

The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY
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(CONTINUED.)

Her very candor had betrayed her. She would go away with these monstrous captors, endure them, even flatter them, until she and they were far removed from the island, and then—she would kill herself. In her innocence she imagined that self destruction under such circumstances was a pardonable offense. She only gave a life to save a life, and greater love than this is not known to God or man.

The sailor, in a tempest of wrath and wild emotion, had it in his mind to compel her into reason—to shake her as one shakes a wayward child.

He rose to his knees with this half formed notion in his fevered brain; then he looked at her, and a mist seemed to shut her out from his sight. Was she lost to him already? Was it that had gone before an idle dream of joy and grief, a wizard's glimpse of mirrored happiness and vague perils? Was Iris, the crystal souled, thrown to him by the storm lashed wave, to be snatched away by some irresistible and malign influence?

In the mere physical effort to assure himself that she was still near to him he gathered her up in his strong hands. Yes, she was there, breathing, wondering, palpitating. He folded her closely to his breast and, yielding to the passionate longings of his tired heart, whispered to her:

"My darling, do you think I can survive your loss? You are life itself to me. If we have to die, sweet one, let us die together."

Then Iris flung her arms around his neck.

"I am quite, quite happy now," she sobbed brokenly. "I didn't—imagine—it would come—this way, but—I am thankful—it has come."

For a little while they yielded to the glamour of the divine knowledge that amid the chaos of eternity each soul had found its mate. There was no need for words. Love, tremendous in its power, unfathomable in its mystery, had cast its spell over them. They were garbed in light, throned in a palace built by fairy hands. On all sides squatted the ghouls of privation, misery, danger, even grim death; but they heeded not the inferno; they had created a paradise in an earthly hell.

Then Iris withdrew herself from the man's embrace. She was delightfully shy and timid now.

"So you really do love me?" she whispered, crimson faced, with shining eyes and parted lips.

He fondled her hair and gently rubbed her cheek with his rough fingers. The sudden sense of ownership of this fair woman was entrancing. It almost bewildered him to find Iris nestling close, clinging to him in utter confidence and trust.

"But I knew, I knew," she murmured. "You betrayed yourself so many times. You wrote your secret to me, and, though you did not tell me, I found your dear words on the sands and have treasured them next my heart."

What girlish romance was this? He held her away gingerly, just so far that he could look into her eyes.

"Oh, it is true, quite true," she cried, drawing the locket from her neck. "Don't you recognize your own handwriting, or were you not certain, just then, that you really did love me?"

Dear, dear! How often would she repeat that wondrous phrase! Together they bent over the tiny slips of paper. There it was again, "I love you," twice blazoned in magic symbols. With blushing eagerness she told him how, by mere accident, of course, she caught sight of her own name. It was not very wrong, was it, to pick up that tiny scrap or those others, which she could not help seeing and which unfolded their simple tale so truthfully? Wrong! It was so delightfully right that he must kiss her again to emphasize his convictions.

They grew calmer, more sedate. It was so undeniably true they loved one another that the fact was becoming venerable with age. Iris was perhaps the first to recognize its quiet certainty.

"As I cannot get you to talk reasonably," she protested, "I must appeal to your sympathy. I am hungry, and, oh, so thirsty."

The girl had hardly eaten a morsel for her midday meal. Then she was despondent, utterly broken hearted. Now she was filled with new hope. There was a fresh motive in existence. Whether destined to live an hour or half a century she would never, never leave him, nor, of course, could he ever, ever leave her. Some things were quite impossible—for example, that they should part.

Jenks brought her a biscuit, a tin of ment and that most doleful cup of champagne.

"It is not exactly frappe," he said, handing her the insipid beverage, "but, under other conditions, it is a wine almost worthy to toast you in."

She fancied she had never before noticed what a charming smile he had.

"Toast," is a peculiarly suitable word," she cried. "I am simply frizzling. In these warm clothes!"

She stopped. For the first time since that prehistoric period when she was "Miss Deane" and he "Mr. Jenks" she remembered the manner of her garments.

"It is not the warm clothing you feel so much as the want of air," explained the sailor readily. "This tarpaulin has made the place very stuffy, but we must put up with it until sundown. By the way, what is that?"

A light tap on the tarred canvas directly over his head had caught his ear. Iris, glad of the diversion, told him she had heard the noise three or four times, but fancied it was caused by the occasional rustling of the sheet on the uprights.

Jenks had not allowed his attention to wander altogether from external events. Since the Dyaks' last escapade there was no sign of them in the valley or on either beach. Not for trivial cause would they come again within range of Jenks' rifle.

They waited and listened silently. Another tap sounded on the tarpaulin in a different place, and they both concurred in the belief that something had darted in curved flight over the ledge and fallen on top of their protecting shield.

"Let us see what the game is," exclaimed the sailor. He crept to the back of the ledge and drew himself up until he could reach over the sheet.

He returned, carrying in his hand a couple of tiny arrows.

"There are no less than seven of these things sticking in the canvas," he said. "They don't look very terrible. I suppose that is what my Indian



The last arrow fell, and he sprang to the right of the ledge.

friend meant by warning me against the trees on the right."

He did not tell Iris all the Mohammedan said. There was no need to alarm her causelessly. Even while they examined the curious little missile another flew up from the valley and lodged on the roof of their shelter.

The shaft of the arrow, made of some extremely hard wood, was about ten inches in length. Affixed to it was a pointed fish bone, sharp, but not barbed and not fastened in a manner suggestive of much strength. The arrow was neither feathered nor grooved for a bowstring. Altogether it seemed to be a childish weapon to be used by men equipped with lead and steel.

Jenks could not understand the appearance of this toy. Evidently the Dyaks believed in its efficacy or they would not keep on pertinaciously dropping an arrow on the ledge.

"How do they fire it?" asked Iris. "Do they throw it?"

"I will soon tell you," he replied, reaching for a rifle.

"Do not go out yet," she entreated him. "They cannot harm us. Perhaps

we may learn more by keeping quiet. They will not continue shooting these things all day."

Again a tiny arrow traveled toward

them in a graceful parabola. This one fell short. Missing the tarpaulin, it almost dropped on the girl's outstretched hand. She picked it up. The fish bone point had snapped by contact with the floor of the ledge. She sought for and found the small tip.

"See," she said. "It seems to have been dipped in something. It is quite discolored."

Jenks frowned peculiarly. A startling explanation had suggested itself to him. Fragments of forgotten lore were taking cohesion in his mind.

"Put it down. Quick!" he cried.

Iris obeyed him, with wonder in her eyes. He spilled a teaspoonful of champagne into a small hollow of the rock and steeped one of the fish bones in the liquid. Within a few seconds the champagne assumed a greenish tinge and the bone became white. Then he knew.

"Good heavens," he exclaimed, "these are poisoned arrows shot through a blowpipe! I have never before seen one, but I have often read about them. The bamboos the Dyaks carried were sumptians. These fish bones have been steeped in the juice of the upas tree. Iris, my dear girl, if one of them had so much as scratched your finger nothing on earth could save you."

She paled and drew back in sudden horror. Another tap sounded on their thrice welcome covering. Evidently the Dyaks would persist in their efforts to get one of those poisoned darts home.

Jenks debated silently whether it would be better to create a commotion, thus inducing the savages to believe they had succeeded in inflicting a mortal wound, or to wait until the next arrow fell, rush out and try conclusions with dum dum bullets against the sumptian blowers.

He decided in favor of the latter course. He wished to dishearten his assailants, to cram down their throats the belief that he was invulnerable and could visit their every effort with a deadly reprisal.

Iris, of course, protested when he explained his project. But the fighting spirit prevailed. Their love idyll must yield to the needs of the hour.

He had not long to wait. The last arrow fell, and he sprang to the extreme right of the ledge. First he looked through that invaluable screen of grass. Three Dyaks were on the ground and a fourth in the fork of a tree. They were each armed with a blowpipe. He in the tree was just fitting an arrow into the bamboo tube. The others were watching him.

Jenks raised his rifle, fired, and the warrior in the tree pitched headlong to the ground. A second shot stretched a companion on top of him. One man jumped into the bushes and got away, but the fourth tripped over his unwieldy sumptian, and a bullet tore a large section from his skull. The sailor then amused himself with breaking the bamboos by firing at them. He came back to the white faced girl.

"I fancy that further practice with blowpipes will be at a discount on Rainbow Island," he cried cheerfully.

But Iris was anxious and distraught.

"It is very sad," she said, "that we are obliged to secure our own safety by the ceaseless slaughter of human beings. Is there no offer we can make them, no promise of future gain, to tempt them to abandon hostilities?"

"None whatever. These Borneo Dyaks are bred from infancy to prey on their fellow creatures. To be strangers and defenseless is to court pillage and massacre at their hands. I think no more of shooting them than of smashing a clay pigeon. Killing a mad dog is perhaps a better simile."

"But, Robert dear, how long can we hold out?"

"What! Are you growing tired of me already?"

He hoped to divert her thoughts from this constantly recurring topic. Twice within the hour had it been broached and dismissed, but Iris would not permit him to shirk it again. She made no reply, simply regarding him with a wistful smile.

So Jenks sat down by her side and rehearsed the hopes and fears which perplexed him. He determined that there should be no further concealment between them. If they failed to secure water that night, if the Dyaks maintained a strict siege of the rock throughout the whole of next day, well—they might survive—it was problematical. Best leave matters in God's hands.

With feminine persistency she clung to the subject, detecting his unwillingness to discuss a possible final stage in their sufferings.

"Robert," she whispered fearfully, "you will never let me fall into the power of the chief, will you?"

"Not while I live."

"You must live. Don't you understand? I would go with them to save you. But I would have died by my own hand. Robert, my love, you must do this thing before the end. I must be the first to die."

The sailor wrestled with the great problem. He may be pardoned if his heart quailed and he groaned aloud.

"Iris," he said solemnly, "whatever happens, unless I am struck dead at your feet, I promise you that we shall pass the boundary hand in hand. Be mine the punishment if we have decided wrongly. And now," he cried, tossing his head in a defiant access of energy, "let us have done with the morgue. For my part I refuse to ac-

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