

BLACK WILLIAM

WHITE WINGS: A
YACHTING ROMANCE,
VOLUME III

William Black

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Romance, Volume III**

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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	10
CHAPTER III.	15
CHAPTER IV.	19
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24

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CHAPTER I. A CONFESSION

What could the solitary scouts, coming back from the various points of the island, know of this quick, unwilling cry of pain, and of the forced calm that followed it? They had their own sorrows. There was a gloom upon their faces. One and all bore the same story – not a seal, not a wild duck, not even a rock pigeon anywhere.

"But it is a fine thing to be able to straighten one's back," says the Laird, who always seizes on the cheerful side; "and we have not given up hope of your getting the sealskin yet, Miss Mary – no, no. The Doctor says they are away hunting just now; when the tide gets low again they will come up on the rocks. So the best thing we can do is to spend plenty of time over our luncheon, and cross the island again in the afternoon. Aye; begun already?" adds the Laird, as he goes up to the canvas, and regards the rough outlines in charcoal with a critical air. "Very good! very good!" he says, following the lines with his thumb, and apparently drawing in the air. "Excellent! The composition very clever indeed – simple, bold, striking. And a fine blaze of colour ye'll have on a day like this; and then the heavy black hull of the smack bang in the foreground: excellent, excellent! But if I were you, I would leave out that rock there; ye would get a better sweep of the sea. Don't distract the eye in sea pieces; bold lines – firm, sound colour: and there ye are. Well, my lass, ye have the skill of constructing a picture. Tom Galbraith himself would admit that, I know – "

But here the Laird is called away by his hostess.

"I would advise you, sir," says she, "to have some luncheon while you can get it. It is a very strange thing, with all you gentlemen on board, and with all those guns lying about, but we are drawing nearer and nearer to starvation. I wish you would give up hunting seals, and shoot something useful."

Here our young Doctor appears with certain bottles that have been cooling in the water.

"There must be plenty of rock pigeons in the caves we passed this morning, on the other island," he says.

"Oh, not those beautiful birds!" says she of the empty larder. "We cannot have Hurlingham transported to the Highlands."

"Whoever tries to shoot those pigeons won't find it a Hurlingham business," he remarks.

But the Laird has a soul above luncheons, and larders, and pigeon-shooting. He is still profoundly absorbed in thought.

"No," he says, at length, to the young lady who, as usual, is by his side. "I am wrong!"

She looks up at him with some surprise.

"Yes, I am wrong," he says, decisively. "Ye must keep in that island. Ye must sacrifice picturesqueness to truth. Never mind the picture: keep the faithful record. In after life ye will be able to get plenty of pictures; but ye may not be able to get an exact record of the things ye saw when ye were sailing with the *White Dove*."

"Well, you know, sir," observes Miss Avon, with a somewhat embarrassed smile, "you don't give me much encouragement. You always speak as if I were to be compelled to keep those sketches. Am I to find nobody silly enough to buy them?"

Now, somehow or other of late, the Laird has been more and more inclined to treat the sale of Mary Avon's pictures as a most irresistible joke. He laughs and chuckles at the mere mention of such a thing, just as if Homesh were somewhere about.

"Sell them!" he says, with another deep chuckle. "Ye will never sell them. Ye could not have the heart to part with them."

"The heart has to be kept in proper subjection," says she, lightly, "when one has to earn one's living."

Queen Titania glances quickly at the girl; but apparently there is no profound meaning concealed in this speech. Miss Avon has taken her seat on a shelving piece of grey rock; and, if she is concerned about anything, it is about the safety of certain plates and knives and such things. Her hand is quite steady as she holds out her tumbler for the Youth to pour some water into the claret.

Luncheon over, she returns to her work; and the band of seal-hunters, taking to cigars and pipes, sit and watch the tide slowly ebb away from the golden-brown seaweed. Then, with many a caution as to patience and silence, they rise and get their guns and set out. Already there is a disposition to slouch the head and walk timidly; though as yet there is no need of any precaution.

"*Glückliche Reise!*" says Miss Avon, pleasantly, as we pass.

Angus Sutherland starts, and turns his head. But the salutation was not for him; it was meant for the Youth, who is understood to be the most eager of the seal-hunters. And Mr. Smith, not having his answer pat, replies, "I hope so;" and then looks rather confused as he passes on, carefully stooping his head though there is no occasion whatever.

Then, by following deep gullies and crawling over open ledges, we reach points commanding the various bays; and with the utmost caution peer over or round the rocks. And whereas yesterday, being Sunday, the bays were alive with seals, disporting themselves freely in full view of a large party of people who were staring at them, to-day, being Monday, finds not a seal visible anywhere, though every one is in hiding, and absolute silence must have reigned in the island, ever since the lobster fishers left in the morning. No matter; the tide is still ebbing; the true hunter must possess his soul.

And yet this lying prone for hours on a ledge of exceedingly rough rock must have been monotonous work for our good friend the Laird. Under his nose nothing to look at but scraps of orange lichen and the stray feathers of sea birds; abroad nothing but the glassy blue sea, with the pale mountains of Jura rising into the cloudless sky. At last it seemed to become intolerable. We could see him undergoing all sorts of contortions in the effort to wrest something out of his coat-pocket without raising any portion of his body above the line of cover. He himself was not unlike a grey seal in the shadow of the rock, especially when he twisted and turned himself about without rising an inch from the surface. And in time he succeeded. We could see him slowly and carefully unfold that newspaper – probably not more than a week old – just beneath his face. He had no need of spectacles: his eyes were almost touching the page. And then we knew that he was at rest; and the hard rock and the seals all forgotten. For we took it that this local paper was one which had written a most important leading article about the proposed public park for Strathgovan, calling upon the ratepayers to arise and assert their rights and put a check on the reckless extravagance of the Commissioners. The Laird himself was openly pointed at as one who would introduce the luxury of the later Romans into a sober Scotch community; and there were obscure references to those who seemed to consider that a man's dwelling-house should become nothing more nor less than a museum of pictures and statues, while they would apply taxes raised from a hard-working population in the adornment of places of recreation for the idle. But do you think that the Laird was appalled by this fierce onslaught? Not a bit of it. He had read and re-read it to us with delight. He had triumphantly refuted the writer's sophistries; he had exposed his ignorance of the most elementary facts in political economy; he was always rejoiced to appear before Tom Galbraith and Mary Avon as one who was not afraid to suffer for his championship of art. And then, when he had triumphed over his enemy, he would fold the paper with a sort of contented sigh; and would say with a compassionate air, "Poor crayture! poor crayture!" as if the poor crayture could not be expected to know any better.

At last – at last! The Laird makes frantic gestures with his newspaper – all the more frantic that they have to be strictly lateral, and that he dare not raise his hand. And behold! far away out there

on the still, blue surface, a smooth round knob, shining and black. Without a muscle moving, eager eyes follow that distant object. The seal is not alarmed or suspicious; he sails evenly onward, seldom looking to right or left. And when he disappears there is no splash; he has had enough of breathing; he is off for his hunting in the deep seas.

What is more, he remains there. We catch no further trace of him, nor of any other living thing around those deserted bays. Human nature gives in. The Youth gets up, and boldly displays himself on a promontory, his gun over his shoulder. Then the Laird, seeing that everything is over, gets up too, yawning dreadfully, and folds his newspaper, and puts it in his pocket.

"Come along!" he calls out. "It is no use. The saints have taught the seals tricks. They know better than to come near on a working day."

And so presently the sombre party sets out again for the other side of the island, where the gig awaits us. Not a word is said. Cartridges are taken out; we pick our way through the long grass and the stones. And when it is found that Miss Avon has roughed in all that she requires of her present study, it is gloomily suggested that we might go back by way of the other island, that so haply we might secure the materials for a pigeon pie before returning to the yacht.

The evening sun was shining ruddily along the face of the cliffs as we drew near the other island; and there was no sign of life at all about the lonely shores and the tall caves. But there was another story to tell when, the various guns having been posted, the Youth boldly walked up to the mouth of the largest of the caves, and shouted. Presently there were certain flashes of blue things in the mellow evening light; and the sharp bang! bang! of the gun, that echoed into the great hollows. Hurlingham? That did not seem much of a Hurlingham performance. There were no birds standing bewildered on the fallen trap, wondering whether to rise or not; but there were things coming whizzing through the air that resembled nothing so much as rifle bullets with blue wings. The Youth, it is true, got one or two easy shots at the mouth of the cave; but when the pigeons got outside and came flashing over the heads of the others, the shooting was, on the whole, a haphazard business. Nevertheless, we got a fair number for Master Fred's larder, after two of the men had acted as retrievers for three-quarters of an hour among the rocks and bushes. Then away again for the solitary vessel lying in the silent loch, with the pale mists stealing over the land, and the red sun sinking behind the Jura hills.

Again, after dinner, amid the ghostly greys of the twilight, we went forth on another commissariat excursion, to capture fish. Strange to say, however, our Doctor, though he was learned on the subject of flies and tackle, preferred to remain on board: he had some manuscript to send off to London. And his hostess said she would remain too; she always has plenty to do about the saloon. Then we left the *White Dove* and rowed away to the rocks.

But the following conversation, as we afterwards heard, took place in our absence: —

"I wished very much to speak to you," said Angus Sutherland, to his hostess, without making any movement to bring out his desk.

"I thought so," said she; not without a little nervous apprehension.

And then she said quickly, before he could begin —

"Let me tell you at once, Angus, that I have spoken to Mary. Of course, I don't wish to interfere; I wouldn't interfere for the world; but — but I only asked her, lest there should be any unpleasant misapprehension, whether she had any reason to be offended with you. 'None in the least,' she said. She was most positive. She even seemed to be deeply pained by the misunderstanding; and — and wished me to let you know; so you must dismiss that from your mind any way."

He listened thoughtfully, without saying anything. At last he said —

"I have determined to be quite frank with you. I am going to tell you a secret — if it is a secret —"

"I have guessed it," she said, quickly, to spare him pain.

"I thought so," he said, quite quietly. "Well; I am not ashamed of it. I have no reason to be ashamed of it. But, since you know, you will see that it would be very embarrassing for me to remain longer on board the yacht if — if there was no hope —"

He turned over the leaves of a guide-book rapidly, without looking at them; the hard-headed Doctor had not much command over himself at this moment.

"If you have guessed, why not she?" he said, in a somewhat hurried and anxious manner. "And – and – if I am to go, better that I should know at once. I – I have nothing to complain of – I mean I have nothing to reproach her with – if it is a misfortune, it is a misfortune – but – but she used to be more friendly towards me."

These two were silent. What was passing before their minds? The long summer nights in the far northern seas, with the glory dying in the west; or the moonlight walks on the white deck, with the red star of Ushinish lighthouse burning in the south; or the snug saloon below, with its cards, and candles, and laughter, and Mary Avon singing to herself the song of Ulva? She sang no song of Ulva now.

"Mary and I are very intimate friends," says the other deliberately. "I will say nothing against her. Girls have curious fancies about such things sometimes. But I must admit – for you are my friend too – that I am not surprised you should have been encouraged by her manner to you at one time, or that you should wonder a little at the change."

But even this mild possibility of Mary Avon's being in the wrong she feels to be incompatible with her customary championship of her friend; and so she instantly says —

"Mind, I am certain of this – that whatever Mary does, she believes to be right. Her notion of duty is extraordinarily sensitive and firm. Once she has put anything before her as the proper thing to be done, she goes straight at it; and nothing will turn her aside. And although there is something about it I can't quite understand, how am I to interfere? Interference never does any good. Why do not you ask her yourself?"

"I mean to do so, when I get the chance," said he, simply. "I merely wished to tell you that, if her answer is 'No,' it will be better for me to leave you. Already I fancy my being on board the yacht is a trouble to her. I will not be a trouble to her. I can go. If it is a misfortune, there is no one to blame."

"But if she says 'Yes!'" cried his friend; and there was a wonderful joy in her eyes, and in her excess of sympathy she caught his hand for a moment. "Oh, Angus, if Mary were to promise to be your wife! What a trip we should have then – we should take the *White Dove* to Stornoway!"

That was her ultimate notion of human happiness – sailing the *White Dove* up to Stornoway!

"I don't think there is much hope," said he, rather absently, "from her manner of late. But anything is better than suspense. If it is a misfortune, as I say, there is no one to blame. I had not the least notion that she knew Mr. Howard Smith in London."

"Nor did she."

He stared rather.

"They may have met at our house; but certainly not more than once. You see, living in a country house, we have to have our friends down in a *staccato* fashion, and always by arrangement of a few at a time. There is no general dropping in to afternoon tea."

"He never met her in London?" he repeated.

"I should think not."

"His uncle, then: did she never see him before?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what does he mean by treating her as a sort of familiar friend who was likely to turn up any time at Denny-mains?"

His companion coloured somewhat; for she had no right to betray confidences.

"The Laird is very fond of Mary," she said, evasively. "It is quite beautiful to see those two together."

He sate for a little time in silence; and then begged to be excused – he would go on deck to smoke. But when, some little time thereafter, we returned from our brief fishing, the dark figure walking up and down the deck was not smoking at all. He paused as the gig was hauled fast to the gangway.

"What luck?"

"About two dozen."

"All lithe?"

"About half-a-dozen mackerel."

And then he assisted Mary Avon to ascend the small wooden steps. She said "Thank you!" as she withdrew her hand from his; but the words were uttered in a low voice; and she instantly crossed to the companion and went below. He stayed on deck, and helped to swing the gig up to the davits.

Now something had got into the head of our Admiral-in-chief that night. She was very merry; and very affectionate towards Mary. She made light of her foolish wish to go away to the south. She pointed out that this continuous fine weather was only hoarding up electricity for the equinoctials; and then we should have a spin!

"We are not going to let you go, Mary; that is the long and the short of it. And we are going to keep hold of Angus, too. He is not going away yet – no, no. We have something for him to do. We shall not rest satisfied until we see him sail the *White Dove* into Stornoway harbour!"

CHAPTER II. ONLY A HEADACHE

Stornoway harbour, indeed! The weather was laughing at us. The glass had steadily fallen until it had got about as low as it could go with decency; and yet this next morning was more beautiful, and bright, and calm than ever! Were we to be for ever confined in this remote Loch of the Burying Place?

"Angus! Angus! where are you?" the Admiral calls out, as she comes up on deck.

"Here I am," calls out a voice in return, from the cross-trees.

She raises her head, and perceives the ruddy-faced Doctor hanging on by the ratlines.

"Where is the fine sailing weather you were to bring us – eh?"

"I have been looking for it," he replies, as he comes down the rigging; "and there is not a breath anywhere."

"Very well," she says, promptly; "I'll tell you what you must do. You must get everybody who can handle a gun into the gig and go away up to the head of the loch there, and shoot every living thing you can see. Do you understand? We are on the brink of starvation! We are perishing! Do you want us to boil tarred rope into soup?"

"No," he says, humbly.

"Very well. Away you go. If you can't bring us any wind to take us into a civilised place, you must provide us with food; is that clear enough?"

Here Captain John comes aft, touching his cap.

"Good morning mem! I was never seeing the like of this weather, mem."

"I don't want to see any more of it," she says, sharply. "Did you bring us in here because there was a convenient place to bury us in? Do you know that we are dying of starvation?"

"Oh, no, mem!" says Captain John, with a grin; but looking rather concerned all the same.

However, her attention is quickly called away by the sound of oars. She turns and regards this small boat approaching the yacht; and the more she looks the more do her eyes fill with astonishment.

"Well, I declare!" she says, "this is about the coolest thing I have seen for ages."

For it is Miss Mary Avon who is rowing the dingay back to the yacht; and her only companion is the Youth, who is contentedly seated in the stern, with his gun laid across his knees.

"Good morning, Mr. Smith!" she says, with the most gracious sarcasm. "Pray don't exert yourself too much. Severe exercise before breakfast is very dangerous."

The Youth lays hold of the rope; there is a fine blush on his handsome face.

"It is Miss Avon's fault," he says; "she would not let me row."

"I suppose she expected you to shoot? Where are the duck, and the snipe, and the golden plover? Hand them up!"

"If you want to see anything in the shape of game about this coast, you'd better wait till next Sunday," says he, somewhat gloomily.

However, after breakfast, we set out for the shallow head of the loch; and things do not turn out so badly after all. For we have only left the yacht some few minutes when there is a sudden whirring of wings – a call of "Duck! duck!" – and the Doctor, who is at the bow, and who is the only one who is ready, fires a snap-shot at the birds. Much to everybody's amazement, one drops, and instantly dives. Then begins an exciting chase. The biorlinn is sent careering with a vengeance; the men strain every muscle; and then another cry directs attention to the point at which the duck has reappeared. It is but for a second. Though he cannot fly, he can swim like a fish; and from time to time, as the hard pulling enables us to overtake him, we can see him shooting this way or that through the clear water. Then he bobs his head up, some thirty or forty yards off; and there is another snap-shot – the charge rattling on the water the fifth part of an instant *after* he disappears.

"Dear me!" says the Laird; "that bird will cost us ten shillings in cartridges."

But at last he is bagged. A chance shot happens to catch him before he dives; he is stretched on the water, with his black webbed feet in the air; and a swoop of Captain John's arm brings him dripping into the gig. And then our natural history is put to the test. This is no gay-plumaged sheldrake, or blue-necked mallard, or saw-toothed merganser. It is a broad-billed duck, of a sooty black and grey; we begin to regret our expenditure of cartridges; experiments on the flavour of unknown sea birds are rarely satisfactory. But Captain John's voice is authoritative and definite. "It is a fine bird," he says. And Master Fred has already marked him for his own.

Then among the shallows at the head of the loch there is many a wild pull after broods of flappers, and random firing at the circling curlew. The air is filled with the calling of the birds; and each successive shot rattles away with its echo among the silent hills. What is the result of all this noise and scramble? Not much, indeed; for right in the middle of it we are attracted by a strange appearance in the south. That dark line beyond the yacht: is it a breeze coming up the loch? Instantly the chase after mergansers ceases; cartridges are taken out; the two or three birds we have got are put out of the way; and the Laird, taking the tiller ropes, sits proud and erect. Away go the four oars with the precision of machinery; and the long sweep sends the gig ahead at a swinging pace. Behold! behold! the dark blue on the water widening! Is it a race between the wind and the gig as to which will reach the *White Dove* first? "Give me your oar, Fred!" says the Doctor, who is at the bow.

There is but a momentary pause. Again the shapely boat swings along; and with the measured beat of the oars comes the old familiar chorus —

... Cheerily, and all together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together! —
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Soon the flowing breeze will blow;
We'll show the snowy canvas on her —
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together! —
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Wafted by the breeze of morn
We'll quaff the joyous horn together! —
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together! —
Ho, ro, clansmen!

"We'll beat! we'll beat!" cries the Laird, in great delight. "Give it her, boys! Not one halfpennyworth o' that wind will we lose!"

The bow cleaves the blue water; the foam hisses away from her rudder. It is a race of the North against the South. Then the chorus again —

Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together! —
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Hurrah! hurrah! As the gig is run alongside, and guns and birds handed up, that spreading blue has not quite reached the yacht; there is no appreciable stir of the lazy ensign. But there is little time to be lost. The amateurs swing the gig to the davits, while the men are getting in the slack of the anchor chain; the women are incontinently bundled below, to be out of the way of flapping sheets.

Then, all hands at the halyards! And by the time the great White Wings are beginning to spread, the breeze stirs the still air around us; and the peak sways gently this way and that; and they who are hard at work at the windlass are no doubt grateful for this cool blowing from the south. Then there is a cessation of noise; we become vaguely aware that we are moving. At last the *White Dove* has spread her wings; her head is turned towards the south. Good-bye! you lonely loch, with the silent shores and the silent tombs – a hundred farewells to you, wherever we may be going!

And slowly we beat down the loch, against this light southerly breeze. But as we get further and further into the open, surely there is something in the air and in the appearance of the southern sky that suggests that the glass has not been falling for nothing. The sea is smooth; but there is a strange gloom ahead of us; and beyond the islands that we visited yesterday nothing is visible but a wan and sultry glare. Then, afar, we can hear a noise as of the approach of some storm; but perhaps it is only the low sound of the swirling of the tides round the shores. Presently another sound attracts attention – a murmured hissing, and it comes nearer and nearer; dark spots, about the size of a threepenny-piece, appear on the white decks. The women have scarcely time to send below for their sunshades when the slight shower passes by – the decks are not even left damp. Then further and further we creep away towards the south; but where we expected to catch some far glimpse of the Irish coast – the blue line of Rathlin or the Antrim cliffs – there is only that dim, sultry haze.

Then another sound – a dull *flop! flop!* – in the distance; and the stragglers who have remained below after luncheon are hastily summoned on deck. And there, far away in the haze, we can dimly descry the successive curved forms of a school of dolphins, racing each other, and springing twenty or thirty feet in the air before they come down with that heavy thud on the water. Those of us who have watched the beautiful lithe fish racing and chasing by the side of an Atlantic vessel, would fain have been somewhat nearer; but we can only see the dim forms springing into the haze. Then the dull pistol-shots in the south slowly cease, and we are left alone on the low murmuring sea.

"But where is Miss Mary?" says the Laird, suddenly becoming aware of the absence of his chief companion.

"Oh, she is in the saloon!" says his hostess, quickly and anxiously. "She is doing something to one of her water-colours. I suppose we must not disturb her."

"No, no; certainly not," returns the Laird, lightly; and then he adds, with a smile which is meant to be very significant, "There is never any harm in hard work. Let her go on; she will have a fine collection of sketches before she leaves the *White Dove*."

But our Queen Tita does not respond to that careless joke. There is a curious, constrained look on her face; and she quite peremptorily negatives a suggestion of the Youth that he should go below for the draught-board. Then one of us perceives that Angus Sutherland is not on deck.

Has the opportunity come at last, then, for the clearing away of all secret troubles? What end is there to be to this momentous interview? Is it Stornoway harbour? Is our frank-eyed young Doctor to come up with a silent wonder and joy on his face – a message that needs no speech – a message that only says, "About with the yacht, and let us run away to the northern seas and Stornoway?" The friend of these two young people can hardly conceal her anxiety. She has got hold of the case of an opera glass, and opens and shuts it quickly and aimlessly. Then there is a step on the companion way; she does not look; she only knows that Angus Sutherland comes on deck, and then goes forward to the bow of the gig, and stands by himself, and looks out to sea.

There is silence on board; for a low rumble of thunder has been heard once or twice, and we are listening. The mountains of Jura are dark now, and the sultry mist in the south is deeper in its gloom. This condition of the atmosphere produces a vague sense of something about to happen, which is in itself uncomfortable; one would almost like to see a flash of lightning, or hear the thunderous advance of a storm breaking in upon the oppressive calm.

The Laird goes forward to Angus Sutherland.

"Well, Doctor, and what think ye of the weather now?"

The younger man starts and turns round, and for a second looks at the Laird as if he had not quite comprehended the question.

"Oh, yes!" he says. "You are quite right. It does look as if we were going to have a dirty night." And with that he turns to the sea again.

"Aye," says the Laird, sententiously. "I am glad we are in a boat we need have no fear of – none! Keep her away from the shore, and we are all right. But – but I suppose we will get into some harbour to-night, after all?"

"It does not matter," he says, absently; and then he goes away up to the bow. He is alone there; for the men have gone below for dinner – with the exception of John of Skye, who is at the helm.

Presently the special friend of the young man puts aside that opera-glass case, and walks timidly forward to the bow of the yacht. She regards him somewhat anxiously; but his face is turned away from her – looking over to the gloomy Jura hills.

"Angus," she says, briskly, "are we not going very near Jura, if it is West Loch Tarbert we are making for?"

He turned to her then, and she saw by his face that something had happened.

"You have spoken to her, Angus?" she said, in a low voice; and her earnest, kind eyes regarded the young man as if to anticipate his answer.

"Yes."

For a second or so he seemed disinclined to say more; but presently he added, scarcely looking at her —

"I am sorry that I must leave you the first time we get near land."

"Oh, Angus!"

It was almost a cry – uttered in that low, piteous voice. Then he looked at her.

"You have been very kind to me," said he, so that no one should hear. "It is only a misfortune. But I wish I had never seen the *White Dove*."

"Oh, Angus; don't say that!"

"It is my own fault. I should never have come from Edinburgh. I knew that. I knew I was hazarding everything. And she is not to blame – "

He could say no more, for one or two of the men now came up from the fore-castle. His hostess left him and went aft, with a hurt and indignant look on her face. When the Laird asked why Miss Mary did not come on deck, she said, "I don't know," with an air which said she had ceased to take any further care in Mary Avon's actions. And at dinner, what heed did she pay to the fact that Mary Avon was rather white, and silent, and pained-looking? She had been disappointed. She had not expected the friend of her bosom to act in this heartless manner. And as for Howard Smith, she treated that young gentleman with a cold courtesy which rather astonished him.

After dinner, when the men folk had gone on deck, and when she was preparing to go too, a timid, appealing hand was laid on her arm.

"I would like to speak to you," said the low voice of Mary Avon.

Then she turned – only for a second.

"I think I know enough of what has happened, Mary," said she; "and it would not be right for me to intermeddle. Young people are the best judges of their own affairs."

The appealing hand was withdrawn; the girl retired to the saloon, and sate down alone.

But here, on deck, an eager council of war was being held; and Angus Sutherland was as busy as any one with the extended chart – the soundings barely visible in the waning light – and proposals and counter proposals were being freely bandied about. Night was coming on; dirty-looking weather seemed to be coming up from the south; and the mouth of West Loch Tarbert is narrow and shallow in parts, and studded with rocks – a nasty place to enter in the dark. Moreover, when should we get there, beating against this south-easterly wind? What if we were to put her head round, and run for

some improvised harbour among the small islands under the shadow of the Jura hills, and wait there for daylight to show us across the Sound?

There was but one dissentient. Angus Sutherland seemed oddly anxious to get to West Loch Tarbert. He would himself take the helm all night; if only the men would take their turn at the look-out, one at a time. He was sure he could make the channel, if we reached the mouth of the loch before daylight. What! with nothing shallower on the chart than four fathoms! How could there be any danger?

But the more prudent counsels of John of Skye at length prevail, and there is a call to the men forward to stand by. Then down goes the helm; her head slews round with a rattling of blocks and cordage; the sheets of the head-sails are belayed to leeward; and then, with the boom away over the starboard davits, we are running free before this freshening breeze.

But the night is dark as we cautiously creep in under the vast shadows of the Jura hills. Fortunately in here the wind is light; the *White Dove* seems to feel her way through the gloom. All eyes are on the look-out; and there is a general shout as we nearly run on a buoy set to mark a sunken ship. But we glide by in safety; and in due course of time the roar of the anchor chain tells us that we are snug for the night.

"But where is Miss Mary?" says the Laird, in the cheerfully-lit saloon. He looks around him in an uncomfortable and unsettled way. The saloon is not the saloon when Mary Avon is out of it; here is her chair next to his as usual, but it is vacant. How are we to spend the last happy hour of chatting and joking without the pleased, bright face, and the timid, gentle, shy, dark eyes?

"Mary has gone to her cabin," says her hostess. "I suppose she has a headache."

She supposes the girl has a headache, and has not asked! And can it be really Mary Avon that she is speaking of in that cold, hurt, offended way?

CHAPTER III. IN THE DARK

And then the next morning the Laird is infinitely distressed.

"What! not better yet?" he says. "Dear me! I wish I could be a woman for a while, to take some tea in to her, and read to her, and coax her into better spirits. What a bad headache it must be!"

But this generous sympathy on the part of one who is little more than an acquaintance touches the heart of Mary Avon's particular friend. She reproaches herself for her cruelty. She not only gets the tea and takes it into the cabin, but she adopts a domineering tone, and declares that until the young lady begins her breakfast she will not leave the place. And then she looks at the timid, worn face; and her hand is placed gently on the hand of her friend, and she says in a lower voice —

"Mary, don't think I am angry. I am only a little bit disappointed. But I don't blame you — you could not help it. It is a pity; that is all."

The girl's face remains rather sad; but she is quite self-possessed.

"You will let me go away," she says, looking down, "when we get to some harbour?"

"There is no need," says her friend, regarding her. "Angus will leave us to-day, as soon as we get across to Cantyre."

"Oh!" she said, quickly, and looking up with a brief appeal in her eyes. "I hope not! Why should he go away? I must go; I would rather go."

"Oh, no, Mary!" her friend said. "If there is any 'must' in the matter, it is on his side; for you know his time is very valuable, and you must have guessed why he has already far exceeded what he proposed to himself as his holiday. No, no, Mary; let us forget what has happened as soon as we can, and make the best of the rest of our sailing. The Laird would have a fit if you seriously threatened to go. And I am sure you are not to blame."

So she kissed her on the cheek, by way of reconciliation, and left. And she told the Laird that Mary had been dutiful, and had taken some breakfast, and would be up on deck in course of time.

Meanwhile, those who had gone on deck had found the *White Dove* lying in a dead calm, some three miles away from her anchorage of the previous night; her sails hanging limp; a scorching sun on the white decks, and a glare of light coming from the blue sky and the glassy blue sea.

"Well, Angus," says his hostess, very merrily — for she does not wish to let the others guess the reason of his sudden departure; "you see the weather does not approve of your leaving us. What has become of your thunderstorm? Where is the gale from the south, John?"

"I was never seeing the like of this weather, mem," said the bearded skipper. Then he added, anxiously, "And is Dr. Sutherland himself going away from the yat?"

"He would like to," she says; "but how is he ever to see land again if you banish the wind so?"

"But it will no be like this long!" says Captain John, eagerly — for he appears to think that Dr. Sutherland has got tired of the fine weather. "Oh, no, mem! I will answer for it. If Dr. Sutherland will wait another day, or two days, I am sure there will be plenty of wind. And we can lie in West Loch Tarbert for one day, or two days — "

"And starve?" she says, abruptly.

But now it appears that one or two of the men have heard of a mysterious village lying somewhere inland from the mouth of the loch; and from a comparison of these vague rumours we gather that we may not be so far from civilisation after all. Perhaps we may once again behold loaf-bread. Visions of cutlets, fowls, grouse, and hares arise. We shall once more hear some echo of the distant world if perchance there be in the place a worn and ancient newspaper.

"Ay," said the Laird, hastily. "I would like to see a Glasgow newspaper! I'm thinking they must have got the steam fire-engine by now; and fine games the bairns will have when they begin to practise

with it, skelping about in the water. It would be a grand thing to try it in the public garden when we get it; it would keep the shrubs and the borders fine and wet – eh?"

"And it would be quite as interesting as any plaster fountain," says his hostess, encouragingly.

"As handsome every bit," says the Laird, laughing heartily at his play of imagination, "as any bit laddie done up in stucco, standing on one leg, and holding up a pipe! It's a utilitarian age, ma'am – a utilitarian age; we will have instead of a fountain a steam fire-engine – very good! very good! – and they bodies who are always crying out against expenditure on decoration will be disappointed for once."

The Laird had at last discovered the whereabouts of the mysterious village on the Admiralty chart.

"But what newspaper will we get in a place hidden away like that? – out of the reach of all communication wi' the world. They'll be a century behind, mark my words. It is when ye live within a reasonable distance of a great centre of ceevilisation, like Glasgow, that ye feel the life of it stirring your own place too; and ye must keep up with the times; ye must be moving. Conservative as I am, there is no supersteetious obstinacy about me; moving – moving – that's the word. The more important the matter in the interest of the public, the more necessary is it that we should have an impartial mind. If ye show me a new sort of asphalte, do ye think I would not examine it, jist because I recommended Jamieson and MacGregor's patent?"

He appealed boldly to his hostess.

"Oh, certainly; certainly you would!" she says, with an earnestness that might have made Jamieson and MacGregor quail.

"For three weeks," says the Laird, solemnly, "I was on that committee, until it seemed that my breakfast, and my dinner, and my supper every day was nothing but tar-smoke. What wi' the experiments without and within, I was just filled with tar-smoke. And would ye believe it, ma'am, one o' they Radical newspapers went as far as to say there were secret influences at work when Jamieson and MacGregor was decided on. My friends said, 'Prosecute the man for libel;' but I said, 'No; let the poor crayture alone; he has got to earn his living!'"

That was very wise of you, sir," says his hostess.

"Bless me! If a man in public life were to heed everything that's said about him," observes the Laird, with a fine air of unconcern, "what would become of his time? No, no; that is not the principle on which a public man should found his life. Do your best for your fellow-creatures, and let the squabblers say what they like. As ah say, the poor wretches have to earn their living."

Here Mary Avon appeared, somewhat pale and tired-looking; and the Laird instantly went to condole with her, and to get her a deck chair, and what not. At the same moment, too, our young Doctor came along – perhaps with a brave desire to put an end to her embarrassment at once – and shook hands with her, and said "Good morning; I hope your headache is better." Her hand was trembling as it fell away from his; and her "Yes, thank you," was almost inaudible. Then she sate down, and the Laird resumed his discourse.

"I was once taken," said he, "by a fellow commissioner of mine to a sort of singing place, or music hall, in Glasgow."

"What?"

"They wanted to have some such place in Strathgovan," continued the Laird, paying no heed; "and I was asked to go and see what sort of entertainment was provided in such places. It was a sorrowful sight, ma'am – a sorrowful sight; the wretched craytures on the stage laughing at their own songs, and the people not laughing at all, but given over to tobacco smoking, and whisky, and talking amongst themselves. No glint of humour – stupid, senseless stuff. But there was one young man sung a song that had a better sound in it – I cannot remember the words – but I sometimes think there was common sense in them: it was about minding your own business, and doing your own work, and

letting fools say or think of ye what they please. Aye, I think there was something in that young man; though I doubt, by the look of his eyes, but he was a drinker."

He turned to Mary Avon, who had been content to be a mute and unobserved listener.

"Well, Miss Mary," said he, brightly, "and the headache is going? And are ye looking forward to getting letters and newspapers when we get back to the world? There is a post-office at that village of Clachan, John?"

"Oh, aye, sir!" said John; "there will be a post-office."

The Laird looked up at him reproachfully.

"But why cannot ye learn the English pronunciation, man? What's the necessity for ye to say *posht offus*? Cannot ye pronounce the plain English – *post oafficc*?"

"I am not very good at the English, sir," said Captain John, with a grin.

"Ye'll never learn younger."

Then he went to Mary Avon, and suggested that a walk up and down the deck might do her headache good; and when she rose he put her hand on his arm.

"Now," said he, as they started off, "I do not like headaches in young people; they are not natural. And ye may think I am very inqueesitive; but it is the privilege of old men to be talkative and inqueesitive – and I am going to ask you a question."

There was certainly no effort at keeping a secret on the part of the Laird; every one might have heard these two talking as they quietly walked up and down.

"I am going to ask ye, plump and plain, if ye are not anxious about going to London, and worrying yourself about the selling of your pictures? There now; answer me that."

"Not very much, sir," she says, in a low voice.

"Listen to me," he said, speaking in a remarkably emphatic way. "If that is on your mind, dismiss it. I tell you what: I will undertake, on my own responsibeelity, that every painting in oil, and every sketch in oil, and every water-colour drawing, and every sketch in water-colour that ye have on board this yacht, will be sold within one fortnight of your leaving the yacht. Do ye understand that?"

"You are very kind, sir."

"I am not bletherin'," said he; "no man ever knew me draw back from my word. So put that anxiety away from your mind altogether, and let us have no more troubles. I could sell – I could sell four times as many for ye in a fortnight! Bless ye, lassie, ye do not know the people in the West of Scotland yet – ye'll know them better by and by. If there's one thino- thev understand better than another it is a good picture; and they are ready to put their hand in their pocket. Oh! they Edinburgh bodies are very fine creetics – they have what they believe to be an elegant society in Edinburgh – and they talk a great deal about pictures; but do they put their hand in their pocket? Ask Tom Galbraith. Ask him where he sets three-fourths of his income. He lives in Edinburgh; but he gets his income from the West of Scotland. Tom's a wise lad. He knows how to feather his nest. And when he has become independent of the picture-dealers, then he'll go to London, and fight the men there on their own ground."

"I should like to see some of Mr. Galbraith's work," she said, "before I return to England."

"You will have plenty of leisure to look at them by and by," replied the Laird, quite simply. "I have some of Tom's very best things at Denny-mains."

It was not until the cool of the afternoon that a light breeze sprung up to fill the sails of the *White Dove*, and press her gently on towards the coast of Cantyre. By this time every one on board knew that Angus Sutherland was leaving, and leaving for good.

"I hope ye will come and see me at Denny-mains, Dr. Sutherland," said the Laird, good-naturedly, "when ye happen to be in Scotland. I have a neighbour there ye would be glad to meet – a man who could talk to ye on your own subjects – Mr. Stoney."

Our Doctor paid but little heed. He was silent, and distraught. His eyes had an absent and heavy look in them.

"A most distinguished man," the Laird continued. "I am told his reputation in England is just as great as it is in this country. A very distinguished man indeed. He read a paper before the British Association not many years ago."

"About what, do you remember?" said the other, at last.

"H'm!" said the Laird, apparently puzzling his memory. "Ye see, a man in my poseetion has so much to do with the practical business of life, that perhaps he does not pay just attention to the speculations of others. But Mr. Stoney is a remarkable man; I am astonished ye should have forgotten what the paper was about. A most able man, and a fine, logical mind; it is just beautiful to hear him point out the close fitness between the charges in the major proposeetion in the Semple case, and the averments and extracts in the minor. Ye would be greatly delighted and instructed by him, Doctor. And there's another thing."

Here the Laird looked slyly at Mary Avon.

"There's a young leddy here who has a secret of mine; and I'm thinking she has not said much about it. But I will make a public confession now: it has been on my mind for some time back that I might buy a screw yacht."

The Laird looked triumphantly around; he had forgotten that it was a very open secret.

"And wouldn't it be a strange thing if this very party, just as we are sitting now, were to be up at this very spot next year, on board that yacht? – wouldn't that be a strange thing?"

"It would be a jolly pleasant thing," said the Youth.

"You are very kind to include me in the invitation," said Angus Sutherland; "but I doubt whether I shall ever be in Scotland again. My father is a very old man now; that is the only thing that would call me north. But I think I could q-et on better with my own work by going abroad for some years to Naples, probably. I have to go to Italy before long, any way."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way; we did not doubt that he might pursue his researches better in Naples.

It was in the dusk of the evening that we slowly sailed into West Loch Tarbert – past a series of rocks and islands on which, as we were given to understand, seals were more abundant than limpets. But whereas the last haunt of the seals we had visited had introduced us to a solitary and desolate loch, with sterile shores and lonely ruins, this loch, so far as we could see, was a cheerful and inhabited place, with one or two houses shining palely white amid the dark woods. And when v/e had come to anchor, and sent ashore, although there were no provisions to be got, the men returned with all the necessary information for Angus Sutherland. By getting up very early next morning, and walking a certain distance, he would catch a certain coach, which would take him on to Tarbert on Loch Fyne in time to catch the steamer. And so that nicherht, before we turned in to our respective cabins, the Doctor bade us all formally good-bye; and Mary Avon among the rest. No one could have noticed the least difference in his manner.

But in the middle of the night, in the ladies' cabin, a sound of stifled sobbing. And the other woman goes over to the berth of her companion, and bends her head down, and whispers —

"Mary, why are you crying? Tell me!"

She cannot speak for a time; her whole frame is shaken with the bitter-sobs. And then she says, in a low, trembling, broken voice —

"He has not forgiven me. I saw it in his face."

CHAPTER IV. TO ABSENT FRIENDS!

Next morning, however, every one perceived an extraordinary change in the appearance and manner of the girl. Mary Avon had come back to us again, with all the light and life of her face, and the contented gentleness of the soft black eyes. What had wrought the transformation? Certain confidential assurances in the silence of the night that Angus Sutherland, so far from not forgiving her, had insisted that she was not to blame at all. Or the natural reaction after a long strain of anxiety? Or merely the welcome fresh breeze of the morning, with the cheerful, wooded shores, and the white houses shining in the sunlight? Any how there was quite a new expression in her face; and we heard the low, sweet laugh again. It is true that, once or twice, as she walked up and down the deck with the Laird, her eyes grew pensive as she looked away along the hills on the southern shores of the loch. That was the direction in which Angus had left in the morning. And these hills were somewhat overcast; it seemed to be raining inland.

Moreover, there was something else to make our breakfast party a glad one. The two men who had rowed our young Doctor across the loch at break of day had had the curiosity to pierce inland as far as the village of Clachan; and the scouts had brought back the most glowing accounts of the Promised Land which they had discovered. They had penetrated a fertile and deeply-wooded valley; and they had at length come upon a centre of the highest civilisation. There was a post-office. There was a telegraph-office. There was a church, the clock of which struck the hours.

"Just fancy that!" exclaimed our hostess. "A clock that strikes the hours! – and a telegraph-office! We might send a telegram to ask whether the country has been invaded anywhere, or whether the Prime Minister has committed suicide."

"I would like to hear about the steam fire-engine," said the Laird almost to himself.

"However, breeze or no breeze, seals or no seals," she says, with decision, "we must stay over a day here, to have the yacht thoroughly provisioned. We cannot go on skating on the edge of tinned meats. We must have a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables, and fresh milk, and eggs and butter; and then two or three joints are always so serviceable – cold, I mean, for luncheon; and if Fred cannot get any game, at least he must get us some fowls. What do you say, Mary? Shall we walk over to this place, and clear the way for Fred?"

"Oh, no!" says the other, lightly; "you and I are going with the seal shooters. They never get near anything; so we cannot be in the way. I assure you, sir, we shall be as quiet as mice," she adds, addressing the Laird.

"Ye will come with us, and ye will speak just as much as ye please," said the Laird, dogmatically. "What signifies a seal? The crayture is good for nothing! And the idea of you two going away by yourselves into the country! No – no; come away and get ready, Howard. If ye cannot shoot a seal with the two leddies in the boat, ye will never do it without. And the sea breezes, Miss Mary," he added, with an approving air, "are better for ye than the land breezes. Oh, aye; ye are looking just fine this morning."

A short time thereafter he was on deck, looking around him at the pleasant trees and the blue waters, when Miss Avon joined him, fully equipped for the expedition; and just at this moment they began to hear a sound of music in the stillness of the morning air. And then they perceived a rude old rowing-boat, pulled by a small boy of twelve or so, coming nearer and nearer; while another small boy of about the same age was peacefully reclining in the stern, his head thrown back so that it met the full glare of the morning sun, while he played vigorously but rather inaccurately "The Campbells are coming" on a tin whistle.

"Look at that!" said the Laird with delight; "is not that perfect happiness? Look at his pride and laziness – having another boy to pull him about, while he shows off on the penny whistle. Dear me, I wish I was that young rascal!"

"He seems happy enough," she said, with a sigh.

"That is because he does not know it," remarked the Laird, profoundly. "If you proved to him that he was happy, it would immediately vanish."

"You cannot be consciously happy; but you may be consciously unhappy – that is rather hard," said she, absently.

However, these two philosophers were withdrawn from this occult point by a summons from the Youth, who had already got the rifles and cartridges into the bow of the gig. And, indeed, as we rowed away from the yacht, in the direction of the rocks at the mouth of the loch, Miss Avon seemed determined to prove that, consciously or unconsciously, she was happy enough. She would not even allow that Angus Sutherland could have felt any pang of regret at leaving the *White Dove* and his friends.

"Poor chap!" said the Laird, with some compassion, as he turned his head and looked away towards those gloomy hills; "it must have been a lonesome journey for him this morning. And he so fond of sailing too; I'm thinking when he saw what a nice breeze there was, he was rather sorry to go away. I should not wonder if it was wi' a heavy heart that he went on board the steamer."

"Oh, no, sir! why should you think that?" said Mary Avon, quickly and anxiously. "If Dr. Sutherland had nothing to consider but yachting, he might have been sorry to go away. But think what lies before him; think what calls him! Look at the position he has won for himself already, and what is expected of him! and you would have him throw away his splendid opportunities in yachting? There is not a University in Europe where he is not known; there is not a man of science in Europe who does not expect great things of him; and – and – how proud his father must be of him!"

She spoke eagerly and almost breathlessly; there was a pink flush in her cheek, but it was not from shamefacedness. She seemed desperately anxious to convince the Laird that our Doctor ought to have left the yacht, and must have left the yacht, and could not do anything else but leave the yacht. Meanwhile, her friend and hostess regarded her curiously.

"A man with such capacities as he has," continued the girl, warmly, "with such a great future before him, owes it to himself that he should not give way to mere sentiment. The world could not get on at all if people – I mean if the great people, from whom we expect much – were always to be consulting their feelings. Perhaps he was sorry to leave the yacht. He does like sailing; and – and I think he liked to be among friends. But what is that when he knows there is work in the world for him to do? If he was sorry at leaving the yacht, you may depend on it that that had passed away before he stepped on board the steamer. For what was that trifling sentiment compared with the consciousness that he had acted rightly?"

Something about the precision of these phrases – for the girl but rarely gave way to such a fit of earnest talking – seemed to suggest to the silent person who was watching her, that this was not the first time the girl had thought of these things.

"Idle people," said this youthful controversialist, "can afford to indulge in sentiment; but not those who have to do great things in the world. And it is not as if – Dr. Sutherland" – she always faltered the least bit just before pronouncing the name – "were only working for his own fame or his own wealth. It is for the good of mankind that he is working; and if he has to make this or that sacrifice, he knows that he is doing right. What other reward does a man need to have?"

"I am thinking of the poor old man in Banffshire," said her friend to her, thoughtfully. "If Angus goes away to Italy for some years, they may not see each other again."

At this the girl turned strangely pale, and remained silent; but she was unnoticed, for at this moment all attention was attracted towards the seals.

There they were, no doubt, and in large numbers. We could see the occasionally moving forms, scarcely distinguishable from the brown sea-weed, on the long projecting points of the low rocks; while here and there one of the animals could be made out, poising himself in a semi-circle – head and tail in the air – like a letter O with the upper four-fifths cut off. But the problem was, how to get anywhere within shot. The rocks, or small islands, had no doubt certain eminences in the middle; but they were low and shallow all round. Obviously it was no use bearing straight down on them from our present position; so it was resolved to give them a wide berth, to pull away from the islands altogether, and then approach them from the south, if haply there might in this wise be some possibility of shelter. It was observed that Queen Titania, during these whispered and eager consultations, smiled gravely and was silent. She had been in the Highlands before.

Seals are foolish animals. We were half a mile away from them; and we were going still farther away. The rocking of the water made it impossible for us to try a haphazard shot even if we had had a rifle that would have carried anything like 800 yards with precision. There was not the least reason for their being alarmed. But all the same, as we silently and slowly paddled away from them – actually away from them – the huge bodies one by one flopped and waddled and dropped into the water with a splash. In about a minute or so there was not a seal visible through our best binoculars. And Queen Titania calmly smiled.

But, as everybody knows, there are two sides to an island, as to everything else. So we boldly bore down on the shores nearest us, and resolved, on getting close, on a cautious and silent landing. After many a trial we found a creek where the stern of the gig could be backed into fairly deep water, along a ledge of rock, and then two of us got out. The ladies produced their knitting materials.

With much painful stooping and crawling, we at length reached the middle ridge, and there laid down our rifles to have a preliminary peep round. That stealthy glance revealed the fact that, on the other side also, the seals had been alarmed and had left the rocks; but still they were not far away. We could see here and there a black and glistening head moving among the lapping waters. Of course it would have been madness to have risked our all on a random shot at sea. Hit or miss, the chances were about equal we should not get the seal; so we quietly retired again behind the ridge, and sat down. We could see the gig and its occupants. It seemed to one of us at least that Queen Titania was still amused.

A dead silence: while we idly regard the washed-up stores of sea-shells around us, and patiently await the return of the seals to the rocks. Then a sudden noise that makes one's heart jump: a couple of terns have discovered us, and the irate birds go wheeling and shrieking overhead with screams that would have aroused the Sleeping Beauty and all her household. In their fright and wrath they come nearer and nearer; at times they remain motionless overhead; but ever continues the shrill and piercing shriek. The face of the Youth is awful to see. Again and again he puts up his rifle; and there is no doubt that, if he were to fire, he might accomplish that feat which is more frequently heard of in novels than elsewhere – shooting a bird on the wing with a rifle. But then he is loth to throw away his last chance. With a gesture of despair, he lowers his weapon, and glances towards the gig. Queen Titania has caught his eye, and he hers. She is laughing.

At length we venture to hazard everything. Furtively each rifle is protruded over the ledge of rock; and furtively each head creeps up by the stock, the hand on the trigger-guard. The caution is unnecessary. There is not a sign of any living thing all around the shores. Even the two sea-swallows, alarmed by our moving, have wheeled away into the distance; we are left in undisturbed possession of the island. Then the Youth clambers up to the top of the rocks and looks around. A skart, perched on a far ledge, immediately takes flight – striking the water with his heavy wings before he can get well on his way: thereafter a dead silence.

"It was the tern that did that," says the Youth, moodily, as we return to the gig. "The seals must have known well enough."

"They generally do contrive to know somehow," is the answer of one who is not much disappointed, and who is still less surprised.

But this wicked woman all a-laughing, when we return to the gig!

"Come, children," says she, "we shall barely be back in time for lunch; and we shall be all the longer that Angus is not here to sing his '*Ho, ro, clansmen!*' But the quicker the sooner, as the Highlandman said. Jump in!"

"It was all owing to those sea-swallows," remarks the Youth, gloomily.

"Never mind," says she, with great equanimity. "Mary and I knew you would not shoot anything, or we should not have come. Let us hasten back to see what Fred has shot for us, with his silver sixpences."

And so we tumble into the gig; and push away, and have a long swinging pull back to the *White Dove*.

There is still some measure of justice meted out upon the earth. The face of this fiend who has been laughing at us all the morning becomes a trifle more anxious when she draws near the yacht. For there is Master Fred idling up at the bow, instead of being below looking after the vast stores he has got on board; and moreover as we draw near, and as he comes along to the gangway, any one can perceive that our good Frederick d'or is not in a facetious frame of mind.

"Well, Fred, have you got a good supply at last?" she cries, taking hold of the rope, and putting her foot on the step.

Fred mumbles something in reply.

"What have you got?" she says, when she is on deck. "Any game?"

"No, mem."

"Oh, never mind; the fowls will do very well."

Fred is rather silent, until he explains that he could not get any fowls.

"No fowls? What butcher's meat, then?" says she, somewhat indignantly.

"None? Nothing?" says she; and a low titter begins to prevail among the assembled crowd. "Have you not got a joint of any sort?"

Fred is almost unwilling to confess – he is ashamed, angry, disconcerted. At last he blurts out —

"I could get nothing at all, mem, but fower loaves."

At this there was a roar of laughter. What had become of all her fresh milk, and butter, and eggs; her mutton, and fowls, and cutlets; her grouse, and snipe, and hares? We did not care for our privation; we only rejoiced in her discomfiture.

"That is just like a Scotch village," says she, savagely; "spending all its money on a church bell, and not able to keep a decent shop open! Do you mean to say you could not get a carrot, or a cabbage, or a pennyworth of milk?"

"No, mem."

"John," she says, in a domineering way, "why *don't* you get the sails up? What is the use of staying in a place like this?"

John comes forward timidly, and stroking his great beard: he half believes in these furious rages of hers.

"Oh, yes, mem, if ye please, mem, I will get the sail set – but – but the tide will be turning soon, mem, and the wind, she will be against us as soon as we get out of the loch; and it will be a long, long time before we get to Crinan. I not well aquent with this place, mem: if we were up in our own part of the Highlands, do you think the people would let the *White Dove* be so long without the fresh cabbage and the milk? No; I not think that, mem."

"But we are not in our own part of the Highlands," says she, querulously; "and do you think we are going to starve? However, I suppose Fred can give us a biscuit. Let us go below."

Our lunch was, in truth, simple enough; but perhaps it was this indirect appeal to Fred that determined that worthy to surprise us at dinner that evening. First of all, after we had returned from

another ineffectual seal-hunt, we found he had decorated the dinner-table in an elaborate manner. There was a clean cloth, shining with the starch in it. There was a great dish of scarlet rowans in the middle of the table; and the rowans had a border of white heather – fathered at Loch-na-Chill: the rowans were for lovely colour, the heather was for luck. Then, not content with that, he had put all our available silver on the table, including the candlesticks and the snuffer-tray, though the sun had not yet sunk behind the Jura hills. But the banquet defies description. The vast basin of steaming kidney soup, the boiled lithe, the fried mackerel, the round of tongue, the corned beef, the tomatoes, the pickles, the sardines, the convolutions of pudding and apricot jam: what Fishmonger or Drysalter or Gunmaker could have wanted more? Nor was there any Apemantus at the feast; there was the smiling and benign countenance of the Laird, who again and again made facetious remarks about the kirk bell of Clachan. Then he said more formally —

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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