

# The Wings of the Morning

By LOUIS TRACY  
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## CHAPTER XVI.

**L**ORD VENTNOR was no fool. While Iris was transforming herself from a semisavage condition into a semblance of an ultra chic Parisienne, Sir Arthur Deane told the earl something of the state of affairs on the island.

His lordship, a handsome, saturnine man, cool, insolently polite, counseled patience, toleration, even silent recognition of Anstruther's undoubted claims for services rendered.

"She is an enthusiastic, high spirited girl," he urged upon his surprised hearer, who expected a very different expression of opinion. "This fellow Anstruther is a plausible sort of rascal, a good man in a tight place, too—just the sort of fire eating blackguard who would fill the heroic bill where a fight is concerned. Hang him, he licked me twice!"

Further amazement for the shipowner.

"Yes, it's quite true. I interfered with his little games, and he gave me the usual reward of the devil's apothecary. Leave Iris alone. At present she is strung up to an intense pitch of gratitude, having barely escaped a terrible fate. Let her come back to the normal. Anstruther's shady record must gradually leak out. That will disgust her. He is hard up—cut off by his people and that sort of thing. There you probably have the measure of his scheming. He knows quite well that he can never marry your daughter. It is all a matter of price."

Sir Arthur willingly allowed himself to be persuaded. At the back of his head there was an uneasy consciousness that it was not "all a matter of price." If it were he would never trust a man's face again. But Ventnor's well balanced arguments swayed him. The course indicated was the only decent one. It was humanly impossible for a man to chide his daughter and flout her rescuer within an hour of finding them.

Lord Ventnor played his cards with a deeper design. He bowed to the inevitable. Iris said she loved his rival. Very well. To attempt to dissuade her was to throw her more closely into that rival's arms. The right course was to appear resigned, saddened, compelled against his will to reveal the distressing truth. Further, he counted on Anstruther's quick temper as an active agent. Such a man would be the first to rebel against an assumption of pitying tolerance. He would bring bitter charges of conspiracy, of unbelievable complicity to secure his ruin. All this must recall on his own head when the facts were laid bare. Not even the hero of the island could prevail against the terrible indictment of the court martial. Finally, at Singapore, three days distant, Colonel Costobell and his wife were staying. Lord Ventnor, alone of those on board, knew this. Indeed, he accompanied Sir Arthur Deane largely in order to break off a somewhat trying entanglement. He smiled complacently as he thought of the effect on Iris of Mrs. Costobell's indignant remonstrances when the baronet asked that injured lady to tell the girl all that had happened at Hongkong.

However, Lord Ventnor was most profoundly annoyed, and he cursed Anstruther from the depths of his heart. But he could see a way out.

He came ashore with Iris and her father. The captain of the Orient also joined the party. The three men watched Robert and the girl walking toward them from the group of officers.

"Anstruther is a smart looking fellow," commented Captain Fitzroy. "Who is he?"

Truth to tell, the gallant commander of the Orient was secretly amazed by the metamorphosis effected in Robert's appearance since he scrutinized him through his glasses.

Poor Sir Arthur said not a word, but his lordship was quite at ease.

"From his name and from what Deane tells me I believe he is an ex-officer of the Indian army."

"Ah! He has left the service?"

"Yes. I met him last in Hongkong."

"Then you know him?"

"Quite well, if he is the man I imagine."

"That is really very nice of Ventnor," thought the shipowner. "The last thing I should credit him with would be a forgiving disposition."

Meanwhile Anstruther was reading Iris a little lecture. "Sweet one," he explained to her, "do not allude to me by my former rank. I am not entitled to it. Some day, please God, it will be restored to me. At present I am a plain civilian, and, by the way, Iris, during the next few days say nothing about our mine."

"Oh, why not?"

"Just a personal whim. It will please me."

"If it pleases you, Robert, I am satisfied."

He pressed her arm by way of answer. They were too near to the waiting trio for other comment.

"Captain Fitzroy," cried Iris, "let me introduce Mr. Anstruther to you. Lord Ventnor, you have met Mr. Anstruther before."

The sailor shook hands. Lord Ventnor smiled affably.

"Your enforced residence on the island seems to have agreed with you," he said.

"Admirably. Life here had its drawbacks, but we fought our enemies in the open. Didn't we, Iris?"

"Yes, dear. The poor Dyaks were not sufficiently modernized to attack us with false testimony."

His lordship's sallow face wrinkled somewhat. So Iris knew of the court martial, nor was she afraid to proclaim to all the world that this man was her lover. As for Captain Fitzroy, his bushy eyebrows disappeared into his peaked cap when he heard the manner of their speech.

Nevertheless Ventnor smiled again. "Even the Dyaks respected Miss Deane," he said.

But Anstruther, sorry for the manifest uneasiness of the shipowner, repressed the retort on his lips and forthwith suggested that they should walk to the north beach in the first instance, that being the scene of the wreck.

During the next hour he became ardent rather than narrator. It was Iris who told of his wild fight against wind and waves; Iris who showed them where he fought with the devilfish; Iris who expatiated on the long days of ceaseless toil, his dauntless courage in the face of every difficulty, the way in which he rescued her from the clutch of the savages, the skill of his preparations against the anticipated attack and the last great achievement of all, when time after time he foiled the Dyaks' best laid plans and flung them off, crippled and disheartened, during the many phases of the thirty hours' battle.

There were tears in her eyes when she ended, but they were tears of thankful happiness, and Lord Ventnor, a silent listener who missed neither word nor look, felt a deeper chill in his cold heart as he realized that this woman's love could never be his. The knowledge excited his passion the more. His hatred of Anstruther now became a mania, an insensate resolve to mortally stab this meddling who always stood in his path.

Robert hoped that his present ordeal was over. It had only begun. He was called on to answer questions without number. Why had the tunnel been made? What was the mystery of the valley of death? How did he manage to guess the dimensions of the sundial? How came he to acquire such an amazing stock of out of the way knowledge of the edible properties of roots and trees? How? Why? Where? When? They never would be satisfied, for not even the British navy, poking its nose into the recesses of the world, often comes across such an amazing story as the adventures of this couple on Rainbow Island.

He readily explained the creation of quarry and cave by telling them of the vein of antimony imbedded in the rock near the vault. Antimony is one of the substances that covers a multitude of doubts. No one, not excepting the doctors who use it, knows much about it, and in Chinese medicine it might be a chief factor of exceeding nastiness.

Inside the cavern the existence of the partially completed shaft to the ledge accounted for recent disturbances on the face of the rock, and newcomers could not, of course, distinguish the bones of poor "J. S." as being the remains of a European.

Anstruther was satisfied that none of them hazarded the remotest guess as to the value of the gaunt rock they were staring at, and chance helped him to baffle further inquiry.

A trumpeter on board the Orient was blowing his lungs out to summon them to luncheon when Captain Fitzroy put a final query.

"I can quite understand," he said to Robert, "if you have an affection for this woman, but I am curious to know why you lay claim to the island. You can't intend to return here."

He pointed to Robert's placard stuck on the rock.

Anstruther paused before he answered. He felt that Lord Ventnor's dark eyes were fixed on him. Everybody was more or less desirous to have this point cleared up. He looked the questioner squarely in the face.

"In some parts of the world," he said, "there are sunken reefs, unknown, uncharted, on which many a vessel has been lost without any contributory fault on the part of her officers."

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, Captain Fitzroy, when I was stationed with my regiment in Hongkong I encountered such a reef and wrecked my life on it. At least that is how it seemed to me then. Fortune threw me ashore here after a long and bitter submergence. You can hardly blame me if I cling to the tiny speck of land that gave me salvation."

"No," admitted the sailor. He knew there was something more in the allegory than the text revealed, but it was no business of his.

"Moreover," continued Robert smilingly, "you see I have a partner."

"There cannot be the slightest doubt about the partner," was the prompt reply.

Then every one laughed, Iris more than any, though Sir Arthur Deane's gaiety was forced, and Lord Ventnor could taste the acidity of his own smile.

Later in the day the first Lieutenant told his chief of Anstruther's voluntary statement concerning the court martial. Captain Fitzroy was naturally pained by this unpleasant revelation, but he took exactly the same view as that expressed by the first Lieutenant in Robert's presence.

Nevertheless he pondered the matter and seized an early opportunity of mentioning it to Lord Ventnor. That distinguished nobleman was vastly surprised to learn how Anstruther had cut the ground from beneath his feet.

"Yes," he said, in reply to the sailor's request for information, "I know all about it. It could not well be otherwise, seeing that next to Mrs. Costobell I was the principal witness against him."

"That must have been awkward for you," was the unexpected comment.

"Indeed! Why?"

"Because rumor linked your name with that of the lady in a somewhat outsooken way."

"You astonish me. Anstruther certainly made some stupid allegations during the trial, but I had no idea he was able to spread this malicious report subsequently."

"I am not talking of Hongkong, my lord, but of Singapore, months later."

Captain Fitzroy's tone was exceeding dry. Indeed, some people might deem it offensive.

His lordship permitted himself the rare luxury of an angry scowl.

"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 Hongkong."

"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 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 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 sampan. 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 in 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 began their second attack from the ridge; how you climbed down the ladder and I followed you? Oh, father, darling," she went on impulsively, tightening her grasp, "you will never know how brave he was; how enduring; how he risked 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 bade 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-direktor. 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 lovelaking. 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

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 summing up.

This brutal argument rather overshoot the mark. The shipowner's face flushed with anger, and Lord Ventnor hastened to retrieve a false step.

"I didn't exactly mean to put it that way, Deane, but my temper is a little short these days. My position on board this ship is intolerable. As a matter of fair dealing to me you should put a stop to your daughter's attitude toward Anstruther on the ground that her engagement is neither approved of by you nor desirable under any consideration."

It may be assumed from this remark that even the earl's sardonic temper was ruffled by the girl's outrageous behavior. Nor was it exactly pleasant to him to note how steadily Anstruther advanced in the favor of every officer on the ship. By tacit consent the court martial was tabooed, at any rate until

the Orient reached Singapore. Every one knew that the quarrel lay between Robert and Ventnor, and it is not to be wondered at if Iris' influence alone were sufficient to turn the scale in favor of her lover.

The shipowner refused point blank to interfere in any way during the voyage.

"You promised your co-operation in business even if we found that the Sirdar had gone down with all hands," he retorted bitterly. "Do you wish me to make my daughter believe she has come back into my life only to bring me irretrievable ruin?"

"That appears to be the result, no matter how you may endeavor to disguise it."

"I thought the days were gone when a man would wish to marry a woman against her will."

"Nonsense! What does she know about it? The glamor of this island romance will soon wear off. It would be different if Anstruther were able to maintain her even decently. He is an absolute beggar, I tell you. Didn't he ship on your vessel as a steward? Take my tip, Deane. Tell him how matters stand with you, and he will cool off."

## CHAPTER XVII.

**S**IR ARTHUR DEANE was sitting alone in his cabin in a state of deep dejection when he was aroused by a knock, and Robert entered.

"Can you give me half an hour?" he asked. "I have something to say to you before we land."

The shipowner silently motioned him to a seat.

"It concerns Iris and myself," continued Anstruther. "I gathered from your words when we met on the island that both you and Lord Ventnor regarded Iris as his lordship's promised bride. From your point of view the arrangement was perhaps natural and equitable, but since your daughter left Hongkong it happens that she and I have fallen in love with each other. No; please listen to me. I am not here to urge my claims on you. I won her fairly and intend to keep her were the whole house of peers opposed to me. At this moment I want to tell you, her father, why she could never, even under other circumstances, marry Lord Ventnor."

Then he proceeded to place before the astounded baronet a detailed history of his recent career. It was a sordid story of woman's perfidy twice told. It carried conviction in every sentence.

At the conclusion Sir Arthur bowed his head between his hands.

"I cannot choose but believe you," he admitted huskily. "Yet how came you to be so unjustly convicted by a tribunal composed of your brother officers?"

"They could not help themselves. To acquit me meant that they discredited the sworn testimony not only of my colone's wife, but of the civil head of an important government mission, not to mention some bought Chinese evidence."

"But you are powerless now. You can hardly hope to have your case revised. What chance is there that your name will ever be cleared?"

"Mrs. Costobell can do it if she will. The vagaries of such a woman are not to be depended on. If Lord Ventnor has cast her off her hatred may prove stronger than her passion. Anyhow, I should be the last man to despair of God's providence. Compare the condition of Iris and myself today with our plight on the ledge!"

The shipowner sighed heavily. "I hope your faith will be justified. If it is not—the more likely thing to happen—do I understand that my daughter and you intend to get married whether I give or withhold my sanction?"

Anstruther rose and opened the door. "I have ventured to tell you," he said, "why she should not marry Lord Ventnor. When I come to you and ask you for her, which I pray may be soon, it will be time enough to answer that question should you then decide to put it."

It must be remembered that Robert knew nothing whatever of the older man's predicament, while the baronet, full of his own troubles, was in no mood to take a reasonable view of Anstruther's position.

Thus, for a little while, these two were driven apart, and Anstruther disdained to urge the plea that not many weeks would elapse before he would be a richer man than his rival. The chief sufferer was Sir Arthur Deane. Had Iris guessed how her father was tormented she would not have remained on the bridge, radiant and mirthful, while the gray haired baronet gazed with stony eyed despair at some memoranda which he extracted from his papers.

"Ten thousand pounds!" he muttered. "Not a great sum for the millionaire financier, Sir Arthur Deane, to raise on his note of hand. A few months ago men offered me one hundred times the amount on no better security. And now to think that a set of jabbering fools in London should so destroy my credit and their own; that not a bank will discount our paper unless they are assured Lord Ventnor has joined

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE.)

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He looked the questioner squarely in the face.



"You will all be paupers."