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"THEIR RIVALS IN SECRET"

Fine Complete Story of Morcove School by Marjorie Stanton

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN

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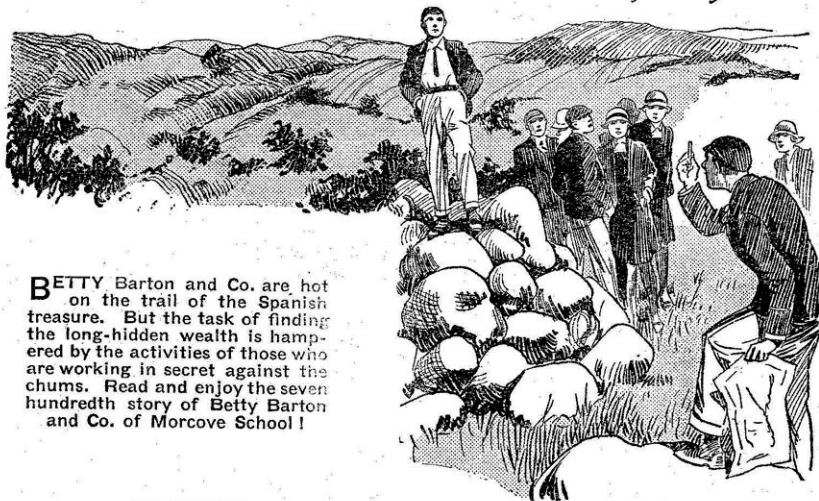


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CHAPTER I.

Can She Solve It?

"I SAY, girls, we must get down to the field now!"

"But do wait a minute, Betty!"

"I would rather go on studying the blessed puzzle, goodness knows; but we weren't on the field at midday, you know!"

"Five minutes longer, Betty!"

This drew a laugh from Betty Barton.

"Five minutes is it to be now? Oh, all right! Carry on, then!"

All Betty's best chums were with her, the captain of the Form, in Study 12. at Morcove School.

It meant a crowded room, although the crush did not manifest itself as much as usual. This was because the girls were shoulder to shoulder round the table, having an object of tantalising interest to study as it lay spread upon that table.

"Anyhow," said Polly Linton, "you drew this copy of the missing chart jolly well, Tess, considering you had to rely on your memory."

"Yes, Tess," one of the other girls added her applauding murmur. "This copy really is—"

"A wemawokable piece of work, bai Jove! Yes, wather!"

For even Paula Creel was standing here to gaze at the chart upon the table; a surprising abandonment of her habitual languor, witnessing to the excited interest of the entire "chummery" in this puzzle that Study 12 was desperately hoping to solve.

"I don't believe we should have done any better even if we had had the original chart that was stolen from the school museum the other night," Helen Craig remarked.

"We certainly couldn't have done much worse," Tess Trelawney commented drily.

Praise for the task she had carried out so well

THEIR RIVALS IN SECRET

BY

MARJORIE STANTON

was having the usual effect upon Tess—to make her appear rather moody. But her chums knew her so well, they were not going to make the mistake of supposing that she really was in a testy mood.

Suddenly that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, wriggled clear of the press of youthful humanity.

"Ah, bah, I am fed up with trying to make out what ze diggings oet is all about! Swindle! I must have a refresher, any old how, bekas my brain—"

"Your what?" Polly asked in a hard-of-hearing manner.

"He is a jolly good brain; as good as yours, and better!" Naomer claimed, nipping to that corner cupboard where, during the hot weather, she kept lemonade on tap, as it were.

Betty stood close to the table again, occupying the place that Naomer had vacated. The puzzling chart, drawn on a fair-sized sheet of Tess' best drawing-paper, was directly in front of Betty now.

"Let's have another look at it, then," she exclaimed, sharing the others' reluctance to give up in despair. "We are convinced the original was a map of the Morcove district. We have got as far as recognising that this wavy line along the top of the plan is the Morcove coastline."

"And that," Polly fumed, "is about as far as we have got. What a problem this is!"

"Most aggravating, yes, wather!"

"You, Paula," madcap Polly sweetly advised, "might just as well sit down. It isn't to be supposed that you, anyhow, are going to solve the riddle!"

"Bekas Polly is ze only one with any brains—we know!" Naomer sauced whilst adding sherbet to a glass of lemonade. "Well, best of luck, everybody!"

But before the dusky one had time to raise the fizzing glass to her lips, by some sort of acrobatic agility Polly was away from the table and taking that same glass to satisfy her own thirst.

"Hi! Bekas—"

"Very nice," said Polly after sampling the "refresher."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Swendle! I call that—"

"You won't be the loser in the long run," the madcap remarked consolingly. "Yes, I feel that that lemonade has done me good. Now to return to the attack, and when—when, Naomer, I have solved the riddle of the chart, and when we have found out where the buried treasure lies, and have got it for ourselves—then you shall have your share!"

The empty glass was returned to Naomer. Mopping her hair in a way that implied revived mental powers, the madcap rejoined the others at the table.

"But these straight lines, girls?" she now debated freshly. "On the original they were as if they had been done with a ruler."

"They mean something," Judy Cardew said with great certitude.

"I really think they must," Polly responded, keeping Betty and others smiling. "Or did the Spaniard who, as we know, drew up the original chart in the year of the Spanish Armada—"

"Fifteen-hundred and eighty-eight," said Helen glibly.

"Correct!" Polly cried, as if she were the Form-mistress taking the class in history. "But did the Spaniard simply rule those lines simply for—well, simply for the fun of the thing?"

"Or was it," Pam Willoughby queried, "simply to make the whole thing harder than ever for anyone but himself to understand?"

"We're getting flippant," Betty laughed. "Now, leave it alone for a bit, I say! You know how it is with a problem in maths. Leave it until some other time—"

"Oh, but you can always afford to leave maths until some other time," Polly struck in. "There is no fortune hanging to the answer to a problem in maths! But this—this—"

"Here, Tess, take it away," the captain said, rolling up the copy.

But now Judy exclaimed:

"Those straight lines, girls—"

"Yes, what?"

The plan was promptly unrolled again.

"There are two of them, aren't there? This one, starting from the top on the left, and sloping to the right, down the plan, towards the centre; and this other, starting from the top, on the right—"

"And running leftwards down the plan towards the centre; quite!" Betty agreed seriously. "But they don't meet at the centre."

"They would meet if they were carried far enough?" Helen burst forth.

"Aha!" Polly cried. "Now!"

"But the lines didn't meet on the original," Tess remarked.

"Oh, no!" Betty said. "You have got them here just as they were on the original. Two straight lines, like two of the sides to a triangle, only they don't meet anywhere, to form a corner!"

Naomer thrust in, chewing an apple:

"Now zen, let me have another squint! Bekas—"

"Yahooch!" howled Paula. "Ow, my foot!"

And she hopped away, nursing the foot that Naomer had trodden upon.

As this led to Polly's turning upon Naomer for having "buted in," there was a considerable raising of dust. True Study 12 hilarity had now set in, so Tess went away with the map, placing it in a table drawer in the study which she shared with Madge Minden.

Some batting practice was the thing when the chums got out of doors. Tennis-courts had to be booked in advance, and Betty & Co.'s present absorption in the mystery of the Spaniard's chart made them disinclined to commit themselves to play at any fixed hour.

It had become their secret hope that at any moment they might be able to fathom the meaning of the chart, in which case sensational activities would follow.

All Morcove School had talked a lot about the original chart during the last day or two, for the simple reason that it had mysteriously vanished from the school museum—and that, too, just at a time when a certain Spanish lady had laid claim to it as having been drawn up by an ancestor.

This lady, staying at the Headland Hotel with her daughter Isabel, chose to be known now as Madame Almaro. But it was inferred that she had enjoyed a title of some degree before the upheaval in Spain forced her to come to England with her daughter.

The original chart had been signed and dated: "Alfonso Almaro—1588," and Morcove's head-mistress had readily admitted that this did seem to establish Madame Almaro's right to possess the document.

But Miss Somerfield had not been free to hand over the ancient parchment immediately, as it was only on loan to the school museum. Whilst steps were being taken to present Madame Almaro's claim in the right quarter, the chart had been stolen from its display cabinet in the museum.

All this had provided food for gossip amongst Morcove girls in general. But only our chums of Study 12 had applied themselves to the problem as to why the stolen chart had been drawn up by Alfonso Almaro in that far-back year, 1588.

Buried treasure? They were joking to that effect now and then in the privacy of Study 12. But at heart every one of the chums was seriously cherishing that theory.

Polly, taking a rest from bowling, drifted across to Tess presently.

"Do feel so wild, Tess, that we haven't made head or tail of that blessed chart!"

Tess nodded. She looked as if she herself were still thinking hard about the Almaro chart, whilst lying in wait for possible catches.

"Supposing it really does relate to buried treasure, Tess—"

"Oh, I feel pretty sure it does!"

"You do? So do I!" Polly promptly agreed. "We know there is a tradition that a Spanish galleon went down off Morocco, after the Armada had been scattered in 1588. So if that Almaro Johnny got ashore—perhaps with some of the ship's treasure—he'd have to see about hiding it."

Tess, nodding again, stepped out neatly, caught a "skyer" from Naomer's bat, and returned the ball to one of the several bowlers.

"He'd be in fear of his own life—one of the enemy," she carried on Polly's reasoning. "So anything he had saved from the ship would have to be put into hiding at once. He couldn't go about with it."

"Then he would draw up that plan for his own future guidance. He'd mean to come back some day."

"And he never got the chance; that's about it, Polly."

"Then look here!" And Polly, like the impatient girl she was, stamped. "Whoever stole the chart the other night did so, most likely knowing that it may prove a guide to the treasure spot. There's a nice thing, Tess! The thief may solve the riddle of the original chart while we are still flummoxed over the copy!"

There came an interrupting hail from Betty:

"You going in to bat now, Polly?"

"No!"—very definitely. "Oh, look here, hang cricket! Can't we chuck this and—"

"Not now, Polly," the captain laughed. "Finish the game of cricket and beat the Spaniards, too!" she playfully paraphrased Drake's historic remark.

Then she stood quite startled by what she had said. Considering she and her chums were thinking so much about Spaniards and the Armada those days, it had been a strangely apt remark.

It might have seemed all the more apt if she and the other girls had been harbouring the suspicion that Madame Almaro and her daughter had the original chart in their possession at this very moment. After stealing it from the museum because they could not wait to come by it honestly!

But although that suspicion had existed in the school directly after the theft, Betty & Co., at any rate, had never entertained it.

They had complete reliance in the bona fides of Madame Almaro and her daughter, and it had become a relief to them to know that the headmistress herself had had her mind set at rest in that direction.

Polly scowled as she walked towards the nets to take the bat from Naomer. The latter had consented to be considered "out," having developed a fresh thirst. In five minutes she had been bowled twice, and had knocked a stump out of the ground more than once with the bat.

"Come on, then," the madcap cried, taking her stand at the

wicket. "And—look out! See if I don't punish some of them!"

Betty turned away to get the right distance for sending down a "hot one." Then she stopped dead, staring in sudden great excitement.

After a moment she faced round and realised that every one of her chums had become transfixed with similar surprise.

No one else in the school would have been startled. To other girls who were scattered over the games field, it was nothing that a lady had sauntered in by the main gateway and was now crossing the grass.

A few of those other girls may even have recognised her as being the same lady who had recently called, with a view to sending a daughter to Morocco next term. But Betty & Co., coming out of their spellbound state, gathered together for an exchange of thrilled whispers.

"It is!" was Polly's whisper. "That other Spanish lady!"

And Betty said tensely, under her breath:

"The one we suspect of having stolen the chart!"

CHAPTER 2.

Who Is This Woman?

MOMENT, this, for some of the girls to think swiftly!

"I say, can't we get word with her?" Polly Linton questioned in an eager undertone.



"I am from Spain, you understand," the lady explained. "You know, perhaps, I think to send my daughter to this school." In view of their suspicious Betty and Polly were more than interested.

"There's nothing like getting a talk with anyone if you suspect—"

"We'll try," Betty quickly nodded. "She is coming this way."

"Looks to me as if she means to speak to us," Tess muttered. "We must be on our guard. Out to pump us, perhaps."

"Two can play at that game," the captain said, smiling faintly. "Here, don't let's appear to be interested in her. Leave her to speak first."

Accordingly, they dispersed for a resumption of the batting practice, two or three of them acting as bowlers, Polly handling the bat, and the rest standing about to field any ball that might be hit clear of the nets.

They could only hope that their mustering together just then had not led the woman to think she was an object of suspicious interest. After all, they might have gathered for a bit of an argument about some point in cricket.

She came on towards them, but only slowly, pausing every now and then to gaze around. At last she took her stand close by the bowlers, and watched several balls go down, to be nicely played by Polly.

"You play the cricket, I see!"

Betty checked sharply in the act of sending down another ball and turned to the lady. She was rather younger than Madame Almaro, and still retained her good looks.

"Cricket, yes!" Betty smiled. "We go in for it a good deal in the summer term."

"And next term?" The question was put very silkily. "You know, perhaps, I think to send my daughter to this school next term? I call to see your headmistress a day or two since."

"Oh, yes, we remember your being shown round!" Betty responded, whilst Polly came up as if out of polite curiosity. The rest carried on with the practice game.

"Very good school!" the Spanish lady exclaimed, flourishing a dainty hand. She spoke with slightly less fluency than the Almaros could command. "Beg! And a long time here, yes?"

"Oh, rather!" Betty laughed. "You might not think so from the present buildings; the schoolhouse has been practically rebuilt. But we go back centuries, if you include the time when the place was a sort of nunnery."

"So they tell me in the town, where I lodge—in the apartment house," the Spanish lady smiled. "The hotel I cannot afford, too expensive. I am from Spain, you understand, and I lose much money in the revolution. But I must try to have the money for my daughter to study at Morcov—ah, yes!"

"You have walked out from the town to have another look round?"

"Si, si!" very affably. "But I shall not go to the schoolhouse this time—no! When I am here before, I do not stay to see—all this!"

Another airy gesture indicated the games field and various detached buildings.

"Would you care for some of us to show you round?" Betty asked. "To explain things?"

"Oh, thank you!"

And Betty came in for a charming bow, which she returned.

"Right-ho, then; you carry on, girls!" was the captain's blithe suggestion, as she sauntered away with the visitor.

"Anybody want this bat? I'm going indoors and up to the study," Polly significantly announced. "No, I'm not," she abruptly changed her mind. "For—here are the boys! Look!"

"Oh!"

"Pipooray—gorjus!"

And Naomer for one was off at a gallop across the field, heading for the main gateway, just inside which "the boys" could be seen parking their bicycles.

"They said they might be over this evening," Pam Willoughby elatedly remarked. "And I expect they'll want to have a look at our copy of the chart."

"I," said Polly grimly, "shall expect them to solve the riddle straight away!"

Meantime, the boys were attracting more fleeting attention from other Morcovians who were on the field, being recognised as those four whose cycling over from Grangemoor School was a frequent occurrence in the summer term.

At one time Polly's brother Jack would turn up with only Judy's brother Dave as partner in the jaunt. But now there was plain Jimmy Cherril to come over with them—always! Likewise, a certain beefy youth, usually spoken of as "young Bloot."

At their own school these four were inseparable; but Jimmy Cherril and Bobby Bloot would not have denied that this was not the only reason why they could never let Jack and Dave ride over to Morcove without them.

Jimmy always felt better—in a way!—for seeing Pam. Young Bloot, for his part, had discovered in Naomer an affinity of tastes in regard to good eating.

"Time, forty-seven minutes nine seconds," Jack informed the girls, as if there had been an attempt to beat the record for the cycle ride between the one school and the other.

"Zen you must need a refresher!"

"I don't know about that," Polly demurred, with her usual pretence of severity towards the boys in general and her brother in particular. "We don't serve refreshments out of doors, and if you go in you'll have to report your arrival, which means a waste of time!"

"We really came to see the captain," said Jack, simply because Betty was off the scene.

"She is engaged," a madcap sister said loftily.

"So soon?" Jack returned. "How we are all getting on in life, boys!"

"But not getting on with the Almaro mystery," was Polly's moaned rejoinder. "You boys are no good at puzzles, are you? Otherwise you might tell us what one wavy line and two straight ones mean."

Jack put three fingers to his forehead, as if a master mind were behind it.

"But of course! An isosceles triangle!"

"Wrong! But I can tell that Dave and Jimmy are really anxious to see the copy of the chart. Even Bobby has more sense," Polly added, thus putting her brother in an inferior class by himself.

"So I'll run and fetch it."

"I'll go!" Tess offered, and sped away to the schoolhouse.

Then, having to wait for her return with the copy, there was an opportunity for serious talk. Good use was made of it. The boys had come over in the earnest hope of being able to cooperate with the girls in regard to the intriguing problem which the latter had set themselves to solve. Any nonsense-talk at the moment of arrival had been only prefatory to a serious debate.

The boys knew about the second Spanish lady, and they were very impressed when told that that woman was even now taking a wander round the school grounds, with Betty as her guide.

"Gee, boys!" Jack exclaimed softly. "Not much we can teach these girls in the way of private detective work! Betty should be doing a bit of good there, anyhow."

"Look, there is Betty with the woman," Helen broke out, nodding to a remote part of the grounds. "Don't know that there is anything of interest to be shown to her over there."

"Perhaps the woman asked to be taken there."

This was one of quiet Dave's rare remarks.

"Would like to get a look at the lady," Jack said. "If we stay around just here, close to the gateway—"

"It's almost certain!" several of the girls answered together. "Surely she'll leave before you boys have to be off?"

Tess came running back with the chart, and it passed into Jack's hands. He held it unrolled, studying it closely in silence for a full minute with his chums.

"Um! Pretty bald affair, isn't it?" he said at last.

"I can't say that I have put in everything that was in the original," Tess murmured. "There were notes in Spanish, too, that I had to leave out—"

"Of course," Dave nodded. "But I shouldn't wonder if you've been able to put on paper all that really matters."

"That wavy line is the Morcove coast-line right enough," Jimmy said. "Pretty wonderful that the cliffs are still just as they were in those days."

"Oh, they're not the sort of cliffs that crumble away," Pam commented. "Hard rock."

"But the two straight lines, running through those crossed daggers?" Polly clamoured. "What do they mean?"

"Haven't you guessed?" asked Dave.

"No! Why?"

"It's all in those."

"What?"

"They're pointers, I reckon. Directional lines."

"But they don't lead anywhere!" Polly fumed.

"They don't even meet," Helen added.

"They would, if they were carried on as straight lines," Dave submitted calmly.

"Well, carry them on, then see what you get!" Polly said impatiently. "Who's got a pencil?"

"But it's no use lengthening the lines like that," Dave threw out.

He seemed to feel that he was taking too big a share in the debate now. But there was a clamorous "Why not?" to drag more out of him.

"Lengthen the lines, and of course you'll find them crossing somewhere, forming one corner of a rough triangle," he said tersely. "But where they cross will still mean nothing—on paper."

"Then I do wish you'd say," Polly fairly groaned, in her feverish excitement, "where would it mean something, where the straight lines crossed, if you carried them on!"

"I say!" Jack interjected. "Hoorosh, boys! Now I see! Good old Dave; he's the one! Jimmy, look here—"

"It's our chart!" Polly pouted, for her brother was about to study it exclusively with Jimmy. "I suppose we girls are entitled to look at it, too?"

"Entitled to everything, Polly-wolly," her brother gaily responded. "Entitled to all the treasure, when it's found—at least, so far as we fellows are concerned. The Almaros will probably put in a claim, and you'll have the county coroner holding an inquest on the find, and the Crown—"

"Oh, switch off!" Polly stamped. "Dave! Do you really see something in those straight lines? If so—"

"Yes, Dave!" Judy and others pleaded.

"But Jack can tell you; he's guessed—"

"No," Jack dissented. "It's your brain-wave, Dave. Ladies and gentlemen, pray silence—"

"I shall hit you!" Polly threatened the inveterate joker. "Give ME the chart! Now, Dave?"

"Where the straight lines would meet, if carried on, there is nothing on the paper to mark the point."

"There was nothing on the original chart that I can remember," Tess put in quickly.

"No," Dave said calmly. "I don't suppose there would be. There's no need for anything to be there. Each straight line starts near the coastline, at a point marked with crossed daggers. Each straight line comes down to another point marked with crossed daggers—"

"Yes, well?"



"Perhaps," Fay Denver suggested sweetly to Isabel, "you would like us to keep you informed as to what they are saying about you at the school?"

"Well, that's all you want."

"It is, you know!" Jack cried, his joyous voice in striking contrast with Dave's level tone. "Now, do you girls see? How dense you are! You take your stand somewhere on the cliffs, at a point corresponding with one of these top crossed daggers—"

"Here, wait!" Tess burst in. "I see, right enough! But—oh, supposing I haven't got the crossed daggers in the right places!"

"Sweendie! Bekas, zen we are whacked, after all!"

"It doesn't matter a bit, I reckon," Dave hastened to reassure those girls who were looking glum once more. "Each set of crossed daggers means, I'm pretty certain, a sort of landmark that was there in those days—"

"But supposing they aren't there now!" was Polly's next horrifying thought.

"Then," Dave said simply, "you really are whacked. And so is everybody else. But I reckon that the Spaniard chose landmarks that were not likely to disappear at any time."

"If only we'd time to go out now with the chart!" Polly said wildly. "Can't we—can't we? How long can you boys stay?"

"An hour, and chance being late for Call Over!" Jack answered glibly. "Never mind a row when we do get back. It's all for a good cause, boys!"

"We've an hour," Pam calculated, glancing at her wrist-watch. "Then come on!"

"Yes, queek! Bekas, zis is getting eggsciting!"

"What about Betty?" questioned Madge. "But I'll stay back, to explain to her as soon as that woman has gone."

"Will you, Madge?"

"Yes, I don't mind."

There was a chorus of thanks at Madge's readiness to deny herself a share in an exploit that might provide most sensational results.

Then, with eager haste, the boys and girls set off together. Each of the lads had his bicycle with him, wheeling it. And Polly—

Polly had the plan!

CHAPTER 3.

The Hunt Is Up

"LET'S try to find the spot meant by the top right-hand set of crossed daggers."

"That's it!" Dave's calm suggestion was breathlessly answered by Polly. "Nearest the school."

She took a look at the map as she ran with the party, and some of the others, jogging along beside her, glanced at it also.

"Somewhere out towards the edge of the cliffs, near the zigzag path down to the beach?"

Jimmy hazarded.

"And we can be there—oh, in no time!" panted Helen.

Even if all this hurrying on had not put a check upon speech, most of them would have lapsed into silence—trying to think, in advance, of something in the nature of a landmark that would be found out there on the cliff edge.

Was there nothing that could be called to mind now? How often had they all been out to that part of the cliff-top, to use the zigzag path which led down to the shore. Scores of times—hundreds! So it seemed as if they should be able to remember—to think of a landmark that was there. And they couldn't!

Five minutes, and they were almost at the end of the run. To right and left of a footpath worn in the springy turf, leading to the zigzag, there was now much rougher ground. Big boulders were lying about, and here and there some of the dark rock which formed the giant headland cropped out of the shallow soil.

Grangemoor had abandoned its bicycles a few moments since, and was now executing a final sprint with the girls.

"Pouf!" some of the latter heaved for breath, when at last this eager race ended, with Jack panting:

"Now! Who's got the chart?"

"I have!" Polly jerked out. "You can look at it, but I must hold it."

This very human remark caused some breathless laughter.

"O.K., boys!" Jack expressed himself, after he and others had consulted the chart. "The top right-hand crossed daggers mean something

out here at the edge of this headland. So—what is there?"

"Nothing!" grimaced Polly, looking about. "Just small boulders—grass—gorse. They're not landmarks!"

"Wash-out, to begin with," shrilled Naomer. "After running so fast zat I am so thirsty now, I could drink ze river."

"But what's that?" Helen cried out in tremendous excitement. "Girls! The remains of the old beacon—"

"What? Oh!"

"Gee, boys!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Bekas, zat might be him!"

Most of them had only a few yards to flounder, over the rough ground, and then they could gather round what few relics remained of the ancient beacon.

Of the iron basket, supported upon a stout iron pole, from which the warning fire used to blaze when storms were raging by night, nothing remained now. The pole itself had long since come down, so eaten away with the rust of years that it had broken off a few feet from the ground.

But there were still the big boulders which had been heaped, cairn-like, round the base of the iron standard, to help steady it.

The boys and girls gazed at what was now a mere heap of boulders, with the grass growing amongst them, and every excited face expressed the thought which Naomer had voiced in her own quaint way.

"That might be it!"

A dramatic silence was ended by Helen as she asked:

"Would there be a beacon in those days?"

"Sure thing!" Jack cried. "Those were just the days when beacons were in use."

"Then it's a starting point for us!" Polly decided, with a clap of the hands. "Cheers!"

"Yes, wather! Bai Jove, I find this most thrilling!" said Paula, who was not easily roused out of her naturally languid state.

"You wait till WE find the treasure," Polly chuckled. "But now what do we do?"

"Look for a landmark suggested by the top left-hand daggers," Dave suggested.

"Chart again, Polly-wolly!" her brother requested. "Now, where's the other landmark likely to be? Oh, I see—"

"Between here and Cliff-edge Bungalow, I make it," Polly caught him up, after this fresh look at the chart. There's a bit of cliff that juts out just like that. Oh, we girls know! Come on, all!"

But this time there was no general stampeede. Dave had suddenly taken it into his head to do some dodging about at the beacon, and this caused the sauer element to stand and watch him.

It was realised that he had some canny reason for posting himself on the seaward side of the cairn, so that he looked over the top of it, inland.

"Mind standing on top of the stones, Jimmy?"

"Well!" gasped Judy and those other girls who were still here.

But Jimmy, in spite of his going to look a bit silly, standing on top of the mound of stones, didn't mind in the least. Dave appeared to be taking a "sight" with Jimmy as a guide.

"Sorry I'm not a bit thinner," he grinned at Dave. "What you need, for this job, is a Scout staff."

"That's just what we do need. Bring one next time," Dave soberly agreed. "But it's helped a bit, your standing up. Right-oh, that'll do."

Dave, having nothing more to do or say, set off after those who had already hurried away, following the line of the cliffs.

"Yes, well," Pam smiled, finding Jimmy Cherrol at her side during the quick march that they all made it, "I know what the idea was."

"Course you do, Pam!" Jimmy could never have doubted it. Tall Pam was to him as clever as she was wonderful to look at, and sporting.

"Dave was trying to see if, by looking inland from that landmark, he could fix his eyes upon another," Pam gave her opinion. "If he could, that would fix the line of sight, wouldn't it, Jimmy? Get another line of sight from the place we are making for now, and then—"

"Where the two lines finally cross, Pam—"

"Yes! That will be THE spot," she nodded, not excitedly, but with great enthusiasm. "Where we find the treasure!"

"Not joking, are you, Pam? There may be a treasure, you know."

"Joking! Better not let Polly or some of the others hear you saying that. We girls are absolutely certain; there is a buried treasure. We have put two and two together. Spanish gold, on board that Armada galleon that went down off Morcove. Alfonso Almaro got ashore with it. There may have been others with him; but he made the chart."

"You've just about got the whole thing out and dried," Jimmy said heartily. "Only, the treasure spot is going to take some finding, I reckon. After all these years—may be built over even."

"I know! I thought of that just now; I don't know if it has occurred to the others," Pam responded in a subdued and graver tone. "Supposing it is somewhere in the school grounds—just where a building has been put up?"

She added uneasily:

"The lines on the chart, Jimmy! If you carry them on until they meet, they do seem to come into the school property."

"Ah, but the chart is only a rough one, Pam; even the original was that. There's no scale drawing. The lines may come out—anywhere! You can't tell by looking at the chart. Had any tennis lately?"

"At times. How's the batting average, Jimmy?"

"Nothing special. About that Spanish woman, Pam—the one you girls suspect of having stolen the original chart. Have you said anything to Miss Somerfield about that?"

"We haven't liked to, Jimmy. As Betty says, we have rather jumped to the conclusion there, and we ought to know something definite before saying anything."

"Do the other Spanish people know about her?"

"That's what we're wondering, Jimmy. We haven't seen either Madame Almaro or her daughter since the theft. They're at the hotel still, we suppose; but—Hullo, what have they found, Jimmy?"

Pam was referring to those who had shown most haste in making for the fresh hunting-ground. She and Jimmy had slackened to a walking pace whilst chatting, and they were a bit behind now. But athletic Pam, when she chose to run—could run! She had won the quarter-mile on Morcove's sports day!

Now she flashed along, and Jimmy fairly galloped to keep up with her. Some of their chums were bunched together at a grassy spot very near the dizzy edge of the jutting cliff that Polly had spoken about. They were waving an eager

"Come on—quick!" to all who had yet to race to the spot.

Pam and Jimmy caught up Helen, Judy and Tess. In one batch these five raced over another hundred yards of level ground; then they were at the spot, and even as they pulled up, more or less out of breath, a massive boulder was being pointed at as being the cause of so much renewed excitement.

"Bekas—I saw him first!" Naomer shrielled, executing a kind of Dervish dance.

"You!" Polly snorted, contumelious as ever where the dusky one was concerned. "We all saw it—couldn't help seeing it as we came up! Who first saw the marks on it? That's more to the point! And I did!"—with a bow.

"Marks?" echoed some of the fresh arrivals.

"What marks?"

"Crossed daggers—"

"Never!"

"Well, if you don't believe—see yourselves!"

And the madeap's pointing hand directed attention to symbols that must have been scratched or chiselled upon the face of the stone long, long ago—two crossed daggers, partly obliterated by centuries of exposure to the weather.

Yet those significant symbols seemed to stand out to meet the eyes of the boys and girls, whilst initials that had been scratched and scribbled by holiday-makers went unnoticed.

"The same sign," Pam said in an awed voice, "that appears on the chart!"

CHAPTER 4.

Stirring up Strife

AT that moment, two Morcove girls who had been sitting with a young lady in the lounge of the Headland Hotel, rose to take leave of her.

On the coffee-table, within reach of which they had sat, there were signs that ices had been sampled.

"Well, thank you so much, Miss Almaro! It was kind of you to come across to speak to us," said the elder of the two girls. "Now we must be off, Edna"—to the other, who was a sister.

"It has been kind of you to tell me so much," Isabel Almaro responded, rather dully. "I have not been near your school to-day, neither has my mother. You will understand why."

"Yes—shame it is!" Fay Denver said glibly. "But you must place the blame in the right quarter now."

"Oh, yes, I shall know what to think—now."

"Good-bye, Miss Almaro," Edna purred.

"And thanks for the ices. They were delicious!"

"Perhaps you would like us to keep you informed," Fay suggested sweetly, "as to what they're saying about you at the school?"

But Isabel Almaro, far from nodding eager assent, looked perplexed.

"How shall I say?" she murmured. "I ask myself, is that what you call—fair? No, I think I will not wish to hear more," she finally decided. "My mother and I—we have lost much because of all the troubles in Spain. But we are still Almaros, and the Almaros have still their pride. Good-bye!" she finished, conferring an aristocratic bow.

"Well, then—cheerio!"

Morcove's headmistress would not have been pleased could she have heard Fay Denver using that slangy expression in this environment, and to a young Spanish lady whose own deportment was that of one brought up to observe every politeness.

Morcove's headmistress would have been very angry indeed, even to know that two of her girls had sauntered into the Headland Hotel half an hour ago, intending to order ices and so become entitled to the amenities of the beautiful lounge for a little while.

Fay and Edna had done, as they were always doing, one of those things that Authority forbade. Girls could always obtain permission to look in at the well-run hotel if relatives were staying there. What girls must NOT do was to treat the hotel as a dropping-in place where, in this hot weather, ices or lemon-squash could be called for.

But the Denver sisters had done it! And, with their usual luck, they had not been caught in the act.

"She was rather nice, Edna!"

"Too serious for my liking. Mournful."

"I'm afraid that's the way with Spanish girls and women."

"And as for their looks—pooh!"

"She won't last, anyhow," Fay said ill-naturedly. "The mother—we saw her at the school, the other day—very gone off."

This scrap of talk was taking place as the sisters sauntered down the private drive of the hotel, to pass out on to the road.

"Seemed to me, Fay, you made that Almaro person thoroughly miserable by telling her that Betty and Co. were to blame for madame's being suspected of the theft."

"Don't care," shrugged Fay. "I do like to get one in at Betty and Co. when I can. We know perfectly well that Betty is always trying to catch us tripping. She'd like to see us turned out of the school."

"Wouldn't she just!" the younger sister agreed, frowning. "Not fit for the Form!"

"As if the Form were anything so very wonderful!"

"Yes!"

They were now close to the open road, upon which they must emerge. Fay sent a wary glance to right and left. Was it all right? Yes!

A skittish run took them out on to the roadway, unobserved, and then they indulged in peals of laughter.

Meantime, Isabel Almaro was standing at one of the great lounge windows that looked out on to the hotel's carriage-way.

She had been watching the two schoolgirls as they flaunted away, and their behaviour out of doors must have increased the disdain she had been feeling whilst doing the polite thing by them in the lounge.

Recognising them as Morcove girls, she had taken it for granted that they merited friendly treatment. But as she sat with them there had been much she had disliked about the sisters. They were not like other Morcove girls with whom she, Isabel, had got acquainted recently. There had been a jollity about them that was charming—not vulgarity.

And yet—

Isabel sighed to herself.

Even those other girls—the Form captain and her best friends—were not, it now seemed, what one had thought them to be.

Unpardonable—unforgivable, the insult! How dared that Form captain persist in the belief—persuading other girls to believe also—that one's own mother really had stolen the chart from the school museum!

The headmistress had appeared to be satisfied by indignant denials that had been given. And yet that captain—a mere schoolgirl—still per-

sisted in the assertion that mother must have been the thief.

Those two sisters had said so, just now, and although one did not care for their ways and many of the things they said, surely they could not be so base as to bear false witness against the captain and those other schoolgirls?

The lounge was almost deserted. Guests were upstairs dressing for dinner. But Isabel felt disinclined to change for the evening. The mother was keeping to her room, and Isabel herself doubted whether either of them would feel like sitting down to their table in the dining-room, presently.

She felt more inclined to go for a walk, and suddenly she went to the lift, to go upstairs and tell her mother that she had decided to take a stroll.

"Very well, Isabel."

Madame Almaro was standing at the window of her bed-room. It was a room on the east side of the enormous hotel, and so the view from the window took in Morcove School, less than a mile away, as well as a good stretch of the rugged coastline.

"But you will be careful, Isabel."

"Yes, mother dear—"

"I could almost be sure that I saw his wife, just now," was the English equivalent of the next remark. When alone together, mother and daughter naturally conversed in Spanish.

"I saw a woman, Isabel, and from her walk—if from nothing else—I felt positive it was SHE! Ah, and she was walking towards the school, Isabel!"

"So!"

A silence fell between these two, a silence that had tragic anxiety in it. Edna Denver had sneeringly referred to the mournfulness of Isabel Almaro. There had been no allowance made, in the shallow hearts and minds of the Denver sisters, for what this mother and daughter had gone through lately—and were still undergoing.

"But no," Madame Almaro exclaimed at last, with a proud fling, "it is not for me to go to the Mother Superior of that school, warning her against—that woman! We do not know—yet! We can only suspect."

It became Isabel's turn to draw herself up to her full height, as if feeling the pride of her ancient race.

"Why should you, mother, speak with anyone at the school again? I shall not, I know that!"

"No. The apology was not enough, Isabel—not for an Almaro! Oh, and we have more to think about than the theft of that document, even though it was such an interesting relic of an ancestor. I think all day; I lie awake in the night, and I ask myself—why, why were we followed from Spain?"

"But, my mother, they cannot harm us greatly here, in this country."

"Isabel, you say that to give me nerve, when all my nerves are shattered. We were followed, and now it is as if we were—haunted. So, be very careful, dearest Isabel, where you go, even though it is daylight still."

"I will be careful, mother, if only for your sake."

"We have only each other now, remember."

"Yes, mother."

"You still lock your door, last thing every night?"

"Oh, yes, mother."

"It is well. I shall not go down to the public rooms this evening, Isabel. The maid shall bring me up a tray. Come to me before you go to bed."

"I will, mother."

And so they parted, Isabel returning downstairs to pass out into the hotel grounds, which had been made very beautiful.

For a while she sauntered between beds of flowers that were vividly colourful in the glamorous light of the long summer's evening. Then she let herself out by a little wicket gate, intending for the use of guests, on to the open cliff land.

Only for a minute or two had she wandered on, when she drew clear of some scattered patches of golden gorse and saw some schoolboys and schoolgirls, stepping together in the direction of the road.

She was observed by all of them—and recognised by most—in the very instant that her eyes fell upon the chattering batch that they made. Nor did her coming to a standstill abruptly check a few eager cries from the girls.

"Miss Almaro! Oh—"

Two or three of them were starting towards her; but she, in her wounded pride, was not going to let them speak. No! That Form captain was not one of them; but these were the captain's best friends—girls who made all the captain's ideas their own. They seemed to want to be friendly now, but that could be only a ruse—to try and turn suspicion into proof.

Isabel turned back, after giving the oncoming girls one rebuffing look that left them utterly amazed.

CHAPTER 5.

Study 12, Beware!

THERE was one member of the Form who got down very early next morning.

Tess Trelawney it was who succeeded in making her toilette and then creeping away without having disturbed any of the other girls in the dormitory.

But Madge Minden awoke a few minutes after Tess had slipped away like that, and as soon as Madge saw the empty bed she herself wanted to be up and doing.

So there was Madge, presently, going downstairs just as the rising bell for the whole school was starting its off-resented *ding-ling-ding-ling!*

It was exactly as she, Madge, had guessed. Tess had gone to the study which the pair of them shared, and was busy upon a task that she had wanted to carry out overnight, only there had not been time for it.

She sat her side of the table, with a sloping drawing-board in front of her, to which the copy of the Almaro chart was pinned flat.

A mapping-pen was in Tess' hand, and with it she was doing some very fine writing.

"Morning, Tess!"

"Hello, Madge!" From the tone, it could be inferred that Tess would far rather

have had the study to herself for a little while longer.

Madge, at any rate, was as good a studymate for the temperamental one as the school could have produced. Nor did Tess fail to appreciate them. There was a great bond of friendship between the two girls—one, a born artist, the other a born musician!

"Here, Madge, you may as well say, now you're here," came the murmur, presently. "Is this going to help all of us—or not?"

Quietly Madge came round to that side of the table, to look over her chum's shoulder at the chart; and then

"Oh, Tess—splendid!"

"Anyhow, it can't do any harm?"

"Harm!"

"But the chart, before I added these notes, was just a copy of the original chart as I remembered it. Some of the girls may think I would have done better to leave it as it was?"

"No, Tess! Those notes you have inserted will be most helpful. I'm sure some of us have needed a few memos as to how far we have got with the puzzle. Have you finished now?"

"Can't think of anything else to put in," Tess frowned, with that pen of hers hovering.

"One thing occurs to me, Tess, now that you have made those notes. We must be awfully careful not to let the chart get into the wrong hands. If—if that Spanish woman really did steal the original chart—"

"But did she, after all? Betty, after an hour with her last evening, seemed to be off that theory a bit."

"I know. But someone stole the original, Tess; and why, if it was not because he or she had guessed that it related to buried treasure?"

Tess held up the completed chart. "Splendid," Madge murmured. "Without this we should never have been able to trace the spot where the treasure is supposed to be buried."



Tess let this remark go unanswered. She was standing up and unpinning the copy, held it up in front of her so that Madge could examine it once more.

"The more I look at it, Tess, the more helpful those notes and queries seem to be, that you have put down this morning. We owe a lot to you over this, Tess."

"Oh, rabbits! I suppose Betty and the rest will be down any minute now, so we might wait about for them? But I want to make good use of every free moment, out of doors, to-day."

"We shall all feel like doing that, Tess. Our next task; to find the two places that are represented by the two lower pairs of crossed daggers on the plan."

"Somewhere jolly close to the school, if not inside the school bounds," Tess muttered.

"Yes; that's what Dave seemed to think, last evening. He's pretty good at these things—wonderful, in fact."

"But it makes it less promising—that's the worst of it," Tess pondered on. "How are you going to be sure of finding the remaining landmarks—if they no longer remain? I'm not trying to be funny—"

"Oh, no! I see what you mean, Tess. The school has been rebuilt in recent times; a lot of ground that was rough moorland has been taken in, to be cleared and levelled."

"That's just it," Tess frowned. "So I reckon we'll be jolly lucky if we are able, at last, to trace out the exact spot where—"

She broke off sharply. Her eyes, after flashing a glance at the closed study door, switched questioningly to Madge's face.

"Someone out there—listening?"

Madge also had heard the faintest of sounds, as of a creeping step. She crossed over to the study door and whipped it open.

The passage was deserted.

"No one," she said.

"This treasure chart business must be making us jumpy," Tess grimaced. "Well"—turning to the window—"it's a jolly morning. I hope the other girls won't be long—"

This time, it was not so much of a breaking off by Tess as a trailing away of her voice into silence. She was staring fixedly out of the window.

Suddenly she flashed round.

"Madge! This is funny—interesting, I mean. If you look straight across from this window to the old boulder landmark on the edge of the cliffs, your eye is in line with that bit of a ruin which stands in our school grounds!"

"You mean the ruined chapel, that has railings round it?"

"Yes!"

"Well?"

"But that's what we want!" Tess said excitedly. "Something that might be another landmark, more inland! We have two more crossed-dagger places to find, you know. That ruin is one of them—oh, it's a certainty!"

Then Madge understood.

"Tess!" she gasped. "Oh! That gives us something more to work on."

"Rather! Here, I shan't wait for the others. You coming down, too? Right—oh," Tess said, darting back to the table. She had yet to put the chart away. In the act of rolling it up she studied it anew.

"By the look of it, Madge, the Spaniard did draw one of the straight lines from the old beacon to a building that is now only a ruin—the nuns' chapel, as it is called. If we are right, then we've

only one more crossed-dagger place to find out. Come on, Madge!"

Rolling up the chart, Tess thrust it away in a drawer on her side of the table, and a few moments later the study was deserted.

But not for long did that study remain deserted.

"No one!" Madge had said, after peering out into the passage just now. And she had been deceived.

There had been someone, listening outside the study; but it was someone who had been quick and stealthy enough to efface herself in time.

Fay Denver!

And now that Madge and Tess had hurried away, here was Fay once more, silently stealing into their study.

The mischievous smile that so often flickered at her lips was there as, leaving the door ajar, she tip-toed to the table.

Her right hand drew open one of the table-drawers; her left hand went in and filched out—a rolled up sheet of drawing-paper.

As soon as she had uncurled it and was giving her eyes to what it bore, she nodded quite understandingly.

A few seconds later someone else arrived at the half-open door. It was Edna Denver, and her sister instantly beckoned her in, to whisper:

"Yes, come and look, Edna! This chart!"

The younger sister pushed to the door, then darted to give her inquisitive eyes to the paper.

"What on earth, Fay!"

"But can't you see what it is?" the elder girl said in great excitement. "A copy of that Almaro chart—the one that was stolen."

"Is it? But there weren't all those notes in English on the original, Fay! Oh, and what do they mean, by—"

"Sh! This is great," Fay exclaimed softly. "I see, if you don't! Tess has made a copy from memory, and the notes have been added as she and her chums carried on their own investigations."

"There's something about 'buried treasure', Fay!"

"Well, don't you see? They reckon that the original chart related to buried treasure. And," Fay panted, "come to think of it, most likely it does!—I say! Betty & Co. are trying to find the exact spot—"

"Oh, but, Fay! Surely—"

"Edna, listen," struck in the other tensely. "If we take this chart now— No, we won't, though!"

"Not? Why not? Yes, let's, Fay—"

"No! On second thoughts Edna, we'd do better to wait. As they make discoveries, they appear to be making notes of them—on this chart. So if we wait until they've gone further—made more notes—"

"Oh! I get you, Fay; splendid! Leave them to do all the finding out, but nip in at the finish!" The low cunning of the idea was delighting Edna. She was all smiles and nods. "It means our getting the treasure!"

Fay quickly re-rolled the chart and returned it to its drawer. Closing the latter, she muttered exultantly:

"I'm glad it's Betty & Co. If only we can, Edna, that will be one in the eye for them! So, out of here now, and a waiting game is the one for us to play."

Edna was already back at the door. She gestured that they must both slip out instantly,

if they were not to be seen, and when they had achieved this movement successfully there was, of course, all the more for them to laugh about.

"A waiting game! But that doesn't mean, Edna," her sister grinned, "that we won't keep an eye on the Study 12 lot. What did Madge and Tess go downstairs for, just now, in such a great hurry?"

"Perhaps, if we go down too——"

"Quite!"
At the staircase, however, they encountered Madge—coming up again! She went running up the further flights that would take her to the dormitory-floor, and Fay was quick-witted enough to guess what this meant.

"Gone to tell Betty and the rest to hurry up and get down, Edna! Looks as if they've made another discovery already, this morning. Wonder what it can be?"

The artful pair could do no more than keep their eyes about them. Such a thing as mingling with Betty & Co. for the purpose of "pumping" them was out of the question. Relations between the Denver sisters and Study 12 were too strained for that.

So, when presently the sisters observed the captain and her chums gathered together in talk near the railed in ruins, they could not go up to them. Even the cool audacity of Fay and Edna stopped short of that.

Nor did it require more than a resentful glance or two, as if to ask why they were hanging around, to cause them to saunter away.

"We shall have half the school wondering what the meeting is about," Betty remarked, after Fay and Edna had retired.

"Let's go indoors and look at the chart," Polly suggested eagerly. "I want to see the notes that Tess has made."

"But these ruins!" Betty exclaimed, inclined to linger in front of them after all.

The crumbling walls and the base of a tower with a winding stairway were all that remained of the so-called nuns' chapel. For the very reason that there was so little of the stonework surviving from past ages, it had been railed round in recent years. Otherwise girls would still have been inclined to climb about the ruins, as they used to do.

"It just occurs to me," Betty suddenly murmured. "That Spanish woman, when I went round the grounds with her last evening—she was very interested in these ruins!"

"She was?" came with quickened interest from several of the other girls.

"Yes!"
"Then you may depend!" Polly plunged. "We really have got her to reckon with! She's after buried treasure, as we are!"

"Seems like it," Betty felt bound to agree. Polly gave one of her impatient sighs.

"Then we must get a jerk on," she exclaimed. "We're not going to let that woman get away with it! If Isabel and her mother were after the supposed treasure, it would be a different matter altogether. But that other woman——"

"I do wish I knew exactly what to think about her," Betty said. "It is all very well to be sure of one's suspicions; but you can't go to Miss Somerfield or anybody else on what might seem a crazy theory. No, we must hold our tongues for a bit longer——"

"And push on!"
"Yes, well," Pam smiled. "we really are getting on, aren't we? This discovery, this morning!"

"What it means now," Judy chimed in, hopefully; "we only need to find out one more crossed dagger spot—the last of the four on the chart—and then we should be able to locate the spot!"

"That's just it," Tess nodded. "And one thing is more certain than ever. The treasure, if there is one, will be discovered somewhere inside the school bounds."

"Bai Jove, just fancy!"
"The lines-of-sight on Tess' map may not be accurate, we know," Judy continued. "But roughly they do indicate a crossing point somewhere in the grounds."

"Look here, let's go up to the studies again," Polly burst out. "Our Study 12 window shows us pretty well all the ground on the map—all that matters, anyhow. If Tess picked up the sight-line running from the boulder to these ruins, by looking out of her window, we may pick up the other!"

"No mistake, it's a great help to survey the ground, as it were, from a high view-point, like an upstairs window," Helen murmured.

"Come on then!"
"I zink eet is a great peety we can't hire an airyplane," jabbered Naomer. "Bekas zen, eef we flew over ze top of ze school——"

"We might come down plop, right on top of the treasure-spot—yes!" Polly agreed sweetly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

After that there was a scurrying return to the schoolhouse. With only a few minutes in hand—for the day's routine would soon be claiming them—they pounded upstairs to the Form quarters.

The idea came to some of the eager girls to resort to the windows of all the studies tenanted

If You Remember—! See page 838

The Schoolgirls' Own



NOT WANTED! "The one who sold, Edna, the book, 'The Schoolgirls' Own' for the Denver School (the book) 'The Schoolgirls' Own' is not wanted!"

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A reproduction of the cover of the first number of The Schoolgirls' Own

by them. What one window did not reveal, another might! So there were only Betty, Polly, Paula, and Naomer to crowd at the window of Study 12.

"Now, what is there?" Polly panted. "To be seen between here and the old beacon?"

"In a direct line—a bee-line," Betty rejoined, just as eagerly.

"Dash, I don't see anything that could be a crossed-dagger place!"

"No—sweendle!"

"Wather a difficult wposition, bai Jove! I am afraid, geals—"

"Oh, if that's the best you can say!" This, of course, was from Polly. "There's the west-side game-field; there's the boundary wall between the school-property and the road—and that's all! It couldn't be the wall, could it, Betty?"

"I'm just thinking, Polly. We mustn't go too much by Tess' map. She may have made one of the unfinished lines too long; may have put the inland crossed dagger places quite in the wrong place. No road was marked on the original plan. And—that boundary wall, Polly—"

"Yes, what?"

"Some of it is very ancient, you know."

"Gosh!"

"It has been practically rebuilt; but—"

"Yes! Here and there are bits of the ancient wall that were left alone, when the builders were at work. When Morcove was a sort of nunnery, a very high wall went along there. You know how thick it is—the old part."

"I wonder, girls—I wonder if the Spaniard scratched or chiselled crossed dagger marks at all the places he chose for his sighting-points? We found those crossed daggers on the boulder at the edge of the cliffs, you know!"

Polly whipped about, as if to be off again.

"Here, we must examine the ruins of the old chapel, at that rate, to see if it bears any crossed dagger sign. If so—"

"But, Polly! We can't now!"

"Can't? Why not, Betty?"

"Attract too much attention!"

"Besides, there isn't time," the captain wisely stressed. "But we will do that, and the best way—just one or two of us, on the quiet."

"You mean, wait till to-night?"

"No, not that. During the day—we'll manage!"

For a moment longer Polly looked exasperated at the idea of delay. Then came her usual grimace of submission to Betty's less headstrong nature. Best to be guided by the captain! That had been proved scores of times over in the past.

After all, Betty might be slow, but she was sure! Her slogan—"We'll manage!"—seldom failed to be justified in the long run.

As for the rest of the chums, they were heart and soul in favour of Betty's policy of hastening slowly. The field of investigation had now been narrowed down to ground within the school bounds. In a way, that was all to the good; but there was this great drawback—it was ground overrun by other girls at all times when they, Betty & Co., were free to act.

Irksome, this delay—maddening, when perhaps five minutes' close searching at the ruins would provide another sensational proof that the girls were on the right track. A pair of crossed daggers—the Spaniard's symbol on the chart—scratched or chiselled upon one of the bits of ancient masonry forming part of the ruins!

Oh, to be able to go there, directly after breakfast, and search! And instead—school!

Then there would be the mid-morning "break." But what opportunity would there be then? The field was never more overrun with girls than it was at "break."

Yet Betty, with her astuteness, contrived to justify that slogan of hers—during "break."

She came out of class with her chums, in the middle of the morning, with an idea to suggest, as simple as it was promising. A lost ball—amongst the ruins!

Within two minutes, a game of French-cricket, played near the ruins, as games were so often played, resulted in a ball going over the railings. As a ball so often did!

Over the railings went some of the chums, promptly, to look for that ball. Why not? That again, was a thing so often done!

They poked about, whilst those outside the railings droned, now and then: "Can't you find it!" As a ruse wearing an utterly innocent appearance, nothing could have been better.

Suddenly:

"Got it!" yelled Polly. "Coming over!"

And the retrieved cricket-ball was whizzed high over the railings, to be caught by one of the waiting girls.

Then Polly and the other searchers came back over the railings with the usual athletic agility—except that Naomer got hooked on, somehow, and had to be lifted off finally.

Whilst this was being done by a couple of the girls, amidst great hilarity, Polly was whispering Betty and a few others:

"At the bottom of the wall, this side—where the ivy grows. Two crossed daggers!"

"Really?"

"Yep!"

"Bai Jove! Geals, geals—"

"Sh! But it's all right then," Betty guardedly rejoiced with her chums. "Now we know! One of the two sight-lines is definitely fixed."

"The boundary wall next," Polly said tensely.

"How I'd like to slip out now, and search every one of the ancient bits that the new wall takes in!"

"Not now," Betty ruled again.

"Oh!"

"No, Polly. Patience—"

But, once again, Polly submitted; and the game of French cricket was resumed, with the macecap herself batting.

Nor did her fuming impatience to be doing something else prevent her from staying "in" until the bell called the whole Form back into class.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Moment of Triumph

TWENTY-PAST twelve by the school's big clock, and two members of the Study 12 "chummary" racing to find the rest and tell them something!

Pam Willoughby and Judy Cardew were the pair. For caution's sake, it had been decided that they should take a look at the boundary wall, whilst the others discreetly held away.

Up to Study 12 they hastened, and found most of their chums in evidence.

Eager watch had been kept from the study window, and Pam and Judy had been seen, returning up the drive in haste. So they were now greeted with a subdued but anxious:

"Well?"

"Yes, well!" Pam smiled, a little out of breath. "It is all right."

"You mean—"



Under the pretext of looking for a lost ball, Polly and a few of the others began to search eagerly for the vital clue.

"Two crossed daggers, on a stone belonging to one bit of the old wall——"

"Goodness!"

"Bekas—pipooray! Gorjus! Ooo, bekas now——"

"Sh'rrp, kid!" Polly hissed, although she herself had nearly gone off her head. "Where? Exactly where?" she clamoured.

Pam and Judy took their chums to the study window.

"Looking from here, girls," Pam said softly, "to the left of the gateway. The crossed daggers are carved about a foot or so above ground level. They want a lot of spotting; so worn away by the weather."

"But they are there!" Judy added rejoicingly. "No mistaking them; So now, we are all complete as to the four points that give the two sight-lines."

"Splendid," Betty sparkled. "Super! Where's that chart of yours, Tess!"

"I'll get it."

In a few moments Tess was back with it, spreading it upon the study 12 table.

She sat down in what was the captain's chair, with the map before her, the others crowding together to look over her shoulders.

"I'm going to carry this left-hand line further down, with the ruler. There we are," she remarked, after making use of a ruler and pencil. "From the boulder at the edge of the cliffs, down through the nuns' chapel, and so on towards the schoolhouse."

"Goodness!" Polly jerked out. "I hope the schoolhouse hasn't been built on the treasure spot!"

"Howwows!"

"Just a bit."

Tess was using the ruler and pencil again.

"Carry this right-hand line further down—so!

From the old beacon, down through the boundary wall, until it crosses the other line, as lengthened by me just then. And there we are."

She sat back, keeping the point of her pencil on the point where the two extended lines crossed.

"And that," breathed Helen, in great excitement, "is the treasure spot!"

"Somewhere just there—close to the gym. Mind you," Tess warned them, "I may be just a bit out. I must know exactly where the right-hand line comes through the boundary wall. A foot or so in error there, makes a difference at the crossing points."

"Do you think you can get it exact?" Betty questioned anxiously.

"Oh, yes. I must just see the crossed daggers on the boundary wall for myself. Better leave it to me. The Spaniard, you know," as she rose, "chose the simplest yet cutest dodge of all. It's a well-known one now. Wasn't so well-known in those days, I dare say."

Polly darted back to the window. Her eyes were dilating as she gazed out.

"Somewhere near the gym," she muttered. "Oh, the other side of it, looking from here—the seaward side. But it's level grass there, part of the playing-fields!"

"Um!" Betty said. "But we must wait——"

"Oh!"

"Until Tess has got the exact location——"

"To within a few yards," Tess said, rolling up the map. "It can be done. But I don't want to be—fdgeted!"

She went away with the chart, leaving her chums to continue in excited talk.

In that study which she shared with Madge, Tess sat down at the table to bring the chart up to the minute, as it were, by making a note or so.

She wrote in a tiny hand: "Buried treasure will be here?" and ringed these words round. They were written close to the point where the two sight-lines crossed, and she felt that it had been just as well to make these various notes.

They seemed to clarify much which, if entrusted only to the memory, would have required a lot of thinking back at times. There was no knowing but what she and her chums might yet have to keep very clear heads.

Back in her table-drawer she placed the chart, and then went downstairs. She was going to find exactly where the crossed daggers symbol was to be found on the boundary wall.

Fortunately, Tess' fondness for sketching out of doors accounted for her often being seen about quite by herself. So, now, she was confident of being able to seek the fateful spot and make some careful measurements that would be most helpful, without attracting attention.

Meantime, Betty and the rest had returned to the open air, for appearance sake. In any case they had to kill time, and they thought it just as well to go for a stroll on the field.

It was a brilliant noontide, and most of Morcove's girls were making the best of it, out

of doors. But there were at least two members of the Firm hanging about upstairs.

Fay and Edna Denver!

Alone together in their study, they were in a keyed-up state. Unless they were greatly mistaken, further progress had been made by Betty & Co. since breakfast. Not for nothing had the sisters kept their eyes about them!

"What do you say then, Edna?" came the elder sister's low-spoken question. "Is it safe to venture now?"

"It's awfully tempting," Edna answered, tensely. "Almost certain that Tess has made more notes on the chart. And she has gone downstairs—we saw her from this window, going out by the main gateway."

Fay nodded.

"The others, too, are out of doors. I don't believe we shall get a better chance than this. Oh, look here, let's risk it!"

"Right-ho! If you don't mind, I don't!"

"Nothing venture!" Fay quoted, with a wry grin. "Think of the things we've done this Term, without being found out!"

"H'm! We were caught with the gaspers, you know—"

"Pooh!"

"But you go ahead, Fay; I'm quite willing. Tell you what, I'll stay at our doorway, and if I suspect danger—I'll just call: 'Fay-ie!' as though I wanted you and wondered where you were."

"Right-ho! I shall just look at the chart, to see the latest."

"That's it."

Edna opened the door and looked out into the corridor. No one was to be seen. Better still, there was a stillness that confirmed the belief; hardly a study had anyone in it. No murmur of talk could be heard.

She glanced round, nodding:

"Coast's clear, Fay!"

"Then here goes!"

There was the old daring, artful grin upon Fay's excessively pretty face as she stole out into the passage. As arranged, her sister remained at their study-doorway, specially alert for any sounds that might give warning of girls coming upstairs.

But a full minute crept by without providing a single moment of alarm for the girl who was on watch. All her straining ears picked up was some piano music, from the music-room below, and the faint and pleasant melody of outdoor sounds—the sharp smack of bat-and-ball, the cheery voices of girls at some "pick-up" game.

Suddenly Fay came flashing back from the study into which she had trespassed.

Edna backed into this study, and her sister darted in, looking wildly excited. To Edna's amazement, Fay had brought the chart away with her.

"You'd never believe, Edna!"

"What, Fay—what?"

"They have found out—the whole thing!"

"They have? Never!"

"Well, look!"

Fay, after entering, had closed the door softly. Now she spread the chart upon the study table. She stabbed a forefinger at a new-made note, almost in the centre of the plan.

"Read that, Edna!"

"Buried Treasure will be here?"

"Don't you see? Where the two straight lines cross! They have solved the riddle, Edna. Just fancy!"

"But they can't have gone out to— Oh, no,



SEVEN hundred SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN,"

Schoolgirls shout in joyous tone;
"Seven hundred Morcove tales—
That's a yarn that never fails.
Every Tuesday hear us say—
SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN is out to-day!"

Seven hundred SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN:
How the time has quickly flown!
Seven hundred weeks have run
When in nineteen twenty-one
We encountered Betty B.
And her study coterie.

Stories grave and stories gay,
Tales of work and tales of play;
Girls who've strange adventures met,
Heroines we'll ne'er forget;
Small girls, tall girls, of all ages,
Each have figured in our pages.

Seven hundred numbers old—
Still there're stories to be told.
We've a bag of magic store;
Stories end—we've got heaps more!
Dip inside—Hey Presto—look!
Here's a new one for our book!

Ah, our old friends—how they've grown!
Yet they still love SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.
New ones join the happy throng,
Proud to say that they belong
To the SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN Brigade—
Seven hundred numbers made!

IRIS HOLT.

for they're still playing about on the field," Edna exclaimed in relief, after darting to the window to glance down to the field. "So that's all right." "I should say it is all right—just about!" Fay chuckled, waving the chart exultantly. "They'll be waiting for to-night now, Edna—you may be certain! How could they possibly hunt about at the spot they've located, in broad daylight? It's somewhere there on the games-field—close to the gym."

"And you brought the chart away, Fay."

"I did! We've got it! Now to see if we, and not they, can be the ones to get any treasure that is there."

"Buried treasure! Yes," Edna breathed, with a covetous smile and nod. "Oh, well anyway, we've put a spoke in their wheel, Fay!"

"We have! Every grudge paid off—that's what it means at the worst, Edna. And at the best—we may lay hands on—"

"St!"

Edna had been startled by hearing someone stopping in the passage, just outside their door.

Next second the door was tapped.

Fay rushed the chart into a drawer. She and Edna were greatly flustered.

"Come in!" the elder girl voiced, with desperate calmness; and the door opened.

A parlourmaid spoke into the room, from its threshold.

"Will you both please report to the headmistress—"

"Do what!"

"Report to the headmistress—at once."

Fay and Edna looked at each other. Then they stared afresh at the maid.

"What about, do you know, Ellen?" asked Fay. "No, miss."

And there was the vacant doorway, awaiting the passing out of the sisters. They were transfixed, however, wondering blankly but uneasily—why had they been sent for?

"Oh, well!" Fay suddenly laughed, mirthlessly. "Come on, Edna, and if it's another row—it's a row, that's all!"

"Yes, who cares, if it is!"

Yet bravado was to forsake them a little in that moment when they followed each other into Miss Somerfield's presence. They had seen her in stern mood before, having been "carpeted" several times during the Term. Never had they seen her looking as stern as this.

"I think you have been told to stand to attention when you are in front of me!" she began sharply. "Fay, I shall question you, as being the elder of you two girls. Were you at the Headland Hotel last evening?"

"We did look in there, yes."

"Without permission?"

"I suppose so!"

"No relatives staying there? No excuse, except that you thought you would like to drop in there, to sit about and have an ice or something like that?"

"Er—yes, that's about it." It was like Fay to be impudent. She worked her face as if trying not to smile.

"You know that the Headland Hotel is strictly out of bounds, unless a scholar has parents or other close relations staying there and due permission is obtained?"

"Oh, yes!"

"If your insolence, Fay Denver, is due to the belief that you and your sister are somehow secure from—"

"I'm not being insolent!"

"You are being very insolent! Now, silence. On your own admission, that matter of the unauthorised visit to the hotel is settled. I pass to something else. A few days ago you were found to have cigarettes in your possession? If I tell you that Matron has made another discovery, this morning, of the same nature—will you wish to dispute it?"

Fay shrugged.

"I don't suppose it would be any use! If some other girls have planted the things on me and Edna, so as to get us—"

"An abominable insinuation to make!" the headmistress cried furiously. "It is no defence whatever, Fay Denver. I am amply satisfied; in spite of my previous warning, you two girls have been disgracing yourselves and the school again. You remember the terms of that warning? Now you will see whether I mean it seriously. Both of you—as soon as you have had dinner—report to Matron about getting packed!"

The shock of those last words struck both girls back a step or two. Did Miss Somerfield really mean it?

As if that very question could be read in their frightened faces, the headmistress exclaimed:

"I mean it—yes! I forbear from expelling you altogether. Between now and next Term there will be time to consider; time for me to go into matters thoroughly, perhaps, with your people. Meanwhile, you are both being sent home!"

"But—but—"

"Fay Denver, not a word! I am telegraphing to your people at home, saying that you are being put on the three-fifty from Barncombe Junction—this afternoon."

A dismissing wave of the hand followed, and Fay and Edna, when they had stumbled together out of the headmistress' presence, stood staring at each other, aghast.

Their boast, that they cared a hang for nobody; their boast, that even the headmistress could be as angry as she liked, at any time, and they would only laugh afterwards. But they were not laughing—now!

CHAPTER 7.

Sensation at Morcove

NOT until just before afternoon school did the news leak out.

Then there was sensation everywhere.

Usually, Study 12 had first word of anything affecting the life of the Form. But Betty & Co. were so occupied with the affair of the Almero chart, they were still in ignorance of Miss Somerfield's stern decree, sending Fay and Edna home for the rest of the Term, when other batches of girls were in their first excitement over the news.

Madge Minden it was who brought that news to Study 12, ten minutes after it had begun to spread like wildfire through the school.

She had been across to the "san" to have her lately injured hand looked at by the doctor. The special treatment had ceased, and Madge was fast regaining the full use of her hand. The doctor, however, when passing on his rounds, would look in now and again.

Another lively debate was being held, in Study 12, when Madge entered. A plan of action had to be settled in regard to the final stage of the treasure-hunt.

"Hallo, Madge!" the captain gaily greeted her

"Another O.K. from the doctor? That's good!"

"Where's Tess then?"

Madge had instantly noticed that the girl in question was absent.

"She has gone down to the boundary wall again, to make doubly certain of some measurements. She should be here any moment now, and then—"

"And then!" Polly burst in, joyfully, "she hopes to adjust our chart so that we shall know the exact spot, to an inch!"

"More or less," Betty qualified. "Still! We have narrowed it all down, no mistake! We must be miles ahead of anyone who has got hold of the original chart—whether it's that Spanish woman or anybody else."

"All ze same, when are we going to get ze jerk on and dig up ze treasure? Bekas—"

"That's the question now!" Polly chimed in, with an impatient turning to the captain. But the captain was giving Madge Minden a steady look.

"The hand is going on all right, Madge dear?"

"Oh, nothing more to be uneasy about!"

"I thought, just then, you seemed to be a bit—upset."

"It's something I have just heard about the Denver sisters."

"What!"

"They're being sent home—"

"Sent—home!" gasped Madge's hearers.

"This afternoon, yes."

"Good gracious!"

"Bekas—what ze diggings, expelled zen?"

"Not exactly," Madge responded. "They are sent down for the rest of the Term. I could tell you girls hadn't heard, directly I came in. But the rest of the school is talking of nothing else."

"Whew!" Polly emitted. "Fay and Edna—packed off at a moment's notice! What then have they been doing now?"

"There are all sorts of rumours. More smoking. And it's said that they went to the Headland."

"Shouldn't wonder," Judy murmured. "That's Fay and Edna all over."

"Yes, and I can't be surprised if Miss Somerfield has come down upon them heavily," Betty frowned. "They have been asking for it. Had several warnings too."

"And I," Polly exploded—"I can't feel frightfully sorry for them, either! If they were being absolutely expelled, then one would feel—what an

awful thing. But if they are only being sent down—"

"Disgrace enough," Helen remarked.

"A disgrace that the Form will probably feel, more than they do," Pam murmured. "They were sort of turned out of their other school, weren't they?"

"Yes, wather, bai Jove! I hev heard them pwactically bwagging to that effect," Paula Creel deplored. "So, weally, without wishing to appear hard-hearted, I must subscribe to Polly's opinion."

And yet—a heavy silence followed, evidencing distress of mind on account of the drastic punishment that had overtaken Fay and Edna.

They might be two girls who had been quite the "wrong wavelength" for Morcove; more things were known to their discredit by their schoolmates than the headmistress could ever have heard about. Even so, Betty & Co. were bound to feel what a pity it all was! For the miscreants' own sake, and for the school's—what a grievous thing!

"Going to-day?" Helen exclaimed, at last.

"They're packing now, I was told," Madge supplemented. "So I doubt if we shall see them again."

At that moment the study-door flashed open, letting in Tess Trelawney.

They would have imagined that the wild excitement in her looks was due to her having just heard the news about Fay and Edna; but her first panted cry was:

"The chart—have you girls got it?"

"Got the chart, Tess? No!"

"Then it's stolen!"

"What!"

"Our copy—stolen!" Tess gasped on, crashing the door shut behind. "It's gone from the drawer—"

"Never!"

But the refusal to believe such an appalling thing had to give way before the look in her eyes.

"It's gone, I tell you," Tess insisted breathlessly. "I came indoors five minutes ago. I went to my study first, to get the chart from the drawer and bring it here. It wasn't there. I hunted about; then I thought you girls might have fetched it away—"

"We haven't touched it, Tess!" was the chorus.

"Then who has?" she questioned wildly. "Someone has been to that study—taken the chart—stolen it from us!"

"Howwows!"

"Bekas—what ze diggings, zere are all those notes—"

"Oh, Tess!" several of them cried out, as with one voice. "Your notes!"

"I know!" she nodded tragically. "That's what makes it a thousand times worse for us! Anybody who stole the original chart had still the problem to solve. The person who has stolen our chart will know almost exactly where to search or dig—"

"It's disgusting!" Polly raged out, stamping furiously. "After all our trouble! But who is the thief, this time?"

"Well, who could it be, this time?" Pam asked. And there they stood, after that, mute and still, faced not only with their cruel loss, but faced with this new problem also.

A fresh problem! And it was to be one, perhaps, which they were fated never to solve!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Next Tuesday's fine long complete
Morcove School story is entitled:



**MORGOVE'S
TREASURE TRAIL**

By Marjorie Stanton