

"Morcove's Treasure Trail" A Fine Complete Story
About a Famous School

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN

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EVERY
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2d



WHAT DID THE STONE CONCEAL ?

One of many dramatic moments in this
week's fine complete Morcove story.

Stories by Marjorie Stanton, Iris Holt, Muriel Holden

A Fine Complete Story Featuring the Chums of Study 12



MORCOVE'S TREASURE TRAIL

By MARJORIE STANTON

ALTHOUGH the original of the mysterious Spanish chart, and Tess Trelawney's careful copy, have both vanished, Betty and Co. have not given up hope of finding the supposed hidden treasure. But, unknown to the Study 12 chums, there are those outside the school who are working in secret to forestall the Morcove treasure-hunters.

CHAPTER 1. Sent Home

MISS SOMERFIELD, the headmistress of Morcove School, entered her private room to find two girls awaiting an interview.

They were dressed for out of doors, and no one could have denied that there was an excessive prettiness about both girls. But they could never have been praised for their manners.

An impudent air of disrespect had been assumed by the two girls, who were sisters. One of them—Fay, the elder by only a year or so—remarked quite insolently:

"We were told you wanted to see us!"

"Fay Denyer," the headmistress said, more in sorrow than in anger, "if ever you do come back to Morcove School, it will have to be as a girl who conducts herself far better. You, too, Edna!"

They had cheek enough to smile, as if to say:

"Will we!"

"But I don't know, I am sure, that I shall

be prepared to re-admit you, next term," Miss Somerfield continued gravely. "It is not merely that you have disgraced yourselves, again and again, during this, your first term at Morcove. You have done much to bring disgrace upon the school. Your parents will not be kept waiting long for a letter from me, going into the matter very fully. Meanwhile, you are both being sent home a fortnight before this term is ended!"

She paused, sighing regretfully.

"I am very, very sorry; but it had to be. Warnings have not availed. So there it is, and now I have only to say that I hope you have a safe journey home. A telegram went to your home address an hour ago. The school car is at the porch to run you to Barncombe Junction, and I understand from matron that you have all you need—"

"Oh, yes!" Fay exclaimed, tossing her handsome head. "And the sooner we are out of this school, the better!"

The headmistress stood tight-lipped for a moment. She was not going to comment upon that further display of insolence. As soon as she

had time to do so, she must go into the case of these two girls—more than tiresome pair that they had proved to be!—with their parents.

"Good-bye, then, Fay Denver; good-bye, Edna. I consider you have both been—"

"And we consider there has been a lot of fuss about nothing! Come on, Edna," the elder sister added airily, and marched away to the door.

Edna stalked after Fay, chin in air.
"Wonderful Morcove!—oh, very!" Fay said loudly, as soon as she and Fay were in the passage. "Rotten old Morcove! Pooh!"

"Cat!" said Fay, making a face at the closed door behind which they had left the headmistress. "Just because we're not prigs!"

"I shall tell dad and mother—"
"So shall I! Oh, we'll have our say in the matter, right enough," Edna seethed.

Then, as they went towards the front hall of the vast schoolhouse, they indulged in shrill laughter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Extra fortnight to the summer hols—that's all it means, Edna!"

"Yes! He, he, he! We'll be back next term. Glad to have us, if only to keep the numbers up. Huh!"

"Here, Edna," came with a nudge from Fay; "before we clear out—let's take a peep at the Form, in class!"

"Yes, let's!"
The entire school was in class for the afternoon, and this meant that there was no one at hand, out here in the hall, to call the lawless pair to order.

On tiptoe they made for that class-room which had been theirs. The Form was evidently at work with pen and paper, for not even the mistress's voice was audible.

The wide door of the class-room had panes of clear glass to its upper half. A few moments, and Fay and Edna were outside the door, nudging each other and grinning as they peered in.

Every girl's head was bent over the work in hand. At her desk in front of the class sat the Form's temporary mistress, correcting some exercise or other done by the Form earlier in the day. The sisters saw her, as she laid by one corrected exercise-book and took up another, glance at the silent class.

"There's the wonderful captain—booh!" Fay whispered derisively. "Anyhow, Edna, we've just about paid her out!"

"I should say so," grinned Edna. "She and all her chums of Study 12—they little know! Look at that Naomer kid, popping a sweet into her mouth—the greedy pig!"

"And Pam Willoughby—if I dislike any of them, Edna, I do dislike her! Too grand to live—puh!"

"Oh, look out—we're being seen!" Edna suddenly tittered.

It was that dusky scholar, Naomer Nakara, who had suddenly upset the whole class by yelling excitedly:

"Ooo, queek, look!" At the same time Naomer had pointed wildly towards the class-room door. "Bekas—look!"

Now, of course, every girl in the rows of desks, and the mistress sitting in front of the class, was staring more or less amazedly towards the door.

Fay and Edna pressed each her face against a pane of glass. In both cases a flattened nose made the face all the more distorted, with its cheeky grin.

"It's time to say good-bye!" sang both girls—and then they fled, screaming their laughter. "Ha, ha, ha!"

An impassive chauffeur was waiting with the car at the schoolhouse porch. As he, too, in their opinion, represented orderliness, they scrambled into the motor in a most disorderly manner, drawing the door round with a bang!

"Home, John!" said Fay. "Ha, ha, ha!"
She flopped back on the luxurious upholstery, with Edna beside her in a similar fit of in-decorous merriment.

Then, as the motor picked up speed on the open road to Barncombe, Fay suddenly lifted a fair-sized attache-case on to her lap.

She snapped open the fastenings, threw back the leather lid and took out a folded sheet of drawing-paper.

"There we are, Edna!" she chuckled, unfolding the paper. "Study 12's wonderful, marvellous copy of the stolen chart!"

"All complete—yes!"
"And mustn't those girls be mad, furious, if they have found out by now that this chart of theirs is missing! Poor Study 12! No Spanish treasure for them, boo-hoo!"

Edna retained her exultant grin.
"Yes, the chart is ours, and we're going to stick to it, Fay! Even if we can't make use of it, now that we're being sent home—"

"But, Edna—an idea!" the elder sister burst out excitedly. "Oh, I wonder—can we?"

"Can we what, Fay?"

But she did not answer immediately. For a full minute she was silent, thinking hard.

Then she brought a flourished hand down smack upon the chart.

"Yes, we can, Edna—and we will! Listen! Not go home, after all!"

"What!"
"Not to-day, anyhow, Edna! It can be worked. I tell you," Fay insisted eagerly. "Dad and mother are away from home. We didn't tell the old cat that, but we knew, didn't we? Any telegram that's been sent will only have been opened by mother's housekeeper—and we know what she is!"

"That old goop!"
"Yes! Now, Edna, listen! When we get to Barncombe, I'll find the nearest call-box and ring up home. It won't be me if I don't wangle things."

"But Fay—what do we do if we don't go home?"

"Do? Stay around here, of course—in secret," was the elder's daring idea. "And use this chart of Study 12's to help us find the treasure!"

CHAPTER 2.

As Daring As Ever

THE car, with its two reckless girls for passengers, and their luggage strapped on behind, romped into quaint old Barncombe.

Half-way along the narrow High Street there was a left-hand turning with the sign: "To the Station." The town post office was at a corner there. When the car was slowing to take the turn-off, Fay Denver rapped to the chauffeur that he must stop.

He pulled up at the kerb—directly opposite the post office.

Fay jumped out.
"Yes," she approved his stopping-place grandly; "I want to go in here, to telephone. We've plenty of time?"

"Yes, miss."

Fay flaunted into the public building and was neither inexperienced nor shy about getting the trunk call put through. With that promptitude which does such credit to the post-office system to-day, she was told which box to go to, and then, with the sound-proof door fastened behind her, she airily commenced the telephone talk.

"Is that Nine-Double-O, Winchcombe? Oh, is that you, Mrs. Hopkins! This is Fay speaking!" A faltered: "Yes, miss!" came back over the wire. Mrs. Hopkins, excellent as a housekeeper in her own old-fashioned way, was probably a-tremble at her end of the line. She never would get used to the telephone.

"Mother and father are still up in Town, aren't they, Mrs. Hopkins? What? Speak louder! Right! There's been a telegram, hasn't there? You opened it? Oh, then you know what it was about!"

Fay fetched a deep breath. "There, Mrs. Hopkins? Listen, then! Edna and I won't be coming home by that train after all. Can you hear me? Oh! I say—we shall—not—be home—after all! Got that? Right! That's all, then."

But with the same breath Fay added: "Hallo, hallo! There? Did you get me? Not to expect either of us, after all! It's all right! 'Bye!"

And Fay came out of the sound-proof box looking as bold as brass.

She laughed as she climbed back into the car.

"That fool of a Hopkins woman, Edna! But just as well she is such a stupe!"

"Is it all right, Fay?" "Oh, perfectly! The way I spoke, she'll take it that there was a scare about illness in the school, I dare say, and that something thought to be infectious wasn't, after all. She would be one to think of illness!"

"So she imagines we're staying on at the school? I say, Fay!"

"Well? Not windy, are you?"

"No!" grinned the younger sister. "It's your doing, anyhow. I don't care!"

"And I—I'm in the mood! Where's the harm, anyway?" Fay laughed. "At this time of year—hardly dark all night! Edna, we're going to have a shot for it, anyhow! Going on home by train to-morrow—and who is to be any the wiser?"

"How about our luggage, Fay?"

"Oh, dump that. At the station—and here we are!" as the car took the final swish round in the station yard.

"How about this chauffeur chap? Is he to stay to see us into the train?"

"He'd better not!" Fay flashed. "What do they take us for—kids?"

It was a very quiet time at the railway station. Fay and Edna, after alighting from the car.

formed the idea that they would be about the only passengers—and even they were not going to board the train, after all!

The chauffeur, according to the habit derived from years of service for the school, manifested a willingness to stay around and be of any assistance up to the last moment. But Fay, tincturing her grand air with offensive disdain, told him he could go.

"And here you are," she said, conferring a silver tip. "The porters will do the rest." He saluted, saying nothing. Not like other Morcové girls, these two. Most objectionable!

Returning to his seat at the wheel, he drove away, whilst a porter now came up to Fay and Edna, where they stood by their luggage.

"The three-fifty, young ladies?"

Laughing cheekily, Fay and Edna peered into the classroom. "It's time to say good-bye!" they chanted, not a whit abashed by the fact that they were being sent home.



"No!" Fay said airily. "We're only leaving these things at the parcel office. Take 'em along and I'll get the deposit tickets for them."

"You can send the luggage in advance, miss, if you like?"

"I know all about that. You do as you're told!"

Edna smiled. She admired her elder sister's domineering ways. The smile came again when Fay, after a couple of minutes' absence, returned to the sunny station yard.

"I asked about the trains in the morning," Fay chuckled. "So that put some dust in their eyes. And now, Edna darling, I think we had better make for the Barncombe Creamery, get some tea whilst it is still safe—"

"And lay in a stock of etables? We shall want something, Fay!"

"We're going to get all we want," was Fay's bland response, "like we usually do!"

CHAPTER 3. Crossed Daggers

IN one of the spacious class-rooms at Morcove School, pens went down with a general rattle now that word had been voiced for the cease work.

"Bai Jove!" sighed that languid member of the Study 12 "chummery," pretty Paula Creel. "Gweat welief, yes, wather!"

"Bekas, now for tea—pipocray!"

"Naomer!" came the reprimanding word. "The Form! Less noise! Quietly now; books away. Naomer, I have NOT said you could jump up, so just sit down again!"

Whereupon the dusky one subsided, with an aggravated: "Sweendle!" uttered under her breath.

At any rate, Naomer was determined to be, as it were, first off the mark at the word. "Go!" As a result, when "Dismiss!" was called, she made such an initial dash that one foot slipped and kicked a neighbouring girl pretty hard on the ankle.

"Owch! Ow!"

"Paula Creel, how dare you make all that——"

"Sowwy," gasped Paula, inevitable victim of Naomer's skittishness. "Er—a shawp twinge, yes, wather!"

More than that Paula would not say, in excuse for the sharp screech. She loved Naomer—simply loved her!—far too greatly for any complaining against her.

The ankle was still discommoding Paula badly enough to compel her, when she got outside with the rest of the Form, to hop towards the stairs. So Naomer very penitently turned back.

"Bekas, what ze diggings, Paula!"

"Naow, you keep away, Naomer deah! I would much wather you—Owp! Why can't you leave me—alone!"

"Bekas, I must help you upstairs to ze study! What, ze diggings, you want some tea, don't you?"

If Paula wanted it then, how much more she wanted it when at last she arrived in Study 12, upstairs. Not only had Naomer persisted in "helping" her upstairs, but there had been mad-cap Polly Linton, too, in attendance.

"There you are, poor lamb," Polly said in a mothering tone to the oft-teased duffer, planting her in the study's best armchair. "And if you are not better presently, we'll take your blood pressure!"

"If this term," Paula groaned, "had anothah month to wun, bai Jove, I would wefuse to remain in this study, yes, wathah! My life, fwom to-night, is——Yarooop!"

This time it was a white tea-cloth, taking Paula full in the face. Polly, in haste to lay the cloth, had given it a preliminary shake that was not only vigorous, but productive of many crumbs left from a previous meal.

"Hot! Much too hot in class this afternoon." Form captain Betty. "Roasting!"

"And I'm not sure that it doesn't mean a storm presently," remarked Tess Trelawney, from over by the window. "The sky is murking over now."

Tess was a reliable weather prophet. Her talent as an artist had made her a great outdoor sketcher, and that in turn had rendered her very weather-wise. She could read the sky, or the changing lights upon the face of nature, better than any of her schoolmates.

Polly, after spreading the tea-cloth, came across to the window.

"I'd like to see a wet evening," she exclaimed. "We could get out—and other girls would be wanting to be about in the open, most likely. So there would be our chance!"

Tess was not the only one to give a comprehending nod. Every one of these girls was longing for the moment when certain investigations could be carried out, in the school grounds, without attracting attention.

Evenings were at their longest at this time of year, and so Betty & Co. could not rely upon any last half-hour of twilight for their opportunity. What was called "Big Hall"—the last assembly of the day—had to be attended by all girls, these midsummer evenings, when it was still light out of doors.

As for a deliberate midnight excursion; a stealthy rising up from beds whilst others in the dormitory were fast asleep—Betty had had no need to set her face against that project.

Even headstrong Polly Linton, who was most liable to let impatience get the better of her, was realising that stealing out at night was not to be considered.

So, for once, the "chummery" hoped for a wet evening. If they chose to slip on mats and "plash about," they would be free to do so. Authority never encouraged Morcove girls to be "sugar-drops." On the other hand, a fine evening would mean a teeming games-field, compelling Betty & Co. to defer their activities.

Helen Craig, returning with boiling water for the big teapot, remarked gaily:

"Talk about early! Not one of the other studies has even started to lay tea. There was no one else getting water, anyhow."

"So much the better!" was Polly's hearty rejoinder. "Girls, we might, by getting down to the field whilst the others are still at tea, have the place to ourselves for a bit!"

"We won't hang about up here, that's certain," Betty nodded. "Nothing to be done indoors now; nothing to be talked about even! The next step——"

"And the last, let's hope!" interjected Polly. "If only we do succeed in finding something!"

"Bekas, you never know!" The imp was rather fond of sounding this warning note. "Bekas, supposing ze treasure buried by ze jolly old Spaniard has been dug up long ago? Sweendle, zen! Another washout!"

"You should say, Naomer, 'Supposing the supposed treasure,'" tall Pam Willoughby gently corrected. "It is only our theory, you know, that the chart we have been going by related to a buried treasure."

"But if there was one, then it's still there!" Polly argued strenuously. "I refuse to believe that anybody has ever found it. If the Almaro johnny could put it away so artfully that he had to keep a chart for his own future guidance, then he must have done the job pretty thoroughly."

"Just one point though," Betty said, with a half mirthless smile, "a lot of re-building has been done at Morcove. Supposing some builders' chaps, digging foundations——"

"Oh!" Polly stamped. "I don't want to hear! Tea!"

She plumped down into her own chair, and the rest of the girls seated themselves, the general mood was a mixture of grave and gay.

At moments the chums felt so elated over recent achievements, they could enjoy the usual tea-time

levity. But at other moments would come thoughts that badly damped their spirits.

It was, for instance, highly gratifying to know that they had solved the riddle of the Spaniard's chart. But for them to have to remember that they had been at work upon a mere copy of the chart, the original having been stolen from the school museum a few nights ago—all this was "not so good!"

Still more trying to the nerves was the loss of their own copy of the chart; the theft of it from one of their studies only a few hours ago.

It must have been the thought of this that kept Betty gravely reflective, during a rest from the pouring-out. When a pause in the talk came, she exclaimed:

"I really don't see how our copy of the chart could have been stolen by the person who stole the original."

"The more I think—neither can I," said one of the others. "The original chart was stolen by night, so it could have been somebody who entered the school. But our copy vanished at midday! Was there an outsider in the school at a time like that?"

"Then who could it have been? Some girl or other?" Helen questioned, in a guarded tone. "If so, she must be a girl who has noticed that we were busy in our free time, trying to find out things."

"Haven't been aware of anyone taking a special interest in our movements," Tess muttered crisply. "As for an outsider being in the school-house, in secret, during the day—why not?"

"Too many of us about, Tess!"

"Oh, I'm not so sure," the captain was answered. "At fixed times we are all in class. Anybody who was clever enough to be able to steal the original chart from the museum would be artful enough to be able to slip in, unseen. And once inside the schoolhouse—think of the size of the building; the out-of-the-way corners for lying low."

"Then you think that it was the same thief in both cases, Tess?"

"I do! That Spanish woman who called once or twice at the school, saying that she thought of entering her daughter next Term. After all, it was a Spanish chart, and she was—a Spaniard!"

"Perhaps you're right, Tess," the captain nodded. "And we'd do better, after all, to stick to that belief. She stole the original, then she got to know that we had made out our own copy—from memory—"

"With notes of our own, too!" Polly interjected with a grimace. "That's the annoying part of it; our copy was more valuable than the original!"

"Cwuel luck, yes, wather!"

"Bekas—sweindle, eef zey get hold of ze treasure after we have found out everything for zem!"

A minute later they remarked how dark the study was becoming. Some of them got up and went to the wide-open window. Polly stretched forth a hand beyond the sill.

"Not raining yet—no," she commented. "But there's a thickening sky for you. Oh, let's get out now, girls! Can't see a soul on the fields!"

This was an eagerness they all felt; but it was wisely decided that some should remain—not simply to clear away the tea-things, but to avoid too big a batch down there where the searching about had to be done.

So Betty went away with Polly, Pam, and Tess—a "brainy" four, although they left others to credit them with being that.

Out of doors an almost eerie stillness had followed the murning over of the summer sky. Nature had lost her breath, and not a leaf trembled. Such a sudden change from grilling sunshine to a stormy gloom had hushed the singing birds.

Under a sky that was assuming the colour of blue-black ink, the Study 12 investigators made their way round to that area of the playing-field which, if all the careful calculations were correct, was the treasure-spot's "location."

They rejoiced to find themselves quite alone out here. This was the normal tea-time for girls, and now that the weather had become so uninviting there was likely to be some sitting about indoors, after tea.

Betty and her three chums had the modern and



"Look!" Polly whispered wildly. "Two crossed daggers!"

finely equipped "gym" between themselves and the schoolhouse. Strangely—and most awkwardly too!—the "location" had come out somewhere close to the gymnasium.

The girls might even find that the Spaniard's treasure had been buried by him, all those years ago, within a few spaces of the modern building's very walls.

"But I don't see how the gym can have been built over the treasure ground," Betty muttered, during a survey that had to be carried on very discreetly. "Surely, they had to dig deep foundations for such a big building?"

"They would clear the whole ground and have lots of trenches to cut," Pam quietly agreed. "So if there were anything like an underground chamber—a vault, or a secret passage—it would have been discovered, I think."

"Besides," Tess exclaimed, "my final calculations on the chart did not place the treasure spot where the gym is, but more this way, where we are now—"

"On plain, level grass!" Betty smiled ruefully. "Can't help that," Tess said. "I rely on those final calculations. We know we got the right landmarks to give us the exact sighting lines. And those two lines cross just here, on the grass."

"Um!" Betty could not help pulling a long face. "What are we to do then? Start digging up the field? I'm not being funny. I'm only wishing that the location had proved to be at a more promising spot. The ruins of the nuns' chapel, over there, for instance—"

"They're one of the landmarks, so the treasure spot can't be there," Tess argued. "I suppose the Spaniard did bury the treasure in open ground. After all, it would be safer, like that, than dumped away in some building which was in existence at that time?"

"Bother," Polly fumed. "It begins to look as if we shall have to go to Miss Somerfield with our story—"

"We can't do that," Betty ruled flatly. "She'd never believe us. Oh, no, we must just carry on patiently—"

A loud sigh from Polly!
"And besides," Tess broke out, as if a hopeful theory had suddenly come to her, "there's this, girls! If the Spaniard buried the treasure in plain, level ground, the spot would be almost certain to show—"

"After all these years?" Polly demurred.
"Yes, I think so! You know that it can still be seen, in different parts of the country, where the plots of land were ploughed back in the middle ages."

"I didn't know that!" the madcap owned.
"That is so," Pam nodded. "Airmen can see the place quite clearly."

"The ground's a different colour, and all that," Tess spoke on quickly. "And so—and so, perhaps, there might be a patch of grass here of a different colour from the rest—due to what's underneath. A square yard or so of the field may have sunk—by an inch or two—"

"But, girls," Betty burst in excitedly, "what about this? This old stone seat!" She was darting across the grass to it as she called the others' attention.

"I say!" Polly gasped. "Oh! Why—why, when it's been there all along—"

"Yes, well, it has been there—more than our time at Morcove," Pam laughed. "The old stone seat where, they say, the nuns used to sit on summer evenings. Another of Morcove's few relics of the olden time!"

The four girls were standing in front of the seat now, gazing hard at it.

"Exact location," Tess muttered, "according to my calculations."

"It is?" Polly breathed. "Then—then it is the place!"

"But—"

"But what, Betty?"

"It's just a stone bench, that's all! If it were an old tomb, railed round, or a bit of some building that used to stand here—"

"Well, it isn't!" Polly fumed. "It's just a seat!"

"And the treasure can't be under the seat," Betty resumed. "Really, I'm not trying to be funny! I wish to goodness the thing were something else, with a stone to raise! But the stone slab is a foot or more above ground."

"It rests on a stone at either end," Tess remarked briskly. "But, wait a bit! What are we standing on?"

The others looked down with her; then, with her, they stood back a step or two sharply.

"A stone!" Polly jerked out, still staring excitably. "A paving stone!"

"I say!" Betty breathed. "That's better!"

"Yes, well," Pam smiled. "That's better!"
Tess said nothing. For a few seconds longer she gazed, in great excitement, with her chums; dilated her eyes upon what, until this thrilling moment, had been a thing of no account whatever. This length of paving stone, settled in the grass in front of the stone seat, so as to afford a dry resting place for the feet.

It could have been placed there in recent years as something that would prevent girls from treading an unsightly place in front of the seat. But it had always been there in Study 12's time, and why shouldn't it have been there in the days when Morcove was a nunnery?

Those who had set up the stone seat, in those far-back days, might very well have gone to the extra trouble of paving these few feet of ground in front.

Suddenly Tess bent forward—stooped to scan the worn surface of the paving stone with those keen eyes of hers.

"Anything, Tess? Is there—oh, is there?" Polly panted. "Looking for the crossed-dagger sign, are you?"

Tess did not answer, but she shook her head—whether in answer to the first question or the second, her chums had to guess!

Then, as those three girls crowded closer to her, she exclaimed briskly:

"Much better keep a look-out. I'll see what can be found. But the stone is so worn with people's treading. Quite hollowed out in places."

"Good sign, Tess," Betty murmured. "Shows it has been here for ages!"

"Yes!"

Betty and Pam moved away, to the distance of a few yards. But Polly was far too excited to be able to leave Tess alone at the stone. No sooner had Tess knelt to be able to peer even closer over the surface, than Polly did the same.

From that little way off, Betty and Pam saw the two girls, in the thunderous gloom of the sultry afternoon, poring over the stone—using their fingers to push back turf where it had overgrown the edges.

Suddenly, a long, low rumble of thunder sounded from off the sea.

"Hallo, here it comes, Pam," Betty whispered. "Thunder-storm!"

"Didn't see any lightning just then! I say," Pam added quickly, "that thunder has brought

girls to the study windows. We must be careful." "They can't see Tess and Polly; the gym is—"

"No; but they may wonder at our standing here!"

Betty was quite of that opinion, too. With Pam, she was stepping to be out of sight from the schoolhouse windows, when—

"Betty! Pam! Quick!"

That was Polly, whispering and beckoning in tremendous excitement, whilst still kneeling at the stone. Tess, too, was still crouched there; but she was busy with both hands, scratching and rubbing at one corner of the grass-surrounded slab.

Betty and Pam darted across, and Polly, gesturing wildly, whispered:

"Two crossed daggers!"

"What!"

"Yes," Tess muttered. "The grass had grown over, and they were all stopped up with dirt. But—"

Flash, flash! came a blaze of lightning.

Bang, crash! Bang! the thunder followed.

And there was a sudden sheeting down of icy rain, to compel the excited four, in this thrilling moment, to rush for cover.

CHAPTER 4.

Storm Over Morcove

RIGHT on through the evening there raged a storm that was to live long in the memory of Morcove's girls.

Lulls there were, now and then, of only brief duration. For the rest, it was a fierce hissing of rain, the incessant zigzagging of lightning down the inky sky, and the crash of thunder directly overhead.

At all the windows were girls, watching the storm in its tropical violence. But some girls—not the youngest only, by any means—felt "scared stiff."

Paula Creel, at one moment, got under the table, squealing for the storm fiend to "drop it!"

As the storm fiend seemed to answer by putting over an extra heavy bombardment from his heavenly artillery, Paula was hauled out from under the table by Polly and Naomer and advised to be careful what she said.

The contrast between the darkness and the vivid flashes which constantly split that darkness was thrilling. Now and then watching girls saw the wide sea illumined by a prolonged flash.

It was reckoned that the games-field was simply under water. No going out was allowed. Not that many girls wanted to go out in this!

But Betty and Co.—oh, how they longed to be able to struggle back in waterproofs and oilskin hats, to that fateful spot out there by the gym! If only it could have been managed—and it could not be!

An ordinary wet evening would have been all right; absolutely in their favour. But this storm was extraordinary.

Not until close upon the routine time for Big Hall did the rain lessen and the lightning-play shift to a far part of the dark sky.

Too late, then, for Study 12 to do anything! With moanings and groanings of disappointment, the girls realised as much. Any chance for a run out of doors in these last few minutes before Assembly would be seized by all the school.

And Fay and Edna—what of them?

Whilst making their afternoon purchases in the town, they had marked the threat of storm. Rain-coats were packed in an accessible manner with

their luggage; but they dare not return to the railway-station to tug out the waterproofs. So, for a few shillings, they had purchased each a waterproof of cheap make.

Even so, whilst the storm was raging they said more than once to each other: "Didn't bargain for this!" It was a prolonged and terrifying experience, the reckless pair sheltering in a lonely shed on the fringe of the moor, which protection they had sought just in time to escape the first deluge.

Time after time the lightning flashes revealed the white faces of the errant sisters, smiling a sickly smile of waning bravado.

The storm, for them, threatened to have direful consequences, even though they might escape a wetting. The district was being "drowned out." How they would manage to fend for themselves, during the night, they had no idea.

It had promised to be a spree, a real scream, to pass the short summer night under warm and dry conditions. But now—

"Oh, well, we've burnt our boats, Edna!"

"I suppose we have!"

"There's no 'suppose' about it," the elder sister muttered tartly. "How could we go through this to the station—even if there were a train that would get us to Winchcombe to-night!"

"Come back here and get what sleep we can?" Edna suggested moodily. They were still hanging about in the shed. "There's a bundle of straw in one corner—I saw."

"Surely we can find a better place than this," Fay mumbled. "But we mustn't worry about that now, anyhow. Oh, I don't care!" she laughed hollowly. "Think of our treasure-hunt by night, Edna!"

"Yes, but the games-field will be almost under water."

Fay advanced one step clear of the shed's open front, to hold her face up to the sky.

"It's stopped now, Edna!"

At that instant, a small car went humming by in the eerie half-light, traversing one of the moorland roads. Both girls watched it in an alarmed way, for it had gone past very close to where they were sheltering.

"Hope we weren't seen, Fay!"

"Oh, but who would it be, anyway! Nobody belonging to the school. A shabby old car, it looked."

"It has turned into the road to Morcove now, Fay!"

"Don't fidget, Edna! It was only some farmer—and he was in a hurry, you could tell. Been held up by the storm, I suppose. Here, it won't get light again, Edna; I make it past nine by my wrist-watch. So let's get a move on."

A shimmer of lightning, to which there was no succeeding rumble of thunder, however faint, revealed Edna's face as a white mask, the eyes wide with fright.

"To—to Morcove?" she faltered.

"Yes! Or shall I go by myself?"

"No, of course not, Fay. I'm not afraid—"

"Aren't you?"

"But isn't it rather—too soon?"

"No! The school will have gone to bed by the time we get there. We want to get to work as soon as possible, Edna. Supposing we have luck, and do find the exact spot, and we see a chance to lay hands on the treasure?"

"It's—expecting a lot, isn't it?" Edna submitted, with a ghastly smile.

"No, I don't see that it is!" was the curt reply. "The Study 12 chart has told us where

those girls reckon the exact spot to be. And surely there will be some—some indication."

"Even after all these years!"

"Oh, you're a fine one, Edna, to be taking part in an adventure of this sort. It is an adventure. Afterwards, you'll be thankful you were with me. Come on!"

They both glanced up to the sky as they stepped away from the old shed, with its dripping eaves. Stars were shining between the dispersing storm-clouds.

"There, it's all right," Fay said with less asperity, as the pair of them trudged along. "I tell you, summer storms are nothing. This one came on dry ground. It'll all soak away in no time! Besides, a few hours and it will be light again!"

"All I hope is that the storm doesn't come back," Edna exclaimed pessimistically. "They do sometimes, you know."

"As a matter of fact, the rain has been in our favour," the elder sister argued, with desperate cheerfulness. "Nobody will be about after such a downpour. Morcove isn't as lonely as it used to be; there's the new hotel, remember—full up, at this time of year."

They soon had that vast building looming upon their left in the darkness, showing scores of lighted bed-room windows. But when the sisters peered in the direction of the school, very few lights were to be seen.

In the noticeable stillness that had come after all the hurly-burly of the thunderstorm, they heard the school chimes ding-donging a quarter-ton.

Fay glanced over her left shoulder to the hotel. "I suppose, Edna, that Spanish lady and her daughter are still staying at the Headland?"

"You mean Isabel Almaro and her mother?"

"Of course I do! I don't know of any other Spanish lady—"

"I do," Edna retorted, with equivalent pettishness. "There was that Spanish woman who called at the school, about entering her daughter for next Term."

"Oh—yes, I forgot her, for the moment," Fay had to admit. "But she wasn't staying at the hotel, anyhow. Well, we didn't dare say so at the school, Edna, but we shall always have to believe that Madame Almaro stole the original chart from the school museum. There was a woman who had no right to be in the school, stealing about, that night, you know! We saw her."

"But when suspicion fell upon her, because of the name—she denied it."

"Of course she did! You don't suppose she'd own up to the theft. But she stole the original right enough. I suppose, simply because it bore the name of an ancestor."

The talk lapsed, for they felt the need of walking quietly and warily back to the school from which, a few hours since, they had been banished!

Reckless behaviour had got them "sent down" in the end; and now an even greater recklessness was luring them back like this. Inevitably, to think that there might be a buried treasure had led to the belief that there was one waiting to be found by those who were rightly guided by the chart. And they had the chart—Study 12's copy of it, which was better than the original, since it contained Betty & Co.'s notes and reckonings.

Fay had purchased a pocket electric-torch, feeling sure that it would come in handy. But she had no need to use it whilst the pair of them were stealthily scrambling through a weak part

of the hedge. It was not the first time they had made secret use of that breach in the line of trim privet bushes.

Shaken twigs cast drops of rain in their faces, and their feet slithered in the storm-soddened soil, so that both girls were feeling sorely tried before they stepped clear of the hedge, on its inner side.

Then Fay turned to her sister, forcing a grin. "No, Edna! It's all right; not a light to be seen now. And, anyhow, we shall be safe enough, over there by the gym."

"You must be awfully careful with the torch, Fay!" was the other's nervous whisper. "New ones give such a strong light!"

"I shan't be such a fool as to wave it about. I may not have to use it at all," Fay said under her breath, "except to take a look at the chart."

A SMALL saloon car was standing on the roadside grass, just beyond the school's eastern boundary.

Its lights were all switched off, and nobody was in the car, nor was anybody standing by.

A woman had driven to this spot, reaching it some ten minutes since. For the last mile of her run she had used only enough power to keep the car travelling slowly and silently. Similarly, her pulling up on the grass had been accomplished very stealthily.

By now this woman motorist had made her way, like a thief in the night, into the grounds of Morcove School. She was darkly clad, so that her tall figure was merged in the surrounding darkness.

Avoiding the schoolhouse, she flitted from one bit of cover to another, trending warily towards the gymnasium.

More than once she held herself quite still, rearing her head to listen intently. But it was not until she had crept close in to one of the outer walls of the isolated building that her straining ears picked up a sound which alarmed her.

Whispering voices, close at hand in the night!

She stood still for a full minute, giving heed to the sibilant sounds, uncertain about the next step to take.

Then she glided on, keeping closer than ever to the wall of the building. A dozen silent steps and she could peer round the corner.

One peep and she drew back sharply.

Two slight figures she had discerned, prowling about quite close to the gymnasium, on that side facing towards the distant road.

Who were they, then? The woman was asking herself that question in a palpitating state of dismay. Who were they, that they were out here at this late hour—prowling around at THIS spot!

She peeped again, and this time she saw that they were only girls, in hats and macintoshes. The hats seemed to be of the regulation pattern worn by Morcove scholars.

And now, as the woman spied cunningly, one of the girls went on one knee and appeared to spread a paper upon the other knee.

Next second the same girl switched on a pocket-torch, shining the bright ray close down to the paper, as if there were something she had to find out from its contents.

Not the slightest doubt could remain in the woman's mind after that. She knew it for a certainty, and she drew back and waited, her face assuming a desperate, ruthless expression as she considered what she must do.



There was a foreign inflexion to the woman's voice, when at last she spoke to Fay and Edna. "What do you do here—out in the storm?"

CHAPTER 5.

The Woman in the Car

BETTY BARTON opened her eyes upon the dark dormitory with a sense of having been awakened by a renewed rumble of thunder. Instantly she saw that some other girl was out of bed and standing at one of the half-open windows.

Some sheet lightning shimmered, silhouetting the girlish figure against the momentarily illumined window.

Then, in the next bed to Betty's, the occupant murmured:

"Is that thunder again?"

"Sh! Not so loud, Polly," pleaded the captain, whilst slipping from her bed.

Another moment and she and the madcap were joining the one who was already at the window. It proved to be Tess Trelawney.

"Storm coming back," whispered Tess. "I got out to see what the night looked like. Fine effect, this sheet lightning over the sea. Look at that!"

"Oh, rabbits to effects upon the sea," muttered Polly. "If we could only slip out now—"

"Well, we can't," Betty decreed inflexibly.

"S'pose not," Polly mumbled. "But I know this; I shall be down and out of doors a good hour before rising bell, in the morning."

Another rumble of thunder went over the schoolhouse. Then the three girls at the window heard the commencing patter of a fresh shower.

"It's raining again," Tess softly commented.

"I hope it pours—all the rest of the night," was Polly's murmur. "That may put a stopper on any rival treasure-hunting. That was a flash!"

It had been fork lightning once more.

The succeeding thunder was a definite clap.

Then came the steady hissing down of heavy rain out of a sky that had become black again.

"Good," Polly muttered. "More power to it!"

At that instant Tess, whilst the lightning was blazing, gave a violent start.

"Hallo—"

"Why, what, Tess—what?"

"I—I thought I saw—"

"Where? Where?" clamoured her two companions at the window.

"Down there, close by the gym—"

"What!"

"Two figures."

"Two?" panted Polly. "Oh—"

"Sh! Look out!" Betty implored. "We don't want to wake others."

But there came, a few seconds later, such an earth-shaking, ear-splitting crash of thunder, the whole dormitory awoke, and amidst all the sudden medley of confused cries sounded Paula's doleful:

"Ow deah, I don't like it! Tewwible!"

"Boo, cowardly!" shrilled Naomer. "As for me—"

And the little imp promptly sought that box of chocolates which she had smuggled up to the dormitory in expectation of a broken night's rest!

FLASH—flash—flash!

Bang! Burrroom, boom, crash!

"Fay!"

"Come on, Edna!"

"No!"

"Yes! We can't stay here!"

"But, Fay—"

Flash, again, and then another tremendous clap of thunder directly overhead.

The rain was sheeting down.

"Fay, why can't we!" the younger sister wailed, whilst being almost dragged along.

"Find shelter in one of the school buildings!"

"No, I tell you! Someone is certain to come round—one of the servants, or the gardeners—to see that everything is all right."

"Oh, I can't believe—"

"You're to come away! We're not getting wet," Fay wildly argued.

But now Edna stopped dead in the pouring rain, wrenching free of her sister.

"I'm not going on! It's madness! We must shelter!"

"Oh, all right then! Windy!"

"I'm no more afraid than you are!"

"Yes, you are!"

"No, I'm not! You must be afraid, to think that anybody would come round whilst the storm is like this. Let's make for the potting-shed."

"Very well."

They ran, bowing their heads under the heavy deluge. For some fifty yards they floundered along like this, too storm-battered to keep their eyes about them.

Then Fay gave an upward fling of her head as she fetched a big breath, and she saw—a dark figure, flitting about vaguely in the eerie, misty light caused by lightning-play during the down-pour.

"Stop, Edna—stop!" Fay gasped, and clawed her sister to a standstill. "Oh, now we must get away—"

"Why, what?"

"Someone—"

"Where? Who was it?"

"A mistress, I suppose. Come on, quick!"

Edna, this time, needed no pulling along. The terrors of the storm had become as nothing compared with the fear of being discovered.

So, with her sister, she now turned and ran the other way. Together they blundered and panted along, making for the boundary hedge.

They scrambled through at the gap. Rising up on the outer side, they ran on again.

"The road," Fay panted. "We can't see our way on the rough ground."

"Have you still got the chart, Fay?"

"Yes—and the torch. Fancy the storm coming back like this!"

"I told you!" Edna wailed, labouring on with her sister.

"But it won't last. Already the rain is stopping. You're not wet through, Edna?"

"Perhaps not; but I feel awful!"

They reached the be-puddled road and, without a pause to regain breath, went scurrying along in the direction of the town.

"Or shall we," Fay suddenly questioned, "make our way down to the shore and shelter in one of the caves? We can't go into the town, of course. I was thinking of that shed. But—"

"The caves, yes!" Edna agreed eagerly. "Nearer!"

"Well, we'll keep to the road until we can go the shortest way across the grass to the cliff-path."

Fay had no sooner said this than she turned about to peer back uneasily in the rainy darkness.

"Car coming, Edna!"

"Oh!"

"And no lights, either! Here, let's get off the road so that we don't get seen. It must be somebody who—"

The rest was never voiced. Both girls were suddenly caught in the full glare of strong headlights. The motorist had switched on the lights

when the car was less than a hundred yards behind the girls, overtaking them.

The dazzle of light rendered the sisters all the more confused. They stumbled blindly together to get off the road; but with sinking hearts they realised that the car was going to pull up.

Too late to avoid being challenged as to what they were doing there, at this time of night! To try to run away now would be to invite a determined pursuit.

The car switched to a standstill on the wet road. Out jumped the driver—a woman.

"So!" she exclaimed at the two girls, who stood all gone to pieces beside the road. "You must be wet?"

"Er—oh, no," Fay faltered. "We—we've got good maes."

"But what do you do, here?" came the inevitable question. "Out in the storm—why is it?" There was a foreign inflexion to the woman's voice. "Even no storm—why you here?"

"We—we are all right, thank you. Er—don't trouble about us—"

"So? You are from the school, yes?"

"Er—no—at least, yes," Fay could not help floundering. She could find excuses at most times, but the present plight of herself and her sister had thrown her mind completely out of gear.

"We—we belong to the school, but—we are not staying there at present. We—are going home—"

"So late? To Barncombe, yes?"

"Er—in that direction, yes."

The woman smiled at last.

"I give you a ride in my car. I also go that way—to the town."

"Oh, but—the rain has stopped again—"

"No matter; you go with me—yes, I shall insist," the woman continued, with a commanding gesture. "It is not fit that you walk all that way. So, there has been a party at the school, and you leave late—yes?"

Both girls felt relieved when the woman hazarded this explanation of their being out so late, "on their way home."

"Yes!" they exclaimed together. "That's right!"

"But," Fay added uneasily, "we really must not make use of your car."

"Why not? Oh, I think you must!" was the insistent murmur. "Come, get in. I must not be delayed. But I shall not go without you. I could not be so—unkind."

Fay and Edna glanced at each other through the last of the falling rain. But further hesitation, they knew, was useless. They must be thankful that the woman had jumped to such a simple conclusion as to why they were out so late—one that rendered them blameless in her opinion.

"Come on, then, Edna!"

"If you will make the signal," the woman silkily remarked, following them to the car, "I will set you down at any point near the town. Your home is—this side, perhaps?"

"Er—we'll let you know," Fay stammered, and got into the car.

Edna climbed in and sat down beside Fay. The woman, agilely writhing back to her seat at the driving wheel, let in the clutch—for the engine had been ticking over—and away they went.

"Well," Edna gasped drearily, "this is a nice business, Fay!"

"How could we refuse?" was the sullen retort. "Oh, no."

"She'd have become suspicious. She isn't so, now. She simply imagines that, as day girls, we were at an evening party at the school."

"She's a foreigner, Fay!"

"Yes, I know. Doesn't understand British schools, evidently, or she would never have imagined that we could have been left to go home—"

"Hallo!" Fay changed to a startled cry. "Turning off?"

The car was being swung round by its driver to take the by-road which wound away across the moor.

"Oh!" Edna gasped, and clutched her sister by the arm. "Fay! She's not going to the town!"

"N-n-no! But—"

"Where is she taking us, Fay?"

"Shut up! How can I say? Dash!" the elder girl raged frantically. "How I wish we had never let her—"

"Fay! I see it all!" Edna wailed. "She knows!"

"What do you mean?"

"Knows that we were out after the treasure! She is that Spanish woman, Fay—the other Spanish woman! The one who called at the school about sending her daughter next term!"

Fay was silent. Her sister could feel her trembling all over. They were huddled closely together on the back seat, with a glass screen shutting them off from the woman at the wheel.

The car went bounding along the plashy road, with the moor lying blackly to right and left under the stormy night sky.

"She knows!" Edna moaned again. "And

that's why she stopped to pick us up! She only pretended to imagine that reason for our being out of doors. She is after the treasure herself!"

Still Fay was silent. A flicker of lightning came in at the car windows, revealing her white, set face.

Suddenly she started to fumble for something in great haste, having to get it out of a pocket of the raincoat.

"She wants the chart, does she? She shan't have it!" Fay panted savagely.

And, crumpling up the stout sheet of drawing-paper into a tight ball, she hurled it with all her might out of one of the open windows.

For barely an instant could the two girls watch the ball of paper as it careered through the air. The car was travelling fast, and, in any case, the paper would have been immediately lost to view in the darkness. They could only guess that it had been thrown hard enough out of the window to fall somewhere off the narrow road—into the gorse, most likely, and so it was lost for ever!

Fay spoke at last tensely.

"I've a good mind to jump out—"

"Oh, no, Fay—no! Madness!"

"But where is she taking us? What will she do to us? We can't—make a fight of it—to get away?"

The words were jerked out of Fay by the violent bumping along of the car. It was a bad road, and the storm had made it worse.

Edna shook her head despairingly.

(Continued on the next page.)

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A SCHOOL AMONG THE MOUNTAINS

AMONG the many delightful letters I have lately received was one from a reader of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN who formerly lived in India, and went to school in the foothills of the Himalayas. Her account of school life there makes interesting reading.

She writes:

"... I went to school every summer in the hills. The school methods are very different out in India, compared with the methods here. We went up to school in March and came home in November. We stayed in school nine months and had three months holiday. We never saw our parents unless they came to see us at the school.

"The school was... in the foothills of the Himalayas, 7,000 feet high. To get to—from where we lived you had to catch a train at 8 p.m. and stay in it all night. Next morning you arrived at — (a place at the foot of the hills) and got into a vehicle called a clanchi, which is almost like a pram without wheels.

"It is carried by four coolies, and when they run it is most uncomfortable, as you are joggled about in a most distressing manner. In spite of this, you cannot

help laughing, as you know how funny you look, when you see another unfortunate passenger being joggled about in the same way. There is another way of going up, and that is by horse. But the worst of travelling by this means is that you feel very stiff and achy by the time you reach your journey's end."

To return to school in the way described by my correspondent must indeed have been quite an adventure. But I imagine that most of my British readers would regard such an interesting experience with delight, as making the return to school a little more welcome!

STUDY 12'S QUEST FOR SPANISH GOLD

In this week's story of Morcove School you have read of Betty & Co.'s further efforts to trace the treasure which is supposed to have been hidden by Alfonso Almaro, after the Armada.

But although they have done so much to elucidate the mystery, Betty and her chums are still faced with difficulties which must be overcome ere they can claim the hidden hoard. In next Tuesday's powerful, long complete tale you will be able to join with the Study 12 coterie in the final dramatic quest for Spanish gold.

This fine story is entitled:

"WHILE THE SCHOOL SLEPT," By Marjorie Stanton.

Next Tuesday's issue of your favourite paper will also contain a merry complete story, featuring the "crew" of the Sprite in a startling adventure, as well as further chapters of our other two popular stories.

Don't miss all these good things!

With best wishes,

YOUR EDITOR.

"No, we—we can't do anything," she quavered hoarsely. "Don't let's make it worse for ourselves, Fay! She's a desperate character—must be!"

Nodding despairingly, Fay bent forward, trying to see ahead through the front screens. Only the side lights were switched on, and they seemed merely to turn the finishing drizzle of rain into a silver veil baffling to the vision.

Desperate character, they had reckoned the woman to be, and desperately enough, indeed, she was driving through the night—away into the moorland wilds. That there was a road to keep to, made this part of the moor none the less desolate. No village, no cluster of cottages even, could be found out this way.

But now the woman slowed her car, as if she intended to pull up as soon as she came to a favourable bit of road.

Fay and Edna looked at each other, aghast. "If she asks us to get out?" whispered Edna huskily. "Out here, on the open moor?"

"We must, I suppose. And, look here; leave it to me to argue with her!"

The car, however, did not pull up. In a few moments it swerved to the right, taking to what was no better than an overgrown cart-track. The bumping along was ten times worse; but it lasted only a couple of minutes.

Then Fay and Edna saw the lights shining feebly upon gateposts. They were at the entrance to some grounds, with a rotting gate hanging wide open and half off its hinges.

A jungle of trees and shrubs was on either side of the curving carriageway which the car traversed. The sisters could see how weedy this private drive was, as if it now served a house standing empty and gone to rack and ruin.

Then the house itself loomed before them, showing not a light anywhere.

The car stopped opposite a ramshackle porch. Jumping out, the woman came round to one of the saloon doors and whipped it open.

"So!" she said. "You must come——"

"But—oh, please——"

"Come, I tell you!"

Fay came stumbling out of the car, and Edna followed. The woman had switched off the lights. But very bright enabled the two girls to see the handsome face, with its half-mocking smile, in the darkness.

"It is," the woman said, "where I live. With my husband, yes. He is here. Shall I call him, or will you obey me?"

"This isn't fair," Fay almost whimpered. "You have tricked us!"

"And you?" the retort was flashed. "Have you not tricked others? Attend me, then—into the house!"

Edna thought of nudging her sister to make a bolt for it—now! But the woman craftily put herself behind them, so that there could be no gaining a start by their flashing off when she was not looking.

At the pitch-dark porch, the woman knuckled the door several times.

An old-fashioned door-chain was rattled off its catch. The door opened, a man loomed before them in the darkness. Discerning the two girls, he stood with a dropped jaw; but the woman's first words must have reassured him.

For a minute husband and wife talked rapidly in Spanish. Then the man came out—apparently to go to the car and put it away. Edna and Fay, as he walked past them without making a sound, noticed that he was in slippers. He did

not treat the girls to any threatening look, but his face, although handsome, seemed evil.

The woman now waved them to go indoors, and as they obeyed she lighted the way for them with a pocket-torch.

Not a stick of furniture was in the hall, from the walls of which plaster was ready to fall in flakes. A directing push at the shoulders of both girls kept them going, nervously, straight on to a room at the back.

It was a rafted kitchen, the great old-fashioned range fireless and brown with rust. Again there was no furniture—only a few up-turned packing-cases, serving for seats and table.

The house was not only without a proper tenant; it was derelict. A final rumble of thunder echoed hollowly through the building.

The woman picked up a box of matches from the wooden case that served as a table and lighted a candle. Then she switched off the torch.

Fay and Edna, quaking inwardly, did their best to face the trickster with indignant looks. But the attempt to put on a bold front failed abjectly, as the woman could tell. She smiled, then changed to ferocity, demanding:

"Now, where is that paper!"

"Paper?" Fay faltered. "W-w-what paper?"

"Your chart!"

"I—I— We don't know what you mean! Do we, Edna?"

But that girl was given no time to answer.

"At once!" the woman stamped. "It is the paper that I see you consulting, at the school! Aha, you did not think that I should say that? No, well, it has been, as you say, a trick!" And she laughed. "I win, you know. And if I win by the cheating—are not you, also, cheats? Pah! That is enough of that!"

She probably meant their continued attempt to appear injured innocents.

"I shall have that chart from you," she insisted vehemently. "So, come! You do not go from here until that paper is in my hands. We live here, you know, my husband and I—in secret!"

In her foreign way she was alternating between tigerish ferocity and a kind of grim humour.

"Si!" she nodded. "Not for us, the great hotel—ah, no! That is for Madame Almaro, as she call herself, and her daughter. The hotel for the aristocrats; but we Guzmans are not aristocrats—tish, no! And yet, who knows? Perhaps we have more money than the Almaros! Certain it is, we are going to have—the Almaro treasure!"

Making a long pause, she stared hard at Fay, then at Edna.

"And I think," she nodded and smiled, "I see you in that museum at the school, one night—so? Aha, correct! The same two! But now, if you please, that paper! For I think, also, it has become a better chart than the original—yes?"

"I haven't got it!" Fay gasped. "Really I haven't!"

"You tell me the lie!"

"No! If—I had it, I would give it to you; oh, I would!" Fay said wildly. "But I—I threw it away; didn't I, Edna?"

"Yes," the younger sister blurted out huskily. "That is so, really! She threw it away as we were coming along in the car."

The Spanish woman folded her arms. In that drawn-up pose, and with her dark eyes glittering in the candlelight, she looked dreadfully antagonistic.

"You must tell me," she said at last, "where that paper can be found."

"But how can I?" Fay protested miserably. "Except that it may be lying somewhere beside the road, on the moor. I don't know where we were when I threw it away."

"Another trick, eh? And still you are going to lose, my fine young ladies! My husband will go out to look for that paper now. But, you understand, do you? If he not find it—"

"You mustn't threaten us," panted Fay, with a last effort at defiance. "You had better be careful. In this country—"

"Oh, yes, I know," came the laughed interruption. "It is a safe country. So, Madame Almaro and her daughter come to it—to be safe! But I and my husband came to this country to gain a great treasure—you understand that? And you two girls will not go from here—no, not until we have that treasure under this roof!"

"Th—that's nonsense," Fay stammered. "You daren't keep us here. We shall be missed—"

"Truly, you will be missed," the woman again cut in, with a slow nod. "But—you will not be found!"

And they saw by her look that she meant it.

CHAPTER 6.

At Last

DAWN had crept back to a rain-washed world lying under a cloudless sky.

The sun had been early to work, this morning, making the sopped fields steam. There was a great peacefulness after all the shattering noises of the night-time.

Betty and Polly, slipping out of doors a full hour before "getting-up bell," heard the gulls crying from away under the mighty cliffs. The drone of a steamer's siren came over miles of quiet water, from a misty horizon.

"Now!" Study 12's impatient spirit exclaimed.

"Yes, Polly—at last!"

An eager glancing about, as they hurried round to that part of the field directly in front of the gym, satisfied the eager pair that they had the place to themselves.

Indoors, maids were down and going about their work, and one or two of them knew that Betty and Polly had got up as early as this. But that didn't matter. A virtue—early rising!

For the two girls to see the slab of stone still in position, in front of the stone seat, was sufficient to afford intense relief.

It would not have surprised them to find the stone heaved aside from its resting-place, and a cavity showing—empty, looted!

"Let's look!" Polly exclaimed, stooping to scrutinise the undisturbed stone. "Just as we left it last evening?"

"I think so," Polly murmured. "Oh, and what a blessing, Polly! The rain

washed soil back into the crossed-dagger chisellings, so that you would hardly see them now."

"Yes, that's all very well," Polly breathed tensely; "but we know that the place was visited during the night. Remember what we saw from the dorm window, when the lightning was on!"

"Oh, I've not forgotten, Polly. But it's evident that nothing was done in the night. The storm, I suppose, simply made it impossible for anyone to search."

"Or did they, Betty—did they succeed, after all? I mean," Polly continued agitatedly; "did they find out about this stone, and do the whole thing?"

"Got the treasure?"

"If it was underneath—yes!"

"But, Polly, would they have troubled to put the stone back, exactly as it has lain for years and years?"

"They might," Polly frowned. "So that no one should suspect that it had been tampered with. After all, people stealing a treasure will go to a bit of extra trouble, to avoid having the theft discovered."

"Well, we don't want to steal any treasure, even if we are still lucky enough to find it," Betty muttered. "We only want it to be dealt with in a lawful way. But—"

"Look here, Betty, instead of talking—why don't we get a crowbar or something, and simply heave up the stone, to see what's underneath?"

"Well, why don't we! Still no one about," Betty gladly commented. "It's a big slab to shift, but you can do wonders with a lever."

She thought hard for a moment.



"Where is that paper?" the woman asked fiercely.

"I know! In the shed on the other side of the gym there's just the thing! You stay here, Polly; I'll run and get it."

"Right—no! Be quick! Hallo, here's Pam!"

Nor was tall Pam Willoughby the only other member of the Study 12 "chummy" to be putting in an appearance at this moment.

Whilst Betty flashed away, to seek the suitable implement, Pam was followed to the fateful spot by Tess Trelawney.

"You might have woken us up," Pam playfully reproached Polly. "How long have you and Betty been down?"

"Only a few minutes. We're going to heave aside the stone and then see—what we can see!"

Tess, after a nodded "Morning!" to Polly, was closely inspecting the surface of the slab.

"It's as we left it, Tess?"

"Yes," Polly was answered.

"But supposing someone turned it over in the night, and put it back afterwards?"

"Oh, no. The grass wouldn't be as it is if that had happened. No one has yet seen underneath."

"Sure?"

"Positive!"

"Then—hooray," the madcap softly rejoiced. "Oh, but when you think! We could do nothing, last evening, nor in the night—nothing, dash it! And our rivals—whoever they may be, they were free to come and go. It's a wonder!"

Betty came back, bearing a weighty crowbar and—to Polly's amazement—an old croquet mallet!

"What on earth's the mallet for, Betty!"

"Fulcrum."

"What?"

"Oh, surely you know," Betty laughed breathlessly. "Thing you use to help you lever away! Any block of wood does. So I grabbed this. The mallet end—"

"Just the thing," Tess approved.

She took the iron bar from Betty, swayed it, and approved that also with a nod.

"Then, we've only to go ahead," Polly said. "Before the crowd comes out!"

"But why should we bother if a crowd does gather round?" Betty now questioned. "It's got to be known. Tisn't as if we are after the treasure for ourselves. Anyhow—"

And, taking the crowbar again, she jabbed its pointed end hard down into the rain-softened turf at the edge of the slab of stone.

Tess understood about that "fulcrum" business. She thrust the head of the mallet against the iron bar, at ground-level.

Betty and Polly pressed on the crowbar, and it came out of the upright to a sloping position. The stone rose half an inch at that end.

"Phew!" Polly puffed. "You can almost hang on to this bar, and it won't—"

"Steady; whoa—gently," Betty pleaded, hanging on with impatient Polly. "A bit at a time."

Pam had not remained an idle onlooker. Realising the need, she had sped away to find something that could be pushed in under the stone, at its raised end, so that it would not sink back when the lever was shifted, to secure fresh "purchase."

She came running back with an old cricket stump and a small piece of hard rock.

"Fingers, Pam!" the captain warned; but Pam was being careful enough as she forced the bit of rock as far under as it would go.

That done, she took the cricket stump and placed one end of it against the bit of rock, so

that she could push the latter further in, as soon as the stone was levered a little higher.

Tess took her stand with Betty and Polly at the crowbar.

"Now," Polly said grimly. "Up she goes. Oh, only another inch!"

"But we're getting on!"

Not nearly fast enough for Polly, however! The slab being safely wedged up, to the extent of an inch or two, she knelt down to try and see underneath!

"Rotten!" she fumed in her impatience. "Can't see yet!"

The others had to titter.

"A few woodlice, and that's all," Polly scowled, rising erect. "Here, come on! We can't be all day!"

"Oh, we'll manage," said Betty.

And manage they did.

Whether it was ten minutes later, or as much as twenty minutes, they had no idea; but at last they had that stone levered aside.

As little as inch-by-inch, almost, they had had to prise it away from its resting-place in front of the ancient nuns' seat. Half-way through their tiring efforts they had had a good deal of the area exposed to the light of day for the first time—since when? And that newly exposed area was simply plain earth. Disappointing!

Nor had any thrilling discovery come about at the end of all their labours with the crowbar.

With the stone-slab quite shifted aside at last, so that all the ground upon which it had rested was entirely exposed—they saw only caked soil!

No secret cavity, its sides walled with brick! No hole in the ground; no flight of steps leading down steeply to some underground chamber!

Imagination had pictured all these things; any one of them was possible—so the girls had been saying to one another. But now—

"Nothing!" Polly exploded disgustedly. "Absolutely nothing!"

CHAPTER 7.

Out on the Moor

"**N**OTHING," Betty echoed dully. "Would you have believed it! When we got all the calculations right—we know that, for a fact!"

"Yes," Tess said bitterly. "If my final calculations were wrong, how was it that we found this slab of stone marked with the crossed daggers sign?"

"Somebody's had the treasure, that's all," Polly moaned. "I don't mean, lately, but—oh, back in the past. They got it, and they filled in the hole with earth, and—and there you are. The earth," she said, "is still there. The treasure isn't!"

"Yet I can hardly believe that," Tess demurred. "The ground on which the stone was laying is just the top soil, crushed down. When you fill in a hole you generally spade in a mixture. You can hardly help doing so."

"Especially if," Pam rejoined astutely, "you have to bring material from a little distance away. Unless they had to dig first, they'd have nothing to put back that was there in the first instance."

"There's a lot of wonderful reasoning," Polly grimaced. "But it doesn't help us to find the treasure. There's no treasure! If ever there was one, it's not here now."

"This is the spot, right enough," Tess insisted. "My calc—"

"Oh!" Polly stamped. "And now—here comes everybody!"

Exasperation, pardonable in the circumstances, excused Polly's exaggeration. Only one or two girls had suddenly appeared, and they were members of the chummy. Paula Creel—yes, even Paula had got up early! Helen Craig was another who was approaching; Madge Minden and Judy Cardew were in evidence. Last, but not least, there was Naomer Nakara.

"Ooo, what ze diggings though! Bekas—"

"Kid," Polly said furiously, "one word from you, and I won't be answerable!"

"Oh, dear," Helen commented mournfully. For a single glance had shown all the newcomers what had been done—and what a little had been achieved.

"Not there?" Madge grieved.

"Not there, not there, my child," Polly quoted bitterly.

"Bai Jove—"

"Sweendle! Ah, bah, another washout!"

"It is a swiz, and no mistake," Betty sighed.

"But, dash it all," Helen exclaimed, "there must have been a treasure? If not, what did the Spaniard's chart mean? What does Tess say?"

"My calc—"

"Yes, we know!" Polly interjected. "Oh, you were right to an inch, Tess. It's wonderful, how we have followed the trail. It's maddening, that it's been all for nothing!"

Some of them had to laugh. Polly's baffled rage was almost comic in its intensity.

"So now," she said, "Naomer and Paula can put the stone back. Go on, you two! We've done enough."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

A burst of chatter told of other girls approaching.

This time, it really was a big swarm of school-mates, just down from the dormitory and in high spirits over the loveliness of the morning.

Inevitably, they came rushing to see what Betty & Co. were doing. A few moments, and a crowd was changing from blank amazement to great amusement over the dislodged stone.

As the chums would say nothing as to the real reason why they had levered the stone out of place, facetious questions began to be asked.

"New kind of physical jerks, is that it?"

"This way; now showing!" another teaser called out. "The strongest schoolgirl on earth! One penny, to see Polly Linton—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or were you girls looking for a lost ball?" asked Pat Lawrence.

"I know!" cried another. "They had to find Paula! She hid under the stone in the night, because of the storm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Absurd ewcatures! As a mattah of fact—"

"Don't answer them!" Polly flashed.

"Ha, ha, ha! But let's see you put the stone back; how you do it—so clever!"

More laughter! Only too gladly would Betty & Co. have walked away, had they been free to do so. But as they had shifted the stone, they certainly were bound to shift it back again.

It could not be left where it was, nor could volunteers for the Herculean task be expected from the ranks of the mockers.

Perhaps a better knack had been acquired, and perhaps again the aggravation of being watched was an extra spur. Be that as it might, Betty and two or three of the "Co." contrived to make a speedy job of the thankless task.

Then, loudly cheered they hurried away, and

Result of

"FAVOURITE CHARACTERS" Competition

The Editor has pleasure in announcing the result of the recent "Favourite Characters" Competition.

In this contest, one reader submitted a correct forecast of the characters in their order of popularity as fixed by the voting of all competitors. THE FIRST PRIZE OF £1 has therefore been awarded to:—

Miss M. Shepherd,
Salter Houses,
Wynyard Park,
Wolviston.

The number of tennis rackets has been increased to eight, which have been awarded to the following eight competitors, whose efforts came next in order of merit:

Miss M. Cronin, Prestwich, Manchester; Miss D. Dobinson, Blackwell, Darlington; Miss E. Evans, Kiveton Park, Sheffield; Miss E. Payne, Walkerville, Newcastle-on-Tyne, 6; Miss V. Richards, Gorsemon, Swansea; Miss B. Silk, Cambridge; Miss M. D. Tallentire, Bridlington; Miss M. Taylor, Watton, Norfolk.

The Editor desires to offer his congratulations to the successful competitors.

The eight characters in their order of popularity were:

1st. Betty Barton	5th. Dave Cardew
2nd. Pam Willoughby	6th. Naomer Nakara
3rd. Polly Linton	7th. Jimmy Cherrol
4th. Jack Linton	8th. Judy Cardew

although they had taken all the teasing in good part they could not help feeling rather dispirited by their humiliation.

There was the thought of what-might-have-been; the crowd's arrival just when the treasure had been unearthed! And instead—

"Ugh! So humiliating!"

"Yes, wather! Extremely so, bai Jove!"

Nor did the feeling of disappointment pass off as time went on. At breakfast, Betty & Co. were subjected to more teasing. Other girls at the table manifested anxiety to ply the chums with extra bread, butter, marmalade, and so on. This, on the grounds that they, Betty & Co., had worked so hard and must need a hearty meal!

"Besides," said Biddy Loveland, "you may be going to shift the stone again, perhaps?"

The giggling then; and the tittering.

Up from table, Betty & Co. sought the refuge of Study 12. They were likely to last, as a laughing stock, throughout the day, and there was discussion as to what they should do with themselves after school.

"And Jack wrote that he and the others might bike over after tea to-day!" Polly suddenly recollected. "Oh, botheration! Are they to turn up and find us being twitted—"

"But they know we were after treasure," Betty said soothingly.

"Doesn't matter! The Form doesn't know—and how can we tell them now? It would only entitle them to laugh at us all the more. A mare's nest! That's what it would be called."

"Well then—after school this afternoon," the captain proposed, "we'll go out. Take our bikes and ride to meet the boys—"

"And zen go with zem into Barncombe for tea! Gorjus!"

"They'll have had tea——"
 "Zey can have another, can't zey? Any old how, zey can watch us have ours!"
 "There are times," said Polly, "when I could——"

"Well, don't!" the captain intervened. "Oh, look here, it's no good our moaning about it all. Any rate, we had the fun of puzzling out the chart—following up the clues."

"Fun," sighed Polly, lying back in an easy chair. "I'm glad you've got such a sense of humour."

"Pewsonally, geals, you hev my sympathy——"
 "Thank you! I'd rather have the Spaniard's treasure," Polly said sweetly.

She jumped up from the chair.
 "I'd rather be Fay or Edna—out of here for the rest of the Term! Can't I be sent down? Why did we ever bother about the chart!"

"Cheer up," laughed Betty. "And this afternoon we'll all go into Barncombe for tea——"

"To celebrate, yes!"

Polly stared.
 "Celebrate what?"
 "Not finding ze treasure, of course!"
 "Duffer!"

But Naomer, by her artless cry, had created a general amusement that led on to Study 12's laughing quite a lot—against itself. Polly, however, looked black again when Helen remarked, wittily, that at least they had "left no stone unturned!" The madcap did not want to bear any more about stone-turning for the rest of the Term.

That afternoon they were out of school rather late, for a visiting mistress had tiresomely prolonged her special lesson.

As she was a mistress as much disliked as the subject she taught, all the Form finished school in a hot and bothered state. It had been another sweltering afternoon.

So Betty & Co. did not feel like riding far to meet Polly's brother Jack and those three good chums of his—Judy's brother Dave, Jimmy Cherrol, and Bobby Bloot.

SPANISH GOLD

Do not miss next Tuesday's fine long complete story, dealing with Betty and Co's final attempt to find the hidden treasure. The title is:—



WHILE THE SCHOOL SLEPT!

By Marjorie Stanton

About a couple of miles along the moorland road they got down to await the boys. Machines were left leaning against various gorse bushes, and a dead pine-tree, lying along the ground beside the road, became a welcome seat for the girls.

"Shan't be sorry now when the hols are here," Polly murmured. "What is there for us at Morocco in the next week or two?"

"Hard luck, our ferreting out so much, all for nothing," Betty nodded glumly—for, of course Polly's despondency had to do with the morning's disappointment.

"The only comfort—our rivals, whoever they were, will do no better!" Helen said.

"And serve them right," Polly rejoined, at her grimmest. "I'd like to know who did steal the charts though!"

"So would I—and I!"
 "Yes," Pam chimed in gently. "Our theory was, that Spanish woman. But if there were two figures sneaking into the grounds last night——"

"And there were!" Tess insisted. "Saw them clearly when the lightning was on."

"Then who were they?" Pam questioned.
 Polly drew a chewed blade of grass from between her lips.

"That's an easy one, girls. Obviously, the Spanish woman and her daughter with her!"

"Shouldn't wonder," Betty nodded. "Hallo, though! What's Naomer making all the row about?"

Restless Naomer had soon tired of sitting on the fallen pine. After some acrobatics amongst stumps of branches, she had roamed away, ready to chase a butterfly or become interested in what she called "lizarts." But now she was rushing back to her chums, shrill with excitement.

"Bekas—look, everybody! Ooo, look, queek! Here, Betty—look!"

"Why, what?" was the general clamour.

It could be seen by all that Naomer was handing a crumpled paper to Betty. For the moment, however, Betty was the only one to realise that it was very like a sheet of the school's best drawing-paper.

"I found it in between some bushes, when I was watching a lizart," Naomer yelled, prancing excitedly. "And I saw part of ze drawing on it——"

"Drawing?" cried Polly. "Why, what drawing?"

"It is," Betty gasped, inviting her chums to stare at the outheld sheet of paper—"the chart!"

"Good gwacious!"

"Our stolen copy!" Judy whispered, as if awe were mingling with surprise.

"Yes!"

"Then how—? Who—? What was it doing there?" cried one and another of the astounded girls.

"Goodness knows!" Betty shrugged. "But what a strange thing this is!"

"Yes, wather bai Jove! Moro mystowy—ah deah!"

"No end to the mystery," Polly exploded.

"And we'll never, never— Yes, we will though! We'll get to the bottom of this mystery, even if we have been whacked over the treasure-hunt.

Girls—all of you; won't we?"

"Yes!"

And there was no doubting that Polly's chums, one and all, were as determined as she to ferret out the truth.