

IN THIS ISSUE: "The School in the Desert" A SPLENDID STORY OF THE GIRLS OF MORCOVE SCHOOL.

# The Schoolgirls' Own



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**TRAPPED!** A dramatic incident in the long complete story of the girls of Morcove School contained in this issue.

This Week's Stirring "MORCOVE" Story of Betty Barton & Co. Abroad.



# THE SCHOOL IN THE DESERT

A magnificent new long complete story relating the wonderful adventures of four girls from Morcove School amongst a strange people!

By MARJORIE STANTON.

East and West.

"COME along, Polly dear, or we shall be late for school!"

"Late for school—ha, ha, ha! What nonsense, Betty—"

"But it isn't nonsense, Polly! You know Miss Redgrave said we really are to attend a class every day, at the palace. And, Polly—"

The girl who was speaking found that her words were falling on deaf ears. Polly Linton was like a child let loose in a toyshop at this moment!

Nor, indeed, could Betty Barton help sharing her madcap chum's excited interest in the strange scene which surrounded them.

There they were, two ordinary British school-girls, who would have given their term-time address as "Morcove School, North Devon"; and there were a couple of them besides, drifting about somewhere close at hand. But they were all just as far from Morcove School, at this moment, as is the proverbial Timbuctoo.

Betty and Co., in fact, were not so many leagues from Timbuctoo!

They were in North Africa, at any rate, and it was the teeming bazaar of the desert city of Nakara through which they were sauntering—with money to spend!

"Betty dear, I wonder what that bearded old priest wants for the red and yellow jam-jar?" Polly Linton whispered, halting in front of a display of native pottery.

"Where's Madge?" Betty fidgeted. "And Paula—what's become of Paula? I say, we oughtn't to get lost to one another! Where—"

"Oh, they'll find their way to the palace, anyhow, dear. I say, shall I ask him how much for the cheese-dish? It looks like a cheese-dish! Bother it; why don't they all speak English?"

"Here is Rose of the Desert," Betty exclaimed, "so she can act as interpreter. Oh, and here are Madge and Paula!"

"Yes, wather!" beamed Paula Creel, working through the jostling crowd with a very gratified expression. "By Jove, this is great, gals! I'm buying wugs for my study at Morcove!"

Then Betty became aware that a big, smiling native was walking behind Paula, with some half-dozen violet-coloured mats over his arms.

"Paula, we don't want that porter at our heels all the time," said Madge. "Send him away!"

"Precisely! Howevah, theah's a most extraordinary difficulty in making oneself properly

understood!" said Paula. "They don't seem to gwasp one's meaning, don't you know!"

"Have you really bought all those mats?" asked Betty, half-laughing.

"Yes, wather! And cheap, too—wemarkably cheap! I am not aware pwecisely what I have paid; howevah, I held out a handful of money, and as he took the lot, I pwesume he's satisfied. As I am sure I am!" Paula beamed.

Then she turned upon the browy merchant. "Palace!" she shrieked, with a gesture in the direction of the Sultan of Nakara's marvellous residence. "Er, pway deliver the wugs at the palace, will you?"

The man looked bewildered, not understanding a word.

"Don't frighten him, Paula—"

"Fwighten him, bai Jove! Ho wather fwightens me, with those great teeth and eyes of his! I—weally, I wish he would take the wetches wugs to the palace. I keep on telling him—palace, palace! Savvy, palace?" she asked desperately.

At last the man broke out into a smile of understanding—not because he understood Paula's talk, but because he had misunderstood one of her gestures.

With a magnificent bow of respect, he suddenly gave her all the rugs to hold. There were six of them, and Paula almost collapsed as they were piled, one after another, into her arms.

"Oh, healp!" bleated Paula. "I asked him to cawwy on, and he thinks I mean cawwy wugs!"

"We'll have a crowd round," laughed Betty. "You duffer, Paula! Now you've done it, getting landed with enough carpets to—"

"Shall I put them down?" panted poor Paula.

"Don't do that; they'll think you are going to open a conjuring entertainment," chuckled Madge. "What a sensation you are making, Paula!"

The aristocrat of the Fourth Form at Morcove, usually the most amiable of girls, was now looking desperate. She and her three chums were the only Britishers here, and ever since they entered the thronged bazaar they had created amused interest. Now it seemed to poor Paula that hundreds of men and women and children—thousands of them!—were gathering round, to watch what she did with the rugs!

What she would have done with them in the end there is no saying, if Rose of the Desert had

not finished haggling with the pottery merchant on Polly's account, and come to the rescue again.

"Oh, Wose, Wose!" Paula groaned with relief. "Pway express my wegwet to all these people, because I can't converse with them! Pway take hold of the wugs, too! Thanks, thanks, Wose! You are a bwick!"

The beautiful face of Rose of the Desert became about as mirthful as she ever allowed it to be, whilst she put the gaudy rugs together, and then handed them over to a boy, for him to take to the palace.

One guttural word or so from Rose of the Desert, and the boy dashed off proudly with his load, whilst the staring onlookers began to disperse, murmuring their comments.

"Lo, these fair strangers from the country of Britain, with whom our master the Sultan is friendly; they are rich, very rich," said one bearded man to his companion.

"Yea, and with an open hand do they buy in our market place," was the gratified rejoinder. "Wherefore, is the word of our master the Sultan proven; to be friends with that great country of Britain is good for Nakara!"

"Yea!"

And they fell to talking of the happy day it had been for the whole desert kingdom to which they belonged, when the aged Sultan declared for progress, prophesying that prosperity would follow in its wake.

On the other side of the great mountain range, to the south of Nakara, there was a rival kingdom whose Sultan was all for the old system of barbaric despotism. There, in the land of Susahiah, corruption and cruelty were still the rule; but here in Nakara, where a wiser, better-hearted monarch reigned, the old order had changed indeed!

Unchanged, however, was the daily life of the ancient city from the romantic point of view.

In every detail this great bazaar through which the chums of Morcove School were making their way this morning, was the bazaar of olden times. For a thousand years and more had the same kind of wugs, and pottery, and brasswork been set out upon the cobbles, under gaudy awnings, for people to haggle over in quarrelsome fashion.

"And it's wonderful!" Polly Linton exclaimed, in an ecstasy, as she and her chums worked their way through the scene of noisy bargaining. "Close your eyes, and your ears would make you think you are in a madhouse! Open your eyes—"

"Bai Jove, it's the Awabian Nights, yes, wather! Geals, just look at these wipping wugs again!"

"More rugs!" grinned Polly. "Come off it, Paula! How do you think we are going to get the souvenirs home? All across the desert by camel, remember!"

"I am nevah likely to forget the camel widing," sighed Paula. "I wogard that mode of pwo-gression, geals, as being remarkably free from any chance of wesepe. Give me a first-class compartment of the Morcove Express—"

"Or the old easy-chair in Study 12!" said Betty. "Yes, wather!"

An aged beggar, squatting on the cobbles, raised one cry in the native language which the girls had come to understand:

"Alms, for the love of Allah—alms!"

His skinny hands were stretched out to the "foreigners," in supplication, and for the twentieth time that morning Betty and Co. gave their dole.

They knew, too, just what all the gibberish meant which he sang after them—his blessings on

their youthful heads, and might they have the best of good fortune to the end of their days!

"Well, we are not exactly having bad luck as it is!" was Polly's amused comment. "Guests at the Sultan's own palace, along with Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Redgrave—"

"And Naomer to keep us in fits of laughter over her English lessons!" added Betty.

"And when the time comes for us to go home to England, taking Naomer with us, chimed in Madge, "another romantic journey all across the great desert!"

"On camels—"

"Oh, don't!" groaned Paula sadly. "Howevah, I quite agree, geals, we weally are having a wight woyal time!"

They were. It seemed the very best of luck that they had been sent out from England, under proper escort, because the good old sultan wanted to see specimens of the British girlhood that was to be found at Morcove School. But was that luck to hold to the end!

Why should it not? Betty and Co. would have retorted gaily, if they had been asked that question. For they were in complete ignorance of dangers which menaced them.

They little knew how close at hand there lurked at least one deadly enemy, or to what terrible doom they might be going when they and Naomer Nakara should set forth across the great desert on the long journey to England!

A journey that would land them safe and sound, in the end, at the gates of Morcove School—so the chums imagined. But, oh, how differently from that the journey was to finish, if only spying and treachery could achieve its deadly purpose!

#### Naomer Comes to School.

"NOW, girls—"

"Yes, wather, Miss Wedgwavel! We quite wealise, bai Jove, it's time we did a few lessons! Howevah—"

"Time? I should think it is," laughed Miss Redgrave, amused by the breathless, excitable state in which her four scholars had turned up at last at the palace "schoolroom."

Nothing less like the Fourth-Form classroom at Morcove could have been imagined. Polly Linton's frivolous comment on the marbled walls and great pillars, and a paved floor strewn with rugs, was that "it would make a great teashop!" And Paula had said: "Yes, wather!"

"Oh, you should have come with us to the bazaar, Miss Redgrave!" Polly cried joyously.

"We saw—"

"Yes, dear, but lessons—"

"And Paula bought a hundred dozen Turkey carpets—"

"Bai Jove, I wonder if they're come, those wipping wugs of mine! Howevah—"

"And, Miss Redgrave—"

"Yes, girls; only we really must do a bit of work for once!" the youthful mistress smiled. "We were to start school-work in the palace, with Naomer as an extra scholar, the day after we got here. And we have been here three days now—"

"Three such ripping days—"

"Yes, wather! Geals, how the time is flying—"

"It is, indeed," the mistress agreed dryly. "Eleven o'clock by my watch—and we were to begin serious work at nine-thirty! You vanished; Naomer vanished; and here I've been waiting—"

"Hello, Naomer dear! Hello!" all four girls now chorused, boisterously, as Naomer Nakara

suddenly glided in through a curtained entrance to the sumptuous apartment. "Work, Naomer! Lessons!"

"Hello, yes!" the native girl echoed, making one of her pretty efforts to pick up the girl's breezy phrases as fast as she could. "Work is ripping, you say, eh? Ripping!"

"Is it, bai Jove!" sighed Paula. "A necessary evil, if you ask me! However—"

"Now, girls!" Miss Redgrave appealed, with a look that showed she treated this bit of schooling as more or less of a joke. "We can make a start at last. Answer to your names, girls, just as if I were calling the roll at Morocco; then Naomer will see how things go! Betty Barton!"

"Present!"

"Polly Linton?"

"Present!"

"Madge Minden?"

"Present!"

"Paula Creel?"

"Yes, wather!"

"Naomer Nakara?"

"I give you present, yes—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Miss Redgrave checked her own laughter, and started to explain.

"Naomer dear, when the girls say "Present," that means they are here. I shall call your name again, and you will say—"

"I am here, with present!"

There was another peal of laughter, in which Naomer joined, although she looked puzzled as well as mirthful.

Then suddenly she pouted ruefully.

"Oh, I never be an English girl!" she sighed.

"You laugh at me always!"

"No, dear. But, you see—"

"Bah, I not give you present now; I go away!" she informed Miss Redgrave, and marched towards the curtained doorway. "It is all silly, this lesson!"

"Naomer darling," coaxed Miss Redgrave. "girls in England do not run away when they don't like the lessons. They—"

"Well, I shall run!"

And she did!

To the great merriment of Betty and Co., and the amusement of Miss Redgrave herself, the little wild thing flashed out of sight between the curtains, and those in the "schoolroom" heard her light feet pattering along a great corridor.

"One of you go and fetch her back," said Miss Redgrave, with a laugh. "If I go, she will lead me a race all over the palace! Paula, you go."

"With the greatest of pleasure, bai Jove!" beamed that young lady hastening towards the exit.

"Use tact, Paula!"

"Yes, wather!" answered the aristocrat of the Fourth Form, as she passed out.

"Well," Miss Redgrave exclaimed then. "I suppose you girls had better be making a start, just for form's sake. Come round me—that's best—and then I'll hear you read some French."

So Betty, Polly, and Madge made a start at the easy lesson, whilst Paula, outside in a marbled corridor, caught her first glimpse of Naomer, playing a sort of hide-and-seek at the far end.

"Naomer deah," Paula purred, going after her in leisurely fashion; "one minute, bai Jove! I've a few grave remarks to make!"

Thus enticed, Naomer allowed the girl to approach her, and then Paula began.

"I wealise, Naomer deah, it must be extwa-

ordinarily aggwavating for you to have to concentwate upon work. Work, Naomer deah, is, however, a painful necessity; a necessary evil, as I pweviously remarked."

"You come and see my doves," said Naomer, tugging Paula by the sleeve.

"Yes, wather! However, I am not quite sure, Naomer, whether looking at your doves is quite in order! At the present moment, we are all undah the painful necessity of concentwating upon the Fwrench language."

"They are so beautiful, those doves. And I love you," said Naomer, stroking Paula's face.

"You come with me!"

"I wealise, Naomer dear, I was advised to use tact. Yes, weal, I wather think I will come with you," Paula assented, and next minute they were out in the blazing sunshine, where Naomer made a



**PAULA'S PURCHASES!** Depositing the rugs in Paula's arms, the native stepped back, bowing. "Oh, healp!" bleated Paula. "I asked him to cawwy on, and he thinks I mean cawwy wugs!"

whole flock of doves flutter about her by giving a cooing sound.

"You come and see my monkey!" Naomer said suddenly.

"Er—weal, having been advised to use tact!" Paula again assented, and so she was led to a corner of the courtyard, where a monkey was bounding about in his roomy cage.

Naomer got him out, talking native endearments whilst she fondled him. And then suddenly she said a word that must have meant: "Go!" For the monkey "went!"

He made a clean leap from Naomer's arms on to Paula's shoulders.

"Healp!" yelled the aristocrat of the Fourth

Form at Morcove. "My gwacious! Gurr, shurr—gurraway! Bai jove—" "Ello, 'ello! That is wipping joke!" Naomer cried gleefully. "Now I am amuse!"

"My deah Naomer—pway call him off! Take him away!" wailed poor Paula. "He's wuffling my heah, bai Jove! He—oh! Gwacious!"

"You take him to school. School good for monkey, not for me!" Naomer advised.

Paula, as a matter of fact, did set off across the courtyard as if to return in haste to the palace "schoolroom." And the monkey was riding on her shoulders.

But that was not to say that Paula wished him to go with her!

Next minute, some of the attendants about the place were frightened out of their wits by an alarming apparition.

It was Paula, careering along like a lunatic, with the monkey enjoying a pick-a-back!

#### The One Who Watched.

**H**ELTER-SKELTER the aristocratic schoolgirl dashed back to the palace, "classroom," where Miss Redgrave and the three students of French turned quite pale with alarm at the sound of so much squealing and yelping. They knew that voice!

"But what can have happened?" Miss Redgrave exclaimed in great alarm. "Oh, we must run and see at once!"

She said "Oh!" in a far different tone next instant, as Paula Creel suddenly dashed in past the curtains, with the monkey now perched on her head.

"Miss Wedgwave! Pway—" "

"Gracious, Paula—" "

"Ha, ha, ha! Where did you find your little brother, Paula?" chuckled Polly. "Here, Jacko, come on then! Have a bite at that!" And the madcap held out a French grammar book invitingly.

Down leapt Jacko on the instant, and made a grab at the book, biting out a page to taste it. As for Paula, she would have rushed away to escape the rascal's further attentions, only just then Naomer stood revealed between the parted curtains.

"Present!" Naomer said mockingly. "'Ello! Is this an English school?"

It certainly was not a specimen of a class-time decorum at Morcove or any other British school. Even Miss Redgrave was in fits of laughter over the way Jacko was alternately conning the French grammar and nibbling at it, whilst poor Paula set her ruffled hair to rights.

"I am afraid, girls, we shall have to abandon the lessons as being hopeless for this morning," the mistress said, with an attempt at gravity, after Jacko had been carried back to his cage, in proud possession of the grammar. "What the Sultan will say, I dread to think! We came out to Nakara to show him what we could do!"

"Well, if his royal highness had seen Paula Creel coming along just now, he would have known that some of us can do wonders," Polly chuckled. "It isn't every girl who can—" "

"Naow, Polly deah! Pway don't be fwivolous—" "

"It isn't every girl who can go sixty miles an hour, with a monkey riding piggy-back—ha, ha, ha! Paula, the press photographers ought to have been here. You looked—" "

"Polly, once and for all!" Paula fairly howled.

"Do you wealise that I was fwightened out of my life?"

"What about the poor monkey?" Polly asked. "Shame, to lead him such a dance! I shouldn't be surprised if he has a nervous breakdown now. Especially if he eats the whole ninety pages of that French grammar—and the cover!"

"How fwivolous you are," sighed Paula. "And the worst of it is, Naomer is just such another as you, Polly! Weally, with that gee! at Morcove my life won't be worth living!"

But it was just like Paula to follow this complaint with a forgiving look. Without Polly to tease her, Paula Creel would have felt that life was not worth living.

Miss Redgrave made the announcement that work would be resumed—with an emphasis on "resumed"—at three in the afternoon, and then she departed, leaving the four chums and Naomer to their own devices. In a little while, however, the bong-bong of some enormous gong dinned through the palace, proclaiming the midday hour, and that was the signal for the girls to rush to the main gateway and look for Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton.

That lady and gentleman had talked of coming along to the palace at twelve o'clock, to be in attendance upon the Sultan.

Standing just inside the guarded gateway, the girls scanned the wide street that was weltering in the midday sunshine, but they could not see their British friends. They were still watching, when Rose of the Desert suddenly joined them in her own quiet, mysterious way.

Were Betty and Co. quite alive to the vigilant eye which the beautiful girl, herself African born, was keeping upon them these days? Perhaps not. They were fond of her; thought all the world of that devotion towards them which had been proved many times over in the past. But—

No, it was hardly possible for them to be aware of the many ways in which this dark-skinned beauty was setting herself to guard the girls during their present sojourn in the desert city. Rose of the Desert was no kill-joy. She loved to see the girls having a happy time, and when there were perils to be on guard against, it seemed to be her duty to watch out for them, not create alarm by talking of them.

"Look!" Madge Minden suddenly exclaimed to her girl companions, after they had all exchanged a smiling word with their faithful attendant. "Now that it has gone twelve o'clock, all sorts of people are coming along to the palace—to have audience with the Sultan, I suppose."

"It seems to be the case every day," Betty remarked. "And what a fine idea it is, for the old Sultan to be ready to grant a personal hearing to all who come in real need of help."

The girls were still watching the quaintly-garbed figures that came trickling in through the wide-flung gate, when a dark figure attracted their attention, going out of the palace—the sombre figure of a very old woman in widow's black.

"There's one of the poor souls whom the Sultan helped on the very day we got here," Betty spoke on quietly. "The poor widow—what was her name? A curious one—"

"Obed Jehathra," said Madge. "Yes, hers was a sad case, if you like."

"And what a brick the sultan was—only don't tell his royal highness I called him that!" chuckled Polly. "To let the old woman lodge for the present in the palace was jolly decent of him, I thought!"

"Yes, wather!"

The old crone, as if divining that the girls were discussing her sad plight, whilst she was hobbling past them towards the gateway, suddenly halted and faced towards them. That is to say, she turned in their direction, but she did not meet their eyes. Her muffled head remained drooping on the stooping shoulders, investing her sombre figure with a very tragic air.

Then, suddenly, she stretched forth one cloaked arm as if bestowing a blessing upon the girls for the way they, too, had helped her, and at that moment her pose was highly dramatic.

"She means well, no doubt," Polly smiled; "but she looks too much like some old witch for my liking!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Geals, she makes me shiver!" Paula said. "Howevah, heah come Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, bai Jove, and so now to go into court!"

"Yes, let's!" Polly approved, joyfully. "It is always as good as pantomime!"

They ran to meet Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, with Naomer amongst them, and then turned back in a chattering, joking party to the palace. But Rose of the Desert did not go with them.

A thoughtful, picturesque figure in the blazing sunshine, she stood alone just inside the gateway, watching Obed Jehathra stuffing forth into the teeming streets.

#### The Spies of Susahlah.

WITH her shuffling, infirm step, the stooping woman in black traversed the age-old streets of Nakara's city, seeming to have little purpose in her journey out of doors.

In every respect she appeared to be just a very old crone who had suddenly taken it into her head to have a hobble in the sunshine. Now and then she paused uncertainly, darting a glance this way and that, still without raising her head; but this was only at busy corners, where perhaps she was afraid of getting jostled by the throng.

In Nakara, one never knew what was coming round the corner. It might be a runaway donkey, or a batch of camels just come in from the desert, or a seething crowd of men and boys all excited about nothing. Again, it might be some rich merchant's wife, going by with her attendants, or the merchant himself, the very picture of solemn dignity, with robes a-flutter as he stalked thoughtfully along.

So it was little wonder that the feeble old woman was very cautious, and kept close to the white-washed walls when she could. An insignificant figure she made, and yet many took notice of her, thrusting alms upon her, along with a compassionate word, because of her aged and her lonely state.

But it was a small city, after all, and even her slow step carried her into an almost lifeless part within a few minutes of her hobbling away from the palace. Going down one shady alley, she came to a flight of worn steps that led up to the top of the city's ancient wall, and these unrailled steps she ascended very slowly.

Thus she emerged at last upon the wall, which was still mounted with a guard by night, although by day it served as a promenade for the dwellers in the crowded city. The cool of the evening was the favourite time for Nakara's happy citizens to take a turn upon the encircling wall, with its view over the vast desert. At this midday hour, the woman found herself to be almost the only person there.

Almost, but not quite!

For, as she meandered along, apparently enjoying the open air, and taking note of the brilliant flowers that grew out of the mud of the wall, she came upon a figure squatting upon the ground, with a vacant stare in his eyes.

"Alms, good mother; for the love of Allah, alms!" he droned, as he heard the woman's passing step. "Blind, blind; alms for one whose eyes no longer behold the glory of Nakara!"

"Thou poor one," the old woman responded, halting to bestow some mite of charity. "Yea, 'tis meet that I should share with thee a little of what is mine."

"'Tis most meet, Nassina, since thou art my own dear wife!" the whining beggar murmured softly, whilst the woman stooped over him as if to hear his tale of woe. "I, whom men pity for my blindness, must not look at thee, O light of my eyes! But I have ears to hear!"

"Then listen," the woman whispered; and hers, too, was a changed voice now. She was no more an aged, infirm woman, than he was without his sight. "I have found out this much at the palace. The child Naomer—"

"May she be soon in the dungeons of Susahlah!" the man struck in, with quiet ferocity. "For that she is a daughter of our royal master's enemy!"

"Yea," the woman rejoined. "Hear me, then, Fuan, my husband. When I come again to thee, I may know the day and means by which the child Naomer goes to the country of England."

"'Tis good, Nassina mine. And the English girls—"

"They, too, thou knowest, will travel with her."

"So will our master the Sultan bring in more than one captive in the net!" the squatting man muttered. "Naomer, the future ruler of this kingdom of Nakara, and the damsels from afar!"

"Ye forget one other," the woman said softly. "The one who is of our own country of Susahlah, but no longer a servant of the master's!"

"Rose of the Desert—"

"Yea! She who denounced us as spies when we fell in with their caravan in the desert; she must go with us to Susahlah, Fuan!"

"To the dungeons in the Sultan's palace, there to live out her days in darkness and torment!" the man rejoined, with a gloating smack of the lips. "Yea, 'tis certain our master the sultan will have great reward and praise for us, Nassina mine! Such a haul as that, see thou!"

Nassina Ben Jezrel stole a glance around, without raising her hooded head.

"I may not linger in talk, Fuan. Do thou await me here every day, and I will come. It may be that even to-morrow I shall know when they leave Nakara! And then—"

"Then for the mountains, thou and I, and over them to Susahlah—yea!" her husband struck in. "Ye do well, Fuan, and I have pride in thee!"

"I do it for the royal master, to win his pleasure and obtain advancement for us both," she murmured, stepping away.

Thus were the cunning pair, spies acting for the fiendish Sultan of Susahlah, keeping in touch with each other.

By posing as a poor, friendless widow, Nassina Ben Jezrel had obtained a footing inside the palace at Nakara, and everything she spied out there she was reporting in secret to her husband. And in all this lay the terrible peril with which Naomer Nakara—and not that girl alone, but even the chums of Morocco School—were threatened.

Nassina shuffled along in the blinding sunshine of the African day, and perhaps she was sculling



**NAOMER REBELS!** "When the girls means they are here, Naomer," said Miss Redgrave. "Bah! I cannot understand your English talk!" retorted Naomer. "I am no present. I go!"

to herself at the way things were going. How swiftly would that smile have vanished, however, had she glimpsed a certain girlish figure in Eastern raiment that was lurking not far off!

Back yonder, at the top of the steps leading out on to the city wall, that girlish figure was lurking now. She was peeping out with extreme caution every now and then; a spy herself, watching other spies!

Presently, when the sham widow-woman had shuffled on out of sight, the native girl stepped out on to the broad walk and sauntered forward, like one more lonely promenader who wished to enjoy the free air, after the pent-up streets. A graceful figure she made, with her half-veiled face and flowing garments, taking each step upon the ball of the foot after the manner of her people. She drew level with the man squatting there as a beggar, and he whined again:

"Alms, O damsel, for mine ears tell me thou art young and very fair! Alms, alms for the afflicted one who will never see the glory of Nakara again!"

"Blind, art thou?" the girl murmured, pausing to cast a few coins into his cupped hands.

"Blind!" She resumed her gliding walk, and under her breath she said to herself, smiling excitedly the while:

"Blind! Ye will not find that Rose of the Desert

is blind, O cunning one! She has eyes that will watch thee and the woman, too, a little while longer. And then—she will denounce thee yet again!

#### A Scare for Paula.

**T**HAT night the Sultan of Nakara gave a great feast in honour of his British guests.

In one of the vast marbled halls of the beautiful palace, a wonderful banquet was served to at least a hundred guests, amongst whom were the chums of Morcove School, Miss Redgrave, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton, and Rose of the Desert.

Naomer was there, of course, the darling of all hearts. It was good to see how the oldest and most solemn-visaged native advisers of the aged Sultan relaxed into kindly smiles as Naomer moved amongst them saucily.

As for the Sultan himself, again and again Betty and Co. saw how lovingly his dim eyes were dwelling upon this beautiful granddaughter of his, the last of his royal house and the future ruler of the kingdom.

The old man was too infirm to go about amongst the throng of guests, after the banquet had come to an end and certain other festivities had begun. But that did not mean that he was aloof from the guests. Mr. Hamilton came round presently, collecting the girls from various parts of the gay scene, because the aged ruler wished to have a word with them.

"My gwacious, am I presentable?" was Paula's immediate concern. "I wouldn't be a discred to Morcove for worlds, geals! And I do feel wather wuffed!"

"A word in your ear, Paula," smiled Mr. Hamilton. "His royal highness remarked how pretty you all looked this evening—you especially!" "Oh, weally? Bai Jove!" Paula beamed. "Haow extwemely good of him! Geals, do you heah that, bai Jove?"

"I'm jealous," Madge said jestingly.

"I knew I wouldn't make a big hit with the sultan," grinned Polly. "He doesn't like mad-caps! At any rate, one's enough for him, and he's got one in Naomer!"

"Lucky girl, Paula," was Betty's smiling remark. "The only one of us he cares for!"

This, needless to say, was all nonsense. The girls had only to be taken up to the throne-like seat at the top of the hall, where the sultan reclined, for him to convince them in what high favour they all stood with him.

"You, they tell me, are captain of a number of girls at the school in England?" he said, with a kindly smile for Betty Barton. "It is a good thing for one to be chosen as captain over others. Do they pay respect to your authority?"

Betty was blushing confusedly. His royal highness evidently imagined that a Fern captain was giving orders from morning till night!

"In England, when my Naomer is there with you," he pursued earnestly, "see to it that she gives you all obedience. I would have her put all her faith in your friendship, Miss Captain—that is the word, perhaps?"

Betty faltered something to the effect that she was sure Naomer would soon fall in with the ways and traditions of a great school like Morcove, and then the dotting grandfather nodded in a gratified way.

"So will the desire of my heart be fulfilled," he commented happily. "In the evening of my days, I think of my kingdom's future, and how great a

one it may be, with Naomer as its ruler! Ruling it with the wisdom and fair play—so you call it, eh?—that she will have learnt in England, that country of progress and freedom.”

Then he had a word for Polly.

“And you”—he smiled upon her—“you will help to make my Naomer very happy, far away from her native land? Ah, I have seen the laughter in your eyes, and I know that yours is a spirit that brightens the darkest day! As for this friend of yours—”

He was now smiling upon Madge, who accordingly felt very shy.

“What was it my good friend, Mr. Hamilton, was saying of you! I think it was that you are a great musician! We are going to hear you give great music presently.”

“Oh, sir, but—there’s no piano!” jerked out Madge.

She had a sudden awful fear that she was to be ordered to make music on one of the native instruments, or else have her head chopped off!

“Dear child,” the ruler said, in his bland, grandfatherly way, “I think you will find that Mr. Hamilton has discovered a piano. Now, a word to this other damsel—”

Paula Creel immediately made a sweeping curtsey, one that she had rehearsed in the privacy of the magnificent sleeping apartment which the girls were occupying together.

“Your royal highness—”

“You would speak with me?” he broke in, with a pleasant look. “You have some request to ask, perhaps?”

“Er—ah—weally, bai Jove! not pweicisely, your woyal highness,” stammered Paula. “Howevuh, since your woyal highness is so good gwacious—I mean gwreat and gwacious—”

Paula shot flustered glances at her chums, who were trying not to titter.

“I merely wish to remark, your woyal highness; your woyal highness has been pleased to express his approval of my appearance! Theahfore—”

“Go on, Paula; that’s the style,” encouraged Mr. Hamilton, enjoying the bewildered look on the Sultan’s face. “You are getting on famously!”

“I merely wish to remark,” floundered on Paula, with the intention of being extremely polite, “it would have been very gwatisfying to me to bring a better waviety of fwocks. Howevah, your woyal highness will appreciate the fact that we had to come a long way fwom England. And camels are wather twying cweatures—yes, wather!”

“Paula do not like the camel!” Naomer suddenly informed her amazed-looking grandfather, as she joined the throng about the throne. “She say he bump her! So, one day I shall give her my horse to ride.”

The Sultan nodded his approval of that idea.

“The white Arab that was my present on thy last birthday? Yes, let all the English girls ride him,” he said. “One day, when the lessons in the palace are over, that sport would give delight to our English friends. Naomer, light of my eyes, how do you like the lessons?”

Fortunately for Naomer, perhaps, she had no time to answer. The tinkling of tambourines was suddenly heard from some anteroom adjoining the hall, and the sultan was too good a host to keep the guests in talk when they could be amused with novel entertainments.

“We will talk of it some other time,” he smiled graciously. “Now there is music and dancing for our British friends to see.”

He gave a quiet sign to some attendant, and next instant the curtains at the bottom end of the hall flew apart, and at least a dozen dancing girls came running forward, whilst other girls ran behind, carrying musical instruments.

The chums of Morcove took up a position in a corner of the hall, all eyes for what was coming. The thrumming music began, and there was such a rhythm in it that Madge Minden, for one, was soon keeping time to it with her head.

Then the dancers, having prostrated themselves for an instant at the foot of the sultan’s throne, leapt to their feet and began one of the skilful native dances.

“Bai Jove, haow extwemely gwaceful!” Paula breathed. “Why can’t I do that, geals?”

“I do it,” Naomer whispered her; “so I teach you, yes? When I am at school with you, we not go to lessons, no. We have a dance; that is better?”

“Yes, wather,” Paula agreed, although she had her doubts about even a Sultan’s daughter being able to do just as she pleased when she got to Morcove!

One thing was clear, Naomer really was going to be a bit of a handful, before she settled down to the routine of a British boarding-school.

Presently the trained dancers finished what had been a truly fascinating performance, and then one of them danced alone. She was the leader of the party and the most beautiful and expert of all.

Louder and faster thrummed the lute-like music, with some weird clashing of cymbals and tinkling



**PAULA'S LATEST HEADRESS!**

“Ha, ha, ha!” chuckled Polly Linton. “Where did you find your little brother Paula?”



of tambourines, and still the clever girl kept up her dazzling performance, flashing around as if she did not know what it was to feel exhaustion.

At the end of the dance, however, when she came to a dead stop with a final clash of the instruments, she was almost ready to drop. For a moment after the applause had broken out, she stood drooping breathlessly; then she flung up her lovely head and smiled her thanks, and skipped away, childishly delighted at having pleased the guests.

"Bwavo, bwavo!" beamed Paula, clapping away as hard as anybody.

"Encore!" Polly called. "Ang-co-er! I say, we are having a jolly evening!"

"Yes, wather! Howevah," Paula exclaimed, in an altered tone of great surprise, "gweat Scott, geals! That looks wemarkably like a Bwedish piano they are bwinging in!"

And a piano it was!

The girls learned afterwards that Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton had had one for some time at their British residency in the city, and it had been brought along—on purpose to give the old Sultan a chance of hearing Madge!

"Come along, Madge—"

"Oh, Mr. Hamilton! Mrs. Hamilton!" gasped Madge, as that lady and gentleman came up to her. "No—"

"Yes, dear—"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, Madge deah, I only wish I could do something besides keep up appearances!" Paula said, with good-natured envy.

The aristocrat of the Fourth Form had only spoken in fun. All at once, however, she found herself wondering whether her "appearances" were as good as they should be. In other words, it was time for Paula to take a peep at herself in the glass—a thing she did about every five minutes at home in England.

So, whilst Madge was needing a great deal of persuasion to be got to the piano, Paula slipped away from the thronged-hall. She was saying to herself that it would not take two ticks to run a comb through her hair; and then she could hasten back in time to hear Madge's contribution to the happy evening.

Nothing but a real desire to look spick and span would have taken Paula away from the brilliant gathering, for this little errand of hers meant going along some very awe-inspiring corridors. It was not yet dark out of doors, but here in the palace there were passages and alcoves that were majestically gloomy at the best of times. Now they were full of a dim half-light that was particularly cheerless to Paula after the bright scene she had come away from.

She kept on her way, although her pretty eyes darted nervous glances to right and left more and more frequently the further she got from the crowded hall. No one else seemed to be about, but she never knew whether or not some invisible guard was stationed in one of the many dark recesses. She hoped that it was not so, for Paula much preferred to be alone, rather than have the feeling that at any moment a dark-skinned stalwart sentinel was going to startle her.

And then, suddenly, she did get startled—by a pair of glaring eyes!

In the instant that Paula stopped dead with a little gasp of fear, she felt sure that here was somebody crouching down to spring at her; for the eyes were very low down in the gloom. Then, as she watched them in a fascinated way, the truth flashed upon her.

They were the eyes of a crouching beast, not those of a human being!

Great goodness, then, what was it—a tiger, or what?

Paula's wits went all out of gear. If she had only kept her nerve, she would soon have discovered that the animal was a perfectly harmless one, though it came of a savage class. It was, in fact, one of the tame leopards that were kept about the palace, just as dogs are kept about a British home.

But Paula lost her nerve. She saw those glaring eyes, and little else besides the eyes, and they were enough for her. Whatever the animal was, it was something even worse—oh, a thousand times worse—than Jacko the monkey!

With a gasping yelp of terror, Paula dashed away in flight—and when she looked round, the beast was coming after her!

"It is the Spy!"

IN the semi-darkness, the terrified aristocrat of the Fourth Form at Morcove could not see that the creature was merely gambolling after her playfully. On and on rushed poor Paula, and now she realised that she had missed her way amongst the maze of passages, and was not going to reach the safety of her and her chums' apartment.

On and on!

Frantically the panting girl dashed to the end of another dim passage, turned into one at right angles to it, and then took her chance at the very first door she came to.

She was looking wildly behind her as she fumbled with the lock. There was the terrible creature, crouching as if to spring at her!

"Healp—healp!" Paula gasped feebly, as she got the door open and simply whirled into the room beyond.

Next instant she had slammed the door shut between herself and the animal; but that was not sufficient comfort for Paula in her present state of terror. Some of the evening light was flooding into this room she had blundered into for sanctuary, and she saw that a woman was here—an old woman in deep black.

Paula rushed at her as a frightened child rushes to its mother for protection.

"Save me! Pway excuse me, too!" panted the agitated girl. "Outside your woom—a dweadful cweature! Healp—healp!"

Then, suddenly, comedy was changed to thrilling drama.

Paula was taking hold of the woman in black, because the girl realised that her English speech could not be understood, and she had simply got to explain by tugs and gestures. She was thus very close to the woman, who shook her off roughly, at the same time drawing herself up.

The bowed figure of the widow Obed Jehathra became, for that one instant, a different figure altogether. Even Paula, in her wild excitement, noticed the change.

She noticed, too, how the woman tried to resume her usual appearance before the change had been remarked.

Too late!

"Why—why?" Paula gasped, forgetting all about the pursuing beast, as she suffered this fresh shock. "You ara not an old woman at all! Gweat goodness, you are someone I've seen before—and I remember where!"

She backed towards the door excitedly, saying, gaspingly, to herself:

"It's the spy—the spy that Wose of Desert

denounced, on our way to Nakara! The same spy—in the palace—oh!”

The impulse was upon her to rush from the room and shout the thrilling news all over the palace. Then she remembered the lurking beast outside the door.

What was she to do?

Little chance did she get for deciding.

With a furious rush, the woman was upon the dismayed girl, muttering something in the native that clearly meant:

“No, you shall not give the alarm!”

Strong hands took hold of Paula Creel, and dragged her away from the door. She tried to call out for help, and then one of those powerful hands closed over her mouth, whilst the other shook her violently.

For a girl of Paula's stamp such rough treatment was too rough to be borne. A dazed feeling gave place to a swooning state, and in a few moments she was lying mute and still at the woman's feet, in a dead faint!

#### To the Dungeons.

THE instant the girl had dropped senseless to the floor, Nassina, the spy, stood away from the inert form, panting harshly after the exertions of the sudden violent scuffle.

Reassured that Paula was not shamming a fainting condition, the woman then stepped quickly to the door and listened. All was silence, and she opened the door a few inches and looked out.

Her cautious glance at once beheld the tame beast that was still lurking in the passage. But she had only to say a soft word of command to it, in the native tongue, for the docile creature to go padding off.

Then Nassina closed the door again, and looked down upon the swooning girl.

For the daring spy it was a desperate situation, and she knew it.

Here was a girl who had recognised her—a girl who had been ready to shout through the palace that one of the same spies who had escaped during the journey across the desert was in their very midst!

“Meddlesome fool!” was the English equivalent of what Nassina was thinking furiously, as she glared down upon the swooning girl. “For her mistake in blundering in upon me like that, and finding out who I am, she deserves to live not another hour! All my plans undone again—and by such a mishap as this!”

Swiftly she knelt down to see if Paula was showing any signs of coming round. The poor girl was still totally unconscious, however. Apart from the shock of the struggle, she had struck her head in falling. So much Nassina now discovered, and it drew an evil smile of satisfaction to the woman's sinister face.

She got to her feet very softly, and peered out once again into the passage.

No one!

Then her desperate intention became apparent. She went back to Paula and took her up as if the lifeless burden was but a featherweight. Without a sound she carried the limp form out of the room and along the passage.

It seemed a rash thing for the woman to be doing; but she knew what she was about right enough.

Not for nothing had she spent several days in the palace of Nakara, picking up every bit of gossip concerning Naomer and the British girls,

and at the same time getting to know all the ins and outs of the anomalous old edifice!

There had been times when the supposed widow, Obed Jehathra, left to her own resources, had made prowling expeditions through the palace, and some of her secret reconnoitring of the building had taken her deep down underground.

Down there, some of them forty feet below the level of the ground, were ancient cells and dungeons that had never harboured a miserable captive during the reign of the present Sultan. Nassina, the spy, had ferreted them out in secret fashion, glad to know of hiding-places to which she might resort in any sudden emergency.

And now, after carrying Paula only a few steps along the passage, Nassina turned into a dark alcove with the limp burden, opened a massive door, and went padding silently down a pitch-dark flight of stone steps.

At the bottom of this flight she was confronted by another door of stout timbers. This she pushed open without setting down Paula, and then, stepping past it, closed the door behind her.

The air of the underground passage was already cold enough; but it grew danker still as Nassina glided along, not the least bit tired by the burden that she carried. For, after yet another stout door, there was a further flight of steps leading downwards.

After that it was a case of shuffling cautiously along the labyrinthine passages, to get to the very remotest of all the old dungeons, whose doors opened on to these stone corridors.

They were dark, unventilated cells, in which doomed captives used to languish to death, in the bad old days when the kingdom of Nakara was as barbaric as any of its neighbouring ones. That the dungeons were empty now, and would never harbour another victim of oppression and cruelty, was proof of the present Sultan's hatred of injustice and tyranny.

In this groping darkness Nassina came at last to the dead end of a passage. When her collision with the damp wall told her that she could go no further, she turned into a dungeon doorway that was close at hand, perhaps thinking to herself this was far enough!

And indeed it was.

Left her, with one door after another closed against her, what hope was there for poor Paula Creel, when she should come to her senses?

Her loudest cries would never be heard, any more than the cries of doomed captives had been heard above ground in the olden times.

“Stay thou there!” Nassina hissed pitilessly, setting down the still unconscious girl upon the clammy pavement of the dungeon. “After all, thy fate is perhaps better than the one that is decreed for thy friends and Naomer, when they have been brought to Susahlah! There are dungeons awaiting them there—and torture, too, perchance!”

She turned the senseless form with her foot, then turned to creep away; but after the first few stealthy steps she stopped dead.

Unless her hearing had tricked her, someone was in the passage outside the dungeon!

Quick as a flash the daring woman darted behind the open door. She knew what she must do—be in hiding there if anybody came into the dungeon, and then slip out behind the person, whoever it was.

But the owner of that soft step, which Nassina had heard come only as far as the open doorway, had stopped.

Something went click, in the darkness, and a ray of light—the brilliant ray from an electric torch—shone into the dungeon.

Rose of the Desert stood there, shining the brilliant beam of light upon the girl who lay all of a heap upon the stone floor.

#### Left to Their Fate.

NASSINA, the spy, knew now with whom she had to reckon.

This girl again!—the same beautiful young woman, known as Rose of the Desert, who had frustrated that other daring scheme!

By the very way the newcomer upon the scene had stopped short of the doorway; it was clear that she was on her guard. And she had that light with her, ready to flash its brilliant ray in all directions!

It meant an end to Nassina's hope of dodging out behind the girl, and then shutting her in the dungeon with Paula. She must take her chance in a struggle.

That decision was formed in an instant, and in the next the woman made a rush for the girl, hoping to catch her by surprise.

She did not succeed. Rose of the Desert eluded her adroitly, at the same time flashing the strong light full in Nassina's eyes. That confused the woman even more than utter darkness would have done, and Rose could easily have seized the opportunity to bolt away; but she was thinking of Paula.

So, instead of a sudden struggle between the two, they now merely confronted each other, with looks of deadly enmity.

"Ye followed me!" Nassina hissed at the girl, passionately, in the native dialect. "Ye have a zeal, truly, for the safety of those in whose service ye are!"

"Yea," Rose of the Desert answered sternly. "I have watched thee with suspicion these last three days, O Nassina Ben Jezzel. And now I know that my suspicions were just ones!"

Nassina smiled venomously.

"I, too, have a zeal," she said. "Well thou knowest, too, whom I and my husband serve, even the ruler of the mighty kingdom of Susahlah!"

"A monster of cruelty," was the scornful rejoinder. "Oh, he would give much, I know, to have Naomer Nakara and her British friends brought into his city in bondage—"

"Yea, and thou also a prisoner amongst them," Nassina struck in. "The last I heard of thee, thou wert a fugitive from Susahlah, and there was a fine reward for thy capture at any time! So will my husband and I get great profit out of this work with which we are entrusted—greater profit than ever! When thou art brought in with the rest, to the Sultan of Susahlah—"

"Fool, to talk of thy wicked plans succeeding!" Rose of the Desert exclaimed. "Since I have thee caught like this, in the very heart of the palace!"

"Fool, thyself!" Nassina suddenly blazed out, and rushed upon the girl once more.

It was at this critical moment that Paula's senses came swirling back to her.

Her eyes flickered open; but all was groping darkness. She did not know that only a moment earlier there had been a ray of light shining upon dungeon walls. She began to remember what had been happening at the moment when her

senses left her, and so she imagined that she was still in the room where there had been that struggle with the woman in black.

Then she realised that that place had not been in darkness like this. Where was she now? Or was it the same room still, with all the evening light replaced by midnight darkness?

She struggled up, only to be knocked over in her weakened state by a couple of scuffling figures. The bewildered girl was grovelling upon the floor when her hand swept over something that rolled about at the touch. It was an electric torch; Paula handled one often enough at Morocco to tell this by the mere feel of it. Shakily she switched it on, and then—

The sight that met her eyes!

She was in a great, bare dungeon, and Rose of the Desert was here, struggling with that desperate woman, the Spy of Susahlah.

To and fro the couple were wrestling furiously, each trying to get the mastery of the other, and Paula knew in a flash that if Nassina proved the victor the dreadful dungeon would soon hold two helpless captives, shut away from all outside aid.

Keeping the torch switched on, she heaved to her feet once more, then rushed in to help Rose of the Desert. But, alas, that help came too late.

Some false step on the slippery pavement by Rose of the Desert had already given Nassina the advantage. Even as Paula was rushing up to join in the struggle, the powerful woman simply hurled Rose from her, and then whirled to the door.

A faint cry of dismay came from Rose of the Desert as she was sent reeling from her opponent. Then—thud!—the door was drawn shut, with Nassina on the outer side of it, and Paula and her would-be rescuer penned in the dungeon.

"My gwacious! Oh, Wose—Wose!" palpitated the schoolgirl, shrinking close to her staggering friend, whilst the beam of light wavered upon the grim stone walls. "What shall we do? Oh, what shall we do now? Will they heah us if we owy for heah?"

"Nay, it is useless," quavered the African girl, with a hand at her heaving breast. "Ah, why did I come along in search of thee, my poor friend!"

"No one else knows!" Paula exclaimed, in great dismay.

"No one!" was the answer. "I, thy faithful one, was going through the palace alone, meaning to visit the woman I suspected, and converse with her. I found her gone from her room, and then I became alarmed, for I could tell that thou thyself had been with her but a minute since."

"How on earth did you tell that?" Paula wondered, breathlessly.

"There is a perfume thou art fond of using," the African girl answered. "That faint perfume was in the room, and I followed it—yea, it led me easily down the steps, the way the woman had carried thee. It was leading me to the rescue, I believed. And lo! it has but led me to share thy captivity!"

"Deah Wose of the Desert, whatever happens, pway understand," Paula faltered, trying to calm down, "I wegard you as a bwick! You were doing your best—"

"For thee or any of thy friends, I have been ready to give my life at any time!" Rose of the Desert broke in, simply. "But now, alas—"

"Yes, what?" the schoolgirl whispered. "How long shall we be kept here? And oh, how will it affect Naomer and the west?"

Rose of the Desert did not answer.

An answer to those terrified questionings she had, but it was an answer she dared not voice!

**No Clue.**

"**P**AULA has not come back, Polly!"  
 "No, just what I was thinking! It is rather strange, Betty!"

"And Rose of the Desert—where is she?" Madge Minden wondered.

It was dark night now, and the festivities at the palace had come to an end. Betty, Polly, and Madge, pleasantly tired after so much novel entertainment and jollity, were quite ready for bed. They had said good-night to everybody except Miss Redgrave, who would be certain to give them a last look-in, as she always did at the dormitory at dear old Morcove.

"I missed Paula just when you were being asked to play the piano, Madge—and what a hit you made, too, by the way," Betty added gladly. "I imagined that Paula would be back in a jiffy; and then, I'm afraid, I forgot all about her!"

"Same here!" said Polly. "There has been so

repeated: "half the repose and all ze bed! Ivo, that is not right!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To-morrow I come to school, and I ask Miss Redgrave to teach me that, yes," said Naomer. "But where is your friend who say: 'Yes, bejuv'?"

"That's what we want to find out," Betty said, with returning gravity. "Paula hasn't been seen for a couple of hours at least!"

At this moment Miss Redgrave came along, on the way to her room adjoining the girls', and she halted in surprise at the remark she had heard.

"Paula not here?" she exclaimed. "But what has become of her then?"

"It is rather odd, but we have seen nothing of Rose of the Desert either, for some time now," Madge stated. "Surely, though, nothing is the matter!"

The worried look that instantly came to Miss Redgrave's face showed that she feared something must indeed be the matter—something serious, too.

She hastened away, after trying to reassure the missing girl's chums; but in a few minutes she



**THE DANCER!** Louder and faster thrummed the barbaric music, with some weird clashing of cymbals and tinkling of tambourines, and still the clever girl kept up her dazzling performance. Betty Barton and Co. sat spellbound with admiration.

much to feel interested in, I never went so long without the desire to tease our aristocratic duffer!"

"See if she is in here—gone to bed with a sudden headache; but I hope not!" Madge exclaimed, as they now came to the door of their stately apartment in the palace. "No—"

"No, she isn't! Well, that's strange!" Polly muttered.

A light step sounded along the corridor which they themselves had just traversed, and there was Naomer, merry as ever, crying:

"Ello! Present! I wish you many happy returns of the good-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled Polly. "That's one way of saying it. But I'll teach you the proper way, Naomer. In England, we say—at least, nice, ladylike girls say it—Good-night, and sweet repose; half the bed and all the clothes!"

Naomer thought this very pretty. It pleased her poetic mind.

"Good-night, and sleep in ze clothes!" she

was back again, with only the most disquieting news.

Nothing had been seen of either Rose of the Desert or Paula Creel since the middle of the evening. Nor could a trace of the missing pair be found, apparently. At any rate, a hasty search through the palace had had no effect.

Betty and her two chums had not started to undress. Now they clamoured to be allowed to assist in a more careful search, and this appeal Miss Redgrave gladly conceded.

The old Sultan has retired for the night, and must not be disturbed," she said. "But the captain of his guard—a very fine man—has promised to continue the search. He has also sent across to the Residency to get Mr. Hamilton to come," Miss Redgrave added.

The girls were taking part in a thorough scouring of the palace and its precincts when both Mr. Hamilton and his wife arrived. They had come along with all possible speed, and although they would not allow themselves to appear to be alarmed, it was obvious that in their eyes the

disappearance of Paula Creel and the faithful Rose wore a sinister look.

After that the search went on in a most thorough manner. If the long-disused dungeons, far underground were not explored, that was not through any negligence on the part of the palace guards. They found the one stout door giving entrance to the subterranean labyrinth as fast and tight as ever, and this dispelled any idea that the missing pair could have got lost down there. Why should the girls go prowling about in those gruesome places, even if they had found an open door inviting them to enter? On an evening of festivity, too! It was unthinkable.

Those responsible for the patrolling of the palace were soon suggesting that Rose of the Desert and the schoolgirl must have wandered out into the city for some impulsive reason, or other, and that was the theory which Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton were bound to favour at last.

Treachery inside the palace! They could not entertain the idea for a single moment. But if, for some inexplicable reason, Paula had strayed beyond the palace walls, and Rose of the Desert had gone after her, then there was no telling what peril they might be involved in.

Mr. Hamilton held counsel with the captain of the guard, and it was decided that a night-long search of the city must be made—a house-to-house search, if necessary. The Britisher himself went off with the native soldiery, whilst Mrs. Hamilton remained at the palace. She was going to wait up, with Miss Redgrave; but Betty, Polly, and Madge—and Naomer, too—were advised to get some sleep now.

The two ladies went with the girls, and somehow it became another round of the palace, in the hope of finding some clue previously overlooked.

"Have we been in here?" Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed, halting on her way past one stout door. "Who occupies this room—or is it empty?"

"No; that poor widow woman is quartered there for the present," Betty informed the Britisher's wife. "The widow, Obed Jehathra."

Mrs. Hamilton tapped upon the door, then opened it and passed inside, followed by the rest. In the native language, the British lady began to converse fluently with the crone-like creature, who got off her couch in an infirm way. She had been lying down fully dressed.

"Peace, good mother," Mrs. Hamilton began softly. "Ye know, perchance, there is trouble in the Sultan's palace this night?"

"Yea, and I am grieved; I sorrow with those who mourn the absence of those they love!" was the quavered answer from the sham old woman. "An hour since did I assure those who came to me, I know naught of what may have happened."

"Ye have seen them not, since the setting of the sun?"

"I? I have stirred not from this room since mid-day," rasped the unsuspected spy. "For truly I am old and full of sorrow, yet comforted by the Sultan's charity. Nay; I would that I could help thee, but thou seest how I can be but a cumberer of the ground in these, my last days."

"Peace be on you," Mrs. Hamilton said, turning away; and the woman made the murmured rejoinder:

"On you be peace, O friend, and on all friends of thine!"

Then the anxious party of baffled searchers withdrew, and the woman was left to herself again behind a closed door.

They seek, but they find not, nor will they!" she exulted to herself. "Verily am I favoured of the Fates! There, in that dungeon where they are, fast shall those two remain. And if they perish, what is that to me? I am safe, and so my work in the palace can still proceed!"

She got down upon her bed of rugs and cushions, with a ray of moonlight striking in upon her smiling face.

"The poor widow Obed," she chuckled evilly. "Truly, Susahlah's ruler will laugh with glee, when the story is told of how I, his cunning spy, duped all his hated enemies!"

The cunning woman again returned to the window, through which the moon, riding high in the cloudless heavens, flung its milky beams.

"My master, the Sultan of Susahlah, shall smile down upon his loyal servant and load her up with rich rewards. 'Nassina, thou hast done well, indeed!' he will say. 'Take thou these camels, and donkeys, and goats, and pitch thy tent upon the bank of the oasis where the grasses grow the longest and the greenest, and the crops grow the thickest, and live at thy ease!' And he will load my husband with gold so that we shall live in ease and grow fat!"

For a long while she mused upon her success and the great reward that was coming to her, then finally fell asleep.

Throughout the night search was kept up in the city of Nakara for the missing two. There was no success—no gaining the least little inkling as to what had become of them.

So above the level horizon of the wide desert the sun shot up again, to blaze for another day in the brassy heavens.

The sandy plains shimmered in the heat, and amidst the jumble of white-walled houses which made up the city of Nakara, men sought what-  
ever shade was to be found. The primitive life of the palace was being resumed, with all the old cries and yells in the bazaars and markets, and friend meeting friend would ask: what of the Sultan's missing guests? Any news of them?

None!

Then the mid-day heat, so intense that all who could sought shelter and a brief siesta within doors, causing the hubbub of the town to die away altogether. The streets were empty then, the native population having no relish for the sun's burning rays at this noontide hour.

All the same, and withering as that sunshine was, what would not Paula Creel and Rose of the Desert have given to be out in it!

Poor Paula, and her equally to be pitied fellow-prisoner, victims of the ruthless Nassina—still shut away in the darkness of the dungeon, and doomed, perhaps, never to see the sun's light again!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(A more terrifying position to be in than Paula and Rose of the Desert now find themselves can scarcely be imagined. Fancy being imprisoned in a dank dungeon far below the ground, where no sound of the outer world can ever penetrate, and the darkness is so intense that it can almost be felt! And how long are they fated to remain in the dungeon? Order next week's issue of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, and read next week's wonderful story, entitled "SCHOOLGIRLS IN CAPTIVITY!")