

# The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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[CONTINUED.]

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY looked long and steadfastly at the retreating boat. Soon it diminished to a mere speck on the smooth sea. The even breeze kept its canvas taut, and the sailor knew that no ruse was intended. The Dyaks were flying from the island in fear and rage. They would return with a force sufficient to insure the wrecking of their vengeance.

That he would again encounter them at no distant date Jenks had no doubt whatever. They would land in such numbers as to render any resistance difficult and a prolonged defense impossible. Would help come first?—a distracting question to which definite answer could not be given. The sailor's brow frowned in deep lines; his brain throbbed now with an anxiety singularly at variance with his cool demeanor during the fight. He was utterly unconscious that his left arm encircled the shoulder of the girl until she gently disengaged herself and said appealingly:

"Please, Mr. Jenks, do not be angry with me. I could not help it. I could not bear to see you shoot them."

Then he abruptly awoke to the realities of the moment.

"Come," he said, his drawn features relaxing into a wonderfully pleasing smile. "We will return to our castle. We are safe for the remainder of this day, at any rate."

Something must be said or done to reassure her. She was still grievously disturbed, and he naturally ascribed her agitation to the horror of her capture. He dreaded a complete collapse if any further alarms threatened at once. Yet he was almost positive—though search alone would set at rest the last misgiving—that only one sampan had visited the island. Evidently the Dyaks were unprepared as he for the events of the preceding half hour. They were either visiting the island to procure turtle and beche-de-mer or had merely called there en route to some other destination, and the change in the wind had unexpectedly compelled them to put ashore. Beyond all doubt they must have been surprised by the warmth of the reception they encountered.

Probably when he went to Summit rock that morning the savages had lowered their sail and were steadily paddling north against wind and current. The most careful scrutiny of the sea would fail to reveal them beyond a distance of six or seven miles at the utmost.

After landing in the hidden bay on the south side they crossed the island through the trees instead of taking the more natural open way along the beach. Why? The fact that he and Iris were then passing the grown over tract leading to the valley of death instantly determined this point. The Dyaks knew of this affrighting hollow and would not approach any nearer to it than was unavoidable. Could he twist this circumstance to advantage if Iris and he were stranded there when the superstitious sea rovers next put in an appearance? He would see. All depended on the girl's strength. If she gave way now; if, instead of taking instant measures for safety, he were called upon to nurse her through a fever, the outlook became not only desperate, but hopeless.

And, while he bent his brows in worrying thought, the color was returning to Iris' cheeks and natural buoyancy to her step. It is the fault of all men to underrate the marvelous courage and constancy of woman in the face of difficulties and trials. Jenks was no exception to the rule.

"You do not ask me for any account of my adventures," she said quietly, after watching his perplexed expression in silence for some time.

Her tone almost startled him. Its assumed cheerfulness was so unlooked for.

"No," he answered. "I thought you were too overwrought to talk of them at present."

"Overwrought! Not a bit of it! I was dead beat with the struggle and with screaming for you, but please don't imagine that I am going to faint or treat you to a display of hysteria now that all the excitement has ended. I admit that I cried a little when you pushed me aside on the beach and raised your gun to fire at those poor wretches flying for their lives. Yet perhaps I was wrong to hinder you."

"You were wrong," he gravely interrupted.

"Then you should not have heeded me. No, I don't mean that. You always consider me first, don't you? No matter what I ask you to do you en-

deavor to please me, even when you know all the time that I am acting or speaking foolishly."

The unthinking naivete of her words sent the blood coursing wildly through his veins.

"Never mind," she went on, with earnest simplicity. "God has been very good to us. I cannot believe that he has preserved us from so many dangers to permit us to perish miserably a few hours or days before help comes. And I do want to tell you exactly what happened."

"Then you shall," he answered. "But first drink this." They had reached their camping ground, and he hastened to procure a small quantity of brandy.

She swallowed the spirit, although she really needed no such adventitious support, she said.

"All right," commented Jenks. "If you don't want a drink, I do."

"I can quite believe it," she retorted. "Your case is very different. I knew the men would not hurt me—after the first shock of their appearance had passed, I mean. I also knew that you would save me. But you, Mr. Jenks, had to do the fighting. You were called upon to rescue precious me. Good gracious! No wonder you were excited."

The sailor mentally expressed his inability to grasp the complexities of feminine nature, but Iris rattled on:

"I carried my tin of water to the pitcher plant and was listening to the greedy roots gurgling away for dear life when suddenly four men sprang out from among the trees and seized my arms before I could reach my revolver."

"Thank heaven you failed!"

"You think that if I had fired at them they would have retaliated. Yes, especially if I had hit the chief. But it was he who instantly gave some order, and I suppose it meant that they were not to hurt me. As a matter of fact, they seemed to be quite as much astonished as I was alarmed. But if they could hold my hands they could not stop my voice so readily. Oh, didn't I yell?"

"You did."

"I suppose you could not hear me distinctly?"

"Quite distinctly."

"Every word?"

"Yes."

She bent to pick some leaves and bits of dry grass from her dress. "Well, you know," she continued rapidly, "in such moments one cannot choose one's words. I just shouted the first thing that came into my head."

"And I," he said, "picked up the first rifle I could lay my hands on. Now, Miss Deane, as the affair has ended so happily, may I venture to ask you to remain in the cave until I return?"

"Oh, please"—she began.

"Really, I must insist. I would not leave you if it were not quite imperative. You cannot come with me."

Then she understood one at least of the tasks he must perform, and she meekly obeyed.

He thought it best to go along Turtle beach to the cove and thence follow the Dyaks' trail through the wood, as this line of advance would entail practically a complete circuit of the island. He omitted no precautions in his advance. Often he stopped and listened intently. Whenever he doubled a point or passed among the trees he crept back and peered along the way he had come to see if any lurking foes were breaking shelter behind him.

The marks on the sand proved that only one sampan had been beached. Thence he found nothing of special interest until he came upon the chief's gun lying close to the trees on the north side. It was a very ornamental weapon, a muzzle loader. The stock was inlaid with gold and ivory, and the piece had evidently been looted from some mandarin's junk surprised and sacked in a former foray.

The lock was smashed by the impact of Jenks' rifle bullet, but close investigation of the trigger guard and the discovery of certain unmistakable evidences on the beach showed that the Dyak leader had lost two if not three fingers of his right hand.

"So he has something more than his passion to nurse," mused Jenks. "That, at any rate, is fortunate. He will be in no mood for further enterprise for some time to come."

He dreaded lest any of the Dyaks should be only badly wounded and like to live. It was an actual relief to his nerves to find that the improvised dum-dums had done their work too well to permit anxiety on that score.

He gathered the guns, swords and creases of the slain, with all their uncouth belts and ornaments. In pursuance of a vaguely defined plan of future action he also divested some of the men of their coarse garments and collected six queer looking hats shaped

like inverted basins. These things he placed in a heap near the pitcher plants. Thenceforth for half an hour the placid surface of the lagoon was disturbed by the black dorsal fins of many sharks.

His guess at the weather conditions heralded by the change of wind was right. As the two partook of their evening meal the complaining surf lashed the reef, and the tremulous branches of the taller trees voiced the approach of a gale. A tropical storm—not a typhoon, but a belated burst of the periodic rains—deluged the island before midnight. Hours earlier Iris retired, utterly worn by the events of the day. The gale chanted a wild melody in mournful chords, and the noise of the watery downpour on the tarpaulin roof of Belle Vue castle was such as to render conversation impossible save in wearying shouts.

Luckily Jenks' carpentry was effective, though rough. The building was water tight, and he had caulked every crevice with unraveled rope until Iris' apartment was free from the tiniest draft.

The very fury of the external turmoil acted as a lullaby to the girl. She was soon asleep, and the sailor was left to his thoughts.

Sleep he could not. He smoked steadily, with a magnificent prodigality, for his small stock of tobacco was fast diminishing. He ransacked his brains to discover some method of escape from this enchanted island, where fairies jostled with demons and hours of utter happiness found their bane in moments of frightful peril.

Of course he ought to have killed those fellows who escaped. Their sampan might have provided a last desperate expedient if other savages effected a landing. Well, there was no use in being wise after the event, and scheme as he might, he could devise no way to avoid disaster during the next attack.

This, he felt certain, would take place at night. The Dyaks would land in force, rush the cave and hut and overpower him by sheer numbers. The fight, if fight there was, would be sharp, but decisive. Perhaps if he re-



*Had done their work too well.*

ceived some warning Iris and he might retreat in the darkness to the cover of the trees. A last stand could be made among the boulders on Summit rock. But of what avail to purchase their freedom until daylight? And then—

If ever man wrestled with desperate problem, Jenks wrought that night.

He smoked and pondered until the storm passed, and, with the changeability of a poet's muse, a full moon flooded the island in glorious radiance.

He rose, opened the door and stood without, looking steadily at the brilliant luminary for some time; then his eyes were attracted by the strong lights thrown upon the rugged face of the precipice into which the cavern burrowed. Suddenly he uttered a starred exclamation.

"By Jove!" he murmured. "I never noticed that before."

The feature which so earnestly claimed his attention was a deep ledge directly over the mouth of the cave, but some forty feet from the ground. Behind it the wall of rock sloped darkly inward, suggesting a recess extending by haphazard computation at least a couple of yards. It occurred to him that perhaps the fault in the interior of the tunnel had its outcrop here, and the influences of rain and sun had extended the weak point thus exposed in the bold canopy of stone.

He surveyed the ledge from different points of view. It was quite inaccessible and most difficult to estimate accurately from the ground level. The sailor was a man of action. He chose the nearest tall tree and began to climb. He was not eight feet from the ground before several birds flew out from its leafy recesses, filling the air with shrill clucking.

"The devil take them!" he growled, for he feared that the commotion would awaken Iris. He was still laboriously worming his way through

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to be bound up with your misfortunes."

"I would not have it otherwise were it in my power," he answered. For an instant he left unchallenged the girl's assumption that she was in any way responsible for the disasters which had broken up his career. He looked into her eyes and almost forgot himself.

"Oh! So those wretched fowls aroused you?" he replied.

"Yes, but why did you arouse them?"

"I had a fancy to roost by way of a change."

"Please be serious."

"I am more than serious. This tree grows a variety of small sharp thorn that induces a maximum of gravity—before one takes the next step."

"But why do you keep on climbing?"

"It is sheer lunacy, I admit. Yet on such a moonlit night there is some reasonable ground for even a mad excuse."

"Mr. Jenks, tell me at once what you are doing."

Iris strove to be severe, but there was a touch of anxiety in her tone that instantly made the sailor apologetic. He told her about the ledge and explained his half formed notion that here they might secure a safe retreat in case of further attack, a refuge from which they might defy assault during many days. It was, he said, absolutely impossible to wait until the morning. He must at once satisfy himself whether the project was impracticable or worthless.

He girl only enjoined him to be careful, and he vigorously renewed the climb. At last, some twenty-five feet from the ground, an accidental parting in the branches enabled him to get a good look at the ledge. One glance set his heart beating joyously. It was at least fifteen feet in length. It shelved back until its depth was lost in the blackness of the shadows, and the floor must be either nearly level or sloping slightly inward to the line of the fault.

The place was a perfect eagle's nest.

A chamois could not reach it from any direction. It became accessible to man only by means of a ladder or a balloon.

More excited by this discovery than he cared for Iris to know, he endeavored to appear unconcerned when he regained the ground.

"Well," she said, "tell me all about it."

He described the nature of the cavity as well as he understood it at the moment and emphasized his previous explanation of its virtues. Here they might reasonably hope to make a successful stand against the Dyaks.

"Then you feel sure that those awful creatures will come back?" she said slowly.

"Only too sure, unfortunately."

"How remorseless poor humanity is when the veneer is stripped off! Why cannot they leave us in peace? Perhaps if I had not been here they would not have injured you. Somehow I seem

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"Ah!" he said quietly. "Evidently I snore."

Iris retreated, and the sailor, tired out at last, managed to close his weary eyes.

Next morning he hastily constructed a pole of sufficient length and strength enough to bear his weight by tying two sturdy young trees together with ropes. Iris helped him to raise it against the face of the precipice and he at once climbed to the ledge.

Here he found his observations of the previous night abundantly verified. The ledge was even wider than he dared to hope, nearly ten feet deep in one part, and it sloped sharply downward from the outer lip of the rock. By lying flat and carefully testing all points of view he ascertained that the only possible positions from which even a glimpse