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The Schoolgirl's Own 2^d



THEIR MESSAGE FOR HELP!

A dramatic incident from
this week's magnificent
long complete tale of Betty
Barton & Co.

A GRAND COMPLETE TALE OF BETTY BARTON & CO. IN NEW SURROUNDINGS!



THE MORCOVE GIRLS AT SEA!

Taken away against their will to South America! Held in the power of revolutionaries, and only to be released if the revolution proves successful! This is the position in which Betty and her chums find themselves. The adventures with which they meet are most enthrallingly told in this magnificent story.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

At Sunset.

"ONLY an hour to sunset, Tess, and even now there is no sign of the ship's return!"

"I was just going to say, Madge, dear, my eyes are pretty good, and yet I can see nothing out there upon the horizon."

"Nothing!"

As Madge Minden voiced the word, she lowered the binoculars which she had been bringing to bear upon all the wide expanse of sea visible from this study window at Morcove School.

"And so the question is, Tess, what are we to do?"

Tess Trelawney answered decisively:

"Find Miss Redgrave, and tell her how uneasy we feel about it all, Madge. That's what I suggest. We have hesitated long enough, in fear of creating a needless scare, but now——"

"If everything is as Miss Redgrave and the headmistress take it to be, the boat should have been returning to its anchorage by now," Madge agreed, with a nod. "It was supposed to be only going for a short trip to sea, as a treat for the girls. Then why is it still out of sight?"

"Madge, the longer we hesitate, the more uneasy I feel. Come along!" was Tess's earnest entreaty, and she took a resolute stride to the study door.

That Madge was eager to go with her chum her own brisk manner showed. Next moment the two girls were outside their "den," and they would have hurried along to the stairs, but were detained by two or three other girls.

"Madge—Tess! I say, that boat isn't back yet!" Helen Craig exclaimed, when this encounter took place in the Fourth Form corridor. "Queer business, isn't it?"

"We are going to Miss Redgrave about it, girls," said Madge, and Helen commented gravely:

"Just as well if you do, I think! Supposing it has been anything but a pleasure trip for our four chums, after all!"

"I know," gloomed Tess. "Well, you girls come with us, won't you, to have a word with Miss Redgrave?"

But Helen Craig and her two companions considerably abstained, saying that it would make such a crowd of them. So, a minute later, Miss Redgrave's gentle "Come in!" only brought

Madge Minden and Tess Trelawney into her presence.

"Well, girls?" The youthful mistress of the Fourth Form looked as if she hadn't a care in the world as she rose to receive the two scholars. "What's the trouble, that you look so anxious?"

"It's about Betty and Polly and Paula and little Naomer," said Madge quietly. "That ocean-going yacht that they were taken for a trip to sea in——"

"It isn't back yet, Miss Redgrave!" Tess exclaimed. "Not a sign of it, even if you use the binoculars! And it will soon be dark. We are worried."

"Worried? Oh, my dear girls, you needn't be that!" was Miss Redgrave's light-hearted response. "Nothing has happened to the boat, to delay its return?"

"No, but——"

"As a matter of fact, had I known you were uneasy, I could have relieved your minds a couple of hours ago. Miss Somerfield has had a telegram from the vessel, yes——"

"A wire from the ship? Oh, by wireless!" Madge exclaimed, smiling at the apparent paradox. "Of course, the vessel is fitted with wireless."

"The telegram was brought to us from the Barncombe post-office, just like an ordinary one," Miss Redgrave explained. "What a wonderful age we live in! It was Madame Florissa who had the message wirelessed from on board, to say that the weather is so beautiful, the girls are having their little treat prolonged."

"Are they?" muttered Tess. "You mean to say they are not coming back to-night?"

"That is so, girls," smiled the mistress. "The steamer's pleasure cruise is to be extended, and it will not be back at its anchorage until early in the morning. Don't you envy Betty and her chums their delightful surprise trip?"

"Well, er——" began Tess, and then Madge chimed in:

"We don't quite know, Miss Redgrave, how to feel about it, even now. You see, our opinion of Madame Florissa has been that she has been mixed up in a rather mysterious bit of business."

"Of course, she is a foreign lady, and the wife of a very wealthy and important personage," Tess

took up the tale, "so, after all, we may only have got hold of a mare's nest. But—"

"But what?" Miss Redgrave exclaimed, looking very amazed all at once. "Girls, when you talk like this—"

"What we dread is the idea of causing a needless scare," Madge resumed earnestly. "As Tess says, the mere fact that Madame Florissa and her daughter are foreigners may have made them seem rather queer customers to us. Yet once or twice we have thought that a lot of mystery surrounded madame's renting that bungalow on the cliffs. She had a powerful wireless set installed—"

"And she received messages from San Fernando, in South America!" put in Tess, getting rather excited. "And, another thing, we had an idea that the cave belonging to the bungalow was used for storing some stuff or other."

"Good gracious!" broke out Miss Redgrave, amazement changing to sheer horror. "In that case, those girls of ours—"

"Oh, I do hope we are not giving you a needless upset!" Madge exclaimed. "You see, we have never had sufficient proof. We were always trying to get absolute proof, so that we could come to you."

"Yes, yes; that is all right, girls," the mistress hastened to assure them both. "We all dislike making wild charges against anybody when definite proof is lacking; but, in view of what you have just told me, I do begin to feel that it would be better if those girls were safely back in the school. We have been quite easy in our minds, because the girls were with Madame Florissa, a lady we trusted implicitly. Madge, dear—and you, Tess—you had better come with me and have a word with Miss Somerfield."

"It seems as if it is high time to tell her about our suspicions, vague though they are," said Madge. "And, if Miss Somerfield approves, I know a thing we could do."

"What is that?" Miss Redgrave paused on the way out of the room to ask eagerly.

"We could go to the bungalow on the cliff. If Marcella, the servant, is still there, then we may reckon that Madame Florissa is coming back all right. But if the place is deserted, then—"

"It will mean that madame and her daughter are gone for good!" the mistress took Madge up excitedly. "In other words, the boat has gone, never to return! Oh, what a terrible thing that will be, when it has four of our girls on board!"

How the talk went, during the next few minutes, in Miss Somerfield's own private room, may be guessed from the sudden rush with which Miss Redgrave and the two scholars set off for the lonely bungalow.

It was nearly a mile they had to go, and the sun was a ball of fire, just about to plunge into the glowing sea, by the time they breathlessly gained the wicket-gate.

The anxious trio already felt their terrible uncertainty giving place to an awful conviction that the bungalow was deserted. No smoke was issuing even from the kitchen chimney, and they saw that the doors and windows were closed.

Agasp for breath, they simply tore along the path that led to the principal entrance to the low-built dwelling. Miss Redgrave stabbed a finger at the bell-press, and there was a loud tr-ring, ring, ring! that brought no response.

"No one here!" Tess panted dismayedly. "Well, let's look round the place. We have a right to do that, surely!"

With the word, she herself ran to one of the

windows and peered in. Madge ran to another, Miss Redgrave to a third.

And, somehow, all that they saw only deepened this dreadful conviction that the recent tenants of the place were gone—gone for ever!

All at once, Madge ran round to the back door and tried the latch. When she found that the door would open, a throbb of relief went through her. Perhaps the tenants were coming back, after all. But for her and her companions to advance into the bungalow meant revelations of a most tell-tale nature.

The kitchen stove was out. On the sitting-room table lay the keys of the bungalow, and under them a note addressed to the house-agent who had let the place, furnished, to Madame Florissa.

Nor was this all to prove beyond further doubt that the lonely dwelling would never know that lady's presence again.

In vain Miss Redgrave and the two girls scoured through the bungalow in quest of the tenant's personal belongings. They were gone, all gone! She must have had a good deal of luggage when she took up her residence in the cliff-top dwelling. There was not a particle of luggage now.

"And so it is certain, absolutely proved!" was Miss Redgrave's appalled exclamation at last. "The ocean yacht came to fetch her away, with her daughter, and our poor girls—"

"They have been carried away as well!" Tess said tensely. "They must have found out Madame Florissa's entire secret, and they would have come rushing back to the school to tell us—"

"To have her detained, yes!" Madge nodded excitedly. "Only, they were caught—made prisoners!"

"And taken on board the boat!" Miss Redgrave rejoined, in great agitation. "Betty, Polly, Paula, Naomer, four of Morcove's scholars, spirited away like this!"

"But how awful!" cried Madge. "What will be done to them? When shall we see them again?"

With blank dismay rendering them speechless for a moment, the three who were in the deserted bungalow found themselves looking out through one of the closed windows.

Now the sun's rim was touching the far horizon, making a crimson pathway over the wide waters. Miss Redgrave and the two girls could not help gazing along that lurid track, for it lay towards the west, the way the mystery ship had gone.

Then suddenly the mistress roused herself out of the stupor which unspeakable dismay had caused.

"Ah, we must not hang about like this!" she burst out wildly. "The steamer has gone. It must be miles and miles away by now, a fast vessel of that sort, with the many hours' start it has had. But something must be done!"

"You mean—" said Madge and Tess together tensely.

"Miss Somerfield will inform the police, and they in turn will take steps to have the vessel found and stopped. Oh, girls, thank Heaven for the wireless!" Miss Redgrave said fervently, suddenly turning to quit the bungalow. "Come back to the school! Every minute, every moment, is precious now!"

Outward Bound.

"WELL, girls, that's the last of the daylight, and a nice dark night at sea it looks like being!"

"Yes, bai Jorel!"

"The end of a far from perfect day!" Polly Linton jested glumly. "Don't know that I ever want to live through another like it, anyhow!"

It was Betty Barton who had begun this bit of subdued talk, as she turned away from a cabin porthole. She and her fellow captives had taken turns at watching darkness fall upon the wide, wide sea.

"They are all going to be sorry for this in the end, surely!" Betty said, speaking with desperate cheerfulness. "In the meantime, though, what else can we do but grin and bear it?"

"I agwee, Betty, deah; I quite agwee!" said Paula Creel indignantly. "It is worse than a trying experience for all of us. Bai Jove, we may be taken all the way to San Fernando, only to get mixed up in this revolution that the Flowissa persons appear to be going to bwing off!"

At this instant the roomy cabin was suddenly flooded with electric light, so brilliant that it quite dazzled the girls, after the deepening gloom they had been in since the sun went down.

"We really can't complain of the lack of comfort," Polly commented presently, taking a look round. "What a gorgeous yacht this must be, if this is a fair sample of it!"

"They won't have stuck us in the best cabin, you may be sure," said Betty. "It's a magnificent vessel—not the least doubt about that. And a good one for speed," she added, giving heed to the persistent throb, throb! of the engines.

"So what hopes have we of being overtaken by any boat that gives chase when they know at home?" was Polly's doleful rejoinder.

"Look here, girls, let's just make up our minds to be as jolly as ever amongst ourselves, shall we?"

"Yes—oo, yes!" Naomer approved, giving a clap of the hands. "And eef Dolores come here to laugh at us, zen we shall do—so!"

Naomer put out her tongue at an imaginary Dolores.

"Sh! Hark!" came suddenly from Betty, whilst she raised her head to listen. "I say, can you girls hear a sound like—like someone weeping?"

"Weeping, Betty, deah? Bai Jove!"

"Who would be doing that?" Polly exclaimed incredulously. "Someone close by, do you mean, Betty, crying?"

"Listen again, girls," the Fourth Form captain said, very softly. "Perhaps I have only imagined it, but once or twice there has seemed to be a sound exactly like some poor girl sobbing."

"Bai Jove, if that's the case, geals—"

"Hark!"

After that there was complete silence in the cabin which held the captive Morcovians.

In listening attitudes they stood, and at last the eyes of all four of them were concentrated upon one wall of the cabin, for it was on the other side of that wall that someone was certainly weeping most piteously.

What did it mean?

Who was it in such a state of acute grief? What could be the cause of these distressing sobs which the girls could plainly hear?

Silent still, the chums met one another's eyes. Until they knew what it meant, it would be hard for any of them to abide by that plucky resolve to "keep smiling." There was in this faint sound of anguish something to make Betty & Co. lose heart again.

How could they fail to feel their own helplessness, the cruelty of their own imprisonment, all the more, when apparently the adjoining cabin

held someone in an even worse plight? A girl, too, or they were being greatly deceived by their straining ears.

"Hark again! Oh, I say, girls, how that poor thing is crying her heart out!" Polly murmured distressfully. "What does it mean?"

"Queek—queek! Let us find out!" clamoured Naomer tensely. "Eet is anuzzer girl that the Florissas have for a prisoner, perhaps!"

"All right, Naomer, darling, keep calm," Betty whispered. "We will give a rap upon the wall, and see what result that has."

There was a dramatic silence once again as Betty raised a hand to give a rap, rap, rap! upon the beautiful satin-wood panelling.

And then, in that very instant when Betty's



NAOMER ON HER DIGNITY! "Grand people, ah, bah!" scoffed Naomer, facing Madame Florissa. "Now I shall spik! We not want to eat with you, see? Eef we cannot have food in here we shall starve, that is all!"

knuckles were about to fall upon the woodwork, she sharply dropped her hand, without having made a sound.

A key had been noisily turned in the lock of their cabin door, and all the four girls flashed round, to see that same door slowly open, revealing Madame Florissa and her proud and handsome daughter!

Who is the Other Captive?

MUCH as they had come to hate the very sight of the South American lady and her youthful daughter, one thing Betty and her chums were bound to admit. Madame Florissa always looked so amazingly beautiful, in a foreign, exotic kind of way.

It was so at this moment. Evidently the mother and daughter were going to sit down to a very stately dinner, in company with those friends and fellow-conspirators who were on board the magnificent yacht. Madame Florissa was in an evening robe of golden tissue that shimmered in the electric light.

As for Dolores, she was dressed as a schoolgirl might dress herself to go to a grand party or to the Royal Opera in London, and mighty proud of her appearance she was.

Both she and her mother had mocking smiles for the four girls, who did not hesitate to give themselves an air of spirited defiance.

"Well, my young English friends," Madame Florissa began, "I have come here to offer you a privilege. Attend to me, for I am here to give you a choice that will not be repeated. You understand that you are my prisoners, and I could, if I liked, treat you with great severity. But the voyage will be a long and wearisome one for all of you. If then, you will give me your promise to be on your best behaviour, you shall be treated, not as prisoners, but more like guests."

It did not please her, evidently, to see how utterly unmoved the girls were by this offer. As a matter of fact, Betty & Co. were just then giving all their thoughts to the mystery girl in the adjoining cabin, whose piteous weeping they had heard.

But madame was not to know about this, and her pride was wounded by what seemed a scornful disdain on the part of the four prisoners.

"Do you not understand me?" she exclaimed sharply, holding herself very erect before the girls. "You can, if you like, have seats at my table for every meal. And, in case you do not realise it, you will be sitting down with the greatest in my country."

"Your country—bah!" little Naomer simply had to retort cheekily. "It is a ver' great country—oh, yes! As beeg as ze pocket-handkerchief!"

"You, you monkey-face!" Dolores instantly flared up, taking a stride that put her in front of her mother. "Say one word more, and I get my mother to have you put where you will make ze voyage alone!"

"I shall say what I please, see!" Naomer answered, undaunted. "But go away. I saw too much of you at ze school, you so-grand daughter of a two-a-penny president!"

Dolores turned to her mother with a gasp of rage.

"Mother, you hear this girl!"

"Pay no heed, my daughter," Madame Florissa said, but her own looks were those of a person who feels greatly insulted.

Then, fixing her eyes upon Betty Barton, she continued:

"You, I think, are what they call the captain at the school? Very well, then. You shall answer for yourself and these other girls. How do you say, Betty Barton? Do you wish to remain shut up together in this cabin, which means having your meals brought to you, as if you were prisoners, or will you promise—"

"At present, Madame Florissa, I am sure not one of us feels like making any promise," Betty broke out calmly. "To be given the chance to sit down to table with you and your friends—"

"It is not the honour that you may think it is!" Polly chipped in saucily. "You and your friends are a lot of secret plotters; revolutionaries, who mean to upset the peace of San Fernando by bribery and corruption!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" Paula chimed in, with a sort of good-humoured dignity. "Moreover, Madame Flowissa, you have dwagged us on board without any luggage. We are unpwvided with the pwooper fwoocks for sitting down with gwand people."

"Grand people—ah, bah!" scoffed Naomer. "Zat is not ze way to spik, Paula. Now I shall spik! We not want to eat with you, see!" the saucy youngster continued, holding herself very high in front of the imperious woman who loomed before her. "Eef we cannot have food in here, then we starve, that is all!"

"Then I would let them starve, mother," Dolores said, through her clenched teeth. "Let them go hungry until they are down on their knees to you, begging for food!"

"Your mother knows she dare not, Dolores," Betty said, putting herself a step closer to that savage-looking girl. "Your mother knows that she and her friends will have to answer to the British Government for anything that happens to us. She is already afraid."

"Afraid? I afraid?" panted Madame Florissa, and Betty instantly answered:

"Yes, afraid!" With the word, Betty levelled a challenging hand at the handsome woman, who quailed a little. "You know it is a most unlawful thing that you have done!"

"I had to do it!" Madame Florissa said passionately. "You had discovered everything in connection with plans, the failure of which will ruin Don Florissa for life. He has put his entire fortune of a million pounds into this venture, and it has got to succeed. Nothing must stand in the way."

"Not even the safety of three British school-girls!" jeered Dolores. "Oh, yes, and a stupid African queen!" with a mocking bow to Naomer.

Betty shrugged her shoulders, keeping her eyes upon Madame Florissa.

"All right, do as you please, Madame Florissa. But you and Don Florissa must be aware there is going to be no excuse for this that has happened to us girls. There will be a row about it, and so you had better look out!"

For a moment Madame Florissa stood biting a lip, whilst her handsome eyes glittered upon the girl who had spoken so bluntly. Then she backed a step, and gestured to her daughter.

"Come away, Dolores! I do not choose to say any more. Come!"

Imperiously, the mother stalked out into the narrow passage on to which the cabin opened, but Dolores did not instantly follow. She had first of all to gratify her mingled jealousy and hatred of the girls by giving them taunting looks.

Under her breath, she muttered something that must have been particularly vindictive as she bestowed a scornful glance upon Naomer. Then she flung up her head and minced away, with a sort of wriggling motion that left Polly Linton all a-grin.

"Thank goodness, they are gone! And now," Polly whispered excitedly, as soon as the cabin door had closed—"now to find out who is next door!"

"Queek—queek, yes!" urged Naomer, trembling with excitement. "All ze time I am feeling sorry for who it is we hear weeping!"

At a sign from Betty, Paula silently moved across the spacious cabin, to remain, like a sentinel, at the door. This was to give warning in case someone presently came to the door to enter without giving a knock.

"Hark!" Betty whispered then. "Yes, the poor girl is still very upset. She seems to be moaning herself off to sleep."

With that, Betty started to rap upon the panelling.

Rap, rap! A pause. Then again: Rap, rap, rap! But no answer came, and suddenly Polly, more impatient than the others, put her lips close to the panelling.

"Do you hear us?" She spoke tensely. "Who are you in there? What is the matter that you are so unhappy? Can you speak English?"

Then, with thrills of intense excitement, the four chums heard a voice responding at last—a girlish voice, more mournful than any they had ever heard before:

"I speak English, yes. I was taught at school to speak it, in San Fernando."

"San Fernando!" echoed Betty and Polly guardedly. "Then who are you?"

And the answer came, in as sad a tone as before:

"I am Carlotta Delona, and my father is the president of San Fernando! He does not know that I am a prisoner."

"A prisoner, like—"

"A helpless prisoner, yes. And the time has been so long I have to weep now. But who are you?" the tearful voice whispered on. "For you seem to me to be kind, friendly, and—oh, I so need someone to pity me! Who are you? Tell me, please!"

"Your friends, Carlotta," Betty and Polly answered, without the least hesitation, whilst Paula, still over by the door, breathed an earnest: "Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals!"

"Let's have a shot at getting this panel out!" was Polly's desperate proposal. "That poor girl shan't be alone any longer!"

"Not if we can help it!" was Betty's equally desperate rejoinder. "Down with a part of the wall—it is only thin woodwork—and then we can have her in with us!"

"Queek—queek, yes!" agreed Naomer, starting one of her excitable capers. "Madame will be furious!"

"Let her!" was Polly's grim word of defiance.

And next instant she and Betty were casting about for the means of breaking through the wall, whilst Paula still stood on guard at the cabin door, beaming with delight at the desperate thing they had all resolved to do.

No Wonder She Wept!

HERE we are! This ought to do the trick!" That was Polly Linton, when all at once the cabin yielded up something that would serve as a makeshift implement for prising an opening in the delicate panelling of the wall.

It was nothing else than a brass curtain-rod that Polly had suddenly got hold of. A couple of feet in length, it was as thick as an ebony ruler, and so it promised to be strong enough when used as a lever.

The difficulty looked like being to make a start, since what the girls badly needed was something in the nature of a chisel. But all in a moment Betty had made her brilliant find.

"How's this?" she asserted, holding out a brass knob that had an iron screw welded into it. "If only I can dig or screw out a hole in the wood with this, Polly, your rod will do the trick right enough, as you say."

And then and there they fell to at the desperate task.

Betty jabbed the point of the screw into the panel, and gave a few turns, then pulled it away sharply. Again and again she worked the screw alternately into the hole and sharply pulled it out, each time drawing some of the frayed wood away from the hole.

A minute or so of this strenuous work, and then there was a hole clean through the panel. After that it was only a case of enlarging this hole, so that Polly could insert the end of the brass rod.

As soon as this was accomplished, Polly forced in the rod, and then levered it this way and that, causing a loud splintering of the delicate panelling.

It seemed a cruel shame to be reducing the lovely woodwork to sheer splinters, but the girls knew it was a greater shame than on the other side of this wall there was a girl yearning for the sight of friendly faces and words of comfort. They must end her miserable plight—they simply must, never mind what regrettable damage had to be committed!

Crack, snap, crack! The splintering sounds continued as Polly worked away furiously. Crick, crack, snap! And they all four could only hope and pray that the inevitable noise of the work could not be heard beyond the cabin walls.

"Polly, you are tired, dear," Betty said, all at once. "Let me have a go."

"No, I'm all right!" Polly maintained blithely, although she was hot and breathless. "Hurrah!" she breathed jubilantly, as another splinter came away. "We are getting on!"

"Yes, wather! And, geals, all is quite quiet outside, thank goodness!"

"I thienk everyone is at ze dinner, perhaps," Naomer suggested, whilst she looked on at Polly's effective work with the lever. "You soon finish now, Polly!"

Betty had already picked another hole, just below the first, and when Polly began on this fresh spot with the brass rod the progress was doubly rapid.

In a little while, indeed, the makeshift implement could be discarded, and the girls were able to take turns at rending away splinters of the woodwork with their bare hands.

Larger and larger the opening grew, and then suddenly two of the girls made a united effort: and, with one furious wrench, they brought away all that remained of the broken section of the panelling.

It came away with an abruptness that caused the pair of them to tumble backwards with breathless laughs.

There was now a hole in the party-wall big enough for anybody of moderate size to wriggle through, and, even as the four girls gazed at the opening which they had rent in the woodwork, they saw a face appear.

It was perhaps one of the most thrilling moments the chums had ever known.

There, framed by the jagged edges of the splintered panelling, was the head of a girl—a girl no older than themselves, and with a face that could only be called marvellously beautiful.

But if she had been only beautiful, this girl whom the chums were suddenly face to face with for the first time in their lives, they would never have stood as spellbound as they did.

The sadness, the tragic suffering in that lovely face, this it was that cast a spell upon the girls.

She peered out at them so wistfully that, all at once, Naomer, like the emotional little thing she was, burst into tears.



THE MYSTERIOUS CAPTIVE. As the four girls gazed at the opening they had rent in the wood-work, they saw a face appear. It was the face of a girl no older than themselves—a girl who had been held captive in the adjoining cabin!

"I not able to help crying!" was the girl queen's quaint admission, as she wiped her own starry eyes. "I zink it so sad!"

"Yes, wather!" quavered Paula. "My gwacious, geals, it weally is pwetty awful—what?"

"Carlotta Delona, you say your name is?" Betty addressed the poor girl, finding her voice at last. "You shall know our names in a jiffy. First of all, though, let us help you out of there."

A very touching thing happened now. Betty had stepped forward and extended a helping hand to the girl, and suddenly that hand was seized and kissed by Carlotta, whilst she exclaimed tremulously:

"How kind of you! How brave, too, you all are! For you have risked the anger of that cruel, heartless woman, Madame Florissa!"

"We just don't care a rap for madame. Let her be as angry as she likes when she finds out!" Betty said cheerily. "So come along, Carlotta, out of that other cabin, which I see is all in darkness!"

"Yes; they would not let me have any light." "What! Oh, the wretches!" Polly exploded wrathfully.

Very gently the girls helped the stranger to scramble through the opening in the wall, realising as they did so how shaky she was, like one who has been through the most unnerving experiences.

The Morcovians' cabin had everything that made for comfort, and in a few moments the poor girl was provided with a low chair, into which it seemed to afford her great relief to sink.

"Ah, this is different from what I have had!"

she murmured weakly, glancing around. "At first I thought I was to be treated kindly. Then, because they thought me proud, they began to take away first one thing and then another."

"Shame!" Polly exclaimed indignantly. "But tell us, won't you, how you came to be kept as a prisoner on board this vessel?"

"Yes, wather, Carlotta, pway do!" Paula said, with a beaming expression that seemed to be as good as a tonic to the unstrung girl. "You wealise, of course, we are—yes, wather—in the same boat, bai Jove! Haw, haw, haw!"

"And that boat is now on its way back to South America!" was Betty's grimaced rejoinder. "No joke for us, that's a fact! But let's have your story first, Carlotta."

"Well, then, you must know that I was at school up in the mountains above the capital of San Fernando, and, by means of a trick, I was enticed away," Carlotta said sadly. "I know, from what has been told me, that my father thinks I am still at the school, whilst the ladies of the school think I am with my father, down in the city."

"Bai Jove!"

"What a cunning trick to have played!" Betty exclaimed disgustedly. "But why—why were you entrapped like that, Carlotta, and brought on board this vessel?"

"So that I may be used as a hostage," was the poor girl's prompt reply. "You understand what that means, do you? There is to be a revolution. It is to come as a complete surprise to my father, the president, and all his supporters. At this moment nothing is known to the present rulers of San Fernando about the plans that Don Florissa has made."

"Pwccisely!" nodded Paula. "And it was only by a mere fluke that we geals, back there in England, found out wather too much for madame's peace of mind. Howevah—"

"On board this vessel they do not mind what they say about it all, even to me, their prisoner," Carlotta spoke on bitterly. "Indeed, they like to taunt me with stories of what they are going to do. Much gold is to be used to bribe and corrupt officials. Then, when the revolution takes place, my father is to discover that I am already in the hands of his enemies. He is to be told, if he does not yield up everything to Don Florissa, he will never see me again."

"Oh, if that isn't just the limit!" Polly said furiously. "Girls, what an absolutely ruthless set of conspirators this Florissa gang is!"

"Abominable!" seethed Betty. "If only we could be the means of spoiling the whole hateful plot, I reckon we would be saving heaps of people loads of misery."

"Yes, yes, that is so!" Carlotta exclaimed vehemently. "Why should there be a change of Government? San Fernando has been peaceful and prosperous these last few years. Ah, but it is ambition that has set Don Florissa on to doing all this! He is a millionaire, and he thinks that money can do everything."

"He had better look out for himself!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!" Paula was chiming in, when suddenly a thing happened that made her voice startle: "My gwacious! Geals, what's happening now?"

The electric lights had suddenly gone out, plunging the cabin into total darkness.

The startled girls might have soon conjectured

that it was a mere failure of the current. For of one thing they were convinced. The whole ship was left in this sudden total darkness.

No gleam of light along the bottom of the cabin door was visible, so they knew that the passage-way was without any light now.

But nothing like a mere fusing of some switch was the simple cause of this unpleasant occurrence.

Even as the five girls were plunged into this deep darkness, they felt that the vessel was being sharply diverted in her course.

At the same time, the engine-room seemed to be putting on a yet greater speed. The throb of the engines became much louder, whilst the vessel seemed to turn aside so violently that the girls actually swayed about on their feet.

"Hark!"

Some of them ejaculated the word as they heard a lot of excitable talk breaking out all over the millionaire's yacht.

Then a good deal of running to and fro set in, so that altogether Betty & Co. felt that they were the only souls on board who were not in sudden panic.

What did it mean?

Suddenly Naomer nipped to the door and listened.

It was at this instant that all the babel of talk died down, and there was a very impressive silence.

Nor had another minute gone by before that silence was rendered quite eerie by the stopping of the engines.

Silent themselves, the girl prisoners in the cabin heard nothing but the soft wash of the waves as the great vessel still bore on in the darkness, with all its engines at rest, all its lights put out, and every soul keeping very quiet.

Naomer came treading back to her chums.

"I hear them speak in—in Spanish, and say they thoenk there is a ship chasing them!"

"What! A British ship, perhaps!"

"Bai Jove! Hooway!" Paula joined in the outburst of delight. "Hooway, geals! We are going to be rescued! Bwavo, the Bwtish Navy!"

Polly darted to one of the cabin portholes.

As she did so, a dazzling light struck in upon her face, causing her to blink her eyes. She stood back for a moment, then tried to look out again, but it was like looking at the sun.

"A searchlight!" Betty cried out joyfully. "Hurrah! The other ship has got on to this one with its searchlight, and there is to be no dodging them, after all!"

Naomer rushed at Paula, and started to waltz her round and round.

"Saved—we are saved!" was the girl queen's jubilant cry. "But what ees the matter, Carlotta?" she exclaimed, suddenly noticing that that girl was sitting down, with hands locked together over a face that was as white as death. "You not seem happy that we are to be saved!"

"Happy!" was Carlotta Delona's panted response. "Oh, I feel it is too good to be true! If only—oh, if only that ship can catch this one, what a mercy it will be!"

But now—throb, throb, throb!—the vessel's engines suddenly surged on again, and the girls could tell how quickly speed was being recovered by the louder wash of the waters along the side and the frequent hiss of a broken wave.

"They are going to make a run for it," said Betty uneasily. "Trying to dodge the other ship is a trick that has failed, and now this boat is

cutting on again. Oh, I wonder which is the faster vessel of the two!"

As they stood looking at one another, gripped with the excitement of this critical time, they were suddenly aware that the light flooding in at the portholes was growing dull. Betty and Polly each ran to a porthole to look out, and simultaneously they voiced a cry that told the others what was happening now.

"Fog! We have run into a sea fog, girls!"

"Bai Jove, then we shall have to stop, surely? They dare not wash on in the fog, geals!"

But the throb-throb of the engines remained as vibrant as ever. And suddenly the cabin door flew open, and Madame Florissa spoke into the darkened cabin, while she switched on an electric torch.

"You are to come out on the deck, and be ready in case of accident!" was her thrilling cry. "We are running on at full speed in a fog, and there is no knowing what will be the end of it. There may be a collision at any moment!"

The Flight in the Fog.

NOT one of the girls answered.

For the moment they were almost inclined to forget the terrible risk that the vessel was running, as they waited for Madame Florissa to see what had happened in the cabin since she was last here.

And suddenly they saw her give a violent start, and then recoil in a staggered way. A gasp of mingled amazement and anger burst from her lips.

"What is this?" she broke out fiercely. "You, Carlotta, here! But—but how, then?"

"That's the explanation!" Betty answered, with



HER SPIRITED DEFIANCE. "Those girls are trembling with fear!" mocked Dolores. "It is a lie!" came the passionate cry from Carlotta as she faced her mocking captor. "When you call these girls cowards you tell an untruth. It is you who are the coward!"

bold calmness, turning to point to the smashed paneling. "We girls did it. Carlotta never even suggested that we should."

"You have had the impudence to smash that bulkhead?"

"Yes, wather! You don't suppose, Madame Flowissa, that we geals were going to sit heah, bai Jove, whilst this poor geal was—"

"Silence!" the foreign lady stormed at all of them, with a stamp of the foot. "You shall be dealt with for this, if we come through the fog in safety. Obey me now! You had better!" she added, waving them from the cabin. "If you are in this cabin when a collision occurs, you know what that may mean. To the deck, then—quickly!"

The girls were not slow to do as they were bidden, for they realised that it was a measure that made for safety, their passing out on to the open deck.

There were no stairs to ascend, only a short passage-way to traverse, their cabin being on a level with the main deck. In a rather bewildered way, they floundered after one another into the open air, to stand there, with the thick fog rolling around.

There was no play of a searchlight upon the vessel now, and the darkness was appalling in its intensity. It was hard to believe that this was a calm night, for a rushing wind fluttered the girls' clothing, but this was entirely due to the speed the vessel was making. Had she slowed down, the wind would have dropped.

Suddenly, Madame Florissa came towards the grouped girls.

"Stand in a line!" she commanded them, with every sign of being in a very wrought-up mood. "And be ready for anything at any moment! You have yourselves to thank for this!" she added angrily. "A wretched British destroyer has been sent after us."

"That I hope they catch you!" Polly rejoined saucily.

"Perhaps you would like them to run us down?" came the sneering voice of Dolores, as she suddenly came close to them out of the dense fog. "Bah, you pretend not to be afraid, but you are trembling for your safety!"

"It is a lie!" was the passionate cry that burst from Carlotta DeLona, startling the girls just as much as it startled the mother and daughter. "So, Dolores, you are face to face with me again, and you are still the same! I would have nothing to say to you, not a word, but when you call these girls cowards—"

"And cowards they are!"

"Coward yourself!" Carlotta panted at Dolores, pointing a denouncing finger. She was speaking in English, so that the Morcovians might understand. "Your own face, Dolores, is as white as chalk. It is you who are afraid, not these girls, who have shown already how little they fear you, or your mother, or anything that may happen!"

And then dramatically she stepped back, to place herself amongst the girls who had set her free from her solitary prison.

"My friends!" she cried out loudly, in a voice that rang with pride in them all. "As for you, Dolores Florissa—"

"Silence!" Madame Florissa struck in fiercely. "Dolores, go away! There must be no talking, no noise. It is an order!"

Then Polly had one of her daring ideas. She nudged Betty.

"I say, Betty—all of you," was Polly's excited

whisper—"they want us to keep quite quiet, so that this vessel can slip away whilst the fog lasts. But why shouldn't we give a shout?"

"Bai Jove!"

"A shout that the other vessel may hear?" Betty said eagerly. "Certainly! Get ready! Altogether—now!"

And next instant all their voices were lifted up in a chorus of appealing cries that must have sounded far and wide over the fogbound sea.

"Help—help! This way—this way!" they yelled with all their might. "Help! Come on, there! Help!"

But only for a few moments were the desperate girls left free to raise those guiding cries to the pursuing destroyer. Then out of the fog that seemed to be rolling thicker than ever loomed the sinister figure of Madame Florissa again, and with her were certain persons whom the girls were to come to know as women attendants upon the yacht—stewardesses and such-like.

Dolores also was back again, and she was not behind her mother and the others in swooping upon the girls, to silence them.

Wild was the scene that then ensued. Out-numbered though they were, Betty and her companions in misfortune would not give in without a struggle. There in the foggy darkness they scuffled and wrestled, and bravely they kept up their desperate cries, hoping to be heard.

It was a wild set-to, however, that could only end one way.

Paula and Naomer were the first to be overborne by superior strength and hustled back to the cabin. Polly and Betty resisted for a few moments longer, but they, too, were then overpowered.

Rumpled and breathless, they were bundled back into the cabin, and in Polly's case a vicious thrust from Madame Florissa herself sent the exhausted girl spinning across the floor.

Giddily she tumbled against Paula, and the pair of them all but went down flat. Close by them in the darkness was Naomer, muttering with rage. But before the Morcovians could calm down and exchange a word with one another, they heard sounds of scuffling at the doorway, where Dolores was venting all her fierce anger upon the poor girl Carlotta.

And, to Betty & Co.'s renewed indignation, there suddenly came a tell-tale slap, slap, slap! as if Carlotta's face was being smacked.

Dimly, they saw that Dolores was indeed beating the other girl, whilst the malignant voice fairly screeched a lot of abuse in Spanish.

Polly shouted indignantly:

"Oh, I say, drop it! Stop that, you wretch, Dolores!" and rushed, with Betty, to intervene.

Madame Florissa, however, was already parting her daughter from the other girl. The woman's own hands seized poor Carlotta and flung her forwards from the doorway, so that she crashed into Betty and Polly.

They gave her a steady hold, and panted a word or so of comfort, whilst they could have burst into tears with the knowledge of how cruelly, unmercifully, she had been treated just then.

"Never mind, dear. You are still with us," was one comforting cry the girls voiced, and then Madame Florissa answered, from the doorway, in a hissing voice:

"She is with you—yes! Together you will all remain now, and so the fate that she meets with will be yours also. I was prepared to give you others a chance, but now—"

And the passionate woman said the rest by stepping back and pulling the cabin door round sharply, closing it with a vicious slam that seemed to promise close confinement for every one of the hapless girls for the rest of the ocean voyage!

The Message in the Bottle.

AN hour passed. Still in total darkness, the inmates of that locked cabin were giving continual glances out of the portholes, only to realise how fast the yacht was rushing on in a fog that was as thick as ever.

Where were they by now? they wondered. How many miles from where, under such dramatic conditions, their fateful voyage had started?

But there were more anxious questions than that to keep the hapless girls in acute suspense.

How could they help wondering whether the great vessel would survive this reckless dash through the sea-fog to which its owners had committed it?

Supposing at any moment this terrific pace was checked by an appalling collision, a sudden blind smashing into another vessel, head-on, the impact simply crushing the bows like matchwood!

The girls had no need to be lacking in courage to feel a shiver of dread run through them as their minds pictured what must inevitably follow such a terrible calamity.

What chance for any of them, amidst all the darkness and chaos of a scene like that?

They could only suppose that those controlling the vessel had taken the best possible precautions by striking aside from the recognised ocean high-ways. Even so, the risk taken was a desperate one, and it went to prove one thing very clearly.

It meant that the revolutionaries were even risking their own lives rather than have all the daring and costly plot frustrated by the stoppage of this yacht.

Doubtless, the vessel that had been in pursuit was only concerned in rescuing the schoolgirls, but their rescue at any time was to mean their proclaiming all that they had discovered concerning the intended revolution, and for the secret to leak out like that was for Don Florissa's desperate ambitions to be quite nipped in the bud.

So the yacht was being rushed on and on through the darkness and the fog, and escape would be certain enough if—no collision occurred!

It was a gambler's chance, such as people of the Florissa stamp might be expected to take.

Suddenly the anxious silence in the cabin was ended by a little cry from Polly, who had stepped to a porthole again only a moment since.

"Ah, it has gone—we are clear of it—the fog!" she broke out sharply. "I can see the stars now."

"Bai Jove, what a relief!" breathed Paula. "Yes, wather!"

"Well, yes, it is," said Betty. "And yet—it means we are in for all the rest, girls. There are hours of darkness for the vessel to have a chance of slipping further and further from the shores of England, and perhaps the next time we sight land it will be South America."

"Better than the other!" Polly said, with a glum smile. "I was not exactly relishing the idea of going down with the boat. Cheer up, everybody! We shall see Morocco again some day!"

"Yes, wather, geals!" Meantime, now that our suspense is relieved, one begins to feel hurgwier than ever—what!"

Perhaps the general state of suspense on board

had accounted for the girls being left unvisited all this time. Anyhow, Paula had scarce spoken before the key turned in the lock and the door swung open, revealing Madame Florissa's elderly servant, Marcella, with a tray.

At the same instant the lights came on again, a sign that those in charge of the vessel deemed the pursuit at an end.

Marcella, of the gaunt figure and stern features, set down the tray, gave all the girls a sharp glance, whilst they were still blinking in the sudden blaze of light. Then, without a word, she departed. The door closed, the lock snicked as the key was turned, and they were free to make a meal from what was to be found on the tray.

"Oh, and they haven't done us so badly!" was Polly's cheery comment. "Cold chicken—"

"Bai Jove, geals, this is gwand!" Paula beamed. "A bit of salad even! And is this lemonade, I wonder?"

It was, and Naomer for one gave a little smack of the lips after setting them to the refreshing drink. In a minute the Morcovians were in such a jovial mood that Carlotta often left off eating whilst she let her lovely eyes stray wonderingly from one happy face to another.

"How are you getting on, Carlotta?" Betty asked by-and-by. "You ought to enjoy this meal now you've a bit of company!"

"Yes, wather!" simpered Paula, tilting another sandwich on to Carlotta's empty plate. "Why, there's nothing to gwumble at now, bai Jove! Pwvided the weather doesn't get wough, we shall have a wipping time!"

Carlotta's sigh of relief at being with the girls was so fervent as to be almost painful to hear.

"I shall never be able to say what I feel. My heart is too full—too full of gratitude," she said softly and prettily. "After what I have been through, day after day, night after night—Oh, you must not wonder that I was weeping with despair a little while ago!"

"A toast!" Polly suddenly jested, in the old Study 12 way, getting upon her feet. "Down with the Florissa gang!"

"Ooo, yes—yes!" applauded Naomer, making haste to charge a glass from the lemonade jug.

"Paula, darlink—"

"Haw, haw, haw!" chuckled that young lady, clinking glasses for fun with the dusky one. "Yes, wather! Confusion to the revolutionaries, geals! Wule Bwittania, and all the west of it—what? Yes, wather!"

Even Carlotta's white teeth flashed then, in a sudden smile that was the first the Morcovians had seen her give.

"That's wight!" approved Paula. "And don't you wovwy about Dolowes any more, you know. By the way, Carlotta, are we wight in pwesuming that you knew Dolowes in San Fernando?"

"She was at school with me once," was the impressive answer. "Always she seemed to hate me, and she would predict a time when her father would be the ruler of the country. I did not let it trouble me, but now—Ah," Carlotta sighed sadly. "I see how carefully and secretly all has been planned!"

"And do you really think the revolution will be brought off?" Polly asked. "Is there no chance of its being nipped in the bud?"

"It is like this, as I understand," Carlotta answered, using English that was quite fluent compared with Dolores'. "It all depends upon whether the country can be taken by surprise. If the Florissa party have time to do a lot of bribing

with the gold that is on board this vessel, then perhaps they will have a sweeping victory when the moment comes. But—"

"My word, if only we could let the people know!" Polly exclaimed in a fuming way. "But here we are, absolute prisoners on the boat!"

"Ah, yes!" Carlotta nodded despairingly. "And it is certain that we shall be landed somewhere in San Fernando, where we can be kept prisoners still. No freedom for us until all is over!"

"Um!" muttered Betty.

"Bai Jove," came from Paula, "wather a twy-ing pwedicament—what! Howevah—"

"Stop, though! Wait a sec! Oh, I have it!" And Polly jumped up, giving a clap of delight. "Girls, why shouldn't we write a message, seal it up in a bottle—"

"And fling it in the sea!" Betty burst out enthusiastically. "Splendid idea! Bravo, Polly!"

"Ooo, yes! Queek—queek!" clamoured Naomer in her usual excitable way. "Ze pencil and paper, queek! And where is a bottle? Queek!"

A pencil and paper they found, and then they searched for a bottle. Eventually one was unearthed from a locker in the cabin.

Hastily they cleared the cabin table, and then Betty sat down to write the message, with the other girls clustered around her. A brief conclave resulted in the decision that the message should tell as much as possible in only a few words.

"Like a telegram," said Polly, "that's the wheeze!"

And so, presently, this was the message which they all took farewell glances at before it was rolled up and thrust into the water-bottle:

"FOUR MORCOVE GIRLS, PRISONERS ON BOARD OCEAN YACHT (NAME UNKNOWN). WRITE THIS. FINDER COMMUNICATE WITH MORCOVE SCHOOL, NORTH DEVON, ENGLAND. URGENT. WARN PRESIDENT OF SAN FERNANDO THAT A REVOLUTION IS PLANNED. HIS DAUGHTER IS WITH US. ALL SAFE SO FAR."

A tremble with excitement were the girls as one of them inserted this message in the bottle and then set about corking it up.

"Let us hope the bottle is soon picked up," said Polly hopefully.

"Yes!" Betty echoed, with a grave smile. "Let's hope it is picked up within a few days, at least. Else we shall have reached San Fernando, and all will have happened, long before the message can serve its purpose. Here goes, anyhow!"

With the word, Betty took the bottle to one of the portholes, and her chums crowded behind her, feeling the dramatic excitement of the moment, the terrible suspense.

"One!" Betty murmured rather solemnly, with the water-bottle held through the porthole, ready to be tossed clear of the speeding vessel. "Two!" she counted aloud, after a tense pause. "Three!"

"And away she goes!" was Polly's blithe rejoinder, as her chum cast the fragile vessel into the sea. "And good luck go with it!"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove!"

Some of the girls dreamed of the floating bottle in the sea that night, dreamed of it when at last they had settled themselves down to rest in this same cabin—their day and night prison, as they now knew it was going to be.

Many a wearisome day and night had dragged

by for the girl prisoners on the yacht before they gleaned evidence which forced them to abandon the hope they had been clinging to in regard to the bottle's fate.

Time after time they had said amongst themselves that it might—yes, it might—has been found ere now. But the hour had come at last when they had this proof to the contrary, alas!

The vessel was fitted with wireless, and it was certain that if the bottle had been found, and if immediate action had been taken far back there in the Homeland, the revolutionaries on board this vessel would have had warning.

Instead, what happened was that every day that found the boat getting nearer, so much nearer, to its voyage's end, saw Madame Florissa and all her companions looking more elated.

And Betty & Co., their imprisonment varied only by the few hours they were allowed to be on deck each day, could only wait—and wonder.

Whither Now?

ONE night, when the girls had been sleeping soundly in their cabin prison for perhaps several hours, they were suddenly roused from slumber in a startling way.

"Come, get up, all of you!" was the commanding cry that struck in upon their dreams. "And be quick about it!"

Then, with eyes suddenly opened wide, the hapless girls saw who had entered the cabin at this strange hour.

It was Madame Florissa.

The cabin lights were switched off, but there was a full moon, shining with a brilliance that is unknown in our Homeland.

Through the portholes slanted the blanching bars of light, and instantly the girls saw that Madame Florissa was fully dressed, and that her beautiful face was paler than usual, as if she was in a state of tense excitement.

"Dress yourselves at once—at once!" she spoke on, with an impatient gesture. "In five minutes I shall return, and expect you to be ready!"

Ready for what?

In several ways was that question quickly disposed of.

The great ocean-going yacht had stopped.

For the first time, ever since that fateful hour when the girls were hauled on board the vessel, off the coast of dear old Morcove, she was lying idle upon the waters, at anchor.

And what did the agitated girls perceive as they glanced out of the little round windows of the cabin? Only the wide, wide sea, as usual, all agleam in the wonderful moonlight?

No.

They saw a mountainous shore quite close at hand, the jagged masses of white rock looking a hundred times more romantic than the very wildest parts of the Devonshire coast. And lonely—oh, how much lonelier than the loneliest spot known to the girls of Morcove was this strange scene which the moonlight showed them—now that their fateful voyage was over!

So far as they could judge, the vessel had put in quietly into a small, deep-water bay, from the shores of which the mountains rose with appalling grandeur.

An eeriness was imparted to this midnight incident by the complete silence on board the yacht and the absence of all signs of life on shore.

Not a light was visible anywhere.

"My gwacious, wheeah are we?" palpitated Paula, whilst she nervously made her toilette, with

fingers that were all thumbs. "Geals, geals, this is wather cweepy—what!"

"It is San Fernando," Carlotta murmured in her low, rich voice. "Surely I know this bit of coast? Yes," she went on in a convinced tone, as she peered out again, "they have brought us to the very same spot where I was taken on board."

"And a lonely spot it is!" grimaced Polly. "Ugh, there is something about all this that I don't quite like!"

Then the cabin door opened again, and Dolores stood revealed.

She did not speak, but contented herself with a gloating look at the other girls, holding herself very erect, as if she could hardly contain the malignant pride that filled her.

Betty & Co. did not continue the talk now that Dolores was present. Doing their best to look quite calm, they finished getting ready, and whilst they did this they heard suddenly the soft splash of oars close to the portholes.

Then a murmur of voices came, in very sinister fashion, speaking a foreign language.

Resignedly, silently, they filed out of the cabin and on to the moonlit deck. One by one, they went over the side, into the broad-beamed row-boat, that had been lowered away for this stealthy midnight landing.

They noticed that all lights were out on board the mighty yacht, which looked so enchantingly beautiful riding at anchor in the bay.

The night was deliciously warm, and fragrant with the scent of flowers. The girls inhaled the smell of the tropical vegetation, and found it delightful after days at sea. The strange experience was one that would have been thrillingly delightful, if only—

Ah, if only they had not felt themselves to be still in such grave peril!

Madame Florissa did not get into the boat with them, but Dolores, after a hasty good-bye at the gangway, descended to take her place amongst the prisoners, as they sat three to a seat. Marcella, of the gaunt figure and inscrutable face, also joined the party, bringing with her another woman who had been in attendance upon the girls during the



THEIR PRISON AT LAST! Dolores swung round to enjoy any expression of fear or despair that Betty & Co. were showing, but she was disappointed. "This place is nice—is it not?" she asked, and then continued: "But only for those who are free. For you it will not be nice!"

Nor could any of the Morcovians deny afterwards that it sent a shiver down the spine to hear such sounds as those at this dead time of night, and in such a barbaric spot.

Madame Florissa suddenly returned, and with every sign of being pressed for time, she beckoned:

"Come, you are to go ashore! And you do not need to be told it is no use trying to raise any alarm. Do as you are bidden, and no harm will be done to you. But if you give any trouble, you will suffer!"

Needless indeed was the impressive warning. These helpless schoolgirl prisoners, what could they do for themselves now? Hundreds, thousands of miles were they to-night, from the old Homeland and their loved ones.

It was good-bye at last to the close confinement of the floating prison that had held them for so many weary days and nights. But they were leaving it only to go ashore upon foreign soil, and to be under close guard still.

voyage. These, and these only, were the girls' companions now, except for a couple of the foreign crew, who manned the boat.

Just as the boat was casting off, Madame Florissa leant over the yacht's side to whisper down some final word to her daughter. That girl answered with a low laugh, at the same time flinging a vindictive look at the captives.

"What did they say to each other, Naomer?" Polly asked that chum of hers guardedly. "It was in Spanish."

"Madame, she say, 'You need not treat them too gently,'" was Naomer's answering whisper. "And Dolores, you see how she laugh, theenking what a joke it is for her!"

"They laugh best who laugh last!" quoted Polly, clenching her teeth. "Cheer up, darling! Here's my hand to hold."

"I not afraid. I not let myself be afraid!" Naomer said in a passionate undertone.

But, because she loved Polly so dearly, she let

her hand lie in that girl's all the while the boat was being rowed to the shore.

Almost without a sound, it grounded upon the beach at last, and quickly and silently the girls were disembarked, along with Dolores and the two women.

Then, with solemn-sounding adieus, the two sailors thrust off, and the rowboat went gliding back over the moonlit waters to the yacht.

"Come!" Dolores said, with all the air of one in complete authority now. "Welcome to the shores of San Fernando, the country that my father is going to rule!"

She put herself in front of the five captives, whilst Marcilla and the other woman followed behind. The very steepest of paths proved to be in front of them all, and it was so narrow that no two of them could walk together.

One behind another, up and still upwards they trod their way, passing giant palms, whose broad fronds were hardly stirring in the night breeze. It was a zigzag path, and in that respect it reminded Betty & Co. of the steep pathways up the combs of Morocco from the rugged shore. But in all else how different the scene was now! Tropical vegetation, and sheer mountains where in England there would be only high cliffs.

All at once, when the girls looked down into the moonlit bay, they saw that the yacht was off again. Silently it went steaming out to sea, whilst the girl prisoners could only go on following Dolores this way and that up the mountain-side.

Then suddenly she struck aside, into a sort of ravine, and after that the girls could no longer glimpse the sea by casting a backward glance. On and on they went, and presently one side of the little valley became terraced, with little flights of stone steps from one terrace to another.

And now Betty & Co. saw that they were going past cultivated plots of ground, and they guessed that this must be the terraced garden of a mountain villa.

Sure enough, a few more zigzag ascents brought them before a very solid-looking edifice with a flat roof. Great verandas ran all round the massive outer walls of the villa, to protect the interior from the terrific heat of the tropical sun. At present, in the moonlight, the effect was one of intense coldness and gloom.

A very prison seemed to be confronting them, a prison whose porch might well have borne the inscription: "All ye who enter here, abandon hope!"

But Betty & Co. were never going to do that. If Dolores, halting at the main doorway, only looked round to enjoy any expression of despair or terror that the girls might be showing, she looked round in vain.

"You theenk it quite nice, do you?" she said nastily, finding them so unafraid. "Well, so it is nice—for those who are free, as I am! But for you"—and she showed her teeth in the moonlight—"it will not be so nice, perhaps!"

From a small handbag that she carried the cruel-hearted girl took a bunch of keys, and fitted one into the massive door.

"Welcome! Again I say it!" she exclaimed mockingly. "Welcome to the country house of Don Florissa, my father, the future president of San Fernando! Now I shall show you to the room you are to have. A nice room—oh, yes! So cold! Just right for you who come from that detestable England!"

Then the girls had to go on along a wide passage and turn off to the left, into an enormous chamber that was more like a vault than a habitable place.

The walls, the floor, the ceiling, all were of stone. And the one window, as the girls instantly noticed, was thickly barred, and had its outer shutters closed.

Dolores had taken out and switched on an electric torch. She swung the brilliant ray all round the gloomy walls, and then, doing a proud walk round the girls that took her back to the vast doorway, she bowed very low to them all, mockingly.

"I leave you, for the present, to make yourselves at home!" she taunted them. "Good-night, you wonderful English! Bah! Good-night, you black-face queen! And you, Carlotta Delona!"

She danced herself backwards through the doorway, giving a pealing laugh that echoed loudly through the enormous, silent building.

Next instant Marcilla and the other woman had withdrawn, and the great door was pulled to upon the girl prisoners with a rumbling thud.

Then silence, a prolonged and profound silence, in this gloomy stone-walled prison to which the hapless girls had been consigned. A minute, two minutes, went by, perhaps, before a voice spoke in the darkness, with all the tension of suppressed passion.

It was Carlotta who was speaking. "Listen to me, my dear, brave friends!" she said excitedly. "We have suffered ourselves to be led here—"

"We could not do anything else!" Polly exclaimed sadly.

"No! But listen!" Carlotta rushed on, and they could tell how she was quivering with rage. "If that Dolores thinks we are going to be resigned, she is mistaken! I know the country. I know this spot—where it is, how far from the capital, where my father is president. You—Will you be brave still? Will you trust me?"

"You mean—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I mean this!" Carlotta whispered on excitedly. "We must seize the first chance to escape, and then we will make for the capital. We will find my father—"

"Yes, yes!" Betty and Polly said together eagerly, whilst Paula exclaimed:

"Wather, bai Jove! Oh, wather, geals!"

"Splendid, that will be!" joined in Naomer, doing a caper on the quiet. "Eef we can get away—"

"We may yet be in time to warn your father, Carlotta, about the plot!"

"That is so," the president's daughter answered softly. "And if only—oh, if only we can do that, if only we can get to him in time, we shall have done far more than saved ourselves from all this humiliation and peril!"

She took a moment to steady her breathing, and then added passionately:

"We shall have saved this dear country of mine from all the misery and sorrow of a wicked revolution!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

If only the Morocco girls and their new-found chum can get free! But can they? There are many exciting adventures in store for them, and you must not on any account miss next week's splendid long complete tale, which is entitled: "The Morocco Girls in the Mountains!"