

# The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY  
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(CONTINUED.)

The Dyaks thought to the manner born, were weary of sun-scorched rocks and salt water. The boat was coming in response to their signals and the slight inspired Jenks with fresh hope. Like a lightning flash came the reflection that if he could keep them away from the well and destroy the sampan now hastening to their assistance perhaps carrying the bulk of their stores they would soon be of shelling their thirst on the few pitcher plants growing on the north shore.

"Come quick!" he shouted, adjusting the back sight of a rifle. "Lie down and aim at the front of that boat, a little short if anything. It doesn't matter if the bullets strike the sea first."

He placed the weapon in readiness for her and commenced operations himself before Iris could reach his side. Soon both rifles were pitching twenty shots a minute at the sampan. The result of their long range practice was not long in doubt. The Dyaks danced from seat to seat in a state of wild excitement. One man was hurled overboard. Then the craft lurched seaward in the strong current, and Jenks told Iris to leave the rest to him.

Before he could empty a second magazine a fortunate bullet ripped a plank out and the sampan filled and went down amid a shrill yell of execration from the back of the cliff. The two Dyaks yet living endeavored to swim ashore, half a mile through shark-infested reefs. The sailor did not even trouble about them. After a few frantic struggles each doomed wretch flung up his arms and vanished. In the clear atmosphere the onlookers could see black fins cutting the pellucid sea.

They were quieting down—the thirst fiend was again slowly salting their veins—when something of a dirty white color fluttered into sight from behind the base of the opposite cliff. It was rapidly withdrawn, to reappear after an interval. Now it was held more steadily and a brown arm became visible. As Jenks did not fire, a turbaned head popped into sight. It was the Mohammedan.

"No shoot it," he roared. "Me English speak it."

"Don't you speak Hindoostanee?" shouted Jenks in Urdu of the higher proficiency.

"Yes, sir!" was the joyful response. "Will your honor permit his servant to come and talk with him?"

"Yes, if you come unarmed."

"And the chief, too, sahib?"

"Yes, but listen! On the first sign of treachery I will shoot both of you!"

"We will keep faith, sahib. May kites pick our bones if we fail!"

Then they stepped into full view the renegade Mussulman and his leader. They carried no guns; the chief wore his creese.

"Tell him to leave that dagger behind!" cried the sailor imperiously. As the enemy demanded a parley he resolved to adopt the conqueror's tone from the outset. The chief obeyed, with a scowl, and the two advanced to the foot of the rock.

"Stand close to me," said Jenks to Iris. "Let them see you plainly, but pull your hat well down over your eyes."

She silently followed his instructions. Now that the very crisis of their fate had arrived she was nervous, shaken, conscious only of a desire to sink on her knees and pray.

The two halted some ten paces in front of the cavern, and the belligerents surveyed each other. It was a fascinating spectacle, this drama in real life. The yellow-faced Dyak, gaudily attired in a crimson jacket and sky blue pantaloons of Chinese silk, a man young and powerfully built, and the brown-skinned, white-clothed Mohammedan, bony, tall and gray with hardship, looked up at the occupants of the ledge. Iris, slim and boyish in her male garments, was dwarfed by the six-foot sailor, but her face was blood-stained, and Jenks wore a six weeks' stubble of beard. Holding their rifles with alert ease, with revolvers strapped to their sides, they presented a warlike and imposing tableau in their inaccessible perch. In the path of the emissaries lay the bodies of the slain. The Dyak leader scowled again as he passed them.

"Sahib," began the Indian, "my chief, Taung S'All, does not wish to have any more of his men killed in a foolish quarrel about a woman. Give her up, he says, and he will either leave you here in peace or carry you safely to some place where you can find a ship manned by white men."

"A woman!" said Jenks scornfully. "That is idle talk! What woman is here?"

This question nonplused the native. "The woman whom the chief saw

half a month back, sahib."

"Taung S'All was bewitched. I slew his men so quickly that he saw spirits."

The chief caught his name and broke in with a question. A volley of talk between the two was enlivened with expressive gestures by Taung S'All, who several times pointed to Iris, and Jenks now anatomized his thoughtless folly in permitting the Dyak to approach so near. The Mohammedan, of course, had never seen her and might have persuaded the other that in truth there were two men only on the rock.

His fears were only too well founded. The Mussulman salaamed respectfully and said:

"Protector of the poor, I cannot gainsay your word, but Taung S'All says that the maid stands by your side and is none the less the woman he seeks in that she wears a man's clothing."

"He has sharp eyes, but his brain is addled," retorted the sailor. "Why does he come here to seek a woman who is not of his race? Not only has he brought death to his people and narrowly escaped it himself, but he must know that any violence offered to us will mean the extermination of his whole tribe by an English warship. Tell him to take away his boats and never visit this island again. Perhaps I will then forget his treacherous attempt to murder us while we slept last night."

The chief glared defiantly, while the Mohammedan said:

"Sahib, it is best not to anger him too much. He says he means to have the girl. He saw her beauty that day, and she inflamed his heart. She has cost him many lives, but she is worth a sultan's ransom. He cares not for warships. They cannot reach his village in the hills. By the tomb of Nizam-ud-din, sahib, he will not harm you if you give her up, but if you refuse he will kill you both. And what is one woman more or less in the world that she should cause strife and bloodletting?"

The sailor knew the eastern character too well not to understand the man's amazement that he should be so solicitous about the fate of one of the weaker sex. It was seemingly useless to offer terms, yet the native was clearly so anxious for an amicable settlement that he caught at a straw.

"You come from Delhi?" he asked.

"Honored one, you have great wisdom."

"None but a Delhi man swears by the tomb on the road to the Kutub. You have escaped from the Andamans?"

"Sahib, I did but slay a man in self defense."

"Whatever the cause, you can never again see India. Nevertheless you would give many years of your life to mix once more with the bazaar folk."

The brown skin assumed a sallow tinge.

"That is good speaking," he gurgled. "Then help me and my friend to escape. Compel your chief to leave the island. Kill him! Plot against him! I will promise you freedom and plenty of rupees. Do this, and I swear to you I will come in a ship and take you away. The miss sahib's father is powerful. He has great influence with the Indian government."

Taung S'All was evidently bewildered and annoyed by this passionate



The belligerents surveyed each other.

appeal which he did not understand. He demanded an explanation, and the ready-witted native was obliged to invent some plausible excuse. Yet when he raised his face to Jenks there was the look of a hunted animal in his eyes. "Sahib," he said, endeavoring to conceal his agitation, "I am one among many. A word from me, and they would cut my throat. If I were with you there on the rock I would die with you, for I was in the Kumbhan regiment when the trouble befell me. It is of no avail to bargain with a tiger, sahib. I suppose you will not give up the miss sahib. Pretend to argue with me. I will help in any way possible."

Jenks' heart bounded when this unlooked-for offer reached his ears. The unfortunate Mohammedan was evidently eager to get away from the perilous gang into whose power he had fallen. But the chief was impatient, if not suspicious, of these long speeches. Angrily holding forth a rifle, the sailor shouted:

"Tell Taung S'All that I will slay him and all his men ere tomorrow's sun rises. He knows something of my power, but not all. Tonight at the twelfth hour you will find a rope hanging from the rock. Tie thereto a vessel of water. Fall not in this. I will not forget your services. I am Anstruther Sahib of the Belgium regiment."

The native translated his words into a fierce defiance of Taung S'All and his Dyaks. The chief glanced at Jenks and Iris with an ominous smile. He muttered something.

"Then, sahib, there is nothing more to be said. Beware of the trees on your right. They can send silent death even to the place where you stand. And I will not fail you tonight, on my life," cried the interpreter.

"I believe you. Go! But inform your chief that once you have disappeared round the rock whence you came I will talk to him only with a rifle."

Taung S'All seemed to comprehend the Englishman's emphatic motions. Waving his hand defiantly, the Dyak turned, and, with one parting glance of mute assurance, the Indian followed him.

Iris touched his arm and he told her all that had taken place. Iris became very downcast when she grasped the exact state of affairs. She was almost certain when the Dyaks proposed a parley that reasonable terms would result. It horrified her beyond measure to find that she was the rock on which negotiations were wrecked. Hope died within her. The bitterness of death was in her breast.

"What an unlucky influence I have had on your existence!" she exclaimed. "If it were not for me this trouble at least would be spared you. Because I am here you are condemned. Again, because I stopped you from shooting that wretched chief and his companions they are now demanding your life as a forfeit. It is all my fault. I cannot bear it."

She was on the verge of tears. The strain had become too great for her. After indulging in a wild dream of freedom, to be told that they must again endure the irksome confinement, the active suffering, the slow horrors of a siege in that rocky prison, almost distracted her.

Jenks was very stern and curt in his reply.

"We must make the best of a bad business," he said. "If we are in a tight place the Dyaks are not much better off, and eighteen of their number are dead or wounded. You forget, too, that Providence has sent us a most useful ally in the Mohammedan. When all is said and done, things might be far worse than they are."

Never before had his tone been so cold, his manner so abrupt, not even in the old days when he purposely endeavored to make her dislike him.

She walked along the ledge and timidly bent over him.

"Forgive me," she whispered. "I did forget for the moment not only the goodness of Providence, but also your self-sacrificing devotion. I am only a woman, and I don't want to die yet, but I will not live unless you, too, are saved."

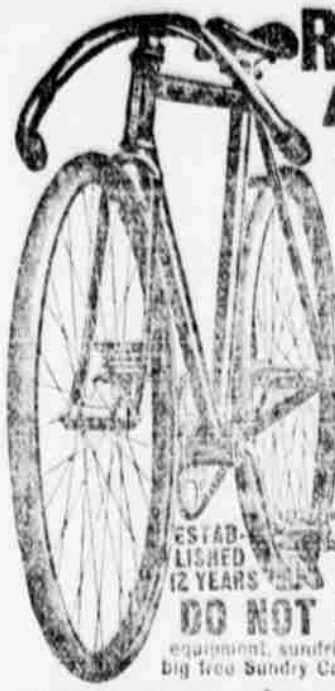
Once already that day she had expressed this thought in other words. Was some shadowy design flitting through her brain? Suppose they were faced with the alternatives of dying from thirst or yielding to the Dyaks. Was there another way out? Jenks shivered, though the rock was grilling him. He must divert her mind from this dreadful brooding.

"The fact is," he said, with a feeble attempt at cheerfulness, "we are both hungry and consequently grumpy. Now, suppose you prepare lunch. We will feel ever so much better after we have eaten."

The girl choked back her emotion and sadly essayed the task of providing a meal which was hateful to her. A few tears fell now and made little furrows down her soiled cheeks. But they were helpful tears, tears of resignation, not of despair. Although the "destruction that wasteth at noonday" was trying her sorely, she again felt strong and sustained.

She even smiled on detecting an involuntary effort to clear her stained face. She was about to carry a biscuit and some tinned meat to the sailor when a sharp exclamation from him

(Continued on Sixth Page.)



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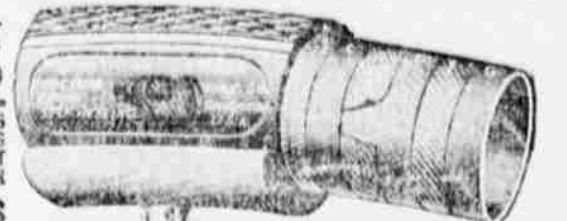
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