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Carolyn Judson Burnett

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE BLUE GRASS SEMINARY GIRLS ON
THE WATER ***



"I AM SORRY YOU INTERFERED WITH US," SAID THE MAN. "YOU'LL FIND
BEFORE LONG THAT YOU HAVE DONE WRONG." Page 57.

**The
Blue Grass Seminary Girls
On the Water**

OR

Exciting Adventures on a Summer Cruise Through the Panama Canal

BY CAROLYN JUDSON BURNETT

AUTHOR OF

“The Blue Grass Seminary Girls’ Vacation Adventures,”

“The Blue Grass Seminary Girls in the Mountains,”

“The Blue Grass Seminary
Girls’ Christmas Holidays.”

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THE BLUE GRASS SEMINARY GIRLS ON THE WATER

THE BLUE GRASS SEMINARY GIRLS ON THE WATER.

CHAPTER I.—PLANNING A TRIP.

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“Dad, we want to take a trip.”

The speaker was Shirley Willing, a typical Kentucky girl, slender of figure, vivacious of manner, and extremely pretty. With her father, she stood on the big, sunny front porch of the Willing farmhouse. As she again was about to address her father, a second young girl, who, it could be seen at a glance, was of about Shirley’s years, joined them.

This was Mabel Ashton, Shirley’s particular friend and life chum. Shirley greeted her with a smile, and Mr. Willing’s face also wrinkled pleasantly.

“I was just telling Dad that we want to take a trip this summer,” explained Shirley.

Mabel smiled.

“We have talked it all over,” she agreed, “and we just want to go some place.”

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“Where?” asked Mr. Willing briefly.

“Why, we—we—want to go to—to—where is it we want to go, Shirley?” asked Mabel in some confusion.

“We hadn’t decided on that yet, Dad,” laughed Shirley. “But we don’t want to stay here on this old farm all summer.”

“And what are you going to do with both your old Dads—leave them behind?” asked Mr. Willing seriously.

“We would like to have you go with us, Dad, but we know you won’t.”

“Why won’t we?”

“Well, I—we,—I—you never have gone with us.”

“It’s never too late to mend our ways,” declared her father dryly. “Perhaps we shall this time.”

Both girls clapped their hands, and scampered about the porch eagerly. At last Shirley stopped her antics, and standing directly before her father, took him by the coat with both hands.

“Do you mean it, Dad?” she asked.

Mr. Willing nodded.

“Yes. Ashton and I have decided that the next time you two youngsters go away from home we

are going with you. When you are by yourselves you get into too much mischief. Now where is it you want to go?"

"We haven't the slightest idea," was the reply.

Mr. Willing turned to Mabel.

"You call your father out here and we'll talk this thing over," he told her.

Mabel hastened to obey, and while she is searching for her father, we shall take time to introduce Shirley Willing and Mabel Ashton more fully to the reader.

The two girls had been friends ever since they could remember. Born and raised within a few doors of each other in the little town of Paris, Bourbon county, Kentucky, they had been inseparable companions from the time they were able to walk. This friendship was strengthened by the fact that their fathers had been bosom friends before them.

While the girls were still young, Shirley's mother died, and a short time later Mr. Willing purchased a large farm on the Bethlehem Pike, three miles from town. It was less than a year later that Mabel's mother passed into the great Beyond, and Mr. Ashton bought a farm adjoining that of his old friend. And here they had lived ever since.

When Shirley reached the age of fourteen, she conceived the idea of going away to school. Mabel announced that she was going with her. The objections of their fathers they soon overcame, and at last found themselves installed as pupils of the Bluegrass Seminary in Lexington. Here, because of their kind-heartedness and their many good deeds, they were soon among the most popular girls of the school.

Being athletically inclined, they were prominent in all branches of girls' sports. Their chief pleasure was horseback riding, in which art there were few more proficient. In fact, Shirley once had saved her father's fortune by carrying the Willing colors to victory in the great Kentucky Derby, as related in "The Bluegrass Seminary Girls on Vacation."

Naturally modest, they nevertheless had been made, soon after their arrival at the seminary, members of the Glee Club, for it was found that both possessed voices of rare excellence. During the second Christmas vacation, with other members of the Glee Club, they had toured the larger eastern cities, and through entertainments had lifted a large debt that threatened the end of the Seminary.

Both girls also possessed great courage, as they had proved on more than one occasion, and they had had many exciting adventures, one of the most important of which was the settling of a mountain feud in which they had faced great danger unflinchingly, as related in "The Bluegrass Seminary Girls on Motorcycles."

The summer vacation now had just begun. Shirley and Mabel had returned from Lexington two days before this story opens. At the Willing place they found Mr. Ashton, who had been very ill for some years, and had been making his home with his friend while his daughter was away at school.

But now Mr. Ashton was greatly improved, as Mabel found to her great joy. He was gaining daily and recovering lost weight and strength.

Mabel, searching for her father in response to Mr. Willing's request, found him in the sitting room. She went up to him and took him by the hand.

"Come on Dad," she said.

Mr. Ashton—"colonel" he was always called by his friends—allowed himself to be pulled toward the door.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Mr. Willing, Shirley and I want to have a talk with you," was the reply.

"H-mm-m," muttered the colonel, "must be something you two want. Have you succeeded in twisting Willing around your fingers?"

"The idea, Dad!" exclaimed Mabel. "You know neither Shirley nor I would think of trying to do a thing like that."

Colonel Ashton grinned.

"Wouldn't you?" he asked dryly. "I'm not so sure of that."

Father and daughter made their way to the front porch, where Shirley and her father were deep in conversation. Colonel Ashton dropped into a chair, and Mabel sat down at his feet.

"Ashton," said Mr. Willing, "these girls say they want to go some place. What do you think about it?"

Mr. Ashton was silent for some moments. He did not seem to be surprised.

"Where do they want to go?" he asked at length.

"We don't know, Dad," said Mabel. "We just want to take a trip."

"And," Shirley broke in, "my Dad says you and he might come with us."

Mr. Ashton looked at his old friend in surprise.

"You say that, Willing?" he demanded.

"Yes, Colonel, I did. Why not, eh? You and I are getting along in years and have earned a vacation. I'm agreeable, if you are."

"I don't know but you are right," was the slow reply. "I guess I am well enough to travel. I'll go."

Mabel jumped quickly to her feet, and hugged him. Shirley performed a similar operation on her father.

"Then," said Mr. Willing, disengaging himself at last, "the only question to be settled is, where shall we go?"

"This is a pretty sizeable country, Willing," said the colonel, "I guess there are plenty of places to go."

"I had thought of Atlantic City," said Mabel.

"And what had you thought of?" demanded Mr. Willing of Shirley.

"Well," was the reply, "there were two things I wanted to do, and I don't know which I shall choose."

"Let's hear them," said Mr. Willing.

"You know, Dad, ever since Mabel and I went away with the Glee Club, we have both been anxious to take a trip on one of the big ocean steamers. That is one thing I would like to do."

"And where would you like to go?"

"Any place. Across the ocean."

"Well, we won't do that," said Colonel Ashton. "This European war makes it too risky. We might be sunk by one of those German submarines."

"Right, Colonel," agreed Mr. Willing. He turned again to Shirley, "and the other thing you would like to do?" he questioned.

"I should like to go to the Panama Exposition in San Francisco."

Mabel jumped to her feet and clapped her hands.

"That's where I should like to go, too," she cried. "Why didn't I think of it before?"

Mr. Willing considered.

"Well," he said at length, "I don't know why we can't do both of those things, Shirley."

"But the ocean trip, Dad. Where would we go?"

"To San Francisco," was the reply.

"But, how—"

"You must remember that the Panama Canal is open to traffic, daughter," explained Mr. Willing. "We can take a steamer from New York direct to San Francisco. Besides, I should like to have a look at the canal, with its great locks and other interesting things. The construction of the canal is considered one of the greatest of all feats of engineering."

Colonel Ashton nodded his head emphatically.

"I should like to take that trip myself," he declared.

"Then we shall consider that matter settled," said Mr. Willing.

"And when can we start, dad?" asked Shirley eagerly.

"Well, we will not be able to leave here for a week or ten days. I have some business affairs that must be put in order before I can get away. Besides, you two girls will want clothes and things, and you can't get those in a minute."

"We'll go to town this afternoon and get some things," declared Mabel.

"All right," laughed Mr. Willing, "but just the same it will take you at least a week to get yourselves ready. Then I shall have to make arrangements for our passage, find out when we leave New York and attend to other details. It will take time."

"But we shall go as soon as possible, Dad?" asked Shirley.

"Yes," was the reply. "You may make sure of that. We shall go as soon as possible. Hello—who's that?"

The others gazed in the direction of his pointing finger. Through the pike gate, at that moment, came a solitary horseman.

"I wonder who he is?" exclaimed Shirley.

The horseman came closer.

Suddenly Shirley gave an exclamation of delight. She had recognized the visitor even at this distance, which was too great for the others to perceive his identity. Mabel looked at her chum in astonishment.

"Dick!" cried Shirley.

Now Mabel understood, and even Mr. Willing allowed a slight smile to steal across his face.

Shirley ran down the steps from the porch and hurried toward the distant yard gate. The girl and the horseman arrived at about the same time, and those on the porch saw the rider lift his cap and dismount. 12

Then he led the horse through the gate, closed it behind him and with the bridle in his hand continued his way to the house afoot, Shirley walking by his side.

"Dick!" cried Shirley again, as the rider dismounted at the gate upon sight of her. "What are you doing here? I am glad to see you."

"I was in Paris on a little business," replied the young man, "and I thought I wouldn't go away without paying my respects to you and your father."

At the house Mr. Willing greeted the young man warmly, for, from previous meetings, he had taken a liking to Dick.

Dick Stanley was a native of Cincinnati, O. He was without parents, and after having met Shirley under exciting circumstances, he had given up a rough set of companions and at length had obtained a place as office boy on one of the big Louisville newspapers. But Dick had not remained an office boy long, and he was now one of the most competent and best liked reporters on the paper.

He had been sent to Paris for a certain piece of news—"on a story," in his words, the words of the newspaper world—and he had just completed his work successfully. Therefore he had hired a horse and come to the Willing farm for a few words with his friends before going back to Louisville. 13

"I'm glad to see you, young man," said Mr. Willing in greeting. "It has been some time since we have had the pleasure of your company."

"Thank you, sir," was the reply. "I am always glad to be here."

He shook hands with Mr. Ashton and Mabel.

Now Shirley proceeded to tell him of the trip they were going to take, and Dick was greatly interested.

"I should like to see the canal," he said. "I have been reading quite a bit about it, and it is very interesting."

"You are right, young man," agreed Mr. Willing.

"It is one of the wonders of the world." He paused, struck by a sudden idea. Then he said slowly, looking squarely at Dick:

"How would you like to go with us?"

"I'd like it fine," declared Dick, with a smile. "I wish it could be done."

"Well, it can be done," said Mr. Willing quietly.

Dick, as well as Shirley and Mabel, looked at Mr. Willing in surprise.

"Dad!" exclaimed Shirley. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," was the reply. "I am going to take Dick with us." 14

Dick shook his head slowly.

"I appreciate your kindness, Mr. Willing," he said quietly, "but I cannot accept such generosity."

"Can't, eh?" blustered Mr. Willing, "and why not, I'd like to know. I am not in the habit of having my invitations refused, sir!"

Again Dick smiled.

"It is very kind of you to ask me," he said, "but I do not feel that I should accept. Of course, I have the money for the trip, but I do not feel I can afford to spend it. Besides, I could not leave the paper for so long a time."

"Couldn't leave the paper!" echoed Mr. Willing.

"I'll speak a few words to my friend Col. Harperson, the owner, and he will see that you are given an indefinite vacation."

"No, sir, thank you, I don't think it can be done."

"I'll tell you," said Mr. Willing, trying a new line, for he had made up his mind to have Dick accompany them, "you will be able to do some writing on the trip. The sights you will see should mean money to you. You should be able to write many interesting articles when you get back."

Dick apparently was impressed with this line of reasoning. And now Shirley added her voice to

the colonel's.

"Please, come, Dick?" she said.

"Well," said the young man after hesitating a long while, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If I can make arrangements to get off indefinitely, I'll go."

Shirley clapped her hands.

"I'm sure you can," she cried.

And Mr. Willing muttered to himself:

"I'll fix it with Harperson!"

The discussion of the trip now became general, and Dick was acquainted with the time they expected to depart.

"You will remain here over night, of course," said Mr. Willing.

"Thank you, sir, I shall be glad to."

"Then we'll put off our shopping till to-morrow, Mabel," said Shirley.

All day the three young people talked eagerly of the coming trip, and Shirley tried to get Dick to promise that he would go, whether he was able to get off or not. But this Dick would not do.

"If they agree to let me off, all right," was his decision.

They sat up and talked till late that night, but Mr. Willing finally put an end to this conversation.

"Shirley," he said severely, "are you going to keep that young man talking all night? How do you expect him to catch the early train in the morning?"

"Well, I would have gone any time he told me," pouted Shirley.

"I don't suppose he would have told you if you had kept him talking all night," replied Mr. Willing dryly.

Dick arose and bade the others good night. A few moments later Shirley and Mabel retired to their room, where they lay for a long time before sleep overcame them, so excited were they at the prospect of the great trip.

"I'm glad Dick is going," said Mabel, "but I don't suppose I am half as glad as you are."

"Why not?" demanded Shirley.

"Oh, just because," replied Mabel, laughing.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," declared Shirley.

"You don't? No, I guess you don't. Do you know, I'd give a whole lot if some nice boy like Dick would come all this way to see me."

"He came to see you as well as me," said Shirley.

"Oh no he didn't. If I had been the only girl here, Dick would not have been on hand to-day. Besides, if it wasn't for you I'm sure he wouldn't even think of taking the trip to San Francisco."

"But he wants to see something of the Panama Canal."

"My goodness! you didn't use to be so dense," exclaimed Mabel.

"Dense?" repeated Shirley. "What do you mean, Mabel?"

"That's right, keep it up," exclaimed Mabel. "I won't say anything more. Are you going into town to-morrow?"

"Yes, I thought we would go in as soon as Dick had gone."

"That suits me. We'll have to get a lot of things."

"I should say so. Why, I haven't a single decent thing to wear."

"We'll put in a good supply, so we won't have to buy anything while we are away. My! but won't it be a nice trip?"

"Won't it though. I can hardly wait for the time to come."

"Nor I. But let's get some sleep or we won't want to get up in the morning."

Both closed their eyes and tried to sleep. But they had too much on their minds to go to sleep immediately, and it was long minutes before drowsiness overcame them and they lost themselves, only to dream that they were sailing across the ocean.

The following morning they accompanied Dick to Wright's station, where he took a train for Lexington. There he would have to change for Louisville.

"Let us know as soon as possible?" called Shirley, as he climbed aboard.

"I will," replied Dick. "I'll write immediately I have learned one thing or the other."

The train moved away.

Shirley and Mabel returned to the house, where Mr. Willing was waiting for them with the automobile.

"Ashton and I have decided to do a little shopping on our own hook," he explained. "We want to spruce up a bit. Daughter, do you suppose there will be any nice-looking, middle-aged ladies aboard the boat? If so, why Ashton and I—"

"Dad!" interrupted Shirley.

"Well, all right. Of course if you object," said Mr. Willing.

All the rest of the day the girls put in shopping. Dresses and frocks for all occasions they bought, besides a couple of outing costumes.

"I don't know how long it takes to get to San Francisco from New York," said Shirley, "so we had best be prepared."

But when the day was over they found they had not completed their shopping, and would have to return again on the morrow.

Mr. Willing, during the day, transacted his business and found out the date of sailing from New York. Taking it for granted that Dick would accompany them, he purchased a ticket and made accommodations for him as well as the others.

"How long shall we be gone, Dad?" asked Shirley, as the automobile sped homeward.

"Well, let's see. This is the fourth of June. We shall leave New York on the fifteenth. I should say we would be back by the middle of August."

"And will we come back the same way?"

"No; we'll come back by rail. One way by boat will be enough. You'll have seen plenty of water by the time you reach San Francisco."

"I hope Dick decides to go with us," said Shirley.

"And so do I," declared Mabel.

"Oh, he'll go, all right," remarked Mr. Willing.

And the latter was right. Three days later Shirley stood before her father with an open letter in her hand.

"It's from Dick," she explained. "He says he is going with us."

Mr. Willing chuckled.

"I see Harperson is still a friend of mine," he muttered to himself.

CHAPTER III.—OFF FOR NEW YORK.

It was the morning of the twelfth of June that the party of five went early to Paris to catch the eight o'clock train for Cincinnati. Dick had arrived the night before, and in spite of the fact that they would have to be up very early in the morning, all sat up talking, for the young people were too excited to go to sleep.

All through the long hours of the night the girls tossed about, scarcely closing their eyes. They were up with the break of day, which was soon after four o'clock.

At last the time for departure came, and they jumped gaily into the large automobile which was to take them to town.

"What time shall we leave Cincinnati, sir?" Dick asked of Mr. Willing, as the train pulled out from the station.

"Twelve o'clock," was the reply. "We'll get there a little after eleven, which will give us time to get across town to the Pennsylvania station. I have made reservations on the New York train."

Nevertheless it lacked only twenty minutes of the noon hour when the train pulled into Cincinnati.

"Hurry girls," ordered Mr. Willing. "We have no time to lose. We can just about make it."

They dashed through the station and out the Third street entrance, where Mr. Willing immediately engaged two taxicabs.

"Pennsylvania Station!" he ordered, and they were off at a good gait.

Through the narrow streets congested with traffic they were forced to go more slowly, and Mr. Willing looked at his watch impatiently from time to time.

"Seven minutes!" he said, and they were still some distance from their destination, and then the first cab stopped to let a car pass in front of it.

"Hurry!" commanded Mr. Willing of his driver. "We haven't got all day to get there. Let the street cars do the waiting after this."

The chauffeur nodded and the cab leaped forward, scattering pedestrians right and left, darting in and out among other vehicles, avoiding a collision as though by a miracle. The second cab

came close behind.

At last the station was reached and all dismounted hurriedly. With Mr. Willing in the lead they ran through the station to the train shed. Here the conductor had just called "All aboard!"

Mr. Willing heard him, and urged the others on faster. They passed through the gate, Mr. Willing assisted the girls and Colonel Ashton up the steps, then climbed up himself. And as he did so, Shirley, who had turned to look at him, cried:

"Where's Dick?"

Mr. Willing looked around, then stood nonplussed. Dick was not here. The train began to move.

There came a shout from behind and a young man came dashing after the train. Shirley cried out in alarm. It was Dick.

The train had gathered headway now and was slipping along beneath the shed more rapidly. Dick sprinted, gained, clutched the handrail of the car and swung himself aboard just as the train gathered even greater speed.

He climbed to the platform, wiped the moisture from his brow, fanned himself vigorously and then smiled.

"Close call, that," he exclaimed.

"Young man," said Mr. Willing dryly, "hereafter let there be no loitering behind. You gave me a scare and I don't care for any more of the same."

"Daddy!" exclaimed Shirley. "I am sure Dick didn't do it intentionally."

"No, sir," agreed Dick. "As I followed after you I bumped into a lady and knocked her suitcase from her hand. It came open and the contents scattered about. For a moment I forgot all about the train and stopped to help her pick them up. Then I happened to remember we were late, and ran after you."

"Your gallantry is bound to get you in trouble if you are not careful," commented Mr. Willing.

They went inside.

Mr. Willing had engaged the two drawing rooms, one at either end of the car. Dick and the two older men were to occupy one and the two girls the other.

It was almost eight o'clock when the train pulled into Pittsburgh. They had just finished dinner, so Dick stepped off to look about for a few moments.

As he stood beside the steps of the Pullman, another man, probably several years his senior, approached and engaged him in conversation. He was an agreeable sort of a chap. He spoke English with the faintest of accents, however, and this Dick was not slow to notice.

It appeared that the man had a berth on the same car, and they climbed aboard together. In the smoking compartment was Mr. Willing, to whom Dick introduced the newcomer. Mr. Ashton came in a few moments later, and all sat talking.

The stranger, who introduced himself as Henry Bristow, made himself very agreeable and Mr. Willing took an instant liking to him.

During the course of the conversation, Dick chanced to mention that they would sail from New York for San Francisco on the fifteenth.

"On what ship?" demanded Bristow eagerly.

"*Yucatan*," was the reply.

"Is that so?" exclaimed the other. "I shall sail on the same vessel."

"For San Francisco?" asked Dick in surprise.

"That all depends," was the answer. "I shall only take passage as far as Colon. Whether I shall go further depends upon my—upon circumstances."

"We shall be glad to have you as a fellow passenger," declared Mr. Willing. "As you are going to be such, you must meet my daughter, and the daughter of the colonel here."

"I shall be pleased," was the reply.

He accompanied the others to the drawing room, where introductions followed.

Young Bristow conversed fluently upon many topics and the others were delighted with him. From his remarks it was gathered that he had traveled considerably.

He spoke familiarly of New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and apparently had a personal knowledge of London, Paris, Berlin and other European cities. He was equally as well acquainted with the larger southern cities.

The two girls were eager listeners to the tales of his travels, and even Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton gave an attentive ear to these stories.

"And where do you live?" asked Mr. Willing suddenly. "What did you say your business is?"

The young man's face suddenly turned red.

"My home is in New York," he replied quietly, "and as for my business, I fear that must remain a

secret for the present.”

“Daddy, you shouldn’t be so inquisitive,” said Shirley with a smile.

“I’m sure I’m sorry,” apologized her father. “I didn’t mean—”

“Say no more about it,” replied the young man with a pleasant smile. “For certain reasons, I am not now able to reveal the nature of my business.”

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Dick had been thinking rapidly. Suspicions had entered his head, and he could not shake them off. And still he knew that they would sound foolish to another.

“I’ll keep them to myself,” he said, “but I’ll keep an eye open.”

The train was just pulling into North Philadelphia when Shirley and Mabel opened their eyes the next morning. Mabel glanced at her watch.

“Seven o’clock,” she exclaimed. “We’ll have to hurry, Shirley. You know these fast trains don’t take long to reach New York from here. Besides, we want to get breakfast on the train.”

They dressed as rapidly as possible, and emerged from their drawing room just in time to see young Bristow stride down the aisle.

He gave them a cheery “good morning” and turned as Mr. Willing came up.

“I hope you will join us at breakfast, sir,” said Mr. Willing.

The young man accepted, and as Dick and Colonel Ashton appeared at this moment, all made their way to the diner together.

“Where shall you stay in New York, sir?” asked Bristow of Mr. Willing.

“At the McAlpin,” was the reply. “We shall spend the two days looking about the city, going aboard the *Yucatan* a couple of hours before time for her departure.”

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Bristow turned to Dick.

“I shall look you up either this afternoon or to-morrow, and we’ll take a stroll,” he said.

“I’ll be glad to walk with you,” Dick replied.

Breakfast over, they returned to the Pullman, where they began to get their things together, for they were close to New York.

Half an hour later the train plunged into the tunnel under the Hudson river. Mr. Willing, who had been to New York before, explained how the tunnel had been constructed and gave other interesting information.

“You wouldn’t think we were in a tunnel,” exclaimed Shirley. “There is no smoke.”

“Electric engine,” replied Mr. Willing.

“And we go right under the river?”

“Yes.”

“My goodness!” exclaimed Mabel. “Just to think that there is a river running right over the top of us. Suppose it would come through.”

Mr. Willing smiled.

“It won’t,” he said quietly.

And now the porter came for their baggage, and carried it to the vestibule. The conductor poked his head in the door and called out:

“New York!”

“Here we are,” exclaimed Shirley eagerly. “The city I have always wanted to see. The greatest city in the world!”

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CHAPTER IV.—DICK HAS AN ADVENTURE.

The two days spent in New York City were days of wonder to Shirley, Mabel and Dick. They were on the go every minute of the time, sightseeing. From one end of the city to the other they travelled with wide-open eyes.

The great skyscrapers impressed them, perhaps, more than any one other thing, though they saw much to amaze them; and next to the great buildings they were impressed by the crowds.

Crowds they had seen in some of the other large cities, but never anything like this.

They took a trip to Coney Island on the second day, and the girls were for going back again that night. Mr. Willing agreed, and they were about to fare forth from the hotel, when young Bristow was announced.

“I’ve come to take you for that promised stroll,” he told Dick.

Dick looked at the others inquiringly.

"You go with him," nodded Colonel Ashton, "the rest of us can get along without you for one evening."

"If I'm breaking up a party—" began Bristow.

"Never mind," said the colonel with a wave of his hand. "You two young fellows run along. We don't need you."

"All right, sir," agreed Dick.

Personally he was glad to have a chance to look about the town a little with one of his own age. The others took their departure, and soon Bristow and Dick also left the hotel.

"I would have looked you up sooner but I have been terribly busy," explained Bristow. "I have had important matters to attend to, and this is the first time I have been at liberty. Where would you like to go?"

"Any place you say," said Dick with a smile. "You know more about this place than I do."

"I guess you're right," was the smiling response, "we'll wander up Broadway aways and watch the theater crowds."

They did so, and continued to stroll about for an hour.

Gradually the crowd thinned out, although there were many pedestrians on the street. As they stood for a moment in front of the Herald building on Herald square, Dick, chancing to turn suddenly, became conscious of a pair of eyes looking steadily at his companion. He called the other's attention to it, and as the latter glanced about the man turned and moved off.

Dick thought no more of the matter until several blocks further along he perceived the same figure slinking furtively after them.

"That man is following us," he said to Bristow.

The face of the latter grew hard.

"We'll see," he said.

At that moment they were passing Forty-second Street, and Bristow swung sharply around the corner. Dick followed him. They walked several blocks, until they stood beneath the tracks of the Sixth Avenue elevated. Here Bristow again turned sharply, and drew up in a doorway. He stopped as Dick came up beside him.

A moment later the figure of the man Dick believed was following them came around the corner. The man's hat was pulled over his eyes, and he did not glance up as he passed the doorway. Bristow and Dick turned and doubled back around the corner.

"He was after us, all right," said Bristow with a laugh, "but I guess we have given him the slip."

But in this he was mistaken.

"I wonder what on earth we are being followed for?" muttered Dick to himself, as they turned down Broadway. "Something queer about this fellow Bristow. That man is not following us for nothing."

Several hours later they stopped in a little restaurant for a bite to eat, "after which I'll take you home," said Bristow.

The restaurant was crowded, and a little while later the waiter seated another man at their table. Dick gave him a quick glance and then stifled an exclamation of surprise.

The newcomer was the same man who had followed them so recently.

Dick leaned over and whispered to Bristow.

"So?" said Bristow. "We'll see what he wants."

He looked the man squarely in the eyes and demanded:

"What are you following me for?"

The man looked at him and smiled pleasantly.

"I just want to keep you in sight," he replied.

"Why?"

"You know, I guess. You don't want me to speak right out, do you?"

"Well, no," replied Bristow, "but I'll thank you to follow me no longer."

"Sorry," was the reply, "but I am afraid I shall have to."

"I warn you," said Bristow quietly, "to let me alone. Is that plain enough?"

"Perfectly plain," was the reply. "I'm sorry I can't accommodate you."

He resumed his eating.

Dick and Bristow finished their meal first and rose to go. The other man waited until they were at the door, then picked up his check and followed them. And so when they passed out, he was right behind them once more.

"I don't like this idea of being followed," said Dick. "What's he want, anyhow?"

"We'll get rid of him," replied Bristow, absolutely ignoring Dick's second question.

He turned down a side street, and they walked for three or four blocks, at length coming to a rather darker street. Here Bristow slipped around the corner and motioned Dick to silence.

The footsteps of their pursuer came to their ears. He drew nearer. Bristow advanced close to the edge of the building.

"What are you going to do?" asked Dick.

"You'll see," was the brief response.

As the man came into view, Bristow suddenly struck out with his right fist, and the man toppled over.

Bristow turned to Dick.

"Come!" he said quietly.

With one look at the fallen man Dick obeyed, and they were soon beyond pursuit.

Dick had been taken by surprise by the suddenness of Bristow's attack. Try as he would he could see no reason for it. He, as well as Bristow, objected to being followed, but Dick would not have taken such measures to elude his pursuer.

He followed his companion without a word, however, and soon they were back at the hotel.

The others had not returned, but Bristow sat down, announcing that he had something important to say to Mr. Willing when the latter did get back.

Half an hour later, Colonel Ashton, Mr. Willing and the two girls came in.

"Well, I see you beat us," exclaimed Mr. Willing. "Have a good time?"

"Yes, sir," replied Dick.

"Mr. Willing," said Bristow, "I have something of importance to say to you."

"All right, sir," came the answer, "out with it."

"Will you all promise to repeat nothing of what I may say?"

"Why all this air of secrecy?" demanded Mr. Willing.

"That I cannot tell you, sir."

"Of course we'll promise, Mr. Bristow," declared Shirley. "Surely, Dad, there is no reason why we should tell any one anything."

Mr. Willing nodded.

"I will promise for myself and the others," he said.

"Very well, sir. What I would say is this: Take my advice, and under no circumstances sail on the *Yucatan* to-morrow!"

Mr. Willing gazed at the young man in perfect amazement, as did the others in the room. Mr. Willing was the first to regain his composure.

"Why?" he asked quietly.

"I can't go into explanations," replied the young man hurriedly; "all I can do is warn you that it is not safe."

"And why isn't it safe?" asked Shirley, now taking a hand in the conversation.

"That I cannot tell you, either. But you all know that a state of war exists between the countries of Europe."

"What has that to do with us?" asked Shirley.

"You are asking me hard questions," said Bristow, "and I cannot answer as I would like to. Let it be enough that there is danger because of it. And if there should even be no danger aboard the *Yucatan*, it will exist in Colon."

"In Colon?"

"Yes. One week from to-day Colon will no longer be safe!"

"It is my belief you are out of your head, young man," declared Mr. Willing grimly.

Bristow shook his head positively.

"I am telling you facts," he declared. "I can't say any more."

"And why won't we be safe aboard the *Yucatan*?" demanded Shirley. "The ship isn't going to sink, is it?"

"No, but—"

"No European country will dare to molest it," declared Dick, "and I can see no reason why there should be danger at Colon."

"I was afraid I couldn't convince you," said Bristow. "However, I have done my best. Good night." He bowed and left the room.

"What do you suppose he is talking about, Dad?" asked Shirley.

"I don't know," was the reply, "and I don't care."

"All buncombe," agreed Colonel Ashton.

"Well, I don't care what it is," exclaimed Shirley. "We have set our hearts on this trip, and we are going to take it. That's all there is about that."

"Good for you, Shirley," agreed Mabel.

Dick Stanley was the only member of the party who did not speak. He sat quietly in his chair, thinking.

CHAPTER V.—ABOARD THE YUCATAN.

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The *Yucatan*, upon leaving New York, did not head straight for Colon. Her route took her down the coast, where she would make several stops. The first would be at Savannah, then Jacksonville, and the third, and last before touching at Colon, would be Havana, Cuba.

Mr. Willing had selected this vessel for the simple reason that it did not put in at these southern ports, for he wished to give the girls an opportunity of seeing as much as possible on the journey. After rounding into the Pacific, following her passage of the Panama Canal, the vessel was scheduled to put in at the seaports of several of the Central American republics and one or two Mexican ports.

Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton, Dick and the two girls stood forward on the gallery deck of the great ship as she got under way and slowly backed out of her slip into the North River.

It was early afternoon, the sun shone brightly and it was very warm. All day the city had sweltered beneath the terrible heat, but as the ship gradually gathered headway a breeze sprang up and blew refreshingly across the deck.

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"This is something like it," declared Mr. Willing, removing his yachting cap and passing his handkerchief over his forehead.

The awnings were stretched, and all took the steamer chairs they had secured. These they pulled close to the rail, and then gazed off across the water.

Directly the Statue of Liberty came into view. The girls gazed at it curiously as they passed and headed for the open sea.

Gradually the lofty spires of the great buildings faded from view, and then the Statue of Liberty disappeared. To starboard could be seen the distant shore of New Jersey, and to port nothing but the broad expanse of the Atlantic.

Darkness descended and with it a cooler breeze.

"Time to eat," said Mr. Willing.

They made their way to the dining room below, where they were seated at the captain's table. The supper was excellent, far beyond Shirley's expectations. The meal over they returned on deck.

Mr. Willing had secured a suite of four rooms well forward on the promenade deck, and after enjoying the cooling breeze for some time, all made their way there.

The strains of a band now floated to them from the main salon. They made their way out. Then the three young people started on a tour of the ship. They took in everything with breathless interest.

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"This is indeed a floating palace," commented Shirley.

"Isn't it though," agreed Mabel.

Dick was no less enthusiastic in his praise.

After a stroll about they rejoined the two elder men in the salon. Then it was that Shirley bethought herself of the fact that young Bristow had said he would be aboard.

"I haven't seen anything of him," she said.

Neither had the others.

"Perhaps he missed the boat," said Mabel.

"I'll have a look at the passenger list," said Dick.

He did so, and there he saw "Henry Bristow, New York," and the number of his stateroom. He went up and knocked on the door.

"Come in," called a voice.

Dick entered the room, then started back in surprise.

Bristow lay propped up in bed, reading. Around his head was a white bandage. Dick hastened to his side.

"Why, what is the matter?" he exclaimed.

"Accident," replied Bristow, with a slight smile, and volunteered no further information.

Dick did not press him for an explanation. After some little talk, in the course of which Bristow said he did not require anything and announced that he would be perfectly fit on the morrow, Dick took his leave and rejoined the others.

"And how was he hurt?" asked Mr. Willing, after Dick had reported what he had learned.

"He didn't say and I didn't ask him," he replied. "But I am sure there is something strange about it, sir."

"I am beginning to think that myself," agreed Colonel Ashton. "He's a queer one. Now, I wonder why he warned us not to sail on this ship?"

"It's too deep for me," declared Dick.

"I have it," exclaimed Shirley suddenly. "Perhaps he is an agent of one of the foreign countries, England or Germany."

Dick looked at the girl in unfeigned surprise.

"What makes you think that?" he asked.

"I don't know. I don't really believe it; I just happened to think of it. Wouldn't it be fun if he was?"

"Well, that all depends," replied Dick. "It depends on what his business aboard would be."

"But what could it be in such a case?" questioned Mabel.

"Well, it might be lots of things. But I don't put any stock in such an explanation."

"Nor I," declared Mr. Willing. "It's my belief the young man is in trouble of some kind, and I'd like to help him out if I could. I like him."

"And so do I," agreed Mabel.

"To tell the truth, I don't know whether I do or not," said Dick slowly. "He's agreeable, and all that; but there is something very peculiar about him. I am sure there is something wrong."

"If I get a good chance, I shall ask him," declared Mabel.

"You'll have about the same luck Dad did when he asked him his business," retorted Shirley, "and that wasn't much."

"Take my advice, all of you, and let him alone," remarked Colonel Ashton.

"That is good advice, Ashton," declared Mr. Willing. "But come, it's bedtime and we shall want to be about early in the morning to enjoy some of this ocean breeze."

An hour later all were asleep.

Had they been about they would have seen a strange sight.

On the upper deck aft, as the ship's bell chimed midnight, three men sat in deep conversation. Two of them were strangers, but the third Shirley or any of her party would immediately have recognized as Henry Bristow.

And there would also have been something else noticeable. The bandage had been removed from his head, nor was there wound nor swelling to show why it should have been tied up in the first place.

The three men talked for perhaps fifteen minutes in low whispers and then parted, going their several ways.

As he had promised, Bristow was about the ship the following morning, but his head was once more bandaged. Mabel, true to her words of the night before, seized the first opportunity and asked him how he had been injured.

"That," was the quiet reply, "I cannot say."

Mabel was highly indignant, and took herself off, leaving the young man smiling after her. Then he shrugged his shoulders and walked away.

All morning the sun shone warm and bright, though it was not too hot for comfort. It was shortly after noon when the passengers were treated to an interesting sight.

Some distance to port came the smoke of another ship, and as it drew nearer an air of subdued excitement became apparent on the *Yucatan*.

"Armed cruiser off the port bow, sir!" came the hail from the lookout.

All rushed toward the rail, and stood looking at the large ship of war, as she bore down toward them. There was no flag at her masthead, and so the passengers were unable to determine her nationality.

"What can she be?" exclaimed Shirley.

"British, I suppose," was Dick's answer. "She'll show her colors presently, I guess."

Dick was right. Five minutes later the British ensign was run up the masthead and fluttered in the breeze. 41

A great cheer broke from most of the passengers aboard the *Yucatan*. Shirley and Mabel joined in it.

At that moment Dick caught sight of the face of Bristow, who stood near. His lips were compressed, and he scowled fiercely.

"He's no Englishman, that's sure," muttered the young man to himself.

Suddenly, from across the water, came the sound of a big gun, and a solid shot struck the water dead ahead of the *Yucatan*.

Immediately her engines were stopped, and the passenger steamer came to a stop.

Instantly wild alarm spread over the ship.

"We've been fired on," cried Shirley. "Will they sink us?"

Dick smiled.

"Oh, I guess not," he replied. "That's just a signal to heave-to and give an account of ourselves."

"But what business have they stopping an American ship?" exclaimed Shirley.

"It is permissible under the laws of war," explained Dick. "You see, the *Yucatan* might be an enemy flying the American flag. As soon as they find out we are all right, they will allow us to proceed." 42

"And would we have to stop just the same for a German?"

"Of course."

"I wouldn't like that," declared Shirley. "I don't mind the English. My grandmother was English, you know."

"Well, I guess my sympathies are a little that way, too," agreed Dick.

The wireless now began to sputter as messages were exchanged between the *Yucatan* and the British cruiser. The latter had approached close enough to make out the *Yucatan*, and now signalled her to proceed on her course.

As the big ship of war turned and made off, a second ovation was given her by the passengers. Men waved their hats and women their handkerchiefs.

Suddenly Shirley seized Dick by the arm, and pointed, whispering:

"Look at that!"

Far aft, Henry Bristow gazed across the water at the British cruiser, and Shirley had perceived that there was hate in his eyes. Even as Dick looked in the direction Shirley pointed, Bristow raised a fist and shook it fiercely at the receding war vessel, while strange words issued from between his lips.

CHAPTER VI.—SHIRLEY LENDS AID. 43

"Look, Mabel, did you see that woman steal that bolt of silk?"

It was Shirley who spoke. They stood among the crowd that thronged the largest department store in Savannah, Ga. The *Yucatan* had put into Savannah early that morning, and learning that the vessel would not get under way again until late in the afternoon, Shirley and Mabel had gone uptown to purchase a few souvenirs of the Georgia city.

It was just after entering the store that Shirley's attention was attracted by the peculiar actions of a young woman who darted somewhat furtively from one counter to another. While the attention of the clerks was given to customers, Shirley had seen the woman slip a bolt of expensive silk from the counter and hide it under a long flowing cape, which she wore in spite of the heat.

Mabel shook her head negatively in response to Shirley's question.

"Which one?" she asked.

Shirley pointed to the figure of the woman who was now gazing at a pretty array of expensive laces. Both girls watched her carefully; and directly, as the crowd about her became more dense, they saw her hand go stealthily forth and take several small bolts of the high-priced material. 44

"Well what do you think of that?" demanded Mabel. "I have heard of such things, but I never expected to see it. What shall we do?"

"Nothing," replied Shirley decidedly. "It's none of our business."

"But won't the poor clerks have to make good the loss?"

"I don't know about that. But if we get mixed up in it we are likely to gain too much notoriety. Let's move away from here."

They pushed their way through the crowd when Shirley came suddenly into violent contact with a figure hurrying from the opposite direction. The latter drew back and lifted his cap.

"Miss Willing," he said. "I beg your pardon. I didn't look where I was going."

Shirley glanced up in surprise at hearing her name spoken. Then she recognized the figure with whom she had collided.

"Why, Mr. Bristow," she said. "I thought I left you aboard the *Yucatan*?"

"I came ashore to do a little shopping, as you young ladies call it," replied Bristow with a laugh. "I shall have to hurry on."

He lifted his cap and was gone.

The two girls continued to stroll about through the store, eyeing the bargains appreciatively.

"Well, I guess we have seen enough," said Mabel finally. "We may as well return to the ship."

As they started toward the door they became aware of the sounds of confusion behind them. For a moment they hesitated, then their curiosity overcame them and they turned back.

Far down the aisle a large crowd had gathered. The girls could hear the loud tones of one of the floor walkers calling for the store detective. Shirley and Mabel elbowed their way through the crowd, and presently were able to see what was going on.

Shirley uttered an exclamation of amazement and clutched Mabel by the arm.

"Look at that!" she cried in a low voice.

And well might she have been amazed. For there, in the center of the crowd, his arm grasped tightly by the big floor walker, was Henry Bristow.

His face was red and he was plainly very angry. However, he was making no effort to release himself. He controlled himself with an effort and spoke.

"I tell you you are making a mistake," he said quietly, and his voice carried to the two girls.

"Is that so?" sneered the floor walker. "So you deny you are a shop-lifter, eh? Well, I didn't suppose you would admit it. How do you account for the possession of this valuable piece of lace the clerk saw you getting away with?"

"It must have caught on my coat," was the reply. "I didn't try to steal it."

"You didn't, eh? We'll see as soon as the house detective arrives. I reckon you have plenty of stuff stowed away in your pockets."

"Well, I haven't," declared Bristow angrily. "You're going to be sorry for this before you get through."

"Well what do you think of that?" demanded Mabel, who had stood with open mouth during this conversation.

"I think that he is innocent," declared Shirley.

She glanced quickly around the store, and as she did so her eyes fell upon the woman she had so recently seen appropriating articles from the counter.

"There goes the woman who did it," she declared, pointing.

Mabel looked and nodded her head.

The woman was coming directly toward them, pushing her way through the crowd vigorously. Shirley stepped forward and barred her progress.

At the same moment Shirley raised her voice and called out:

"That man is innocent, Mr. Floorwalker. Here is the shop-lifter."

The woman again tried to push by Shirley, but the latter maneuvered so as to be directly in front of her at every step.

Shirley's words caused a commotion. Willing hands darted out and seized the woman, and she was taken before the man who still grasped young Bristow by the arm.

Shirley and Mabel pushed their way forward.

"I saw this woman steal a bolt of silk and some laces," declared Shirley. "I would have said nothing about it had not Mr. Bristow, whom I know, been accused."

"It isn't true!" cried the woman. "The girl is in the plot with the man."

Shirley's face grew red.

"I am not!" she declared. "This woman is guilty. She put the things under that long cape."

The floor walker was plainly mystified. He glanced from one to the other.

"Well, it will do no harm to have a look," he declared. He turned to the woman. "Will you remove your cape, madam?"

The woman drew back, and pulled the garment closer about her.

"No, I won't!" she declared, "I—"

"Very well," said the floor walker. "I shall have the floor matron search you."

He turned and called to one of the clerks. But the woman waited for no more. With a single move she took off her cape, and threw it to the floor. 48

"There," she said, throwing out her arms, "you may see that I have nothing."

"I saw her take them," declared Shirley, looking at the woman in surprise, for she could not see a sign of a stolen article.

A frown gathered on the floor walker's face as he glanced at Shirley.

"This looks rather bad for you." he said to her pointedly.

Shirley took a step back.

"What do you mean?" she asked in no little alarm.

"It seems that the lady is telling the truth. What was your object in accusing her?"

"I tell you I saw her take them," declared Shirley again.

The floor walker shrugged his shoulders.

It was Mabel who finally cleared up the situation. The woman's cape still lay on the floor where she had thrown it. Mabel stooped down to pick it up, and as she did so the woman also snatched at it.

But Mabel was the quicker of the two and captured the garment. Quickly she turned it wrong side out, and as she did so there was a gasp from the crowd.

For the inside of the coat was literally filled with secret pockets. Mabel thrust her hand in and pulled out the bolt of silk. She held it above her head. 49

"Here it is!" she cried.

"I bought and paid for that," sputtered the angry woman.

One after another Mabel now produced other articles of value, which she exposed to the view of the crowd. And in each case the woman's explanation was the same:

"I paid for that!"

But the floor walker was not to be fooled, nor was the manager of the store, who came up at that moment. The former released his hold on young Bristow and made him an abject apology.

One of the women detectives was called, and the shop-lifter turned over to her. Then the manager addressed Shirley and Mabel.

"I owe you two young ladies a debt of gratitude," he said. "This shop-lifting has been going on for a month or more and we have lost heavily. Thanks to you I believe we have the culprit at last. Without your assistance she would have escaped."

Shirley and Mabel acknowledged this praise with slight inclinations of the heads, and then Shirley spoke to Young Bristow, who stood near.

"Are you going back to the boat, Mr. Bristow? We shall be glad of your company."

The young man accepted this invitation, and the three made their way from the store. 50

"I can't thank you enough, either of you," he declared as they walked along. "I was in a ticklish position, and but for your assistance might have been put to no end of trouble."

"How did you happen to be accused?" asked Shirley.

"Why, I was walking through the aisle, and because of the crowd I was shoved against the counter. A piece of lace caught on a button of my coat, and I dragged it with me as I went by. Then the girl behind the counter cried out that some one had stolen something. The floor walker saw the lace caught in my coat and collared me. That's all."

"I see," said Shirley, and added with a smile: "You certainly did look funny there!"

"Did I? Well, I didn't feel very funny. I was afraid I would be held long enough to make me miss the ship, and I can't afford to do that."

"Then your business in Colon is very important?" asked Mabel.

Young Bristow looked at her in silence for some moments, and Mabel grew red as she thought she was to be rebuffed again. But she wasn't. Bristow finally answered her question.

"Very important," he said quietly.

"By the way," said Shirley as they walked along, "how is your wound? I see you have removed the bandage."

A startled expression flitted across the young man's face, but neither girl perceived it.

"It's much better," he made answer. "Not even a scar left. It didn't amount to much, after all."

Fifteen minutes later they were back aboard the *Yucatan*, where Shirley related their experiences to others of their party.

"I'll have to keep a closer watch on you two," declared Mr. Willing. "Every time you get away by yourselves you run into trouble. And you won't always come out of it so easily."

Several hours later the big steamship moved majestically out of the harbor and soon was headed down the coast once more. She came to anchor again the following morning at Jacksonville, the last American port at which she would touch until she reached San Diego, California. The Willing party went ashore again, but this time, true to his word, Mr. Willing would not permit the girls to wander away by themselves.

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As they strolled about, Shirley became suddenly ill. She knew it was nothing serious, brought on probably by the excessive heat. Therefore she informed the others that she was going back aboard the ship, as she wished to lie down. Mabel agreed to go with her.

The fathers saw the two girls into a taxicab, which soon dropped them at the pier, where they immediately went to their suite.

Shirley felt much better now that she was out of the sun, and lying down on the sofa picked up a book and commenced to read. Mabel sat down at a little desk to write a letter.

In spite of the cooling breeze made by the electric fan in the room, it was still rather warm, and Mabel left the outer door open to get what breeze they could from over the water. Mabel was in the first room, and Shirley in the one beyond.

Suddenly Mabel heard footsteps running down the deck toward their suite. She glanced up idly, wondering why any one should put himself to so much exertion on such a hot day, and even as she looked up a figure darted into the room and closed the door behind him.

Mabel jumped quickly to her feet and faced the newcomer, who, she now perceived, held a revolver in his hand.

Mabel was not frightened by the sight of the weapon, for she was not unacquainted with the use of firearms and had faced more than one dangerous situation; but as the man turned and faced her, she uttered a cry of amazement.

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The man was Henry Bristow.

Bristow, who had not perceived that the room was occupied, turned at the sound of Mabel's voice, his revolver half raised. At sight of Mabel he dropped his arm, and removed his cap.

"Please pardon me for this intrusion," he said quietly. "I did not know the cabin was occupied nor whose it was. I just happened to see the door open, and I slipped in."

"What is the matter?" asked Mabel, who realized that something must be wrong.

"Oh, nothing," was the reply.

Before Mabel could utter another word, there was a loud knock on the closed door.

Shirley, in response to the knock, came in from the next room. She took in the situation at a glance, but did not betray her surprise by so much as an exclamation. She advanced quickly toward Mabel and young Bristow.

"What is wrong?" she asked in a low voice.

Bristow waved his revolver toward the door.

"They want me," he said. "I can't allow you girls to be drawn into this, so I shall go out."

A dark expression passed over his face, and his hand tightened on the revolver. Shirley became alarmed.

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She motioned him to the room beyond.

"You go in there," she said. "No one will bother you."

For a moment Bristow hesitated, then he bowed and passed in. As he went by her, Mabel reached out and relieved him of his revolver. Bristow started to protest, then changed his mind and said nothing.

Mabel motioned to Shirley.

"You go in too," she said. "I'll stay here."

Shirley obeyed without a word. Then Mabel walked to the little center table, and put the revolver in the drawer.

Came another sharp knock on the door. Mabel advanced and threw it open.

Three men stood in the doorway, and all removed their hats at sight of her.

"What is it?" demanded Mabel.

"We are searching for a man named Von Blusen, who is aboard this ship. We trailed him down the deck here, and he disappeared. Have you seen him?"

"I know no one by that name," returned Mabel.

"He's a young fellow," went on the spokesman of the three, "and a very smooth-spoken chap. All the other cabins are locked but this one. I happen to know that this door was open a few minutes ago. I thought he might possibly have come in here?"

He looked at Mabel inquiringly.

"I know no one by that name," declared the girl again.

"Perhaps you know him by some other name, then?"

Mabel did not reply.

The man became suspicious.

"I am afraid we shall have to search this cabin, miss," he said. "I am not convinced he is not in here."

"What is it you want with this man?" asked Mabel, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"Well, I don't mind telling you. Von Blusen is a German and I have been tipped off that he is up to some mischief, I don't know just what. My orders are to take him ashore and turn him over to the U. S. authorities."

"And who are you?" demanded Mabel.

"Me? Why, I'm a United States special officer."

He threw back his coat and exposed a badge, which he covered hurriedly. Mabel, therefore, did not see it clearly. Something seemed to tell her, however, that the man was not telling the truth.

She stepped back quickly to the little center table, and as the first man advanced after her, she quickly opened the drawer and produced Bristow's revolver, which she levelled at the three men.

"You can't come in here," she said quietly.

The foremost man drew back, as did the others.

"But, miss," said the spokesman, "we must search the cabin. I am sure Von Blusen came in here. Will you deny it?"

"I don't have to deny it," declared Mabel angrily. "If you are United States officers, as you claim, you will have some means of identification."

"I showed you my badge," said the man.

"Yes, and you were careful that I didn't get a good look at it."

"But we must make the search."

"Then you must have an order. I know that much. I know you have to have a piece of paper, or something—a warrant I believe it is called."

"I haven't any warrant now," was the reply, "but I am going to make the search just the same."

He stepped forward, but Mabel covered him with her revolver.

"You have come in here against my command," she said quietly, "and I should be perfectly justified in shooting you, as I would a burglar."

The man sought to temporize.

"Now, see here miss—" he began.

Mabel took a step forward. She was growing angry.

"You just get right out of here," she exclaimed.

The man drew back a step and scratched his head perplexedly.

"Miss," he said, "you are making a big mistake to shield this man. I tell you he is plotting mischief which may involve the United States in war. We must have him before the ship sails."

"Well, you won't get him in here," declared the girl.

Again the man hesitated, then seemed on the point of moving forward again.

"I warn you for the last time to get out of here," said Mabel very quietly.

Once more her revolver came to bear on the man, and he drew back, throwing up his hands with a gesture of dismay. Then he turned to his companions.

"What can we do against that?" he asked. "We can't use a girl roughly, and if the ship gets beyond the three-mile limit, we can't get him till we reach Colon."

"Guess we'll have to wait then," said one of the others.

"Yep, guess we will."

The leader turned to Mabel and made her a low bow.

"I'm sorry you interfered with us," he said. "You'll find before long that you have done wrong."

"Perhaps I shall," said Mabel; "but I couldn't permit you to invade my cabin."

"Tell you what, Tim," said one of the men, "we'll just camp out here and get him when he comes out. He's likely to come out before we sail."

"Good idea," agreed the leader. "We'll do it."

Again he made a low bow to Mabel and followed his men out.

"Sorry to have troubled you," he muttered as he took his departure.

Shirley and Bristow now came in from the other room.

"You did splendidly, Miss Ashton," declared Bristow warmly. "I was afraid you would allow them to enter."

Before Mabel could reply there came the sound of voices outside. One, raised in anger, was that of Mr. Willing. A moment later, followed by Colonel Ashton and Dick, he entered the room.

His gaze fell upon Henry Bristow.

"So," he growled, "it's you they're after, eh?"

"Yes, sir," returned Bristow quietly.

"Well, you sit down over there, young man," said Mr. Willing, pointing to a chair. "I'm going to tell you a few things, and I don't care whether you like them or not."

CHAPTER VIII.—THEIR FIRST QUARREL.

Shirley and Mabel glanced at Mr. Willing in surprise. Young Bristow took the seat indicated, and the others also sat down.

"First," said Mr. Willing to Bristow, "I am going to ask you a question or two. If you refuse to answer, I shall, of course, draw my own conclusions."

The young man nodded.

"Proceed, sir," he said.

"All right. Now, in the first place, are you connected, in any capacity, with the German government?"

"That I cannot answer," was the reply.

"Very good! Now, then, are you aboard this ship at the command of the German government?"

"I cannot answer that question, either, sir."

"Suit yourself. Is it not a fact that those with whom you come in contact—those who seem to be your friends—are in danger because of their associations with you?"

"I suppose you are right, sir."

"Just as I expected," declared Mr. Willing. "Now I've got this to say. Already you have been the means of getting my daughter and the colonel's daughter into your scrapes. They have come to your assistance twice. Also Dick has been with you on one adventure. You will admit that, of course?"

"Of course, sir."

"Good. Then here is my ultimatum: I want you to keep away from me and mine. I don't want you to cross this threshold again; and I don't want you to speak to any of us should you chance to encounter us. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly, sir," replied Bristow rising from his chair, his face pale.

"I am glad I do," declared Mr. Willing. "I haven't any use for a spy, be he German or English. Now you can get out of here."

Without a word Bristow moved toward the door. But Mabel leaped forward and barred his path. She turned to Mr. Willing.

"Surely you wouldn't send him out to be captured?" she exclaimed. "Those men are waiting for him out there."

"That is none of our affair," said Mr. Willing.

"I agree with Mabel in that," declared Shirley. "If he goes out before we are beyond the three-mile limit, he will be taken prisoner."

"And if he isn't there is no telling what may happen," commented Mr. Willing.

"Dad," said Shirley, "please let him stay until we have passed the three-mile limit? Please!"

Mr. Willing hesitated.

"Well, I agree," he said at length.

Bristow spoke to Mr. Willing.

"I shall stay, sir," he said, "but it is because I must avoid capture if it is possible. Otherwise I wouldn't stay in the same room with you."

Mr. Willing smiled. He didn't mind that kind of talk, but not so Shirley. She sprang to her feet and faced Bristow angrily.

"How dare you speak to my father like that?" she demanded. "How dare you?"

Bristow turned his head away, and made no reply.

Mabel quickly came to the support of Bristow.

"And why shouldn't he?" she asked. "He hasn't done anything and your father was very mean."

"Why, Mabel," exclaimed Shirley in surprise.

"I mean it," declared Mabel. "Your father was mean."

"He couldn't be too mean to a German," exclaimed Shirley.

"You people make me tired," declared Mabel angrily. "Why are you forever jumping on the Germans? They are in the right and they are going to win."

"They are not!" This from Shirley. "The English are going to win, and I hope they do!"

"And I hope the Germans win," declared Mabel.

"Shirley! Mabel!"

Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton had now taken a hand in the conversation. But both girls were too angry to heed them.

"And just because this man is a German you are all against him. If he were English you would be shaking hands with him."

Mabel was losing control of herself.

"Why, Mabel," said Shirley. "You know that is not true."

"I know it is true," declared the girl.

Colonel Ashton took her firmly by the arm.

"Mabel, I am surprised at you," he said. "Go to your room."

"It's Shirley's room, it's not mine," cried Mabel.

Shirley advanced toward her friend.

"Mabel, what do you mean?" she asked quietly.

"You know what I mean. You told me I wasn't telling the truth."

Shirley compressed her lips and stepped back.

Mr. Willing took a hand in the conversation.

"Unless this foolishness ceases we shall leave the boat at Havana and return home immediately," he said quietly. "I will have none of this."

"I don't care," declared Shirley, also now very angry.

"Neither do I," this from Mabel.

"Shirley, go to your room," ordered Mr. Willing. "I am your father and I will be obeyed."

Shirley glanced at her father's stern face, and obeyed. She knew that when he looked like that he was not to be trifled with.

"Mabel, you go with her," said Colonel Ashton quietly.

Mabel hesitated.

"Do you hear me?" asked the colonel.

Mabel also realized that she had gone too far. She made her way after Shirley.

Inside their room the girls did not speak to each other. In the heart of each there was a peculiar feeling, and each knew that, in a measure, she was to blame. But neither was ready to give in yet.

It was their first quarrel.

Outside Mr. Willing turned to young Bristow.

"This," he said, "is your doing. And when you once set foot outside this cabin, don't you ever cross my path again."

The *Yucatan* was under way now, and from the window Mr. Willing could see the three men still waiting on the outside. But at last they took their departure and Mr. Willing knew they had passed beyond the three-mile limit. He turned again to Bristow.

"Now Bristow or Von Blusen or whatever your name is," he said, "get out."

Bristow turned a dark look upon him.

"You have insulted me," he said, "and you shall pay for it."

"I couldn't insult you, you little whipper-snapper," said Mr. Willing angrily. "Are you going to get out of here?"

"When I've had my say," declared the young man angrily. "If it were not that I am on important business I would chastise you right now."

"Is it because you have important business or because you are a child?" asked Mr. Willing smiling.

Bristow took a threatening step forward, but now Dick took a hand.

"That's enough of this," he said sternly, and putting forth a hand he pushed Bristow back.

The latter's face turned a dull red, and he struck at Dick, who promptly slapped him across the face. Dick also was angry now.

"You shall pay for that blow," shouted Bristow. "I can't fight you now, but when I have completed my work I shall seek you out."

"I won't be very hard to find," declared Dick. "Now get out."

He took the infuriated Bristow by the neck and the bottom of the coat and ran him out the door. Then he closed it after him.

"Rather a fiery young man, that," remarked Colonel Ashton grimly.

"Rather," agreed Mr. Willing dryly. He turned to the other room and called: "Shirley! Mabel!"

A moment later the two girls came forth. Mr. Willing looked at them severely for some moments before he spoke.

"You should both be ashamed of yourselves," he said at last. "The idea of such foolishness. Why, you have never quarreled before."

"And there will be no more of it," declared Colonel Ashton grimly. "At the next sign of trouble we shall turn right around and go home."

"Well, Mabel started it," declared Shirley.

"I did not, you started it," exclaimed Mabel.

"Shirley!" said Mr. Willing.

"Mabel!" exclaimed Colonel Ashton.

The girls became silent, but continued to glare at each other.

Then, suddenly, a smile broke over Shirley's face. Her father breathed more freely. Even Colonel Ashton looked at the two girls eagerly.

Then Shirley advanced toward Mabel and held out her hand.

"I'm sorry for what I said, Mabel," she declared earnestly.

For a moment Mabel hesitated, but for a moment only. Then she jumped quickly forward, and ignoring her friend's outstretched hand, threw her arms around her and broke into tears.

"It was all my fault," she sobbed. "You didn't say anything."

"Yes I did, too," said Shirley. "It was as much my fault as it was yours."

"No it wasn't."

"Yes it was."

"It was not."

The two girls drew back from each other.

"I say it was," declared Shirley.

"And I say it wasn't," declared Mabel.

"What is the matter with you two?" demanded Mr. Willing, stepping between them.

"Nothing, Dad," said Shirley, smiling again. She turned again to Mabel.

"I'm sorry," she said quietly.

"And so am I," said Mabel.

Once more they fell into each other's arms, laughing happily. Then, arm in arm, they turned and made their way to their own rooms, absolutely ignoring the presence of the others.

Dick, who had felt decidedly uncomfortable during this scene, grinned foolishly. Colonel Ashton laughed aloud, and Mr. Willing smiled.

"Funny things happen, my boy," exclaimed the latter, slapping Dick on the back. "You learn something every minute."

And in the other room Mabel said:

"We shall never, never quarrel again."

"Never!" agreed Shirley.

CHAPTER IX.—ADRIFT.

In the distance the Cuban city of Havana was slipping slowly from sight. Aft on the promenade deck Shirley, Mabel and the others of the party, together with many other passengers, were casting last looks at the island metropolis. 67

The sun was just sinking below the horizon, but there were still several hours before darkness would fall. The view was indeed picturesque and the passengers were impressed with it.

The steamship *Yucatan* was now on the last leg of her journey toward Colon.

In the main salon a crowd of men had gathered. On the upper deck, the gallery deck, the promenade deck and the main deck they had also gathered in knots. They blocked the main staircase and the exits from the engine room below.

A group somewhat larger than the rest had assembled about the captain's cabin. A close observer would have noticed that each man among these different groups wore a peculiar little button in the lapel of his coat.

Each group was silent. It appeared that they were waiting for something. Now a young man appeared and spoke to the first group holding his open watch in his hand. Then he passed on to the next, then to the next, until he had approached all. Then he took his place with the others near the bridge, and waited, watch in hand.

Suddenly he pulled a little whistle from his pocket, put it to his lips, waited a moment, and then blew a shrill blast, that penetrated to the farthest part of the ship. 68

Instantly the various groups of men wearing the button of peculiar design came to action.

The passengers on the promenade deck, the Willing party among them, found themselves under the muzzles of many revolvers. On the gallery, the deck, the main salon, the grand stairway a like condition prevailed.

Only the men who guarded the exit from the engine and boiler rooms were inactive, but these stood with drawn revolvers.

A dozen men swarmed from the bridge into the wheel house, where they confronted the pilot, the Captain, the first and second officers, who chanced to be there together. Officers in other parts of the ship also had been held up.

The surprise had been complete. The *Yucatan* was at the mercy of this army of conspirators, whoever they chanced to be.

Shirley and Mabel had eyed the strange proceedings upon their section of the ship with no less amazement than the rest of the passengers. Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton and Dick were equally astonished.

"What is it, a wholesale hold-up?" demanded the colonel.

"Worse, I'm afraid," declared Mr. Willing.

"I know!" exclaimed Shirley suddenly. "Mr. Bristow is concerned in this." 69

"My goodness! I believe you are right Shirley," declared Mabel.

"I know I am right," returned Shirley positively. "This is why he sailed on the *Yucatan*."

In the meantime the captors of the vessel had relieved all on board of whatever weapons they had. They had made a systematic search of the cabins, while some of their number kept the crew and passengers covered. Of the many aboard the ship the only ones who did not know what had happened were the engine crew and stokers.

The wireless had been among the first points seized, and the operator had had no opportunity of sending a message.

And now a young man moved about among the passengers, assuring them that there was no danger so long as they kept quiet. This young man came aft on the promenade deck where the Willing party stood.

Even as Shirley had surmised, he was Henry Bristow.

He smiled as he approached them.

"Well," growled Mr. Willing, "I see you have put the thing through."

"Part of it sir, part of it," was the reply. "The rest is to come."

"What are you going to do now, Mr. Bristow?" asked Mabel.

The latter smiled at her.

"Captain Von Blusen, if you please, Miss Ashton," he said, "I am no longer Henry Bristow, but 70

Captain Friederich Von Blusen, of His Imperial Majesty's service."

"And what are you going to do with the ship?" asked Shirley.

"Why, we shall do a little cruising," was the reply. "We have established a naval base off the coast of Cuba, but we have no ships on this side of the Atlantic. Therefore we must have ships. This is the first."

"And what are you going to do with us, captain?" asked Mabel.

"Ah, that is the hard part," was the reply, "but, before starting, we came to a conclusion, though none of the passengers is likely to be pleased. We shall set you adrift in small boats."

The others staggered back in dismay.

"Impossible," declared Mr. Willing. "Surely you are not barbarians."

"The law of necessity must be obeyed," replied the captain.

He took his departure.

"The cold-blooded scoundrel," declared Colonel Ashton. "This is what we get for helping him to escape."

"And that is my fault," declared Mabel.

"Well, there is no use talking about it now," said Dick. "It's too late."

An hour later the new crew began getting out the boats, and all the passengers provided themselves with life preservers. Fortunately, the weather was calm and the sea smooth and there was little likelihood of a storm at this time of year.

With everything in readiness, Captain Von Blusen once more approached the Willing party, and drew Mabel slightly to one side in spite of the protests of the others.

"Miss Ashton," he said, "in your cabin the other day you spoke of your sympathies to the German cause. Now I shall tell you something, for you have done much for me. Advise the others to make no attempt to reach Colon, should they be picked up."

"And why not?" demanded Shirley.

The captain hesitated.

"Well, there is no harm in telling you," he said at last. "Of course, you may not know that Germany is trying to bring the United States into this war on her side. We have at last found a way. Just off Colon are several Japanese warships. We shall near them unobserved, and signal by wireless that a certain thing must be done, representing ourselves as one of the Japanese battleships.

"Naturally, we shall be refused permission. Now we have a new invention that would enable us to destroy Colon from a distance, and in our message we shall threaten this unless the supposed Japanese demand is granted. Do you understand?"

Mabel nodded her head slowly. She was beyond words.

"And when the demand is refused," continued the captain "we shall use some of this new explosive. That will mean war between Japan and the United States, and therefore, England also, as she is Japan's ally. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Mabel quietly.

"And what do you think of the plan?"

"I think it is contemptible," declared Mabel.

"But, but—" began the captain.

"I don't care to hear any more," said Mabel. "But you will not succeed, I am sure of that. You can not succeed."

She turned on her heel and made her way back to the others, the captain standing as if rooted to the deck as he stared after her.

Mabel turned the matter over in her mind. She felt certain that the captain had been boasting, and the more she thought it over the more she became convinced of it. Therefore, she decided to say nothing about it to the others.

Under the muzzles of the revolvers of the captors of the big steamship, captain, officers, crew and passengers now took their places in the small boats, and were lowered over the side.

Each boat was well stocked with provisions and water, for the Germans had no mind to set their prisoners adrift and let them starve or perish of thirst.

The shore of Cuba was not far away, and, with steady rowing by the men, it would be possible for them to reach there within twelve hours. Besides, there was always the chance they would be picked up by a passing vessel.

Fortunately, the passenger list was not large. The bulk of it had been made up of the men who had later captured the ship. Therefore, officers, passengers and crew included, there were not more than three hundred set adrift.

The engine room crew had been impressed into service by the Germans.

The Willing party found themselves in the boat with the captain and perhaps a dozen other passengers. As the boat struck the water, and the men began to row away from the big steamship at the captain's command, Shirley and Mabel were badly frightened.

In spite of the cheering words spoken by their fathers, Dick and other male passengers, they did not bear up very well. As they looked first in one direction and then the other and saw nothing but water, they broke into tears. The small boat looked very small indeed to be at large upon the water.

Presently all the boats were launched, and rowed some distance from the steamer. There they stopped as a sudden blast signified that the big ship was about to get under way and leave them.

It began to grow dark. The electric lights aboard the large vessel glowed suddenly, and slowly the brilliantly lighted floating palace made off in the gathering darkness.

As it went away and left them to the mercies of the sea, cries of anguish, despair and condemnation were hurled after the men who had thus set the passengers and crew adrift. Women sobbed, and men stood up in the boats and shook their fists after the steamship *Yucatan*.

And then the great ship disappeared from sight. The men in the small boats renewed their work at the oars, and the boats moved toward the distant Cuban coast.

Adding to the fearfulness of their condition, darkness descended upon them like a pall.

CHAPTER X.—COLON.

At a word from Mr. Willing, after several hours of rowing, Shirley and Mabel cuddled up in their end of the boat and tried to sleep; but this they found impossible, and all through the night they gazed out over the dark waters.

Here and there the lights in the other boats were visible, but before morning they had lost sight of these. When the first faint streaks of dawn appeared in the east there was not another boat to be seen. They had become separated in the night.

The almost twenty passengers in the little craft ate of the food that had been provided and drank of the water. Thus refreshed, and with the sun now appearing above the horizon, their predicament did not seem as serious as it had during the blackness of the night.

There was not an object in sight to break the monotony of the water, and the boat rocked gently on the easy swell of the sea. The men bent to the oars again and sent the little craft skimming through the water.

Came a cry from the man at the rudder, and the eyes of the others followed his gaze toward the distant horizon. They beheld a faint cloud in the otherwise clear sky.

"Steamer!" cried the first man.

The cloud approached nearer and at last the outline of a ship, appearing very small at that distance, could be made out. It was headed on a course that would bring it almost directly in the path of the smaller boat.

As the hull of the vessel grew larger by its approach, occasional cheers broke from the lips of those in the little craft. So far it was impossible to tell whether the castaways had been sighted or not; but as the big ship neared them—now scarcely more than a mile away—the shrill blast of the steamer's whistle split the air. The small boat with its passengers had been discovered. The passengers raised another cheer.

Rapidly the large vessel bore down on them, and the little craft bobbed swiftly toward it. At last they came alongside.

"Ladies first!" cried the captain of the *Yucatan*.

Shirley and Mabel were the first over the rail, where they stood awaiting the arrival of the others.

Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton and Dick were the last to go aboard, and no sooner were the refugees all on deck than the big vessel resumed her course. The captain motioned them to his cabin.

The ship upon which they now found themselves proved to be the *Reliance*, with a cargo of freight from New Orleans for Colon.

This the captain explained when he learned where the erstwhile refugees were bound.

"We can't offer you the same accommodations you had aboard the *Yucatan*," he said, "but you are welcome to the best we have."

"And we are indeed glad to get it, captain," Shirley spoke up.

"No doubt, no doubt," smiled the captain. "All night in an open boat is no pleasure trip, even if this is the month of June," and he ordered them assigned quarters forward.

While by no means as large and pretentious as those on the *Yucatan*, the cabins were nevertheless clean and comfortable.

"We can thank our stars that we were fortunate enough to be picked up so soon," declared Dick.

"What can have become of the other boats?" asked Mabel.

"Probably reached the Cuban shore," replied Colonel Ashton. "We are doubtless the only ones that lost our course. The others more than likely stuck close together."

"I hope they are all safe," declared Shirley.

"I am sure they are," returned her father.

"Now," said Colonel Ashton, "the thing to be considered is, what to do when we reach Colon. Shall we take another steamer and continue our course, or shall we turn about and go home?"

"We don't want to go home, Dad," exclaimed Shirley. "You won't give up the trip to San Francisco, will you?"

"No, I think not," was the reply. "We can replenish our wardrobes in Colon sufficiently to get to Frisco, and we can do the rest of our buying there. No, we shall go on."

The girls clapped their hands in delight. Both had feared that the disaster might put an untimely end to their summer vacation.

"What do you suppose the Germans intend doing with the *Yucatan*?" asked Dick.

"Well, you heard the captain speak of a naval base on the coast of Cuba. They probably will run in there, put some big guns aboard and start out on a privateering cruise. There have been a couple of such German raiders, and they did considerable damage to British merchant ships before they were chased to the safety of internment in Newport News."

"I guess that is about what they plan to do," agreed Dick. "I'll surely have one experience of which to write when I get back to work."

An hour later the party was gathered on deck, when the captain of the *Yucatan* approached.

"The first thing I shall do is to report this to General Fullaway, at Colon," he declared.

"General Fullaway!" exclaimed Mr. Willing. "You don't mean General Hugh Fullaway?"

"The same," replied the captain. "Do you know him?"

"Well, rather," replied Mr. Willing. "We were schoolmates years ago, and have been close friends since. He comes from my home town. I shall look him up. But I didn't know he was in command in Colon."

"He has only been recently put in command," was the reply. "I too know him well."

The *Reliance* proved to be a very slow vessel, and it was days before the city of Colon was sighted.

At the entrance to the Panama Canal, Colon is a very picturesque city. Since work on the canal was begun, bringing thousands of Americans to the country, it has been more or less metropolitan in character, at the same time retaining its South American atmosphere.

Shirley and Mabel looked about with wonder as they made their way through the dirty narrow streets toward the hotel. This, however, they found to be strictly up to date in all respects, and they were soon installed in comfortable quarters.

Several hours later, Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton left the hotel, announcing that they were going to pay their respects to General Fullaway. They were back several hours later and informed Shirley, Mabel and Dick that they were to dine with the general in his quarters that night.

The girls were naturally excited at this prospect, and spent most of the day in the purchase of suitable garments. Dick, as well as Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton, also purchased more clothing to take the place of what had been lost when they were set adrift from the *Yucatan*.

General Fullaway had already heard the story from the captain of the *Yucatan*, but supper over, he desired to hear it once more from his guests.

Mr. Willing related their first meeting with the German commander, who had introduced himself as Henry Bristow when they had first met. He told of the experience aboard the *Yucatan* while the vessel was tied up at Jacksonville.

"You did wrong not to let the men take him, no matter who they were," was General Fullaway's verdict.

"I realize that now," said Mr. Willing, "but who could have suspected such a gigantic plot?"

"It was a gigantic plot," agreed the general, "and was carried out excellently. It must have been well planned."

"Mr. Bristow warned us not to come to Colon, general," spoke up Shirley.

"He did?" exclaimed the general in surprise. "And why, pray?"

"Well, he said it wasn't safe," replied Shirley.

"Hm-m-m," muttered the general, with a smile. "And did he tell you why?"

"No, sir."

"I thought not," laughed the general.

"But he told me, general," put in Mabel.

The others looked at the girl in surprise, but Mabel bore up steadily under their scrutiny.

"What do you mean, Mabel?" demanded Colonel Ashton.

"You remember when he took me aside just before we were set adrift, father?" asked Mabel.

"Yes, of course."

"That's when he told me, but it seemed so absurd and impossible that I didn't repeat it."

"What was it, Miss Ashton?" asked General Fullaway. "Will you tell us?"

"He said that Colon was in danger," replied Mabel, and she repeated the conversation she had had with Captain Von Blusen aboard the *Yucatan*.

The others listened to her with breathless interest, and there were exclamations of surprise when she concluded.

"Absurd," said Mr. Willing.

"Impossible," Colonel Ashton agreed.

"It would seem so, on the face of it," said General Fullaway, "and I suppose it is. It is true, there are two Japanese warships off the entrance to the Canal. They have not been allowed to pass through because several German merchant vessels are here. As soon as they have cleared, of course we shall permit the Japs to go through."

"And have the Japs objected to the delay?" asked Mr. Willing.

"They have indeed. They have demanded permission to pass, which has been refused. That was yesterday. But this tale of yours," the general turned to Mabel, "is incredible. I suppose the German commander told it to you to frighten you."

"I suppose that was his reason," Mabel agreed.

At this moment an orderly entered the room and gave a message to General Fullaway. The latter read it, and then turned to Mabel again.

"It seems that your warning may bear fruit, after all," he said quietly.

"Why, sir?" asked the girl eagerly.

"Why, this message I have here," said the general, tapping the paper with his finger, "is, or seems to be at least, a communication from the Japanese commander. He says if his ships are not allowed to pass through the canal to-morrow, he will destroy the city of Colon!"

CHAPTER XI.—A WAR SCARE.

An air of intense anticipation pervaded the General's dining room.

Shirley finally broke the silence.

"And will you give them permission, general?" she asked.

"Not without such instructions from Washington," was the reply. "My duties are clearly defined. The Japanese ships cannot pass through the canal while German merchantmen are in Colon harbor. However, I am not at all sure the message is from the Japs."

"You mean—the *Yucatan*," asked Dick.

General Fullaway nodded.

"I wouldn't be at all surprised," he replied quietly. "I shall communicate with Washington at once, repeating the story you have told me."

He left the room, and returned in a few moments with a slip of paper which he gave to the officer who had brought the message.

"I should have a reply in a couple of hours," he told the others. "Would you care to wait and hear the result?"

"Indeed we would," declared Shirley.

It was almost three hours later before the reply came. General Fullaway read the message in silence, then turned to the others.

"Your story must be true, Miss Ashton," he said. "Washington seems to have had some rumor of it. The cruiser *Tennessee*, now stationed here, has been ordered to take the *Yucatan* in charge."

"Will there be a battle?" demanded Mabel anxiously.

"I do not think so. The *Yucatan*, armed though she probably is by this time, would hardly be a

match for the *Tennessee*."

"I wish we could go with her," declared Shirley.

"So do I," agreed Dick.

General Fullaway was silent for some moments, and then he said:

"Perhaps it can be done. There will be no danger. I don't believe Captain Ainslee would object. The *Tennessee* will not sail before morning. I shall communicate with the captain immediately, and let you know before morning. He will probably wish to hear your story anyhow."

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Shirley, Mabel and the others returned to the hotel, where they prepared for bed. Mr. Willing was just about to retire when there was a knock at the door. Opening it, a bellboy passed him a message. It was from General Fullaway and said that Captain Ainslee would expect the Willing party aboard the *Tennessee* by 8 o'clock in the morning.

Mr. Willing called this piece of news to Dick and the two girls, and all were greatly pleased.

"Just think of taking a trip on a warship!" exclaimed Shirley.

All were about early the next morning and were soon at the pier, where they found that a cutter from the *Tennessee* had been sent to meet them. Captain Ainslee himself greeted them as they made their way over the side of the cruiser, and conducted them to his cabin.

Here he left them for a few minutes while he gave orders to get the ship under way. Directly it began to move slowly through the waters of the harbor, Captain Ainslee returned to the others.

"Now," he said to Mabel, "I should be glad to hear your story at first hand."

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Mabel repeated it and the captain listened attentively.

"To tell the truth," he said, "this may be more serious than I supposed. If Germany is bent upon drawing the United States into the war, the *Yucatan* may not surrender so easily."

"You don't mean she is likely to fight?" asked Mr. Willing in some alarm.

"That's just what I mean," was the reply.

And Captain Ainslee proved a good prophet.

It was well after noon when a cry from the lookout brought all to deck.

"Steamer off the port bow!" it came.

The two girls rushed to the deck with the others. The ships were still too far apart for those aboard the cruiser to make out the other plainly, and the wireless was immediately put in action.

"German converted cruiser *Kaiserin!*" came the reply to Captain Ainslee's message.

"I desire to come aboard you," was the message flashed back. "Heave to!"

The vessels drew nearer together, until at last Captain Ainslee knew the other vessel was in range of the *Tennessee's* big guns.

"I was afraid he would run," he explained. "Now I shall make my demand for surrender. It's the *Yucatan* as you can see."

The wireless was again put to working, and a demand made upon the German to surrender.

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"What for?" came the question.

"Theft of United States vessel and threatening destruction of Colon," was the reply flashed back.

Captain Von Blusen must have realized that the game was up. The *Yucatan* was brought quickly about and turned to run.

"Clear for action!" came the command aboard the *Tennessee*.

Shirley, Mabel and the others of the party found themselves hurried back into the Captain's private cabin. There, through the port-hole, they watched the preparations for battle.

The girls were greatly interested, and in spite of the fact that they knew they were in danger, they did not lose their coolness nor their courage.

Realizing that the passenger ship was probably faster than the cruiser, Captain Ainslee wasted no further time. The great forward turret gun spoke with a roar, and Shirley and Mabel cried out at the terrific noise.

They could watch the progress of the big shell as it sped toward the *Yucatan*, where it kicked up the water but a few yards to port. Again and again the big gun spoke, and then there was a cheer from the crew as a shell struck home.

Twice more the *Yucatan* was hit, and, while not in a vital spot, her speed was suddenly reduced. The *Tennessee* dashed on.

Then came the first shot from the enemy. The spray flew high beside the cruiser as a shell struck the water to larboard. Before she could fire again, another shell from the *Tennessee's* forward turret gun crashed aboard her.

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Then a white flag was run up the *Yucatan's* masthead.

The firing aboard the *Tennessee* ceased, and the cruiser bore down on the enemy.

Boats were hurriedly lowered, manned and darted across the water to take charge of the *Yucatan*. Half an hour later one of them returned bearing the German commander and his officers. They were conducted to the captain's cabin immediately.

Henry Bristow—now Captain Von Blusen—at first did not see the members of the Willing party in the cabin, and he faced Captain Ainslee angrily.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" he demanded.

Captain Ainslee smiled.

"Come, come, captain," he said. "Why this air of wounded dignity? Surely you won't attempt to deny that you stole the *Yucatan*?"

"Of course I deny it," was the reply.

"And I suppose you will also deny sending a message to the commandant at Colon, threatening to blow up the city?"

"That is absurd," was the reply.

Captain Ainslee motioned to Mabel, and she stepped forward.

"Do you recognize this young lady, captain?" demanded the commander of the *Tennessee*.

As the other's eyes rested upon Mabel, he stepped back in surprise and a look of genuine alarm passed over his face. Then it grew dark. He was very angry.

"So," he exclaimed, "this is the way you show your sympathy for Germany, eh?"

"What is Germany to me?" demanded Mabel hotly. "I'm no German."

"But you said—"

"I said that because I was angry at the time. You have made trouble enough for us. I'm glad you have been captured."

"Further denial is useless, captain," declared Captain Ainslee. "I don't believe you will dispute the young lady's words."

Von Blusen turned away angrily, and his gaze rested on Dick and the others for the first time.

"I see you are all here," he said. Then to Dick, "And I have not forgotten that I have a debt to settle with you."

He stepped quickly across the cabin and before the others were aware of what he intended to do, he struck Dick sharply across the face with the back of his hand.

Dick was on his feet in an instant and would have leaped upon his assailant had not the others stayed him.

"Captain!" cried the commander of the *Tennessee*, "you forget yourself! If that is the way you Germans conduct yourselves no wonder the whole world is against you. Another move like that and I'll have you put in irons!"

The German captain drew back but said nothing.

"Now," continued Captain Ainslee, "I would like to know the meaning of this affair you have been mixed up in. Is Germany seeking war with the United States?"

"Why not?" was the reply. "The United States has been against us, why shouldn't we be against her?"

"It's your own evil consciences that make you think that," replied Captain Ainslee. "The United States has been strictly neutral in this war. But an accounting for this will be demanded of the Kaiser."

"And he'll give it," thundered the captain, striking the table with his fist. "He'll give it!"

"Maybe he will, but he'll be sorry," declared Shirley, who could keep quiet no longer. "Uncle Sam will stand no foolishness from the Kaiser."

Captain Von Blusen smiled at her scornfully.

"We shall come over here some day and take the United States," he said.

"You'll be surprised when you try it," said Shirley angrily.

"Shirley!" exclaimed Mr. Willing. "Keep quiet!"

"I don't care," cried Shirley. "Anybody knows Uncle Sam can whip Germany, and all the rest of them, too, for that matter."

Again Mr. Willing would have enjoined the girl to silence, but Captain Ainslee stayed him with uplifted hand.

"Let her alone," he chuckled. "That is the spirit I like to see!"

The *Tennessee* returned immediately to Colon, followed by the *Yucatan*, now manned by a crew of American sailors. The run was made quickly, and darkness had just descended when the ships came to anchor and the Willing party made their way ashore and returned to their hotel.

Captain Von Blusen and the members of his crew were immediately turned over to the Canal Zone authorities, pending orders from Washington.

What was the surprise of Shirley and the others, upon reaching the hotel, to find there others of the passengers who had been set adrift when the *Yucatan* was captured by the German conspirators. They greeted each other warmly.

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"We were picked up by a steamer and just reached here this afternoon," one of the women passengers explained to Shirley and Mabel. "We had about given you up for lost. The rest of us are all here."

"And so is the *Yucatan*," replied Shirley.

In response to exclamations of astonishment, she related the story of the recapture of the vessel.

"Then we shall be allowed to continue our trip, I suppose," remarked one of the passengers.

"Unless the government decides to hold on to the steamer," said another.

But the government did not, and the following day the full crew of the *Yucatan* was once more aboard the vessel, and it was announced that she would resume her journey the following morning.

The day was spent by most of the passengers viewing the sights of interest in the canal zone and in the city of Colon proper.

A few words concerning the Panama Canal will not be amiss here.

The canal was opened to smaller vessels on August 5, 1914, but the official opening did not take place until much later, being attended with elaborate ceremonies.

The canal is about fifty miles in length from deep water in the Caribbean Sea to deep water in the Pacific Ocean. It ranges in width from 300 to 1,000 feet with an average bottom width of almost 700 feet. The Gatun dam along its crest is 8,000 feet long.

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The construction of the canal is considered one of the greatest feats of engineering of all time and was accomplished at a tremendous cost. The land was secured by treaty from Colombia at great expense and resulted in considerable trouble between the United States and the South American republic.

It is provided by treaties that the canal shall be open to the vessels of all nations, merchantmen, or ships of war, in times of war as well in times of peace; but strict rules of neutrality have been provided for the passage of war vessels.

All this Mr. Willing explained to the others during the day. With the coming of night, the passengers began to go aboard the *Yucatan* for the ship was to sail at an early hour and it was deemed advisable to be aboard the night before.

Therefore, when Shirley and Mabel arose and went on deck, the *Yucatan* already had started its passage through the canal. The girls stood upon the upper deck aft and looked about with interest; but after an hour of this they grew tired and went down to breakfast.

The passage of the canal would require about ten hours and Shirley remarked to Mabel that she would be glad when they were on the Pacific and sailing up the coast.

93

"And so will I," agreed Mabel. "Of course it is nice to see all these things, but they don't interest me a whole lot."

"I feel the same way. To tell the truth I shall be glad to get to San Francisco. From what I have heard, the Exposition must be beautiful."

"Indeed it must. By the way, I wonder what will be done with Henry Bristow—I mean Captain Von Blusen?"

"I don't know," replied Shirley. "However, I suppose he will be taken to Washington."

"He seemed a very nice young man. I wouldn't have thought he was a German."

"Well, I suppose there are nice Germans as well as any other kind," replied Shirley with a laugh. "But I wonder why they took such chances?"

"Orders, I reckon. The Germans have shown great daring and bravery in this war."

"I should say they have. I wonder if the United States will be drawn into the war."

"My goodness gracious! I hope not! Why, Daddy might have to go."

"Oh I guess not," laughed Shirley. "He is too old for that, except as a last resort."

"But Dick might have to go."

"That's so; but I don't think there will be any war between the United States and Germany. We could whip them easily."

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"I suppose the Germans think they could whip us just as well as we believe we can whip them."

"But I know we can whip them."

"Well, I'm not so sure. But one thing is certain, we won't have to go to war. That's the advantage of being a girl."

"Oh I don't know," said Shirley, "I believe I would like to go."

"Not for me," declared Mabel. "Still, I might be willing to go as a Red Cross nurse."

"That's what I meant," replied Shirley.

Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton and Dick now joined them, and they discussed recent happenings.

"You don't suppose there is any chance of Von Blusen getting away, sir?" asked Dick of Mr. Willing.

Mr. Willing looked at him and smiled.

"Afraid he'll come after you?" he asked.

"No, not exactly sir," replied Dick. "I just wondered, that's all."

"I don't think there is. I'm sure I don't want to be on the same ship with him again. He'll make mischief wherever he is."

But Mr. Willing was to be disappointed in this wish, as it turned out later.

Noon came and passed and still the big steamship was in the canal; but with the coming of the supper hour the Pacific ocean became visible in the distance.

95

It was the first time that Dick, Shirley or Mabel had seen the Pacific, and they stared ahead for a long time.

"I don't see as it looks any different from the Atlantic," declared Shirley.

"What did you expect?" asked Mabel. "Think you were going to see the name on it?"

"Not exactly. I don't know just what I expected, but I thought it would look different."

The others laughed.

"It might feel a little different in case a big storm came up," said Dick.

"I don't want to be in a storm on any water," declared Shirley with decision.

"I should say not," Mabel agreed. "A storm is bad enough with lots of dry land under your feet."

The sun was just disappearing below the horizon when the *Yucatan* at last stuck her nose into the waters of the Pacific ocean.

"Well, here we are in the Pacific at last," said Colonel Ashton. "Do you feel any difference, Shirley?"

"Not a bit," replied the girl with a smile.

Mr. Willing looked at the sky.

"I guess there will be no storm on this trip," he said.

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Half an hour later all went below to supper.

They had almost finished a delightful meal when their attention was attracted by the sound of a scuffle on deck. All rushed hastily up.

There, struggling with a knot of sailors, was a single man. His back was turned to the girls as they made their way on deck, and at first they did not recognize him.

He was giving a good account of himself, striking out with such force and skill as gave evidence of much training in the use of his fists; but the sailors were too many for him, and he was at last overpowered and thrown to the deck.

Rude hands jerked him to his feet and it was then that Shirley and Mabel obtained their first look at his face.

Shirley started back with a cry of utter amazement. Then a name leaped to her lips, and was repeated by all the passengers within sight.

"Captain Von Blusen!"

"How in the world did he get here?" exclaimed Shirley.

"I can't imagine," declared Mabel, staring with open mouth.

Captain Anderson of the *Yucatan* now hastened down from the bridge and confronted the prisoner.

"What are you doing on my ship and how did you get here?" he demanded angrily.

Captain Von Blusen smiled at him.

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"I just escaped, that's all," he replied. "You treated me so well before that I thought I would take passage with you. Besides it was the least likely place I would be looked for."

"But how did you escape?" demanded the captain.

"That would be telling," was the reply, and the young man smiled tantalizingly. "However, it will do no harm to say that I have good friends in Colon."

"Well, I'll guarantee you won't do any more harm aboard my ship," declared the captain angrily.

He turned to his first officer. "Have him put in irons!"

"Very good, sir," replied the first officer, and advanced toward the prisoner.

"One moment," said the latter drawing himself up. "I did not come here with any ill motive," still addressing the captain, "and I desire to give my parole."

"And what good is your parole?" demanded Captain Anderson.

"One gentleman is always ready to accept the word of another gentleman," said Von Blusen slowly. "I give my word to make no attempt to escape."

The captain hesitated, then waved an arm expressively.

"Very well," he said. "Your parole is accepted."

He returned to the bridge, and the sailors released Von Blusen. The latter walked over to where the Willing party were gathered.

"Well, here I am again," he said with a smile.

"I see you are," replied Mabel, and deliberately turned her back on him.

The young man's face became red. He turned on his heel and walked off without another word.

CHAPTER XIII.—ASHORE IN COSTA RICA.

The steamship *Yucatan* was swinging slowly into a little harbor. Land, visible for the first time since leaving the Panama Canal, was now close at hand.

"What place is this?" asked Shirley of Dick, who stood forward gazing over the rail by her side.

Dick consulted his guide book, remarking: "I can't remember the name of these outlandish places."

"It's Punta Arenas," he said at last, looking up. "Costa Rica, you know," he added in explanation.

"And what are we putting in here for?"

"You'll have to ask the captain about that," replied Dick. "It's too deep for me."

The vessel came to anchor some distance from shore. It was announced that the ship would lay there for several hours, and the captain gave notice that those desiring to land would be taken off in the small boats.

Shirley immediately announced her intention of being one of the landing party, and loath to let the girl go alone, Mr. Willing and the others also determined to go ashore.

Half an hour later found them strolling about the dirty looking narrow streets of the little town.

Poorly-dressed natives, men, women and children, eyed them queerly as they walked along, the latter following them for blocks begging for money. Shirley would have given one of the children a piece of silver but for the first officer of the ship, who stayed her.

"Give money to one of them and the rest will follow you forever," he explained.

"But they look so dirty and hungry," protested Shirley.

"Perhaps they are," was the officer's reply, "but take no chances with them."

Shirley followed his advice, as did the others of the party, and the dirty native children soon let them alone. When the party started back, however, the children trailed them once more, begging piteously for money.

At the wharf Shirley, unheeding the advice of the officer, turned and tossed a silver quarter toward them.

Instantly the place became a scene of wild confusion. There was a scramble as boys and girls dived headlong for the piece of silver. Loud cries filled the air.

A little girl raised up with the piece of money clutched tightly in her hand and started to run. But the others were upon her in an instant, and threw her to the ground, striking and clawing as they tried to take the quarter away from her.

Shirley looked at the disorder she had caused in amazement.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed. "I had no idea they were so savage."

She watched the struggle.

Now a boy had secured the quarter and tried to escape with it. But he fared no better than had the girl, and soon was beneath the pile of struggling bodies. The children fought savagely, biting, screaming, kicking and scratching.

The party from the steamship watched with interest.

"See what you did, Shirley," cried Mabel. "Just watch them fight."

"I won't do it again," declared Shirley. "Some of them will be badly hurt."

At this moment a newcomer appeared upon the scene. He walked slowly, and plainly was in no particular hurry. Shirley glanced at him curiously.

He was attired in a dark blue uniform. A revolver and sword hung at his side. He was short but stout, and a black mustache curled fiercely upward.

He was just what Shirley took him to be, an officer of the Costa Rican army.

He advanced into the mass of struggling children and pushed the combatants aside without ceremony. As they looked up and perceived him, the fighters turned and fled.

The sight was indeed comical and Shirley and all the others laughed long and loud.

One little boy, before taking to his heels, stooped quickly and picked up the quarter, which had rolled a short distance away. But even as he started to run, the native officer reached out a hand and caught him by the shoulder.

In vain did the boy struggle to free himself, biting and kicking. He was no match for the man, and at last he dropped the piece of silver. The officer then released him and looked around.

While the Americans still watched him he stooped, picked up the quarter, turned it over in his hand once or twice, spun it in the air, caught it as it came down and thrust it in his pocket. Then, without a glance to right or left, he turned and stalked away.

"There!" exclaimed the ship's officer, "you can see what has happened to your quarter. It's what happens to most of those thrown to the children by tourists."

"It's an outrage!" declared Shirley. "I wouldn't have given him anything. Isn't there something we can do about it?"

"Not a thing," was the reply. "It is legitimate graft. But watch, now, you'll see what the little folks do."

As the native officer continued to swagger along, from behind houses and from down streets a hail of rocks and stones dropped upon him. The children, divided in the fight for the quarter, had joined forces against this common enemy and were pelting him vigorously.

"Good!" exclaimed Mabel. "I am glad of it. I hope they hurt him, the big coward."

The native officer stopped and glared around angrily at his small assailants for a moment, while the rocks and stones fell on him faster than before. One struck him in the face. This was too much for his courage. He took to his heels, and with the mob of children in close pursuit, was soon lost to sight.

"I hope they get him," declared Shirley vehemently.

"They won't, though," replied the officer of the *Yucatan*. "If he were to turn on them they'd stop and, from a safe place, continue their bombardment. He'll find shelter some place."

Before they could return to the launch which would take them back to the ship, the swarm of children again came into view, rushing for them.

"Quick!" cried the officer, "into the boat. They'll run right over us. They've caught a sight of silver and they won't let us alone until we give them some, or until we are out of reach."

He hustled the others toward the small boat at a run, and succeeded in getting them in before the native children reached the water's edge. Then the boat put off for the ship.

A cry of anger went up from the shore.

"Duck!" cried the officer, himself taking his place in the stern and grasping the rudder.

His warning came not a moment too soon.

A shower of missiles, hurled with unerring aim, fell upon the little craft. Disappointed in their quest, the native children were now bent on revenge.

As fast as they could pick them up and throw, rocks went skimming across the water, falling on both sides, and in front and behind the boat. Several dropped aboard.

One, in falling, just skimmed the back of Shirley's head as she stooped over in the boat. Dick immediately squeezed in behind her, and another, thrown with unerring aim, carried away his hat. Fortunately however, this broke the force of the stone, and it fell to the bottom of the boat without doing any further damage.

The boat was drawing out of danger now, and the occupants sat up again and drew breaths of relief. Only the stronger of the tots could now reach them with their missiles, and the distance was too great for accurate throwing, so those in the boats felt perfectly safe.

Upon the shore the crowd of native boys and girls gave vent to cries of rage at thus being deprived of their revenge. They danced about excitedly and waved their hands in angry gestures.

At this juncture another native officer hove in sight, and the crowd turned on him. Again rocks, stones and other weapons came into play as the children turned upon him to vent their wrath. For a moment the officer seemed on the point of charging into the crowd, then changed his mind, wheeled on his heel and took to flight. The young ones gave chase, their shouts and cries

carrying across the water to the occupants of the boat.

"Well!" exclaimed Shirley, now that they were out of harm's way at last, "they are vicious little things, aren't they?"

"Rather," replied the officer dryly. "If a person fell into their hands it would go hard with him."

"But what makes them so fierce?" asked Mabel, greatly interested.

"That's hard to say. However, it probably is because they are half starved and look upon the whole world as a common foe. More than one tourist has received rough treatment at their hands."

"And will they attack any one like that?" asked Dick.

"Not unless he shows money," was the reply. "That is the remarkable part about it. No matter how much a man may have in his pocket they will not attack him unless they catch sight of silver or gold. One glimpse of it, however, seems to drive them wild."

The officer gave his attention to the boat for a moment, and then continued:

"Another thing, as you have just observed. They will fight each other, but let a third party interfere and they will all jump on him."

"Just like a quarrel between a man and his wife, eh?" asked Mr. Willing with a smile.

"Exactly. They're a queer lot, and you will find them about the same in all Central and South American countries."

The small boat now rubbed gently against the side of the *Yucatan* and the passengers scrambled up the ladder to the deck.

"We were lucky to get out of that with whole skins," declared Shirley, when all once more stood on deck.

"I should say we were," agreed Mabel.

"Perhaps this experience will teach you to heed the advice of others, daughter," said Mr. Willing dryly.

"I won't try and play the good Samaritan to native children any more, Dad," said Shirley smiling.

A long blast from the ship's whistle, followed by the clanking of chains as the anchor was drawn in, the vibrations of the engines became noticeable, and, with her nose pointed to the open sea, the steamship *Yucatan* resumed her journey.

CHAPTER XIV.—U. S. S. PRAIRIE.

"Steamship off the port bow, sir!"

It was the cry of the lookout.

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated. There, showing dimly through the gathering darkness, steamed a dark gray shape. Another glance from the lookout was enough to convince him of the vessel's identity.

"United States cruiser, sir!" came his call.

"Can you make her out?" asked the captain's voice from the bridge.

The lookout was silent for several minutes, and then called back:

"Cruiser *Prairie*, sir."

There was a muttered ejaculation from the captain. Shirley, standing near, caught the words:

"Wonder what she's doing in these waters? She was in Bluefields the last I heard of her. Must be trouble of some kind or she wouldn't be here."

The two ships exchanged messages, the nature of which were unknown to the passengers, however. Both continued on their course.

Morning showed to the passengers the cruiser proceeding ahead of them. All day the two ships retained their relative positions and when night came on they were unchanged.

When Shirley awoke the following morning the *Yucatan* was stationary. Shirley and Mabel dressed quickly and went on deck. There they found that they were in a little harbor. Shirley asked a question of one of the other passengers.

"Where are we?"

"Port of Corinto, Nicaragua," was the reply.

At this moment a small boat was just about to be lowered. Shirley and Mabel rushed up to the first officer, who was in command of it.

"Can we go with you?" she asked.

The officer hesitated, then: "I see no reason why you cannot," with a smile. "Jump in."

The girls obeyed and a few moments later were being rowed toward the not-far-distant shore. There the boat drew up at the wharf, and, signalling to the girls to accompany him if they so desired, the officer leaped lightly ashore and lent them a helping hand. The sailors were ordered to await his return.

"Where are you going?" asked Shirley.

"American consulate," was the reply. "There has been some trouble here, and Captain Anderson has sent me to find out what it's all about."

At the consulate Shirley and Mabel remained outside, while the first officer was closeted with the consul.

"We might as well walk around a bit," Shirley decided. "There is no telling how long he may remain there."

Mabel was nothing loath, and they made their way to the street. Here they walked along slowly, looking curiously at the native Nicaraguans and the queer buildings, all of old Spanish architecture and design.

"None of this for me," was Shirley's decision half an hour later.

"Nor me," agreed Mabel. "I want to live in civilization."

Unconsciously the girls had wandered further from the consulate than they realized, and as they were on the point of turning back Mabel caught sight of a familiar figure. 109

"Captain Von Blusen!" she exclaimed, catching Shirley by the arm.

Shirley caught her breath and gazed in the direction Mabel pointed.

It was true. There, slinking along furtively, was the gallant captain and he was walking along at a rapid rate.

"Wonder where he is going and why he's in such a hurry?" asked Mabel.

"I don't know," returned Shirley, "but I'll warrant he is up to no good."

"But he has given his parole to make no attempt to escape."

"I don't imagine he'll set much store by that if he sees a good opportunity to get away."

Shirley would have continued her way back, but Mabel said:

"Wait a moment, Shirley. Perhaps, by following him a bit, we may learn something useful. What do you say?"

For a moment Shirley hesitated, but for a moment only.

"Perhaps we can," she said then. "There can be no danger if we keep out of sight. Come on."

The German was now some distance ahead of them, and taking care to avoid being seen should he turn suddenly, the girls followed him. 110

But apparently Captain Von Blusen had no idea that he would be followed. He strode rapidly along and not once did he turn his head.

"He must have been here before," Shirley decided. "He seems to know where he is going."

For another ten minutes they followed him, and then Shirley halted.

"I am afraid we had better go back," she said. "We may get lost."

"Oh I guess not," declared Mabel. "And besides we have plenty of time. The ship will probably stay here most of the day. Come on, Shirley."

Shirley allowed herself to be led along.

They had now approached the outskirts of the little town, and the young German struck off through a clump of trees. At the edge of these Shirley stopped abruptly.

"We won't follow him any further," she said decisively. "It might be dangerous."

"I guess you are right," agreed Mabel. "I wish he had stayed where we could keep track of him."

"So do I. But he didn't. We had better be getting back."

They turned and started to retrace their footsteps, but even as they did so the footsteps of a large body of men came toward them. They were not yet in sight, but the men were coming right down the street through which the girls must go on their way back. 111

Mabel looked at Shirley in alarm.

"What shall we do?" she exclaimed.

"We'll just have to put on a bold face and walk right along," declared Shirley. "Come."

She started out slowly, Mabel walking by her side.

A moment later there appeared ahead of them, advancing at a rapid march, a body of armed men. Shirley and Mabel shrank close to the side of the street to give the marchers as much room as possible.

At first it seemed the girls would get by without trouble, for the first troop had passed them, paying no attention to their presence.

But as the officer in command of the troop came abreast of them, a command suddenly rang out: "Halt!"

The troop stopped abruptly, and grounded their arms. Shirley and Mabel also paused, as they believed the words were meant for them. Then, seeing the soldiers pause, they moved on again. But again came the cry of "Halt."

The girls halted in their tracks.

The commander, whom they perceived was a man well along toward seventy, but who nevertheless walked perfectly erect and who looked very imposing in his bright military uniform, advanced toward them.

"What are you young ladies doing here?" he asked courteously, in English.

"We were just walking about the city, sir," replied Shirley, her voice trembling somewhat in spite of the efforts she made to keep it steady.

"Where do you come from?"

"Steamship in the harbor, sir."

"You mean the cruiser?"

"No, sir," replied Mabel. "The passenger steamer, sir."

"H-m-mm-m," muttered the officer.

Before he could speak further there came, from the town, the sound of more rapidly approaching footsteps.

"Come with me," cried the Nicaraguan officer quickly, "if you go on you will be hurt. Come quickly."

He urged his men on with a sharp command.

Shirley and Mabel hung back.

"Quick!" cried the general again. "There will be fighting here in a few minutes, and if you are in the way you are likely to be hurt."

A squad of men, at his command, surrounded the two girls, and they were forced to go along whether or no.

The troop dashed quickly for the shelter of the woods in which the girls had seen Captain Von Blusen disappear a few moments before.

Once in the shelter of the trees, the officer in command gave several sharp orders, and the troop divided into three parts. Then they flitted rapidly further in among the trees.

Shirley and Mabel, now badly frightened, found themselves with the commanding officer's section. They could see that they were bearing off to the right and several times would have spoken, but the officer silenced them with a gesture.

"I shall answer your questions later," he said once.

Although the girls did not know just what was the matter, they realized that the Nicaraguans were fleeing from another, and, supposedly, a larger body of men.

"I hope they overtake us. I want to get back to Dad," cried Mabel.

"And I hope they don't," exclaimed Shirley.

"Why, Shirley!"

"I mean it. If they do overtake us it may mean a battle, and then we would be in danger. As long as we keep away from them we are safe. Besides, Dad will find us some way. Our fathers and Dick won't permit us to be carried off."

"I reckon you are right, Shirley," Mabel agreed finally. "Besides, there is an American cruiser near. They'll have the bluejackets out searching for us."

"And they will find us, too," declared Mabel.

"I hope they hurry up and come," exclaimed Shirley. "I'm badly frightened, but I don't want to show it. The thing to do is to make the officer think we are not a bit scared."

"We'll try," said Mabel calmly.

For an hour they continued on their way, and then suddenly the force began to increase as men appeared from other directions and joined the main body.

Although the girls did not know it, these were the same men who had scattered at the first sign of pursuit. They had made a detour to throw the pursuers off the track.

At last the commander called a halt. Then he approached the two girls.

"I guess I had better explain why I insisted on your coming with us," he said with a pleasant smile.

"If you please," said Shirley.

The officer gazed at both girls admiringly.

"You take it coolly enough," he declared. "Many in your places would be badly frightened."

"Surely there is nothing to be afraid of," said Mabel, determined to show as bold a front as possible.

"No," said the officer, "there isn't." He looked at them closely. "I wonder if either of you happen to know who I am?" he asked.

Shirley shook her head negatively.

"I'm sure I don't," said Mabel.

"Then I must introduce myself," was the reply. "I am General Pedro Garcia, President of the republic of Nicaragua."

Both girls looked at him in the utmost surprise.

"You may well be surprised," said the general, a touch of bitterness in his tone, it seemed to Shirley, "and no doubt you are to see the President of the country in such a predicament?"

Shirley didn't know much about Nicaragua, but she decided she might as well agree with him, as he seemed to expect it.

"Yes, sir," she said.

"And I am surprised to find myself in such a position," said the President. "I shall explain. With my men I am fleeing from the revolutionists."

"Revolutionists?" echoed Shirley.

"Exactly. I was in Corinto with some of my army for diplomatic purposes. While absent from Managua there was an uprising. It seems to have been well planned, for it broke out in all parts of the republic at once, even here in Corinto."

"I was surprised with my men this morning and was forced to flee. That's about all there is to it."

"But why did you bring us with you?" demanded Shirley. "Why didn't you allow us to return to our ship?"

"Because you might never have reached there," replied the President quietly. "You would probably have fallen into the hands of the revolutionists. While you are with me you are safe."

There was no doubting the sincerity in the President's voice, and both girls unconsciously breathed easier.

"Besides," continued the general, "your presence may help me a bit."

"In what way sir?" asked Mabel.

"Well, there is a United States cruiser in Corinto harbor. When you are missed the natural supposition will be that you have fallen into the hands of the revolutionists. The U. S. sailors will be sent after you, and will be likely to attack my foes."

"I see," said Shirley with a slight smile. "Then you did not save us from an altogether unselfish motive."

"My dear young ladies, consider," said the President, "it is better for both of us."

"I don't doubt you, sir," replied Shirley; "but just the same I would rather be safe aboard our ship."

"And so you shall be, if it is within my power to put you there," declared the President of Nicaragua warmly.

At this moment two of the general's troopers approached, dragging a third man between them. Shirley and Mabel fell back a few feet.

"Hello! Who have we here?" demanded President Garcia.

"Prisoner, sir," replied one of the men.

"Release him," said the President. "I shall talk to him myself. Who are you, and what are you doing here?" he demanded sharply.

Shirley and Mabel both started at the sound of the prisoner's voice. He was none other than Captain von Blusen.

"I'm Captain von Blusen, of the German navy," was the reply. "I have been held prisoner aboard an American ship, and have but recently escaped. I am seeking Colonel Hernandez."

"Hernandez!" exclaimed President Garcia, stepping back in surprise. "The leader of the revolutionists!"

"And may I ask your name, sir?" said Captain von Blusen.

"I," said the general, "am the President of Nicaragua."

The prisoner gave vent to a long whistle and a look of dismay passed over his face. It was gone in a moment, however, and he turned to the President with a smile.

"I am fortunate in finding you, sir," he said. "I am authorized by my government to make you a proposition."

"Well, I shall hear it," said the President.

"I am authorized to offer you a large sum of money for the privilege of establishing a German naval base on the Pacific coast of Nicaragua."

"Enough!" cried the general with a wave of his hand. "It shall not be done if I can prevent it. Germany indeed. Were I able, I myself should draw a sword against her. You will find no German sympathy in these parts."

Captain von Blusen bowed his head. He said nothing further on the subject.

"What will you do with me?" he asked.

"I shall hold you until the rebels have been put down," was the reply. "Then you shall be released. I wouldn't trust you now."

He signalled two of his men and the young German officer was led away between them.

At this moment another officer rushed up to the general.

"Our presence has been discovered, sir," he gasped. "The enemy is approaching."

Shirley and Mabel now perceived that the President of the Republic of Nicaragua, in spite of his advanced years, was a man of action.

He turned rapidly from one to another of his officers, and these dashed quickly away. A moment later the few troops began to move, and the girls realized that President Garcia had taken some steps to offset the advance of the revolutionists.

They found themselves going along with the troops.

"My goodness! I wish we were back on the ship," exclaimed Shirley.

"You don't wish it any more than I do," declared Mabel. "I am more frightened than you are. Suppose there should be a battle. What would happen to us?"

Shirley shrugged her shoulders.

"You know as much about it as I do," she made answer.

Mabel looked at her in amazement.

"Why, Shirley Willing!" she exclaimed. "Aren't you afraid? I am scared half to death."

"I am just as badly frightened as you are," declared Shirley. "I may not look it, but I am."

"I don't believe you are frightened at all," said Mabel.

In spite of the seriousness of the situation and her declaration that she was badly frightened, Shirley was forced to smile at her friend's words.

"Well, perhaps I'm not so awfully scared," she confessed. "I'm anxious to see what is going to happen."

"I know what is going to happen," was the reply. "We are going to get hurt!"

Mabel broke down and began to cry.

Shirley took her chum gently in her arms, and stroked her hair.

"There, there!" she said. "Stop crying. No one is going to hurt us. You are just overwrought, that's all."

"I just know we are going to be shot—and—and killed," sobbed Mabel.

"Nonsense," said Shirley sharply. "Look up now and stop that crying. We are perfectly safe. Stop crying."

Mabel looked up suddenly at the sharpness in her chum's tone, but her tears soon were dried away. Shirley, in speaking as she had, had done the best thing possible. She had realized that it was time for sharp words and not for sympathy.

After a march of perhaps a half hour, President Garcia called another halt, and then summoned his officers into consultation.

The two girls stood close, but they could not make out what was being said. At length the general dismissed his officers with a gesture, and as they scattered to their respective posts, the general approached the two girls.

"We are going to make a sharp turn to the south here," he said quietly, "and then we shall move back and engage the enemy. That will put you safely behind us. Now, if I were you, I would bear off slightly to the right, and then go straight ahead. In that way you will be out of danger. If the firing comes closer to you, make another wide detour, turn about and try to make your way back to the ship. But I would not do that until after the battle ceases."

"Thank you, sir," said Shirley. "We shall do as you suggest. We thank you for your thoughtfulness in keeping us from falling into the hands of the revolutionists. May you come through the battle unharmed, and may you be successful."

She extended her hand, and the President bent over it gravely.

"I thank you for your good wishes," he said quietly.

Mabel also now advanced and extended her hand, and the President bent over it.

"Good luck to you, Mr. President," said Mabel.

"I thank you, too, young lady," said the President simply. "Now heed my injunction and betake yourselves to a place of safety. We shall advance at once."

Once more he bowed low to them, swung sharply about on his heel and was gone. With hoarse commands from the officers, the troops faced to the left and marched off.

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"I guess we had better be moving, Shirley," said Mabel.

Instead of turning to the right, they went straight back.

"It should be safer here," said Mabel as they hurried along. "The revolutionists are liable to advance on the right as well as on the left!"

"I wish we could get some place where we could see," declared Shirley.

Mabel stooped in her tracks and gazed at her friend in the utmost astonishment.

"Shirley!" she exclaimed. "Surely you don't mean that?"

"Of course I mean it. If we could only find some place where it is safe."

Unconsciously the girls had borne off to the left, and now suddenly they came upon a clearing in the midst of the woods. And as they glanced back, they saw the Nicaraguan government troops advancing across it.

But even as they looked the troops came to a halt, and most of them fell to their knees. Shirley looked around quickly. Directly behind her was a large tree.

"If we haven't forgotten our tomboy days we'll climb up there and watch the battle," she declared.

She led the way, and in spite of her misgivings, Mabel followed.

CHAPTER XVI.—THE GIRLS SEE A BATTLE.

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As Shirley and Mabel, from their shelter among the branches, peered across the plain, they saw puffs of smoke issue from the now kneeling body of men. Sharp reports came to their ears. The only man still standing erect, as they could see plainly, was President Garcia, who, with upraised sword, was directing the movement of his men.

A man dropped his rifle and fell to the ground, and Mabel shrieked.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed a moment later. "This is terrible, Shirley!"

Shirley's lips were compressed, and for a moment she turned her eyes away.

The firing became louder now, and for the first time the girls noticed that President Garcia and his men were retreating toward them.

"We had better get down out of here!" exclaimed Mabel. "We may be struck."

Shirley agreed, and they were about to descend, when, from behind them, came rapid footsteps, indicating the approach of a considerable number of men. Shirley and Mabel became silent.

A moment later a score of dark-visaged Nicaraguans, with rifles ready for instant use, appeared and took up their position at the edge of the little woods, several of them falling flat under the very tree in which the two girls were perched.

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Mabel uttered an exclamation as the first volley was fired by these newcomers. In spite of the fact that she was prepared for it, the sharp reports of the weapons had wrung a cry of surprise from her. Shirley, more calm, uttered no sound.

The girls could now see that the men beneath them were a part of President Garcia's force, for they were shooting over the heads of their companions, apparently in an effort to cover the retreat of the main body.

The latter now retreated more rapidly and at length joined forces with the men beneath the trees. Shirley and Mabel could hear their conversation plainly, but as it was carried on in Spanish, they could not make out the trend of it.

For perhaps fifteen minutes President Garcia's men held their position, firing at the enemy from the shelter of the trees.

The plight of the two girls was much more serious than either realized, for a chance bullet was

likely to hit one of them at any moment. And yet they felt safer in the tree than they would have felt among the soldiers on the ground.

So far the enemy had contented themselves with lying flat on the ground some distance away and firing at the trees, but now, as Shirley perceived by peering across the plain, they were preparing for a charge.

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A moment later there was a wild yell, and they came forward on the run. They spread out as they came on, and here and there a man fell over, struck down by a rifle bullet.

In spite of their great danger both girls became lost in wonder at the sight, and stared ahead with straining eyes. Shirley was brought to herself by the sound of something buzzing past her head. She knew in a moment what it was.

"Mabel!" she cried. "Climb as high as you can or we shall be shot!"

She scrambled higher up among the branches, and Mabel followed suit.

Here no bullets flew past them, and looking down they saw that President Garcia was ordering his men to retreat.

The government troops disappeared further back in the woods, and now the danger came from their bullets rather than from those of the enemy. The girls were in a ticklish situation and they were fully alive to their peril.

The enemy pushed further into the woods, pursuing the government troops. The bullets flew less thick, the sound of firing became fainter and fainter, and then died away in the distance.

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Shirley roused herself from the trance in which she seemed to have fallen.

"Come, Mabel," she said. "Let's get down and get back to the ship before some of them come back."

Mabel was nothing loath, and quickly the girls slid to the ground and advanced to the edge of the clearing. Here they stopped for a moment, looking about them.

Several figures were sprawled about on the ground. The girls shuddered.

"It is terrible," said Shirley.

"Don't look at them," urged Mabel. "Let's run."

But as they were about to take to their heels, they were startled by the sound of a voice directly behind them.

"Ha!" it said.

The girls wheeled in their tracks to confront a man with rifle levelled directly at them. A cry of fear was rung from Mabel's lips, but Shirley said nothing.

The man advanced and the girls shrank back. A torrent of words poured from the man's lips, but it was absolutely unintelligible to either of the girls.

Shirley made a gesture, indicating that they did not understand, and the man said:

"Americanos?"

"Yes," replied Shirley. "Do you speak English?"

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"Si!" replied the man, "a leetle!"

"We want to go away," said Shirley eagerly. "We belong on the ship in the harbor."

"No! Stay here. General Orizaba will return soon," said the man in broken English.

Shirley started to protest, but the man made a threatening gesture with his rifle.

The two girls looked at each other in dismay.

"Out of the frying pan into the fire, Mabel," declared Shirley. "I guess we shall have to stay."

There was apparently no help for it. They sat down upon the grass to await the arrival of General Orizaba, who, they rightly guessed, was the commander of the revolutionary forces.

Their captor stood vigilant guard. Apparently he was determined to allow them no chance to escape. He sat some distance away, with his rifle across his knees. The two girls settled themselves with their backs to a large tree, and made themselves as comfortable as they could under the circumstances.

There was a snapping of a twig behind them, and Shirley glanced about uneasily.

"S-s-h-h," came a low voice. "Keep still and show no surprise."

Both girls recognized the voice in an instant.

They maintained their composure well, and spoke only to each other.

"It's Dick!" whispered Shirley.

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"I know it," replied Mabel.

"Then we are safe."

The girls' guard now put an end to their conversation. Rising he approached them and

commanded:

“Silence!”

He did not hear soft footsteps passing beyond him, nor did he turn in time to see a figure leap from behind a tree and spring at him. The first he realized of his danger was when a pair of strong arms went round him, and he was hurled violently to the ground, his rifle flying from his hands.

“Get the rifle, Shirley!” called Dick, as he and his opponent struggled for mastery.

Shirley leaped forward, stopped, and when she arose she held the rifle.

For a moment she considered the advisability of advancing and lending Dick a hand, then concluded that he was more than a match for the Nicaraguan. Besides, the figures were locked in such close embrace that she couldn't have aided Dick if she would.

Now Dick succeeded in shaking off the grip of his opponent, and sprang to his feet. The Nicaraguan did likewise, and sprang back.

As Dick leaped forward again, the man's hand went to his holster, and a revolver flashed in his hand.

But before he could bring the weapon to bear, Shirley stepped quickly forward, levelled her rifle at him, and in a clear sharp voice, cried:

“Halt!”

The man wheeled quickly and as he did so, Dick sprang upon him from behind. A quick blow sent the revolver hurling several feet away, and then Dick stepped back to give free play to his boxing skill.

The Nicaraguan rushed at him, but Dick stepped lightly aside, and as the man went by, carried on by the impetus of his rush, Dick struck out straight and true from the shoulder.

The Nicaraguan crumpled up in a heap on the ground.

Shirley and Mabel ran quickly to Dick's side.

“Are you hurt, Dick?” asked Shirley anxiously.

“No!” was the smiling rejoinder, “but I would have been if you had not been prompt with that rifle. That's all that saved me.”

“How did you find us?” asked Mabel.

“Followed you. We became alarmed at your absence and I said I thought I could find you. I imagined you had gone for a stroll, and when I saw this bunch of pirates going through the town I guessed that you would fall into their hands. I came along after them and just as I was about to go on I saw you climbing down from the tree.”

“Well, you didn't arrive a minute too soon,” declared Shirley. “We were badly frightened, weren't we Mabel?”

“I know I was,” was her chum's reply. She turned to Dick. “But how——”

“I'll explain later,” interrupted Dick. “The thing to do now is to get away from here before they return. Come on.”

The girls started on ahead of him, and Dick turned for a glance over his shoulder.

Then he uttered an exclamation of alarm, and shouted:

“Run!”

For in that quick glance over his shoulder he had perceived the return of the revolutionists.

CHAPTER XVII.—MABEL BRINGS THE BLUEJACKETS.

Shirley and Mabel needed no further urging, and took to their heels. Dick followed close behind.

In the one brief glance in which he had perceived the return of the soldiers, Dick had been unable to determine whether their presence had been discovered, but he believed it wise to take a chance. Hence his command to run.

The three sped lightly over the ground and had gone some distance when they heard a shout from behind, followed by the sharp reports of several rifles.

Dick stopped suddenly and called to the girls to halt. They obeyed instantly.

“There is no use being shot,” said Dick quietly, “and although they are poor shots they would be sure to hit one of us sooner or later.”

“Then what shall we do?” cried Mabel.

“There is only one thing to do,” was the reply. “Surrender.”

"Dick is right," agreed Shirley. "It is foolish to attempt to escape."

In the meantime the band of revolutionists had been coming toward them, and at length surrounded the three figures. A man, who appeared to be the leader, though he wore no uniform nor mark of distinction, advanced and addressed Dick.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" he demanded in English.

Dick explained, and the man heard him through quietly.

"And who was it hurt Pedro back there?" and the leader waved toward the spot where Dick had struggled with the Nicaraguan.

"I did," he replied quietly, and explained the cause of the fight.

"Well, you will have to stand trial for attacking one of my men," said the leader. "I am General Orizaba."

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He signalled for his men to surround the three, which was soon done, and they continued their march back toward the city.

"Every step in this direction is better for us," said Dick to the two girls, as they marched along. "We'll get out of this trouble some way, be sure of that."

"Oh, I know no harm will come to us as long as you are here," replied Shirley.

"Thanks," said Dick dryly. "But I don't see how I can do much for any of us right now."

"Something will turn up," said Shirley positively.

"I hope it turns up soon," declared Mabel.

But if the prisoners hoped to be taken directly back to town they were doomed to disappointment.

After crossing the clearing in the woods, General Orizaba led his men to the left, where after an hour's march, he called a halt. Then he again approached the prisoners.

"We shall camp here," he said. "Here, also, you shall be tried for attacking Pedro."

Dick made no reply, but Shirley did

"We are Americans," she said, "and you don't dare to interfere with us."

"I don't, eh?" was the reply. "You shall see."

Pedro, it now appeared, had been revived and brought along. The general motioned for him to approach. He pointed to Dick and spoke in Spanish. It was impossible to tell what they were talking about, but all three were keen enough to know that it boded no good for them.

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The general turned again to Dick.

"Pedro says you struck him without warning and without provocation," he said. "I have decided, therefore, to dispense with the trial, and to fix your punishment myself."

"I warn you——" began Dick.

"Caramba!" roared the leader, becoming very angry. "What do I care for your warnings, or for your friends either?"

"There is an American cruiser in the harbor," said Dick quietly. "The commander knows where I am, and if I am not back within two hours, he will land a force of sailors to see why."

General Orizaba seemed to hesitate, following these words. Then he became even angrier than before. He was about to speak, when a horseman clattered up.

The general turned to him and they conversed in low tones. Then the horseman dismounted, and leaving his horse, made his way to where the rest of the revolutionists sat upon the ground some distance away.

General Orizaba again faced Dick.

"Dog of an Americano!" he thundered. "You shall be shot for daring to interfere with one of my men."

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Dick only smiled.

"I guess you don't mean that," he replied quietly.

"I don't, eh? You shall see." He paused a moment. "But you shall live until sunset."

He turned to call one of his men; and at that moment, Mabel, who stood closest to the riderless horse, suddenly leaped forward and sprang upon the animal's back.

So sudden was her movement that for a moment the Nicaraguans failed to realize her intention.

That moment was sufficient for Mabel to seize the reins and turn the horse's head toward the city. Then she dug her heels into his flanks and away they went.

Dick and Shirley were no less surprised than the Nicaraguans, and both uttered cries of alarm.

General Orizaba darted forward with an ejaculation, and called to his men.

"Shoot!" he cried.

Rifles were brought to bear, but the horse had gained his stride and was galloping along like the wind. Volley after volley was fired after the girl, but thanks to the movement of the horse and the poor marksmanship of the Nicaraguans, Mabel was not touched.

Rapidly she rode, nor did she draw rein when she entered the town but galloped straight to the pier. Here still lay the small boat of the *Yucatan*, manned by its crew. Rapidly explaining the situation, the girl urged the sailors back to the ship without waiting the return of the first officer, who was some place in the town.

About the ship, Mabel found that Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton were ashore searching for the girls, and so she went straight to Captain Anderson. That worthy acted promptly. He quickly signalled the cruiser *Prairie*, which Mabel, saw for the first time, perceived lay close by.

The *Prairie* signalled for the captain and Mabel to come aboard, which they did without loss of time. In a few words Mabel explained the situation to the commander of the cruiser.

Action came quickly.

A bugle sounded, piping the crew to quarters. The commander detailed a landing party of one hundred and fifty marines and sailors. These were quickly rowed to the shore—Mabel going with them as a guide, for she refused to be left behind.

Once ashore, the girl led the way toward where she had left her friends, the men going forward at the double-quick, their weapons ready for instant use.

When General Orizaba perceived that Mabel had made good her flight, his anger knew no bounds. He berated his men roundly and danced about like a madman. Then he turned to Dick.

"But you shall not escape!" he declared.

"You'll have a squad of marines down on you in a few minutes," replied Dick with a cheerful smile. "Then where will you be?"

"Bah!" said the angry general. "What are a few marines? We can drive them back."

"Think so, do you?" asked Dick. "I'm afraid you'll be surprised."

"You shall see," declared the angry leader. "You shall live until you see your countrymen defeated."

"Guess I shall live a long time then," said Dick, with a smile.

The smile angered the leader, and he stepped close to Dick and slapped him across the face.

Dick's anger boiled up and he promptly sent his fist crashing into the general's face, knocking him down.

The young man regretted this act the next moment, for he knew that probably he had brought matters to a crisis.

General Orizaba sprang to his feet and with a shout drew his revolver and covered Dick.

Shirley screamed. Then General Orizaba lowered his revolver.

"No, I won't do it yet," he said. "I promised you should see your countrymen defeated, and so you shall. I shall kill you later."

"Thanks," said Dick.

In spite of his apparent nonchalance, he breathed easier, however, for he had been at the point of death, and none knew it better than he did.

"We are all right now," he told Shirley in a low voice. "The marines and sailors will soon be here, and these fellows can't stand up against them."

Shirley smiled at him bravely.

"I know it," she replied quietly.

Now the leader of the revolutionists signalled two of his men to bind the prisoners. This was soon done, and they were taken well to one side of what proved to be the line of battle.

"I do this so I may be sure you will be saved for me," said General Orizaba with an evil smile. "It would be nice to have you shot down by American bullets, but I would rather do it myself. Besides, from here, you can see us defeat the Americanos."

"Many thanks for your kindness," returned Dick. "I'll speak a word for you when you are in the hands of the Americanos, as you call them."

"That," was the reply, "will never be."

Dick shrugged his shoulders.

"Have it your own way," he said.

Came a shout from one of the men who had been sent forward on scout duty.

"The Americanos!" he cried.

General Orizaba hurried toward him. Dick and Shirley drew a breath of relief.

An instant later a long line of hurrying blue figures came into view. Shirley and Dick looked at

them with pride in their eyes.

The marines and sailors advanced at the double.

“Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!”

The battle had begun!

CHAPTER XVIII.—END OF THE REVOLT.

The Nicaraguans met the first charge of the bluejackets bravely enough, but they were now opposed to men who knew not the meaning of the word defeat, nor what it meant to retreat. Under the first fire from the Americans they wavered; at the next they began to fall back and at the third they turned and fled.

Dick and Shirley, bound as they were, nevertheless could see how the fighting progressed, while thanks to the thoughtfulness of the revolutionary leader they were out of danger themselves.

But now that the day was going against the enemy, Dick feared that General Orizaba, mindful of his threat, would return to his prisoners before seeking safety in flight. Therefore he began to devise a way of escape.

After some effort he succeeded in getting out his pocket knife. Then, holding it in one of his bound hands, he bent his head and opened the big blade with his teeth. Fortunately the rope with which he was bound was not thick, and the knife was sharp.

For perhaps ten minutes, holding the knife in his mouth by the handle, Dick sawed at the bonds on his hands. At last the rope parted. Quickly he untied his feet, and then unbound Shirley, who also arose to her feet.

The Nicaraguan forces were now in full retreat, and as Dick would have led Shirley forward toward the town, a single figure burst into sight. As the man came closer Shirley and Dick could see anger and hate written large on his features. They recognized him upon the instant.

“Orizaba!” exclaimed Shirley.

“And come to fulfill his promise, I guess,” agreed Dick quietly.

“Run!” cried Shirley.

“What’s the use?” asked Dick. “He has a gun.”

It was true. In the hands of the defeated revolutionary leader was a revolver of heavy caliber, and he flourished it as he came toward them.

Dick turned to Shirley.

“You get back out of sight!” he commanded. “I can handle this fellow!”

Shirley protested.

“But—but,——” she began.

“Quick!” exclaimed Dick. “He is very angry and for that reason will be easier to handle. I don’t believe he could hit a barn door now.”

Shirley followed Dick’s command and withdrew a short distance, although she was still in plain sight of the infuriated Nicaraguan.

Standing quietly, with his hands on his hips, Dick awaited the attack of the Nicaraguan. A full hundred yards away, but still running, the latter opened fire with his revolver.

“Good!” thought Dick to himself. “He can’t hit me that way, and his shells will soon be gone.”

Five times Orizaba fired, and each time the bullet went wild.

Shirley, from her place of safety, watched the encounter breathlessly. She stood with clenched fists and awaited the outcome of each shot anxiously.

A sixth time Orizaba’s revolver spoke.

Dick staggered, and Shirley gave utterance to a scream, while a laugh of derision came from the Nicaraguan.

But the latter’s mirth was destined to be short-lived. Dick, still with a smile on his face in spite of the dull pain in his left arm where Orizaba’s last bullet had struck, stepped forward to meet his enemy in his mad rush.

They came together with a shock and tumbled to the ground, where Orizaba clawed desperately at Dick’s face and eyes.

“So that’s your game, eh?” muttered Dick to himself.

He protected his face with his injured arm, while with the uninjured one he rained a shower of blows upon the Nicaraguan’s face. The latter soon tired of this and sprang to his feet. Dick also arose.

There was a cry of alarm from Shirley as Orizaba stepped back. His hand went to his belt, and a knife flashed in the air. But Dick, quick as a cat, gave him no time to use it.

He realized his danger in an instant and acted promptly. With a shout he sprang forward, and seized the upraised arm with his right hand. He twisted it fiercely, and the Nicaraguan gave a cry of pain as he released his hold on the knife and stepped back.

As he did so, Dick drove his right fist into his face, and General Orizaba tumbled to the ground, where he lay still.

At the same moment there was a cheer from close at hand and, turning, Dick saw a dozen marines who had gathered about to watch the contest. Shirley came forward anxiously.

"Are you hurt Dick?" she asked.

"Not much, I guess," was the reply. "He winged me with the last shot, but I am sure it is nothing serious."

"He's all right," shouted one of the marines, as they gathered about him and congratulated him upon his fight.

Shirley turned on them angrily.

"And you stood off and left him to be killed," she exclaimed. "You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

"Oh, we know he could handle that fellow," was the response, but the men looked at one another somewhat sheepishly.

Their reason for not interfering was perfectly apparent. They had enjoyed the spectacle of Dick and Orizaba locked in combat, and had felt morally certain Dick would come out on top.

"Just the same, he might have been badly hurt!" said Shirley, by no means convinced.

"Oh, they did all right," said Dick with a laugh. "Come Shirley, let's get back to the ship and I'll have the surgeon look at this arm."

"Are you hurt, Jack?" asked one of the men stepping forward.

"Bullet in the arm," was Dick's reply; and he added: "But my name is not Jack."

"Everybody is Jack to us," was the answer. "But had we known you were wounded we would have taken that fellow off your hands. Come on, there is Dr. Thomas over there."

Dick and Shirley followed the marines to where the surgeon was engaged in bandaging the wounds of an American sailor, the only man who had been touched by one of the enemy's bullets.

He bound Dick's arm up quickly, remarking that it would be as good as new in a day or two.

"Shirley!"

It was Mabel's voice, and turning, Shirley saw her chum rushing toward her. She ran to meet her and the greeting was affectionate.

"How dared you take such a chance, Mabel?" demanded Shirley.

"Well, somebody had to do it, and I was closest the horse," was the reply. "I knew they couldn't hit me."

"Nevertheless, it was a desperate risk," said Dick, who came up at that moment. "I expected to see your horse go tumbling."

"But how did you get aid so quickly?" demanded Shirley.

Mabel explained.

"And they made me go back when the fighting began," she continued. "I wanted to hunt you up immediately, but the lieutenant wouldn't let me."

"I should say not," declared Dick.

"Shirley was in danger. Why shouldn't I have been there?" demanded Mabel. "I saw Dick and the general fighting and I came forward as fast as I could," the girl continued, "and when I saw the Nicaraguan go down I knew our troubles were over."

"And where is Dad?" asked Shirley.

"I didn't see him," replied Mabel. "I suppose they are looking for us in some other part of the town. I'll bet they are badly frightened."

"I fear so too," replied Shirley. "I guess we had better get back as soon as we can. But we shall have to thank the lieutenant first."

That officer declared that he wanted no thanks.

"We are glad to have been able to take a shot at those fellows," he said. "We have been wanting to do it for a long time, but this is the first opportunity we have had. We—Hello!"

He broke off suddenly. Riding rapidly toward them was a large body of men, and above them floated a white flag. They dismounted some distance away, and one approached.

The girls recognized this man immediately. He was President Garcia.

He rode up to the lieutenant, and introduced himself.

"And I would like the person of Orizaba delivered to me," he said quietly.

"You shall have him," replied the lieutenant. "It will save us trouble."

The unfortunate revolutionist, fully recovered now, was turned over to the President of Nicaragua and marched away. Then President Garcia appeared to perceive Shirley and Mabel for the first time. He raised his hat to them.

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"I am pleased that the señoritas have escaped safely," he said quietly, and making a low bow to them, he turned his horse about, and a moment later was gone.

The lieutenant in command of the marines now ordered his men back to their ship, and the girls accompanied them on their return march through the town. Dark looks were cast at them from all sides, but none ventured a word.

"You may see they don't love us very much in these parts," said the lieutenant with a smile. "They would welcome a chance to shoot us all."

At the pier the two girls saw their fathers approaching rapidly, and they ran forward to meet them. The meeting was affectionate, for both Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton had been greatly alarmed at their long absence.

"I am going to keep my eye on you in the future," declared Mr. Willing.

The girls only laughed. Both men were profuse in their praise of Dick's gallant actions, and Colonel Ashton declared:

"It's a good thing we brought him along, Willing."

The marines gave the Willing party a rousing cheer as they stepped into the *Yucatan's* small boat and were rowed back to the vessel.

"I'm glad to see you back," declared Captain Anderson. "We're late now. We shall leave here at once." He turned to the first officer. "You may get under way immediately, sir!"

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And as the *Yucatan* steamed from the harbor, the passengers gathered about the two girls, demanding an account of their experiences.

CHAPTER XIX.—A GUATEMALA ADVENTURE.

"This," said Captain Anderson, waving his hand, as the steamer entered a little harbor, "is Champerico, the only Guatemalan port at which we shall touch. It is the last Central American republic we shall see. Would you care to go ashore?"

"I would like to go," said Shirley, with a sidelong look at her father.

"You won't go unless I do," was Mr. Willing's ultimatum. "You have been in trouble enough. I'm going to keep you in sight." He turned to Colonel Ashton. "Would you care to go ashore, Ashton?"

"Why, yes," was the reply.

"Good. Then we shall all go," said Mr. Willing.

"You can go with me," said Captain Anderson. "I am going to pay my respects to the American consul."

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An hour later a small boat put off from the ship and headed shoreward. In it, besides Captain Anderson and the crew, were Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton, Dick, Shirley and Mabel.

"We'll keep out of trouble this time," commented Mr. Willing.

They accompanied Captain Anderson to the United States consulate, where they were introduced to the consul. An hour later they all started back toward the boat.

As they walked down one of the dirty streets Captain Anderson espied a figure slinking along.

"Hey!" he cried. "There goes that scoundrel Von Blusen, who broke his parole and ran away at Corinto. I'll get him!"

He darted hurriedly across the street, and laid a hand on the young man's shoulder. The latter looked up in surprise, and then perceiving Captain Anderson, jerked suddenly free and took to his heels, running directly toward the Willing party.

"Head him off!" cried Captain Anderson, and Dick and the two men leaped to obey.

Straight at them rushed the young German officer, and a few feet away hurled himself forward with a powerful spring. He struck the three squarely, and all went to the ground in a tangled heap.

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Von Blusen was the first to regain his feet. He raised a hand as though to strike one of his fallen adversaries, but the approach of Captain Anderson at that moment caused him to turn and flee quickly.

The captain made after him at top speed, calling upon him to halt. Around the block they ran, and then, unconsciously doubling back, Von Blusen once more found himself bearing down on Dick and Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton.

A moment later Captain Anderson, panting, hove in sight and gasped out:

"Stop him!"

This time the three spread out, so they would have a better chance of halting the fugitive. The latter ran straight at Mr. Willing and the force of the contact sent both to the ground. As Von Blusen arose Colonel Ashton leaped for him.

But the German was too quick for the colonel, and missing his grasp, the latter sprawled on the street. Von Blusen turned just in time to meet Dick with a hard blow to the face, and Dick toppled over.

Then Von Blusen darted up a little alleyway.

Unmindful of his intention to keep a close eye on the girls, Mr. Willing, now red with anger, made after him, as did the colonel, Captain Anderson and Dick.

The girls found themselves alone in the street.

The noise of the chase had attracted many spectators, among them several members of the native police.

Suddenly Captain Von Blusen emerged from the alleyway on the dead run, his pursuers close on his trail.

Perceiving one man thus followed by many, the native officers decided to interfere. Von Blusen darted past them, evading their outstretched arms by dodging neatly; but the others were not so fortunate.

Pursuers and native police collided with a shock, and there was a tangle of arms and legs as they rolled in the dirty street. The officers freed themselves first, and drawing their revolvers stood by while the others arose.

One of them broke into a torrent of Spanish.

Captain Anderson, the only member of the party who spoke the language, halted in his tracks.

"I'm an American citizen," he told the policeman. "Take your hands off me," this to one of the officers who insisted upon holding him by the arm.

The officer chattered volubly and clung to the arm.

Captain Anderson freed his arm with a quick wrench, and tapped the officer lightly on the shoulder with his hand.

"Caramba!" roared the Guatemalan, and levelled his revolver at the captain.

"Caramba yourself!" cried the captain, and extending his arm suddenly, he took the pistol away from the little officer.

The latter stamped the ground angrily and broke into another torrent of unintelligible words.

But Captain Anderson now perceived he had acted rashly in thus giving way to his temper. The blood of the other native officers was aroused, and they surrounded the Americans gesticulating vigorously.

At that moment Captain Von Blusen, who had been hovering just around the corner, reappeared, and approaching the officers, addressed them in Spanish.

"These men tried to rob me," he declared. "I want them arrested!"

"Si señor! It shall be done!" replied one of the officers.

"I'll go with you to make the charge," continued the young German.

"Si señor!" said the native officer.

Turning, he motioned for the four to precede him. Captain Anderson was inclined to hang back, as were the others, but a word from Captain Von Blusen decided them to go on.

"They'll shoot if you don't go," declared Von Blusen with a smile.

Shirley and Mabel, who had been standing nearby while all this was going on, now made as though to approach, but Mr. Willing waved them back.

"Go back to the consulate and tell the consul what has happened," he called to her.

The girls turned to go, but Von Blusen, realizing what was going on, called to the officers to stop them.

"Run!" cried Captain Anderson, who was the only one who understood the import of the German's words.

"Halt!" cried one of the Guatemalans, as the girls broke into a run.

But the girls did not understand him, and if they had, their actions would have been the same.

They set out for the consulate at top speed and they did not stop, in spite of pursuit and cries of

"Halt!" until they dashed in the door.

The consul greeted them with an exclamation of surprise.

"What's the matter?" he demanded.

Shirley explained.

"And hurry," she added tearfully, "they will lock them up in a dirty old jail."

The consul was forced to smile.

"Oh, well, I guess it won't hurt them any," he replied.

The girls looked at him in astonishment, and Shirley opened her mouth to speak. The consul silenced her with a gesture.

"I'll get them out, all right," he assured them.

He looked at his watch and continued.

"It is now ten o'clock. I think I can safely promise to have them back aboard the *Yucatan* by five o'clock."

"Five o'clock!" repeated Shirley. "And where will they be all that time?"

"Jail," was the brief reply.

Shirley could not repress an exclamation of dismay.

"But can't you hurry?" she exclaimed.

"Now don't you fret," said the consul. "There is certain red tape that must be gone through, and it will take time. Besides, it is needless to hurry. In this country no one hurries. If I seem unduly excited it will take longer than ever."

"Please do the best you can, then," said Shirley.

"I shall," replied the consul. "In the meantime, you two girls return aboard the *Yucatan*. I'll call my secretary and have him escort you back."

In response to his summons a young man appeared and the consul instructed him to see them back aboard their ship.

"Yes, sir," said the young man. "Come," to the girls.

He accompanied them to the wharf, where he instructed the sailors to take them aboard and then return and await the arrival of the captain and the others.

It was almost six o'clock when Shirley and Mabel, gazing toward shore, perceived the little boat of the *Yucatan* bobbing toward them. As it drew close they could make out the faces of their fathers, Dick and Captain Anderson.

A short time later all appeared on deck. Their clothing was ruffled and dirty, and it was plain to the girls that their fathers were not in the best of temper. Nevertheless Shirley could not repress a slight dig at them.

First she approached Captain Anderson.

"And did you capture Captain Von Blusen?" she asked.

"No," grumbled the captain. "I hope I never set eyes on him again."

"Dad," said Shirley, "do you remember what you said to us about getting into trouble?"

Mr. Willing growled some unintelligible reply.

"We've never been in jail yet, Dad," continued Shirley slyly. "Were you?"

Mr. Willing glanced at his daughter and seemed about to make some sharp response. Then he controlled himself and spoke:

"Yes, we were in jail," he growled. "We spent the best part of the day there."

"Well," said Shirley, "you are always getting in trouble. I reckon Mabel and I will have to keep closer watch on you."

"I am sure of it," declared Mabel.

Dick smiled, but there was no amusement on the faces of Mr. Willing nor Colonel Ashton. They scowled at their daughters.

"Now, Dad," continued Shirley, "did Captain Von Blusen—"

"Will you be quiet?" demanded Mr. Willing. "Haven't we had enough trouble for one day without all this chatter. Come, Ashton, we'll go to our cabin."

Shirley, Mabel and Dick broke into a loud laugh as the two stalked away arm in arm, looking neither to the right nor left.

The passengers aboard the *Yucatan* gazed curiously at the approaching battle cruiser.

It was the morning following the departure from Champerico, and the *Yucatan* had been halted by a shot fired across her bow. Officers and passengers alike were curious as to the identity of the cruiser.

So far she had shown no colors.

"Do you suppose she is English?" asked Shirley of Dick, as they gazed over the rail at the oncoming stranger.

"Must be either English or Japanese," replied Dick. "Not much chance of any other vessel being in these waters, unless, of course, she is a United States cruiser. But that can't be, because she would not have halted us." 155

Signs of activity became apparent aboard the cruiser, and the colors were run up the masthead. For a moment they could not be distinguished, but as the breeze caught the ensign, a gasp went up from the passengers, with here and there a cheer.

For the colors thus displayed were the red, white and black of Germany!

"My goodness! Will she shoot us?" exclaimed Shirley in some dismay.

"Hardly," declared Dick. "I don't believe Germany wants to go to war with the United States."

There came a message from the German to Captain Anderson:

"I am coming aboard!"

A few moments later a boat put off from the cruiser, and soon scraped alongside the *Yucatan*. An officer appeared over the side and was greeted by Captain Anderson.

"How did you get here?" was his first question. "I had reason to believe the *Yucatan* was now in other waters."

"Well," replied Captain Anderson dryly, "your little piracy scheme didn't work, you see."

The German officer controlled his temper with an effort. 156

"Have you a passenger by the name of Bristow aboard?"

"Oh," said the captain, "you mean Von Blusen. We did have him aboard, in irons. I released him on parole, and he broke it. I'll never trust another German."

The German officer drew himself up angrily.

"Have a care, sir!" he exclaimed. "You seem to forget that I can sink you on a moment's notice."

"Oh, no I don't. But I'm sure you won't. Already you have troubles enough. I'll thank you to dispose of your business immediately and then get off my ship."

"I'll have a look at your papers," said the German shortly.

Captain Anderson led the way to his cabin.

As they talked, the passengers on deck noticed smoke upon the horizon. Save for this little blur and the German cruiser there was nothing else in sight but water.

The blur became larger, and at last took the shape of a vessel. As it drew nearer it could be seen that it was a battle cruiser. It bore down toward the German cruiser at full speed.

"I hope it's an Englishman," declared Shirley.

"Probably is," said her father, "although it may be a Jap." 157

Still the German officer was in the cabin with Captain Anderson.

Suddenly the head of another German officer appeared over the rail of the *Yucatan* and dashed toward the captain's cabin. A moment later both reappeared, dropped over the side and the boat made back toward the cruiser.

The *Yucatan* was very close, and now, at a command from Captain Anderson, she got under way.

"If that other cruiser is a Britisher, there is bound to be a fight, and we don't want to be in the way," explained the captain. "We'll stand off at a distance and look on."

This plan met the approval of the passengers, and as the *Yucatan* steamed toward a safe spot all eyes were turned upon the second cruiser waiting for her to show her colors.

And at last they were unfurled, and a cheer rang the length of the ship. The British ensign fluttered from the mast.

The German cruiser, immediately the identity of the other was determined, turned to flee. She seemed fully as large as the British ship, and there were comments of surprise aboard the *Yucatan* that she didn't offer to accept battle.

But there was to be no escape for the German. The British cruiser gave chase, and it was soon apparent that she was much faster than the foe.

There was a heavy crash as her big guns opened fire on the stern of the enemy. The *Yucatan's* passengers watched eagerly for the result.

The German cruiser seemed to stagger in her stride, and a cloud of wood and steel flew in the air. The first shot had struck home, and in some manner had disabled the engines of the German. Escape being impossible, the latter turned to give battle.

Immediately the British cruiser reduced her speed.

Shirley and Mabel stood at the rail of the *Yucatan* with clasped hands and strained faces.

"And to think that we shall see a real sea fight!" exclaimed Mabel.

"But think of the poor sailors," said Shirley.

"Of course," said Mabel, "but they may be saved. Perhaps the German commander will surrender."

"I am sure he won't," declared Shirley.

"No, he won't surrender," said Dick. "Whatever else you may say of the Germans, their bravery cannot be doubted."

Now the first gun on the German cruiser spoke, and a shell plowed up the water alongside the Britisher.

"They'll have the range in a minute," said Dick, "and then they'll go at it hammer and tongs."

He was right. The next shot from the German burst squarely over her enemy's forward turret, putting it out of commission.

There was a cheer from the few German passengers aboard the *Yucatan*.

But the British cruiser more than evened up the score with her next shot.

A shell burst squarely amidships on the German. A moment later there was a terrific explosion.

The German cruiser seemed to part in the middle. It staggered crazily. She had been wounded unto death, as every passenger aboard the *Yucatan* realized.

Men flung themselves into the sea, and struck out in the direction of the *Yucatan*.

Captain Anderson was a humane man, and while the matter possibly was none of his business, he determined to aid the unfortunate victims. He ordered the ship's lifeboats manned and lowered.

"Look!" cried Shirley.

Another terrific explosion drowned her voice. The German cruiser suddenly sprang into a brilliant sheet of flame, seemed to leap in the air, then disappeared.

The calm waters of the Pacific closed over her. She was gone.

Shirley and Mabel held their breath in speechless amazement. It seemed to them incredible that such a great ship could have been sent to the bottom in such a short time.

"The poor sailors!" exclaimed Shirley. "I hope they will all be saved."

"They won't be," declared Captain Anderson, who had come up and now stood among the others. "With my glass I saw the commander on the bridge a moment before the ship went down. He has gone with her, and so, probably, have most of his officers."

He lifted his cap from his head, as did the passengers.

"It's a terrible thing, this war," continued the Captain. "How many went down I do not know; but how many of those who did know what they were fighting for? Not many."

Meanwhile the little lifeboats of the *Yucatan* were helping the crews of the British cruiser pick up the survivors. The work went on with the utmost haste, for there were many who could not swim.

Fortunately most of those who had jumped just before the explosion were saved. These were all taken aboard the British cruiser, and a short time later the British commander came aboard the *Yucatan*.

Shirley and Mabel looked with some awe at this British sea fighter. He seemed a veritable hero in their eyes. Once on deck, he strode toward Captain Anderson with quick steps, his carriage erect.

"I thank you for your assistance in saving many helpless sailors," he said to Captain Anderson. "Without your aid many would have perished."

"How badly is your ship damaged, sir?" asked Captain Anderson, asking the question that was uppermost in the minds of all aboard the *Yucatan*.

"Very little, sir," was the reply. "Two guns shot to pieces, and five men injured. No man was killed. There was also some slight damage to the engine room. It was a notable victory."

"Indeed it was!" cried Shirley, who could keep silent no longer.

The British sea captain gazed at her for a moment, then bowed slightly.

Shirley's face grew red at her own boldness, but she said nothing more.

The commander of the British cruiser followed Captain Anderson to the latter's cabin, where he inspected the ship's papers. Half an hour later he made his way over the side of the *Yucatan* and

was soon back aboard the cruiser.

Immediately he had left, the *Yucatan* got under way and continued her journey up the Mexican coast.

All the passengers remained on deck gazing after the British cruiser, which had turned in the opposite direction; and until she was lost to sight in the distance, a faint smoke marking her location, hardly an eye was taken from her.

"Well, Shirley," said Mr. Willing, "what did you think of the battle?"

"It was wonderful," replied the girl, clasping her hands. "I am glad the English won."

"And so am I," agreed her father. "How do you think you would like to be a sailor aboard a man-o'-war?"

"I'd love it!" declared Shirley with enthusiasm.

Dick looked at her peculiarly.

"I believe you would," he said quietly at last, and, turning on his heel, he went below.

CHAPTER XXI.—A WOMAN PLOTTER.

Aboard the *Yucatan* was a woman passenger, who, on the trip up the Pacific, had made herself very agreeable to the members of the Willing party. She was not an American although she spoke English fluently, with the slightest of accents. Neither Shirley nor Mabel had asked her nationality, but they had agreed that she must be a Spaniard.

The woman had given her name as Mrs. Miguel Sebastian and this strengthened the belief of the members of the Willing party that she was a native of one of the Latin countries. She had come aboard the ship for the first time at Colon, but for several days had kept to her stateroom, so the passengers had not seen much of her.

She was young, hardly more than twenty-five, slender, rather light complexioned for a Spaniard, and extremely pretty. Since leaving Champerico she had been much in the company of Shirley and Mabel, and both girls had taken an instinctive liking to her.

She had travelled much, apparently, and told them tales of many lands. Her husband, she said, was abroad in Europe, but would join her in San Francisco within a month. She was well posted on current events, and seemed to have the history of Mexico at her finger tips.

It was while the *Yucatan* was steaming into the harbor of Acapulco, the first Mexican port at which they were to touch, that Mrs. Sebastian related some of the history of the revolution-torn republic.

"I have always been greatly interested in Mexico," she told the girls, as the three leaned over the rail this morning. "I have spent several years in the country. I have friends here in Acapulco, and I shall make an effort to see them while here. Would you care to go with me?"

"We would love to," declared Shirley, "but I don't know whether Dad will consent to our going without him."

"We shall see," returned Mrs. Sebastian. "I can promise you a dinner that you will never forget. Nowhere outside of Mexico can you get real Mexican food, and it will be something to remember."

Colonel Ashton, Mr. Willing and Dick now joined the others on deck, and Shirley asked for permission to accompany Mrs. Sebastian.

Mr. Willing appeared somewhat dubious, but Mrs. Sebastian also asked him to consent.

"I'll promise to return them to you safely," she said with a smile.

"In that event, I shall give my consent to their going, madam," returned Colonel Ashton gallantly.

"And I," agreed Mr. Willing.

"Thanks so much," said Mrs. Sebastian, "and I'll go and ask Captain Anderson just how long we shall remain here."

She walked away.

"Mr. Willing," said Dick, "it may appear wrong, but somehow or other I don't exactly trust that woman."

"Pooh!" replied Mr. Willing. "What does a youngster like you know?"

"Perhaps I am wrong," replied Dick, "but something tells me she is not to be trusted. She is up to some mischief."

"Why, Dick!" exclaimed Shirley. "Don't you want us to go?"

"To tell the truth I don't," was the reply.

"Young man," said Colonel Ashton, "you will learn, as you grow older, not to jump to such rash conclusions. Mrs. Sebastian is a gentlewoman."

"Right you are, Ashton," declared Mr. Willing. "We're old enough to know, eh?"

The two men smiled at each other and walked away, leaving the young people together.

Mrs. Sebastian returned a few moments later.

"Captain Anderson says we shall be here until evening," she said, "so we shall have plenty of time for our trip ashore. He says we may go in the first boat, so you girls had better run along to your cabin and get ready. Mr. Stanley will entertain me until you return."

Shirley and Mabel hurried away, and Dick and Mrs. Sebastian stood together looking across the water at the shore, which was drawing closer rapidly.

"Where are you going when you get ashore?" asked Dick abruptly.

"Why, I am going to call upon a friend," was the smiling reply.

"Then you have been here before?" questioned Dick.

"Many times."

"Mrs. Sebastian," said Dick quietly, "are you a Mexican?"

The woman started back in surprise.

"Why, no," she replied at last. "I was born in Spain. Why do you ask?"

"I just wondered," was Dick's evasive answer. "By the way, I suppose it is perfectly peaceful here now?"

"Yes, indeed," was the reply. "I guess the fighting is all over, now that General Villa has been successful in Chihuahua and other northern states."

"But there has been trouble down here?"

"Oh yes, but it is all over. Besides, the revolutionists probably have not enough money to buy arms and ammunition."

"Why don't they steal them? It wouldn't be the first time."

Mrs. Sebastian's face turned red.

"What do you mean?" she asked angrily.

"I am sorry I offended you," Dick apologized. "I spoke thoughtlessly."

"Say no more about it," said Mrs. Sebastian with a laugh. "I am naturally touchy on that subject, for I have friends who were of the revolutionary party."

"I see," replied Dick, and the subject was changed as Shirley and Mabel returned to them.

Half an hour later the *Yucatan* dropped anchor a mile off shore and the small boats were lowered for such passengers as desired to land.

Mrs. Sebastian, Shirley and Mabel soon found themselves in the first boat and making shoreward at a good clip.

"We shall be back in plenty of time," Mrs. Sebastian had called to Mr. Willing just before they took their places in the boat.

The men nodded and waved their hands, and the occupants of the boat returned the salute.

Now the small boat scraped the shore, and an officer sprang out and lent a hand to the passengers. Mrs. Sebastian was the first to go ashore, and Shirley and Mabel followed a moment later.

The little street that ran along the water front was crowded with natives, dirty, ragged and unkempt, with here and there a gaily bedecked Mexican. They did not present a very inviting aspect, and the two girls shrank close to Mrs. Sebastian.

The latter paid no attention to the natives, but pushed her way through the crowd with never a glance to right or left. She continued along the street until they came upon a long line of dilapidated cabs.

She signalled to one of the drivers, who opened the door. Mrs. Sebastian motioned the girls to climb in, spoke a few quick words in Spanish to the driver and entered the cab. A moment later they were being driven through the dirty streets as fast as the old horse could go.

"I thought my friend might be at the landing to meet me," the woman explained, "but as I didn't see anything of her, I thought best to drive right to her home."

Shirley and Mabel nodded their understanding of this, and turned to view the passing sights.

After an hour's drive the cab pulled up before a house somewhat larger than the rest, and the cabman dismounted and threw open the door.

"Here we are at last," said Mrs. Sebastian as she alighted and motioned the girls to follow. Then she gave the cabman a single piece of silver and turned to the heavy door.

This she opened without the formality of a knock, and led the way across a small patio—a

courtyard—in the center of what appeared to be the house itself. Here they brought up against another door, and Mrs. Sebastian knocked sharply three times.

There was a moment's delay, then the door swung open and a man's face appeared.

At sight of Mrs. Sebastian the man stepped back with a bow, and Mrs. Sebastian, followed by the two girls, swept by him.

The door slammed behind them.

Mrs. Sebastian led the way into a small but luxuriously furnished room off the main hall, where she turned to the man who had followed them, and spoke a few words in Spanish. The man bowed and departed.

"I told him to announce our arrival," explained Mrs. Sebastian.

The girls surveyed the interior of the handsome apartment curiously.

"I had no idea they lived so well in Mexico," said Shirley.

"Nor I," declared Mabel.

"The upper classes live as well in Mexico as elsewhere," replied Mrs. Sebastian. "It is only the poorer—or peon—class that you have heard about, apparently."

Footsteps sounded without and a moment later a handsomely attired woman entered the room, followed a moment later by a fancifully garbed man. The woman rushed up to Mrs. Sebastian and they greeted each other affectionately. The man also appeared glad to see the visitor.

Mrs. Sebastian then presented the girls, and it developed that both Don Miguel and his wife—for so they were introduced—spoke English. They made the girls welcome, and told them to make themselves at home.

"I have promised them a real Mexican dinner," explained Mrs. Sebastian with a little laugh.

"They shall have it," replied Don Miguel, throwing wide his arms.

"And now," said Mrs. Sebastian, "where can we have a talk?"

"In the next room," was the reply.

"Good! I am sure my young friends will excuse me for half an hour."

She looked inquiringly at the two girls. The latter nodded, and the Don and two women made their way from the room.

The moment they were gone, Shirley and Mabel began an inspection of the room. There were two windows, both of which looked on the street and both of which were barred.

Shirley uttered an exclamation.

"Barred!" she said.

"That's nothing," laughed Mabel. "Surely you remember all windows are barred in Mexico."

"That's so," agreed Shirley.

After some further inspection of the room, Mabel crossed to the door through which they had come, and turned the knob. Then her face paled and she stepped back with an exclamation of alarm.

"What's the matter, Mabel?" asked Shirley.

For a moment Mabel did not reply. Again she turned the knob and then she stepped back and looked at Shirley.

"It's locked!" she declared.

CHAPTER XXII.—CAPTAIN VON BLUSEN BOBS UP AGAIN.

"Are you sure?" asked Shirley, her face also turning a shade whiter.

"Try it yourself," replied Mabel.

Shirley advanced and laid hold of the knob, but the door would not open.

The girls looked at each other in alarm.

"I never heard that they always locked the doors in Mexico," said Mabel.

"Nor I," agreed Shirley. "Do you suppose it was an accident?"

"I don't know what to think," replied Mabel.

There was no denying the fact that both girls were badly frightened. They darted hither and thither about the room, seeking a means of egress; but there was none and they finally sat down.

"It must have been an accident," said Shirley at last. "Surely Mrs. Sebastian would have no

reason for wishing to keep us prisoners.”

“That’s what I think,” Mabel agreed. “The door must have locked itself.”

“Well, all we can do is wait for some one to return,” said Shirley.

And so they waited.

As the minutes passed, each seemingly more slowly than the one that had gone before, the fright of the girls increased.

An hour passed and still Mrs. Sebastian had not returned.

Shirley was about to speak, when they heard the sounds of footsteps outside and the doorknob turned. The door opened and Mrs. Sebastian stepped in smiling.

“I had no idea I had been gone so long,” she exclaimed. “Why didn’t you call me? You have been as quiet as mice.”

Shirley and Mabel each drew a breath of great relief.

“Then you didn’t lock us in purposely?” asked Mabel.

“Lock you in? What do you mean?”

“The door was locked and we couldn’t get out. That’s why we were so quiet,” replied Shirley, laughing. “We thought you had locked us in.”

“The idea!” exclaimed Mrs. Sebastian. “The door locked?” She approached and examined it. Then she looked up with a smile. “Why, the catch is on,” she exclaimed, smiling. “And were you frightened?”

“No, not much,” replied Mabel slowly. “We knew it must have been locked accidentally.”

“Of course,” replied the woman. “Now would you care to wash up a bit? Dinner will be ready in fifteen minutes.”

The girls nodded and the woman led the way. Fifteen minutes later all were seated in the cozy dining room, where Shirley and Mabel had their first introduction to Mexican cooking.

Each girl sampled everything that was placed before her, and in spite of their efforts to try and enjoy the meal, disappointment was written large on their features. Mrs. Sebastian noticed this and laughed, while the donna and her husband smiled slightly.

“So you don’t like the Mexican dishes,” said Mrs. Sebastian.

“Well, they are a little too hot for me,” said Shirley, somewhat ruefully.

“Try some of these tortillas,” said the man, “perhaps you will find them to your liking, though they are warm.”

The girls tried some, but with no better result. They finally gave up in despair.

The meal over, Mrs. Sebastian led the way back to the other room, which apparently was the parlor. Here all sat down to talk and the girls spent a very pleasant afternoon.

Finally Shirley looked at her watch. “What time did Captain Anderson say we would leave?” she asked of Mrs. Sebastian.

“Soon after five o’clock,” was the reply. “Why?”

“It’s almost four now,” replied Shirley. “Hadn’t we better be going?”

“Oh, no, we have plenty of time,” was the answer. “It will not take us so long to get back.”

Shirley subsided, and the others continued the conversation.

At half past four Shirley again mentioned the time. Mrs. Sebastian arose, spoke a few words to the others in Spanish, and then came over to Shirley.

“I have decided,” she said, laying a hand on the girl’s shoulder, “to remain here over night and go on by train to-morrow. Will not you and Mabel stay with me?”

“I am sorry, but we can’t do that,” replied Shirley. “If you will call a cab for us and direct the driver, we shall not trouble you to take us back to the boat.”

“But we should like to have you stay,” said the donna.

“We would indeed be glad to do so, but father would worry,” said Mabel.

The Don also added his voice, but the girls turned a deaf ear. Both arose and put on their hats. Then they approached to tell their hosts good-bye.

Mrs. Sebastian spoke quickly to the Don and his wife in Spanish. Then she turned to the girls.

“Come,” she said, “remove your hats and stay.”

“It is impossible,” replied Mabel.

“We would be glad to if we could,” said Shirley, “but we must hurry now, or we shall be too late, and the ship will go without us.”

The girls turned toward the door.

“One moment,” said Mrs. Sebastian, raising a hand.

The girls halted in their tracks.

"We must insist upon your staying over with us," said the woman quietly.

"But—" began Shirley.

"I said we must insist," repeated Mrs. Sebastian. "You may as well remove your hats."

Both girls stared at her in utter astonishment. Shirley was the first to grasp the significance of the situation.

"Then it is true!" she exclaimed; "the door was locked! We are prisoners!"

The man of the house bowed low.

"Prisoners, or guests," he said. "It shall be as you prefer."

Shirley did not reply, but leaped quickly toward the door. The others were across the room and could not interfere. The door swung open, and Shirley called out:

"Quick, Mabel! Run!"

Mabel sprang after her friend.

But the time taken to open the door proved costly. Before Shirley could dart through it, Mrs. Sebastian had her by both shoulders, while the other woman held Mabel powerless.

Then they led the girls back into the room and bade them sit down. Perceiving the uselessness of resistance, the girls obeyed.

Mabel immediately broke into tears, and Shirley threw her arms about her.

"Don't cry, dearie," she exclaimed. "We are in no danger. They will not dare to harm us."

She gazed at their three captors angrily.

"What do you want with us?" she demanded.

"You shall know in good time," replied Mrs. Sebastian gruffly.

Her manner had undergone a sudden change. She was no longer the good-natured, smiling companion of the steamer. Her face was hard, and she seemed to have aged ten years.

She turned to the other woman.

"Bring paper, pen and ink," she commanded.

The latter hurried away to obey this order, and returned a few moments later, bearing the required articles, which she placed on a table.

Mrs. Sebastian drew up several chairs and motioned the two girls, who had been staring at them curiously, to take the seats.

Both realized it would be useless to refuse and did as commanded. Mrs. Sebastian passed the paper, pen and ink to Shirley.

"Write as I dictate," she ordered.

Here Shirley protested.

"What is it you wish me to write?" she asked.

"You'll hear quick enough," was the reply. "Write."

Shirley replaced the pen gently on the table.

"Not until you tell me what you want me to write, and to whom," she replied quietly.

The others looked at her in surprise, then conversed a few moments in Spanish. At last Mrs. Sebastian said:

"The letter is to your father and to Colonel Ashton. It will contain a demand for \$20,000—\$10,000 apiece—for your return."

Shirley rose suddenly to her feet and gave a cry of amazement.

"You mean that we are to be held for ransom?" she exclaimed in unbelief.

"Exactly," replied the man.

"And so you are robbers," exclaimed Shirley scornfully.

Mrs. Sebastian's face flushed.

"No," she replied quietly. "But the patriotic forces in Mexico are in need of money. We have taken this means of getting it for them. Your fathers are rich. They will not miss the money, and it will mean so much to us."

"And if we refuse to write?" asked Shirley.

"You probably will spend the remainder of your days in Mexico. But you won't refuse. Come now, write as I dictate."

"May I speak to my friend in private first?" asked Shirley.

Mrs. Sebastian hesitated. Then:

"Yes, but be quick."

Shirley and Mabel put their heads close together.

"Shall I write the letter, Mabel?" asked Shirley.

"Yes," was the instant reply. "Then Dad will know we are in danger and just what sort of danger. It is the only way we can get word to the others. I know they will find us."

"I guess you're right," agreed Shirley.

She returned to her place at the table, and picked up the pen.

"Dictate and I shall write," she said.

"I am glad to see you are so sensible," smiled Mrs. Sebastian.

She dictated and Shirley wrote. When she had finished she had both girls affix their signatures, and then address an envelope.

She clapped her hands and a young native boy entered the room. To him Mrs. Sebastian gave the letter and spoke in Spanish, whereupon the boy hurried away.

Hardly had he gone when there came three sharp knocks at the door without. The conspirators looked at each other in alarm, and the hopes of Shirley and Mabel rose suddenly.

But the latter were doomed to disappointment. Mrs. Sebastian left the room, only to return a few moments later followed by the figure of a man.

Shirley took one look at him, and gave a cry of surprise.

The newcomer was Captain Von Blusen!

CHAPTER XXIII.—THE SEARCHING PARTY.

A long blast from the whistle of the *Yucatan* broke the stillness of late afternoon.

Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton and Dick, who were peering shoreward from the deck of the steamer with straining eyes, looked anxiously at each other.

"What can be detaining them?" exclaimed the former.

"I am sure I don't know," returned Colonel Ashton. "They probably will be here in a few minutes."

A boat put off from shore; it was the last of the *Yucatan's* small craft, which had been awaiting the return of late passengers. It was too far away for the watchers to identify those aboard it.

Mr. Willing breathed a sigh of relief.

"I guess they are coming at last," he said.

The three watched the approach of the boat eagerly. At last it came close enough to make out the occupants. There was not a woman aboard.

Cries of alarm issued from the lips of the three watchers. At the same moment there came another blast from the steamer's siren.

"They are not in the boat!" exclaimed Dick. "What shall we do?"

Mr. Willing did not stop to reply. He hurried toward the bridge where Captain Anderson stood, ready to give the signal to up-anchor immediately the small boat was hoisted aboard.

Mr. Willing, closely followed by Colonel Ashton and Dick, rushed up to him.

"Captain!" exclaimed Mr. Willing. "My daughter and the colonel's daughter and Mrs. Sebastian are still ashore. They are not in the last boat. What is to be done?"

The captain turned the matter over in his mind.

"We should be on our way now," he replied at last. "I am afraid we shall have to go without them."

Mr. Willing let out a roar of protest.

"No you don't!" he cried. "You can't go and leave my daughter behind like that."

"Well, what would you have me do?" asked the captain.

"Wait!" was the reply. "Wait for them!"

The captain looked at his watch.

"It's five thirty now," he said. "I shall wait until six thirty."

With this the others were forced to be content.

"If they haven't come then, we'll have the captain set us ashore," said the colonel.

The passengers from the last boat came over the side, and Mr. Willing questioned them eagerly.

None had seen any sign of the missing ones.

Dick, gazing over the rail, uttered a cry and pointed across the water.

A boat was putting off from shore and coming toward the steamer.

"I guess they are coming at last," said Colonel Ashton. "I'll read Mabel a lecture when she gets here."

As the boat approached closer it became evident that it had but a single occupant; and as it drew still nearer, that the occupant was a young native.

Captain Anderson hailed him through his megaphone.

"What do you want?" he shouted in Spanish.

"Message for Señor Willing!" came the reply.

Five minutes later, bowing and scraping, the boy put a message into Mr. Willing's hands.

The latter tore it open quickly and his eyes devoured the words in a moment. Then he gave a cry of rage.

"What's the matter?" asked Colonel Ashton and Dick in a single voice.

For reply, Mr. Willing read them the contents of the letter—a demand for \$20,000 if the girls were ever to be seen again.

Mr. Willing and the others rushed again toward the captain on the bridge. The captain read the letter gravely.

"I wish I could help you, sir," he said at last. "But it is impossible. I must get under way within half an hour.

"Hey! Where you going?" This last to the native boy who had suddenly leaped into the water, climbed into his boat and was making off toward the shore.

"Get him!" cried the captain to his first officer.

One of the *Yucatan's* boats put off and gave chase.

But the distance was too great to overtake the fugitive, and it was soon apparent that he would make his escape.

"If we had laid hold of him we might have learned something," said Captain Anderson. "He knows where the girls are. But it's too late now."

"What can we do?" demanded Mr. Willing anxiously.

"My advice," said the captain, "is that you stay behind and put the matter in the hands of the American consul. He can tell you better what to do than I can."

"Where did the message say to leave the money, Willing?" asked Colonel Ashton.

Mr. Willing passed him the letter.

"Nine o'clock, southeast corner San Francisco street, Tuesday. Check payable to Miguel Martinez will do. Come alone," read the colonel.

"H-m-m, must have lots of confidence in themselves if they can use a check."

"Now gentlemen," said Captain Anderson, "the best I can do is to set you ashore. I must get under way immediately. I'm sorry, but I have my other passengers to think of."

Mr. Willing acknowledged the justice of this.

"Give us ten minutes to get some things together and a boat to set us ashore then," he said.

The captain consented, and Dick and the two men hastened to their cabins, where they gathered what few belongings they could.

"We'll have the captain dispose of the rest in Frisco," said the colonel. "We'll get them when we get there."

This the captain agreed to do, and ten minutes later the three were rushing shoreward in the steamer's powerful gasoline launch. Immediately they clambered out, the launch put back to the ship.

"Reckon we had better go straight to the consulate, colonel," said Mr. Willing.

"Right. But how are we going to find it?"

"I'll try some of these natives. Some of 'em must speak English."

After two unsuccessful attempts, Mr. Willing was successful in his quest.

Half an hour later they were in the presence of the American Consul, Mr. Edwards, to whom they explained the matter.

"What are they, a band of robbers?" asked Dick.

"I should say they are probably revolutionists," replied the consul. "The situation here is peculiar. All factions are at war with each other. The latest so-called patriots are followers of Carranza, and I happen to know are without funds. If they can't pay their men they will lose them. I

wouldn't be surprised if they were the ones who had captured your daughters."

"Well, what are we going to do about it?" demanded Mr. Willing.

"To tell the truth, there isn't much we can do. Officially, I am powerless. The United States hasn't recognized the Carranza faction, and for that reason I cannot call on its agents officially. However, I can pay a personal call upon Señor Jorge Hernandez. He may know something."

"Then let's get busy at once," cried Dick.

"I don't suppose you care to pay this ransom, Mr. Willing?" asked the consul.

"I'll pay it if I can't get my daughter back any other way. If she is in danger I shall pay it anyhow."

"I am sure that she is in no danger of violence," returned the consul. "They would not harm an American at this crisis. All they will do is to hold her in the hope that eventually you will pay. I would advise against paying the ransom at once."

"I shall follow your advice, sir," said Mr. Willing. "You know more about these brutes than I do." 185

"Then we shall call on Hernandez," said the consul. "Come."

He called a cab, and all were soon at the home of Señor Hernandez, who Consul Edwards explained, was one of the foremost of the revolutionists in western Mexico.

Señor Hernandez received them cordially, and expressed surprise at the story Mr. Willing related. He even called his wife into consultation.

"If our party is concerned in this matter I am not aware of it," he told them. "I shall make inquiries, and if I find it is true, someone shall pay dearly."

"Oh, some of your fellows have captured them all right," declared Dick angrily. "I wouldn't be surprised if you know all about it."

"Sir!" exclaimed the Mexican, drawing himself up.

"Mr. Stanley!" exclaimed the consul. "You forget yourself!"

Even Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton apologized to the Mexican for Dick's outburst.

"Say no more about it, señors," was the suave reply. "Youth is always hot-headed, you know."

"I didn't say it because I am hot-headed," declared Dick. "I said it because I mean it." 186

Hernandez gazed at the others with an air of wounded dignity.

"If I am to be insulted, I shall not continue the interview longer," he said.

"The boy meant no harm, señor," said the consul. "He is just angry, that's all."

"Then, I shall speak more with you if he is excused," was the reply.

The consul looked at Dick.

"You had better go outside," he said. "You have already made trouble enough."

Dick was on the point of making an angry retort, but checked himself.

"Very well," he said. "I shall wait for you without."

He left the room, and went out on to the street, where he stood gazing first this way and then that while he waited for the appearance of the others.

A man swung sharply past him in the darkness. Dick was caught by the other's erect carriage, plainly that of a military man.

"Too tall for a Mexican," muttered Dick. "I'll have a look at him."

He followed. Under a dim street light half a block away the man paused to light a cigar. The flare of the match lighted up his features.

"Von Blusen!" exclaimed Dick. "I'll bet he is mixed up in this in some way. I'll follow him." 187

Taking pains to avoid being discovered, he set out on Von Blusen's trail.

CHAPTER XXIV.—FLIGHT.

When Mrs. Sebastian entered the room where Shirley and Mabel were held prisoners, followed by Captain Von Blusen, she immediately addressed her fellow conspirators.

"This," she said, indicating the German officer, "is Captain Von Blusen, a German naval officer. He informs me that he is seeking, for his government, a naval base on the Pacific. In return for this the German government will pay handsomely."

"In that event," replied the Mexican, who it now developed was none other than Miguel Martinez, "we may do business. Take a seat, señor."

Von Blusen did so, and for the first time his eyes fell upon the two girls.

"Miss Ashton! Miss Willing!" he exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

"We are prisoners," replied Shirley bitterly.

"Why?" demanded the captain.

"Held for ransom," replied Shirley.

The captain smiled.

"A good idea," he said turning to the others. "An excellent manner in which to raise money, providing you are not caught."

"I was not aware that you were acquainted with these young ladies," said Mrs. Sebastian.

"Oh, yes indeed! I know them well," was the reply. "In fact I have a little score to settle with them myself. One of our best laid plans was foiled because of them."

"So?" queried Martinez. "Will you explain, captain?"

"With pleasure."

The captain did so, and the others listened with amazement to the story of the plot to capture the *Yucatan*, and its ultimate outcome.

"They are smart girls," declared Mrs. Sebastian, "but this time I believe we have them safe."

"I sincerely hope so," was the reply.

An hour later the girls were left alone.

"What on earth shall we do?" exclaimed Mabel.

"There is nothing we can do," replied Shirley. "We must wait for some one to rescue us."

"Do you suppose there is anything in what Captain Von Blusen gave as his reason for being here?"

"Of course; but the thing that puzzles me is how he got here so soon. You remember how we left him?"

"Yes. But he's a very resourceful man. I wish he were on our side."

"So do I. If he were, we might get away."

It was after seven o'clock when Mrs. Sebastian, Martinez and his wife reentered the room.

"We have had no reply from your fathers as yet," said the former. "However, we did not really expect one. It is to be hoped for your sakes that they leave the money to-night."

"I don't believe they will," replied Shirley quietly.

"So much the worse for you then."

At this moment a native boy came in and announced that the American consul was without, accompanied by two strangers, and that he desired immediate communication with Señor Hernandez.

"Well, they are on the trail," said Martinez, with a laugh. "I wonder what the consul would think if he knew that Hernandez and Martinez were one and the same person. Well, I shall see the consul. You be very quiet in here, for you know how sounds carry in this house."

Mrs. Sebastian nodded, and Martinez, alias Hernandez, made his way from the room.

He returned an hour later with a smile on his face.

"I've thrown them off the track, all right," he said gleefully. "I was startled for a moment, though. There was a little whipper-snapper with the two Americanos—Señor Stanley is his name—and he accused me of knowing the whereabouts of the prisoners. I denied it, and Consul Edwards rebuked him and sent him from the room."

At this moment there came footsteps running rapidly down the hall, and a moment later Captain Von Blusen burst in excitedly.

"Quick!" he cried. "We must get away from here."

"Here! here!" said Hernandez calmly. "What is the matter? Give an account of yourself."

"I was walking along the street," said Von Blusen, "when I came across one of the Americans from aboard the *Yucatan*."

"Who?" demanded Mrs. Sebastian anxiously.

"Young Stanley," cried the captain.

"Stanley?" repeated the others.

"Yes. I heard someone following me, and I waited for him to come up. When I saw who it was I hit him with my fist and knocked him down. He was up in a moment, though, and pitched into me. We had quite a tussle, but I finally managed to get away and come here to warn you."

"And were you followed?"

"I don't know."

"The Kaiser must be proud of you," sneered Hernandez. "If you have botched his plans as you have ours, he would have you shot. Come," he turned to the two women, "the game is up. We shall have to fly. If the Americano has followed this man here, my connection must soon be discovered. Consul Edwards will suspect. We must fly!"

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"Where?" exclaimed Mrs. Sebastian.

"Mazatlan. We have just time to catch the night train. Hurry!"

The two women turned and dashed from the room and Hernandez turned to the girls.

"Put on your hats," he said gruffly.

The girls obeyed without a word, for they could see the man was very angry.

Then he turned to Captain Von Blusen.

"As for you," he said, "you keep out of my sight in the future. Approach me again and I will have you shot."

"But—" began the captain.

Hernandez produced a revolver which he levelled at the German.

"I guess I had better do it now," he declared. "It will save trouble."

His finger tightened on the trigger.

But before he could fire, Shirley sprang forward with a cry and seized the arm that held the revolver.

Hernandez whirled on her angrily, but as he did so, Captain Von Blusen sprang forward and struck the man a heavy blow on the head with his fist. Hernandez toppled over.

Captain Von Blusen turned to the girls.

"I can do you no good here," he said hurriedly. "I'll tell your friends where you are being taken and we shall save you."

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He darted from the room and disappeared.

Shirley and Mabel made as though to follow him, but before they reached the door, the two women reappeared. Mrs. Sebastian took in the situation with a quick glance and bent over Hernandez, who was now stirring feebly. Directly he sat up and his gaze roved about the room.

"Where did he go?" he cried.

"Who?" asked his wife.

"The German! The man who knocked me down."

"He's gone," said Mrs. Sebastian. "Come, Hernandez, we have no time to lose."

Hernandez staggered to his feet, and his gaze rested on Shirley. He took a threatening step forward.

"You—" he began.

Mrs. Sebastian threw herself between them.

"There will be no harm done these girls while I am here," she said quietly. "Please remember that."

As Hernandez still seemed on the point of trying to get at Shirley, the woman suddenly produced a revolver, which she levelled directly at him.

"Stand back!" she cried. "Haven't you any sense? Don't you know what would happen should harm befall either of these girls?"

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"She is right," said the man's wife. "Come, let us go."

Hernandez muttered to himself, but he turned away.

In response to his call the native boy again appeared and announced that a closed cab was at the door.

Hernandez led the way, and Mrs. Sebastian motioned for the girls to follow him. The two women brought up the rear.

Outside all climbed into the cab and were soon being driven away.

Neither girl uttered a word as the cab bumped along the uneven street, but each was badly frightened. For half an hour the cab continued its way and then it came to a stop.

"Not a word!" ordered Hernandez of the two girls, as he prepared to alight.

The girls had sense enough to obey this injunction and went into the little station, dimly lighted, and boarded the waiting train without so much as speaking to each other.

As Shirley glanced back over her shoulder while climbing up the steps, she caught sight of a familiar figure lurking in the shadows. She could not be certain, but she felt positive that the man was Captain Von Blusen.

Captors and captives took seats at the rear end of the last car, where they sat in silence until the train began to move. Then, for the first time, did Hernandez breath in relief.

"Safe enough now," he declared.

"But they may telegraph ahead and have us detained," said his wife.

"No one knows we have come this way save Captain Von Blusen," was the reply, "and it will not be to his interests to interfere with us."

Shirley and Mabel now found themselves able to converse without being overheard by the others.

"I saw Captain Von Blusen in the station as we climbed aboard," said Shirley.

"Do you think he will help us?" asked Mabel.

"I don't know, but some way I feel that he will. He seemed sincere enough when he spoke just before he left."

"My goodness gracious! I hope something turns up soon!" exclaimed Mabel. "Our Dads must be worried to death."

"Well, if Dick is on the trail, I am sure we shall be rescued," declared Shirley.

"You have lots of confidence in Dick, haven't you?" asked Mabel.

"Of course. Why shouldn't I have?"

"Well, I hope we are rescued soon."

"Some way, I believe we shall be," declared Shirley.

The train sped on through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXV.—ON THE TRAIL.

It will now be necessary to go back a little ways.

When Colonel Ashton, Mr. Willing, and U. S. Consul Edwards left the home of Hernandez, alias Martinez, following their brief interview, they looked about for Dick who had said he would wait for them on the outside; but having set forth on the trail of Captain Blusen, Dick, of course, was not in sight.

"Guess the young man has gone back to the consulate in a huff," said the consul with a slight smile.

"He shouldn't have spoken as he did," declared Mr. Willing.

"Is there any chance that he was right in his conjectures?" asked Colonel Ashton slowly.

"Hardly," replied the consul dryly. "Hernandez is a queer man, but he would hardly do a thing like that."

"Well, I don't know," replied the colonel. "I have found that you never go far wrong when you listen to what a newspaper reporter says. They seem to smell out these things."

"He's on the wrong scent now," declared Edwards.

At the consulate they could find no trace of Dick.

"What can have happened?" demanded Mr. Willing anxiously.

"Oh, he'll turn up," declared the consul. "We'll wait."

They sat down to await the return of Dick, meanwhile talking over what was best to be done.

Meantime, Dick, on the trail of Captain Von Blusen, was having troubles of his own. He had approached too close behind the German, and the latter had realized he was being followed.

Rounding a corner, the German officer stopped abruptly. As Dick swung around the corner he recognized him instantly and struck out with his fist. The blow caught Dick on the side of the head and he went down.

He was up in a moment, however, and grappled with his opponent. In this sort of fighting the German was no match for Dick, but he finally succeeded in breaking the latter's hold, and took to his heels.

Dick ran after him.

Unconsciously the German took the direction from which he had just come, and not stopping to think that he might be followed, had thus betrayed the rendezvous. He ran straight to Hernandez' home, as we already know, and Dick recognized it.

Captain Von Blusen entered by the back door, and there Dick stopped. He had seen enough to tell him just how the situation stood, and realizing that he could accomplish little himself and that haste therefore was essential, he hurried back to the consulate.

"Where have you been?" cried Mr. Willing jumping to his feet as Dick burst into the room.

"I've been trailing Von Blusen, sir."

"Von Blusen!"

"Yes, sir, and I have learned enough to warrant my belief that Hernandez is concerned in the disappearance of Shirley and Mabel."

In a few words he related what had occurred.

Consul Edwards drummed upon the table with his fingers for several minutes. Then he rose to his feet.

"You must be right," he said, "although it seems impossible. Are you armed?"

The others shook their heads. The consul left the room and returned a moment later with a revolver for each.

"We may not need them, but it's best to be prepared," he said grimly.

"What are you going to do?" asked Colonel Ashton.

"We shall go back and call on Hernandez. In my official capacity, of course, I could not do this, but I'm willing to take a chance. We'll search the house from top to bottom."

They did not enter the home of Hernandez by the manner in which they had gone before. Dick led the way to the place he had seen Captain Von Blusen enter, and tried the door.

To his surprise it opened easily, and Dick, with weapon ready, led the way in. From first one room to the other they went, Consul Edwards lighting the way with a pocket searchlight.

Suddenly Dick stooped and picked up something. The consul turned the light on it. It was a small handkerchief. Dick looked it over for a mark of identification. In the corner he saw two initials, "S. W."

He passed it to Mr. Willing.

"Shirley's!" exclaimed the latter, after a glance at it.

"We are on the right track," declared the consul.

They continued the search of the house, but not a soul could they find. From top to bottom and back again they went, but the result, of course, was the same.

At last they were forced to give it up.

"I have it!" exclaimed Dick suddenly. "Von Blusen warned them and they have taken the girls some place else."

"That's it, of course," said the consul. "Well there is nothing more we can do to-night, but I'll promise to have the town raked with a fine-tooth comb the first thing in the morning. If they are here, we shall find them before noon."

"But where can they be to-night?" demanded Mr. Willing anxiously.

The consul shrugged his shoulders.

"*Quien sabe?* as the natives say," he replied. "However, you may make sure they are in no danger."

With this the others were forced to be content, and Edwards led the way back to the consulate. Here he suggested cigars before all should turn in for the night, and they sat down to talk over the situation.

"I'll have every house in town searched from top to bottom in the morning," said the consul. "They must be here, so we shall of course find them."

"I wish there was something we could do to-night," declared Dick. "This inaction makes me restless."

"It makes me that way too, young man," declared Mr. Willing, "but the consul undoubtedly knows best. We shall leave it to him."

Consul Edwards looked at Dick inquisitively.

"What I would like to have you tell me," he said, "is why you suspected Hernandez in the first place?"

"I don't know exactly," replied Dick slowly. "But he is a shifty-eyed old villain, and can't look at you. I have learned that a man like that is not to be trusted. I was morally certain he was lying. I don't know why, but I just seemed to feel it."

"Well, you figured it out and no mistake. I wouldn't be surprised now to learn that Hernandez and Martinez are one and the same person."

"They are!" came a voice from one of the open windows.

The four within the room started suddenly to their feet, and the consul advanced.

"Who and what are you?" he called, with his hand resting on his revolver. "Come out and show yourself."

There was a sound of someone climbing in the window, and a moment later a man stood before them. Colonel Ashton, Mr. Willing and Dick leaped to their feet with cries of amazement.

The newcomer was Captain Von Blusen.

Dick took a quick stride forward, and his hand grasped the young German by the collar of his coat.

"I'll guarantee you won't get away this time," he said grimly.

"Who are you and what do you want here?" demanded the consul, who had never seen the officer before.

"This," said Dick to the consul, "is the man who gave the warning in time to allow the girls to be taken to some other hiding place."

"Is that true, sir?" demanded the consul, taking a step forward.

Von Blusen nodded.

"It is," he replied briefly.

"Then you shall answer to me for your part in this outrage," declared Mr. Willing, advancing with great anger.

"And to me," declared Colonel Ashton, also advancing.

Captain Von Blusen raised a hand.

"One moment, gentlemen," he said calmly.

"Give the man a chance to speak," said the consul. "He shall not get away, and I'll give you my word he'll do no further mischief. What have you to say for yourself?"

"Well, I can tell you where the two young ladies have been taken."

"You can?" exclaimed the colonel eagerly. "Where?"

"Mazatlan!"

"Mazatlan? Where is Mazatlan?" demanded the consul.

"As to that I cannot say. They left on the train not half an hour ago."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I followed to make certain, that I might tell you."

"And why are you so interested in telling us?" asked Dick skeptically.

"For one reason, because Miss Willing saved my life no longer than an hour ago," was the calm reply.

"It is true," he continued, seeing that the others eyed him in amazement.

He then went into details of the scene that had occurred following his return to Hernandez after his fight with Dick in the street.

"But how are we going to find them in Mazatlan?" exclaimed Colonel Ashton.

"You might wire ahead and have them taken from the train," suggested Dick.

"No, I have a better plan than that," declared the consul.

"What is it?" asked the others eagerly.

"We'll kill two birds with one stone. I'll wire the American consular agent there to have them shadowed when they leave the train. Then we'll not only be able to rescue the young ladies, but the Mexican authorities will nab the plotters."

"An excellent plan," declared Colonel Ashton. "Now how shall we get there?"

"There is not another train till morning," said the consul, "but," and a twinkle came into his eyes, "if you have the price, I can guarantee to have a special engine and one car ready to go within the hour, and I can promise a clear track ahead."

"Let's have it no matter what the cost!" roared Mr. Willing. "I want my girl back as soon as I can get her!"

"And so do I," shouted Colonel Ashton.

CHAPTER XXVI.—IN MAZATLAN.

It was a long tedious journey to Mazatlan, and it was after noon of the following day when Shirley and Mabel followed their captors from the train upon which they had spent the night and morning.

"I'm glad to get off that train, I don't care what happens," said Mabel as the five made their way

through the dingy-looking station.

"I should say so," agreed Shirley. "I'm so sleepy I could fall right over here."

"I managed to get a few winks during the night," returned Mabel. "I curled up in the seat."

"I couldn't sleep that way. I tried, but it was no use."

They had now reached the street side of the station, and here Hernandez signalled a passing cab. Into this the girls were thrust and then the two women and the man climbed in. Hernandez gave an address to the driver, and the cab whirled away.

None of the occupants saw a man, who had been loitering about the station when the train pulled in, hail a second cab and come after them. This was the man who had been delegated to shadow them upon the request, by wire, of Consul Edwards at Acapulco.

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To Shirley and Mabel it seemed that they rode through the streets of the city for hours before the cab stopped its bumping and drew up before a typical Mexican native house in the outskirts of the town. Hernandez and the two women climbed out, and the girls followed them into the house.

The man in the pursuing cab ordered his driver to halt while still some distance away. Then he dismissed the driver and approached the house afoot. He saw the five figures enter the dwelling and approached no nearer, but took a stand some distance away, where from time to time, he looked at his watch.

An hour passed, then two, and at length the man turned and walked away.

Inside the house Shirley and Mabel had been shown to a back room, the windows of which they saw were heavily barred. Mrs. Sebastian accompanied them.

"Now girls," she said, "if you are quiet and make no trouble, I am sure that you will be freed before long."

"You mean we won't have to wait for ransom?" asked Shirley eagerly.

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"No, I don't mean that. But I am sure the money will be paid over within a day or two."

"And we shall have to stay here all that time?"

"Yes. I wish I could interest you in our cause. You could do lots for us if you chose."

"Thanks, but I don't care to listen to the troubles of criminals," declared Shirley.

The woman's face turned red.

"You do us an injustice," she replied. "What I have done has been for my country."

"I thought you were a Spaniard," interrupted Mabel.

"I am, on my mother's side," was the reply. "My father was a Mexican."

"Well, I wouldn't be mixed up in any such business," declared Mabel. "I think you should be punished for the manner in which you got us in your power."

"But it was for my country. Surely you can understand that?"

"No, I can't understand it," declared Shirley. "It's robbery that you are attempting."

The woman shrugged her shoulders.

"There is no use talking to you," she said.

She went out of the room, locking the door behind her.

"Well, here we are," said Mabel, with a wry look at her chum. "Now, what are we going to do?"

"I wish we could escape," declared Shirley. "I'll tell you what. The next time we hear any one coming, we'll stand behind the door, and as soon as they come in we'll slip out and run. If we can reach the street some one may help us."

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"There will be no harm trying," Mabel agreed. "They won't hurt us, I am sure."

It was several hours later before they had the opportunity of putting their plan to the test.

"Quick! Here comes some one!" whispered Shirley.

She took her stand behind the door and Mabel joined her there. A key turned in the lock, and the door swung slowly inward. The girls were out of sight behind the door.

Mrs. Sebastian, being unable to see them, advanced into the room with a startled exclamation, and looked hurriedly about. Seizing a moment when the woman was looking the other way, Shirley, closely followed by Mabel, dashed from her place of concealment and out the door.

Mabel was just disappearing through the door when Mrs. Sebastian wheeled suddenly about and caught sight of her. The woman sprang forward with a cry, but Mabel, in passing, had seized the knob of the door and pulled it to after her.

It was the work of an instant to turn the key in the lock, and Mrs. Sebastian was safe in the girls' recent prison.

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"Now what?" said Shirley when Mabel had come up to her.

From the room they had just quitted a series of blows were rained on the door, and Mrs. Sebastian's voice could be heard calling for help.

"No one knows she's in there so if the disturbance is heard they'll think it is us," declared Mabel. "If we are silent and careful now, we may be able to get out."

Shirley advanced cautiously and peered into the next room. Then she returned to Mabel.

"No getting out that way," she whispered.

Mabel advanced and looked into the room beyond. In it sat Hernandez and his wife.

Shirley nodded her head.

"No, we can't get out there," she agreed.

The girls looked about for some other means of escape.

They now stood in what appeared to be a long and narrow hall, and at Shirley's whispered suggestion they went back along it. Far to the rear they could see a faint beam of light and Shirley's heart beat faster with renewed hope.

At last they came to a high window, through which the light streamed. It was out of reach of the girls, but Shirley found a chair which she dragged forth and mounted. Her shoulders now were on a level with the window.

The girl uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"What is it, Shirley?" asked Mabel breathlessly.

"We can get out here," was the reply, "the window is not barred."

"Hurry then," cried Mabel anxiously. "I'll come right after you."

Shirley wasted no further words. She drew herself to the sill, and looked down. Then she shuddered slightly. It was a long drop, fully twenty feet.

But Shirley did not hesitate, for she realized that the jump must be taken. She lowered herself until she clung to the window with her hands, then released her hold and dropped.

She fell in a sprawling heap, and she felt a sharp pain in her ankle. In spite of this, she was up in an instant, however, and turned her eyes to the window, where Mabel's head had just appeared.

The latter drew herself to the window sill, and then glanced down at the ground.

"I can't do it, Shirley," she exclaimed.

"Of course you can," called her chum. "Lower yourself as far as you can and then drop."

Mabel maneuvered about the window trying to get into such a position that she could lower herself. But her fright was such that she was afraid to loose her hold long enough to change her position. She looked down at Shirley helplessly.

"I tell you I can't," she declared.

"But you must, Mabel," replied Shirley anxiously. "Hurry!"

Again Mabel moved about, but the result was the same.

"Mabel! Jump!" cried Shirley.

Mabel now began to cry, as she moved about a little on her perch.

"I—I—can't, Sh-Shirley," she said. "I am afraid!"

"My goodness!" muttered Shirley to herself. "What shall I do? I can't climb back up there after her."

She considered the matter for several moments, the while Mabel sat in the window and sobbed. Then Shirley reached a decision, and acted immediately.

"Quick, Mabel! Here comes Hernandez!" cried Shirley.

Mabel's hesitancy and fright vanished on the instant. Quickly she lowered herself by her hands and dropped to the ground. She fell in a heap, but was unhurt and was up again in a moment.

"Where is he?" she asked.

Shirley was forced to laugh.

"I just said that to get you down," she returned. "If I hadn't you would have stayed up there all day."

Mabel's tension also relaxed, and the girls moved slowly away from the house, Shirley finding that her ankle had stopped hurting and was not even swollen.

"Where shall we go?" asked Mabel.

"American consulate, I reckon," replied the girl, "if we can find it."

"We must find it," said Mabel firmly.

"Yes but how. Neither of us can speak Spanish."

"Then we must find a Mexican who speaks English. We should have no trouble doing that."

The girls had been walking along rapidly, for they wished to put as much space as possible between them and their recent prison; but at the same time they did not run for they did not wish

to attract attention by the appearance of undue haste.

Suddenly there came a cry from behind. Unconsciously both girls stopped in their tracks and looked back over their shoulders. But one look was enough.

"Run!"

"Run!" cried Shirley in the same breath.

Dashing after them as fast as his stout body would permit, was Hernandez.

Shirley and Mabel wasted no time in deciding what was best to be done.

Keeping as close to each other as possible, they took to their heels and dashed madly along the street.

CHAPTER XXVII.—DICK IN PERIL.

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The special train bearing Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton, Dick and Captain Von Blusen arrived in Mazatlan only two hours after that on which Shirley and Mabel had reached the city. The four went at once to the American consulate.

Consul Edwards had been unable to accompany them, but after sending the telegram requesting that the fugitives be shadowed, he had written a note to Consul Harrington at Mazatlan and this he had given to Mr. Willing as a means of introduction.

Mr. Willing sent in the letter to the consul, and the latter received them immediately.

"I have a man shadowing the fugitives," said the consul. "I told him to report here the minute he was sure he had run his quarry to earth."

"Is there no danger they will elude him?" asked Dick anxiously.

"Not much," was the smiling reply. "Fisher was formerly a newspaperman and has had considerable experience along that line."

And the consul was right. A short time later Fisher appeared.

"Have you found their refuge?" was Colonel Ashton's first question after the introductions had been made.

212

"I followed a man, two women and two girls to a native house in the eastern extremity of the city," was the reply. "I have no doubt they are the right ones."

"Good," returned the consul. "Now the first thing to do is to enlist the support of General Seauterey, the commandant of the city. Without him we can do practically nothing. But he will be glad to capture Hernandez."

The consul took his departure, announcing that he would return as soon as possible.

Dick left the room announcing that he would take a little stroll outside. Mr. Willing enjoined him to be back by the time the consul returned.

Dick, thinking deeply, was unconscious of the passing of time and the distance which he had walked. At last he roused himself from his reverie and looked at his watch.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "I have been gone more than an hour. I had better hurry back."

He gazed about him, and saw that he was in an evil-looking part of the town. He swung about on his heel and set out in the direction from which he had come.

As he passed a narrow street, even dirtier-looking than the rest, an arm suddenly shot out and dealt him a blow across the head, knocking him to the ground.

213

Dick was stunned by the force of the blow, but he was by no means deprived of his coolness nor resourcefulness. He rolled over quickly several times, seeking to put as much distance as possible between himself and his unseen opponent, and then scrambled quickly to his feet.

Two men bore down on him. Short wiry Mexicans they were, and one held a knife in his hand. Dick took one look at them, then turned and ran.

But the force of the blow he had just received made it impossible for him to run far, and soon he turned, and with his back to the wall of a house, faced his adversaries.

Just out of striking distance the latter halted, and spoke to him in Spanish. Dick shook his hand, indicating that he did not understand.

"Speak English," he said.

The men conversed together in low tones, then one of them spoke a single English word to Dick:

"Money!"

"Oh, I see," said Dick, "you want my money, eh? Well, you won't get it. I need it myself."

He shook his head at the men, and they gesticulated angrily, one of them raising his knife. Then,

with a cry, they sprang forward.

Dick was in a serious predicament and he realized it. But he determined to do his best. As the men closed on him, Dick struck out. One of the men staggered back. 214

At that moment there came the sound of pattering feet down the street. The men drew back. A second later two running figures came into sight, and Dick cried out in amazement.

The figures were Shirley and Mabel, and even as Dick recognized them a third form came into view, and this Dick immediately recognized as that of Hernandez.

"Shirley! Mabel!" called Dick.

The girls half halted in their stride, and then, with glad cries, came toward him.

The men who had attacked Dick, seeing the approach of another man, turned and made their way to the next corner, where they stood to watch developments.

Hernandez, perceiving that he had but one to contend with, and this a young man, advanced confidently. Shirley and Mabel had now reached Dick's side, and the three faced the Mexican.

Without a word Hernandez's hand went to his pocket, but Dick was too quick for him.

"No you don't," he cried, and sprang forward.

His right fist shot out with stunning force, and the Mexican rolled on the ground, his revolver, which he had succeeded in drawing, being hurled from his hand. 215

Dick quickly took each girl by the arm and urged them along.

"Hurry!" he cried.

What he feared came to pass.

Hernandez got quickly to his feet, and perceiving the men who had so recently attacked Dick, he beckoned them to him.

As the men came up, he waved his arm at the figures of the two girls and the young man.

"Catch them!" he shouted. "Reward!"

The men needed no further urging, but dashed after the three. Dick urged the girls along as swiftly as they could go, casting occasional glances over his shoulder. He hoped against hope that assistance would come from some quarter.

But not a sign of a native officer did he see. The few people they passed looked at them curiously, and must have realized the aspect of things by the noise of the pursuers, but none offered to lend a helping hand.

Several times Dick was on the point of turning back to face the pursuers, but he determined only to do this as a last resort to give the girls time to get away while he held the others back.

He led the girls sharply around a corner and they ran as fast as they could along the dirty street. But the pursuers were gaining, as Dick perceived by a quick glance over his shoulder. Then Dick made his decision. 216

As he rounded the next corner he whispered to the girls:

"Run hard!"

He released their arms and stopped, just out of sight from the pursuers.

A moment later they came into view, and Dick was upon them in an instant, striking right and left as swiftly as he could. Just as it seemed there was a chance of his overcoming his two foes, a third figure joined in the fray.

This was Hernandez himself, and he turned the balance in the favor of Dick's enemies.

Shirley and Mabel had gone on a few feet when Dick had turned back, for they had not known what he was about to do. They missed him in a moment, however, and stopped to see what had become of him.

They saw the struggling knot of men, and Shirley cried:

"Oh! Dick will be hurt! What shall we do?"

"What can we do?" demanded Mabel. "Dick said to run. I guess we had better run."

"And leave him there like that? I should say not."

"But what can we do?" asked Mabel, in consternation.

"I don't know. But I am not going to run away."

And Shirley resolutely made her way back toward the fighters. Mabel followed. 217

But aid came for Dick even as it had for his first two enemies. And the aid was from an unexpected source.

"Hello!" exclaimed a voice in English. "What's going on here?"

"Help!" cried Dick in English.

"An American, eh," said the voice, "and three greasers attacking him with knives. Here goes."

Dick felt his enemies give way before him, all but one, and this one he sent to the ground with a hard blow to the face. Then he gazed about. Nearby stood Shirley and Mabel, and upon the ground were the other two Mexicans. Dick looked at the man who had come to his rescue, and gave a cry of astonishment.

"Captain Anderson!"

The commander of the *Yucatan* was no less surprised. He surveyed Dick and the two girls critically.

"How in the name of all that's wonderful did you all get together again and how did you beat me here?" demanded the captain.

Dick explained his arrival in a few words, and then Shirley took up the story.

"But we had no idea of the *Yucatan* was here," said Dick.

"I landed not fifteen minutes ago," replied the captain. "Of course a train runs faster than a boat, which is the reason you are here ahead of me. Now I guess you had better return aboard with me." 218

"We'll go to the consulate first," declared Dick. "The others are probably still there."

"Good idea," replied the captain. "I was on my way there now."

He led the way, and the others followed.

But when they reached there they learned, much to the disappointment of both girls, that neither the consul nor any of the others were about.

"Consul Harrington and his visitors accompanied General Seauterey and a squad of soldiers," a clerk explained. "They left not fifteen minutes ago."

"Too bad," declared Captain Anderson. He turned to the girls. "Will you remain here or come aboard?" he asked.

"We'll go aboard, thanks," replied Shirley. "I want to get out of this city and this country. We can leave word with the clerk here, and Mabel's father and mine will come aboard as soon as they return."

"Right you are," agreed Captain Anderson. He addressed the clerk. "When Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton return with the consul," he said, "you tell them to come aboard the *Yucatan* immediately. I have important news for them."

"Very well, sir," said the clerk. 219

"Why didn't you tell him to tell Dad we had been rescued?" asked Mabel.

"Why," replied the captain with a smile, "I was saving that for a little surprise."

CHAPTER XXVIII.—ALL ABOARD AGAIN.

Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton, to go back to the time that Dick left them after the departure of Consul Harrington, were greatly alarmed when the boy failed to return immediately. Half an hour after his departure Consul Harrington returned with General Seauterey and half a dozen troopers.

The general announced that he was not only willing but eager to round up Hernandez, who, he said, was the real head of the revolution in Western Mexico. Mr. Willing expressed his alarm over Dick's safety, and they waited ten minutes.

"I'll have my clerk tell him to wait when he comes in," said the consul. "There is no use delaying longer."

To this Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton agreed.

"Dick is always turning up missing," declared the colonel. 220

"But he always turns up safe again," replied Mr. Willing.

"Oh, he'll be back all right," said the consul. "He can hardly have fallen into any danger this time."

Fisher, the man who had trailed the conspirators to their lair, now summoned two automobiles, and the party climbed in. The trip to the house where the girls had been confined was made in record time, and a short distance away a halt was called.

General Seauterey and his men now took the lead, and surrounded the house. The general himself approached the door and knocked on it loudly. There was no response, but a second sharp knock brought a voice from behind the door. It was a woman's voice and it said:

"What is wanted?"

"Open the door!" demanded the general.

"Who are you?"

"General Seauterey."

There was an exclamation of dismay from within, and the sound of retreating footsteps. Again the general pounded on the door. There was no response and he called to two of his men.

"Break down the door," he instructed them.

The heavy rifle butts of the soldiers crashed against the wood, shattering it. Several hard kicks and it was in splinters. With drawn revolver General Seauterey led the way.

Two soldiers, Mr. Willing, Colonel Ashton and Captain Von Blusen followed him. The others remained on guard without to prevent the escape of the fugitives.

221

Through the house strode the general, throwing wide the doors of the various rooms. And at last he brought up against another locked door. This was burst in as had been the first, and the general advanced first.

Came a shot from the room, and the general staggered back, then moved forward again. At the far side of the room were two figures, the general could just make out in the darkness.

"Hands up!" he cried.

"Don't shoot!" came in a woman's voice. "We surrender!"

"Come forward then," said the general.

Two women, who proved to be Mrs. Hernandez and Mrs. Sebastian, advanced shrinking.

"Where is Hernandez?" demanded the general.

"He is not here," was the reply. "We expect him back any moment."

"Where is he?"

"He went after the two prisoners, who escaped."

"Your prisoners have escaped?" demanded the general.

"Yes."

The general turned to one of his men.

"Call the others within," he ordered.

The other four troopers came into the house, followed by the Americans and the German captain. Mr. Willing was the first to see Mrs. Sebastian, and he sprang toward her.

222

"What have you done with my daughter, madam?" he demanded.

Mrs. Sebastian shrank back from him.

Colonel Ashton also stepped forward and angrily demanded that Mabel be produced at once. Then Mrs. Sebastian spoke.

"They have escaped!" she declared.

Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton were skeptical. Mrs. Sebastian saw that they did not believe her.

"It is true," she declared. "They locked me in a room and jumped from a window. Hernandez has gone after them."

"We'll wait here for Hernandez to return," decided General Seauterey. "We'll get him when he comes back, and if he has the prisoners it will save us further search."

None doubted that this was the best plan, and so all sat down to wait, General Seauterey meanwhile keeping watch at the door himself.

Suddenly he sprang to his feet.

"Here he comes—alone!" he cried.

He motioned his men to the door.

"He'll run when he sees the broken door," he said. "I'll command him to halt. If he doesn't obey, fire."

It was as the general had predicted. When Hernandez saw the broken door, he stopped in surprise. Then he turned and would have run. General Seauterey stepped forward and shouted:

223

"Halt!"

Hernandez paid no heed.

"Fire!" cried the general.

Two puffs of smoke and two sharp cracks. Hernandez fell to the ground, but sat up in a moment and seized his left foot in his hand, at the same time moaning with pain.

"Good work, men!" cried the general. "Go and bring him here!"

Two of the soldiers obeyed, and Hernandez was soon in the house.

"Where are the two prisoners?" demanded the general.

Hernandez looked at him and sneered.

"Find out," he said.

"So I will," returned the general.

He motioned to his men.

"Bind the prisoners and put them in the car outside," he ordered.

Then he led the way from the house.

"I shall have this man questioned more fully," he said to the consul, "and I shall send you a message to the consulate within an hour. He will not fail to tell what he knows of the prisoners."

With this Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton were forced to be content, although the anxiety of each was growing at every minute. 224

The Mexicans and their prisoners climbed into one of the automobiles, and the Americans and Captain von Blusen into the other. They were whirled back to the consulate.

The clerk addressed Mr. Willing.

"Captain Anderson, of the Steamship *Yucatan*, was here a few moments ago, sir," he said. "He desires your presence aboard immediately. He says he has important news for you."

"Regarding my daughter?" asked Mr. Willing eagerly.

"He didn't say, sir," replied the clerk.

"Come, Ashton," cried Mr. Willing excitedly. "Perhaps Captain Anderson has learned something."

"I shall accompany you," said Captain von Blusen.

The others offered no objection and the three hurried away together, Mr. Willing telling Consul Harrington that they would let him know the result of their trip.

At the water front they were fortunate enough to find an unengaged boatman, who offered to put them aboard the *Yucatan* for a fair price.

"Never mind the price," said Mr. Willing. "Hurry and get us there."

The boatman wasted no time, and soon they were heading for the big steamship as fast as they could go. 225

Dusk was just falling as they went swiftly over the water, and none could but think what a pretty spectacle the great ship made with her thousands of electric lights shining brightly.

"And that's the ship you attempted to get away with, Captain Von Blusen," said Mr. Willing.

"Yes, and would have gotten away with but for Miss Ashton," replied the captain. "However, I bear no ill will. It is the fortune of war."

"And we bear you no ill will, captain," declared Colonel Ashton. "It is true that you have made us considerable trouble, but I appreciate your position in the matter. I know that you were acting under orders."

"Thank you," replied the captain.

"I can say the same, sir," declared Mr. Willing, "Here, at the last, you have been of service to us, and in view of that, things that have gone before must be overlooked."

"Thank you, sir."

The little boat now scraped alongside the *Yucatan*. Several moments later the three were aboard the big steamship and rushing toward Captain Anderson's quarters.

Their arrival had been reported before they came aboard, and so they found Captain Anderson alone.

"Glad to see you gentlemen again," said the captain, shaking hands with Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton. He looked Captain Von Blusen over coldly. "I shall talk to you later," he added. 226

Captain Von Blusen bowed.

"Oh, he is all right, captain," said Mr. Willing. "He has been of great aid to us in searching for our daughters."

"So?" Captain Anderson's stern expression relaxed a trifle. "I am glad to hear it."

He held out his hand, and the young German grasped it.

"You but did your duty, as you saw it, I suppose," said Captain Anderson.

"What is the piece of news you have for us, Captain Anderson?" asked Colonel Willing, who had been waiting impatiently for the commander of the *Yucatan* to broach the subject that had called them aboard.

"Have chairs, gentlemen," said the captain, ignoring the question.

The others sat down, the older men twisting about uneasily. At last Mr. Willing could stand it no longer.

"Captain," he cried, jumping to his feet, "if you have any words of our daughters, tell us. Don't

keep us in suspense any longer.”

Captain Anderson gazed at him steadily for a few moments, then arose, and walked to a door in his cabin.

“I have three prisoners here I would like you to see,” he said quietly.

With a sudden movement he threw wide the door, and there stepped forth first Dick, then Shirley, then Mabel.

The two men absolutely ignored Dick, who stepped aside.

With glad cries the others rushed toward each other. Shirley found herself clasped in her father’s arms, and Mabel and her father also clung tight together. Then they stepped back and looked at each other.

“This is my little surprise,” said Captain Anderson with a smile.

CHAPTER XXIX.—“CAPTAIN VON BLUSEN.”

“And when we found you had escaped we didn’t know where to look for you,” said Mr. Willing, in concluding the story of the search.

“We never doubted that we should get away in some manner,” declared Shirley. “We were sure you would find us, but when the chance for escape came we took advantage of it.”

“And where did you get to when you left the consulate?” demanded Colonel Ashton of Dick.

Dick explained.

“And if Captain Anderson had not arrived so opportunely, there is no telling what might have happened,” he declared. “He put the enemy to rout.”

“It wasn’t much of a job,” replied the captain, waving aside Mr. Willing’s thanks. “I just touched two of them with my fists and they went down.”

“I reckon you didn’t touch them very gently, captain,” said Colonel Ashton, with a grim smile.

“Well, perhaps not,” answered Captain Anderson, “but it was no time for half way measures.” He turned to Captain Von Blusen. “And what am I to do with you?” he asked.

“I should be glad if you would take me to San Francisco,” was the reply.

Captain Anderson turned this over in his mind.

“You have made much trouble for me,” he said finally, “and besides, the United States authorities may be looking for you, for all I know. However, I have no such information, and as you seem to have turned over a new leaf, I shall do so.”

“Thank you, captain.”

“I would advise you, however,” continued the captain, “to go ashore at the first American port instead of going to Frisco. The authorities may be on the lookout for you, and I don’t know what they would do with you. Your theft of the *Yucatan* was nothing short of piracy.”

“I suppose you are right,” returned Captain Von Blusen, “and I shall act upon your advice. What is the first United States port at which you shall touch?”

“San Diego.”

“Then I shall go ashore there.”

“Very well, unless, of course, in the meantime I should receive word to hold you.”

“But you won’t report the captain’s presence here?” exclaimed Shirley hopefully.

“No; I shall say nothing about it unless I am asked.”

“Thank you again, captain,” said the young officer.

He turned on his heel and left the room.

“When shall we get under way again, captain?” asked Colonel Ashton.

“First thing in the morning,” was the reply. “We’ll probably be out of sight of land when you tumble out.”

“We can’t get away from here any too quick to suit me,” declared Shirley.

“No, indeed,” Mabel agreed. “We have had trouble enough to last us for a long time to come. The sooner we get back to civilization the better.”

“And that goes for all of us,” agreed Mr. Willing.

“I’m glad to have you back aboard the *Yucatan*,” declared Captain Anderson. “To tell the truth, I didn’t expect to see you in Mazatlan. I felt sure you would eventually find the young ladies safe and sound, but I feared I should have to make the rest of the trip without you. I tell you, it made

me feel good to run across young Stanley here this afternoon."

"It didn't make you feel as good as it did me, captain," returned Dick significantly.

"Well, perhaps not under the circumstances," laughed the captain. "The only one of our passengers who will not complete the trip is Mrs. Sebastian."

"And a good thing for all concerned," declared Colonel Ashton. "I don't see how she fooled us so completely, Willing."

"She did though," returned Mr. Willing. "I would never have suspected her of having any ulterior motives."

"You wouldn't listen to me," said Dick. "I suspected her from the first. Now I can say 'I told you so.'"

"We'll place more confidence in your foresight in the future," declared the colonel.

"I don't want to run you away," said Captain Anderson, "but it's my belief you had all better turn in. You look fagged out, the whole bunch of you. Sleep is the best remedy."

"You are right, captain," declared Shirley. "I feel as though I could go to sleep standing on my feet."

They bade the captain good-night, thanked him again for his assistance, and made their way to their cabin, where, after some further talk, all turned in.

So completely were they exhausted that it was after eight o'clock the following morning when Shirley, the first to awake, sprang up. She glanced out the window of her stateroom. The sun shone brightly, and from the barely perceptible motion of the steamer she knew they were moving.

She called Mabel, and the girls dressed quickly. Shirley knocked on the next door and aroused the others, and an hour later, after a hearty breakfast, all stood forward on the promenade deck enjoying the fresh morning breeze.

There was not a speck of land in sight and would not be for hours. An hour later Captain Von Blusen joined them and after awhile Captain Anderson stopped to exchange a few words.

It was while the commander of the *Yucatan* was there that there came a hail from the lookout.

"Smoke to the leeward, sir!"

All glanced in the direction indicated. There, upon the distant horizon, was a faint cloud of smoke. As they gazed it presently took shape, and half an hour later it did not take the second cry of the lookout to tell them the approaching vessel was a battle cruiser of the first class.

"Wonder what this one is?" said Shirley, as the vessel drew nearer.

"I don't know. It might be German. It has been supposed there were two German vessels in these waters, but we have already encountered one. This may be another."

"It's hardly possible, though," said Mr. Willing. "Captain Von Blusen, to your knowledge, are there any German ships of war in these waters?"

"I can't answer that question definitely, sir," he replied. "All I can say is that it is possible."

"I don't believe this is a German," said Dick. "But whatever she is she is coming right toward us."

It was true. The stranger was shaping a course that would intercept the *Yucatan* several miles ahead.

"I wonder if she will stop us?" said Mabel.

"Of course," replied Captain Von Blusen. "The commander will probably come aboard to have a look at the ship's papers."

"Will he interfere with you?" asked Mabel.

"Hardly," was the reply. "In spite of the fact that I am a German, he will not dare to interfere with me aboard a neutral ship."

"Boom!"

It was the sound of a great gun aboard the cruiser.

"Signal to heave-to," said Captain Anderson.

He made his way to the bridge, and in response to his command, the *Yucatan* came to a pause. Then all eagerly waited for the cruiser to show her colors.

"German!" was the audible gasp from the passengers as the red, white and black of the German Empire were unfurled at the masthead.

"I am coming aboard you," was the message the German commander flashed to Captain Anderson.

A small boat put off from the cruiser and soon bumped alongside the *Yucatan*. A moment later an officer in a smart uniform came over the side. He made his way at once to where Captain Anderson stood on the bridge.

"Is this the way you meet a German naval officer?" he demanded angrily.

Captain Anderson looked at him in surprise.

"What would you have me do?" he demanded, taking a step forward.

"And when you address me, say sir!" exclaimed the German, who seemed rather young and possessed of much self-importance. "You should have met me as I came over-side."

"Say sir to you, eh?" exclaimed Captain Anderson. "If you don't get off my ship in five minutes I'll throw you over the rail."

The German officer stepped back, and half drew a revolver. Captain Anderson advanced another step.

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But interference came from an unexpected source.

Captain Von Blusen, who had stood close enough to overhear this conversation, suddenly ascended to the bridge. He walked quickly up behind the German officer, and seizing him by the shoulder, swung him around sharply.

"You forget yourself, Lieutenant Von Meyers!" he said angrily. "Get back to your boat!"

The German lieutenant gazed at this newcomer threateningly, then a look of the greatest astonishment passed over his face. He took three quick steps backward.

Captain Von Blusen stood perfectly erect, one hand pointing toward the small boat from which the German lieutenant had just climbed to the deck of the *Yucatan*. He said no further word.

And while officers and passengers of the *Yucatan* looked on in amazement, the German lieutenant took two quick steps forward again, fell upon one knee, took Captain Von Blusen's other hand and touched it with his lips!

Then he arose, saluted, and walked rapidly away.

CHAPTER XXX.—THROUGH THE GOLDEN GATE.

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There was an audible gasp from passengers and crew, and the same question was upon every lip:

"Who is he?"

As the German lieutenant reached the side of the ship, Captain Von Blusen spoke again:

"Lieutenant Von Meyers!"

The lieutenant turned about sharply, and came to attention.

"You will wait with the boat. I shall go with you."

The lieutenant saluted again and stood stiffly erect in his tracks.

Captain Von Blusen turned to Captain Anderson.

"I shall relieve you of the responsibility of my presence immediately, captain," he said quietly. "I shall go aboard the cruiser."

Captain Anderson was too much taken by surprise to mutter more than:

"Very well, sir."

Why he added the "sir" the captain could not have told, but there was something in the bearing of the man that faced him that called it forth involuntarily.

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Captain Von Blusen held out his hand, and the commander of the *Yucatan* grasped it.

"Good luck to you, sir," said the latter.

"And to you," returned Captain Von Blusen.

He descended from the bridge, and made his way to where the Willing party stood gazing at him in open-eyed wonder.

The German officer first addressed Mr. Willing and Colonel Ashton.

"I am sorry that I have been the means of putting you to so much trouble," he said, with a slight bow, "but whatever I did I considered in line with my duty. Please believe that."

"I have no doubt of it," replied Mr. Willing.

"Nor I," agreed Colonel Ashton.

Captain Von Blusen now turned to Dick, and with the slightest of smiles he extended his hand.

"As you and I had a little difficulty," he said, "I pray you will overlook it."

Dick grasped the extended hand, as he replied.

"Why, of course. I guess I am a bit hot-headed once in a while."

"No more than I am," returned Captain Von Blusen. "It has been my chief fault."

He pressed Dick's hand once more, and then turned to the two girls, who had been too stunned by what they had witnessed, to speak.

The captain extended a hand to each in turn and Shirley and Mabel shook hands with him.

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"I am pleased to have met you, Miss Ashton," he said courteously, "and you, Miss Willing, and I regret that I have been the means of causing you unpleasantness. But as I have said to your fathers, what I did was but in the line of duty. Now I must say good-bye, but when the war is over," he looked at Mabel, "I hope that I shall see you both again."

He bowed low, and before the girls could reply, he made his way toward the spot where the German lieutenant stood awaiting him. He motioned the latter to precede him over the side, and was just about to follow, when he seemed to think of something.

He walked quickly back across the deck to where Shirley and Mabel stood, and spoke.

"I suppose you all wonder who I am," he said quietly, "and while I would greatly like to satisfy your curiosity, I fear it is impossible at this time."

Now Shirley found her tongue.

"You can at least tell us whether you are of royal birth," she cried.

Again Captain Von Blusen bowed low.

"I cannot say yes, nor can I deny it," he answered.

"Then your name is not really Captain Von Blusen?"

The captain smiled and bowed, but made no reply.

Now Mabel spoke.

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"Captain," she said quietly, "for by such name only can we know you now, we should, of course, be honored with your confidence, but if you cannot speak at this time, I for one shall ask you no questions."

Captain Von Blusen took her hand and bent over it gallantly.

"I thank you, Miss Ashton," he replied quietly. "Some day I hope to be able to confide in you."

He bowed to the others, and turning sharply on his heel, made his way to the side of the ship and clambered over the rail.

Now the passengers hurried to the side of the ship, and gazed with something like awe at the boat that made swiftly for the German cruiser.

Captain Anderson did not give the signal to get under way until the cruiser's launch was being hoisted aboard, when there broke out from the cruiser a salvo of guns.

"A salute!" cried Captain Anderson, raising his voice to make himself heard. "He is some one of importance. Now I wonder——"

He broke off suddenly, as he counted the number of guns and, in his mind, ran over the list of relatives of the German Emperor. Then his clouded brow cleared, and he smiled.

"If he wishes to keep it a secret, I am not the man to betray it," he said to himself.

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That Captain Anderson knew who "Captain Von Blusen" really was there could be no doubt, but the commander of the *Yucatan* kept his promise to himself and confided to no one, in spite of the questions that were poured on him later.

Now Captain Anderson gave the signal to get under way, and the *Yucatan* slowly gathered headway. The German cruiser remained stationary as the *Yucatan* approached, and the big steamship passed her less than a quarter of a mile away.

There, on the bridge of the cruiser, with the commander of the vessel and his officers standing at attention, stood "Captain Von Blusen." The passengers waved their hands at him, and he, in return, lifted his cap and made a low bow.

Then the passengers aboard the *Yucatan* saw him turn to the man they could make out was the commander of the cruiser and give a sharp command. The latter repeated it to one of his officers, and a moment later a second salvo broke out from the cruiser. At the same time the German flag at the masthead was dipped in salute.

"That," said Captain Anderson calmly, "is a fine token of respect. Too bad we haven't the guns with which to return it."

He gave an order, however, and the American ensign at the masthead of the *Yucatan* returned the salute.

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These courtesies having been exchanged, all became bustle and hurry aboard the German cruiser, as the passengers on the *Yucatan* could see. Men dashed hurriedly hither and thither, and a moment later the cruiser swung slowly about and headed due south.

"And that is the last we shall see of Captain Von Blusen," declared Shirley. "I wonder who he is."

"I haven't any idea," returned Mabel slowly, "but there can be no question that he is of high rank."

"No, there can be no question about that," agreed Mr. Willing, who had overheard this

conversation. "I should say that he is a member of the Imperial German family."

"Then what is he doing in the United States?"

"I have learned a couple of Mexican words," replied Mr. Willing. "Quien sabe?" (Who knows.)

"But he said we should hear from him when the war is over," declared Mabel.

"Yes," said Shirley, "he said 'we' but he meant you."

Mabel's face turned a trifle red.

"What do you mean?" she asked in some confusion.

Shirley laughed.

"I guess you know what I mean, all right," she made reply. "Do you remember saying something like that to me once?"

"But I had reason to," protested Mabel. "It was so plain in Dick's case."

"No more so than in Captain Von Blusen's case," declared Shirley.

"I don't see——"

"Oh, yes you do. You mean you just won't admit it. Well, you don't have to. Why, what makes your face so red, Mabel?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," declared Mabel, and turning about quickly, she rushed to her cabin, leaving Shirley laughing to herself.

The steamship *Yucatan* was forging ahead at full speed now, and was rapidly lessening the distance to the first California port—San Diego.

"Dad," said Shirley, "isn't there a second fair at San Diego?"

"Yes," replied her father, "why?"

"Well then, why can't we stop off there for a day or two and go on to San Francisco by rail?"

"We can if you wish it," replied Mr. Willing.

"Then let's do, Dad."

"All right."

And so it was arranged. Shirley went below where she and Mabel immediately began gathering their things together so that they would be ready to leave the boat the moment it docked at San Diego.

There was no question that the girls had become great favorites with all the passengers. Many pressed them to continue the trip to San Francisco, Captain Anderson being one of the most anxious to keep them aboard as long as possible.

"I don't know what I shall do without you," he told Shirley and Mabel. "We have had lots of excitement on this voyage, more than ever before, and you two girls have been mainly responsible for it. I hope that I shall see you again some time."

"Why," said Shirley, "there are many more summers coming, and if we ever decide to make this trip again we shall not ever think of taking any boat but yours."

"May the time come soon," said the captain.

The passengers bade them an affectionate good-bye as they left the *Yucatan* at San Diego, and then they entered a taxi and were driven to a hotel, where they once more made themselves comfortable for a stay ashore.

They spent two days at the San Diego exposition, and then took a train for San Francisco to view, as Shirley expressed it, "the greatest sight they ever expected to see."

And none of the party was a whit disappointed in the great exposition. In fact, it was far beyond expectations. For two weeks they remained in the California metropolis, spending every minute possible upon the large exposition grounds overlooking the Golden Gate and the broad expanse to the Pacific.

When the time came for them to betake themselves homeward, it was with regret that they realized it would be long before they could again hope to see the beauties of the far-off state of California.

There remains yet one incident to be told.

Two weeks after their return home, Mabel received a registered package postmarked Rome, Italy. Eagerly she ran to her room with it, where she opened it in solitude; nor could she repress a cry of admiration when she drew out a beautifully bejeweled cross, patterned after the Iron Cross of Germany—the Iron Cross with which the German Emperor decorates his troops for bravery.

With it there was a brief note, with the signature "Captain Von Blusen."

Looking closer at the piece of paper on which the message was written, Mabel perceived a seal of peculiar design. She ran hastily for her dictionary, and turned to the seals of the various nations.

There was a striking similarity between the seal on the paper and the Imperial German seal, as reproduced, in colors, in her big dictionary.

For perhaps half an hour the girl sat silent, musing.

"Can it be possible?" she asked herself at last "I wonder——"

She rushed downstairs to consult Shirley, who at that moment was holding a tete-a-tete with Dick on the sunny front porch.

THE END.

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In this series of remarkable stories by Wilmer M. Ely are described the adventures of two boy chums—Charley West and Walter Hazard—in the great swamps of interior Florida and among the cays off the Florida Coast, and through the Bahama Islands. These are real, live boys, and their experiences are well worth following.

IN HANDSOME CLOTH BINDINGS

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THE BOY CHUMS ON INDIAN RIVER; or, The Boy Partners, of the Schooner "Orphan."

In this story Charley West and Walter Hazard meet deadly rattlesnakes: have a battle with a wild panther; are attacked by outlaws: their boat is towed by a swordfish; they are shipwrecked by a monster manatee fish, and pass safely through many exciting scenes of danger. This book should be read first.

THE BOY CHUMS ON HAUNTED ISLAND; or, Hunting for Pearls in the Bahama Islands.

This book tells the story of the boy chums' adventures on the schooner "Eager Quest," hunting for pearls among the Bahama Islands. Their hairbreadth escapes from the treacherous quicksands and dangerous waterspouts, and their rescue from the wicked wreckers are fully told.

THE BOY CHUMS IN THE FOREST; or, Hunting for Plume Birds in the Florida Everglades.

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THE BOY CHUMS' PERILOUS CRUISE; or, Searching for Wreckage on the Florida Coast

This story of the boy chums' adventures on and off the Florida Coast describes many scenes of daring and adventure, in hunting for ships stranded and cargoes washed ashore. The boy chums passed through many exciting scenes, their conflicts with the Cuban wreckers; the loss of their vessel, the "Eager Quest," they will long remember. This is the fourth book of adventures which the boy chums experienced.

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In this story Charley West and Walter Hazard embark upon a new and dangerous quest for fortune. With their old and tried comrades, Captain Westfield and the little negro, Chris, they join the great army of fishermen that yearly search the Florida seas for the thousands of kinds of rare fish and water creatures that abound there. The Florida waters hide many strange and unknown dangers. The perils the chums encounter from weird fishes and creatures of the sea and the menace of hurricanes and shipwreck, make very interesting and instructive reading. This is the sixth book of adventures of the boy chums.

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