

Wings of the

By LOUIS TRACY

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At the moment when the scene was hot and dark. It was like being immured in a foul tunnel, and almost as dark. Jenks looked over the parapet. He thought he could distinguish some vague figures on the sands, so he fired at them. A volley of answering bullets crashed into the rock on all sides. The Dyaks had laid their plans well this time. A firing squad stationed beyond the smoke area and supplied with all the available guns commenced and kept up a smart fusillade in the direction of the ledge in order to cover the operations of the scaling party.

Jenks realized that to expose himself was to court a serious wound and achieve no useful purpose. He fell back out of range, laid down his rifle and grabbed the crowbar. At brief intervals a deep hollow boom came up from the valley. At first it puzzled them until the sailor lit upon an explanation. Mir Jan was busy.

The end of a strong, roughly made ladder swung through the smoke and banged against the ledge. Before Jenks could reach it those hoisting it into position hastily retreated. They were standing in front of the cave, and the Mohammedan made play on them with a rifle at thirty feet.

Jenks, using his crowbar as a lever, toppled the ladder clean over. It fell outward and disconcerted a section of the musketeers.

"Well done!" cried Iris.

The sailor, astounded by her tone, gave her a fleeting glance. She was very pale now, but not with fear. Her eyes were slightly contracted, her nostrils quivering, her lips set tight and her chin dimpled. Resting on one knee, with a revolver in each hand, she seemed no pulling mate for the gallant man who fought for her.

There was no time for further speech. Three ladders were reared against the



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rock. They were so poised and held below that Jenks could not force them backward. A fourth appeared, its coarse shafts looming into sight like the horns of some gigantic animal. The four covered practically the whole front of the ledge save where Mir Jan cleared a little space on the level.

The sailor was standing now, with the crowbar clinched in both hands. The firing in the valley slackened and died away. A Dyak face, grinning like a Japanese demon, appeared at the top of the ladder nearest to Iris.

"Don't fire!" shouted Jenks. And the iron bar crashed downward. Two others pitched themselves half on to the ledge. Now both crowbar and revolver were needed. Three ladders were thus cumbered somewhat for those beneath, and Jenks sprang toward the fourth and most distant. Men were crowding it like ants. Close to his feet lay an empty water cask. It was a crude weapon, but effective when well pitched, and the sailor had never made a better shot for a goal in the midst of a hard fought scrimmage than he made with that tub for the head of the uppermost pirate.

Another volley came from the sands. A bullet plowed through his hair and sent his sou'wester flying. Again the besiegers swarmed to the attack. One way or the other they must succeed. A man and a woman—even such a man and such a woman—could not keep at

by an infuriated horde of fifty savages fighting at close quarters and under these grievous conditions.

Jenks knew what would happen. He would be shot while repelling the scaling party. And Iris! Dear heart! She was thinking of him.

"Keep back! They can never gain the ledge!" she shrieked.

And then, above the din of the fusillade, the yells of the assailants and the bawling of the wounded, there came through the air a screaming, tearing, ripping sound which drowned all others. It traveled with incredible speed, and before the sailor could believe his ears—for he well knew what it meant—a shrapnel shell burst in front of the ledge and drenched the valley with flying lead.

Jenks was just able to drag Iris flat against the rock ere the time fuse operated and the bullets flew. He could form no theory, hazard no conjecture. All he knew was that a twelve pounder shell had flown toward them through space, scattering red ruin among the amazed scoundrels beneath. Instantly he rose again, lest perchance any of the Dyaks should have gained a foothold on the ledge.

The ladders were empty. He could hear a good deal of groaning, the footsteps of running men and some distant shouting.

"Sahib!" yelled Mir Jan, drawn from his retreat by the commotion without.

"Yes," shouted Jenks.

The native, in a voice cracked with excitement, told him something. The sailor asked a few rapid questions to make quite sure that Mir Jan was not mistaken.

Then he threw his arms round Iris, drew her close and whispered:

"My darling, we are saved! A warship has anchored just beyond the south reef, and two boats filled with armed sailors are now pulling ashore."

CHAPTER XV.

THE drifting smoke was still so dense that not even the floor of the valley could be discerned. Jenks dared not leave Iris at such a moment.

He called to Mir Jan: "Take off your turban and hold it above your head if you think they can see you from the warship."

"It is all right, sahib," came the cheering answer. "One boat is close inshore. I think, from the uniforms, they are English sahibs, such as I have seen at Garden Reach. The Dyaks have all gone."

Nevertheless Jenks waited. There was nothing to gain by being too precipitate. A false step now might undo the achievements of many weeks.

Mir Jan was dancing about beneath in a state of wild excitement.

"They have seen the Dyaks running to their sampans, sahib," he yelled, "and the second boat is being pulled in that direction! Yet another has just left the ship."

A translation made Iris excited, eager to go down and see these wonders.

The boom of a cannon came from the sea. Instinctively the girl ducked for safety, though her companion smiled at her fears, for the shell would have long preceded the report had it traveled their way.

"One of the remaining sampans has got under way," he explained, "and the warship is firing at her."

"Poor wretches!" murmured Iris. "Cannot the survivors be allowed to escape?"

"Well, we are unable to interfere. Those caught on the island will probably be taken to the mainland and hanged for their crimes, so the manner of their end is not of much consequence."

To the girl's manifest relief, there was no more firing, and Mir Jan announced that a number of sailors were actually on shore. Then her thoughts turned to a matter of concern to the feminine mind even in the gravest moments of existence. She laved her face with water and sought her discarded skirt.

Soon the steady tramp of boot clad feet advancing at the double was heard on the shingle, and an officer's voice, speaking the crude Hindoostanee of the engine room and forecabin, shouted to Mir Jan:

"Hi, you black fellow! Are there any white people here?"

Jenks sang out:

"Yes, two of us! Perched on the rock over your heads. We are coming down."

He cast loose the rope ladder. Iris was limp and trembling.

"Steady, sweetheart," he whispered. "Don't forget the slip between the cup and the lip. Hold tight, but have no fear. I will be just beneath."

She was now so unsteady that she could hardly guard her movements. In the midst of an accident. But a moment later her lover was near the top of the hand guiding her. She was almost reached the top of the ladder, exclamation of joy. A blow caused her to fall at the downward.

A Dyak, lying at the foot of the scaling ladder, and an officer, descended. In his left hand he grasped a parang; his right arm was bandaged. Though unable to rise, the vengeful pirate mustered his remaining strength to crawl toward the awaying ladder. It was Taung S'Ah, inspired with the hate and venom of the dying snake. Even yet he hoped to deal a mortal stroke at the man who had defied him and all his cutthroat band. He might have succeeded, as Jenks was so taken up with Iris, were it not for the watchful eyes of Mir Jan. The Mohammedan sprang at him, with an oath, and gave him such a murderous whack with the butt of a rifle that the Dyak chief collapsed and breathed out his fierce spirit in a groan.

At the first glance Jenks did not recognize Taung S'Ah owing to his change of costume. Through the thinner smoke he could see several sailors running up.

But, with the passing of the chief, their last peril had gone. The next instant they were standing on the firm ground, and a British naval lieutenant was saying eagerly:

"We seem to have turned up in the nick of time. Do you, by any chance, belong to the Siskar?"

"We are the sole survivors," answered the sailor.

"You two only?"

"Yes. She struck on the northwest reef of this island during a typhoon. This lady, Miss Iris Deane, and I were flung ashore."

"Miss Deane! Can it be possible? Let me congratulate you most heartily. Sir Arthur Deane is on board the Orient at this moment."

"The Orient!"

Iris was dazed. It was all too wonderful to be quite understood yet. She turned to Robert:

"Do you hear? They say my father is not far away. Take me to him."

"No need for that, miss," interrupted a warrant officer. "Here he is coming ashore. He wanted to come with us, but the captain would not permit it, as there seemed to be some trouble ahead."

Sure enough, even the girl's swimming eyes could distinguish the gray bearded civilian seated beside an officer in the stern sheets of a small gig now threading a path through the broken reef beyond Turtle beach. In five minutes father and daughter would meet.

Meanwhile the officer, intent on duty, addressed Jenks again.

"May I ask who you are?"

"My name is Anstruther—Robert Anstruther."

Iris, clinging to his arm, heard the reply.

So he had abandoned all pretense. He was ready to face the world at her side. She stole a loving glance at him as she cried:

"Yes; Captain Anstruther of the Indian staff corps. If he will not tell you all that he has done, how he has saved my life twenty times, how he has fought single handed against eighty men, ask me!"

"Captain Anstruther does not appear to have left much for us to do, Miss Deane," the officer said. "Indeed," turning to Robert, "is there any way in which my men will be useful?"

"I would recommend that they drag the green stuff off that fire and stop the smoke. Then a detachment should go round the north side of the island and drive the remaining Dyaks into the hands of the party you have landed, as I understand, at the farther end of the south beach. Mir Jan, the Mohammedan here, who has been a most faithful ally during part of our siege, will act as guide."

The other man cast a comprehensive glance over the rock, with its scaling ladders and dangling rope ladder, the cave, the little groups of dead or unconscious pirates—for every wounded man who could move a limb had crawled away after the first shell burst—and drew a deep breath.

"How long were you up there?" he asked.

"Over thirty hours."

"It was a great fight!"

"Somewhat worse than it looks," said Anstruther. "This is only the end of it. Altogether we have accounted for nearly two score of the poor devils."

Robert looked toward the approaching boat. She would not land yet for a couple of minutes.

"By the way," he said, "will you tell me your name?"

"Playdon—Lieutenant Phillip H. Playdon."

"Do you know to what nation this island belongs?"

"It is no man's land, I think. It is marked 'uninhabited' on the chart."

"Then," said Anstruther, "I call upon you, Lieutenant Playdon, and all others here present to witness that I, Robert Anstruther, late of the Indian army, acting on behalf of myself and Miss Iris Deane, declare that we have taken possession of this island in the name of his Britannic majesty the king of England, that we are the joint occu-

(Continued on Sixth Page.)

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