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# The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY

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"I had no idea your memory was so good," he said weakly. "Excellent, I assure you. Moreover, during our forty-four days together you have taught me to think. Why do you adopt subterfuge with me? We are partners in all else. Why cannot I share your despair as well as your joy?"

She blazed out in sudden wrath, and he understood that she would not be denied the full extent of his secret fear. He bowed reverently before her, as a mortal paying homage to an angry goddess.

"I can only admit that you are right," he murmured. "We must pray that God will direct our friends to this island. Otherwise we may not be found for a year, as unhappily the fishermen who once came here now avoid the place. They have been frightened by the contents of the hollow behind the cliff. I am glad you have solved the difficulty unaided, Miss Deane. I have striven at times to be coarse, even brutal, toward you, but my heart flinched from the task of telling you the possible period of your imprisonment."

Then Iris, for the first time in many days, wept bitterly, and Jenks, blind to the true cause of her emotion, picked up a rifle to which, in spare moments, he had affixed a curious device, and walked slowly across Prospect park toward the half obliterated road leading to the valley of death.

The girl watched him disappear among the trees. Through her tears shone a sorrowful little smile.

"He thinks only of me, never of himself," she murmured. "If it pleases Providence to spare us from these savages, what does it matter to me how long we remain here? I have never been so happy before in my life. I fear I never will be again. If it were not for my father's terrible anxiety I would not have a care in the world. I only wish to get away so that one brave soul at least may be rid of needless tortures. All his worry is on my account, none on his own."

That was what fearful Miss Iris thought or tried to persuade herself to think. Perhaps her cogitations would not bear strict analysis. Perhaps she harbored a sweet hope that the future might yet contain bright hours for herself and the man who was so devoted to her. She refused to believe that Robert Anstruther, strong of arm and clear of brain, a knight of the Round Table in all that was noble and chivalric, would permit his name to bear an unwarrantable stigma when—and she blushed like a June rose—he came to tell her that which he had written.

The sailor returned hastily, with the manner of one hurrying to perform a neglected task. Without any explanation to Iris he climbed several times to the ledge, carrying armloads of grass roots, which he planted in full view. Then he entered the cave, and although he was furnished only with the dim light that penetrated through



"Oh, I see!" he groined.

the distant exit, she heard him hewing manfully at the rock for a couple of hours. At last he emerged, grimy with dust and perspiration, just in time to pay a last visit to Summit rock before the sun sank to rest. He asked the girl to delay somewhat the preparations for their evening meal, as he wished to take a bath; so it was quite dark when they sat down to eat.

Iris had long recovered her usual state of high spirits. "Why were you burrowing in the cavern again?" she inquired. "Are you in a hurry to get rich?" "I was following an air shaft, not a lode," he replied. "I am occasionally troubled with after wit, and this is an instance. Do you remember how the flame of the lamp flickered while we were opening up our mine?"

"Yes." "I was so absorbed in contemplating our prospective wealth that I failed to pay heed to the true significance of

that incident. It meant the existence of an upward current of air. Now, where the current goes there must be a passage, and while I was busy this afternoon among the trees over there"—he pointed toward the valley of death—"it came to me like an inspiration that possibly a few hours' hewing and delving might open a shaft to the ledge. I have been well rewarded for the effort. The stuff in the vault is so eaten away by water that it is no more solid than hard mud for the most part. Already I have scooped out a chimney twelve feet high."

"What good can that be?" "At present we have only a front door—up the face of the rock. When my work is completed—before tomorrow night, I hope—we shall have a back door also. Of course I may encounter unforeseen obstacles as I advance. A twist in the fault would be nearly fatal, but I am praying that it may continue straight to the ledge."

"I still don't see the great advantage to us." "The advantages are many, believe me. The more points of attack presented by the enemy the more effective will be our resistance. I doubt if they would ever be able to rush the cave were we to hold it, whereas I can go up and down our back staircase whenever I choose. If you don't mind being left in the dark I will resume work now by the light of your lamp."

But Iris protested against this arrangement. She felt lonely. The long hours of silence had been distasteful to her. She wanted to talk.

"I agree," said Jenks, "provided you do not pin me down to something I told you a month ago."

"I promise. You can tell me as much or as little as you think fit. The subject for discussion is your court martial."

He could not see the tender light in her eyes, but the quiet sympathy of her voice restrained the protest prompt on his lips. Yet he blurted out after a slight pause:

"That is a very unsavory subject."

"Is it? I do not think so. I am a friend, Mr. Jenks, not an old one, I admit, but during the past six weeks we have bridged an ordinary acquaintance-ship of as many years. Can you not trust me?"

Trust her? He laughed softly. Then, choosing his words with great deliberation, he answered: "Yes, I can trust you. I intended to tell you the story some day. Why not tonight?"

Unseen in the darkness, Iris' hand sought and clasped the gold locket suspended from her neck. She already knew some portion of the story he would tell. The remainder was of minor importance.

"It is odd," he continued, "that you should have alluded to six years a moment ago. It is exactly six years almost to a day since the trouble began."

"With Lord Ventnor?" The name slipped out involuntarily.

"Yes, I was then a staff corps subaltern, and my proficiency in native languages attracted the attention of a friend in Simla, who advised me to apply for an appointment on the political side of the government of India. I did so. He supported the application, and I was assured of the next vacancy in a native state provided that I got married. I was not a marrying man, Miss Deane, and the requisite qualification nearly staggered me. But I looked around the station and came to the conclusion that the commissioner's niece would make a suitable wife. I regarded her 'points,' so to speak, and they filled the bill. She was smart, good looking, lively, understood the art of entertaining, was first rate in sports and had excellent teeth. Indeed, if a man selected a wife as he does a horse, she—"

"Don't be horrid. Was she really pretty?"

"I believe so. People said she was."

"But what did you think?"

"At the time my opinion was biased. I have seen her since, and she wears badly. She is married now and after thirty grew very fat."

"Artful Jenks! Iris settled herself comfortably to listen."

"I have jumped that fence with a lot in hand," he thought.

"We became engaged," he said aloud.

"She threw herself at him," murmured Iris.

"Her name was Elizabeth—Elizabeth Morris." The young lieutenant of those days called her Bessie, but no matter.

"Well, you didn't marry her, anyhow," commented Iris, a trifle sharply.

And now the sailor was on level ground again.

"Thank heaven, no!" he said earnestly. "We had barely become engaged when she went with her uncle to Simla for the hot weather. There she met Lord Ventnor, who was on the victory's staff, and—if you don't mind, we will skip a portion of the narrative—I discovered then why men in India usually go to England for their wives. While in Simla on ten days' leave I had a foolish row with Lord Ventnor in the United Service Club—hammered him, in fact, in defense of a worthless woman—and was only saved from a severe reprimand because I had been badly treated. Nevertheless, my hopes

of a political appointment vanished, and I returned to my regiment to learn after due reflection what a very lucky person I was."

"Concerning Miss Morris, you mean?"

"Exactly. And now exit Elizabeth. Not being cut out for matrimonial enterprise, I tried to become a good officer. A year ago, when the government asked for volunteers to form Chinese regiments, I sent in my name and was accepted. I had the good fortune to serve under an old friend, Colonel Costobell, but some malign star sent Lord Ventnor to the far east, this time in an important civil capacity. I met him occasionally, and we found we did not like each other any

better. My horse beat his for the Pagoda Hurdle handicap. Poor old Sultan, I wonder where he is now!"

"Colonel Costobell fell ill, and the command of the regiment devolved upon me, our only major being absent in the interior. The colonel's wife, unhappily, chose that moment to die, as people say, with Lord Ventnor. Not having learned the advisability of minding my own business, I remonstrated with her, thus making her my deadly enemy. Lord Ventnor contrived an official mission to a neighboring town and detailed me for the military charge. I sent a junior officer. Then Mrs. Costobell and he deliberately concocted a plot to ruin me, he for the sake of his old animosity—you remember that I had also crossed his path in Egypt—she because she feared I would speak to her husband. On pretense of seeking my advice she inveigled me at night into a deserted corner of the club grounds at Hongkong. Lord Ventnor appeared, and as the upshot of their vile statements, which created an immediate uproar, I—well, Miss Deane, I nearly killed him."

Iris vividly recalled the anguish he betrayed when this topic was inadvertently broached one day early in their acquaintance. Now he was reciting his painful history with the air of a man far more concerned to be scrupulously accurate than aroused in his deepest passions by the memory of past wrongs. What had happened in the interim to blunt these bygone sufferings? Iris clasped her locket. She thought she knew.

"The remainder may be told in a sentence," he said. "Of what avail were my frenzied statements against the definite proofs adduced by Lord Ventnor and his unfortunate ally? Even her husband believed her and became my bitter foe. Poor woman! I have it in my heart to pity her. Well, that is all. I am here!"

"Can a man be ruined so easily?" murmured the girl, her exquisite tact leading her to avoid any direct expression of sympathy.

"It seems so. But I have had my reward. If ever I meet Mrs. Costobell again I will thank her for a great service."

Iris suddenly became confused. Her brow and neck tingled with a quick access of color.

"Why do you say that?" she asked. And Jenks, who was rising, either did not hear or pretended not to hear the tremor in her tone.

"Because you once told me you would never marry Lord Ventnor, and after what I have told you now I am quite sure you will not."

"Ah, then you do trust me?" she almost whispered.

He forced back the words trembling for utterance. He even strove weakly to assume an air of good, humorous badinage.

"See how you have tempted me from work, Miss Deane," he cried. "We have gossiped here until the fire grew tired of our company. To bed, please, at once."

Iris caught him by the arm. "I will pray tonight and every night," she said solemnly, "that your good name may be cleared in the eyes of all men, as it is in mine. And I am sure my prayer will be answered."

She passed into her chamber, but her angelic influence remained; in his very soul the man thanked God for the tribulation which brought this woman into his life. He had traversed the wilderness to find an oasis of rare beauty.

It was a beautiful night. After a baking hot day the rocks were radiating their stored up heat, but the pleasant southwesterly breeze that generally set in at sunset tempered the atmosphere and made sleep refreshing. Jenks could not settle down to rest for a little while after Iris left him. She did not bring forth her lamp, and unwilling to disturb her, he picked up a resinous branch, lit it in the dying fire and went into the cave.

He wanted to survey the work already done and to determine whether it would be better to resume operations in the morning from inside the excavation or from the ledge. Owing to the difficulty of constructing a vertical upward shaft and the danger of a sudden fall of heavy material he decided in favor of the latter course, although it entailed lifting all the refuse out of the hole. To save time, therefore, he carried his mining tools into the open, placed in position the cheval de frise long since constructed for the defense of the entrance, and poured water over the remains of the fire.

This was his final care each night before stretching his weary limbs on his couch of branches. It excited delay in the morning, but he neglected no precaution, and there was a possible chance of the Dyaks failing to discover the eagle's nest if they were persuaded by other indications that the island was deserted.

He entered the hut and was in the act of pulling off his boots when a distant shot rang sharply through the air. It was magnified tenfold by the intense silence. For a few seconds, that seemed to be minutes, he listened, cherishing the quick thought that perhaps a turtle, wandering far beyond accus-

omed limits, had disturbed one of the spring gun communications on the sands. A spluttering volley, which his trained ear recognized as the firing of muzzle loaders, sounded the death knell of his last hope.

The Dyaks had landed! Coming silently and mysteriously in the dead of night, they were themselves the victims of a stratagem they designed to employ. Instead of taking the occupants of Rainbow Island unawares they were startled at being greeted by a shot the moment they landed. The alarmed savages at once retaliated by firing their antiquated weapons point blank at the trees, thus giving warning enough to wake the seven sleepers.

Iris, fully dressed, was out in a moment.

"They have come!" she whispered.

"Yes," was the cheery answer, for Jenks face to face with danger was a very different man from Jenks wrestling with the insidious attacks of Cupid. "Up the ladder! Be lively! They will not be here for half an hour if they kick up such a row at the first difficulty. Still, we will take no risks. Cast down those spare lines when you reach the top and haul away when I say 'Ready.' You will find everything to hand up there."

He held the bottom of the ladder to steady it for the girl's climb. Soon her steady feet, like a message from a star: "A. I. Right! Please join me soon!" The coiled up ropes dropped along the face of the rock. Clothes, pick, hatchet, hammer, crowbars and other useful odds and ends were swung away into the darkness, for the moon as yet did not illumine the crag. The sailor darted into Belle Vue castle and kicked their leafy beds about the floor. Then he slung all the rifles, now five in number, over his shoulders and mounted the rope ladder, which, with the spare cords, he drew up and coiled with careful method.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE sailor knew so accurately the position of his reliable sentinels that he could follow each phase of the imaginary conflict on the other side of the island. The first outbreak of desultory firing died away amidst a chorus of protest from every feathered inhabitant of the island, so Jenks assumed that the Dyaks had gathered again on the beach after riddling the scarecrows with bullets or slashing them with their heavy razor edged swords.

A hasty council was probably held, and, notwithstanding their fear of the silent company in the hollow, an advance was ultimately made along the beach. Within a few yards they encountered the invisible cord of the third spring gun. There was a report and another fierce outbreak of musketry. This was enough. Not a man would move a step nearer that abode of the dead. The next commotion arose on the ridge near the North cape.

"At this rate of progress," said Jenks to the girl, "they will not reach our house until daylight."

"Almost wish they were here," was the quiet reply. "I find this waiting and listening to be trying to the nerves."

They were lying on a number of ragged garments hastily spread on the ledge and peering intently into the moonlit area of Prospect park. The great rock itself was shrouded in somber shadows. Even if they stood up, none could see them from the ground, so dense was the darkness enveloping them.

He turned slightly and took her hand. It was cool and moist. It no more trembled than his own.

"The Dyaks are far more scared than you," he murmured, with a laugh. "Cruel and courageous as they are, they dare not face a spook."

"Then what a pity it is we cannot conjure up a ghost for their benefit. All the spirits I have ever read about were ridiculous. Why cannot one be useful occasionally?"

The question set him thinking. Unknown to the girl the materials for a dramatic apparition were hidden amid the bushes near the well. He audaciously braved the stage effects of juvenile days, but these needed limelight, blue flares, mirrors, phosphorus.

The absurdity of hoping to devise any such accessories while perched on a ledge in a remote island, a larger reef of the thousands in the China sea, tickled him.

"What is it?" asked Iris.

He repeated his list of missing stage properties. They had nothing to do but to wait, and people in the very crust and maelstrom of existence usually discuss trivial things.

"I don't know anything about phosphorus," said the girl, "but you can obtain queer results from sulphur, and there is an old box of Norwegian matches resting at this moment on the shelf in my room. Don't you remember? They were in your pocket, and you were going to throw them away. Why, what are you doing?"

For Jenks had cast the rope ladder loose and was evidently about to descend.

"Have no fear," he said. "I will not be away five minutes."

"If you are going down I must come with you. I will not be left here alone."

"Please do not stop me," he whispered earnestly. "You must not come. I will take no risk whatever. If you remain here you can warn me instantly. With both of us on the ground we will incur real danger. I want you to keep a sharp lookout toward Turtle Beach in case the Dyaks come that way. Those who are crossing the island will not reach us for a long time."

She yielded, though unwillingly. She was tremulous with anxiety on his account.

He vanished without another word. She now saw him in the moonlight

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near the well. He was rustling among the shrubs, and he returned to the rock with something white in his arms, which he seemingly deposited at the mouth of the cave. He went back to the well and carried another similar burden. Then he ran toward the house. The doorway was not visible from the ledge, and she passed a few horrible moments until a low hiss beneath caught her ear. She could tell by the creak of the rope ladder that he was ascending. At last he reached her side, and she murmured, with a gasping sob:

"Don't go away again. I cannot stand it."

He thought it best to soothe her agitation by arousing interest. Still hauling in the ladder with one hand, he held out the other, on which luminous wisps were writhing like glowworms' ghosts.

"You are responsible," he said. "You gave me an excellent idea, and I was obliged to carry it out."

"What have you done?" "Arranged a fearsome bogey in the cave."

"But how?" "It was not exactly a pleasant operation, but the only laws of necessity are those which must be broken."

She understood that he did not wish her to question him further. Perhaps curiosity, now that he was safe, might have vanquished her terror and led to another demand for enlightenment, but at that instant the sound of an angry voice and the crunching of coral away to the left drove all else from her mind.

"They are coming by way of the beach, after all," whispered Jenks. He was mistaken in a sense. Another outbreak of intermittent firing among the trees on the north side of the ridge showed that some at least of the Dyaks were advancing by their former route. The appearance of the Dyak chief on the flat belt of single, with his right arm slung across his breast accompanied by not more than half a dozen followers, showed that a few hardy spirits had dared to pass the valley of death, with all its nameless terrors.

They advanced cautiously enough, as though dreading a surprise. The chief carried a bright parang in his left hand; the others were armed with guns, their swords being thrust through belts. Creeping forward on tiptoe, though their distant companions were making a tremendous row, they looked a murderous gang as they peered across the open space, now brilliantly illuminated by the moon.

Jenks had a sudden intuition that the right thing to do now was to shoot the whole party. He dismissed the thought at once. All his preparations were governed by the hope that the pirates might abandon their quest after hours of fruitless search. It would be most unwise, he told himself, to precipitate hostilities. Far better avoid a conflict altogether, if that were possible, than risk the immediate discovery of his inaccessible retreat.

In other words, he made a grave mistake, which shows how a man may err when overegged by the danger of the woman he loves. The bold course was the right one. By killing the Dyak

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