

The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY
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[CONTINUED.]

"What a beautiful place!" murmured Iris. "I wonder what it is called."

"Suppose we christen it Rainbow Island?"

"Why 'Rainbow'?"

"That is the English meaning of 'Iris' in Latin, you know."

"So it is. How clever of you to think of it! Tell me, what is the meaning of 'Robert' in Greek?"

He turned to survey the northwest side of the island. "I do not know," he answered. "It might not be farfetched to translate it as a ship's steward, a menial."

Miss Iris had meant her playful retort as a mere light hearted quibble. It annoyed her, a young person of much consequence, to have her kindly condescension repelled.

"I suppose so," she agreed, "but I have gone through so much in a few hours that I am bewildered, apt to forget these nice distinctions."

Jenks was closely examining the reef on which the Sirdar struck. Some square objects were visible near the palm tree. The sun, glinting on the waves, rendered it difficult to discern their significance.

"What do you make of those?" he inquired, handing the glasses and blandly ignoring Miss Deane's petulance. Her brain was busy with other things while she twisted the binoculars to suit her vision. Rainbow Island—Iris—it was a nice conceit, but "menial" struck a discordant note. This man was no menial in appearance or speech. Why was he so deliberately rude?

"I think they are boxes or packing cases," she announced.

"Ah, that was my own idea! I must visit that locality."

"How? Will you swim?"

"No," he said, his stern lips relaxing in a smile; "I will not swim, and, by the way, Miss Deane, be careful when you are near the water. The lagoon is swarming with sharks at present. I feel tolerably assured that at low tide, when the remnants of the gale have vanished, I will be able to walk there along the reef."

"Sharks!" she cried. "In there! What horrible surprises this speck of land contains! I should not have imagined that sharks and seals could live together!"

"You are quite right," he explained, with becoming gravity. "As a rule, sharks infest only the leeward side of these islands. Just now they are attracted in shoals by the wreck."

"Oh!" Iris shivered slightly.

"We had better go back now. The wind is keen here, Miss Deane."

She knew that he purposely misunderstood her gesture. His attitude conveyed a rebuke. There was no further room for sentiment in their present existence. They had to deal with chill necessities. As for the sailor, he was glad that the chance turn of their conversation enabled him to warn her against the lurking dangers of the lagoon. There was no need to mention the devilish now. He must spare her all avoidable thrills.

They gathered the stores from the first dining room and reached the cave without incident. Another fire was lighted, and while Iris attended to the kitchen the sailor felled several young trees. He wanted poles, and these were the right size and shape. He soon cleared a considerable space. The timber was soft and so small in girth that three cuts with the ax usually sufficed. He dragged from the beach the smallest tarpaulin he could find and propped it against the rock in such manner that it effectually screened the mouth of the cave, though admitting light and air.

He was so busy that he paid little heed to Iris. But the odor of fried ham was wafted to him. He was lifting a couple of heavy stones to stay the canvas and keep it from flapping in the wind when the girl called out:

"Wouldn't you like to have a wash before dinner?"

He straightened himself and looked at her. Her face and hands were shining, spotless. The change was so great that his brow wrinkled with perplexity.

"I am a good pupil," she cried. "You see I am already learning to help myself. I made a bucket out of one of the dish covers by slinging it in two ropes. Another dish cover, some sand and leaves supplied basin, soap and towel. I have cleaned the tin cups and the knives, and, see, here is my greatest treasure."

She held up a small metal lamp.

"Where in the world did you find that?" he exclaimed.

"Buried in the sand inside the cave."

"Anything else?"

His tone was abrupt. She was so disappointed by the seeming want of appreciation of her industry that a gleam of amusement died from her eyes, and she shook her head, stooping at once to attend to the toasting of some biscuits.

"This time he was genuinely sorry."

"Forgive me, Miss Deane," he said penitently. "My words are dictated by anxiety. I do not wish you to make discoveries on your own account. This is a strange place, you know—an unpleasant one in some respects."

"Surely I can rummage about my own cave?"

"Most certainly. It was careless of me not to have examined its interior more thoroughly."

"Then why do you grumble because I found the lamp?"

"I did not mean any such thing. I am sorry."

"I think you are horrid. If you want to wash you will find the water over there. Don't wait. The ham will be frizzled to a cinder."

Unlucky Jenks! Was ever man fated to incur such unmerited odium? He savagely laved his face and neck. The fresh, cool water was delightful at first, but when he drew near to the fire he experienced an unaccountable sensation of weakness. Could it be possible that he was going to faint? It was too absurd. He sank to the ground. Trees, rocks and sand strewn earth indulged in a mad dance. Iris' voice sounded weak and indistinct. It seemed to travel in waves from a great distance. He tried to brush away from his brain these dim fancies, but his iron will for once failed, and he pitched headlong downward into darkness.

When he recovered, the girl's left arm was around his neck. For one blissful instant he nestled there contentedly. He looked into her eyes and saw that she was crying. A gust of anger rose within him that he should be the cause of those tears.

He tried to rise.

"Oh! Are you better?" Her eyes quivered pitifully.

"Yes. What happened? Did I faint?"

"Drink this."

She held a cup to his mouth, and he obediently strove to swallow the contents. It was champagne. After the first spasm of terror and when the application of water to his face failed to restore consciousness Iris had knocked the head off the bottle of champagne.

He quickly revived. Nature had only given him a warning that he was over-drawing his resources. He was deeply humiliated. He did not conceive the truth, that only a strong man could do all that he had done and live. For thirty-six hours he had not slept. During part of the time he fought with wilder beasts than they knew at Ephesus. The long exposure to the sun, the mental strain of his foreboding that the charming girl whose life depended upon him might be exposed to even worse dangers than any yet encountered, the physical labor he had undergone, the irksome restraint he strove to place upon his conduct and utterances—all these things culminated in utter relaxation when the water touched his heated skin.

"How could you frighten me so?" demanded Iris hysterically. "You must have felt that you were working too hard. You made me rest. Why didn't you rest yourself?"

He looked at her wistfully. This collapse must not happen again for her sake. These two said more with eyes than lips. She withdrew her arm. Her face and neck crimsoned.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "The ham is ruined!"

It was burnt black. She prepared a fresh supply. When it was ready Jenks was himself again. They ate in silence and shared the remains of the bottle. A smile illumined his tired face.

Iris was watchful. She had never in her life cooked even a potato or boiled an egg. The ham was her first attempt.

"My cooking amuses you?" she demanded suspiciously.

"It gratifies every sense," he murmured. "There is but one thing needful to complete my happiness."

"And that is?"

"Permission to smoke."

"Smoke what?"

He produced a steel box tightly closed and a pipe.

"Your pockets are absolute shops," said the girl, delighted that his temper had improved. "What other stores do you carry about with you?"

He lit his pipe and solemnly gave an inventory of his worldly goods. Beyond the items she had previously seen he could only enumerate a silver dollar, a very soiled and crumpled handkerchief and a bit of tin. A box of

Norwegian matches he threw away as useless, but Iris recovered them.

"You never know what purpose they may serve," she said. In after days a weird significance was attached to this simple phrase.

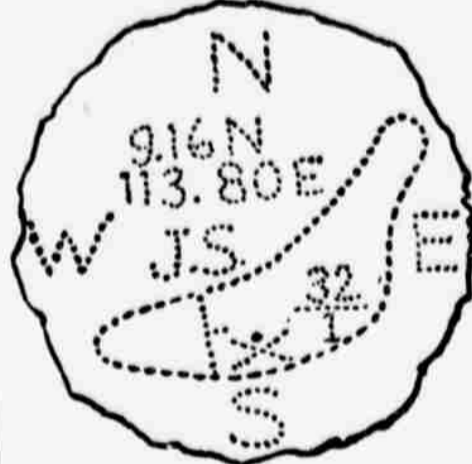
"Why do you carry about a bit of tin?" she went on.

"I found it here, Miss Deane," he answered.

Luckily she interpreted "here" as applying to the cave.

"Let me see it. May I?"

He handed it to her. She could make nothing of it, so together they puzzled over it. The sailor rubbed it with a mixture of kerosene and sand. Then figures and letters and a sort of diagram were revealed. At last they became decipherable. By exercising patient ingenuity some one had indented the metal with a sharp punch until the marks assumed this aspect:



Iris was quick witted. "It is a plan of the island," she cried.

"Also the latitude and the longitude."

"What does 'J. S.' mean?"

"Probably the initials of a man's name. Let us say John Smith, for instance."

"And the figures on the island, with the 'X' and the dot?"

"I cannot tell you at present," he said. "I take it that the line across the island signifies this gap or canyon, and the small intersecting line the cave. But 32 divided by 1 and an 'X' surmounted by a dot are cabalistic. They would cause even Sherlock Holmes to smoke at least two pipes. I have barely started one."

"It looks quite mysterious, like the things you read of in stories of pirates and buried treasure."

"Yes," he admitted. "It is unquestionably a plan, a guidance, given to a person not previously acquainted with the island, but cognizant of some fact connected with it. Unfortunately none of the buccaneers I can bring to mind frequented these seas. The poor beggar who left it here must have had some other motive than searching for a cache."

"Did he dig the cave and the well, I wonder?"

"Probably the former, but not the well. No man could do it unaided."

"Why do you assume he was alone?"

He strolled toward the fire to kick a stray log. "It is only idle speculation at the best, Miss Deane," he replied. "Would you like to help me to drag some timber up from the beach? If we get a few big planks we can build a fire that will last for hours. We want some extra clothes, too, and it will soon be dark."

The request for co-operation gratified her. She complied eagerly, and without much exertion they hauled a respectable load of firewood to their new camping ground. They also brought a number of coats to serve as coverings. Then Jenks tackled the lamp. It was a most difficult operation to open it.

Before the sun went down he succeeded and made a wick by unraveling a few strands of wool from his jersey. When night fell, with the suddenness of the tropics, Iris was able to illuminate her small domain.

They were both utterly tired and ready to drop with fatigue. The girl said "good night," but instantly reappeared from behind the tarpaulin.

"Am I to keep the lamp alight?" she inquired.

"Please yourself, Miss Deane. Better not, perhaps. It will only burn four or five hours anyway."

Soon the light vanished, and he lay down, his pipe between his teeth, close to the cave's entrance. Weary though he was he could not sleep forthwith. His mind was occupied with the signs on the canister head.

"32 divided by 1; an 'X' and a dot," he repeated several times. "What do they signify?"

Suddenly he sat up, with every sense alert, and grabbed his revolver. Something impelled him to look toward the spot, a few feet away, where the skeleton was hidden. It was the rustling of a bird among the trees that had caught his ear.

He thought of the white framework of a once powerful man, lying there among the bushes, abandoned, forgotten, horrible. Then he smothered a cry of surprise.

"By Jove!" he muttered. "There is no 'X' and dot. That sign is meant for a skull and crossbones. It lies exactly on the part of the island where we saw that queer looking bald patch today. First thing tomorrow before the girl awakes I must examine that place."

He resolutely stretched himself on his share of the spread out coats, now thoroughly dried by sun and fire. In a minute he was sound asleep.

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