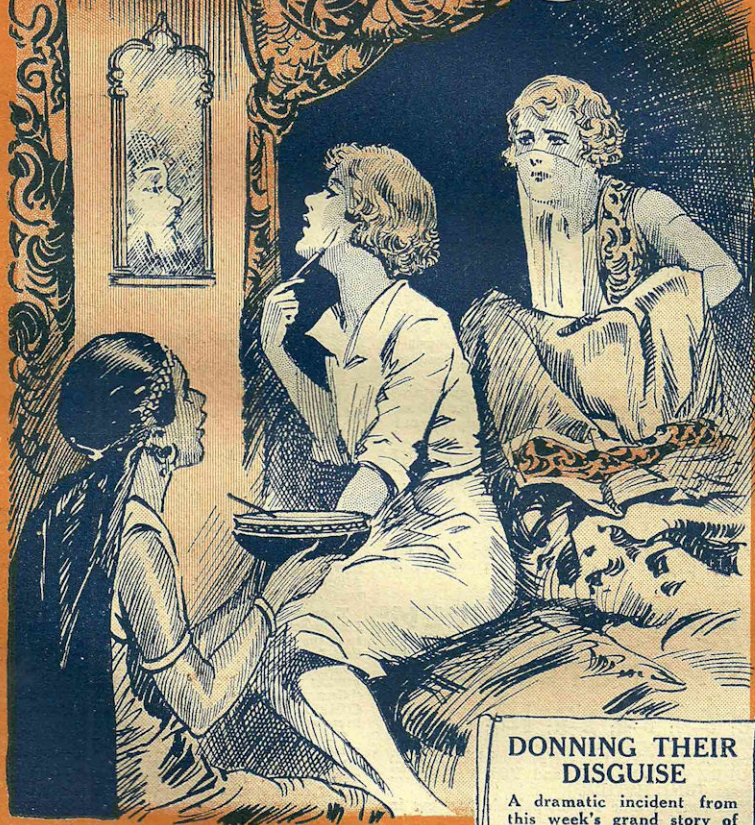


"HER DANCE OF DECEPTION" Grand Complete Story in This Issue

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



## DONNING THEIR DISGUISE

A dramatic incident from this week's grand story of Betty Barton and Co. on Holiday.

No. 759. Vol. 30.  
Week ending  
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EVERY TUESDAY.

Sparkling Complete Story of DODO WREN Inside

Sold as Slaves by Order of the Sultan, Betty Barton and Polly Linton Quickly Prove That They're Still "True Blue"



# THE SCHOOLGIRL SLAVES

Prisoners Both

"YOU awake, Polly?"  
 "Yes, Betty. Daylight again!"  
 "Yet I don't hear a sound."

Of that dawnlight which had suddenly put the stars to flight, only the merest glimmer reached these two girls, where they had passed the summer night in a bare, stone-walled chamber.

Prison-like, the place had but one small window, set high above the stone floor, with massive iron bars.

Down from this barred window came a little of the daylight which was strengthening so rapidly. Kneeling up on the bits of matting which had been thrown down for them as bedding overnight, the two girls held their faces raised to the high window. The light, such as it was, came down to them, making them look very wan.

And no wonder! No wonder there was little colour in the cheeks of either Betty Barton or Polly Linton, in such a place as this!

A prison it was—this vast and ancient building to which they had been brought, towards sunset last evening.

Along tortuous passages they had been conducted, to have the door of this chamber unbolted for them—and to see its grim interior for the first time by the crimson sunset light.

One of the dungeons in the prison of Susahlah—

Morcover Meets Hardship With a Smile in This Grand Holiday Story

By MARJORIE STANTON

and who could say how many hapless souls in the last thousand years and more had languished here!

Asleep and dreaming, could these two girls have had a wilder, more nightmarish dream than this? That they, a couple of British schoolgirls on the roll of famous Morcover School, were captives whose fate was soon to be decided by the mere whim of a tyrant!

But they were awake, and that was the grim reality which they had to face, now that another day had come.

"How do you feel, Polly?"  
 "Oh, not too bad! I was so utterly dead-beat, I soon went off—"

"So did I; and the sleep has done me good. Wonderful thing, sleep!" Betty murmured.

"In fact—almost a pity to wake up? Oh, but I'm not going to talk like that, Betty, even alone with you. As for when they come here—as I

suppose they will soon be coming now—they shan't catch me looking whacked! They just shan't!"

"That's the stuff," Betty nodded. Her own stoicism did not take the same form as Polly's; but it was just as great.

Polly had stamped to emphasise her plucky resolve, just then; it was that stamp of the foot with which she so often shook the floor of Study 12 at Morcove. As for Betty, hers was the less impassioned manner which enabled her to handle, term-time, all the problems and perplexities of the Form-captaincy—without getting ruffled.

"So long as they don't part us, Polly, we shall be all right! Somehow," Betty asserted stoutly, "I feel sure of that. After all, we're British, and the brute of a sultan must think twice about what he orders to be done to us."

Polly nodded.

"We two, Betty—a pair, anyhow! And, as things have gone, there's some comfort in that, isn't there? If Pam and Bunny and Naomer had not managed to get away, on the other side of those mountains—no, it wouldn't have been any better for us; I mean, to have them with us now. It's much better to know that they did get away, anyhow."

"And must have got clean away, too," Betty carried on the resolutely cheerful talk. "They were not recaptured—we can be sure of that. Polly, if they have managed to get to Nakara, then help for us must soon come! Sixty miles away, didn't we reckon yesterday? Forty or so from where they did the getaway—only forty, and Pam had that horse."

"Yep! Goodness knows how Bunny and Naomer got on, with their stolen camel," Polly grimaced. "But Pam, anyway, is such a splendid rider, and her horse was a beauty. If anybody could do it, Pam could!"

"We'll go on hoping that all three of them are safe, at any rate," Betty said fervently. "And now—hark! That sounds like someone coming!"

A dull clang, as of an iron gate being flung round against a passage wall, somewhere in the gloomy building, had sounded just then. It was followed by a jingling of keys, carried by somebody coming otherwise silently along a passage.

Betty and Polly looked at each other. It did not mean failing nerve on the part of either girl, that they exchanged glances like this. What it did mean was a mute: "Now to show them the stuff we are made of—"

Crash, some huge and rusty key was slammed into the primitive lock of the dungeon door. The hasp squeaked over, a bar was banged clear of its fastening, and then the door opened inwards.

In the doorway stood a black-garbed woman, about whose waist ran a leathern girdle, securing a bunch of keys on its chain. The solemn black robe that she wore was brought up to hood her head, so that she had a terrible appearance of being in a shroud. The lower half of her face was veiled, and Betty and Polly saw only the sunken eyes and wrinkled forehead of this gaoleress—one who was obviously old. Her hands were inside the loose folds of her dress.

She did not enter, but remained just by the doorway, whilst a quite young woman came in and strode towards the two schoolgirls, a mocking light in her dark eyes.

With this second woman the girl captives had become quite familiar now. They even knew her name—Nassona. She was one of two young women who had been charged to look after the captives, during nights and days of journeying across the desert.

Suddenly Nassona gestured to the old woman

to come forward. She did so, and as she walked the folds of her dress opened, to reveal her hands—and clutched in them was something the sight of which made the girls' hearts sink.

It seemed to be a set of fetters which had been brought in. The short chain was formed of long links, and at each end there was a primitive sort of padlock.

The dungeon walls had iron rings here and there, and the first appalling belief of Betty and Polly was that they themselves were now to be chained up.

But in a few moments they realised that the intention was simply to chain them together. Bad enough! At least, however, it meant that they were not to be separated.

The woman who had fetched the fetters did all the work of putting them to use. She first passed the chain around Betty's waist, securing it there by one of the padlocks, and then carried it on to girdle Polly in similar fashion.

The fastening of the second padlock snapped shut, and there the chums were—chained together, with so few intervening links between them that they could never be more than a yard or so apart.

Nassona laughed as the gaoleress finished her grim task and stood away from the victims. Then, by imperious gestures, she signed to them to pass out of the dungeon.

Where they were to be taken now they could not even surmise. What was to be done with them—how could they even guess? Yet so intolerable had the last few minutes been, in that awful cell, there was an initial sense of relief at being marched away.

Then, inevitably, that relief quickly changed to the vague dread of something worse to come.

Chained together now! At every step, as they followed Nassona along lofty, gloomy passages, with the old woman in black shuffling behind, the links of the slack chain running from the waist of one girl to the other's jungled and clinked.

They could not be sure, but it seemed to Betty and Polly they were being taken along passages, and up two or three steps here, to go down two or three steps there, which they had trod yesterday evening. If so, then it looked as if they were going to be taken out of the prison now.

But at last, for Betty and Polly at any rate, the gloom and the solitude of the sultan's prison were left behind.

Nassona had brought them out into a stone-paved courtyard, into which the sunlight was already beating fiercely. Swarthy guards of a negroid blackness were posted here and there. Long-barrelled rifles helped to give these ruffianly fellows an air of swagger.

For a couple of minutes Betty and Polly were kept at a standstill, whilst the falling in of a batch of the armed guards, to serve as an escort, went on to the accompaniment of much joking and laughter.

Then the fifteen-foot-high gates, spiked along the tops of them, were unbarred and opened.

Instantly Betty and Polly came in for yells of execration from a crowd that was hanging about, just beyond the gateway.

Several of the armed guards went out to make the mob split apart, and slowly, whilst the uproar still continued, a passage way was secured.

Nassona put herself in front of the chained-together captives and began her own proud walk towards the gateway, knowing that Betty and Polly must follow—for the escort was close behind them.

Out by the wide gateway they went, to have that parted crowd deafening them with its still louder jeering and yelling. Every face a cruel face! Every voice charged with intense ferocity! And why? What harm had these British girls ever done to anyone belonging to this stronghold of barbarism to which Fate had brought them?

The noisy mob fell in behind, whilst scores of other sightseers came running to line the way. Betty and Polly found themselves being marched through the very heart of the city—if city it could be called. In spite of the attendant throng, the two girls were bound to get some impression of the place, and they realised that it was sickeningly primitive. The dwellings were mud-walled hovels. In one place, where a fire had raged, people were living in rags of tents reared over the rubbish left by the fire.

And yet, suddenly, amidst all this squalor, the sultan's own palace was to be seen. A spreading building surrounded by walls of a great height, it was the only place, apart from the prison, that had any claim to importance.

Prison and palace—and all the rest only a human ant-heap. That was Susahlah's capital—

With the gateway in the outer wall of the palace being opened before them, Betty and Polly sidelonged each other.

For now they knew what the next thing was to be.

They were to stand before the sultan, that he himself might first exult over such a rare pair of captives and then—decide their fate!

#### The Sultan Speaks!

**A**FTER the wild din of the crowded streets, how silent the palace seemed at first!

Betty and Polly, waiting with Nassona in a stuffy ante-chamber, heard only a purring voice now and then and some intermittent music, faint and lute-like.

Such talk as came in to them was, they guessed, that of idle attendants with little else to do but gossip. And the music—they could imagine that to be the fitful playing of lutes by slave girls, cushioned here and there in airless alcoves.

Suddenly they heard a loud voice, and whilst it spoke there came a piercing shriek as from someone in crazy despair over what was being said.

But if that piteous cry had been wrung from man or woman receiving sentence of punishment at the hands of the human monster who ruled Susahlah, it must have failed to shake him.

From that vast audience-hall where, apparently, he was dealing with current matters that offered an outlet for his savage mood, the harsh voice came louder than ever to Betty and Polly, overriding all other sounds.

Then they heard him going off into fat laughter, whilst some music was started in the hall itself—to drown, no doubt, the last despairing moans of some hapless creature who was now being dragged away.

A few moments more, and then Nassona signed to her two charges that their turn had come. She held aside a curtain which hung across the entrance to the ante-room, and they passed out before her.

There was a short, marble-floored passage for them to traverse, and then, between massive columns which replaced the wall upon their left, they saw the whole audience-hall and the sultan himself, seated upon a divan.

So few sounds, apart from the tyrant's recent shouting, had come from this part of the palace, that Betty and Polly had supposed him to be almost alone. But the place was thronged.

In the foreground crowded those who seemed to have come in out of the streets. Whether as petitioners for favours or as mere sightseers, there they were, in violent contrast with all those whose duties placed them just below, and on either side of the divan.

Guards with golden scabbards for their swords were to be seen, and girl musicians, their gossamer raiment all bespangled, sat all together, orchestra-like, on a berugged dais.

All this and much else Betty and Polly were bound to take in, even though they felt



Scornfully Nassona rejected the young woman's offer to buy Betty and Polly. The chums felt their hopes fading. They had liked the look of the stranger and had shrewdly suspected that Nassona thought she would be too kind a mistress for them.

themselves to have been brought here only to be doomed—perhaps to die before the day was ended!

Nassona passed them more to the front, and there they came under the eye of the sultan as he sat there amongst heaped cushions.

He was listening to some young woman who had been allowed to stand forward to have word with him. Whatever her case might be, it did not appear to be holding the sultan's interest. He was scarce heeding the fawning voice, and suddenly he impatiently checked her.

But, for once, he was not minded to indulge his fondness for bullying. On the contrary, he spoke as if the young woman could go her way in peace, assured of his goodwill. She made obeisance and began some grateful murmuring; but he altogether ignored her now, looking towards Nassona and the white captives.

So, in another moment, the young woman who had been a successful suppliant bowed herself away from the petty monarch. Nassona was now waving on Betty and Polly. Advancing, they passed the young woman as she came gliding away. And then—

The shock for both girls that it was, to find that here at last was someone native to the desert country whose heart surely beat for them in pity!

Eyes as dark and lovely as were Nassona's conferred the swiftest glance in passing; but Nassona's had never been anything but a glance promising cruelty, whilst these eyes seemed to promise—*loving aid!*

**B**UT she, so mysterious in her bestowal of that secret friendly glance, was gone by them both instantly.

Nor was this either time or place for any looking round, to see what became of her.

Betty and Polly were even now standing where she had stood but a few seconds ago—in front of the divan, directly under the sultan's eye.

Desperately both girls strove to stand steady, and even spiritedly erect, whilst enduring a scrutiny that was openly unfriendly. Nassona was not to be the only person to speak about them. Of a sudden others were at hand—men whom Betty and Polly recognised as being members of the camel-party which had brought them to Susahlah.

One and another of these men spoke, in addition to Nassona, and by the very tone of each successive voice the poor girls could tell how accusation was being heaped upon accusation.

The sultan was interested—keenly. He asked questions, drawing answers that obviously ministered to his fanatic hatred of all foreigners. From Nassona he obtained a supplementary statement which evidently stressed the unbroken spirit of the two girls—the trouble which she in particular had had with them.

At last he gave the nodded equivalent of "Enough!" His own violent voice began what must have been a boastful, jocular speech, holding up to scorn the country to which the white girls belonged. When he laughed, he laughed as one who was secure in his own might. His fat cheeks wobbled as he gabbled. After alternating for a time between utterances and chuckled boasts, he finally went off into a great rage which fetched him to his feet, so that he might tower before the girl captives whilst proclaiming his will in regard to them. Pointing towards them, he spoke a few more words in a raving manner.

Then came a finishing shout, a gesture waving them out of his sight, and instantly Nassona

pounced upon Betty, the nearer prisoner, and started to drag her away.

The chain linking the girls together tautened, and Polly was almost pulled off her balance. Recovering herself as quickly as possible, she stumbled after her hustled chum. They went out of the audience-chamber with Nassona, jeered at and laughed about by all.

Some of the people followed, and suddenly both girls saw again that young woman who, just now, had given them such a meaning look.

Only for an instant was her half-veiled face observable in the surging throng. She seemed to let herself sink out of sight to Betty and Polly; but then she was frail as compared with others in the crowd, and she had perhaps been swept off her feet.

Would they see her again? That was the question agitating their minds whilst being led away—out by the palace gateway into the open town, yet not, it seemed, to be taken back to the prison.

Along different alleyways Betty and Polly were now conducted, but the same crowds as before flocked around.

The heat, the buzzing flies, the yelling mob again—above all, the dreadful certainty that something was going to be done to them in public—it all combined to bring the two girls to the verge of despair.

Perhaps it was no more than a few hundred yards, but they seemed to be taken on and on for a great distance before the vile byways of the town gave way to an open place, where mules and goats were tied, and fowls stood exposed for sale in coops.

The market-place! And here, at the bidding of her whom they were powerless to defy, they had to take their stand, close to one of the posts for tying beasts, so that it could be used to tether them.

They knew their fate at last. That final outburst of the sultan's, gibberish to them at the time, must have meant nothing else but this.

"To the market with them both!" had been his savage decree. "And there let them be sold as slaves!"

#### Sold!

**Y**OKED together by a chain, the ends of which secured them to a post, Betty and Polly stood under the burning sun in the market-place.

The helplessness of their situation reduced them to silence. They could do nothing—they had no hope—and so they just stared in front of them with lack-lustre eyes, indifferent to the jeering crowd that gathered about them.

Nassona lolled near, interviewing the various would-be purchasers of the captives. She was evidently sticking out for a very high price. Time and again potential buyers engaged her in animated haggling, but in every case Nassona would have none of their offers.

And these potential buyers! Betty and Polly shuddered as each one approached; felt sick with dread as the bargaining proceeded; gave a sigh of relief when the customers departed—a relief only tampered with fear that the next one might be even worse.

Suddenly Betty saw Polly's drooping head rise, and heard a faint sound issue from her parched lips. Nassona, at the moment, was dismissing a client with some final mocking comment which invariably closes an unsuccessful business deal

in the East, and Betty, taking advantage of this, exchanged glances with her chum.

Polly nodded her head swiftly in front of her. Betty looked, and a new-born hope came to her.

Strolling towards them was that young native woman—the one person in this dread city that had seemed to pity them.

She did not appear to be glancing at them, but both girls had the intuition that they were her objective. They were convinced that she was acting a part, although outwardly so casual and apparently disinterested.

"If only she would buy us!" was Betty and Polly's unspoken hope.

The young woman stood for a moment examining the purchases she carried in the long, shallow basket. Then, gliding up to where Nassona stood, addressed some remark to her.

Betty and Polly quivered with excitement. They heard Nassona give a shrill laugh of derision, accompanied by vigorous shaking of the head. But the other quietly persisted, with every now and then a glance towards Betty and Polly. "She is trying to buy us!" muttered the captives.

Yet they dared not appear interested. If by so much as a look or a sign they betrayed their hopes, the cruel Nassona would break off all negotiations.

In the meanwhile quite a crowd had gathered listening to the argument between Nassona and her customer, now waxing fast and furious. At length the customer produced money. Nassona laughed at the sum shown. A further handful of coins jingled. Again Nassona rejected the offer with scorn. Her voice rose in shrill, insulting derision—a sign that she was standing out for a much higher price than the other could hope to pay.

Betty and Polly exchanged despairing glances. Nassona was not to be tempted by any amount so far as this purchaser was concerned.

Finally the young woman took a ring from her finger. It flashed for a second in the dazzling sunlight—Nassona eyed it—but was not to be tempted. With a gesture she waved it from her, and turned away to signify "Nothing doing."

Whereat, the young woman, picking up her basket, drifted into the crowd and was quickly lost to sight.

"Our last hope gone," gritted Betty to herself. She dared not look at Polly. She felt that the sight of her chum's face would have been too much for her.

How Nassona would gloat over any sign of emotion on the part of the captives! No, thought Betty, she must keep all feelings in check—must keep up an outward show of silent defiance at all costs.

And then there came into view about the stoutest woman Betty and Polly had ever seen. She was evidently someone of importance, for the crowd parted left and right as she ambled forward. Behind her, holding a huge umbrella-like contraption over her mistress, walked a young girl.

No sooner did Nassona see the newcomer than she dragged a stool forward, and with a low bow placed it for the stout woman to sit on, at the same time murmuring servile words of greeting. The stout woman subsided with a grunt, and then peered through her little pig-like eyes at Betty and Polly.

Nassona at once broke into a long speech concerning the captives, finally concluding by dragging them forward for the stout woman's closer inspection.

For a while she peered at them frowningly. Then, to their astonishment, the stout woman addressed them in broken English.

"White girls," she cackled mockingly. "White girls—good for slaves—do plenty much work when beaten— Ehhhhhh!"

And, breaking into mirthless laughter, she jerked her head round on Nassona and babbled a string of words in her native tongue.

Nassona listened with fawning agreement, all the while shooting malicious and triumphant glances at Betty and Polly, as if to say:

"This is the sort of mistress I wanted for you." Polly set her lips, and then in a voice strangely unlike her own addressed the stout woman.

"We're British," she jerked out. "D'you understand—British—"

"Breetesh!" echoed the stout woman. "I know Breetesh—meet plenty Breetesh one time. They kill my people—oh, yes! Plenty kill 'em. I no forget Breetesh—"

She leered vindictively, her body swaying to and fro, as she glanced at the daughters of the enemy race. Then with a motion to Nassona to assist her, she rose to her feet. She issued a swift order, and Nassona, grabbing at the end of rope that bound Betty and Polly, started to pull them along.

"The worst has happened, Polly," muttered Betty.

"I know—I know!" gasped Polly. "She belongs to one of those tribes our people have fought. She means to take it out of us—and she'll do it, too. Oh, if only that other one had bought us—"

"Sh! Not so loud," warned Betty. "That other one may yet save us. Cling to the thought of her—she's our only hope."

Even as Betty whispered this she suddenly caught sight of someone in the crowd that she was almost certain was the young woman herself. Only for a second did she stand out of the throng before being swallowed up in the eager multitude that pressed round to view the little prisoner.

In and out of the narrow streets they passed until presently they halted in front of a dwelling that was more imposing than the others. Two armed men stood on guard at the entrance, and they lifted their spears in a rough form of salute to the stout woman.

Inside they went, and how thankful Betty and Polly were at last to get into the cool gloom.

"Now, Breetesh girls," mumbled the stout woman, "you do much work—oh, much work—Natisha!" She turned to the little slave girl who had borne the umbrella and spoke to her in Susahlahn. After which she added: "This will help work—"

"This" was a long, cruel-looking whip that hung on the wall. The fat woman took it down and switched it with an expert hand.

"Eet ces good for Breetesh," she nodded ominously.

For a second it looked as if she was going to apply the whip, and Betty and Polly stiffened to meet the castigation. But the woman replaced it on the wall and waved to them to depart.

Following the young girl, the captives were led down a winding passage until they reached a long, low apartment which turned out to be the kitchen.

An aged, beetled-browed, hook-nosed woman was there, and directly she spotted them shrieked out an order, at the same time gesticulating towards a huge collection of earthenware jugs and basins.

"She means clean them," muttered Betty.

"I suppose that's the idea," returned Polly faintly, "and as that means water, I'm all in favour of it. Water! I could drink a cistern dry!"

A small yard at the back contained a well, and at this Polly and Betty drank deeply before they started to cart the utensils out. The little slave girl hung around, but made no effort to come near them. But all the while she peered at the two white girls as if they were some strange animals that had come her way for the first time.

For over an hour Betty and Polly toiled, with the beaked-nosed old woman keeping an eye on them through the slit of a window. Whenever they paused, her thin, cracked voice rose shrill in protest.

"I'd like to hurl one of these jugs at her," grunted Polly. "The old Guy Fawkes!"

"She's not as bad as the fat woman," returned Betty with a slight shudder. "She gives me the creeps, and I don't mind owning it. She's got her knife into our people—I know she's just longing to use that whip."

"If she does—" began Polly defiantly. But she broke off with a helpless gesture. "Can't stop her, can we?" she mumbled. "We shall just have to grin and bear it, Betty. We're—we're—slaves. My word—if we were only back at dear old Morcove!"

Presently the beaked-nosed dame tottered into some further room, and Betty and Polly took the opportunity to snatch a moment's much needed rest. A footstep, however, coming to their ears sent them scuttling back to their task. They looked up, and in the doorway saw Natisha, the little slave girl.

"Is that kid spying on us?" grunted Polly.

"Very likely," shrugged Betty. "Still, she's by far the nicest thing they have about here. I'll try the effect of a smile on her—that is, if I can remember how you do a smile."

"If you talk like that, old thing, I shall howl," mumbled Polly.

As it happened, however, there was no need for Betty to start friendly overtures. Natisha suddenly stole up to them, and, picking up a dish, whispered in a tense, low tone:

"I spik your tongue—I am from Nakara—We 'elp each ozer. Shush-h-h—I pretend to strike you becase you do not work—"

And with this Natisha, in perfect pantomime, fetched Betty and Polly a most realistic imaginary box on the ears, to the vast approval of the beaked-nosed old woman, who peered out at this very moment.

"Oh—oh—tee-hee!" cackled her laughter. "It is good, Natisha, that the white girls learn their lesson," she added in Susahlahn. "I speak well of you to the Gracious One."

"Rather give me of thy store of dates, Zozo," replied the little slave girl, with a laugh, "so that I can eat them in front of these lazy ones."

"The dates it shall be," nodded the other.

But directly she had gone to get them Natisha turned to Betty and Polly.

"She go to get me dates," she whispered. "But eet ces for you—" She went through the motion of eating. "When she does not look I give zem you. Savvy?"

"Natisha—you're a sport!" breathed Polly.

#### An Uncertain Refugee

THE first weary day of serfdom drew slowly to a close. Not until the Eastern twilight suddenly descended did Betty and Polly cease their toil.

With an apology for a meal—some dry bread, a little fruit and a pitcher of water—they were thrust into a cell-like chamber, the key grated in the lock, and they were left in complete darkness.

But strangely enough the spirit of hope was not absent from either of the girls. There was the memory of that young native woman to hearten them; also the friendly little Natisha, who had hinted that they could help one another.

"She evidently wants to get away from here as much as we do," whispered Betty.

"That's true," nodded Polly. "She's probably been planning an escape for a long time, but hadn't the courage to manage it on her own. But with us to help her—" Polly grinned ruefully. "Fat lot of good, though, our help's likely to be."

"You never know," muttered Betty sagely. "Companions may give her confidence. Besides, there're our friends at Nakara. They're not being idle. I bet Mr. Willoughby's well on the warpath. To-morrow—all sorts of things may happen."

Thoroughly worn out with fatigue, they shortly fell asleep, and slumbered soundly until the key grating in the lock, the following morning, stirred them to wakefulness.

On the threshold stood Natisha.

She raised a warning hand. "We have friend in city," she whispered. "I tell you not her name, for if eet was discovered that she 'elp, they would force you by torture to tell of her. So eet ces a secret."

"D'you mean there's a chance to escape?" breathed Betty.

"I mean nozzings," shrugged Natisha. "Eet ces as Allah wills."

And then she burst out at them in her native tongue—for the old woman was approaching—and chided them into the yard, where another day's toil was awaiting them.

To make it worse, Natisha was soon nowhere about to give them a hint; only the beaked-nosed old Zozo, who, in reply to their signs as to the right way to go about things, just snorted and squeaked at them in angry chidings of their want of skill.

"Oh, for a drop of hot water and a bar of soap!" breathed Polly.

Then they were set to grind corn in a big, shallow stone container, with an enormous pestle. They persevered at the hard, unusual task when suddenly, in the midst of it, the stout figure of their task mistress hove into view.

She stood for a moment surveying them through half-closed eyes, and Betty and Polly feeling that the storm was about to break, prepared for the worst.

"Breetesh girls," murmured the stout woman in her low, sing-song voice, "do not their work well. Oh, no! They are lazy. They not—" she sought in her mind for the word. "They not—try."

"We do!" burst out Polly. The other rolled her big head slowly from side to side.

"Not try," she said again, her mouth slitting into a grin as if the discovery pleased her. "But I teach zem! You come inside."

"Polly," grunted Betty, "she's got that whip. We're for it. Don't know what we can do—"

"She's by herself," breathed Polly. "She's fat and out of condition. The two of us—"

"You come inside," echoed the soft, sing-song tones from within. "I wait you—"

But the Morcovians did not move, and suddenly

the woman whirled the whip and caught Polly a cruel lash across the shoulders.

"Oh!" gasped Polly.

Betty sprang forward. "Stop that!" she said sharply. "If you dare use it again—"

She broke off in consternation.

With a spring, totally out of keeping with her bulk, the fat woman pounced on them again, but this time Betty and Polly were on the alert. Polly jumped to her feet and, by a movement learnt on the hockey field, swiftly sidestepped and ducked clear of the descending thong. Betty, too, avoided the onslaught, and the enemy, encountering only empty air, lost her balance and crashed into the wall.

With a sudden gasp she dropped the whip and threw up her hands to her head. For a second she swayed—then crumpled up with a low moan and toppled to the ground with a mighty crash.

It had all happened so quickly that Betty and Polly could only stand there gaping. "What now?" breathed Betty.

The answer was supplied by Natisha dashing into the room.

"Allah is with us," she gulped. "Queek—come inside, and ze clothes I've zere all ready for ze washing— We go. A friend waits us! No more, I say—queek—queek—or it be too late—"

Inside the house, Betty and Polly discovered, to their huge delight, that not only was clothing available, but that Natisha had also procured some stain made from berries to darken their skin, and, at top speed, the two schoolgirls proceeded to put on the stain and don the clothing.

The moment they had finished they hurried from the house, flitting in and out of the throng in the streets, until Natisha pulled up at a dirty habitation that joined the city wall.

She gave a peculiar cry that resulted in the door sliding open.

"Inside—inside!" breathed Natisha, bundling them through the doorway.

The door shut with the same suddenness that it had opened, leaving them in pitch darkness, but Natisha guided them forward until they reached a small apartment lit by a swinging lamp.

In the centre of this stood the beautiful young native woman who had tried so hard to buy them.

Betty and Polly gaped at her in silent delight.

And she, raising her veil, smiled sweetly and kindly upon them.

"Welcome, dear ones," she said in English. "You are safe with me, for I am 'Rose of the Desert.'"

With a glad cry Betty and Polly echoed the name. They knew her quite well although they had not met her since a previous visit to Nakara. But Naomer had often mentioned Rose of the Desert, and now that she stood before them they



With a sudden movement the woman lashed Polly cruelly across the shoulders. Betty sprang forward. "Stop that!" she said sharply, but she, like Polly, realised how much they were in the woman's power.

wondered they hadn't guessed her identity from the first.

"I must be brief in what I have to tell thee," said Rose of the Desert. "This that I have done—it must be made known to my lord Willoughby."

"Then you—you are in close touch with Mr. Willoughby!" Betty exclaimed. "Does that mean you have come from Nakara?"

"Yea. And others were with me—are out yonder even now," was the answer which thrilled the listeners. "They watch for a sign from me—one that my lord Willoughby taught me how to send forth. Thus!"

As she spoke, she had fumbled something from the folds of her loose raiment. It was a tiny pocket mirror—a "vanity" glass. Rose of the Desert held it by the fingers-tips, moving it about in an unmistakable manner. There was no sunshine in this place; but Betty and Polly understood instantly.

"They will see a signal which you give by flashing the mirror in the sun!" nodded Betty. "A heliograph, as they call it."

"Nay, such things to me are mysteries," Rose of the Desert murmured. "Yet did the great my-lord teach me so much, that I might speak with him through the air."

"The signals—what are they to be?" pressed Polly. "Is there one to ask Mr. Willoughby to come on, and another to tell him to wait?"

Rose of the Desert nodded.

"But my soul is troubled, dear ones, for now truly I know not what signal to give! I, who would die for any of ye as gladly as I would die for my dear queen whose friends we are—I left



those who bore me by air from Nakara, in the machine that is as a bird. Think not that I knew ye were to be sold for slaves. As one who only came to spy, and, if Allah willed it so, to seek thee out, I did according to the custom of strangers entering Susahlah and desiring to live in peace. I sought the favour of the sultan; and lo—ye were there!"

"We were!" grimaced Polly.  
"I tried to buy thee, but that girl Nassona asked more than I had. I went away to sell valuables, so that I could pay the price Nassona desired. Alas, on my return ye had become the slaves of Hacksoeth, the widow of the captain of the sultan's guard, who died in battle against your race."

"Then that is why she hated us," murmured Betty.

"And yet," went on Rose of the Desert, "I did not despair, for ye were being taken to the dwelling where one of my race was a slave." She placed her hand fondly on Natisha's shoulder. "And with Natisha's aid I hoped to make ye free."

"Which you have done!" chorused Betty and Polly, warmly embracing her.

But Rose of the Desert shook her head. "Not free yet," she sighed. "The widow Hacksoeth will leave no stone unturned to recapture thee. The whole town will be searched. All of us are in great peril until nightfall. Until then we dare not attempt to leave Susahlah."

The Morcove girls exchanged disappointed glances.

"How far away are our friends, Rose?" asked Betty.

Rose of the Desert took them to the small barred window and pointed across to the line of mountains that walled in Susahlah to the north.

"About five miles," calculated Polly. "And the plane? Which side of the mountains is that?"

"The other side," replied Rose of the Desert. "They will be waiting for your signal!" said Betty.

Rose of the Desert nodded.

"Now that I have news the signal shall be given," she answered. "Wait here, dear ones, with Natisha, while I go to the housetop and with my mirror flash the good tidings. In the book of Fate it may be written that ere another day has come, there will be an end to all this danger."

She unfastened the door, whispering to them to keep it closed after she had passed out. She would signal her return by giving three knocks.

"Another moment and they were alone.

"Isn't she wonderful!" muttered Polly. "Just the same as when we first got to know her at the time Naomer came to Morcove. But how lucky she should have been in Nakara when Mr. Willoughby turned up. But I say! D'you think Naomer, Pam and Bunny got there, too?"

"Hope so," said Betty. "We ought to have asked. But at a time like this you can't think of everything. Hark! Is that Rose coming back?"

They listened intently, and Natisha crept to the door.

"Passer-by—not Rose of the Desert," they heard her whisper.

Then Betty and Polly had the idea of watching the distant mountains to see if there was any answer to Rose's signal.

The mountains had a melted-down look in the heat haze. They seemed to have assumed a less rugged outline, and were a mere colourless blur under a brassy sky.

Suddenly they sighted a diamond-like

sparkle coming from all that distance away. It was the flash of a tiny mirror in the sunlight—an answer to Rose of the Desert's flashed signals from the housetop!

"Good!" Polly breathed rejoicingly. "Then they know."

"And what's more," rejoiced Betty, "now we know the exact spot to make for."

At that moment Natisha was seen to spring to her feet and point to the door.

"Someone is outside," she breathed.

Two taps resounded, and after that—one more.

"Rose?" queried Betty. "I counted three knocks."

But Natisha seemed uncertain.

"Wait!" she gestured.

She crept up to the door. The faint hum of voices came to their ears, and to the words that were spoken Natisha listened intently. All at once she stiffened, and tiptoed back to Betty and Polly.

"Danger!" she muttered. "Outside is the girl—Nassona!"

### The Last Trek!

NASSONA! Had that vindictive one tracked them down?

"She know not that we are here," breathed Natisha. "But she think she see Rose of the Desert pass out—so I hear her tell someones—she may wait—And then—"

Natisha broke off as once more came the tapping on the door.

Breathlessly they waited for what was to follow. If Nassona and her companions forced open the door, then they were done for. It was a moment of most frightful anxiety.

Once the door shook as if some forcible entry was to be attempted; but to their intense relief no further effort followed. Yet the voices still sounded outside, to tell them that Nassona continued to linger.

"Rose must have spotted her from the roof," whispered Betty. "Wonder what she'll do—"

The answer to this problem was supplied with startling suddenness. Three emphatic knocks rang out, and with them Rose's voice requesting admittance.

The three girls gaped at each other. Rose asking to come in with Nassona standing by! It was madness!

Yet what else could they do but admit her? She must have some vital reason for her action.

"I open the door," mumbled Natisha. "You keep back—"

And so saying Natisha removed the bar.

Betty and Polly, hidden in the shadows, saw Nassona flounce inside closely followed by Rose of the Desert. Nassona cried out something in her native tongue. But Rose's reply was in action, not in words. With a swoop like a panther, her arms encircled Nassona's neck in a choking grip; she bore her to the ground, and with an equally swift movement wound a long scarf round the girl's head.

They heard Nassona give a faint, stifled gasp as she lay struggling on the floor, but these struggles were of short duration, for Rose of the Desert had snatched at a piece of rope and expertly trussed the enemy like a helpless chicken.

Rose stood up and contemplated her for a second. Then she turned to the others.

"It was the only thing to do," she shrugged. "She declared she would not leave until she had speech with me, and so I enticed her inside so that

we could talk. And behold, dear ones, we have talked, and thanks be to Allah, the first and last word has been with me."

"Rose—you're wonderful!" gasped the Morcovians.

Rose of the Desert waved aside their congratulations.

"My signal was answered," she announced. "Ah—ye saw it from the window? Then our friends are now on the alert, although, alas, they can do nothing while we are still cooped here. But even in that I am not without hope. At sunset an ox cart leaves by the North gate. It carries merchandise for a neighbouring tribe, and could ye but hide under the covering, we could elude the guards. But how to get to the cart I know not."

"You mean," broke in Betty, "we can't go by the streets?"

Rose of the Desert nodded.

"Not for us is the door of this house," she sighed. "All the city is seeking the girls who attacked the sultana."

"The window, then?" said Polly.

"Yea—if we could get the bars away. The other side is an unfrequented path to the North gate, and in the darkness the risk is not great. But to remove those bars—It is a man's work."

"We'll see what schoolgirls can do," gritted Betty. "Come on, Polly—Natisha—Here's something that will help."

The "something" was a rusty rod that had been lying in the disused hearth. Very likely it had come away from the chimney opening at some time or other, where its purpose may have been to serve as a crossbar upon which cauldrons could be hung.

Even if the noise inseparable from a battering-ram use of this bar had not mattered, the girls would have preferred to resort to it as a lever.

They knew what tremendous force could be applied if they brought their combined strength into play.

Betty quickly thrust one end of the iron rod between two of the window bars, and then she, Polly and Natisha began to bear upon it.

But the first five minutes' work made them realise that the task would take hours.

**THEY** worked in pairs—Betty and Polly—Rose of the Desert and Natisha. And the pair that rested sat by the prisoner, who, although still bound hand and foot, no longer had the scarf over her face.

But Nassona was too cowed to attempt to cry out. Had the positions been reversed, she knew how she would have treated a captive, and she fully expected that this treatment would be her fate if she did anything to arouse the anger of her captors.

In the East it is always woe to the vanquished. Nassona couldn't visualise anything else.

So she lay there brooding over the fate in store for her, and trying to hide the mingled hatred and fear in her eyes.

It was just when the red glow of the setting sun shone on the wall that Polly breathed a thankful: "Betty! It's coming!"

Together they all pressed at the lever and jerked, for now it was apparent that they were likely to dislodge one of the slabs of stone into which the bars were embedded. The bars were rusted into the stone, but the stone itself was badly jointed to the wall.

Polly left Betty to go on prising, and set her

hands to the dislodged stone, now that it threatened to come clean away bringing the bars with it.

Once again, but gently this time, Betty levered. Then she took the bar away and set it down, and was free to help drag at the loosened bars and dislodged stone. Presently it tumbled to the floor.

After that it was the work of a few moments to force the remaining bars out of the way.

"Allah is with us," Rose of the Desert murmured. "And surely will not now desert us."

She bent over the prisoner and once more tied the scarf over her face to form a gag.

"It will be some time before she can get free of that," said Rose. "Then she can call—but her cries will be too late. Come—darkness is falling to cover up our flight."

She agilely climbed through the unbarred window. Polly went next, then Natisha, and finally Betty.

Down the darkened and unfrequented alleyway they flitted like spectres, until presently Rose of the Desert halted.

"Yonder—the North gate!" she breathed. "And there in that alley stands the ox cart."

"Yes, yes," whispered Betty tensely. "What do we do now?"

"Do ye follow me down the alley and hide in yonder doorway," returned Rose of the Desert. "I will bargain with the driver that he takes me on his journey. As well you know a bargain is not struck quickly in these lands—much argument—much refusing—before terms are reached. And while this is happening all of you will get into the cart and shelter beneath the covering. And so, with Allah's help, we shall get through the North gate."

And so it befell that Hassan, the driver of the ox cart, some few minutes later, found himself engaged in deep discussion concerning the price he should charge for allowing a lady to accompany his cart to the distant village of Nars-el-Hahib.

The lady offering an absurdly low sum, Hassan at once stuck out for an absurdly high sum, and much time elapsed before the rival amounts went up and down, eventually to arrive at a mutually agreed total. And during this time three lithe figures had emerged from a nearby doorway, and one by one darted to the back of the ox cart and crawled beneath the covering.

Then the cart moved off, passed slowly through the North gate, while Betty and her companions lay inside, scarce daring to breathe, and finally rumbled away over the stony track that curled in the direction of the distant mountains.

"Done it!" breathed Betty.

"Cheers!" gasped Polly, laughing in a way that showed the strain she had undergone.

"Back to my own Nakara," sighed Natisha, the little slave girl.

And Rose of the Desert was equally rejoicing as she strode by the side of Hassan and the oxen.

And then suddenly the quietude of the still night air was shattered by a loud report from the direction from whence they had come.

Bang!

A gunshot! And only a few yards away from the cart specks of soil flew up to tell of a bullet. Bang, again—and then—bang—bang—bang!

Hassan, the driver, promptly made for the nearest sand heap and rolled himself up in it. Consequently he never saw Betty, Polly and

Natisha crawl from his cart, and start running for their lives.

"Faster, faster, oh, dear ones, I beseech ye!" cried Rose of the Desert. "Once we are out of range of their guns all will be well."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

A bullet spat viciously a yard on their left—another on their right. Never had Betty and Polly run as they ran that night.

Suddenly the firing ceased; it may have been because the wielders of old-fashioned weapons believed the fugitives to be out of range. A more possible and sinister explanation—that the pursuers had sallied out from the city gate, and those who had been firing from the walls of the city were afraid of hitting their own people.

And then, all at once, came a droning noise in the sky, and to those four in peril never had they heard a more beautiful sound. An aeroplane—their aeroplane ready to swoop to the rescue at the first touch of dawn.

And doubtless, following on Mother Earth, were other members of the rescue party.

And the pursuing horde of Susahlahns, having also heard the plane, and fearing, no doubt, an avalanche of bombs, thought better of venturing into the darkness. They discharged a parting salvo, bellowed their war cries, and then, like a flock of frightened sheep, scuttled back into the fastnesses of their city.

And Hassan, eventually unburying himself from the sand, resumed his journey, wondering what it was all about, but happy in the thought that the transaction with the missing lady had been on a "cash down" basis.

But the "missing lady"—otherwise Rose of the Desert—was also happy as she strode forward with her "dear ones." Peril and danger were over. At daybreak kindly voices would hail them, friendly hands clasp theirs. They had won through!

#### After All!

"MORNING, kid!"

"Hi, what ze diggings! Bekas, none of your cheek, Polly!"

"Get up, slacker—"

"Do you hear ze names she is calling me, Rose of ze Desert? Just as eef we were in ze jolly old dormi at Morcove!"

"Sorry, your Majesty," laughed one who was quite her madcap self again. "I was forgetting—the sudden rumour. We chums of yours, Naomer, must now pay you proper respect, as you are going to remain at Nakara—"

"What-a-at!"

"Done with Morcove, yep! A queen you are, kid—I mean, your Majesty—and a queen you remain!"

"Do I! Not ze bit of eet, zank you! All right for a change," rattled on Nakara's impish girl-queen, springing out of her royal bed in her own royal sleeping apartment in the royal Palace of Nakara. "All right for a holiday—"

"Holiday, did you call it?" chuckled Polly, her eyes sparkling as she glanced at beautiful Rose of the Desert and Natisha, who were attending on her Majesty. "Some holiday! I'll go to Brighton, next summer hols."

"Ah, bah, you know very well, now zat all ze danger is over, and everybody has turned up all right—we are having a gorjus time!"

"But what about the time we had?"

"You don't want to zink about that!"

"Oh, don't I! I want to write a whole book about it!"

"Well, any old how, I want to get my bath! So good-bye for now!" said Naomer, vanishing.

"And then have Rose of the Desert to help you dress—booh!" Polly called out. "Did it have to have its Nanny, then?"

"Booh to you!" yelled back Naomer, from her sumptuous bath-room. "Bekas—jealous!"

"I suppose I am," Polly owned, addressing Rose of the Desert. "One thing does make me envious, at any rate. Your devotion to—our Naomer!"

The lovely dark eyes of Rose of the Desert were turned upon Polly, who saw how they shone with an emotional joy.

"Thy friend and schoolmate and my queen, the light of my soul!" the personal attendant of her youthful Majesty made answer softly.

"But it was not kind of me to say what I did, just then," Polly suddenly realised. "Do forgive me, Rose—"

"Forgive thee?"

"It was one of my bad jokes," the madcap grimaced. "A sample of my usual brick-dropping, if you get me? I don't suppose you do! Seriously, Rose, there is no need for any of us other girls to envy Naomer the devotion you show her. You've been just as devoted to us! But you have! A couple of days ago—when Betty and I looked like losing our lives, over there in Susahlah!"

"The servant of the queen is the servant of the queen's dear friends—"

"Servant!"

And suddenly Polly darted at Rose of the Desert, to give her a quick kiss and a hug.

As this boisterous demonstration had the effect of embarrassing the queen's "lady-in-waiting," Polly whipped about and made off, dashing out of the royal bedchamber as she was accustomed to dash out of Study 12 at Morcove.

"Hallo, hallo!" cried Bunny Trevor, with whom Polly almost collided, in the marbled corridor. "Where are you off to, Polly? The taxi for Home hasn't turned up yet."

"No," Polly jested back. "I rang up last night to say I'd like to stay a few days longer out here, as the fun's only just beginning."

Then Betty appeared, in company with a batch of girls who looked, as she did, expectant of a day of delights.

"Bai Jove!" beamed Paula Creel; and Polly inquired:

"Why, what?"

"Most gratifying, Polly deah—that is all! I wealise perfectly weall that for a day or so we hev all been togethah again, and yet—I can't get over the mawvellous weunion!"

"There's a lot besides the reunion I can't quite get over," Betty laughed.

"It's surprising, though, what one can get over," Bunny sparkled. "Last night's banquet, for instance!"

"And another to-night!" said Judy Cardew. "Nakara has certainly gone whoopee! When we go out into the town, presently, we shall find it's another public holiday."

"I don't fancy it takes much to make Nakara go whoopee," Tess Trelawney grinned. "Always put off until to-morrow what needn't be done to-day—it's on the City arms."

"But after all," interposed Madge Minden; "they have got their queen amongst them, for once in a while; and that, to them—"

"Oh, and besides," Betty exclaimed, "to-day that trade agreement with Britain is to be signed, sealed, and delivered!"

"By Naomer; and I can just see her making a big blot as she signs," Polly chuckled. "Hooray, though; cheers for the British Empire and the Old Flag—flying alongside Nakara's. One in the eye for that other Great Power—whichever it was—that wanted to queer the business!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!"

"Those Lessards," several of the girls murmured.

For it was known now that every danger which had beset Morcove and Co, during its holiday visit to this part of the world, was traceable to Jules Lessard and his wife.

The desert would never have held any peril for Betty and Co. if there had not been the Lessards

In other words, this very day, in Nakara, there was to be carried into effect the very thing which the Lessards had schemed their hardest to prevent.

The girl-queen herself was in the capital, and, by presiding at the State Council which was to ratify the agreement, she was to invest the whole business with greater importance than ever!

The one thing that had been dreaded by those for whom the Lessards were acting—that the queen and the agreement would get to Nakara together! And that very thing had happened after all.

So, somewhere in the world, this happy morning for Nakara and its British friends, there must have been those who felt badly "hipped."

As for the Lessards, it would be many a day before they were likely to make another bid for fortune by acting as paid secret service agents, chosen for their unscrupulous natures.



In turn Betty, Polly and the slave girl made their way cautiously from the sheltering doorway to the ox cart. They all knew that one false step now would mean an end of their chances of getting away from this city of tyranny and despair.

to bribe desert-dwellers into their service, even as the Lessards themselves had been bribed.

When, first, things began to go wrong for the schoolgirl travellers and those in charge of them, they had supposed that a conspiracy existed, simply to frustrate the girl-queen's arrival in her own capital. But there had been more in it than that.

Pam Willoughby's father, who, with Mrs. Willoughby, had come out from the Homeland with the girls, had carried with him a vitally important document about which secrecy was being preserved.

That document was the trade agreement which was to be ratified to-day. The Lessards' job it had been to do all they could, by fair means or foul, to get hold of that document, so that its terms might become known to interested and rival parties.

Madam Lessard was in safe custody, in Nakara, and Jules Lessard was lying dangerously ill in that fine hospital which the desert city owed to British influence.

She had feared that her husband had lost his life in the open desert; but he had been brought in by those who found him—at his last gasp and his mind clean gone for the time being, as the result of exhaustion, thirst and fear.

A native caravan of peaceful Nakanan traders had found him, after coming upon Mrs. Willoughby and those others who had been stranded in the desert.

"Kismet!" Fateful indeed had it been, all this! Those peaceful Nakanans had found Mrs. Willoughby, and the girls who were with her, in desperate need of help. There was no illness, however. Even Mr. Somerfield, their air pilot who had been wounded after the plane's forced

landing in the desert, had gone on well. But Jules Lessard, when he was found, had been more dead than alive.

"Oh, listen, girls! There go the bells!"

"Lovely!"

It was sudden ringing out of different peals, all over the desert city. Some of the bells were small and tinkling; others were great things of bronze, whanging away like gongs. The combined effect was very Oriental.

"Here, let's all go out into the town!" Polly gaily proposed. "I've got a spending fit—want to buy souvenirs!"

"The bazaar will be closed for the holiday," Bunny said.

"It will be open for us!" Betty predicted.

"Yes, wather—haw, haw, haw!"

"I'd like to buy a few presents," Pam Willoughby serenely remarked as they all started to drift for the open air. "But as for souvenirs—I've got the only one I want to take Home with me."

"You mean—that Arab horse, the one you called 'Beauty'?" Polly cried. "Something like a souvenir, that!"

"Yes. Well," Pam smiled, "I think he will have a happy life, in the park at home at Swanlake."

"At that rate," Bunny gurgled, "I think I ought to buy the camel which got me and Naomer to Nakara, the other day. Girls, how would it be if I shipped the camel to Morcove, to turn loose on the games field?"

"Fwivolous as evah, bai Jove!" Paula chortled.

"All of you!"

"Hi!" a familiar voice suddenly hailed them, and her Majesty Queen Naomer of Nakara came dashing up. "Bekas, what ze diggings—sweeindle! Going off without me!"

"Did Nanny say you might come?" Polly wanted to know.

"Oh, let Naomer come," Bunny said. "She

may get us discount in the bazaar—being a queen."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

THEY roamed away through the lovely palace gardens and out into the city, whilst the bells still sent down their own quaint melody to the teeming streets.

And every step of the way Morcove and its royal scholar met with signs of affection and respect. Everywhere Nakara had hung out Union Jacks along with its own national emblem.

In a little while Mr. and Mrs. Willoughby found the girls, sauntering through the bazaar, and then Mr. Somerfield happened along, pipe in mouth.

Except for a slight limp, he was quite recovered from the wound in the knee, and he showed how he could even get along quite well, arm-in-arm with Bunny and Polly.

"Peace and prosperity and happiness," Betty exclaimed by-and-by, to some of her chums. "How different from Susahlah!"

"Yes, I am jolly proud of my country," shrilled her Majesty Queen Naomer. "He is a good one! And I am jolly well going to see zat he gets better and better. You wait! Bekas, Morcove is teaching me quite a lot—"

"I didn't know that!" the madcap said in mock amazement.

"Now zen, don't be funny, Polly! Bekas, you know very well zey work me at Morcove just as hard as any of you girls!"

"And we know how hard that is," Bunny sighed. "Makes you almost dread going back for another term, doesn't it?"

"Oh, I shan't mind," said Polly. "In fact, if you ask me, girls, it will seem quite a rest cure after the holiday it's been, so far. And, anyway, we've still a few weeks left which we're going to spend in jolly old Ruritania!"

[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]

## A Nice Quiet Time in Turania? That's What Betty Barton and Co. Expect, But—

Their Train is Held up by Rebels!

They Have to Finish the Journey on Foot!!

Their Hostess is Missing!!!

And that's only the start of things.

Don't miss the first of a thrilling new series of Morcove holiday stories by

**Marjorie Stanton**

in next Tuesday's

**SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN**



*Dave Cardew Has Disappeared and Grangemoor School is in a Ferment of Anxiety*



# Grangemoor to Guard Her

BY MARJORIE STANTON

## The Noise in the Night

"PREFECT GAYNER in disguise!"

Eagerly Jack Linton and three of his best pals of Grangemoor School peered through the tangle of wild rose and hawthorn bushes, hoping to glimpse again a figure they had detected half a minute previously.

"Are you certain it was Gayner? He was supposed to have gone to London, you know."

They spoke in deep whispers, then lapsed into silence as they continued their watching.

Prefect Gayner!

They were certain it was the senior whom they had "spotted" in the act of slinking away. Ralph Gayner, lurking about down here at one of the loneliest parts of the riverside at a time when he was supposed to have gone right away from the school on special leave!

Doing all this, too, in disguise!

No wonder Jack and his three chums were troubled.

They were searching the riverside near Grangemoor that evening for some clue to the whereabouts of their form chum, Dave Cardew, who had mysteriously disappeared a day or two before.

"Ugly, that's what it is," Jack muttered. "We suspected Gayner knew something about Dave's disappearance, and now it looks as if we weren't far out after all. It must be something to do with Dave that forced Gayner to pretend to go away—and come back again in secret. He knows what happened to Dave that evening."

"Can we follow him?" Jimmy Cherrol asked.

"No, dash it!" Tom Trevor softly raged. "The fellow seems to have gone to earth."

"Reckon he saw us and felt scared stiff," commented fat Tubby Blot, with a lump of chocolate distending his right cheek. "As soon as he could take to his heels, I guess he just ran for it."

"Huh! Well, perhaps it will be as well not to advertise the fact to him that we saw him," Jack frowned. "He probably hopes he got away unseen. He was already sneaking away when I first spotted him. We could have gone after him then, only it means showing ourselves. He has an advantage over us as it is. He knows we must get back to the school, whilst he will have the whole night in front of him to do whatever he has come here to do."

"And what's that, Jack, do you reckon?" asked Jimmy.

"Gosh, I hardly like to say what's in my mind now about Gayner—I really don't!" Jack sighed. "He's a bouncer, but he belongs to Grangemoor. But it begins to look as if Gayner 'outed' Dave. Unless he's in terror over something he did to Dave, I can't see why he should have come back in secret, after getting special leave to go home."

"They say," Tubby wheezed, shifting the chocolate to the other side of his jaw, "a criminal always has to come back to the scene of his crime. Guilty conscience—"

"Oh, shut it! No need for even you to get melodramatic, Tubby. No, I think Gayner has probably come back to look for something that—if found by the police or anyone else—would incriminate him. Well," Jack added in a tone of bitter disappointment, "he's gone, and we shan't do any good by sticking here. 'Tisn't to be supposed he'll come back whilst he thinks we're still in the neighbourhood."

"And we'll be late unless we scoot for the school," Tom remarked.

"I've a thundering mind to stay out all night, and chance it!" Jack said suddenly. "Lie up for the fellow and catch him!"

"That's a good idea," declared Tom Trevor.

"Hark! Gosh, what's that?" Jack interjected, flinching about to stare another way in the falling darkness. "Didn't you fellows hear—"

"Yes," Jimmy panted. "Queer sound, wasn't it? Where did it come from exactly?"

"He's not gone plump into the river by accident, has he?" queried Tubby.

"But that wasn't a splash," Jack said tensely. "More like a bumping sound—from a bit farther up-stream, certainly. A boat, bumping the bank? But whoever takes a boat there—all reeds and shallows."

"Let's go and see," Jimmy hinted.

"Yep, come on!"

Hastily they ran over the lush grass, away from the hedge towards the sedgy bank of the winding stream. Close to the water the evening light was stronger, and there the boys could see their way quite well and could make good use of their straining eyes whilst hurrying up-stream.

That they now stood exposed to view by anyone lurking in the vicinity they were not forgetting, but that did not seem so important now. Something had happened that made quick action more imperative than a continuance of stealthiness.

And suddenly they heard that mysterious sound again. It came from somewhere still ahead of them.

"The old mill is just along there," Jack jerked. "That's where the noise seemed to me to come from."

"It's in ruins," Tom remarked. "Wonder if the noise was nothing more than a bit of timber waggling about in the sluice. Rains have put so much water in the river that a lot of extra wood has been collected by it."

"I think you're right!" exclaimed Tom, whilst they all four ran for the ramshackle building. "The police visited this mill when they were searching for Dave, didn't they?"

"Perhaps it was Gayner who made the noise—perhaps he means to shelter there for the night," Jack suggested. "He might be blundering about amongst the ruins—"

"If it's Gayner, will you try to nab him?" Tubby panted.

He received a look from Jack implying that there was no need to ask the obvious. The beefy one scarcely noticed it; it was taking him all his time to keep up with his wiry pals in the rush to the mill.

The vast building, long since fallen into disuse, stood now like an island. The main river passed it on one side, but the cut channel through which the water flowed to serve the mammoth wheel was so flooded that it was now like a second river.

A rotting footbridge enable the boys to cross the bubbling channel, and then they paused to listen outside the mossy outer walls before going inside.

Now, however, no sound came to them except the seeping of water through decayed sluices. An owl flew out by one broken window and silently floated away.

"If it's Gayner, he'd be keeping perfectly still now; must know we've turned up," Jack whispered. "But if he's here, we're going to see him, now that we've come so far after him. No letting him slip away again. Surround the place."

"Right-ho!"

"I'm going in," Jack continued. "Jimmy, you stay just about here. Tubby, you go round to a back corner, where you can watch two sides at once. Tom, you take another corner."

That said, Jack promptly passed in at a low doorway, the door itself hanging half-open, with one hinge gone.

Jack had to feel his way about inside the mill

very warily. It was pitch black inside the old building, and it was not easy to walk about in it, either.

Fallen brickwork and timbers littered the floor, and there were low beams against which it was easy to strike one's head a nasty blow in the darkness.

Had this been only a tumbledown house, Jack would not have needed to be half so cautious. But instead of so many rooms once meant for habitation, there were various divisions necessitated by the process of milling, with pits where some bit of machinery used to work, and flights of ladder-like stairs.

Greatest risk of all to anyone prowling in the dark, there were open trapdoors let into the floor here and there. If Jack fell through the trapdoors, he would tumble into the river beneath the mill. But Jack was bearing these in mind. All the while he could hear the water surging around and beneath the derelict building.

And then suddenly—that other sound again!

He had no sooner heard it this time, though, than he realised its meaning.

"Hi, you-fellow!" he shouted at the top of his voice to his chums. "Hi, come in!"

A few moments and, one after another, his three pals were groping their way to him in the darkness.

"Gosh, chaps, we've found Dave!" he cried.

"What!"

"He's somewhere in this place—it was Dave who made that knocking noise we heard. He's trying to get out!" Jack cried. "He's alive after all, and we're going to get him out. Dave!" he bellowed. "Hi, Dave! Dave!"

The others took up the hailing cry.

"Dave! Dave! Hi! Dave Car—dew!"

Then they paused, hoping to hear a voice responding.

Thud! was the first sound they heard, apart from the incessant slushing of water.

"It's from somewhere high up," Tom judged.

"Listen!"

"Jack! Jimmy!" came a muffled, appealing cry. "Tubby, Tom! This way, Grangemoor!"

And then, once again—thud!

### The Secret of the Mill

IN sudden, frantic haste they started to find their way aloft, whilst sending out reassuring shouts.

"Right-ho, Dave! Coming! Coming, Dave!"

A rickety flight of plank steps got them to the first floor in a building that was one of many stories. Then they found another flight to take them still higher; a steeper and narrower flight, up and down which workmen in the old days ran, nimble as sailors.

Tubby, coming last of all, missed his tread and went clattering down again. Considerably blown, he made his second and more successful dash, stumbling off the top stair on to the floor of what had once been warehouse space.

He rejoined his chums in a far corner, where they had found a perfectly upright ladder that must be climbed if they wanted to get to some loft or other by the trapdoor which it served. The ladder was clamped to the wall, but some of the clamps were infirm now, and Jack, first to start the climb, voiced a warning:

"Careful, you fellows! The whole thing is ready to come down."

A few moments more and all four rescuers were off the ladder, stooping as they crossed the loft floor. Then direction was determined by the faint,

exhausted voice of Dave, which sounded as if he were cut off from them by brickwork.

Then, on that side of the loft farthest from the trapdoor in the floor, they encountered some formidable obstacle. Tubby struck a match, and the obstacle proved to be a big stack of mouldy straw, in trusses. The bundles must have been long since forgotten, or at any rate abandoned, by the man who put them here for storage purposes.

They were piled high against the wall on this side of the loft, almost reaching to the sloping roof.

Instantly the four chums realised that the heaped straw might be hiding some door in a partition wall, and they started to claw and drag the bundles out of the way.

"Coming, Dave!" Jack shouted.

"Good old Jack! Can't you see the door?"

"Half a sec., old man. We're having to shift aside a lot of bales of straw. But now then!"—as the dark oak of a massive door became exposed. "Hooray, attaboy!"

"One moment," said Jimmy. "We've got to draw back these bolts. Rusty as can be, too!" he raged, as one particularly refractory bolt resisted all his efforts.

His chums helped him and some extra furious wrenching disposed of that bolt a moment later. The boys backed as they dragged open the door.

Then they dived through the opening.

"Here we are, Dave!" cried Jack. "Are you bound, Dave?"

"No," they heard Dave declare. "No, I—I'm all right. I can see better than any of you, I dare say. My eyes have been accustomed to this darkness for days. You go out first, and I'll follow."

"O.K.!"  
"You know the way about; I don't. You'll understand w h e n I explain."

"Dave," called out Tom, during the descent to ground level, "mean to say you hadn't any idea as to what ladders and steps there were? Then you must have been carried up to that black hole when you were insensible?"

"That's it. And I've had to guess who did it."

"Ah!" said Jack. "We chaps have been—er—doing some guessing just lately, Dave. We rather guessed—a certain pre."

"Do you mean Gayner? No, you were wrong."

"What!"

"Let's stand here whilst I tell you a few things," Dave suggested, w h e n they reached the ground floor of the mill. "I can guess how late it is, and that you chaps ought to be at school."

"We'll be excused when they know we've found you."

"We've got to decide what to do about it all now," Dave spoke on gravely. "I mean, decide how much is to be told."

"Gosh! You're not thinking of shielding Gayner, Dave?"

"Gayner, I tell you, isn't entirely answerable—"

"He thinks he is, though; we're certain of that," Jack interrupted. "But you go on, Dave."

"And here's some choc, Dave," the beely one cheerfully suggested. "You must be simply starving!"

"But I'm not. Would you have found me alive, after all this time, if I hadn't had a supply of food and water?"

"Eh?" gasped Jack. "A supply—of food?"  
"Yes. Someone has been keeping me going—visiting me at times when he knew I was asleep. He must have waited until he could tell, by the sound of my breathing, that I had dropped off. Three times, altogether, I woke up and found that food and fresh water had been left for me."

"By heck!" Jack cried. "And it was n't Gayner, you say?"

"No, I don't think it was he," Dave hastily answered. "I can imagine that he has been wondering if he were to blame for my being missing, for he did set upon me here in this old mill."

"He did!"  
"Yes; I received a note that was supposed to be from Hetty Morland, asking me to meet her here one evening, and bring those papers with me that I had been taking care of. I had a suspicion that it was a fake message—a trap. So, although



Feverishly Jack Linton and his chums tore down the "wall" composed of trusses of straw. They could see that a doorway was being revealed. It was from the other side that the cries for help had come.



I turned up here, I came without the papers. And then Gayner took me by surprise—set upon me—”

“To get the papers,” Tom cried. “So it was Gayner who had written the fake letter!”

“No. He only turned up because he had watched me set off from the school alone, and he guessed that I might be going to meet Hetty about the papers. Anyhow, we had a bit of a scrap, and he made off in fright—when I tripped over something on the floor of the mill. And then, suddenly—this was the queer thing,” Dave raced on, “I got a blow on the head from somebody else who had crept up behind me in the bad light. That downed me, and when I came to I was shut away where you found me just now.”

“Searchers must have come when you were asleep,” Jimmy remarked. “And any noise they made would not be loud enough to wake you—when there was all that straw heaped against the door up there.”

“Then who did lure you to this place in the first instance, Dave?” clamoured Jack. “But of course, that scoundrel, Hetty’s uncle! The brute who lives—”

“Sh! That’s where we have got to be careful—silent,” Dave struck in impressively. “I can prove nothing; he can easily deny all knowledge of the affair; and the only result of dragging him into it will be—trouble for Hetty!”

“We don’t want that,” Jack briskly commented. “All right, then; not a word about Ezra Joab. And now—Jimmy, you’re the one to run on ahead of us to the school and let them know we’ve found Dave. He’s coming along with us others, and he’d like a thumping good supper—cold beef and pickles and—”

“I’d like a bath,” Dave laughed his preference, whilst Jimmy floundered away into the open air to do the race back to Grangemoor. “Otherwise, I tell you, I’m quite O.K., and the sooner Judy is told, at Morcove—”

“Gosh, and won’t Judy and all of them at Morcove be thankful about this!” Jack rattled on rejoicingly.

“Boys, how about going over there to-morrow, for a spree? You’ll be excused school for a week, Dave, and we chaps ought to get something in return for this.”

“Medals,” said Tubby.

“Medals be blowed; time off from school is my mark,” Jack snorted. “But I dunno; the Head’s mustard these days; and you’re not going to be able to be exactly candid about it all, Dave. So, usual thing, I suppose: the Old Man properly on the ramp. Why do we always get into these rows?”

### A Case for the Head!

**B**UT there was to be no row that night. Dave was promptly handed over to Mrs. Challenor to get the bath he desired and to be hurried into an exceedingly “comfy” bed, and then to be served with something very tasty on a tray which would help him to go off into a sound sleep.

Meantime, in the dormitory where Dave’s proper bed was still vacant, tremendous excitement of a joyous nature reigned.

Jack’s versatility enabled him to give a most thrilling account of the whole affair, without his once mentioning the names of Ralph Gayner or Ezra Joab. There were embellishments to Jack’s story such as made Jimmy and Tommy and Tubby marvel. It was a masterpiece of circumstantial narrative that left out everything of vital importance.

Long after “lights-out” the dormitory was still in a state of “whoopie.” Jack having supplied such a good story, some of the listeners had felt that it was up to them to provide a feast in return.

Jack, in lighter vein, was at his best. He, who had been like a bear with a sore head whilst Dave was missing, was now in bounding spirits. His witticisms finally resulted in such a dangerous explosion into loud laughter that there had to be a hasty disposal of ginger-beer bottles and salmon tins under various beds, and as hasty a retirement between sheets.

But Authority, next day, showed its teeth.

By tea-time, when school had ended for the day, Mr. Challenor intimated to the five that the Head considered the hour had come for a stricter inquiry into the strange case of Dave Cardew.

“So you boys had better go along now; the Head is expecting you,” said the Housemaster affably. “I take it, Cardew, that you did not wish me to plead for the interview to be deferred, on physical grounds. You are feeling quite yourself again now?”

“Oh, yes, sir!”

“Good. And I wish you luck, I’m sure.”

“We need it,” grinned Jack, after he and the others had made their exit from Old Tony’s room.

It was, however, a cheerful-looking batch of chums who, five minutes later, stood paraded before a very glowering Head.

“Now,” said he. “One could do no more last night than simply be thankful that you, Cardew, had turned up safely after all, and notify the police. I also, as you know, rang up Morcove, so that your sister’s anxiety might be ended.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“I will thank you, Cardew, to give me a much more detailed explanation. At present there are features in the case requiring elucidation. Firstly, I have yet to know why you went to the ruined mill that night. Secondly, your statement that you were not only shut away in that mill by someone who had attacked you, but that you were also supplied with the necessities of life—that statement, Cardew, smacks of—h-m!—”

“I know, sir; but it was so.”

“And you can still give me no description of your assailant?”

“No, sir.”

“Now, Cardew, there must have been a motive, you know, for your being treated like that. Surely, then, you have asked yourself what that motive can have been; who could have had reason for doing this thing to you.”

Dave shook his head.

“Very well!” said the Head, in that sighing way which always gave warning of judgment to come. “Then I must draw my own conclusions. This, all of you, is not the first time, just lately, I have detected a conspiracy of silence. Again, in fact, I am refused explanations. I can only conclude that so much as I have been told is purely mythical, that is all.”

He puckered his mouth for a long moment, concentrating his frowning gaze upon Dave.

“In other words, I am forced to the conclusion that there was no assailant, Cardew! You disappeared for all that length of time, and then turned up unharmed—practically none the worse for this alleged ordeal! I say ‘alleged,’ for I am now convinced there was no ordeal in reality. You simply absented yourself from school for reasons known only to yourself and your friends here. You had your hiding-place; they kept you going with supplies. And the whole thing,” the

Head suddenly stormed, banging a hand down upon his desk, "is an escapade so reckless, so disgraceful, it merits the very severest punishment!"

The Head broke off, glaring at Dave.

"Cardew, it is no use your shaking your head like that. A mere shake of the head will never exculpate you! You could speak, and I would hear you. Any of you could speak out now, if only you could truthfully say something that would prove me to be in error. And you are silent, all of you!"

He fetched a deep breath.

"I can imagine nothing worse than this 'disappearance' that has been staged. You are all gated until further notice, and, in addition, you will be caned—before the school."

Did he hope, perhaps, that this pronouncement would put an end to their collective silence—cause one or another of them, at least, to find his tongue at last? If so, he must have been disappointed. The pause he made meant silence, until he himself resumed.

"I will have you all called out, in Hall, some time to-morrow, to be caned in public. The school must see that such escapades as yours cannot be indulged in with impunity. So now, all of you—go!"

They turned about on the Turkey carpet and filed out.

"Now, Dave," Jack said cheerfully, "don't look like that!"

"But—you chaps—all for my sake—"

"If you will do things for young ladies in distress, like Hetty Morland," Jack grinned, playfully affecting scorn for Dave's chivalrous befriending of Hetty, "then we fellows must stand by you, I suppose! But it's all right," he pursued delightedly. "See how we stand now, boys! After

all, Dave, you've still got those papers of hers! Not so bad, considering Gayner has been trying to get hold of them, and Ezra Joab has been trying, too—not the least doubt; and even Percy Denver thought he would find them useful."

"Gated, though," Dave said, "when all that you fellows have done—"

Jack took him by the arm as they all swarmed for the open air; whereupon Jimmy took Dave by the other arm. Then Tom and Tubby linked arms as they came on behind.

"Hallo—look!" Dave said, as they gained the open air. "There's Gayner!"

"What! So it is!" Jack chuckled. "Soon back from home, isn't he, boys? Ha, ha, ha!"

Ralph Gayner could be seen alighting with a week-end bag from a taxicab outside Challenger's.

"Come on, boys!" Jack gaily urged. "Let's run and ask him how he has enjoyed special leave!"

"The artful dodger," Tom grinned. "We'll give him gyp about it all—why not?"

So they ran, realising that there was just time for them to get to Gayner, before he would have settled with the taxi-driver and gone indoors.

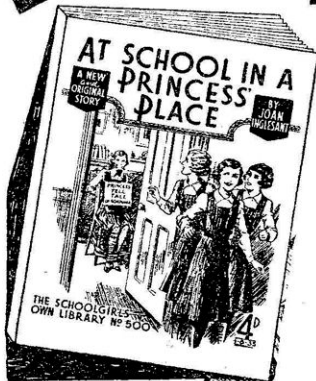
But all Challenger's had known that the five had been up before the Head, and now batting nets and tennis courts were suddenly deserted by fellows who wanted to know how the interview had gone off. The Diehards, whilst running to confront Gayner at the porch, came in for an attendant mob clamorous for information. "Was the Head all right?" Challenger's wished to know, having suffered from an uneasy belief that he would be on the ramp.

"Oh, quite all right!" Jack gave the happy assurance. "Carry on! We shall be in the

(Continued on the next page.)

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honours list—on the green-baize board—by and by. You'll see!"

"But—"  
"Scuse us, you chaps," Jack pleaded. "Here's Gayner, back from leave, and we want to say how pleased we are to see him again! 'Afternoon, sir!' the fun-lover addressed Gayner, at the same time giving a mocking salute. "Had a nice time, sir?"

"Catch your train all right yesterday, sir?" asked Tom. "And how was everything at home, sir?"

"We didn't expect you back so soon!" grinned Jimmy.

Gayner, guiltily realising why he was being so boldly cheeked, became very confused. As the only means of saving his face, he did his best to appear in a good humour after an enjoyable, if lightning, bit of leave.

"Somebody else is back, too—eh?" he smirked. "Well, Cardew; so there you are! I heard—when I got to the station just now—about how you had been found last night. Er—none the worse for it, eh?"

"Oh, no!"  
"Good! Then perhaps you'd like to carry my bag up to my study? I'd like to hear all about your adventures, and you can tell me upstairs."

He said this with his usual grandness as a prefect; but Dave knew that the trickster was inwardly wretched—all of a dither lest his part in the affair had become known.

Only just back as he was, for all Gayner knew he might be having to face the Head at once; might even be under sentence of expulsion before another hour was out!

Dave's chums did not go with him into the schoolhouse. He and the prefect went alone together upstairs.

"Well," Gayner asked at last, with a forced grin, "what have you been telling the Head?"

"Nothing."  
"Because you dared not—eh? Anyway, you know very well I—I wasn't the cause of your being missing like that. As for any bit of a scrap we had that night—you should have let me have those papers that I wanted. I can't help it that I lost my temper. It's enough to madden a fellow, when he wants to do his best by Hetty Morland, to be stalled by a young idiot like you."

"But I am the one who wants to do the best by Hetty," Dave gave back curtly. "You only want to do the best for yourself."  
"Oh?"

"Yes—and at her expense, too! I don't know everything, but I know that much!"

Gayner blenched; but he was able to resume a display of amused contempt.

"As you say, Cardew, you don't know everything. As it happens, I do—see? And now I am going to open your eyes to one or two things. You are making the biggest mistake if you think your ferreting out things for Hetty, from those papers, is going to benefit her in the long run. They deal with her childhood, don't they? The less she knows about her childhood, the better. D'you quite get that?"

"I don't believe it."  
"Whether you do or don't, I'm not going to have you carrying on like this any longer. From what I have just said, you will be guessing now that I know more about Hetty Morland's childhood than she knows herself."

"Oh, I guessed that," Dave calmly remarked, "weeks ago."

"And you couldn't credit me with wanting to do her a good turn, really, by preventing her

from finding out who she really is and—er—all that?"

"No."  
"All right," Gayner scowled. "But I tell you I'm not going on any longer like this. You and I will go down to Joab's presently, and, in your presence, I will tell Hetty Morland all that she is dying to know. She'll wish, then, she had never started this raking up the past; and you, I reckon, will wish you had taken my warning—to let sleeping dogs lie."

"Sorry," Dave smiled, "but I can't go down to Joab's with you. I'm gated."  
"Dash your impudence!" Gayner flared out at last. "I shall go down to Joab's, anyhow—and tell the girl! And when she has started crying, asking me why I ever came there to tell her such a thing, then I shall simply say you were going to make it known to her in the end. You, her precious schoolboy inquiry agent—pah!"

"But so far as I have been able to find out at present"—Dave still smiled—"there doesn't appear to be anything to come out in the end that will sort of smash Hetty's hopes about the future. Anyway, Gayner, you must please yourself about what you do—"

"Here, come back—wait!" For Dave had turned away to the door. "Haven't you admitted that you don't know everything, you fool, and haven't I been saying that I do? Then no more of this cheek from you, Cardew, for I'm not standing for it. You've still got those papers?"

"Oh, yes!"  
The two were facing each other again. Towering in front of the one who was junior to him, Gayner stretched a hand towards the door, the pointing finger vibrating with the fury that possessed him.

"Either you go away now and come back with those paper, to hand them to me at once—within five minutes!" Gayner said fiercely, "or I will go down to Joab's and tell Hetty Morland—"

"That you and she were brought up together as children?" Dave hazarded. "Certainly, that may be nothing for Hetty to be proud of, Gayner, but I don't see why it should exactly blight her life to be told just that!"

"Clever! Only that doesn't happen to be all—see? It's no use, Cardew," the senior raged, "I know things that you don't! Here, have the papers told you this?" he rushed on, turning back to the table to scribble on a half-sheet. "Will Hetty be glad to know her father was—that?"

And the paper upon which one word had been written was held out for Dave to read.

Gayner, in his haste, had scrawled with a blue pencil. To Dave, the thick writing seemed to be equivalent to placard type. Only one word, but the sight of it turned him deathly pale—as Gayner, watching him, noticed.

"Yes!" The prefect spoke again at last. "So what about it now, Cardew? Are you going to let me have those papers straight away, or is Hetty Morland to be told that by me this evening? One thing or the other! My mind's made up; you just make up yours!"

"I made up my mind days ago," Dave said, "about what to do with those papers."

And, with that for his last word to the fellow, he walked out.

**WHAT** is this new threat Gayner is making to induce Dave to do as he wishes? Will he carry it out now that Dave has defied him? Don't miss next Tuesday's gripping chapters of this "story that is different." They are more enthralling than ever.