

# The Wings of The Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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[CONTINUED.]

"Rumor is a lying jade at the best," he said curtly. "You must remember, Captain Fitzroy, that I have uttered no word of scandal about Mr. Anstruther, and any doubts concerning his conduct can be set at rest by perusing the records of his case in the adjutant general's office at Hong-kong."

"Hum!" said the sailor, turning on his heel to enter the chart room.

The girl and her father went back to the island with Robert. After taking thought the latter decided to ask Mir Jan to remain in possession until he returned. There was not much risk of another Dyak invasion. The fate of Taung S'All's expedition would not encourage a fresh set of marauders, and the Mohammedan would be well armed to meet unforeseen contingencies, while on his (Anstruther's) representations the Orient would land an abundance of stores. In any event it was better for the native to live in freedom on Rainbow Island than to be handed over to the authorities as an escaped convict, which must be his immediate fate no matter what magnanimous view the government of India might afterward take of his services.

Mir Jan's answer was emphatic. He took off his turban and placed it on Anstruther's feet.

"Sahib," he said, "I am your dog. If some day I am found worthy to be your faithful servant, then shall I know that Allah has pardoned my transgressions."

In spite of himself Sir Arthur Deane could not help liking Anstruther. The

my fleet and Captain Ross my most trusted commander," he said. "You may well imagine, Mr. Anstruther, what a cruel blow it was to lose such a vessel, with all these people on board and my only daughter among them. I wonder now that it did not kill me."

"She was a splendid sea boat, sir. Although disabled, she fought gallantly against the typhoon. Nothing short of a reef would break her up."

"Ah, well," sighed the shipowner, "the few timbers you have shown me here are the remaining assets out of £300,000."

"Was she not insured?" inquired Robert.

"No—that is, I have recently adopted a scheme of mutual self insurance, and the loss falls pro rata on my other vessels."

The baronet glanced covertly at Iris. The words conveyed little meaning to her. Indeed, she broke in with a laugh:

"I am afraid I have heard you say, father dear, that some ships in the fleet paid you best when they ran ashore."

"Yes, Iris. That often happened in the old days. It is different now. Moreover, I have not told you the extent of my calamities. The Sirdar was lost on March 18, though I did not know it for certain until this morning. But on March 25 the Bahadur was sunk in the Mersey during a fog, and three days later the Jemadar turned turtle on the James and Mary shoal in the Hooghly. Happily there were no lives lost in either of these cases."

Iris was appalled by this list of casualties, yet she gave no thought to the serious financial effect of such a string of catastrophes. Robert, of course, appreciated this side of the business, especially in view of the shipowner's remark about the insurance. But Sir Arthur Deane's stiff upper lip deceived him. He failed to realize that the father was acting a part for his daughter's sake.

Oddly enough, the baronet did not seek to discuss with them the legal looking document affixed near the cave. It claimed all rights in the island in their joint names, and this was a topic he wished to avoid. For the time, therefore, the younger man had no opportunity of taking him into his confidence, and Iris held faithfully to her promise of silence.

The girl's ragged raiment, sou'wester and strong boots were already packed away on board. She now rescued the Bible, the battered tin cup, her revolver and the rifle which had "scared" the Dyaks when they nearly caught Anstruther and Mir Jan napping. Robert also gathered for her an assortment of Dyak hats, belts and arms, including Taung S'All's parang and a sumpitan. These were her trophies, the spoils of the campaign.

His concluding act was to pack two of the empty oil tins with all the valuable lumps of auriferous quartz he could find where he shot the rubbish from the cave beneath the trees. On top of these he placed some antimony ore, and Mir Jan, wondering why the sahib wanted the stuff, carried the consignment to the waiting boat. Lieutenant Playdon, in command of the last party of sailors to quit the island, evidently expected Mir Jan to accompany them, but Anstruther explained that the man would await his return some time in June or July.

Sir Arthur Deane found himself speculating on the cause of this extraordinary resolve, but, steadfast to his policy of avoiding controversial matters, said nothing. A few words to the captain procured enough stores to keep the Mohammedan for six months at least, and while these were being landed the question was raised how best to dispose of the Dyaks.

The commander wished to consult the convenience of his guests.

"If we go a little out of our way and land them in Borneo," he said, "they will be hanged without troubling you further. If I take them to Singapore they will be tried on your evidence and sent to penal servitude. Which is it to be?"

It was Iris who decided.

"I cannot bear to think of more lives being sacrificed," she protested. "Perhaps if these men are treated mercifully and sent to their homes after some punishment their example may serve as a deterrent to others."

So it was settled that way. The anchor rattled up to its berth, and the Orient turned her head toward Singapore. As she steadily passed away into the deepening azure the girl and her lover watched the familiar outlines of Rainbow Island growing dim in the evening light. For a long while they could see Mir Jan's tall, thin figure motionless on a rock at the extremity of Europa point. Their hut, the reef, the ledge, came into view as the cruiser swung round to a more northerly course.

Iris had thrown an arm across her father's shoulders. The three were left alone just then, and they were silent for many minutes. At last the flying miles merged the solitary palm beyond the lagoon with the foliage on the cliff. The wide cleft of Prospect park grew less distinct. Mir Jan's white clothed figure was lost in the dark background. The island was becoming vague, dreamlike, a blurred memory.

"Robert," said the girl devoutly, "God has been very good to us. Do you remember this hour yesterday?" she murmured, "How we suffered from

thirst; how the Dyaks led us on a mad attack from the water; how I climbed down the ladder and how you loved you? Oh, father, darling, I went on impulsively, righteously, I grasp, "you will never know how I loved you; how enduring; how he was all for me and cheered me to the end."

"I think I am beginning to understand now," answered the shipowner, averting his eyes lest Iris should see the tears in them. Their Calvary was ended, they thought. Was it for him to lead them again through the sorrowful way? It was a heartrending task that lay before him, a task from which his soul revolted. He refused even to attempt it.

The explanation of the shipowner's position was painfully simple. Being a daring yet shrewd financier, he perceived in the troubled condition of the far east a magnificent opportunity to consolidate the trading influence of his company. He negotiated two big loans, one of a semiprivate nature to equip docks and railways in the chief maritime province of China, the other of a more public character with the government of Japan. All his own resources, together with those of his principal directors and shareholders, were devoted to these objects. Contemporaneously he determined to stop paying heavy insurance premiums on his fleet and make it self supporting on the well known mutual principle.

His vessels were well equipped, well manned, replete with every modern improvement and managed with great commercial skill. In three or four years, given ordinary trading luck, he must have doubled his own fortune.

No sooner were all his arrangements completed than three of his best ships went down, saddling his company with an absolute loss of nearly £600,000 and seriously undermining his financial credit. A fellow director, wealthy and influential, resigned his seat on the board and headed a clique of disappointed stockholders. At once the fair sky became overcast.

Sir Arthur Deane's energy and financial skill might have enabled him to weather this unexpected gale were it not for the apparent loss of his beloved daughter with the crack ship of his line. Half frenzied with grief, he had his enemies do their worst and allowed his affairs to get into hopeless confusion while he devoted himself wholly to the search for Iris and her companions. At this critical juncture Lord Ventnor again reached his side. His lordship possessed a large private fortune and extensive estates. He was prudent withal and knew how admirably the shipowner's plans would develop if given the necessary time. He offered the use of his name and money. He more than filled the gap created by the hostile ex-director. People argued that such a clever man, just returning from the far east after accomplishing a public mission of some importance, must be a reliable guide. The mere cabled intelligence of his intention to join the board restored confidence and credit.

But there was a bargain. If Iris lived she must become the Countess of Ventnor. His lordship was weary of peripatetic lovenaking. It was high time he settled down in life, took an interest in the legislature and achieved a position in the world of affairs. He had a chance now. The certain success of his friend's project, the fortunate

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He looked the questioner squarely in the face.

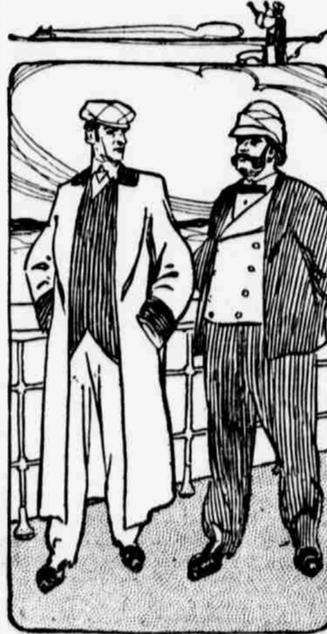
man was magnetic, a hero, an ideal gentleman. No wonder his daughter was infatuated with him. Yet the future was dark and storm tossed, full of sinister threats and complications. Iris did not know the wretched circumstances which had come to pass since they parted and which had changed the whole aspect of his life. How could he tell her? Why should it be his miserable lot to snatch the cup of happiness from her lips? In that moment of silent agony he wished he were dead, for death alone could remove the burden laid on him. Well, surely he might bask in the sunshine of her laughter for another day. No need to embitter her joyous heart until he was driven to it by dire necessity.

So he resolutely brushed aside the woebegone phantom of care and entered into the abandon of the hour with a zest that delighted her. The dear girl imagined that Robert, her Robert, had made another speedy conquest and Anstruther himself was much elated by the sudden change in Sir Arthur Deane's demeanor.

They behaved like school children on a picnic. They roared over Iris' troubles in the matter of divided skirts, too much divided to be at all pleasant. The shipowner tasted some of her sago bread and vowed it was excellent. They unearthed two bottles of champagne, the last of the case, and promised each other a hearty toast at dinner. Nothing would content Iris but that they should draw a farewell bucketful of water from the well and drench the pitcher plant with a torrential shower.

Robert carefully secured the pocket-books, money and other effects found on their dead companions. The baronet, of course, knew all the principal officers of the Sirdar. He surveyed these mournful relics with sorrowful interest.

"The Sirdar was the crack ship of



"You will all be paupers."

completion of his own diplomatic undertaking, marriage with a beautiful and charming woman—these items would consolidate his career. His heart was set on Iris.

He seized the first opportunity that presented itself to make Sir Arthur Deane acquainted with a decision already dreaded by the unfortunate shipowner. Iris must either abandon her infatuation for Anstruther or bring about the ruin of her father. There was no mean.

"If she declines to become Countess of Ventnor she can marry whom she likes, as you will all be paupers together," was the earl's caustic summary.

(Continued on Sixth Page.)

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