

WILLIAM BLACK

WHITE WINGS: A
YACHTING ROMANCE,
VOLUME I

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CHAPTER I

ON THE QUAY

A murmur runs through the crowd; the various idlers grow alert; all eyes are suddenly turned to the south. And there, far away over the green headland, a small tuft of brown smoke appears, rising into the golden glow of the afternoon, and we know that by and by we shall see the great steamer with her scarlet funnels come sailing round the point. The Laird of Denny-mains assumes an air of still further importance; he pulls his frock-coat tight at the waist; he adjusts his black satin necktie; his tall, white, stiff collar seems more rigid and white than ever. He has heard of the wonderful stranger; and he knows that now she is drawing near.

Heard of her? He has heard of nothing else since ever he came to us in these northern wilds. For the mistress of this household – with all her domineering ways and her fits of majestic temper

— has a love for her intimate girl-friends far passing the love of men; especially when the young ladies are obedient, and gentle, and ready to pay to her matronly dignity the compliment of a respectful awe. And this particular friend who is now coming to us: what has not the Laird heard about her during these past few days? — of her high courage, her resolute unselfishness, her splendid cheerfulness? "A singing-bird in the house," that was one of the phrases used, "in wet weather or fine." And then the enthusiastic friend muddled her metaphors somehow, and gave the puzzled Laird to understand that the presence of this young lady in a house was like having sweet-brier about the rooms. No wonder he put on his highest and stiffest collar before he marched grandly down with us to the quay.

"And does she not deserve a long holiday sir?" says the Laird's hostess to him, as together they watch for the steamer coming round the point. "Just fancy! Two months' attendance on that old woman, who was her mother's nurse. Two months in a sick-room, without a soul to break the monotony of it. And the girl living in a strange town all by herself!"

"Ay; and in such a town as Edinburgh," remarks the Laird, with great compassion. His own property lies just outside Glasgow.

"Dear me," says he, "what must a young English leddy have thought of our Scotch way of speech when she heard they poor Edinburgh bodies and their yaumering sing-song? Not that I quarrel with any people for having an accent in their way of

speaking; they have that in all parts of England as well as in Scotland – in Yorkshire, and Somersetshire, and what not; and even in London itself there is a way of speech that is quite recognisable to a stranger. But I have often thought that there was less trace of accent about Glesca and the west of Scotland than in any other part; in fact, ah have often been taken for an Englishman maself."

"Indeed!" says this gentle creature standing by him; and her upturned eyes are full of an innocent belief. You would swear she was meditating on summoning instantly her boys from Epsom College that they might acquire a pure accent – or get rid of all accent – on the banks of the Clyde.

"Yes," say the Laird, with a decision almost amounting to enthusiasm, "it is a grand inheritance that we in the south of Scotland are preserving for you English people; and you know little of it. You do not know that we are preserving the English language for you as it was spoken centuries ago, and as you find it in your oldest writings. Scotticisms! Why, if ye were to read the prose of Mandeville or Wyclif, or the poetry of Robert of Brunne or Langdale, ye would find that our Scotticisms were the very pith and marrow of the English language. Ay; it is so."

The innocent eyes express such profound interest that the Laird of Denny-mains almost forgets about the coming steamer, so anxious is he to crush us with a display of his erudition.

"It is just remarkable," he says, "that your dictionaries should put down, as obsolete, words that are in common use all over the

south of Scotland, where, as I say, the old Northumbrian English is preserved in its purity; and that ye should have learned people hunting up in Chaucer or Gower for the very speech that they might hear among the bits o' weans running about the Gallowgate or the Broomielaw. '*Wha's acht ye?*' you say to one of them; and you think you are talking Scotch. No, no; *acht* is only the old English for possession: isn't '*Wha's acht ye?*' shorter and pithier than '*To whom do you belong?*'

"Oh, certainly!" says the meek disciple: the recall of the boys from Surrey is obviously decided on.

"And *speir* for *inquire*; and *ferly* for *wonderful*; and *tyne* for *lose*; and *fey* for *about to die*; and *reek* for *smoke*; and *menseful* for *becoming*; and *belyve*, and *fere*, and *biggan*, and such words. Ye call them Scotch? Oh, no, ma'am; they are English; ye find them in all the old English writers; and they are the best of English too; a great deal better than the Frenchified stuff that your southern English has become."

Not for worlds would the Laird have wounded the patriotic sensitiveness of this gentle friend of his from the South; but indeed, she had surely nothing to complain of in his insisting to an Englishwoman on the value of thorough English?

"I thought," says she, demurely, "that the Scotch had a good many French words in it."

The Laird pretends not to hear: he is so deeply interested in the steamer which is now coming over the smooth waters of the bay. But, having announced that there are a great many people

on board, he returns to his discourse.

"Ah'm sure of this, too," says he, "that in the matter of pronunciation the Lowland Scotch have preserved the best English – you can see that *faither*, and *twelmonth*, and *twa*, and such words are nearer the original Anglo-Saxon – "

His hearers had been taught to shudder at the phrase Anglo-Saxon – without exactly knowing why. But who could withstand the authority of the Laird? Moreover, we see relief drawing near; the steamer's paddles are throbbing in the still afternoon.

"If ye turn to *Piers the Plowman*," continues the indefatigable Denny-mains, "ye will find Langdale writing —

And a fewe Cruddes and Crayme.

Why, it is the familiar phrase of our Scotch children! – Do ye think they would say *curds*? And then, *fewe*. I am not sure, but I imagine we Scotch are only making use of old English when we make certain forms of food plural. We say 'a few broth;' we speak of porridge as 'they.' Perhaps that is a survival, too, eh?"

"Oh, yes, certainly. But please mind the ropes, sir," observes his humble pupil, careful of her master's physical safety. For at this moment the steamer is slowing into the quay; and the men have the ropes ready to fling ashore.

"Not," remarks the Laird, prudently backing away from the edge of the pier, "that I would say anything of these matters to your young English friend; certainly not. No doubt she prefers

the southern English she has been accustomed to. But, bless me! just to think that she should judge of our Scotch tongue by the way they Edinburgh bodies speak!"

"It is sad, is it not?" remarks his companion – but all her attention is now fixed on the crowd of people swarming to the side of the steamer.

"And, indeed," the Laird explains, to close the subject, "it is only a hobby of mine – only a hobby. Ye may have noticed that I do not use those words in my own speech, though I value them. No, I will not force any Scotch on the young leddy. As ah say, ah have often been taken for an Englishman maself, both at home and abroad."

And now – and now – the great steamer is in at the quay; the gangways are run over; there is a thronging up the paddle-boxes; and eager faces on shore scan equally eager faces on board – each pair of eyes looking for that other pair of eyes to flash a glad recognition. And where is she – the flower of womankind – the possessor of all virtue and grace and courage – the wonder of the world? The Laird shares in our excitement. He, too, scans the crowd eagerly. He submits to be hustled by the porters; he hears nothing of the roaring of the steam; for is she not coming ashore at last? And we know – or guess – that he is looking out for some splendid creature – some Boadicea, with stately tread and imperious mien – some Jephtha's daughter, with proud death in her eyes – some Rosamond of our modern days, with a glory of loveliness on her face and hair. And we know that the master who

has been lecturing us for half-an-hour on our disgraceful neglect of pure English will not shock the sensitive Southern ear by any harsh accent of the North; but will address her in beautiful and courtly strains, in tones such as Edinburgh never knew. Where is the queen of womankind, amid all this commonplace, hurrying, loquacious crowd?

Forthwith the Laird, with a quick amazement in his eyes, sees a small and insignificant person – he only catches a glimpse of a black dress and a white face – suddenly clasped round in the warm embrace of her friend. He stares for a second; and then he exclaims – apparently to himself: —

"Dear me! What a shilpit bit thing!"

Pale – slight – delicate – tiny: surely such a master of idiomatic English cannot have forgotten the existence of these words. But this is all he cries to himself, in his surprise and wonder: —

"Dear me! What a shilpit bit thing!"

CHAPTER II

MARY AVON

The bright, frank laugh of her face! – the friendly, unhesitating, affectionate look in those soft black eyes! He forgot all about Rosamond and Boadicea when he was presented to this "shilpit" person. And when, instead of the usual ceremony of introduction, she bravely put her hand in his, and said she had often heard of him from their common friend, he did not notice that she was rather plain. He did not even stop to consider in what degree her Southern accent might be improved by residence amongst the preservers of pure English. He was anxious to know if she was not greatly tired. He hoped the sea had been smooth as the steamer came past Easdale. And her luggage – should he look after her luggage for her?

But Miss Avon was an expert traveller, and quite competent to look after her own luggage. Even as he spoke, it was being hoisted on to the waggonette.

"You will let me drive?" says she, eying critically the two shaggy, farm-looking animals.

"Indeed I shall do nothing of the kind," says her hostess, promptly.

But there was no disappointment at all on her face as we drove away through the golden evening – by the side of the murmuring shore, past the overhanging fir-wood, up and across the high land commanding a view of the wide western seas. There was instead a look of such intense delight that we knew, however silent the lips might be, that the bird-soul was singing within. Everything charmed her – the cool, sweet air, the scent of the sea-weed, the glow on the mountains out there in the west. And as she chattered her delight to us – like a bird escaped from its prison and glad to get into the sunlight and free air again – the Laird sate mute and listened. He watched the frank, bright, expressive face. He followed and responded to her every mood – with a sort of fond paternal indulgence that almost prompted him to take her hand. When she smiled, he laughed. When she talked seriously, he looked concerned. He was entirely forgetting that she was a "shilpit bit thing;" and he would have admitted that the Southern way of speaking English – although, no doubt, fallen away from the traditions of the Northumbrian dialect – had, after all, a certain music in it that made it pleasant to the ear.

Up the hill, then, with a flourish for the last! – the dust rolling away in clouds behind us – the view over the Atlantic widening as we ascend. And here is Castle Osprey, as we have dubbed the place, with its wide open door, and its walls half hidden with tree-fuchsias, and its great rose-garden. Had Fair Rosamond herself come to Castle Osprey that evening, she could not have been waited on with greater solicitude than the Laird showed in

assisting this "shilpit bit thing" to alight – though, indeed there was a slight stumble, of which no one took any notice at the time. He busied himself with her luggage quite unnecessarily. He suggested a cup of tea, though it wanted but fifteen minutes to dinner-time. He assured her that the glass was rising – which was not the case. And when she was being hurried off to her own room to prepare for dinner – by one who rules her household with a rod of iron – he had the effrontery to tell her to take her own time: dinner could wait. The man actually proposed to keep dinner waiting – in Castle Osprey.

That this was love at first sight, who could doubt? And perhaps the nimble brain of one who was at this moment hurriedly dressing in her own room – and whom nature has constituted an indefatigable matchmaker – may have been considering whether this rich old bachelor might not marry, after all. And if he were to marry, why should not he marry the young lady in whom he seemed to have taken so sudden and warm an interest? As for her: Mary Avon was now two or three-and-twenty; she was not likely to prove attractive to young men; her small fortune was scarcely worth considering; she was almost alone in the world. Older men had married younger women. The Laird had no immediate relative to inherit Denny-mains and his very substantial fortune. And would they not see plenty of each other on board the yacht?

But in her heart of hearts the schemer knew better. She knew that the romance-chapter in the Laird's life – and a bitter chapter it was – had been finished and closed and put away many and

many a year ago. She knew how the great disappointment of his life had failed to sour him; how he was ready to share among friends and companions the large and generous heart that had been for a time laid at the feet of a jilt; how his keen and active interest, that might have been confined to his children and his children's children, was now devoted to a hundred things – the planting at Denny-mains, the great heresy case, the patronage of young artists, even the preservation of pure English, and what not. And that fortunate young gentleman – ostensibly his nephew – whom he had sent to Harrow and to Cambridge, who was now living a very easy life in the Middle Temple, and who would no doubt come in for Denny-mains? Well, we knew a little about that young man, too. We knew why the Laird, when he found that both the boy's father and mother were dead, adopted him, and educated him, and got him to call him uncle. He had taken under his care the son of the woman who had jilted him five-and-thirty years ago; the lad had his mother's eyes.

And now we are assembled in the drawing-room – all except the new guest; and the glow of the sunset is shining in at the open windows. The Laird is eagerly proving to us that the change from the cold east winds of Edinburgh to the warm westerly winds of the Highlands must make an immediate change in the young lady's face – and declaring that she ought to go on board the yacht at once – and asserting that the ladies' cabin on board the *White Dove* is the most beautiful little cabin he ever saw – when —

When, behold! at the open door – meeting the glow of the

sunshine – appears a figure – dressed all in black velvet, plain and unadorned but for a broad belt of gold fringe that comes round the neck and crosses the bosom. And above that again is a lot of white muslin stuff, on which the small, shapely, smooth-dressed head seems gently to rest. The plain black velvet dress gives a certain importance and substantiality to the otherwise slight figure; the broad fringe of gold glints and gleams as she moves towards us; but who can even think of these things when he meets the brave glance of Mary Avon's eyes? She was humming, as she came down the stair —

O think na lang, lassie, though I gang awa;
For I'll come and see ye, in spite o' them a',

– we might have known it was the bird-soul come among us.

Now the manner in which the Laird of Denny-mains set about capturing the affections of this innocent young thing – as he sate opposite her at dinner – would have merited severe reproof in one of less mature age; and might, indeed, have been followed by serious consequences but for the very decided manner in which Miss Avon showed that she could take care of herself. Whoever heard Mary Avon laugh would have been assured. And she did laugh a good deal; for the Laird, determined to amuse her, was relating a series of anecdotes which he called "good ones," and which seemed to have afforded great enjoyment to the people of the south of Scotland during the last century or so. There

was in especial a Highland steward of a steamer about whom a vast number of these stories was told; and if the point was at times rather difficult to catch, who could fail to be tickled by the Laird's own and obvious enjoyment? "There was another good one, Miss Avon," he would say; and then the bare memory of the great facetiousness of the anecdote would break out in such half-suppressed guffaws as altogether to stop the current of the narrative. Miss Avon laughed – we could not quite tell whether it was at the Highland steward or the Laird – until the tears ran down her checks. Dinner was scarcely thought of. It was a disgraceful exhibition.

"There was another good one about Homesh," said the Laird, vainly endeavouring to suppress his laughter. "He came up on deck one enormously hot day, and looked ashore, and saw some cattle standing knee-deep in a pool of water. Says he – ha! ha! ha! – ho! ho! ho! – says he – says he – '*A wish a wass a stot!*' – he! he! he! – ho! ho! ho!"

Of course we all laughed heartily, and Mary Avon more than any of us; but if she had gone down on her knees and sworn that she knew what the point of the story was, we should not have believed her. But the Laird was delighted. He went on with his good ones. The mythical Homesh and his idiotic adventures became portentous. The very servants could scarcely carry the dishes straight.

But in the midst of it all the Laird suddenly let his knife and fork drop on his plate, and stared. Then he quickly exclaimed —

"Bless me! lassie!"

We saw in a second what had occasioned his alarm. The girl's face had become ghastly white; and she was almost falling away from her chair when her hostess, who happened to spring to her feet first, caught her, and held her, and called for water. What could it mean? Mary Avon was not of the sighing and fainting fraternity.

And presently she came to herself – and faintly making apologies, would go from the room. It was her ankle, she murmured – with the face still white from pain. But when she tried to rise, she fell back again: the agony was too great. And so we had to carry her.

About ten minutes thereafter the mistress of the house came back to the Laird, who had been sitting by himself, in great concern.

"That girl! that girl!" she exclaims – and one might almost imagine there are tears in her eyes. "Can you fancy such a thing! She twists her ankle in getting down from the waggonette – brings back the old sprain – perhaps lames herself for life – and, in spite of the pain, sits here laughing and joking, so that she may not spoil our first evening together! Did you ever hear of such a thing! Sitting here laughing, with her ankle swelled so that I had to cut the boot off!"

"Gracious me!" says the Laird; "is it as bad as that?"

"And if she should become permanently lame – why – why –"
But was she going to make an appeal direct to the owner of

Denny-mains? If the younger men were not likely to marry a lame little white-faced girl, that was none of his business. The Laird's marrying days had departed five-and-thirty years before.

However, we had to finish our dinner, somehow, in consideration to our elder guest. And then the surgeon came, and bound up the ankle hard and fast; and Miss Avon, with a thousand meek apologies for being so stupid, declared again and again that her foot would be all right in the morning, and that we must get ready to start. And when her friend assured her that this preliminary canter of the yacht might just as well be put off for a few days — until, for example, that young doctor from Edinburgh came who had been invited to go a proper cruise with us — her distress was so great that we had to promise to start next day punctually at ten. So she sent us down again to amuse the Laird.

But hark! what is this we hear just as Denny-mains is having his whisky and hot water brought in? It is a gay voice humming on the stairs —

By the margin of fair Zürich's waters.

"That girl!" cries her hostess angrily, as she jumps to her feet. The door opens; and here is Mary Avon, with calm self-possession, making her way to a chair.

"I knew you wouldn't believe me," she says coolly, "if I did not come down. I tell you my foot is as well as may be; and Dot-and-carry-one will get down to the yacht in the morning as easily

as any of you. And that last story about Homesh," she says to the Laird, with a smile in the soft black eyes that must have made his heart jump. "Really, sir, you must tell me the ending of that story; it was so stupid of me!"

"Shilpit" she may have been; but the Laird, for one, was beginning to believe that this girl had the courage and nerve of a dozen men.

CHAPTER III

UNDER WAY

The first eager glance out on this brilliant and beautiful morning; and behold! it is all a wonder of blue seas and blue skies that we find before us, with Lismore lying golden-green in the sunlight, and the great mountains of Mull and Morven shining with the pale ethereal colours of the dawn. And what are the rhymes that are ringing through one's brain – the echo perchance of something heard far away among the islands – the islands that await our coming in the west? —

O land of red heather!

O land of wild weather,

And the cry of the waves, and the laugh of the breeze!

O love, now, together

Through the wind and wild weather

We spread our white sails to encounter the seas!

Up and out, laggards, now; and hoist this big red and blue and white thing up to the head of the tall pole that the lads far below may know to send the gig ashore for us! And there, on the ruffled blue waters of the bay, behold! the noble *White Dove*, with her

great mainsail, and mizzen, and jib, all set and glowing in the sun; and the scarlet caps of the men are like points of fire in this fair blue picture; and the red ensign is fluttering in the light north-westerly breeze. Breakfast is hurried over; and a small person who has a passion for flowers is dashing hither and thither in the garden until she has amassed an armful of our old familiar friends – abundant roses, fuchsias, heart's-ease, various coloured columbine, and masses of southernwood to scent our floating saloon; the waggonette is at the door, to take our invalid down to the landing-slip; and the Laird has discarded his dignified costume, and appears in a shooting-coat and a vast gray wide-awake. As for Mary Avon, she is laughing, chatting, singing, here, there, and everywhere – giving us to understand that a sprained ankle is rather a pleasure than otherwise, and a great assistance in walking; until the Laird pounces upon her – as one might pounce on a butterfly – and imprisons her in the waggonette, with many a serious warning about her imprudence. There let her sing to herself as she likes – amid the wild confusion of things forgotten till the last moment and thrust upon us just as we start.

And here is the stalwart and brown-bearded Captain John – John of Skye we call him – himself come ashore in the gig, in all his splendour of blue and brass buttons; and he takes off his peaked cap to the mistress of our household – whom some of her friends call Queen Titania, because of her midge-like size – and he says to her with a smile —

"And will Mrs. – herself be going with us this time?"

That is Captain John's chief concern: for he has a great regard for this domineering small woman; and shows his respect for her, and his own high notions of courtesy, by invariably addressing her in the third person.

"Oh, yes, John!" says she – and she can look pleasant enough when she likes – "and this is a young friend of mine, Miss Avon, whom you have to take great care of on board."

And Captain John takes off his cap again; and is understood to tell the young lady that he will do his best, if she will excuse his not knowing much English. Then, with great care, and with some difficulty, Miss Avon is assisted down from the waggonette, and conducted along the rough little landing-slip, and helped into the stern of the shapely and shining gig. Away with her, boys! The splash of the oars is heard in the still bay; the shore recedes; the white sails seem to rise higher into the blue sky as we near the yacht; here is the black hull with its line of gold – the gangway open – the ropes ready – the white decks brilliant in the sun. We are on board at last.

"And where will Mr. – himself be for going?" asks John of Skye, as the men are hauling the gig up to the davits.

Mr. – briefly but seriously explains to the captain that, from some slight experience of the winds on this coast, he has found it of about as much use to order the tides to be changed as to settle upon any definite route. But he suggests the circumnavigation of the adjacent island of Mull as a sort of preliminary canter for a few days, until a certain notable guest shall arrive; and he would

prefer going by the south, if the honourable winds will permit. Further, John of Skye is not to be afraid of a bit of sea, on account of either of those ladies; both are excellent sailors. With these somewhat vague instructions, Captain John is left to get the yacht under way; and we go below to look after the stowage of our things in the various staterooms.

And what is this violent altercation going on, in the saloon?

"I will not have a word said against my captain," says Mary Avon. "I am in love with him already. His English is perfectly correct."

This impertinent minx talking about correct English in the presence of the Laird of Denny-mains!

"Mrs. – herself is perfectly correct; it is only politeness; it is like saying 'Your Grace' to a Duke."

But who was denying it? Surely not the imperious little woman who was arranging her flowers on the saloon table; nor yet Denny-mains, who was examining a box of variegated and recondite fishing-tackle?

"It is all very well for fine ladies to laugh at the blunders of servant maids," continues this audacious girl. "'Miss Brown presents her compliments to Miss Smith; and would you be so kind,' and so on. But don't they often make the same blunder themselves?"

Well, this was a discovery!

"Doesn't Mrs. So-and-So request the honour of the company of Mr. So-and-So or Miss So-and-So for some purpose or other;

and then you find at one corner of the card 'R.S.V.P.?' 'Answer if YOU please!'"

A painful silence prevailed. We began to reflect. Whom did she mean to charge with this deadly crime?

But her triumph makes her considerate. She will not harry us with scorn.

"It is becoming far less common now, however," she remarks. "An answer is requested,' is much more sensible."

"It is English," says the Laird, with decision. "Surely it must be more sensible for an English person to write English. Ah never use a French word maself."

But what is the English that we hear now – called out on deck by the voice of John of Skye?

"Eachan, slack the lee topping-lift! Ay, and the tackle, too. That'll do, boys. Down with your main-tack, now!"

"Why," exclaims our sovereign mistress, who knows something of nautical matters, "we must have started!"

Then there is a tumbling up the companion-way; and lo! the land is slowly leaving us; and there is a lapping of the blue water along the side of the boat; and the white sails of the *White Dove* are filled with this gentle breeze. Deck-stools are arranged; books and field-glasses and what not scattered about; Mary Avon is helped on deck, and ensconced in a snug little camp-chair. The days of our summer idleness have begun.

And as yet these are but familiar scenes that steal slowly by – the long green island of Lismore —*Lios-mor*, the Great Garden;

the dark ruins of Duart, sombre as if the shadow of nameless tragedies rested on the crumbling walls; Loch Don, with its sea-bird-haunted shallows, and Loch Speliv leading up to the awful solitudes of Glen More; then, stretching far into the wreathing clouds, the long rampart of precipices, rugged and barren and lonely, that form the eastern wall of Mull.

There is no monotony on this beautiful summer morning; the scene changes every moment, as the light breeze bears us away to the south. For there is the Sheep Island; and Garveloch – which is the rough island; and Eilean-na naomha – which is the island of the Saints. But what are these to the small transparent cloud resting on the horizon? – smaller than any man's hand. The day is still; and the seas are smooth: cannot we hear the mermaiden singing on the far shores of Colonsay?

"Colonsay!" exclaims the Laird, seizing a field-glass. "Dear me! Is that Colonsay? And they telled me that Tom Galbraith was going there this very year."

The piece of news fails to startle us altogether; though we have heard the Laird speak of Mr. Galbraith before.

"Ay," says he, "the world will know something o' Colonsay when Tom Galbraith gets there."

"Whom did you say?" Miss Avon asks.

"Why, Galbraith!" says he. "Tom Galbraith!"

The Laird stares in amazement. Is it possible she has not heard of Tom Galbraith? And she herself an artist; and coming direct from Edinburgh, where she has been living for two whole

months!

"Gracious me!" says the Laird. "Ye do not say ye have never heard of Galbraith – he's an Academeecian! – a Scottish Academeecian!"

"Oh, yes; no doubt," she says, rather bewildered.

"There is no one living has had such an influence on our Scotch school of painters as Galbraith – a man of great abeelity – a man of great and uncommon abeelity – he is one of the most famous landscape painters of our day – "

"I scarcely met any one in Edinburgh," she pleads.

"But in London – in London!" exclaims the astonished Laird. "Do ye mean to say you never heard o' Tom Galbraith?"

"I – I think not," she confesses. "I – I don't remember his name in the Academy catalogue – "

"The Royal Academy!" cries the Laird, with scorn. "No, no! Ye need not expect that. The English Academy is afraid of the Scotchmen: their pictures are too strong: you do not put good honest whisky beside small beer. I say the English Academy is afraid of the Scotch school – "

But flesh and blood can stand this no longer: we shall not have Mary Avon trampled upon.

"Look here, Denny-mains: we always thought there was a Scotchman or two in the Royal Academy itself – and quite capable of holding their own there, too. Why, the President of the Academy is a Scotchman! And as for the Academy exhibition, the very walls are smothered with Scotch hills, Scotch spates,

Scotch peasants, to say nothing of the thousand herring-smacks of Tarbert."

"I tell ye they are afraid of Tom Galbraith; they will not exhibit one of his pictures," says the Laird, stubbornly; and here the discussion is closed; for Master Fred tinkles his bell below, and we have to go down for luncheon.

It was most unfair of the wind to take advantage of our absence, and to sneak off, leaving us in a dead calm. It was all very well, when we came on deck again, to watch the terns darting about in their swallow-like fashion, and swooping down to seize a fish; and the strings of sea-pyots whirring by, with their scarlet beaks and legs; and the sudden shimmer and hissing of a part of the blue plain, where a shoal of mackerel had come to the surface; but where were we, now in the open Atlantic, to pass the night? We relinquished the doubling of the Ross of Mull; we should have been content – more than content, for the sake of auld lang syne – to have put into Carsaig; we were beginning even to have ignominious thoughts of Loch Buy. And yet we let the golden evening draw on with comparative resignation; and we watched the colour gathering in the west, and the Atlantic taking darker hues, and a ruddy tinge beginning to tell on the seamed ridges of Garveloch and the isle of Saints. When the wind sprung up again – it had backed to due west, and we had to beat against it with a series of long tacks, that took us down within sight of Islay and back to Mull apparently all for nothing – we were deeply engaged in prophesying all manner of things to be achieved by

one Angus Sutherland, an old friend of ours, though yet a young man enough.

"Just fancy, sir!" says our hostess to the Laird – the Laird, by the way, does not seem so enthusiastic as the rest of us, when he hears that this hero of modern days is about to join our party. "What he has done beats all that I ever heard about Scotch University students; and you know what some of them have accomplished in the face of difficulties. His father is a minister in some small place in Banffshire; perhaps he has 200*1.* a year at the outside. This son of his has not cost him a farthing for either his maintenance or his education, since he was fourteen; he took bursaries, scholarships, I don't know what, when he was a mere lad; supported himself and travelled all over Europe – but I think it was at Leipsic and at Vienna he studied longest; and the papers he has written – the lectures – and the correspondence with all the great scientific people – when they made him a Fellow, all he said was, 'I wish my mother was alive.'"

This was rather an incoherent and jumbled account of a young man's career.

"A Fellow of what?" says the Laird.

"A Fellow of the Royal Society! They made him a Fellow of the Royal Society last year! And he is only seven-and-twenty! I do believe he was not over one-and-twenty when he took his degree at Edinburgh. And then – and then – there is really nothing that he doesn't know: is there, Mary?"

This sudden appeal causes Mary Avon to flush slightly; but

she says demurely, looking down —

"Of course I don't know anything that he doesn't know."

"Hm!" says the Laird, who does not seem over pleased. "I have observed that young men who are too brilliant at the first, seldom come to much afterwards. Has he gained anything substantial? Has he a good practice? Does he keep his carriage yet?"

"No, no!" says our hostess, with a fine contempt for such things. "He has a higher ambition than that. His practice is almost nothing. He prefers to sacrifice that in the meantime. But his reputation — among the scientific — why — why, it is European!"

"Hm!" says the Laird. "I have sometimes seen that persons who gave themselves up to erudition, lost the character of human beings altogether. They become scientific machines. The world is just made up of books for them — and lectures — they would not give a halfpenny to a beggar for fear of poleetical economy —"

"Oh, how can you say such a thing of Angus Sutherland!" says she — though he has said no such thing of Angus Sutherland. "Why, here is this girl who goes to Edinburgh — all by herself — to nurse an old woman in her last illness; and as Angus Sutherland is in Edinburgh on some business — connected with the University, I believe — I ask him to call on her and see if he can give her any advice. What does he do? He stops in Edinburgh two months — editing that scientific magazine there instead of in London — and all because he has taken an interest in the old woman and thinks that Mary should not have the whole responsibility on her

shoulders. Is that like a scientific machine?"

"No," says the Laird, with a certain calm grandeur; "you do not often find young men doing that for the sake of an old woman." But of course we don't know what he means.

"And I am so glad he is coming to us!" she says, with real delight in her face. "We shall take him away from his microscopes, and his societies, and all that. Oh, and he is such a delightful companion – so simple, and natural, and straightforward! Don't you think so, Mary?"

Mary Avon is understood to assent: she does not say much – she is so deeply interested in a couple of porpoises that appear from time to time on the smooth plain on the sea.

"I am sure a long holiday would do him a world of good," says this eager hostess; "but that is too much to expect. He is always too busy. I think he has got to go over to Italy soon, about some exhibition of surgical instruments, or something of that sort."

We had plenty of further talk about Dr. Sutherland, and of the wonderful future that lay before him, that evening before we finally put into Loch Buy. And there we dined; and after dinner we found the wan, clear twilight filling the northern heavens, over the black range of mountains, and throwing a silver glare on the smooth sea around us. We could have read on deck at eleven at night – had that been necessary; but Mary Avon was humming snatches of songs to us, and the Laird was discoursing of the wonderful influence exerted on Scotch landscape-art by Tom Galbraith. Then in the south the yellow moon rose; and a

golden lane of light lay on the sea, from the horizon across to the side of the yacht; and there was a strange glory on the decks and on the tall, smooth masts. The peace of that night! – the soft air, the silence, the dreamy lapping of the water!

"And whatever lies before Angus Sutherland," says one of us – "whether a baronetcy, or a big fortune, or marriage with an Italian princess – he won't find anything better than sailing in the *White Dove* among the western islands."

CHAPTER IV

A MESSAGE

What fierce commotion is this that awakes us in the morning – what pandemonium broken loose of wild storm-sounds – with the stately *White Dove*, ordinarily the most sedate and gentle of her sex, apparently gone mad, and flinging herself about as if bent on somersaults? When one clambers up the companion-way, clinging hard, and puts one's head out into the gale, behold! there is not a trace of land visible anywhere – nothing but whirling clouds of mist and rain; and mountain-masses of waves that toss the *White Dove* about as if she were a plaything; and decks all running wet with the driven spray. John of Skye, clad from head to heel in black oilskins – and at one moment up in the clouds, the next moment descending into the great trough of the sea – hangs on to the rope that is twisted round the tiller; and laughs a good-morning; and shakes the salt water from his shaggy eyebrows and beard.

"Hallo! John – where on earth have we got to?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I say WHERE ARE WE?" is shouted, for the roar of the rushing Atlantic in deafening.

"Deed I not think we are far from Loch Buy," says John of Skye, grimly. "The wind is dead ahead of us – ay, shist dead ahead!"

"What made you come out against a headwind then?"

"When we cam' out," says John – picking his English, "the wind will be from the norse – ay, a fine light breeze from the norse. And will Mr. – himself be for going on now? it is a ferry bad sea for the leddies – a ferry coorse sea."

But it appears that this conversation – bawled aloud – has been overheard. There are voices from below. The skylight of the ladies' cabin is partly open.

"Don't mind us," calls Mary Avon. "Go on by all means!"

The other voice calls —

"Why can't you keep this fool of a boat straight? Ask him when we shall be into the Sound of Iona."

One might as well ask him when we shall be into the Sound of Jericho or Jerusalem. With half a gale of wind right in our teeth, and with the heavy Atlantic swell running, we might labour here all day – and all the night too – without getting round the Ross of Mull. There is nothing for it but to turn and run, that we may have our breakfast in peace. Let her away, then, you brave John of Skye! – slack out the main-sheet, and give her plenty of it, too: then at the same moment Sandy from Islay perceives that a haul at the weather topping-lift will clear the boom from the davits; and now – and now, good Master Fred – our much-esteemed and shifty Friedrich d'or – if you will but lay the cloth on the table,

we will help you to steady the dancing phantasmagoria of plates and forks!

"Dear me!" says the Laird, when we are assembled together, "it has been an awful night!"

"Oh, I hope you have not been ill!" says his hostess, with a quick concern in the soft, clear eyes.

He does not look as if he had suffered much. He is contentedly chipping an egg; and withal keeping an eye on the things near him, for the *White Dove*, still plunging a good deal, threatens at times to make of everything on the table a movable feast.

"Oh, no, ma'am, not ill," he says. "But at my time of life, ye see, one is not as light in weight as one used to be; and the way I was flung about in that cabin last night was just extraordinary. When I was trying to put on my boots this morning, I am sure I resembled nothing so much as a pea in a bladder – indeed it was so – I was knocked about like a pea in a bladder."

Of course we expressed great sympathy, and assured him that the *White Dove* – famed all along this coast for her sober and steady-going behaviour – would never act so any more.

"However," said he thoughtfully, "the wakefulness of the night is often of use to people. Yes, I have come to a decision."

We were somewhat alarmed: was he going to leave us merely because of this bit of tossing?

"I dare say ye know, ma'am," says he slowly, "that I am one of the Commissioners of the Burgh of Strathgovan. It is a poseetion of grave responsibility. This very question now – about

our getting a steam fire-engine – has been weighing on my mind for many a day. Well, I have decided I will no longer oppose it. They may have the steam fire-engine as far as I am concerned."

We felt greatly relieved.

"Yes," continued the Laird, solemnly, "I think I am doing my duty in this matter as a public man should – laying aside his personal prejudice. But the cost of it! Do ye know that we shall want bigger nozzles to all the fire-plugs?"

Matters were looking grave again.

"However," said the Laird cheerfully – for he would not depress us too much, "it may all turn out for the best; and I will telegraph my decision to Strathgovan as soon as ever the storm allows us to reach a port."

The storm, indeed! When we scramble up on deck again, we find that it is only a brisk sailing breeze we have; and the *White Dove* is bowling merrily along, flinging high the white spray from her bows. And then we begin to see that, despite those driving mists around us, there is really a fine clear summer day shining far above this twopenny-halfpenny tempest. The whirling mists break here and there; and we catch glimpses of a placid blue sky, flecked with lines of motionless cirrus cloud. The breaks increase; floods of sunshine fall on the gleaming decks; clearer and clearer become the vast precipices of southern Mull; and then, when we get well to the lee of Eilean-straid-eam, behold! the blue seas around us once more; and the blue skies overhead; and the red ensign fluttering in the summer breeze. No wonder

that Mary Avon sings her delight – as a linnet sings after the rain; and though the song is not meant for us at all, but is really hummed to herself as she clings on to the shrouds and watches the flashing and dipping of the white-winged gulls, we know that it is all about a jolly young waterman. The audacious creature. John of Skye has a wife and four children.

Too quickly indeed does the fair summer day go by – as we pass the old familiar Duart and begin to beat up the Sound of Mull against a fine light sailing breeze. By the time we have reached Ardtornish, the Laird has acquired some vague notion as to how the gaff topsail is set. Opposite the dark-green woods of Funeray, he tells us of the extraordinary faculty possessed by Tom Galbraith of representing the texture of foliage. At Salen we have Master Fred's bell summoning us down to lunch; and thereafter, on deck, coffee, draughts, crochet, and a profoundly interesting description of some of the knotty points in the great Semple heresy case. And here again, as we bear away over almost to the mouth of Loch Sunart, is the open Atlantic – of a breezy grey under the lemon-colour and silver of the calm evening sky. What is the use of going on against this contrary wind, and missing, in the darkness of the night, all the wonders of the western islands that the Laird is anxious to see? We resolve to run into Tobermory; and by and by we find ourselves under the shadow of the wooded rocks, with the little white town shining along the semicircle of the bay. And very cleverly indeed does John of Skye cut in among the various craft – showing off a little

bit, perhaps – until the *White Dove* is brought up to the wind, and the great anchor-cable goes out with a roar.

Now it was by the merest accident that we got at Tobermory a telegram that had been forwarded that very day to meet us on our return voyage. There was no need for any one to go ashore, for we were scarcely in port before a most praiseworthy gentleman was so kind as to send us on board a consignment of fresh flowers, vegetables, milk, eggs, and so forth – the very things that become of inestimable value to yachting people. However, we had two women on board; and of course – despite a certain bandaged ankle – they must needs go shopping. And Mary Avon, when we got ashore, would buy some tobacco for her favourite Captain John; and went into the post-office for that purpose, and was having the black stuff measured out by the yard when some mention was made of the *White Dove*. Then a question was asked; there was a telegram; it was handed to Miss Avon, who opened it and read it.

"Oh!" said she, looking rather concerned; and then she regarded her friend with some little hesitation.

"It is my uncle," she says; "he wants to see me on very urgent business. He is – coming – to see me – the day after to-morrow."

Blank consternation followed this announcement. This person, even though he was Mary Avon's sole surviving relative, was quite intolerable to us. East Wind we had called him in secret, on the few occasions on which he had darkened our doors. And just as we were making up our happy family party – with the

Laird, and Mary, and Angus Sutherland – to sail away to the far Hebrides, here was this insufferable creature – with his raucous voice, his washed-out eyes, his pink face, his uneasy manner, and general groom or butler-like appearance – thrusting himself on us!

"Well, you know, Mary," says her hostess – entirely concealing her dismay in her anxious politeness – "we shall almost certainly be home by the day after to-morrow, if we get any wind at all. So you had better telegraph to your uncle to come on to Castle Osprey, and to wait for you if you are not there; we cannot be much longer than that. And Angus Sutherland will be there; he will keep him company until we arrive."

So that was done, and we went on board again – one of us meanwhile vowing to himself that ere ever Mr. Frederick Smethurst set sail with us on board the *White Dove*, a rifle-bullet through her hull would send that gallant vessel to the lobsters.

Now what do you think our Mary Avon set to work to do – all during this beautiful summer evening, as we sat on deck and eyed curiously the other craft in the bay, or watched the firs grow dark against the silver-yellow twilight? We could not at first make out what she was driving at. Her occupation in the world, so far as she had any – beyond being the pleasantest of companions and the faithfulest of friends – was the painting of landscapes in oil, not the construction of Frankenstein monsters. But here she begins by declaring to us that there is one type of character that has never been described by any satirist, or dramatist, or fictionist –

a common type, too, though only becoming pronounced in rare instances. It is the moral Tartuffe, she declares – the person who is through and through a hypocrite, not to cloak evil doings, but only that his eager love of approbation may be gratified. Look now how this creature of diseased vanity, of plausible manners, of pretentious humbug, rises out of the smoke like the figure summoned by a wizard's wand! As she gives us little touches here and there of the ways of this professor of bonhomie – this bundle of affectations – we begin to prefer the most diabolical villainy that any thousand of the really wicked Tartuffes could have committed. He grows and grows. His scraps of learning, as long as those more ignorant than himself are his audience; his mock humility anxious for praise; his parade of generous and sententious sentiment; his pretence – pretence – pretence – all arising from no evil machinations whatever, but from a morbid and restless craving for esteem. Hence, horrible shadow! Let us put out the candles and get to bed.

But next morning, as we find ourselves out on the blue Atlantic again, with Ru-na-Gaul lighthouse left far behind, and the pale line of Coll at the horizon, we begin to see why the skill and patient assiduity of this amateur psychologist should have raised that ghost for us the night before. Her uncle is coming. He is not one of the plausible kind. And if it should be necessary to invite him on board, might we not the more readily tolerate his cynical bluntness and rudeness, after we have been taught to abhor as the hatefullest of mortals the well-meaning hypocrite whose vanity

makes his life a bundle of small lies? Very clever indeed, Miss Avon – very clever. But don't you raise any more ghosts; they are unpleasant company – even as an antidote. And now, John of Skye, if it must be that we are to encounter this pestilent creature at the end of our voyage, clap on all sail now, and take us right royally down through these far islands of the west. Ah! do we not know them of old? Soon as we get round the Cailleach Point we descry the nearest of them amid the loneliness of the wide Atlantic sea. For there is Carnaburg, with her spur of rock; and Fladda, long and rugged, and bare; and Lunga, with her peak; and the Dutchman's Cap – a pale blue in the south. How bravely the *White Dove* swings on her way – springing like a bird over the western swell! And as we get past Ru-Treshnish, behold! another group of islands – Gometra and the green-shored Ulva, that guard the entrance to Loch Tua; and Colonsay, the haunt of the sea birds; and the rock of Erisgeir – all shining in the sun. And then we hear a strange sound – different from the light rush of the waves – a low, and sullen, and distant booming, such as one faintly hears in a sea-shell. As the *White Dove* ploughs on her way, we come nearer and nearer to this wonder of the deep – the ribbed and fantastic shores of Staffa; and we see how the great Atlantic rollers, making for the cliffs of Gribun and Burg, are caught by those outer rocks and torn into masses of white foam, and sent roaring and thundering into the blackness of the caves. We pass close by; the air trembles with the shock of that mighty surge; there is a mist of spray rising into the summer air.

And then we sail away again; and the day wears on as the white-winged *White Dove* bounds over the heavy seas; and Mary Avon – as we draw near the Ross of Mull, all glowing in the golden evening – is singing a song of Ulva.

But there is no time for romance, as the *White Dove* (drawing eight feet of water) makes in for the shallow harbour outside Bunessan.

"Down foresail!" calls out our John of Skye; and by and by her head comes up to the wind, the great mainsail flapping in the breeze. And again, "Down chub, boys!" and there is another rattle and roar amid the silence of this solitary little bay. The herons croak their fright and fly away on heavy wing; the curlews whistle shrilly; the sea-pyots whirr along the lonely shores. And then our good Friedrich d'or sounds his silver-toned bell.

The stillness of this summer evening on deck; the glory deepening over the wide Atlantic; the delightful laughter of the Laird over those "good ones" about Homesh; the sympathetic glance of Mary Avon's soft black eyes: did we not value them all the more that we knew we had something far different to look forward to? Even as we idled away the beautiful and lambent night, we had a vague consciousness that our enemy was stealthily drawing near. In a day or two at the most we should find the grim spectre of the East Wind in the rose-garden of Castle Osprey.

CHAPTER V

A BRAVE CAREER

Bur when we went on deck the next morning we forgot all about the detestable person who was about to break in upon our peace (there was small chance that our faithful Angus Sutherland might encounter the snake in this summer paradise, and trample on him, and pitch him out; for this easy way of getting rid of disagreeable folk is not permitted in the Highlands nowadays) as we looked on the beautiful bay shining all around us.

"Dear me!" said Denny-mains, "if Tom Galbraith could only see that now! It is a great peety he has never been to this place. I'm thinking I must write to him."

The Laird did not remember that we had an artist on board – one who, if she was not so great an artist as Mr. Galbraith, had at least exhibited one or two small landscapes in oil at the Royal Academy. But then the Academicians, though they might dread the contrast between their own work and that of Tom Galbraith, could have no fear of Mary Avon.

And even Mr. Galbraith himself might have been puzzled to find among his pigments any equivalent for the rare and clear colours of this morning scene as now we sailed away from

Bunessan with a light topsail breeze. How blue the day was – blue skies, blue seas, a faint transparent blue along the cliffs of Burg and Gribun, a darker blue where the far Ru-Treshanish ran out into the sea, a shadow of blue to mark where the caves of Staffa retreated from the surface of the sun-brown rocks! And here, nearer at hand, the warmer colours of the shore – the soft, velvety olive-greens of the moss and breckan; the splashes of lilac where the rocks were bare of herbage; the tender sunny reds where the granite promontories ran out to the sea; the beautiful cream-whites of the sandy bays!

Here, too, are the islands again as we get out into the open – Gometra, with its one white house at the point; and Inch Kenneth, where the seals show their shining black heads among the shallows; and Erisgeir and Colonsay, where the skarts alight to dry their wings on the rocks; and Staffa, and Lunga, and the Dutchman, lying peaceful enough now on the calm blue seas. We have time to look at them, for the wind is slight, and the broad-beamed *White Dove* is not a quick sailer in a light breeze. The best part of the forenoon is over before we find ourselves opposite to the gleaming white sands of the northern bays of Iona.

"But surely both of us together will be able to make him stay longer than ten days," says the elder of the two women to the younger – and you may be sure she was not speaking of East Wind.

Mary Avon looks up with a start; then looks down again –

perhaps with the least touch of colour in her face – as she says hurriedly —

"Oh, I think you will. He is your friend. As for me – you see – I – I scarcely know him."

"Oh, Mary!" says the other reproachfully. "You have been meeting him constantly all these two months; you must know him better than any of us. I am sure I wish he was on board now – he could tell us all about the geology of the islands, and what not. It will be delightful to have somebody on board who knows something."

Such is the gratitude of women! – and the Laird had just been describing to her some further points of the famous heresy case.

"And then he knows Gaelic!" says the elder woman. "He will tell us what all the names of the islands mean."

"Oh, yes," says the younger one, "he understands Gaelic very well, though he cannot speak much of it."

"And I think he is very fond of boats," remarks our hostess.

"Oh, exceedingly – exceedingly!" says the other, who, if she does not know Angus Sutherland, seems to have picked up some information about him somehow. "You cannot imagine how he has been looking forward to sailing with you; he has scarcely had any holiday for years."

"Then he must stay longer than ten days," says the elder woman; adding with a smile, "you know, Mary, it is not the number of his patients that will hurry him back to London."

"Oh, but I assure you," says Miss Avon seriously, "that he is

not at all anxious to have many patients – as yet! Oh, no! – I never knew any one who was so indifferent about money. I know he would live on bread and water – if that were necessary – to go on with his researches. He told me himself that all the time he was at Leipsic his expenses were never more than 1*1.* a week."

She seemed to know a good deal about the circumstances of this young F.R.S.

"Look at what he has done with those anæsthetics," continues Miss Avon. "Isn't it better to find out something that does good to the whole world than give yourself up to making money by wheedling a lot of old women?"

This estimate of the physician's art was not flattering.

"But," she says warmly, "if the Government had any sense, that is just the sort of man they would put in a position to go on with his invaluable work. And Oxford and Cambridge, with all their wealth, they scarcely even recognise the noblest profession that a man can devote himself to – when even the poor Scotch Universities and the Universities all over Europe have always had their medical and scientific chairs. I think it is perfectly disgraceful!"

Since when had she become so strenuous an advocate of the endowment of research?

"Why, look at Dr. Sutherland – when he is burning to get on with his own proper work – when his name is beginning to be known all over Europe – he has to fritter away his time in editing a scientific magazine and in those hospital lectures. And that, I

suppose, is barely enough to live on. But I know," she says, with decision, "that in spite of everything – I know that before he is five-and-thirty, he will be President of the British Association."

Here, indeed, is a brave career for the Scotch student: cannot one complete the sketch as it roughly exists in the minds of those two women?

At twenty-one, B.M. of Edinburgh.

At twenty-six, F.R.S.

At thirty, Professor of Biology at Oxford: the chair founded through the intercession of the women of Great Britain.

At thirty-five, President of the British Association.

At forty, a baronetcy, for further discoveries in the region of anæsthetics.

At forty-five, consulting physician to half the gouty old gentlemen of England, and amassing an immense fortune.

At fifty —

Well, at fifty, is it not time that "the poor Scotch student," now become great and famous and wealthy, should look around for some beautiful princess to share his high estate with him? He has not had time before to think of such matters. But what is this now? Is it that microscopes and test-tubes have dimmed his eyes? Is it that honours and responsibilities have silvered his hair? Or, is the drinking deep of the Pactolus stream a deadly poison? There is no beautiful princess awaiting him anywhere. He is alone among his honours. There was once a beautiful princess – beautiful-souled and tender-eyed, if not otherwise too lovely –

awaiting him among the Western Seas; but that time is over and gone many a year ago. The opportunity has passed. Ambition called him away, and he left her; and the last he saw of her was when he bade good-bye to the *White Dove*.

What have we to do with these idle dreams? We are getting within sight of Iona village now; and the sun is shining on the green shores, and on the ruins of the old cathedral, and on that white house just above the cornfield. And as there is no good anchorage about the island, we have to make in for a little creek on the Mull side of the Sound, called Polterriv, or the Bull-hole; and this creek is narrow, tortuous, and shallow; and a yacht drawing eight feet of water has to be guided with some circumspection – especially if you go up to the inner harbour above the rock called the Little Bull. And so we make inquiries of John of Skye, who has not been with us here before. It is even hinted, that if he is not quite sure of the channel, we might send the gig over to Iona for John Macdonald, who is an excellent pilot.

"John Macdonald!" exclaims John of Skye, whose professional pride has been wounded. "Will John Macdonald be doing anything more than I wass do myself in the Bull-hole – ay, last year – last year I will tek my own smack out of the Bull-hole at the norse end, and ferry near low water, too; and her deep-loaded? Oh, yes, I will be knowing the Bull-hole this many a year."

And John of Skye is as good as his word. Favoured by a flood-tide, we steal gently into the unfrequented creek, behind the great

rocks of red granite; and so extraordinarily clear is the water that, standing upright on the deck, we can see the white sand of the bottom with shoals of young saithe darting this way and that. And then just as we get opposite an opening in the rocks, through which we can descry the northern shores of Iona, and above those the blue peak of the Dutchman, away goes the anchor with a short, quick rush; her head swings round to meet the tide; the *White Dove* is safe from all the winds that blow. Now lower away the gig, boys, and bear us over the blue waters of the Sound!

"I am really afraid to begin," Mary Avon says, as we remonstrate with her for not having touched a colour-tube since she started. "Besides, you know, I scarcely look on it that we have really set out yet. This is only a sort of shaking ourselves into our places; I am only getting accustomed to the ways of our cabin now. I shall scarcely consider that we have started on our real voyaging until – "

Oh, yes, we know very well. Until we have got Angus Sutherland on board. But what she really said was, after slight hesitation:

" – until we set out for the Northern Hebrides."

"Ay, it's a good thing to feel nervous about beginning," says the Laird, as the long sweep of the four oars brings us nearer and nearer to the Iona shores. "I have often heard Tom Galbraith say that to the younger men. He says if a young man is over confident, he'll come to nothing. But there was a good one I once heard Galbraith tell about a young man that was pentin at Tarbert – "

that's Tarbert on Loch Fyne, Miss Avon. Ay, well, he was pentin away, and he was putting in the young lass of the house as a fisher-lass; and he asked her if she could not get a creel to strap on her back, as a background for her head, ye know. Well, says she – "

Here the fierce humour of the story began to bubble up in the Laird's blue-grey eyes. We were all half laughing already. It was impossible to resist the glow of delight on the Laird's face.

"Says she – just as pat as ninepence – says she, 'it's your ain head that wants a creel!'"

The explosion was inevitable. The roar of laughter at this good one was so infectious that a subdued smile played over the rugged features of John of Skye. "*It's your ain head that wants a creel:*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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