

THE PAPER EVERY SCHOOLGIRL SHOULD READ!

The Schoolgirl's Own 2^d



**MOCKING THE
MORCOVIANS!**

An incident from this week's long complete tale of Betty Barton & Co. in South America.

A Grand Adventure Tale of Betty Barton & Co. in South America.



The Whip Hand.

CRACK! Snap! Crick, crack, snap! It was the sharp lashing of a whip that was sending a noise almost as loud as a pistol-shot through the house.

The girl who was dexterously jerking the leathern thong in the air, to make it give out the unpleasant sound, was smiling maliciously to herself as she did so.

She had come, whip in hand like this, along a gloomy passage whose stone walls and floor intensified every sound that was made. The cracking of the whip was very loud, and it was a ringing laugh that the girl suddenly gave, as she looked behind her and saw someone watching her.

"Ha, ha, ha! This should teach them to be polite to me, I think, Marcilla?" the girl chuckled in Spanish at the gaunt woman who was her mother's servant. "When these English girls see this—"

And again she snapped the whip in the air—snap, slash, crack!

Back there at the end of the passage the old woman's thin face went awry for a moment with a sour sort of smile. She made no answer to the girl, who flaunted on to a massive door, a panel of which she struck with the butt of the whip—bang!

Then, purposely making a great jingling sound with the bunch of keys that she had with her, Dolores Florissa inserted one in the lock and sent the door wide open.

"Now then, you English—bah!" she cried jeeringly, striding into the vast, gloomy room which held her mother's prisoners. "And you—you stupid black-face, calling yourself a queen in your own country—bah, what do you think of this, eh? How you like the sound of this?"

The lash curled sharply in the air again, repeating the ugly crick, crack, snap!

"Oh, and you, Carlotta—I must not forget you!" Dolores sneered on, bestowing a mocking grin upon that hapless girl who was now a fellow-prisoner with the four Morcovians in this lonely mountain villa above the shores of San Fernando.

Dolores Florissa, daughter of the man who intended to bring about a bloodless revolution in this South American republic, was having her proud hour now. That whip in her hand was intended to symbolise the freedom with which she

The Morcove Girls in the Mountains.

By MARJORIE STANTON.

You will find your old favourites, the chums of the Fourth Form at Morcove School, in fresh surroundings this week. The tale of their adventures in tropical South America makes one of the most fascinating stories this popular writer has yet given us.

could treat these girls just as cruelly as she pleased.

"Well, speak, some of you! Say good-morning!" she jeered.

With a wider grin than ever, she glanced at the one window of the room. It had thick iron bars, for it was a ground-floor window, and in this part of the world householders had to guard against the most daring class of robbers.

But the window was not only heavily barred; at present its outside sun-shutters were closed, and that was why the great room was in such a chilly gloom.

Dolores minced across to the window, and put her hands between the bars to push the shutters open.

As they swung round, opening away from the window like folding-doors, a view of the mountainous country was disclosed. There was blazing sunshine, and tropical vegetation gave a brilliant colour to the view.

The girls had preserved a dignified silence in the presence of Dolores. She would have liked to believe they were cowed by the sight of that whip, but she knew them too well to be able to derive that malicious satisfaction.

"You speak nothing!" she twitted them, in her imperfect English. "You not laugh and chatter quite so much as you used to at ze Morcove School! You wish you were back there now, is it not? Well, you are here, and here you stop—yes!"

Betty Barton now showed her intention to say something by advancing a step.

"For your part, Dolores Florissa, you have such a lot to say, it rather looks as if you must keep on chattering to keep your own spirits up! You are like your mother—"

"What you mean?"

"What I say," was Betty's calm response. "You put on very grand airs. You are never tired of telling us how helpless we are—"

"And so you are quite helpless! Until we choose to let you go—"

"All right; we've heard all that before! I was going to say, sometimes people who are full of boasting are the very ones to be full of secret anxiety. We call it bluffing in England."

"Yes, wather!" Paula Croel now spoke up, with a very creditable expression of beaming composure, considering the gravity of the situation.

"So the more you cawack on about the gwand twiumpth you and your people are going to have, the less we shall expect to see that twiumpth come off! If you follow my meaning?" she added, so blandly, that all her chums smiled.

"You are bluffing yourselves!" sneered Dolores.

"Oh, no," Polly said serenely. "We make no boast about not caring what happens. We know where we are, and what you and your people can do to us, and we frankly admit we feel mad about it—"

"Yes, wather! Fawious at the way we are being tweated!" Paula broke out again. "Bai Jove, though, there will be a wow about it all sooner or later in England!"

"In England—bah!" That miserable, wretched, detestable country—thousands of miles from here!" jeered Dolores. "Who cares for England out here! When my father has made himself president of San Fernando, he will know how to deal with England!"

"It is possible," said Betty, smiling, "that Great Britain will know how to deal with him!"

"When he is president—when!" flashed out Naomer, unable to keep silent any longer in front of Dolores. "And eef he do make himself president, it will only be for a day, two days—fwee days, eef he is lucky!"

This scornful cry left Dolores biting a lip. Her eyes gleamed.

"My father will be president for life—"

"No, no, no, he will not!" Naomer answered vehemently. "Eet is not bluff when we say that—cet is truth. Your father, he will not have all ze people behind him!"

"What a lie to say so!" Dolores panted fiercely. "You know nothing about this country—"

"But Carlotta, here, does," said Betty, in an even voice, at the same time taking Carlotta Delona by the sleeve in an affectionate way. "She has told us—"

"A lot of lies; she can speak only ze lie!" Dolores burst out, with a look of special jealousy and hatred for Carlotta. "You! If I have one word from you, Carlotta Delona—you see this whip, do you?"

"Now, look here," Betty said, advancing another step. "We may be pretty helpless, Dolores, but we just don't mean to allow anything of that sort!"

"Wather not, bai Jove! Dolowes, you are a wretched little bully, bai Jove. Dwop it now—"

"Silence, all of you!" Dolores stormed, standing back a step, with the whip slightly raised. "I have only to call out, and Marcilla and others will be here. Bully, you say I am? If that means that I can do just as I like, then I am a bully, and proud of it, yes! Now listen, for I am giving my orders!"

"Oh, really?" Polly could not help retorting cheekily.

"We are not going to wait upon you, so do not think it," Dolores continued fiercely. "For to-day Carlotta will do all that is needed. She will fetch you water and things to wash with. She will bring you food. Carlotta Delona, come here!"

"No, Carlotta, don't move!" Betty and Polly exclaimed together. "We are not going to have that!"

"No!" was Polly's own cry of flat defiance. "If you think, Dolores, that you are going to make Carlotta your special victim, you are mistaken! She is one of us now—"

"Bah, you can say what you like, but I hold the whip!" Dolores seethed, delighted to find the girls were ready to defy her. "For the last time, Carlotta, I order you! Go out of that door!"

Not to be Borne.

CARLOTTA did not move. Even if she had been inclined to obey, the other girls would have so hemmed her around that she would have been compelled to stand still. They were close to her now, and their undemonstrative air of being ready to protect her was very fine.

"But let me go, my dear friends!" she pleaded softly. "For it will perhaps make it better for you!"

"No!" all four Morcovians said together, and next instant they were voicing varying cries of indignation, as Dolores suddenly laid about her with the whip.

"Oh!"

"You bully, Dolores—you bully!"

"Eef you touch me!" shriled Naomer. "Be careful!"

"Bah!" Dolores shouted wildly, and lashed the thong of the whip towards them all again.

This time one or two of them came in for a stinging cut about the ankles, and that brought matters to a climax.

Straight at Dolores dashed Betty and Polly, nothing daunted because the cruel girl had sprung back a step and was brandishing the whip to keep them off.

Slash—crack—slash! the thong sounded, but next moment Dolores was knowing what the Morcove spirit meant.

Betty and Polly had seized her, and now the whip was wrenched from her grasp. She shrieked, quite expecting to have the whip turned upon her, but instead, she found herself bundled out through the doorway by Polly, whilst Betty broke the stock of the whip across her knee—snap!—and then flung it to a far corner of the room.

Marcilla came rushing forward, no doubt imagining that all five girls had set upon Dolores. The pair of them began a lot of excitable chatter in Spanish, which Naomer cheekily interrupted by placing herself in the doorway and yelling, as she capered about in front of them:

"We not afraid of you! We not afraid of you! Cowards, cowards, cowards—that is what you are!"

This, on top of the humiliation Dolores had just suffered, was too much for her. Hissing with fury, she doubled her fists and fairly hurled herself at Naomer. But that nimble little thing skipped aside, and Dolores shot past her mark, full into the arms of Polly!

"Outside!" said Polly, and she simply slung the girl bully back into the passage with a hearty "Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Betty sent the door round with a violent wrench, so that it closed with a deafening slam.

"Good!" was Polly's comment. "Nothing like showing all of them that we can hold our own!"

"Yes, wather, geals, haw, haw, haw! Hark, though!"

Dolores had her lips to the outer side of the key-hole and was screeching through at them passionately:

"Now you will not have any breakfast, you see? You change your tune when you are hungry, perhaps!"

And for answer, the Morcovians joined in a loud laugh, feeling sure that starvation was a

thing their captors simply dare not deal out to them.

Sure enough, less than an hour later the door opened again, to admit Marcilla and another woman, and they each had a tray of food and a pitcher of water.

The food set before the girls was of the very plainest kind—simply bread and fruit. But although the bread seemed very unpalatable to the Morcovians, the fruit was perfectly fresh and delicious, and they agreed that it would need to be poorer fare than this to make them pull long faces.

It was only when they paid heed to poor Carlotta's sad looks that their hearts sank a little.

Whether she was trying to raise a bright smile at some little joke in which the Morcovians were indulging, or whether they found her all at once standing a little apart from them with the most mournful of expressions, they were bound to feel how she was suffering.

Poor Carlotta! She had not the might of the British Government upon which to rely. She was the daughter of the present President of San Fernando, and for her this cruel captivity meant—what?

Her fellow prisoners could guess. Full well they could understand the terrible suspense she was undergoing, and, worse, the agonising dread of what might happen to her father if the revolution succeeded.

At present he was ruling the country in that city which was the capital of San Fernando. Possibly not a whisper had reached him or his colleagues concerning the imminence of the revolution which Senor Don Florissa hoped to bring about by means of bribery and corruption. The only souls who knew about it all, outside those sworn into the secret, were these girl prisoners in the mountain villa.

No wonder, then, Carlotta drifted to the barred window more than once, to heave a wistful sigh as she stood gazing out. Every hour that was passing was bringing the moment nearer for her father's enemies to strike!

"Cheer up, dear," Betty whispered to the poor girl presently, coming to her side at that barred window. "I know what you are thinking."

"If only we could get away from here!" Carlotta exclaimed tensely. "You remember what I said last night? I could find the way from here to the capital, and then my father would be warned in time!"

"Yes, well," Betty said in a subdued but cheering tone, whilst the other girls gathered round, "perhaps we shall yet get the chance, Carlotta. Let us wait through to-day—"

"Because there is nothing like knowing how many people we have to reckon with in this place," chimed in Polly shrewdly. "As the day goes on we may find out, and then—"

"When the night has come—then will be the time!" Betty took up the talk softly. "A dash from here, an all night tramp, with you showing us the way!"

"And you will not be afraid?" Carlotta exclaimed tensely.

"Afraid!"
"Ah, I insult you by such words," she continued quickly. "I know you could not be afraid; you have been so splendid all along! You save my heart from breaking, you are so kind, so true in your friendship! Very well, then, if only we can get the chance we will—"

"Sh—look out!" came Polly's sudden warning whisper, whilst at the same instant a figure flashed into view just outside the barred window.

It was Dolores again.

She must have been crouching down close to the wall under the window, trying to listen, but she could not have overheard anything, the girls had been talking too guardedly. And perhaps it was because her artful prying had been baffled that she began to prance to and fro in front of the window, mocking at the girls.

"You birds in a cage, why you not sing? Ha, ha, ha!" she jeered. "How do you feel now, you nigger-queen? Bah! And you, Carlotta! I am so ver' sorry we have to keep you prisoners—oh, yes, ver' sorry! Ha, ha, ha!"



OUTWITTED BY SCHOOLGIRLS!

Marcilla, rushing into the prison chamber, found only Dolores there! "They have escaped!" the girl cried angrily. "They tricked me, Marcilla. Find help! We must follow them. They must not get away!"

The girls turned away from the window, for they were not going to stand there to be mocked. Betty and Polly were tight-lipped with anger. Paula was looking as if she would like to find an armchair in which she could lounge. Naomer's dusky face enhanced the glitter in her dark eyes.

As for poor Carlotta, to and fro, to and fro she walked the gloomy prison chamber, with clasped hands under her chin, and a pathetic look of sad musing filling her lovely countenance.

How long—how long was this state of things to continue?

Will Their Chance Come?

BUT nightfall found the five hapless girls still behind the locked door of that room with the barred window, with all hope gone for the present.

In vain had they looked forward during the day

to a chance of finding out how many persons there were about the place.

They had not been allowed out for anything in the nature of exercise, and so it had been impossible for them to get to know whether or not Dolores, with Marcella and the other woman, were the only people in the house apart from themselves.

Food had been brought to them twice during the day by the two women, Dolores showing herself each time at the doorway for the purpose of mocking at the girls. Were these three the only ones about the place, then? If so—

If that were the case, Betty & Co. were in the mood to take their chance the very next time the door was opened, if Dolores and the two servants really were all with whom they had to reckon. But it was a very big "if."

Late in the afternoon they had heard other voices faintly talking within the house. It was their belief that certain persons had come in—perhaps with news or messages from Madame Florissa. But whether those persons were staying on or not, the hapless girls could not tell.

Unfortunately, Carlotta was bound to discourage the others' desperate hope that their custodians numbered only three. She had been kept in this lonely mountain villa before ever she was taken on board the yacht that ultimately spirited the girls away from Morocco. Her experience was that several peasant people were attached to the villa. There was a gardener, with a wife and daughter. These three used to occupy a little shanty in the terraced grounds, and they kept a very fierce watchdog!

Was there much doubt that these people and the dog were still here?

At any rate, the girls had sense enough to see what a fatal mistake it might be to attempt the escape before they knew how many people with whom they had to reckon.

After this it was a bitter disappointment when, next morning, they themselves pushed open the shutters of the barred window, to see Dolores parading to and fro outside, with a savage-looking dog held on a leash.

Back from the window the girls stepped sharply, for the hateful girl had instantly started her taunting cries. The dog joined in with his fierce woof, woof, woof! and then the girl who held him brought the fierce beast close to the window and incited him to spring up at it and growl upon the prisoners.

The girls kept quite silent whilst this was going on. Not until Dolores had wearied of her malicious teasing and had gone off with the dog, did they break out into subdued talk.

"That rather spoils our hopes, girls!" grimaced Polly.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, a nice thing if we bwoke away, only to have that wretched cweature sent after us!"

"We know what we have to reckon with now," said Betty sadly. "It means that we must make our plans accordingly. For we are going to get away—we must!"

"Yes, Betty—yes!" agreed Polly heartily. "If there were fifty people about the place, and fifty dogs, it would simply mean that we must make our plans accordingly."

Carlotta's lovely eyes shone again with admiration and gratitude.

"Ah, it is for my sake you talk like this—so bravely!" she exclaimed fervently. "You could

let the days go by, knowing they dare not do you any real harm. But because any day may see the wicked revolution brought about—"

"Pweicely!" Paula said, with her beaming look. "Yes, wather! The gweat thing is—"

"To get away, and warn your father—"

"Ooo, yes—queek, queek!" was Naomer's characteristic interjection.

Betty had been standing in deep thought. She broke out tensely:

"To-night, girls? Now that we know there are others besides Dolores and the two women—"

"Sh!"

It was Polly who gave the warning whisper. Her ears had been the first to detect the shuffle of steps in the passage.

The key rattled in the lock, and once again Marcella and the other woman entered with food and water. The one servant was as elderly and stern-faced as the other. Neither of them could speak a word of English, and up till now they had never addressed a remark to the girls. But as they were passing from the room, Marcella turned and spoke in Spanish to Carlotta.

It was some order or other, as the Morcovians could guess, and Carlotta was soon enlightening them.

"Presently we are to spend a few minutes in the open air," Carlotta said to her companions, the instant Marcella and the other woman had gone. "We must not look upon it as a chance to escape, however. Would they let us out if it was not safe for them to do so?"

"There is no telling!" Polly exclaimed in a deep whisper. "Supposing we find some implement that will help us to get those iron bars out of the window, then—"

"Sh!"

They were all cautioning one another again, fearing they were letting themselves get too excited. Dolores might be listening at the keyhole or outside the window. One never knew!

So they made their breakfast, having already performed their ablutions. When the meal was over they tidied up the room, each girl rolling up her mattress and blanket for the day. There had been no real hardship so far, except that Paula felt it was rather cruel to be denied a mirror!

"Gwacious!" she fumed suddenly, standing still to finick with her hair. "You know, geals, I call it a cwuel pwivation, this keeping us without a glass! How can a geal manage to put her hair to wights?"

"I show you—oo, yes—queek!" was Naomer's mirthful exclamation, and next instant she was holding a copper tray in one hand, and giving it a polishing wipe with a bit of cloth.

"There you are, you dear old duffer—he, he, he!"

"Bai Jove," was Paula's beaming comment, as the dusky one stood in front of her, holding up the improvised mirror, "that's bettah, Naomer darling—yes, wather!"

"You theenk I am clever, do you?"

"Clever, bai Jove! Such an inspiwation, Naomer—"

"Then give me a kees—queek, queek!" entreated the excitable little imp, in one of her sudden bursts of affection.

She flung the tray away—clang, batter, crash! and simply sprang at Paula, who yelled:

"Heal! Geals—Naomer—my hair! Dwop it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The gloomy, stone-walled room rang with the really hearty peals of laughter. Even Carlotta seemed to forget all anxieties for just that one moment—the moment when poor Paula, the spick-and-span girl of the Fourth Form at Morcove, was having all her morning toilette spoiled by Naomer's too-demonstrative attentions.

"What a life!" sighed Paula, when at last Naomer had drawn off, leaving her breathless. "Wumped to bits, bai Jove—a sheer wreck! And I did want to be presentable when we go for our morning stroll, bai Jove!"

"Morning stroll is good!" said Polly, with a grimace. "Exercise in the prison yard, more likely!"

And it certainly was nothing much better than that!

Both Marcilla and the other woman conducted the girls forth into the open air. Nor had the hapless five passed the threshold of the house before they saw Dolores waiting for them on the path, with that savage dog on the leash.

At sight of the girls the horrid creature showed his teeth and strained to get at them, growling deeply. He was so strong as almost to pull Dolores along with him, and there was a moment or two when the girls feared that she would never be able to hold him in. Paula turned pale, gasping faintly:

"My gwacious, gials!"

"Good-morning!" mocked Dolores, hanging on to the leash, whilst the dog pawed and strained harder than ever. "I hope you are ver' well? Ha, ha, ha!"

Then she spoke a word in Spanish to the fearsome beast, who gave a rasping growl deep in his throat.

"You must excuse!" Dolores laughed, with a flash of her own teeth. "He not like you English, no! And he is not used to queens with black faces, ha, ha, ha!"

"You know the dog better than we do," Betty said in a warning tone. "If anything happens, Dolores, you will have to account for it!"

"To the British Government, yes? Bah!" And she snapped her fingers, holding the leash by only one hand to do so.

The dog jerked her forward, and then she gave a mock scream of dismay that left Marcilla and the other woman amused, in their sour way. They went back into the house, talking to each other.

It was then clear to the girls that they were never to be out of sight of Dolores, and that their first attempt to make a dash for liberty—if they should be so reckless—would mean her setting the dog after them.

But, dog or no dog, the girls would never have dreamed of making a dash during the day. Darkness alone was all they were ever likely to have to aid them, and that aid they simply must have during the first hours of any fight that they might attempt.

All the time, as the girls wandered this way and that in the terraced garden, there was the galling consciousness of how closely Dolores was in attendance. Her jeering voice was hardly silent for a moment. She dubbed them her flock of sheep, and continually talked of the dog's savage nature.

The grounds of the mountain villa were, of course, wonderfully beautiful. In spite of the irksome restraint, and the ever present thought of how the time was flying, with Carlotta's father all

unwarned of the peril that threatened, Betty & Co. could not fail to enjoy the bit of exercise.

Time after time they paused on some path to admire exotic flowers that were so strange to them, so large and brilliant. Enormous butterflies flitted in and out amongst the palms.

But all was not as enchanting as this. Once Carlotta told them to look up into the cloudless sky, and there they saw a few dark specks against the blue—vultures!

"Bai Jove!" was Paula's softly-breathed comment. "Howwid cweatures, what?"

Like her companions, she moved on a few steps, still gazing up at the hovering birds of prey.

But suddenly the girls' thoughts were interrupted in a dramatic manner. The jeering cries of Dolores changed to a sudden shriek.

Round flashed Betty and the rest to see the dog at the end of the leash gazing fascinatedly at a crawling thing which had suddenly appeared from the undergrowth. It was a snake!

Dolores dropped the leash and fled, while the Morcove girls gazed at the curious sight before them. The dog seemed incapable of movement; but then, as the snake advanced, the animal gave a sudden cry and, turning, bolted away across the undergrowth in the direction of a forest which stood near at hand.

Quick as lightning the snake followed, but to the girls' relief, much as they hated the great brute, the dog seemed to have a sufficient start to carry it clear of the reptile.

A moment later the dog and the snake had vanished, leaving the girls staring at one another in bewilderment.

Night Comes Again.

"Oh, how awful!" said Polly, breaking the silence which had fallen upon them.

"Yes, this is not like England," said Carlotta. "You see, there are perils in our forests. Perhaps it will make you feel—"

"Feel afraid to try and escape?" asked Betty.

"No, listen, girls; the dog has bolted, Dolores is no longer here. Supposing we—"

"Impossible!" was Carlotta's dissenting exclamation. "It must be that we have darkness in our favour, or we will never succeed."

"Besides—look!" came from Betty, under her breath, and a jerk of the head directed the others' glances to where a man and woman were just coming in through a gateway from the mountain-side.

Carlotta whispered that they were the couple who looked after the grounds of the mountain villa. They were still here, then! But the dog had bolted! Betty & Co. were not going to forget that.

At sunset that evening they were only waiting for darkness to shut down upon the mountainous world before they took the first step towards the attempt at an escape.

Their minds were made up. Conditions would never be more favourable than they were now. Before another night had come another watchdog might be obtained. Moreover, it was quite possible that to-morrow would see fresh faces about the place.

It was evident that there was a coming and going of messengers, and what more likely than that the place would have to accommodate a weary messenger who had not time to return before dark?

The girls had been given their evening meal,



HAD SHE FOLLOWED THEM?

The girls crouched down while the figure walked past with a slow step. As she came alongside them, the moonlight shone on her face, and the concealed girls gave a gasp of recognition. It was none other than Madame Florissa!

and so they did not expect to be visited again this evening. What they had to devise, then, was some ruse by which, after nightfall, Dolores could be lured to the prison chamber, and then suddenly overpowered.

It was Polly who had the great inspiration. Her scheme was simplicity itself. They were all to start singing and carrying on generally in a very unruly manner. It would not be Dolores to fail to come along and command them, in her domineering way, to keep quiet. Any sounds suggesting high spirits would be maddening to her. She liked to glory in the thought that the girls were as wretched as could be.

No sooner was the sun down than darkness came on swiftly. All in a minute the girls, as they watched from the barred window, saw the glowing sky darken to a deep purple, whilst the stars flashed forth brilliantly.

There would be a good deal of moonlight later on, and so it was expedient to get away, if possible, before the moon came up.

"Come on, then!" Betty herself gave the word softly, when it was almost pitch dark out of doors. "All together, girls!"

And the uproar—for it could be called nothing else—began at once.

First the girls talked and laughed as if they were enjoying the greatest jokes amongst themselves. Then Polly started a song with a chorus.

It needed no effort after that to keep up the rowdyism. To hear Naomer joining in an old English hunting song was quite enough to make Betty and Polly and Paula interrupt their own singing with peals of laughter. Carlotta was all

genuine merriment, too, keeping up a great clapping of hands by way of applause.

And then suddenly—bang, bang! the door was pounded on the outer side, and Dolores called in to them all:

"Stop that, you in there! You hear me? How dare you!"

"Boo!" they jeered at her. "Boo-oo! Who are you?"

Dolores went away, but came back with the keys. Loudly she jingled them in her braggart way, as she fitted one into the lock. The massive door swung open, and she flaunted into the room.

"If there is any more of this impudence——" she began. But that was as far as she got.

In a flash Betty and Polly pounced upon her, taking her completely by surprise.

Before she could evade them, or give a cry for help, the Study 12 pair had tight hold of her. Betty hugged the girl close, and Dolores found her face being pressed to that captor's chest, so that it was now too late to try and cry out.

Even if Dolores had managed to raise a yell for help, the appeal would perhaps have failed. For Paula and Naomer and Carlotta still kept up the singing, for the special purpose of drowning any outcry.

Into the middle of the room Betty and Polly dragged Dolores, and in the next few moments she was having a blanket flung over her head and held down all round her.

Whilst this was happening, two of the other girls darted to the door and peered out.

The passage was in darkness and deserted. The girls were joyfully convinced that Marcilla and the other servant were at their evening meal in the kitchen. As the house was a big one, and the kitchen regions were remote from this part, there seemed a chance—a grand chance.

"Queek, queek—yes!" Naomer turned back from the door to whisper, all a-dance with excitement. "We shall do it—queek!"

"Wather, bai Jove!"

That was Paula, as she ran to a corner and picked up a couple of the small bundles which had been prepared, in readiness for a chance like this. The girls had saved a little food from every meal served to them, and each would be provided with a small quantity of rations and a blanket.

But Dolores, smothered up in the blanket, was not gagged. She was shouting and yelling, and her muffled cries would surely have been heard, only the would-be fugitives took care to keep up their own uproar.

A moment more and the girl was as helpless as it was within their means to make her. The question was—could they get away before she extricated herself from the blanket that was tied about her, or before her yells made Marcilla and the other servant feel that they must leave their supper, to come and quell the disturbance?

Betty and Polly each snatched up a bundle. Naomer and Carlotta did likewise, and then they darted across to the open door.

Paula was already there, peering out. She made a sign that all was clear, and out into the passage they surged.

To the left the corridor led towards the kitchen. They went to the right, sped the short distance to a door which gave entry to a room in which they had never yet been. What awaited them on the other side of that closed door?

No use pausing to consider. Not a moment for hesitation. Headstrong Polly was first, as usual.

She boldly sent the door wide open and rushed in.

No one!

And there, on the opposite side of the room, were French windows opening on to a verandah. They heard Dolores still yelling frantically, whilst she struggled to extricate herself from the blanket.

"Come on!"

"Queek, queek—yes!"

"Bai Jove, geals—"

"We shall do it!" exulted Betty softly. "Once clear of the house and grounds, and we will manage somehow!"

"Quick!" Carlotta exclaimed tensely. "Oh, if only we may have the good fortune! Hark, though!"

They all heard the tell-tale sound, as they were stealing from the room by way of the French windows. It was the voice of Dolores, no longer muffled by the blanket.

"Marcilla—Marcilla! Help! They are getting away!" she was shrieking in Spanish.

And the five fugitives, as they flitted out into the nightbound garden, knew just what was happening back there in the cage from which the birds had flown!

Vividly they could picture exactly what really took place before another minute was out. Marcilla, running forward from the kitchen to the prison chamber, to stop dead at the threshold, finding only Dolores there.

"Gone—they have gone!" was the passionate cry of rage that Dolores gave, whilst she gestured wildly at her mother's faithful servant. "It was a trick, Marcilla, and now—"

"Gone—flown? No, no!"

"Yes, I tell you!" stormed Dolores, stamping a foot. "Did you not hear them, you idiot?"

"We heard much noise. We thought it was merely—"

"Bah! It was their trick! And now they have gone, and perhaps we shall not be able to catch them! Marcilla, find help—call in all the aid you can!"

"But certainly, Dolores. Oh, if madame, your mother, knew what had happened—"

"I am going after them!" panted Dolores, ending all talk by dashing out of the room. "They shall not escape—they shall not! If they do, and if they reach the capital—oh, it will ruin everything!"

Free—Free!

"WHERE are we now?"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! Geals—"

"Goodness knows! Never mind, though!"

"Yes—queek, queek!"

"We are free at last! We are free!"

It was Carlotta Delona who followed the Morcovians' breathless exclamations with that word of intense relief.

"Free!"

They had dashed clear of the garden of the mountain villa and had been rushing wildly yet stealthily up the roughest and steepest of paths. Groping darkness was around them—that deep tropic darkness which precedes the rising of the moon.

They accounted it a lucky thing that a breeze was stirring, causing the palms and giant grasses to rustle loudly in their harsh, dry fashion. Sounds of that sort, the desperate fugitives felt, were going to save themselves from being heard.

That a pursuit had started, they had not the least doubt.

Ere they were clear of the mountain garden they had heard the most tell-tale cries from the direction of the villa. And for the last five minutes it had been a mad dash to evade recapture.

"Carlotta—"

"We cannot do better than go on and on," was that girl's quick response, whispered to the girls who were looking to her for guidance.

And on and on they went. One behind another up the craggy pathway, with storm-twisted trees spreading their unshapely branches overhead, so that the brilliant stars were hidden from view—on and on!

Every one of the girls was more than breathless. It was a scrambling rush uphill that was bound to cause the most violent "stitch" in one's side. Paula was simply groaning for breath. But pause they must not, when they knew that Dolores, Marcilla, and all the rest of the villa establishment were chasing after them.

Would they get away? Would they do it?

What it meant, if only the dash for freedom succeeded!

Not merely escape from all the irksome imprisonment, but an escape whilst there was yet time, perhaps, to convey the warning to Carlotta's father!

That was what the Morcovians were realising just as keenly as Carlotta herself was.

Do it? They must do it—they must succeed! Somehow it was going to seem a deep disgrace to them all, a slur upon Morcove School itself,



THEIR GOAL IN SIGHT!

Carlotta was smiling proudly as Betty pointed out the city. "It is the capital of San Fernando!" she exclaimed. "The city where my father governs this country. And when we reach there, all will be well."

if their own daring did not succeed in spoiling the Florissa plot.

On and on! Higher and higher the fugitives mounted, each girl hugging up to herself the little bundle that was of such vital value.

They were warm with the flight at present, but they could feel how keenly the night breeze was blowing at this high altitude. And food—they would need every scrap of the food that they had managed to save and bring with them.

Hark!

To stand still and listen for just a moment was to hear still those tell-tale sounds of a pursuit. If they, the escaped prisoners, were desperate, it was certain that Dolores and the rest were desperate, too!

"Well, they shan't catch us—they shan't!" Polly said fiercely through her set teeth. "They shan't even glimpse us!"

In the starlight the four Morcovians saw Carlotta standing in a rapt state for that one moment, wringing her hands at her breast. Her beautiful face, white as marble, had something of a spiritual look in it, as if she was praying.

"How can we fail—now!" she panted. "But we must go on at once. Shall I lead the way?"

"Yes, wather!"

"Queek, queek, yes! I would not be captivated by that Dolores for anything!" said Naomer.

Paula chuckled. Naomer had meant "captured" when she said "captivated," and the dusky one's misuse of the word was amusing.

All at once they received a bad scare.

They were still dashing on and on uphill, when they heard a loud rustling of foliage, a crashing of branches, close at hand on their left.

It made them wonder whether Dolores or one of the others had come by a shorter way up the mountain-side, and was thus likely to burst out upon them.

Whether it was one of the pursuers, or merely some wild animal startled by their proximity, the girls never know. Carlotta gestured to them to keep up with her, as she turned abruptly aside to follow a side track.

The going was as rough as ever after that, but it was not so steep. In places it was level, and there they laboured along at a desperate run.

Five minutes of this, and Carlotta again turned off to resume the uphill climb. There was no path now, and they had to scramble over boulders and brush through the mountain's patches of scrub as best they could.

It was a time for the girls to think of that snake they had seen, and to go in momentary dread of being struck at in the darkness. But the worst that happened was an encounter with a prickly cactus. Paula, for one, could have squealed with "distress" as her hands and ankles got such a continual stabbing and scratching.

For all that the plucky girls went through, however, there was this tremendous reward. Halting at last, to listen again, they heard no sounds now of the pursuit.

"Bai Jove," gasped Paula, "what a relief!"

"Don't let's halloo before we are out of the wood, though," said Polly, and Carlotta gave that girl a quick, approving glance, as if impressed by the wisdom in a saying that was new to her.

"An English proverb, Carlotta!"

"It is a wise one," murmured that girl. "We must indeed be cautious still."

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, I'm not for wunning

any wisks, geals. I'm all for wunning all the way to the place where your father is, Carlotta deah!"

"Ah, the city where my father is!" murmured the president's daughter. "You would have to run for a night and a day!"

"Is that so!" exclaimed Betty. "Phew!"

"Bai Jove!"

"It is many leagues from here, yes. Perhaps you are losing heart then."

"No, no!" the Morcovians instantly assured Carlotta, heartily enough, and she nodded gravely.

"Forgive me. I ought never to doubt your courage or your fortitude. You are wonderful!"

"What about yourself, dear?" smiled Polly.

"I? Ah, but I am my father's daughter. To me the intended revolution means a thousand times more than it does to you. It must be so! It is the fate of my own dear country that is at stake! But come then, my friends, for I know you are as eager as I am to prevent the revolution!"

And on again they went.

The moon rose whilst they were still toiling up the vast mountain-side. It came up over the peak of a neighbouring mountain, flooding the wild world with its silvery radiance. Amidst all the excitement of the desperate flight, the girls found themselves marvelling at the romantic grandeur of the moonlit scene.

Never once did they halt, however, to stand and gaze around. That night they meant to keep on and on until they were fit to drop.

Every step of the way was a step farther from the prison from which they had made the dash for freedom. It was a step, too, nearer the capital of San Fernando, where President Delona, the widower father of beautiful Carlotta Delona, was ruling the country so well and wisely, in utter ignorance of the blow that was now so imminent.

Midnight itself found the resolute girls at the very summit of the mountain. They could look behind them as they still hurried along, and far, far below was the moonlit ocean.

The sea!

Such a vast expanse of it was spread before them in the moonlight, and yet what a mere particle it was, compared with all the thousands of miles of trackless ocean that lay between them and the dear old homeland!

"You remember that bottle we dropped into the sea with the message in it?" Polly suddenly murmured. "I wonder—"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, supposing it has been plöcked up by now!"

Betty smiled dubiously.

"Well," she said cheerily next moment, "we shall know—when we get to Carlotta's father!"

And after that they tramped on again, Carlotta keeping to the track, such as it was, when the Morcovians might perhaps have lost it.

She told them that although she had never come this way before, she knew the geography of the country so well that she could feel sure of the right direction. Every one of the mountain peaks was known to her by name. The mountain which they themselves had climbed was called San Rosafel.

"Well, you just lead on," said Polly, "and we'll follow."

It was a good thing that their spirit was as obdurate as Carlotta's. The night was far advanced before she proposed a thorough rest. Other

girls might have started to complain, long before then, of the intense fatigue, and might have thought her unreasonable at going on so persistently. But the Morcovians were sharing to the full all her passionate desire to be in time. If only they could be in time to warn her father!

At this late hour of the night they were far down the inland side of the mountain, and around them were the same signs of cultivation that had been so in evidence at the place from which they had fled.

"We must be careful now," Carlotta whispered. "We cannot be far from a dwelling—some great man's country house most likely. This looks like the outskirts of a big estate."

Poor little Naomer suddenly yawned loudly, and then exclaimed with a brave smile:

"I very sorry! I not want to be tired!"
"You are all more tired than you will say," Carlotta murmured earnestly. "I myself feel I cannot go one more step, although I am so anxious—oh, so anxious! It must be that we rest now!"

So saying, she began to peer around in the moonlight, knowing that the girls were desirous that she should decide upon what seemed the safest place. For a minute she left them; to prow into a sort of thicket that lay beside the rough track. If they were to rest, they might as well rest thoroughly, by spreading their blankets somewhere and getting a snatch of sleep. And so the Morcovians left it to her to seek out the best spot.

She had come stealing back to them, as cautiously as ever, when something happened to fetch the girls' hearts into their mouths.

It was nothing else than the sound of a slow, perhaps cautious step, quite close at hand.

And the fugitives had believed themselves to be quite alone!

How thankful they were that in the last five minutes they had been keeping perfectly quiet! There was the panicky thought—who was this, lurking close at hand? Good gracious, had they come so far in the last few hours, only to find that Dolores and the rest of the pursuers had somehow circumvented them?

Impossible to rush away! In the moonlight the girls met one another's startled eyes, and were in immediate agreement as to what must be done.

Silently they laid down their bundles, silently they themselves crouched down in that jungle formed by giant grasses and tall palms.

It was a thrilling moment, for however well they might lie concealed, they were still so close to the path. And of a certainty the unknown prowler was coming this way. It might be only a rough but honest peasant fellow, sauntering in the moonlight—some peon, perhaps, attached to the estate. But what if it was someone belonging to the mountain villa from which the girls had fled!

They held their breath as they crouched amidst the sheltering undergrowth. In any case, they felt they must not be discovered—that it would mean utter disaster. Something urged them to be on guard like this.

And well for them that they had this instinctive feeling of alarm.

A few seconds more, and the person from whom they were hiding was going slowly by them on the path, walking with a slow, musing step. The brilliant light from the moon shone upon the solitary figure—a woman's.

She paused suddenly to look this way and that—

not as if she was suspecting the lurking presence of other people, but more as if she was waiting about for someone. And as she paused, and the moonlight shone brighter than ever upon her clear-cut features, every one of the concealed girls knew her in a flash.

It was Madame Florissa, and no other!

Critical Hours.

MADAME FLORISSA—here! No need to say how rapidly the girls' hearts were pounding now.

Almost within touching distance of them was the very woman to whom they owed all their recent hardships and misfortune—the mother of Dolores Florissa, and the wife of the very man who was engineering the wicked revolution!

Mercifully, she did not glimpse the crouching girls or hear their suppressed breathing. She walked on again, but only for a step or so. Then she picked up a sound suddenly, and so did the girls—the sound of someone coming up the track on horseback.

For it was the click-clop of a horse's hoofs that had become faintly audible all at once.

Madame instantly turned back, walking quickly down the path, and in a few moments the girls felt that it was safe to start whispering.

"She was waiting about for some messenger," Polly breathed, "and he has come!"

"Not from the villa that we fled from?" whispered Betty. "Impossible, surely? What do you say, Carlotta?"

"As you say—impossible," was that girl's tremulous response. "He has come from quite the opposite direction!"

"From the city, perhaps?"
"It is quite likely—yes," said the president's daughter. "And now, I wonder—"
She paused. "If he has brought news for Madame Florissa, perhaps I can find out—"

"Oh, but be careful!" Betty implored, for Carlotta was softly rising to her feet. "Take care!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove—"
"Trust me," Carlotta spoke down to them, in a guarded tone. "I will do nothing to imperil you, my friends."

"It isn't that, Carlotta," Polly answered quickly. "But—"

"I understand! Wait, though—wait here!"

And she was gone.
Never would Betty & Co. forget the anxious time that followed.

Soon the rider on horseback must have encountered Madame Florissa on the steep track, for the beat of hoofs ceased. From then onwards they expected at any moment to hear a sudden outcry that would tell them that Carlotta, in her desperate eagerness to hear what passed, had betrayed herself.

"My gracious, if that gal does get caught!" breathed Paula. "And yet—"

"And yet it was so fine of her to take the risk!" Polly agreed softly, with a nod. "Poor Carlotta! I never look into her eyes but what I feel a sort of pang of pity stab me!"

"She ees a—how you-call-it?—a brick!" exclaimed Naomer guardedly. "And I love her just as much as I detest that Dolores!"

"If I thought that the Dolores' party was going to rule this country, I should feel just about broken-hearted," said Betty tensely. "I say, girls, we simply must manage, you know!"

"To warn Carlotta's father in time?" returned Polly. "Rather!"

"Bai Jove, it will be the ruin of this country if we don't!" sighed Paula. "They are a lot of unscrupulous people, those Flowissas. That a wick man should want to snatch the weins of government, just because he is wick—it makes me furious!"

"He should be put in ze prison," Naomer said fiercely, "and all his money taken from him!"

"Yes, wather! Haw, haw, haw!"

"Sh!"

Paula, too amused by Naomer's quaint way of expressing her disgust for Senor Don Florissa, had given a chuckle. Reminded of the need for silence, she instantly caught her breath in dismay, and all four girls were silent after that, listening.

Not a sound did they hear for several minutes. Then suddenly there was the patter of hoofs, as the horse was walked away from where, lower down the path, some conclave had been taking place.

It was yet another five minutes after this before Carlotta startled all her chums by suddenly appearing before them in the moonlight.

She was very agitated. By laying a finger to her lip she warned the girls to be very cautious still. Then, as they silently got on to their feet and gathered around her, she spoke in a tense whisper.

"It has been wonderful! I crept to where the messenger on horseback was standing to talk with madame. He had certain letters for her from the city, but also he had a lot to tell her, and she was very eager—she made him say it at once."

"You listened—you managed to hear?" Betty and Polly exclaimed together.

"Every word!" was Carlotta's excited answer. "And now I know that we are close to a certain grand house where all the conspirators meet at different times."

"Bai Jove!"

"It is a much larger house than the villa we escaped from, and it is so much nearer the city," Carlotta spoke on. "Oh, my friends, just think! If only we can get to my father in time, then perhaps he could have this place surrounded—"

"And then all the plotters would be captivated, hurrah!" Naomer broke out, cheering under her breath.

"Captured, Naomer means," smiled Polly. "Yes, Carlotta, this is getting more thrilling than ever. Just fancy, if only we could—but we must—we must!"

"We will!" was Betty's vehement rejoinder. "I feel I could go on again now—tramp and tramp—"

"Until we dwop, bai Jové! Yes, wather!" Paula beamed.

"It all depends upon what we girls can do, that's certain," Betty continued. "The message in the bottle can't have been found."

"Alas, no," sighed Carlotta, "or I would have heard them talking of it as a disaster to their plans. As you say, it is for us to save the country by warning my father in time. If we fail, then—"

She said the rest by dropping her head and shrugging her shoulders in a most pathetic manner.

"But it must be that we rest now," she insisted gravely. "A little sleep in the fresh air of these mountains, and I know how strong and

hopeful we shall all feel once more. Come then, let us spread our blankets at once!"

Nor was it ten minutes later before all the worn-out girls were lying at ease in a certain spot that Carlotta had previously decided would be quite safe, not only from "the enemy," but from such perils as wild beasts and snakes.

They did not think it necessary to take turns at keeping watch, such a safe ambush had they found. It was certain that they would be sleeping lightly, and some instinct would warn them, even whilst they slept, of approaching danger.

"And as for the risk of sleeping too long—the dawn will wake us," Carlotta predicted, with calm conviction. "We should not go on again before daylight, for now we must see this place by day, so as to know it again."

"When we have warned your father, yes," Naomer spoke softly, as she curled herself up for sleep in her blanket. "And when the soldiers are coming to surround the house, and make madame and all of zem prisoners! So good-night!" she added.

They closed their weary eyes upon a jungle-like world upon which the moon was setting. It grew very dark again, very cold, too, whilst the five fugitives slumbered there amidst the trees that clad the wild mountain-side. All was deadly quiet during this last hour or so before the dawn, when the stars were flashing with a frosty brilliance.

Then swiftly the new day drew on. Rapidly the stars went out in the brightening, cloudless sky. As the sun rose, wonderful rosy colours suffused the romantic scene. A twittering of birds began. Yet all the girls slept on—and what wonder, either, after the exhausting night that theirs had been!

The first to awaken was Carlotta. Silently she threw aside the blanket that had wrapped her round and rose, to stand for a full minute gazing down upon her still sleeping companions.

Then she moved a step or two apart from them, and stood looking around her, taking in the beauty of the scene in this golden light of the tropic dawn.

"My country, how beautiful it is!" she said under her breath to herself. "And to think that if we fail, if we are not in time with warning, it is a country that the Florissas will rule!"

She heaved a sigh, and then stepped back to the other girls and very gently roused them.

"May I wake you now, Betty?" was her tender way of excusing the rousing touch. "Polly—Naomer—Paula, you do not think me unkind because I have ended your sleep?"

"Eh, what? Why, it's morning!" was Polly's amazed utterance, as she sat up and rubbed her eyes.

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, geals, and I was dweaming, too, such a wipping dweam! We were all back at Morcove School, bai Jove, having such gwand times!"

"Ah," murmured Betty, with a far-away look in her eyes, "Morcove School! I wonder what they are thinking about it all just at present? Madge Minden, Tess Trelawney, and all the rest of our chums—I wonder if they have the least idea of what has really been happening to us?"

What were they making of it all by this time at Morcove School? What could they make of it, when there had been no news of the missing girls

ever since they had been spirited away by Madame Florissa?

This same sunny morning that found the girls, in the wilds of San Fernando, filled with the desperate hope of being in time to warn Carlotta's father—it was a sunny morning at Morcove that found Madge and Tess and a few others doing just what they had done so anxiously every morning since their dear chums became lost to them.

Hours previously to this, when it was still only breakfast-time at Morcove, Madge and Tess had run out on to the school drive to await the arrival of the boy with the early papers.

Within a few minutes of rising from their beds, the girls had inquired if there was any news by telephone or telegram. None! No news, either, when the post had come in. Now it only remained for them to scan the morning paper, on the chance of finding some little item of news that might appear to have some bearing upon the mystery.

Success or Failure—Which?

THE wild, mountainous tract of tropical country had begun to feel the roasting heat of the morning sun when, past the spot where the fugitive girls had rested in the night, there came a solitary figure, on foot.

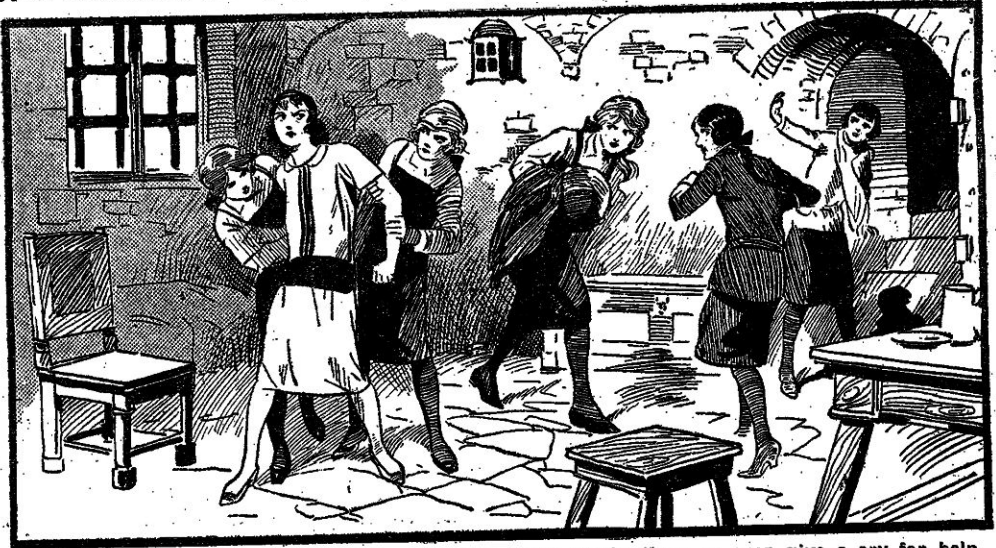
It was Dolores Florissa!

Her appearance was such as would have given anybody a shock to see.

She looked wild with suspense, and simply dead beat after wanderings that had gone on all through the night. The shoes that encased her shapely feet were literally worn to bits.

Mechanically, as if she had been doing the same thing ever since she started in pursuit of the escaped girls, she was now glancing this way and that as she flogged along. Her harassed look proclaimed the thought that was distracting her:

"Where are they? What is my mother going to say?"



THE TABLES TURNED! Before Dolores could evade them or even give a cry for help, Betty and Polly pounced upon her, taking her completely by surprise. The others hastened toward the door of the room in which they were imprisoned. Now they must make their escape!

The newsboy rode up on his bicycle, and from him the anxious girls secured a newspaper. Hastily Madge opened it out, with Tess and other girls gathering around, many of them peering over Madge's shoulders to scan the columns with her.

"Well, what?" clamoured others tensely. "Can you see anything—anything that has to do with San Fernando? Anything about the yacht that took Betty and the rest away?"

"Nothing!"

Madge handed on the paper at last, and drifted away with Tess and Helen. No news again—none! And how strange that was!

The bell rang for first lessons presently. Madge and the rest trooped into the class-rooms, and the school's routine began for another day. And all the time the girls of Morcove School must still wonder helplessly, why—why had Betty & Co. been carried off like that, and where—oh, where, were those girls to-day?

Dolores dragged wearily past that spot where the girls had lain themselves down in the moonlight. Now it was the middle of the morning, and the waving palms were a merciful shelter from the scorching heat as the panic-stricken girl continued for a little way down the mountain track, then turned aside into the grounds of a palatial white house.

The place looked lifeless from outside. But Dolores knew that it simply teemed with life within. For this was the headquarters of the party of whom her scheming father was the chief.

Lucky for her, perhaps, that she had not her father to face, with the calamitous news that she was bringing! It was going to be bad enough having to tell her mother. So the girl was saying to herself dejectedly, and so it proved.

Within a minute of her being admitted to the vast hillside residence by one of the numerous native servants, Dolores was alone with her mother in the latter's boudoir. It was a grand

room on the first floor, with a balcony that was hung with reed sunblinds.

Madame Florissa herself was looking weary when Dolores came in, to find her sitting about in a low chair in a state of undress. Coffee had been served to the lady, but it was being left untasted on the tray.

That weariness, however—it gave place to the most excitable animation the instant Dolores had said the first words accounting for her sudden appearance.

Springing to her feet, the mother gazed wildly at her daughter, panting anxiously:

"What! Escaped—you tell me they have escaped? Dolores, my heavens, how could you let them get away? Oh—"

"Mother, it is no use blaming me!"

"Ah, so you say!" fumed Madame Florissa, beating her hands together. "But there must have been carelessness. Either you or Marcilla and the other servant—between the lot of you—"

She took a furious turn about the room, her light robes flowing gracefully.

"We were keeping them prisoners because they had it in their power to warn Carlotta's father. And now, that is what they will do. They will make for the city; they will tell him all they know—"

"Yes, but—"

"Ah, don't talk to me! This that has happened may mean the ruin of everything. And remember, Dolores, if the plot is frustrated by those girls, your father will be left penniless as well as being cast into prison. All the money paid away for the revolution will be wasted; the rest will be confiscated. You should have guarded those girls—"

"I did—I did!"

"You have failed!" was the mother's withering comment.

"If you will let me explain, mother—"

"Too late! Explanations will do no good now," madame said bitterly. "No! But what must be done is this: The girls are at large, but there may yet be time to round them up!"

She crossed swiftly to a bell, and tinkled it.

"Maretta," she said to the woman attendant who appeared, "tell Carlos that in five minutes I will be down to see him in the inner courtyard. He must have every available servant—men and women alike—ready to send out upon an urgent search. Be quick, then—let him know!"

That, and madame's urging nod of the head, sent Maretta hurrying away, and then Dolores found her mother facing her again, in a wrought-up manner.

"To think that those wretched girls should be even now on their way to the capital! And Carlotta is one of them—Carlotta who knows the country so well! Oh, it is maddening! But they shall not escape us—no!"

And, as she passed towards an inner room, intending to make herself more presentable before going down to get the search-party off, she muttered harshly:

"We will get hold of them again somehow—we must! And then Carlotta, the British girls, and the other whom they speak of as a queen in her own country—they shall pay dearly for their daring, that is all!"

Next moment Dolores was left alone. Sighing with the weariness that was upon her, she drifted to one of the balcony windows, and stood dejectedly gazing out.

Suddenly the heavy-hearted girl gave a violent start, and bent forward to gaze in a certain direction with a keener interest.

Then she flashed about, and began to hunt round the spacious room for something. On a side table, at last, she found what she wanted—a pair of field-glasses.

Back to the balcony window she darted with these, and held them up to her eyes, bringing the binoculars to bear upon a distant mountain-side.

"Mother! Mother—quick!" she was calling out next instant. "Oh, quick—come and look!"

Madame Florissa came hurrying from the adjoining room, looking as vexed as ever.

"How, then, Dolores? What now?"

"Look! Take these glasses and look over there—to that mountain-side!" the daughter said excitedly. "Ah, but now they are lost to sight again."

"They?"

"The escaped girls, mother! I saw them—glimpsed them for an instant, working along a mountain path."

Madame Florissa spoke with a sudden, passionate composure that boded ill for the fugitive girls.

"Stay there, and watch still with the glasses, Dolores. I am going down to see Carlos and the rest. In five minutes twenty of our people, at least, will be going after those girls. And so—"

"They will not escape us after all, mother!"

It was midday, and now, as the schoolgirl fugitives came creeping cautiously along one of the numerous mule-tracks in which this mountainous world abounded, there opened out before their dazzled eyes a scene of thrilling grandeur.

Far below them, and still a great way off, set in a vast valley that was cupped by all the huge mountains, they beheld a big town whose buildings were all dazzlingly white. The atmosphere was amazingly clear—so different from the mistiness of our homeland climate—and as the Morcovians gazed they could easily discern the stately grandeur of some of the Government buildings and the cathedral.

Carlotta, standing by, was smiling proudly now as she pointed.

"The capital of San Fernando!" she murmured. "The city where my father governs all the country!"

"By Jove, geals, then we are as good as theah!"

"Ah, it seems nearer than it really is!" was Carlotta's grave comment on Paula's elated cry. "Anyhow," said Betty blithely, "we shall do it yet!"

"We do it, yes, yes!" was Naomer's excitable exclamation. "Queek, queek—let us go on again! If we were to be caught now it would be no jape!"

"It would be a disaster that would sadden me for the rest of my life, I know," was Carlotta's earnest rejoinder. "We are having good fortune, however, and something tells me we shall yet be in time!"

But would they—would they, after all, get through with the vital warning? Or were they, at this very moment, in peril of recapture by Madame Florissa's search-party?

(END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Success or failure? What does the future hold in store for the Morcove girls? Will they win through, or will the Florissas recapture them just when hope seems to be burning brightly in their hearts? You must not miss next week's enthralling long complete tale, which is entitled: "Thanks to the Morcovians!"