

Noble

IN THIS ISSUE

TWO SPLENDID SERIALS, TWO COMPLETE TALES,
NEEDLEWORK NOTES, ETC., ETC.

The Schoolgirl's Own 2nd



THE MIDNIGHT CALL!

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

:: Adventures and interest abound in this splendid complete tale. ::



THEIR NIGHT OF MYSTERY!



By MARJORIE STANTON.

A full-of-mystery story telling what happened when Dolores Florissa, the strange new girl at Morcove, disappeared for an evening, and Betty Barton and Polly Linton went in search for her. It will hold your attention to the very end.

Study 12's Latest.

"It works, Betty! It works!"

"Well, just fancy—"

"It works splendidly!" Polly Linton almost yelled, as she stood in Study 12 at Morcove School, with a pair of earphones clapped over her pretty head. "I'm getting Cardiff!"

"That's a jolly sight better than getting in a rage," said Betty Barton, "as you have been doing in the last half-hour."

"You listen, Betty!" entreated the Form captain's study-mate and bosom chum, whipping off the earphones to pass them over. "It is the news bulletin."

"Thanks, dear; I would love to have a go. Study 12, the first one at Morcove to have its own crystal set! I say, it is coming through perfectly!"

"Isn't it?" And Polly waltzed round the study to relieve her triumphant feelings. "I began to think I never would get any result. I didn't know whether it was the aerial, or the cat's-whisker, or what; there was nothing doing. And then suddenly—"

"Weather forecast, Polly!" sang out Betty, who now wore the 'phones. "Another depression—"

"Shame!" Polly commented glumly. "Hallo, and here is Paula Creel."

"Yes, wather!"

"Another depression!" was the teaser's witty allusion to Paula Creel's woeful look on entering the study. "Gracious, Paula darling, don't look like that!"

"Polly dear, I am indeed greatly depressed. I have come wound for a bit of peace and quietness. All I ask is a word of sympathy. My life at present is just one weavy wound of—"

"Whoa, look out! Mind that leading-in wire!"

"Bai Jove! Wireless, geals?"

"Ah!" Polly said proudly. "You are just in time to be present, Paula darling, at the inaugural ceremony!"

"Come and listen-in, Paula," suggested Betty. "You've used earphones before?"

"Weal, no, geals, but— Oh, thanks, thanks!"

Paula beamed as the Form captain helped her to put them on. "Bai Jove, haow extremely comf— Owl! My hair!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My gwacious, it was coming out by the woots, geals! Howevah, that's bettah, yes, wather!"

"Sit down, there's no extra charge," Polly said, gesturing towards the best easy-chair. "Then tell us what you hear, dear."

"Thanks, thanks!" simpered Paula, walking towards the chair. "Bai Jove, it weally is most— Gurrow! Healp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Paula, when she walked towards the chair, had forgotten that the 'phone wires were not long enough for the purpose. She was suddenly pulled up painfully, and her cries of woe were loud and dismal.

"My gwacious, geals! Dwéadful wench! I thought I was stwuck by lightning, what? Howevah—"

"What can you hear now, deah?"

"Nothing, deah, nothing! Don't be alarmed!"

"But we want you to hear!" cried Polly. "You ought to be hearing!"

"Yes, wather! Unfortunately, howevah, I ain not," Paula regretted politely. "I assure you, Polly dear, the silence is pwofound."

"Bother it! Then you have gone and busted up the thing!" fumed Polly. "When we were getting Cardiff so beautifully! Ah, dear, I—"

"A moment, Polly dear! Hark! Bai Jove!"

"Well, what?"

"Nothing, dear, nothing! I wegwet to say the silence is unbwoken."

"I wish the crystal set was unbwoken instead," grimaced Polly ruefully, standing close to fiddle with it. "Is it this, I wonder, that has gone wrong?" And she moved the whisker.

"Healp!"

"Now what's the matter?"

"A sound, Polly—at last. But such a painful one."

"You duffer, that was the cat's-whisker!"

"The what, bai Jove? It sounded to me more like a dog! A sort of gwowl, Polly. Hooway, hoowah, now I can hear gwand!"

And after that, for the space of a full minute, the elegant member of the Fourth Form stood

listening, entranced, her pretty face wreathed in smiles.

Then suddenly the door whisked open, and Naomer pranced into the study. She took in the situation at a glance.

"Ooo, wireless! You have a set all to yourselves! Let me leesten—let me, queek, queek!"

Rushing at Paula, she remained all a-dance for a second or two, whilst that simpleton was trying to take off the 'phones without getting her hair caught.

"Oh, hurry up, queek, queek, you make me miss all ze news!" Naomer cried impatiently, and made an excitable grab at the 'phones.

"Heap! Ow! Ooooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My hair, Naomer, my hair!" howled poor Paula, skipping about frantically, now that the dusky one had the 'phones to herself. "You dwagged it out by the woots, Naomer! Do you hear?"

"I hear, yes, splendid!" said Naomer, listening to the wireless. "Ooo, how nice to have ze wireless in your own study. I must have one, yes!"

She whipped off the 'phones dexterously, and spoke on excitedly, to the amusement of Betty and Polly. As for Paula, that unlucky young lady flopped into the easy-chair and sighed.

"To-morrow I go into Barncombe and buy a set like this—yes, I shall!" Naomer declared gaily. "You not mind, Paula darlink; eef I fit ze wireless to our study?"

"Anything, anything for peace and quietness, Naomer deah!"

"And Helen Craig, she will not mind; she will love it. As for that new girl, Dolores Florissa—ah, bah!"

"Whda, now, steady, Naomer!" laughed Polly. "That Dolores," scoffed Naomer, "daughter of a man who was President of San Fernando. For five minutes, yes, perhaps! And she think herself as good as me, Naomer Nakara, a queen in my own country!"

"Naomer dear," counselled Betty soothingly, "give it a rest."

"No, I not! I go and tell her now; I am to have ze wireless, and if she not like it, then she can—how you say it? She can lump it, yes!"

And Naomer was gone, hanging the door spiritedly behind her. Paula, lying back in the arm-chair, gestured sadly.

"You wealise, geals! That's the sort of thing going on all day between those two geals in my study. It's dweadful. Something must be done. It is weducing me to a state of—weally, I am a week, a nervous week, bai Jove!"

"Poor dear!" said Polly, taking the elegant one by the wrist to feel her pulse. "Yes; well, lie there, poor darling."

"You geals tweet it as a joke," sighed Paula. "Helen Cwaig wegards it as most amusing. To me it is a downright twagedy!"

"Hush! There, there!" Polly said with mock gravity. "You must keep calm, or it will go to your brain, if you've got any."

"Thanks, thanks!" murmured the long-suffering one, closing her eyes. Her voice came dreamily. "All I ask is a bit of peace. It's a dweadful life. If I may just wecline here?"

"Certainly, dear!"

"Thanks, thanks!"

"Your poor forehead," sympathised Polly, whilst she was able to wink at Betty now that the patient had her eyes shut. "I'll get something for it!"

"Thanks, Polly, thanks! You are extremely kind, you and Betty. Ah, dear!"

Polly only ran as far as a neighbouring study for what she wanted. She came back in a few moments, treading softly, as a nurse might. In one hand she had a small wet sponge, in the other a tube of red water-colour paint, borrowed from Tess Trelawney, the artist of the Form.

"Is that better, dear?" Polly asked presently, smearing the sponge across Paula's forehead.

"Much bettah, Polly deah. A weal welief, Polly."

"Refreshing, is it?" the madcap spoke on soothingly, whilst she now made passes with the sponge upon Paula's cheeks and down her nose. "You find it cooling?"

"Most wetweshing, Polly deah; yes, wathor! Thanks! You are so kind!"

"Oh, I don't know about that," Polly might well demur, drawing off at last, and leaving Paula with a water-colour painted face. "Take things quietly, Paula."

"I will geals."

And Paula did!

There she lolled in the best arm-chair, whilst Betty and Polly went on taking turns at listening-in, giving an amused glance every little while to a certain face that was now the colour of a well-cooked beetroot!

At it Again.

NAOMER, when she ran back to her own study, a few doors off from Betty and Polly's, found Dolores Florissa standing at the open window using field-glasses.

Moreover School's bold position, on its great headland, gave almost every window in the place a glimpse of the sea in one direction or another. And most of the Fourth Form studies were specially favoured in having an extensive outlook that took in a good deal of rugged coastline and a big expanse of sea.

It was a very clear evening after a day of pelting rain, and the glasses must have enabled Dolores to pick up very distinctly the many fine vessels that were far away upon the horizon-line.

Naomer had been going to look out of the window, as it happened, to see how an aerial could be arranged. Like all the other girls, she knew a good deal about wireless by now. Finding that Dolores was standing there, the dusky one waited patiently. Nor did she allow herself to get impatient even when the new scholar seemed to linger at the window, simply out of spite.

"Well?" Dolores asked contemptuously, all at once, lowering the glasses. "What do you want, eh?"

"I want, eef you please, to see out of ze window when you have finished."

"Ah, when I have finish!" the South American girl responded, with a smile intended to exasperate Naomer. "That will be not yet."

"Very well then, I shall wait!"

"Very well, then, you can wait," said Dolores, and laughed whilst she held up the glasses again. "The window is mine as much as she is yours!"

Naomer waited. She was proud to think that her forbearance would have earned her the praise of Betty and the rest had they been here to see. What an aggravating girl this was!

"You, what do you want to look out of the window for?" Dolores asked presently, in a withering tone. "I can see ships that are perhaps going to South America, to my country. What ship ever goes to your stupid Nakara, that bit of baked

sand in the middle of Africa? I can see, with these glasses—"

"Eef you look hard enough," Naomer simply had to exclaim, losing her temper at last, "you will see, perhaps, who is President of San Fernando for this evening?"

"What you mean?" demanded handsome Dolores, lowering the glasses to glare at her schoolfellow.

Naomer showed all her white teeth.

"I mean that they change ze president every day, is it not?"

"No, it is not!"

"Every week then—same thing! Your father was president for how long?"

"He will be president again!" flashed Dolores fiercely. "And I shall be there, in San Fernando

"Very well, I hope it will be soon."

"Bekas?" questioned the South American girl, looking ready to fly at the girl queen.

"'Bekas,' the sooner you go, ze sooner I am please!"

"You should learn to speak ze English before you try to be funny!"

"Eef it come to that," said Naomer, "you not spik ze English so good as me. No!"

"Pouf! Eef I cannot spik English better zan you, I not spik at all!"

"Then why do you spik?" demanded Naomer, spoiling for a set-to by now. "Do I want to lessten, you think?"

Dolores gave one of her grand shrugs.

"I should zink you do want to listen, yes. You have ze ears big enough!"

"And you—you have a nose—"

"How then? What is wrong with my nose?"

"Nozing is wrong as he is at present," Naomer said, quivering. "But eef I pull him—"

"What! You pull my nose? Go on then, pull him—you black-faced— Ah, ver' well!" Dolores hissed, finding her nose suddenly tweaked. "Then now I shall fight you!"

"Fight me then, yes—queek, queek!"

And there they were, the pair of them, at it again instantly.

This was only the third time to-day that hostilities had broken out in the study. On both occasions Helen and Paula had been on hand to intervene. But now—

"Come on, you so-grand queen—bah!" Dolores seethed, whilst Naomer, wrestling with her opponent furiously, panted back.

"I am a queen, I am a queen! And you—ah, bah! Two-a-penny president!"

Next moment a chair went over—bang! Then the table was violently pushed out of position, the cloth coming half off.

Wilder still the scrimmage went on between the two foreign girls. This way and that they scuffled and wrestled, shaking the breath out of each other.

"I teach you!"

"And I teach you!"

Again they tumbled together against the table, and now the cloth slid further off. An inkpot toppled to the floor. A ruler rolled after the inkpot. Thud—slither—crash! And still the one girl was as game as the other to go on with the conflict.

Suddenly Dolores tore herself free of Naomer's hands, and then sent that girl spinning across the room.

Naomer recovered herself, drew breath, and came dashing back. Dolores snatched up the ruler and brandished it.

"Take care," she gasped, stamping a foot, "or I shall—"

"Dolores, stop! Oh!" was the arresting shout from someone who had burst into the study.

It was Betty. Behind her were Polly and two or three other girls, drawn hither by the sudden uproar they had heard.

Dolores cast the ruler towards the fireplace, glared at the Form captain, then shrugged.

"What you want, you capitaine?" she sneered.

"We want some order in the place Dolores," Betty said steadily. "This is getting a bit serious."

"Yes, wather!" Paula's familiar voice could be heard thinly, from the passage. "Geals, is it safe? My gwacious—"

"Ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha!"



NAOMER IS IMPATIENT! "Oo, queek, queek I!" Naomer cried impatiently. "You make me miss all ze news!" She made a grab at the earphones and Paula let out a yell. "My hair, Naomer, my hair!" the amiable one cried. "You will have it out by the woots!"

Sudden violent shouts of laughter from girls in the corridor caused Betty and Polly to look round. Naomer rushed from the study to find out what the merriment was about.

In a moment Dolores was the only girl in the vicinity who was not enjoying the spectacle of Paula Creel, standing there with a face as red as a beetroot and blissfully unconscious of that fact.

Dolores kept to the study, and what followed took place in the corridor. There Paula Creel suddenly realised that she was an object of great merriment.

"But why? What have I done?" she gasped, in round-eyed amazement. "Why do you gwin?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Ooo, what a jape! He, he, ho!" Naomer joined in, capering about.

"Weally," groaned Paula, "I would just like to know what all this is about? Is anything wrong with me, what?"

"My word, you have got a colour!" said Tess.
 "A colour, bai Jove! Then—my gwacious, there you are, geals! This is the result of all the stwain! I knew it was coming! I've felt myself working up for it. I say, I'm feeling funny—about the face!"

"You look funny, dear," sympathised Polly.
 "Very!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Where's a miwwo?" wailed Paula, and she turned and fled back to Study 12, with the girls in pursuit.

Into the famous den they crowded, in time to see Paula take a look at herself in the glass.

"Healp!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "I've got a bwight red waash!"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why do you laugh? I'm ill, stwuck down, my gwacious! Oh, dear—oh, dear!" poor Paula groaned, casting herself into the easy-chair.
 "Fetch the doctow, pway!"

Altogether it was not until five minutes later that the adored duffer of the Form ceased, for the time being, to provide the most delicious fun for her chums. But at last she was made to "realise" that this was only another case of Polly's harmless japing; and that she—Paula—had only to perform some simple ablutions to look "quite all wight again."

Whereupon, like the amiable girl she was, she herself became all chuckles, and went away, leaving Polly freely forgiven.

The crowd that had been packing Study 12 dispersed, and then the chums who were still here turned the talk into a rather serious channel.

It was the perpetual warfare between Naomer and Dolores that was giving Betty & Co. genuine concern.

True, the constant flaring up of these two girls had its humorous aspect. Helen Craig had been convulsed with laughter once or twice at some wordy combat between Naomer and Dolores—all in such quaint "English," too!

But Betty and her chums had seen Dolores just now with that snatched-up ruler in her hand, and they agreed that when a personal fend got to that sort of thing it was time for others to intervene.

Much as they loved Naomer, the chums really could not absolve her from all blame. They had to be fair, and there was no denying that Naomer herself could be a very provoking, impudent little rascal at times.

From the very first, however, one thing had been evident. Whereas Naomer's temper was invariably short-lived, and usually ended in her shedding tears of regret, Dolores would end a "flare-up" by looking as venomous as she could. It was always, "You wait; I will get my revenge!" that one read in Dolores' eyes after a fracas in the study.

What, then, was to be done?

The obvious answer was—get Naomer and Dolores separated.

Nor was there any doubt that, if Miss Redgrave or anyone else with authority had discovered how unfriendly the two foreign girls were, one or the other would have been shifted ere now.

As it was, the headmistress and her colleagues were going on in the belief that Naomer and Dolores were particularly suited to each other. They both spoke Spanish far more fluently than they spoke English, and it was felt that this should prove a bond between them.

"We don't want Miss Redgrave to know about this continual rumpus that is going on," said Betty. "If we gave her a hint—"

"Naomer will catch it, as well as Dolores," nodded Polly. "Serve her right, perhaps! All the same—"

"Something must be done!"
 "Yes, wather, bai Jove!" came Paula's timely rejoinder, as she now floated back into Study 12, with her natural complexion. "I tell you what, geals—"

"Well, what?" demanded several of them. "If you've got a solution to the problem of Naomer and Dolores, let's have it!"

Paula sat down—in the easy-chair, of course.

"There is," said Paula, "a pwoneness to disagreement in that direction. By that, geals, I mean—"

"Whoa!" said Polly, looking about for a cushion to hurl. "We don't need to be lectured."

"There is an incompatibility of tempewaments, what? On the one hand," simpered Paula, "we have Naomer—with all due respect, a wild creature, yes, wather! On the other hand—"

But now Polly fung the cushion, and extinguished the amiable speechmaker, and the matter was suddenly taken a big step further by Betty's exclaiming:

"I tell you what, girls! Naomer had better come into Study 12!"

"That's the idea!" Polly agreed heartily. "An arrangement of that sort can be made without troubling Miss Redgrave."

"And surely Naomer will be delighted to be in with you two girls, in this den?" said Madge.

"Bai Jove, wather!"

But that was just where they were to find themselves greatly in error. Naomer, when she had the suggestion made to her before school next morning, simply refused to entertain it!

"No, I shall not—no!" she said vehemently, to the utter surprise of Betty and Polly. "I stay in the other study—yes!"

"But, Naomer, darling, wouldn't you like to be apart from Dolores?" coaxed Betty.

"No, why should I? She will say I run away! I am a queen, I am, and I not run away from a daughter of a man who is only a president in a top-hat!"

"You could use my wireless," Polly suggested. "I shall have my own wireless, thank you all ze same," said the self-willed youngster. "I go into Barneombe to buy him to-day!"

"You have always liked to be in this study, Naomer—"

"Oh, yes; and I shall often come. But I not let that new girl turn me out of the other study—no!"

"But look, dear—"

"It will save such a lot of squabbling, Naomer."
 "Why should I save ze squabbling? I like it! No, I not come into this study, but I love you all ze same!"

So there it was, and a resumption of the coaxings at midday achieved no better effects. Naomer, evidently, was quite enjoying the feud.

And, alas, so was Dolores!

Not a Nice Girl.

AFTER dinner, Polly Linton came in Study 12, where Betty Barton was sitting alone, in an obvious state of perplexity.

"Betty, there's only one other thing to be done. We must have Dolores in with us!"

Betty got up.

"I was just thinking the same," she said, none too happily. "No doubt we could have her in here without Miss Redgrave raising any objection. We are only two—"

"We always have been only two in here," nodded Polly, "for the reason that it is the captain's study, and a good many interruptions and gatherings take place. But Miss Redgrave won't think less of us for quietly taking in Dolores. They are four in that study."

"The question is, then, will Dolores come?"

"Ah!" said Polly. "Now you are asking! She doesn't love us, Betty!"

"She doesn't exactly love anybody in the school, I fancy," Betty said regretfully. "A peculiar girl. It won't be all honey having her in with us, even if she will come, but we'll ask her."

Dolores was alone in the other study when the two chums sought her out. This was a "halfer" at the school, and she had lost no time after dinner in getting her things on to go out.

Strikingly handsome she looked, too, in her expensive tailored clothes. It was not the prettiness of a Paula Creel that Dolores had. In her foreign way she looked boldly beautiful; a miniature woman rather than a girl of school age.

Nothing could have been nicer than the way Betty and Polly approached this new scholar about what they had in mind. But from the very start she was a hostile, suspicious listener. In her strung-up way she stood dividing her lightning glances between the Form captain and Polly. At the finish, she curled one of her vivid red lips.

"Be with you in Study 12?" she said scornfully. "Why should I?"

"We have just explained, Dolores!"

"Pouf!" she shrugged. "You zink I believe that is the true reason? I am not such a fool!"

Betty received this in silence; not so Polly.

"What do you think we are playing at, then?" burst out Polly hotly. "Understand, Dolores, we Morcovians are not in the habit of saying one thing and meaning another! Our one idea is to end this perpetual squabbling between you and Naomer!"

"Oh, yes!"

That annoyed Polly more than ever.

"I can tell you this, Dolores; we don't want you in our study because we are as fond of you as all that!"

"But, setting aside personal feelings," Betty interposed, composedly, "for the sake of the Form—"

Dolores laughed with her handsome head thrown back.

"Ha, ha, ha! For the zake of ze Form—pah! Do you zink I care zat for your school?" And she snapped her fingers. "I am only here for a leetle while! My heart is not here at all; it is in South America!"

Then the study door opened, and Naomer stood revealed.

"Yes," she said saucily, "and the sooner you go after your heart, the better!"

"You—you—"

"Well, what am I? You say!" challenged Naomer. "Come on, queeck!"

But Betty and Polly interposed together.

"Now, now, Naomer! Come away, dear! Come with us into Barncombe, and buy that crystal set you want."

But Naomer was deaf to these entreaties. She was spoiling for another "rumpus," and Betty and Polly did not breathe freely until Dolores had stalked out of the study, after looking the girl queen up and down contemptuously.

It took all the brightness of this sunshiny afternoon—one that had followed a showery morning—to restore the chums' spirits, as they rode away to Barncombe on their cycles. There were Betty and Polly, Madge and Tess, Helen and Paula, and Naomer. And the only unworried one of them all was—Naomer!

She saw that her loving chums were not merely perplexed, but were vexed with her personally, and she seemed to think it rather a joke. The gist of her roguish talk was that she was a queen, and would please herself!

There was not much chance of a discussion, however, whilst the girls were pedalling along.

They had need to hurry, so as to be back in time for a three-fifteen games fixture.

Suddenly, though, the girls met with a surprise that meant their slowing up for a bit of talk, even if they had to pelt on all the harder afterwards.

Less than a mile from the school, just where the road took a more inland turn towards the quaint old Devonshire town, they were giving passing glances to the distant bungalow at the cliff's edge, where Dolores' mother was at present staying.

"Hallo, look—a wireless aerial!" Polly was the first to comment.

"Yes!"

"Bai Jove! When was that wiggled up?" wondered Paula.

"Only this morning, surely," said Betty. "We were along this way after tea yesterday, and I'm sure that aerial mast was not there then."

"What a big affair it is, too," remarked Tess. "Does that mean they have a big valve set?"

"Not necessarily," answered Polly. "It's just as important to have a good aerial, even for a crystal set like mine."

Naomer grinned.

"I 'spect they have a 'normous big set, to hear San Fernando spikking! It must be nice to know every time they have a new president!"

The girls could not help laughing, though they felt they ought to say: "Now, now!" to Naomer. Paula was so amused, she almost fell off her bicycle.

"Haw, haw, haw, geals! That was wather wick, what?"

"Rich!" chatted on Naomer, in her sparkling style. "This mornink that Dolores tell me her mother and father are 'normous rich. I tell her, bah, what do that matter? Then she say she slap my face—"

"And then I had to part the pair of you!" put in Helen, with a laugh. "What's to be the end of you two, I don't know!"

A nice downhill stretch was in front of the cyclists now, and they took it with a rush, gaining an impetus that helped them half-way up the hill that came after. When they were nearly into Barncombe, the blare of a motor-horn warned them to beware of a motor-cycle coming on behind.

It was Cora Grandways. With a deafening roar she overtook and passed ahead of the chums, showing off her undoubted skill as a rider of the "twin-cylinder."



THE NEW GIRL'S ANGER. Dolores snatched up a ruler. "Take care!" she cried, stamping her foot. "Or I shall—" "Dolores, stop!" came the cry from the doorway as Betty and Polly came rushing into the study.

On the way back from the town presently, the chums again felt their eyes attracted to the bungalow on the cliff. And now they could glimpse the imperious figure of Madame Florissa, alone in the two-acre plot that surrounded the charming residence.

She was close to the aerial mast, and the girls fancied that she had come out to make some adjustment or other. They did not see any sign of Dolores, and this rather surprised them. It was believed she spent most of her time over at her mother's place.

If they had glimpsed Dolores just then, what a fateful difference it might have made in the lives of at least some of the chums of Study 12! For it was due entirely to their not knowing what had become of Dolores this afternoon, that Betty Barton and Polly Linton were ultimately to be sent upon a journey in quest of her. And that journey—

Long afterwards, only too well Betty & Co. realised that it was a certain after-dark journey to the bungalow on the cliff that began all the deep mystery and perilous adventure that was to come!

Where is Dolores?

IT had been dark but a short while that evening when Miss Redgrave came into Study 12.

Only Betty and Polly were here, for the moment. Their prep. had been finished half an hour ago, and the youthful mistress of the Form found both girls quietly reading.

"I wonder if you two know what has become of Dolores?" Miss Redgrave inquired, looking

rather uneasy. "It appears that she has not been seen since dinner."

The chums shook their heads.

"Would she be across at the bungalow?" suggested Betty. "She goes there a good deal, doesn't she?"

"It is fairly safe to suppose that she is there," was the answer; "all the same, I simply must find out for certain. She should know better than to stay on so late, especially when it appears likely that we will have a stormy night."

Even as Miss Redgrave spoke, a blast of wind went shuddering and bellowing around the school-house.

"We went by the bungalow, at a distance, this afternoon," Polly remarked, "and saw Madame Florissa—"

"But not Dolores?"

"No, Miss Redgrave. We were rather surprised not to see her with her mother, since it was a halfer at the school."

After pondering a moment, the mistress spoke decisively:

"You girls—I can always rely upon you to carry out any little mission for me properly. I think you had better put on your things and go across to the bungalow. My compliments to Madame Florissa, and will she please let Dolores return with you at once."

Two books were slammed shut boisterously. This run out of doors was going to be jolly!

"And can we please take a few of the other girls?" Betty pleaded eagerly. "They would so love to come!"

"Just two or three more of you—certainly," was the ready assent. "But don't make up a crowd, will you, for it might give offence to Madame Florissa?"

In the act of passing from the study, Miss Redgrave paused to add:

"There is not much doubt that you will find Dolores there. But we cannot have her coming back alone after nightfall. She is boarding at this school and must observe the rules. I shall have to see Madame Florissa about it if this occurs again."

Without indulging any ill-feeling towards Dolores, the chums considered that it would serve her right if she did get a severe talking to, by-and-by. It was a golden rule with Betty & Co. never to do anything, if possible, that was likely to leave others in anxiety about them.

Another minute had hardly sped before five of the girls, dressed for outdoors, were going downstairs. Paula, Madge and Tess were the three who were accompanying the Study 12 couple on what was to be such a fateful errand.

They had avoided asking Naomer to join them, and luckily that youngster was all taken up with her new crystal set, so hardly noticed that she was being, not unkindly, left out of the jaunt. Helen Craig stayed with Naomer. She was giving the girl queen invaluable help with the installation.

The wild night wind came at the chums with a rush as they emerged from the schoolhouse porch. Low clouds were driving thickly across the sky, constantly obscuring the moon. Even before the girls were clear of the school gateway, they heard the stormy sea crashing and surging along the shore under the headland.

When the moonlight went from the wind-swept plateau that the girls were traversing, Polly would switch on a pocket-torch that she had brought with her. And so they battled their way along the lonely road, raincoats flapping in the blast, waterproof hats set securely upon their heads.

Out at sea not a speck of light was to be discerned. It was a night for all vessels to keep the rugged coast at a distance.

There was a bit of a respite from the gale when the chums were going along a part of the road that was sunk between high banks. But this only made the wind seem fiercer than ever when at last they left the road to go across open ground to the bungalow.

One or two windows of the romantically situated dwelling were shining brightly through the darkness, and Polly made the remark:

"Not much doubt that we shall find them all indoors."

What was their amazement, then, when they had got to the main door of the bungalow, to ring and ring and yet get no answer!

The chums were astounded.

Why was no one answering the ring at the bell? Would several of the rooms be lamplit, as they were, if nobody was at home?

"Oh, someone simply must be indoors!" Polly exclaimed; and now she took a turn at the bell-push, and kept her finger upon it with a persistence that set the others laughing.

Tr-r-r-ring, ring, ring, ring, ring!

Still no one came to the door!

"Bai Jove!" murmured Paula, from where she had sought refuge from the tearing wind, close to the house wall. "Haow remarkable!"

"Perhaps only that old woman, the servant of the place, is at home, and she is deaf?" hazarded Tess.

"She was not deaf that other time we came here," said Betty. "Besides, if Madame Florissa and Dolores are not here, then where are they?"

"Altogether, I think we might be excused taking a peep in at the windows, if we can," suggested Madge. "We want to know at once if Dolores is here."

"Yes, wather. Geals—"

"Come on, then!" agreed Betty, stopping quickly to a window whose drawn curtains had lamplight behind them.

Contriving to look in round the edge of the curtains, the girls saw a deserted sitting-room. It was nicely furnished, and looked so snug that somehow they felt it was but a minute since Dolores and her mother were there.

Then they passed on to another window, and this time it proved to be the dining-room that they were peeping into, with such good excuse for so doing. The table was laid for a meal, with places for two.

"No one!" was Polly's astounded comment.

"Well!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It's queer," said Betty, with a puzzled smile.

"The kitchen, then?"

"Yes, but wait a bit, though," came from Tess, as she still peered into the dining-room. "Do you see the wireless set in the corner over there? What a fine one!"

"My gwacious, geals!" Paula fairly gasped. "Why, it's the vewy biggest I've ever seen."

"How many valves, I'd like to know!" murmured Polly, as she, too, peeped again. "I should say they could get South America all right with a set like that, if they want to!"

She was thinking of what Naomer had said, in jest, during the cycle ride.

"This is not nice, having to scout about like this," Betty deplored, as they trod round to the back of the building. "But we are just bound to find out if anyone is here and refusing to answer our ring."

The kitchen window baffled them, however. Instead of hanging curtains, it had a holland blind that had been let down to the full from its roller, and to look in round the edge of it was impossible.

"Um!" more than one of them said, as they stood and looked at one another. "Now what's to be done then?"

"Can't hear a sound," remarked Polly. "Even the servant must be gone from the place!"

"But don't you think we are entitled to wait and expect all three of them to turn up?" questioned Betty. "You noticed that the cloth is laid for two in the dining-room?"

"Madame and her daughter!" said Madge. "Then—"

"Yes, let's wait," urged Tess. "In that case, they should not be long."

"In the meantime, where are they?" wondered Polly. "What can one make of it all? No neighbours within a mile. And would they be as late as this, getting back from some mere visit to Barncombe?"

"Such a rough night—hardly!" mused Betty. "How the wind blows!"

"Yes, wather!" Paula complained rather dismally. "And, geals—oh, gwacious, it's starting to wain, bai Jove!"

"Oh, I hope not!" laughed Madge. "Or how are we going to wait, without getting wet? Not much shelter here, with the wind tearing round the place like this!"

Nor had the sudden downpour continued for more than a minute before the perplexed chums



WHY WAS SHE AFRAID? Madame Florissa's angry mood was most apparent. Her clothing was wet and sea-stained, but she looked full of dignity. "How then!" she exclaimed fiercely. "What does this mean, eh? You spy on me!"

were standing close against the best-sheltered wall, and, even so, were getting pretty damp.

"How much more of this?" Polly sang out glumly, at last, above the howl of the wind. "Bother Dolores!"

"Yes, wather! Geals, it is most oppressing; an intolewable nuisance!"

"And we are not going to stand it; why should we?" Betty spoke up spiritedly. "Where is the harm in our seeing if the back door is on the latch, and if it is——"

"Certainly!" cried Polly. "We'll wait inside!"

With a still fiercer squall of rain suddenly lashing down, it was a great relief, indeed, for the girls to find they could enter at the back door. It was only on the latch—and this fact in itself suggested that, if the tenants of the place were away, they were certain to be back very shortly.

But was the place deserted, after all? Or was the old woman, Marcilla, in her kitchen and acting on instructions not to answer any ring at the bell?

"Hallo, there! May we come in, please?" Betty made a point of calling, as she lifted the latch of the back door and set foot inside the scullery. "Is anybody at home?"

"There was no answer.

"That settles it!" muttered Polly. "But what a strange business it is!"

Quickly they all got under cover in the dark and poky scullery, and then the outer door was hastily closed against the shrieking gale.

A moment or so of silence ensued, the girls feeling rather uncomfortable.

Unquestionably they had a perfect right to invite themselves into the bungalow. They had been sent on an errand that meant calling at the place; it was a pouring rain now, with no real shelter anywhere out-of-doors in such an exposed position; and they had good reason for expecting Madame Florissa and Dolores to show up suddenly—from where, goodness only knew!

Some Mystery Here.

POLLY LINTON switched on the torch, whilst they were still huddled together in the scullery. The light revealed how wet their outer things had become; another minute in the rain and their waterproofs would have been running. As it was, the girls could be glad that they had not brought any wet indoors to give trouble to Marcilla by-and-by.

Five minutes crept by—ten—a quarter of an hour. And these the girls were still, waiting with diminishing patience. Their feet shuffled more and more frequently as they grew more and more tired of standing about.

"My givacious," Paula sighed at last, "I'm weady to droop, geals! Weally, this is too twying!"

"It is, and I vote we go into one of the rooms and sit down," Betty proposed. "Where can they be, when there is so much to suggest that they have been here since darkness fell?"

She opened the kitchen door and led the way into that lamplit room. The range held a good fire, and there was the pleasant odour of something cooking in the oven.

"You see, it's just as if they were due back at any moment to sit down to their evening meal," was Polly's comment on all this.

"Yes, wather! Weal, geals, the old geal keeps the place beautifully clean and tidy, what?"

The others agreed, and then another spell of silence ensued. There were only two chairs, however, and the girls soon decided to go into the dining-room. It seemed to be doing the most con-

siderate thing, in the circumstances, if they kept out of the sitting-room, which was daintily furnished.

There, in the dining-room, the laid cloth and the places set for two again witnessed so clearly to Dolores having been meant to partake of the evening meal with her mother. Where was she, then? Where also was Madame Florissa?

The chums sat down, and Paula for one was soon loling her head back, looking as dreamy as if she was in Study 12's best armchair. The others sat around in silence, smiling when they caught one another's eyes. How odd it all was!

On crept the minutes, whilst out of doors the wild night grew wilder still. Terrific gusts swept round the lonely bungalow. The roar of the sea was always in the girls' ears. Rain lashed the windows.

"Heigho!" Polly yawned at last. "If this goes on much longer, I shall start listening-in at the wireless! Somehow to relieve the monotonny."

"Don't you dare touch it," was Betty's half-serious warning. "It's one thing to be waiting here out of the rain, another thing to start meddling, Polly!"

The madcap laughed.

"Considering the trouble we have been put to, I think we'd be excused even if we all dished up the supper and ate it!"

Paula opened her eyes then.

"Supper, geals? Bai Jove, yes, wather——"

"Nothing doing, dear!" said Polly. "So go to sleep again!"

"Miss Redgrave will soon be worrying about us, in addition to Dolores," Madge remarked ruefully. "Pity there is no telephone."

"We wouldn't be here if there were!" said Tess. During a fresh spell of silence they were able to tell that the storm of rain had suddenly ceased. Betty went to the window and peered round the edge of the blind.

"Moon's out again," she said. "How wild the sea looks with the moonlight on it. The tide will be running high to-night."

Then she turned round.

"Girls, now that the rain is over, do you know I think some of us ought to go back and let Miss Redgrave know."

"Yes, certainly!" Madge agreed quickly. "You and Polly stay here, and let Tess and Paula go with me."

"I think we should," approved Tess. "Else Miss Redgrave will be feeling more worried than ever. What shall we tell her, though?"

"Say this," advised Betty promptly; "we have every reason to believe that Dolores is with her mother, only they are away from the place just at present. Explain what makes us think that they will be back in a little while——"

"And that as soon as we can," Polly chimed in, "Betty and I will come along home to the school with Dolores."

"Supposing the rain starts pelting again, and Madame Florissa wants you two girls and Dolores to remain all night?" questioned Madge. "It is quite likely she may."

"Then leave it at this," said Betty. "Unless we are back by lock-up time, Miss Redgrave may feel quite sure that we have been invited to sleep the night here."

This left matters happily arranged, and it now only remained for Polly to go across to Paula and give her a stake.

"Wake up, dear."

"Eh, what? Bai Jove——"

"Get a move on, pet! Time to go back to the school!"

Paula must have been half dozing, for everything had to be explained to her. And very reluctant she was, apparently, to turn out again, but there could be no indulging her wish to remain with Betty and Polly.

Should the mother and daughter come in so late as to make the girls' return to the school inadvisable, it would be quite enough for Madame Florissa to have to sleep two of them in addition to Dolores.

So, taking advantage of the temporary cessation of the rain, Madge and Tess went off with Paula, leaving Betty and Polly to the oppressive silence of the strangely forsaken bungalow.

That silence was all indoors. Outside, the night-bound world of turbulent sea and bleak cliff-land remained as noisy as ever with the gale.

Now and then the searching wind shook the latch of the back door, and the two girls got so tired of jumping up in the belief that someone was come home at last, they presently made the rattling door more secure. And then it was quieter than ever within the lonely dwelling.

For an hour the two chums kept up their talk, if only to pass away the time. But, when the evening had grown as late as this, and still they were alone, it seemed as if they had exhausted all topics.

Over and over again they had debated the indefinite feeling that had come upon them recently in regard to Dolores and her mother. That feeling—one of vague mistrust, puzzlement—they could not account for; but it was certainly not being lessened by what was taking place to-night.

Lapsing at last into a silence that was the outcome of weary waiting, Polly let her eyes close as she lolled in an easy-chair. The oil lamp had warmed the room, the hubbub of the gale was a drowsing sound in one's hearing; everything, in fact, was conducive to a sleepy condition.

Once she found herself paying heed to the renewed hiss of rain against the windows. But this fresh squall of rain passed as quickly as it had come, and she was nodding again, with only the wearisome shrilling of the wind in her ears.

The next she knew, someone was shaking her by the shoulder, and exclaiming excitedly:

"Polly! I say, dear!"

It was Betty, and the lamplight showed her face to be pale and tense.

"I've just had an idea, Polly—where the mother and daughter are, and the servant, too, perhaps. The cave under the cliff, Polly—that is where they are!"

Sought—and Found.

POLLY LINTON was out of her chair in a flash. She looked at her wrist-watch.

"Half-past ten! Then I must have been asleep!"

"You were, Polly," smiled her chum. "I dozed, too, but suddenly awoke, and—I don't know if it was something I had been dreaming, but the idea came in a flash. There is a cave that is rented off with this bungalow—"

"Yes, of course," nodded the other girl. "The man who built this place acquired the cave under the cliff and turned it into a private boathouse. But—goodness, Betty, why ever should they be down there to-night?"

"They are newcomers to this district; they don't know the tides, how tricky they can be,"

Betty responded gravely. "And to-night the sea must be running high."

"You mean they have got caught by the tide? But that doesn't exactly explain things, dear. What could have taken them down to the cave?"

"Ah," said Betty, "there I'm just as puzzled as you! Polly, there is something in the whole thing that is—queer. If it were the proper holiday season, and the evenings were long and the weather right, you could understand their going down to the cave, to take the boat out. But an evening like this has been—"

"I say, hadn't we better go and see?" Polly broke in uneasily. "We can take care not to get into any danger. On the other hand, it seems as if we ought to find out, if possible, whether they really are down there. They themselves may be in great danger!"

Betty nodded.

"Yes, Polly. You've got your torch, and it is not raining just at present. There is a way down to the shore, through acombe that is not two minutes' walk from this place—"

"I know! Come on, then," urged Polly; and in a few moments they were letting themselves out by the back door into the wild night.

Bright moonlight was coming and going upon the storm-ridden sea, which claimed their gaze, whilst they battled across the wind-swept headland, making for the combe. As soon as the ground was sloping away in front of them, the roar of the breakers was twice as loud as it had been.

Far fiercer now, also, was the rush of the wind as it came at them in the funnel formed by this narrow ravine which opened upon the shore. Often had Betty and Polly been that way before, and this was fortunate. The path was a rough and rocky one, often half lost amidst the wind-blown clumps of gorse. Their knowledge of the place enabled them to avoid going amiss and to get on with all speed down to the shore.

There, the mountainous waves were shaking the very earth as they crashed and pounded upon the shingle. Whenever one burst wave went washing back, to let another come on, there was a vast stretch of foam all agleam in the moonlight. Then—burroomp! thundered another breaker, and with a furious hiss the yeasty sea surged up the slope again, rolling tons of stones over and over.

The two girls, their raincoats flapping in the wind, at once looked along under the cliff, the base of which, they knew, was seldom reached by a high tide. But the waves had reached it to-night, although by now the foamy waters seemed to be receding.

In that direction people must pass if they wished to go between the cave and the bungalow on the headland above by the shortest way. Any other course would be a roundabout one.

So, now that Betty and Polly were at the water's edge, there was enough to tell them that anybody who this evening had gone along the base of the cliff to the cave might certainly have been caught by the extra high tide.

"Are they there then, in the cave?" Polly wondered, shouting the words to her chum above the noise of the waters. "We can just see the entrance, but it is only a pitch-black hole."

"The tide is low enough now for anyone to venture," Betty remarked. "But we are not going to do that, Polly."

"No." Polly was headstrong, but she would

never have been so rash as to suggest doing a thing like that.

"If they are there—and it really looks as if they were caught by the tide—they'll get away soon now. As for ourselves, Polly, we'd better get back."

"I'm glad we came, though," Polly sang back. "It is something to know that the tide has been running so high that—Hallo, look! There they are!" she shouted excitedly.

Sure enough, the light of an electric torch had suddenly blinked at them from the darkness of the cavern mouth. As the two girls remained to watch, the light became a continuous one. It was being used to help some person or other to come creeping along, close in under the mighty cliff.

"Shall I flash my torch, to show that we are here, Betty?"

"No, better not, perhaps," the Form captain decided. "It might—it might leave them wondering who we are; might make them hold back."

"Not wanting to be found out over such a scrape as they have been in," was Polly's understanding rejoinder. "I shouldn't be surprised, Betty. What can they have been about, to visit the cave a night like this?"

"I don't think we had better ask them," Betty muttered; and Polly, if she had answered, would again have shown herself in complete agreement with her chum.

They were sharing the same conviction that there was something of a secret, almost sinister nature, which had better be remembered but not talked about too much.

Slowly, very slowly, the person carrying the torch worked towards them along the base of the cliff. For a time, all Betty and Polly could see was the ray of light. Then suddenly they discerned a woman's figure, and behind that one, two other forms.

"It is our three, right enough," Polly declared. "Madame Florissa, Dolores, and the old woman."

"Yes, Polly."

And five minutes later the three in question were at the end of the awkward scramble, finding themselves confronted with the two chums.

The latter had hardly expected their presence to be other than an unpleasant surprise for the trio. But the annoyance, the dismay and resentment on the faces of all three exceeded anything for which Betty and Polly had been prepared.

Madame Florissa's angry mood was most apparent. Her clothing was wet and blown about, but yet she looked full of dignity.

"How then!" she exclaimed fiercely to the girls. "What does this mean?"

The chums took turns at explaining. The account they gave of themselves should have earned them words of regret and gratitude, but never once did Madame soften her expression. To give a glance at Dolores and the servant was to be aware of their looks of angry resentment.

At last Madame Florissa shrugged and laughed in a pettish manner.

"It is a nice thing, if I cannot have my daughter to visit me, on a half-holiday, without all this fuss!" she said bitterly. "Surely Miss Redgrave could guess that Dolores was with me."

"She did guess, Madame Florissa, but she had to make certain. You would not like it if—" Betty was saying, but the foreign lady interrupted impatiently:

"Oh, that is enough! Well, you can go back to

the school now, and explain. You understand; we were caught by the tide. We were told, when we did rent the bungalow, that it was always safe—"

"But this evening the sea has been so terrible!" interjected Dolores.

"It has," agreed Polly. "And we wonder that you ventured down to the cave."

"Enough!" exclaimed Madame Florissa sharply. "You can go. Yes, what?"

"It is very late," Betty said. "Are you really going to ask us to return to the school? It will mean knocking up someone to let us in."

"And what of that?" Dolores burst out; but the mother gestured to the girl to be quiet.

"So," Madame said at last, "you zink I should ask you to sleep at my place?"

"Well, really," pleaded Betty, "it seems only reasonable."

"Will they not be anxious at the school?"

"Not a scrap! We have made that all right. What the headmistress would not like would be our going back so late. She knows where we are."

"With friends, yes?" Madame exclaimed, with the sudden, winning smile that she could assume when she liked. "All right, come. I do not mind! After all—"

And she turned to say a few words to her daughter and servant, in Spanish.

Thereupon they all made their way up the combe-path to the bungalow. Not a word did Polly or Betty have spoken to them during the brief but tiresome journey.

Dolores seemed to be the most ungracious of the three. Madame Florissa was at least affecting good-humour. Marcilla was mute; but then it was perhaps her position as a servant that made her so.

Indoors, the two chums were at once shown to a spare room which they could occupy for the night. There they quickly discarded their outdoor things, and they would have been willing enough to roll up for sleep at once, but Madame was proving properly hospitable. She had said they must partake of supper.

It was a peculiar, much-seasoned dish that came out of Marcilla's oven—a sample of the foreign cuisine that was adhered to at the bungalow. Betty and Polly would not have cared for it, only they were really hungry, and a keen appetite reconciled them to the strange fare.

Towards the end of the meal Marcilla withdrew to her kitchen. She had been waiting at table up till then, and the two girls wondered at a mistress keeping a servant in attendance, when the latter herself must be so tired and hungry.

It seemed to show what an implacable woman Madame was.

And yet it was perfectly obvious that old Marcilla had a great devotion for her handsome, dignified mistress.

"She has been with me all my life," Madame remarked carelessly, after the old woman had withdrawn. "She does not like it here; but then—" And a shrug seemed to imply the scornful addition: "Who would?"

There was no lack of talk during the next few minutes. With a sort of forced vivacity, Madame Florissa kept up a pleasant chatter. Now and then, too, she looked at the sullen Dolores as if to admonish her for displaying such unfriendly mood. To the very last, however, that girl refused to alter her attitude.

Betty and Polly were embarrassed by this. But what made them still more uncomfortable was

when the mother and daughter started to talk with each other in Spanish.

Madame could keep up her smiling, but if ever Dolores laughed or smiled, it was in a malicious, derisive style. So the two chums felt pretty certain it was they themselves who were being dismissed.

Soon afterwards madame gave the signal to rise by suddenly getting up to go to the mantelpiece, where she had left some cigarettes. Having lit one, she knew better than to offer the case to Betty and Polly, even in fun. But she allowed Dolores to help herself as a matter of course.

They all reseated themselves for a few minutes, away from the table, and Dolores, as she coolly whiffed at the cigarette, was continually flinging the most contemptuous glances at her school-fellows. As guests for the night, Betty and Polly could not very well return the despising glances. But after this—

"You two, you are ver' tired, is it not so?" madame said at last. "Not like my Dolores, no.

friends!" the lady added, drawing off to the door. "Good-night!"

She bestowed a last smile—as false, the girls were certain, as it was sweet—and was gone, closing the door after her graceful exit.

All at once Polly did a thing that witnessed to that mistrust. She stole across to the door and silently turned the key in the lock. Nor did Betty fail to look relieved when this had been done. Somehow they both felt safer—now.

They themselves had been lying down for at least ten minutes before they heard such sounds as told them that the three foreigners were now going to bed. Three different bed-room doors closed with a soft snick of the lock, and soon after that all was deep silence.

Betty and Polly, with blankets drawn up to their ears, could have talked away now, with no risk of their whispering being overheard in adjoining rooms. But they were dead tired; their minds relaxed quite suddenly from the tension of



AT DEAD OF NIGHT! "Look!" cried Polly. "There they are!" She pointed to where the light of an electric torch had suddenly blinked out from the darkness of the cavern mouth along the shore. Some person or other was creeping along close to the mighty cliff.

She can always turn ze night into day. But it must be that we all go to bed now."

She stood up, and, after casting the unfinished cigarette into the grate, straightened her tall figure to its full extent. It was rather the action of one who, feeling languid, must not allow languor to have its way.

"I will see you to your room," she said, stepping gracefully across the room. "Dolores, say good-night to your—friends!"

The daughter only gave the two girls an insolent nod, at the same time calmly puffing at the cigarette.

"I am sorry if you are not to be so comfortable as I would desire," Madame Florissa said softly, when she had attended Betty and Polly to the bed-room. "But did I expect such a thing—no! And it is all bekas I am so silly as to take Dolores and Marquilla with me down to that so-stupid cave!"

"This will be quite all right for us," said Betty, "and we thank you for having us."

"You zink so? Then sleep well—my dear young

the last few hours, and soon both girls were sound asleep.

Was it only a minute later, or an hour afterwards, when Betty suddenly opened her eyes again upon the darkness of the bed-room? She could not tell. But she was suddenly wide awake once more, with the feeling that it was no sound outside the bungalow that had broken her rest. She had slept through too many stormy nights at Morocco, to be awakened by the mere booming of the wind.

What had disturbed her, then? Something that had happened inside the bungalow, she was sure. But what?

After a few moments the conviction seized her that she would never get to sleep again until she had eased her mind.

She first looked at her wrist-watch, which she was still wearing, not having undressed properly to-night.

The luminous dial told her that the hour was three in the morning.

What Betty Saw.

THREE o'clock in the morning! Then she had been sleeping a long, long while when that sound disturbed her. And what sound could it have been?

Very cautiously Betty worked herself apart from the still sleeping Polly, and slid out of bed. What was going on in the bungalow? Had someone come to the bed-room door to try it?

Without a sound she trod across to the door, then listened.

Hark! Yes, someone was astir in the place. Surely that was the faintest of steps she had heard, coming from the dining-room?

After a moment Betty cautiously turned back the key and opened the bed-room door.

With a beating heart she moved out into a sort of vestibule, going on very slowly and with extreme caution towards the dining-room door.

The latter was slightly ajar, and when she was yet a pace or so from it she could tell that there was moonlight in the dining-room. But no lamp had been lit, so could there be anyone there, after all?

That question—it was answered in dramatic fashion before another moment was out.

Betty got to the dining-room door, and peered round the edge of it, to see Madame Florissa standing at the wireless set, with earphones affixed to her head. The nickel-plated bands of metal gleamed in the moonlight.

And it was three o'clock in the morning!

Listening-in, and at such a time as this—for what possible reason could it be? Betty wondered.

Unseen herself, she stood peering into the moonlit room. Madame Florissa's back was turned towards the door, and all her attention was given to the task that occupied her. Listening-in—to what?

Then, suddenly, she subsided into a chair that stood close to the many-valved instrument. Sitting forward, she opened a notebook upon a side table, and began to jot down with a pencil, whilst she still listened-in.

For several minutes Betty must have stood there, watching. Then, convinced that nothing more than this was going to happen, she crept away. Back in the bed-room, she quickly and silently closed the door, relocked it, and then darted for the bed.

"Polly—'sh! Polly!" she roused her chum, whispering the words under drawn-up bedclothes. "Polly!"

"Why—"

"'Sh, not a sound, Polly!" was the excited entreaty with which Betty checked the other's wondering exclamations. "I say, it is three in the morning—"

"Well?"

"And Madame Florissa is at the wireless, listening-in! Polly, what on earth can she be receiving at a time like this? And she is jotting down something, too!"

"Jotting down, is she?" Polly returned softly. "Morse, perhaps? But why—what— Wait a bit, though. I've got it! Yes—"

"'Sh! Well, what?"

"She is listening-in to America—to South America!" Polly whispered excitedly. "Don't you see? Allow for the time, and there you are! Betty, she is getting some message from her own country, most likely."

"But why?" Betty exclaimed, keeping her voice muffled by the bed coverings. "Why should she? I mean to say, Polly, it is all so—so suspicious!"

"It is," came back the tense whisper. "So suspicious, Betty, when you take one thing with another. Do you know what I would like to do?"

"Find out what she is receiving?"

"If only we could!" fumed Polly. "My word, it does seem as if we ought to—if only we can, somehow! But— Ah, of course!"

"Well, what?"

"The big valve set at the school!" was Polly's excited answer. "If she can get San Fernando, so can we! We would have to slip down to the wireless-room in the night—"

"Supposing it is a private message? Supposing it is some secret information? Supposing—"

"There's no privacy in wireless, Betty, if you know the wave-length. And if it is in code, we'll puzzle it out!"

Polly suddenly tumbled the blankets about, as if she felt hot with all this sudden excitement.

"That's what we must do," she spoke on, in a guarded tone. "Can you hear me, Betty?"

"Yes, dear."

"We must find out the wave-length somehow. And then—then, Betty, Madame Florissa will not be the only person to listen-in at Morcove, and at three o'clock in the morning, for whatever message is being transmitted from someone in San Fernando!"

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Next week's enthralling complete Morcove School story is entitled, "The Schoolgirl Listeners-in!" In it you will read more about the mystery in which Dolores Florissa and her mother are mixed, and you will find out how Betty and Polly make a great discovery and get on the track of a strange secret.



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