

The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY
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[CONTINUED.]

"The ship is lost?" she said after a pause.

"Yes, madam."
"Are we the only people saved?"
"I fear so."
"Is this a desert island?"
"I think not, madam. It may be chance be temporarily uninhabited, but fishermen from China come to all these places. I have seen no other living beings except ourselves. Nevertheless the islanders may live on the south side."

"It surely cannot be possible that the Sirdar has gone to pieces—a magnificent vessel of her size and strength?"

He answered quietly: "It is too true, madam. I suppose you hardly knew she struck, it happened so suddenly. Afterward, fortunately for you, you were unconscious."

"How do you know?" she inquired quickly. A flood of vivid recollection was pouring in upon her.

"I—er—well, I happened to be near you, madam, when the ship broke up, and we—er—drifted ashore together."

She rose and faced him. "I remember now," she cried hysterically. "You caught me as I was thrown into the corridor. We fell into the sea when the vessel turned over. You have saved my life. Were it not for you I could not possibly have escaped."

She gazed at him more earnestly, seeing that he blushed beneath the crust of salt and sand that covered his face. "Why," she went on, with growing excitement, "you are the steward I noticed in the saloon yesterday. How is it that you are now dressed as a sailor?"

He answered readily enough. "There was an accident on board during the gale, madam. I am a fair sailor, but a poor steward, so I applied for a transfer. As the crew was short handed, my offer was accepted."

Iris was now looking at him intently. "You saved my life," she repeated slowly. It seemed that this obvious fact needed to be indelibly established in her mind. Indeed the girl was overwrought by all that she had gone through. Only by degrees were her thoughts marshaling themselves with lucid coherence. As yet she recalled so many dramatic incidents that they failed to assume due proportion.

But quickly there came memories of Captain Ross, of Sir John and Lady Tozer, of the doctor, her maid, the hundred and one individualities of her pleasant life aboard ship. Could it be that they were all dead? The notion was monstrous. But its ghastly significance was instantly borne in upon her by the plight in which she stood. Her lips quivered; the tears trembled in her eyes.

"Is it really true that all the ship's company except ourselves are lost?" she brokenly demanded.

The sailor's gravely earnest glance fell before hers. "Unhappily there is no room for doubt," he said.

"Are you quite, quite sure?"
"I am sure—of some." Involuntarily he turned seaward.

She understood him. She sank to her knees, covered her face with her hands and broke into a passion of weeping. With a look of infinite pity he stooped and would have touched her shoulder, but he suddenly restrained the impulse. Something had hardened this man. It cost him an effort to be calm, but he succeeded. His mouth tightened, and his expression lost its tenderness.

"Come, come, my dear lady," he exclaimed, and there was a tinge of studied roughness in his voice, "you must calm yourself. It is the fortune of shipwreck as well as of war, you know. We are alive and must look after ourselves. Those who have gone are beyond our help."

"But not beyond our sympathy," wailed Iris, uncovering her swimming eyes for a fleeting look at him. Even in the utter desolation of the moment she could not help marveling that this queer mannered sailor, who spoke like a gentleman and tried to pose as her inferior, who had rescued her with the utmost gallantry, who carried his quixotic zeal to the point of first supplying her needs when he was in far worse case himself, should be so utterly indifferent to the fate of others.

He waited silently until her sobs ceased.

"Now, madam," he said, "it is essential that we should obtain some food. I don't wish to leave you alone until we are better acquainted with our whereabouts. Can you walk a little way toward the trees, or shall I assist you?"

Iris immediately stood up. She pressed her hair back defiantly.

"Certainly I can walk," she answered. "What do you propose to do?"

"Well, madam—"
"What is your name?" she interrupted imperiously.

"Jenks, madam. Robert Jenks."
"Thank you. Now listen, Mr. Robert Jenks. My name is Miss Iris Deane. On board ship I was a passenger and you were a steward—that is, until you became a seaman. Here we are equals in misfortune, but in all else you are the leader. I am quite useless. I can only help in matters by your direction."



Plodding together through the sand.

so I do not wish to be addressed as 'madam' in every breath. Do you understand me?"

"As you wish, Miss Deane," he said. "The fact remains that I have many things to attend to, and we really must eat something."

"What can we eat?"
"Let us find out," he replied, scanning the nearest trees with keen scrutiny.

They plodded together through the sand in silence. Physically they were a superb couple, but in raiment they resembled scarecrows. Both, of course, were bareheaded. The sailor's jersey and trousers were old and torn, and the sea water still soughed loudly in his heavy boots with each step.

But Iris was in a deplorable plight. Her hair fell in a great wave of golden brown strands over her neck and shoulders. Every hairpin had vanished, but with a few dexterous twists she coiled the flying tresses into a loose knot. Her beautiful muslin dress was rent and dragged. It was drying rapidly under the ever increasing power of the sun, and she surreptitiously endeavored to complete the fastening of the open portion about her neck.

Suddenly he gave a glad shout. "By Jove, Miss Deane, we are in luck's way! There is a fine plantain tree."

The pangs of hunger could not be resisted. Although the fruit was hardly ripe, they tore at the great bunches and ate ravenously. Iris made no pretense in the matter, and the sailor was in worse plight, for he had been on duty continuously since 4 o'clock the previous afternoon.

At last their appetite was somewhat appeased, though plantains might not appeal to a gourmand as the solitary joint.

"Now," decided Jenks, "you must rest here a little while, Miss Deane. I'm going back to the beach. You need not be afraid. There are no animals to harm you, and I will not be far away."

"What are you going to do on the beach?" she demanded.

"To rescue stores, for the most part."
"May I not come with you. I can be of some little service surely?"

He answered slowly: "Please oblige me by remaining here at present. In less than an hour I will return, and then perhaps you will find plenty to do."

She read his meaning intuitively and shivered. "I could not do that," she murmured. "I would faint. While you are away I will pray for them, my unfortunate friends."

As he passed from her side he heard her sobbing quietly.

When he reached the lagoon he halted suddenly. Something startled him. He was quite certain that he had counted fourteen corpses. Now there were only twelve. The two Lascars'

bodies which rested on the small group of rocks on the verge of the lagoon had vanished.

Where had they gone?

CHAPTER III.

THE sailor wasted no time in idle bewilderment. He searched carefully for traces of the missing Lascars. He came to the conclusion that the bodies had been dragged from off the sun dried rocks into the lagoon by some agency the nature of which he could not even conjecture.

They were lying many feet above the sea level when he last saw them, little more than half an hour earlier. At that point the beach shelved rapidly. He could look far into the depths of the rapidly clearing water. Nothing was visible there save several varieties of small fish.

The incident puzzled and annoyed him. Still thinking about it, he sat down on the Highest rock and pulled off his heavy boots to empty the water out. He also divested himself of his stockings and spread them out to dry.

The action reminded him of Miss Deane's necessities. He hurried to a point whence he could call out to her and recommend her to dry some of her clothing during his absence. He retired even more quickly, fearing lest he should be seen. Iris had already displayed to the sunlight a large portion of her costume.

Without further delay he set about a disagreeable but necessary task. From the pockets of the first officer and doctor he secured two revolvers and a supply of cartridges, evidently intended to settle any dispute which might have arisen between the ship's officers and the native members of the crew. He hoped the cartridges were uninjured, but he could not test them at the moment for fear of alarming Miss Deane.

Both officers carried pocketbooks and pencils. In one of these, containing dry leaves, the sailor made a careful inventory of the money and other valuable effects he found upon the dead, besides noting names and documents where possible. Curiously enough, the capitalist of this island morgue was a Lascar, who in a belt around his waist hoarded more than a hundred pounds in gold. The sailor tied in a handkerchief all the money he collected and ranged pocketbooks, letters and jewelry in separate little heaps. Then he stripped the men of their boots and outer clothing. He could not tell how long the girl and he might be detained on the island before help came, and fresh garments were essential. It would be foolish sentimentality to trust to stores thrown ashore from the ship.

Nevertheless when it became necessary to search and disrobe the women he almost broke down. For an instant he softened. Gulping back his emotions with a savage imprecation, he doggedly persevered. At last he paused to consider what should be done with the bodies. His first intent was to scoop a large hole in the sand with a piece of timber, but when he took into consideration the magnitude of the labor involved, requiring many hours of hard work and a waste of precious time which might be of infinite value to his helpless companion and himself, he was forced to abandon the project. It was not only impracticable, but dangerous.

Again he had to set his teeth with grim resolution. One by one the bodies were shot into the lagoon from the little quay of rock. He knew they would not be seen again.

He arose and shook himself like a dog. There was much to be done. He gathered the clothes and other articles into a heap and placed portions of shattered packing cases near to mislead Iris. While thus engaged he kicked up out of the sand a rusty creese, or Malay sword. The presence of this implement startled him. He examined it slowly and thrust it out of sight.

Then he went back to her, after donning his stockings and boots, now thoroughly dry.

"Are you ready now, Miss Deane?" he sang out cheerily.

"Ready? I have been waiting for you."

Jenks chuckled quietly. "I must guard my tongue. It betrays me," he said to himself.

Iris joined him. By some mysterious means she had effected great improvement in her appearance. Yet there were manifest gaps.

"If only I had a needle and thread"—she began.

"If that is all," said the sailor, fumbling in his pockets. He produced a shabby little hussif containing a thimble, scissors, needles and some skeins of unbleached thread. Case and contents were sodden or rusted with salt water, but the girl fastened upon this treasure with a sigh of deep content.

"Now, please," she cried, "I want a telegraph office and a ship."

When they reached the sands she caught sight of the pile of clothes and the broken woodwork, with the small heaps of valuables methodically arranged. The harmless subterfuge did not deceive her. She darted a quick look of gratitude at her companion. How thoughtful he was! After a fearful glance around she was reassured, though she wondered what had become of—them.

"I see you have been busy," she said, nodding toward the clothes and boots.

"Yes," he replied simply. "Lucky find, wasn't it?"

"Most fortunate. When they are quite dry I will replenish my wardrobe. What is the first thing to be done?"

"Well, Miss Deane, I think our programme is, in the first place, to examine the articles thrown ashore and see if any of the cases contain food. Secondly, we should haul high and dry everything that may be of use to us, lest the weather should break again and the next tide sweep away the spoil. Thirdly, we should eat and rest, and, finally, we must explore the island before the light falls. I am convinced we are alone here. It is a small place at the best, and if any Chinamen were ashore they would have put in an appearance long since."

"Do you think, then, that we may remain here long?"

"It is impossible to form an opinion on that point. Help may come in a day. On the other hand—"

"Yes?"

"It is a wise thing, Miss Deane, to prepare for other contingencies."

"Do you mean," she said slowly, "that we may be imprisoned here for weeks, perhaps months?"

"If you cast your mind back a few hours you will perhaps admit that we are very fortunate to be here at all."

She whisked round upon him. "Do not fence with my question, Mr. Jenks. Answer me!"

He bowed. There was a perceptible return of his stubborn cynicism when he spoke.

"The facts are obvious, Miss Deane. The loss of the Sirdar will not be definitely known for many days. It will be assumed that she has broken down. The agents in Singapore will await cabled tidings of her whereabouts. She might have drifted anywhere in that typhoon. Ultimately they will send out a vessel to search, impelled to that course a little earlier by your father's anxiety. Pardon me, I did not intend to pain you. I am speaking my mind."

"Go on," said Iris bravely.

"The relief ship must search the entire China sea. The gale might have driven a disabled steamer north, south, east or west. A typhoon travels in a whirling spiral, you see, and the direction of a drifting ship depends wholly upon the locality where she sustained damage. The coasts of China, Java, Borneo and the Philippines are not equipped with lighthouses on every headland and cordoned with telegraph wires. There are river pirates and savage races to be reckoned with. Casting aside all other possibilities and assuming that a prompt search is made to the south of our course, this part of the ocean is full of reefs and small islands, some inhabited permanently, others visited occasionally by fishermen." He was about to add something, but checked himself.

"To sum up," he continued hurriedly, "we may have to remain here for many days, even months. There is always a chance of speedy help. We must act, however, on the basis of detention for an indefinite period. I am discussing appearances as they are. A survey of the island may change all these views."

"In what way?"

He turned and pointed to the summit of the tree covered hill behind them.

"From that point," he said, "we may see other and larger islands. If so, they will certainly be inhabited. I am surprised this one is not."

He ended abruptly. They were losing time. Before Iris could join him he was already hauling a large undamaged case out of the water.

He laughed unthinkingly. "Champagne!" he said. "A good brand too!"

This man was certainly an enigma. Iris wrinkled her pretty forehead in the effort to place him in a fitting category. His words and accent were those of an educated gentleman, yet his actions and manners were studiously uncouth when he thought she was observing him. The veneer of roughness puzzled her. That he was naturally of refined temperament she knew quite well, not alone by perception, but by the plain evidence of his earlier dealings with her.

To the best of her ability she silently helped in the work of salvage. They made a queer collection. A case of champagne and another of brandy, a box of books, a pair of night glasses, a compass, several boxes of ship's biscuits, coated with salt, but saved by their hardness, having been immersed but a few seconds; two large cases of hams in equally good condition, some huge dish covers, a bit of twisted iron-work and a great quantity of cordage and timber.

There was one very heavy package, which their united strength could not lift. The sailor searched around until he found an iron bar that could be wrenched from its socket. With this he pried open the strong outer cover and revealed the contents—regulation boxes of ammunition, each containing 500 rounds.

"Ah!" he cried. "Now we want some rifles."

"What good would they be?" inquired Iris.

He softly denounced himself as a fool, but he answered at once: "To shoot birds, of course, Miss Deane. There are plenty here, and many of them are edible."

They worked in silence for another hour. The sun was nearing the zenith. They were distressed with the increasing heat of the day. Jenks secured a ham and some biscuits, some pieces of driftwood and the binoculars and invited Miss Deane to accompany him to the grove. She obeyed without a word, though she wondered how he proposed to light a fire. To contribute something toward the expected feast she picked up a dish cover and a bottle of champagne.

The sailor eyed the concluding item with disfavor. "Not while the sun is up," he said. "In the evening, yes."

"It was for you," explained Iris coldly. "I do not drink wine."

"You must break the pledge while you are here, Miss Deane. It is often



The bodies were shot into the lagoon.

very cold at night in this latitude. A chill would mean fever and perhaps death."

She covertly watched his preparations. He tore a dry leaf from a notebook and broke the bullet out of a cartridge, damping the powder with water from a pitcher plant. Smearing the composition on the paper, he placed it in the sun, where it dried at once. He gathered a small bundle of withered spines from the palms and arranged the driftwood on top, choosing a place for his bonfire just within the shade. Then inserting the touch paper among the spines he unscrewed one of the lenses of the binoculars, converted it into a burning glass and had a fine blaze roaring merrily in a few minutes. With the aid of pointed sticks he grilled some slices of ham, cut with his clasp knife, which he first carefully cleaned in the earth. The biscuits were of the variety that become soft when toasted, and so he balanced a few by stones near the fire.

Iris forgot her annoyance in her interest. A most appetizing smell filled the air. They were having a picnic amidst delightful surroundings. Yesterday at this time—She almost yielded to a rush of sentiment, but forced it back with instant determination. Tears were a poor resource, unkindful of God's goodness to herself and her companion. Without the sailor, what would have become of her, even were she thrown ashore while still living? She knew none of the expedients which seemed to be at his command.

"Can I do nothing to help?" she exclaimed. So contrite was her tone that Jenks was astonished.

"Yes," he said, pointing to the dish cover. "If you polish the top of that with your sleeve it will serve as a plate. Luncheon is ready."

He neatly dished up two slices of ham on a couple of biscuits and handed them to her with the clasp knife.

"I can depend on my fingers," he explained. "It will not be the first time."

"Have you led an adventurous life?" she asked, by way of polite conversation.

"No," he growled.

"I only thought so because you appear to know all sorts of dodges for prolonging existence—things I never heard of."

"Broiled ham—and biscuits—for instance?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Men and Heads.

"What kind of head do you like on a man?" was asked of the president of a corporation employing several thousand hands. He replied: "It depends altogether on what I want the head to do. Each department of our business requires a different shape of head. We don't look for veneration, benevolence, generosity, sublimity, conscientiousness, acquisitiveness or idealism. Take them all in all, I think I'd rather have around me men of combative, aggressive, hope, spirit, constructiveness. I try to pick out such. I should like every man in my employ to have at least two-thirds of his head in front of his ears. Men with big back heads are overweighted with intellect; too slow to keep up with the age."—New York Press.