

The Wings of The Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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[CONTINUED.]

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 gainsaid. 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 rudely might be the guise of the strange 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 aching 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 innings, 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 disdained 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 what you have been good enough to acquaint us with. Meanwhile we will give you every assistance and—er—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 every 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 ex-

cuse him, won't you?" she asked, with a seraphic smile to the others.

They walked off together.
"Jimmy!" gasped a fat midshipman to a lanky youth. "She's got on you togs!"

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

CHAPTER XVI.

LORD VENTNOR was no fool. While Iris was transforming herself from a semisavage condition into a semblance of an ultra chic Parisienne, Sir Arthur Deane told the earl something of the state of affairs on the island.

His lordship, a handsome, saturnine man, cool, insolently polite, counseled patience, toleration, even silent recognition of Anstruther's undoubted claims for services rendered.

"She is an enthusiastic, high spirited girl," he urged upon his surprised hearer, who expected a very different expression of opinion. "This fellow Anstruther is a plausible sort of rascal, a good man in a tight place, too—just the sort of dre eating blackguard who would fill the heroic bill where a fight is concerned. Hang him, he licked me twice!"

Further amazement for the shipowner.

"Yes, it's quite true. I interfered with his little games, and he gave me the usual reward of the devil's apothecary. Leave Iris alone. At present she is strung up to an intense pitch of gratitude, having barely escaped a terrible fate. Let her come back to the normal. Anstruther's shady record must gradually leak out. That will disgust her. He is hard up—cut off by his people and that sort of thing. There you probably have the measure of his scheming. He knows quite well that he can never marry your daughter. It is all a matter of price."

Sir Arthur willingly allowed himself to be persuaded. At the back of his head there was an uneasy consciousness that it was not "all a matter of price." If it were he would never trust a man's face again. But Ventnor's well balanced arguments swayed him. The course indicated was the only decent one. It was humanly impossible for a man to chide his daughter and flout her rescuer within an hour of finding them.

Lord Ventnor played his cards with a deeper design. He bowed to the inevitable. Iris said she loved his rival. Very well. To attempt to dissuade her was to throw her more closely into that rival's arms. The right course was to appear resigned, saddened, compelled against his will to reveal the distressing truth. Further, he counted on Anstruther's quick temper as an active agent. Such a man would be the first to rebel against an assumption of pitying tolerance. He would bring bitter charges of conspiracy, of unbelievable compact to secure his ruin. All this must recoil on his own head when the facts were laid bare. Not even the hero of the island could prevail against the terrible indictment of the court martial. Finally, at Singapore, three days distant, Colonel Costobell and his wife were staying. Lord Ventnor, alone of those on board, knew this. Indeed, he accompanied Sir Arthur Deane largely in order to break off a somewhat trying entanglement. He smiled complacently as he thought of the effect on Iris of Mrs. Costobell's indignant remonstrances when the baronet asked that injured lady to tell the girl all that had happened at Hongkong.

However, Lord Ventnor was most profoundly annoyed, and he cursed Anstruther from the depths of his heart. But he could see a way out.

He came ashore with Iris and her father. The captain of the Orient also joined the party. The three men watched Robert and the girl walking toward them from the group of officers.

"Anstruther is a smart looking fellow," commented Captain Fitzroy. "Who is he?"

Truth to tell, the gallant commander of the Orient was secretly amazed by the metamorphosis effected in Robert's appearance since he scrutinized him through his glasses.

Poor Sir Arthur said not a word, but his lordship was quite at ease.

"From his name and from what Deane tells me I believe he is an ex-officer of the Indian army."

"Ah! He has left the service?"

"Yes. I met him last in Hongkong."

"Then you know him?"

"Quite well, if he is the man I imagine."

"That is really very nice of Ventnor," thought the shipowner. "The last thing I should credit him with would be a forgiving disposition."

Meanwhile Anstruther was reading Iris a little lecture. "Sweet one," he explained to her, "do not allude to me by my former rank. I am not entitled to it. Some day, please God, it will be restored to me. At present I am a plain civilian, and, by the way, Iris, during the next few days say nothing about our mine."

"Oh, why not?"

"Just a personal whim. It will please me."

"If it pleases you, Robert, I am satisfied."

(Continued on Sixth Page.)

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