

The Wings of The Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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CHAPTER XV.

THE drifting smoke was still so dense that not even the floor of the valley could be discerned. Jenks dared not leave Iris at such a moment.

He called to Mir Jan: "Take off your turban and hold it above your head if you think they can see you from the warship."

"It is all right, sahib," came the cheering answer. "One boat is close ashore. I think, from the uniforms, they are English sahibs, such as I have seen at Garden Reach. The Dyaks have all gone."

Nevertheless Jenks waited. There was nothing to gain by being too precipitate. A false step now might undo the achievements of many weeks.

Mir Jan was dancing about beneath in a state of wild excitement.

"They have seen the Dyaks running to their sampans, sahib," he yelled, "and the second boat is being pulled in that direction! Yet another has just left the ship!"

A translation made Iris excited, eager to go down and see these wonders.

The boom of a cannon came from the sea. Instinctively the girl ducked for safety, though her companion smiled at her fears, for the shell would have long preceded the report had it traveled their way.

"One of the remaining sampans has got under way," he explained, "and the warship is firing at her."

"Poor wretches!" murmured Iris. "Cannot the survivors be allowed to escape?"

"Well, we are unable to interfere. Those caught on the island will probably be taken to the mainland and hanged for their crimes, so the manner of their end is not of much consequence."

To the girl's manifest relief, there was no more firing, and Mir Jan announced that a number of sailors were actually on shore. Then her thoughts turned to a matter of concern to the feminine mind even in the gravest moments of existence. She loved her face with water and sought her discarded skirt.

Soon the steady tramp of boot clad feet advancing at the double was heard on the single, and an officer's voice, speaking the crude Hindoostanee of the engine room and forecabin, shouted to Mir Jan:

"Hi, you black fellow! Are there any white people here?"

Jenks sang out:

"Yes, two of us! Perched on the rock over your heads. We are coming down."

He cast loose the rope ladder. Iris was limp and trembling.

"Steady, sweetheart," he whispered. "Don't forget the slip between the cup and the lip. Hold tight, but have no fear. I will be just beneath."

It was well he took this precaution. She was now so unmoved that an unguarded movement might have led to an accident. But the knowledge that her lover was near, the touch of his hand guiding her feet on to the rungs of the ladder, sustained her. They had almost reached the level when a loud exclamation and the crash of a heavy blow caused Jenks to halt and look downward.

A Dyak, lying at the foot of one of the scaling ladders and severely wounded by a shell splinter, witnessed their descent. In his left hand he grasped a parang; his right arm was bandaged. Though unable to rise, the revengeful pirate mustered his remaining strength to crawl toward the remaining ladder. It was Taung S'Ah, inspired with the hate and venom of the dying snake. Even yet he hoped to deal a mortal stroke at the man who had defied him and all his cutthroat band. He might have succeeded, as Jenks was so taken up with Iris, were it not for the watchful eyes of Mir Jan. The Mohammedan sprang at him, with an oath, and gave him such a murderous whack with the butt of a rifle that the Dyak chief collapsed and breathed out his fierce spirit in a groan.

At the first glance Jenks did not recognize Taung S'Ah owing to his change of costume. Through the thinner smoke he could see several sailors running up. But, with the passing of the chief, their last peril had gone. The next instant they were standing on the firm ground, and a British naval lieutenant was saying eagerly:

"We seem to have turned up in the nick of time. Do you, by any chance, belong to the Sirdar?"

"We are the sole survivors," answered the sailor.

"You two only?"

"Yes. She struck on the northwest reef of this island during a typhoon. This lady, Miss Iris Deane, and I were flung ashore."

"Miss Deane! Can it be possible? Let me congratulate you most heartily. Sir Arthur Deane is on board the Orient at this moment."

"The Orient?"

Iris was dazed. It was all too wonderful to be quite understood yet. She turned to Robert:

"Do you hear? They say my father is not far away. Take me to him."

"No need for that, miss," said the warrant officer. "Here is a warrant officer."

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cer in the stern sheets of a small galley now threading a path through the broken reef beyond Turtle beach. In five minutes father and daughter would meet.

Meanwhile the officer, intent on duty, addressed Jenks again.

"May I ask who you are?"

"My name is Anstruther—Robert Anstruther."

Iris, clinging to his arm, heard the reply.

So he had abandoned all pretense. He was ready to face the world at her side. She stole a loving glance at him as she cried:

"Yes, Captain Anstruther of the Indian staff corps. If he will not tell you all that he has done, how he has saved my life twenty times, how he has fought single handed against eighty men, ask me!"

"Captain Anstruther does not appear to have left much for us to do, Miss Deane," the officer said. "Indeed, turning to Robert, 'is there any way in which my men will be useful?'"

"I would recommend that they drag the green stuff off that fire and stop the smoke. Then a detachment should go round the north side of the island and drive the remaining Dyaks into the hands of the party you have landed, as I understand, at the farther end of the south beach. Mir Jan, the Mohammedan here, who has been a most faithful ally during part of our siege, will act as guide."

The other man cast a comprehensive glance over the rock, with its scaling ladders and dangling rope ladder, the cave, the little groups of dead or unconscious pirates—for every wounded man who could move a limb had crawled away after the first shell burst—and drew a deep breath.

"How long were you up there?" he asked.

"Over thirty hours."

"It was a great fight!"

"Somewhat worse than it looks," said Anstruther. "This is only the end of it. Altogether we have accounted for nearly two score of the poor devils."

Robert looked toward the approaching boat. She would not land yet for a couple of minutes.

"By the way," he said, "will you tell me your name?"

"Playdon—Lieutenant Phillip H. Playdon."

"Do you know to what nation this island belongs?"

"It is no man's land, I think. It is marked 'uninhabited' on the chart."

"Then," said Anstruther, "I call upon you, Lieutenant Playdon, and all others here present to witness that I, Robert Anstruther, late of the Indian army, acting on behalf of myself and Miss Iris Deane, declare that we have taken possession of this island in the name of His Britannic Majesty the king of England, that we are the joint occupants and owners thereof and claim all property rights vested therein."

These formal phrases, coming at such a moment, amazed his hearers. Iris alone had an inkling of the underlying motive.

"I don't suppose any one will dispute your title," said the naval officer gravely. He unquestionably imagined that suffering and exposure had slightly disturbed the other man's senses.

"Thank you," replied Robert with equal composure, though he felt inclined to laugh at Playdon's mystification. "I only wished to secure a sufficient number of witnesses for a verbal declaration. When I have a few minutes to spare I will affix a legal notice on the wall in front of our cave."

Playdon bowed silently. There was something in the speaker's manner that puzzled him. He detailed a small guard to accompany Robert and Iris, who now walked toward the beach, and asked Mir Jan to pilot him as suggested by Anstruther.

The boat was yet many yards from shore when Iris ran forward and stretched out her arms to the man who was staring at her with wistful despair.

"Father! Father!" she cried. "Don't you know me?"

Sir Arthur Deane was looking at the two strange figures on the sands, and each moment his heart sank lower. This island held his final hope. During many weary weeks, since the day when a kindly admiral placed the cruiser Orient at his disposal, he had scoured the China sea, the coasts of Borneo and Java for some tidings of the ill-fated Sirdar.

To examine every sand patch and tree covered shoal in the China sea was an impossible task. All the Orient could do was to visit the principal islands and institute inquiries among the fishermen and small traders. At last, the previous night, a Malay, tempted by hope of reward, boarded the vessel when lying at anchor off the large island away to the south and told the captain a wondrous tale of a devil haunted place inhabited by two white spirits, a male and a female, whither a local pirate named Taung S'Ah had gone by chance with his men and suffered great loss. But Taung S'Ah was bewitched by the female spirit and had returned to his home with a great force, swearing to either perish or perish. The spirits, the Malay said, were his father and his mother.

"I never believed it," said the captain.

"Iris was dazed. It was all too wonderful to be quite understood yet. She turned to Robert:

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neither of them could be the daughter whom he sought. He bowed his head in humble resignation, and he thought he was the victim of a cruel hallucination when Iris' tremulous accents reached his ears.

"Father, father! Don't you know me?"

He stood up, amazed and trembling.

"Yes, father, dear. It is I, your own little girl given back to you."

They had some difficulty to keep him in the boat, and the man pulling stroked smashed a stout oar with the next wrench.

And so they met at last, and the sailors left them alone to crowd round Anstruther and ply him with a hundred questions. Although he fell in with their humor and gradually pieced together the stirring story which was supplemented each instant by the arrival of disconsolate Dyaks and the comments of the men who returned from cave and beach, his soul was filled with the sight of Iris and her father and the happy, inconsequent demands with which each sought to ascertain and relieve the extent of the other's anxiety.

Then Iris called to him:

"Robert, I want you."

The use of his Christian name created something akin to a sensation. Sir Arthur Deane was startled, even in his immeasurable delight at finding his child uninjured, the picture of ruddy health and happiness.

Anstruther advanced.

"This is my father," she cried, shrill with joy. "And, father, darling, this is my mother."

And so they met at last.

Is Captain Robert Anstruther, to whom alone, under God's will, I owe my life many, many times since the moment the Sirdar was lost."

It was no time for questioning. Sir Arthur Deane took off his hat and held out his hand.

"Captain Anstruther," he said, "as I owe you my daughter's life I owe you that which I can never repay. And I owe you my own life, too, for I could not have survived the knowledge that she was dead."

Robert took the proffered hand.

"I think, Sir Arthur, that of the two I am the more deeply indebted. There are some privileges whose value cannot be measured, and among them the privilege of restoring your daughter to your arms takes the highest place."

Then he turned to Iris.

"I think," he said, "that your father should take you on board the Orient, Iris. There you may perhaps find some suitable clothing, eat something and recover from the exciting events of the morning. Afterward you must bring Sir Arthur ashore again, and we will guide him over the island. I am sure you will find much to tell him meanwhile."

The baronet could not fail to note the manner in which these two addressed each other, the fearless love which leaped from eye to eye, the calm acceptance of a relationship not to be questioned or gossiped. Robert and Iris, without spoken word on the subject, had tacitly agreed to avoid the slightest semblance of subterfuge as unworthy alike of their achievements and their love.

"Your suggestion is admirable," cried Sir Arthur. "The ship's stores may provide Iris with some sort of rig-out, and an old friend of hers is on board at this moment, little expecting her presence. Lord Ventnor has accompanied me in my search. He will, of course, be delighted."

Anstruther flushed a deep bronze, but Iris broke in:

"Father, why did he come with you?"

Sir Arthur, driven into this sudden squall of explanation, became dignified.

"Well, you see, my dear, under the circumstances he felt an anxiety almost commensurate with my own."

"But why, why?"

Iris was quite calm. With Robert near, she was courageous. Even the perturbed baronet experienced a new sensation as his troubled glance fell before her searching eyes. His daughter had left him a joyous, heedless girl. He found her a woman, strong, self-reliant, purposeful. Yet he kept on, choosing the most straightforward means as the only honorable way of clearing a course so beset with unsuspected obstacles.

"It is only reasonable, Iris, that your affianced husband should suffer an agony of apprehension on your account and do all that was possible to effect your rescue."

"My affianced husband?"

"Well, my dear girl, perhaps that is hardly the correct phrase from your point of view. Yet you cannot fail to remember that Lord Ventnor—"

"Father, dear," said Iris solemnly but in a voice free from all uncertainty. "My affianced husband stands here! We plighted our troth at the very gate of death. It was ratified in the presence of God and has been blessed by him. I have made no compact with Lord Ventnor. He is a base and unworthy man. Did you but know the truth concerning him you would not mention his name in the same breath with mine. Would he, Robert?"

"Be advised by me, Sir Arthur, and you, too, Iris," he said. "This is no hour for explanations. Leave me to deal with Lord Ventnor. I am content to trust the ultimate verdict to you, Sir Arthur. You will learn in due course all that has happened. Go on board, Iris. Meet Lord Ventnor as you would meet any other friend. You will not marry him, I know. I can trust you."

"I am very much obliged to you," murmured the baronet, who, notwithstanding his worry, was far too experienced a man of the world not to acknowledge the good sense of this advice, no matter how strangely might be the guise of the ruffian person who gave it.

"That is settled, then," said Robert laughing good naturedly, for he well knew what a weird spectacle he must present to the bewildered old gentleman.

Even Sir Arthur Deane was fascinated by the ragged and hairy giant who carried himself so masterfully and helped everybody over the stile at the right moment. He tried to develop the change in the conversation.

"By the way," he said, "how came you to be on the Sirdar? I have a list of all the passengers and crew, and your name does not appear therein."

"Oh, that is easily accounted for. I shipped as a steward in the name of Robert Jenks."

"Robert Jenks! A steward?"

"Yes. That forms some part of the promised explanation."

Iris rapidly gathered the drift of her lover's wishes.

"Come, father," she cried merrily. "I am anxious to see what the ship's stores, which you and Robert pin your faith to, can do for me in the shape of garments. I have the utmost belief in the British navy, and even a skeptic should be convinced of its infallibility if H. M. S. Orient is able to provide a lady's outfit."

Sir Arthur Deane gladly availed himself of the proffered compromise. He assisted Iris into the boat, though that active young person was far better able to support him, and a word to the officer in command sent the gig flying back to the ship. Anstruther during a momentary delay made a small request on his own account. Lieutenant Playdon, nearly as big a man as Robert, dispatched a note to his servant, and the gig speedily returned with a complete assortment of clothing and linen. The man also brought a dressing case with the result that a dip in the bath and ten minutes in the hands of an expert valet made Anstruther a new man.

Acting under his advice, the bodies of the dead were thrown into the lagoon, the wounded were collected in the hut, to be attended to by the ship's surgeon, and the prisoners were paraded in front of Mir Jan, who identified every man and found by counting heads that none was missing.

Robert did not forget to write out a formal notice and fasten it to the rock. This proceeding further mystified the officers of the Orient, who had gradually formed a connected idea of the great fight made by the shipwrecked pair, though Anstruther squirmed inwardly when he thought of the manner in which Iris would picture the scene. As it was, he had the first linings, and he did not fail to use the opportunity. In the few terse words which the militant Briton best understands he described the girl's fortitude, her unflinching cheerfulness, her uncomplaining readiness, to do and dare.

When he ended, the first lieutenant, who commanded the boats sent in pursuit of the flying Dyaks—the Orient sank both sampans as soon as they were launched—summed up the general verdict:

"You do not need our admiration, Captain Anstruther. Each man of us envies you from the bottom of his soul."

"There is an error about my rank," he said. "I did once hold a commission in the Indian army, but I was court-martialed and cashiered in Hongkong six months ago. I was unjustly convicted on a grave charge, and I hope some day to clear myself. Meanwhile I am a mere civilian. It was only Miss Deane's generous sympathy which led her to mention my former rank, Mr. Playdon."

Had another of the Orient's twelve pounder shells suddenly burst in the midst of the group of officers it would have created less dismay than this unexpected avowal. Court-martialed? Cashiered! None but a service man can grasp the awful significance of those words to the commissioned ranks of the army and navy.

Anstruther well knew what he was doing. Somehow he found nothing hard in the performance of these penances now. Of course the ugly truth must be revealed the moment Lord Ventnor heard his name. It was not fair to the good fellows crowding around him and offering every attention that the frank hospitality of the British sailor could suggest to permit them to adopt the tone of friendly equality which rigid discipline if nothing else would not allow them to maintain.

The first lieutenant by reason of his rank was compelled to say something.

"That is a devilish bad job, Mr. Anstruther," he blurted out.

"Well, you know I had to tell you."

He smiled unaffectedly at the wondering circle. He, too, was an officer and appreciated their sentiments. They were unfeignedly sorry for him, a man so brave and modest, such a splendid

type of the soldier and gentleman, yet by their common law an outcast. Nor could they wholly understand his demeanor. There was a noble dignity in his candor, a conscious innocence that disinclined to shield itself under a partial truth.

The first lieutenant again phrased the thoughts of his juniors.

"I and every other man in the ship cannot help but sympathize with you. But whatever may be your record—if you were an escaped convict, Mr. Anstruther—no one could withhold from you the praise deserved for your magnificent stand against overwhelming odds. Our duty is plain. We will bring you to Singapore, where the others will no doubt wish to go immediately. I will tell the captain that you have been good enough to acquaint us with. Meanwhile we will give you every assistance and attention in our power."

A murmur of approbation ran through the little circle. Robert's face paled somewhat. What first rate chaps they were, to be sure!

"I can only thank you," he said unsteadily. "Your kindness is more trying than adversity."

A rustle of silk, the intrusion into the intent knot of men of a young lady in a Paris gown, a Paris hat, carrying a Trouville parasol and most exquisitely gloved and booted, made feverish one gasp.

"Oh, Robert, dear, how could you? I actually didn't know you!"

Thus Iris, bewitchingly attired, was gazing now with provoking admiration at Robert, who certainly offered almost as great a contrast to his former state as did the girl herself. He returned her look with interest.

"Would any man believe," he laughed, "that clothes would do so much for a woman?"

"What a left handed compliment! But come, dearest. Captain Fitzroy and Lord Ventnor have come ashore with father and me. They want us to show them everything! You will excuse him, won't you?" she added, with a seraphic smile to the others.

They walked off together.

"Jimmy" gasped a fat midshipman to a lanky youth. "She's got on your togs!"

Meaning that Iris had ransacked the Orient's theatrical wardrobe and pounced on the swell outfit of the principal female impersonator in the ship's company.

Continued next week.

RAILROAD NOTES.

Colonist rates, to Arizona, British Columbia, California, Idaho, Mexico, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington and Wyoming via the New York Central Lines. Tickets on sale February 14th to April 6th. See New York Central and West Shore ticket agents for particulars. 50w7.

Mardi Gras at New Orleans, February 27, to March 5, 1906. Remarkably low rates via the New York Central Lines. Call on ticket agents for particulars. 50w2.

Effective at once, commutation tickets of the issue of the New York Central or West Shore Railroad, sold between any two points common to both lines in the territory between Churchville, Rochester and Syracuse, will be good on trains of either line. Consult local agents for rates, etc. 51w2.

Easter Excursion to Boston via New York Central on Saturday, April 7th, \$10.00 round trip. Tickets good returning on or before Tuesday, April 17th.

This excursion offers teachers a splendid opportunity to spend the Easter holidays at the city.

Call on New York Central Ticket Agents for tickets and all information. 51w5.

Wabash Railroad are selling round trip tickets to many points in Western States on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, also colonist tickets daily to Pacific Coast points one way, until April