

COMPLETE WITHIN "MORCOVE MUST TAKE THE RISK" By MARJORIE STANTON

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2^d



"WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?"

A tense moment in this week's powerful long complete Morcove-In-India holiday tale.

AN ENTHRALLING COMPLETE STORY OF BETTY AND CO.'S HOLIDAY ADVENTURES IN INDIA

Morcove Must Take the Risk



BY MARJORIE STANTON

WHILE seeking the mystic Temple of the Moon, in the very heart of India's mighty jungle, Betty and Co. and the other members of the intrepid party have fallen into dire peril from which, it seems, there may be no way out!

The Night is Past

DAWN, after a night of a million stars. Break of day, after a night of lurking danger.

The crests of the rugged mountains were suffused with rosy light. As high up as any of them, or so it seemed, a bird of prey winged this way, that way, his eagle eye doubtless searching the cool, sunless valley.

There had been rifle fire at fitful intervals during the night. So now perhaps as the hot Indian day drew on there would be something for beak and talon to work upon.

"PHEW, girls, I am thankful!"
"That it's morning again? So am I, Polly!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Hawdly a wink all night!"

"Bekas eef eet was not somebody potting at ze camp, eet was mosquitoes, or spiders, or snakes."

"Not snakes, Naomer dear," smiled Betty Barron, in term-time the captain of the Fourth Form at Morcove School. "You must have dreamed the snakes."

"What ze diggings, how could I dream when I didn't get to sleep all night!"

But now somebody had a word to say about this contention, having unflapped the tent to

look in upon the four girls who had slept there for the night.

Mrs. Linton it was, mother of that madcap Morcovian, Polly Linton.

"Oh, come, Naomer," laughed Mrs. Linton, "when I gave you a look-in during the night you were fast asleep! You all were—to my great relief."

"No, bekas I zink I only shut my eyes so as not to see all ze creepy-crawly things," argued that little imp, Naomer Nakara, who was Morcove's royal scholar from some tiny desart kingdom in North Africa.

And now during the "hols" Naomer, along with all her best chums of Morcove School, was out in India.

Not only so, but being out in India the girls were at present in a pretty tight corner, together with various grown-ups and a jolly trio of school-boys.

"Owp!" came dolefully from that amiable duffer, Paula Creel. "Wow!"

"Now what's the matter!"

"The mosquito curtain. Geals, geals, I am i-xtwivably wound up in muslin."

"Like a blessed silkworm-cocoon, I declare you are!" snorted Polly, with her usual make-believe impatience towards the beloved duffer. "Mumsie darling, Paula wants to go home to-day."

"I'm afraid Paula can't," the jest was blandly answered. "Hero we are—"

"But don't, mumsie, don't say here we must stay."

"Oh, no. We shall go on again presently."

"Hooray!" cheered Polly heartily. "Stuff to give them! But it would be a crime to turn back now, when we're only a few miles from the Temple of the Moon, where Professor Donkin hopes to make such wonderful discoveries."

"Yes, pipooray!" shrielled Naomer, none the less skittish for her alleged bad night. "And blow ze old Rajah of Chodopore—"

"Blow, bugles, blow!" a boyish voice at this instant vociferated, outside the tent. "Cookhouse, boys."

"Just hark to Jack," chuckled Polly, for that was unmistakably her fun-loving brother, starting to give a very effective imitation of a bugle-call.

"Fall in, A Company."

"Shan't!" Morcove's madcap shouted through the canvas wall of the tent. "I'm not dressed yet."

"And what ze diggings, I can't find anything!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Linton left the four girls to it and passed out in time to see her lively son treating the occupants of other tents to facetious cries. Having worked off some of his early-morning jocularity, he was going towards his and the other boys' tent, but he saw his mother and tacked towards her.

"Morning, mater. You look all right, anyhow."

"I am all right. It's just wonderful; not one of us seems a bit the worse, really, considering how disturbed the night has been."

"Nice healthy country."

"Is it? But I do think it was abominable of those tribesman, or whoever they were, to take pot shots at our camp directly darkness fell. I didn't think it a healthy sign, Jack, when a stray bullet went right through one of the girls' tents."

"When I was out in India in sixty-three, mater—"

"Oh, go on with you," laughed the fun-lover's mother with an affectionate push. "And make yourself tidier than that for breakfast."

"Certainly, mater. Orderly!" Jack continued his nonsense, with a shout for one or another of the boys with whom he had shared a tent.

"Where's my batman? Private Dick Cherrol—"

Whereupon Dicky Cherrol stood forth, playfully saluting.

"Full dress, my man," said Jack, pretending to twirl a fine military moustache. "And put plenty of Shino on my buttons."

"Yessir."

"Ape!" a sisterly voice derided Jack, and he looked across some rough ground to see Polly putting her head outside her tent. "Morning, Dicky!" she hailed, pretending to ignore her brother. "Had a good night?"

"Fine, thanks. Topping morning, Polly."

"Private Cherrol, two days' C.B. for talking!" Jack stormed, and then strolling into his tent he was instantly done with all nonsense.

He had quiet Dave Cardew to talk to now, and although Dave could enjoy fun as well as the next fellow, by nature he was serious, and Jack liked to adapt himself to his company.

"They don't quite know how many miles to the temple, Dave old son; but have a good try to get there to-day."

Dave nodded that that was the idea certainly.

Dicky came into the tent. He and Jack, whilst Dave went on lacing a boot, looked at each other, and ended by smiling grimly. The three

boys seemed to be having thoughts that they knew were best kept from the Morcove section of the expedition.

"I dunno," frowned Jack at last. "Seems as if we upset the rajah chap pretty badly yesterday. Pretty clear he's no friend of ours now."

"If you ask me," grimaced Dick, "he was going to be a trouble, anyhow. His friendship would only have been a pretence. Chap's an out-and-out rotter. Strange, when you think what a decent sort his father, the old rajah, was."

Suddenly Jack chuckled.

"Ha, ha, ha! Can't help laughing over the way we sailed into him at his palace yesterday when he was just enjoying having one of his workmen almost flogged to death."

Dave stamped a foot into the other boot and did more lacing. Then having tied the knot he stood up.

"It'll be coming back that we shall get it," he remarked tersely.

"Get what, Dave?"

"The worse of the rajah's treachery. This is the position as I see it: Our Professor Donkin is the only chap in the world who can solve the mystery of the Temple of the Moon up yonder in the mountains. So the rajah at heart wants the professor to succeed. But he won't want the professor to reap the reward of success."

"How do you mean, then, Dave?" asked Dick. "Is there money in it, do you think—buried treasure and all that?"

"How can Dave say?" Jack butted in breezily. "When the professor himself won't say a word as to what all those ancient documents that he translated revealed. But I guess Dave is right about the rajah. We'll have all our work out to keep clear of him on our way back. Meantime we haven't got there yet."

Less than a minute after this, however, the boys were showing what a determination there was to "get there" sooner or later, and so were most of the girls.

There was a general bustling about to be en route again as soon as possible after breakfast. That alfresco meal was being got ready by several of the Morcove juniors, under the superintendence of Mrs. Cardew, mother of Dave and his sister Judy.

It may be doubted whether Naomer's presence at the "cookhouse" served any useful purpose. But there she was, disputing the position of second-in-command with madcap Polly.

Soon a brew of tea was "on the go," and Betty and others who were letting down the tents and getting things together generally, nipped across for what the dusky one called a "refresher."

But the boys were too far off and much too busy to come running up for a mugful, dipped out of the dixey. They had taken on all the work of tending the teams of oxen, which with sundry ancient native carts, the expedition was now dependent upon for transit.

This time yesterday there had been three cars to rely upon, plus the present bullock carts. But the hateful quarrel with the young Rajah of Chodopore had cost Morcove & Co. those cars and also all native labour.

"Here you are, you boys," smiled staid Madge Minden, turning up at the wagon-lines with a welcome jugful of tea. "And brekker will be really ready in five minutes from now."

"Salaam, meess sahib," Jack said. "We're warm, boys, but we're not whacked, nunno. This way to the cattle show."

"Not exactly fat stock," Madge commented on the very bony oxen. "Poor things."

"They'll fill out as they get older," Jack gravely assured her. "At present they're only about twenty years old."

But he had as kind a heart for dumb friends as had Madge and all the others. Even whilst he was joking he went on seeing after the patient creatures in a way that they certainly appreciated.

"And altogether, Madge, I can't feel frightfully sorry the porter-wallahs did desert yesterday," he chatted on cheerily. "Too much shouting in their own lingo; too much jello-jello!"

He looked round for Dick.

"Corporal Cherrol, you may take a drink."

Madge was smiling as she went away to rejoin some of her girl chums, leaving those three boys so hard at it and so full of fun.

"We'd be lost without them."

"The boys? Rather!" agreed tall Pam Willoughby, strapping a holdall. "Dad has just been telling me; they each took a turn on guard in the night. Oh, bother, I've left out these medicines!"

"They can go into some other bag," Helen Craig remarked of the overlooked case of "pocket" remedies and anti-sting lotions. "So long as we do make sure of them, Pam. We mustn't forget that we're a bit down in our stock of such things after yesterday, when Judy here gave away that other caseful to that poor native woman."

"Yes," Judy Cardew agreed in a tone of deep feeling. "I wonder if she was able to take anything that did her good. How ill she looked, shut away down there in that awful shanty of a place in the swampy forest."

"If only we could have brought her and her daughter away with us," was Madge's wistful rejoinder. "Oh, it's too awful for words—to think the hateful rajah has sort of doomed them to stay in that dreadful place."

"But we're not going to allow it," Pam said with fervent relief. "Not likely! It's going to be an awfully risky business; but my parents, and Polly's and your mother, Judy—oh, and the professor, too, their minds are made up, we know. Before we leave Chodopore—"

There was a sudden noisy and not unwelcome interruption: the whang, bang, whang of a biscuit tin, beaten by Naomer with all her might over at "cook-house."

"Bekas, everybody, fall in for brekker!" yelled the dusky one joyously. "Everybody, roll up for rations, and a prize for ze best appertite."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But all the stout-hearted jollity of mustering for this first meal of the day did not last for long.

Less than five minutes later there was the sudden clip, clop of cantering horses, coming along the road of dry mud from the direction of the palace, which was only a few miles away.

Then juniors and grown-ups alike saw, and saw with amazement; the young rajah himself, riding straight towards them.

Their Enemy—Now

"THE rajah!"

It was uttered in amazement by every member of the expedition.

"The rajah—and what does he want!"

He came up at a smart canter, with a "syce" or native groom at a respectful distance behind.

The young rajah was in the same riding kit that he had been wearing when first some of the members of the expedition encountered him yesterday, before they got to his palace.

He was, too, in the same airy, swaggering mood, treating first the grown-ups and then the boys and girls to polite bows from horseback, that had a good deal of mockery in them.

"Good-morning," he smiled, speaking in his fluent English. "Only when he was excited did his English speech become tintured with Oriental mannerisms."

"Good-morning, rajah," said the menfolk



Displaying the medicine-case, the young Rajah said, with fine sarcasm: "Something you left behind yesterday that you cannot afford to be without! To whom shall I give this?"

stiffly, whilst the ladies of the party showed a deliberate coldness.

Swinging down from his saddle and leaving the "syce" to keep an eye on the mettlesome black horse, the rajah clicked his heels together. He was very vain of his slim, tall figure.

"I always take an early morning ride," he explained silkily. "So I thought I would come this way and see if you were all right. You had a peaceful night, I hope?"

"We had some scoundrels or other firing at us during the night," frowned Mr. Linton. "In your territory."

"Ah, it is one of the things I have to take in hand," smiled the rajah mockingly; "a certain lawlessness that started in my late father's time. He relied on kindness, you know, and I am afraid it—well, it didn't work."

"You will have a difficulty, rajah, in replacing it with something better," said Mr. Willoughby sternly. "But you must excuse us; time does not permit of argument."

"Oh, I am not for wasting your time!" was the laughed retort. "Having chosen to quarrel with me, you will have your work cut out now to complete the work and get these boys and girls back to England in time for next term, eh?"

The look he had for the juniors then, it angered them.

Once again they seemed to see beneath the thin veneer of Western culture, discerning the real craftiness and cruelty of the man.

He turned grandly, to sign to the groom that he would remount.

"Oh, and by the way," he faced the Britishers again, "something you left behind yesterday that you cannot afford to be without. To whom shall I hand this?"

And he displayed a case of tropic medicines which the groom had handed him.

Intensely dramatic was the silence that reigned as he stood there, offering to hand over the case, and the Britishers stood simply staring at it.

For it was the self-same case of phials, as they all instantly realised, that had been conferred in secret upon the fever-stricken woman yesterday back there in the forest of Chodopore.

"Thank you, I'll have it," said Mr. Linton, his steel-blue eyes meeting the rajah's. "We did not leave this behind at the palace."

The rajah with a wicked smile and a shrug turned to his horse again.

"It was brought to me by one of my men, that is all I know," he lied. And after he had vaulted into the saddle again:

"Well, I still wish you the best of luck, Professor Donkin, over your investigations at the Temple of the Moon. You must be sure to report to me at the palace on your way back."

The spirited horse reared up, but the rajah obviously enjoyed showing off his horsemanship. In a few moments he had given flourishing farewells and was galloping away.

The metal case that had been handed to Mr. Linton was shining in the clear morning sunlight. Mr. Linton seemed to wince as he looked down at it. He turned to those who were grouped about it and found them looking similarly distressed.

"He means to prevent us helping that poor woman!" broke from Betty in great distress. "What are we to do? We can't desert them."

SOMETHING had to be done, and done at once. But what should it be?

Morcove and the boys were to find themselves of one mind in the end about the answer to that

problem. When next minute the grown-ups were conferring amongst themselves, as they were bound to do at times, the juniors began their own subdued burst of talk.

"Not another yard further until we have done something for that woman and her daughter!" Pelly said determinedly.

"We must put their welfare before all else, yes," nodded Pam, whilst Betty chimed in:

"It's rough on the professor. This Temple of the Moon business has promised to be the crowning work of his lifetime. But the temple has kept its secret for how many thousand years. So it isn't likely to give it up to anyone else in the meantime."

"Goodness, no!" said Jack. "The professor has got the field to himself there. It's what is rattling the rajah so much; he must depend upon the professor. Only the rotter doesn't want the expedition to do anything to save his victims."

"Some big reason why he means to keep them shut away in that swamp," Dave reasoned quietly.

"We shall have to save them!" Helen exclaimed passionately. "And there's no time to waste."

At this instant they saw that prompt agreement had been reached amongst the grown-ups. The juniors were being beckoned, and they ran up eagerly.

"We think of doing this," Mr. Linton began with complete composure. "Some of us must go back."

"Oh, good!" was the chorus.

"All things considered," continued Mr. Linton, "the party to go back had better consist of Mrs. Cardew, Dave and Judy. Also Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, with Pam."

"It's a case of going back on foot," said Mr. Willoughby. "But you youngsters won't mind that. We go back to yesterday's jumping-off place. That's on the edge of the pavement, so to speak. There we can obtain reinforcements."

"And we may take it for granted, I suppose," smiled Pam serenely, "that if we want to turn aside into the forest to call at that wretched place where Naina and her mother are living, we shall do so?"

"We shall do that, right enough," Mrs. Willoughby smiled and nodded. "It should be all the easier when Dave and Judy will be with us. They know the place."

"Good enough!" broke from Jack heartily. "Loud cheers. Dave old son, you've got a fine innings in front of you. If you don't keep your wicket up—but you will."

"We must all make the best of a bad job," said Mr. Linton with a forced laugh. "There's a lot of danger in the air, and perhaps we ought all to go back. But if we did that we'd have to go right back. We couldn't hang about in Chodopore."

"As it is, boys and girls," Mr. Willoughby joined in cheerily, "by one half of the party going towards the temple the rajah may not suspect. He's bound to discover that some of us have been sent back, but it will look as if that is merely to keep open lines of communication, as it were."

"So long as he doesn't discover all the rest," Polly exclaimed. "But there, that's up to those who go back, and I wish I were one of them."

"Afraid you are going to have too tame a time of it, my dear, going on with the rest to the temple." Her father laughed gravely. "You needn't imagine, Polly, that you won't get your share of excitement. So now to get busy."

"Fall in A Company!" cried Jack. "Corporal Cherrol, tell the baggage wallahs to yoke up. Come on, boys."

As the "baggage wallahs" only existed in Jack's imagination he and Dick Cherrol scooted away to do the yoking up of the oxen. And Morcove, whilst it found a hundred and one things to do with all possible speed, yet had time to notice that Jack and Dick managed very well for amateurs.

Half an hour later all was right for the move off. Those who were going back had now been dubbed the "Flying Column," and they certainly looked mobile enough to deserve the term.

Everything they would have with them had been got into haversacks. The distance was nothing great, and with ample allowance for intervals of rest by the way they could hope to reach yesterday morning's "jumping off place" for the wilds before nightfall.

There, as they knew, a couple of fresh cars could be obtained and an ample petrol supply, so that with any luck they might be with the rest of the party again by tomorrow evening at the temple itself.

Dave, coming up with Judy and Pam to say good-bye to the other juniors, drew an envious cry from Jack.

"What's that he's wearing!"

A revolver.

"I was going to make you a sergeant, temporary, without pay," said Jack to Dave. "Shan't now. But, my boy—my boy," tapping him upon the shoulder in fatherly fashion, "if you keep the flag flying you shall draw some of your pay in a fortnight's time."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ape," Polly stigmatised her brother mirthfully. "Well, good-bye, Judy darling, and you Pam darling. Best of luck!"

"And booh to ze rotten old rajah!" shrilled Naomer. "Have you got plenties of food for ze journey. Bekas you never know."

"Enough to last us days," laughed Pam, reaching a hand round to pat her haversack.

"And some medicines," added Judy with a meaning smile.

"Bai Jove," beamed Paula, "it is a welief, yes, wather, that you are going to visit Naina and her mother! Pway give them my love, gails. I have nevah met them, but I feel sallowy for them all the same."

"Hear, hear!" said Tess, whilst others murmured to the same effect.

By now the intense heat of the Indian day was upon this wilderness of rock and sunbaked earth. The yellowish, tufty grass rustled harshly in the hot breeze. Lizards darted about, taking their toll upon the myriads of insects that Paula in particular found so trying.



The leopard leapt at Naina with deadly accuracy, but before it reached the native girl two shots rang out. Mr. Wilmoughby and Dave had been on the alert.

To look up to the great hills was to see them colourless in the blinding sunlight. At moments the dazzled eye would play a trick, and then it would seem as if the mighty masses of rock were molten and so changing their shape.

Last good-byes were said all round, and then there was a ringing cheer from all their friends as the Flying Column moved off on foot.

At no moment had there been an under-note of sadness or anxiety in all the last cries and counter-cries. Plans had been altogether upset; the secret hostility of the rajah and the desperate need to rescue those two victims of his, out of common humanity—these things had put a sudden and tremendous strain upon the entire expedition.

But they were changed conditions and sudden emergencies that had at the same time put young and old alike upon their mettle.

Naina and her mother were to be saved. They must be saved.

The fact that the rajah had somehow possessed himself of the helpful medicines within a few hours of their being presented to Naina and her mother yesterday, it proved what sort of man he was.

Now, more than ever, Morcove & Co. was determined that humanity should prevail over ruthlessness.

Far, far more was to be accomplished, at least, so it was hoped, than the mere bestowal of a fresh supply of medicines upon that woman lying so ill in the forest dwelling, with only her devoted daughter to care for her.

Those who were going back hoped to arrange

for the final escape of mother and daughter. It would take some doing. But much could be secretly arranged, at any rate, against the thrilling hour when the whole expedition would be on its way back.

Meantime there was Jack's jocular "jello, jello!" to the teams of oxen, signalling the start off upon the next stage in the direction of the temple.

Jack had noticed that a cry like "jello, jello!" seemed to be what you said in India if you wanted anybody to "get a move on." And sure enough it certainly answered where the oxen were concerned.

All that day they kept on at a mere snail's pace. The patient beasts had a good deal of rough ground to traverse, and it would have been unkind to urge them. Also there were some uphill stretches where the travellers always got down to walk, out of that kindness to animals which is second nature to Britishers.

Roasting hot was the afternoon, and the flies were a terrible pest. Betty and the other girls, trudging along with a weariness that made them laugh at themselves, missed Judy and Pam, the same as Jack and Dicky were missing Dave. But there it was; "all for a good cause."

This rugged country just under the giant mountains knew no cultivated patches. It was a land of desolation.

Once only did they come upon a fellow being, and he was an aged priest, a living skeleton, with a shaven skull, resting beside the way in a rare bit of shade.

Professor Donkin conversed with the man fluently in the native, and so the others got to know that the priest was returning from the Temple of the Moon.

He had been on a pilgrimage to it, barefoot all the way. Now he was going back to some far-distant village, very happy.

Naomer offered him some chocolate, but although he accepted it with every sign of thanks, he threw the chocolate itself away and kept the silver paper.

In the late afternoon the sun was behind the mountains, and Morcove could breathe again. The professor had been consulting some maps as he walked with Mr. Linton, and now the word was given for the day's journey to end.

A camp was to be pitched in good time for the coming night.

"And this, girls, is as far as we propose to go with our outfit," Mr. Linton explained to them presently. "The temple, according to our maps, is only a couple of miles further on; but it's in a spot terribly difficult to get at."

"But, daddy, only two miles!" cried Polly. "Say an hour to get there and an hour to get back, at most. Oh, can't we just get a peep at the ruins before dark?"

"It would be jolly," Betty added her eager cry.

"Well, we'll see."

There was just enough in this from Mr. Linton to tell the girls; it all depended upon how quickly everything could be got ready for the night.

So there was a speedy off-loading of tenting and stores, and very soon some of the tents were up. The girls had run them out, and they had a right to be proud of the achievement, the nature of the camping ground being what it was.

As for Jack and Dick they stuck by their oxen. Taking them to where a bit of grazing could be

found, with no fear of straying, they left them well provided with water also.

It was getting the water for the beasts that took up the boys' time. The so-called well was really only a mud-hole, but to get the water up, a bucket at a time without turning the rest to a thick soup, wanted some doing.

"Whew, and now I could do with a drink myself," puffed Jack, coming across to the girls with Dick by and bye. "A long, fizzy one, through a couple of straws, would be just a treat."

He got that treat. Naomer had one of her own "patent" fizzy ones to offer in competition with tea brewed by Mrs. Linton. Jack sucked down his foaming tumblertful through two straws, exchanging appreciative winks with Dick, who had also favoured a soft drink. Then Jack inquired:

"Any repeats, Naomer? Hooray, boys, encores going. She makes a jolly good drink-wallah, doesn't she, Dave?"

Naomer bowed to the compliment.

"Bekas I have had eggspereience at Morcove, don't forget."

Betty, taking a rest along with the rest of them, suddenly murmured:

"I wonder how the others are getting on. We shan't know a thing about them until we see them again."

And perhaps when this was said a sense of foreboding seized all who were there. For there was complete silence such as comes after a sudden thrill of vague fear for the safety of those who have gone into deadly danger.

In Secret

"THIS is the place," said Dave.

They had come at last by cautious stages to where the hardly distinguishable track led away into the depths of the forest.

Of the six of them Dave and Judy alone had gone this way before. Now the brother and sister were to tread the dangerous path with a welcome escort of grown-ups, not to mention Pam, who was always girlish pluck itself.

But Judy knew full well that although the protection was greater than yesterday, so much greater was the danger.

Were the rajah's spies about? Were there eyes in the forest and ears, too, all on the alert to see and hear anything that, reported at the palace, would win the tyrant's favour?

Stepping softly, they went between the giant trees whose masses of foliage dimmed the daylight. One behind another, Dave and Mr. Willoughby going first and second, they filed along the grass-encumbered path.

With such caution was every step taken, only once did a bird fly off screeching from branches overhead. And presently they came upon a snake that actually seemed to be taken by surprise.

It lifted its head and hissed at them, then slid away into the undergrowth. Another snake they found, gorged with a recent meal, and it only gleamed its eyes at them as they skirmished by silently.

Dave and Pam's father had each a revolver in hand now. The danger was as deadly as that. When a crashing sound came from several trees away and then the cries of some creature of the wild, they knew that it had been dropped upon, as any one of them might be at any instant.

And it was to such a world that the rajah had banished his widowed sister-in-law and her young daughter. Fever arising by night to assail

them, and if the fever failed, then there were how many other dangers promising to gratify his cruel whim, that both of them must be doomed to remain amid the swamps.

Suddenly Dave spoke back softly without looking round.

"Here we are, sir."

Again he and Judy were seeing the tree-embowered building in all its rotten, ramshackle state, where mother and daughter were dragging out their existence.

"Just a bit then."

There was neither sight nor sound of life about the place. The reed curtains hanging down at doorways and windows gave the building a gloomy look. Under its wooden canopy in the rank clearing an idol gazed out in the old aloof way; as if nothing that might happen could matter in the least to it. As indeed how could it!

The six were still bunched together on the last yard of the jungle path by way of a cautious pause when they heard a girlish voice faintly from inside the building.

"That's Naina," Judy whispered. "I know her voice."

Mr. Willoughby signalled the party to pause. For calmness he might have been at home in his smoking-room at Swanlake. But he was in India, and he knew India, and calmness was not the only quality he was bringing into use.

After a moment they heard Naina singing softly as if to herself as she went about the sombre building. The low, sweet girlish voice was charged with a pathos so intense, it brought a lump into the throat to be hearing it.

Suddenly the singing grew louder. Naina had parted some curtains at a doorway to step out on to the sunless veranda.

Then she saw the Britishers, and for a moment her voice faltered in its singing. But only for that one moment; in the next she was singing on again, and they all knew why. In case of spies lurking amongst the trees.

The six had not yet emerged upon the clearing, and now if they made any movement at all it was a retiring one.

They felt that Naina would rather come across to them than have them go to her.

After a minute she stepped down from the veranda and sauntered about as if merely taking the air, such as it was, in that pent-up spot.

And then suddenly a terrible thing happened.

A lithe creature streaked straight at Naina with lightning-like, deadly accuracy. It was a large animal of the cat tribe, probably a leopard. More than that the six had no time to notice.

With eyes of horror they saw it springing upon the girl, to bring her down. But Mr. Willoughby fired—bang! He had been as ready as all that for any emergency.

The bullet took checking effect, but with an infuriated howl the lithe creature was continuing the attack when Dave fired at the same instant that Mr. Willoughby let fly again.

Bang, bang! And the wild beast rolled over dead, leaving Naina unharmed after all, but almost swooning with terror.

"Come on," Mr. Willoughby spoke crisply then, boldly advancing. "But look out; our shots may have been heard."

He must have noticed and admired the manlike composure of Dave, always so quiet and steady. After firing that one shot he might easily have lost some of the former vigilance. But he had not needed to be reminded that, even though that

savage creature lay dead in the grass other dangers lurked.

As for Judy and Pam, their only thought was to hasten forward with their mothers and do everything possible to restore poor Naina's shattered nerve.

That girl, after looking terrified for a moment, was retreating to the veranda. Judy, Pam and the two mothers rushed to be with her there; but Dave and Mr. Willoughby, without any loss of vigilance, were bound to pause as they went by the dead beast.

It was a great leopard, and it wore a collar.

"See that, my boy?" jerked out Mr. Willoughby, pointing his left hand down to that sinister band of leather encircling the leopard's throat.

"It was on a leash, sir."

"It was on a leash, Dave," said Pam's father, bringing up his revolver to the ready again, whilst he looked this way and that into the surrounding trees. "Either it escaped, or someone unleashed it."

And man and boy met each other's eyes for a moment with looks of grim horror.

"DADDY—both of you; we're to go inside."

That was Pam, now that she had darted back to her father and Dave.

Glancing then towards the veranda they saw that it was deserted. Naina had taken Judy and the two mothers into the ramshackle building.

Pam took a look at the shot leopard. She noticed the tell-tale collar, and her lips parted in a mute "Oh!" of shocked understanding.

But she kept her nerve and said nothing. In silence the three of them crossed to the building and mounting to the veranda went in by a reed-curtained doorway.

In the gloom they found the others, including Naina. There had been some hurried whispering, and now Mrs. Willoughby said to her husband in a guarded voice:

"Naina's mother is much better to-day. She had used one of the medicines yesterday before the case was taken away from her. The fever has left her."

Mr. Willoughby gave a pleased nod.

"May we see your mother?" he asked Naina. "You've been told perhaps we have a fresh supply of medicines for you; and that's not all. We've got to get you both away."

Naina—was it a wonder, poor soul!—burst into tears.

She quickly dried her eyes, and then faltered what she had to say, shaking from head to foot the while.

"My mother has risen to-day; yes, you may see her, but she will fear for your safety. Sahib, the danger."

"We have only to think about the danger to you and your poor mother, my girl. Where is she?"

Even as the question was asked it was answered in dramatic manner. Naina's mother came gliding upon the dim scene, her dark eyes enlarged with fear and anxiety.

At sight of the six would-be rescuers she swayed slightly.

"They do not mean us to escape from here," she whispered in English, with only slightly less fluency than the rajah himself could boast.

"Were they your revolvers I heard?"

"Yes, we shot a leopard," Pam's father nodded calmly. "Are you fit to travel, do you think?"

"I? I would rather go, even if I had to die in the jungle, than remain here. If only for Naina's sake," was the fervent answer. "But you—you must not risk your own safety."

"Have no fear for us," said Mr. Willoughby, side-glancing his wife and Mrs. Cardew, who both nodded. "You've got to get away with us—now."

"But first," interposed Mrs. Willoughby, "here are more medicines. I would take just a little of this," selecting a phial from the opened case. "It is the same stuff that strengthened you yesterday, but you could not repeat the dose?"

The poor woman, hollow-eyed and wasted, shook her head. Pam's mother tilted a couple of pellets on to the upturned palm, and in a few moments Naina came hurrying back with a vessel of water.

"Your kind ones," the native woman said, meaning those who had visited the place in secret yesterday, "they had not been gone one hour, and there was someone here from the palace. It was known. So they took the medicines away. Naina had them hidden, and she would not say where; she was ready to die rather than speak. But I—I cannot let my Naina suffer for me like that. So I speak for her."

Judy and Pam gazed at Naina, who seemed to think nothing of the heroism she had displayed.

The widow of Hunda Khan swallowed down the pellets and sipped some water.

"Listen," Mr. Willoughby said softly. "Our first idea was to get in touch with you again like this and arrange something. We are going back; the rest of our party have gone forward—"

"To the Temple of the Moon?" panted Hunda Khan's widow. "Ah," she sighed. "If only my husband had lived. He say to me so often how some day the secret of the temple would be discovered—by a British gentleman, the sahib professor. But my husband is no more. They kill him—"

"Killed him!" gasped some of the listeners in renewed horror.

The woman covered her lips for a moment. "Did I say that? I should not have said it," she whispered in great agitation. "Only Naina has known; it is what I believe. That tyrant who is now the rajah—he removes us from his path, one by one, one by one."

"Here, we must talk some other time," Pam's father exclaimed, shaking off the spell of horror. "The thing is to get you and Naina away from here at once. We'll get you back to what we call our base, and then— Yes, Dave, what is it?"

For Dave had seemed to want to interrupt.

"Smell of burning, sir?"

"Why, so there is!" Pam and Judy exclaimed together, their nostrils suddenly detecting the acrid smell.

"But it's not anything on fire in the house?" Mr. Willoughby inferred. "More like a bonfire—green wood."

"I'll go and look," Dave suggested tersely. "I'll be careful."

"Right you are, my lad."

Somehow his sister and Pam felt impelled to go with him as he returned towards the reed curtains that would let him out on to the veranda.

The vague danger decreed that Dave should pass out first, and so he was a moment before the two girls in finding that the clearing was smoke-ridden, as if Mr. Willoughby's supposed "bonfire" had been kindled close at hand.

"Who would have lighted any rubbish?" Judy put the conundrum to Dave. "Naina and her mother don't appear to have had anyone working for them about the place?"

"They looked surprised over this smoke," Pam added her comment. "It seemed—it seemed to frighten them again. But there, you can't wonder at that. Where is all this smoke coming from, Dave?"

It was like him not to answer unless he was certain. He held up a finger for silence, that all three of them might listen their hardest.

Then it was that they began to hear sounds that were sinister; somewhere not far off in the forest the undergrowth itself was on fire.

The faint hissings and splutterings and at irregular intervals a kind of smothered roar—r-r! There could be no mistaking the origin of such sounds.

The forest itself—on fire!

'Midst the Forest Fire

DAVE turned to his sister and Pam. "The wind's bringing it this way. The whole building will go up, of course." "Sooner we get away, the better then!" whispered Pam tensely. "They'll lose everything, poor things!"

Another nod from Dave.

"Such as it is. But I'm afraid we can't help that," he said. "Besides, we're going to save them. The fire is going to help us, funnily enough."

Pam and Judy looked at each other then blankly. They would have feared that Dave had lost his head, only they knew him too well. He nudged them to return with him indoors, and they hurried in before him.

"Mother," Judy called out in alarm, "it's the forest itself!"

"On fire? My goodness!"

"The wind's bringing it this way, sir," Dave reported, as Mr. Willoughby waited to hear more, unmoved. "Whether it's accidental or— He shrugged. "Anyway, it's a pretty swift blaze, according to the smoke."

"Yes, well—"

"Naina!" that girl's mother screamed, and they ran to each other. "Oh!" and there followed a rush of despairing cries in the native tongue.

"Good smoke screen, in fact, sir," added Dave. "Yes, my boy. Yes."

Mr. Willoughby, becoming alive to the need for instant flight, was yet as calm as ever.

"Come on, all," he said. "Out of this. We're all to keep together. Naina or her mother may drop; they haven't our strength. Dave and I will keep an eye on them, anyhow. You others just keep going."

The room was suddenly darkening as the smoke out of doors thickened.

"Wind's nothing much amongst the trees," Mr. Willoughby added. "We may just do it. Ah, Dave, good idea!"

Dave had started to drench a cotton cloth covering a small bamboo table with all the water from the vessel which Naina a few minutes since had brought to her mother.

As soon as the cloth was soaked he took it up and tore it into strips, handing them round.

The room darkened still more. The fire sounded louder all at once, and suddenly there was an added commotion—the crashing by of animals in mad flight from the flames.

A few moments more and all who were within

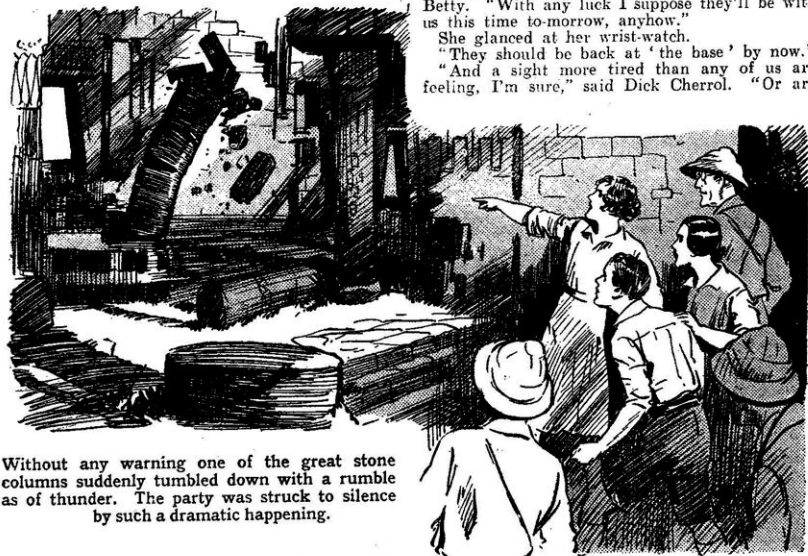
the doomed building had bandaged mouths and nostrils against the smoke that was likely to become overpowering.

Mr. Willoughby strode out to the veranda in advance of all others; but he came back instantly. His wife and Mrs. Cardew were having difficulty in getting Naina and her mother to leave the building. But he, by an imperative yet kindly look, got them out of that transfixed state.

He shepherded them into the open air, where the dense and drifting clouds of smoke caused mother and daughter to gesture tragically.

Dave was coming out last of all, a step behind Pam and Madge.

"Must remember," he said to the two girls through his muffler, "what they've been through."



Without any warning one of the great stone columns suddenly tumbled down with a rumble as of thunder. The party was struck to silence by such a dramatic happening.

Pam nodded that she had heard and quite agreed. Judy looked round for her brother, and seeing him, was satisfied.

The Temple of the Moon

"OH, but what a wonderful place!"
"Bai Jove, most impressive, yes, wather!"

"Bekas as eef it were here when ze world began."

"Some ruin, and that's a fact!"

The Temple of the Moon.

At last—at long last eyes that conned school-books during term-time at Morcove and Grange-moor were viewing the marvellous ruins of this far-famed Indian temple.

Betty and the others, still missing Pam and Judy very much, had toiled up a last half-mile of stony lizard-haunted pathway, and then with the two boys and the grown-ups they had suddenly emerged upon a summit as flat as a table-top.

It was as if Nature itself had shorn one of the

giant mountains of its upper half so as to form the site for a vast and sacred edifice, to be erected when mankind was in its infancy.

Thousands of years ago had stone upon stone been laid, and series of archways fashioned and strange inscriptions carved about the walls. And yet still the temple, to a marvellous extent, remained.

For every stone column that had come tumbling down there was one that still reared itself grandly. Great gaps there were, where arches had collapsed; but there yet remained other arches in majestic series to let through splashes of sunshine and so preserve wonderful effects of light and shade.

"Oh!" said Madge in a kind of ecstasy. "If only Judy and Pam were with us, and the others!"

"I was just thinking of them again," cried Betty. "With any luck I suppose they'll be with us this time to-morrow, anyhow."

She glanced at her wrist-watch.

"They should be back at 'the base' by now."
"And a sight more tired than any of us are feeling, I'm sure," said Dick Cherrol. "Or are

you girls a bit whacked after that last scramble uphill?"

"Not a bit."

"Surprising, bai Jove; most extraordinary!" said Paula, using pocket-comb and mirror as if crowds of other sightseers were about. "I couldn't hev twudged and twamped like this at home at Morcove, I'm positive."

"It's the mountain air, now that the sun has stopped trying to frizzle us," Jack said gaily. "Well, boys, what about a group for the jolly old camera?"

"No, to-morrow!" Polly ruled. "When the others are here. But we must have one of the professor."

She took the camera from Tess, who was thinking more about the water-colour sketches that she hoped to make, and ran towards the grown-ups.

"Professor Donkin!"

"My dear!"

"Would you please stand there," Polly

regulously requested, "so as to have all the ruins behind you."

"And don't forget to look pleasant, plis," chimed in Naomer, scampering up to witness the snapshooting. "Bekas we want him for our album in Study 12. Gorjus!"

"Impossible not to look pleasant, I hope," said the courtly old student of Sanskrit and other ancient languages, "in such company."

"That means me, not you, Naomer, so buzz off," jested Polly. "Bother! I can't get half the ruins into the picture."

"I suppose you are aware," smiled Professor Donkin, "you have posed me just where the high priest used to stand on occasions of great ceremony?"

"Oh, is that so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the other juniors, by now standings to look on.

"You have told us so little about the temple up till now, you see," the madcap said to the famous scholar silyly.

"Perhaps because I know so little myself."

"Ooo, fibs!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas you know very well you read all about ze temple in those ancient dockuments that you had when you were staying at ze Morcove bungalow. So you must know everyzingk!"

"No," disclaimed the professor blandly. "Nor is it at all certain that being here at last I am going to find out everything. A great secret is housed amongst these piles of ancient architecture—"

"Zen, what ze diggings, why not have a go at finding it out now, queek! Bekas you never know. Ze artful rajah may pinch ze whole thing."

There was a round of laughter over this.

"Ah, boys and girls," said the genial old buffer, still waiting to be "snapped" by Polly, who was busy with the view-finder, "from what those ancient documents told me, this is not the time for certain investigations and tests that I hope to make. I must be here by night."

"At night-time, professor?"

"Sweendle, bekas we shan't be here."

"Oh, but why shouldn't you?" Mrs. Linton hastened to reassure the juniors. "It seems that Professor Donkin must see the ruins in the moonlight. Remember, it is the Temple of the Moon. And to-morrow night is full moon. If all goes as we hope there is no reason why to-morrow night—"

"Ooo, gorjus! Pipooray! Bekas—"

"Gee, boys, won't the ruins look wonderful, too, by moonlight!" broke out Jack. "We'll make it an all-night do, with supper, and I might fetch along the jolly old gramophone. No extra charge."

"Now, professor."

Snap!

"Ha, ha, ha! Splendid!" was the amused comment.

"World copyright reserved," said Polly. "Thanks, Tess!" And the camera went back to its owner. "I think I shall have to write a book about—"

And there Polly stood struck to silence, became transfixed along with all the others by something that was happening.

A weather-worn column and some fragments of masonry that it supported had suddenly tumbled down with a rumble as of thunder.

Nobody had been in any danger from the falling stonework. The startling collapse, of

which there had not been the slightest warning, had occurred at a safe distance from where they all stood. But that such a thing should have occurred so uncannily left old and young alike agape.

"Goodness!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Wather alawming, what!"

"Bekas, we might have been underneath! Ooo, we had better look out, bekas you never know."

Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby and the two boys were turning to Professor Donkin bewilderedly.

"Can you offer any explanation, professor?"

"No, Linton. It could never have been caused by the youngsters' laughter, as happens, of course, in the case of avalanches at times."

"Is there someone there?" Jack suddenly suggested. "Did he lever out a stone at the base and so bring the whole lot down?"

"There's no one," Betty voiced her conviction. "We must have seen or heard him."

"I suppose it just happened," smiled Mrs. Linton. "After all, ruins must come down bit by bit at some time or other."

"Only that particular bit seems to have chosen a curious moment," commented Dicky Cherrol thoughtfully. "You ought to have had the camera ready, Tess."

They went forwards very warily to where there was the new-made mound of tumbled stonework.

"Whew, the dust it has raised!" said Helen.

"The air's quite thick with it."

It was really no use looking at the heap itself. Inquiring eyes were much more inclined to send roving glances amongst the rest of the ruins, in case somebody should be lurking around or creeping away after causing the fall.

But not a glimpse of any living thing could be seen, whether human or otherwise.

"There's no one!" Tess echoed Betty's conviction of a minute or two ago.

"We certainly seemed to have the place to ourselves when we got here," exclaimed Mrs. Linton.

"And I really don't see why anybody should do a thing like that."

"Bekas, silly, I call it. Much worse for us, eef zey were to creep to our camp and steal some of ze provisions. Bekas zere is no one on guard down there, don't forget."

"In other words," said Polly, "Naomer is beginning to suffer from her usual complaint. Food again."

The camp had been left to take care of itself, for the simple reason that Morcove & Co. could not have left behind a guard sufficiently strong to resist any definite act of hostility. A wandering native might pilfer one or two things, but that risk was well worth running for the sake of keeping together.

"The stonework was simply ready to fall, and that's all there is to it—don't you think so, professor?" argued Mr. Linton at last. "Well, a valuable warning to all of us to keep clear. I say, this isn't dust hanging about in the air now?" he added in fresh surprise.

"No."

"I seem to smell a bonfire of green stuff," said Jack, sniffing. "Phew, this must be smoke that's come over the whole place—the very thinnest smoke from some big fire a good way off."

"That's about it," Dick nodded. "Sort of effect you can get from a heath fire at home. Notice it miles and miles away, you can."

"Then this fire— Great Scott!" Jack changed to an appalled tone. "I hope it isn't way back

in that forest we came through yesterday before we got to the palace."

There was the sudden tense silence, that comes of consternation.

"Is it the forest?" Betty echoed Jack's cry. "The others—where are they? What's happening to them?"

Up Against It

AT that moment down in the smoke-darkened forest the other half of the expedition was fleeing before the pursuing blaze.

It should have been possible for the three juniors and the three parents to have won through to the forest roadway with Naina and her mother within a few minutes of the flight from the doomed building.

But half-way along the narrow track leading back to the road Mr. Willoughby had heard a great shouting and yelling of natives in panicky movement along that very road.

Then even at the risk of yielding a few over-taking moments to the fire he called a halt.

Not to be seen by anyone now, that seemed to him as vitally important as was the need for flight itself. And his wife and Mrs. Cardew agreed with him.

So did Judy, Pam and Dave.

Only let them all escape from the blazing forest unseen and it would be taken for granted at the palace that they had perished in the fire.

Amidst all the excitement of these critical moments minds were running on the sinister nature of the whole affair. There was a strong probability that this was no accidental fire.

But that as it might, even by now Naina and her mother would certainly have been overtaken by the flames if there had been none of these Britishers with them when the forest fire was started.

Mother and daughter could never have escaped unaided.

The ill-fated widow was already unequal to the demand for desperate haste. Illness, even though it had been but a mild form of fever, had left her weak. Mr. Willoughby was taking her up now to carry her bodily as he turned aside from the forest track.

And Naina, she was having to be helped along by Judy and Pam.

In the blinding smoke they all went on again, having to find a way for themselves now through untrodden undergrowth.

The wetted bandages about their mouths and nostrils were proving of great help. There was the feeling that they would yet owe their lives to them.

All the hurly-burly of the raging fire came after them. The flames seemed to be galloping through the forest, widening the fiery front more



Half-blinded and stifled by the smoke, Pam and Judy and the others stumbled on through the undergrowth, with the roaring fire raging at their very heels.

and more every moment. The dreadful danger was close behind them, and also it had spread to their right.

Yet for the fugitives to go straight ahead meant coming out upon the roadway at some point or another, whilst to bear to the left meant making for the palace.

A cruel choice of evils, that. As the less deadly one, Mr. Willoughby had decided for a bold tacking to the left. He and his companions were all sure that this forest roadway was at present swarming with mobs of natives—men who were sent out in gangs daily to work upon the timber felling.

All that could be heard of the shouting and yelling evidenced a stampeding up the road in the direction of the palace. But it was such a panic as meant no stopping until open ground close to the palace had been reached. So there was just a hope, after the hordes of natives had swarmed clear of the road, our fugitives might slip across unseen—

Suddenly Dave dimly saw with his smoke-stung eyes Naina's utter collapse from exhaustion.

He was still coming last of all, close behind his sister and Pam, who had the native girl between them. Lurching closer he shouted through his muffler:

"Here, girls, let me have her."

"No, Dave; you can't. We—"

But he would not listen. With calm mastery he stooped and took up the half-unconscious girl.

He took her right out of the others' care, shouting to them to go on.

And indeed they had all to go on somehow, anyhow, or be overtaken by the devouring flames. At moments in spite of the thick smoke and the density of the trees a lurid glow came and went. The fire was as close behind them as all that.

Birds, overcome in their wild flight, constantly dropped at the feet of the fugitives. Every living thing was in flight, and it was heart-rending to see a creature as lovely and gentle as a gazelle suddenly streak past them, only to drop down right in front of them a moment later—done for.

They trampled their way round the poor doomed thing, and then Judy and Pam heard Dave panting aloud to himself:

"I can't leave it there like that. I must put it out of its misery!"

They looked round. Carrying Naina as Mr. Willoughby was carrying the native woman, over a left shoulder, the lad still had the full use of his right arm. That right hand still carried the revolver.

Keep a wide eye open for our representatives at the seaside resort you are visiting. They have a packet of delightful Cadbury's Dairy Milk Chocolate for you when you buy your copy of **SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN**.

He paused, intending to dispatch the dumb creature with a merciful bullet, but at that very instant Mr. Willoughby, right at the front, turned round and made urgent warning signs.

They had nothing to do with what Dave had intended. The signs meant:

"Stand still! Quiet!"

So then this was some terrible check, some awful danger just ahead of them.

Pam's father lurched back a step or two.

"The road's just there after all. We've come out upon it sooner than we should have."

"People there?" panted Dave. "Many of them? Or can we try slipping across? The smoke's going to screen us quite a lot."

"It's the rajah himself," Mr. Willoughby grimly answered.

"Alone?"

Pam's father shook his head.

"He has had a lot of the natives stopped in their flight. He is giving orders for them to wait and watch."

"For us?"

"If not for us, then for this poor woman and the girl," was Mr. Willoughby's hoarse response. "And it all amounts to the same thing. We can't go on. Yet we can't go back by even a single yard."

His smoke-begrimed, heated face looked ravaged with the helpless desperation that was his.

"I'm trying to think," he said through clenched teeth, "what we can do now."

Night at the Camp

NIGHT had closed over that lonely, rugged tract of country just short of the mountain ranges where the other half of the expedition had made its fresh camp.

Safely back from that first eager visit to the

Temple of the Moon they had soon been able to sit down to a rough and ready meal.

The camp-fire burned well, affording those who were ranged about it a threefold comfort. The dancing flames gave a cheery illumination, and the night was fresh enough for an occasional waft of heat to be welcome; but above all, the fire served to keep off the mosquitoes.

"There's the moon," said Madge, ending one more of the many pauses in the camp-fire conversation.

"Yes; not at the full to-night," Professor Donkin commented. "But to-morrow night—"

"Ah!" came from several of the juniors with thrilled looks.

"Bekas eet is going to be gorjus, spending ze whole of to-morrow night up zere at the temple," chattered Naomer, whilst helping herself to a left-over slice of pineapple.

"About that curious business of the smoke awhile back," Mr. Linton suddenly remarked. "I don't think we need be anxious. It has occurred to me; they may have only been burning up a lot of rubbish at the clearings back there in the forest."

"There's still a reek of it in the air," sniffed Dick Cherrol. "Must have been a pretty big blaze. But surely it can't have interfered with the other half of our party in any way?"

"If anything, I'd say it may have helped 'em a bit," said Jack, with cheery optimism. "A good smoke screen would be very useful, although they should have been back beyond the forest by that time, don't you think?"

There were several murmurs telling of a determined hoping for the best, and then silence reigned again. The girls found themselves watching the moon as it crept higher, shedding a silvery radiance upon this wild spot, so strange a place indeed for them to be in.

Then Naomer caused a paper bag to rustle as her hand ferreted into it.

"What's she after now!" exploded Polly. "Hey, you'll have nightmare!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Not ze bit of eet; I sleep like ze top to-night, and be blowed to spiderses and mosquitoes and all ze rest. And I am going to be up before anybody else, you see, to get everybody ze morning cup of tea."

"Whatever time you do get up you'll find at least two of us about," Mr. Linton laughingly remarked. "We must keep a guard going all night—two by two."

"Revolver for me!" requested Jack gaily. "I don't see why Dave should have been given one and me not."

"You shall have a revolver, my boy," Mr. Linton seriously answered the mock grievance. "But neither you nor Dick must think of taking guard-duty until towards morning. You two boys and the girls need some rest at once."

He tapped out his pipe, and that became the signal for a general rising up.

"One tent for the lot of us to-night, girls," said Polly, patting back a yawn. "And when I turn over you all do the same—just remember."

"Bai Jove, I shan't need much wocking, I know!"

"There's no danger of your being rocked, anyhow," chuckled Betty. "You may get rolled—flat."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sergeant-major Cherrol." Jack found the higher-sounding title for his chum, whilst the

girls said their good-nights to the grown-ups. "Just give an eye to things at the wagon-lines, and make up the camp-fire, and give all the cart-wheels a spot of grease, and clean my Sam-Browne, and you might get in enough water for to-morrow, and then if you've got no more to do—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Captain Cherrol," interposed Polly very sweetly, "I do think you ought to get Private Linton transferred to another regiment."

The merriment increased. Even out here in India and in the thick of such a great and perilous adventure as it was, the juniors had to have their bit of bed-time fun.

"Private Cherrol!" stormed Jack. "Confound the man!"

"The Army to-day!" boomed Jack, with all the pomposity of a major-general. "When I was in India in fifty-seven—ah, those were the days, sir!"

And he made that his stalking-off remark, heeling round a few seconds later to shout to the hilarious girls:

"Night, all! 'Night, Polly-wolly!"

"Night, Jack."
"Pleasant dreams and sweet repose," Naomer yelled after him. "And half of ze bed, and all of ze clothes."

Then Polly, drifting away with her chums to the tent they were using for the night; noticed Naomer's laden state. "What have you got there?"

"Nuzzingk, Polly. Only a snack for ze night. Bekas you never know."

"Just look at her, girls. About a pound of biscuits and a bottle of tonic water and a cake of chocolate."

"The geal is simply a—"

"Well, what am I, Paula? You say, queek! Bekas—"

"Oh, pway don't turn watty," said the lover of peace and quietude hastily. "I—I—I meant nothing dispawaging, weally, Naomer deah—no."

"Good job for you."

"Will you girls go to bed!" shouted Jack from

a distance. And then they heard him singing:

"Shine, shine, moon,

Whilst I dance with Dinah dear."

They passed into the tent. It was a good-sized one, and by sleeping feet-to-pole they would have all the room they wanted.

The intention was to leave the entrance unflapped, so that there would be plenty of fresh air.

"I could do with a quencher," Polly announced, as soon as undressing had started. "Did I see a bottle of tonic water?"

"You can't see him now, bekas I have hidden him."

"I noticed your hiding it," said Polly, diving for the hiding-place with a promptitude that left Naomer the laughing stock of the others. "Thank you."

"And zen you talk about me being greedy."

"This is for my health's sake," Polly said virtuously. "No one can ever accuse me of eating between meals, as a rule. I do feel I could do with just a bit of chocolate for once."

And with the words playful Polly impounded the chocolate as well.

The Night Watch

THEY were soon all asleep.

How late in the night it was Betty did not know, except that daylight was nowhere at hand when she woke up, and quietly turning over, fell to thinking about the whole great adventure with a refreshed mind.

Presently she heard subdued voices outside the tent. They were those of Mr. Linton and the professor, so

she inferred that the two men were chatting softly whilst keeping guard.

She dropped off again, and next it was Polly Linton who came out of a most refreshing spell of sleep.

Deep darkness was in the tent, and sitting up to look out through the unflapped entrance she could tell that the moonlight had left the camp-



A SAD BLOW

When they asked me to act
In the Merchant of Venice,
'Twas a comforting fact
That they thought I could act,
For I'd lately been sacked
From the school team at tennis.
An actress they lacked
For the Merchant of Venice.

"I'll be Portia, I'm sure!"
I was certain about it;
The girls on my floor
Said "At acting you'll score;
Though your tennis is poor—
You're an actress undoubted!
You're Portia for sure—"
They seemed certain about it.

So I read up the part
Till I'd learnt it completely.
I knew it by heart,
I was longing to start:
'Twas a beautiful part,
I should do it quite neatly
For I'm naturally smart
And speak rather sweetly.

Then the cast was read out
For the Merchant of Venice—
I uttered a shout
When I heard without doubt
That the girl who would spout
Portia's part was—Joan Dennis!
I—was "Noises without!"

I've gone back to tennis!

IRIS HOLT.

ing ground. The night sky was cloudless and star-crammed, but the moon must have gone down behind the towering mountain range.

She groped for her wrist-watch and read the time by the luminous figures.

Nearly four in the morning.

A little after this she picked up the faint boyish voices of Jack and Dick.

The two lads were out in the open, so evidently it had become their turn in the all-night watch.

Just like Polly then to be seized with the idea of getting up, dressing without disturbing any of her tent-mates, and going out to relieve one of the boys. She could share the watch with her brother, thus enabling Dick to "get down to it" again.

Three minutes later she was stealing out of the tent, well protected against the sharp night air.

She drew a deep breath, feeling the bracing cold air of this upland country to be delicious.

Then padding across the pebbly ground she came to where Jack and Dick were just then standing at the camp fire. Their boyish figures were black silhouettes against the fitful gleam.

"St!" said Polly roughly.

"Halt! Who goes there?" Jack instantly retorted. "Now, Polly-wolly, what's this nonsense?"

"I've had all the sleep I can possibly do with," she stated flatly. "So I am going to do the rest of the spell with you, Jack, and Dick must go back to bed."

"What d'you think of her, Dick?" grinned the madcap's brother. "Shall we put her in irons?"

"It's jolly decent of you, Polly," Dick said heartily. "But I'm quite enjoying—"

"You want to save yourself up for something that may not be quite so enjoyable," Polly struck

in with a grim smile. "We don't know, any of us, what we may be in for, do we? So there's a good fellow, do as I say, and in the morning, for a reward, you shall sit next to me at brekker, if you want to."

"She's a caution," chuckled Jack. "Go on, then, Dicky. Perhaps there's a good deal in what Polly says."

"But what would Mr. Linton say?"

"Dad always lets me have my own way," was Polly's triumphant answer to that. "See you at brekker, Dick."

Thereupon to keep up the military flavour that had become such a source of fun to them all Dick clicked his heels, saluted, and marched away.

"He's a good chap," Jack murmured. "One of the best. He and Dave, they're all the pals I want, Polly. Some coffee in the billy. Have some?"

"I shouldn't mind!"

So Jack found an enamelled mug and half-filled it for her.

"Delish! You have some, Jack."

"Thanks, just to keep you company."

This brother and sister, who teased and derided each other so mercilessly at all times in the presence of parents and friends, they were finding it awfully nice now to be keeping each other company.

That deep affection, lodged so deep down in the heart of each, was coming to the surface for once.

"How has the night gone so far, Jack?"

"Oh, fine! Not a single scare of any kind.

The dad says that some wild beast came and took a look at him and the professor during their spell. It glared for a long while, then went away."

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"Those ruins were very wonderful, Jack."

"One of the wonders of the universe."

"To-morrow night will be the night for thrills, it seems," Polly murmured on with tremendous enthusiasm. "Fancy, if the professor really does solve the riddle! Think of all the ages that have gone by since those papers were written about the Temple that he was able to translate."

The only Johnny in the world who could read them properly, to get the real hang of it all, yes," Jack nodded.

"The professor's a dear."

"You've said a mouthful, Polly. What I like about the professor most of all; this secret of the temple took second place in his mind at once, as soon as we found out about Hunda Khan's widow and her daughter. He'd have chuckled it in, only we were able to send back help like we did."

"I know," Polly nodded. "And although he is such a good age he wanted to be one of those to go back."

A pause.

"Do hope, Jack, that the others were able to get a word, at any rate, with Naina and her mother on the way back. But that rajah—"

"St, Polly! Listen!"

Standing then acutely on the alert with him she could hear nothing to feel alarmed about, only the wolf-like howl of some animal a great way off in the darkness.

But Jack, after a moment or two, gave a convinced nod.

"Someone coming," he breathed.

All But One

POLLY LINTON'S heart took on an even quicker beat.

"Someone—where?" she whispered, drawing closer to Jack. "Who can it be?"

"How should I know!" Jack muttered, with more good humour than his sister felt entitled to receive. Hers had been a pretty unreasonable question, to say the least. But she was very excited.

"Yes," she suddenly resumed, speaking more to himself than to her, "it's somewhere down there." And he began to walk in the direction indicated.

Polly went silently in step with him, peering, listening.

"Had we better wake up the others, Jack dear?"

"Just a bit. I can't hear anything now. Yes. I can!"

"Oh, and so can I, now!" she jerked out. "There again; someone sort of stumbling on the stony track, coming up. Jack," she added agitatedly, "that's the track by which we came along from the palace."

A nod was his only response. She saw him feeling for the revolver in his belt, whilst he and she stood quite still again.

It was that darkest hour which comes before the dawn. The stars in their myriads were blazing in the velvety pall formed by the night sky.

"Polly!"

"Yes, Jack?"

"You go and rouse up dad and the mater and the rest of them. I'm staying here. Seems to me someone must be coming the rest of the way with extra caution."

"Oh, Jack, I don't like to leave you!"

"Piffle! Most likely it's only some thieving native hoping to pinch something. The rajah's left us alone all day, As we reckon, it's not to

his interests to make trouble for us—only to stop us helping Naina and her mother until after the professor has—"

Jack broke off, and that made Polly, in the act of retiring softly, stop dead.

"My goodness, Polly!"

She darted back to him.

"Look! Look!" he said. "It's one of our lot!"

"What? Where? How do you mean, Jack?"

Oh! Polly gasped on as her dilating eyes at last discerned a figure some hundred yards or so down the track by which the plateau was reached.

"One of the girls!"

"Judy or Pam—one or the other! Go and rouse the rest, Polly, quick!"

"Oh, I can't! I must find— Judy!" Polly called hoarsely. "Is that you? Pam, it is you? Answer—answer!"

"I'm Pam," the response came faintly, as if the approaching girl were at her last gasp for breath.

"Is she alone? I can't see!" Jack panted. And then: "She's alone! My goodness, Polly! But do run and let them all know!"

"Yes, I will."

Polly ran off as she said it. But she was looking back at every other step, while Jack hurried down to meet Pam.

Five seconds later he was almost with her. She had come to a standstill, as if unable to manage the rest of the rise.

"Pam! Where are the others? What are you doing alone?"

She looked ready to drop. She was holding a hand up to her head. He took her arm.

"Pam."

"Down—down there, Jack," she managed to tell him huskily, with a gesture that seemed to mean awful things.

And next second she would have fallen in a swoon, but Jack caught her and held her up.

THE camp was roused.

Out of that tent which had slept so many girls during the night came hurrying figures.

Betty and others raised bewildered, wondering cries for Polly.

"What's up then, Polly?"

But Polly was gone as quickly as she had come. Someone ran across to the girls. It was Mrs. Linton.

"Has Polly told you?"

"No. All she did was to put her head inside the tent and shout, 'Wake up, all; get up!'" Betty explained. "Before we had our wits about us she was off again."

"And I must be off; too. Pam's turned up."

"What!"

"Howwows!"

"Yes, bekas—"

"But where is she then?" was the frantic chorus.

Even if Mrs. Linton had not made signs that the best thing was for them all to follow her they would have done that. They kept up with her as she sped for the track that went downhill off the plateau.

Mr. Linton and the professor were going on before them all; but Morcove noticed that Dick was doing a kind of sentry-go. And as long as the girls would live they would always remember that as being one of the finest examples of calm courage and ability in a moment of great crisis. He felt that a look-out ought to be maintained, and so—

There he was, fighting down all the desperate

longing that must have been his, to rush with the others to Pam and so get to know what had happened.

Then they got to Pam. She was still having to be held steadily by Jack, although her faintness had passed off. Mrs. Willoughby, with a little cry of acute anguish, took the poor tottering girl and kept strong, loving arms about her.

"I'm all right now," quavered Pam, but she was still fighting for breath. "I—I came on to— to tell you."

"Yes, Pam, yes."

"We've been—oh, I don't know how long, trying to get to you. We didn't get back to the base—only as far as the bungalow. The forest took fire."

"Ah!"

"We managed to get Naina and her mother away from the bungalow in time. It was a wild rush to get out of the forest before the fire overtook us. We had nearly managed, and then we found the rajah on the forest road, ordering coolies to look out for us."

"How terrible!" ejaculated Mrs. Linton. "How awful!"

"But we got away after all," Pam panted on. "The coolies were just too panicky over the fire to obey orders even from the rajah. It gave us our chance—that and the dense smoke together. We got through, all of us, except—"

"Except—" Betty and others snatched the ominous word from Pam's lips.

"There, there, dear," Mrs. Linton murmured, for she could feel Pam trembling again. "Take a moment, my dear."

"The rest may be coming on now," the faltering voice resumed. "It has been terribly slow and difficult. Naina's mother has had to be carried almost all the way. We took turns. Mrs. Cardew has sprained an ankle. In the end I said I'd go on in advance and—let you know. Judy wanted to come with me, but I thought she should stay with her mother."

"How far back now, do you think, roughly?" asked Mr. Linton. "A mile—two miles?"

"Nearer two, I should fancy. But I may be all out. It was hard going, and dark."

"You poor Pam," Mrs. Linton said, kissing her. "Oh, what you have come through, for the sake of those others!"

"Oh, it's nothing," was the sighing response.

"I'm thinking about Dave."

"Dave! You mean—"

"He's the one who is missing. They've got him. You see, he would stay behind, to sort of keep the wretches in check."

"Sacrifice job," said Jack grimly. "Good old Dave! But why wasn't I with him! Why weren't Dick and I there! They've got him, you say?"

"Yes."

"In that case he'll be at the palace, a prisoner," Mr. Linton cried.

During the sudden pause that ensued Paula was heard sobbing silently. The rest, whilst managing to keep back their tears, felt no less emotional.

The sublime courage that had actuated every member of the Flying Column was something not to be thought about without its bringing a lump into the throat.

"It's getting light," Tess suddenly observed.

The stars were paling.

"A prisoner at the palace, is that what you think, dad?" Jack burst out, after another heavy silence. "Then the best thing for some of us to do—go and get him back."

"My dear boy—"

"Dick and I, gov'nor—only say the word. It's our Dave they've got—our Dave!"

"I know, and it's terrible. But you can't do that."

Polly and some of the other girls found Jack staring at them in a strange, wild way. He seemed to be mutely appealing to them to use their persuasions. But, of course, they had to be silent.

"Then what I want to know," he cried out suddenly, "what are we to do—what are we?"

He turned like one crazed with grief and helpless rage and went away, shaking clenched fists at his shoulders.

"And if he feels it like that," murmured Betty sadly, "what about Judy? How she must be feeling it!"

Again silence fell. Here was a catastrophe indeed. Until they knew for certain that Dave was safe and well how could any one of them feel a moment's peace of mind?

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Prisoners at The Rajah's Palace

Do not fail to read next week's fine complete story of
Betty and Co.'s adventures in India.

In Next
Tuesday's
Issue

*Their Peril at
the Palace*



By
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