

IN  
THIS  
ISSUE

*Mobile*  
"From Morcove to Morocco!"

A stirring story  
of the Girls of  
Morcove School

# The Schoolgirls' Own



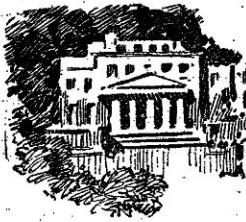
## THE SANDSTORM!

Then the whole tent was demolished; torn from its lashings and blown to shreds, leaving Betty and her chums exposed to the full fury of the storm.

(See "From Morcove to Morocco," inside.)

2<sup>nd</sup>

Come with Betty Barton & Co. into the Land of Mystery  
and Adventure.



# FROM MORCOVE TO MORAGGO!



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

By MARJORIE STANTON.

### Off and Away.

"**B**ETTY, I just wonder how many frocks Paula is packing?"

"Ah! I wonder. If you are through with your luggage, so am I, Polly. So we might pop along to Paula—"

"Yes, and I want to see Madge! Madge mustn't forget to take some music," said Polly Linton, breathless with all the excitement of a sudden going-away.

"Do they have pianos in the desert?" asked Betty, the captain of the Fourth Form at Morcove School, as she buckled a last strap.

"Madge must show the natives what she can do on a tom-tom, or a guitar, or whatever it is they play! I shall be all right for a musical instrument; I've got a comb!"

"A comb and a toothbrush. Who was it said he or she could go all round the world with that for sufficient luggage?" Betty remarked, as she and her bosom chum hastened from their study to look in upon Paula.

"Time's flying—how it is flying!" Polly almost gasped. "I shouldn't wonder if the car is at the porch now!"

"Well, if Paula's ready—"

"It—a very big if!" said Polly, stopping to fling open the door of that study in which Paula Creel should be in the act of strapping her luggage.

"Paula, darling—oh, help!" chuckled Polly, the madcap of the Form, gazing at the frightful disarray of garments still unpacked.

"Yes, wather! A little heap is worth a deal of pity," Paula answered distressfully. "I wegwet, gails, it is downright impossible for me to go as a respectable member of society, with only three bits of luggage!"

"Well, three bits is the limit, Paula!"

The madcap of the Fourth Form was interrupted by the sudden quiet appearance of a young lady who had the air of being booked for a great journey, as the girls were.

"Oh, Miss Redgrave—," all three scholars began.

"Are you nearly ready?" smiled the young lady in question, stopping short just inside the doorway. "I can't stay, girls; but, if you want any final advice, just ask. I've seen Madge; she has only to open one bag to slip some music inside, then she'll be ready."

"Hurrah! Hooray!" Polly commented jubilantly. "Then it's only a case of helping Paula

to pack! All right, Miss Redgrave, we'll be ready in five minutes!"

The young lady, the assistant mistress of the Form, accepted that assurance with a satisfied smile, and withdrew, having indeed not a moment of her own time to waste.

It was she who was to be the girls' companion on a mission so unusual and romantic that it had caused a sensation little likely to die down in the school, even when the voyagers should have got a thousand miles upon their journey.

"At last the great day arrived!" Polly cried, flippantly quoting from an old-fashioned story-book. "At last the morning dawned—"

"Yes, wather! Howevah—"

"And Paula Creel, in her study at Morcove School, was in the throes of packing—"

"Bai Jove, thwoes of packing is wight, gails! Three bits of luggage—it can't be done!"

"It must and shall be done!" the madcap cried dramatically. "So here goes!"

There was a yelp of horror from Paula as she saw the madcap starting to pack for her.

Polly's cramming in sundry articles, and tossing aside others, as if this was a mere rag-and-bone shop, clashed with all the aristocrat's notions of how to fold and put away a "fwock."

All the same, the grim fact was coming home to Paula that at any minute now the car would be at the door, and so she resigned herself, shuddering with horror every time Polly, unable to find room for a superfluous garment, tossed it to one side.

"There we are!" Polly announced breathlessly, jumping away from one unshapely looking bag. "See how we do things! Hallo, Madge darling!"

"Ah, Madge deah, pway come in—"

At that instant the blare of a motor-horn sounded close to the house.

"The car—the car!" Polly shouted; and after that, poor Paula's things came in for a ruder handling than ever.

The last of the three bits of luggage would not close promptly, so Polly knelt upon that particular bag, whilst Betty and Madge, splitting with laughter, pulled at and buckled the straps.

From the end of the passage boomed the porter's gruff voice:

"Luggage for the young ladies as is going away, please!"

"Yes, in here—and in No. 12, and in the study over there!" Betty and Polly answered together.

"Good-bye, Mr. Codlin, whilst we are about it!"

The gay but sincere farewell to Morcove's house-porter was not spoken without a slipping of liberal "tips" into that worthy's hands.

"Thank'ee, young ladies all; thank'ee kindly, and I'm sure I wish you the best of luck! Bong voyage, and all that! You are to be away, they tell me—"

"Six or seven weeks—"

"I shouldn't ha' thought it possible—getting there and back in sich a little time. Well," said Codlin, starting to shoulder some of the luggage, "you are to be envied—that's all I know!"

And so every other inmate of the school was ready to exclaim, with good-natured envy, this morning.

From Miss Somerfield, the Headmistress, down to the wee-est member of the lowest Form, there was nobody who would not have been glad to be going with Miss Redgrave and the four girls on their great journey!

And now—now that the very moment for a general good-bye had come—the chums of a *Fourth Form* found that a little formality had been arranged that they had fully expected and had partly dreaded.

It was the middle of the morning, and the school as a whole was enjoying the break between classes. The Headmistress had thought it would be a fitting thing for the scholars to line up in the open air, close to the waiting car, so that she could say a few words about the whole business, preliminary to calling for three cheers for the voyagers.

There, then, the whole school was assembled at the moment when Betty and Co., with Miss Redgrave, came out together. Cheers greeted them instantly; and another burst of cheering marked the appearance of a fifth person who evidently belonged to the "expedition."

This was a dusky, beautiful girl in the flowing raiment of a desert-dweller. She had been long enough at Morcove School for her Eastern figure to excite little interest amongst the scholars, although new girls always asked in great amazement, who was that strange person? Not a mistress, surely; and just as surely not a scholar!

Such questioners were easily enlightened.

The beautiful young woman was known as Rose of the Desert—the picturesque name she had been given as a child by her own people. She had once done Miss Somerfield a great service, and, having incurred the enmity of the ruler of the desert kingdom to which she belonged, safety and happiness had been ensured her by letting her make her life at Morcove.

For a few boisterous moments the assembled scholars filled the air with their joking comments on the "expedition," and their good-natured wishes for its success. There had to be silence, however—and it was eagerly conceded—when the Headmistress stepped forward to say her word or two.

"Girls of Morcove School!" began Miss Somerfield, in her clear, genial voice. "There is no need for me to go into details concerning this great and notable event. The thing began as a sort of secret, but it leaked out, and really there was no reason why it should not. The school was supposed not to know, but—"

She laughed with the scholars.

"I am afraid there has been a great deal of talk after lights out, just lately, concerning this mission we, as a school, are sending to a country far away!"

Some cheering broke out, inspired by Miss

Somerfield's thrill of pride as she associated the word "mission" with the school.

"A mission is the right term for what these girls are embarking upon to-day, under the guidance of Miss Redgrave. You know that they are really going to Africa—North Africa—to bring back a certain girl, the grandchild of a native ruler, to be educated. But more than that—"

Miss Somerfield smilingly had to pause, to allow another burst of cheering to die away. Then she resumed, briefly detailing the reason why the "expedition" was going out to fetch that native girl, instead of her being merely sent to England under other escort.

It was no news to the scholars, for, as Miss Somerfield had said, the whole business had leaked out. Yet the girls listened with breathless interest.

Once again they heard it explained that the native ruler—one who was entirely favourable to British ideas and institutions—was too old, and far too tied in any case, to come to England with his grandchild. But he wished to see, and let those around him see, what sort of companions and the kind of tuition his grandchild would have in England, and so he had proposed that a party of Morcove scholars should visit his country.

The business had been carefully handled and all details arranged by the British authorities out there, so the safety of the mission was absolutely ensured.

The parents of Betty and Co. were not only willing for their girls to go; they were proud, needless to say, that their daughters had been selected. Miss Redgrave they knew as well as Miss Somerfield knew her, and they could have wished for no better companion for Betty, Polly, Paula, and Madge.

"So, girls," Miss Somerfield made haste to wind up, with a beaming look, "for the sake of the school, apart from all the loving goodwill you bear towards Betty and her chums, you will wish them a hearty good-bye! You—"

"Hear, hear! Hurrah!"

"You know that they go as representatives of a school which has won a great reputation. Out there, they will be on very strange soil; they will be in a land where civilisation is a thousand years behind the times. And there, we are sure, they will maintain our reputation, impress all around them with the spirit which—"

But the rest was never said. Nor did it need to be said!

There broke out such a storm of cheering as told how every scholar understood and shared the Headmistress's earnest sentiments. And Miss Somerfield, seeing how the girls were yearning to break ranks and mob round the lucky four, gave the sign that they could do so.

"Hurrah! You lucky lot! Good-bye, Betty! Good-bye, Polly—Paula—Madge! Oh, if only we were coming! Hurrah!"

"Betty, you haven't shaken hands with me—"

"Or me! Polly—"

"Madge dear, good-bye—"

"Paula—"

"Bai Jove, geals! Weally, this is extwemely good of you, to be so demonstrwative! Geals—"

"Mind you write!" someone called out; and there were shouts of laughter.

The idea of Betty and Co. finding time to write—even supposing they could find a letter-box in the desert—was too good.

"Good-bye, then—good-bye!" came the last ringing cry from more than a hundred throats, as the

large car at last blared its way down the carriage-way to the gates.

Madge Minden, always a subdued girl, spoke very quietly as she dried a tear or two.

"Thank goodness, we are not saying good-bye to our people until to-morrow," was her murmur. "I don't think I could have stood it all in one day!"

"The dear old school!" exclaimed Betty, looking out at the stately range of buildings. "To think that before we see those walls again, we shall—What's the matter, Paula?"

"My gwacious—Polly deah! Did you pack my comb and bwush?" gasped the aristocrat of the Form. "And the silver miswov?"

"Did I or did I not?" Polly teasingly wondered. "Oh, well, never mind it—"

"Polly deah, pway be sewious! I do hope and twust you remembered the manicure set! And those bits of wibbon! And the—"

"Ha, ha, ha! You dear, fussy thing!" Polly chuckled, giving her dressy chum an affectionate squeeze. "It's all serene, Paula. I put in the face cream, too—I know I did, because I heard the jar crack! Unless it was the mirror!"

"Oh, dear, don't talk about cracked mirrors!" laughed Betty, whilst poor Paula turned quite pale at the thought of a burst pot of the special cream, to keep off sunburn, being mixed up with her frocks. "A cracked mirror means bad luck, doesn't it? And we shall want all the good luck that is going, I know, if we are to be back at Morcove School in six weeks' time!"

They would indeed!

Betty was only speaking lightly, because for all of them it was a choice between being very tipsy at the moment of going away, or else breaking down and blubbing! Such a wrench it had meant at the last, even though it was a glorious bit of foreign travel that was taking them from the school they loved.

But what Betty had only said in jest came to be said in earnest by all four girls at last.

When a thousand miles and more lay between them and the Homeland, and they were in the thick of such difficulties and dangers as no one could ever have foreseen—then indeed they knew, with good reason, that all the luck in the world must be theirs, if ever they were to see their loved ones again!

#### The Watchers in the Desert.

IT was sunset in the desert.

Over the vast undulations of sand and brown rock the lurid evening light was flaming, now that the sun himself was right down upon the wide and level horizon.

For this one minute or so longer, the wilderness world that had shimmered and blazed in the sun's light all day was to glow in the reddening rays. Then the flaming orb would be gone, and out of the cloudless sky might would rush down the velvet darkness that the desert loves, when the lonely wanderer may behold a million stars flashing like splendid jewels.

Sunset, and so, for all who hold the faith that belongs to the East, the hour for prayer.

Here, at a tiny palm-clump and water-hole—the one small oasis, almost the one little bit of green within a radius of twenty miles—were two believers in the ancient faith that bids its followers turn towards Mecca at the setting of the sun.

They were a man and a woman, and at first glance one would have taken them to be in a sorry state—mere vagrants of the desert.

Not only were they in raiment that was little better than so much old rag to cover their skeleton forms; they owned little more, apparently, than the bundle of camel-wool cloth which, whenever the need arose, could be rigged up to serve as a small tent in a very few minutes.

No camel of theirs had taken his fill at the water-hole, nor did sheep or goat share their desert life. Whence they came, and how they existed in such a destitute state—beggars with no one to beg from, one would have said—was a mystery. One of the thousand mysteries that are the great desert's own!

To make that mystery all the deeper, there was this to be said for the two—they did not look like beggars born. Theirs was none of the cringing, abject spirit which so often goes hand in hand with the whining for "Backsheesh! Backsheesh!" in the cities of the East. On the contrary, the man



**OFF TO MOROCCO!** The instant Miss Somerfield gave the order to break rank, the girls raced forward to congratulate Betty and Co. and wish them bon voyage.

carried himself with a fearless mien; there was nothing down-looking in those piercing black eyes of his, and when he cupped his beard with a brown hand, in thought, he might have been a king for dignity.

And the woman—she was his wife—shared his dignified air. She was much younger than he, and even in her rags of clothes she looked somehow imperious.

Here, in the awful solitude of the African wilderness, these two were kneeling in prayer at this moment, a little apart from each other, with a tiny square of matting under each of them on the baked sand. The sun was down, and under their breath they were reciting the age-old formulas of the Islamic creed.

A wind stirred across the weary wastes, and the leaves of the palms clashed harshly; how different a sound from the soft rustle of foliage which one

hears in the Homeland! By the time man and woman had finished their fervent devotions, the deep, cold pool amongst the rocks was reflecting some early stars.

In this brief twilight the man now kindled a fire of sticks. But it was a significant thing that he did not start the flames until he had scanned the desert in all directions. It was as if he had to be quite sure that night would find him and his wife left undisturbed at the oasis, before he dared venture to kindle the fire.

She for her part had a trifle of food ready for their frugal repast by the time the sticks were flaring in the darkness. Close to the gipsy-fire they sat, eating in silence, and with only water from the pool to wash down the meal. It was blowing cold across the wastes now, and when the woman shivered a little, and crouched nearer the fire, the man spoke a word of advice:

"Nassina, there will be little warmth for thee outside the tent. Go ye to it, yea, and sleep early and well."

"And thou, Fuan, my husband?"

"I have much to ponder," he answered her. "A while longer, too, must I be on guard, lest they come upon us by surprise."

"Night is upon Allah's garden," the woman murmured, turning round to peer at the darkness which walled them in. "They will not come now! None travel the desert by night, except the lawless."

He bent his head in assent, stroking his pointed black beard the while.

"They will not come, sayest thou, and truly it would surprise me to see aught of them before another noon has passed. We know not why, but there has been some delay, and to-night they rest, perhaps, many a league short of this spot."

As the woman arose, with a writhe of the body suggesting great weariness, she could be seen smiling a little scornfully in the firelight.

"Thou and I, Fuan, we did not allow ourselves to be delayed!" she remarked proudly. "How many leagues—and on foot, yes? No caravan of camels for us, and a guard for protection! Yet have we reached the appointed place at the appointed time!"

He nodded quietly, "True!" and then stood up, to attend her to the poor sort of tent where she must pass the night. She yawned very wearily after they had stood talking a few moments there, and Fuan remarked in a gentle, rallying tone:

"Nassina, dear one, another day will find thee with all thy spirit renewed. Take thy rest, then, and Allah be with thee?"

"I—I know no weariness in the purpose, if that is what ye mean," she exclaimed, her eyes suddenly aflash. "This body of mine cries out for rest; but how could my spirit flag, when it is our master's own royal bidding that we seek to do?"

Fuan responded with a glance that showed the pride he had in this wife of his. A man of few words, he left her without saying more, and next minute he was squatting before the fire again, absently throwing on stick after stick to help the blaze, whilst he kept counsel with himself.

Then, of a sudden, he sprang up in alarm.

Turning away from the fire, he kept his fine head reared so as to pick up any sound that might come to him out of the desert—a repetition of that sound he had surely heard only a moment ago.

The tinkle of camel bells!

For a minute or more he stood all on the alert like that, and then, satisfied that there really were

travellers coming on across the nightbound desert, he flashed about and kicked the fire to bits.

Whilst the scattered brands were still sending sparks into the air, he rushed off to the tent.

"Nassina!" he whispered in her ear. "They come—those whom we were sent to watch for!"

Whether she had yet settled down or not, the woman was only a moment in flinging aside the flap of the tent and stepping into the open.

"Yea!" she exclaimed softly, after listening intently. "They come—those with whom we must go into the Sultan of Nakara's country, risking our lives to do so!"

Fuan was already pulling the tent to pieces. The fire was dying out, and only the light of the stars helped him to see what he was doing. But this was a task he could have done blindfolded—to fold the tent into a bundle such as could be slung across one shoulder.

A little louder grew the distant jangle of the caravan bells, with now and then some native driver's cheering on of a tired beast.

"They beheld the fire, and it gave them heart," Nassina muttered. "They are rejoicing that this must be the oasis they should have reached before the setting of the sun. Poor fools! If they knew what each stage of the journey may be taking them to!"

"None know what fate has in store for them!"

Fuan murmured, with all the fatalism of his race.

"Nassina, come thou—away!"

And in a few moments they had vanished together into the black darkness, and the dead fire was all that told of their recent presence there.

#### The Spies from Susahliah I

NOT for long was that tiny oasis left bereft of human life.

Less than an hour later a big camel party had reached the palm-clump, and was halting it as the resting-place that they should have got to well before sunset.

The patient beasts of the desert were unladen, and whilst some of the men saw about rigging up tenting for the night, others watered and fed the camels, afterwards getting them together in a bunch to take their well-earned rest.

Another fire of sticks was soon stabbing the darkness with its leaping flames, and for those who wanted it there was coffee and biscuits. But at least four members of the party desired nothing but a tent to lie down in, upon a blanket-strewn bed of sand, and that longed for rest for their weary bodies was soon forthcoming.

"Oh, the jolting for all those hours!" Betty Barton said with a mock groan, the moment she was alone with her three chums in the snug tent.

"And the cold," added Madge Minden, "when they said we must still keep on, even though night had fallen. But it is wonderful how the guides find their way in the dark, isn't it?"

"Don't forget they saw a gleam of fire—not a bad mark to make for," Polly remarked. "But I quite agree—those brown chaps are 'cute!'"

"Downright bwicks, gails," Paula chimed in, with enthusiasm. "Howevah, good-night, stwaight away. I'm just about weady to drop!"

And there the talk ceased. For once, sheer weariness got the better of Polly's love of teasing. Nor could the other girls make any further comments on their latest stage in the great journey which had begun at the porch of Morocco School.

It had been a day of thrills; their fifth day of camel-riding across the vast wilderness of sand and rock, and yet the novelty of such travelling had

not worn off. In the morning, they would be all on the chatter again, filling this desert-tent with the laughter and talk that had so often made the Fourth Form dormitory a pandemonium after "first bell." But to-night they were dead beat!

So, with a lantern on the ground that would be left burning all night, they wound themselves about with warm blankets, and stretched themselves along the accommodating floor of soft mud just as if they had sunk into a feather-bed.

"Comfy, Paula?"

"Yerwarrer," was Paula's half-asleep answer. "Bejuv, it's wipping!"

"Goo'-night, all!" called Betty, after a huge yawn.

"Goo'-ni'!"

Silence again then, except for the voices of the native drivers and guards, whose last bit of camp-fire talk seemed to sound like a deadly quarrelling now and then. But the girls knew by this time that it was not quarrelling, only excitability.

They heard, too, the camels bubbling and muzzling in more or less contented fashion, and the occasional shrilling of the night wind over the desert.

These were sounds that were not going to keep the schoolgirl travellers awake for a single moment, when a girlish voice outside the tent said a soft "Good-night, Mrs. Hamilton!" Then the owner of the voice quietly undid the flap of the tent and came inside.

It was Miss Redgrave, for whom the girls had left ample room to lie down amongst them.

She refastened the flap of the tent, outside which the woman to whom she had said good-night now stepped away, to seek her own quarters in another shelter.

By the glow of light from the camp fire, this Mrs. Hamilton was revealed as a matronly lady, very good-looking, and with an air of being accustomed to the life of the desert. She was, in fact, the wife of a tough yet courtly Britisher who had been long in residence at the city of Nakara, the two of them doing a great pioneer work for the Union Jack.

Far away in the Foreign Office of the great Empire on which the sun never sets, it was known to the officials there in what high favour Hugh Hamilton and his good lady stood with the Sultan of Nakara. There were stately occasions when Hugh Hamilton must needs dress for his part, and then his broad chest had to show many a decoration that had been conferred for great services modestly made light of by himself. But at this moment, as he came between the rustling palms to fall into company with his wife, he looked the plainest of plain Britishers.

"Everything all right, Hughie?" his wife questioned affectionately.

"Oh, yes," he answered, smoking a last pipeful of strong tobacco with keen relish. "I feel a bit puzzled that that fire we saw from a distance was suddenly put out and we found no one here. It means, of course, someone skeddaddled—"

"When they heard our camels?"

Hamilton nodded, keeping the pipe between his fine white teeth.

"Still, we know the sort of thing that happens in the desert," he said airily. "You so often get a case of a man having fallen among thieves, and getting so badly handled, he packs up and clears out the moment there is a caravan coming along that he can't be quite sure of!"

He added, with a most gratified expression:

"The girls stuck it well, Norah—that extra bit after sunset!"

"They are splendid," was the enthusiastic answer. "Oh, Hughie, it has been a delight, my coming with you to meet them at the coast and to travel back with them to Nakara. They are a bit of the Homeland—a real bit!"

"And you think Gran'pa Nakara will take to them? I do," the Britisher said with conviction. "As for little Naomer Nakara—can't you just imagine how she will dance with joy at having the girls for her friends?"

Mrs. Hamilton laughed.

"The idea is that Miss Redgrave shall hold classes at the palace, during the week or two the girls are there. I can see them getting through a fine lot of lessons!"

"They'll have enough to take their minds off work, that's a fact," agreed Hamilton. "Nakara is a dazzling, bewildering place even when the old man isn't en fête. And he will just about do all he can, you see, to give our young ladies a royal time!"

"Yes," murmured Norah Hamilton, going on towards her tent, whilst her husband strode beside her, "and it will be a royal time for us, whilst it lasts. When they go, they'll take my heart with them to England, Hughie!"

"Then I must fix up for a bit of leave, that's all, so that we can all go with your heart," he answered, with a look that was a fitting response to her own affectionate expression. "I wouldn't wish to be a day where I'm not close to your heart, Norah."

"You won't ever be, Hughie—not really," she assured him, and so the pipe came away from his lips at last, that he might give her his good-night kisses.

One more round of the camp he made, not because he lacked faith in the men who were in his service for this unique desert-trip. They were the friendly Sultan's own picked fellows—men whose loyalty had been tested fifty times over. He roamed around, out of sheer delight in being out here in the open desert. And it was under the wide and starry sky that he rolled up in a blanket at last, like any one of the natives.

Then, for all except the few whose duty kept them on watch, the night passed in undisturbed sleep.

Dawn came, putting out the myriad stars and flushing earth and sky with wonderful hues of rose and gold, and with the rising sun the camp was full of life.

"Oh, it is perfectly gorgeous again—always glorious!" was Polly's exuberant cry, as she was the first to come away from the tent. "Morning, Mrs. Hamilton! Don't you ever have a rainy day to spoil everything?"

"We have worse than rainy days," smiled Mrs. Hamilton, whilst she watched the schoolgirl giving a madcap sort of good-morning to Rose of the Desert.

The difference between Polly's breezy manner and the quiet dignity of the beautiful native girl was rather amusing.

"And this is the last day but one before we get to Nakara—hooray!" exclaimed Polly. "I want to see the wonderful palace, and make friends with Gran'pa Nakara, and chum up with Naomer! I want to—"

The girls flashed about, their hearts missing a beat, and in an alarmed manner they looked for cause of the startling hubbub.

Even Mrs. Hamilton was uneasy for a moment. She saw her husband's tall figure amongst the



**DENOUNCED!** "Even from the great city of Nakara came we," said Fuan Ben Jezrel in answer to Mr. Hamilton's inquiry. "Sayest thou so? Then ye lie!" cried Rose of the Desert, pointing accusingly at him.

crowd of dusky fellows who were making such an uproar, and from that distance he appeared to be in the thick of a hostile crowd.

Then the shouting died down, and the small crowd dispersed, so that Mrs. Hamilton and the girls could see the Britisher coming towards them, with two natives—a man and a woman—who did not belong to the caravan.

"It's all right," he sang out cheerily. "These two poor wretches caused a bit of a shindy by coming up to beg."

"Oh, what a plight they are in!" Madga exclaimed compassionately. "Mr. Hamilton, do you mean to say that they are out here in the desert, with no means of getting about except on foot?"

The Britisher spent a moment telling the abject pair to keep close at hand, and then he turned to his wife and the girls.

"I'm sorry to say it's a case of their having been robbed of everything—that is, if they are to be believed. Thieves fell upon them a few days ago, they say, and as good as left them to die of privation."

"Poor things!" exclaimed the girls.

"It was their fire we saw last night, before we got to the oasis," Mr. Hamilton went on. "Directly they heard us coming, they put the fire out and made off, fearing further ill-treatment."

"Well, they know they are in good hands now," Mrs. Hamilton said, with a kindly glance at the still scared-looking couple. "Where do they hail from, Hugh—do you know?"

"I'm just going to find out," he answered, and turned upon the man and woman.

"Thy name?" he demanded.

"O great one, I am thy servant; as the dust beneath thy feet am I, Fuan Ben Jezrel," the man in rags answered, with a gesture of servility.

"And this woman?"

"My wife, and the light of my soul, O master; she shall tell thee. Nassima is her name, and her prayer is as mine, that ye will take pity on us!"

"The's all right; we'll get you fed and clothed, and you an come along with us to Nakara. Whence came ye?" asked Hamilton.

"Even from the great city of Nakara came we," was the prompt reply. "O master, we are the humblest of those who live by Allah's favour in the city of Nakara; yet are we the great Sultan's most loyal followers."

"Sayest thou so? Then ye lie!" cried a voice that had not yet spoken.

And there, with eyes aflash, stood Rose of the Desert!

### The Storm.

**T**HE effect of Rose of the Desert's unexpected cry was intensely dramatic.

The schoolgirls jumped with the shock, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed together, "Ah!" as if to say:

"Then there is treachery here!"

As for Fuan Ben Jezrel and his wife, they were utterly confounded; a treacherous pair, indeed, with all their cunning plans upset by this sudden denunciation!

"Ye belong not to the country of Nakara!" Rose of the Desert cried out at them, whilst her right arm was stretched forth in a denouncing way. "Ye are of the same unhappy country that gave me birth—ye are from Susahlah!"

"Susahlah?" Hamilton echoed, with a deepening frown. "Rose of the Desert, you are sure of this? It may be serious—"

"Yea—"

"Nay!" Fuan Ben Jezrel suddenly shouted down Rose of the Desert vehemently. "It is the girl who lies to thee, O master! May my bones rot in the desert, if I tell thee false! Ask in Nakara, and ye shall find that Fuan Ben Jezrel and his wife are known to many!"

"Many there may be who know ye, and ye may know the city well enough, but only as spies!" Rose of the Desert rushed on with rising scorn. "Thou—thou art in the service of the Sultan of Susahlah! And therefore thou art enemies to the Sultan Nakara and his people!"

Fuan and his wife looked as if they would like to fly at Rose of the Desert.

"Steady now," was the English equivalent of what Hugh Hamilton said to the unmasked couple. "This wants looking into."

Rose of the Desert controlled her angry scorn.

"O master," she exclaimed earnestly, "will ye doubt that I say truly, when I tell thee, in the days when I myself was in the city of Susahlah, these two were known to me? Woe is me, that I should have to put thee on thy guard against people of my own race! But—"

"Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton understand," Betty broke in gently. "They know that your eyes had been opened to the cunning and cruelty of the Sultan of Susahlah, at the time you fled to England for safety."

"We know this, too," muttered Hamilton; "our own Sultan Nakara has a lifelong, deadly enemy in the Sultan of Susahlah! The one is all for progress and friendship with civilised countries; the

other is as great a monster as were all his ancestors."

"And these two," Mrs. Hamilton exclaimed un- easily, gazing at Fuan and his wife, "they were meaning to pass themselves off as inhabitants of Nakara, not Susahlah! Hugh, it is a fishy business!"

"Very," was the quiet rejoinder.

The Britisher turned a stern eye upon the baffled pair.

"Ye will go with us to Nakara, as ye desired. Only, see thou, ye will go under arrest!"

"Nay, master——"

"Silence!" Hamilton commanded the whining pair. "Lies have been told, and that settles it! The Sultan Nakara wants no spies in his country just at the present time. When Naomer, his grand- child and the light of his eyes, has gone to England, then, perhaps, you may go free, back to the wicked monster in whose pay ye are!"

Fuan fell back a step and stared at his wife, who gazed back at him in similar amazement. It was the best they could do for themselves—affect utter bewilderment at the plot which they were as good as charged with being concerned in. A plot, as Hugh Hamilton suspected, to frustrate all the good that the aged Sultan had planned for his grand- child.

Now Fuan gathered breath as if to make a vehement speech denying all connection with any such plot; but Hamilton, with a stern face and curling lip, was not to be blustered with.

"Ye lied once; ye will lie a thousand times, given the chance," he said. "No more!"

And then he half-turned, to call up two or three of the guards. By a mere gesture he made it clear that the ragged impostors were to be put under arrest, and briskly the men marched up to surround the couple.

Next instant Betty and her chums gave sharp screams of terror, for Fuan, in the one moment that was left to him, had flown at Rose of the Desert.

In his mad fury he would surely have killed her, only the Britisher himself was even quicker than the guards to intervene.

Hamilton's fist landed the bearded fellow a blow that knocked half the senses out of him, and instantly Rose of the Desert was free of the brown hand that had taken her by the throat. She jumped away, and then the guards closed in round Fuan and Nassina both, and hustled them out of sight.

The Britisher went after them all, to see that no violence was done to the refractory prisoners, and so the four girls were left alone with Mrs. Hamilton. Rose of the Desert had drawn apart the moment the dramatic scene ended.

"My gwacious," Paula palpitated, "I would not like to be Wose of the Desert, if ever that precious pair get a chance for vengeance!"

"My husband will take care they are not set free for as long as any of you are in this country," Mrs. Hamilton assured them. "It would be a fatal thing, perhaps. Thank goodness," she added fervently, "Rose of the Desert was with us, to put us on our guard!"

And there and then the Britisher's wife opened Betty and Co.'s eyes to the danger of enemy spies getting into Nakara just at present.

It was known that the barbaric Sultan of Susahlah was ever on the alert for a chance to strike a blow at his rival ruler. Therefore, it was highly necessary to avoid reports reaching the Sultan of Susahlah as to how and when Naomer Nakara would be going to England.

"In the palace at Nakara, she is absolutely safe," Mrs. Hamilton explained, whilst she and her listeners sat at their open-air breakfast under the palms. "But you can see the chance it would give that cruel wretch, if he could——"

"Capture her on the way to England?" exclaimed Betty. "Well, if there is anything like that later on, it will mean our being captured, too!"

"Yes," said Polly; "and how does that prospect please you, Paula, darling?"

"Pway don't be frivolous!" pleaded Paula, turning quite pale. "I am frequently reminding you, Polly dear, theah are some things too serious to be joked about! I—I—weally——"

"Oh, eat your breakfast, and don't give the matter another thought!" suggested Mrs. Hamilton, with a light laugh. "Of course, you will travel back across the desert with a strong guard. Besides, those spies have been found out in time, and that's everything!"

"Yes, wather!" Paula agreed, looking slightly relieved. "They—bai Jove, you know!—they can't possibly escape, can they?"

"Impossible, dear?"

All the same, it became a joke during the day to see how anxiously Paula Creel kept an eye upon Fuan Ben Jezrel and his wife, as that dejected- looking couple came along at the tail end of the caravan, under close guard.

"They—they seem quite all wight, what?" Paula remarked hopefully, from time to time, after slewing round on her own camel to look back at the prisoners. "Betty dear—Polly—Madge! You don't think they can possibly give us the slip?"

Her chums simply laughed at the idea, so ridiculous it was. With a Britisher's characteristic mercy towards the vanquished, Mr. Hamilton had



**A CHARITABLE ACT!** The old woman ran forward and prostrated herself at the feet of the throne. "I have been robbed and ill-treated by the people beyond the mountain!" she wailed. "Then you shall be given a room in my palace," said the Sultan, raising his hand.



not had the man and woman bound, although the custom of the country made a rope round the neck the fashion for a captive. He had had them fed, and the camel they rode made the day's travelling quite as comfortable for them as it was for the rest of the party.

Far more comfortable, indeed, than it was for Paula herself! Poor Paula! She never would feel at home on the back of a camel!

"No, geals," she sighed wearily, as the lengthy troop of beasts was jolting up some rising ground, with the down-going sun casting gigantic shadows in front of them, "I wegard it as the most distressing form of t'wavel ever cweated, bai Jove!"

Mr. Hamilton sang out a consoling remark.

"Only another half-hour, Paula! We camp for the night just down the other side of this rise. Watch out, too, for the white walls and the minarets of Nakara! From the summit of this hill you can sometimes see the city—"

"Oh, hip, hip!" cheered Polly. "Hear that, girls? At last—at last we are going to see the city!"

"I rather hope not," Mr. Hamilton called out again, with a slightly uneasy laugh. "Whenever the horizon has been clear enough for me to see the city from this distance, it has meant bad weather."

But they did see the city as they topped the low hill up which the camels had padded steadily. The horizon this evening was unusually clear, and with the setting sun behind them they saw, fully fifteen miles away, the coppery gleam of the mosque's dome, and patches of pure white which they knew to be the blanched walls of flat-roofed houses.

The camels were halted, so that the travellers from England might gaze for a minute in a spell-bound manner at the thousand-year-old desert city which was to be their journey's end.

If only they could have reached the palace to-night!

None wished it with greater fervour than the Britisher, who now knew as well as the natives under him that a desert storm was getting up. The hot wind came in strong gusts, lifting the sand in an eddying way. But another fifteen miles was absolutely out of the question, and so night found the girls under cover of a tent that flapped its slack sides to the thrilling blast, whilst lanterns winked here and there in the darkness.

With the dust blowing thicker and thicker about them, the trusty fellows were keeping about in the open, just as a coming storm at sea means all hands on deck.

And suddenly, towards midnight, the sandstorm broke with full fury upon that part of the desert.

Huddled in the one tent along with Mrs. Hamilton, Miss Redgrave, and Rose of the Desert, the chums of Morocco School were stricken with dread as they heard warning shouts and cries become deadened by the noise of the raging storm.

Peer out they dare not, but they could imagine the scene outside the tent—black darkness, now that all the stars were blotted out, the men and camels sheltering as best they could from the cloudb of heavy dust that were going by with the gale.

Could a lantern be kept burning anywhere out there in such a wind? Their own dim light bobbed up and down, as the frail walls of brown blanket failed to keep out furious draughts.

Louder, louder moaned the storm fiend, whilst that frail shelter held out bravely against the raging wind and the weight of shifting sands. Then, all in an instant—but not before the awe-struck girls had become certain that it would happen—the whole tent was demolished: torn from its lashings

and blown to shreds, leaving all who had known its shelter exposed to the gale!

There followed a sheer battle for life amidst the smothering clouds of sand.

More than once the girls felt they had only struggled clear, to become finally swallowed up by whole moving banks of sand. And, as it was with those who had suddenly lost the shelter of the tent, so it was with all their companions in distress.

Guards and camel-drivers were having their fight for life, whilst the poor beasts had to huddle down and do the best for themselves. It was one of those times of darkness and chaos when no man knows where his fellow is, or how he is faring.

How many victims was the sandstorm claiming? There was no knowing what tragic gaps a roll-call would show, when the worst was over!

#### Too Late!

At last the storm passed, leaving the whole face of the desert changed. The first lanterns to be relit revealed mounds of sand where there had been rocky hollows, whilst here and there it became an urgent task to get a partly buried camel on to its feet again.

Dazed and exhausted though they were, the girls wanted to be of use, even if it was only by salvaging some of the stores and baggage. But what came their way all in a moment was more thrilling work than that.

For, suddenly, they heard sounds from close at hand in the darkness, as if somebody was calling for help after being almost buried alive. They rushed heart in mouth towards the spot, to find quite a different state of affairs.

In the starlight they saw that one of the camels was here, and that close to it two men were struggling furiously with each other. There was a woman also, and she was in the act of mounting the camel.

Fuan and his wife!

In a flash the whole situation was clear to the dismayed schoolgirls.

Yes, it was the spy's wife who was with the camel, and the spy himself was at grips with the camel's guard!

Betty and Co. heard again a gurgling cry, such as had first attracted them to the spot, and now they knew that Fuan's strength was proving too much for his opponent.

"Stop him—stop him!" Betty shouted excitedly, whilst her chums, rushing forward just as eagerly, called anxiously:

"Help! Mr. Hamilton! Help—this way—help!"

Too late!

Down into the loose sand Fuan suddenly dashed his one opponent, and next instant he and his wife were mounted upon the camel.

Frightened as it was, the beast needed but an urging shout from man and woman to go striding off. Betty and the other girls tore after it in sheer desperation, but it was not to be overtaken, and they turned back.

On—on sped the camel, ridden by the Sultarr of Susahlah's crafty spies, and all Betty and Co. could do was to stand gasping for breath at last, whilst they saw with horrified eyes how swiftly the escaped prisoners were finding safety for themselves in the vast spaces of the nightbound desert!

Gone!

In a few moments the camel and its desperate riders had been swallowed up by the darkness, nor could the schoolgirls pick up a sound that would be a guide for any pursuit.

In the silence that now fell around them, all they

seemed to hear was an echo of that mocking laugh which Fuan and his wife had given as they sped off.

A laugh of mockery, with a threat in it, too!

A laugh that meant nothing, if it did not mean that Fuan Ben Jezrel and his wife would only live, now, for the hour when they would have Rose of the Desert, the four schoolgirls—ay, and others besides—completely at their mercy!

#### At the Palace!

OUT of the lonely wastes of the arid desert into the teeming city of Nakara!

To the chums of Morocco School it was like the rising of a curtain upon the changed scene in a play, when their sulky camels stalked in procession through the town's main gateway at noon next day.

Once inside the city walls, all who had come upon this romantic mission from the Homeland felt overwhelmed by what the sight and hearing had to take in all at once.

They rode their camels in a dazed manner; more than dazzled by the blinding sunshine, the quaint old streets, the zig-zag alleyways that were blotched with cool shade. All the colours of the rainbow were before the girls' eyes; gaudy Eastern raiment, gaudy awnings over the open-air bazaars, where gaudy carpets, and pottery, and clothes were waiting to be haggled for.

All this, so soon after leaving the shores of England, gave Betty and Co. the feeling that they really were looking across the footlights at a reproduced bit of the land of Islam, rather than having a part themselves in the strange scene. They could not realise how all Nakara had turned out to-day to witness their entry into the city, and that for this hour or so the normal life of the place was held up.

Yet such was the case.

Into that one broad way leading from the ancient gateway to the Sultan's own great palace, all Nakara had thronged.

Solemn-faced merchants were mingling with the gamins of the town; veiled girls and women were there in hundreds, thinking it how strange a thing that these strangers from afar should ride abroad with no covering to their pretty faces! The halt, the lame, and the blind—and Nakara had its share of such, as every Eastern city has—were using the occasion to cry louder than ever for "Backsheesh! Backsheesh! For the love of Allah, Backsheesh!"

There were the Sultan's soldiers, too, standing at the salute as the procession went by, with Mr. Hamilton at its head, and his wife riding with Miss Redgrave and the girls. More soldiers than ever at the palace gates, where Betty and Co. still had to ride on into a spacious courtyard, with wonderful buildings of Moorish character on three sides of it.

Shapely palms adorned the big square, in the centre of which was a great marble fountain. Behind the bewildered new arrivals the guards kept out the jabbering populace by closing the massive gates against them, and now all the hubbub gave place to lute-like music that was being played by slave-girls.

"Bai Jove!"

Paula had found her voice at last, apparently!

"This sort of triumphal entry, gails, is a most wipping supwise! One would imagine, don't you know—"

And there she was cut short by a very startling happening.

All in a flash, a girlish figure in native raiment came racing forth from some dark alcove into the blinding sunlight of the square.

She was crying out so excitedly, Betty and the rest thought she was running from someone who wanted to punish her. Then they found that it was only delight that made the girl so excited. Laughter was mingled with her shrill outcry; and she was clapping her hands jubilantly.

"Naomer!" Betty guessed, keeping eager eyes upon the beautiful girl. "It is Naomer, surely?"

"That's right, young ladies!" Mr. Hamilton cried gaily, alighting from his camel. "And now for introductions!"

But the future ruler of Nakara could not wait for formalities to be gone through. The girls were being dismounted, and as fast as they got off the camels' lumpy backs, Naomer made rushes at them.

"Yes, I am Naomer, and I am so happy!" she chattered at them in the sweetest of girlish voices.

"Because now you have come to me from England, and I shall love you! Like I loye Meesse's 'Amilton, and Meester 'Amilton, yes!"

"Bai Jove, your woyal highness, I—weally, this is most gwatifying!" beamed Paula. "You speak English remarkably weal—yes, wather!"

"I spik ze English, and ze French, and ze Spanish! If I mix them, you will not be offended, nō?" she pleaded prettily. "Oh, you big, nice English girls! I must grow up like you! Tell me, you like this country?"

That was only one of a hundred things she wanted them to tell her, and never gave the girls the chance to do so, as they moved on, on foot, towards some great curtained way into the palace. For she was talking all the time.

Again and again Paula began a beaming "Yes, wather, bai Jove!" And again and again Naomer's voice chattered on, silencing her school-fellows-to-be.

That she was a little darling to all the host of native officials, and attendants, and slaves about the palace, was made clear to Betty and Co. No one glimpsed her queenly little figure, or heard her silvery talk and laughter, without breaking into smiles.

"And, Betty," madcap Polly whispered, with a low chuckle, "I am dead certain she is a big handful to manage! She wasn't meant to slip out to es like that, I know!"

"It's why Granpa Nakara is sending her to boarding school, perhaps!" was Betty's dry rejoinder. "Oh, the fun of having her at Morocco!"

"Bai Jove!" beamed Paula. "She's a wegular little witch!"

Naomer had been chattering away to Madge. She now resumed conversation with the other girls, and all they could do was to nod and smile, still unable to get in a word edgewise, so to speak.

It was hardly a wonder that the excited girl had talked herself breathless by the time she and the English visitors reached a grand ante-chamber in the palace, where they were to await an audience with the monarch.

Then it was that the girls noticed how the beautiful girl, after the first burst of delight, seemed to suffer a sudden lapse of spirits. Afterwards they came to know that it was always the way with her. Either she was bubbling over with high spirits, or else a prey to emotions that made her pretty face look sweeter than ever in its sudden sad expression.

"You are very quiet all of a sudden," Madge ventured to say gently.

"Yes? That is because I think of my father and my mother," Naomer sighed sadly. "How they would have been so happy this day, to see me with

new friends of my own age from England! But they are dead, my father and mother."

And she added, after a sad silence:

"That is because of an enemy, who would kill me also, if he could!"

The schoolgirls started violently. It gave them a shock—not to be told that there was such a deadly enemy, for they were thinking all the time of the Sultan of Susahlah—but to know that Naomer knew!

That this girl, no older than any of the girls in the Fourth Form at Morcove School, should be aware of the implacable enmity of the monster who ruled that other desert kingdom—it was a touching state of things, to say the least.

But now, to Betty and Co.'s great relief, the girl was suddenly restored to high spirits by the announcement that the old Sultan, her grandfather, was ready to give audience to the "mission."

Mrs. Hamilton led the way out of the ante-chamber, and then her husband—versed in all the ways and ceremonies of the palace—took the whole party in hand.

Unseen hands drew apart the gorgeous curtains which took the place of doors, and all at once the awed schoolgirls were in a vast, pillared hall, at the upper end of which was a dais.

The light was subdued, and all was very quiet. The visitors' feet made not a sound as they trod the thick rugs that were strewn upon the marble floor. From some remote alcove, faint music made a pleasant thrumming melody, whilst the host of officials and attendants who were with the Sultan, only a few were talking in whispers.

In such a thrilling environment as this, the girls found it a relief to hear Mr. Hamilton say breezily:

"It's all right, young ladies. He's a dear old chap."

Next moment, Betty and Co. had no eyes except for that infirm old man who, on his throne-like couch above the marble steps, was resting his own dim vision upon them.

All the dignity and solemn grandeur of an Eastern potentate were his, and, with his dark face and long white beard, he made a grim figure, from whom the girls felt inclined to shrink with dread. In a moment, however, this fear of him was dispelled.

Shakily he got to his feet, and came down the few steps to extend his wrinkled right hand to Miss Redgrave and the scholars, smiling as he did so.

"In the evening of my days I find the happiness I dreamed of as a youth," he murmured in English. "You are welcome. You see an old, old man who grows weary of the cares of his kingdom, yet never weary in his friendship for England."

Whilst such kindly words as these were falling upon their ears, the girls could not help thinking of the difference between this desert ruler, with his enlightened mind and his noble desire for progress, and the rival Sultan of Susahlah—that crafty, cruel monster, whose kingdom was still the home of barbarism!

"Your highness," Miss Redgrave answered shyly, "not the least happiness, in the evening of your days, must be to see what a worthy successor is to come after you?"

"Naomer? Yes," he murmured, and rested that feeble hand of his upon the girl's dark head, when she ran to him at once. "One, by Allah's will, who will lead my subjects in the way that I have set their feet upon—the way to greater progress, freedom, prosperity!"

There he made a sudden pause. He had picked up sounds from outside the hall which told of

some sudden excitement there, and he now made a gesture to an attendant to see what was the matter.

In a few seconds the man returned, and some talk in the native dialect followed, unintelligible to Miss Redgrave and the girls. Then the aged Sultan gave an order for someone to be admitted, and Betty and her chums thought that they would have to withdraw. In his kindly way, however, he merely waved to them to stand aside.

"One in great distress craves help from me," he explained softly; "an old woman, they tell me, and a widow, wherefore she is being admitted at once. But, remain friends, for I have much to ask you about your country, and the school."

Even as he finished speaking, the high curtains were rustled apart once more, and a strange, tragic figure stood revealed, standing between two of the Sultan's guards.

She was an old, stooping woman, garbed in funeral black. Her head drooped with the weight of sorrowful years, but in any case the down-bent face would not have been visible to any who sought to scan it, for it was thickly veiled in black.

The Sultan returned to his throne-like lounge, and the moment he was seated there the guards nudged the woman. Instantly she tottered forward until she was at the foot of the dais, where she prostrated herself in abject fashion.

"O, great one whose servant I am—"

"Arise—speak," the Sultan bade her kindly.

And this was the talk that passed between the monarch and his suppliant, as it was afterwards put into English for the girls by Hugh Hamilton.

#### The Woman in Black.

"O MY great one and master!" faltered the sorrowful figure that stood visibly trembling before the Sultan of Nakara. "It is no fable, that all who suffer great trouble may seek aid from thee, and find it!"

"Fable? Nay, it is my wish," the old man answered gently. "Many have stood in the place where thou standest now, woman, and have made me happy by craving the help I would have every subject of mine take joy in giving others. Say on, then, and I listen!"

"My years are fewer than thine, O master, yet are they many enough; too many, since they have brought me only sorrow and loneliness," the tragic woman said moaningly. "I was but a little while wedded, when he who was the half of my soul was stricken and died."

"Poor woman, for that affliction alone may all pity thee!"

"As they have, truly," the widow answered, in a weeping tone; "more than I dared pity myself, for it was Allah's will! Yea, who will not bear with fortitude the burden that Allah himself bestows? So have I, these two score years, railed not at my fate. Only, my lord and master, when men treated me cruelly, did my spirit break. For then it seemed to me that my lot was too hard a one to bear!"

"What men were they?" the aged Sultan demanded, with a sudden fire in his sunken eyes. "Subjects of mine, wilt thou tell me?"

"Nay—oh, nay," was the earnest response.

"But behold, O great one whose servant I am, in my lonely wanderings I strayed into the country that lies beyond the mountains south of Nakara—"

"Into the country of Susahlah!" the Sultan muttered. "Yea, then thou wert truly unfortunate!"

How shall strangers within that country fare safely, when it is a land of cruelty and bloodshed even for those who own allegiance to that monster? My enemy, against whose cunning hand I myself have to be prepared night and day!"

"Men there, with their womenfolk, took me and held me captive," the poor creature sobbed. "I was a widow, and yet they pitied me not; I was poor, and yet they took what little I had. With bare feet have I found my way back to this happier land, O my lord, and in thy fair city there are many who will take compassion on me. Yet it came upon me that I would do well to lay myself at thy feet—"

"And thou wert right to do so," the Sultan assured her, in that kindly tone of his. "As I am the richest in this land, so I should be the first to give aid! Thy name, woman?"

"Obed Jehathra," was the faltered answer. "In El Borah, which is far to the north from here, was I born."

"Then thou art a subject of mine—"

"The very least, and the most devoted, O my lord!"

stood with bowed head before the English girls, gesturing her thanks.

It was an act of kindness the chums of Mercove School would much rather have done in secret, but this was the only opportunity they would have, so they imagined. For all they knew, they would never see the woman in black again.

As she was being led away by Nulita, the Sultan came down from his lounge to speak to his British visitors.

"You have seen that poor woman?" he exclaimed bitterly. "She is not the first victim of the cruelty and wicked wrongdoing which is encouraged by the monster who holds sway in the land of Susahlah! What does he or any of his subjects care whether the one to be robbed and ill-treated be poor and feeble? It is nothing to them whether the victim be an old widow-woman or—a fatherless child!"

And the glance the old man directed to Naomer at that moment gave a special significance to his words that was not lost upon the chums.

A fatherless child—motherless, too! But little



**A JOYOUS WELCOME!** A girlish figure dressed in native raiment ran out from a dark alcove into the blinding sunlight with arms outstretched and eyes dancing with pleasure. "Naomer!" Betty guessed, looking at the beautiful girl.

"Obed, woman of great sorrow, go ye straightway with the attendant I shall send thee with, and she will care for thee; yea, even in the royal palace for a while at least," the Sultan said, causing the bowed figure to kneel to him again in fervent gratitude. "Nulita, thou wilt have charge of her."

That woman at once stepped forth from the throng of female attendants, and gave a steady hand to the one in black. Betty and Co. had not been able to understand the talk, but they had easily divined the situation, and their hearts were touched.

"Poor soul!" Madge exclaimed aloud, as the crone-like creature went shuffling by, scarce able to drag one foot after another. "I want to help her, too—I must!"

"Yes, wather! Heah, you poor woman," Paula beamed, whipping out a handful of the country's coinage. "Get something for yourself with that, pway do!"

Betty, Polly, and Madge all pressed gifts of moneyp upon her, and the hapless woman could not be enticed away by her attendant until she had

would that weigh with the Sultan of Susahlah, if ever Naomer Nakara should fall into his hands!

"She never shall!" was Betty's unspoken resolve. "Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and all of us girls will see to that!"

"Wather!" chimed in Paula. "I don't profess to be much of a guardian myself, don't you know, but when it comes to the pinch, bai Jove, and I'm pproperly woused, I'm a twifful awkward!"

"Awkward isn't the word for it," grinned Polly, never able at any time to resist an opportunity of poking fun at Paula.

"And pway what is the word, Polly?"

"Well, I was thinking of clumsy!"

"I will pass by the observation with the contempt it deserves," was Paula's crushing rejoinder. "Merely pwaying to observe that we Cwheels have never been deficient in courage. No, bai Jove!"

"I know that, dear," said Polly, squeezing the swell girl's arm. "You've proved it times out of number. Hasn't she, girls?"

"Rather!"

Paula beamed.

"Thank you, geals," she simpered. "And now perhaps Naomer will take me to some apartment where I can just put my hair to wights, and where I can rest for a moment, for, what with the heat and the excitement, I really am quite pwestwate!"

But ah! What sinister thing was this that was happening, in the very palace of Nakara, at the moment when the Morcove girls were giving vent to this merry chatter?

Nulita, the attendant, had led the woman in black to a dim apartment in the women's quarters, where the stricken soul could rest and recover herself. There already she who had given her name as Obed Jehathra was quite alone. And, in the solitude of that room in the palace, she was smiling to herself behind the veil that masked her face.

"Have I done well, Fuan?" she murmured, as if communing with someone with whom she was in league. "Would not our master, the Sultan of

Susahlah, load me with his praises if he knew that I, Nassina Ben Jezrel, am here in the very palace of Nakara?"

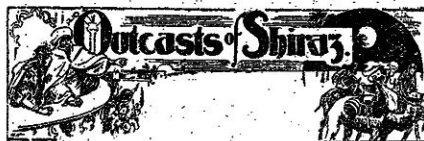
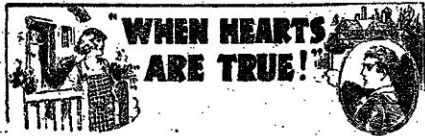
She got up from a low bench and crossed to the small window, still preserving the hobbling step which was part of her skilful disguise.

And thou, Fuan, my husband," she mused on, gazing away to the vast desert, "thou art to be ready, whenever the moment comes! Ready to go back with me over the mountains to Susahlah—with our work of spying done!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(The Morcove chums are now fairly embarked on their foreign expedition, and in next week's magnificent story, entitled "The School in the Desert!" you will find some highly exciting happenings are in store for Betty Barton and Co.—particularly Paula Creel. Her courage will be put to a severe test, and it remains to be seen how she will behave in the ordeal she is called upon to face.)

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