

The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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The most careful scrutiny did not reveal any arms of precision. They all carried muzzle loaders, either antiquated flintlocks or guns sufficiently modern to be fitted with nipples for percussion caps.

Each Dyak, of course, sported a parang and dagger-like crescent; a few bore spears, and about a dozen shouldered a long straight piece of bamboo. The nature of this implement the sailor could not determine at the moment.

In the neighborhood of the fire an animated discussion took place. Though it was easy to see that the chief was all paramount, his fellow tribesmen exercised a democratic right of free speech and outspoken opinion.

Flashing eyes and expressive hands were turned toward the cave and hut. Once when the debate grew warm the chief snatched up a burning branch and held it over the blackened embers of the fire extinguished by Jenks. He seemed to draw some definite conclusion from an examination of the charcoal, and the argument therefor proceeded with less emphasis. Whatever it was that he said evidently carried conviction.

Iris, nestling close to the sailor, whispered:

"Do you know what he has found out?"

"I can only guess that he can tell by the appearance of the burned wood how long it is since it was extinguished. Clearly they agree with him."

"Then they know we are still here?"

"Either here or gone within a few hours. In any case they will make a thorough search of the island at day-break."

"Will it be dawn soon?"

"Yes. Are you tired?"

"A little cramped—that is all."

"Don't think I am foolish. Can you manage to sleep?"

"Sleep! With these men so near?"

"Yes. We do not know how long they will remain. We must keep up our strength. Sleep, next to food and drink, is a prime necessity."

"If it will please you I will try," she said, with such sweet readiness to obey his slightest wish that the wonder is he did not kiss her then and there. By previous instruction she knew exactly what to do. She crept quietly back until well ensconced in the niche widened and hollowed for her accommodation. There so secluded was she from the outer world of horror and peril that the coarse voices beneath only reached her in a murmur. Pulling one end of the tarpaulin over her, she stretched her weary limbs on a litter of twigs and leaves, commended herself and the man she loved to God's keeping and, wonderful though it may seem, was soon slumbering peacefully.

The statement may sound passing strange to civilized ears, accustomed only to the routine of daily life and not inured to danger and wild surroundings. But the sailor who has snatched a hasty doze in the trenches, the sailor who has heard a fierce gale buffeting the walls of his frail ark, can appreciate the reason why Iris, weary and surfeited with excitement, would have slept were she certain that the next sunrise would mark her last hour on earth.

Jenks, too, composed himself for a brief rest. He felt assured that there was not the remotest chance of their lofty perch being found out before daybreak, and the first faint streaks of dawn would awaken him.

When the morning breeze swept over the ocean and the stars were beginning to pale before the pink glory flung broadcast through the sky by the yet invisible sun, the sailor was aroused by the quiet fluttering of a bird about to settle on the rock, but startled by the sight of him.

His faculties were at once on the alert, though he little realized the danger betokened by the bird's rapid dart into the void. Turning first to peer at Iris, he satisfied himself that she was still asleep. Her lips were slightly parted in a smile. She might be dreaming of summer and England. He noiselessly wormed his way to the verge of the rock and looked down through the grass roots.

The Dyaks were already stirring. Some were replenishing the fire, others were drawing water, cooking, eating, smoking long thin stemmed pipes with absurdly small bowls or oiling their limbs and weapons with impartial energy. The chief yet lay stretched on the sand, but when the first beams of the sun gilded the waters a man stooped over the prostrate form and said something that caused the sleeper to rise stiffly, supporting himself on his uninjured arm. They at once went off together toward Europa point.

"They have found the boat," thought Jenks. "Well, they are welcome to all the information it affords."

The chief gave some order, at which they all hung back sheepishly. Cursing them in choice Malay, the chief seized a thick faggot and strode in the direction of the cave. Goaded into activity by his truculent demeanor, some followed him, and Jenks, unable to see, but listening anxiously, knew that they were tearing the cave de frise from its supports. Nevertheless none of the working party entered the excavation. They feared the parched bones that

shone by night.

As he had not been able to complete the communicating shaft it was not



The monstrous object crouching in luminous horror.

now of vital importance should the Dyaks penetrate to the interior. Yet he thanked the good luck that had showered such a heap of rubbish over the spot containing his chief stores and covering the vein of gold. Wild as these fellows were, they well knew the value of the precious metal, and if by chance they lighted upon such a well defined lode they might not quit the island for weeks.

At last on a command from the chief the Dyaks scattered in various directions. Some turned toward Europa point, but the majority went to the east along Turtle beach or by way of the lagoon. Prospect park was deserted. They were scouring both sections of the island in full force.

The silent watcher on the ledge took no needless risks. Though it was impossible to believe any stratagem had been planned for his special benefit, an accident might betray him. With the utmost circumspection he rose on all fours and, with comprehensive glance, examined trees, plateau and both strips of beach for signs of a lurking foe. He need have no fear. Of all places in the island the Dyaks least imagined that their quarry had lain all night within earshot of their encampment.

Jenks slid back down the ledge and, gently awakened Iris. She sat up instantly and gazed at him with wondering eyes.

Fearful lest she should forget her surroundings, he placed a warning finger on his lips.

"Oh," she said in a whisper, "are they still here?"

He told her what had happened and suggested that they should have something to eat while the coast was clear beneath. She needed no second bidding, for the long vigil of the previous night had made her very hungry, and the two breakfasted right royally on biscuit, cold fowl, ham and good water.

In this, the inner section of their refuge, they could be seen only by a bird or by a man standing on the distant rocky shelf that formed the southern extremity of the opposite cliff, and the sailor kept a close lookout in that direction.

Iris was about to throw the remains of the feast into an empty oil tin provided for refuse when Jenks restrained her.

"No," he said smilingly. "Scraps should be the first course next time. We must not waste an atom of food."

"How thoughtless of me!" she exclaimed. "Please tell me you think they will go away today?"

But the sailor flung himself flat on the ledge and grasped a rifle.

"Be still, on your life!" he said. "Squeeze into your corner. There is a Dyak on the opposite cliff."

True enough, a man had climbed to that unhappily placed rocky table and was shouting something to a confederate high on the cliff over their heads. As yet he had not seen them nor even noticed the place where they were concealed. The sailor imagined from the Dyak's gestures that he was communicating the uselessness of further search on the western part of the island.

When the conversation ceased he hoped the loud voiced savage would descend. But no! The scout looked into the valley, at the well, the house, the cave. Still he did not see the ledge. At that unlucky moment three birds, driven from the trees on the crest by the passage of the Dyaks, flew down the face of the cliff and began a circling quest for some safe perch on which to alight.

Jenks swore with an emphasis not the less earnest because it was mute and took steady aim at the Dyak's left breast. The birds fluttered about in ever smaller circles. Then one of them

dropped easily on to the lip of the rock. Instantly his bright eyes encountered those of the man, and he darted off with a scream that brought his mates after him.

The Dyak evidently noted the behavior of the birds—his only lore was the reading of such signs—and gazed intently at the ledge. Jenks he could not distinguish behind the screen of grass. He might perhaps see some portion of the tarpaulin covering the stores, but at the distance it must resemble a weather beaten segment of the cliff. Yet something puzzled him. After a steady scrutiny he turned and yelled to others on the beach.

The crucial moment had arrived. Jenks pressed the trigger, and the Dyak hurtled through the air, falling headlong out of sight.

The sound of this, the first shot of real warfare, awoke Rainbow Island into tremendous activity. The winged life of the place filled the air with raucous cries, while shouting Dyaks scurried in all directions. Several came into the valley. Those nearest the fallen man picked him up and carried him to the well. He was quite dead, and, although amid his other injuries they soon found the bullet wound, they evidently did not know whence the shot came, for those to whom he shouted had no inkling of his motive, and the slight haze from the rifle was instantly swept away by the breeze.

Iris could hear the turmoil beneath, and she tremulously asked:

"Are they going to attack us?"

"Not yet," was the reassuring answer. "I killed the fellow who saw us before he could tell the others."

It was a bold risk, and he had taken it, though now the Dyaks knew for certain their prey had not escaped there was no prospect of their speedy departure. Nevertheless the position was not utterly hopeless. None of the enemy could tell how or by whom their companion had been shot. Many among the excited horde jabbering beneath actually looked at the cliff over and over again, yet failed to note the potentialities of the ledge, with its few tufts of grass growing where seeds had apparently been blown by the wind or dropped by passing birds.

Jenks understood, of course, that the real danger would arise when they visited the scene of their comrade's disaster. Even then the wavering balance of chance might cast the issue in his favor. He could only wait, with ready rifle, with the light of battle lowering in his eyes. Of one thing at least he was certain—before they conquered him he would levy a terrible toll.

He glanced back at Iris. Her face was pale beneath its mask of sun brown.

The chief was listening intently to the story of the Dyak who saw the dead man totter and fall. He gave some quick order. Followed by a score or more of his men, he walked rapidly to the foot of the cliff where they found the lifeless body.

Jenks stole one more hasty glance at Iris. The chief and the greater number of his followers were out of sight behind the rocks. Some of them must now be climbing to that fatal ledge. Was this the end?

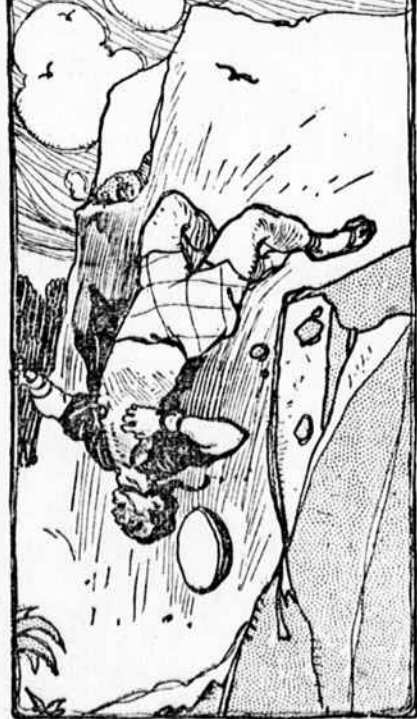
Iris bent forward sufficiently in her sheltering niche to permit her to gaze with wistful tenderness upon Jenks. She knew he would dare all for her sake. She could only pray and hope.

Suddenly a clamor of discordant yells fell upon her ears. Jenks rose to his knees. The Dyaks had discovered their refuge and were about to open fire. He offered them a target test perchance Iris were not thoroughly screened.

"Keep close," he said. "They have found us. Lead will be flying around soon."

She flinched back into the crevice; the sailor fell prone. Four bullets spat into the ledge, of which three pierced the tarpaulin and one flattened itself against the rock.

Then Jenks took up the tale. So curiously constituted was this man that,



The Dyak hurtled through the air.

although he ruthlessly shot the savage who first spied out their retreat, he was swayed only by the dictates of stern necessity. There was a feeble chance that further bloodshed might be averted. That chance had passed. Very well. The enemy must start the dreadful game about to be played. They had thrown the gage, and he answered them. Four times did Jenks' rifle carry death, unseen, almost unthought, across the valley.

Ere the fourth Dyak collapsed limply where he stood others were there, and careful foliage they were bound

firing at the little puff of smoke above the grass. They got in a few shots, most of which sprayed at various angles off the face of the cliff. But they waited for no more. When the lever of the Lee-Metford was shoved home for the fifth time the opposing crest was bare of all opponents save two, and they lay motionless.

The fate of the flanking detachment was either unperceived or unheeded by the Dyaks left in the vicinity of the house and well. Astounded by the firing that burst forth in midair, Jenks had cleared the dangerous rock before they realized that here, above their heads, were the white man and the maid whom they sought.

With stupid zeal they blazed away furiously, only succeeding in showering fragments of splintered stone into the eagle's nest. And the sailor smiled. He quietly picked up an old coat, rolled it into a ball and pushed it into sight amidst the grass. Then he squirmed round on his stomach and took up a position ten feet away. Of course those who still carried loaded guns discharged them at the bundle of rags, whereupon Jenks thrust his rifle beyond the edge of the rock and leaned over.

Three Dyaks fell before the remainder made up their minds to run. Once convinced, however, that running was good for their health, they moved with much celerity. The remaining cartridges in the magazine slackened the pace of two of their number. Jenks dropped the empty weapon and seized another. He stood up now and sent a quick reminder after the rearmost pirate. The others had disappeared toward the locality where their leader and his diminished troop were gathered, not daring to again come within range of the whistling dumdums. The sailor, holding his rifle as though phasing shooting, bent forward and sought a belated opponent, but in vain. There was no sound save the wailing of birds, the soft sough of the sea and the yelling of the three wounded men in the house, who knew not what terrors threatened and vainly bawled for succor.

Again Jenks could look at Iris. Her face was bleeding. The sight maddened him.

"My God!" he groaned. "Are you wounded?"

She smiled bravely at him.

"It is nothing," she said—"a mere splash from the rock which cut my forehead."

He dared not go to her. He could only hope that it was no worse, so he turned to examine the valley once more for vestige of a living foe.

CHAPTER XII.

THOUGH his eyes, like live coals, glowered with sullen fire at the strip of sand and the rocks in front, his troubled brain paid perfunctory heed to his task. The stern sense of duty, the ingrained force of long years of military discipline and soldierly thought, compelled him to keep watch and ward over his fortress, but he could not help asking himself what would happen if Iris were seriously wounded.

There was one enemy more potent than these skulking Dyaks, a foe more irresistible in his might, more pitiless in his strength, whose assaults would tax to the utmost their powers of resistance. In another hour the sun would be high in the heavens, pouring his ardent rays upon them and drying the blood in their veins.

Hitherto the active life of the island, the shade of trees, but or cave, the power of unrestricted movement and the possession of water in any desired quantity robbed the tropical heat of the day of its chief terrors. Now all was changed. Instead of working and careful foliage they were bound

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to the brown rock, which soon would glow with radiated energy and give off scorching gusts like unto the opening of a furnace door.

This he had foreseen all along. The tarpaulin would yield them some degree of uneasy protection, and they both were in perfect physical condition. But—if Iris were wounded! If the extra strain brought fever in its wake! That way he saw nothing but blank despair, to be ended for her by delirium and merciful death, for him by a Berserk rush among the Dyaks and one last mad fight against overwhelming numbers.

Then the girl's voice reached him, self reliant, almost cheerful: "You will be glad to hear that the cut has stopped bleeding. It is only a scratch."

So a kindly Providence had spared them yet a little while. The cloud passed from his mind, the gathering mist from his eyes. In that instant he thought he detected a slight rustling among the trees where the cliff shelved up from the house. Standing as he was on the edge of the rock, this was a point he could not guard against.

When her welcome assurance recalled his scattered senses he stepped back to speak to her, and in the same instant a couple of bullets crashed against the rock overhead. Iris had unwittingly saved him from a serious, perhaps fatal, wound.

He sprang to the extreme right of the ledge and boldly looked into the trees beneath. Two Dyaks were there, belated wanderers cut off from the main body. They dived headlong into the undergrowth for safety, but one of them was too late. Jenks' rifle reached him, and its reverberating concussion, tossed back and forth by the echoing rocks, drowned his pining scream.

In the plenitude of restored vigor the sailor waited for no counter demonstration. He turned and crouchingly approached the southern end of his parapet. Through his screen of grass he could discern the long black hair and yellow face of a man who lay on the sand and twisted his head around the base of the farther cliff. The distance, off measured, was ninety yards, the target practically a six inch bullseye. Jenks took careful aim, fired, and a whiff of sand flew up.

Perhaps he had used too fine a sight and plowed a furrow beneath the Dyak's ear. He only heard a faint yell, but the enterprising head vanished, and there were no more volunteers for that particular service.

He was still peering at the place when a cry of unmitigated anguish came from Iris:

"Oh, come quick! Our water! The casks have burst!"

It was not until Jenks had torn the tarpaulin from off their stores and he was wildly striving with both hands to scoop up some precious drops collected in the small hollows of the ledge that he realized the full magnitude of the disaster which had befallen them.

During the first rapid exchange of fire before the enemy vacated the cliff several bullets had pierced the tarpaulin. By a stroke of exceeding bad fortune two of them had struck each of the water barrels and started the staves. The contents quietly ebbed away beneath the broad sheet and, flowing inward by reason of the sharp slope of the ledge, percolated through the fault. Iris and he, notwithstanding their frenzied efforts, were not able to save more than a pint of gritty discolored fluid. The rest, infinitely more valuable to them than all the diamonds of De Beers, was now oozing through the natural channel cut by centuries of storm, dripping upon the headless skeleton in the cave, soaking down to the

very heart of their buried treasure.

Jenks was so paralyzed by this catastrophe that Iris became alarmed. As yet she did not grasp its awful significance. That he, her hero, so brave, so confident in the face of many dangers, should betray such sense of irredeemable loss frightened her much more than the incident itself.

Her lips whitened. Her words became incoherent.

"Tell me," she whispered. "I can hear anything but silence. Tell me, I implore you. Is it so bad?"

The sight of her distress sobered him. He ground his teeth together as a man does who submits to a painful operation and resolves not to flinch beneath the knife.

"It is very bad," he said; "not quite the end, but near it."

"The end," she bravely answered, "is death! We are living and uninjured. You must fight on. If the Lord wills it we shall not die."

He looked in her blue eyes and saw there the light of heaven. Her glance did not drop before his. In such moments heart speaks to heart without concealment.

"We still have a little water," she cried. "Fortunately we are not thirsty. You have not forgotten our supply of champagne and brandy?"

He could only fall in with her unreflective mood and leave the dreadful

truth to its own evil time. In their lit the nook the power of the sun had not yet made itself felt. By ordinary computation it was about 9 o'clock. Long before noon they would be grilling. Throughout the next few hours they must suffer the torture of Dives with one meager pint of water to share between them. Of course the wine and spirit must be shunned like a pestilence. To touch either under such conditions would be courting heat, apoplexy and death. And next day?

He tightened his jaws before he answered:

"We will console ourselves with a bottle of champagne for dinner. Meanwhile I hear our friends shouting to those left on this side of the island. I must take an active interest in the conversation."

He grasped a rifle and lay down on the ledge, already gratefully warm. There was a good deal of sustained shouting going on. Jenks thought he recognized the chief's voice giving instructions to those who had come from Smugglers' cove and were now standing on the beach near the quarry. "I wonder if he is hungry," he thought. "If so, I will interfere with the commissariat."

Iris peeped forth at him.

"Mr. Jenks!"

"Yes," without turning his head. He knew it was an ordinary question.

"May I come too?"

"What, expose yourself on the ledge?"

"Yes, even that. I am so tired of sitting here alone."

"Well, there is no danger at present. But they might chance to see you, and you remember what I?"

"Yes, I remember quite well. If that is all"—There was a rustle of garments. "I am very mannish in appearance. If you promise not to look at me I will join you."

"I promise."

Iris stepped forth. She was flushed a little, and, to cover her confusion, maybe, she picked up a rifle.

"Now there are two guns," she said as she stood near him.

He could see through the tail of his eye that a slight but elegantly proportioned young gentleman of the seafaring profession had suddenly appear-

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