

"PAM'S DESERT PERIL" GRAND MORCOVE HOLIDAY STORY  
BY MARJORIE STANTON—INSIDE

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

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## THE DESERT CAPTIVE

A thrilling moment from this  
week's grand long story of  
Betty Barton & Co. on holiday.

GRANGEMOOR AND MORCOVE SCHOOL STORIES INSIDE

*Snatched From Her Friends' Side—Borne Captive Across Burning Desert Sands—  
Such is the Startling Ordeal Pam Willoughby Faces*

# Pam's Desert Peril



## CHAPTER I.

### The Glamorous East

"HALLO, Polly—going out?"  
"Before it gets too hot, Betty! You coming?"  
"Rather! I'll just get a hat."  
"And fetch along some of the other girls, Betty!"  
"Right—ho!"

That lively step which so often took Betty Barton, the Form captain, in and out of her study at Morcove School, was as brisk as ever again this morning.

Out here in the desert country of North Africa, where Betty and her chums of Study 12 had at least a month of the summer "hols" to spend together, the heat could be pretty trying during the latter part of the day.

But nightfall, with the stars flashing vividly in their millions above the dark and desolate wastes of sand-dune and rock, always brought relief.

Then a delicious breeze,

dry and bracing, moved across the nightbound desert.

So this morning Betty and all her chums had awakened feeling "full of beans." And, although they had now been several days and nights in what was the only decent hotel in semi-barbaric El Kareb, the awakening to all the hubbub of this Moorish kind of town had meant an undiminished delight—a thrill as great as ever.

Polly Linton, just as much a madcap on holiday as she was, in term-time at Morcove, went out on to a balcony now.

The hotel, in spacious grounds, stood aloof from the town. She could send her gaze roving over the huddle of white-walled, flat-roofed houses, marking the narrow and sinister alleyways which ran between them, and looking amused at many an every-day feature of the life of the place.

The Gate of the Desert—El Kareb! The very name of the hotel, put into English, meant Hotel of the Gate of the Desert.

The place was wild enough, the native life no more changed than Betty and Co. were likely to find it when they had gone many a league farther upon their holiday travels, and had come to—Nakara!

For it was to far-inland Nakara they were travelling, in the care of Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby.

**Morcove in the Mysterious  
East: The First of a  
Grand New Series by  
MARJORIE STANTON**

Nakara, the white-walled ancient capital of that tiny desert kingdom over which a girl, of school age still, had been called to reign as queen!

"Polly!" a voice gaily



hailed her, and she spoke back into the shabby private sitting-room of the hotel from the balcony:

"Here, Betty!"

"Oh, there you are," said Betty, coming out on to the balcony. "Well, I'm ready! I've got Pam and Bunny to join us. Tess is out on the hotel roof, sketching the place from up there! Madge is staying with her, for company."

"What about Naomer and Paula, then?"

"Naomer wanted to come, but—Mrs. Willoughby said no. Rather put her foot down, in fact!"

Polly stared.

"Really? Why's that, Betty?"

"A shrug preceded the answer.

"They've got to keep a bit of an eye upon Naomer, I suppose, now that we have got as far as this. After all, Polly, you can't wonder! We're apt to forget that she is—the queen!"

Polly grinned.

"In Nakara, she may be. But she hasn't got there yet! Goodness, have we all got to start making obeisance to her, like the natives do? Catch me!"

"So Paula," Betty lightly supplemented, "is going to stay in with Naomer. I couldn't find Helen and Judy— Oh, here they are!"

The Form captain and Polly had returned to the sitting-room whilst chatting. Now there were these four chums of theirs, at any rate, to join them in a morning's saunter through the city.

Pam, slightly taller than any of the others, was the only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby. Some day she would inherit stately Swanlake from her parents—that famous estate a few miles from Morcove, in Glorious Devon.

As for Mr. Willoughby, he had a wide experience of the East and its ways. Governments had made use of him from time to time. He had been everywhere, could speak a dozen different languages, and was an expert in the art of Secret Service.

"Going to be another scorcher!" laughed jolly Helen Craig, as she and the other five Morcovians got clear of the extraordinary building which was the Desert-Gate Hotel.

"But isn't it grand?" came Judy Cardew's cry of delight—"that we're here, in this wonderful, marvellous country! My spools will never last out, I know they won't," she deplored, even then handling the camera which hung by a strap from her shoulder.

For a few moments more they were in the comparatively tame surroundings of the hotel grounds. Then the primitive life of El Kareb rushed at them as they passed out by a gateway in the high, white boundary wall.

There was a short length of steep road, inches deep in dust, running down to all the jumble of native buildings—the homes of the people, the age-old market-place, a bazaar or two, a mosque, the prison; grandeur and squalor, all mixed up together!

The girls had a dozen boys and girls rushing to meet them, before they were half-way down the hill. Against the recognised rule that it was no use conferring coppers upon the urchins, Morcove had to open its purse, so to speak.

Betty and her chums thus found themselves entering the market-place with all the urchins at their heels. Even if Morcove was not going to give any more coppers, Morcove was to be followed about, to see what happened!

Then a bunch of goats stampeded, just as they were being haggled over by a couple of white-robed, fierce-eyed men. The goats ran all

amongst some panniered donkeys, and El Kareb's market-place became a riot, during which some resting camels were the only living things to keep calm.

Even Betty and Co. got caught up in the general excitement. It was all very well for some of them to laugh an, "Oh, let's get out of this!" It took some doing.

But at last they got away from that particular pandemonium, and it seemed a striking change to absolute peace when they began a saunter through the principal bazaar.

The footway along the narrow street of native shops was made all the narrower by the awning'd stalls set in front of the hovel-like emporiums. Long-bearded ancients, in their loose, white raiment, were crying their wares, and here and there a man had found a square foot or so of shady cobbles to squat upon, with a basket of fruit in front of him.

All the town knew where Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby and their youthful charges—the only Britishers in the place—were staying, and they were the objects of many curious looks.

"Here, girls," Polly exclaimed suddenly, "here's this woman again, wanting to tell us our fortunes! And I feel like going in, this time!"

"How long will it take? Can we all get them done?" Betty pondered eagerly. "It would be fun!"

The woman was an old, crone-like hag, in the black garb of a widow. Her "parlour" for the reception of clients seemed to be two steps down from the cobbles, in between a rug-merchant's stall and a pottery shop.

From where she had been marking the dawdling approach of the schoolgirls, the old hag now lured them nearer with an enticing bow and the persuasive cry:

"I spik ze English, very good, tell you much—good fortune! Come, ladies, let Obed Belaka tell you the fortune her way, by the hand in the sand, all true!"

"I'm going in, anyhow!" Polly gurgled. "She really can tell you things, you know!"

"Yes, dad was saying," Pam smiled, "she was taken to London to be in one of the exhibitions, years ago—her powers are so uncanny."

In spite of her years, the black-garbed woman now moved herself quickly, to go before the half-hesitant girls into her cellar-like abode. Her sunken eyes, peeping over the edge of the flimsy veil which screened the lower part of a doubtless wrinkled face, had gleamed delightedly at the prospect of such a large "seance."

At her gloomy doorway, she stretched a skinny arm to draw aside some curtains, and as the girls filed past her she muttered fresh assurances of their getting their money's worth.

"Fifty thousand a year for me," Bunny flip-pantly predicted her own future. "Oh, and head girl of Morcove before I leave!"

## CHAPTER 2.

### The House of the Fortune-teller

THE curtains at the doorway fell back behind them, and there was then only the sickly light from a primitive oil lamp.

A long bench stood against one of the dark wooden walls, and the fortune-teller gestured to her youthful patrons to be seated. In the centre of the dim-lit apartment was a little round, black table, with two stools.

The brass lamp, its wick floating in oil, hung above them, and the table held a shallow, brass dish, filled with sand.

The weird-looking woman moved to and fro in front of the seated girls, eyeing each in turn as if the ritual demanded that she must pick them for turns.

Then, suddenly enough to make a few of them jump, she levelled a skinny hand at Pam, who understood that she was to go to one of the stools at the table.

She did so, and her chums saw her smiling as serenely as ever when the old woman got her to press her open hand, palm downwards, into the bowl of sand.

"Gosh, is that how it's done?" Polly breathed, as the woman, occupying the other stool, drew the bowl towards her and fell to studying the impression left in the sand.

"Rather like having your fingerprints taken?" Bunny suggested. "Now I wish I hadn't come! I know mine is a short line of life, and that she'll tell me I'm to be hoofed out of Morcove, and—"

"Sh'rrp!" Polly nudged her, whilst shaking with inward laughter.

The woman, crouching over the bowl of sand, looked aside at them—fiercely, they felt. As this seeming reproof was followed by a full minute of silence, during which she stared fixedly at the sand, Morcove humorously considered that she took the whole business very seriously.

Even this conviction, however, did not prepare them for her sudden standing up and muttering some gibberish to herself as if her temper were ruffled. Surely they were keeping quiet enough now?

For a few moments she moved to and fro, still muttering to herself! then she turned to Pam—not to start the expected outpouring of a handsome "fortune," but only to gesture her back to the bench.

This brought surprise into the usually serene face of Pam even. It was only after a startled moment that she got up and, smiling again, came back to the bench.

"Not much for your money so far, Pam!" Bunny chuckled as she came back to them. "I suppose we are told all the fortunes all at once, at the finish? Hope they don't get mixed! Next, please! Oh, best of luck, Polly!"

The madcap had been beckoned to the table.

"Here's to the next time," Polly hummed, prancing across to the stool which Pam had just vacated.

The old crone had stirred up the sand and patted it flat again. Promptly Polly slapped her open hand down upon it, hard.

"I always believe in making a good impression, girls!"

Obed Belaka must have got over her black mood by now. She gave a purring little laugh as if knowing from Polly's tone and manner that here was a fun-

lover. Again the marked sand in the bowl was looked at by the fortune-teller, who instantly nodded in a gratified manner.

Nor, in this instance, was there any delay in reciting what the "hand" was telling its reader.

"Yes, good; ver' good!" the hag chattered.

"Much money soon!"

"That means, girls, a remittance waiting for me when I get to Nakara," Polly exulted.

"Cheers!"

"Plenty good health—"

"Hooray, girls, hear that? No more of that tired feeling on Mondays at Morcove! I wonder," Polly said, sotto voce, "how much she stings you for this?"

"Long life!"

"And a merry one, I hope? And what else, please—"

The madcap's nonsense went not a word beyond that. Suddenly the sombre den filled with a terrible uproar from outside, causing all the girls to start up in alarm.

Even the old woman, accustomed though she was to the bursts of yelling which might mean nothing more than some haggling in the bazaar, stood in a kind of palsy of fright.

There must have been something intelligible to her in the fierce-toned babel, so that she knew instantly what was happening.

As for the girls, their first impulse was to rush outside to see; but of one accord they decided to remain where they were, for there was a very ugly note in the fiendish din.



Half in amusement the Morcove chums watched the native fortune-teller. But their smiles gradually subsided. The old woman seemed to be greatly concerned about Pam Willoughby!



Then, causing their hearts to pound on faster, a girlish scream of terror came to their startled ears.

Simply because the scream was so unlike all the uproar of the native men and the yelling of native urchins, it had come through all that appalling hullabaloo—almost to Betty and her chums as a voice they knew.

"My gracious!" Betty jerked, next instant. "That's Naomer, out there!"

It was like Polly, most headstrong of them all, to make a dart for the open air. Not that her less impetuous chums were inclined to hang back now—far from it. They were all crowding after Polly as she dragged the entrance-curtain aside and rushed up the two or three steps into the narrow thoroughfare formed by the opposing rows of shops and stalls.

After the gloom of the fortune-teller's hovel the fierce sunlight dazzled them for a moment. Then they began to see that they were almost on the fringe of a scene of turmoil.

The screechy jabberings and hoarse shoutings were as loud as ever, and not a word of it all could the girls understand. They saw how an excited crowd of a moment or two ago was becoming a small mob, owing to the number of people rushing to the spot.

All this the six girls took in in a single instant. Then their hearts leapt again as they saw Naomer rushing towards them, looking badly scared!

But there was Paula Creel, also, a moment later than Morocco's dusky scholar in extricating herself from the seething mass of native humanity. An hour ago, at the hotel, Paula had looked as elegant as she took such pride in being at Morocco School; but now—

Her hat was lopsided, her tropic apparel looked as if it had been nearly torn from her back, as she came rushing close behind Naomer, to put herself with Betty and the rest.

"Bekas—Ooo, you never saw such a thing!" was Naomer's excitable beginning. "Zey nearly got me!"

"What!"

"Ow, tewwible—ow, pouf!" Paula said gaspingly as she now fetched up in front of the horrified six. "Bai Jove—awful! Disgwaceful—yes, wather! Geals, geals, there was an attempt to kidnap Naomer!"

"Never!"

"What ze diggings, I tell you—" Naomer was resuming, when bang! went a revolver shot, fired somewhere in the bazaar.

"Here, get to cover, all," Betty urged, with great presence of mind. "This is getting a bit too—"

Bang! went another shot, and then again—bang!

But now the firing seemed to result in the mob's surging away from where the girls were clustered. After all, they remained there, for it seemed safe to do so.

"Looks as if somebody has made off, firing as he ran," Bunny exclaimed. "They're howling like a pack of wolves."

A few moments more, and the narrow way between the shops was left with only white-robed figures, picking themselves up from the ground after being knocked over in the melee. Then after being knocked over in the melee. Then some of the bearded traders came out of their hole-in-the-wall shops, ruefully contemplating damage done outside.

"Not good for you here," a voice suddenly whispered to the girls. "All go, quick!"

They turned round. It was the widow Obed Belaka, just outside her gloomy abode. They saw

a lingering alarm in her deep-set eyes; but this was, next instant, changing to a look of great relief.

"Ah," she muttered, "one comes to protect you!"

It was Mr. Willoughby, coming down the alleyway of shops with a very rapid stride. The girls ran to meet him.

"All safe, are you?" he had been able to infer, directly he sighted them. "I heard the row starting and came out to see after you."

"Was it you who fired, daddy?" asked Pam. They all knew that he carried a revolver.

"No, Pam. It seems that someone fired over the heads of the crowd whilst making his escape. It was a successful getaway, too, I'm told!"

"Zen eet must have been ze people who tried to get hold of me who did ze bunk!" burst forth Naomer. "Bekas ze crowd were all on to zem for trying to grab me! And eef Paula hadn't yelled out, zey would have got me, too! Bekas I was so surprised, before I could do anything I was being hustled along—"

"By how many persons?" Mr. Willoughby asked eagerly.

"Ooo, dozens and dozens, I should think! Bekas—"

"Er—Naomer is making a pawdonable exaggeration, I wather fancy," Paula put in, whilst she put her flustered self to rights. "I would say no more than half a dozen—"

"Enough of them to bring it off, as I know the way the thing can be brought off in places like this," Mr. Willoughby gravely exclaimed.

"In broad daylight, too!" said Polly.

"Oh, yes. But we needn't go into the what-might-have-been. Sorry, girls, but you had better all get back to the hotel now."

"I very sorry I ever came out, after a zing like that," Naomer exclaimed ruefully. "But, what ze diggings, how was I to know?"

"You were told, though, weren't you?" Mr. Willoughby reminded the dusky one, more in sorrow than anger. "Mrs. Willoughby told you there were reasons why you had better keep to the hotel and its grounds?"

"All right zen, I brought eet on myself!" Naomer blithely owned. "Eet not Paula's fault, bekas I would make her come with me, like I always make her do as she is told!"

"Pity you don't do as you are told, kid!" said Polly, to which Naomer promptly retorted:

"What about you, come to zat? Do you!"

There was some laughter then, with Mr. Willoughby saying a good-humoured:

"Come along, anyhow, all of you!" He was taking the first returning step with the chattering girls, when he found his sleeve being plucked by the old fortune-teller.

She made obeisance as he turned round and voiced a pleasant remark in the native tongue. They must have been words asking her to excuse him, as he was in a hurry, for she bowed very low and then took retiring steps towards her curtained doorway, looking more respectful than abashed.

Then the girls all moved away with Mr. Willoughby; but suddenly Pam turned back to speak to the woman, who was standing to watch them go.

"You have not been paid," Pam said, tendering a few coins, which the woman eagerly took. "But you did not tell me my fortune—why?"

Obed Belaka wagged her head as if implying "I don't understand you." But Pam could not believe that, since the old crone certainly knew some English.

"Tell me, now," Pam coaxed. "Please!" There was a muttered refusal, this time, and then, suddenly pointing after Mr. Willoughby as he walked with the other girls, the woman questioned excitedly:

"Your father, missy?"

"Yes."

"Good!" the woman's quick nod clearly implied. She did not speak again, but as quickly turned to go into her sombre lair.

Pam felt a little disconcerted, but her father and the others were now looking round for her, so, resuming her habitual serenity, she hastened up to them.

"I remembered—we hadn't given the woman anything," was her excuse to her chums for having stayed behind those few moments. "This place—coming to life again, evidently!"

Naomer as they came to the gates of the hotel. Away she capered, to get indoors, and it made her chums laugh again to see how she dodged past Mrs. Willoughby, who promptly whipped about to give chase and take her to task.

But all the girls were for going indoors now, if only because the recent fluster amidst the heat and dust of the bazaar had made them feel the need for a wash and tidy-up.

"Hallo, some new arrivals?" was Betty's comment on a stack of luggage in the hotel's front hall. "Wonder if they are British?"

"We can easily see," Pam serenely remarked and went across to look at the visitors' book.

There was a fresh entry, reading:

"M. and Mme. Jules Lessard."

Pam noted the rest of the particulars, then turned away to go upstairs after her chums.



For one tense moment Pam wondered what the native woman meant to do. Suddenly the woman knelt, and with the dagger-like knife cut away a portion from the hem of Pam's frock. Then Pam understood. This was to be sent to—her friends.

By adding that quick comment she succeeded in taking the others' mind off the fortune-teller. The bazaar was indeed teeming with people again—many of them, units in the recent mob, drifting back for a reason that was to mean some embarrassment to the Britishers.

The sight of Naomer and Paula safe with the rest of the girls and Mr. Willoughby was obviously causing the greatest satisfaction.

Whether or no El Kareb knew that Naomer was the native queen of a more inland tract of country, one thing was obvious to Morocco. The sensation of a few minutes since was being regarded as a most regrettable incident. El Kareb, if only for financial reasons, desired all visitors from foreign parts to be spared any unpleasantness.

"And now—me for a refresher, queek!" cried

"A Frenchman and his wife," she remarked casually to Betty and one or two others, overtaking them in a bed-room corridor. "And they have come—just fancy!—from Nakara!"

### CHAPTER 3. Schemers Both!

**JULES LESSARD**, just arrived from Nakara, stood on one of the balconies of the hotel, smoking a cigarette—and thinking hard.

A minute since he had seen some British school-girls come through the palm-dotted ground of the hotel to return indoors. Now his gaze was reflectively upon the sun-scorched town at the foot of the low hill.

He was a tall, lithe man of little more than thirty, rather too handsome, if anything.

He had given his nationality as French, but somehow there was a suggestion of the half-breed about him.

He heard a light footfall in the private sitting-room which this particular balcony served, and he lounged round to go back into the room.

Madame Lessard was there—a virile-looking woman of about his age, with a perfectly lovely face and wonderful raven-black hair. Only, when she smiled, it was a hard smile, and her beautiful eyes were, after all, what is sometimes called soulless.

"No luggage come up yet? Confound them!" Jules said to his wife in French. "An imbecile lot, here, Mimi."

She shrugged.

"Eh, bien, it is the country, Jules. You think it is well for us to be in the same hotel with those British?"

"I was not going to any other hotel," he scowled, stubbing out his cigarette. "It will be all right. Either they will find out nothing, or they will find out all."

"In which case, Jules—"

"Bah, they will not connect us with anything—I was only joking," he grinned.

"A moment since I heard some of them talking as if—as if there had been a scare for them in the town this morning."

"I know!"

It was a displeased response from Lessard as he crossed to a sideboard to mix himself a drink.

"Those fellows made an attempt just now," he muttered, "and failed—that is obvious. Imbeciles! They are all imbeciles out here in this vile country."

"Including—these British, Jules?"

"Don't be funny!"

"You said 'all,' ma chérie. And truly, it is that one or two of these girls are, I think, a little droll! So much the better, of course. I shall enjoy—"

There was an interrupting knock at the sitting-room door.

"Come in!" snapped Lessard, setting down an empty glass.

A bloused manservant of the hotel entered, luggage-laden. After he had staggered in with the first consignment of baggage, Mimi Lessard went by him, passing out with a gliding step that was too "stagey" to be natural. She had many affectations.

The Hotel of the Gate of the Desert, although the best place in El Kareb, was without any spaciousness as to its upper floors, where there was a maze of narrow passages serving all the so-called private suites which travellers mostly asked for.

Whether or not Madame Lessard had stayed here before, she now managed to lose her way, and was ultimately found looking prettily at a loss by one of the Moroccan girls.

"Bon jour!" smiled madame ingratiatingly. "Pardon, you are English," changing to that tongue. "Er—which ees the way down, s'il vous plait—if you please?"

"I'm going down myself," said Pam cordially. "It's the other way, and you need to turn back."

"Oh, merci! A strange country, this, for you to be—on holiday, oui?"

"We love it! And it so happened we had a reason for coming out to North Africa in the hole, with my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby."

"So?"

"Yes." But Pam, with her inborn reserve, was not going into details. It was not that she mistrusted this excessively pretty woman, although Pam certainly was not taking to her.

"It is not that you stay here all the time in El Kareb?"

"Oh, no. We go on—to another place, in a day or two."

"My husband and I," remarked Madame Lessard, now going downstairs with Pam, "have come from Nakara. Ah, that is a wonderful city—Nakara! You should be there when the young queen—only a schoolgirl still—arrives in her native city. The celebrations there will be! But," checking on the stairs to treat Pam to a sudden comprehending smile, "why did I not guess at once! The girl queen of Nakara—it must be that she is in your party! Of course!"

"Yes, well—"

"It is so, is it not? Or, pardon, is it that the girl queen travels incognito, for the sake of safety?"

"Oh, no. It is no secret that Queen Naomer of Nakara is with us. But—excuse me," Pam pleaded serenely, "I do want to get downstairs and find my people."

Madame Lessard could not keep a certain acidity out of her farewell smile. And afterwards, having allowed Pam time to disappear down a lower flight of stairs, the woman turned back.

She re-entered the private sitting-room, to find her husband in an easy chair, smoking another cigarette furiously, as if his brain were working furiously, too.

"At least, Jules, one of those girls is no imbecile."

He took no notice.

"She is the daughter of—Mr. Willoughby!"

Then Lessard gave a violent start.

"Ah, he has a daughter with him, has he?"

"Si, si! She is—very English," said Mimi Lessard disdainfully. "Excuse me"—and she goes away."

Lessard stood up, exhaling whiff after whiff of cigarette smoke from his thin nose.

"You know, Mimi," he exclaimed softly, after a lengthy pause, "I have been thinking. That mistaken attempt down there in the bazaar just now—it is going to make them all the more careful with the queen. Between us, we must try and find out—during the day—if any special precautions are being taken. I think you will find there are."

And he was right in his prediction.

Before dinner that evening his wife was able to tell him:

"I have this moment found out; the girl queen is to sleep differently to-night. She was with two of the other girls, in one of the bed-rooms. To-night she is to sleep with Mrs. Willoughby. I heard this by listening at one of their doors, now that they have come up to change for the evening."

Lessard flung away his cigarette with a vicious gesture.

"That is what comes of those fools of bunglers not waiting for a better moment," he said savagely. "I tell you, the Willoughbys will not let the girl out of sight for an instant now! Day or night, she will be guarded. Well, those native rascals have got to earn their pay somehow."

"There must be a balcony to madame's bedroom," Mimi remarked softly. "I heard it said that her husband will sleep out there, under the stars."

"As his own protector! He would—that Willoughby," scowled Lessard. "I know the man, what he is."

"It is a pity," was the rejoinder; "until to-day the girl queen has been most of her time with the other girls. But now—"



"Precisely! It would be as easy for us to get hold of that girl as it would be for me to lay hands on those papers which the Willoughby fellow has upon him. And how difficult that would be, we know. Yet there it is; the girl queen must not get to her capital before we have laid hands on those papers which Willoughby has brought with him from England. If she does, all is lost! One moment, Mimi," he pleaded, and sat down to rack his brains.

His became in the end such a stress of mind, he leant forward, elbows on knees, with his head between his hands.

Mimi Lessard lighted a cigarette, then went away to her own room to get dressed. She wished to appear very distinguished by wearing a Paris frock.

The British party, she knew, had their meals served in a private sitting-room. But she hoped that some of the girls would be out in the garden after dinner.

"Mimi!" her husband presently called her back to their sitting-room. So, smoothing the frock which she had just put on, she sauntered out to him.

"Listen to me," he said in a peevish tone. "I change the plan, that is all! We say we cannot get hold of the girl queen, except at a greater risk than we dare run. Very well. We choose another girl, that is all—eh?"

"But, Jules—"

"Ah, you do not see, it will be all the same in the end," he snapped impatiently. "There is that Willoughby man's own daughter, is there not?"

Mimi's fine brows were rising now, whilst she nodded again and again, understanding better. Striding across to her, he continued rapidly:

"Is his daughter's safety less to that man than is the safety of the girl queen? I ask you! So, Mimi, we will take his daughter—you see what I mean?"

"You must mean, Jules—for the present?"

"Precisely! And that pig of a Willoughby can have her back, later on—at a price! Well?"

"But that is quite a good idea, Jules."

"You like it? Bon!" It was not surprising that he rubbed his hands together in delight at her approval of the changed plan. She was his very shrewd confederate in a life of living by the wits.

"Here, Jules," she called to him in a little while, and he came away from his dressing-room fastening on his evening tie.

She had been standing in a reflective state at the balcony window, and he joined her there.

"Now I have been thinking, Jules—"

"Oui?"

"If it could be done to-night?"

He laughed softly.

"It is that I am going down into the town after dinner, Mimi! I go—to see the sights, hein?"

"Sunset, and then the sudden starry night," she murmured, gazing down to the quiet garden of the hotel, with its colourful flower-beds, its rock pools, and all the fascinating clumps of cacti and tall palms.

"Look, Jules—just there," she whispered, pointing to a far corner of the grounds; "where there is that little terrace."

He nodded.

"Those English girls—they should see the city, under the stars, from these, Mimi! Or, at least, one of them should—hein?"

"And perhaps," his wife smiled in return, "one of them will!"

## CHAPTER 4.

## After Sunset!

It was sunset, and the muezzin from some high, white tower of El Karob's mosque was sounding the call to prayer.

After another day of burning heat and dust and clamour, silence was suddenly falling upon the teeming native city.

"How lovely it is out of doors, now, girls!"

"Yes, but Jove; most wewfeshing, Pam deah!"

"Especially after such a gorjus dinner!"

"I noticed, kid," said madcap Polly, with her usual lack of respect for Naomer's royal state, "you did yourself pretty well!"

Betty and Co. had all come out into the hotel grounds to enjoy the fascinating scene which sunset meant.

A lurid light was to last for only a minute or two longer; then darkness would rush down from the sky. Whilst this sunset light still lasted, turning every moment to a richer and deeper tone, the effect was almost theatrical.

Whichever way the girls sauntered; whichever way they looked, flowers and shrubs and trees were tinged with the crimsoning light. A little breeze stirred, and now and then the dry leaves of the tall palms clashed.

And now and then, in spite of the high wall running round the private enclosure, the girls could glimpse the hushed town, and see how the copper dome of the mosque seemed to shimmer more than all else in the dying light.

"Naomer dear!" called the affectionate voice of Mrs. Willoughby from the hotel steps.

"Oh, what ze diggings!" stamped that dusky scholar into whom Morocco had failed to instil the right sense of discipline. "Bekas—"

"I want you, dear!"

"Go along, kid," Polly mocked. "And be put to by-byes! Time for all little—"

"You give me any of your sauce, Polly, and—and you see what I will do to you when I get to Nakara!" was the playful threat. "Bekas, mind, I can do as I like zere!"

"Yes, but mother is still calling you," Pam blandly interposed. "So I would go across to her, Naomer, if I were you."

"Sweendle! But I am not going in without some of you, any old how! Come on, Paula—queek!"

"Er, I was wather inclined to—"

"Are you coming?" shrilled Naomer, stamping imperiously. "Or are you anuzzer who wants to get it in ze neck from me, when we get to Nakara? I can't imagine you enjoying being in a dunjin, with no bed to sleep on, and only bread and water—"

"Howwows, no!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A wave of darkness seemed to go over the romantic scene as others watched Naomer and Paula going back to the hotel. After seeing the first stars flash out, Madge and a few more returned indoors. Madge was going to play a much-out-of-tune grand piano which the hotel boasted.

"But I feel I can't go in yet awhile," Pam said to Betty and Polly and Bunny, who also seemed inclined to linger out of doors. "Look at that crescent moon, girls, hanging over the mosque."

"That's the East, if you like!" Betty said in delight. "How quiet the town is now."

"Different from this morning!" Bunny chuckled. "That was a queer business, wasn't it? It must have caused your father and mother some worry, Pam, on Naomer's account."

"It did look very serious, being Naomer," was Pam's calm response. "And the gang got away from a mob that would have as good as lynched them—so dad thinks."

"Marvellous how they did get away!" said Polly. "They must know the town well; must have been able to dodge into some of those twisty-twiny alleys which I'd love to be prowling through myself at this very moment! See how mysterious the town looks now—after dark!"

"It does, and no mistake," Betty murmured. "All four of them had mounted some rockery steps to reach a flowery terrace which dropped sheer away on its far side, forming, indeed, part of the outer wall of the hotel grounds."

"Ah, you have found the best place of all, girls, for viewing the town!" purred a voice, and they all flashed round.

Madame Lessard had joined them on the terrace, treading the rock steps so silently that the girls had not known of her proximity until she spoke.

Although they all felt a vague aversion from her, as being a rather flashy woman and the husband of a man who badly jarred upon them, they did not like to go away at once. Not for the first time, the lavishly dressed beauty showed a desire to be friendly.

"Look!" Pam exclaimed to her three chums. "Some people on horseback—oh, lovely Arab mounts, I'm sure!—riding out of the town after dark! How strange!"

"Oh, no," Madame Lessard implied superior knowledge of the country's ways. "It is, possibly, that they have chosen to journey by night, to spare their horses from the heat."

By the combined light of stars and crescent moon the riders could be clearly discerned, keeping their dainty-stepping mounts at a mere walking pace. Drawing out more on to the open ground lying between the compact little desert town and the hotel, they could be counted—four white-riimented natives, as they appeared to be.

"I love a good horse," Pam exclaimed. "I'm glad you think they are kind to their mounts, Madame Lessard."

"But how far will they be travelling, do you think?" Betty asked in surprise. "Can horses tackle the desert tracks?"

"We are only on the edge of the desert, here," Madame answered. "Roads of a kind are to be found; although farther in—as at Nakara, for example—it is not so."

She waved to the riders, who were now going by at the foot of the low hill. Instantly they turned their steeds to take the bit of rising ground.

"Oh, do they think we want them?" Pam remarked, but she was in delight at their coming nearer. "I hope they won't be offended!"

"Not so," laughed Madame Lessard. "They will consider it a compliment. You will admire their mounts, and we shall all wish them a safe journey."

With a final patter of hoofs on the stony ground, the nimble steeds topped the rise, and then the riders were in speaking distance of Madame Lessard and the girls.

The woman called a few words softly to them in the native language, and then they all gave grand gestures, as if in response to a pleasing remark. The girls, unable to enter into conversation with them, made friendly signs.

At a distance, in the starlight, the muffled figures had looked all alike; but now it could be seen that two of them were women.

Madame Lessard spoke again, and then one of the men rode his steed close in against the

wall. Swaddled in his loose white robes and with a bit of blanket cloaking him against the coming cold of the night, he looked tremendously imposing.

Speaking down to the man who had ridden close in to the wall, Madame Lessard must have said something which caused him to flash a pleased glance at all the girls.

Then one of the women—his wife, perhaps—rode nearer, and he and she became very eager to show off their horses. They caused the fiery steeds to give a proud fling of the head. White froth hung about the muzzles.

"Lovely creatures," Pam said, kneeling at the edge of the wall to reach out and stroke one or the other of them. "Oh, you beauty, you!" she said ardently as the black steed supporting the woman pattered nearer still.

The other girls saw the woman in a perfectly passive state, although her mount was restive enough. Pam's way of fussing with the beautiful creature—as she petted her own pony at home at Swanlake—was a knowing way. It gave the present recipient of her caressing touches extreme delight.

Then, suddenly, this moment of quiet delight to the girls changed to one of absolute horror.

Quick as a flash, the mounted woman shot forth an arm that must have been tremendously strong. She seized Pam and pulled her off the wall.

Pam, still kneeling at the very edge, and even reaching over, had been unable to save herself from the lightning-like and treacherous seizure.

Although pulled off the wall by only the woman's left arm, Pam was not suffered to fall to the ground below. Her feet never even touched the ground for a moment.

At one instant she had been there on the wall, and in the next she was being skilfully held up, and then hurled across the back of the horse, to become its additional burden.

Betty and the two other girls shouted wildly; Madame Lessard screamed as if the horror of what had happened was just as great for her.

As for Pam herself—whether she had cried out or not, her dismayed chums had no idea. They only knew that she now looked like an inert figure, hugged up to the woman who had seized her, and who now set her spirited steed riding away at a gallop.

The other riders were also off, voicing not a word, emitting no mocking laugh even. Except for the sudden mad patter of the horses in their whirlwind flight towards the open desert, the only sounds were those made by captured Pam's frenzied chums and cunning Mimi Lessard.

"Hi, help—help!" all three girls shouted round towards the hotel. "Help!" they yelled on, whilst taking the big leap from the top of the wall to the ground.

Crash, they landed upon their feet, at the very spot where that horse had stood which was now bearing Pam away.

And then—why they had jumped down, except as the outcome of a frenzied anxiety, they did not know. Useless to dash off on foot in pursuit—they knew it now, and instantly they ran to get back into the hotel grounds by the gateway.

As they did this, they could hear Madame Lessard crying out still for help, whilst she ran from the terrace towards the hotel. They got one of the massive iron gates open and rushed in, instantly attracting the attention of people who, by this time, had flocked out of the hotel.

Foremost in the mixed crowd which surged to meet them were Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby and the other girls.

That Pam was not to be seen must have been noticed instantly, for the three were being asked in tones of great alarm, as they panted nearer:

"Pam—where's Pam, then? Where's Pam?"

"She—she's—Gone!" Betty for one almost sobbed out, pointing wildly away to the open country.

"Taken!"

"What!"

"Under our very eyes—carried off!" Polly raged. "We had no time—oh, it was awful; done in a flash!"

"Oui, oui!" Madame Lessard now cried out, wringing her hands like one distraught. "Oh, if I had known! Oh, how I am sorry—upset! That poor girl—"

"Our Pam?" ejaculated Mr. Willoughby tensely. "Carried off?"

"And I feel it is my fault—oh, but you will please forgive me, I am sure you will!" Madame Lessard wept.

"Of course Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby will see you were not to blame," Betty exclaimed, carried away by the sight of the woman in that hysterical state of grief. "You were not to know those wretches would do a thing like that. We must explain—"

But Mr. Willoughby, at any rate, seemed to have formed sufficient idea of what had happened. His daughter had been carried off, and that was enough for him to know at present. He turned sharply upon some of the hotel staff who were crowding around and voiced what must have been some urgent appeal in their language, for they at once whipped about and ran back to the hotel building, as if to carry out certain instructions.

Then, with his wife and the girls at his heels, he rushed for the gateway, checking for a moment just beyond it to peer away into the darkness.

"That way they went," Betty pointed eagerly, for she knew that he was trying his hardest to make out the fleeing kidnappers.

But there was to be no glimpsing them now. The girls themselves strained their eyes until the water came to dim them, and it was all in vain. The night had swallowed up that tiny band of galloping fugitives.

Nor did the faintest sound of a hoofbeat come to those who were listening every bit as eagerly as they stared in that unwinking way.

Below the hill, El Kareh was as quiet as ever; except for the occasional barking of a dog. Overhead, the star-crammed sky seemed to mean only peaceful sleep for those who had known the heat and burden of the torrid day.

But this terrible deed had been done, and somewhere out there on the nightbound wastes Pam was being borne away—perhaps never to be seen again by all those who held her dear!



Suddenly, to Pam's amazement, a familiar voice spoke in quaint English: "Bekas, are you all right, Pam?" it asked. It was Naomer! What was she doing here in this desert prison?

"I am going down into the town. I may be able to do some good," the vanished girl's father said steadily at last. "You girls—all go back into the hotel, with my wife, and—"

And there he broke off, suddenly aware of a black-garbed figure shuffling towards the thronged gateway; an old woman, as they could instantly tell, struggling for breath after the toilsome ascent from the town.

"Why, it's the fortune-teller!" Bunny jerked. "So it is!"

The old crone seemed to see in Mr. Willoughby one whom she had come seeking. As quickly as her breathless state would allow, she stepped to speak to him; but he, gently signing to her that he had not a moment to spare, strode past her and was next instant running downhill towards the town.

"What is it, Obed?" Betty asked, gladly remembering that the woman could speak a little English. "Mr. Willoughby did not mean it unkindly, but there has been a big upset—you savvy?"

In the starlight, they all saw the woman's sunken eyes enlarge as from sudden wild fright. She gasped, and then:

"His daughter?" she rasped anxiously. "To her has it been done?"

"Yes!" several of the girls said together. "Pam has been carried away—in this last minute or two!"

"Ohé, ohé," was the wailing cry which came



from the woman's veiled lips. "Kismet!—it is Fate," she quavered on mournfully. "I came to tell him, her father—"

"Come to tell him what?" clamoured the girls, whilst Pam's own mother simply stood there like one bereft.

"What I, Obed Belaka, did not dare tell thy friend," the fortune-teller answered in a weeping way.

And then they knew.

It was some such appalling fate as this that had overtaken Pam to-night which old Obed had somehow divined to be in store for the poor girl, during that strange "seance"!

## CHAPTER 5.

### No Chance of Escape

LONG after the young moon had set, Pam found her captors reining up where some low, rocky hills interrupted the dead level of sandy wastes.

How long she had been borne on and on in the darkness she had no exact idea. It seemed to her that they had all ridden unchecked for hours; but she knew that in such a time of peril as this that had come to her, every moment may seem to have the span of a minute.

Far advanced as the night had become, and with the moon gone down, it was still possible for her to discern much in the darkness. So brilliantly flashed the stars in their thousands.

The woman whose mount Pam had been forced to share was young and lithe. She dismounted gracefully and would then have offered to lift her captive down, but Pam was in the mood to show that she was no stranger to a horse's back. She alighted with an agility that must have commanded the woman's admiration, for the smile Pam received was not altogether a mocking one.

Instantly there was some hurried talk amongst her captors, she being kept standing close by.

When the talk had lasted a few minutes, one of the women, drawing a gleaming blade from the folds of her flowing raiment, stepped close enough to Pam to be within striking distance.

For one terrible moment Pam wondered what was going to happen to her. Then the woman suddenly took hold of Pam's frock at the hem, and with a knife cut away a six-inch square of it.

That done, Pam was left alone again. The woman took the piece of material to one of the men, who put it away in a wallet.

Then both women turned back to Pam and signed to her to follow them. As she obeyed—having no choice but to obey—she noticed that the two men remounted, as if to ride away again at once.

And now she lost the comforting sight of the starry sky, being conducted into a cave in one of the low hills; a cave so small that its entrance was more like a mere cleft in the rock, and farther in, it was no better than a natural tunnel.

One of the women lighted a hurricane lamp of Western make, having taken it from a pack which her mount had carried.

For a few minutes, whilst pursuing activities which convinced Pam that the rest of the night at least was to be spent here, she was treated with absolute disregard. This may have been due to the women's knowledge that it was useless to attempt any speech with her.

All the same, the calm indifference of her custodians became a thing of sinister import. If ever they glanced at her, there was nothing like pity in the glance!

Presently she was given a crust of black bread to eat, and some water was poured out for her from a skin bag. She declined the bread, but was glad of the water. Excitement had left her with a dry mouth.

Soon afterwards, expressive signs directed her to lie down upon the dry, sandy floor of the cave and go to sleep. She could tell that the two women were going to take turns at remaining awake, on guard.

Pam coiled down, with the rugged walls of the cavern, dimly-lit by the lantern, to make her feel that she was as helpless as a prisoner in a dungeon. In a minute or two the light was put out, but even then—sleep! How could she?

Spirited enough not to be in any torment of despair, she yet had to lie awake in the pitch-black darkness, living over again the dramatic and appalling events of the night.

Why had she been seized and carried away like this? Were her captors only reacting to some lawless, marauding instincts, when in a moment they had seized her like that? An impulsive deed, only done because the chance offered—was that the explanation? Or had the whole thing been planned?

One thing she could not forget. That obvious attempt to kidnap Naomer, in broad daylight in the city! Bearing that in mind, it did look as if a plot had existed, involving the spiriting away of one or another of them. Or was Naomer the intended victim, and had she, Pam, been carried off only by mistake?

"Yet how could I be mistaken for Naomer?" Pam's mind puzzled on. "I know this, though; if I was seized in mistake for her—just as well! I'm British, and that makes all the difference."

British! She would let her captors realise it—in the right British way! Utterly at their mercy, and perhaps liable to suffer an all-the-speedier fate, because a mistake had been made. But whatever happened, she would face it, she hoped, with something at least of the calm courage of her race.

Fortified by that thought, at last she slept, dreaming badly. She awoke with a start, with a vivid belief that the face of Madame Lessard had figured in the jumbled dream, and she found herself thinking instantly:

"Madame Lessard! I wonder! Had she guessed that we would take a turn in the hotel grounds after dinner? She turned up like that—and so did the riders from the town—"

But there was no time for Pam to pursue this new and disquieting train of thought. There was feeble daylight in the cave, and both women were astir, paying heed to her now that she had sat up.

At once one of her custodians signed to her to rise and follow. Whilst the other remained in the cave, preparing some food, this first woman went before Pam into the open air, walking on the ball of the foot, so that the motion was a half-gliding, half-tripping one, peculiar to her kind.

The dazzling sunshine of another tropic morning almost blinded Pam for a few moments. The heat rushed at her—from above, and up from the ground as well, and from the burning rocks behind her. But she was in the open air again, thankful to be so even though there was something cruelly tantalising in having been brought out here. Free—and yet not free!

Nor was she granted more than a few minutes outside the cave. The woman tipped a mere pint of water into a tiny hollow which offered itself as a natural basin in a round boulder, and

Pam, signed to do so, made the best use of that water for some ablutions.

She wondered at their being able to spare her any water at all, for washing; but later in the day it became evident that they knew of a pool or water-hole somewhere amongst the rocks.

Longest day that Pam had ever known—this her first day as a helpless captive out here in the sandy wilderness. Nothing happened, and the maddening monotony inevitably served to increase the suspense. There was nothing to put a check upon thinking, thinking—hour after hour!

If only she had been taken on again; if only her two guardians had spoken to her, even in language which she could not understand—would have been some relief.

But the African sun ran his course across the azure sky, and dipped towards the level horizon; and Pam, whether inside the cave or brought out for a minute or so to see again the limitless wastes lying all round, and perhaps one vulture high overhead—Pam was as a captive, concerning whom some fateful decision was being awaited.

And at last she was back again in the cave, watched over by both the native women, knowing that darkness was rushing down once more upon the desert world.

No wonder, she thought bitterly—no wonder these two women had gone through the day without revealing the slightest trace of uneasiness.

The lair to which she, Pam, had been brought was one they could rely upon as being safe from discovery. That seemed to be only too evident now, at the end of a day which had provided not one throb of hope for her.

Night again—and what hope was there of searchers, would-be rescuers, suddenly turning up by night? If there had been any trail to pick up and follow, that would have been done more surely by day than it could ever be done in the darkness.

And yet—

Even as such despondent thoughts as these were Pam's, now that night had come again, she thrilled at a sound which found its way into the cavern, a sound that caused her guardians sharp alarm.

Now these women were losing all their calm confidence in the security of this rocky retreat. They even looked panicky, and so Pam could joyfully infer that the faint pad-pad of a galloping horse bringing someone towards the lair was, to them, a sign of danger.

Their agitated muttering to each other intruded upon Pam's hearing, whilst she wanted only to go on listening to that significant sound from outside. But at least she could still detect it, and could be sure that it was bringing some rider nearer, nearer.

One of the women glided away to the mouth of the cave, whilst the other stepped closer to Pam with what was the first really menacing gesture she had received.

It was a threatening sign: "Not a sound, or —" And so there they both stood, mute and still, and the very intensity of the silence in the cave enabled Pam to hear sounds from outside all the more distinctly.

She heard the other woman out there suddenly voice a challenging sort of cry. It was answered, in the native, by a breathless, girlish voice. A pause, then came a sharp jabber of talk, not a word of which Pam could understand, although she saw how her present custodian started again and again whilst following what was being said just outside the cave.

The two voices broke off, and suddenly the

other woman came gliding back into the dim-lit cavern, bringing with her a young girl in a loose robe of white linen and a yashmak.

Then, the shock that went through Pam as a familiar voice spoke in English!

"Bekas, are you all right, Pam?" the voice asked in breathless eagerness, and Naomer pulled aside the yashmak.

\* \* \* \* \*

One of her own dear chums of Morcove School, and that chum—NAOMER!

## CHAPTER 6.

### Their Desperate Plight

"PAM, queek—spik to me!"

"Naomer darling!"

"Yes, zis is me, Pam—all by myself, too! Bekas, eet was ze only zing to do—and I have done it, hooray, gorjus! Now eet won't be long before you are free, Pam, any old how!"

Excitable Naomer had implored her captive chum to speak, but, as usual, the dusky scholar of Morcove was far more inclined to do all the talking herself.

Nor, indeed, did Pam want to say anything that would put a check upon the amazing explanations which her impish schoolmate was likely to rattle off. Silent herself, Pam was thankfully aware of the two women leaving her and Naomer to each other, whilst they whispered together in great excitement.

"Pouf!" Naomer still puffed for breath. "Ze horse rode and rode and rode, until I thought he was never going to stop! I must have come miles and miles, meillions of miles, Pam! But I did ze trick—yes; my little dodge answered all right! Zat horse, Pam—"

"What horse, Naomer?"

"Why, ze horse zat was tied to a post outside ze hotel, of course! Ze one zat brought a man with a message for your father—about you! Ze man brought a bit of your frock zat had been cut off like with scissors, and a note, and I was with Mrs. Willoughby when your father came to spik to her about eet all."

Pam nodded an eager:

"Yes? Go on, dear!"

"And ze note said something about zey could have ze rest of you eef ze terms were accepted. I don't know what ze terms were, Pam; but ze man was to be allowed to take back a message. But I could tell, your father and mother seemed to zink eet was a bit too steep what they were asking. Bekas your mother, who looked scared stiff, said: 'Impossible terms!' So you can imagine, zey are a sweendle! And so—and so I suddenly made up my mind what to do, pretty queek."

"Oh, Naomer," Pam exclaimed emotionally, "have you done something without letting any of them know—"

"What ze diggings, of course I have, or I wouldn't be here, would I?" was the glib reply. "Bekas, eef I had said to Betty and ze rest what I wanted to do, zey would have had a fit! I thought of that, betcher life, and so I did eet all in secret—"

"Did what, then?"

"Well, first I slipped up to ze room where I had been put for sleeping, and changed into zee clothes zat I didn't expect to wear until I got to Nakara. Zen I crept down, dodging everybody, and made for ze place where I knew ze messenger-Johnny had tied his horse. Ooo, Pam, he is a

wonderful horse; you should see him! As for ze way he brings you along—"

"Yes, but— Oh, Naomer, did you take that horse and simply ride away?"

"Of course I did! Zat is how I have got here! And my great idea aekted all right, don't forget! Bekas, just as I had eggspected, ze horse had only to be given ze rein and he thought he was to go back azackly ze way he had come! So I just gave him his head, you know, and ze way he galloped me along—away from ze hotel and ze town, like an eggpress train!"

Pam felt as if her brain were turning whilst she listened to all these artless remarks. By the dim light of the lantern in the cave she saw Naomer looking only proud and joyful at being here as the result of the desperate exploit; but to Pam herself the dusky one's well-meant deed was fraught with terrible possibilities.

"And now—queek, listen, Pam, bekas zis is ze great thing!" Naomer resumed delightedly. "Why I did ze bunk on ze borrowed horse, hoping he would bring me to where you were, eet was because zis morning I heard your mother telling Betty and ze others zat you must have been kidnapped bekas zey could not get me, and zat very likely zey would offer to send you 'back in eggchange for me!"

Before Pam could offer a word in response, Naomer rushed on again:

"And after zat, Pam, from zat very moment I was thinking; eef only I could get ze chance to give myself up to ze wretches who had got you! Bekas, I could tell your mother and father were feeling zat would have to re-fuse to do a deal like zat with the swendlers. I am sure zat is just why your mother said: 'Impossible!' after ze man had brought the note. Well! I was thinking all ze time of you, and so when I got that chance—I jolly well took it!"

"You dear girl," Pam exclaimed, and gave her self-sacrificing chum a quick kiss. "Oh, it was a fine thing you did, Naomer, but it was madness—"

"What! Not ze bit of eet! Now, Pam, don't you be all of a fidget about me, like your father and mother, just bekas I am a queen! What ze diggings, eef only zey would understand; bekas I am a queen, nobody will have ze cheek to harm me! Any old how," Naomer wound up quite blithely, "here I am, and now zey have

—got me zey won't want you. Zey will be sending you back at once, Pam."

Her turning about caused Naomer to draw the gaze of both women. They broke off their own excitable talk, and one of them, divining the girl's need, gave her some water to drink.

Then, as Pam did not fail to notice, whilst Naomer was drinking, some remark was made to her in the native tongue which caused her to stare indignantly.

Next moment Naomer had flung down the little earthenware pitcher and was starting what seemed to be an outburst of protesting remarks.

She was answered by both women in turn, in tones that seemed to mean a cruel mocking. Again Naomer spoke, this time with a passion that made her stamp a foot, and again she received only a mocking answer.

Then, with tears of vexation glistening along her lashes, she turned to Pam once more.

"Ah, bah, I have made ze mull of it!" Naomer suddenly shrilled in a heart-broken way. "I have done eet all for nothing! Zey are not going to set you free, Pam, although they have got me! And it is a rotten swendle, that's what eet is, bekas how was I to know—"

"Hark!" Pam struck in, thrown into great excitement again by sounds from the nightbound wastes. "Will that be dad and some others from El Kareb? They are riders coming towards the cave, Naomer. Have they been able to— to follow you up?"

Not from the chum who was now a fellow-captive did Pam receive the answer, but from the two women—for their smiling eyes proclaimed, only too well, that this time they were in no alarm. Something was occurring now which they had expected.

Calmly, if eagerly, one of the women hurried away into the open air, and then her companion purred a few remarks to Naomer, who drooped as if the utterances had dealt her a crushing blow.

"What does she say, Naomer?" clamoured Pam. "Oh, if only I knew the language! What has she told you, dear?"

"She say," was the mournful answer, "zey are friends of theirs, with camels, who have just turned up. And we are to be taken away from here at once."

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

## A DRAMATIC FLIGHT TO AID THEIR FRIENDS AND THEN—DISASTER!



But Betty Barton & Co. refuse to give way to despair. Fate has thrown down a challenge and they meet it with real courage. Be sure to read

### "MORCOVE'S DESERT DISASTER"

By Marjorie Stanton

In next Tuesday's "Schoolgirls' Own"



The Headmaster 'Hands it Out' to the Grangemoor Chums, But They Don't Mind. It's in a Good Cause



# Grangemoor to Guard Her

By Marjorie Stanton

In For It!

"HERE, you boys! Don't you move—any one of you!"

It was an order voiced in the sternest tone by the headmaster of famous Grangemoor.

So there, in a line, stood five members of Challoner's House, hearing the "Old Man" naming them as he loomed nearer in the twilight.

"Linton! Cherrol! Trevor! And your name, boy—Bloo, is it?"

"Yes, sir!"

The very surname of beefy Tubby seemed something for the Head to fall foul of.

"Ha!" said the Head. "I shall have better reason for remembering your name, boy, after this! And now," to the fifth culprit, in sheer amazement: "Cardew! You, a party to all this?"

"Yes, sir. In fact, it's my fault that these other chaps are here."

"That I should find any of you here would, a minute ago, have been to me unthinkable! When it is only an hour, Linton, since I caned you for having been involved in a—brawl—at this very spot! When I distinctly told you, too, that this new riverside resort was out of bounds until I had seen for myself what it is like. For which reason, I have come here in my car to have a look round, and— Bless my soul! the Head suddenly changed to a gasp of increased astonishment. "Who—who else is it over there, appearing to want to sneak away?"

It was a blundering sound which had caused the Head to heel round sharply.

"You, sir!" roared the Head. "Come here!" Jack nudged one or two of his chums in secret and unholy delight. They had seen prefect Gayner, after he had floundered out of the river, trying to sneak away. Now he was having to turn round and come towards all five of them and the Head, still dripping water from his clothes.

"Gayner!" the Head gaspingly identified the sopped figure. "The state you are in, Gayner!"

"I know, sir," said the prefect, relying upon his smooth tongue to appease the wrath of authority. "I dislike having to offer an explanation, sir, but—"

"Well, Gayner? Well?"

"These boys, sir; they set upon me just now and pitched me in the river."

The Head, whipping about again, showed a face to the five which said: "No! Impossible!" But Jack Linton promptly said:

"Yes, sir, that's quite right."

"All five of them were on to me, so what could I do?" Gayner submitted, whilst the Head stood bereft of speech. "As a prefect—"

"Gayner, obviously I cannot hear you now, when you are drenched to the skin. Run back to the school and get changed. And you boys," turning grimly upon the five again—"you will be dealt with! Meanwhile, if you're caught at this place again, I'll expel you!"

As this instant two rather shadowy figures emerged on foot from the end of the dusky lane.

The Head took a good look at them, whilst they, after halting in initial surprise at sight of the senior, who was hastily going away in his crest-fallen state, at last stared towards the five and their irate "Old Man."

"It's Ezra Joab, sir," Jack cheerfully imparted, "and his niece—Miss Morland."

"Oh, is it!" muttered the Head. "You boys—be off, I say, this instant! You will hear from me in due course," was the ominous threat.

Promptly darting to recover bicycles which had brought them to the spot, the chums came within speaking distance of Joab and his niece. As they could tell, the ill-favoured man was now ambling towards the Head with the obvious intention of ingratiating himself. But Hetty Morland—in the greatest agitation, due to the headmaster's presence—wanted to speak to them all.

She skirmished closer, with one eye upon the headmaster; and then Dave in the fading light shook his head at her—a warning "not now!" which she was quick to act upon.

Instantly she diverted her steps and went on alone towards the cottage.

All things considered, there could have been little reason for Jack's starting to chuckle, as soon as he and his pals were riding away together. But it was like him to see a saving humour in the catastrophe.

"I wouldn't have had Gayner get away unseen for anything," Jack laughed softly. "Oh, boy, what did he look like—ha, ha, ha! They pitched me in, sir! Well, so we did, and serve the rotter right."

"What'll we get for it?" Tom speculated.

"Oh, a flogging—a gating as well, perhaps," Jack hazarded. "But wasn't it worth it? I'll say it was!"

Jimmy Cherrol, whilst implying hearty assent with a nod, spoke aside to Dave Cardew, who was riding abreast with him.

"But what made Gayner set about you, Dave? If we others hadn't turned up he would have gone on bashing you—hitting you when you were down, the cur!"

But Dave, seeming not to hear the question, altered the gear with which his machine was fitted. His doing something instead of speaking was Dave's customary way of hinting that he preferred not to speak.

"All right then—don't!" growled Jack, with that huffiness which had never yet imperilled the friendship. "Ours not to reason why, boys: ours but to do or die! As for the reason—that's Dave's concern."

Then Dave smiled aside at each of his chums in turn, letting them know—as if they could possibly have been in doubt—how grateful he was for the timely aid they had given him. His reticence, however, remained the same during the rest of the ride back to school.

That boyish chivalry which with a remarkable "braininess," had induced Hetty Morland to make of him a friend-in-need—it was placing a seal upon Dave's tongue.

A strange business! So he was saying to himself as he lay awake in the dormitory that night, long after all lights-out talk had ceased.

Only a week or two ago, he had not even known of Hetty Morland's existence. Now, unless he was greatly mistaken in certain theories which he had formed, he knew more about her than she knew about herself!

Those papers which she had asked him to look at, in her behalf—for years they had been secretly in her possession, without her being able to understand why they should relate to her. There was some printed matter, in French, and she knew not a word of French!

Yet, as she had told him, a belief had always existed in her mind that the papers could throw light on her origin; and by now he knew that they did, indeed, appear to do that.

If only he could get a chance to speak with her in secret; he wanted to put her more on her guard than ever, against—Ralph Gayner!

He, Dave, had already warned her that the prefect was likely to appear inquisitive. Since that warning was given, Gayner's inquisitiveness had even tempted the fellow to enter the riverside cottage whilst uncle and niece were absent, and to rummage through the drawers of an old bureau.

Aware of this, Dave felt that Gayner was now in a stop-at-nothing mood, some strange interest in Hetty Morland being his motive for wanting to find out more about her.

But why should the prefect be dominated by an interest in the girl?

"Well, maybe I've got the answer to that question too!" Dave smiled to himself in the darkness. "If so, then it's a cert; what he was trying to lay hands on at the cottage was the very batch of papers which I'm minding for Hetty!"

And in all this, as the shrewd lad realised, there was greater reason than ever for going slowly.

Altogether, the whole business bristled with difficulties. But it would not have been Dave to go to sleep that night before he had reached a decision as to what the next step must be.

The result was that after school, next midday, he sat down in the study to get off a letter. Tom, Jimmy, and Tubby were on hand, but their light talk did not fidget Dave. Presently, however, Jack turned up.

"Huh," Jack snorted, observing the letter-writing. "So now you are getting off a little note to her, are you? I'm not asking any questions, Dave; I'm only warning you! That girl down at Joab's, whilst she is quite a nice young lady, is going to get you expelled in the end!"

"But this is to my sister, at Morcove—"

"Judy? I'll lay you anything you like, anyhow," Jack wagered, banging the table so that Dave had to pause in his writing, "it's about Joab's niece! Chaps, he doesn't answer—"

"But then, does he—ever?" grinned Tom Trevor.

"Well!" Jack sighed, "we'll wait a bit and see! Nothing from the Head yet. Doesn't look to me as if Old Tony"—this was their Housemaster—"has even heard about last night. So perhaps the whole thing is to be forgotten. If not—Boy!" he thundered at Dave, imitating the Head's voice, "do you hear me? If we do each get half a dozen of the best, then either you end this mystery business with Hetty Morland, or—we're through with you!"

Dave, taking this whence it came, went on writing.

"I go by Gayner," said Jimmy. "He gave you a look to-day that ought to mean something, if I know the brute."

Dave, with his not-to-be-drawn smile, gummed up the flap of an addressed envelope, pounded on a stamp with his fist, then went away with his letter to get it posted downstairs.

The sooner his sister Judy received it, at Morcove School, the better. Really, he should have been sending a line to Hetty Morland; but this was the safer course—to get a message to that girl, via Judy.

Unless he was much mistaken, Gayner would not be above intercepting and opening a letter, if he saw one going through the school's post to Joab's niece. As a prefect, it was quite easy for the fellow to keep a close watch upon the mail.

An unscrupulous bouncer! That was Ralph Gayner, and that was the fellow he, Dave, was up against, in all this queer business which he was handling as Hetty's friend-in-need.

## A Trap for Dave!

**S**UDDENLY, on the ground floor, Dave came face to face with the letter which was to go into the postbox, close by.

Dave had the wit not to put the letter out of sight. Now that Gayner had noticed the stamped envelope, he might as well be allowed to see that it was addressed only to one's sister.

"By the way, Cardew!"

"Yes?" Dave calmly responded, whilst taking a last look at the address.

"I shall want you in my study after school to-morrow afternoon. Better not forget!"

And the prefect stalked off, doubtless very self-satisfied over the way he had comported himself, after the humiliation of last evening.

As for Dave—he shot the letter into the postbox, then returned upstairs, wondering: "Now, what does he want me for, to-morrow afternoon? Bit of fagging? But why—me?"

At Grangemoor, prefects were entitled to fag juniors, within fair limits. Later in the day, the five heard a rumour that Gayner, to-morrow, had got his "fearfully swell" guardian coming to see him.

That sounded as if Dave need wonder no longer. He had been spitefully chosen as a fag who must get everything just-so in Gayner's study, in time for the guardian's arrival.

Gayner always spoke of his "guardian"; but there were those at Grangemoor who fancied that the gentleman in question was one who had adopted Ralph years ago.

But Dave, making for the prefect's study at the appointed time next afternoon, was going to be on his guard, even though it did appear to be mere spite that had caused him to be picked for the job.

"There's a lot to do, so you'd better take your coat off to it," Gayner snapped. "The whole place wants clearing up first." He grandly gestured, implying pride in his lordly untidiness. "Then you'll lay tea for two. My guardian, Mr. Gordon, gets here at half past four."

Dave's obedient nod was not enough for the prefect.

"I'll stay and see you do it," was the smooth but goading remark, "Better take your coat off to the job. There's a peg behind that door."

Then—in a flash, shrewd Dave understood. Gayner was staying around, hoping for a chance to go through his, Dave's, pockets.

Twice the prefect had told him to take off his coat and hang it up. It was to hang there whilst he was sent away on some trifling errand.

Dave took off his coat, and hung it up. He



"These boys, sir; they set upon me and pitched me into the river!" the dripping prefect told the amazed Headmaster. The Grangemoor chums did not attempt to deny the charge or to excuse themselves. Gayner deserved all that had happened to him.

detected an excitable "That's good!" in Gayner's eyes; and he thought to himself: "You fool, to think you can do it on me like this—"

There were some papers in the breast-pocket of Dave's jacket. They were the very papers entrusted to him by Hetty Morland. He took them out, and stuffed them in one of his trouser-pockets.

Perhaps Gayner, baffled in his intention, turned to look out of the window so as to hide a raging look from Dave.

"I'll be back in a minute—"  
"What do you mean!" Gayner cried, flashing round. "You young— Here, come back, I tell you! Cardew—"

But Dave, who had spoken coolly whilst turning to the door, was passing out. He was aware of the prefect springing across the room to catch him and drag him back, and he dived into the passage, pulled the door shut—slam!—and was off.

The door was whipped open again instantly. Dave, in his shirt sleeves, streaked for the stairs, knowing that Gayner was in hot pursuit.

Ahead of his enraged pursuer by only a few yards, Dave got to the staircase and went three-steps-at-a-time up two flights.

Then he was at the landing which served his study corridor.

He nipped into it and ran as far down it as

his study-door. If he checked then, it was not to go into the study, but only to open the door a foot or so and then pull it shut again, creating a deceptive bang! that Gayner would be bound to hear.

Then Dave flew on again, for the prefect had not yet appeared in the passage.

When, in a moment or two, Gayner did reach the main-stairs end of the corridor, he saw no Dave; but he thought he knew where he was—and was mistaken.

There had been just time for Messrs. Jack, Jimmy, Tom, and Tubby to get over their astonishment in the study, at the way the door had opened and closed again—without anybody coming in!—when Gayner burst into the study.

"Cardew!" he panted. "Here, where is he then? Confound that fellow!"

"You wanting Cardew?" asked Jack blandly. "The last we saw of him he was going to your study, to fag for you!"

"Oh, shut up," was the prefect's infuriated cry. "If he comes in here, you tell him from me! If he's not back in my study in a minute from now, I'll just about wring his neck."

"Right," said Jack. And then, Gayner, having departed, with a vicious slam of the door: "Chaps, what about it? I tell you, there's no peace! Got to go into action again, boys."

"But this is a bit thick," Tom complained, rising with a cheerfulness which belied his words.

Then the door opened, letting in jacketless Dave. Calmly ignoring four pairs of staring eyes, he heeled the door shut, and came to the study table, inquiring:

"Got a large envelope anywhere?"

Jack pulled open a drawer on his side of the table and rummaged out a foolscap envelope.

"I was keeping that, in case I had to make my will, leaving everything to Polly. But it doesn't look as if the Old Man is going to send for any of us now. Second day, and nothing yet! Will that do, Dave?"

"Nicely, thanks," nodded the cryptic member of the chummers, lugging some folded papers out of a trouser-pocket. "Look here, you fellows," as he thrust the papers into the envelope, "I can't explain what these are—"

"My dear chap," said Jack engagingly, "just as if we would expect you to explain!"

"But," said Dave, with his not-to-be-drawn smile, "I want to put them somewhere safe for the present. I've a hunch that Gayner would like to get hold of them."

"Talking of whom," Jack rejoined cheerfully, "he was here a jiffy ago, and he is going to wring your neck."

"He can do that; but he can't have these papers, see?" responded Dave, whilst he quickly thrust them, in their envelope, behind a bookcase. "That'll do for now. And I s'pose I had better get back to that pre's den."

He turned to the door. As he did so, there came a gentle tap-tap—of such significance to all five boys, they looked at one another, somewhat drop-jawed.

"Come in!" Jack bawled.

It was a parlourmaid from Head's House, with a message to the effect that their presence over there was desired—immediately.

"O.K., miss," Jack thanked the girl, for self and friends. And when she had gone:

"Well, chaps, we're for it!" said he cheerfully. "Sing as we go, boys!"

And he led the march-out, whistling.

\* \* \* \* \*

About this time, three girls who belonged to

Morcove School were pedalling hard for Grange-moor, where each had a brother in Challenor's House.

"We'll go there first," said Polly Linton, the madeap brother of jovial Jack. "So that you, Judy, can give your message to Dave. It may make all the difference, if he is told at once—what Hetty Morland wanted him to know."

There was a family likeness to Dave Cardew, in the way Judy merely nodded.

"And afterwards," said Bunny, the sparkling sister of Tom Trevor, "we can perhaps get hold of the Head and tackle him—oh, somehow! For why shouldn't we, whilst we are over this way, do our best to get them off!"

### The Hour Has Come!

FOR a full minute the headmaster of Grange-moor had kept five boys waiting in line upon the Turkey carpet and respectfully at attention, whilst he finished some writing.

Now he laid down his pen and stood up.

"Yes," he remarked. "That matter of an evening or two ago."

And he moved to where he could reach down his cane from the top of the huge bookcase, as if certain of bringing it into use.

"I don't know if any of you boys now have anything to say; anything in extenuation?" he resumed, coming towards them with the cane. "Have you?"

Only four of them shook their heads, and this left him with his eyes fixed keenly upon Dave.

"What about you then, Cardew?"

"I think, sir, my chums should be let off. They were only out of bounds at Joab's because I had gone there."

"To persuade you to return before you were caught? Cardew, your plea on behalf of these other culprits will not do! Gayner's word can be relied upon at all times—or he would not be a prefect. Gayner's version is that he was aware of your intention of slipping away to Joab's a second time that evening, never mind that I had put the place temporarily out of bounds. He was the one who hurried down to Joab's to deal with you and turn you from your folly. I suggest that these four friends of yours, Cardew, only went after you because they knew that a prefect was on your track, and they wanted to warn you!"

"No, sir."

The Head gave the usual sigh with which he was accustomed to closure all argument.

"You boys must be punished—all five of you. It was a disgraceful affair, one of the most unpleasant features being that you, Cardew, appear to have been the prime culprit."

Jack broke out:

"But, sir—"

"Linton, silence! About this newly opened riverside resort; I am not keeping it out of bounds to the whole school. The man Joab is better than he looks. My brief talk with him left me quite reassured. But Joab's, to you five boys, is still out of bounds—remember that!"

Tr-r-r-r, ring, ring! an extension telephone shrilled its interruption. The Head turned away to the instrument, and the five guessed that it was a ring-through from the hall, announcing a visitor—possibly, some boy's parent.

"Who?" they heard the "Old Man" exclaiming irritably, after a moment or two of listening.

"No, certainly not! I can't be bothered now. I— They must go away! But let them wait then, and I'll see what I can do presently."

He picked up the cane again, and returned to



the five with a step suggesting great reserves of physical strength.

At that moment, the three Morcove girls were being most politely shown to a little waiting-room just off the entrance-hall of Head's House.

"Plenty of papers to look at, young ladies," said the manservant whose duty it was to attend to callers. He drifted away, and the girls sat down.

Suddenly a sound reached them from what they knew to be the Head's sanctum, on the other side of the large hall.

Repeated, the sound seemed to the girls to take on more of a "swish!"

Polly stood up. Then Bunny and Judy did the same.

Their eyes were enlarging with a kind of growing horror. Their breathing quickened.

Swish! Swish! With an almost pendulum-like regularity the significant sound was continuing. Swish! and again—swish! And as for any other sound—not one!

"He's caning them!" Polly gasped at last.

And, like the headstrong girl she was, she went with a rush across the hall, to the closed door of the Head's sanctum.

Bunny and Judy ran with her—were close behind her as she rapped the mahogany panelling with her knuckles.

"Who's there?" came the testy voice of the Head.

"I want to come in—we all want to!" Polly fairly shouted. "Here, girls, is this door locked? No!" as she turned the knob and found that the door would open.

"In, then—in!" Bunny excitedly urged.

Polly's furious thrust sent the door wide open.

At one moment all three of them were surging in, very noisily; then they were at a standstill, aware of the queerest looks in the faces of all five boys, whilst there was the Head—still came in hand!

### Ordered Out!

HE spoke at once, glowering upon the girls. "What's this! How dare you! When I expressly said—"

"But—sir!"

"Silence, girl!" Polly was shouted down. "I never, in all my born days, knew of such a thing! Go away—go away—"

"Oh, no," said Bunny. "No!"

He glared at her.

"I have not the slightest idea why you girls have come here from Morcove—"

"Perhaps you will let us explain, sir?" pleaded Judy.

"No," he said flatly; "certainly not—after this. You must withdraw; that is all. I am a busy man, and above all, I will not have scenes. You must go, and that means you must not go across to Mr. Challenor's. You understand?"

"But, sir," Bunny began to plead blandly.

"You boys will now go away, losing no time in seeing that these girls set off back to their school. I am aware, of course, that they are the sisters of some of you. Even so—"

He flourished them all away, girls and boys together. "This instant, please!"

There was nothing to do but go, though Polly vehemently protested.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Whew, Polly-wolly!" Jack said.

Then he laughed—and she laughed with him. The passion was dying away in her as swiftly as it had arisen.

Judy had put herself in step with her brother. No sooner were he and she outside, the others close upon their heels, than she whispered rapidly:

"I gave that girl at Joab's the message you asked me to let her have. We called at Joab's on our way."

"Thanks, Judy. I hated bothering you, but—"

"I quite understand. They won't make a living down there if the place gets kept out of bounds. You don't want to do anything which, if it became known, might cause a bother."

"That's one reason, Judy. There's another; but I can't say anything to you about that. There's a lot I can't go into, either with my pals or you. I'd like to, but I am not free to confide in anyone at present."

"Dave dear, she is a nice girl—Hetty Morland. And when I told her I was your sister, she spoke as if— Oh, as if you were being such a wonderful friend to her, over a most difficult matter. By the way, she sent a message to you. On no account do anything hasty— I think she meant—better to wait a bit—"

There was no time for more. Brother and sister were being overtaken by the others.

"What about it, Dave?" came Jack's chuckling inquiry. "We're not gated. So how about giving the girls some tea, somewhere? Mustn't take 'em down to Joab's though—that would be just about the end of the world. But we can go along to the Tollgate Teahouse."

"You fellows take the girls along there," Dave cheerfully responded. "You mustn't forget I'm wanted in Gayner's study. Suppose I ought to get back, now I'm free?"

Meet Maureen—the Girl  
With the Twinkling Toes—  
Who Danced Her Way  
Into Adventure



BY BARBARA KENT

Don't miss this splendid complete story—the first of a grand new series—which appears in next Tuesday's

Schoolgirls' Own

"All this mystery, Dave," madcap Polly censured him, with her mock-grin smile. "Why won't you say?"

"You believe in speaking your mind, Polly-wolly," said her brother. "Dave doesn't!"

She tilted her chin.

"Here we girls made up our minds," she spoke on aggressively, "directly Hetty Morland hinted that she feared you had all been gated; we decided at once to see the Head about it all, whilst we were about it!"

"And you've seen him," chuckled Jack. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Dave is not free to explain what he is doing for Hetty Morland, or he would," Judy explained.

"I doubt it!" said Polly dryly. But her last glance for Dave, as he went away, smiling, was full of the old regard.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was a fine car standing in front of the gothic porch of Challenor's House, when Dave went hurrying in.

He wondered if Gayner's so-called guardian had turned up in that car and was now upstairs with his "ward."

Then, from a landing-window, Dave glimpsed the detested prefect, sauntering about the school grounds with a tall, slim, middle-aged gentleman.

Instinctively Dave took to the gentleman, and if only for the sake of not keeping him waiting for tea—doubtless after a long motor-run—he sprinted to the senior's study and got busy.

Much of the tidying-up had to be scamped, so that tea-things could be rattled out all the sooner. Gayner, like other seniors, kept his own table linen, crockery, and larder, and Dave had no difficulty in making the hasty preparations. They were nearly completed, and he was on the point of going away for boiling water, when steps and voices heralded the arrival upstairs of Gayner and his "guardian."

The latter preceded the senior into the room, nodding genially to Dave.

"Fagging, eh? Well, nothing like it, my boy! Your time will come to fag others, eh?"

Dave's smile acknowledged that that was a perfectly fair way of looking at it. In case the gentleman should wish to say more to him, he did not immediately go away for the boiling water after all.

But the visitor now resumed conversation with Ralph Gayner.

"By the way, Ralph—what's Joab's?"

"Joab's? Er—"

"Why I ask; I gave a lift to a young lady as I came the last mile or two. Well, she looked tired, and was carrying a lot of purchases. She told me she lived at Joab's."

"Oh—er—yes," Gayner said, smiling feebly. "It's a sort of riverside tearhouse—punts for hire, and all that—just lately opened."

"Indeed? After tea, Ralph—like me to run you down to Joab's in the car, you showing me the way? But just as you please!"

"Well, sir, I—"

"Quite all right then; we won't! But that young lady—I don't know why, but she rather appealed to me. Made me feel that I'd like to know more about her."

"Cardew, you can get the water now," Gayner said aside to Dave flusteredly. "Hurry up. Mr. Gordon wants his tea."

Dave, with his secret belief that Gayner also would like to know more about Hetty Morland, was quick to watch for the effect of those last words upon the senior.

And Dave saw, as he passed to the study-doorway, such a look in the prefect's blanched face as could only have come from fright!

Fright—and something worse than fright; sheer panicky terror!

And why? Why, indeed, except that it was exactly the state of mind into which Dave had expected the prefect to be thrown by Mr. Gordon's remarks.

"Another sign," Dave was saying to himself, as he hurried away to get the boiling water; "pointing—pointing to just what I have been, thinking about that chap this last week or so—"

Gayner, known to be an orphan, and therefore his origin might have been as obscure as that of Hetty Morland's! A well-born fellow, Gayner would have the school believe him to be wealthy in his own right; but what if he really had been only adopted out of pity by that kindly-looking gentleman years ago?

What if Gayner, when first he met Hetty Morland at Joab's, had seen something in her looks, gleaned something from remarks of hers, which had stirred his memory to its very depths?

Dave, for once, was feeling rather keyed up now. His brain was working furiously, urging him—for the sake of all the goodwill which Hetty deserved, whereas Gayner must be held in scorn as a selfish bounder only thinking of his own security—to lose not a moment.

"I've the best part of an hour, I suppose," Dave reflected, when next minute he was done with his bit of fagging. "They've got to have tea, and even then, Mr. Gordon won't be in a hurry to be off again in the car. Here goes, then!"

And by those last words he meant—a bringing together of Hetty and Mr. Morland before another hour was out!

It meant a secret dash to Joab's again—and Joab's, to Dave, was still out of bounds. No matter! "At any rate, I shan't run into Gayner!"

Then it flashed upon him—get the papers from behind the study bookcase and take them with him, to let Hetty have them again. Urge her to consult Mr. Gordon about them; advise her to entrust them to him!

It was the last thing Gayner would wish to happen; but what was good for Gayner would be bad for Hetty.

"Simply can't believe she is his sister, without her knowing it," Dave's mind rushed on, as he sped for his own study to get the papers. "He can't be such a cad as to want not to know her as a sister; to want her not to share what life holds for him. But—were they, somehow, orphans together, as children? Oh, I don't know, but—there's so much that points to something of the sort—"

He had been passing many other fellows belonging to his House, whilst dashing to the higher floor. Not one of them had he heeded. Now he whipped into the study, meaning to get the papers and then be off full pelt for Joab's.

But when he felt behind the bookcases for the envelope his groping hand could not get to it, and half a minute later he knew, by desperate searchings, that the papers were GONE!

**A SHOCK** for Dave indeed, especially as the papers have been entrusted to him for safe-keeping. But you can rely on Dave to get busy at once to get on the track of the thief. Don't miss the further enthralling chapters of this fine story in next Tuesday's SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. You've told all your friends about it, haven't you?