

The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY
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CHAPTER VII (Continued).
None of the Dyaks saw him. All were intent on the sensational prize



In the grasp of two ferocious looking Dyaks

They had secured, a young and beautiful white woman so contentedly boasting about the shores of this fetid island. With the slow speed advised by the Roman philosopher the back sight and fore sight of the rifle came into line with the breast of the coarse brute clutching the girl's face.

Then something bit him above the heart and simultaneously tore half of his back into fragments. He fell, with a queer sob, and the others turned to face this unexpected danger.

Iris, knowing only that she was free from that hateful grasp, wrenched herself free from the chief's hold and ran with all her might along the beach to Jenks and safety.

Again and yet again the rifle gave its short, sharp snarl, and two more Dyaks collapsed on the sand. Six were left, their leader being still unconsciously preserved from death by the figure of the flying girl.

A fourth Dyak dropped. The survivors, cruel savages, but not cowardly, unslinging their guns. The sailor, white faced, grim, with an unpleasant gleam in his deep set eyes and a lower jaw protruding, noticed their preparations.

"To the left!" he shouted. "Run toward the trees!"

Iris heard him and strove to obey, but her strength was failing her, and she staggered blindly. After a few despairing efforts she lurched feebly to her knees and tumbled face downward on the broken coral that had tripped her faltering footsteps.

Jenks was watching her, watching the remaining Dyaks, from whom a spluttering volley came, picking out his quarry with a murderous ease of an unseen agency. He liked this. It would be a battle, not a butte.

The fifth Dyak crumpled into the distortion of death, and then their leader took deliberate aim at the kneeling marksman who threatened to wipe him and his band out of existence. But his deliberation, though skillful, was too profound. The sailor fired first and was professionally astonished to see the gauntly attired individual tossed violently backward for many yards, finally pitching headlong to the earth. Had he been charged by a bull in full career he could not have been more utterly discomfited. The incident was sensational, but inexplicable.

Yet another member of the band was prostrated ere the two as yet unscathed thought fit to take a retreat. This they now did with celerity, but they dragged their chief with them. It was no part of Jenks' programme to allow them to escape. He aimed again at the man nearest the trees. There was a sharp click and nothing more. The cartridge was a misfire. He hastily sought to eject it, and the rifle jammed. Springing to his feet, with a yell, he was going to fight them singly, hand and foot. The flying men caught a glimpse of him and accelerated their movements. Just as he reached Iris they vanished among the trees.

The sailor knew that the Dyaks had landed at the sandy bay. They were equipped with the passage through the reef and came from the distant islands. Now they would endeavor to escape by the same channel. They must be prevented at all costs.

He was right. As they came out into the open he saw three men, not two, pushing off a large sampan. One of them was the chief. Then Jenks understood that his bullet had hit the lock of the Dyak's uplifted weapon, with the result already described. By a miracle he had escaped.

He hadly prepared to fly the three of them with the same cruel purpose that distinguished the opening phase of this singularly one sided conflict. The distance was much greater, perhaps 800 yards from the point where the boat came into view. He knelt and fired. He judged that the missile struck the craft between the trio.

"I didn't allow for the sun on the side of the fore-sight," he said, "or perhaps I am a bit shaky after the run. In any event they can't go far."

A hurrying step on the coral behind him caught his ear. Instantly he sprang up and faced about—to see Iris. "They are escaping," she said.

"No fear of that," he replied, turning away from her. "Where are the others?"

"Dead!"

"Do you mean that you killed nearly all these men?"

"Six of them. There were nine in all."

He knelt again, lifting the rifle. Iris threw herself on her knees by his side. There was something awful to her in his slight and businesslike declaration of a fixed purpose.

"Mr. Jenks," she said, clasping her hands in an agony of entreaty, "do not kill more men for my sake!"

"For my own sake, then," he growled, annoyed at the interruption, as the sampan was aloft.

"Then I ask you for God's sake not to take another life. What you have already done was unavoidable, perhaps right. This is murder!"

He lowered his weapon and looked at her.

"If those men get away they will bring back a host to avenge their comrades—and secure you," he added.

"It may be the will of Providence for such a thing to happen. Yet I implore you to spare them."

He placed the rifle on the sand and raised her tenderly, for she had yielded to a paroxysm of tears. Not another word did either of them speak in that hour. The large triangular sail of the sampan was now bellying out in the south wind. A figure stood up in the stern of the boat and shook a menacing arm at the couple on the beach.

It was the Malay chief, cursing them with the rude eloquence of his barbarous tongue. And Jenks well knew what he was saying.

CHAPTER VIII.
They looked long and steadfastly at the retreating boat. Soon it diminished to a mere speck on the smooth sea. The even breeze kept its canvas taut, and the sailor knew that the boat was intended for the Dyaks were flying from the island in fear and rage. They would return with a force sufficient to insure the wreaking of their vengeance.

That he would again encounter them at no distant date he had no doubt whatever. They would land in such numbers as to render any resistance difficult and a prolonged defense impossible. Would help come first—a distraction to which he had no answer could not be given. The sailor's brow frowned in deep lines; his brain throbbled now with an anxiety singularly at variance with his cool demeanor during the fight. He was utterly unconscious that his left arm encircled the shoulder of the girl until she gently disengaged herself and said appealingly:

"Please, Mr. Jenks, do not be angry with me. I could not help it. I could not bear to see you shoot them."

Then he abruptly awoke to the realities of the moment.

"Come," he said, his drawn features changing into a wonderfully pleasing smile. "We will return to our castle. We are safe for the remainder of this day, at any rate."

Something must be said or done to reassure her. She was still grievously disturbed, and he naturally ascribed her agitation to the horror of her capture. He dreaded a complete collapse if any further alarms threatened at once. Yet he was almost positive—though search alone would set at rest the last misgiving—that only one sampan had visited the island. Evidently the Dyaks were unprepared as he for the events of the preceding half hour. They were either visiting the island to procure turtle and beche-de-mer or had merely called there en route to some other destination, and the change in the wind had unexpectedly compelled them to put ashore. Beyond all doubt they must have been surprised by the warmth of the reception they encountered.

Probably when he went to Summit rock that morning the savages had lowered their sail and were steadily paddling north against wind and current. The most careful scrutiny of the sea would fail to reveal them beyond a distance of six or seven miles at the utmost.

After landing in the hidden bay on the south side they crossed the island through the trees instead of taking the more natural open way along the beach. Why? The fact that he and Iris were then passing the grown over tract leading to the valley of death instantly determined this point. The Dyaks knew of this affrighting hollow and would not approach any nearer to it than was unavoidable. Could he twist this circumstance to advantage if Iris and he were still stranded there when the superstitious sea rovers next put in an appearance? He would see. All depended on the girl's strength. If she gave way now, if instead of taking instant measures for safety, he were called upon to nurse her through a fever, the outlook became not only desperate, but hopeless.

And, while he bent his brows in worrying thought, the color was returning to Iris' cheeks and natural buoyancy to her step. It is the fault of all men to undertake the marvelous courage and constancy of woman in the face of difficulties and trials.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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