



IN THE DEVIL'S TERRITORY

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Miss Barnard had never visited this particular "holy land" of the Hindus. Since newly arrived missionaries Trula Cronk and Nelle Woolsey hadn't visited any shrine, the seasoned missionary felt it her duty to initiate them in this aspect of the culture. So off to Kalighat they went.

They were assigned a guide inside the temple gate and followed him through lanes lined with stalls exhibiting repulsive religious symbols. The guide opened paths for them through devotees, sacred cows, pariah dogs, self-torturing yogis on spikes, holy men with bodies smeared with sanctified grease and cow dung, and whining religious beggars with festering sores and sickening afflictions.

Occasionally the question would prick Miss Barnard's conscience: Should we be here or not. But, she reasoned, how else would they understand the grip of evil that holds these whom Christ came to save.

The guide led them to the riverbank where rows of piled firewood and human corpses lay smoldering. He waxed eloquent as he recited the temporal and eternal benefits involved in donating the price of such a ritual. "Matter of fact," he warned, "all the curses in the book" would be upon those who fail to contribute.

From the riverside, they moved toward the Golden temple, the temple of Kalighat. The missionaries waited uneasily inside the first gate as the eager priests flung open the temple doors to the massive idol of Kali. The cunning priests arrange to end the tour here and pressure tourists for money.

Goats, dripping with holy water, shrieked before Brahman priests, wielding sharp and shiny knives. Ardent worshipers wallowed in the sacrificial blood.

The women kept their visit as short as possible and in due time were outside the temple area. But another passageway and an extensive courtyard lay between them and the street outside, Meanwhile, sinister pressures, like demonic tentacles, were closing in around them.

The demand for money grew more vehement, and the threats more emphatic. Miss Barnard explained that their God did not allow them to make offerings to any other, although they offered to pay a satisfactory fee for their guide's services. It was refused. "The price of a corpse, and nothing less."

Eyes flashed and took on a hellish look. The conflict thickened. Miss Barnard, overcome with a sense of responsibility, motioned the novices to make their escape as she dealt with the priests.

Miss Barnard inched her way through the courtyard as she bargained with the priests who clung to her like leeches. If she could only reach the safety of the

street. But it was not so. Instead of relative safety, she found herself encircled by a new reinforcement.

In a moment's time, the Hindu philosophy of womanhood flashed across her mind. In this very place, in past years, human victims had been slain, including pilgrims from far and wide. Kali was best appeased by the blood of a virgin.

More frightening than a sacrifice, however, was the possibility of a lifetime of slavery in such a hell. One thing was sure—for the moment, she was their captive.

As she stood surrounded by these evil men, she ceased to see human forms. Bodies, yes, but such as she had never seen. Satan had dropped his mask. There he stood in bold encounter, undisguised, with all his underworld team.

"Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" followed by "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb" came the Word, whispered in her ear. She was covered by the blood of Christ. She was in Him. Those demoniacs could not touch her without the Lord's permission.

Miss Barnard pled the full benefits of that precious blood as she kept extending to the priest-guide a note of currency suited to pay his services. This fee was due him in any case, but once he received it, according to cultural usage, he could not demand more.

She prayed he would take it. But he gripped his clawlike hands behind his back in token of his stern refusal. The other priests strengthened his hands, for they expected a share. As she persisted in brandishing the rupee note before, suddenly an unseen force took over. The arm of the priest began to slowly move forward, as if unable to resist, and the hand extended to grasp the money.

The demonic power was broken.

The older missionary searched for her coworkers and walked toward them at a fairly brisk pace. When they looked back, all the priests had stopped—strewn along the road at varying distances.

When Miss Barnard recovered from her shock, she was gripped with the reality of demons. It ushered her into a new realm of missionary experience and philosophy, and a new belief in the relevance of the Word, both for then and for today.

—Taken from the book, *First Fruits* by Lorene Miley.
Available from WNAC.

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