

The Jungle of Adventure

By

Yahoo!-Group 'Blyton'

(<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/blyton/>)

Written by:

Anita Bensoussane

Michael Edwards

Bikram Bhakta Joshi

Nanine Kamp

Hari Menon

Shagufta Naaz

Keith Robinson

Commented by the Group's members.

An exciting vacation awaits the children when they hear that they will pass the holls in foreign India, in a house in the jungle far away from the big cities.

And as always they fall right into an adventure the moment they arrive. And what an adventure it is! Strange men in the night, a secret passage, an odd boy, and a mysterious old riddle written a century ago brings the children to puzzles.

At first they don't know what to think of it, but slowly everything falls in it's place and Philip with his new pet Rikki, Jack, Dinah, Lucy-Ann, and Kiki of course too, have a great time in solving the secrets of 'The Jungle of Adventure'!

© Yahoo!-Group 'Blyton', 2008

Table of Contents:

CHAPTER 1. EXCITING NEWS.....	4
CHAPTER 2. MAKING PREPARATIONS	9
CHAPTER 3. OFF ON AN ADVENTURE!	17
CHAPTER 4. INDIA AT LAST!.....	21
CHAPTER 5. THE DAK BUNGALOW	27
CHAPTER 6. A SUDDEN DISTURBANCE	33
CHAPTER 7. ADVENTURES IN THE NIGHT	39
CHAPTER 8. A CHANGE OF PLANS.....	44
CHAPTER 9. A FRIGHTFUL SHOCK.....	49
CHAPTER 10. A WAY OUT	55
CHAPTER 11. KRISH'S STORY.....	60
CHAPTER 12. THE OLD DIARY.....	64
CHAPTER 13. INVESTIGATING THE DOLMEN.....	69
CHAPTER 14. JAYA, AND KRISH!	77
CHAPTER 15. EXCITING PLANS	84
CHAPTER 16. IN THE SECRET PASSAGE.....	89
CHAPTER 17. STRANGE THINGS IN THE MORNING!.....	96
CHAPTER 18. BACK TO THE DAK BUNGALOW	104
CHAPTER 19. PHILIP'S PLAN	110
CHAPTER 20. ALL ENDS WELL.....	118

Chapter 1. Exciting News

By Nanine Kamp.

Edited by Anita Bensoussane

Dinah was reading a letter. She had just received it from her mother, Mrs. Cunningham, and now she sat in a corner of the common room at school. Her eyes flew over the lines and as she read her face slowly grew red. She suddenly took a deep breath. "Listen to what my mother has written to me!" she said to her friends, who were in the same room. It was afternoon and the girls had a free hour before having to begin their prep. But before Dinah had finished her sentence the door of the room flew open and a girl with red hair and freckles all over her face ran in. She looked very excited and her face was as red as Dinah's. "Dinah! Dinah!," the girl yelled. "Have you read Aunt Allie's letter? Oh, I simply can't wait until the hols!"

"Lucy-Ann!" admonished Pam, who was head of the class. "How dare you run in like this!"

But her voice got lost in the noise, because Dinah replied even more loudly to

the red-haired girl:

"Yes I have! What a surprise. Oh, I cannot wait either."

The two girls held on to each other and started what seemed to be a strange kind of dance in the middle of the room. Erika, who had been reading a book on the ground, had to flee hastily to a safer place, or else one of the two girls certainly would have fallen over her.

Dinah and Lucy-Ann didn't even notice. They were so excited. The other girls in the room looked at them and smiled, wondering what news the girls had received. If even Lucy-Ann was so excited, the news certainly must be terrific.

"Now," said Pam, after a while. "That's enough. Soon one of the mistresses will be along to ask us if we have gone mad. Please quieten down you two and tell us your news."

Finally Dinah and Lucy-Ann calmed down. But their faces were still red.

“Mother’s letter contained fantastic news,” Dinah said to her friends. “We are to go abroad in the coming hols, and you’ll never guess to what country!”

The girls didn’t know, so Dinah told them.

“India! Were going to India! Isn’t that terrific!”

It certainly was. The girls gazed with astonishment at Dinah and Lucy-Ann in the middle of the room. India, so very far away!

What a marvelous time they would have!

“How wonderful for you!” said Pam. “Please could you tell us more? Where in India will you be staying, and how will you travel there?”

“Mother doesn’t give many details. She only says that Bill has been invited to stay by someone he knows, and that we will all be spending the hols there,” replied Dinah, looking at her mother’s letter which she was still holding in her hands. “We’ll be going by plane. It’ll be fantastic!”

It really was something special to look forward to. Dinah and Lucy-Ann counted the days before the holiday would start. Thirty-five days! It seemed like a long time, but the days would fly past. Dinah and Lucy-Ann looked for India on the big globe which stood in Dinah’s classroom.

“There it is!” exclaimed Dinah.

“What a big country,” said Lucy-Ann. “It looks even bigger than on the maps we have.”

“That’s because India lies nearer the equator,” explained Dinah.

“Compared to India Britain is very small.”

“Can we see whereabouts in India we’ll be staying?” asked Lucy-Ann. “Aunt Allie mentioned the name, but it was such a strange name that I have completely forgotten it. Do you remember?”

“Khitanpur,” said Dinah. “Somewhere near Khitanpur.”

The two girls searched, but they could not find Khitanpur on the globe.

“We’ll have to look it up on the map,” said Dinah.

As the days passed the girls learnt more about the trip. They heard that they would be going to a part of the country in which there was a lot of jungle. It was a deserted part, far away from the big cities, and covered with very beautiful vegetation. Mrs. Cunningham sent them a book about it, and the two girls read it with interest.

“Look how many beautiful birds there are,” said Lucy-Ann to Dinah. “I bet Jack will be able to take some smashing photographs there.” Jack was Lucy-Ann's elder brother, and she was very proud of him. Lucy-Ann and Dinah were not real sisters. Dinah's mother had adopted Jack and Lucy-Ann after the children had spent an exciting holiday with each other. Lucy-Ann adored Dinah's mother, but Jack had a special place in her heart. It was too bad that she and Jack were separated during school terms. But in the holidays they saw each other and Lucy-Ann looked forward to being together again. Jack loved birds very much. He had a bird himself; a parrot named Kiki, who was with him at school. Kiki could say any number of phrases, and could imitate lots of sounds. She usually mixed them up, making the children laugh uproariously.

Dinah brought Lucy-Ann back to reality.

“He must not forget to buy plenty of rolls of film,” she said to the younger girl. “I don't know if we will be able to visit a shop in India.”

The day came that Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham arrived to take the children to town. They had asked special permission from the school to have the children for one day, because some preparations could not wait until school broke up. They would take the children to the hospital to get the required vaccinations, and they would take Kiki to the vet for an examination. Both were needed for traveling to India.

Dinah and Lucy-Ann were waiting outside at the front door, and were very excited. As soon as Bill's car appeared at the entrance of the school they started to run. The car braked and a door opened. “Aunt Allie!,” Lucy-Ann cried. “I have missed you.”

The girl ran into the arms of Mrs. Cunningham and gave her a big hug. Behind Mrs. Cunningham a second door opened and two boys stepped out of the car. Mr. and Mrs. Cunningham had picked up the boys first so that Jack and Philip were already there.

“Jack!,” cried Lucy-Ann when she saw her brother. “I had not expected you to be here!”

Jack smiled. “Hello sister,” he said.

He clearly was a brother of Lucy-Ann: he had the same red hair as she had, and the same enormous amount of freckles on his face.

Lucy-Ann let Mrs. Cunningham go and flung herself into the arms of her brother. She was overjoyed to see him.

“Hello!,” said a voice from above her. “Lucy, Lucy!”

Kiki!, exclaimed Lucy-Ann.

“Kiss goodbye!”, said Kiki and then made the sound of a very big kiss.

Lucy-Ann laughed.

“Not yet,” she answered. “Silly Kiki.”

But the parrot only wanted to have a hug from Lucy-Ann, and she gave it to her.

Dinah had kissed her mother too, and had said hello to Philip. She was not as demonstrative as Lucy-Ann. She now winked in the direction of the windows above the entrance of the school. “Don't think that they are deserted,” she told Philip. “All the girls are curious to see us.”

“Get in the car, everyone,” a deep voice called suddenly from the driving seat. “Let's get off. We have a busy day today and I have to bring you back on time this afternoon”. It was Bill, Mrs.

Cunningham's husband. He had not left the car, and Lucy-Ann quickly circled around it to give him a hug too.

They all got in the car, chatting happily. Bill accelerated and the car drove off.

They had a happy day in town. Lucy-Ann had been rather afraid of the vaccinations, but they were fine. Kiki complained much more. As soon as Jack entered the vet's surgery, the parrot tried to escape. But Jack didn't let her go. Kiki got angry and squawked

loudly. They all could hear her in the waiting room. But the vet was used to such things and treated her with professionalism. Kiki was examined thoroughly and afterwards the vet gave her some sweets as a reward.

“Your parrot is doing very well,” he told Jack. “I will write a report for her which you can take to India.”

Jack was relieved. He had been afraid that Kiki would not be allowed to enter India. If that had been the case, he would have stayed in England too. But now it seemed that he could go with the others.

They did some shopping in the town. Kiki was very noisy. She felt Jack’s relief. In the clothes shop she flew to the bar which was above the fitting rooms and walked along it, looking down into each room.

“Hello?,” she said with a deep, manly voice. “Hello?”

The women in the rooms got a fright. Lucy-Ann couldn't help laughing although it wasn't very polite.

“Where did she get that from?,” she asked Jack.

“From this year’s play,” answered Jack. “It’s the voice of the policeman picking up the telephone in our play. Kiki was there while we rehearsed, and she has picked up several sentences.”

“Police!,” said Kiki who had heard what Jack said. That word reminded her of some other phrases. “Get the police!”, she started yelling, and then she imitated the sound of a policeman’s whistle: “Pheeeeeeeeeee!”

The shop owner came running to the fitting rooms, looking very worried. Lucy-Ann couldn't stop laughing.

“Oh, I love it when Kiki says such things,” she said. “Oh, it is good that there are only two weeks of school left. Then we will all be together again.”

“And we’ll be off to India,” Philip said grinning. “What an exciting time we will have!”

Yes, Philip was right. They would have an exciting time!

Chapter 2. Making Preparations

By Bikram Bhakta Joshi

Finally the time came when they were to leave - and what a ruckus that there was! What with Dinah fighting with Philip over a glowworm - his latest pet, that he was thinking of taking along to India. Of course, Dinah was furious! Not that creepy crawly thing for sure! She simply couldn't bear it, and to think that she was to seat next to Philip on the plane. She would be fretting all the time for it to appear wriggling and crawling out over to her. Ugh! "But she's a beauty!" retorted Philip, taking the glowworm out of the perforated plastic box where he kept it. Dinah gave a horrid look, and with a squeal fled out of the room. "Wait - you should see the greenish light emitting from her abdomen. You are daft to be afraid of such a harmless creature!"

However, to Philip's indignation and Dinah's huge relief, 'the harmless creature' was to be left behind - after a firm denial by Bill.

"First of all, the airline people won't approve of your glowworm on board. Even if you were able to smuggle it over, I doubt if the climate out there will suit it. I hardly hope it to survive," Bill explained kindly yet firmly. "Surely you wouldn't like to end up taking life out of the poor thing, would you?"

Of course, Philip had the sense to see that Bill had point there, so he gave up the idea of letting the glowworm take a trip to India.

Well, perhaps he would come across some other interesting species in India. Maybe a baby elephant! He chuckled to himself - thinking of a cute little elephant cub trotting beside him and a dismayed look on Dinah's face.

And to add to the hullabaloo, there was this crazy Kiki of a bird, screeching her head off and being a nuisance to everyone. She had sensed the excitement and was going nuts.

"Give back that hanky, Kiki... KIKI!" yelled poor Lucy-Ann, who was tired of folding the hanky and packing it for the fifth time in a row - only for it to be neatly snatched away by the excited bird.

“Bad Kiki!” said Jack, giving Kiki a sharp tap on her beak - after returning the crumpled hanky to Lucy-Ann.

“Poor Kiki! Bad Kiki!” said Kiki, with a huff. “Boor Kiki! Pad Kiki!” And then hid her head inside her wing - as if ashamed.

“Yes - you should be ashamed of yourself,” said Jack, sternly.

“Really - you are impossible at times, Kiki. Yet, you are a darling!” Jack scratched her wings and immediately she popped out her head and swelled up as if to make some or other horrible noise. But looking at Jack's stern face she thought better of it and instead nibbled his ear with an affectionate crooning noise.

Jack was happy. He was looking forward to watching hordes of birds in the Indian jungle. He had already started studying books on Indian birds. One, which he was planning to pack along with his clothes, was lying on the bed. 'Popular Handbook of Indian Birds' by Hugh Whistler, it read.

“Surely you are not thinking of taking that huge book along with you!” said Mrs. Cunningham in exasperation.

“Please, Aunt Allie!” pleaded Jack. “Let me take just this one. I won't be able to recognize half the birds out there, if I don't have a reference book. And I'm looking forward to photographing quite a few for my photo album. That is part of the hols' assignment, you know - 'Visual Representation of your Hobby'. And you very well know that ornithology is my hobby. I might even be making it my profession.”

Mrs. Cunningham smiled, looking amused. She always felt amazed at Jack's craze over birds and at Philip's amazing ability to understand and make himself understood to all kinds of animals and insects alike.

“Guess what!” continued Jack. “I already know quite a few things about Indian birds. There is this cuckoo - which is called Koel in India. And there is this Mynah - which is said to be a talkative bird. Kiki will have a fine competition if she meets one.”

Kiki eyed Jack enquiringly. Talk of competition! She will be teaching them quite some manners. Grrrrrr - growled Kiki and stopped abruptly when she received a sharp tap on the beak for the second time that day. She squawked indignantly and flew out of the room.

“You and your birds,” sighed Mrs. Cunningham, giving way. “All right, all right - I will let you take this one. But mind you, not another. Your baggage is already brimming. I wonder how you're going to close it.”

“Oh - thanks!” said Jack happily. “I promise I won't put in another. Aunt Allie, have you seen my field-glasses? I thought I had them just a while ago.”

“Here they are, Freckles!” offered Philip, handing them over.

“You'd left them behind in the other room, old thing!”

“Thanks, Tufty!” said Jack, with a twinkle. “I'm looking forward to spotting one or two rare birds, if I am lucky enough.”

Freckles and Tufty - those were the nicknames they used for each other. What with Jack's freckled face, he couldn't have had a better nickname. And with that stubborn tuft of hair that Philip had which wouldn't bow down even after umpteen tries, he was rightfully nicknamed Tufty.

“Bill, where will we be staying in Khitanpur?” asked Dinah, who'd come back cautiously into the room and was eyeing suspiciously at Philip's pocket where he had kept his glowworm. “Will we be living in huts? In the book that mother had sent, I've seen pictures of people dwelling in huts with thatched roofs. It looks different from what we have here though.”

“No - no,” said Bill, packing the bundle of passports that they would be needing during the journey. “We won't be staying in such huts. My friend Jim Anderson, who has invited us to India, is providing us with a bungalow to stay - what they call as Dak Bungalow - a kind of rest house.”

“Isn't Jim the one you'd once gone traveling with to Africa?” asked Dinah.

“Yes - he's the one. He's a great game hunter and a globe-trotter. He has been living in India for a year though. Even if he's a hunter, he doesn't do that for pleasure. He is famous for stalking and hunting down dangerous wild animals - even killing them if needed. The villagers look upon him as a saviour. They call him 'Bagh Sahib' - as the one who hunts down tigers.”

“Killing wild animals?” said Philip in awe. “Doesn't that sound cruel? How could anyone regard him as a saviour!”

“No - as I said he doesn't do it for pleasure.” said Bill. “All the animals are not as tame and lovely as you generally see around here in England. There are times when the wild animals become dangerous - even start killing men and devouring them.”

“Gosh!” exclaimed Lucy-Ann, with a shiver.

“Golly - I've read about such animals in one book,” Jack chipped in, paying no attention to Lucy-Ann's disgusted look. “They are called man-eaters. Aren't they, Bill? One become a man-eater when the wild animal, be it a tiger or a lion, grow too old or wounded so that it can't hunt down its usual preys. Man is said to be its easiest prey. Though men are intellectual, they are physically weak compared to other animals.”

“You are right, Jack.” said Bill, giving a knowing glance at his wife, whose face wore a look of concern. “But there is nothing to worry, Allie. Jim says the locality where we are going is free from such animals - at least for miles.”

“Er - even so, is it really a good idea to take the children to such place?” said Mrs. Cunningham in a worried tone. “The place sounds pretty formidable! You never told me these things before.”

“Well - I thought you knew about Indian Jungles,” said Bill with a smile. “Anyway, Jim has not faced any of such incidents for quite a while. That was after he killed one tigress who'd become a man-eater because some poachers left her badly wounded. But that was nearly six month back and was in the next village - nearly five miles away. So you need not worry, Allie.”

“That means, in a way, men are responsible for turning an animal into a man-eater,” said Lucy-Ann, thoughtfully.

“That's very true, Lucy-Ann.” said Bill, puffing his pipe. Sensing the grimness in his wife's expression, Bill tried to change the subject. “All right - let's talk of the pleasant things about the place. This place where we are staying is called Chitban - which means a pleasant forest. It is half an hour's jeep ride from Khitanpur and situated on the edge of a dense forest - a proper jungle in fact. The place has been named after the jungle. Jim says that early in the morning, deer and black bucks come in flocks to graze on a meadow near the Dak Bungalow. It's a sight to watch he says - the deer gamboling and frolicking.”

“But - “ started Mrs. Cunningham, still not convinced.

“Come on, Mother!” said Philip, hugging her. “If Bill says the place is all right, it must be fine. After all, we'll have Jim with us. Besides, if Bill is there, nothing can go wrong!”

With a sigh, Mrs. Cunningham leaned back on her chair - shaking her head in apprehension. “I just hope everything is as fine as Bill says!”

Bill clasped her hand, and winked at Philip. The smoke emitting out of the pipe that Bill was smoking wriggled and curled up to the ceiling until it vanished into thin air.

“Golly!” said Jack, with a dreamy expression, his eyes following the path made by the smoke. “The place sounds smashing!”

Kiki flew in and settled on Jack's shoulder. “Pop - pop - pop!” She whispered into Jack's ear.

“You will like this place where we're going – old thing.” said Jack scratching Kiki's crest. “Lots of trees to fly around and you will be meeting many of your relatives out there. I just hope you won't get lost in the forest!”

“All the same, I've half a mind not to go,” mumbled Dinah. “The forest must be thronged with nasty insects.”

“Then you stay behind with Aunt Sarah,” said Philip, with a grin.

“And keep her company - while we go away to India.”

“Don't say that, Philip!” said Mrs. Cunningham sternly. “Of course - Dinah is coming. And yes - it's so kind of Sarah to come and stay here in our absence and look after the place. She will be

here at any moment. She called me this morning and said that she would be coming by train. Too bad we couldn't go to meet her at the station.”

Hardly had she finished speaking, than there was the screech of a vehicle stopping outside.

“That must be Sarah,” said Mrs. Cunningham, looking out of the window. “Dinah – go and see, will you?”

A thin-looking woman followed Dinah - beaming at everyone, a baggage in one hand and an umbrella in the other.

“Allie! So good to see you again!” she said with a twinkle in her eyes. Mrs. Cunningham hugged her and Bill gave her a broad smile.

“And it's so nice of you to come here to stay, Sarah!” said Mrs. Cunningham, gratefully.

“Hello Bill! How are you? Oh - is this Philip! My - my, how you have grown!” said Aunt Sarah, looking around at the children.

“And this must be Dinah. And here is little Lucy-Ann, yes? You must be Jack, with that dear-looking bird! I also used to have a parrot - but the poor thing died of old age just a month ago. Here - I have some sunflower seeds somewhere on me.” She fumbled around and brought out some seeds. She held them out for Kiki. Kiki cocked her head to one side and eyed the seeds suspiciously. Well - if this nice looking lady was kind enough to provide her with those tasty looking sunflower seeds, she wouldn't mind having some. With a squawk, she flew over to Aunt Sarah's shoulder and began to peck at the seeds - much to the amusement of the children. It was not often that Kiki trusted someone instantly.

“I still carry around a supply of sunflower seeds. I haven't grown out of the habit - as you see,” said Aunt Sarah, with a sad smile.

“Peppy, that was my parrot's name, liked them very much. She kept me company for so long a time - and fine company she was. It is sad to say goodbye - you know.”

To Lucy-Ann's horror, she suspected Aunt Sarah's eyes getting a little moist. She must be missing her parrot very much. Everyone

felt sorry for her - especially Jack. He couldn't think how he would feel in the absence of Kiki. He shook his head to keep out the horrible thought.

The children liked this timid looking woman, with a nice smile and a kind face. And if Kiki trusted her so readily, she must be all right!

At last, after many an unpacking and packing the preparations for the trip was supposedly completed, to the huge relief of Mrs. Cunningham. Well - was it complete?

“Goodness me!” said Mrs. Cunningham, in exasperation. “Philip - you've forgotten to put in your shorts. And why have you packed that sweater, Jack? Are you thinking of wearing it in that hot weather of India? You'll get boiled!”

“Gosh!” said Jack, looking sheepish. “I was supposed to tuck in a vest - instead a sweater went in. So stupid of me! Sorry, Aunt Allie!”

Aunt Sarah was sitting on the couch, smiling at the excited faces of the children. How happy they looked! They were bound to be happy, because they were leaving early in the morning the very next day.

“You'd better get into bed early, children!” said Bill, thinking that they wouldn't get their much-needed rest unless they had a good sleep before traveling commenced the next day. “It will be a long flight to Bombay - from where we will have to take another flight to Bangalore. Jim will be meeting us there. He has kindly agreed to arrange for further travels. You are in for a long and tiring journey, so try to get as much rest as you can.”

So amidst grumbles and complaints, the children were ushered into their rooms. It took two stern visits from Mrs. Cunningham, before the children at last settled down in their beds.

“Good night, Jack. Good night, Philip,” called out Lucy-Ann.

But no one replied from the next room because both the boys were already fast asleep - tired out as they were from the day's excitement. Only Kiki was awake, perched at the foot of the bed. "How many times have I told you to close the door?" said Kiki softly, probably to the small mouse scuttling into its hole in a corner of the room. But there was no door for it to close, of course. Really - Kiki! Sometimes you say such silly things. Now go to sleep, because tomorrow - it is going to be a very exciting day! Good Night, Kiki! Sleep tight!

Chapter 3. Off on an Adventure!

By Anita Bensoussane

Jack was the first to wake the next morning. It was not yet light so could hardly be called morning at all really, but they were to leave the house at some unearthly hour to catch an early flight from London Heathrow to Bombay. Remembering immediately that today was The Day, Jack felt a surge of excitement. He sat up in bed, fumbling for the switch of his bedside lamp, and turned it on with a click which sounded surprisingly loud in the stillness. Kiki stirred, blinked wonderingly, spread her wings and flew lightly to his shoulder, where she began to nibble at his ear. Philip was still sound asleep in his bed on the other side of the room, completely buried beneath his eiderdown except for that stubborn tuft of hair, which insisted on peeping out at the top.

“Here we go, Kiki old thing,” said Jack in a low voice. “Off on another adventure!”

His gaze wandered to the wall opposite his bed – his Wall of Adventure as he called it – and, squinting slightly in the dim light, he admired his collection of treasures. On that wall he had pinned up maps of secret ways and his precious photographs of birds, his favourites being the ones of golden eagles nesting in a castle courtyard and clouds of seabirds soaring and swirling above rocky islands in Scotland. The Castle of Adventure and the Sea of Adventure – what fine holidays they had had in both those places, full of the most extraordinary goings-on! “Jolly frightening at times,” thought Jack to himself, “but tremendously thrilling. I wouldn’t have missed them for the world!” Next to the maps and photographs was a wall-mounted cabinet with glass doors which held his prize possessions – a beautifully wrought dagger from the Greek island of Thamis and a weighty copper nugget from the Isle of Gloom. Underneath the cabinet stood a well-stocked bookcase containing heaps of bird and animal books, photography magazines, a fat volume on ships and another on aeroplanes,

plenty of adventure stories, an atlas or two and an enormous book about the lives of famous explorers.

“Perhaps we’ll be famous one day,” mused Jack, “with all the adventures we’ve had. How smashing it would be if someone decided to put us into a book!”

He was snapped out of his reverie by the sudden shrilling of the alarm clock from Bill and Aunt Allie’s room. “Rrr-r-r-r-r-r!” it shrieked, with a harsh, urgent jangle that went on and on. “Rrr-r-r-r-r-r! RRR-R-R-R-R-R!”

Kiki flew swiftly to Philip’s bed, poked her head beneath his eiderdown and repeated the sound loudly in his ear. “Rrr-r-r-r-r-r! RRR-R-R-R-R-R!”

Philip emerged from the covers, a startled expression on his face, but, like Jack, he remembered at once what day it was and felt far too excited to be cross. Already there was a banging of doors, a pattering of feet, a clamour of calling voices and a mad scramble for the bathroom as everyone hurried to get ready on time and, before long, an appetising smell of bacon and eggs drifted up the stairs as Aunt Sarah cooked a hearty breakfast for them all. Dinah hummed tunelessly but cheerfully to herself as she raced downstairs, two steps at a time.

“India!” she thought. “Nothing but a pink blob in my Geography textbook up to now. A pink blob which is about to come alive for us all! What does it have in store for us, I wonder?”

Several hours later they were on the aeroplane, heading for Bombay. Everything had gone smoothly – saying good-bye to Aunt Sarah, travelling to the airport, checking in their luggage, showing their passports and other documents, boarding the plane and tucking into a second breakfast which had been brought round on trolleys. Now they were well into the flight, enjoying a lunch of chicken salad followed by biscuits and fruit, washed down with orange juice.

“How super to be eating our meal amid the clouds!” exclaimed Philip, gazing at the ragged puffs of dazzling snowy whiteness which floated below them, through which they caught frequent glimpses of a constantly-changing landscape.

“How super not to have to wash up!” added his mother, smiling.

“There’ll be no washing-up at all for you these holidays, Allie,” said Bill, firmly. “We’ll have a maid at the bungalow, and a cook as well. All you have to do is relax.”

“I am rather looking forward to a nice, peaceful holiday,” admitted Mrs. Cunningham.

“Nice and peaceful?” said Jack, incredulous. “Whoever heard of a nice, peaceful jungle? I’m looking forward to adventures a-plenty!”

“A-plenty, a-plenty, nineteen, twenty!” squawked Kiki, jiggling up and down on Jack’s shoulder. That made them all laugh and nearby passengers turned their heads to look at the parrot, amused at her antics.

“I don’t know about nineteen or twenty adventures, old thing,” said Jack, ruffling Kiki’s feathers affectionately. “Mind you, we’ve had a fair few already so we may well have twenty in the end – or even more. You simply never know!”

“Lucy-Ann is quiet today,” remarked Dinah.

“Yes,” answered Philip. “She’s got her nose in a book.”

Lucy-Ann glanced up, hearing her name mentioned. “It’s Kipling’s The Jungle Books,” she said. “Both Jungle Books in one volume. Just the thing to read on a journey to India!”

“Let’s have a look,” said Philip, and Lucy-Ann passed him the book. Philip flicked through the pages with interest. “I’ve read these stories before,” he said, “but not for a while. And my copy didn’t have these illustrations. Aren’t they marvellous – so detailed and dramatic?”

“Yes,” agreed Lucy-Ann. “Wonderful pictures. As I turn the pages I can almost feel the jungle around me, dark and brooding and mysterious. Just look at that splendid drawing of the elephants, flinging up their trunks and trumpeting.”

Curious, Dinah and Jack had a look too, though Dinah shuddered at a picture of Mowgli wrestling with Kaa, the python. “Illustrated by Stuart Tresilian,” read Jack. “I was thinking only this morning that it would be smashing to have our own adventures put into a book – or perhaps a whole series of books. If there’s ever any chance of that, we’ll have to track down Stuart Tresilian and ask him to be the illustrator. I can just imagine what his drawings of misty islands, rocky passages, craggy mountains, castles, fox-cubs and puffins would be like. Absolutely first-class!”

“Oh, you and your dreams, Jack!” laughed Bill. He picked up his glass, still half-full of orange juice, and raised it solemnly. “To all our dreams!” he said, and drained the remaining juice in one go. Yes, to all their dreams! May at least some of them come true!

Chapter 4. India at Last!

By Anita Bensoussane

On landing in Bombay the children, Mrs. Cunningham and Bill caught another plane to Bangalore – a much shorter flight which, as Lucy-Ann commented, seemed to be over almost before it had begun. After they had produced their documentation for the umpteenth time, and collected their baggage, they made their way outside. A wave of shimmering heat hit them and the children were glad that they were dressed simply, the boys in shorts and sleeveless shirts, and the girls in cool cotton frocks. Jack noted the harsh sunlight which cast deep black shadows and thought what dramatic photographs he would be able to take in this country, full of contrasts.

A man was striding towards them, greeting Bill with a cheery grin. “Allow me to introduce Jim Anderson!” smiled Bill. “He’s going to take us the rest of the way by jeep.” Jack and the others gazed at Jim, awed, regarding him as something of a hero after what they had been told of his background. He was of a wiry build, tanned and rugged, with twinkling eyes of startling blue and dark hair tinged with grey at the temples. The children warmed to him at once and the boys in particular felt that they could learn a lot from him.

“Hop in!” he said, indicating the jeep, and the children clambered into the open back of the vehicle, marvelling at the massive tyres which were designed to ride easily over the roughest terrain. Mrs. Cunningham followed them, helped up by Philip, while Bill and Jim stowed away the luggage.

“It takes about an hour and a half to drive from here to Khitanpur and then on to Chitban,” said Jim as they set off. “But we could stop in the centre of Bangalore for a couple of hours first if you like. It’s a fascinating city and I thought you might welcome the opportunity to stretch your legs.”

“A splendid idea!” replied Bill, and everyone agreed. They drove to the centre, exclaiming at how busy and lively the city was.

Rickshaws, bicycles, cars, carts, donkeys and pedestrians jostled for space and there was a continuous babble of voices in languages the children could not even identify, let alone understand. The streets were lined with little shops and squat, square apartments, with the occasional bungalow. “I’ll give you a tour of the city by jeep before parking by the market,” said Jim. He was as good as his word and drove them past some spectacular sights – grand temples with tiers of intricate carving, huge statues, palaces with ornate columns and arches, and parks bright with blossoms, their fountains and shady trees looking most inviting. “No wonder Bangalore is known as The Garden City of India,” said Mrs. Cunningham, remembering what she had read in her guide book. “The parks are glorious, especially the roses which bloom everywhere. I can smell their fragrance as we pass.”

Jim pulled up at the market-place, leaving the jeep under the watchful eye of a parking attendant – a serious-faced boy who didn’t look much older than Lucy-Ann. It was fun to wander through the stalls, which sold all kinds of things – pottery, jewellery, ornaments, bolts of material in vivid colours, embroidered slippers, carpets, pastries and various fruits and vegetables, many of which were unfamiliar to the children. There was an aroma of spices and frying batter mingled with sandalwood and leather – pungent but rather pleasant once you got used to it. “I wonder whether anyone has thought of bottling this smell and selling it?” said Lucy-Ann, sniffing hard. “I’d like to buy some and scent my handkerchiefs with it so they’d always remind me of India!”

They came to a stall which sold wooden animals, carved in exquisite detail. Behind the counter sat an elderly man dressed in a long tunic and baggy trousers, whittling away at a new carving. Jack and the others watched, astonished to see the graceful form of a deer taking shape from a rough block of wood. “What wouldn’t I give to be able to do that!” exclaimed Philip. “Imagine how

surprised the fellows at school would be to see me pick up a lump of wood, chip away at it and produce a tiger or an elephant. Old Stibbins, the woodwork master, would probably faint with shock!” Jim insisted on buying an animal for each of them as a souvenir. Philip chose a panther, smooth and sleek, Lucy-Ann plumped for a bear-cub and Dinah picked out a comical-looking monkey. As for Jack, he was delighted with a majestic kite, its wings outspread and every feather distinct. He ran his hands absently over the solid wood, enjoying the feel of it beneath his fingers, until Kiki grew quite jealous and nuzzled against the boy’s hand, chuntering impatiently.

They continued wending their way through the maze of stalls. Bill bought a bottle of rose perfume for his wife and a large box of sweetmeats for everyone to share – little squares of a pink coconut confection, dense and sticky. They reminded Dinah of coconut ice. The children liked them but felt they could only manage one or two squares at a time – except Philip, who claimed that he could quite easily polish off the whole boxful by himself if only he had the chance!

“Oh!” cried Lucy-Ann suddenly, pointing at the next stall. “Those poor birds and animals! I do so hate to see them cooped up like that.” The others looked and saw a number of small cages of wood and wire, each containing a bird or animal, set out on a table. In the nearest cages were a mynah bird, a squirrel and a monkey, all looking rather bedraggled and sorry for themselves. “It does seem terribly cruel,” said Philip. “I expect these animals have been caught in the wild and will be sold to dealers. We know of pet shops back home which stock creatures like exotic finches or tortoises and, sadly, not all such pets have been bred in captivity. Unlike Kiki, of course, who has never lived in the wild and would be unhappy away from humans.”

Dinah saw that the stall was run by a girl of about her own age and an older woman – the mother, probably. She sensed that the girl was staring at her, and caught her eye. The girl winked, not at all abashed. She pointed at her hair and then at Dinah’s, saying

something that Dinah could not understand before breaking into a peal of merry laughter. Her laughter was infectious and Dinah found herself smiling even before Jim explained the joke. Like Dinah, the girl had a tuft of hair at the front of her head which refused to lie down flat and she had been amused to see that Dinah – and Philip too – had the same problem. The Indian girl's hair was thick and black like her mother's, but hers was unruly while her mother's was perfectly straight and glossy. Both the girl and her mother wore elegant saris of green and purple but the older woman's face was stern and forbidding, her mouth set in a straight line, while the face of the girl sparkled with mischief and merriment and perhaps just a touch of defiance. Dinah offered her a sweetmeat and the girl took it. As she did so, the metal bangles on her slender brown wrist jangled and she slipped one off and handed it to Dinah with a smile. Dinah put it on, surprised to have made a friend without actually having spoken a word. It gave her a warm feeling to have been singled out by the girl. People normally fell into conversation with Jack because of Kiki, or admired Philip's ability with animals, or adored the affectionate Lucy-Ann, but Dinah generally took longer to get to know people – or to let people get to know her. It made a change for someone to notice her from the start.

Seeing Jim greet the girl's mother and exchange a few words with her, Dinah asked if he knew the family. "Yes," he answered, "or at least I know of them. The girl's name is Jaya and she minds the stall with her mother and helps at home with the housework. She's something of a rebel though, by all accounts – a restless soul who would much prefer to spend her time out in the wilderness if she were allowed, hunting and trapping and fishing with her father and elder brother."

Dinah liked to think of her friend as a rebel. She herself was plucky and adventurous and it seemed that Jaya was the same. Just as she was thinking that, there came an almighty crash and the sound of raised voices. The market was crowded and, in the hustle and bustle, someone had jolted the table, knocking one of

the animal-cages to the floor. As it hit the ground, the catch came undone and the door sprang open. Out scampered a little creature, coming to a halt at the sight of all the staring faces surrounding it. It stayed stock-still, only its whiskers twitching, and the children admired its long, bushy tail and coat of speckled grey.

“What is it?” asked Dinah. “It looks rather like a stoat to me.”

“It’s a mongoose,” said Philip. “Isn’t it a beauty?”

“Yes,” agreed Lucy-Ann. “It’s like Rikki-tikki-tavi in The Jungle Book.”

The mongoose had sat up at the sound of Philip’s voice, alert and quivering. The crowd of onlookers fell silent, waiting to see what would happen. Slowly, Philip took a step closer, making a low crooning noise in his throat. The little creature looked up at him with eyes of golden-brown, somehow knowing that it could trust this boy. Still moving slowly, Philip crouched down and held out his hand. The mongoose sidled nearer and sniffed cautiously at his fingers. Then, with a sudden bound, it leapt onto the boy’s shoulder, curling its tail around the back of his neck.

“Oh, what a darling!” cried Lucy-Ann. “Are you going to keep it, Philip? Please do say yes.”

Jim had a quick word with the older woman, who nodded her head. “The mongoose is yours if you want it,” said Jim to Philip. “Jaya’s mother says it must have taken a liking to you – she always found it a temperamental little thing herself and she’ll be glad to let it go.”

Philip was overjoyed. “Thank you,” he said. “I won’t force it to stay with me if it wants to wander back off into the wild, of course, but I get the feeling it will be happy to keep me company for a while.”

“Super!” said Jack. “What are you going to call it?”

“It’s a boy mongoose, so what else but Rikki?” replied Philip, smiling at Lucy-Ann. “Our very own Rikki-tikki-tavi!”

Although the air was still warm, late afternoon had slipped into evening and the sky was a flame of rose and gold. Bill checked

his watch. "I'm afraid it's time we were leaving," he said.
"We've had a long day and we still have quite a way to go."
They returned to the jeep and piled in, suddenly feeling weary. As the jeep rumbled and jolted along, the children and Mrs. Cunningham lolled against one another and, one by one, fell fast asleep. Kiki tucked her head under her wing and Rikki curled up snugly on Philip's lap. Stars studded the sky and the moon spilled its silvery radiance over the countryside, but still they slept on. And every turn of the wheels, every judder and jolt, brought them nearer and nearer to the jungle – the Jungle of Adventure!

Chapter 5. The Dak Bungalow

By Hari Menon

It turned out Bill had miscalculated the amount of time the children would take to explore Bangalore! As Jim steered the jeep deftly on a southward course he spoke softly to Bill, who was sitting next to him.

“Looks like rain, Bill. I hope we get there by nine o'clock. I've told the boy to keep dinner ready in any case.”

“I don't think the children are hungry yet. They had plenty to eat in the evening,” replied Bill. All the same, he was hoping they wouldn't be too late. He turned around to smile reassuringly at his wife.

“All fine back there, Allie?” he asked. She and the children were awake again – all except Lucy-Ann, who was still fast asleep. The half-hour nap certainly was refreshing.

“There's some of that coconut sweet left -- want some?” asked Philip.

“No thanks,” said Bill. “I wouldn't want to deprive you. I'm surprised you didn't finish it all, actually.”

“No, we didn't,” said Philip, who was feeling a bit sick. He reached out to stroke Rikki, who had curled into a ball on his lap and was fast asleep.

Lucy-Ann continued to asleep, squashed uncomfortably between Jack and Dinah. Kiki was wide awake though, and kept eyeing the mongoose.

“Rikki-tikki,” she said thoughtfully. “Rikki-tikki, tikki-rikki, rikki...”

“You got it, old thing,” said Jack. “That's his name. How much longer, Jim? My bones feel as if they have shaken loose!”

“Matter of an hour -- or less, if the weather holds,” said Jim. The thunderclouds were gathering ominously overhead, but he didn't seem worried. For that matter, nothing ever seemed to faze him. About an hour after they set out, they saw a weather-beaten sign that read “Khitanpur -- 5 miles”. But then the jeep swerved off the

tarred road and into a jungle path where two deep tyre ruts were clearly visible. Clearly they weren't going to touch Khitanpur after all.

“Oh dear -- I hope this doesn't keep up,” said Mrs Cunningham.

“Is the road this bad all the way, Jim?”

“Nope,” said Jim with a grin. “It gets worse ten miles on.”

Dinah groaned. “I think I'm beginning to feel hungry again. Are we stopping at a hotel, Bill?”

“The nearest hotel is an hour away -- in the direction we came from!” said Bill. “But don't worry; we'll have supper waiting when we arrive at the bungalow.”

There passed through a thickly forested area, which Jim informed them was called Chitban, or “beautiful forest”. Jim said that the trees on either side of the road were mostly teak, and sandalwood. The former, he said, was widely used to make furniture while sandalwood yielded a kind of oil that was used to make perfumes.

“What's that to our right, Jim? Not an elephant, surely?” asked Jack suddenly. He pointed to a black shadow some distance from the track. Night had fallen, but the moon threw a ghostly glow on the landscape and they could make it out easily.

Jim didn't even bother to look at the looming shape. “Oh, it's one of those stone things... this area is full of them. Nobody knows what they are exactly, but it's commonly believed they are megalithic monuments -- markers for ancient burial chambers.”

“They're called dolmens,” put in Bill. “You have them in Europe too. They usually consist of three or four upright stones, on which rests a large flat stone. Most of these structures date from the early Neolithic period -- that's three or four thousand years BC.”

“How absolutely thrilling!” said Philip at once. “Let's stop and explore.”

“Don't be silly, Philip,” said his mother. “This is no time to explore megaliths.”

“We know, Aunt Allie,” said Jack hopefully. “But can't we just take a quick look?”

“You can always explore during the day,” said Jim firmly. “There are many more of these in this area -- including one just a mile away from where we're going to stay. Some of them have underground chambers, so you can see those too -- if you promise to be careful.”

“Super!” thought Philip and Jack, making up their minds to go exploring the very next morning!

Thankfully it didn't rain, despite some ominous rumbles every now and then. It was almost 9 o'clock when the jeep pulled off the dirt road and into a little clearing. All of them tumbled out in a heap, glad to get a chance to stretch their legs. Lucy-Ann took a while to realize where they were though.

“This is as far as the jeep will go,” said Jim. “The path to the bungalow is being resurfaced, so I don't want to risk taking the jeep any further. See that light up there? That's the place. It's only a couple of minutes if you walk up. Just stick to the left and you'll be there in no time.”

It didn't take very long for them to climb the last few feet and reach the place that would be their home for the next few days. It was a large stone building with solid wooden beams and rafters, and had the sloping roof that's common in places that see heavy rainfall. The roof was made of what looked like terracotta tiles, but it was too dark to say. A single light-bulb hung on the verandah, or porch.

“Welcome to my humble abode!” said Jim Anderson with a flourish as he ushered them in. “And mind the lizards,” he added, even as Dinah gave a muffled shriek.

The single-storeyed building was squarish, with a large verandah in front and a rather smaller one at the back. Two bathrooms were at either end of the rear verandah. The main door opened into a large hall, which had an unlit fireplace and two bookcases. It was sparingly furnished, but what little furniture there was seemed very old indeed.

Massive teak doors led off to smaller rooms, which the children presumed were the bedrooms. A passage led to the dining hall, with the kitchen at the rear.

“You know why it's called a dak bungalow, don't you?” Jim said. “Dak is the Indian word for post, or mail, and these bungalows were built by the British to be used by mail carriers and officials as a place to rest when they had to visit remote places. Later they were taken over by the Indian government and made into rest-houses in areas that had no hotels.”

“Khitampur was a thriving little town not so long ago,” he continued. “It had a brisk trade in sandalwood and spices. For some reason the business began to fail about ten years ago and it became more and more of a ghost town. They say smuggling had something to do with it. Anyway, this dak bungalow came up for sale some years ago and I decided to buy it for myself.”

“Oh, and I thought it was _dark_ bungalow all along!” said Lucy-Ann in surprise, as the others roared at her.

“The lights _are_ a bit dim, I'm afraid,” Jim said. “There's no electricity, you know, so we have to generate our own power from a paraffin-run generator. And there's no hot water on tap in the bathrooms. You'll have to get it from the kitchen.”

“Well, don't worry -- we're quite used to roughing it,” said Bill with a smile. Aren't we, kids?

“Rather!” said Jack. “Compared to some of the places we've stayed in, this seems like paradise. Remember Craggy-Tops? It was much worse -- terribly cold and draughty.”

“Do I remember!” said Philip, rolling his eyes. “I can see we're going to have fun here. See those bookcases, Jack? They seem to have some old books and maps -- have a squint. I bet you'll find a Kipling or two there.”

“I'm sure,” said Jack, looking pleased. “Hey -- where's that mongoose off to?”

Indeed, Rikki had jumped off Philip's shoulder and was busy sniffing around the room. He shot through a connecting door and was gone.

“Oh, let him be,” said Philip. “I’m sure he wants to explore the place. I would too, if I weren’t so tired.”

“I’m hungry,” said Lucy-Ann dolefully. “I don’t even care if we eat indoors or outdoors anymore! Doesn’t anybody want dinner?”

“I’ll go see what Krish has made,” said Jim, disappearing into the doorway. He’s the boy who helps in the kitchen. I have two helpers -- Krish, who’s in charge of the kitchen, and an old man who doubles as watchman and caretaker. He lives in a little cottage outside the main house -- you wouldn’t have seen him since you didn’t take the main path.”

“I’m sure you’d like to wash up first,” he continued. “Why don’t you check out the bedrooms and choose the one you like? There are three guest rooms, so you’ll not be on top of each other. That one on the right is mine, by the way.”

Lucy-Ann liked her room. It had a simple wooden cot that was large enough for both Dinah and her, and a small chest of drawers. A wood-framed mirror stood in one corner. A second door opened out on to the rear verandah. The boys’ bedroom was similar, but the one Bill chose had a bigger bed -- and an old-fashioned writing desk in the corner!

Twenty minutes later the four children and three grown-ups were sitting at the large wooden table tucking into their meal. It was simple fare, but everyone agreed it was delicious -- even if it caused Dinah’s nose to run; it was so very spicy!

There was a tureen of dal, a kind of soup made of yellow lentils. There was a spicy curry made from vegetables bought from the market in Khitanpur. There were seven fat trout that Krish had caught from a nearby stream and roasted over a slow fire. There was plate of salad. There was a mountain of chapattis -- a kind of flat bread -- and fragrant steamed rice. And then there was rice pudding for dessert!

Krish stood by silently and watched them eat. He would eat only after they were done; clearly he felt his duty was to fill the plates as fast as they were emptied. He was a thin, solemn, dark-skinned

boy only a little older than Philip or Jack. The children wondered if he understood any English.

Kiki seemed to approve of the meal wholeheartedly, though she kept asking Dinah to blow her nose. As for Philip's mongoose, he was fast asleep -- in Philip's bed!

Chapter 6. A Sudden Disturbance

By Michael Edwards

After dinner, they all sat around together, talking idly for a while, and eating a few more sweets. Philip and Lucy-Ann both yawned, and Jack frowned at them - but they couldn't help it.

Bill said, "Well, it's been a relaxing evening after a long day. I think it's time you kids were off to bed now."

"Not yet, Bill," said Philip, trying to stifle another yawn. "I wanted to explore the bungalow, and see all over it."

"Time enough for that tomorrow," said Bill firmly. "And the light will be better for that then, also. Go on - off you go. We'll be following you very soon anyway."

Lucy-Ann yawned again, and set the others off, too. They protested a bit more; but their hearts weren't in it, since they were in fact starting to droop rather after their exciting day; and soon they went off to undress and brush their teeth. Rikki curled up on Philip's bed and looked at him as if to say, "I'm waiting for you - aren't you coming to bed?"

"Yes, Rikki - I'm coming now," said Philip, stroking the mongoose's fur affectionately.

The girls talked with each other a bit in bed, as did the boys, and there was occasional calling out from one bedroom to the other - but that soon died away as the children fell asleep. Rikki snuggled up close to Philip, and Kiki perched on the bed-head next to Jack and put her head under her wing to go to sleep.

Jack suddenly awoke with a vague feeling of alarm penetrating his befuddled mind, although he had no idea why; he fought to regain his senses as he struggled to emerge from a vague dream about jungles and snakes and mongooses and animal poachers and giant monoliths and burial chambers, all jumbled up somehow in a way that was increasingly making less sense as his mind came more into focus.

He heard Kiki mumbling away, and thought that must have been what awakened him. But he was still puzzled - Kiki didn't usually wake him up in the middle of the night, and he had the nagging feeling that there must be a reason.

He sat still, listening intently for a minute. In the silence of the night, broken only by the distant croaking of frogs, he suddenly heard a slight rustling outside - and possibly the cracking of a twig too. This must be what had awakened Kiki and stirred her up slightly. Kiki raised her crest and said, "Call the police" - almost conversationally to begin with - then again, a bit louder, "Call the police!"; and in the moonlight coming in at the window, Jack saw her start to open her beak wider.

Jack had a sudden hunch as to what she was about to do, and reached out to her. "Pheee - " she started to screech, before Jack tapped her on the beak to silence her.

"Shut up, Kiki," he snapped at her irritably. "For goodness' sake, what's up with you? - we're all trying to sleep. It's probably just a mouse outside."

Philip stirred and woke, rubbing his eyes.

"Blow you, Kiki," said Jack. "Do you want to wake everyone up?"

"What's up?" asked Philip sleepily.

"Kiki's heard something outside and was about to screech out her police whistle," replied Jack. "Wouldn't that go down well? - and she probably just heard a rat or mouse or something."

Kiki still seemed agitated, and made as if to say more, but Jack tapped her beak again, afraid she might wake the entire household up.

He sat listening further - and again a few indistinct noises came that somehow did not feel like the natural noises of the night.

"I think we'd better go out and investigate," said Jack in a low voice. "I'm starting to think it's more than just some small creature outside. And I don't entirely like the idea that people may be snooping round outside - even though it may just be curious locals who noticed strangers arriving here."

"I wouldn't have thought there'd be many locals around at all, here in such a lonely spot in the jungle," said Philip.

"That's what makes it necessary to check it out," whispered Jack.

"Come on - we won't tell Bill. We'll just go out and look round, and come back and tell him if we find anything out of order."

The boys slipped on their dressing-gowns and shoes, got their torches, and left the room - and almost bumped into the two girls, who had apparently just emerged from their room after hearing the commotion. Jack whispered to them what had happened, and Lucy-Ann looked a bit scared. But Dinah immediately said, "I'll come with you."

"No, you won't," said Philip.

"Yes, I will," she said, "and you can't do a thing to stop me."

"Dinah, for goodness' sake, we can't all go out there stomping around like a herd of elephants."

"You're not stopping me," whispered Dinah back fiercely. "And I can be just as quiet as you can. And if we keep arguing about it, not only will we miss seeing whatever's going on outside, but we'll wake Mother and Bill, and they will stop *all* of us going out. So just be a good boy, and let me come along with you."

Philip glared at Dinah, but saw that he had no choice but to give in and let her come. Lucy-Ann showed no desire to come, and Jack said to her, "Look after Kiki for me, will you? She's still a bit agitated, and I'm afraid she might make a noise at the wrong moment. Try and keep her quiet if you can."

"Yes, of course," said Lucy-Ann. "Kiki, dear - come on - come with me a bit and I'll look after you." Kiki immediately flew from Jack's shoulder to Lucy-Ann's, and crooned a little to her, nibbling her ear affectionately and cracking her beak once or twice. She seemed to be calming down now.

"Perhaps you'd better take Rikki into your room, too, if you don't mind," said Philip, who had picked Rikki up. "He may not be quite as used to you yet as he is to me, but I think he'll go with you."

Dinah already had her torch, and had donned her shoes and a dressing-gown, obviously already prepared to go outside even before she had met the boys.

Lucy-Ann returned to her room with Kiki still on her shoulder. Philip followed with Rikki, left him with Lucy-Ann, shut the door to her room to stop Rikki following him out again, and then rejoined Jack and Dinah.

The three children crept past the other rooms where the grown-ups were hopefully still asleep, and out of the front door and onto the verandah.

"Just a minute," whispered Jack. "I thought the sounds were more from the back, although they were so soft it was difficult to be sure. But we haven't seen out the back yet and don't know the lie of the land; so maybe it's best to start from the front. Why don't we split into two parties and go on opposite sides of the bungalow, so we don't miss anything? We can meet up at the back."

"How will we let each other know if we find anyone or anything that needs to be watched out for?" said Philip.

"I know," said Jack. "If any of us sees anything, we can signal to each other by making owl-hoots. I heard owl-hoots earlier in the evening, and I think I can mimic them, even though they are a bit different from owls in England."

"Good idea," said Philip. "I heard those owls earlier, too, and I think I can make a passable imitation. How about one hoot means 'Seen nothing'; two means 'Seen something or someone suspicious, am following them - be careful for yourself'; three means 'Come to me immediately'; four means 'Keep away and go and get Bill immediately'?"

"Great," said Jack. "The more hoots, the greater danger it signifies. Now let's go - we may not have a lot of time. You and Dinah go along the left of the bungalow, and I'll go to the right. Thank goodness those clouds have mostly cleared and the moonlight is coming through. Try to avoid using torches if you

can, and if you do, cover them with your hands and let only the tiniest chinks of light slip through your fingers."

The children separated into their two parties and crept away on either side of the bungalow.

Lucy-Ann sat in her room, anxious and worried as she tried to calm the wriggling mongoose down on her bed, while Kiki sat on her shoulder, chattering away occasionally. She had largely calmed down, but still seemed a touch agitated. Lucy-Ann listened intently to any noises outside in the night, but heard only indistinct sounds that could have been normal night sounds in this strange new place.

"Come back, Jack," she murmured to herself anxiously. "I'm sure it's not safe out there. We should have woken Bill and Jim up, and they would know what to do. We should have, we should have." She sat for a few more minutes; then suddenly she heard a confused commotion outside. She couldn't quite identify all the sounds, but heard a fair bit of rustling of bushes, and she thought she heard more than one voice - one of which sounded like a man's voice.

Kiki squawked and flew off Lucy-Ann's shoulder. Startled, Lucy-Ann jumped up and looked around to see what had upset Kiki and to see where she had gone. Not seeing Kiki anywhere in the room, Lucy-Ann was puzzled. The door was still shut, so where could Kiki have gone?

Lucy-Ann looked higher - and there was Kiki, perched somehow above the closed door. There was a louvred ventilation opening over the doorway, and the louvres were open - and Kiki was sitting in the opening.

"Kiki!" called Lucy-Ann. "What's up with you? Come here."

More noises came from outside, and Kiki squawked again and disappeared out of the room through the opening. Lucy-Ann threw open the door and ran out of the room, managing to shut the door just in time to keep Rikki inside as he made to leave the room

too. She ran towards the front of the bungalow, and was just in time to see Kiki flying out of the front door, which had been left open.

More noises reached her, and they sounded as if they were coming from the rear of the bungalow.

"I must get Bill," she panted to herself, making for the door to Bill's bedroom.

"Bill, Bill," she called out, knocking on his door. "I think the boys and Dinah are in trouble outside!"

Chapter 7. Adventures in the Night

By Michael Edwards

Jack saw a rough foot-track going to the rear of the bungalow, with thick bushes on the right of the track and the side wall of the bungalow on the left. As he crept along, utter silence reigned, until he reached the rear of the bungalow. There appeared to be a large clearing studded with trees and bushes extending backwards from the rear verandah.

Suddenly he heard another distant sound - again a slight rustle that didn't seem natural, somehow. It seemed to come from the other side of the clearing, or perhaps from the thick trees that bordered the rear of the clearing - it was difficult to tell. In the silver-grey-black moonlit landscape, it was impossible to see anything clearly at all.

It occurred to Jack that the sounds seemed to come from a spot that was quite close to where Philip would emerge from the other side of the bungalow.

"I'd better warn him," he thought - and, putting a hand to his mouth, he gave two quick hoots, hoping he sounded enough like the local owls he'd heard earlier.

Suddenly the rustling got louder, and a dark figure rapidly approached him! "What is it?" the man whispered in an accented voice.

Jack stood rooted to the spot, terrified, and not knowing how to respond, or whether simply to run.

Philip and Dinah went round the end of the front verandah and made their way along the left side of the bungalow, where the ground was very rough; but a slight path could be seen in the dappled moonlight. It didn't look as if this path was used very often, since it was overgrown with weeds, and even tendrils from some creeper off to the side.

Something scampered across the path and Dinah could be heard

giving a sharp intake of breath. Philip clapped his hand across her mouth, afraid she might scream; she struggled briefly, then quietened down, and Philip removed his hand.

"What was that for?" whispered Dinah crossly.

"Just thought you'd scream out at the sight of a rat crossing the path," said Philip.

"You beast," said Dinah, raising her voice slightly.

"Just shut up and come on," said Philip. Dinah glared at him, but subsided, and continued ahead with him.

As they rounded the rear corner of the bungalow and saw a clearing ahead partly covered with bushes, there was a sudden commotion some distance ahead, well behind the rear of the bungalow - and Philip heard three urgent-sounding owl-hoots from somewhere ahead.

"Come on - we must find Jack - they may have got him," whispered Philip.

He moved forward rapidly, with Dinah immediately behind. They went round a clump of bushes - and bumped into someone!

The other person fell over, and as he got up he exclaimed something indistinct, then murmured irritably, "I only wanted you to come to me, not to knock me over. Come with me and - " He broke off in surprise as he got a good look at Dinah and Philip.

"Oh! - who are you? - what are you doing here?"

Dinah, still smarting over Philip's rebuke, felt bold, and retorted, "I might ask what are *you* doing snooping round this house where we're staying? You have no business being here - especially in the middle of the night!"

"You're a cheeky young miss, aren't you?" said the man, who looked more English than Indian, and had very little accent. "You kids had better come with me!" Before Philip and Dinah could move away, he reached out with both hands and grabbed them each by an arm, and started dragging them through the bushes. Dinah wriggled furiously and tried to kick the man, but he seemed to be very strong, and held on and kept dragging the two across the clearing. She yelled out, "Bill - Bill - help us - they've got us!"

Jack stared at the man in front of him, who seemed just as startled as he was.

"Who are you, and why are you here?" he asked the Indian man in front of him.

"You do not need to know about that," he replied in a thick accent. "You are new here, and you do not know what goes on in this area, and it is not your business. Come with me."

He grabbed Jack, and gave a hoot like an owl. He waited for a responding hoot, then started walking Jack in the direction it came from. Jack struggled to get away, and the man hit him.

Suddenly a fluttering sound welled up from behind, and something seemed to be swooping down on the man, who tried to duck.

Whatever it was came back again, and the man started to panic, and fell over, dragging Jack down onto the ground with him.

Astonished at this sudden intervention, Jack looked up and all around, and, although he could see only dimly in the moonlight, he could see that it was Kiki. She must have got outside somehow, heard the goings-on, and come to join him again. She was clearly upset at seeing the man attacking Jack, and flew in circles closely above the man's head, her wings almost flapping in his face.

The panicked man, not knowing what had suddenly attacked him like this, gave a yell and let Jack go, and blundered off into the bushes. Jack picked himself up and rubbed himself, as Kiki settled onto his shoulder.

"Thanks, Kiki, old thing," murmured Jack to Kiki, rubbing her on the crest. "Kiki comes to the rescue in a crisis."

He peered ahead, trying to see where the man was going; but, although he could hear crashing sounds in the bushes made by the man, he couldn't see where he had gone. He headed cautiously in that direction as best as he could hear, thinking that Philip and Dinah may be over there, and afraid the man would crash into them.

Suddenly he heard scuffling and struggling ahead, and screams from Dinah. He ran towards the screaming.

Philip and Dinah kept on struggling against the man who dragged them through the bushes. Suddenly Philip managed to break away, and tried to force the man to let Dinah go. She had just broken free too when a second man, seemingly darker-skinned, loomed up ahead and approached, lunging at Philip before he could run away. He dealt Philip a heavy blow to the head, and Philip fell, momentarily stunned.

Dinah was grabbed again by the man who had been holding her before, and she screamed for help.

Another, smaller figure appeared from the bushes and latched itself onto the man holding Dinah. It was Jack, Dinah saw with relief. Jack pummelled the man hard, trying to make him let go of Dinah.

"Jack, get him off me," she yelled. "He's hurting me - and the other man knocked Philip to the ground."

"Get off her, you bully," yelled Jack at the man, trying to pull him away from Dinah. "She's just a girl and can't hurt you."

The other man came up and grabbed Jack, and gradually overpowered him, holding him firmly with his arm twisted behind his back as he groaned in pain. He was alarmed to suddenly feel cord being threaded round his wrists, and struggled wildly in panic; but he could not stop the man from tying his hands together behind his back. Dinah's captor grabbed her again, and started tying her up also.

"Philip! Philip!" she screamed - but, off to one side, she could see Philip staggering to his feet, obviously still stunned and unable to help much just yet.

"Help, help!" she called, before what felt like yards of cloth were stuffed into her mouth.

One of the men pulled out from his clothing what looked like a large folded mail-bag, and started unfolding it, until it appeared

more than three feet long; and the other moved towards Philip with rope in his hand, obviously intending to bind him too - when two large figures suddenly loomed up and launched themselves furiously into the two men, taking full advantage of the element of surprise which was on their side.

These newcomers didn't waste energy with words, but pounded their fists into the two men, sending them flying to the ground. The two men tried to get up and fight, but one seemed winded and the other was flagging noticeably with exhaustion, and they abandoned the fight and ran off into the bushes.

Jack and Dinah looked at their rescuers - and saw with infinite relief that they were Bill and Jim. Good old Bill and Jim! Thank goodness they had come to the rescue - and just in the nick of time, too.

Chapter 8. A Change of Plans

By Keith Robinson

Philip's head was feeling rather sore just above his right ear. A bruise was already beginning to develop, and a very worried Mrs Cunningham was dabbing at it with a cold wet cloth. "Sit back," she fussed over him. "Don't try to get up. And keep that horrible animal away before you get germs."

"I'm all right, Mother!" said Philip, getting quite cross. "And Rikki doesn't have germs. He's really quite clean." Nevertheless he pulled the squirming mongoose down from his shoulder and into his lap, where he stroked it fondly. Rikki almost seemed to purr like a cat and immediately curled up and closed his eyes.

Philip was more annoyed with the situation than hurt from the heavy blow to his head. Those brutes had very nearly kidnapped his sister and Jack, and Philip had been powerless to stop them. If it hadn't been for Jim and Bill showing up at the right moment... They were all seated in the dining hall, around the table they had eaten so well at just a few hours earlier. It had been such a nice meal and a happy, exciting occasion — but now, in the dead of night, with a ring of worried faces and the threat of danger in the darkness outside, the thrill seemed to have gone out of the holiday. Lucy-Ann was crying and couldn't seem to stop. Jack was comforting her as best he could, and even Kiki was sitting on her shoulder nibbling her ear with affection — but the tears continued to flow. Dinah looked pale and scared, and kept glancing at Philip and wincing at the darkening bruise she saw there.

Mrs Cunningham was out of sorts, and dabbed at Philip's head as if it were bleeding profusely. Once more Philip brushed her hand away. "Mother, if you keep that up, you'll wipe away the skin and get right down to the skull!"

In the background, keeping himself to himself, Krish stood silently. He was a very odd boy, Philip thought to himself. Did he ever speak?

Meanwhile, Bill was furious. He was off to the side of the room talking to Jim. He'd pulled Jim aside earlier as if to have private words with him, but the room was almost empty of furnishings and his low, growling voice bounced easily off the walls so that everyone could hear what he was saying.

"You must have some idea who those men were, Jim," he insisted. "What were they doing here? What did they want with my children?"

Philip felt a small rush of pride. Even though Bill was technically his stepfather, it was still a thrill whenever Bill spoke of the four children as his own — as he did more and more frequently as time went on. It had been strange for Philip and Dinah at first, to be without a father for so long and then, suddenly, to have one again, and to be able to say "my father" in conversation like all the other boys and girls at school. It was especially exciting because Bill was not an ordinary man by any means. He worked with the government, a sort of spy, a man of mystery and intrigue. He could be a very dangerous man to cross — but at the same time was the most loving and thrilling father any child could ever have. Jim was frowning deeply and pacing back and forth. "I honestly don't know who they are, Bill. But..." He stopped and stared at the floor for a moment. "I wonder..."

"You wonder what?" said Bill. "Spit it out, man!"

Jim turned to face them all, looking troubled. "There was an incident a couple of weeks ago. I busted a small poaching game quite by accident. I was out hunting, you see — I'd seen a particularly nasty cobra loitering about near the dolmen one time. I was going to let it live so I could study it, but when I heard you were coming to visit, Bill, I figured you and the kids would want to explore the place. So I went to the dolmen to hunt it down." He paused for breath, and Philip couldn't help jumping in. "What kind of cobra?"

"The big kind," said Jim grimly. "A King Cobra. You don't see them around here very often, except in captivity — they're often used by snake charmers, you know. But I haven't seen one in the

wild for years. It was a bit of shock when I saw the thing. They can grow up to eighteen feet, you know, and — "

Dinah promptly gave a scream and visibly shuddered. "I want to go home," she said shakily.

"Don't be silly," said Philip — but he said it gently and kindly. He was still quite shaken by the idea that his sister had nearly been kidnapped. He knew that Jack could have handled himself, but Dinah...

"Don't worry, love," said Jim. "The chances of meeting that thing are slim. Snakes are more scared of humans than we are of them, you know. Besides, King Cobras are more interested in feeding on other snakes. And if they can't find other snakes, they'll go after rodents." He eyed Rikki with a smile. "That mongoose there — keep him by you, Philip, because those critters will go after snakes like they're play things. A mongoose is tough; it can stand to be bitten by a cobra, because it has some natural resistance to the venom. But mark my word — a King Cobra's bite can bring down an elephant, so steer clear. If you see one... well, just make sure you don't," he finished with a frown.

Bill went over to Lucy-Ann, who had finally stopped crying and seemed petrified into silence. Her eyes were large and teary.

"Don't worry, Lucy-Ann," he said, squeezing her shoulder lightly.

"Jim's a hunter. He's an expert on wildlife around here. If he's not too worried about bumping into this snake, then nor am I. It's just better to know the possible dangers, rather than be blissfully ignorant of them. Same goes for my job, you see. I'm always being warned about some villain or other who's got it in for me, and I nod and listen, take notes, and so on, but I very rarely have any trouble from these people. As with the King Cobra, these villains might be dangerous in their own little worlds, but they prefer to keep to themselves and avoid trouble wherever possible. Still," he added, "being warned is being informed."

Jim nodded — a little too enthusiastically, Philip thought to himself, as if the man was trying to play down the danger. He made a mental note to keep a very watchful eye open for eighteen foot snakes!

Mrs Cunningham finally left Philip's side and sat on one of the dining chairs at the large wooden table. "I don't see what any of this has to do with these men that were here tonight."

"No, nor do I," said Dinah.

"Well," said Jim, "as I said, I went out looking for this cobra near the dolmen. Since King Cobras hunt by day and sleep by night, I figured it would be best to sneak about after dark and see if I could find it sleeping." He snorted. "Fat chance of that! There are a thousand places it could hide. But I looked anyway. The dolmen has some small hiding places and I wondered if it might be taking refuge in there at nights — maybe it coils itself into a small aperture in the rock walls or — "

Dinah screamed again. "Will you please stop!" she cried. "How am I ever going to enjoy myself in India knowing that there's a fifty foot poisonous snake hiding in every nook and cranny?"

"Sorry, miss," said Jim, looking ashamed. "Anyway, there I was, searching the dolmen... and evidently it was being used for some shady goings-on. A table, some chairs, tins of food, lamps, that kind of thing. But what caught my eye were the traps, chains, wires, and all sorts of nasty things, even a cage. The cage was big enough to hold a medium-sized animal such as a tiger or bear. And judging by the types of traps I found, I guessed these villains were after bears."

"Oh!" said Lucy-Ann, and buried her face in Jack's shoulder. Jack had been quiet for a very long time, and Kiki, as if understanding that the situation was serious, had not uttered a word either.

"Bears are hunted for all sorts of reasons," Jim went on. "Sloths seem to be the popular choice at the moment. They're captured alive and trained as dancing bears. Also, did you know that a sloth's bile is used in countries like China as medicine?"

"Jim," said Bill very sternly indeed.

Jim's weather-beaten face reddened. "Sorry," he said. "Look, the thing is, I found all this stuff and confiscated it — just piled the lot into my jeep, cage and all — and immediately went to report it to the police, who came out the next day and investigated. I shouldn't have touched anything though. By removing all their gear, I gave the game away — so the poachers probably scarpered and never came back. I should have left it all and let the police lay a trap for them. As it is, I don't believe the poachers have been caught yet, and perhaps they're feeling a little, er..."

Bill closed his eyes. "Do you mean to say that we might have a band of angry poachers breathing down our necks?" He turned to his wife. "Allie, I think we should probably leave. I don't mind the danger myself — but I can't let you and the children stay on here with this kind of threat. Why, I'd rather let them take their chances with the King Cobra!"

"Not on your life!" said Dinah with a shudder. "Give me poachers any time."

"We can't leave!" said Jack, finally speaking up. He looked mortified at the idea of leaving. "We've only just arrived! Bill, please, we can't leave now just because of a few men! You and Jim can handle them, and then there's Philip and I — now that we know the danger, we can certainly keep lookout at night and deal with these fellows if they happen to come back. You simply can't make us leave."

"It's no good arguing about it," said Bill firmly. "We're leaving."

Chapter 9. A Frightful Shock

By Keith Robinson

Philip climbed to his feet, gently lifting Rikki to his shoulder. His head throbbed, but he ignored it manfully. He turned to Jack. "I hate to say it, Freckles, but Bill's right." He looked across at Dinah. "I'd hate to think of the girls in danger."

Dinah nodded and smiled gratefully at her brother. "Yes, this place is dangerous. Poisonous snakes, bears, poachers... All sorts of horrible creatures. This isn't my idea of a holiday at all."

"Nor was a cruise to the Greek islands," said Philip shortly, suddenly annoyed with his sister. "Or a trip down the River of Abencha! For that matter, you're not too keen on any place we go on holiday — because you're terrified of animals, even harmless ones like mice and lizards and stick insects. I'm not sure you're the best judge as to whether we're in danger here or not! Honestly, Dinah, you — "

"Don't put this on me!" Dinah snapped. "You know Bill's making sense. We're in danger here."

At the far end of the room, Krish sidled quietly out of the room. Philip noticed him leaving and thought once more what a strange boy he was. He'd been as silent as a shadow all this time.

"I'd like to leave too," said Lucy-Ann in a small voice. "But we don't have to leave India. I just mean leave here — this remote place in the jungle. If anyone attacks us, we'll have no one to run to for help. Perhaps we could just go and stay in a busy town somewhere?"

"Very sensible of you, Lucy-Ann," said Bill, nodding but still looking extremely grim. "I'll have no arguments on this from anyone. Your safety is far too important to me. We'll leave first thing in the morning — but we won't leave India, we'll just head to the nearby town of Khitanpur and find a hotel to stay in. Okay, Jim?"

Jim looked embarrassed and miserable. "I understand," he said, nodding. "I just wish... Well, I wish I'd let the police catch those

poachers so that we wouldn't be in this pickle." He threw up his hands. "So, it's agreed then — we pack up and leave in the morning. There are no hotels in Khitanpur, but I have a good friend there who has plenty of room. I'm sure he'll put you all up. Heck, I'll even stay there with you — probably safer for me in the long run. And you can still enjoy India. We'll visit the jungle but stick to the outskirts within easy reach of the town; we'll visit some other dolmens I know of; and I'll hound the police until they catch up with those villains. Who knows, perhaps they'll catch them in the next few days, and if so, we can all come back here for the rest of the holiday."

Somewhat reluctantly, Philip and Jack had no choice but to agree to the new arrangements. Both Dinah and Lucy-Ann looked a little happier, and Mrs Mannering was positively overwhelmed with relief. Bill and Jim shook hands. "It's not your fault, Jim," Bill told him. "If anyone knows about putting the family in danger through doing one's job, it's me!"

"I'd better go and speak to Mo," said Jim. Seeing some blank looks, he continued, "Mohinder is the caretaker. I doubt he knows anything about this little incident tonight; his little cottage is a few hundred yards through the forest, on the main road. I very much doubt the poachers came in on that road — they most likely followed the track we arrived on. Sneaky devils. I'll be back soon." "Be careful," said Bill as Jim grabbed a powerful torch and hurried out.

There was a long silence after he'd gone, and Kiki chose that moment to lighten the atmosphere with a few cheerful statements. "Better go, Mo, Mo," she screeched. "Blow your nose, wipe your feet, you silly boy!"

Everyone laughed, and the tension seemed to ease. Rikki stirred awake for a moment, glanced around, and promptly went back to sleep.

Jack went to the window. "I guess those poachers were here to kidnap Jim," he said thoughtfully. "They had a large sack with them, and some rope, and cloth to use as a gag. They must have

heard somehow, or just guessed, that Jim was the one who ratted them out and stole their equipment, so they came here to deal with him."

"Yes," said Philip, "and we happened to turn up out of the darkness and surprised them. I suppose if they were planning to kidnap Jim, who they thought lived here alone, they must have decided they'd better take us as well, otherwise we'd blow the whistle on them."

"Very likely," Bill agreed. He clapped his hands suddenly, and Rikki jumped awake in Philip's arms. "Look, Allie, how about putting the kettle on? I think we could all use some hot chocolate or something. See what you can rustle up in the kitchen, would you? Ask that odd boy, Krish, to help you if you can't find what you need. He's around somewhere. Perhaps the girls could go with you, for company."

Mrs Cunningham seemed all too happy to make herself busy, and she hurried off with Dinah and Lucy-Ann in tow. Dinah cast a suspicious look over her shoulder; she knew this was just Bill's way of getting the girls out of the way so the boys could talk. Sure enough, Bill immediately lowered his voice and spoke earnestly to Jack and Philip, drawing them closer. "Now, look. Poaching is serious business. These monsters routinely kill animals without conscience for money — and a lot of money too. Now, Jim said he confiscated all their equipment — traps, chains, the cage — but I can't imagine the poachers would bother trying to get it all back. They could easily buy more and continue their business elsewhere. No, they're here for some other reason, and the only reason I can think of is revenge."

Philip and Jack glanced at each other. At the same time, Kiki and Rikki seemed to glance at each other too, as if they understood all that was being said.

"And," Bill went on, "since they clearly came here with the intention of kidnapping Jim, I can only assume they wanted to cart him off somewhere and lock him up for a while to teach him a lesson... or worse."

Jack gulped. "Worse? You mean... kill him?"

"Perhaps." But then Bill shook his head. "No. If they wanted to kill him, they could have done that here — very quickly and easily, I should imagine. Taking him off somewhere in the dead of night... that takes more effort, so they're either really angry with him and want to torture him, or..." He paused, frowning. "Or there's some other reason we can't fathom."

The door burst open at that moment and Jim came in, looking both worried and angry. "Someone's done something to the jeep," he growled. "It wouldn't start, and I assumed it was flooded or something. It's happened before, and I could smell the petrol. So I sat for a bit and waited, then tried again. But then I suddenly realized the fuel gauge showed empty — and yet I filled it up just before I arrived at the airport today so I'd have a full tank to get home on. There should be at least half a tank left in there." Jim blew out loudly through his nose. "Then I saw it. The petrol running off into the dirt. Someone punched a hole in the fuel tank."

"Someone sabotaged the jeep?" cried Bill. He clutched at his bald head, and made a rush for the kitchen. "Allie — Dinah — Lucy-Ann!"

The boys followed hot on his trail, and Jim came pounding after them. Bill burst into the kitchen and skidded to a halt. Mrs Cunningham and the two girls stared at him in fright.

"What's wrong, Bill?"

"Oh, Allie — for a moment there, I thought — " Bill closed his eyes for a moment, then pulled his wife to him. "We have a problem. The jeep has a hole in the fuel tank. It's been sabotaged." He called over his shoulder to Jim. "Do you have another car?"

"Yes, but it's not going anywhere fast. I've been fixing it up, and the engine is in pieces. Mo has a rickety old motor bike though; not much good for getting the family out of here, but I could ride into town and fetch the police."

"Do it," said Bill in a commanding voice. "The rest of us will stay put. Where's Krish? Never mind. Make sure you're armed when you leave here, Jim. And — do you have a spare gun I can use?" "Right here," said Jim, handing Bill a shiny revolver from under his jacket. "I have another I'll grab on my way out. Also, I have a couple of shotguns in my room, plus a high-powered rifle under my bed. You'll find ammunition in the bottom drawer of the chest in my room."

"Oh, Bill," said Allie, her hand flying to her mouth. "You know I hate guns. Is this really necessary?"

"I'd rather be pointing one at the enemy if they happen to burst in and try to take us," Bill answered. He planted a hand on Jack's shoulder. "Jack, my boy, extinguish all the lights. We'll watch for poachers from the windows. It'll be easier if we're in darkness, and they won't see us quite so easily." As Jack rushed off, with Kiki chattering excitedly on his shoulder, Bill turned to Philip. "And you, Philip — look around and see if you can find Krish, will you? I have a funny feeling about that boy. My instincts tell me he's involved in this."

"What?" said Jim, looking pained. "Are you serious? He's just a little odd, that's all. A bit quiet. He came here a week ago looking for work, and he said he was good in the kitchen. And he is. I gave him a trial run for a day or two, and then hired him to help out here during your stay. He's all right, really."

"Then where is he?" asked Bill quietly.

But Jim never had a chance to answer, for at that moment Jack gave such a shout from the dining hall that everyone jumped. In a flash Bill went hurtling back down the hall. Philip almost tripped over Bill's feet in his hurry to keep up. They found Jack in the dining hall, in darkness, staring and pointing in horror out of a window.

"Someone just lit a fire and ran off!"

Bill, Jim, Mrs Cunningham, Philip, Lucy-Ann and Dinah pressed themselves against the glass — and immediately saw what Jack was pointing at. Around Jim's jeep was a rapidly-expanding ring

of fire, glowing blue at its base and flickering orange at its tips as it fed on the large pool of leaked petrol. It seemed hungry and eager for more, and it sputtered and sniffed on its ever-increasing circle.

Even as the shocked family watched, the hungry flames found more and more petrol to guzzle — and all in the space of a heartbeat or two. Much of the leaked fuel had already sunk into the sodden dirt and mixed with the afternoon's downpour, but now, impossibly, the ravenous fire found a fresh stream of petrol that ran all the way across the clearing and straight towards the Dak Bungalow in a thin, straight rivulet. The flames flowed quickly with a whoosing sound, faster than ever now. As the fiery trail reached the stone walls of the bungalow, it inexplicably split into two and ran off along the side of the house in both directions. "They've poured more petrol!" cried Bill. "They punched out the fuel tank, and then poured more of the stuff all around the place while we were talking! They're trying to burn us out!"

The flames suddenly reared up outside the window and licked hungrily at it. Everyone backed away from the glass in horror. "Out!" Bill ordered. "Before it surrounds us — quick, get out!" "Surely the house won't burn from the outside?" said Dinah, her voice quavering. "It's made of stone — "

"OUT!" Bill roared. "Everyone outside NOW!"

Chapter 10. A Way Out

By Shagufta Naaz

Jack and Philip rushed towards the back of the house to see if there was a gap anywhere in the fiery circle, but the would-be-kidnappers had done their job well: the house was completely encircled by the fire and the flames were too high to cross easily. “Maybe we can wrap ourselves in blankets and rush through the flames” suggested Jack

“Or douse out a gap with buckets of water and make a dash for it,” said Philip.

Bill felt a fierce rush of pride for the children... “his children.” No matter how difficult and scary things got, they never gave up. Even the girls looked brave and determined, though their faces were pale. Bill thought of all the times they had faced deadly danger yet come through with honours. But it seemed now they were in a worse fix than they had ever been before.

If only there was a way out – a way to escape....

“I can help you escape” said a voice. It was Krish.

“What ... what do you mean?” asked Jack, barely noting the odd fact that Krish was speaking perfect English, though with an accent.

“I know an escape route, come, we have to hurry” said Krish as he turned and walked towards the fireplace. Bill noticed that he was carrying a cloth bag slung over his shoulder; it seemed rather full.

“What the...?” Before Bill could complete his question Krish had taken hold of the brass knob on the corner of the mantelpiece. As he turned it they heard a queer grating sound and, right before their eyes, a part of the fireplace swung away from the wall

“A secret way!” said Jack stepping up to take a look but Bill pushed him aside.

“Let me see. Aha, there’s a small alcove here with a trapdoor set in the floor. Jim, do you know anything about it?”

“No, I had no clue” said Jim, coming over to take a look. He still looked shaken by all the events of the night but his training as a

game hunter stood him in good stead and he managed to remain calm.

Bill hoisted up the trapdoor to reveal a steep flight of stone steps.

“How did you find it Krish?”

“It is a long story; I suggest we get out of here first.” Replied Krish as he lowered himself down. “Follow me.”

“Do you trust him, Jim?” asked Bill in a whisper.

“Well seeing that there are seven of us against one of him, I don’t think it’s a risk, and we don’t have much choice do we?” replied Jim, following Krish through the trapdoor.

Silently the party filed down the stairs with Bill bringing up the rear. The steps were crumbling in places but Bill helped his wife and Lucy-Ann over the worst bits and soon they were at the bottom.

“Golly – this is amazing” cried Jack as he played his torch over the walls of the passage which was wide enough to allow four people to walk abreast. Instead of being tunnelled out of rough earth as they had expected, it had walls of stone, intricately carved and painted with depictions of Hindu deities, birds and animals. The entire tunnel was a work of art, obviously created by many skilled men over a period of years, maybe decades.

In spite of the urgency of the moment Philip couldn’t help lingering near a detailed carving of a goddess playing a musical instrument.

“That’s Saraswati, the patron goddess of the arts” explained Krish, seeing his interest.

“This is no time to examine the artwork Philip,” said Bill sharply. Even though he had pulled the secret door back into place he didn’t want to risk the crooks breaking into the house and finding the tunnel. Things could get very ugly if that happened.

They continued down the passage. After about a quarter of an hour Philip noticed that the ground was no longer level.

“We’re climbing an incline, can you feel it?”

“Yes, we must be nearing the opening” replied Jack, but just then they came up against a solid wall, again beautifully carved and painted.

“Hey, we seem to have come up against a dead end,” he called out, but Krish stepped forward. “There is a door in the roof” he said pointing up. Jack could make out the outline of a trapdoor in the carved ceiling but how did it open? “There’s a latch hidden in the flower,” said Krish pointing to a carved lotus. He used his fingernail to release a minute catch and, with a click, the panel swung open.

“Jim, you and I will go out first” said Bill, pushing Krish aside and drawing out his revolver as he pulled himself out of the trapdoor. It was still dark outside, though dawn was fast approaching, but by flashing their torch cautiously around, the two men took stock of their surroundings.

“Good heavens. Look where we’ve come out” exclaimed Jim.

“Right in the middle of a dolmen.”

Bill played the light around; they were indeed right in the centre of a huge dolmen. He listened for any signs of the poachers but all seemed quiet and peaceful.

“Come on out, it’s safe” he called out.

Soon the entire party was gathered under the roof of the dolmen and Jim had got a fire going “to keep away the monsters” as he told Lucy-Ann, trying to make her smile.

Bill took off his jacket and laid it on the floor for his wife to sit on.

“Here Allie, you can lean against this stone and maybe take a nap.”

“I’m all right,” said Mrs. Cunningham, though she collapsed gratefully on the floor. “I only wish we’d thought of bringing some food; we could all do with a snack after all this excitement.

“I have food, enough for all of us,” said Krish reached into his bag and drew out chappatis rolled up in newspaper, small packets

containing tea leaves and sugar. He had even remembered to pack a small pan to heat the water in.

“You can fill this from the stream, it’s just down that way” he directed Jack as he set about putting out the food. Another time Jack would have balked at following orders from someone as young as himself, but now, in the space of an hour, an indefinable change had come over Krish; there was an air of dignity and a commanding presence about this young boy and Jack went off to do as he was bid without a second thought.

In ten minutes they were tucking into a strange but delicious breakfast.

“Mmm...spicy omelette wrapped in a fried chappati... lovely” said Lucy-Ann, taking a bite of her exotic omelette sandwich.

“Mmm...” said Kiki in a forlorn voice. “Mmm...”

“Oh poor Kiki, you must be hungry too, Jack give her some sunflower seeds,” said Dinah helping herself to an omelette roll.

“There aren’t any in my pocket, Kiki try a bit of chappati,” offered Jack

“When in India do as the Indians...”giggled Lucy-Ann

Krish sprinkled a bit of sugar on a buttery morsel of chappati and offered it to Kiki, “My grandmother kept a parrot; she fed it bits of chappati crumbled up with butter and sugar. Maybe Kiki will like it too.” It seemed that Kiki did and the children were left in peace to enjoy their meal.

“Rikki can find his own food,” said Philip as the mongoose scampered off to forage for lizards and maybe a small rodent or two.

There was just one tin mug to drink from which Krish insisted on giving to Mrs. Cunningham; for the rest of the party he and Jim fashioned rough cups by twisting thick glossy leaves into cones. They leaked a bit but who cared, it was good to sip the hot tea even if there was no milk to go with it.

Finally, after all the food had been eaten, Bill lit his pipe, looked at Krish and said “well young man, I think it’s time we heard that

long story of yours. Who are you, why were you at the Dak Bungalow and how did you know about the secret passage?” “Who built the passage?” asked Philip, who had been greatly struck by the beauty of the carvings.

Krish was silent for a long moment, gazing at the pink sky as the dawn crept slowly over the horizon. Then finally, as if making up his mind about something, he started his tale.

Chapter 11. Krish's Story

By Shagufta Naaz

“The passage, as well as the Dak Bungalow was built over a hundred years ago by the Raja of Khitanpur who used it as a hunting lodge. He was a very learned man and deeply interested in astronomy and other sciences. He believed the dolmens were the key to some great astronomical secret and he used to visit them at different times of the day and night to observe the position of the sun, moon and stars. Thus he had this passage built so as to be able to walk down to the dolmen without needing the accompaniment of his entire retinue.”

Krish paused to draw a breath and take a sip of water. Dinah looked up and watched as the first rays of the sun struck the dolmen and lit up its roof.

“Over a hundred years ago an Indian raja sat right here and watched the sun rise in exactly the same way” she mused. “It’s like going back in time and watching a scene being played over again.”

She jerked out of her reverie as Krish took up his tale once more. “One year the raja and his wife came to spend a few days at the Bungalow. They had brought their young son and a grand celebration was planned for his birthday. It was the summer of 1857.

Krish paused as if expecting a comment; Jim realised what he was referring to.

“The Mutiny?”

“Oh yes, remember Tufty, we read about it in our history class last year” Jack said, “The local soldiers revolted against the British officers. There was immense bloodshed and thousands of people were killed before it could be brought under control.

Krish nodded. “The Mutiny, or what we call the war of independence, broke out just then. The raja was all set to ride out and join his soldiers but before he could do so, tragedy struck. A mob of rioters attacked the Bungalow. The raja and his men were

taken by surprise; they fought valiantly but the mob was in a frenzy. They were all slain.”

The children stared at Krish in horror. “All of them? Even his wife and child?” asked Lucy-Ann in a whisper.

“His wife and most of the servants died but the child’s ayah grabbed the baby and ran to safety down the secret passage.”

There was a long silence as the party absorbed the story. It seemed like something out of a melodramatic play but then, history often was melodramatic.

“But why did those people attack the raja? Were they the mutinous soldiers?” asked Dinah.

“No. They were just a gang of crooks who had heard rumours of the raja’s great wealth. Of course the Bungalow was not the raja’s official residence; there was no great treasure there – except one thing...”

There was a suspenseful moment as Krish paused for dramatic effect – he certainly knew how to tell a story.

“The rani’s necklace.” He continued. “It was a family heirloom, passed down through generations; legend says it was presented to a mortal princess by the goddess of wealth as a reward for some good deed.” Krish smiled at the children, “I know this sounds like a fairytale to you, and perhaps it is, but you must understand that the value of the necklace was far more than the price of its gems. It is believed that a gang of clever jewel thieves took advantage of the unrest in the area. They raised a rabble and incited them to attack the Bungalow. While the mob vented its fury, they searched the place for the necklace.”

“Did they find it?” asked Philip eagerly.

Krish shrugged. “No one knows. Two of the gang members were killed, the rest of the looters were rounded up by the soldiers the next day but the necklace was never seen again. The police searched high and low, they questioned all the known jewel thieves but to no avail. The necklace was lost. Many believe it was hidden by the raja before he died; they continue to search for it to this day.”

Bill had been listening quietly so far but now he stirred, “And that’s what you were doing at the Bungalow, isn’t it? You heard the tale of the lost jewels and decided to try your luck. You fooled Jim into hiring you and managed to find the secret passage. How did you find it, did you know where to look?”

Krish looked straight at Bill. “I knew because my grandfather told my father – who told me - how his ayah smuggled him out of the passage the night his parents died.”

“You mean...” Jack whispered...

“The Raja of Khitanpur was my great-grandfather,” said Krish with a simple pride. “My grandfather was brought up by his ayah, what you would call a nanny, who saved every penny to give him a good education. The raja’s property was taken over by the state but my grandfather managed to set up a small business and in time became reasonably well off. But he never forgot the story of the lost jewels – for him it meant more than just a precious necklace; it was his link to his parents, to his lost heritage...”

Krish paused. The children could sense the lump in his throat and knew that he was controlling his voice with an effort.

“It’s all right Krish, you don’t have to tell us anymore, we understand” said Mrs. Cunningham who was deeply moved by this touching story.

“No, you have a right to know. It’s because of me that you are all in this mess.”

“What? You mean the kidnapers were after you?” asked Jim in surprise.

“Yes. You see, my father had promised my grandfather that somehow, someday he would track down the necklace.

Unfortunately he could never do so and it always preyed on his mind. He died last month....but before he....before that he made me promise I would try to find it. These men are known crooks and they have been on the trail of the necklace as well. They are convinced that I have some clue to it where it’s hidden so they followed me here. I think they planned to kidnap me last night but thanks to you all I was saved.”

Krish smiled at the little company though his eyes were suspiciously bright. Lucy-Ann slipped her arm through his. “You saved us too Krish, we would never have got out without your help.”

Krish squeezed her hand gratefully. “When I realised what had happened I decided to leave the Bungalow rather than stay and expose all of you to more danger. That’s why I packed all this food,” he grinned, “Good thing I did.”

“I’ll say,” said Philip. “I wish you’d packed some of those pink sweets as well, I could do with about six.”

“You and your sweets,” groaned Bill. “Let’s figure out what our next step should be. The men will return and search the house.

They may find the passage and follow us. We need to move on.”

Krish stood up and picked up his bag, “It’s only me they are after, if I leave, you all will be safe. Don’t worry, I know the jungle very well, it will hide me.”

“You’re not going anywhere old chap, we’re in this together now” said Jack.

“Jack’s right,” said Bill, “We’ve been in worse spots than this, a couple of jokers are not going to spoil our trip to India. Now let’s see...”

But before Bill could complete his sentence there was a loud rustling noise...

Someone – or something - was coming.

Chapter 12. The Old Diary

By Hari Menon

"Hold still!" warned Bill as the sound became louder. It sounded as if something was being lightly dragged over the forest floor, which was strewn with leaves.

"I hope it isn't a snake!" whispered Jim to Bill. "Remember I told you I chanced upon a king cobra here recently?"

Rikki seemed to sense danger, and was standing stiffly next to Philip, tail twitching hard. And Kiki, who had been quiet all along, suddenly started squawking dismally.

"Let's not scare Allie and the kids, Jim," said Bill in an undertone. "Shut up, Kiki!"

Just then, with a sigh of relief, Bill realised the sound was fading. The danger had passed -- at least for the moment.

"Jim, you'd told us about some things you saw stashed in a dolmen," said Jack. "The poachers' stuff, that is. Did you mean this one?"

"Yes," said Jim shortly. He had recognised the little cavity where they had taken refuge. It was where he had seen traps, cages and other things the poachers had stashed a week or two earlier. Of course, now the stone cavity was quite bare.

Philip and Jack were most interested in the dolmen, and were exploring it inside out. But apart from the enclosure and the entrance to the underground passage -- now shut -- there was little to see.

"I like the way the first rays of the sun fall on the roof," said Lucy-Ann. "It makes it glow in some way, don't you agree?"

The others nodded. The roof of the dolmen -- or "capstone" as Bill called it -- did look impressive in the early morning sunlight. They could imagine the Raja of Khitanpur making himself comfortable under the dolmen long, long ago, to observe the skies at leisure.

"It's light," said Lucy-Ann. "Do you think we can go back now? Or will we have to stay here a while longer?"

Bill smiled and ruffled her hair affectionately. "I think we can return to the bungalow. We can't very well stay here all day! And while the breakfast Krish provided was very welcome, I don't suppose it's going to hold us for longer than a couple of hours." "We'll go through the forest this time," suggested Krish. "Let's not go back through the secret passage. For all we know the men may be waiting for us." "Yes," said Philip. "If we double-back and remain on our guard, I'm sure we can outwit them. If we enter through the fireplace and the men happen to be around, we'd give the game away." "If they're around at all, that is," said Dinah gloomily. She was looking gloomier with each passing moment at the way their supposed holiday was going. But she gamely got up to help the others bury the remains of their breakfast, and before long the little party trooped off with Jim leading and Krish bringing up the rear. Rikki was on a trip of his own, though he kept rejoining the group after disappearing every now and then.

"Where's Mohinder?" muttered Bill as they walked past a little log hut where the caretaker lived. The children hadn't noticed it when they arrived. But now they saw it -- a squarish, spartan building with just two rooms. One window was open, and it was obvious there was nobody in there.

"I remember he'd said something about a niece of his coming to see him all the way from Bangalore," said Jim. "Or maybe he meant he was going to see her, and I misheard. He could have left last evening, before we arrived. I don't recall seeing him -- did you, kids?"

They hadn't. It was quite mystifying. Why would an old caretaker suddenly disappear?

They approached the dak bungalow cautiously. They were half-afraid they'd see a burnt-out shell, but thankfully the building looked intact. The grass in the immediate vicinity had been burned

black, however, and the stone walls looked rather sooty in many places. Not a soul could be seen or heard.

The door was ajar. They entered the hall and paused, but they couldn't hear a sound. If anyone had been there the previous day, they weren't around any longer. The fireplace seemed undisturbed -- at least their secret way remained secret!

Jim was looking around the room with a puzzled frown.

Everything looked all right, but surely something was wrong?

"The bookcase!" he said at last. "They've been rummaging through the books. Beats me what they expected to find though. It's just some junk that came with the house; I've not had a chance to go through all of it myself. My own books are in a locked cupboard in my room."

"Perhaps there's a clue in there!" said Philip excitedly. "Jack, I told you last night we ought to explore those books. Blow! We may have lost a valuable clue!"

"Now hold on a moment," said Bill. "What clue could the men possibly hope to find among a bunch of old books? I think we're jumping to conclusions."

"I'm with Bill," said Dinah. "Who would want to pinch this, for instance?" she said as she gingerly pulled out a tattered hardback edition of Kipling's 'Plain Tales from the Hills'. It made her sneeze -- a sneeze that was faithfully copied by Kiki.

"Maybe they were looking for the diary," said Jim with a frown. "I remember one of the books was an old diary or journal of some sort, full of figures and diagrams -- a form of shorthand, I should think. I thought it may be valuable, so I put it with my things."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Jack. "Let's have a look at it! Krish, over here!"

"You can pore over all the musty old journals you like, but leave me out of it," said Mrs Cunningham firmly. "I'm going to see what I can rustle up for lunch. And please don't disturb Krish; he's kindly agreed to help me in the kitchen."

The children hardly heard her. For a change, lunch was forgotten. They followed Bill and Jim into the latter's bedroom. Jim went to a

stout-looking cupboard and unlocked it. Clearly he was taking no chances with his personal stuff!

"Here we are," he said, holding out what looked like a bundle of yellowed papers wrapped in a leather slipcase. It had been bound into a book of sorts, but the binding had fallen apart long ago. It was clearly very old -- so old that the papers could crumble to bits when not being handled with care. The children carefully took a leaf each.

"Hey -- don't let that bird grab a page too," said Bill in alarm as Kiki sidled up to the group and cocked her head at Lucy-Ann's page, exactly as if she was reading it with great interest. "Polly put the kettle on," she announced solemnly.

"Quite wrong, Kiki," said Lucy-Ann, stroking the parrot's crest affectionately. "It's Krish who's put the kettle on. Can't you hear it in the kitchen?"

"Let's spread the pages out on the big dining table so we can all take a look," suggested Dinah. The others thought that was a good idea. So, under Jim's watchful eye, they all went into the kitchen to pore over the curious journal. Krish was very interested in the find, but he continued to do his chores uninterruptedly.

"It's all a lot of diagrams and mathematical symbols," said Lucy-Ann, disappointed. "I don't think we're going to get anywhere with this!"

"Trigonometry, I should think," said Philip. "All about triangulation and stuff," he added, on seeing Lucy-Ann's mystified face. "I wish I'd paid more attention to old Nosey when he was going on about this in geometry class."

"A bit late to be thinking of school, old chap," said Bill with a grin. "Geometry is not one of my strong subjects either but offhand I'd say these are mostly logs of astronomical observations, including some hand-drawn star charts."

"Of course!" exclaimed Philip. "It could be the Raja's own journal from a hundred years ago! Didn't Krish say he was keen on astronomy?"

It did look likely. Some of the entries were dated, and many were not. But the effort that had gone into recording the details was obvious. Unfortunately, apart from the numerals and diagrams, the rest of the writing was in a squiggly script that neither Bill nor Jim could recognise.

Even Krish looked perplexed by the strange writing. It didn't look anything like the three or four languages he knew. The mathematical symbols meant nothing to him. It was most disappointing.

"It could be a form of shorthand devised by the Raja himself," said Bill at last. "In that case we shan't be cracking the secret anytime soon. If there's a secret in this pile of papers, that is. Besides, I'm starting to feel hungry -- what about you lot?"

"I say," said Dinah suddenly. "This sheet of paper has something written in English, though the letters are hard to make out. But I can see it's dated July 15, 1857!"

"That's exactly a hundred years ago, right down to the year," said Bill in surprise. "Today is July 15."

"What does it say, Dinah?" asked Krish, but Jim had gently taken the page from her hand and was peering intently at it through a magnifying glass.

"It is in the eye of wisdom that wisdom shall shine forth, and wisdom shall shine forth when the eye is at its lowest ebb," he read. "Now what on earth does that mean?"

They looked blankly at each other. Nobody had any ideas at all. It was all very maddening!

Chapter 13. Investigating the Dolmen

By Nanine Kamp.

Edited by Keith Robinson.

"Lunch is ready," said Mrs. Cunningham. "Would you clear the table, please?"

"Ah yes, thanks!" answered Bill. "I'm really hungry. Let's see what you have prepared."

Jim collected the sheets of paper and put everything back into the leather slipcase while Dinah and Lucy-Ann laid the table. Soon everyone, except Krish, was sitting at the dining table and enjoying a delicious lunch.

"It's a strange riddle, isn't it?" said Philip with his mouth full. "I would like to know what it means. How exactly did it go, Jim? I've half forgotten."

Jim closed his eyes to remember. "It is in the eye of wisdom that wisdom shall shine forth, and wisdom shall shine forth when the eye is at its lowest ebb."

"Now, 'ebb' means 'low', as with a tide," said Jack thoughtfully.

"I would say," said Philip, "that it must have something to do with a rising and falling star taking position in the sky. But which star? And how can we ever find out?"

"Well, it must be the 'eye of wisdom'," said Bill. "Jim, do you happen to know if there is a sign called 'wisdom' in the starry sky?"

"I don't know anything about astronomy," said Jim. "Sorry."

"Would Krish know?" wondered Philip aloud. He turned and, to his surprise, found the boy standing close by. Again he wondered why the boy seemed so reluctant to join in conversations. Even now, when the group was discussing his business, he kept his distance and stayed out of it.

"Krish, come sit with us," Philip invited. "There's no sense in your standing over there!"

But to his disappointment, Krish shook his head and remained in his place, never moving except to refill empty plates and cups from time to time.

Philip shook his head and returned to the discussion at the table.

"I'd say," said Dinah, "that the dolmen can tell us more. It's there that the Raja studied the stars and wrote down his discoveries. So maybe we can find something there that tells us more."

"Yes," said Jack. "That's a good idea, Dinah. Let's go back to the dolmen after lunch. What do you say, Bill?"

"We'll have to go today," added Philip. "Wasn't the riddle noted exactly one hundred years ago? It might well be that the stars are in the same position now as they were back then. We must take advantage of it."

"Children, please hold on a bit," interrupted Mrs. Cunningham suddenly. "I'd first like to know whether we'll be staying here at all, or going to Jim's friend's house as he suggested this morning." The little group around the dining table fell silent.

Bill took his wife's hand. "The happenings of last night have scared you, haven't they?" he said. "But you don't need to be frightened. I don't think that the men are that dangerous. As Krish said, they are only after the necklace, and perhaps after him. I don't want to flee because of a few men. We can stand up to them, I'm sure. So, I suggest we stay here and help Krish in the search for his heritage."

Mrs. Cunningham sighed.

"I'm here to protect you," continued Bill. "And I promise, if things get dangerous, we'll go to Jim's friend. Is that all right with you?"

"All right," answered Mrs. Cunningham, not looking very pleased about it. "We'll stay here then. For now anyway."

Jack and Philip breathed a deep sigh of relief. They would have hated to leave this place just as things were getting exciting!

"So, are we going to the dolmen this afternoon?" asked Philip again.

Bill turned to Jim. "That will depend on what your plans are for this afternoon," he said to the rugged man.

"I'm sorry, Bill," said Jim. "But I have a lot to do this afternoon. I have to repair my jeep and go to Khitanpur to buy more fuel. Furthermore, I have to go to the police station to report what happened last night. We can't leave this unreported. I'm sorry, but I can't be with you this afternoon."

"Then we won't go to the dolmen," decided Bill. "I'm sure Allie wants to stay here, and I can't leave her here alone. And I don't want you young fellows to go there alone. Remember that it was recently the hiding place of poachers! It's a dangerous place."

The four children were very disappointed.

"But today is the day!" protested Philip. "It was exactly one hundred years ago today that the Raja wrote this riddle! You simply can't stop us from investigating, Bill!"

"Yes, I can," answered Bill grimly. "Your safety, and your mother's, comes first. So you don't go."

"Well," said Jim slowly, scratching his head, "maybe Mrs. Cunningham can come along with me to the village. I'm sure she will like the trip. And that will enable you to go with the children to the dolmen, Bill."

The children looked excitedly to Bill.

Bill had to think for a few seconds. He exchanged looks with his wife, who finally shrugged and nodded. She agreed with the plan! The children knew that if she agreed, then Bill probably would too.

"Oh, please!" begged Lucy-Ann.

Bill made his decision. "Yes, all right, that's a good idea," he said to his friend. "Thanks, Jim."

Jim smiled. "That's all right. I first have to repair the jeep though. I do have a small jerry can of fuel here, which will just get Allie and I to Khitanpur. Give me half an hour. Then you can go off to the dolmen."

After everyone had finished lunch, Jim disappeared to look after his car. In the meantime, Mrs. Cunningham and the two girls cleared the table and washed the dishes.

Soon Jim returned. "Oh, that reminds me," he said, when he saw Mrs. Cunningham doing the dishes. "In Khitanpur I have to fetch the maid." He laughed at Mrs. Cunningham. "I guess you've been wondering about her," he continued, "but you've been too polite to mention it. Well, I hired a young lady to serve the house during your stay here. I was supposed to fetch her today, but with all that's happened... well, I completely forgot! She's probably wondering whether I still plan to collect her. So I must pick her up first thing when we get to Khitanpur. So, if you are ready, let's go."

Soon, everything was ready and they all left the house. Jim and Mrs. Cunningham went off in the jeep, after first brushing ashes and soot off the seats. It was a wonder the jeep hadn't gone up in flames the previous night, with all that burning petrol! But it seemed fine apart from a bit of charring on the wings.

As soon as they had gone, Bill set off for the dolmen with five children and a parrot. Krish was going along too, although he seemed nonchalant about it. Philip had petted Rikki just before they left; he'd decided to leave him behind, curled up in a comfortable corner, rather than worry about him in the jungle. It was afternoon and the air was filled with humid warmth. Crickets chirped loudly, their never-ending melody filling the trees. Unseen animals rustled about in the bushes, foraging for food. Although the sun rode high in the sky, hardly any sunlight filtered down through the thick branches and their canopy of huge leaves, and the soil underfoot was wet and soggy.

It was about a mile to the dolmen. It stood in a little clearing, and this small patch of land in the heart of the jungle was filled with sunlight. The grass was dry and warm, and the dolmen looked like it was basking. It was an impressive structure, a formation of stones about the size of a large living room, with walls all around except for a narrow doorway and a number of gaps that let slants

of light in. Although they'd been here before, it seemed different in the afternoon sun.

Jim had said that dolmens were markers for ancient burial chambers. A number of them had chambers beneath, but this one had a secret passage!

"Well," said Bill, "what are we looking, children?"

"I think we are looking for angles," said Dinah thoughtfully.

"Angles, angles, bangles, bangles," said Kiki, and she flew up from Jack's shoulder and enjoyed a moment of freedom in the clearing.

Dinah didn't even notice her. "Let's look to see if there are any peculiar holes or angles cut in the stones, that stars can be seen through. Perhaps there's a certain place to stand or lie down, where certain stars are visible."

"Yes, perhaps," said Philip, nodding. "'Wisdom shall shine forth' -- through a hole in the roof."

The children hunted about the dolmen, inside and out. Outside there were several places beneath the overhanging stone roof that might possibly fit the riddle; the capstone had large chunks missing around the edges that might somehow frame a cluster of stars in the night sky. But it was unlikely. Inside the dolmen there were gaps in the roof that let slants of daylight through -- and presumably starlight too, although none of the children could remember if stars had been visible through the gaps the previous night.

Bill was not satisfied. "None of these holes are convincing enough," he said. "The Raja meant something that should have been clear on first sight. How are we ever supposed to solve this riddle when we have umpteen possibilities?"

The children stopped searching when they heard a tremendous racket in the air. It was Kiki, screeching loudly as she flew back to Jack. Following her was a beautiful colored bird.

"Wow!" said Jack, admiring it. "Too bad I haven't got my camera here at the moment. Look at those colors!"

To his disappointment, the bird turned when she saw the group of people in the clearing, and flew away. Kiki crept to Jack, making little cooing sounds. Jack stroke her feathers.

"What did you do, you silly Kiki?" he asked the upset parrot.

"What did you do to make that bird angry?"

"Silly Kiki," was all Kiki could say. "Silly Kiki."

Bill had sat down in the shade of the dolmen. "Let's discuss what we are going to do," he said. "I think we have investigated the dolmen well enough. So, what next?"

"I want to see the underground passage," said Philip. He was busy studying a cricket, which was chirping nearby. "Look how big this cricket is!"

"Leave that beast alone," said Dinah immediately. "Don't think of putting it in your pocket, Philip!"

"No need to be worry about that, little sister," answered Philip.

"I'm sure the cricket wouldn't like the darkness of my pocket."

"I want to explore the passage again too, Bill," said Jack. "We didn't get much chance to look properly last night."

"Fine," said Bill. "Let's go. But we'll have to hurry. Time is marching on."

But the entrance was shut. The square hole in the ground that they had come through in the early hours of the morning was now covered with a great stone slab. Unmovable, as it seems.

"There has to be a way in," Jack said, getting annoyed. "The Raja of Khitanpur wouldn't have made the passage one way only. There must be a way to open this door. Come on, let's all feel about for a catch or button or something."

But Krish, who had been standing quietly in the background as usual, watching intently but not joining in, now stepped out of the shadows and found it for them -- a small lever hidden under the lip of a flat stone that formed part of the floor. He pulled the lever and with a click the great stone slab blocking the entrance to the Raja's secret passage sunk into the ground, revealing a dark opening.

They all went down, torches shining. Again they got overwhelmed by all the beautiful carvings they saw on the wall – and even on

the ceiling of the passage! The little troop admired them while walking down.

After some time, Bill looked at his watch in the beam of his torch and said, "Children, it's time to go back to the dak bungalow. Your mother and Jim will be waiting for us. Let's go."

"But we haven't finished investigating this passage yet!" protested Lucy-Ann. "I was so busy admiring all these carvings that I forgot to look for gaps that might see stars through."

Everyone busted out into laughter.

"There are no stars to be seen down here, Lucy-Ann," said Bill in a friendly tone. "We're deep underground. Come on, let's back to the entrance."

"Oh," said Lucy-Ann, and her face reddened. "Then why exactly did we want to investigate this passage?"

"Maybe there is a look-through at the beginning of the passage, but we don't have time to look any more today," said Bill as they neared the entrance. He stuck his head up through the hole into the dolmen. "Look how orange the sunlight has got! It will be dark soon."

"Oh, but Bill, today is the day," said Philip. "We simply must come back here after dinner and watch the stars."

"No, we're not coming back here today, Philip," answered Bill. When everyone started to protest, he raised his voice firmly. "We didn't have much sleep last night, and the day before was tiring. We must get ourselves a good amount of sleep tonight." He shone his torch into the darkness. "This is a mile-long passage. I think I'd prefer to head back through the jungle."

"But, Bill!" protested Philip one last time. "Today is the day! We have to look at the stars."

"We don't," said Bill, resolute. "End of discussion, Philip."

The children were very disappointed as they hurried back through the jungle to the dak bungalow. They saw light shining out of its windows as they approached, and knew that Jim and Mrs Cunningham were back. As the jungle darkened under the night

sky, the little group arrived at the bungalow. They opened the door and trooped in.

And there a pleasant surprise awaited them!

Chapter 14. Jaya, and Krish!

By Nanine Kamp.

“Jaya!” Exclaimed Dinah when she discovered the Indian girl in the hall of the dak bungalow. And yes, it was Jaya! The Indian girl sprung up when she heard Dinah’s voice and came up to her immediately. She laid her arm around Dinah’s shoulders and put her face next to Dinah’s. Then she smiled and pointed to the tuft of hair they both had. It was a comical sight and everyone smiled. Jim entered the hall from his bedroom and discovered the little troop.

“There you are,” he said. “And you have found Jaya too, I see. Well, this must have been quite a surprise for you, I guess!”

“It surely is,” answered Philip. “How does she get here?”

Jim grinned.

“The girl told that she was going to help Sowmya, the maid that I have hired,” he said. “They both insisted that I should take her with me. I guess, Jaya’s plans must have been quite a surprise for her mother!”

Mrs. Cunningham entered the hall too.

“Ah, there you are,” she said. “We have dinner ready. Come and sit down at the dining-table.”

During dinner Philip and Jack pleaded again to go to the dolmen this night, but Bill was inexorable. After dinner the children were sent to bed. They still protested about not going to the dolmen, but they also started to feel tired, so in the end they obeyed and went to bed.

Bill had not told the family, but he was worried for the upcoming night. What if the bad men came back to the house? He spoke to Jim and the men agreed to take turns and guard the house this night. Jim offered to take the first turn, allowing Bill to catch some sleep.

After some hours the two men changed roles. Jim went to bed, and Bill settled himself in the hall. He tried to get fully awake while listening to the stillness in the house and the chatters and cries of night-prowlers outside in the jungle. In the night the jungle seemed full of life. It was in strange contrast with the dark bungalow where everything was silent. But suddenly Bill thought he heard something on the back verandah. Was there something going on, or had he misheard and had it just been one of the sounds of the nightly jungle? Curiously the man got up and went to the kitchen. Immediately he saw that he had heard right. The door to the verandah was ajar and in the darkness outside Bill just caught a glimpse of someone slipping away. Very annoyed the man shut the door and went investigating the bedrooms. Who was the little slip-away? To his relief he found his own children still lying in bed, but the bed of Krish empty! So Krish had been the one who had slipped into the night! Bill frowned his eyebrows. What was that boy up to in the middle of the night, while evil men probably were hiding in the bushes outside? Should he go after him? Bill stood still for a minute. But he decided that he wasn't there to protect Krish. His task was to protect his family. When the boy wanted to face danger, he could go along. He could not expect from Bill to leave his family and look after him. The man shook his shoulders and went back to the hall to continue his guard.

Luckily the next day Krish was in the kitchen, preparing breakfast. His face was closed and Bill could not read from it whether last night had been successful, or not.

During breakfast the children discussed what they would do today. They all agreed to go back to the dolmen to give the entrance of the secret passage a closer look.

“We need Krish to open the panel,” said Philip and turned to the boy who was standing on his usual place, a few meters from the table.

“Krish, are you going with us?”

Krish nodded.

Then Dinah gave everyone a surprise.

“Jaya is going with us too,” she announced.

“Oh no, she isn’t,” answered Philip immediately. “We are not here to guide a whole group to the dolmen. Besides, who knows if she isn’t working for those bad men who are also hunting for the necklace! What do we know about her after all?”

Immediately Dinah drew a obstinate face.

“Jaya can be trusted,” she answered shortly to Philip.

“And how do you know that for sure?” asked Philip pestering back.

“I know!” answered Dinah angrily. “Philip stop being so mistrusting. Bah! Jaya is a good girl. I can tell it from her face. I want her to go with us.”

“Luckily your wishes won’t always be obeyed, little princess,” sneered Philip.

That made Dinah angry.

“Oh! You are horrible!” she screamed over the table. “I tell you, Jaya is coming with us!”

But then Sowmya suddenly intervened.

“Jaya, isn’t going anywhere,” she told the children and turned to the table. She was a woman of around 40, chubby and with a friendly face. But with a determined look in her eyes. Now she looked at the children around the table.

“Jaya, isn’t going anywhere today,” she repeated. The floor of the hall needs to be polished, and she will help me with that.”

A silence fell around the table. Some could not hide a smile. Jaya sure would not like to stay home and polish the floor, while the others were out on an exciting trip! But Sowmya had said, and she was the boss.

After breakfast the children and Bill prepared themselves to go to the dolmen. Mrs. Cunningham would stay at home. She settled herself on the verandah accompanied with a book. Jim would stay

at the dak bungalow too. He had bought paint and wood in Khitanpur. He would check the damage that the fire had done to the house, and repair were necessary. So Bill went with the four children and Krish. Jaya looked grumpy. She hated to go polishing the floor. This was not going as planned! But Sowmya was inexorable. And the small group left the house without Jaya.

But as soon as the troop approached the dolmen they heard a small rustling in the bushes, and there appeared Jaya! Somehow she had succeeded to escape. The girl smiled at the group and joined.

Dinah looked triumphantly to Philip.

“Now Jaya is here after all,” she said.

Bill frowned his eyebrows, but there was nothing to be done. Jaya was here and the man knew that she wouldn't be sent away.

Krish opened the secret entrance to the carved passage, and they all got in.

“Now, what are we looking for?” asked Lucy-Ann. “How did that riddle go? Does anybody remember?”

“It is in the eye of wisdom that wisdom shall shine forth, and wisdom shall shine forth when the eye is at its lowest ebb,” answered Bill. He had memorized the riddle. “We are looking at a meaningful angle to see the stars.”

The children looked around in the passage. All around them the walls were carved, but they didn't see a place from which the stars could be seen in a special angle. They were slowly getting disappointed.

But then, Jaya suddenly gave them a surprise.

“Wisdom,” she said and she pointed at a certain carving on the wall.

Everyone looked curiously at the carving Jaya was pointing at. It depicted a goddess playing a musical instrument. The picture somehow reminded Lucy-Ann of another carving she had seen, not long ago.

“Wisdom,” repeated Jaya still pointing at the carving. “Saraswati, goddess of wisdom.”

Now Lucy-Ann recognized the carving. At the same moment Jack recognized it too.

“Saraswati?,” he repeated. “There is another carving of this goddess far down in the passage. Almost near the dak bungalow. Krish showed us the night we fled.”

“Yes, you are right, Freckles!” said Philip startled. “And this carving is exactly the same!”

“No, not the same,” said Lucy-Ann, who now remembered the carving down in the passage very clearly. “In this carving a white bird is standing at the feet of the goodness – a swan, while in the carving over there the bird was colored. I remember it very well. It wasn’t a swan there but a peacock.”

Jaya had listened to Lucy-Ann. Now she pointed at the carved swan at the wall which was standing at the feet of the carved goodness.

“White bird, spiritual wisdom,” the Indian girl said
She waved to the sky outwards.

“Eternity.”

Then she pointed to the black spot in which the passage was disappearing.

“Colored bird, earth wisdom.”

She waved to the carvings in the passage around her.

“Art.”

Everyone felt silent. They could feel this had something to do with the riddle. Hadn’t it said: ‘It is in the eye of wisdom that wisdom shall shine forth’? Well, in this passage wisdom did shine forth. All the way from the spiritual wisdom at the entrance of the dolmen; to the mundane wisdom, near the dak bungalow. Philip felt a shiver going over his back. He felt as having discovered something very special.

Bill went up to the carving and investigated the eyes of the goodness. There was nothing to be seen. He went on studying the carving very closely and discovered that the eye of the swan was

special. Excited Bill shone his torch from the left side to the eye, and suddenly there was a small ray of light shining all through the passage. The ray was bounced from one shining piece of rock to another and went down into the passage, deeper and deeper. All children held their breath in excitement.

“This is great!,” said Philip stepping forwards to the carving. “Bill how did you find that?”

Bill was investigating the eye of the swan.

“The eye is hollow,” he told Philip. “Look, there is a hole left and a hole right. There seems to be a piece of glass inside, which bundles the light and sends it down into the passage.”

“It is being reflected by little pieces of rock, on and on,” said Jack excitedly. “It goes down very far.”

“Bill, do you think this is the solution of the riddle?,” asked Lucy-Ann, almost breathless.

“It can be,” answered Bill. “But I don’t think an ordinary torch will suffice. As you said, Jack, the light goes on and on. But does it go far enough? I think it should approach the other carving of Saraswati. For that the light of this torch is way too weak.”

“But then? What then?,” asked Jack.

“Sunlight,” answered Bill. “Sunlight must be strong enough. The sun must fall into the eye of the swan.”

All children looked at each other in full excitement. That was the solution of the riddle! Sure it must be! Sunlight that had to shine under a certain angle to be able to fall into the eye of the swan, the eye of wisdom! They felt themselves trembling while realizing that they had actually solved the riddle.

In the meanwhile Bill looked at Krish with a look of suspicion.

The boy was standing a bit apart from the group, his face closed as always. Bill could not discover excitement or dismay at the boy.

What was he thinking at this moment? Bill should think that this discovering would not leave the boy untouched. He should have been excited too. But he was so closed. Wait, they had been in the dolmen yesterday too! For sure the boy must have noticed the carving of Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom. And might have

guessed the solution of the riddle, far before Bill discovered it.
Then, why hadn't he told them?

Chapter 15. Exciting Plans

By Nanine Kamp.

Bill couldn't go on with his thoughts.

"We must see on what time of the day the sunlight falls into the eye," said Jack excitedly. "Come on, let's go above and study the sky."

"I hope we aren't too late," added Philip. "Maybe the sun takes the right position only one or two days in the year."

He drew an accusing look to Bill. But Bill pretended that he hadn't seen Philip's look.

"There is no need to worry," he answered calmly. "When yesterday would have been the day, today's position of the sun will suffice too. Remember that we are near the equator. The sun doesn't rise and fall with the seasons as far as it does in the UK." They all got out of the passage and looked up to the sky. Up above the sun was still shining, but in the south some dark clouds were approaching.

"Seems we will get rain this afternoon," said Bill. "We have to keep an eye on those clouds, children. In this area the rain pour can be very heavy."

Jack pointed to the east.

"Look Bill," he said, "when the sun is standing in the lower east, it will be able to shine right under the capstone, being reflected by that stone over there - which has a surprising smooth surface - and fall into the passage. This is the only possibility. When the sun gets higher the capstone will break the light."

"And what about the west?" asked Dinah.

"On the west-side there is no opening," answered Jack. "The dolmen is quite massive on that side. No, I am sure that it must be the morning sun."

Bill studied the sky and the stones of the dolmen around him.

Then he studied the entrance of the passage. He switched on his torch and shone onto the stone with the smooth surface. The light of his torch fell into the passage.

“So, the angle must be around this,” he said while shining. “I agree with you Jack, that we must try to catch the morning sun.”

“Oh,” said Lucy-Ann and she got an exciting feeling over her.

“Are we going to watch how the sunlight falls into the swan’s eye tomorrow morning, Bill?”

“Yes, we are,” answered Bill. “It’s quite possible that it’s the solution to that strange riddle that we have found.”

“Then we have to raise early tomorrow,” said Dinah gloomy.

“Very early.”

“You don’t need to come,” answered Philip immediately. “Jack and I can go alone with Bill.”

“Oh no,” answered Lucy-Ann. “I want to be there too. I want to see how the sunlight falls into the eye of the swan and I want to see how the ray of light will be bouncing all through the passage to the peacock. Don’t say that only you boys go.”

“No we won’t,” said Bill and he ruffled Lucy-Ann’s hair. “Don’t be afraid. When we go, we will go all. This is our adventure. Our adventure in the jungle.”

The clouds in the sky approached very quickly.

“We have to go to the dak bungalow,” said Bill looking at the sky.

“The rain is coming soon.”

“Where is Jaya?” asked Dinah suddenly

Every one looked around in surprise. No one had seen Jaya disappearing, but she wasn’t there anymore.

“There is no need we go looking for her,” said Bill a bit irritated.

“I am sure Jaya can help herself. Come on, let’s go to the dak bungalow.”

Everyone got out of the dolmen and started to walk through the jungle. While they were walking the sun got covered by the clouds, and it grew dark. It made the little group walk even faster. Bill told the children that they wouldn’t like to be outside when the rain started.

When they were near the dak bungalow Jaya suddenly appeared. In her arms she carried beautiful colored flowers of a sort that Dinah never had seen before. Obviously she had picked them in

the jungle. The girl smiled cheerfully to the group, and her jolly face accompanied with the colorful flowers made such a nice picture that everyone forgave her mischief at once.

Dinah thought that Jaya had picked the flowers for her, but she hadn't. The flowers were for Sowmya. As soon as Sowmya discovered the girl in the dak bungalow, she started to scold her in a strange language. Jaya didn't answer to Sowmya's stream of words but handed her the flowers instead with a shy smile. That gesture surprised Sowmya and she stopped scolding. The woman took the flowers and admired them, and even thanked Jaya! The girl breathed in relief. That had ended well! But it turned out that she had breathed too soon. The next moment Sowmya sent her to the hall to polish the floor all the same!

It wasn't long after Bill and the children had come home that it started to rain. And what a rain it was! Jack, Philip, Lucy-Ann and Dinah thought that they had never seen such a heavy rainfall in their whole lives!

"These aren't raindrops anymore," said Dinah looking outside through the windows in the hall. "These are rain streams! What a luck that we are inside."

"It is a surprise that the soil doesn't get washed away," said Philip looking down to the earth where the rain made heavy streams of water. "Where does all that water go to, Jim?"

"There is a river nearby," answered Jim. "It will drain off all the water that is falling down. Don't worry, this pouring is very common. The monsoon-season is starting. I guess we will get some more of these showers during your vacation."

It was still raining when the evening fell.

"I hope that the rain will stop before tomorrow morning," said Lucy-Ann to Dinah when they went to bed. "I would like to see the sun falling into the swan's eye, do you?"

“Yes,” answered Dinah. “Bill said that it will last only for a short moment. It can come and go in just a few seconds. We must take close attention.”

“I hope we will be able to solve the riddle tomorrow,” said Lucy-Ann. “I am dying to know where the ray will point to.”

“I bet it will be somewhere near the carved Saraswati with the peacock,” answered Dinah. “But we will see soon.”

As the passage was too large to walk up in the time that the ray would be there, they had decided to split up. Bill and the boys would go to the dolmen to see the sun falling into the swan’s eye, and Jim and the girls would stay near the carved Saraswati with the peacock to look out for the end of the ray - and hopefully find the hiding place of the Raja’s necklace!

“It will be exciting,” said Lucy-Ann. “I like Jim, do you too? I liked the tales he has been telling this afternoon.”

As it had been raining all afternoon the group had gathered into the hall around the fire-place and Jim had been telling several of his adventures. The children had been listening in awe. Had Jim really experienced that all? The admired him even more after these stories.

“Yes, he really is a brave man,” agreed Dinah. “And he knows a lot of the jungle-life. That does remind me. I remember that he has told us that every morning deer and black bucks come to graze on a meadow nearby. I would like to see those. Maybe we can go looking after we have found the necklace tomorrow.”

“Oh, that would be nice!” answered Lucy-Ann. “Yes, let’s ask that. Tomorrow will be perfect to do it. Bill says that the capstone will cover the sun yet very early in the morning, so it will be still early when we have finished. We must ask Jim to show us the meadow tomorrow morning.”

The girl yawned and got into bed.

“I don’t know what you still have to do,” she said to Dinah, “but I go to sleep now. Has Bill told you on what time he will wake us? It will be very, very early I am afraid.”

“Yes,” answered Dinah. “It will be early.”

“Oh, but I don’t mind,” told Lucy-Ann quickly. “Tomorrow will be an exiting day! I am happy to rise early for it.”

Yes, Lucy-Ann was right. Tomorrow indeed would become an exciting day. But unfortunately a bit different than the girls were expecting now!

Chapter 16. In the Secret Passage

By Nanine Kamp.

The jungle was still dark when Bill woke up the children. “Sssh,” he said. “Please be quiet. Don’t wake up Allie and Sowmya.”

Not long after, everyone was fully awake. They felt a little excitement going through them as they thought of the things lying ahead of them. Today they would discover the secret of the carved passage! Today they would see the ray of light going through the passage to reveal the secret hiding place of the Raja! The children whispered excitedly with each other.

They collected in the hall. Jim was there too. He handed Bill a gun.

“You can never be sure,” he said grinning.

Jaya was there as well. For nothing in the world she would have passed this excitement! Unfortunately nobody noticed that Krish was absent. As time passed by Bill and the children cared less and less about him. The boy always was so silent and inconspicuous that the children tend to forget him more and more. And this morning nobody thought of waking him up.

Rikki also was still in the bedroom. Philip had left him there. The mongoose had been deep in sleep and the boy hadn’t dared to wake him up. Kiki however was present. Jack wouldn’t have thought of letting her behind! The bird didn’t like all this movement on the early morning. She pinched her eyes and tried to get some extra sleep while sitting on Jack’s shoulder. But she was wakened up every time when the boy moved his body.

Jim opened the entrance to the passage in the fireplace. They would go through the passage this morning, as the jungle was still too dark. The children heard the queer sound of grating through the hall as the part of the fireplace behind which the secret passage started, swung away.

“There it is,” said Jim when the alcove was visible. “Well, let’s go down.”

They all went down into the passage. As they let their torches shine around, their hearts were beating in excitement. There was the carving of Saraswati, and indeed there was no swan in this carving but a peacock instead. The peacock had its tail spread out and all the eyes of its beautiful feathers shone into the passage. "There are a lot of eyes in this carving," remarked Lucy-Ann remembering the riddle.

Bill looked at his watch.

"Philip, Jack, we must go to the other end of the passage now," he said. "I am afraid we have to hurry a bit. Let's go."

He turned to Jim.

"After the sun has been gone out of the passage we will come back to you," he told him.

"That's okay," answered Jim. "We will wait for you here. When everything has gone well, we will have found the hiding place then."

The two groups wished each other good luck, and Bill and the boys disappeared into the darkness. They walked quickly, spilling no time. In time they reached the other end of the passage. Above them in the ceiling was the trapdoor to the dolmen.

"Now, how did that trapdoor open?" said Philip. "I remember that it had something to do with this carved lotus."

He rummaged around the carved flower on the wall and succeeded in finding the latch. With a click the panel swung open. Curiously the boys peeped outside. Fortunately they were in time. The sky was coloring pink, but the sun hadn't got up yet. The rain was gone, and it promised to become a sunny day.

"Good," said Jack satisfied. "Sun is all we need this morning."

"All we have to do right now is sit down and wait," said Bill. And he sat down on the stone ground. "I don't think it will take long."

At the other side of the passage Jim and the girls were waiting too. In the meantime Lucy-Ann took a closer look at the carved Saraswati and its peacock, trying to find the secret hiding place

before the ray would point it out. She investigated all eyes of the peacock, but couldn't find anything strange.

"Don't take pains," said Jim to her. He had sit down too. "Soon the ray will show it for you. Please be patient."

Lucy-Ann gave up searching. Instead she joined Dinah en Jaya who were a bit further in the passage. Jaya was pointing at the carvings and explaining to Dinah what each picture meant.

Unfortunately she used very few English words and talked mostly in a language that Dinah couldn't understand. The girl had a hard task listening to Jaya.

Time passed, and everything kept silent. Jim looked at his watch. He saw that they had been waiting for over half an hour yet. He found it strange that still nothing had happened. But he didn't tell the girls. Maybe the ray would show up soon now.

But time marched on and still nothing happened. The girls now too noticed the delay.

"Shouldn't the ray have shown itself by now?" asked Dinah one time. "How late is it?"

Knowing that now it sure was too late, Jim nodded.

"I think something has gone wrong," he answered. "Let's wait on Bill and the boys to return."

"Oh, what a pity!" said Lucy-Ann disappointed. "Has it really failed?"

"Have we been too late?" asked Dinah to Jim. "Isn't the sun on the right track anymore?"

Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe it has been cloudy," he answered. "Don't worry, girls. The treasure won't run away. Let's wait what Bill and the boys have to say."

Just then the group in the passage heard the sound of a strange manly voice in the hall of the dak bungalow. And to their surprised eyes two, no three strange man started entering the passage. They were handling guns, and with those they pointed to the small group down there. Everyone got gripped with fear.

Quickly Jim sprung to his feet, but he was too late. He didn't even have time to grip his own gun.

"Raise your hands," said one of the men to the group. "Raise your hands you all! Don't anybody of you move."

Angry Jim rose his hands into the air. The hands of the three girls already were up.

"Who are you and what are you doing in my house?" Jim asked angrily.

"No words," answered the man shortly. He was from Indian origin and spoke with an accent. He now nodded to the men who were standing behind them and they stepped forward with large pieces of rope in their hands. Without saying anything they walked up to the three girls and started to tie them. When Jaya was bound she protested heavily. She yelled in her own language very loudly, and the men became very annoyed with her. Finally one of them slapped the girl hard in her face. For a moment Jaya was breathless. And in that moment the man finished tying her arms and legs.

Jim protested too, but the Indian man who had spoken firstly kept him under control with his gun, and he couldn't do anything.

When the three girls were tied up, the men came to Jim and tied him as well. After everyone was helplessly tied, the man disappeared, taking the torches of Jim and the children with them. They shut the door to the dak bungalow and in the passage everything became dark.

There they were, all lying on the stone floor of the passage, in pitch darkness. Lucy-Ann felt tears running over her cheeks. She couldn't help them coming. She was so scared!

Jim noticed the sniffing of the little girl.

"Don't worry," he said to her. "I am sure Bill and the boys will turn up soon, and set us free. Don't be scared. It won't take long."

But on the other end of the passage also a lot had happened!

Bill and the boys had been waiting in the passage for the sunlight getting to shine in, as suddenly the stone slab at the entrance came into movement. It leveled up to the ground and before Bill and the boys could do something, it had closed the entrance. "Hey!" said Philip startled. "What is happening?"

He rushed to the carved lotus on the wall and tried to release the catch. The catch released, but the stone didn't move. Someone or something was preventing it to lower.

Bill had been looking at Philip's tryings. Thinking hardly.

Suddenly he remembered that Krish hadn't come with them on their early morning exploring and he drew his conclusions. He raised his voice.

"Krish, is that you up there?" he asked to the stone above them.

There came no answer.

"Krish?"

Still no answer.

"Krish, called Bill, don't be silly. We are serving your case. There is no need in stopping us this way."

And then someone answered.

"This is not Krishnan," a voice sounded. It spoke perfectly English with only a little accent. "Be quiet you. You are captured. We know very well what you are after, and we won't let you get it."

Bill listened in anger. Those men! He really had thought that they had been gone. That the jungle had been save. Nothing had happened in the past two days! But somehow the men were back now. And they had gripped him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

But again he got no answer.

Philip pulled on Bill's shirt.

"It's one of the men who captured us that night," he whispered. "I recognize his accent."

Bill grumbled. But he couldn't do anything.

"Don't try to get away," the voice outside suddenly called. "The other side of the passage is captured as well. We know all of your little secret."

Philip and Jack exchanged looks. Bill saw them looking and drew a questioning face.

Jack explained: "When they don't open the entrance, we will miss the sun shining in. That means to two things."

Bill nodded.

"I got it," he answered. "Either the men don't know about the secret of the Saraswati-carvings, or they already have found the hiding place."

"Yes," added Philip. "But what I don't know is why they are capturing us then."

Bill sat down thinking.

"The night before yesterday, when all of you were asleep, I caught Krish slipping away into the jungle," he told the two boys. "I couldn't get after him, but I am curious what he has done that night. You know, we had been in this passage that afternoon. We didn't know then that Saraswati was the goddess of wisdom, but I am sure Krish would have known. I think he has guessed the solution of the riddle that afternoon. Sure him slipping away that night will have had something to do with it. Let me think what might have happened."

Bill got silent and started to think. But his thinking was disturbed brutally by the sudden start of a big tumult above his head.

"A snake!" someone called. "A snake!"

And there noises of struggling and fighting started. Accompanied by the heavy breathing of a man. Curiously the two boys and Bill looked up to the stone above them. What was happening outside? Some minutes passed. Minutes in which the fight above went on and on. No other sound was being heard than a constant shoving over the stone and the heavy breathing of the man. The boys and Bill waited and wondered how this would end. Suddenly the stone above them gave way. It lowered and opened the entrance. The following moment a man, totally wrapped in by an enormous snake fell into the passage.

With a loud smash both fell on the ground. They hurt themselves painfully. Startled the snake unwound itself from the man. Angry

it looked around the darkness of passage and suddenly it discovered Bill and the two boys before him. He hissed dangerously, and then he came in movement and started to shove up to the frightened man and boys!

Bill, Philip and Jack were caught in fear. At their back was the wall which formed the end of the passage. And in front of them was the enormous snake. They couldn't get anywhere!

Chapter 17. Strange things in the morning!

By Nanine Kamp.

Suddenly something grey flung past. The boys didn't realize at first what it was. From the opening above it sprang onto the ground, jumped between the boys and the snake, and there it stood still. It's muzzle directed towards the snake and it's tail moving slowly back and forth. Then the boys recognized it: It was Philip's mongoose!

"Rikki!," cried Philip in surprise.

He felt a sudden feel of pride. Rikki had come to rescue him!

What a loyal animal it was!

The snake had noticed the mongoose too. It hissed dangerously. But the mongoose wasn't afraid of the snake. He kept his muzzle up and waited.

Slowly the snake moved forwards. It obviously had forgotten about Bill and the boys. It only saw the mongoose now. It had hurt himself while falling down into the passage, and the never-ending pain accompanied by the sudden appearance of that animal who dared to challenge him, made him angry.

On some inches distance the snake stopped moving. For a few seconds nothing happened. Then the snake attacked.

"Rikki!," cried Jack in fear.

But Bill pulled the two boys aside.

"Get away, you two," he said to them and pointed to the darkness of the passage. In his hands he had Jim's gun and with that he pointed to the man who still was lying on the floor.

Cautiously Jack and Philip passed the enormous snake who now was fighting with Rikki. Jack was very afraid that the mongoose would be hurt. The snake was hissing and trying to bite the little animal. But to his relieve he saw that Rikki still was jumping around. Growling, and trying to bite the snake on his turn. Philip was less afraid, for he knew that Rikki would stand the bite of a snake.

At save distance they watched the fight go on.

Now Bill passed the fighting animals too. He kept his gun pointed to the man on the ground and he didn't let his eyes go off of him.

"Don't say anything," he hissed to him.

The man didn't answer. He even didn't look at Bill. With frightened eyes he watched the fight between Rikki and the snake going on nearby. Bill walked up to the man.

"Get up," he ordered.

Now the man looked up at Bill. Still he didn't react. Bill repeated. "Get up you, I said!"

Slowly the man stood up. Jack shone on him with his torch. In the light they saw that he was a European man of around forty, bold and dressed in a dark grey suit, which after the fight with the snake now looked rather filthy. The man still was a bit dizzy, but despite that his eyes looked mean. Bill knew that he couldn't trust him in any way.

"Turn around," he said shortly.

The man obeyed and turned around. At the same moment a loud hissing sounded through the passage. Rikki had bit the snake dangerously!

Feeling full of pain the snake winced, hissing loudly. Aside of the snake the mongoose stood, in deepest concentration, guarding every movement of his victim. The snake winced around, hissing and hissing. And then suddenly, all was over. The hissing dyed away and the snake's body fell onto the ground.

The boys and the two men took a deep breath of relieve.

"Rikki," said Philip thankfully. "Good work, boy! Come here, let me pet you."

When Rikki saw that the snake was dead, he jumped over to Philip, who lifted the mongoose up into his arms and pet him wherever he could.

"Well, I must say 'thank you' too," sounded Bill's voice through the passage to Philip. "Really, Philip, we owe your animal our lifes!"

Philip laughed delighted.

"What are we going to do now?" asked Jack.

Bill nodded in the direction of the passage.

“We go back to Jim and the girls,” he replied. “I want to see if they are all right.”

He turned to the man in the grey suit.

“And you will walk in front of us,” he told him. “So, go. Move!”

The man didn't answer but turned around obediently and started walking down the passage. Bill and the boys followed him through the darkness. Back to the dak bungalow.

After some time walking Bill knew that the dak bungalow wouldn't be far away now. Suddenly he remembered the words that the man had said earlier that morning: ‘The other side of the passage is captured as well’. Those words got him cautious. He quickly signed to the boys that they had to walk behind him and told everyone to be silent. He took the man close to him, picking him with his gun in his back. And so the little group cautiously went on.

They turned around the last corner, and there they saw Jim and the girls lying on the ground, all tied. The rest of the passage seemed empty.

With a cry Philip and Jack pressed forward and started untying the girls.

“Dinah, Lucy-Ann, what has happened? Are you hurt?”

Nobody was hurt. But Lucy-Ann cried. She was so glad that she was able to move her hands again! Dinah rubbed her wrists. Her hands had been tied very tightly. More tightly than had been necessary. They were all cold.

As soon as Jim was untied too, he got over to Bill and the two started whispering.

“Is it save here, Jim?,” asked Bill his friend.

Jim nodded.

“Yes, it is save” he answered. “At least for now. The men are up in the dak bungalow. They tied us and left us here.”

And he told his friend how he and the girls had been captured. At the same time Philip and Jack silently told the girls about Rikki's fight with the snake. Dinah and Lucy-Ann listened in awe to the boy's story. Rikki had fought with a real snake! They wished that they had seen it.

"And we were lying on the ground," moaned Lucy-Ann.

"Who is that man?", asked Dinah meaning the bold European.

"He was there above in the dolmen," Jack explained. "He wanted to shut the entrance, but he was caught by the snake."

"It's the same man who captured you and me some nights ago," added Philip. "Don't you recognize him?"

Dinah looked more closely.

"It can be," she answered. "I don't remember very much of the men that night."

Jim and Bill had exchanged their information. Jim picked up the ropes and started to tie the man's wrist while Bill kept him covered. When he was finished. Bill winked to the children to get near to him

"We are going back to the dolmen, children," he told them. "We want to get out of this passage as soon as possible. At least before the men come down and discover that their captives are gone."

He nodded with his head to the man in the grey suit.

"We'll take him with us. He'll go first and I go directly after him.

I want you to come directly after me. Please, stay close to me, and don't get behind. I don't want anyone to stray off. "

He looked sharply to Jaya.

"Have you understood that too, Jaya?," he asked. He knew what the girl was alike.

Jaya started.

"Yes, yes!," she answered hastily to Bill. "Yes, I have."

"Good," answered Bill and looked around the group of children standing around him. "Now, is everyone ready? Let's go. Keep silent."

The little parade came into movement. The man in the grey suit went in front. With a closed face he walked through the passage.

Directly after him followed Bill. He held his gun continuously pointed towards the man in front of him, and when the man dared to walk too slow, the gun came into his back.

“Walk on,” Bill then commanded.

After Bill came the two boys and the three girls. They didn't speak a single word. They longed to get out of this passage. All had got so different than what they had expected! Jim closed the little procession. He too had his gun in his hand. And he constantly looked behind to make sure that no-one was following them. It was a silent trip down through the passage, a trip which seemed to go on endlessly. But to everyone's relief nothing happened.

Finally, after what seemed ages to the children, the troop reached the other end of the passage. There above them in the roof the trapdoor still was open. Outside the sun was up and the world was bright with sunlight. The light fell into the passage and lighted the snake's body which still was lying on the ground. The girls looked at the body and shivered.

“A King Cobra,” said Jim looking too. “Probably the one that I have seen around. A pity that it's dead now.”

Bill didn't answer Jim. Instead he pointed up to the gap.

“Can you look if everything's save up there, Jim?,” he asked his friend.

Jim agreed and Bill turned towards the children.

“Stay there for a moment,” he said to them. “Keep into the passage until Jim calls you. We'll have to be sure first that there is no trap awaiting us outside.”

The children nodded. Jim started getting himself out of the passage, cautiously but very smoothly. He sure had done such things more often!

Some minutes passed while Jim was outside, checking the environment. After then he returned.

“It's save,” he called down into the passage. “You can come up, children.”

One by one the children climbed out of the passage. Jim helped them and immediately directed them to a big stone near the entrance.

“Keep your back to that stone,” he told every one, “and guard the environment. Please warn me immediately when you see something suspicious.”

And then he turned to help the next one coming up.

The children did what he asked and guarded the environment. But nothing happened, and everyone got out safely. Outside the sun was shining, and the jungle was full of life. Every one was happy to be out of the dark passage. Kiki stretched herself.

“Goodmorning,” she said and looked at the children.

“Goodmorning.”

It was her first sound. All the way in the passage the parrot had been silent. She knew that something had been going on and that she had not been allowed to speak. But she also had been feeling very uncomfortable in the dark, and now she was relieved that she was back in the sunshine. And she was feeling hungry!

She looked down to Jack’s pocket’s. Did he happen to have some left-over seeds? She danced from one leg to the other and was thinking about doing the sound of the breakfast bell from the boy’s school.

In time Philip saw Kiki looking and knew what she was thinking about.

“Watch out, Jack. Kiki is hungry!,” he warned Jack. “Look out, she might do that noisy bell again!”

Just in time Jack stopped Kiki from ringing the breakfast bell by tapping her on her beak.

“Silent Kiki,” he said sternly with a low voice to her. “You silly bird. We are still in danger!”

But Kiki was annoyed. How dared Jack to tap her, while she was so hungry! She squawked and rose up into the air and gave everyone a fright.

“Ssh!,” hissed Jack.

Kiki landed on Lucy-Ann's shoulder, and looked at her pockets! Maybe Lucy-Ann had something to eat?

But Lucy-Ann also didn't have any seeds. She was very sorry. "I am sorry, Kiki," she said to the bird. "I don't have anything. You'll have to wait."

Suddenly all children felt hungry. How long had they been in the passage?

"What time is it?," asked Jack. "Does anybody know?"

Philip had a watch. He looked on it and was surprised.

"It's nearly 9 o'clock!" he answered. "We must have been in that passage for ages. No wonder that I am feeling hungry!"

While the children were waiting at the stone, Jim got back down into the passage. The two men decided to tie up their prisoner and to leave him there. They would let the police pick him up later. Jim took the ropes with which he and the girls had been tied. He had taken them with him. And while Bill kept pointing his gun to the man, Jim completely tied him up. Jim knew how to tie: when he finished, the poor man couldn't move a single finger!

"So, that's done," said Jim to Bill. "He cannot escape now. Come on, Bill. Let's go outside."

The two men left the man aside the snake's dead body and then climbed out of the passage.

"What are we going to do now, Bill?" asked Jim while he closed the entrance. "Are we going to the police?"

But to his surprise Bill shook his head.

"No," the man answered, "no we cannot go to the police right now, Jim. Allie is in the dak bungalow with those men you told me about. And I am worried about her. I want to go there and see what I can do."

Jim nodded at once. He understood his friend.

"OK," he answered, "we'll go to the dak bungalow then. And look for Allie. And for Sowmya and Krish too! But let me call Mohinder first. He certainly will help us. We can leave the children in his house, and then we will go to the dak bungalow

with us three men. Don't worry about Allie, Bill. I am sure that she won't be harmed. After all she is a woman."

Bill didn't answer but nodded instead. Jim put his hand shortly on his friend's shoulder and then got up.

"We'll go to Mo's house," he told the children. "You'll stay there while Bill, I and Mo will take a look at the Dak Bungalow. Let's go, it's not far from here."

Everyone got up. Jim led the group through the bushes of the jungle in the direction of the caretaker's little cottage. After some time they could see it shimmering through the bushes: a log hut. Small, but robust. There was light burning inside and Jim was relieved that Mohinder was at home. He walked up to the door and knocked.

"Mo," he called to the closed door, "it's me, Jim. Please open."

But to his surprise everything kept silent. No-one answered, and no-one came opening the door. Jim knocked again.

"Mo," he said. "Please, open the door. I need your help."

But again no answer came.

Jim tried the door, and discovered that he could open it. He opened, and went inside.

But a few seconds later he was back outside. He waved to Bill and the children to come. His face was stony.

Alarmed Bill and the children ran up to the house. They gathered inside where Jim was too. The man pointed to a bundle that was lying on the floor. Everyone looked. There, tied up with yards of rope, and with cloth in his mouth, was Krish!

Chapter 18. Back to the Dak Bungalow

By Nanine Kamp

“Krish!,” called Jack in surprise.

Bill didn't say anything but bent down and took the cloth out of the boy's mouth.

“What has happened?,” he asked Krish with a stern voice.

The boy tried to clear his throat. His mouth had become very dry and he had hard times with it. Finally he could speak.

“It were those men,” he said. “They captured me yesterday late in the evening, when I was outside emptying the dust bin.”

“Was Mo there too?,” asked Jim sternly.

Krish shook his head.

“No. But he was here and opened the door when the men took me to this hut. I am sorry, Jim.”

Jim walked up and down the little room.

“Mo is one of them! Of all men!”

He turned towards Bill.

“I am sorry,” he said, “I thought that the man was trustable. He already lived here when I moved in, and seemed to be grown together with this area. So I decided to keep him. Really, he looked fine to me.”

“It's not your fault, Jim,” answered Bill.

Bill kneeled next to Krish and started to untie his ropes. Jack kneeled too and helped him.

“We have to think what we are going to do now,” said Bill while untying. “Krish, what do you know of these men?”

The boy shook his head.

“Almost nothing, sir,” he answered. “They grabbed me and took me here.”

“And Mo?” asked Jim.

“Mo was here and helped the men to bring me in. After then they all disappeared. They haven't returned since then.”

“How many were of them?”

Krish thought for a second.

“Two, I guess. They are those men that are after me. I am so sorry that I am giving you this trouble.”

“We’ll discuss that later,” answered Bill shortly.

Krish was untied. He sat up carefully and rubbed his arms and legs.

“What are we going to do, Bill?” asked Jim.

“We’ll go to the Dak Bungalow,” Bill answered. “But now without Mohinder. I am afraid that we’ll have to take the children with us. I don’t want to leave them here with all that is happening.”

Jim nodded.

“OK,” he answered.

Bill turned to Krish.

“Can you walk?,” he asked.

Krish tried to stand up. He had troubles with it, but after some tryings he could stand on his legs.

“Krish! Polly put the kettle on. Where’s Polly?” screeched Kiki.

“Rikki-tikki,” she added when she noticed the mongoose walking in. “Rikki-tikki. Tikki-Rikki!”

The mongoose had found something to eat outside and was still chewing while walking in. Kiki saw his mouth going and became jealous. She wanted to have something to eat too! And before anyone could stop her, Kiki started sounding the breakfast-bell. Everyone got a fright.

“Ssshh!,” urged Jack angrily and for the second time that day he tapped Kiki on her beak.

“Oh, she can’t help,” pleaded Lucy-Ann. “Please Jack. She is just hungry. And to tell you the truth, I am too.”

Jim and Bill looked at each other.

“OK,” said Jim, “let’s see if Mo has something to eat in his kitchen. I admit that I need a good meal too. It’s better that we eat first and go to the Dak Bungalow with a filled stomach. Who knows how long it will take us there.”

The group gathered into the little kitchen of Mo’s hut and looked around for something to eat. They found bread and eggs and

Dinah put on a fire and prepared toasted bread with fried egg for everyone, and a cup of tea. They all felt better afterwards.

“And now up to the Dak Bungalow,” said Bill, when they had put all plates and cups into each other on one corner of the little kitchen table. “I want you to be careful, children. Don’t do anything stupid and don’t stray away from Jim and me. Keep in mind that we are only taking you with us because I don’t want you to loose out of sight.”

The children nodded. They promised to be careful. Then the troop of two men, three boys, three girls, a parrot and a mongoose left the hut.

The Dak Bungalow wasn’t far away. The group approached it cautiously from the back. Not far from the clearing they kneeled down between the bushes and looked at the house. From were they were they could see the windows of the sleeping rooms and the kitchen. Suddenly Bill started.

“I can see Allie,” he whispered. “Look, she is at the window of the girls’ bedroom!”

Everyone looked at the girls’ bedroom where they indeed could see aunt Allie standing at the window.

“She seemed to be alright,” whispered Jim. “Look, there’s Sowmya too.”

He was right. Sowmya had come next to aunt Allie and the two were looking outside the window.

“They cannot come out, the door to the verandah is locked,” whispered Bill.

“I see it,” answered Jim. “But that’s something I can solve. I have the keys with me. Wait here. I will fetch the two women.”

He sneaked away while the others ducked a bit deeper into the bushes. Everyone peeped through the leaves at the house. They saw Jim cautiously approaching it. The women inside the house discovered Jim and they started waving and winking through the window.

“Ssh,” signed Jim to them. He quickly crossed the little clearing and then climbed onto the verandah. He hold the key in his hands. While looking left and right to make sure that the coast was clear he unlocked the door of the girls’ bedroom, and aunt Allie and Sowmya came outside.

The children in the bushes saw Jim pointing the two women were they could leave the verandah, and then the three adults crossed the clearing and came to the place were the children were hiding. “Aunt Allie,” said Lucy-Ann with appreciation. “I am so relieved that you are here!” She ran over to Mrs. Cunningham and hugged her.

Mrs. Cunningham looked to the children around her.

“Were have you all been?,” she asked. “I woke up and there were this men in the Dak Bungalow. And you all were gone!”

Philip smiled to her.

“Mother, it’s nothing,” he assured. “We’re only in the middle of an adventure, that’s all!”

Mrs. Cunningham looked questioning to Bill, who didn’t notice.

He was looking to the Dak Bungalow and whispering with Jim who had been talking with Sowmya. Suddenly he looked up.

“We go to the front of the house,” he told the group around him.

“The men seem to be sitting in the hall. We want to take a look at them.”

Everyone got up, and directed by Jim, they sneaked through the bushes to the front of the Dak Bungalow. There they couldn’t get as close to the Dak Bungalow as they had been at the backside, because here eat the front the clearing was bigger. Jim sighed.

“Bill, we’ll go to the verandah,” he said. “I want to look into the hall.”

He turned towards the children and the women.

“You all stay here in the bushes. Whatever happens, stay here. Have you understood?”

Everyone nodded to show that they had understood.

Bill looked at Jack and Philip.

“Philip, Jack,” he said to the two boys. “I want you two to go the Khitanpur immediately, when something happens. Don’t try to rescue us personally, but go and fetch the police. Sowmya will show you the way.”

Jack nodded, but Philip asked.

“You only go spying, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” answered Bill. “And we will be careful. It’s only in case that I say this. I don’t want you to get involved.”

Now Philip nodded too.

“OK,” he answered, “I understand.”

The two men disappeared. From their hiding place between the bushes the children could see them sneaking towards the clearing and then crossing it from the side. There they were on the front verandah. Carefully they sneaked to the windows of the hall and from a corner they peeped into the Dak Bungalow.

Minutes past by. Minutes in which nothing happened. The two men were there on the verandah. They watched and listened to what was happening in the Dak Bungalow. The children and the two women waited between the bushes. It was slowly getting afternoon and the sun had got high into the sky. It was warm, and the jungle had gone silent because of the heat. Everything seemed to hold.

After some time, Jim looked at Bill. Bill looked back and nodded. Then the two men started to sneak away.

Soon later they were back with the children.

“What have you seen, Bill?,” asked Jack immediately.

Bill looked at the children around him and told.

“There were four of them,” he said. “They were sitting in the hall, and were discussing. They have discovered that Jim and the girls are gone and are very angry. They were discussing what to do now.”

“Mo was amongst them,” said Jim darkly. “I am so disappointed in that man.”

“We’ll have to stop them,” added Bill. “They also knew about the snake, but they are assuming that the snake has killed our friend in

the grey suit. They don't know what has happened in real at the Dolmen and that their friend is still alive.”

“We have to capture them, before they escape,” said Jim.

“Yes,” answered Bill. “We have to capture them. But how?

There's only us two – I don't want you children to get involved – and they are with four. And they are inside the Dak Bungalow with places to hide everywhere. How can we ever capture them?”

Everyone got silent. Yes, that was a big problem. When Jim and Bill would enter the bungalow, the men would easily escape to the back and disappear into the jungle. How could they ever take hold of them? Everyone in the group thought hard. Suddenly Philip hit himself on his knee.

“Yes, that's it!,” he said. “I have a plan. A perfect plan!”

The boy got up and looked around the group. His mouth smiled and his eyes were twinkling with mischief. Everyone wondered what he was thinking of.

“I know what we can do,” he said to the group around him. “Let's capture those men the same way as they have tried to capture us some nights ago!”

Chapter 19. Philip's Plan

By Nanine Kamp

The four adults and five children stared unknowingly at Philip. What did that boy mean? Suddenly Bill started to grin.

"Philip, you are terrific," he said. "Yes, we will do that. At least, if Jim agrees."

Jim still didn't know what Philip had devised, but suddenly it occurred to him. He groaned.

"You don't mean the fire, do you?"

"Yes!," answered Philip. "Of course I mean the fire. Let's smoke out these guys the same way as the have tried to smoke out us!"

Now everyone understood what Philip had been thinking of.

"But they will escape through the passage, like we did!" protested Jack.

"That's part of the plan," Philip answered. "When the men are in the passage, one of us goes inside the house and closes the entrance. Then they are locked up!"

Jack shook his head.

"And what about the other side of the passage?" he asked. "The one at the dolmen?"

"That's closed," answered Bill. "Jim closed it when we left. And I am sure that the men won't find the latch in the carved lotus to unlock the trapdoor."

Jim shook his head.

"My house," he said. "After all the repairing and painting that I have done. Once again!"

"But," said Dinah. "The Dak Bungalow is made of stone. It won't burn down. It didn't burn down the other night, and the men know that. They will never try to escape!"

Now Bill shook his head.

"You are wrong Dinah," he explained. "It wasn't the fire for which we had to escape into the passage. It was the smoke. The smoke enclosed the house and came entering it through the chinks.

Smoke is poisonous. It kills faster than flames do. The men know that. They will escape.”

As always Kiki had the last word.

“Polly put the kettle on,” she said stately.

“Yes Kiki,” answered Bill grinning. “You are right. We will put the kettle on. And we will put it on a very big fire.”

“My house,” groaned Jim.

It was some time after. Jim had fetched the jerry can of petrol which he had refilled in Khitanpur two days ago, and the two men had poured the petrol out over the two verandahs of the Dak Bungalow. They had worked very quickly. The men were still sitting inside, but Jim and Bill expected that they would come outside soon. The fire had to be burning by then!

In his barn Jim had also found some other stuff that would burn nicely. He poured it out together with the petrol. The stuff looked like petrol, but it was darker and more sticky.

“This will burn for a long time and give fine smoke,” Jim said to Bill. “Just what we need.”

Now all was ready and Jim unlit the fire.

From their hiding place in the bushes the children saw the small fire run through the grass, following the track of the spoiled petrol. Just as it had done some nights ago! Soon after the fire reached the two verandah’s. The men had poured more petrol there, and the small flames rose up.

Immediately the man in the Dak Bungalow got warned. The children could hear their screams coming from inside. They were very started. But it already was too late to leave the Dak Bungalow: The house was surrounded by fire. The flames rose up in the air and licked at the stones. A thick black smoke rose up. Jim’s stuff worked marvelously.

In the bushes the children and the four adults watched and waited. Would their plan work? Would the men try to escape through the secret passage? They hoped for it.

“I think it’s time that I go inside and close the entrance to the passage,” said Jim after some minutes had passed. The fire still was burning, but Jim knew that it wouldn’t burn for long anymore. “Bill, please guard me, while I am rushing inside.”

The two men ran away and disappeared around the Dak Bungalow. At the back the fire had already started to lower. Within some minutes they both were back.

“Everything is fine,” reported Jim. “The Dak Bungalow was empty. The men have escaped into the passage. And I have closed the entrance, and made sure that no one can open it. Even from the outside. Philip’s plan has worked well. The men are captured.”

The men were captured! Everyone smiled in relief. That was good news!

Some time later the fire was extinguished. Jim and Bill entered the house again and put all windows open to let the smoke go out. Then they returned.

“Soon you can go back to the Dak Bungalow,” Jim told the children. “It’s a bit sooty inside, but luckily not much.”

“Did you hear the men in the passage while you were in?,” asked Jack.

Bill shook his head.

“No,” he answered. “We didn’t hear anything. Probably they have started walking down the passage. “

“Yes,” answered Jim. “And at the other end they will find their bold friend, neatly tied up. I guess that they will be pleased to see that he’s still alive.”

The man turned to Bill.

“I think it’s time that I go fetching the police,” he said. “I will take the jeep to Khitanpur. I won’t be away for long. And I am sure that our friends in the passage will become much more annoyed when they discover who I’ll bring back with me.”

He smiled and turned to walk away. But Bill held him back.

“Oh, Jim, would you do me a favor?,” he asked.

Jim held on.

“Whatever you ask, my friend.”

Bill smiled.

“Thanks,” he said. “Will you please take Allie with you. I am sure she is sick of this adventure in the Jungle. A trip to the town, and a meeting with the police will do her good.”

Allie smiled at her husband. How he had guessed it right! At the moment she was fed up with this jungle, with the Dak Bungalow, and with everything that has happened. She longed to be in the civilized world.

Jim nodded.

“Of course,” he said. He held out his hand to Allie to help her get up.

“Come along with me, miss. We will go to a ordinary town, where everything is fine.”

Jim and Mrs. Cunningham disappeared. Bill started searching his pockets and found his pipe. He took it, filled it and then unlit it. Small circles of smoke started to rise upwards.

“You would say that after all that fire I would have had enough of it, but you don’t know how glad I am that I finally can smoke this pipe in peace.”

He looked around at the circle of children around him and his eyes stopped resting on Krish.

“Well,” he said to the boy. “Now you tell us everything that has been going around. Do you understand me? I want to hear everything.”

Krish cleared his throat. But he nodded. Once more he cleared his throat. He found it difficult to start. But then he found the words.

“Please, don’t think that I have lied to you the other night,” he said to Bill and the others. “I haven’t. I am the great-grandson of the raja who once owned this place, and I am here to find the necklace which still belongs to my family.”

“Do you have found it?,” Bill asked shortly.

Slowly Krish nodded.

“Yes, I have found it,” he answered. “It was hidden in a carved lotus flower in the secret passage.”

“Oh!,” said Lucy Ann a bit disappointed. “Did the ray point it out?”

Again Krish nodded.

“Yes, it did. And I can tell you that it was a beautiful sight, seeing that ray jumping from stone to stone, all through the passage.”

“When did you catch the necklace?” asked Bill sternly. “I suppose it has been the morning before we went. When you slipped away in the night.”

Now Krish turned very shy. He hardly dared to look at Bill.

“Yes,” he answered.

“Why haven’t you waited on us?,” asked Bill slowly.

“Because,” answered Krish, “because I didn’t want to put you into danger. It’s only my business, not yours. And I didn’t want you to get hurt because of my goals. I had planned to slip away as soon as I had found the necklace. I nearly did, but then I discovered that the problems would not end when I sneaked away.”

“What do you mean?,” asked Bill being on his guard. “Speak out, boy.”

“Well, there is this business of which I didn’t know,” answered Krish. “The business of this area. Really, I had no idea that this was happening.”

He again kept silent. But suddenly Sowmya interrupted.

“Now I realize of what necklace you are talking about,” she said to Krish. “It’s the Lakshmi one, am I right?”

Krish didn’t answer but nodded instead.

“That necklace belongs to this environment!” said Sowmya rather upset. “It has been here for decades. You don’t have the right to snap it away!”

Bill intervened.

“Please stay calm,” he said to Sowmya. “Explain us instead what that necklace means to you.”

The woman obeyed Bill and tried to get calm.

“Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth,” she started telling. “She is the one who helps people in their business. It’s told that one of her necklaces is buried in the grounds of this area, and we believe that it gives our area it’s wealth. Khitanpur was a thriving little town not so long ago, with a lot of business going on. Unfortunately the business is failing right now. Taking away the necklace will definitely put the end to it.”

Bill listened to Sowmya and thought hard. When she had finished he didn’t say anything at once, but kept on thinking. Then he turned to Kish.

“But that’s not what those men are after, are they?,” he asked the boy. “There is more.”

Krish nodded.

“Yes, there is more,” he replied. “I discovered that with the business of Khitanpur failing, another business came up and has been growing strong through the years. A really profitable business.”

Bill nodded.

“And Mohinder has something to do with it,” he said.

Krish nodded.

“Mohinder is the man behind this business,” he replied. “He organizes the rituals and a good part of the money goes to him, as he is the caretaker of this area and has to give his approval for the rituals.”

“What rituals?,” asked Jack.

Krish turned his head to the boy

“Rituals to get better in business,” he replied. “Rituals to receive Lakshmi’s support. Believe me, Mohinder has become a rich man out of those.”

So, that was the situation! No one spoke as they were trying to digest the news that they had got.

Bill was the first who opened his mouth.

“But the necklace is yours.”

“The necklace definitely is mine,” confirmed Krish. “But I don’t mind if it stays here. All what I wanted was to find it back. Now I

have found it, and I am satisfied. When it stays here and continues to give the area it's wealth, I am happy. All that I want is that there will be taken care that it won't be stolen, or exploited again."

"Well, that's doesn't seem too difficult to me," said Bill.

Sowmya took a breath of relief.

"I hope this area will find it's wealth back," she said. "Khitanpur deserves to be a busy town."

"Where is this necklace now?," asked Lucy-Ann. "I would like to see it."

Krish pointed to the Dak Bungalow which was standing at the other side of the clearing, it's windows all open.

"It's inside the Dak Bungalow. Luckily I didn't have it with me when those men grabbed me. Don't expect too much of it. It's not that fancy and time have made it dull. But to me this necklace is very valuable."

Sowmya nodded.

"Yes," she said. "The necklace is very valuable. To us too."

Bill looked at the Dak Bungalow.

"Well, I think that the smoke will be away by now," he said.

"Let's go inside and take a look at that necklace. And then we get ourselves something to eat. I don't know how you are, but I am hungry again!"

"Oh yes, me too," said Lucy-Ann. "I am glad that we can go inside."

She stood up and took Bill's hand.

Now everyone stood up.

"When those men are out of the passage, you must show us the ray and the lotus where the necklace was hidden, Krish," said Philip.

"I'd like to see that."

Krish smiled.

"I think I will put the necklace back in there," he said. "It's safely hidden there. Only we know the hiding place and the way to find it. And we'll keep it secret. We can lock the entrances to the passage even more to be assured that the necklace is safe. And

then Khitanpur will have it's necklace and all the possibilities to become a wealthy town again.”

“But first we'll have lunch,” sounded Bill's voice. “Well, what are you waiting for? Come on you all!”

Chapter 20. All ends well

By Nanine Kamp

They all went back to the dak bungalow and entered it. A faint scent of smoke still was hanging around, but for the rest all seemed fine. Sowmya turned to Jaya and wanted to tell her plans for cleaning up the soot, but Jaya stubbornly kept being directed to Krish.

“Where do you have hidden that necklace?” asked Jack to the boy. “Please show us.”

Krish nodded with his head in the direction of the kitchen and went to its door. Everyone looked surprised. In the kitchen? They would never have expected that the necklace would have been stored there!

Curiously the children followed Krish. They entered the kitchen and saw Krish pressing on the tiles at the wall. Then suddenly one of them opened! Behind the loose tile a small gap appeared. The children looked in surprise at the gap.

“Gosh, a secret hiding place!” exclaimed Philip. “And we didn’t know of that. Krish, how many more secrets does this house have?”

Krish smiled mysteriously and put his hand into the hiding place. Out of the secret place came a paper kitchen bag which seemed to be new. Clearly Krish had brought it recently from town, filled with food. But now it served as protection for the necklace inside. The boy opened the bag and carefully took out its content. There the necklace was, the necklace of the goddess of wealth. Everyone looked in curiosity and admiration to the jewel that now was lying in Krish’ hands.

As the boy had told, the necklace didn’t look very impressive. It was made of silver that through the years had turned dull. The jewel consisted of big balls which were connected to each other by smaller balls. Although the balls were dull, the children could see that in the big ones pictures were carved, and that at some places pieces of another kind of metal had been put in to enrich the

pictures. It was clear that the necklace had been made by skilled craftsmen long ago; and although it's dullness, it looked impressive. Everyone was silent.

"This is the necklace that the goddess of wealth gave to a mortal princess," Kris said. "The necklace that has been a family heirloom for centuries. I am happy that I have found it back." The boy stroke the necklace lovingly and put it carefully back into the bag. He put the bag into the hole. Then he pressed the loose tile until it was back on it's place. The children looked at the closed tile. They couldn't see anything that told them that this tile was hiding a secret gap. Krish turned towards the children. "I am going to prepare lunch," he said.

They were having lunch when they suddenly heard voices sounding up and getting louder and louder. They all thought at first that the voices were coming from the secret passage below, and that the men had got back and they got a bit frightened. But to everyone's relief the voices appeared to come from the outside. Jim was back. And he had taken a dozen of sturdy police-men with him. The men entered the dak bungalow and suddenly the house was full of activity. Bill got up and disappeared in the hall, but to their disappointment the children had to stay in the kitchen. Things became serious now. In the kitchen they waited impatiently. They could hear all kind of noises coming from the hall: Voices sounding up, and commands being given. Footsteps walking around. After some time the noises disappeared, and the house got silent. The children guessed that everyone must have been gone into the passage. The house calmed down. But suddenly there was the sound of shooting! Frightened the children looked at each other. Shooting in the passage! They hoped that everything was all right.

"Pop!" said Kiki immediately and imitated the sound of the gun shot.

"Pop, pop, bang!"

“Be silent Kiki,” warned Jack.

He, Philip and Jaya stood near the kitchen door and tried to hear every sound. At the moment they could hear nothing. All had been quietened down again.

But after some time the sound of voices came back. The children awaited them with curiosity and also with a bit of fear. From who were these voices? Were they from Jim and the police-men? Or did those bad men happen to have conquered?

“What do you hear?” asked Dinah impatiently to the three children who were still waiting at the kitchen door. Dinah badly had wanted to stand there too. But the place at the door was full with Philip, Jack and Jaya and so she had to stay at the dining table. She was burning of curiosity.

“What is going on?” she asked once again. “Please tell me, what do you hear?”

But the boys couldn't make out much yet.

“Sssh,” said Philip. “Let us listen.”

Suddenly the door opened. It was Bill. He laughed loudly when he saw three frightened faces in front of him.

“So you were eavesdropping?” he said while he came in and closed the door behind him. “You naughty children! Well, I think you will be pleased to hear that everything has gone well.”

All children, and Sowmya too, took a breath of relieve.

“Are the men captured?” asked Lucy-Ann.

Bill smiled.

“Yes they are. Haven't you finished your lunch yet? Come on, let's get back to the table. While we continue our lunch I will tell you everything.”

Bill told what had happened. The men indeed had gone to the other end of the passage. There, at the other end, they had found their mate and they had untied him. Somehow the men had decided to return to the Dak Bungalow after then. And so Jim and the police-men encountered them half-way in the passage. The shooting the children had heard, had been from the guns of the police-men, when one of the bad men tried to run back to the

Dolmen. The bullet had hit the men's leg and he was wounded now. A doctor would come soon. After the shooting the police didn't have any difficulties in capturing the men anymore.

"They are in the hall now," said Bill. "They will be taken away soon."

Out of the hall still came the sound of voices. The children would like to take a look at what was happening there, but Bill didn't let them go out of the kitchen. After some time the voices died away and it became silent. Jim entered the kitchen.

"It's done," he said while he sat down on an empty chair. "The police is back to Khitanpur and they have taken the men with them. Mohinder too. I tried to talk with him, but the man kept silence. I am afraid I have to watch out for a new caretaker."

"I am very sorry that I have done this all to you," said Krish suddenly. He finally spoke a word. After showing the necklace he had turned back into his usual silence. It still was weird. But the children slowly got used to it.

Jim looked at the boy who stood at the other side of the kitchen table. He seemed to think about something. But he didn't tell anything. Instead he said:

"It's not your fault, boy. At least we have caught them now. Hopefully the rest of the vacation will be peaceful."

To Jim's relieve the rest of the days kept peaceful indeed. Now that every danger was gone, the children were allowed to explore the jungle by themselves. They were relieved about this.

Especially Jack and Philip who now finally could explore the fauna of the jungle. The boys made huge trips and enjoyed themselves very much. On some trips Jim accompanied them, and the two boys were happy when he did, because the man knew a lot about the life in this area. He learned the boys very much. Jack saw plenty of amazing birds, and took many nice pictures with his photo camera. The boys had great fun one time with Kiki and a large troop of parakeets who obviously were surprised to meet a

parrot like Kiki. Curiously the parakeets approached to investigate her, and Kiki got nervous of those little green birds flying around her and she started to yell to them.

“Wipe your feet!” she yelled to the parakeets. “Blow your nose!” But the parakeets didn’t wipe their feet nor blow their nose. Instead they kept flying around the parrot. The brave ones getting closer and closer.

“Bang!” Kiki suddenly said, and she imitated the sound of a gun shot. To her relieve that worked. Immediately the whole troop of parakeets fled away frightened, and they disappeared into the trees.

But the parakeets were curious. And it was only some seconds later that the first ones reappeared! Kiki saw them coming, and she didn’t like it.

“Grrl,” she growled angrily to the approaching green parakeets. She sounded like a dog.

Some more birds approached.

“Grrrl,” Kiki growled again, a bit louder.

But the parakeets didn’t mind this growling.

Kiki got very annoyed with those sticking birds, who didn’t seem to listen. Angry she made the sound of the gun shot again and again that worked. All parakeets fled away once more and disappeared.

But again it was only some seconds later that the first parakeet reappeared..

But now Kiki knew what to do, and she started to make a game out of it. She raised her crest and looked proudly to the parakeets around her who again were trying to approach her.

“Polly-golly,” she said kindly to the curious parakeets around her. “Polly-golly.”

And the parakeets fled nearer.

“Polly-golly”, said Kiki once again. She obviously tried to lure the birds towards her. And the parakeets approached.

Then let Kiki her gun crack again, and all the green birds disappeared hastily. Behind them the parrot cackled loudly and

had big fun of herself. In their hiding place Jack en Philip laughed too. The two boys had a hard task to keep silent by all this. That silly bird of a Kiki!

Krish showed the children where he had found the necklace. Sadly he couldn't show them the ray of light anymore. The days had past by and the sun wasn't at the required level anymore. But he could show them the hiding place still.

Accompanied by all five children, and by Kiki and Rikki of course, the boy climbed down into the passage and guided the children to the carved picture of Saraswati with the peacock at the wall.

"Didn't I tell you!" said Lucy-Ann when she saw the picture. "The peacock had something to do with it."

"Yes it has," said Krish. "The ray came bouncing all through the passage, and hit one of the eyes of the peacock. I don't know anymore which one it was."

"The goddess is sitting on a lotus flower, an enormous one!" discovered Lucy-Ann suddenly. "Krish, didn't you tell us that you had found the necklace hidden inside of a lotus flower? Was it this one?"

The boy shook his head.

"No, it wasn't the big one," he replied. "It's this smaller one."

The boy turned to a small lotus, which was carved a bit underneath the big lotus flower.

"The ray pointed to this little flower leaf on the right," Krish went on telling. "I pulled the leaf, and then the biggest leaf of the lotus opened."

The boy pulled the small lotus leaf to which the ray had pointed and the children saw the most front leaf - the biggest one - of the lotus flower opening. A small gap appeared.

Krish pointed to the gap.

"In this gap I found the necklace," he told proudly.

All children looked inside the gap. The gap was empty now, but the children could easily imagine how the necklace must have been lying there.

“It’s a fine hiding place,” remarked Jack. “A secret gap hidden in a secret passage. No wonder that no-one could find the necklace until the legal heir did.”

Krish smiled shyly.

“I must say that it’s thanks to you, that I have found it. I am very grateful for your help.”

From his pockets the boy delved a bag. The children recognized the bag at once. It was the paper bag in which the necklace was stored.

“I’m returning the necklace to it’s place,” explained Krish. “It’s safely hidden there. No one knows about this secret hiding place, except us. And we will keep it secret, won’t we?”

“Yes we will,” answered Philip immediately. “We promise you that we won’t tell anybody about this place. It will be our secret.”

Carefully the boy took the necklace out of the bag. Everyone admired the dull necklace once more. Then the boy laid the necklace into the little gap and closed the leaf of the lotus flower. “Hidden here the necklace will continue to give it’s wealth to the area,” he said when the leaf was closed. “I hope Khitanpur will be wealthy soon.”

The days of the vacation fled by faster and faster and all children lost count of them. But inevitably the end came into sight.

“Can you believe that we only have five days left from today?” said Lucy-Ann one morning at breakfast. “Coming Friday we’re flying back. How fast the days have fled! I must say that I don’t look forward to coming Friday. I won’t like to leave this place!” Everyone agreed with Lucy-Ann. They had had a lovely time in the jungle.

“The Jungle of Adventure,” said Jack with glittering eyes. “I will never forget the adventure that we have had here. Those men that

nearly kidnapped us, and the secret passage with the two carved pictures of Saraswati, and the riddle...!”

Philip was patting Rikki who had climbed onto his nap.

“Do you know yet what you’ll do with him?” asked Dinah her brother, meaning Rikki.

She half hoped that Philip wouldn’t take the little animal back to the UK. Although the girl did like Rikki, she didn’t find it a pleasant thought to have him at home in the UK.

But to her luck there was no reason to be afraid.

“Yes,” answered Philip. “I have spoken with Jim, and we have agreed that I will give Rikki back his liberty. He deserves to get the opportunity to go back into the jungle. But in case he doesn’t like to live in the jungle anymore, he can come back to the Dak Bungalow and then Jim will take care of him.”

Lucy-Ann took a sigh of relieve.

“I am glad Rikki will have a home,” she said. “But I know he’ll miss you, Philip.”

“I’ll miss him too,” answered Philip. “But I am convinced that giving back his liberty and leaving him here in the jungle is the best I can do for him.”

“Oh yes,” answered Lucy-Ann quickly. “I agree with that. It was terrible to see those animals in those little caves, down back in Bangalore. I hope Rikki will never be caught again by such men.”

“He won’t,” assured Philip. “He has grown since then. I am sure he will keep out of the hands of those.”

“Do you know what has happened with Krish?” asked Jack. “He is smiling from to ear to ear this morning!”

The children had got so used to the stillness of the Indian boy that they often forgot that he was around and tended to talk as if he wasn’t. They were heavily surprised when this time Krish answered the question himself.

“Jim has offered me the job of caretaker of this ground,” he told the children happily. His face was happy and his eyes glittered.

“He won’t need me as a cook anymore when you return to the UK and I was afraid that I would have to leave this place. But now Jim

has offered me this job and I can stay here. I will live in Mohinder's hut and guard the area. And I can also guard Lakshmi's necklace and take care that no-one is taking gain out of my heritage again. I am very happy. After all those decades finally my family is back on this ground."

The children listened to the boy and were happy for him. They couldn't see him as a guard, to be honest. Thin and solemn as he was. But they thought that Jim had made a good decision nevertheless.

Philip turned to Dinah.

"What is going to happen to Jaya?" He asked.

During the vacation the three girls had spent a lot of time together. In her faulty English Jaya had told Dinah and Lucy-Ann a lot about the Indian life and culture. They all had had much fun. For Sowmya Jaya had been a pain. She had been able to evade of nearly all her tasks! At first Sowmya had been very angry, but later she had given up. And Jaya had enjoyed her time with the two English girls. She understood Philip's question and took a sad face.

"I will miss you," she said seriously.

"Jaya will go back to her mother," answered Lucy-Ann for Dinah.

"She has told us that she'd rather stay with us. When she is old enough she will come to the UK to look for us."

"She will be welcome then," concluded Dinah with a stern look to Philip.

Jim entered the kitchen.

"Good morning you all," he said cheery. "Have had a good sleep?"

"Jim! Where have you been?" asked Bill surprised. "I missed you this morning in the dak bungalow."

Jim smiled.

"I have made a trip to Khitanpur," he answered. "Amongst other things I have spoken with the police. All the men have confessed and have told their story. Parts of them we already knew. But it was interesting to hear how Mo had come to his deed. I learned

that he isn't that trustable as I always thought. The police discovered that he had some other things running too. So they were glad that they had caught him now. And I am glad that it was not that I paid Mo too low for his work that made him starting doing this business."

Jim got silent while the others looked at him. They could see that the sudden turn of Mohinder's character had touched the man.

"Everything has come to a good end," said Lucy-Ann suddenly looking satisfied. "But oh, how I hate to have to leave this place coming Friday!"

The girl turned to Bill.

"Bill, can't we stay some weeks longer?" she asked. "Please, say yes."

Bill smiled and ruffled Lucy-Ann's hair.

"I am sorry to disappoint you, girl, but your school is starting in two weeks," he said. "And you know what a lot of business your mother always have with preparing four children for the next school term. No, I am sorry, but we really have to return to our home coming Friday."

"But you can come back in the next vacation," said Jim. "You'll always be welcome here."

"Oh yes!" answered Lucy-Ann, and her face turned happy.

"Thanks, Jim. Yes, that we'll do. We'll come back. And then we'll meet everyone again: You Krish, and you Jaya, and Rikki."

"And the necklace, and the secret passage, and the two carved Saraswati's," added Philip with a grin, "and the Dolmen."

"And Kiki will be pleased to meet the parakeets again," said Jack.

Everyone laughed. The boys had told the others about Kiki's adventure with the parakeets.

"God save the King," said Kiki stately who always wanted to have the last word. She raised her crest. "Polly put the kettle on."

Jim pointed his finger warningly to the parrot.

"Mind you," he said. "That never again!"

---The End---