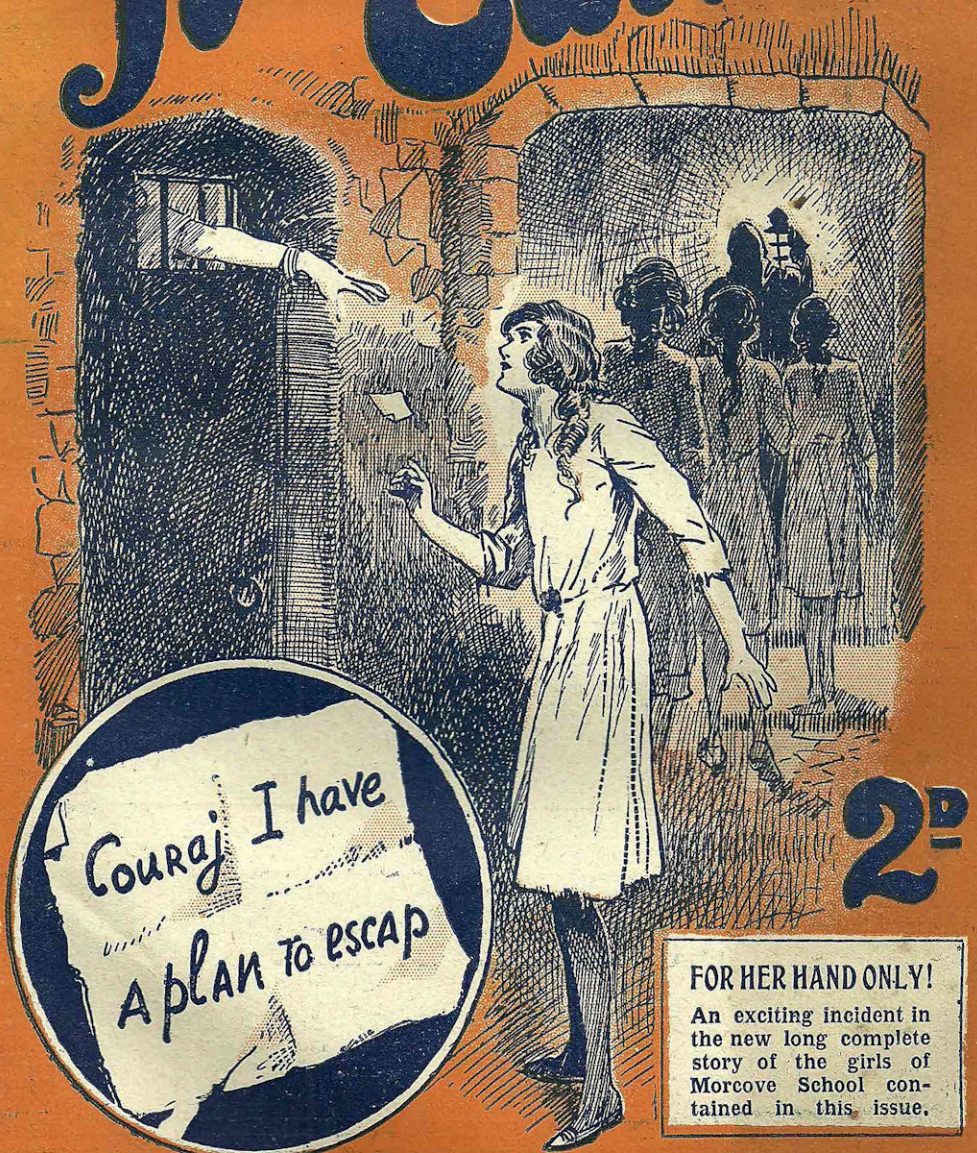


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The Schoolgirls' Own



FOR HER HAND ONLY!

An exciting incident in the new long complete story of the girls of Morcove School contained in this issue.

Betty Barton & Co. prove that they cannot be intimidated by persecution.



ROSE OF THE DESERT'S MESSAGE!

A magnificent long complete story relating the adventures of the girls of Morcove School in the heart of Morocco!

By MARJORIE STANTON.

Beyond All Aid.

"I SUPPOSE the whole teeming city will have heard about our capture, Polly. It would be like the Sultan of Susahlah—"

"To invite everybody to go on holiday, on account of his great triumph?" Polly Linton took the speaker up, bitterly. "For it is a triumph—oh, a most wonderful triumph, to have made prisoners of a party of helpless schoolgirls!"

This was said with extreme disgust, Polly's lip curling the while with scorn.

"So long as they don't separate us—" Madge Minden exclaimed, causing another girl to break out with great fervency:

"Yes, wather! Oh, geals, that will be too dweadful, if we are dwagged apart, as soon as we weach the wretched palace!"

Betty Barton said, in a sullen tone: "Here she comes again!" as she kept her eyes upon a tall, handsome woman, garbed in native raiment, who was approaching with an agile, gliding step.

The four schoolgirls were not the only persons in this barbaric place who had had the grave misfortune to fall into enemy hands.

There were, in fact, three other captives who, at any minute now, would be called upon to march under guard into that desert city.

But, just at present, these four schoolgirls were separated from their fellow captives, and upon them this native woman, who was their wardress, now bestowed a special smile of mockery.

As the girls had had good cause to know by this time, it maddened Nassina-Ben Jezrei not to be able to speak the English language, and so heap insults upon the helpless captives' heads. They were not surprised to see her glide away to another part of this palm-clump, at which they had all been dismounted from the camels, and return with a certain girl of their own age who could act as interpreter.

"Tell them thou!" Nassina hissed at this poor girl, whose terrified look showed that she herself was a prisoner. "Tell these, thy friends, that they will soon be at the palace—face to face, yea, with the royal master, at whose mercy they are!"

Then the girl, whose dusky face was agonised with dread, spoke in broken English, her voice full of tears.

"Alas, you English girls that I love! This cruel Nassina desires to make us weep. She tell so often, how there is no hope for us!"

"There may not be any hope left, Naomer, darling," Betty said, with all the spirit she could command. "But we girls are just not going to blub!"

"Blub? How you say blub? He is a word I do not know!" Naomer remarked, curiosity almost getting the better of alarm. "I know 'Ello, present!' and 'Keep smile!' I do not know 'blub'!"

Polly Linton found herself giving a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha! Hullo, fancy me, able to laugh! Well, so much the better—"

"Yes, wather! Bai jove, geals, to heah anybody laugh in this wotten pwedicament is quite wewfeshing, bai jove!"

And then they all laughed—Naomer included—causing Nassina to menace that girl with a raised hand.

"Thou dare to laugh!" the merciless woman hissed. "When ye are less than a league now from the dungeons of Susahlah! Thou wilt not laugh when thou art led with the rest through the city streets, with all Susahlah mocking at thee!"

Nor was that moment long delayed, for soon they were being hustled through the narrow streets that echoed to the cries of the savage population of Susahlah.

The widening gates of the ancient palace received captors and captives alike, and only for a few minutes were the hapless prisoners allowed to rest in one of the ante-chambers, before they were led into the very presence of the Sultan.

With only the thrumming music of some stringed instruments to break the great stillness that was upon the royal abode, through marbled halls were they marched. Unseen hands drew apart enormous curtains, that took the place of doors, and then—what an awful moment was that when the hapless captives saw, in the dim light that lit this inner court, the tyrant of Susahlah upon his royal throne!

To the Dungeons.

THERE he was, a ruler as crafty and cruel as any that had gone before him in this barbaric land of Susahlah; the pampered despot who still held to the old creed of bribery, corruption, and capricious tyranny!

On his magnificent throne, at the upper end of the great, dim hall, he was sitting forward as the prisoners were led in, his white teeth flashing out of his dusky face.

In that eager attitude, with one jewelled hand stroking his pointed black beard, and his eyes full of exultation, he looked what he was—a cruel tyrant, ready to gloat over captives who were quite at his mercy.

And everywhere else in the vast hall were those who looked as if they went in fear of their very

lives, for all they were enjoying high favour to-day.

"Gloomy were the faces of the Sultan's so-called 'advisers,' although toadies would have been a more fitting term to apply to them. There had been some music and dancing before the captives were brought in, and even the slave-girls who thrummed the native kind of mandoline, as well as the skilful dancers, were all pathetically sad.

In the centre of the hall the captives were halted, whilst Fuan and his wife advanced at a sign from the Sultan, and knelt to him.

Their very foreheads touched the carpeted steps below the throne as they murmured dutiful testimonies to his greatness. Then, as he gave a muttered word of approval, they leapt erect, and Fuan began a voluble story.

It left the monarch smiling gleefully, this story of how Fuan and his wife had gone into the neighbouring kingdom of Nakara, there to spy out the means of capturing the girl Naomer, and how they had not only succeeded in seizing her, but had even brought back these other captives, knowing how pleased the royal master would be.

"Yea, Fuan Ben Jezrel, trusty one; and thou, Nassina—ye have done well, truly," he exclaimed, softly, when all had been told. "The reward I promised shall be thine, and more besides—yea, such special favour as thou shalt ask! Name it, and it is thine!"

"O royal one, whose servant I am; thy unworthy servant," Nassina, the woman spy, broke out at once, with a gesture of abject humiliation. "One favour do I entreat, my lord! It is that I be given charge over these, thy captives!"

"It is granted; yea, it would have been my wish," the Sultan answered promptly. "Go with them, and lodge them in the dungeons, Nassina; yet must I give them greeting first! The damsel Naomer—bring her thither!" he added, in a chuckling tone.

Nassina flashed back to the group of captives, and singled out poor Naomer, who looked ready to swoon with fright. Roughly she was hustled closer to the throne, from which the cruel tyrant glowered down upon her.

"So, Naomer Nakara, daughter of an enemy whom I destroyed when thou wert still a child!" he said to her mockingly. "Why tremble ye? Were ye not brought up to the ways of a Sultan's court?"

He levelled a denouncing finger at the shrinking girl.

"Thou—thou art next in succession to the throne of Nakara itself!" he said, savagely. "When that poor fool, thy grandfather, quits this world, the throne should be thine—so thou hast been taught to think! But I have decreed otherwise, as thou knowest now! Never shalt thou see Nakara again, nor yet that kingdom of England—England, fah!" he sneered. "Nassina Ben Jezrel shall be thy teacher, in my palace. And she shall teach thee to own me the greatest of all that rule!"

"That she never will!" Naomer forced herself to pant at the bully on the throne. "No, no—never!"

"Silence! Away, daughter of insolence!" the Sultan almost shouted at her, with a menacing fling of the hand. "Now bring the one they call Rose of the Desert!"

In a few moments that beautiful young woman was close to the throne, and, as if to let him see at once how she defied him, she held herself erect as possible before him.

"Down on thy knees!" he ordered her, with an angry gesture. "Thou art of my race, Rose of the Desert—"

"I am no subject of thine!" she flashed, retaining her erect posture. "Would I ever have sought sanctuary with friends in a free land across the seas, if I had not found thee to be unworthy—"

"Ye anger me!" he struck in furiously. "But I should laugh rather; for thou art fallen into my hands at last, Rose of the Desert! These many days has there been a price upon thy head, and that price goes to my cunning ones, Fuan Ben Jezrel and his wife! Take her away!" he cried, with another fierce gesture. "And now—"

His flashing eyes came to rest upon the four British girls.

"Ah, these I cannot converse with," he muttered ruefully, in an aside to some of his fawning attendants. "Yet will I give them a message, perchance, with mine eyes. Hither, ye!"

The four girls stood motionless, and although Nassina rushed at them and waved them towards the throne, they still refused to approach it.

The Sultan gnashed his teeth at the sight of such flagrant defiance, looking very little pacified when Nassina called up some of the slave girls to take hold of the captives and simply drag them forward.

This was done in a few seconds, the poor school-girls realising the futility of offering resistance; and then for a full minute the Sultan glowered upon them, trying to strike fresh terror to their hearts by his look of triumph.

But it could hardly be said that he did so.

Long before this—in the very first hour of their surprise capture—the hapless girls had known almost the climax of human dread. Even if this enthroned bully could have spoken their language, and so been able to jeer and threaten, he could have said nothing to make them more appalled than they had been all along.

At last he called up his favourites of the hour—the man and woman who had achieved this triumph for him. To Fuan Ben Jezrel the Sultan spoke a few more words of praise, and then he made some smiling remarks to Nassina which she construed as an order.

Next second she had bowed herself away from the throne, and was making a sign to the white girls:

"Come!"

And, following her, they went out through the spacious ante-chambers, crossed the great courtyard, where for a minute the African sun once more smote upon their heads. Then—chilly gloom, deepening to a black darkness, relieved only by the dim lantern that Nassina had found for herself.

The chums of Morcove School were at their unhappy journey's end!

They were shut up together in one of the dungeons of Susahlah!

"If We Refuse——"

"BETTY!"

"Yes, Polly?"

"I thought you might be asleep, dear," whispered Polly Linton. "I must have dozed for a bit myself——"

"I did go off, Polly, directly Nassina left us to ourselves in here. I was so dead beat!" whispered back Betty Barton. "I say, Paula is sleeping like a log, I should think! Poor Paula!"

"Poor Madge, too!" Polly Linton exclaimed, with a compassionate glance at both girls, who were still sleeping off the exhaustion of their wearying travels as Nassina's captives, "Poor all of us!"

There was a heavy silence after that. Then—"Naomer has been put somewhere apart from us," Betty broke out in great distress, "Rose of the Desert, too. I wonder—"

"Oh, Betty, darling, I think we had better give up wondering what is to happen! If only one could wonder whether we shall ever be rescued—but we know that that is simply impossible!"

"It really is about as bad as bad can be," sighed Betty. "They captured Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton at the same time, and that just about does for any chance of our being got out of this dreadful plight. I wish I knew what has happened to that splendid Britisher and his wife!"

"Yes," murmured Polly. "What a brave fight he put up for us when our camp was taken by surprise. Well, I'm glad I was born a Britisher. Something to be proud of, to belong to the same race that gives you a man like that!"

At this instant Madge Minden stirred in her sleep, then gave a hard sigh, as she opened her eyes.

"Betty, darling! Polly—"

"Yes, Madge. We feel sort of better after our doze," Betty hastened to say, as cheerily as she could. "We won't wake Paula; better to be asleep than awake in a place like this!" she added sadly. "Ah, if only we had been able to escape from that cavern in the mountains! But our luck was out, and so—here we are, in a pretty plight!"

Seeing Betty get to her feet very quietly from the pile of rugs which had been thrown down for all four prisoners, Polly and Madge followed her example.

Aching in every limb, they stood up, leaving only Paula Creel curled in sleep upon the dungeon floor.

The large, dim lantern, had been left with the schoolgirl captives. It was hanging from a great rusty chain suspended from the stonework overhead. Betty unhooked it, and carried it with her on a round of the black dungeon, Polly and Madge keeping close to her.

They found only what their minds had prepared them for—solid stone walls, with absolutely nothing in the nature of a window.

Window, indeed, when this dungeon was perhaps forty feet below the level of the palace courtyard!

There was just one massive door, and over it a ventilation hole, criss-crossed with massive iron bars.

The girls hovered near the doorway, gazing desperately at massive timbers, which they knew they would never, never be able to get past. They scrutinised as much of the massive lock as was visible, and what they saw might well have made their hearts sink lower than ever.

"That grating over the door!" Betty exclaimed at last, twisting the lantern so that the light shimmered upon the iron bars.

"Yes," Polly said desperately. "Oh, give me a bunk up, just for the sake of something to do! Let me climb up somehow—"

"Very well, dear; as you say, anything to—to pass the time!" Betty broke in; and then she set the lantern upon the floor.

That done, she took her stand close to the door, beneath the grating. Setting her feet apart for

a good "stance," she leant inwards towards the door, letting her hands spread themselves against the great timbers.

In that firm position she was ready for Polly to get what that girl—the madcap of Morcov School—breezily termed a "bunk up!"

Madge did the "bunking-up" for the sportive girl. Polly was no featherweight, but by taking a good breath Madge managed to lift the madcap well off the ground and flop her against Betty.

Then began a bit of wild scrambling that would have been funny enough in other circumstances.

Even as it was, Polly gave a feeble echo of one of her gleeful titlers, as she hauled herself up by the most desperate struggles, until she was actually standing upon Betty's suffering shoulders!

So at last the acrobatic Polly had her head level with the iron grating, the bars of which she



ADVENTUROUS POLLY! Standing upon Betty's shoulders, Polly grasped hold of the bars and peered through the grating into the passage beyond. What she saw made her leap hurriedly to the ground.

held on to with both hands. She examined those bars, then did her best to peer out through them.

"Well?" Madge whispered up.

"The lantern, Madge!"

Quickly it was handed up, and then Polly shone the light through the grating.

Next second she lowered the lantern, and gave a warning:

"Look out! I'm going to jump!"

And down from Betty's shoulders she sprang, toppling over as she came to ground. She had forgotten the sleeping Paula, and had only just missed flopping full across her. Paula received a slight shaking, and it seemed as if she must

wake up now. For a moment, however, she still remained quiet.

"Do you know there is somebody on guard in the passage outside?" Polly whispered excitedly. "A native woman is there, and looks like being there day and night alike. I saw her, and she saw me—"

"That's why you took the light away so quickly?" Madge guessed. "Well, it would be all the same, I suppose, even if there were no sentry in the passage. We are just about helpless!"

"Yes, wather!" came the sighing murmur from Paula Creel, as she suddenly sat up in a half-asleep manner. "As I was about to wemark, geals—"

"Hullo, Paula, darling!" Betty said, if only to make a cheerful sound for the awakened girl to hear.

"Bai Jove, haow do you do, Betty, deah? I am pwetty well myself, thanks! I wegwet I've been dweaming howwibly! Howevah—"

Paula sat bolt upright, gazing around with a more intelligent look.

"Gweat goodness, this was my dweam!" she gasped. "Of course, bai Jove, we're not at Morcove School! We are in Afwica—pwisoners!"

"We are all together, Paula; that's something, eh?" Polly said, comfortingly.

"Yes, wather! Gweat goodness, don't talk of our being sepatwated! The one gwatifying feature of this distwessing pwedicament," Paula said, floundering up from the hard bed of rugs, "is that we are togethah, bai Jove! Fwiends through thick and thin!"

"Come here; let me kiss you," was Polly's comment on this. "You're a duck, Paula; a perfect brik!"

"Thanks, thanks! I appweciate the compliment, Polly, deah! Howevah, pway wefwain fwom wuffing my hair!"

"Oh, she can still feel concerned for her appearance!" chuckled Polly, glorying in the chance for a light word.

"Yes, wather! The principle I go on is this, geals," Paula said, caressing her stray wisps of hair to rights. "The gweater the distwess you are in, bai Jove, the gweater need for keeping respectwable! How's that, geals? Do I look—"

"Just the same dear old Paula who used to drop in at Study 12—"

"Ah, Study 12, bai Jove! Would that I could dwop in there; dwop through the earth itself, geals, wather than wemain in duwance vile! That Sultan fellah—"

"He's a wretch!" Polly said, through clenched teeth.

"Pwecisely! Without using stwong expwessions, geals, I wegard the Sultan as being a downwight—"

"Hark!" Betty put in softly. "Someone's coming!"

Then they all four listened keenly, and sure enough they heard steps padding towards the dungeon door, whilst next moment the voice of Nassina was heard in talk with the woman sentinel in the passage.

Then a big key grated in the lock, and the door swung open, revealing that crafty, pitiless woman but for whose work of spying the girls would never have been in this plight to-day.

If it was a maddening thing, however, for Betty and Co. to have this woman's mocking eyes upon them again, the visit had one consoling feature.

It was all the girls could do not to cry out with

joy when they saw that Naomer Nakara had been brought here by Nassina.

That woman flashed about and seized the girl roughly, sending her with a violent push into the midst of her friends. And that needless bit of savagery was another token of what sort of treatment they all might expect at the hands of this ruthless creature.

Drawing herself up, as if she were swelling with triumph, Nassina said a few harsh words to Naomer—the only captive there who could understand the language. Then she waited, whilst poor Naomer tremblingly put what had been said into broken English.

"I am to tell you we shall be slaves, and must work!" she faltered, pathetically. "She will come again to us, and if we refuse we are to be put in chains!"

Under the Tyrant's Eye.

NASSINA was watching for the effect of the words upon the British girls, and perhaps she was not displeased to see how their eyes blazed with indignation.

To a woman of her nature, it would be a joy to have refractory captives to deal with. She would know how to break their spirits!

With one of those mocking laughs which Betty and Co. were becoming inured to by now, she glided away, pulling the door shut behind her, and after she had said a few words to the sentinel in the passage, her receding step gave place to deep silence.

"Naomer, deah," Paula now said, in a comforting voice. "My poor geal, we realise that this is a—welly, don't you know, a most distwessing pwedicament! Howevah—"

"Yes, darling, don't cry!" the others pleaded, feeling fit to share Naomer's emotional distress, as they saw the tears coursing down her cheeks.

Poor Naomer!

The girls could remember her as being the very life and soul of the palace at Nakara; but now—alas, was it a wonder if she was overwhelmed with despair? She had good reason for knowing that her present captivity was the fulfilment of a threat that the Sultan of Susahlah had vowed he would fulfil.

"We are to be put to work, are we?" Polly said, when at last they had got her to stave her pathetic tears. "Well, that won't kill us!"

"Bai Jove, no!" agreed Paula, quite brightly. "It will mean a bweath of fwesh air now and then, and that will be a w relief!"

Betty, keeping an arm affectionately about Naomer's shoulders, ventured to ask her:

"What of Rose of the Desert, dear? Is she not to share this dungeon with us?"

"I not know; I think not!" Naomer said sadly. "She come with me part of the way, then Nassina open one other door, and Rose of the Desert is gone!"

"You mean, she has been put in another dungeon?" Madge rejoined. "That's a great misfortune. Well, there; we must make the best of things!"

"Oh, yes, yes!" Naomer exclaimed, and she even managed to raise a feeble smile. "It is now that we—how, you teach me? We keep smiling, yes!"

"Wather, bai Jove!"

Paula was absolutely determined, evidently, to be her old amiable self, full of cheerful affability.

"Work?" beamed the aristocrat of the Fourth

Form at Morocco. "Work, did somebody say? Weal, why not? Nothing degwading in work! Howevah, I twust it will not be work of a weally heavy nature—"

Naomer was standing as if fascinated by the amiable drawings of this extraordinary English schoolgirl. There was something about Paula Crel that Naomer always did find bewildering!

"To my gweat wegwet, deah," the aristocrat explained, "I do not share Polly's remarkable vigour! I am, in fact, a wather fwall oweature, Naomer—extwemely fwall! Howevah, I'll work with gweat pleasure. Only—"

"I wonder what the work will be!" Betty put in, taking the words out of Paula's mouth. The girls were soon to know.

After some hours in the lantern-lit dungeon, during which they had had food and other necessities brought to them by Nassina, that woman came again to the cell, and this time she took her stand in the open doorway, and signed to the prisoners to file out.

They could only obey, although the suspense of not knowing what was intended now was almost too great to be borne.

With Nassina preceding them, they trod the labyrinthine passages, went up more than one flight of stone steps, and so emerged at last into the palace courtyard.

The day was drawing to an end now. All the Moorish style of architecture in which the great palace was fashioned had changed in colour from the dazzling white of the morning sunshine to a rosy glow. It was a most beautiful effect, and if only this had been the palace at Nakara—

Ah, if only this had been the palace of that good and aged monarch, who was Naomer's own grandfather, instead of the stronghold of Susahlah's cruel tyrant!

And now, in the open courtyard, Nassina soon showed the girls what their slave-like task was to be.

On a low wall stood a row of water-pots. Seizing one of the schoolgirls—it happened to be Madge—Nassina hustled her to the earthenware jars, and thrust one of them into the captive's hands.

Then Betty, Polly, and Paula had each to take up a water-pot, whilst Naomer was reserved for another task.

In a remote and shadowy part of the courtyard there was a well of water. Thither the schoolgirl slaves were led, along with Naomer, who was then set to drawing the water with which to fill the pitchers.

Nassina made the girls form into a line after their pots had been filled. They were going to carry them as best they could, but that would not have gratified Nassina's spiteful longing to humiliate these handsome, fair-faced captives.

Again she darted at the foremost girl, and showed her how to carry the water-pot in true Eastern fashion—on the head. And, again, the others had to follow the example set.

Then the gesture was given that meant "March!" and across the spacious courtyard trailed the hapless slaves, to the amusement of numbers of native slaves and other inmates of the palace.

Only too well Betty and Co. understood that the task was devised simply for their humiliation in the eyes of the Sultan's subjects. How it would be chuckled over in the city—the story of the work to which the English captives had been put!

Nor was the Sultan himself without a sight of the hapless girls going to and fro with their water-pots.

There came a moment when Betty, for one, chanced to turn her eyes aside towards the main building; and there, a sinister figure poised upon the flat roof, with the setting sun dying his white raiment a blood red hue, was the tyrant of Susahlah, gazing down upon Nassina's slave-gang—and smiling as he gazed!

Naomer Pleads For Her Schoolgirl Friends.

TO and fro—to and fro!

Backwards and forwards across the paved courtyard dragged the wearied schoolgirls, their arms aching with the fatigue of holding them aloft to keep the water-pots steady upon their heads.

Even Polly—perhaps the strongest girl of the four—felt ready to let her pot go smash to the ground, each time she lifted it from her head, either to get it filled at the well, or to empty it at the other end into the huge marble basin.

As for Paula—

"Oh, my gwacious!" that poor girl fairly gasped, each time her tingling arms managed to relieve her head of its burden. "This is aweadful!"

What added to the aristocrat's distress was the fact that she never quite got the knack of carrying the pots, as did her chums: Paula was on the stagger the whole time she was going across the courtyard, with the water very often stopping over the rim of the pot and streaming down her face! "Stick it, dear!" Betty besought the poor girl, again and again, in a whisper.

"Yes, wather! I won't give in until I dwop—I'm deshed if I will!" was the gasping response. "But, oh, wait till I get to England!"

Her chums had heard her use that phrase before, and they were aware that it seemed to help poor Paula a great deal to be resigned for the present.

Evidently the aristocrat was going to get the whole matter taken up by Parliament, when—ah, but would she ever see England again? That was the question.

Now and then Nassina attended the girls back and forth across the courtyard, mincing proudly along because of the fine spectacle her own special slave-gang made. But most of the time she stayed near the well, deriding poor Naomer, as that girl slaved away at getting the water up.

"Faster, thou!" Nassina commanded sternly. "Ye have done with idle hours in thy grandfather's palace, Naomer Nakara! Ye desired to be taught, and taught thou shalt be—but in no English school!"

With the merciless wardress jeering at her like this, it was rather strange to hear the poor girl suddenly address the woman in a winning way:

"Nassina!"

"Yea?"

"Oh, Nassina!" the hapless girl entreated pathetically, whilst the schoolgirls were going across the yard with their pots, "I am in thy master's hands, I know; a poor prisoner, doomed—"

"Doomed thou art, indeed!" Nassina put in, with a malicious smile.

"But my poor friends from England!" the girl exclaimed. "Must they suffer with me, Nassina? Say thou, what harm have they ever done thy master? Wherefore should he keep them in captivity?"



THE SCHOOLGIRL PRISONERS!

Betty Barton and Co. were led into a large apartment, and thrust forward until they stood face to face with the scowling Sultan.

"Harm, ye ask!" Nassina deigned to answer the suppliant girl. "Are they not thy friends—ones, who came from their own country, to show thy poor fool of a grandsire what manner of friends ye would have in England? That is sufficient!"

"Nay, Nassina! Oh, for myself I dare not ask any pity!" Naomer pleaded on, with a look that might have melted a heart of stone. "I, as the future ruler of Nakara, against whom thy master has always been in enmity, must accept my cruel fate. But my soul is troubled for these others—"

"Ye love them, these fair-faced ones, Naomer?"

"Yea, with all my heart I love them!"

"Then, let this be a thought to ponder, in the dungeon," Nassina rejoined, taking delight in tormenting the girl. "Those ye love are to share every bit of the suffering that is decreed for thee!"

Then Naomer burst into tears.

The sudden flood of grief caused her to let go of the rope by which the water was raised from the well, and the vessel plunged to the bottom with a loud splash.

"Thou dolt!" Nassina stormed at her. "Cease thy weeping, and work, or the lash shall set thy shoulders tingling!"

It was said in the native; all the same, the returning schoolgirls could tell what was being threatened, with such expressive gestures did their captor illustrate the words.

And the blood of Betty and Co. boiled to that extent that, at all costs to themselves, they might have done something to take a little of the swagger out of Nassina, only at that instant a startling thing happened.

Some official in the courtyard sang out an

announcement that caused all eyes to turn to where he stood, just inside the gateway.

The sudden tramp of many feet was heard, and then a party of the Sultan's soldiery marched into the courtyard, with three prisoners in their midst.

All five girl-captives at the well had their gaze drawn to the newcomers upon the scene, and in the self-same instant all five knew who the prisoners were.

Mr. Hamilton and his wife! And there, too, was Miss Redgrave, to make one more helpless slave, no doubt, for the tyrant of Susahlah!

What Does This Thing Mean?

THE chums of Moreove School hardly knew whether to be glad or sorry to see their grown-up friends suddenly brought in, like this, into the Sultan's stronghold.

In the very first instant that recognition took place there was the joyful thought: "They are still alive, then!"

But this was followed in a flash by the tragic misgiving: "Better, perhaps, if they had perished when they were resisting capture, than to have become prisoners as helpless as ourselves—and doomed, perhaps, to an even crueller slavery!"

Nassina did not fail to notice how the schoolgirls yearned to rush at their fellow captives, if only for a handclasp, a single word of commiseration. And once again she aired her pitiless authority.

"Yea, behold them; but never think ye will be allowed speech with them!" she said harshly, addressing the words to Naomer.

"What does she say, dear?" Betty asked anxiously.

"We shall not have talk with our friends, ever!" was the mournful answer. "Alas, the good Mr. Hamilton and his lady! And the Mess Redgrave, who teach me to say 'Ello, present!' How I am sad for them!"

"They have seen us!" Madge murmured, moved almost to tears now that the grown-up prisoners were looking this way. "They, too, I suppose, are thankful to see us alive and well. But, oh, Betty—Polly—Paula, dear—"

"Wait till I get to England!" Paula fumed. "Weally, this is too dreadful!"

Further talk was prevented by Nassina, who now gave a loud call to Naomer to return to the dungeons in company with the schoolgirls. So, in full view of the halted prisoners, who were ringed about by the Sultan's guards, Betty and Co. filed away across the courtyard, set down their empty pitchers on the low wall, and then trailed in through that gloomy doorway which gave admittance to the dungeon steps.

All the glamour of the evening light that had been upon the outer world gave place to what would have been groping darkness, but for the lantern that Nassina carried. Proudly she preceded them down the stone steps, and along those subterranean passages which were so ill-ventilated and dank. In the same passage, out of which the girls' dungeon opened, she gave a special glance to a certain closed door, as she went past it; and those who saw her do this guessed the reason.

Surely this was the other dungeon into which Rose of the Desert had been cast alone!

Each girl in the shuffling line gave a wistful glance to that closed door, noticing that it was similar to their own, with a grating just above it. But only one girl—the last in the line—actually had a glimpse of the lonely captive.

It was Polly who, coming last in the line of weary, shuffling figures, was amazed to see Rose of the Desert's beautiful face suddenly show itself high up there behind the iron grid.

"Rose!" Polly felt she wanted to cry out excitedly; but she desisted—and well for all of them that she did!

For if Nassina had been warned of what was about to take place behind her back at this moment, how differently would all the captives have fared!

But Nassina heard no excited gasp, to make her suspicious, for no sound of that sort was made. Polly shuffled on at the tail end of the line, and all at once she saw Rose of the Desert's hand slip something through the grating, and let it fall.

It came softly down—a folded slip of paper that Polly snatched at in mid-air and held fast. A message!

And what a message of comfort, too, as the five girls realised the moment they were left to themselves in their own dungeon.

Gathering in a ring, with the lantern in their midst, they all scrutinised the unfolded slip of paper which Polly herself was prizing.

Rose of the Desert had become fairly fluent as a speaker of the English tongue, but her attempts to write in that language were always ludicrous. So now the girls saw many letters of the alphabet turned the wrong way, whilst the spelling was startling, to say the least.

But there was the message; and so what matter the form in which it was given?

COURAJ—I HAVE
A PLAN TO ESCAP.

A plan of escape!

The scrap of paper passed from hand to hand, the girls never tiring of gazing at those quaintly-fashioned, yet thrilling words.

"Oh!" Polly breathed excitedly. "Blessings on her head—our own Rose of the Desert!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" Paula agreed heartily. "This—is is extremely gwatifying, geals! The pwofound welief—what? The—the weally, I quite fail to express myself! Howevah

"You say to me, she write truē?" Naomer struck in quaintly.

"You mean, is it possible that Rose of the Desert can mean it? Yes, it is certain that she has a plan!" Betty exclaimed. "She would never raise our hopes like this unless she felt justified!"

"What can the plan be, though?" Madge wondered, with raised brows. "Just think! She is locked away by herself in that other dungeon!"

"It is no use speculating, that's a fact," Polly struck in decisively. "But there it is—a plan of escape! A ray of hope!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove!"

Paula, you duck, I simply must waltz you once round!" exclaimed jubilant Polly, almost off her head with joy. "Come on!"

And whether Paula wanted to or not, she had to let the madcap take her about the waist and dance her round the dungeon—surely as strange a sight as those walls had ever witnessed!

"Oh, I see you so happy; I am happy, too!" Naomer announced quite gaily. "Yes, wuw-wuw-wu-wather!"

"Oh, she's copying your own patent expression, Paula!" chuckled Polly, as they both stopped,

quite out of breath with the romp. "Say it again, Naomer, darling. Yes, wather!"

"How gwatifying it is, geals, to have a bit of the old fwivolity at last!" beamed Paula. "And good weason, too bai Jove! Bwavo, Wose of the Desert! It is my pwofound belief that she will do the twick, and then—Wait till I get to England!"

Polly had not finished letting off steam, so to speak. She was starting a very subdued; "Hip—pip—pip—" when Madge exclaimed: "Sh! Look out!"

And Polly only just had time to become as solemn as an owl, before Nassina re-entered the dungeon.

Even so, the sharp-eyed woman seemed to guess that the girl slaves had found some cause for cheering-up. She darted a suspicious glance at one and another of them, but made no comment.

Suddenly singling out Madge Minden with a pointing finger, she waved that girl to the open doorway.

Madge turned as white as a sheet. It was evident that she only was required to go out of the dungeon. And what did this mean? Separation from her chums? For how long—and for what reason?



A MESSAGE OF HOPE! Madge darted across the floor and grasped Mr. Hamilton by the arm. "Listen!" she panted, "Rose of the Desert has a plan of escape!" And as she spoke in English, their captors had no idea what she said.

In sudden awful dismay she remained motionless, looking to her friends as if to ask them: "What does it mean?" And then Nassina, with a harsh laugh, pounced upon the poor girl, and simply rushed her into the passage.

"Madge!" her chums almost screamed, in their wild anxiety. "No—no! Oh, not that—not that!"

Separation! It was the thing they had dreaded—a special cruelty that had been spared them so far. But now—

With a resounding thud the great door was pulled shut, and then the key grated in the lock. Inside the dim-lit dungeon, those who had been left behind heard sounds, through the grating, that told of Madge's being hustled away by that pitiless wardress—and still the fate that she was going to remain unknown!

The agony of suspense was too much for all of them, and there was a full minute whilst they simply wept floods of tears. And then, as Polly controlled her emotions, and was the first to put away her handkerchief, she came upon the bit of folded paper that was in her dress-pocket.

She filched it out, and there, as good as a friendly voice speaking comfort to the girls in this moment of poignant grief, were the cheering words that Rose of the Desert had written:

COURAGE! I HAVE A PLAN OF ESCAPE!

Madge Minden's Ordeal.

AN hour passed—two hours. And still the girl who had been suddenly taken away was absent from the dungeon.

Then, when her fellow captives had abandoned all hope of seeing her again that night, they heard a sound that brought wild relief.

Nassina's step sounded in the passage, and her low voice gave that password which was spoken to the woman sentinel every time the dungeon was visited.

Nassina came in alone, however, and so the girls' hearts sank again.

She had not brought back Madge!

"Ask her—implore her to tell us, Naomer!" Betty said, in great agitation. "What has become of poor Madge!"

Scant chance did Naomer get, alas, to try and win a word of enlightenment from this stern wardress.

"Tis thee I have come for!" Nassina flashed at Naomer. "Come, and thou thyself will soon know where the other damsel is! As for these, her friends—"

Nassina let her dark eyes mock at Betty and Polly and Paula in their misery, then waved Naomer to the door.

"No, no, I not go—I not go!" that girl cried out in English, and would have rushed to the schoolgirls for protection, but Nassina acted in ruthless fashion, as usual.

Her strong arm seized the trembling girl and pushed her before out of the dungeon, whilst the woman sentinel in the passage was there, to thrust back Betty and shut the door once more.

Naomer, in the passage, cast herself down upon the stone flags, but was dragged to her feet instantly and forced to go on—to what fresh miseries and torments she did not know!

Swiftly she and Nassina emerged upon the palace courtyard, under a star-crammed sky. Keeping a firm grasp of the hapless girl, the implacable woman half-led, half-hustled her along a cloistered side of the square. The architectural glories of the Sultan's stronghold were all around Naomer now—a welcome change from the dark,

bare dungeon. But it meant no relief to her, when she still had to find out why, like Madge, she had been brought away from the rest.

Why—oh, why was it?

Suddenly Nassina halted before a certain door, dealing it a rap with her knuckles. Instantly it was opened by someone on the inner side, and Nassina passed through, taking Naomer with her.

Pretty lanterns of coloured glass were suspended from the chamber roof, and by that effective light the frightened girl saw that the place held at least a dozen other girls. They appeared to be the band of slave-girls who played those quaint kind of mandolines in the palace, and Naomer realised that they were assembled for a sort of evening performance.

Some were standing about, others were taking their ease with true Eastern languor upon rugs and cushions. All were ravishingly beautiful, the flimsy cloth that veiled the lower half of each girl's face only enhancing the loveliness of such features as were visible.

Nassina, the instant she entered the chamber, looked about for someone, and that caused a couple of musicians to push forward a girl who had been shrinking in a corner.

Madge!

There she was—poor Madge, with little of the dread gone from her pallid face that had been there when she was first brought along from the dungeon.

"Now, thou!" Nassina turned to say to Naomer. "Either this English girl is without wits, or she is stubborn! But thou wilt make her understand! When I was in disguise at the palace of Nakara, I heard the gossips say she was a clever musician—yea, most clever! Tell her, then—"

The woman made one of her fierce gestures.

"Tell her that she plays, this evening, before the royal master himself. And thou, Naomer—thou shalt dance to him!"

"I, dance?"

"Yea!" the woman exclaimed. "See, there are the robes. Put them on!"

Naomer, by now, was standing in the centre of the large apartment, with the other slaves withdrawn to its four corners. At the girl's feet lay a bundle of shimmering raiment, and Nassina turned it over with her foot, crying again:

"Put them on!"

"Oh, Nassina!" Naomer burst out, in tearful despair. "I do not dance like the trained ones of our country! I shall be but a mockery!"

"Thou art meant to be a mockery, thou child of Nakara!" was the jeering rejoinder. "Obey, then, and quickly! It will go hard with thee and thy fellow captives—yea, those loved ones of thine!—if ye refuse!"

Thus warned, and still as utterly helpless as ever in this woman's hands, what else could Naomer do but obey?

She was, as a matter of fact, an accomplished dancer, having playfully learned many of the skilful dances which formed such a large part of the entertainment given at her grandfather's palace at Nakara. Poor girl, though, she was nervous and sick at heart, and she could imagine the derisive laughter that her performance was likely to create.

Tremblingly she divested herself of some of her usual native raiment, and then donned the flimsy, shimmering garments which had been provided for her.

Happy-hearted soul that she was by nature, how

she would have laughed merrily if only this had been an innocent prank of hers, in the palace of Nakara! As it was, the tears were pricking her lovely starry eyes, whilst she made the hurried toilette.

"Thou art pretty enough for the part!" Nassina remarked, and smiled to see how this excited jealous looks and murmurs amongst the ordinary slave-girls. "A proud hour for the royal master, truly, when the daughter of a royal enemy is made to dance to him, even as a slave—yea, as a slave!"

Naomer was now ready, and so her stern avenger gave fresh attention to Madge. Snatching up a spare mandoline, the woman thrust it into the girl's hands.

Then the whole company of entertainers quitted the apartment in a sort of procession. The trained musicians, gliding along on the ball of each foot, thrummed at the strings, making a rhythmic tune for all to walk in time with, whilst Madge—

Poor Madge!

She, like Naomer, knew only too well that it would be worse for her if she did not do her best. And yet how her whole heart revolted against the part she had been picked for to-night!

Carrying that water-pot to and from the well in the courtyard was a task a thousand times preferable to this! In any case, she had been with her schoolgirl chums then. Now she was friendless, except for dear Naomer, and even Naomer was not quite the same as a friend of one's own old school in the happy Homeland!

Her thoughts went to Betty, Polly, and Paula, and all the other captives—Miss Redgrave, and Rose of the Desert, and Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton.

What a coup this tyrant of Susahlah had made! What a haul of prisoners! Nor was she without a thought of Morecove School itself, far away in glorious Devon; and of all those friends and mistresses who had envied her and her fellow travellers the "luck" of setting forth upon what had promised to be such a safe pleasure trip!

As for those at her own home, she simply tried not to think of them at all, but the effort was useless, needless to say. She felt she might just as well be going in her own funeral procession at this moment, for all hope there was of home and its loved ones ever being seen again.

And now she and her companions reached that vast apartment of the palace where they were to perform.

It was the throne-room, where she and her friends had been set before the bullying Sultan on the day they were brought in from the desert. It was all lit up now, but deserted, sounds from an adjoining apartment telling of the company that was assembled there—probably at some banquet.

The trained musicians took up their accustomed positions, squatting together upon rugs and cushions to one side of the hall, and amongst them Naomer and Madge had to find places.

To Naomer the squatting pose came quite naturally; but Madge would have seated herself in English fashion, only Nassina would have none of that.

Standing over the girl, who was powerless to refuse, Nassina made her copy the native fashion; knees apart, and feet tucked under the haunches. And in that unaccustomed fashion Madge was posed—with the mandoline laid out upon her lap, for her fingers to strum—when the curtains suddenly rustled apart, and the Sultan and all his retinue swept in from the adjoining chamber.

This evening, as if to celebrate some great occasion, the royal bully was magnificently robed, whilst enormous gems shone and glittered upon his lavish garments. Those who came after him, too, were in their stateliest attire, the general effect being a dazzling one.

It seemed to Madge that the Sultan, and every one of his following, had a special glance for her—a mocking glance, too. All about her sat the slave girls, drawing that low, sweet music from their stringed instruments, and she herself made a show of plucking the strings of her mandoline. But her fingers were too palsied with agitation ever to have kept time with the other players, even if she had known how to play the native melodies.

The glittering monarch joked and laughed with those around him, after he had taken his seat upon the throne; and then suddenly he clapped his hands for silence, and uttered one sharp command.

"The child of my enemy—let her dance!" he called imperiously to Nassina, who flashed about and made a sign to the musicians to commence the dance music, whilst she hissed at poor Naomer:

"Come, thou—dance!"

"I Refuse!"

ONLY too well Madge could imagine what Naomer's feelings were, now that the moment had come.

Impossible to refuse!

For Naomer, as for the other captives, that was the stern reality to which the mind must resign itself now. And so this child, whose parents had been slain in her infancy by hirelings of this very monarch, was bound to submit to the ordeal that had been decreed for her.

Quietly she arose from her place amongst the musicians, and all was silence—except for the measured music—as she stepped to the spot kept clear for her, in front of the throne.

Madge could see how the trembling girl took a grip upon herself, and then those tiny feet made the first few graceful steps of a native dance.

In an instant, however, a scandalous murmur arose, whilst Nassina rushed forward and stopped the girl, hissing a command at her.

Naomer should have prostrated herself at the foot of the steps in front of the throne, before commencing the dance. Nassina's quivering hand pointed to the spot where the girl must now kneel in all humility to the monarch; and Naomer only stood motionless!

No, that was a thing she simply must refuse to do—go upon her knees to this tyrant! Defiance was certain to mean her being dragged to those steps and forced to bow herself there; but go of her own volition she simply would not!

So her flashing eyes said—the pretty eyes of this adorable girl, once so full of mirth, and now even glittering with the spirit that was roused in her.

Madge, like all the rest of the company, saw that defiant look, and in that moment she loved and admired the ill-fated girl more than ever.

Ah, if only one could jump up and rush to her side, with the hope of helping her to withstand this tyrannous treatment, this cruel humiliation! Impossible, though—worse than useless to yield to any such desperate impulse!

"Ye refuse?" was the cry that Madge guessed Nassina was hissing at Naomer.

"Yea—yea, I do refuse! He slew my father, that monster there—"

The girl's passionate outburst got no further. Nassina seized her, and dragged her towards the throne steps; but it was only a senseless form that finally collapsed before the glowering Sultan and his retinue. Naomer had fainted, and so, for this one occasion at least, the royal bully was to be denied the servile cringings that his vanity demanded!

The music was stopped, and, amidst a babel of talk, Nassina had to take up the unconscious girl and carry her away. In a few moments the great curtains had swished back into position, and then the Sultan held some sullen talk with those around him, causing the rest of the company to stay their whisperings. He was in angry mood now.

Another royal command was given, and Madge's heart seemed to turn right over, for she fully expected that the order had something to do with her. But no; attendants went out, and it was obvious that they had been sent to fetch—one of the other captives, perhaps?

Herself almost swooning with suspense, Madge waited and watched with all the rest in the hall—the only unit in the great assemblage who was not a native of this barbaric country. The musicians were talking in whispers, but that was all so much gibberish to Madge, the musician of the Fourth Form at Morcove.

Then, with startling suddenness, those high curtains were flashed apart again, and the attendants came tramping in, bringing with them a bound prisoner, at sight of whom Madge almost cried aloud in anguish.

“To-morrow—to-morrow——”

It was Mr. Hamilton who had been brought in like this, and with his arms tied behind him. Some man of the Sultan's, who seemed to be a sort of captain of the guard, marched towards the throne, whilst the other swarthy fellows stayed at the lower end of the hall. Thus all present had a clear view of the Britisher, whilst he himself could take note of the throng around him.

He did so, and in an instant his gaze was upon Madge.

His white face twitched with the anguish that it meant to him to see her set amongst the slave girls, and never in her life had the girl, for her part, tried so hard to speak with her eyes.

“Don't grieve for us; you did your best, and this could not be helped!” was what she sought to tell the splendid fellow, by a mere momentary meeting of his direct glance. “Oh, we know how you would give your life to save us, if only you could!”

And perhaps a message as comforting as that was telegraphed to him by the girl's eloquent eyes, for she saw him straighten up, as if his spirit had been revived, whilst his one guard marched him on to the foot of the dais.

The Sultan seemed to rock upon his throne with the excitement of this moment—the moment when he could rest his baleful gaze upon a white prisoner, and that prisoner one upon whom he could heap insults and threats.

“Aha!” the bully laughed at Hamilton. “Ye do not enjoy the position ye held at the palace of Nakara! Ye were the reformer, there; one to teach that old enemy of mine—the peaceful ways of Britain! Here, thou art a prisoner—and here we still treat prisoners as our fathers did before us!”

Hamilton did not answer. On the other hand,

he did not quail, as the tyrant had hoped to see him do.

“What shall I have done to thee?” the Sultan resumed, exultingly.

Then Hamilton spoke, his calm voice causing a sensation in the assemblage.

“You will doubtless do as brutality dictates,” he said. “But I give you this warning; for whatever is done to me and the other prisoners, my country will exact heavy penalties. It will cost you your throne in the end!”

“Thou liest, for none beyond the seas will ever know!” the Sultan blazed out. “Remember; ye and your fellow captives were taken prisoners by my trusty spies in the mountains of Susahlah. That ye were brought hither to my palace no man can ever report to Nakara's ruler, for no man knows!”

“Very well, you will see,” was the English equivalent of Hamilton's shrugged answer.

It was a spirited remark that left the Sultan convulsed with rage. For a few seconds he mouthed incoherences at the Britisher, and then, finding satisfaction in the thought of how utterly at his mercy the captive was, he gave the signal for him to be removed.

It was a moment when a sudden daring idea flashed upon Madge's mind.

Mr. Hamilton must never be left to go back to his dungeon without a word of comfort!

After all, comfort of a sort had been granted her and her chums—the comfort of that strange message from Rose of the Desert. Then let it be passed on, somehow, to this other hapless prisoner!

Such were the thoughts that were in Madge's mind, causing an impulse which she instantly yielded to.

As Hamilton was being led past where she was sitting amongst the musicians, she suddenly leapt to her feet and ran to the Britisher before anybody could deter her.

As if her one crazy impulse was to fling her arms about his neck and burst into tears of distress, she did actually bring her hands to rest upon his broad shoulders. But the joyful thought was with her: no one would know the meaning of the words she meant to cry out, except the Britisher, for whose ears alone they were intended.

“Listen—quick!” she panted at him, with the guard and Nassina already starting to drag her and Hamilton apart. “There is hope for us! Rose of the Desert has a plan—a plan of escape!”

“Rose!—a plan?” he jerked out excitedly.

“Yes—oh, yes! Patience, then, and we girls will try to——”

Madge was silenced by being shaken violently by Nassina; but the thing was done!

Enough had been said to give Hamilton a bit of hope to cling to. And, for all Madge knew to the contrary, he might even be able to pass it on to his wife and Miss Redgrave.

She saw him no more, for whilst the tall guards closed in around him, she herself was hustled away by Nassina. The next Madge knew she was in the open-air, getting another brief glimpse of the African sky and all its myriad stars, before the dungeon passages received her once more.

And so, ending the whole cruel ordeal through which she had passed, the dungeon's own walls were soon around her once again, and Betty and the others were hugging her as if she had come back from the grave.

Naomer was there, recovered from her heavy

swoon, and in her broken English she had already told the anxious trio what was happening to Madge.

"To think of your being put amongst those native slave girls!" Polly exclaimed, indignantly. "Shame! Shame!"

"Bai Jove, wait till I get to England—only wait!" chimed in Paula. "There will be a wow about all this!"

"I don't want to talk about it!" sighed Madge. "Only, there's one thing I must tell you—I have managed to pass the word to Mr. Hamilton that Rose of the Desert has a plan—"

"What? Oh, good—good!" burst out Polly; and she hugged Madge again.

"Splendid!" agreed Betty. "It may be that he will even be able to pass the hopeful news on to the others! Confess, Madge, dear; you are not sorry you were put to that bit of humiliation, when it meant the chance of saving one other captive at least from awful despair?"

"Of course she isn't!" exclaimed Polly, with some of the boisterousness of the old days in

Susahlah! And yet, there had been that impressive message from Rose of the Desert, bidding them keep up heart, because she had a plan that promised deliverance for them all!

The girls had lapsed into a thoughtful silence when Nassina suddenly visited them again—evidently for the last time to-night, for she ordered them to get to sleep without further talk.

Taking her stand just inside the doorway, she remained a gloating onlooker on what little the girls could do to ensure the rest they needed. Beds there were none, needless to say. But all round the dungeon walls there ran a large stone ledge, and there the unhappy captives spread the rugs.

That done, it was simply a case of "getting down to it" without any undressing.

But when Nassina had again departed, doubtless satisfied that her charges would fall asleep in a few moments—so worn out must they be—Betty and Co. might have been seen to come off the stone ledge and kneel to say their prayers, just



ALIVE, BUT PRISONERS! Hearing the shouts of the mob beyond the gate, Betty Barton and Co. turned round, and there beheld Mr. Hamilton, his wife, and Miss Redgrave, being led into the courtyard by a company of the Sultan's picked troops.

Study 12. "I only hope I'm put to scrubbing a passage—if they ever do scrub anything in this part of the world! Any task for me, anyhow, if it can mean a chance to whisper with the Hamiltons and Miss Redgrave now and then!"

There came a sudden wistful sigh from Betty.

"If only we could get a whispered word with Rose of the Desert, to know what her plan is!" she exclaimed softly. "Strange! I can't help puzzling my brains with the problem—how can Rose of the Desert have hit upon a plan of escape?"

How, indeed! Here were Betty and Co. and Naomer, locked away in this big dungeon, and forced to think of Rose of the Desert as in solitary confinement in a cell hard by, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Redgrave—where were they imprisoned?

Had any prisoner at any time, even with only his or her freedom to think of, managed to win through to liberty from these dungeons of

as they had never omitted to say them in the old Fourth Form dormitory at Morcove.

Naomer had performed her devotions at a different time and in a different way, and she now kept very quiet; nor did she offer any comment when her fellow captives were getting back on to the stone bench.

Then, with no sound from the outer world reaching them in that underground prison, the girls whispered one another good-night, and closed their eyes, longing for the merciful relief that sleep would bring.

Thus the end of the first day's captivity within the walls of the Sultan's stronghold!

Soon enough another day would be here, with only humiliation and cruelty for their lot—only that, except the precious hope which Rose of the Desert had given them, when she wrote:

COURAGE! I HAVE A PLAN OF ESCAPE!

Courage had Betty and Co. shown when they

laid themselves down to rest in that dim-lit dungeon, without letting a single tear wet their lashes. They were soon fast asleep, dreaming of the freedom of the Homeland, it may be, and of the old happy days at Morcove School. Peacefully they slumbered on, at any rate, the hours passing with never a movement of those weary forms to break the awful stillness of the dungeon.

Towards morning, however, Naomer suddenly turned over in her sleep, and then awoke, sighing sadly.

For awhile she lay in the same place that had been her resting spot all through the night; but at last she, poor girl, could stand the great silence and the feeling of loneliness no longer.

So, very softly, she got on that part of the stone ledge, and glided to where one of the girls was sleeping. She did not know which English friend of hers it was, nor did she care. Naomer loved them all!

She found there was room for her to snuggle down close to this other girl, and as stealthily as ever she curled herself there.

Ere another moment had sped, the voice of Betty Barton was asking softly:

"Is that you, Naomer, darling? Oh, my poor, dear Naomer; yes, keep close to me, if it comforts you!"

"I sorry I wake you, Betty!" the other girl whimpered regretfully. "But you not angry? You know I so love all my kind English friends! Without them I would die!"

Then Betty's arm went about that pathetic little figure, and Naomer slept again, comforted indeed.

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

(Rose of the Desert has raised high hopes in the hearts of the captors. What can her plan of escape be? Like Betty Barton and Co., we can only exercise our patience and wait for the great moment to arrive when it is safe to put her plan into action. Whether it leads to success or failure, you can be certain that next week's splendid story in this series, entitled

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