

“THE RIVER MAID!”

Our grand new serial!
Starts to-day!

The Schoolgirls' Own

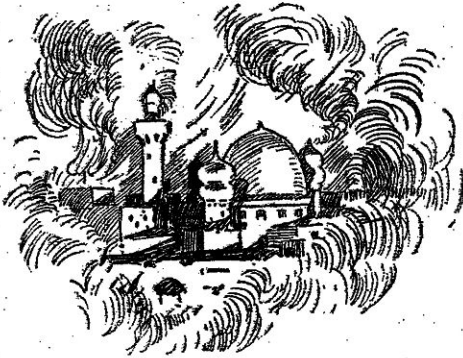


THE TAUNTED SCHOOLGIRLS!
One of the many ordeals that Betty Barton & Co. have to face. See "A Dash for Freedom!" a new long complete story contained in this issue.

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All the world over the bravery of the British schoolgirl is known, and Betty

Barton & Co. fully maintain this reputation for Morcov School.



Captives All.

"A NOTHER day of it, Polly!"
"Yes, Betty. Another day—although it might still be midnight for all one sees of daylight down here!"

"It is a shivery air, too!" Madge Minden exclaimed, with a sudden, sharp shudder. "Who would ever imagine that in two minutes we could be out in the roasting African sunshine, if only we were free to open that awful dungeon-door?"

"If only—ah, if only!" Polly Linton echoed mournfully. "If only we were free! You may well say it, Madge darling!"

"Bai Jove, yes, wather! Howevah, geals, what I say is, wait till I get to England! There's going to be a wov about this, don't you know?"

Thus Paula Creel, at one time popularly known as the aristocrat of the Fourth Form at Morcov School.

"And pway, geals," the amiable drawler went on, with a cheerfulness that did her great credit, "haow did you all wepose duwing the night? I myself was ages getting to sleep, bai Jove—"

"Oh, story!" exclaimed Polly, making up her mind that, whatever the new day might have in store, it would be all the better to begin it with a bit of teasing! "As soon as that hateful Nassina person left us to ourselves in that dungeon, last night, you were snoring hard!"

"Polly! Haow often must I pwoctest that I am not given to snorwing! My wocollection of last night is that I weclined upon a hard stone bench for hours and hours before I dwopped off. And then I dwreamed, geals!"

"I hardly know when I'm really awake and when I'm dreaming these days," said Madge, with a wan smile upon that pretty face which the dungeon-lantern illumined. "It's all such a night-mare!"

"Weal, I dwreamed this dwream," pursued Paula, whilst she fiddled with her untidy hair. "We geals were all at Morcov School again—deah old Morcov, bai Jove! It was tea-time in Study No. 12, bai Jove, and Betty was pouring out the wewashing cup—what? Bai Jove, you know, doesn't it make your mouth watah, geals, to think of—"

"Hark! Oh, here comes that hateful Nassina!" Betty exclaimed. "The only step we ever hear in the passage is hers! Now for the day's slavery to begin!"

"For poor Naomer, as well as for us!" added

A DASH FOR FREEDOM!

A magnificent new long complete story of the girls of Morcov School—captives in a desert city.

By Marjorie Stanton.

Madge, with a compassionate glance at the girl she had named so softly.

That girl was still lying fast asleep upon the wide stone ledge that had been the resting-place for all five captives during the night. Now that Nassina was grating a key in the lock of the dungeon-door, the schoolgirls felt it wise to wake their fellow-prisoner. But they did this so gently that poor Naomer Nakara was only just opening her lovely dark eyes when the door swung wide before a tall, stern form—Nassina ban Jazrel.

At sight of the frail little captive who was only just rousing up, this implacable woman made a lightning movement across the dungeon floor, crying out fiercely in the native:

"Thou Naomer—up!" And she laid hold of the girl and dragged her to her feet. "Do ye think to lie idle, as in the days when ye were at the palace of Nakara—Nakara's own future ruler? Ye are in Susahlah now, and neither Nakara nor the land of England shall ye ever see!"

"And thou," the girl flashed back, in one of the bursts of passionate indignation which came to her at times, "thou, Nassina, will yet be sorry for making my poor life even harder than it might be! Beware—beware, I say; the ways of fate are strange, Nassina—"

"Silence!" Nassina shouted down that spirited voice, as if some superstition made her afraid of what was going to be said. "No more, Naomer, thou slave of the royal master, as are these thy friends his slaves as well! Come, follow, or must I drive thee with the whip?"

And she backed towards the door, there to stand aside and glower upon the five captives, as they filed out into the lantern-lit passage.

There, outside the dungeon, another woman was at her post. Night and day alike, in this dungeon-passage some woman or another was keeping watch and ward, and Nassina never visited her charges without exchanging the secret password with this patient sentinel.

"Where to, now, I wonder?" Betty said below her breath to Polly, as they all five climbed the staircase that led up to the palace courtyard.

"To breakfast, let's hope!" Polly whispered back glumly. "Even that horrid dungeon hasn't taken my appetite away!"

"It's very twying," the others heard Paula reflecting aloud. "Most aggrawating, the pwedica-ment we are in! Howevah, wait till I get to England."

Then Nassina, who could not speak a word of English, made a little rush up the gloomy steps, to put herself alongside the girls and warn them to be silent by waving a clenched hand menacingly.

To show defiance of the woman would have been foolish in the extreme, since it was absolutely in her power to make their lives as miserable as she pleased. Not that Betty & Co. were at all disposed to whine for pity—no! But they did feel the wisdom of being submissive.

Soon there was no more talking after that, and, as they all filed out into the sunlit yard, each girl had to content herself with wondering what was in store.

There were the waterpots that they had been put to filling, yesterday, and was that to be their task again to-day? Before they had even been given a crust of bread to eat? Why not? Where was the limit to the cruelty which they might be subjected to?

They were slaves, indeed—fated, perhaps, never to know another hour of freedom!

But Nassina did not halt them at the waterpots. Instead, she led them along a beautiful cloistered way that was paved with marble, to a part of the palace precincts where all was very quiet.

None of the Sultan's burly guards were here, only a few slave girls, looking as if they did not find their slavery very hard. All the same, they seemed to have their own sad thoughts, as they lolled about in the hot sunshine that struck down upon them from the brassy heavens. Perhaps they would have been happier with some task to do, was Betty's thought. Yesterday's experience had taught her that there was relief from brooding in being put to hard work.

Nassina was now leading, and it was her long, slender arm that suddenly drew aside a heavy curtain screening from view what lay beyond. At a sign from her, the girls marched on, and next moment they found themselves in an enclosure so imposing, with its marble pillars and shady alcoves, that it was like a little temple.

The centre of the floor was sunk, and there, with marble steps leading down to it, sparkled an inviting cold-water bath, big enough to swim in.

Such luck as this—for if they really were to be allowed to bathe, it was luck of the very best kind—simply took the girls' breath away. In spite of the command of "Silence!" Paula Creel could not help exclaiming delightedly:

"Bai Jove! Haow wipping!"

For Paula, that luxury-lover, simply revelled in the daily bath she was accustomed to indulge in at Morcove.

"Bath first; bweaker afterwards, what?" she exclaimed. "Come, geals, this is a weal relief!"

"Touch wood," muttered Polly. "Nassina may only have brought us here to tantalise us!"

"Oh, gwacious—oh, healp!" was Paula's glum rejoinder to that hint.

But it was all right, after all. The bath was a luxury that Nassina simply did not dare deny the girls, lest they should fall ill. That she begrudged them the bit of pleasure that bathing meant, was evident enough from the scowling tone in which she gave instructions as to what they were to do.

"Strip ye, and be quick in the water," she said to Naomer bullyingly, meaning that girl to interpret the command. "I return in a little while, and woe upon ye if ye keep me tarrying!"

Then—oh, the glorious joy of it—she actually went away, leaving the girls as much to themselves as they would have been in the privacy of a dressing-tent on Morcove beach!

"Hurrah!" Polly had to breathe softly. "Who says I won't be first in?"

"Hooway, yes, wather!" Paula beamed, whilst they all set about divesting themselves of their clothes. "It is much to be gewgawed that I've no wubber cap for my head, bai Jove. I do object to getting my heah wet! Howevah—"

"Keep a smile!" Naomer put in, her dusky face wearing a bright enough smile just at present. And what dusky little arms and legs they were, too, that were soon plashing about in the water!

One after another the girls took their bold plunge from the deep end, and it was a wonder that peals of merry laughter were not soon ending the deep silence that was upon the whole palace at this hour.

With that refreshing bath to revel in, the girls almost forgot, for the time being, all their woes.

The bullying of Nassina; the uncertainty as to what sort of cruel fate the very next hour might have in store for them; above all, acute anxiety as to what doom had been meted out to others who had been captured along with them—these were things Betty & Co. did not speak of, whilst they swam and plashed around.

And the end of it was that Polly, like the born madcap she was, simply had to get a bit of fun at Paula's expense!

Paula—that long-suffering victim of the madcap's love of japing—did not see Polly draw a big breath and then go under water. But Paula did suddenly feel something pinching one of her toes—and Paula yelped. How she yelped!

"Yurr-owh!" was the aristocrat's spluttering cry, as she turned a half-somersault in the water.

"Theah's cwabs in the water—lobsters! Watah dwagons, bai Jove, biting my toes off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my gwacious, was it you, you wascal?" Paula panted, suddenly understanding—for Polly had bobbed up again, chuckling. "Haow fwivolous you are, weally! You make me cwoss!"

"Keep a smile!" said Naomer, meaning "keep smiling!" And in an instant Paula was saying: "Yes, wather!" with Polly forgiven freely, for about the hundredth thousandth time since their friendship began!

Just as they finished dressing, Nassina suddenly reappeared, and all in an instant the girls' mood was changed from gay to grave. It was not simply that Nassina's presence cowed them; she had brought someone with her, and it was the sight of this other person that made Betty & Co. feel excited—desperately anxious once again.

For it was Rose of the Desert.

At last that native girl—as beautiful as she was loyal to her schoolgirl friends—had been brought out of the dungeon where she had been kept apart from them all! And now—oh, if only this could be the chance to exchange a few words with her!

Just a word or two with this other captive, and what a difference it might mean to the girls! So they were thinking, without daring to talk to that effect amongst themselves. Nassina was here, and so—caution!

But, if only there could be a moment's whispering—well, it might yet mean the difference between life and death to Susahliah's hapless captives!

Whispered Words.

NASSINA had preceded Rose of the Desert into this half of the swimming bath! Unable to find fault with any of the girls for being behindhand with their toilette, she signed to them

to pass out, then snapped a command at Rose of the Desert that must have meant:

"Come on, you!"

Was this to be the chance, then? Betty & Co. meant to make it so!

Pretending to be in a hurry to get away, they went crowding towards the curtained exit, and in a moment they were all close enough to Rose of the Desert to whisper.

Nassina might overhear the lowered voices; but if she did, it would be no great danger, for she did not know English!

"You slipped us that note, saying you had a plan of escape," Polly whispered, as one of the first to go by Rose of the Desert.

"What is the plan—can you hint?" Betty took up the whispering, as she went by.

And Rose of the Desert, whilst she appeared to be ignoring the girls, whispered behind the white cloth that veiled the lower half of her face:

"One night, it will be! I cannot say! Find out where the others are lodged!"

The very faintest of whispers, but like a wild cry of entreaty it seemed to resound in the ears of those who heard it.

"Find out where the others are lodged!"

Paula was going by now. She breathed softly:

"Yes, wather—"

"We will if we can," Madge added, as her share of the breathless talk.

And then even Naomer, coming last in the line, dropped a word that was apt enough.

"Keep a smile!" she whispered. "Keep a smile!"

It was all over after that. The girls were in the wide corridor outside the swimming bath, and Rose of the Desert was, no doubt, being ordered by Nassina to bathe.

But that one chance had been seized, and with what splendid success, too!

The girls, for their part, had gained a little enlightenment. The plan that Rose of the Desert had thought out was still as big a mystery as ever, but there was now the thrilling promise—"one night, it will be!"

She, for her part, had been able to entreat their assistance over a thing that was probably causing her great anxiety. Where were Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Redgrave being lodged?

The chums could easily believe that perhaps, as soon as that bit of information was obtained, the plan of escape could be carried out.

Only let them get to know where those other captives were shut up in this stronghold of the Sultan's, and "one night" might be the very next night to come!

There was no time for any excited debate such as the girls were longing to indulge in. Nassina came out to them immediately, and led them back to the courtyard, where some bread and water awaited them.

As the captives divided the unappetising loaves amongst themselves, the native slavegirls they had seen before gathered close by, to look on and make mocking comments. They were encouraged to do this by Nassina, who also had another scheme for making the chums and little Naomer suffer needless distress.

Instead of allowing them to rest in the shade whilst they ate their prison fare, she compelled them to go and stand in the full glare of the blinding sunlight, close against a wall that was hot enough to tingle any hand that touched it.

Sheer torture was the word for such treatment. It seemed to the poor girls that they felt the heat

of the sun worse than ever before because of that cool bath from which they had emerged only a few minutes since. But they stood the cruel ordeal with an unyielding spirit, buoyed up with the hope that providence would yet aid their escape.

Help from outside sources was not to be dreamed of. But that plan—oh, if only it could succeed!

Only give them the chance to strike a blow for themselves, and they would risk death itself rather than let that chance go by!

What Madge Discovered.

AS soon as the frugal meal had been eaten, Nassina found tasks for them all.

Naomer she put to drawing water from the well, whilst Paula and Polly had to go to and



THE BRITISH SPIRIT! At last, in sheer self-defence, Madge dealt an open-handed slap across the face of the most aggressive of her tormentors.

fro with the waterpots—to and fro, to and fro, in the scorching sunshine, with those large earthenware vessels held upon their heads in Eastern fashion.

Betty and Madge, however, were evidently marked out for some other intrigue. Madge was led away, to be placed amongst the slave musicians—and her heart sank as she found herself banded with those native girls again! The same girls with whom she had had to play before the Sultan, overnight.

Nor did the talented musicians of the Fourth Form at Morocco fare any better by being left amongst these girls, without Nassina to bully her.

No sooner had Nassina withdrawn, taking Betty

with her, than poor Madge realised that her dusky companions were very hostile to her—jealous, perhaps.

Like Nassina, they longed to heap insults upon the schoolgirl's head, but could not speak a word that would be intelligible to her. So, for awhile they ringed her about, treating her to derisive smiles and contemptuous looks, whilst they discussed her freely amongst themselves.

Then one of the most spiteful began to bait Madge, by making a feint of striking her across the face.

That had Madge upon her mettle in a moment. "If you dare!" was the look in her eyes, whilst she made up her mind to find somewhere to sit down.

It meant breaking clear of the crowd around her, and she made a polite enough sign:

"Let me pass, please!"

At the first step, however, she was given a violent push by one of the slavegirls—and then another pushed her from behind.

The "sport" of pushing and pummelling Madge caught on, and it was kept up with such energy that she turned quite dizzy. She lost her temper, besides, and in a sudden desperate manner she made a dash to get clear of her persecutors.

Then they gave full play to their jealous animosity. Furiously they all set upon her, and poor Madge could guess the meaning of the fierce jabbering that accompanied the punching and pummelling.

This white girl had defied them—insulted them by showing what a spirit she had! This girl, one of those about whom such a fuss was being made in the palace—she thought a lot of herself, did she? But they would take some of that spirit out of her!

And so the badgered girl saw nothing but angry faces around her, whilst brown hands, with bangles jingling at the wrists, pulled her this way and that, and span her about, and even flicked her across the mouth now and then.

At last, in sheer self-defence, she dealt an open-handed slap at one of her tormentors, and then—what ample revenge was exacted for the blow!

The girl whose face had been slapped, was the one who had been foremost all along in tormenting Madge. She was certainly the most beautiful of the whole bevy of beautiful girls, and doubtless she was the most jealous. She incited her companions on with a few hissed phrases, and the next Madge knew she was down upon the rug-bestrewn floor, with the young furies trying to tear her clothing to shreds.

Then, when the poor girl was almost swooning with the shock of such barbaric maltreatment, Nassina appeared.

She gave a burst of harsh laughter as she saw what was taking place, and it is certain that she would have encouraged the wild-cat lot of girls to wreak still greater fury upon the white captive, only there was not time.

The woman must have learned that the slave musicians were desired to play at once in the palace; for the words she spoke ended Madge's sufferings at the others' hands.

With wild looks, and panting for breath, after the passions they had given way to, the excitable girls flashed about to take up their mandolines, whilst Madge herself tried to rise but could not.

It was no use. She felt as if the spiteful pack that had set upon her had beaten and pummelled her into a state of utter exhaustion. Even when

Nassina came at her and dragged her on to her feet, she could not stand up properly.

After giving her a violent shaking, Nassina let go her hold of the girl, who simply dropped to the ground, gasping weakly. The slavegirls laughed their purring laughs of delight, but Nassina, for her part, now seemed to take alarm.

In any case, poor Madge was so torn and dishevelled that she could not have gone with the rest of the musicians without first setting herself to rights. In an exasperated manner, Nassina had to sign to her to remain there, and next moment Madge was alone.

All within the palace of the Sultan of Susahlah knew better than to keep him waiting at any time. The musicians had been called for, and so they hastened away, with Nassina following to make what excuses she could for Madge's absence.

For the first minute or so, the schoolgirl was simply too unstrung to do more than lie back upon the heaped cushions to which she had dragged herself. Only very slowly her dazed mind began to realise that this was something that had not occurred before—for one of the captives to be left alone. At last, however, she was sitting up—taking a grip on herself whilst she wondered excitedly: was any advantage to be gained by this chance spell of privacy?

She got to her feet very warily, and crept to the door. Stealthily she turned back the primitive fastening of the lock, and drew the massive door open just a few inches, or so.

No one!

That was her gratifying discovery as she peered out.

She gained courage; opened the door wider, and crept forth into the wide passage-way. It was made dim by all the thick pillars of marble that were a feature of the place, and by the heavy curtains that hung across all openings on to the courtyard. There was that in the subdued light which made Madge's heart quake; the silence, too, was unnerving in a way. Oh, this hateful place—so beautiful from an architectural point of view, but it was a most dreadful prison to her and her hapless chums; a prison possessing vague terrors for all of them!

She prowled forward, ready to dive aside into one of the many alcoves and hide there at the first hint of danger. But when she saw how many different apartments opened on to this long corridor, she could scarce hope to avoid being taken by surprise. She could only take her chance and go on boldly, finding out all that she could whilst that chance lasted.

Then, suddenly, she came to a side passage, giving access to more of the apartments in this quarter of the palace where, apparently, no men ever set foot. Where did this passage lead to?

She resolved to find out, if possible. For, what if some bit of knowledge gleaned like this should be of vital help to Rose of the Desert's mysterious plan?

A few stealthy steps were all she took, however, then checked, heart in mouth.

Voices!

In one of the apartments along this side passage two people were talking together, very softly. They were feminine tones that Madge's keen hearing had picked up, and they alarmed her greatly.

And then—ah, how quickly that throb of alarm was succeeded by a thrill of joyful excitement.

English voices they were—the voices of Miss Redgrave and Mrs. Hamilton!

The "Song" Madge Sang.

MADGE shot a glance behind her, then rushed on silently to the door of that room from which the subdued talk was audible.

At all costs she felt she must try the door, and, if it were unlocked, must give those two captives the joyful surprise of rushing in upon them.

Second thoughts are best, however, and Madge had one such thought to hold her in check.

No; if the door were unlocked, then it was absolutely certain that the two captives were lodged with some native attendant who was their wardress.

"Better to take careful note of where this room's situated, and then go back!" the schoolgirl decided shrewdly. "And yet—"

And yet, how hard it was not to get in touch with her two friends and fellow captives! To go back without having spoken even one word with them—when such a chance as this might never, never occur again!

Still, Madge adhered to the course that she felt was the wiser one. She never even tried the lock of the door, but held away from it, looking around so as to acquire a mental plan of the place.

She counted the number of doors in the passage, and whilst doing this she realised that each door had—not a number, but some weird symbol that was the native way of distinguishing one room from another.

"So much the better!" thought Madge, and she did not go creeping back to the slavegirls' apartments, in the other corridor, before she had memorised the symbol that adorned her friends' prison-chamber!

Nassina had not returned, and Madge was still left to her own resources. In great agitation she paced about, wondering how to make the best of what solitude might still be left to her!

Then an inspiration came. Make out a plan, and get it to Rose of the Desert if possible—that was the thing!

There was not a scrap of paper for the desperate girl to utilise; but that did not deter her.

In a jiffy she had her soiled handkerchief spread upon the marble floor, and was lying down upon some rugs and cushions near by, as if still suffering from the effects of her maltreatment. But she had found a stump of pencil in her dress-pocket, and stealthily she was drawing her plan upon the bit of cambric!

With lightning speed she sketched a ground-plan of the palace and its precincts, and where the passage was, leading to the very room in which she was working at present. Then that side passage, with all the doors marked off, and one door with its symbol copied out faithfully from memory—Madge got it all down upon that flimsy handkerchief!

She was just printing the words: "Miss R. and Mrs. H. in here," when the deep silence was ended. Someone's gliding step was sounding along the passage.

Nassina!

Swiftly the schoolgirl crumpled up the handkerchief and put it out of sight, along with the bit of pencil. That was that! Would it ever be of any use, after all! There was no knowing; but she had done her best, anyhow!

Nassina came in, to find the girl captive doing her best to restore her appearance after the rough handling she had received. In the woman's hands was a bundle of native raiment, which she had evidently intended Madge to put on. But when Nassina saw how the girl was managing to make

her own clothes look nice enough again, she simply tossed the bundle into a corner.

No doubt the woman wardress had a good reason for wanting all the schoolgirls to retain their British costume. To the Sultan himself, as well as to everybody else about the palace, it was gratifying to see the girls remaining outwardly as British as they were at heart—whilst they remained too, hapless slaves about this stronghold of barbarism!

Madge was now given a commanding sign that meant: "Take up your mandoline, and follow me!" And next minute she was walking heavily-hearted behind the woman, convinced that she was to join the musicians in the palace, after all.

At the top of the wide steps leading into the central court, however, the girl was suddenly halted. With gestures that could not be misunderstood, Nassina bade her squat down there in the open air, and start playing the mandoline.

It was meant as another bit of humiliation for the hapless captive, but in secret Madge rejoiced. The sun was blazing down upon her, and the stonework upon which she sat, as well as the wall behind her, seemed hot enough to shrivel her up. Better this, though—oh, a thousand times better—than being taken into the palace, to be under the eye of that royal tyrant as he lolled upon his jewelled throne!

But it would never do for her to look relieved! Nassina stood by, and, with that pitiless creature's baleful eyes upon her, the girl was careful to look as miserable as ever.

Laying the stringed instrument upon her lap, as she squatted upon the hot pavement, she strummed away, thinking what an absurd melody—if it could be called a melody at all—her unskilled hands were making.

If Madge's own musical ear was offended by her strummings, however, there may well have been those about the palace who marvelled at the aptitude with which she had mastered the native instrument. To many, the fingers of this schoolgirl slave may have seemed to be plucking a very tender, if simple tune from those few taut strings.

Perhaps, too, it was some note of tragic sadness—of utter despair—in the slow thrumming that pleased Nassina, for once again that woman's bold eyes bestowed a glowing look upon the poor girl.

After a time Nassina went away, but Madge dared not pause in her playing. Almost blinded by the wilting heat, she thrummed away steadily, with no one, it seemed, to heed her except some sileat-footed attendant or other who went by in the courtyard.

From where she sat, she could see poor Naomer toiling away at the well, and Paula and Polly dragging to and fro with their waterpots. But where was Betty? There was no glimpsing her.

Madge could see, too, the entrance gates, where tall guards were doing duty as sentinels, and so she had her interest aroused when, all at once, the great wooden gates were turned back, to let a company of men into the courtyard.

At first sight of them, as they came trooping in, in very disorderly fashion, Madge imagined them to be only a company of native soldiery who had been parading through the desert city. Then, with a sudden throb of pity such as she always experienced at sight of a fellow prisoner, she saw that Mr. Hamilton was with the soldiers.

Crowds of the city's idlers had kept pace with the hapless prisoner and his array of guards, and, even when the gates had been closed again, the air still rang with cries and yells of execration.



A PLEASANT SURPRISE! A brown hand drew down the yashmak that hid the lower part of her face, and they saw—not the features of Nassina, but the lovely face of Rose of the Desert!

So Madge knew that the one British captive who was a grown man had been taken round the city, this morning, to delight the savage populace.

She could have burst into tears at the thought of this awful indignity to which the brave gentleman had been subjected. If only she could give comfort to him was again her wistful thought—and so another daring idea suddenly seized the girl.

Louder than ever she plucked the strings of her quaint mandoline, whilst she suddenly lifted up her voice in song.

It was intentionally a mournful, despairing note that her voice took on, and to the ears of the natives it must have seemed like a very dirge; the hysterical wailing of one doomed captive at the sight of another!

Only, what Madge sang—the very words, all unintelligible as they were to the native inmates of the palace—were words that made a plain, unrhymed message for Mr. Hamilton's ears.

Could any girl have turned her own plight as a slave musician to better advantage than Madge was now doing? Surely not!

In that sing-song tone she told the Britisher, as he was being marched away to his cell, that she had heard his wife and Miss Redgrave talking together only a little while ago, and so nothing terrible had happened to them so far. She also let him know that Rose of the Desert still had great hopes of the plan of escape. One night, it would be—so let him keep up heart, and be prepared!

That his heart was lifted up by this strangely-delivered message she had proof before he was gone. Fine giant of a Britisher that he was, he

stood a head taller than any of his dusky guards, and so Madge could see him looking across to her with eloquent eyes—looking back at her, when at last he was being hustled through a doorway.

The thrilling scene had ended, and now the girl left off singing, although she durst not cease her thrumming on the mandoline. How long! How much longer, was her poignant thought, as she felt the sun's rays burning with fiercer heat than ever! And yonder were her equally hapless chums, still forced to go on drawing and carrying the water.

Oh, if only this could be the last day of humiliating, cruel slavery!

As if to give her something to suffer that would be the very climax of the morning's cruel ordeal, the Sultan himself came presently into the open air, with a few cringing attendants.

He came slowly forth to take a turn upon the courtyard steps, and the instant his eye fell upon Madge, still squatting there with her mandoline, he moved towards her.

There was a most distressing moment for the girl when she had to thrust away at the strings whilst she sat trembling beneath the monarch's eye. He himself knew not a word of English, and so he could only laugh at her. But what a laugh it was!

After that, he paced to and fro with his servile retinue, all the jewels with which his brilliant garments were sewn flashing in the sunlight. And each time he went by Madge he looked down upon her with a look that said:

"My helpless prisoner—as all your friends are prisoners! How it delights me to see you at my mercy!"

But he soon tired of his airing—the only air he would possibly take to-day—and as soon as he was gone Nassina came up to Madge and signed to her to get up. She was not taken back to the musicians' room, but was allowed to keep her mandoline. Betty was fetched from some other part of the palace, and then Naomer, with Polly and Paula, were called off their task.

Thus the five girl captives were brought together again, to their intense relief, and were led back as one party to their dark dungeon.

One way and another, Madge might well feel that she had turned her own hand a lot, this morning, to good account; but there was one thing yet she hoped to do—the most daring thing of all!

She had managed to take the last position in the line, as they all filed back—Nassina leading, as usual. Now, as the weary, sun-dazzled girls dragged along the dungeon-passage, Madge stealthily took out her screwed-up handkerchief.

She knew which was Rose of the Desert's cell—here it was, with an iron grating above the locked door. Was Rose of the Desert inside at this moment? Madge could not tell; she had got to do the desperate thing, and risk the consequences!

Last in the line, and with Nassina some distance ahead, Madge halted for the merest fraction of a second—just time enough for her to take aim and cast the ball of cambric towards that iron grating. If it struck the bars and fell back, then there would be no trying again this time! Up it flew, and now—no—

Yes!

Oh, what splendid luck!

The screwed-up handkerchief had whizzed silently between the bars! And so Madge could go on with the rest of the schoolgirl slaves, rejoicing in the thought that her rough plan of the

palace had found its way into Rose of the Desert's keeping.

"One Night——"

NIGHT had come again to the schoolgirl slaves, in their lantern-lit dungeon beneath Susahlah's marble halls.

The hour was not late, and the girls were expecting a final visit from Nassina; for, although they had been given their evening meal, it was certain that she would look in upon them once more, to order them to sleep, as had happened on the previous night.

"Well, she can come as soon as she likes, and tell us to get down to it," Polly exclaimed, in a tone of suppressed excitement. "But I for one will not be asleep very quickly, tired as I am!"

"Nor I!" said Betty tensely. "Will it be to-night—oh, I wonder, will it?"

"The mere chance that it may be, is some bit of comfort," Madge put in softly. "And when I think of the luck I had, in getting that plan to Rose of the Desert——"

"Yes, wather! Geals, that may have made all the difference in the world to Wose, as we agreed when Madge told us? Naomer, darling, I'm afraid you are wather depressed; you do not quite gwasp——"

"Oh, yes, I understand, and I try to keep a smile, like you brave English girls that I love," Naomer exclaimed. "Only to see you so brave is what makes me feel to blub!"

"Well, I never!" Polly said, with a queer chuckle. "That's odd, Naomer darling! It ought to make you happy, dear, to see us trying to keep our end up!"

"I keep a smile, and I blub as well—yes," was Naomer's half amusing, half pathetic way of explaining her emotions. "Some day I learn not to blub any more, like you——"

"I've blubbed once to-day, I admit it," Betty owned with a grimace. "It was this morning when Nassina took me up to the flat roof of a building near the palace gateway, and made me stand there for people to stare at me from the street. To be made an exhibition of, like-that, it hurts!"

"Poor Betty, I should just think it did hurt!" Madge exclaimed, catching at the other girl's hand to press it. "That was worse than my having to——"

"Sh! Nassina!"

It was Polly whose ears had been the first to pick up the sound of a step in the passage. All talk ceased at once, and in the sudden silence they heard the voice which they knew so well by this time, murmuring the password to that sentinel who was on duty outside the dungeon.

Then the key grated in the lock, and the heavy door swung open, the girls backing away together as the figure of Nassina—imperious as ever—glided into the dungeon.

She closed the door behind her, and now the girls expected the usual bullying commands that always followed this woman's entry.

Instead, however, a startling thing happened—something that left the five girls gasping with amazement.

A brown hand drew down the white cloth that was folded about the lower half of the woman's face, and so they saw—not the features of Nassina, but the lovely face of Rose of the Desert!

Rose of the Desert—here, in Nassina's stead!

Here, in the guise of Nassina; wearing every bit of raiment that distinguished that woman,

and knowing the password, possessing the dungeon keys—or how else could this wonderful thing have come about?

Wonderful? But it was more than that. To all five girls it seemed miraculous!

"Sh!" Rose of the Desert cautioned them, with a graceful motion of the arm. And then, leaning towards them, she whispered in English:

"Will you take your chance with me? It may be freedom—it may not. But are you ready to take the risk?"

Their excited eyes answered her, and she whispered on:

"When Nassina—that she-fox—came to me, a minute since, I flung myself upon her. She is there in the dungeon that was mine, and will neither cry out nor move an inch, so fear not! The password—listening at the grating of my dungeon, I have often heard the word given, and so I was ready with it. The keys I took from her, as well as such raiment of hers as I needed to disguise myself——"

"Oh, Wose, Wose!" Paula could not help breathing, in an ecstasy of admiration. "Goodness gwacious——"

"Hush!" the intrepid daughter of the desert interrupted. "Now, quick! Follow me, when I lead the way as if I were Nassina! The sentinel has been told by me that the Sultan has sent for thee!"

In the dim lantern light the girls exchanged round-eyed glances. They would follow Rose of the Desert—of course they would! But was it thinkable that they could possibly win through to freedom?



A PERILOUS MOMENT! "Ye have a goodly batch now, Nassina!" The guard smiled obsequiously, and though he looked straight at Rose of the Desert, he failed to penetrate her disguise.

"And what about the others?" Madge whispered anxiously, whilst her chums joined in, just as earnestly:

"Yes—yes, wather! What about Miss Redgrave and Mrs. Hamilton—her husband, too?"

Rose of the Desert's only answer was a reassuring gesture. She had entered with a lantern, and this she now took in her hand again, whilst she signed to one of the girls to pick up the other light.

Betty did this, and then—then the first daring step was taken!

Rose of the Desert, calmly turned back to the door and drew it wide open for the girls to file out. Every inch the gloating Nassina she looked, standing there, whilst the girls, as they passed forth into the dungeon passage, made a point of looking more cowed than ever.

Thus they passed that unsuspecting woman sentinel to whom, just now, the password had been given.

The audacity of this thing that Rose of the Desert had done! But there is a saying that fortune favours the brave, and so far, at any rate, all had gone well with her and those girls for whom, at any time, she would have yielded up her life.

One great advantage was hers, of course. She was actually a native of the same desert city that Nassina belonged to, and so it was easy for her to speak the same dialect to perfection. All the same, the chums of Morocco School and their darling Naomer felt they would never cease to marvel at the courage and daring which their fellow captive had shown.

Rose of the Desert, as she came away from the girls' empty dungeon, locking it after her, even paused to exchange a bit of muttered talk with the deceived sentinel. Then she came on quickly, as if merely to put herself amongst the trembling captives, her gliding step and the poise of her head Nassina's to the life!

Up the shallow dungeon steps they went, meeting no one, and so all at once they emerged upon the courtyard, with the stars flashing in their thousands in the night sky.

Here, too, they made no alarming encounters, although the anxious eyes of the girls could perceive sentinel-like figures looming here and there in the great courtyard.

Then, at a moment when all seemed so safe, one of those watchful guards came away from his post, stalking towards the whole band of girls, as if his suspicion was aroused!

How they kept their heads at that critical moment the girls could never afterwards say. It would certainly have been no surprising thing if they had flown into a panic.

Closer and closer, with his long stride, drew this man of the Sultan's, and there was not the least doubt that he was going to speak with Rose of the Desert, imagining her to be Nassina.

Would he see through the disguise? Would he detect just the faintest difference between this girl's voice and Nassina's? If so—

If so—and the next moment would decide—Rose of the Desert's desperate plan would have been frustrated at the start!

Is It Disaster?

THE man halted but a few paces off from the girls, and to the chums' surprise it was Rose of the Desert who spoke first.

Afterwards they realised that she had murmured the password, just as Nassina or any other

official in the palace would have done in the same circumstances.

As soon as this formality had been gone through, the man spoke with a show of great respect for Nassina, as being one in high favour with the Sultan.

"Ye are with the captive damsels early and late, Nassina!"

"Yea, friend. Anxious are my days and nights, when it is by special favour of the royal master himself that I have charge over these damsels. If I should be only a little careless—"

"Thou wilt never be at fault, thou of whom all Susahlah is so proud!" the man flattered her. "Alas, I would that I were in a better position to serve the royal one! My zeal is great, Nassina, but the opportunity—"

"Thy zeal shall reach the Sultan's ears by word from me, friend." Rose of the Desert spoke him softly. "Pay heed, and I will not fail to reward thee. Guard thou these captives a moment, whilst I go yonder to the place where two others are kept."

"The two women—"

"Even so," was the calm answer, leaving Betty & Co. more amazed than ever at Rose of the Desert's audacity. "It is the royal master's bidding that I assemble all the captives, that they may be taken before him anon!"

And she glided away.

The duped fellow swaggered round the five girls, smiling as he saw how pale and terrified they looked. Their quaking state was only what he expected of them, and so the girls really helped to deceive him by being all of a tremble with dread.

The moments passed, and what moments they were for Betty & Co.! What an eternity of suspense each succeeding second seemed to them!

Supposing this man should be joined by others—what would happen then, when Rose of the Desert returned? And oh, supposing Rose of the Desert did not return, but was found out—caught in the act of getting Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Redgrave out of their prison chamber!

On top of these dismaying thoughts, there was yet another to keep the girls in a frantic state of uneasiness.

How about Mr. Hamilton? Even if Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Redgrave were got out of their prison chamber, how could the Britisher himself ever be got away from where he—

The sudden padding of steps upon the corridor pavement sent a thrill to the girls' hearts. Rose of the Desert was returning—and not alone, either!

Wonderful, again! Here she came, gliding back to the girl captives, with Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Redgrave!

In the pose of Nassina, the daring Rose had not hesitated to present herself at that room which Madge had marked on the plan, to demand that both women be delivered up to her—by the Sultan's wish!

"So!" the man who had been keeping watch upon the girls remarked, showing his white teeth in a flattering smile for "Nassina." "Ye have a goodly batch now, Nassina!"

"Yet is there one more—and him will ye go with me to fetch away," Rose of the Desert answered in Nassina's authoritative tone.

"The Englishman!"

"Yea, even the husband of this woman," the clever girl responded, at the same time striking Mrs. Hamilton lightly across the mouth, as an

"insult." "Go before me, friend, and show the way!"

But the duped guard hesitated.

"Ye ask a strange thing, Nassina!" he exclaimed. "The Englishman—yea, I know where he is lodged; but there are those appointed to guard him. If I interfere—"

"Friend, question not what Nassina is about!" Rose of the Desert spoke sternly. "Is not the Englishman as much my prisoner as these others? Show me to the place where he is, and I will satisfy his guards!"

She added sulkily, as if it were an explanation she should not have been called upon to make:

"These women and girls are with me, and I want not a crowd of soldiers to attend the Englishman when he joins us. One will suffice—and it shall be thou, friend!"

The poor dupe swelled with pride when he heard that. With the false "Nassina" walking her female prisoners in two-and-two fashion, he led on to the other side of the courtyard, to where a dark doorway gave admittance to some dungeon steps.

Here "Nassina" halted Betty and the rest, then went with the guard down the steps, remarking that the captives were too cowed to try and take advantage of their being left alone for the moment.

Left behind in the nightbound yard, under the star-crammed sky, they waited in breathless suspense—Mrs. Hamilton, Miss Redgrave, and the girls. What their longing was to burst into talk may be imagined, but for a minute at least every tongue was held in check.

Then Polly, always a bad hand at keeping a still tongue, broke out with a groaning sort of whisper.

"Oh, if anything goes wrong now! And even if she brings Mr. Hamilton out to us—how are we to get away from the palace!"

"We are in the hands of providence," Miss Redgrave murmured fervently. "Surely Heaven itself will aid us! Think how wonderful it is that we are assembled here, when only a few minutes ago—"

"Yes, wather! Wait till I get to England!" Paula had to exclaim below her breath. "We'll have Woss of the Desert's photograph put in the papers for this! Bai Jove, she must have a medal, too, gals!"

"I say!" came Betty's sudden hopeful whisper. "If only we can get away from the palace before the alarm goes up, it ought to be all right. Rose of the Desert knows every hole and corner of Susahlah; it is her native city!"

"Then perhaps we can escape into the desert," Madge rejoined hopefully, "and—"

"Hark! Oh, what is all the shouting for? Hark!" two or three of the girls suddenly exclaimed.

Huddling together in great dismay, they all turned their eyes towards the other side of the courtyard, for it was from the women's quarter of the vast palace that the outcry was going up.

"It is the alarm!" Mrs. Hamilton said hoarsely. "The whole thing has been found out!"

Life or Death—Which?

FAR underground, in a dark passage similar to the one the girl captives had often traversed to and from their own dungeon, the girl who was posing as Nassina had been halted by her guide outside a prison cell.

There was a guard posted near the door, and

Rose of the Desert addressed herself to him with as much composure as ever.

"Open the door, friend, and let the Englishman come forth! It is the Sultan's command that he and all the other captives shall be taken before him this night, after the feasting."

"So?" the gaoler responded, with slight resentment. "And wherefore does the Sultan's order reach me in this fashion?"

"Nay," the sham Nassina murmured soothingly, "thou knowest that I, Nassina ben Jezrel, am given charge over all the damsels and the women that are prisoners! I am in favour with the Sultan—"

"Thou art, truly?" was the far from good-humoured rejoinder. "Perchance, ye deem the Englishman no better than a woman; but I tell thee, his spirit is not broken yet, Nassina! If he goes, then I go with him—yea!"

"So be it; and this thy friend shall help to protect thee!" Rose of the Desert answered, with just the scorn Nassina might have indulged in. "Open the door!"

The gaoler detached a key from the bunch that hung about his waist by a leathern girdle, and fitted it into the lock. He had thrown open the door, and was calling upon Hamilton to stand forward, when the other man, who had been Rose of the Desert's guide, suddenly bent towards her suspiciously.

"Ye gave me the password," he said; "yet art thou truly Nassina ben Jezrel?" "Nay, by Allah—"

"Rose of the Desert!" Hamilton gasped out, realising in lightning fashion the sort of trick that had been played. Ah—

"Save yourself!" the brave girl panted, whilst she began to struggle with the man who had found her out. "Quick—they are in the courtyard—your wife—the others—"

"What! Then that for you!" Hamilton suddenly cried at his gaoler, with a blow that took the fellow full in the face.

He went down like a log, and next second Hamilton was at the doorway, tackling the other man!

That swarthy fellow had seized Rose of the Desert, but Hamilton's hand went about his throat, and suddenly the girl was free, and the two men were battling together.

Not for long, however. Such strength was Hamilton's as comes to any man when he is fighting for his own life and the lives of dear ones. He shook his opponent until the man's teeth rattled, lifted him clean off the ground, then hurled him headlong into the dungeon.

The fellow fell crash against the gaoler, who was thus laid out flat once more, just as he had started to struggle up.

And then—slam! Click! Rose of the Desert had kept her wits about her. She had pulled the door shut and turned the key, making guard and gaoler alike prisoners in the dungeon, whilst she and Hamilton were in the passage.

"My wife?—the girls?—in the courtyard, you say?" Hamilton panted at her. "Then come on! Oh, my brave girl, whether we succeed or fail, my gratitude to you will be the same. For you to have— Hark, though!"

He came to a dead stop as he voiced that startled word.

"Some alarm going up! You hear it, Rose of the Desert? All that shouting and yelling, somewhere—"

"Nay, fear not; all goes well!" was the desert-girl's calm answer. "It is an alarm of fire."

"Fire!"

"Yea! It is but a part of my plan! Thus do we gain our chance to escape whilst all is confusion!"

"You mean to say you have set the palace on fire?" Hamilton gasped.

"Nay, O master! There is no fire, only a smother of smoke; but it deceives them. In this city there is nothing dreaded more than fire!"

It was no time to stand talking. Every second was of vital value now, and Hamilton simply rushed along the dungeon passage and up the dark stairway, with Rose of the Desert following just as fleetly.

So, in a brief space, they gained the open air, where the ever-increasing shouts and yells of panic were appalling to hear.

Thick clouds of reeking smoke—caused, as the escaping captives afterwards learned, by Rose of the Desert having kindled some litter that was smothered with wetter stuff—were drifting out of the women's quarters; and to the inmates of the place it must have seemed as if a devastating fire had broken out.

Hence a state of dire panic everywhere. Not a man was keeping at his proper post. The smoke was drifting across the courtyard, and such figures as Betty & Co. could discern through the thick pall were ones that dashed blindly to and fro.

Some carried wildly-waved lanterns, others torches, and as these tossing lights shone redly through the smother, Hamilton thought to himself:

"They'll have a fire in real earnest, if they are not careful!"

Not that he or any of his desperate companions were lingering to watch the scene of cowardly panic.

Almost in the very moment that Hamilton and the desert girl rejoined the others in the courtyard, they were making the best of their opportunity.

Hamilton would have made a direct rush for the gateway. He had armed himself with a snatched-up stick, and was ready to lay out any man who might be there to challenge him. But Rose of the Desert, fortunate in having all that knowledge of the palace which had been acquired in earlier days, said quickly:

"Nay, this way, friends!"

Speeding after her, they were soon zig-zagging along a narrow alley-way between two very high walls, one of which seemed to be the boundary wall that encircled the whole great stronghold.

Sure enough, all at once Rose of the Desert fetched up breathlessly in front of a gateway, and when her hands had manipulated fastenings that she must have been acquainted with, she dragged the wooden door wide open, and her companions looked out into the dark streets of the city.

"Then come on!" was Hamilton's urging word. "None shall stop us now!"

He looked, indeed, game enough to battle through a whole mob of the Sultan's men, as he placed himself at the head of the fugitive band of girls and women. The missile he held was as thick and heavy as a table-leg, and he was the man to wield it to good effect if the need should arise!

But, with the pandemonium in the palace growing every moment wilder, throwing the whole desert city into a state of terror, the escaping

prisoners were able to dart along this alleyway, and that without being checked.

It was groping dark in those narrow by-streets, and some of the smoke had already drifted in this direction. Native men and women there were, but they themselves were all rushing about in great confusion.

Fire!

As Rose of the Desert had said, it was the one thing which the whole populace stood most in dread of. Let a fire break out in this desert city, it might spread and spread until the whole place was burning from end to end! And this, too, was a fire at the royal palace!

Out of one narrow street into another sped the desperate fugitives, often brushing close by native men and women without being suspected. It might have gone otherwise with the escaping prisoners if one had not been Rose of the Desert. For, now and then, someone going by at a rush, making for the palace, cried out an anxious question, and then Rose of the Desert was able to answer with all the fluency of a native of this city.

Whenever she did have to make answer like this, she took care to convey the very gravest information, and so the alarm was deepened. The palace was on fire! The palace was a raging furnace! The whole city was in danger!

But now the fugitives had to emerge from the last of those sheltering side-streets on to a wide one that led to the city gate. How would they fare now?

"Girls—"

"Yes, Betty?"

"I say, I wonder if Mr. Hamilton knows." Betty panted under her breath, with only Polly, Paula and Madge near enough to catch her excited words, "there are scores of camels at the palm-camp outside the city? I saw them to-day, when I was made to stand on show on the palace wall! Oh, if only we can get out of the city—"

"Past that gateway—yes! But it is closed for the night!" Madge muttered, with a hissing breath.

How then—how were they ever to get past that formidable barrier, into the open desert to freedom!

Mr. Hamilton could not have known, yet he set forward across the wide approach to the gateway as if he had success at his command.

Here and there in the darkness a man could be dimly seen joining in the rush that had set in everywhere for the heart of the town. A fire at the palace! What a sight to behold, if one could only get near enough!

So, even in this open space inside the city gates, the would-be fugitives, for all most of them were in British garb, claimed no one's notice. But there was one fellow, the custodian of the gateway, who still remained at his post, and with him Mr. Hamilton had got to reckon!

In advance of the girls, straight for that gate-keeper the Britisher went, and all in a moment the dusky fellow was laid out flat—knocked senseless by a straight-from-the-shoulder blow that a British fist had dealt him.

The massive keys were slung by a girdle about his waist, and Hamilton knelt down, with what seemed to his agitated companions amazing calmness, to take possession of them.

At that moment a violent knocking started upon the outer side of the age-old gate, and there were excited yells from men impatient to be admitted.

"My gracious!" palpitated Paula. "How can

we get out without letting them in! And then—"

"It's all right," Hamilton himself answered, getting up from his knees with the bunch of keys in his hands. "All of you—stand aside there, in that doorway, and wait for my signal!"

They obeyed with a rush, huddling out of sight in the narrow doorway which he had indicated. And then they saw him walk calmly to the city gates, and work one massive key into the primitive lock, whilst the timbers shook with the pushing and thudding of the impatient mob outside.

His steady hand turned back the hasp, and instantly both gates swung inwards, letting through the jabbering throng that had come rushing hither, drawn to the city by the great uproar.

To Freedom!

MR. HAMILTON, as would have been the case with the proper gatekeeper, was simply swept backwards, with one of the gates screening him; and so the rabble stormed past him.

combined with British pluck, alone had achieved the apparently impossible!

Away across the sands of the desert—how they sped on, all of them, under that wide and starry sky, making a bee-line for the palm clump where the camels could be seized.

And now, as they darted anxious glances behind them, there was a sight that could mean only one thing.

Mr. Hamilton's belief that there would be a fire in real earnest at the palace was being justified. In the very heart of the desert city there was a lurid glow, against which the squat, flat-roofed buildings were blackly silhouetted. Some overturned lantern or dropped torch had done the trick, kindling a real blaze in the palace, and now, indeed, might the whole populace be alarmed for the safety of the city.

With the keen desert-wind blowing across the town, those fanned flames would leap higher and higher—and who amongst all the Sultan's guards and slaves would make any attempt to cope with



THE BURNING OF SUSANLAH! Through the thick pall of smoke that drifted across the courtyard, Betty and Co. could see the natives dashing to and fro, shouting, gesticulating, frantic with terror!

They made a closely-packed crowd of perhaps thirty men, and when they were gone no stragglers came in their wake.

"Oh, I know who they are—the men who were in charge of all the camels!" Betty burst out excitedly. "And that's all the better for us!"

"Bai Jove—yes, wather!"

"Now!" came the word from Mr. Hamilton, and in a flash his companions were out of their hiding-place and speeding after him through the gateway.

The open desert!

Here it was, and only a few hundred yards away were the picketed camels. To the fleeing prisoners it seemed as if they could now shout:

"Free! Free!"

No longer did the dungeons of Susahlah hold them captive. They had escaped from the palace; they were now even outside the formidable walls of the desert city. And all this—this wonderful, providential escape—it had been accomplished with no aid from outside!

The daring and audacity of Rose of the Desert,

the raging conflagration? With the helpless fatalism of their race, men and women alike would be mere despairing onlookers, thinking:

"Kismet—it is fate! It must burn!"

Burn that fire did in any case, for the lurid glow was growing brighter and brighter whilst the fugitives were unloosing camels at the palm-clump and getting mounted.

Away!—away!—as fast as ever the fleet beasts could traverse the nightbound wastes, and if ever the girls looked back, whilst they clung on as best they could to their jolting mounts, they saw the city of Susahlah burning fiercely.

On and on! Over the great desert, every yard of the way meaning greater hope for the chums of Morocco and their fellow fugitives; and so at last the city they had fled from—that foul stronghold of barbarity, only fit to be wiped for ever from the map—was far down upon the level horizon. A whole town, blazing from end to end!

"No wonder there was no pursuit!" jerked out Betty, still hanging on rather comically to the camel that was bearing her along with the rest.

"The people back there have got something else to think about now, without bothering about us!"

"Ye-ye-yes, wuw-wuw-wather!" Paula had to chime in, although almost all the breath was jolted out of her body. "It's quite all right, what? At this wate, geals, we shall soon be back at Morcove!"

"Ha, ha, ha! But that's the way to talk, Paula darling," chuckled Polly. "To me, it really is just as if we shall be at the dear old school again before another day is out!"

"Well, I can promise you this," Mr. Hamilton cried to the girls, "by sunrise you will be in friendly territory! See—there are the mountains that lie between Susalah and Nakara. Even if we have to dismount and abandon the camels on this side, we'll soon be across the heights. And then—"

"I see my grandfather once more, before I go to the great country of England!" was Naomer Nakara's delighted outburst. "I say him, good-bye, keep a smile, and then I go to England to be taught!"

"Yes, wather! And don't forget, Naomer darling, there will be woom for you in my study. Bai Jove, geals—"

"Hurrah, hooray! That's how I feel!" sang out Polly, the madcap, and she urged on her trusty camel: "Goo on, there! Gee-up—gee-hoa!"

Mrs. Hamilton, riding close to Miss Redgrave, made a laughing comment on the jubilant state the girls were in, now that all danger was past.

"Those girls of yours—what a handful they must be, dear!"

"Sometimes!" allowed the youthful mistress of the Fourth Form at Morcove. "And do you know what I am thinking? Naomer Nakara looks like being a special handful, apart from the rest!"

"Ah, our quaint little Naomer," was Mrs. Hamilton's rejoinder, whilst she glanced at Nakara's future ruler in the starshine. "Yes, I think you are right. From what I have seen of her, all the time she has been under my eye at the palace of Nakara, Morcove School is going to find another madcap in her. What do you say, you girls?"

"Naomer? I say she has come through everything like a little heroine!" Betty answered for one.

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Like a weal bwick!"

"And if ever, Naomer dear, you do find yourself pining for your native land, when you are at Morcove," Madge put in, laughing lightly, "I'll play you a tune on one of those mandoline-things!"

"Oh, I not blub one leetlest tear now," Naomer assured them gaily. "I keep a smile, always!"

"That's the stuff!" chuckled Polly. "Hurrah, then, for England, home, and beauty! And if ever there's talk of another trip to this part of the world—well, just count me out!"

Then they all laughed, nor did the flow of light-hearted talk cease for a single moment, whilst the chums of Morcove and their friends rode on and on through the African night, leaving the burning city of the tyrant Sultan far behind them in the desert!

A fortnight later, Betty & Co. landed in England, and what a day of never-to-be-forgotten joy it was for the girls; what huggings and kisses between loving parents and their sunburnt schoolgirl travellers, on the quay at Dover!

What a great hour for Naomer, too, when at last her pretty feet were firmly set upon the land of her dreams! England—Morcove!

But, as a record of all the strange and perilous adventures which Betty & Co. met with, during their "mission" to the desert country of North Africa, our story really ends here.

It needs a fresh story altogether, to describe what that little dusky damsel, Naomer, made of Morcove School, when she got there—and what Morcove made of her!

That story may be told someday. Meantime, will it not be just as big a change to us, as it was to the chums of the Fourth Form, to be done with all the barbarism of Susalah and its tyrant ruler, and to be in the old surroundings once again?

So, instead of scenes laid in such strange places as the dungeons of Susalah or the glowing desert, we shall have class-room and study before our eyes when the curtain rises once more.

Paula, without doubt, will be lolling in the old favourite chair in Study No. 12. Betty Barton will be managing to "keep a smile," as Naomer has it, in spite of the little trials and difficulties of the Fourth Form captaincy. Madge will be able to romp downstairs to the music-room for a bit of Beethoven, whenever she is inclined, instead of being forced to play a native mandoline as a slave musician! And Polly—

Well, if Polly Linton is not more than ever the madcap of the Fourth, we shall be surprised!

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Next Week's Grand
New Morcove Story
is entitled:

"The Day Girl's Dilemma!"



Once more we find Betty Barton & Co. back at the grand old school. Besides Naomer, two new girls have arrived—JESS LINGARD, a poor girl who has won her way into the school by sheer hard work, and her cousin, STELLA MUNRO, a girl whose indulgent parents have granted her every wish. When I tell you that the rich girl chums up with the exclusive and snobbish Audrey Blain, you will guess that Stella has little inclination to have much to do with her humble cousin. But you cannot guess at the extraordinary complications which arise through this relationship. It is a story that will hold you enthralled from start to finish.



Order Next Week's Issue
of "The Schoolgirls' Own"
At Once.