppose I shall ever go yachting again, after I leave the *White Dove*. And if I were, I don't suppose I should be able to afford to have a maid with me, unless the dealers in London should suddenly begin to pay me a good deal more than they have done hitherto."

At this point she was summoned below by her hostess calling. The Laird was left alone on deck. He continued to pace up and down, muttering to himself, with a proud look on his face:

"A landscape in every panel, as I'm a living man. Tom'll do it well, when I tell him who it's for. . . . The leddies' cabin blue and silver—cool in the summer—the skylight painted—sh'll no be saying that the Scotch are wanting in taste when she sees that cabin!"

"Sing tantara! Sing tantara! The Highland army rues That e'er they came to Cromdale!"

And her maid—if she will not be able to afford a maid, who will?—French, if she likes! Blue and silver—blue and silver—that's it!

And then the Laird, still humming his lugubrious battle-song, comes down into the saloon.

"Good-morning, ma'am; good-morning! Breakfast ready! I'm just ravenous. That wild lassie has worked me up and down until I am like to faint. A beautiful morning again—splendid!—splendid! And do ye know where ye will be this day next year?"

"I am sure I don't," says his hostess, busy with the breakfast-things.

"I will tell ye. Anchored in the Holy Loch, off Kilmun, in a screw yacht. Mark my words now: *This very day next year!*"

CHAPTER XXV.

A PROTECTOR.

"Oh, aye," says John of Skye, quite proudly, as we go on deck after breakfast, "there will be no more o' the dead calms. We will give Mr. Sutherland a good breeze or two when he comes back to the yat."

It is all Mr. Sutherland and Mr. Sutherland now!—everything is to be done because Mr. Sutherland is coming. Each belaying-pin is polished so that one might see to shave in it; Hector of Moidart has spent about two hours in scraping and rubbing the brass and copper of the galley stove-pipe; and Captain John, with many grins and apologies, has got Miss Avon to sew up a rent that has begun to appear in the red ensign. All that he wants now is to have the yacht beached for a couple of days, to have the long slender sea-grass scraped from her hull; then Mr. Sutherland will see how the *White Dove* will sail!

"I should imagine," says the Youth, in an undertone, to his hostess, as we are working out the narrow entrance to Loch Speliv, "that your doctor-friend must have given those men a liberal *pour-boire* when he left."

"Oh, I am sure not," said she, quickly, as if that was a serious imputation. "That is very unlikely."

"They seem very anxious to have everything put right against his coming," he says; "at all events, your captain seems to think that every good breeze he gets is thrown away on us."

"Dr. Sutherland and he," she says, laughing, "were very good friends. And then Angus had very bad luck when he was on board; the glass wouldn't fall. But I have promised to bottle up the equinoctials for him—he will have plenty of winds before we have done with him. You must stay, too, you know, Mr. Smith, and see how the *White Dove* rides out a gale."

He regarded her with some suspicion. He was beginning to know that this lady's speech—despite the great gentleness and innocence of her eyes—sometimes concealed curious meanings. And was she now merely giving him a kind and generous invitation to go yachting with us for another month? or was she, with a cruel sarcasm, referring to the probability of his having to remain a prisoner for that time, in order to please his uncle?

However, the conversation had to be dropped, for at this moment the Laird and his *protégé* made their appearance; and, of course, a deck-chair had to be brought for her, and a foot-stool, and a sunshade, and a book. But what were these attentions, on the part of her elderly slave, compared with the fact that a young man, presumably enjoying a sound and healthy sleep, should have unselfishly got up at an unholy hour of the morning, and should have risked blowing up the yacht with spirits of wine in order to get her a cup of tea?

It was a fine sailing day. Running before a light topsail breeze from the south-east, the *White Dove* was making for the Lynn of Morven, and bringing us more and more within view of the splendid circle of mountains, from Ben Cruachan in the east to Ben Nevis in the north, from Ben Nevis down to the successive waves of the Morven hills. And we knew why, among all the sunlit yellows and greens—faint as they were in the distance—there were here and there on slope and shoulder stains of a beautiful rose purple that was a new feature in the landscape. The heather was coming into bloom—the knee-deep, honey-scented heather, the haunt of the snipe, and the muircock, and the mountain hare. And if there was to be for us this year no toiling over the high slopes and crags—looking down from time to time on a spacious world of sunlit sea and island—we were not averse from receiving friendly and substantial messages from those altitudes. In a day or two now the first crack of the breech-loader would startle the silence of the morning air. And Master Fred's larder was sorely in want of variety.

Northward, and still northward, the light breeze tempering the scorching sunlight that glares on the sails and the deck. Each long ripple of the running blue sea flashes in diamonds; and when we look to the south, those silver lines converge and converge, until at the horizon they become a solid blaze of light unendurable to the eye. But it is to the north we turn—to the land of Appin, and Kingairloch, and Lochaber; blow, light wind, and carry us onward, gentle tide, we have an appointment to keep within shadow of the mountains that guard Glencoe.

The Laird has discovered that these two were up early this morning; he becomes facetious.

"Not sleepy yet, Miss Mary?" he says.

"Oh, no—not at all," she says, looking up from her book.

"It's the early bird that catches the first sketch. Fine and healthy is that early rising, Howard. I'm thinking ye did not sleep sound last night; what for were ye up before anybody was stirring?"

But the Laird does not give him time to answer. Something has tickled the fancy of this profound humorist.

"Kee! kee!" he laughs; and he rubs his hands. "I mind a good one I heard from Tom Galbraith, when he and I were at the Bridge of Allan; room to room, ye know; and Tom did snore that night. 'What,' said I to him in the morning, 'had ye nightmare, or delirium tremens, that ye made such a noise in the night?' 'Did I snore?' said he—I'm thinking somebody else must have complained before. 'Snore!' said I; 'twenty grampuses was nothing to it.' And Tom he burst out a-laughing. 'I'm very glad,' says he. 'If I snored, I must have had a sound.' A sound sleep—d'ye see? Very sharp—very smart—eh?"—and the Laird laughed and chuckled over that portentous joke.

"Oh, uncle, uncle, uncle!" his nephew cried. "You used never to do such things. You must quit the society of those artists, if they have such a corrupting influence on you."

"I tell ye," he says, with a sudden seriousness, "I would just like to show Tom Galbraith that picture o' Canna that's below. No; I would not ask him to alter a thing. Very good—very good it is. And—and—I think—I will admit it—for a plain man likes the truth to be told—there is just a bit jealousy among them against any English person that tries to paint Scotch scenery. No, no, Miss Mary—don't you be afraid. Ye can hold your own. If I had that picture, now—if it belonged to me—and if Tom was stopping wi' me at Denny-mains, I would not allow him to alter it, not if he offered to spend a week's work on it."

After that—what? The Laird could say no more.

Alas! alas! our wish to take a new route northward was all very well; but we had got under the lee of Lismore, and slowly and slowly the wind died away, until even the sea was as smooth as the surface of a mirror. It was but little compensation that we could lean over the side of the yacht, and watch the thousands of "sea-blubbers" far down in the water, in all their hues of blue, and purple, and pale pink. The heat of the sun was blistering; scorching with a sharp pain any nose or cheek that was inadvertently turned towards it. As for the Laird, he could not stand this oven-like business any longer; he declared the saloon was ever so much cooler than the deck; and went below, and lay at length on one of the long blue cushions.

"Why, John," says Queen T., "you are bringing on those dead calms again. What will Dr. Sutherland say to you?"

But John of Skye has his eye on the distant shore.

"Oh, no, mem," he says, with a crafty smile, "there will not be a dead calm very long."

And there, in at the shore, we see a dark line on the water; and it spreads and spreads; the air becomes gratefully cool to the face before the breeze perceptibly fills the sails; then there is a cheerful swinging over of the boom and a fluttering of the as yet unreleased head-sails. A welcome breeze, surely, from the far hills of Kingairloch. We thank you, you beautiful Kingairloch, with your deep glens and your rose-purple shoulders of hills; long may you continue to send fresh westerly winds to the parched and passing voyager.

We catch a distant glimpse of the white houses of Port Appin; we bid adieu to the musically named Eilean-na-Shuna; far ahead of us is the small white light-house at the mouth of the narrows of Corran. But there is to be no run up to Fort William for us to-night; the tide will turn soon; we cannot get through the Corran narrows. And so there is a talk of Ballahulish; and Captain John is trying hard to get Miss Avon to pronounce this Ballahulish. It is not fair of Sandy from Islay—who thinks he is hidden by the foresail—to grin to himself at these innocent efforts.

Grandeur and grandeur grow those ramparts of mountains ahead of us—with their wine-coloured stains of heather on the soft and velvety yellow-green. The wind from the Kingairloch shores still carries us on; and Inversanda swells the breeze; soon we shall be running into that wide channel that leads up to the beautiful Loch Leven. The Laird re-appears on deck. He is quite enchanted with the scene around him. He says if an artist had placed that black cloud behind the great bulk of Ben Nevis, it could not have been more artistically arranged. He declares that this entrance to Loch Leven is one of the most beautiful places he has ever seen. He calls attention to the soft green foliage of the steep hills; and to the mighty peak of granite, right in the middle of the landscape, that we discover to be called the Pap of Glencoe. And here, in the mellow light of the afternoon, is the steamer coming down from the north; is it to be a race between us for the Ballahulish quay?

It is an unfair race. We have to yield to brute strength and steam kettles.

"Four to one Argyle came on."

as the dirge of Eric says. But we bear no malice. We salute our enemy as he goes roaring and throbbing by; and there is many a return signal waved to us from the paddle-boxes.

"Mr. Sutherland is no there, mem, I think," says Captain John, who has been scanning those groups of people with his keen eyes.

"I should think not; he said he was coming to-morrow," is the answer.