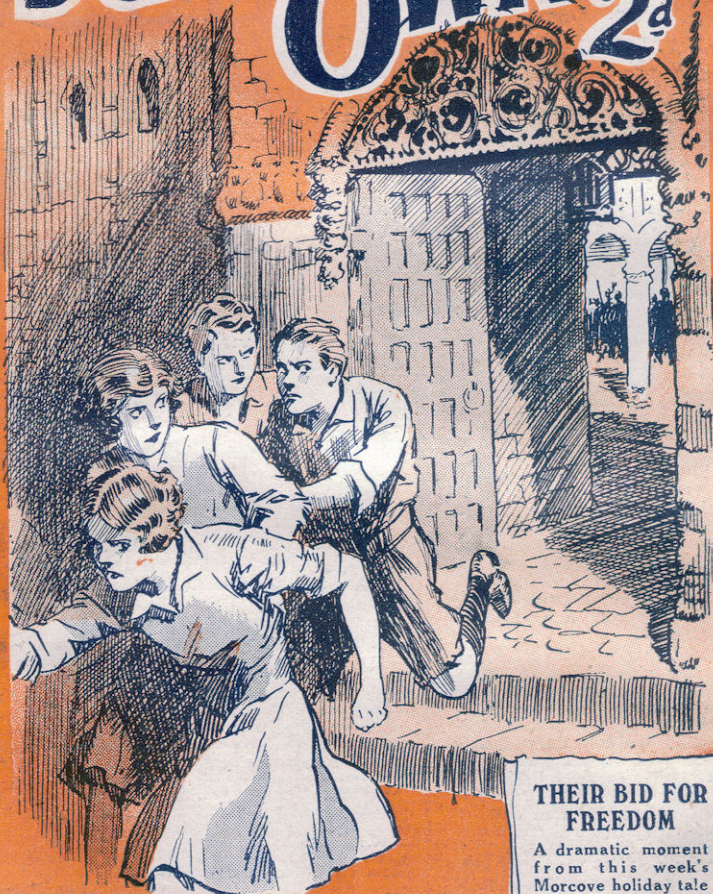


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# The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2<sup>d</sup>



## THEIR BID FOR FREEDOM

A dramatic moment  
from this week's  
Morcover holiday tale

# Their Peril at the Palace



*Brilliant, Long Complete Holiday Story, Featuring Betty Barton and Co. in India*

**B**ECAUSE they have befriended Naina and her mother, who have been banished to the jungle by the young Rajah of Chodopore, the Morcove chums and the rest of the Expedition have incurred the wrath of the heartless, upstart Rajah. But Betty and Co. are ready to dare any danger for the sake of the two unhappy outcasts, who so desperately need their aid.

## Morcove Flies the Flag

"**H**OW have you slept, Judy dear? Do you feel a bit recovered?"

"Oh, I'm nothing to bother about, Betty! Yes, I did sleep—like a log!"

"Well, have this, Judy."

"Oh, thanks, ever so!"

It was a good cup of tea, with some biscuits, that Betty Barton—in torn-time Fourth Form captain at Morcove School—had brought to this chum of hers, Judy Cardew.

Not in the Fourth Form dormitory at Morcove. Not within a thousand miles of Morcove, in fact, for Betty and Judy and all the rest of the chums of Study 12 were holidaying—in India!

But it was more than a holiday that accounted for the girls being out here, along with various fathers and mothers, a certain Professor Donkin, and three schoolboys.

It was an expedition—with a purpose!

Fate decreed that "Morcove" should render Professor Donkin a great service just at a time when, at home in England, he had been engaged upon the translation of very ancient Indian writings, dealing with the Temple of the Moon.

So, in return, the professor, when he found that his intended journey out to India was coinciding with the juniors' holidays, had proposed that

they, and as many of their parents as could do so, should join him for the trip.

But one thing is certain. Neither the professor nor any of the other grown-ups would ever have dreamed of bringing the boys and girls, had there been any forewarning of the upsets in store.

That the position at this moment was pretty serious could have been inferred from the gravity with which Betty Barton and Judy Cardew looked at each other.

Normally they were "full of beans," like the rest of the "chummery." But Judy, sitting up on her blanket-bed in this tent, to sip the welcome cup of tea, looked anxious, and Betty could hardly force a smile to hide her own uneasiness.

"Things are not too good, Judy, I'm afraid."

"They're not, Betty."

"Still, dear, we mustn't despair——"

"Oh, no!"

"It's a shocking thing, and no mistake, that your brother Dave has fallen into the hands of that hateful rajah fellow. But—one can always take a brighter view of things in the morning, can't one? Those who are best able to judge are now feeling sure that Dave, at any rate, has not come to any real harm yet."

**BY MARJORIE STANTON**

Betty added, ardently:

"How fine it was of your brother, Judy, to sacrifice his own safety for the sake of helping you others to get away and so rejoice us others! There's not the least doubt it meant a great blessing to those whom you rescued from the rajah's clutches!"

Judy set down her empty cup with a rather shaky hand.

"You mean, Betty, that native girl and her mother? If the rajah had got hold of those two—well, I suppose it would have meant cruelty to both, in the long run. We know that he has been treating Naina and her mother in a most appalling way."

"He's a brute—a monster!" Betty blazed out. "And, of course, being natives and relations of his, they haven't the protection of the British flag—not, at any rate, to the extent that we have. Oh, by the way, Judy, talking of that," Betty was glad to add brightly, "we're going to fly the Union Jack from a pole in the camp! Jack and Dick were setting about rigging up a pole when I came in just now."

"Good idea!" Judy nodded and smiled. "Oh, and I wouldn't feel at all down about things, Betty, if it were not that we lost Dave last evening. After all, we have kept our end up, haven't we?"

"I should say so!" Betty responded heartily. "We've not only got within a couple of miles of the Temple of the Moon, but we have managed to get Naina and her mother out of the rajah's clutches. They're here in camp with us now—and the Union Jack will soon be flying! Not so bad, Judy."

"I'm going to get up, Betty—"

"Judy—no, dear!"

"But—"

"You must lie down again!" coaxed Betty, constraining the other girl to sink back. "Why, it was almost dawn when you and the others came struggling back to camp, after such a terrible experience! It's an order, Judy; all of you who were away all day yesterday are to rest for a bit."

"Very well," sighed Judy, smiling bravely and patiently. "But don't let it be thought that I'm crocked up anyhow, for I'm not! Tell Polly and the others I'm quite all right!"

"I will, Judy! Your mother will be here in a little while. Ta-ta for a bit!"

And Betty passed out of the tent, to be in the scorching rays of the Indian sun, now high in the cloudless heavens.

The romantic and Oriental nature of the scene came at her in a kind of wave of surprise, as it always did, after a few minutes under cover. She and her chums—they felt at times that they would never get used to such thrilling surroundings.

There were mountains close at hand, and the height of them took Betty's breath away still, if she looked in their direction. The camping-ground was all sun-baked mud and glistening rock, over which the heat quivered. One had to look twice to make sure that the camp-fire was really burning; in the blinding sunlight hardly a trace of smoke or flame from the tinder-dry fuel showed.

"Betty—queek, queek!"

The owner of the shrill voice was capering with excitement as she beckoned. And Betty Barton laughed outright, finding sudden comic relief in what was taking place, just where that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, was all a-dance.

The two boys had got that flag-pole up! Now the ceremony of sending aloft the Union Jack, to float in the breeze, was to be performed with suitable demonstrations.

Dick Cherrol and Jack Linton—the latter the fun-loving brother of madcap Polly Linton—were going to give loud cheers, and so were the girls!

Betty scampered across to join the group, which did not consist entirely of juniors. In addition to the two boys and at least six of Betty's Study 12 chums, Professor Donkin was in evidence. So, too, were Mr. and Mrs. Linton and Mr. Willoughby.

"Just a sec, boys," gaily requested Jack, regardless of the fact that most of his audience consisted of girls. "We don't want to hoist the jolly old flag upside down!"

"It's a signal of distress if you do!" commented his sister Polly. "And even if we are in distress, we don't want people round here to know it!"

"Wather not, bai Jove!" beamed Paula Creel, that beloved duffer of the Study 12 'Co.' "Hooway, it does one good, geals, to see the flag—"

"Not so fast, boys!" Jack had again to apologise, owing to a bit of trouble with the ropes.

"In fact, if anybody would like to make a little speech, there's time!"

"Then I will!" volunteered Polly Linton, living up to her madcap reputation very finely, considering the present difficulties and dangers. "Er—ahem!—ladies and gentlemen—"

"Pipooray!" yelled Naomer. "Bekas, bravo Polly!"

"Somebody sit on Naomer, please!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now, we're ready, boys!" Jack suddenly announced. "So hurry up, Polly-wolly, with what you've got to say!"

But Polly could tell that a bit of nonsense was going to answer very well as a morning tonic for all. She therefore mounted a large block of stone with great pomposity, and bowed to all the applause that was accorded her in the lofty position.

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are here to-day—"

"And gone to-morrow—or shall be," said Jack flippantly.

"We are here to-day—"

"Bekas we can't help ourselves!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ladies and gentlemen!" Polly vociferated solemnly, "are we downhearted?"

"No-o-o!"

"I should say not!" cried Polly. "A bit sticky, and can you wonder, in this heat! A bit up against it—that's admitted! But, ladies and gentlemen—but!"

At this point a fly popped down Polly's throat, and so Jack very obligingly offered an impromptu speech, whilst his sister went through a bit of pantomime over her pretended choking.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" said Jack, pretending to adjust a monocle. "On behalf of the Mayor and Corporation of Chodopore—"

"And in the absence of our friend the rajah—"

"Friend! Booo!" hooted Morcove.

"Bekas, he is a rotter, hiss!"

"Thank you!" bowed Jack to the interrupters. "I accept the amendment! Any old how, it is a great pleasure to me to attend here to-day, to hoist, ladies and gentlemen, the flag! And when I say flag—"

"You mean zo jolly old Union Jack, pipooray!"



"Nunno!" said Jack, blandly staying grinning Dick in the act of hoisting away. "The Flag, ladies and gentlemen, of Freedom!"

"Hooray!" dinned Morcove, the professor and the two fathers joining in heartily. "Hurrah!"

"The flag upon which the sun never sets, boys! And that reminds me of an incident in my old days out in India," Jack rolled on deliciously. "If I may just tell you—"

"You may not!" said Polly, who had quite got over the choking by now. "Pull away, Dicky." "Hurrah!" What a cheer it was, as the flag at last sailed aloft, to shake itself out, on its way up, and end by floating bravely and boldly in the breeze!

"And let the rajah take a good look at that," Polly exclaimed, when the prolonged cheering died away. "And think twice about what he does next!"

"Gee, boys!" sparkled Jack, unable to take his eyes off the bright-coloured flag, "it really does do one good to see it!"

"Oh, and I think it may do some real good, too," declared Mr. Linton, with genuine gravity. "There shouldn't be any sniping at the camp, like we came in for the other night. The rajah is a great man out here, we know, and as a young man the position has rather gone to his head. But he was educated in Europe, and—"

There was a sudden interruption—and a burst of surprised cries from the girls, one of them Polly's own cried:

"Daddy, look! Look, who's coming!"

"Yes, bekas—what ze diggings, a native!"

All eyes were upon him instantly, a lithe, dark-skinned man, in brown shorts and very little else apart from his turban.

That he was simply a messenger could be realised instantly. He came running up in nervous haste, making such extravagant gestures of entreaty—as if he feared he might be shot on sight—that some of the juniors laughed.

Then they all saw that he carried a folded note. A dozen paces short of the grouped Britishers he stopped dead, then salaamed.

Mr. Linton turned to Mr. Willoughby, and the professor, who both walked out a few yards, whilst the messenger, at a word or so in the native, came to them. He salaamed again, and offered the note.

Mr. Willoughby took it. He knew the language as well as the professor even, having spent many years in India. The professor, indeed, was more of a student of ancient India, and so Mr. Willoughby was certainly the better man for dealing with the messenger.

The juniors kept silence, watching, as Pam's father read the note. Then he and the professor came back to make known the contents to all.

"Almost one could have expected it," Mr. Willoughby said with stern disgust. "This is from the rajah. He will send Dave Cardew back to us, under safe escort, on condition that we first send Naina and her mother—to the palace!"

"It will mean suffering for them if we do," muttered Mr. Linton. "But what will it mean for Dave himself, if we don't!"

And then the silence came again.

#### For the Sake of a Chum

TO Betty and the other girls, the rajah's crafty offer seemed to mean nothing but mental torture for all.

So it came as a tremendous surprise when, in a few seconds they saw Mr. Willoughby start a calm smile.

"After all," he said cheerfully, "the rajah's note tells us more than is in the actual words! He dare not, anyway, send to take Naina and her mother out of our hands by force!"

"No!" And the father of Polly and Jack glanced up at the Union Jack, then winked. "It still stands for a good deal, boys and girls—whether it's flying or not."

"And it is flying, daddy; what's more, we're going to keep it flying!" burst out Polly. "Oh, but the awful thing will be—that is, if we keep Naina and her mother with us—Dave's state of mind, down there at the palace."

"Boys, I've got it!" came Jack's outburst then. "Now, dad—and everybody else, please!"



"Dave Cardew will be sent back to us," Mr. Willoughby said grimly, "on condition that we first send Naina and her mother to the Rajah's palace!"

he implored. "Let me and Dick go back with this messenger—wallah—"

"To the palace?"

"Yep!" Jack answered his father. "And get clapped into the same dungeon-place, most likely, that holds Dave. The idea being that at the least he'll have us with him, and we can tell him from you it'll be all right. The rajah knows there's a limit he can go to."

"I wish you'd let us," Dick Cherrol pleaded. "Surely, it's sound sense, what Jack here suggests? It's everything now, to get word to Dave that he has nothing to fear really."

"Not that Dave's likely to be feeling windy," Jack hastened to add. "But he must be worrying, and it would be a great thing to get a word with him."

"I think so, too," Mr. Linton agreed. "Dave's a shrewd lad. He will have guessed that the rajah intends to use him as a pawn in the game. Just a moment, and I will see what your mother has to say."

It ended in Mr. Willoughby and the professor going with Mr. Linton, to consult with the ladies. And then Morcove could have its say with the two boys.

"I can't persuade you not to go!" said Polly. "All the same, if you did," her brother grinned back. "We're going—eh, Dicky?"

"If only the grown-ups will let us—and I reckon they mean to."

"Yes, well," said Pam, "it's just splendid of you both. One can't say more than that."

"I can!" shrilled Naomer. "Bekas, I sink you are jolly good sports, and ze bravest boys in all ze world, and you deserve a medal, and don't forget to take plenties of provisions," she branched off. "Bekas, you never know! Eef ze rotten old rajah sticks you in a cell, with only bread and water—where will you be?"

"In the cell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah, bah, I am serious about food—"

"You always are," Polly chuckled.

"So I shall go and get you boys some rations to have about you in secret, yes! Good idea, to have some sandwiches under your helmets, and some chocolate in your boots—"

"Chocolate where?" gasped Polly.

"In zeir boots! Bekas, never mind eef it melts—eet is still chocolate!"

This was greeted with such peals of laughter, Naomer stamped away in a "pet." The next sent of her she was coming up to Jack and Dicky when the two boys were ready to be off.

The grown-ups had decided to let the plucky pair make the great venture. Mrs. Linton's ready assent had clinched the whole matter. If she, as Jack's own loving mother, could agree, then it was not for others to demur. And, of course, she had not known a moment's hesitation.

It would have meant no satisfaction to her to insist that Jack be spared the risk, when she knew so well that Mrs. Cardew must be suffering on account of poor Dave.

The native messenger had been told by Mr. Willoughby that the two boys would be going with him back to the palace. They were to bear a letter for the rajah, which was now being penned.

"Here you are zen, boys, and best of ze luck to you!" cried Naomer, coming to them where they were in farewell talk with Polly and the rest. "Just a few snacks, in case!"

"Phew!" stared Jack as the dusky one displayed the "snacks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Naomer's arms were loaded with what appeared to be the contents of a bran-tub—all manner of tiny packages and screwed-up papers. In vain Jack and Dave slapped their already bulging ration-bags. Naomer insisted that her offerings must be extra to all that had been put up for the boys by other hands.

"Well, thanks," Jack grinned, starting to stow away some of the snacks. "And some day, when you're back at Morcove, I'll repay you. Stand you a jolly good tea at the Barncombe Creamery, with cream-buns ad lib."

He put a package under his pith helmet, and replaced the latter crookedly.

"How do I look, girls?"

They shrieked their laughter, and the fun was still going on when Mr. and Mrs. Linton came up.

"Here's the note for the rajah, Jack. It won't please him. But the firmer and bolder we are, the better for all of us in the long run."

"It's why we wanted to go, sir," smiled Dick. Polly's mother was saying a last whispered word to Jack, before kissing him good-bye. Afterwards, Mrs. Linton went to motherless Dick, and kissed him, too.

"Yes," said Polly, in approval. "And I feel I could do the same!"

"Go on, then, my dear!" counselled her mother.

"No!" Polly decided, smiling at Dick. "It might be a bad example to Betty and the rest!"

"But when you boys get back to us, with Dave—zen, gorjus!" yelled Naomer. "Bekas, a grand celerbration! I go to see about him now!"

"Well, so-long, all!" Jack cried gaily. "Company, by the r-r-right, quick MARCH!"

The rajah's messenger had got over his nervousness and seemed to be quite responsive to the fun-lover's engaging grin. But it was little hope that either Jack or Dick could have of conversing with the man, during the journey on foot to the palace. He knew no English.

Morcove strayed after the two boys and the turbaned native until the way for those three dropped gently downhill. By their jaunty steps and last jovial wavings, Jack and Dick might have been setting off for a pleasurable "hike"; but Morcove knew!

Every step the lads were taking was a step towards great danger.

There had been flippancies up to the last moment, but now the girls could only stand in silence, whilst watching the fearless boys until they should pass out of sight.

Suddenly, Polly, finding she could do so without being noticed, quietly backed away from the pensive group. She did not feel equal to being her usual madcap self, and yet she dreaded her chums turning to her, presently, to find her looking sad.

She tiptoed away from them all, and their attention was still so concentrated upon those receding figures on the road that led away to the palace, they did not notice her stealthy withdrawal.

Then an impulse too strong to be resisted directed her to that tent which at present held only Judy Cardew. As she reached the tent-opening, she realised that Judy was now up from her blanket-bed and nearly dressed.

"Oh, Polly darling!"

Judy said it in a heartfelt tone, dropping comb and brush to come at her chum as if to fling comforting arms about her.

"Polly—I've just been told by mother—those two boys, dear!"

"It was up to them," said Polly simply.

Very poignant was the silence that fell between those two girls, lasting several moments.

"Friendship is a wonderful thing, Polly," said Judy at last. She repeated the thought, in the words it had been given by a famous poet studied at Morcove: "What a glorious thing friendship is—world without end!"

"It is," Polly said as simply as before.

## No Thought of the Danger

"JUDY—Polly! Have you seen Naina?"  
 "Naina, Betty? No!" Polly answered the chum who was here at the tent-entrance of a sudden, looking greatly alarmed.  
 "We can't find her or her mother!"  
 "What!"

Betty did not come into the tent. She looked ready to whip about and be off again.

"You know we put them by themselves for the night, feeling they would be happiest like that?" she spoke on breathlessly. "Now that tent is empty, and—we can't see a sign of them in camp. I came to see if they were here, by any chance; the last place where—"

"Goodness, but that's strange!" jerked out Polly, whilst Judy's looks proclaimed her amazement and dismay. "They haven't—gone off?"  
 "Must have done!"

Betty flashed away after saying that. The action suggested a desire, shared by others in the camp, to do something about it—at once!

Polly and Judy turned to each other.  
 "I know one thing; Naina and her mother can't have been gone long, Judy. Why, I saw them both only a minute or so ago—when I was coming here to have a word with you."

"What were they doing then?" questioned Judy eagerly. "I mean, were they up and dressed—"

"Oh, yes. They seemed to be wondering if they might come out of their tent. I suppose they felt—shy."

"Or were they thinking of slipping away even then," Judy said tensely, "and your going by made them hesitate?"

"Thinking of going down to the palace, Judy—to give themselves up?" gasped Polly hoarsely. "So—as not to be a burden upon us? Oh, Judy, if it's like that I must go—"

"I'm coming, too, Polly!"  
 They passed out of the tent and were instantly aware of a great running-about by the others.

The two girls found no one close at hand. Even Betty, here only a few moments since, was already at the other end of the camping-ground.

"They don't seem to be seeing them," Polly commented, and then she and Judy, using their hands as an extra screen from the dazzling sunshine, sent surveying glances around.

Judy, in a moment or so, gave a violent start.

"Why, look, Polly!"

"Where, where?"

"There!"

Judy was pointing away into rocky ground behind that tent from which she and Polly had just emerged.

"I don't see anything, Judy!"

"I saw them both—"

"You did?"

"Just glimpsed them—yes!"

"After them, then—come on!"

Just like headstrong Polly to voice such an impulsive cry as that. She herself set off upon one of those sudden rushes with which she was accustomed to cross the games-field at Morcove. Judy, forgetting the fatigue from yesterday's exploits, flashed to keep up with the madcap.

"Naina!" they both called loudly as they ran, zig-zagging amongst the rocks. "Naina—come back!"

But the appealing cry, although it must have been heard by Naina and her mother, did not take effect. If anything, it had probably tended

to make those two run faster than ever. Polly and Judy thought of this, and they did not call out again.

"We must just keep after them, Judy—over-take them somehow!"

"That's it!"

And on they dashed, giving not a thought to the fact that they were putting themselves out of touch with all the others. The mind of either girl had room for one thought only, at this exciting moment: Naina and her mother really were resolved to deliver themselves up to the rajah!

"You can guess why," panted Polly, darting along with Judy hard upon her heels. "They have discovered that our people have sent the rajah a refusal."

"Yes! And how fine of both of them, Polly! I say, though, we don't seem to be catching them up. It's all these mounds of stone and huge rocks; they could hide—"

"We'll keep on, for I don't believe they'd think of hiding," Polly responded hastily. "They're trusting in the start they got."

Judy was quite willing to go on running, at the same time keeping a sharp look-out to right and left. There was, she felt, a lot in Polly's theory. The native woman and her daughter, being determined to be a risk and burden to others no longer, would be all for keeping on the run, away from the camp.

To hide from one pair of friendly pursuers would be to run a big risk of being found by others.

Suddenly, both Morcove girls panted together: "There they are!"

It had been a glimpse, and only a glimpse, of the two runaways, on ground that offered less shelter. Fewer of these giant boulders and rugged blocks of stone were just there; on the other hand it was where some trees grew.

Naina and her mother, in fact, had reached the higher side of a tree-dotted slope, and now they had the trees to screen them.

But Polly and Judy, as soon as they had dashed on, downhill, to the wooded part of the slope, had no difficulty in completing the well-meant chase. No one could make a wild rush between these trees without creating a tell-tale rustling of dry sticks underfoot.

Guided and encouraged by such sounds as these, in another minute both schoolgirls came right upon the runaways with a final breathless dash.

"Stop, Naina! Both of you—oh, please!"

And they stopped. Run to exhaustion as they were, mother and daughter turned about, making gestures that were in accord with the most pitiable looks.

Then, for a few moments, pursuers and pursued alike had to stand, getting their breath back.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done this!" Polly managed to say at last, still heaving for breath. "You must come back to the camp—"

"No!" Naina dissented, in the tone of tragic resignation that the Britishers had come to associate with her and her mother. "My mother say, and I say, it is not right—"

"But, listen—"

"We go to the palace," the widow of Hunda Khan broke in upon Judy's pleadings. "And so the rajah will send you back your brother—that brave one who gave himself for us, yesterday."

The ill-fated woman's agitation robbed her speech of only a little of its wonderful fluency. So well had she and Naina been taught English whilst Hunda Khan was still with them.

"Ah, and you are all brave, you British," she continued fervently. "We hear how you arrange it; that those two boys shall also go to the palace—and they have gone! No matter. We go now, very quick, and so, before the rajah can do them harm, we shall be there!"

"But the rajah will not do them any real harm—we're certain of that!" Polly argued strenuously. "He dare not—"

"He will not do them any harm so that his people can whisper of it—no," the tragic woman agreed. "Ah, but I know the rajah! My husband was taken from me, in a moment, so that I could not find out anything; but it was the rajah's doing. Naina and myself—no order us to live in that forest, and why? It is that we interfere with his plans, and no one shall say 'Lo, he has harmed them!' But he is a monster—"

"Towards both of you, yes," Judy agreed. "And that's the very reason why you mustn't dream of giving yourselves up to him!"

"Not after we have managed to save you from his clutches as we have," Polly joined in. "Oh, please, please, do come back with us now! You can't imagine how upset the others are, at finding you have acted like this! It is brave of you, but we can't let you!"

Naina received a sudden firm look from her mother that meant "Come!"

Just an instant too late, Polly tried to detain the widow by a clutch at her arm. Mother and daughter were off once more, rushing on between the trees.

But the two schoolgirls were not going to give up the attempt. They felt that the consequences, if they did, to these brave souls, would be too terrible for words. For once, Polly's impetuosity was no greater than Judy's.

They both tore on after the native pair, desperately determined to pull them to a standstill, and finally compel them to return to camp. It must be deeds, not pleadings, when next mother and daughter were overtaken.

And then, of a sudden, danger came to the well-meaning girls. Not a wild beast, pouncing upon them from amongst the trees, but something worse, far worse than that. A band of men—some of the rajah's own men, as they could only be, surely—surrounding Naina, her mother, and the two Morcove girls, all in an instant!

Polly and Judy—they stopped dead.

Too late they realised the dangerous distance which they had come from the camp. No cry for help would travel as far back as all that.

Besides, they were too breathless to raise anything like a loud shout—and already these fierce-looking fellows were making threatening signs.

Barely two seconds did the dramatic silence last. Then one of the men jabbered at Naina and her mother in the native dialect.

They answered with passive nods that evidenced the old tragic resignation to hard fate. In any case they must have regarded their lives as forfeit to the rajah. But they looked at Polly and Judy with a world of unspeakable anguish and pity in their eyes.

Those looks were so distressing, the two girls' first impulse was to say something that would sound cheery.

"Oh, it can't be helped!" Polly shrugged. "We're caught now, of course, but—"

"They won't dare to harm us," Judy chimed in, for what it was worth.

"These men will take you with us—to the palace!" Naina's mother quavered in a tone of terror. "So, your kindness to us has ended even in this. Now my heart weeps for you, dear ones!"

There was no time for more. Before the poor woman could swallow back a sob and resume her tremulous utterances, she and Naina were jabbered at again by the tallest and fiercest of the half-dozen men.

It was an order to go on again—under escort now.

At the same time, some of the men gestured fiercely to Judy and Polly.

"You, too!" was implied, and what else could they do but obey.

Trying to appear far less alarmed for themselves than they felt, they set off behind Naina and her mother. Some of the men went in front, taking great lunging strides; the rest came on behind—very close behind the two girls.

This formation lasted for as long as the way led through the wooded slope. As soon as they had all emerged upon open ground there was a man to walk on either side of the four captives.

For a while Polly and Judy had much to say to each other by means of looks only. But at last Polly's habitual impatience proved too much for her, and she broke out:

"Judy, I don't suppose these men know a word of this lingo—don't care if they do, anyhow! This is a pretty dreadful fix we're in now, Judy!"

"Awful! They'll be so anxious, back at the camp—that's what worries me!"

"Yes. But were we to blame?"

"No, I don't think so. How could we help chasing after Naina and her mother, knowing that they were going to give themselves up?"

Polly nodded.

"Oh, and the boys will be at the palace, anyhow!" she said, with another plucky shrug.

"Judy, do you know what? I quite expect my dad and Mr. Linton will soon be down at the palace, wanting to know what the rajah means by this!"

It was Judy's turn to nod.

"And Polly, the worst of it all is that we shan't be able to help Naina and her mother now. Who on earth can help them—now?"

"I know, dear. It's a tremendous pity," Polly sighed, her eyes resting sadly upon the mother and daughter, going on before, silent and despair-ridden. "After all that happened yesterday—our getting them safely to our camp! But we're not in luck's way over this Indian business, Judy. That's what it means."

The subdued talk lapsed. Captives and captors were now treading the rough and dusty track by which the expedition had set out from the palace to the Temple of the Moon. The two girls recognised their surroundings—and how they wished they were going in the reverse direction again!

"Wonder how far ahead Jack and Dicky are?" Polly suddenly exclaimed. "Not far—can't be."

"But they had the few minutes start, and we shan't overtake them," Judy responded composedly. "They'd be certain to step it out pretty smartly."

Even so, both girls continued to stare ahead whenever the dusty track went round a slight bend. There were, at times, opportunities for peering several hundred yards along the rough road, but it was always deserted—a wearisome, lifeless ribbon of road, burning in the sun, and

the dust ready to rise in clouds from underfoot.

Suddenly they went round what proved to be the last bend, for the palace came into view. Its wonderful masses of Oriental architecture were directly ahead, on a lofty site.

High walls, and rows of trees planted with great taste in former times, hid all the spacious grounds and the grand terraces from the eye at present; but one of the great gateways was at the end of this road.

The road, so far as Naina and her mother were concerned, of No Return!

Polly and Judy could not help harbouring that despairing belief on account of the native widow and her daughter.

If only this had never happened, then, indeed, there might have been hope for them both. The expedition could have managed in the end, very likely, to smuggle them away beyond reach of the rajah's clutches. But now—

"I don't like the way these fellows keep their eyes upon Naina and her mother," Polly whispered. "It's as if they'd had the strictest instructions not to let them get away. Oh, but look, Judy—look!"

Polly's sudden excitement over something to be glimpsed at the gateway caused her to make a movement that must have seemed to the men like an intended dash to get away.

Instantly one of them threw out a bony brown arm, and the sinewy dark hand clutched Polly by the shoulder.

She shook off the hand, glaring and stamping resentfully.

"Mind what you're doing!" she flashed at the man, forgetting that he was not likely to understand.

Nor did he understand—only her look! It sufficed. He moved away from her, abashed.

"The awful cheek!" Polly turned to say to Judy. "But did you see—along there, at the gateway? The rajah, on horseback!"

"I saw more than that," was Judy's excited response. "I saw—Jack and Dicky."

#### Prisoners All

AT that moment, as strange a scene as any spot could ever have staged was being enacted just inside the gateway.

The rajah was down from his saddle, a syce taking charge of the beautiful black horse. With a swaggering poise, the rajah was standing to open and read a letter that had been presented to him, only a few moments ago, by Jack Linton.

Jack and his equally plucky chum, Dick Cherrol, were here, shoulder to shoulder—calm! There could not have been a more genuine calmness than was theirs.

Even though the rajah's evil face had lighted up with a kind of wicked glee as he came upon the two boys just as they boldly marched in by the gateway; they had remained undaunted.

"So!"

The young rajah had finished reading, and was folding up the letter.

"Your know what is in this?"

"We do, sir!"

"Then you probably know," he said ironically, with all that fluency acquired during his years in England, "there will be no answer for you boys to take back? You expect, in fact, to remain—my guests?" And he laughed.

"Your prisoners, hadn't you better say?" Jack returned, as calm as ever. "Yes, Dick and I know all about that, too."

"Good! Then you will not be disappointed even if you have to—prolong the visit, shall we say? At any rate, I think I can promise that you will not be bored! There are parts of my palace that you did not see, when you were here with the others, the day before yesterday. You shall see what I do not always show to ordinary—visitors!"

Jack and Dick held themselves perfectly steady, although they sensed a sinister meaning behind the silken words.

"You can stick us away just where you like, sir," Jack broke out, next moment. "We don't mind. We're British, and our flag still counts for something."



Jack used every device he could think of to try and make the native understand that he and the others wished to be with Dave; but the grim gaoler was adamant.



"In Chodopore—very little," the rajah was saying, softly, when a sudden shuffle-shuffle of footsteps at the gateway caused him to turn round.

The two boys did not observe the look that came into his dark eyes now. They themselves were transfixed, dilating their own eyes upon the small, mixed crowd that was entering the palace grounds.

Some swarthy natives, Naina and her mother—those two, being brought in as captives! And with them—Polly and Judy!

"Gosh!" gasped Jack. "Great Scot, Dicky!"  
 "Whew!" was all that Dick Cherrol could emit, in his staggered state, whilst the rajah voiced an exultant:  
 "So!"

POLLY felt that it was a stupid thing to be doing, but she had to do it all the same. She nodded and smiled at the two boys.

Then her brother gasped aloud once more:  
 "My hat, Polly! What on earth are you and Judy doing here?"

"It couldn't be helped—"  
 "Couldn't be helped? But—"  
 "We shall be all right!"  
 "Will you!"

Yet Jack, even as he said it, so doubtfully, had suddenly to grin. His sister's smile, in the circumstances, may have been a fatuous one, but it was catching. Dick grinned as well. Nor was Judy, always serious, free from a faint look of amusement.

"So!" the rajah now repeated, as he gloated upon the newly-brought-in captives. "More guests! I am—charmed," he was going to add mockingly, but Jack struck in bluffly:

"That's enough of that, sir—trying to be funny I mean, when it's no joke for my sister and her chum to be treated like this. You'll let them go back—under safe escort?"

"Back to the camp? I am sorry—no!" was the polished answer. "They would have to have an escort, as you suggest, my very chivalrous young gentleman! And a certain ceremony about to be performed in the palace grounds makes it impossible for me to spare—"

"Oh, switch it to earth!" Jack exploded. "Look here, sir, you've no right to keep those two girls as captives! You dare do anything to them, and you'll know it! I—I don't want to be rude, but—"

"The British instinct—I quite understand," the rajah mocked. "Would you like me, then, to let you boys take the girls back? Again, I am sorry it can't be done!"

"Dash you!" stamped Jack, and he was going to say more, but the rajah blandly gestured "Not now!" and turned to the villainous-looking fellows who had brought in the prisoners.

There was some rapid talk in the native language, lasting a minute or two, and whilst it went on the juniors did their best to convey comfort to Naina and her mother, by their looks.

To speak with those two hapless ones now was impossible. And even if talk in private had been possible—what more could it have done, beyond giving the very poorest comfort to the unhappy pair.

To have got them again, after losing them—that was something that was going to cause the rajah to be all the more severe.

Suddenly he ended his talk with the men, two of whom seized Naina and her mother, and

took them on towards the great palace. The juniors' blood boiled, but intervention was out of the question.

Once—twice, mother and daughter looked back, whilst being hustled along as if they ranked now as common prisoners. And the boys and girls, as they gazed after them, felt that they would perhaps be permitted to see them again.

"These men of mine," the rajah said darkly, "they will conduct you to the palace. I shall be there myself, in a little while; it is a busy morning for me. All Chodopore is to come in, before noon, to be present at a few floggings—"

He paused, to let the word sink in, tapping a top-boot with his riding-whip.

"A little matter of discipline, yes!" he smiled on evilly. "Yesterday, men of mine were insubordinate. As a ruler I mean to rule. That is what the rest of my people must be made to understand. So!" And he directed the juniors' attention to certain preparations being made in the centre of the lovely grounds.

Judy was turning very pale. Polly's mouth was set in a grim line. As for Jack and Dicky, they were opening and shutting their hands in a keyed-up way.

The rajah lighted a cigarette.  
 "I will see that you are given good places from which to watch! But it is not for a little while yet. Ali!" he called to one of the men who were still standing by, and said the rest in the native.

Next moment the juniors were ordered to march away together, under escort. Their way to the palace lay along a very broad centre road, ornamented with stone elephants and tufted palm trees.

The Indians with whom the prisoners had to march had ugly scowls for them now. It had not been so when Polly and Judy were being brought in by these and the two other men, just now. The rajah must have let it be known that even though they—the boys and girls—were British, he would do as he liked with them.

But would he—would he dare to do that, after all?

"I doubt it," Polly muttered stoutly, when they had fallen into talk amongst themselves. "It's just his showing off."

"Guess it is," nodded Jack with a wry look. "All the same, I'd give all I've got for you two girls not to be here."

"So would I," said Dick moodily. "The chap's such a rotter; just the exception to the usual run of big pots in this country."

"I want to see Dave," exclaimed Judy, wistfully. "If only we can all see him!"

"Rather!" Jack nodded. "Well, most likely we two chaps are going to be slammed away somewhere with him. Hope so, anyhow. Don't know about you girls!"

But the rajah said we were to be present at those floggings." Polly broke out. "I suppose that meant Dave is to be forced to look on as well. We may be able to speak to him then. Oh, won't it be awful, though, having to witness more brutality—done to order!"

"I don't know that I'll be able to stand by, doing nothing," Jack said, with a V between his brows. "I can't promise to keep my fists down."

"Nor can I," frowned Dick. "Dash this rajah chap. Things were going so fine for us all, until he cropped up. Now it doesn't look much like that Temple of the Moon business being cleared up."

"Great shame!" said Polly. "When the professor has gone to such terrible trouble and expense. Besides, it promised to be such a thrilling thing for us!"

The muttered talk had to end there. They were at the top of some broad, shallow steps, in front of the main entrance to the vast palace.

But they were not to be taken in through that doorway. There was just a moment for them to glimpse the cool-looking, paved hall, beyond the carved doorway, and a squatting idol that regarded all who went in and out with a dull stare. Then the escort signed to, the juniors to go to the left along the front of the dazzling white building.

It was a paved terrace they traversed, on a scale as grand as all else. But at the end of the terrace they went round the corner of the main building, and a big change in the architecture confronted them.

Now the juniors beheld more fortress-like buildings. Uncarved outer doors were extremely massive; every window was heavily barred.

"Is this where they have kept Dave since he fell into their hands last night?" Jack muttered. "Sort of Black Hole of Calcutta touch about this, if you ask me!"

They were halted in front of a closed outer door, which one of the men pounded with a fist.

After a few moments, bolts were shot back, and the door came open, revealing a fierce-looking Indian. From a chain girdling his waist dangled a bunch of keys.

"Well, Bluebeard!" Jack stolidly jested. They were to be handed over to this man, that was evident. After a few jabberings, the escort signed to the juniors to go in, and again they could only obey. One consolation: Dave was perhaps to be found somewhere inside!

The gaoler-like Indian did not close the outer door after taking over his fresh charges. Nor did the escort go away. Noticing all this, Jack and Dick side-glanced each other in a "Nothing doing!" manner.

Polly and Judy, going along a dim passage with the two boys and the gaoler, expected at any moment to find themselves ordered to enter some cell where they would be left to themselves.

Sure enough, the gaoler suddenly halted them all, just round the corner, and made stern signs to the two girls that the door he was going to unlock was the door of their separate cell.

"Stop a bit!" Jack burst out then, with such a protesting air that the Indian, not understanding a word, yet stared hesitantly.

Instantly, Dick Cherrol added his protesting gestures. It became the thrilling hope of Polly and Judy that by sheer force of character—or by sheer "bounce," to use a more expressive word—the boys were going to bluff the man into leaving them altogether.

His uncertainty seemed to imply that he had received no definite orders as to what he must do with all four of them, beyond keeping them under detention.

"See if I can't make the joker understand," Jack rose to the occasion cheerfully. Indicating himself and his fellow-captives, he held up four fingers.

"Savvy four? He's got that, boys! Well, then, one more for Dave, makes five."

And Jack now held up four fingers and a thumb—five!

The Indian clearly understood, but scowled.

Then Jack drew a square in the air, with his left hand, keeping the right hand in the centre. It meant—or so, at least, Jack hoped it would mean to the Indian—that five prisoners were to be in one cell.

"And no nonsense about it, Mr. Bluebeard!" Jack spoke on glibly, with the most indignant, commanding looks. At the same time, Dick nodded vehemently, in confirmation.

Jack rammed a clenched fist into the palm of his other hand.

"Jello, jello!" he said. "Got that? All British, and passports in order. Savvy! Jello, then—jello, jello!"

It mattered not in the least that next moment Jack was saying:

"Gee, boys, it's done the trick!" The Indian could not understand.

But Polly and Judy had to be very careful not to let looks reveal amusements as well as joyful relief.

As for Dick, when the Indian took them farther along this second passage, to the door of another cell, Dick frowningly implied:

"So I should think!"

Then the Indian, jingling his bunch of keys, rammed home one huge key into a lock, turned back the hasp, and sent the stout cedar-wood door wide round.

He signed to all four juniors to go in.

They did so, and Dave Cardew was there, the light from a barred window shining strongly upon his face.

#### Behind the Bars

**B**OOM! The door of this stone-walled cell went as the Indian gaoler closed it, after his withdrawal.

That the door had been pulled shut like that, and the key turned upon them, went unnoticed by the juniors.

"Dave!" was Judy's wild cry.

"Judy! Polly! But—"

"Cheerio, Dave, old son!" Jack broke out, with all the old, comfort-giving levity. "We just thought we'd look you up, you know!"

Dave knew better than to tell Jack that it was no time for "rotting." If spirits could be maintained, in spite of such a run of ill-luck, so much the better. So Dave smiled, although he looked concerned enough next moment.

"And the others?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, they're at the camp!" smiled Polly.

"Yes, Dave; they're all right—at least, we hope so," his sister added, crossing over to him. "How are you, dear? They haven't been ill-treating you?"

"I'm all right," he hastened to reassure them all, cheerily. "The worst they've done is to keep me shut up here. 'Course, I wasn't going to let myself get down about it all. The great thing is, that Naina and her mother are out of that brute's clutches, thanks to yesterday!"

"Er—yes, you did a fine thing yesterday," Jack adroitly turned the talk. He and the other captives of the last hour or so were suddenly realising; best not to let Dave know that his action had been heroism thrown away.

"Oh, never mind about anything I did," Dave modestly entreated. "But what does it mean—you four here? This is pretty awful?"

"Dick and I simply got permish to come down and join you," Jack stated. "That's the honest truth; old son."

"And Judy and I—er—we got taken up by

some of the rajah's men, after straying from the camp," Polly explained, suppressing all reference to Naina and her mother. "Pity, but there it is!"

"And so now—the first thing, as Naomer would say," grinned Jack, slewing round his haversack. "Had any brekker, Dave?"

"I had some bread and water."

"You must be starving. But here we are, boys! Feel better after this, all of us! Stuff to give the troops!"

"You must all keep me company," said Dave. Polly laughed.

"We're doing that, as it is! And I must say, Dave, they might have given you a better room."

"Room, do you call it?" grinned Dicky. "And what's this, then?" dragging forward a bench for the girls to seat themselves. "Chippendale?"

He and Jack partook of a snack, along with Dave; but the girls were not hungry—little wonder! Pluckily as they might be making light of the general position, the outlook was pretty black.

Not a sound came to the interned youngsters from other parts of the building. But soon their ears picked up a significant commotion that had started in the palace grounds.

"Sounds as if all the people the rajah spoke about are assembling now," Judy commented.

"Have you been told, Dave, about the floggings?"

"What!"

"It's a dashed shame!" Jack prefaced the reluctant explanation. "The rajah's having some of the beggars flogged, for not doing as they were told—yesterday. The whole population of Chodopore is under orders to look on, it seems—and so are we."

Dave stood up, looking fierce. He had been sitting upon a wooden stool at the table, where his chums had opened the haversacks.

Taking up the stool, he placed it close to the wall, under the barred window. The latter was set rather high, but by mounting the stool he was able to see out.

After peering between the bars for a few moments he jumped down again and faced round. "You can see the crowds. Hundreds of natives."

"Let's look!" And now Jack took his stand upon the stool. "Gee!" he instantly exclaimed.

"What a mob! Men, women and children!"

"Children, too—just fancy!" Judy cried out, in bitter scorn. "They're to witness the whole thing as well. Oh, why—why did that brute ever become the rajah!"

"Why? Simply because he ousted his elder brother—that Hunda Khan fellow, who was a really decent sort." Dave said tersely. "There must have been foul play, I reckon, that Hunda Khan disappeared and was reported dead, just at a time when he should have been coming into everything."

"Ah, Hunda Khan was one of the best," Polly agreed earnestly. "But this rajah—"

"He's a wash-out!" frowned Dicky.

Jack suddenly looked round, still standing upon the stool.

"Boys, they're nearly ready, by the look of it. Look here, what are we to do? I mean to say, it'll be more than you two girls can bear!"

"I shall shut my eyes," Judy said.

"I shall shout 'Shame! Shame!' as soon as it all begins!" Polly burst out, in her headstrong way. "I don't care!"

"But, look here," Jack struck in wildly, at

the same time jumping off the stool, "can't we chaps do something, after all? Dave—Dicky? Can't we save Polly and Judy from—"

"They've taken my revolver," Dave exclaimed huskily.

"They've taken mine and Dicky's, come to that," Jack said. "Gosh, it's awful. Mean to say, even if we lash out—"

"Here, can we go for the bally gaoler-chap, the moment he unlocks and comes in?" burst out Dicky desperately. "And make a dash for it?"

"Dash for where?" asked Dave.

"Anywhere, out of the palace!"

"It can't be done," Dave ruled soberly. "Just think of all the hundreds of people who have been got together! And they all know, by now, that the rajah has a down on us. If we stood only half a chance, I'd be for taking it. But—"

"Dave's right," said Judy.

"St!"

That was Polly, as a key grated into the lock. Then, the door swinging open, they all five saw how futile it would have been, to make a dash for freedom.

The gaoler was not alone. At least half a dozen tall natives, in the uniform of the rajah's body-guard, stood drawn up just outside the cell.

The scowling gaoler signed to the five to come out. He also spoke something, but even if they had understood the native language they might not have been able to follow what he said. So loud was the hubbub coming in at the window it rendered the man's voice almost inaudible.

The din resulting from ever-increasing excitement amongst the crowds outside was lost to the boys and girls, as soon as they had passed back into the dim, stone-walled passage.

Except for their own and the guards' footsteps, there was a tomb-like silence.

But in a minute the open air was reached—the dazzling brilliance of an Indian midday, after the sepulchral gloom of the prison. Then the medley of sounds that broke upon their hearing formed a kind of tumult.

It seemed to the juniors as if excitable quarrels were in progress everywhere amongst the mustered natives.

The people could not assemble quietly, and every tongue was adding its quota of jabber-jabber and screech-screech.

But our youngsters soon realised that squabbling there was none, only great excitement, pure and simple. The nearer they were taken, by their guards, the better they could sense the actual mood of the crowd. And that mood was one of general satisfaction, as if a great treat were in store.

"Can it be that they're really going to enjoy seeing some of their own pals flogged?" Jack muttered thickly.

"Perhaps it's because they've got a half-day off on account of it," said Dick. "They are usually worked like slaves, I reckon."

"They should have had Naina's father: for a rajah," Judy murmured. "He would have been so different."

"There's the rajah—look!" was Polly's sudden tense outburst. "Riding that elephant. What a display!"

"Yes, talk about Samway's Circus that comes to Barncombe!" grinned Jack.

The rajah, in fact, was showing himself off to the people in great state.

The elephant he rode was saddled with a very gorgeous howdah.

All the trappings were in vivid colours, and

whilst a white-frosted attendant walked on either side of the long-tusked mammoth, another native sat perched upon the neck, plying an ivory-handled whisk.

The rajah himself, alone in the howdah, was dressed in his richest Eastern raiment.

From a distance, the juniors caught the flash and sparkle of gems, including the one priceless jewel that adorned his turban.

It was easy for the boys and girls to observe all this, whilst their guards slowly made a way for them through the jabbering crowds. That one elephant loomed high above the head and shoulders of people who lined the way he was treading.

Now the din was dying down—into a respectful silence, as the juniors supposed. They wondered if, at the end of an awed silence, a great ovation would come. Surely the people would be giving

ster!" seemed to be the gist of what the mob was shrieking and yelling.

And suddenly he was down! It happened before the eyes of the juniors, all in a moment.

They saw that part of the crowd had surged around the elephant, and that a few frenzied men had assailed that howdah as a battalion might have stormed a strong hold set upon a hill.

"Gosh, they've got him!" Jack jerked out as he and his sister and the rest saw the canopied howdah invaded by those few men who had swarmed up, by means of the girths and strappings. "Here, boys—this is our chance!"

"Steady!" said Dave. But he, for one, was greatly agitated. It did appear to be a sudden, miraculous chance of escape.



As Jack approached in friendly fashion, the elephant suddenly wheeled about and directed a stream of muddy water at the boy. There was great merriment among the watchers.

the equivalent of a British cheer, for this high and mighty overlord of theirs?

Then, suddenly a most sensational thing happened.

Instead of anything like a cheer, a prolonged yell of utter execration broke out.

It was a wild demonstration of fury against the rajah, taken up by every native assembled there—except the juniors' guards.

In a flash the youngsters realised that, except for the rajah's own uniformed bodyguard, all Chodopore had turned against its rajah.

It had turned against him, and meant to rend him!

The ears of Polly and Judy were almost split, as the saying is, by the ferocity of the yelling. And every bit as ferocious were the excitable gesticulations, the shaking of brown, bony fists in the air.

"Down with the rajah—down with the mon-

Every instant the assembled crowds were becoming more mob-like in their wild disorder. The howdah rocked and pitched violently, like a small boat on a rough sea—for the elephant was feeling restive.

The juniors darted glances at their guards. Those men were forgetting all about them, their charges. Panicky fear for their own safety was in the men's faces.

Then, still hesitant about what to do, the boys and girls looked over the heads of the raging mob once again.

They were just in time to see the rajah pitched headlong out of the howdah.

He had been flung out, as if thrown to the mob, to be torn to pieces.

Polly and Judy, giddy with the excitement and horror of it all, were suddenly nudged violently by the boys.

"Come on!"



"Get away?"

"Yes—look sharp! It's our chance!"  
Incredible, yet it was so! The two girls realised as much, as they obeyed the boys' urgent words. The reward, this of keeping a stout heart and of being on the side of justice and mercy. No one in this seething crowd, however wrought up he might be, was going to molest them.

And the guards—the guards had vanished.

Whether those men had gone forward to do their best for the rajah, or whether they had simply bolted for their own safety's sake, the juniors could not tell. Nor were they concerned to know.

Enough that the men were no longer here!

Polly and Judy found the boys thrusting a way for them out of the turbulent mass of coloured humanity.

They had all five been only on the fringe of the crowd, when this fearful storm of pent-up human passions broke loose, so they were soon clear of the press.

In these first moments of the outbreak, the tendency of the mob seemed to be to keep together there and deal with the rajah!

"Can you girls run all right?" Jack flung back the panted inquiry as he led in the rush for the nearest exit from the grounds.

"Can we run?" Polly breathlessly answered.

"Non-stop for the camp, if you like, you boys!"

"And that's what it must be!" Dick jerked out.

"Say, we can go out by that gateway over yonder!"

"Yes!"

"What luck!" gasped Judy. "We shall do it!"

"Serve him right," her brother muttered, in allusion to the rajah. "He's been asking for it."

The jerky exclamations ended. It was a time for saving one's breath.

As fast as they had ever been known to run on the sports fields at their schools so they all ran now.

In the broiling sunshine they simply streaked for the nearest exit.

The ever-increasing shouts and yells filled the air. It was impossible to hear them and not feel that at any moment a part of the mob, in sheer, insensate fury might turn upon them, the juniors, British though they were.

But they glanced behind, whilst dashing on, and it was all right. No howling horde giving chase yet.

It may have taken them only a minute at most to reach the gateway, but it certainly seemed to be an appalling length of time before they were there. At last, however, they were darting through that unguarded exit and then—

"My hat!" gasped Jack, stopping dead.

They all stopped dead.

"Daddy!" was Polly's breathless cry.

For she had almost run right into the arms of her father.

#### Critical Moments

"DAD! Oh!"  
"Polly—Jack—all of you—"

"Gosh, guv'nor," jerked out Jack, mopping a moist forehead. "So you—came down to see about it all?"

"I did! With Polly and Judy suddenly missing from camp, it wasn't good enough! But what's happening now—in there?"

"A bit of luck for the expedition—I don't know about it's being luck for the rajah," grinned

Jack. "His people have turned against him."

"Good heavens!"

"But, daddy, can you wonder?" panted Polly. "Oh, he has led them a life. He was going to have a lot of men flogged, with all the rest of the people to look on!"

"But it's a fair old Barney's Bull now," chuckled Jack. "And so we took the chance and hoofed it! Jello, jello, yessir!"

"Then, for goodness' sake," said Mr. Linton quickly getting over the staggering surprise, "go on running, back to camp!"

"There's just one thing, sir," said Dicky. "Now that you've turned up—how about Naina and her mother?"

"Ah! They are—in the palace?"

"They were captured along with me and Judy, yes!" Polly cried out. "I've just remembered them!"

"So have I!" broke in Judy. "Oh, can't something be done for them?"

Dave was looking upset now.

"You didn't tell me about Naina and her mother!"

"No well—"

There came such a fearful uproar from the palace gardens all talk was interrupted. Mr. Linton stepped quickly to where he could see in through the gateway, and the juniors did the same.

They saw that the mob was suddenly swarming in the direction of the palace itself.

That solitary elephant, shorn of his trappings, and with the howdah hanging on all anyhow, was ramping around in a frightened way.

"You and I, Jack, will see if anything can be done for Naina and her mother," Mr. Linton briskly decided. "We can't tell, but it may be possible to get them out of the palace."

"And back to the camp with us?" Polly rejoined eagerly. "Oh, that would be just splendid!"

"But you two girls must not hang around," the madcap's father further decreed. "Dave and Dick will see you safely back to the camp, as fast as you can leg it!"

"If I might suggest, sir—" blurted out Dick, and Mr. Linton smiled a cordial:

"Well?"

"Let Jack and Dave be the ones to go with Polly and Judy?" pleaded Dick, "and let me keep with you."

"Nunno!" cried Jack. "Don't do me out of my chance to—"

"It's like this," Dicky spoke on sturdily. "I've got no parents, no brothers or sisters. So if anything happened to me, it doesn't matter." "Doesn't it!" voiced the other juniors, together.

"If we lose you, Dicky, we shall feel it as we'd feel the loss of a son or brother," Mr. Linton exclaimed, earnestly. "But you have offered, and I'm going to accept you! My own boy will go back with the others—"

"Ooom!" groaned Jack. "Shame, boys!"

"Remember, something may happen to me," his father stressed calmly. "The mob is in a crazy mood. And there's your mother to be thought of, Jack."

That settled it. Next instant, Jack was giving a half-serious salute.

"Right-ho, guv'nor! But you'll get back all right, and so will Dicky! Best of luck, Dick! You're an artful blighter, to have put it that way, but you're a chum and a sport!"

There was no time for more. Every moment

was of vital value. Polly took only half a second to kiss her father, whispering, "Daddy darling, you are a dear!" Then she was losing him again, for the time being.

Never before had her young mind been in such a whirl. No sooner had she encountered her father here at the gateway, than desperate circumstances had decreed this fresh parting.

He and Dicky—they walked boldly into the palace grounds, where all was a state of riot. Polly and Judy, with Jack and Dave, were supposed to resume the flight back to camp, but they had to linger.

The wild scene that could be witnessed from that gateway fascinated them. Flower-beds were being trampled over. Wrecking and pillaging had set in. And all the time, the general drift of the frenzied natives was towards the palace.

"Gosh!" breathed Jack, still watching with the other three, "they look like turning the place upside down."

"So long as they don't fire it," muttered Dave. "But we must get away. You know what your dad said."

"I suppose we must, although I long to stay," sighed Polly. "Oh, look though—here comes that elephant! Goodness, we mustn't get in its way!"

"Gee, no!"

And next instant that gateway was deserted. The juniors had skipped away from it pretty smartly, calculating that the huge, frightened beast would soon be there—and would not stop when he got there!

Nor did he.

They looked back, after running a hundred yards or so, and the elephant was just then charging out by the gateway.

The empty howdah still rode his back, loosely, taking one lopsided position and another as he came lumbering along, casting his trunk about. Altogether upset by the wild scene in which he had been involved, his one idea was evidently to get away from it.

"Gracious!" gasped Judy, for the elephant was certainly capable of outrunning them.

"Is he going to keep to this bit of road?" wondered Jack. "If so, we'd better dodge aside. Dave—"

"Yes, dodge him!" that lad advised smartly. "But keep together!"

So they all four dived aside on to some palm-dotted ground, leaving the straight bit of roadway to the mammoth.

Heart in mouth as to whether he could not espy them and, in some maddened mood of his own, come straight at them, they stood ready to do their best to dodge him still.

But he trundled past, keeping to the roadway, and it seemed to the juniors that his fright was lessening.

He was already slowing down, and was not tossing his trunk about so wildly.

"My, but he's a whacker!" breathed Jack, as the scare passed off. "Jolly good fellow, treat him properly."

"Yes, poor thing!" murmured Judy. "That awful row has been too much for him."

"Hallo! Gee, boys, just see him now—stopping for a drink at that water-hole!" came Jack's delighted comment. "Here, I say, Dave old son, what about catching him, and getting him to take us home?"

"To the camp?" gasped Polly. "Don't be a goop, Jack! Just as if—"

"I'm not so sure!" persisted her fun-loving brother. "I'm going to try, anyhow. Come on, boys!"

He boldly advanced from the bit of shelter, and that left Polly smiling in a way that meant: "Yes, let's!"

"What do you think, Dave?" queried Judy.

Dave gave a sober smile that seemed to imply he thought it might be all right. The three of them stopped after Jack, who soon began to address the elephant in a soothing way, having got near enough.

"Whoa, boy!" said Jack, and he came in for a wicked look from a very small eye, whilst the elephant sucked up more water and squirted it down his throat.

"Feel better after that, eh, old son? I should say so!" Jack chatted on to the runaway. "Take your fill, old chap, and then—"

And then the elephant interrupted by squirting a whole trunkful of water, full in Jack's face.

"Wow! Oooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That's very funny!" giggled Polly.

"Funny!" grimaced Jack. He had been nearly knocked over by the force of the cold douche. Now he had to shake himself like a Newfoundland dog after a swim,

"Sopped to the skin!" he complained. "Gee, though, I do believe the old chap meant it kindly."

"He's friendly enough," said Dave. "You can guess why. He has nothing but friendly recollections of other white people he has met at times."

"Wait till I've tried him with a few of Naomer's snacks," chuckled Jack, opening his haversack. "Here you are, Sambo—a slab of chocolate—Gosh, silver paper and all! It's gone, boys!"

Again Polly and Judy became convulsed with laughter. This business of the stray elephant was providing a big reaction from all the stress and strain of recent events.

"Good old boy!" said Polly, suddenly making bold to stroke an extended trunk. "You're a nice old chap!"

"Hey, whoa!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

For Jack was finding Sambo helping himself at the haversack. The trunk-tip had gone in, and out it came again with another of Naomer's packages of provender.

Down his accommodating throat the elephant popped that second snack, and then plainly, like Oliver Twist, asked for more.

"Nunno," said Jack, fastening up the haversack. "You must earn the rest, old son. Any objection to taxiing us up to the camp? Hooray, boys, he's simply asking if we'd like a lift."

"And I would!" declared Polly blithely. "For I feel I've done just about enough running about."

"Same here," said Judy. "But be careful, you two!"

Jack and Dave were gingerly setting about adjusting some of the straps by which the weighty howdah should have been held in proper position. The broad leather straps had worked loose during all the turmoil in which the elephant had been involved. But the boys soon got everything readjusted.

Whilst they were thus occupied, their sisters petted the mighty beast, whose tiny eyes set in

that huge head of his, seemed to hold a pleased sparkle.

"Come on, then, boys!" Jack at last requested jovially. "Although how to climb up to the jolly old howdah is a bit of a puzzler. What we really need is a pair of housemaid's steps."

Polly turned to Judy roughly.

"Er—after you, Judy dear!"

"Oh, but—I don't quite see—"

"Neither do I!"

"Hurry up, please!" droned Jack. "Show all tickets. Here, I'd better hoist you up, Polly!"

And he did so. Taking his sister about the knees, he sturdily hoisted her high enough for her to be able to take hold of the howdah and so clamber aboard.

"Oh, comfy!" she promptly called out, settling down.

Then Dave hoisted up his sister. Judy scrambled in over the side, and there were two pretty faces to peep down upon the boys very saucily.

"Who is going to drive, Dave—you or me?" Jack now wanted to know, with mock gravity.

"Oh, you, Jack! I'll get in along with the girls!"

"I'm not used to quite such a big car as this," Jack jested, patting the elephant. "But I'll do my best. You get in, and then I'll start up. Now, Robot, keep the brakes on for a bit, please!"

It must have been Jack's tone of voice that gave the elephant to understand he had nothing to fear. If ever Jack had talked pure nonsense he was talking it now!

"Shouldn't be surprised if the steering is a bit loose," he further remarked, whilst clambering up by means of the saddlery on to the elephant's neck. "Gosh, and what do we do, boys, for a hooter? Oh, we'll just have to give the traffic-signals a miss!"

"So long as we get away sharp!" urged Polly, her merriment tintured with anxiety. "After all, we are not—oh!" she broke off, finding herself almost thrown off her balance in the howdah. "We're off!"

"See?" Jack's triumphant cry came to those who were riding behind him. "All done by kindness. Fork left, Sambo, that's the way! Gee, it's great, boys! Be able to get into top gear presently!"

And a minute later, to Jack's cry of "Jello, jello!" the elephant was trundling them safely, as they hoped, back to the camp.

#### Naina Brings News]

"**B**ETTY, queek—queek! Pam! Everybody—oo, queek!" Naomer's eyes were bulging in their sockets.

"Bekas—an efferlant!" she yelled.

"My goodness!" gasped Betty.

For now she and some of the other girls had rushed out into the sunshine, to come in for the same sensational spectacle that had sent Naomer almost off her head.

Up the rough track leading to the tableland on which the expedition had its temporary camp an elephant had come, with a howdah on his back.

And in the howdah reclined—wonder of wonders!—Polly and Judy and Dave, whilst on the neck of the mammoth rode Jack, looking as happy as you please.

"Jello, jello!" the astounded beholders heard

Jack playfully urging on the great beast. "Hi, hi!" he shouted to them gaily. "Mind your toes, there!"

"What ze diggings! Bekas—"

"Bai Jove!" gaped Paula. "What will be happening next, geals!"

From the howdah there came a long-drawn-out cheer, started by Polly.

"Hoo-ray-ay-ay! Hoorah-h-h! Back again! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Whoa, boy! Whoa, Sambo!" Jack was soon instructing the elephant. "Gosh, I don't believe I'm going to be able to get him to stop! Whoa—whoa!"

"Howwow!" said Paula, hastily retiring.

But it was all right; Sambo pulled up, showing great delight when Jack promptly smacked the mighty forehead, in token of praise.

"Cherio!" cried Polly, waving from the howdah. "How do you like our new car, girls?"

Such levity did a great deal to relieve the minds of all who had been forced to hang about in camp, whilst such thrilling things were happening below at the palace. But Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby, Mrs. Linton, Mrs. Cardew and the professor were next moment volleying anxious inquiries about Mr. Linton and Dicky Cherrol.

"Oh, they'll be all right—it's certain!" was Polly's reassuring cry. "We've got wonderful things to tell you, as soon—er—as soon as we've got down! Question is, how do we get down?"

Jack, for one, simply slid to the ground, and in the end Polly and Judy got to earth again with perhaps more speed than elegance, Dave doing his best to help them.

Then, whilst hasty explanations were being given, Sambo found himself coming in for a great deal of well-deserved petting. Naomer was in love with him instantly.

"Bekas, you are a nice old thing, and I would like to take you home to Morocco! Wait ze bit, and I get you a refresher!"

Sprinting away, she soon returned with a bucket of water for his drink, and a tin of biscuits by way of a "snack."

Naomer began by feeding the biscuits to him one by one, but she ended by placing the tin within reach of his trunk-tip and letting him help himself. Which he did, with obvious delight.

Meantime, comment on the morning's happenings down at the palace, began to come from those who had been in camp.

"From what you boys and girls have told us," said Mr. Willoughby, "it looks as if we shall not be troubled with the rajah any more. But until Mr. Linton and Dicky are safely with us again we are bound to feel anxious."

"It occurs to me," spoke the professor gravely, "I am a pretty good age, and not much use in any rough and tumble, I'm afraid but I do feel strongly inclined to go down to the palace—"

"And I'll go with you!" declared Pam's father promptly. "You and I, professor, both know the lingo, and we may find the natives quite amenable, if we talk to them the right way. We'll link up with Linton and the boy, at any rate, and see what can be done."

Now it was Pam's turn to feel a pang of anxiety at the idea of her father going into possible danger. But, like her mother, she was not going to offer a word of dissuasion.

A few minutes later, Mr. Willoughby and the professor were off, and it was for all those who were now in camp to settle down to a long wait, without giving way to overmuch anxiety.

Jack and Dave had coaxed Sambo away to the "wagon-lines," where they could give him all his needs. As for the girls, they had a great deal to say to one another, but that did not prevent them from being active about the camp.

So the time of waiting wore away; hour after hour, and still no development.

The afternoon sun went behind the giant mountains, and early evening drew on with welcome shade and coolness.

Still the camp was in anxious doubt about those who were away, and still old and young alike bravely resisted pessimistic fears.

Then, when the sudden darkness of the tropical nightfall was at hand, a shout came from two or three juniors who had posted themselves at the top of the track.

In the fast-failing light they had dimly discerned a small crowd, coming up the track.

The whole camp turned out, instantly. Uncertainty and alarm seized all for, it looked as if this were simply a mob of natives, possibly hostile, making for the camp.

But in a few moments reassuring shouts were heard in English.

"That's my daddy!" Pam said joyfully.

"And that's mine!" cried Polly.

"Oh, hooray—"  
"Yes, bekas—gorjus! Now you can see zem—and zere is Dicky, too, and ze jolly old professor! Pip-ooray!"

"Mor—cove!" vociferated Betty and others.

"All well!" the cry came back.

"Then I wonder," breathed Mrs. Linton tensely, "have they brought back Naina and her mother?"

"Oh, if only they have!" fumed Polly. And they had.

Within five minutes nothing but wild jubilation swayed Morcove and the boys.

It had taken a good deal of time, but in the end that fine purpose had been achieved, down there at the palace. Naina and her mother had been brought away, back to the camp, nor was there the slightest fear of their again being taken out of the hands of the British friends.

The exact fate of the rajah was unknown. He had not lost his life at the hands of the infuriated mob, but he had certainly been roughly handled. One rumour had it that he had managed to ride away, another story was that he was a prisoner—in his own palace!

Be that as it might, the state of things down at the palace made it quite certain that the expedition would not be troubled by the down-fallen tyrant any more.

The rebel natives were more than friendly towards the Britishers. Gladly had the rioters allowed Naina and her mother to go free.

As for the native crowd that had come into camp along with the two fathers, the professor, and Dick Cherrol, it comprised men who had eagerly offered to serve the expedition.

So now, Morcove and Co. had all the help



The elephant lumbered into camp, the occupants of the howdah waving gaily; and from those in camp came relieved cries of greeting.

it could possibly want. Men to tend the bullock-teams, water "wallahs," and native porters, and cooks—in all, they comprised quite a regiment.

"And they're just splendid!" was Betty's happy comment, coming into one of the tents last thing of all, that night. "You've only got to give them a smile and they'll do anything for you!"

"They have had such a cruel time under the rajah," Pam murmured feelingly. "Dad has talked—with a lot of them, and they have told him awful things—about floggings, and bread-and-water in pitch-dark dungeons."

"But now—but now!" Polly rejoiced. "Hooray, it's all clear for the Temple of the Moon and its secret! No more upsets, and so perhaps after all we shall not have to go back home, without knowing—that secret!"

"Gorjus! Bekas—you never know! Bekas, supposing ze secret of the temple has something to do with—"

Naomer's outburst was cut short in dramatic fashion. All in a moment and quite unexpectedly, she and others in the tent found Naina looking in upon them, and in Naina's dark eyes there was a strange look.

She was like one who has just received a dizzying shock.

"Hallo, Naina!" several of the chums greeted her. "We thought you had gone to bed!"



They had said good-night to her a few minutes since, her tent being one that she was to share with her mother.

"You have not heard?" she asked them, excitedly, and they all voiced a wondering:

"Heard what, Naina?"

She came right into the tent then. By the dim light of a lantern hanging about the centre-pole, her dark thin face showed great emotion.

"It is something that has been told to my mother by one of the natives," she whispered agitatedly. "He is a man who worked about the palace. He say—he say that my father is not dead!"

"What!"

"He is ALIVE!" Naina spoke on, her eyes enlarged with joyful excitement. "How it is, the rajah had him taken away—alive. Although so cruel, the rajah could not be as wicked as that—to get rid of my father altogether, and so—"

"Great goodness!" burst out Polly. "We get you, Naina—don't we, girls? It was given out that your father had died, although really he had only been—spirited away!"

"It was one night," Naina said, nodding impressively. "They seize him at the palace, and someone else who is very ill—he is put in my father's place. It was the sick man who died. So," and she brought her hands together in a wistful clap, "my father may be alive now alive!"

"But where—where?" jerked out Betty. "Can that native say where?"

Naina shook her head.

"Would it be in some dungeon, I wonder, down there at the palace!" Pam shudderingly exclaimed.

But again Naina nodded in dissent.

"No, no!" was her vehement whisper. "For that native is certain of one thing. There are several of them who have been certain, ever since that night, many moons ago. They know that my father, Hunda Khan, who would have become rajah, was taken away from the palace."

"And that is all?" Judy caught the speaker up. "But surely it can be said, roughly, which way they took your father?"

"It is said," came Naina's low-spoken answer, "that they took my father—this way. The same road that we came from the palace, he was taken, that night. It is said, that perhaps they took him—to the Temple of the Moon!"

A sensational silence followed those last words. The Temple of the Moon!

Instantly, those of the girls who had already paid a flying visit to the temple, saw it again in their mind's eye. That ancient ruin, still an object of such mystery, and preserving still its unsolved secret!

"I thought I would come to tell you," Naina spoke again at last. "Now I go away, to sleep. Oh, my dear ones," she paused to add, as she turned to go, "you who have been so good and kind, so brave! Will you do one thing more for me and my mother?"

"We'll do anything, Naina!"

"Before you sleep, pray that we may yet find my dear father—still alive!"

She was gone, as soon as the entreaty had been uttered.

And the Morcove girls, left alone together, looked at one another in an awestruck manner, saying each to herself:

"The Temple of the Moon!"

(THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

## At the Temple of the Moon

A dramatic surprise awaits the intrepid Morcove party on arrival at the Temple—fitting climax to a series of momentous holiday adventures. Do not fail to read of the thrilling events which lead

Betty Barton and Co. to discover—

### The SECRET of the TEMPLE



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