

10 PRIZES MUST BE WON Delightful Holiday Competition
In this Issue

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d

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EVERY TUESDAY



"DON'T MOVE!"

One of many dramatic situations in this week's vivid long complete Morcove holiday story.

New Series of Complete Stories Starts Within

Holiday Adventures in Spain With the Morcove Chums**THEIR PERIL *on the* PASS**

Complete Story by Marjorie Stanton

WHILE Fernando Almaro remains in hiding, the chums of Morcove and Grangemoor are doing all in their power to help him. And their activities on his behalf lead them into the thick of adventures such as they have seldom met before.

CHAPTER I.

"Passports, Please!"

IT was two hours after the summer dawn.

Now the hot sun of this southern clime was drawing off the last of the morning mists from the mountain valleys.

A man in dark uniform who stood in a sentinel-like attitude at the top of the Sierra Jucz pass could see wisps of the mist floating lazily up the steep slopes, finally to dissolve in the sunshine.

Far down to and away over the undulating lowlands this watcher on the mountain-top could see now. Cultivated fields and tiny paddocks and many orchards and olive groves were mapped out to him.

Dark clumps of pepper-trees blotted the wide view, and he could pick out the snaky railway line, one tiny railway station, and here and there a white-walled farmhouse.

He was not alone, this man, even though he was at an altitude of several thousand feet, amidst the barren and rugged rocks.

Beside the rough and narrow track—the only way over the mountain range for many miles in either direction, except for skilled mountaineers—there were one or two wooden buildings, with

notice-boards outside, as if the whole place served an official purpose.

Several other men, all in a kind of police uniform of dashing type, were at this moment breakfasting in one of the huts. The aroma of their morning coffee scented the crisp air finely.

But only this one man was out of doors, appearing to keep a rather alert watch upon the mountain road, in so far as it was visible to him in short sections. He wore a belt to his uniform, and the belt held a revolver.

Suddenly he shielded the sun from his eyes and peered fixedly down the rugged mountainside.

Then he went into the building to find a pair of field-glasses. His companions, breakfasting heartily made some jocular inquiries, which he answered just as jocularly.

Even so, after a minute they all left off eating to come out and see. With some wiping of trim black moustaches, they sauntered up to the comrade who was on duty.

He laughed, offering round the glasses. "It is all right, my friends," he said in Spanish. "Only some excursionists, by the look of them." "You must be right, Jaime!" laughed one of the others, as he now brought the glasses to bear

upon some figures toiling up the mountain road. "But what are excursionists doing in Savarona at a time like this?"

"Seeing the country," said another man drily. "Spending money," another remarked with a gratified smile. "Good enough—si?"

"I think they will not get much for their money," grinned the man using the field-glasses. "But these, if you please, are mere boys and girls!"

"Si!" nodded Jaime. "British, I think!"

"Some of the friends of Mr. Cook, no doubt! But my coffee shall not get cold for the sake of this. They will be some time yet—if they are indeed coming to the top of the pass."

"But there is one in the party—is there not?—rather older," Jaime suggested, taking back the glasses.

"Si! There would be. And, indeed, there should be more than one in charge of them—boys and girls, pah! Well, if they arrive, the captain will require to see their papers—all the vouchers of the tourist agency, si!"

And back to their meal roystered the breakfasters, leaving Jaime on the look-out as before.

He was zealous, and the order having come through for a special vigilance to be maintained, he did not devote all his attention to the "tourists."

Again and again he left off watching them, with a kind of amused interest, to scan the jagged wastes to right and left.

In the hut, the other men chatted away pleasantly, whilst cigarette-rolling followed the cleaning up of the breakfast dishes. There seemed to be a general agreement that it should be left to the "captain" to take life seriously.

He, with a sword and scabbard trailing from his belt, did not appear from his private quarters until half an hour later.

By that time Jaime was ready to report that the "tourists" were still coming on up the mountain road, and so they might be expected to arrive at the frontier station.

"Good," nodded the captain, smoking a cigar. "I will see them myself."

As he stalked away, going to a hut that served as a kind of orderly-room, Jaime exchanged a wink with one of his comrades.

"The captain is looking for excitement—"

"And promotion, Jaime!"

"Si! And he will get neither," was the chuckled conviction. "There is not going to be any trouble. It is just a scare, if you ask me."

"The Central Government is nervous."

"The Central Government is a wise government; therefore, as I say, there will be no trouble."

"A shot fired in the night, down there?"

"Tcha!" scornfully. "A farmer, shooting an owl! But here they come," was the English equivalent of Jaime's grinned comment. "Our young friends, the tourists! Now," said Jaime, "if only we were a café, what a roaring-trade we might do. They will be thirsty!"

"And we do not sell the—what is it they all drink in England? The beer of ginger, si!"

A little while after this, a small table was brought out into the sunshine, and a chair. Then some files of papers were placed upon the table, and a rubber stamp or two.

Up the last few hundred yards of the toilsome ascent laboured the "tourists"—four girls of school age, three schoolboys, and a young lady of about nineteen.

"Whew!" puffed one of the girls, whom we

may now identify as that madcap of Morcovo School, Polly Linton. "Good job Paula didn't come!"

"We'd have been carrying her by now," jested Betty Barton.

"Would we?" doubted Polly. "Not whilst we had Jack, ready to oblige." And she looked to him, her fun-loving brother, to make suitable response. It came.

"Gosh, boys! Hannibal crossing the Alps isn't in it. And now I believe I've come without my jolly old passport."

"Don't worry," said his sister sweetly. "I'll explain that you're my brother."

"That'll only make it worse for me!"

"I'd hit you, only I'm too exhausted. You never once," Polly reproached him, with mock bitterness, "helped me with the climb."

"You shouldn't have come," he said, heartlessly. "Oh, boy, but here's a brass hat coming out to put us through it!"

"I don't like the look of him," spoke Judy Cardew, with that gravity which was usually hers. "He's the sort to raise objections."

"But he can't," said Judy's brother Dave calmly. "The pass can't be closed to us."

"Isabel will be the difficulty, I'm afraid," murmured tall Pam Willoughby, in reference to the young lady who was with them. "She's Spanish."

"Oh, but this is only an outing from the farm down below," Jack stolidly argued.

"Quite," Betty nodded. "Oh, we'll manage."

"If I," Polly moaned, "have come all this way, only to be turned back—I shall say things!"

Meantime, she was prepared to repress all skittishness, and to form a unit in an orderly group of juniors, so that officialdom might feel proper respect was being shown.

The young lady, leading these boys and girls, was met by the officer, who saluted her. She responded very graciously, without causing him to relax his self-important look.

"Some young friends of mine, on a visit from England," she explained, including the six in one airy gesture. "They have come out for the day."

"But they do not wish to go beyond this point?"

"They are very, very anxious to see the famous mountain shrine on the other side."

"Si! Very well then; but I must see their passports."

"They have them ready."

"Good! And you?"

"I have my identity papers."

"You will show me, please!"

He sat down to the table, and Isabel, unfolding a paper that bore her rubber-stamped photograph as well as written answers to printed questions, offered it for inspection.

Directly he read her name he bristled suspiciously.

"Almaro?"

"Isabel Almaro—yes, sir."

"No; then you cannot pass," he said flatly. "I have that name—Almaro—on my black list here." And he slammed a hand upon one of the files of papers.

Isabel bowed submissively.

"But, sir—"

"Young lady, my advice—go back, and take your young friends with you. You know there is sudden trouble in this province? The orders are for me to be very particular."

"Unfortunately, sir, these boys and girls arrived on a visit to me and my mother when

the country was quiet. Look at them," Isabel pleaded. "And please understand me; they intend to be only a few hours on the other side."

"They can enjoy themselves just as well on this side!"

"But they will not see the shrine of San Segura, captain!"

He cast his eyes over the juniors sternly.

"If you cannot let me pass, sir—"

"Oh, I cannot do that," he waved. "Impossible. Your name is Almaro. If I asked you were you any relation to Fernando Almaro, it would only tempt you, perhaps, to give me a false answer!"

"No, sir; I will be quite open with you about that."

"Ha! A sister of his, then?"

Isabel bowed gravely.

"I will respect your feelings," the officer said, twirling his moustache. "In return, you must respect my authority."

"I do, sir."

"As for these young people—if you are prepared to let them go on alone, whilst you turn back, then I will see their passports. I must," he insisted, resuming his seat at the table, "be particular. They are your friends, and you are—*an Almaro!*"

Isabel bowed again, then signed to the boys and girls to go before the examining officer, one by one. In the background several of the men looked on, grinning.

The officer, unable to speak English, had to get Isabel to translate for him now and then. At Jack's turn:

"He wants to know if you have any gold?"

"Gold! I wish I had!"

The next question was about tobacco.

"Have you any cigars, pipe tobacco, or cigarettes?"

"I've a packet of Spanish gaspers that I bought in Monserova, that he's welcome to!"

But the dreadful things, when tendered for inspection, were solemnly returned.

As for Polly, she was asked if that was her photograph.

"It's supposed to be!"

"He says it isn't like you!"

"My own feeling was that I couldn't be quite as hideous as that!"

But tall Pam Willoughby came in for a compliment.

"He says you are a very pretty girl."

"Yes, well," said Pam serenely, "supposing I were, it wouldn't be any business of his."

Even Isabel, though she had cause for great anxiety, was all smiles before the fussy routine had been completed. All the passports, duly stamped, were handed back to their respective owners.

Then the officer, rising from his chair, walked between Isabel and the juniors, solemnly gesturing that they were, so to speak, now separated from her by a great gulf fixed.

"Good-bye, then, my dear friends," she called out to them, emotion creeping into her voice.

"And I hope you will enjoy doing—what you set out to do!"

"We'll manage!" Betty called back blithely. A favourite slogan of hers, that—charged this time with a very special significance which Isabel could appreciate!

"Good-bye, Isabel! Shame you can't come with us!"

"Good-bye, and—good luck!"

"**B**UT the luck hasn't been so bad, up till now, has it?"

Jack's chuckled remark, now that he and his fellow juniors had set off again, by themselves, was meant for his sister and the other girls, as



"My husband would come to me, but he cannot. Why is that?" Drucilla panted. "You tell me, please, quick."

well as Dave and Jimmy. He, Jack, always addressed the company in general as "boys."

"Splendid!" Polly sparkled. "And now—what's the address?"

This was the madcap, at her best, and the others went off into laughter.

"I remember the road, but I've forgotten the number!" Jack carried on the joke.

"Never mind," said Betty. "It is somewhere, we know—close to the shrine of San Segura!"

CHAPTER 2.

Pam and Jimmy

EASY going for the supposed "excursionists" now that the mountain track fell away before them, on this side of the great range, just as steeply as it had risen on the other side.

A well-defined track there was—almost good enough to be termed a road. Jack gave it as his opinion that any car "could do it." Dave, more level-headed, considered that a motor-cycle, or perhaps even a "baby" car, could have achieved the summit from the other side and safely made this descent; but anything bigger than that in motors—no!

All three boys argued it out, whilst Betty, Polly, Pam and Judy jogged downhill in talk amongst themselves—about the loveliness of the summer morning and the "simply marvellous" scenery. They talked, too, about the way the "hols" were flying by, and wondering what this and that schoolmate of theirs was doing at this moment.

One thing neither they nor the boys discussed was their motive for this outing. From the pleasant and often nonsensical chatter with which all six of them enlivened the journey on foot, it might have been inferred that they were simply out for a carefree "hike." Taking in, of course, a visit to the famous shrine of San Segura! Otherwise, why have persisted in this direction, when it had involved the loss of Isabel Almaro as a very instructive companion?

"Well," Polly complained at last, "where is the shrine? I'm sure we've come at least a mile down this side."

"If you'd like a rest and a sandwich, why not say so?" her brother protested mock-testily. "As a matter of fact"—with a change to great geniality—"it wouldn't be a bad idea, boys!"

"No!" Polly ruled severely. "Keep the rations! For supposing we miss the way, coming back? It can't be far now, and I want lunch—a proper lunch!—at that rest-house place which Isabel said is quite close to the shrine."

"Oh, yeah," Jack drawled. "Garçon! But what do we speak on this side of the mountain—French or Spanish? Or shall we"—cheerfully—"just stick to English, and let it go at that?"

"But they won't understand a word; is it likely—at a lonely sort of road-house, up here on the mountains?" Polly objected.

"Then, what do we do?" Jack asked dismayedly. "I know!"

And, making a round "O" of his mouth, he pointed to it with a finger.

"They'll savvy that, boys! Meantime—just to ward off the pangs—would anyone like one of these choice gaspers?"

"It would have served you right, Jack, if that officer had taken you into custody for having them. At your age!"

"The hols," he trotted out the old excuse, and struck a match. "Whoof! Urr!" at the first whiff.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And now, I wish I had a mandoline," he said, heroically smoking on with pretended relish. "Then I'd be quite native. Twang, twang," he thrummed an imaginary stringed instrument.

"On the top of a mountain I stand," twang, twang! "With a crown of red gold in my hand"—twang, twang!"

"That's 'The Spanish Student,'" Pam recognised his quotation.

"And you're not one, Jack, so shut up," his sister requested. "Oh, come on, all! Or we shan't get a table!"

"What is 'The Spanish Student,' Pam?" asked Jimmy Cherrol, coming to her side as the journey was resumed.

"Haven't you read it? Yards of it have been running in my mind ever since we landed in

Spain," she rippled. "Everything so—reminds me. You ought to know Longfellow, Jimmy!"

"I prefer a good thriller myself. Sorry," he pleaded, and seemed to think he ought to leave her to talk to one of the others. But she resumed, before he could drift away:

"Where we are going to call, Jimmy, to get a rest something to eat—I do hope it won't be modernised or anything. I'd love to find mountain people there—gypsies!"

"If there are any left of the old sort, I should reckon they'd be found around here, Pam."

"Any left? But Spain's still swarming with them! So dad said. Only they're in more out-of-the-way places than this, even, I suppose."

"What, don't you call this the last word in loneliness, Pam?"

"Oh, it's lonely enough to us. But to them—a main road!" she surmised. "And trippery, at times. We're day-trippers, come to that."

"Let's hope they think so."

She turned serious eyes upon him then.

"Let's hope they do, Jimmy."

And yet he found himself hoping that they would—at least, not Pam. In his boyish way Jimmy always marvelled that she took any notice of him at all.

At parties for instance, she got rushed at for dances, yet somehow there was always one for him. Sometimes there'd be two. And she'd eat an ice with him when she had just shaken her head: "No, thanks!" to some other fellow.

It made times like that—and especially a holiday-time like this—jolly nice for him. Only, as he often considered, it would all end some day.

Leaving school would mean, for Pam, great things in life. She'd be presented at Court; there'd be a "coming-out" dance given for her by her mother; and then—well, even if he were there, he wouldn't be able to see over all the heads of fellows flocking around.

And then, suddenly, she struck in on this gloomy vision of his, of himself going away early from some such grand function, the very manservant who helped him into his greatcoat giving him a pitying look. "Why did you come—you!"

"Some day, Jimmy—when we're grown up—we shall be talking about this morning; our going who could forget? And there is all the rest, and why it was—"

"Oh, heaps of things'll have happened to make you forget."

"Jimmy—never," she declared strenuously. "Even if it were only this wonderful scenery—just look at the view!—and the glorious mountain air; who could forget? And there is all the rest, Jimmy!"—lowering her voice. "Our having such a big thing to do!"

He glanced about warily.

"We've been keeping off the subject; but I suppose it's all right to talk a bit now?"

"Oh, yes. After all, in English, Jimmy!"

"Well, you know what I think, Pam. You and the other girls were real sports to come along like this. It should have been left to us three chaps—"

"Oh, Jimmy, no," she laughed. "It would have been too ridiculous! You three boys, having to find a mother and her baby, at this rest-house place that we ought to come in sight of at any moment now. Think of the difficulties there may be, Jimmy! It isn't as if you could just walk in and inquire for her by name. Or hand the note to the landlord, to give to her. But we girls—we can, for instance, admire the baby—"

"But you can't speak the lingo, Pam!"



Jimmy indicated that he must have a rope—a long rope. And although she could not comprehend a word of English the good woman nodded that she understood.

"One can praise a baby, Jimmy, without being able to speak its mother's language. One can take it on one's lap and nurse it for a bit, and then hand it back—with the note," Pam whispered, "smuggled in the shawl or whatever there is!"

"That's a good idea, Pam."

"Obvious thing, Jimmy! Oh, hark, though! Music!"

The others also had heard it—guitar-like music—faintly in the air.

"But that," Betty exclaimed, when they had all stood still for several moments, listening, "is lovely! I say, I do believe the rest-house place is close at hand now!"

"Yes—hark to that!"

Some other musical instrument had joined the first in the same lively tune. It was an accordion, panting out its melody lustily, and now the tune, from being "thin," was swelling louder on the air.

Then several voices began a chorus. It went in a wild way, the singers shouting and laughing directly the stanza was finished.

"Oh, come on!" Polly clamoured. "Only just round this bend, and we'll be there!"

CHAPTER 3.

The Inn of San Segura

THEY passed with eager haste round that sharp bend in the mountain road, and it was like a scene in a play that came before their eyes.

Nothing more capable of taking the mind back

with a shock to past ages had the juniors ever beheld. Historic castles and ancient manor houses in the Homeland were not comparable with this age-old travellers' rest of San Segura.

Unchanged! After all the centuries that had passed, during which it had served as a sort of caravansera for those going over the mountains by way of the pass of Sierra Juez—still unchanged!

The rambling old building, built with rock quarried from the mountainside, stood squatly on a natural terrace.

That rocky shelf, as it might be called, was large enough to provide a spacious courtyard, which the straggling buildings walled in on three sides, the fourth being open to the road.

Outside galleries of old oak, richly carved, ran round the walls fronting on to the courtyard, and this meant flights of stone steps here and there, very picturesque.

At an altitude where nothing grew of its own accord on the jagged slopes, well-tended plants and creepers were flourishing in the yard, where most of the life of the place was lived.

Tables and benches were dotted about, for meals to be served, and every supporting post to one of the galleries might be used for tying up a mule or donkey whilst one rested, and nobody would object.

But what made it such a scene in a play to Betty and her chums was the chorus-like grouping of people at this moment thronging the courtyard.

If they were not gipsies all, then Morcoveo and Co. had come upon a phase of Spanish life that belonged to the long ago. Men and women were gipsy-like in their dress. Brilliant colours were favoured; great golden earrings glistened and brown arms were bangles.

There had been the singing which the juniors had heard, and perhaps some dancing. Now, except that someone jingled a tambourine, as if impatient for another song and dance, a mere chattering of a very happy nature was going on.

But all this talk amongst themselves stopped with dramatic sharpness when the boys and girls came wandering into the courtyard—strangers in a strange place indeed!

Jack, Dave and Jimmy—they did the polite thing, touching their hats to the company. It was a gesture that took pleasing effect. Instantly, there were cordial smiles, and all the murmured comments were evidently of a friendly kind.

The younger women were extremely beautiful, and the menfolk handsome in a dark, fierce way. Jimmy noticed at once how several of the women whispered amongst themselves whilst devoting their flashing eyes to Pam.

An aproned, jolly-looking man—obviously the landlord of the place—came genially towards the "hikers"—followed by his good dame, a buxom woman who had "cut herself in half" by wearing a blue bodice to a red skirt. In addition, she wore a colourful scarf about her head and had yellow stockings.

"You try and make 'em understand, Dave," said Jack, falling back upon that brainy chum of his.

But the party's wants were already understood! The landlord, swiftly inferring that none of these "foreigners" could speak Spanish, not to say the Spanish that he, in his mountain world, spoke, was gesturing hospitably to benches which had been vacated by other patrons.

At the same time, the good woman of the place conveyed by her smiles and nods that the girls must be liking to get a wash and tidy-up, after their morning's climb. Would they follow her?

She conducted them up one of the stone staircases to the gallery running round three sides of the courtyard. Then she dived in before them through a narrow doorway, and finally left them to themselves in a guest-chamber.

"My word!" Polly gasped, as soon as she was alone with her schoolmates. "The simple life, with a vengeance. That must be the bed Don Quixote slept in!"

"Museum piece, yes," Pam smiled. "But it's all—jolly."

She held a hand under the water as she poured some from a brown pitcher into a basin.

"Like ice," she commented delightedly. "No soap, but it's soft water—oh, lovely."

"I wonder how Paula would like this!" chuckled Betty. "But, there, Paula always carries her own pocket comb and mirror."

"Just as well we left her at home at the farmhouse, with Naomer," Judy remarked. "Paula never could have managed that climb."

"But wouldn't Naomer have delighted in being here!" laughed Polly. "That landlord and his wife both look as if they believe in good living! He was a Spanish edition of Tubby Blot!"

"Poor Bobby," murmured Pam, looking for a towel. "Having to stay in his bed-room all day, at the farm, so that the servants will imagine him to be unwell!"

"He won't break his heart," Betty found relief in saying, with conviction. "So long as Madame Almaro takes good meals up to him—and she'll do that, right enough!"

"Ah, and besides," said Judy, "he is such a brick—Tubby. He knew that the ruse was the only way for the Almaros to have their Fernando in the house without the servants suspecting."

The talk would have continued whilst, one by one, the girls got a welcome sluicing of face and hands, but suddenly the accordion had started afresh, in the courtyard.

Pam darted to a window that looked on to the yard.

"Oh, I say!"

Mandolines were joining in, twanging away whilst the accordion vamped out the tune.

"Sort of tango," said Polly, joining Pam at the window. "Perhaps someone will dance— Oh, look at that!"

A young woman had stepped out to the courtyard centre, which was clear of tables and chairs. She held a tambourine that jingled prettily in tune with the other music.

Up here, at the window, the girls saw Jack and his two chums get up from their bench to move it more out of the way of the intending dancer. She flung them an appreciative smile. Then the mandolines twanged louder, the accordion trumpeted—and she danced beautifully.

"I say," Polly breathed. "On the stage in London—she could make a fortune."

"Born in her," Pam nodded. "Wonderful!"

After a minute or so, a young man advanced to dance with her. There was encouraging applause. To some, the dancing might have seemed too wild to be graceful; but the Morcovie girls detected much in it that was extraordinarily clever and delicate.

"We'll go down."

"Yes!"

"Just a sec, though," Betty requested; and then, whipping off one shoe, she took from it—a folded note!

"Better have this ready to hand now, girls."

"Oh, rather," she was answered.

"I wonder," Judy quavered, becoming very

serious at the thought of what hung upon the day's adventure—"I wonder if we shall see Fernando Almaro's wife!"

"This is the place, anyhow," Polly grimaced. "They'd been living here, as paying guests, for several weeks, when he heard a bit of gossip that made him go off to try and find his mother and sister."

"I'm ready now," Betty said softly, having put the folded note out of sight.

Pam was nearest the door. She opened it, and they all four passed out into the short, dim passage that had to be traversed to reach the outer gallery.

Only a step did each take, however, and then—they stood quite still.

The mowing cry of an infant!

No sooner had that sound reached their ears than the girls knew; Fernando's wife was quartered in a room that was actually next to the one where they had obtained the welcome wash.

Polly pointed eagerly to the closed door serving that other room.

"Knock!" she urged her chums. "Go in?"

"But wait a second," Betty counselled. "Perhaps—"

The door came open softly, letting out a young woman. There was nothing "native" about her clothes; but her looks were those of a Spanish beauty.

She came out, looking over a shoulder back into the room. So, whilst obviously giving a fond glance to the darling babe that she was leaving, safely cradled, she did not at once heed the girls in the passage.

But they, for their part, felt that it was now or never.

Betty took out the note. It was addressed simply to "Drucilla"—a note pencilled by Fernando Almaro during the night, after he had been smuggled into the farmhouse, wounded by a gunshot.

Now the young woman, closing the door behind her, politely noticed all four girls. Without displaying the note, Betty voiced the name questioningly:

"Drucilla?"

The young wife's violent start was sufficient answer. Betty offered the note, and it was seized with passionate eagerness, whilst dilating eyes as good as said:

"Who are you, then?"

Betty put a finger to her lips—"Sh!" Her chums were glancing about, to obtain timely warning of any intrusion.

Five seconds at most sufficed for Drucilla to devour what little her husband had been able to scrawl in explanation of the desperate position he was in. A fresh revolt in the Province of Savarona, and he a "wanted" man, on the black list as a suspected instigator of the revolt!

Down in the courtyard the music and dancing had again ceased. Only a murmur of carefree gossip was now audible. To the Morcovie girls, it was as if a chorus had left the stage and the scene was now one of tense drama.

Drucilla's lovely dark eyes came at them over the top edge of the note she had been reading.

"You—Englesh?"

They nodded.

"Come, see my baby," she said quickly; and then, lowering her voice as she ushered them into the bed-room:

"I cannot go back with you; but—I shall come, soon, to the farm!"

CHAPTER 4.

"I Must Go!"

A MOMENT, this, for Betty Barton and the other girls to experience a strange mixture of feelings!

A great delight had seized them, when they had found Drucilla addressing them in their own tongue. But, that about her intention to turn up at the farm—it created a kind of blank dismay in the minds of the chums.

The very tone in which that announcement had been made was evidence that Drucilla was voicing an impulsive decision. The note had not asked her to come. Most likely it had implored her to keep away, for her own dear sake and the baby's.

She closed the door and remained silent, watching the girls give tender glances to the wee thing lying in swaddling clothes on the bed of an old-fashioned four-poster.

"What a darling!" Judy whispered.

The little mite was asleep, and they were all going to be careful not to awaken it.

"So you speak English?" Betty faced round to address the young mother very softly. "What a blessing for us!"

"Yes, I can spik the Engleesh a little," was the swift response. "My mother was Spanish, my father French. He went to the Great War. My mother and I were near the Front all those cruel years, and often had billeted upon us the nice Engleesh Tommy, or the officer—so gentil! I am only a little girl then, and they take me on their knee and talk to me. So, I learn the Engleesh! But now," she whispered on rapidly, "oh, what is this about my dear Fernando?"

"The note from him has told you—"

"That he is at the house of his mother and sister—the farm of Sierra Juez, over there in Savarona province. He would come to me, but he cannot! Why is that? You tell me, please, quick!"

Betty consulted her chums with her eyes. All three other girls were for Betty's frankly explaining, as their nods implied.

"Listen, then," she said very softly to the young wife and mother. "It was very unfortunate. Just when he had traced his mother and sister, after they had been most strangely lost to him—"

"For two year, si!"

"This trouble broke out in Savarona," Betty continued; "in Monserova, the capital of the province. At the very moment when he was having a first talk with his mother, soldiers turned up to make inquiries. There is a round-up going on—your understand?"

"Ah, yes, yes! And he—he was not arrested, then?"

"No, he just managed to escape. But last night he was challenged, whilst starting to climb the mountains to get back to you on this side of the pass. He gave that challenger the slip, but ran into fresh danger a few minutes later."

"And then?" panted Drucilla, opening and shutting her hands excitedly.

"He was fired upon in the dark—"

"Ah!"

"The wound was not a serious one—in the arm. But he was bleeding and could not hope to go on after that. He struggled down to the farmhouse. Some of us—we had been out with his sister Isabel, meeting him in secret—we got him indoors—"

"But that," the listener struck in, "was noble! How I thank you—"

"No need," Betty pleaded. "It's only what anyone else would have done out of sheer pity. We are guests at the farmhouse. We are fond of his mother and sister—have got to know them so well. So we were thinking of them, as well of Fernando himself—and of you and his little baby!"

"Wounded," Drucilla repeated hoarsely to herself. "And I am not with him! Ah, but I soon shall be—yes, yes! At once, I leave—"

"Oh, but think," Betty implored. "As his wife, there is danger for you on the other side of the mountains. He must be wanting you to remain away?"

"Si! But what sort of a wife would I be if I thought only of my own security!"

"That we can understand quite well," Pam now took turn in arguing with the devoted woman. "But supposing, by turning up at the farm, with your dear baby, you only make things worse for Madame Almaro and Isabel?"

"It cannot be worse for them than it is for me—apart from him at a time like this. No, I shall come!" Drucilla insisted vehemently. "The danger for any of us—wife, mother, sister—it does not matter!"

"Yes, well," Pam agreed, "but then there is—your baby."

"Ah, our little girl will not suffer," its mother smiled, flashing her dark eyes adoringly towards the sleeping infant. "Who would harm a babe? But, I tell you, he needs me—me! Oh, I know there is his mother, his sister; but Fernando is devoted to me also—"

"We're quite sure about that," Judy put in gently.

"Then consider!" Drucilla pleaded passionately. "If I am not with him, he will not get well. It will turn to fever. And then, perhaps, he die, and I not there to hear him say with his last breath, 'Drucilla—' Not there to hold the little one before his eyes as they close! Ah, no," she said again fiercely. "It must not be like that!"

The baby awoke and cried feebly. She crossed quickly to take it up from the bed, and walked about the room with it, cuddled in her arms.

Betty and her chums, waiting whilst the little one was hushed off again, had nothing to say to one another.

Even amongst themselves—what could they say in regard to the unwisdom of the young wife's desperate decision? There must be times when Love will not listen to Reason.

"But, Drucilla," spoke Pam very gently, when the nursed baby was again asleep, "I doubt if they will let you pass the barrier at the top of the mountain road. Very strict orders have been given."

"Is the name Almaro on your identity paper?" Betty asked. "Or did Fernando marry you under a different name?"

"We have lived here under another name. But it is Almaro on my paper."

"Then they'll never let you through, up there at the barrier," Polly exclaimed. "You'd have to show your paper."

"Si! But it does not matter!" Drucilla said with a sudden daring smile. "I shall not travel the road—no. I go aside—"

"Drucilla!" Betty gasped. "Oh, you mustn't risk it! To go off the road is to be in great danger. Climbers have been killed, so Isabel told us."

"I have been in danger before," was the smiled

retort. "I was for three years where they bombed us, and the shrapnel fell about us often. This climber will not be killed!" she added. "We will get there in safety, dear one"—brushing her lips over the babe's smooth forehead.

Betty looked at Polly, who shrugged—hopelessly. Judy turned to Pam, who said:

"Yes, well! Had we better go down now, perhaps, in case it is wondered why we are talking so much up here?"

Drucilla nodded in eager approval.

"By all means! And I will speak with you again, if possible. If not, then—a revolver!"

And the look with which she said it, so sublimely heroic, would be remembered by the girls as long as they lived.

A MEAL of cold viands and a marvellous salad was awaiting them when they rejoined the boys in the shady courtyard.

"Not a word about this," Jack jested, "to Naomer when we get back. As for Tubby, if we chaps told him, he would have a fit—and then he would be a real case! Whereas, I can just imagine him going strong, on the farmhouse fare, at this very moment."

"We saw the dancing from the window," Betty gaily remarked. "Wonderful! Er—we also saw such a lovely baby, with its mother!"

"Oh, did you?" Jack returned affably, knifing a loaf of coarse bread. "That's interesting!"

"But it's pretty awful, too," Polly guardedly rejoined, for the benefit of all three boys. "She's determined to get over the mountains, to be with him at the farmhouse."

"What?"

"I thought that would be it," Dave murmured quietly. "But they'll turn her back at the barrier."

"They won't," Judy sighed, "for the simple reason that she means to get past—off the road."

"Gosh!"

"Jack, you ape, you're looking too excited," Polly warned him. "We're being looked at all the time."

"I'm only excited about this meal," he declared, and made signs to that effect, goggling his eyes at some black sausage. "But do you realise?" he added guardedly. "That young wife is going to turn up at her mother-in-law's home! And you know what mothers-in-law are!"

"Not always," Judy demurred.

"Oh, all right! Wait and see, boys!"

"There's one thing," said Polly; "you'll never have a mother-in-law, Jack—no girl will have you!"

She added:

"And besides, I shall want you to look after me, when I'm an old maid!"

"It will be a terrible undertaking," Pam murmured; and Polly, at that moment helping herself to salad, stared.

Pam smiled.

"I was meaning—Drucilla's finding her way over the mountain, without keeping to the pass."

"Oh, I see!"

"And a baby in her arms," Judy mused. "But she simply will do it. Nothing we could say made any difference."

"I can understand that," said Dave tersely.

"One of us chaps should go with her."

"Yes, boys—"

"Oh, she wouldn't dream of allowing that," Betty deplored. "Still, we might fix up something unbeknown to her. One of us follow her.

She won't be going yet, and I take it that we shall see her again, to speak to her."

"That's the idea," Jack nodded. "Meantime, what about the jolly old shrine place?"

"We must see that, yes," Betty said. "Otherwise it will seem as if Isabel fibbed when she told the police at the barrier that we had come for that purpose."

"It's not far?" Judy suggested. "Only a little way farther down the mountain road. We could be there and back in an hour?"

"If you don't mind, I'll stay around here," Pam said gently.

There were no surprised looks. She was free to please herself. Also, her chums instantly surmised that she thought it expedient for somebody belonging to the party to remain at the rest-house, in case Drucilla should have a favourable moment for communicating something.

So, half an hour later, there was a roaming off without Pam. The last they saw of her, she was still occupying a seat just where they had lunched in the courtyard. Some of the other patrons of the place had left by now, and the rest were indolently quiet in the midday heat.

The famous shrine, at a spot where a miracle was supposed to have been wrought, ages ago, was not to be come at nearly so quickly as the juniors had imagined. Even when they obtained their first glimpse of it, they saw that they had much farther to go down the winding mountain road before they would be there.

Then Jimmy mumbled:

"Look here, I—I reckon I'll turn back here."

"Eh, what!" cried Jack.

"Poor Jimmy," smiled Polly. "So lonely without his Pam!"

"Good boy, then," Jack carried on the teasing. "Run to her," as if Jimmy were a doggie that had been brought for a walk without his youthful mistress. "Home, then!"

Jimmy reddened, looking foolish. He could stand any amount of teasing, so long as it did not involve Pam.

"Shame!" Judy laughed, taking pity upon him. "It's all right, Jimmy. We understand."

"Yes," said Dave. "We understand." The assurance was an exact repetition of Judy's, but, somehow, it carried a different meaning.

Jimmy seemed to realise this, for he cast a sort of imploring look at serious Dave, as much as to say: "Don't tell them, if they haven't guessed!"

Then he turned back, alone, taking the uphill road very slowly and leisurely.

He reckoned he had some time in hand, and he did not want to exercise any needless haste. He had to reserve all his energies, in case—well, in case, when he did get back to the rest-house, he should find Drucilla even then on the point of leaving upon her desperate journey.

The mountain road, on this side of the range, was all sharp windings amongst appalling crags. So he did not have any early sight of the rest-house on this return trudge.

Until the last hundred yards or so it remained hidden to him by a huge shoulder of rock. Then he suddenly had the ancient hostel in full view, and could see straight into the courtyard—and could not see Pam.

But no uneasiness seized him. She had probably gone indoors, he reasoned. Very likely she was even now getting a further useful talk with Drucilla. He'd sit down in the yard and wait, that was all. He hadn't come back with any idea

of pestering around Pam—only to be on hand in case of necessity.

Now, however, the buxom landlady came bustling out to him, all smiles. She offered a note; a folded sheet of paper addressed simply to "Betty."

That he, Jimmy, had a right to read the note, he never doubted. Although inscribed to Betty, its contents were meant for all of them.

His heart was throbbing now as he unfolded the note. Any message at all meant that Pam was no longer here!

He read the pencilled lines:

"Dear Betty,—Directly you had left, she went off. I had one minute's talk with her. She was dead against my going with her.

"But I am off now, to follow her up, feeling that she must have someone near, in case of need. Love,—PAM."

CHAPTER 5.

Over the Mountains

JIMMY CHERROL raised his eyes from this pencilled message at last, to find the good woman of the rest-house still standing by, full of politeness and goodwill.

Plainly she was wishing she could converse with him.

He tapped a finger to the note, implying that he meant its writer, then gestured the question:

"Which way?"

The woman, smiling, pointed up the mountain road.

From this, he conjectured Pam had kept to the road at first. No doubt, indeed, Druquilla had done the same. It would only be when near the summit that there would have to be a turning aside, to avoid the police barrier.

He felt in all his pockets for a pencil. Dash! Of course, he hadn't got one!

Then he made signs to the landlady that he wished to write.

"Si, si!" she bowed, and bustled away, returning promptly with a bit of pencil.

Seizing it gratefully, Jimmy spread Pam's note upon one of the refreshment tables and wrote under what she had written:

"Have gone after Pam. I'll see that she doesn't come to any harm. Expect us at the farm. All the best,—**JIMMY.**"

Would that explain everything? Yes, he thought so.

Re-folding the note, he returned it to the woman, expressive gestures conveying that she must hand it to the others when they came dawdling back. Also, he tipped her.

She nodded very intelligently, and was still all smiles. Understanding that Jimmy was now going the same way as Pam had gone, she seemed to want to say:

"And quite right, too!"

She bowed him away, and Jimmy, stolidly British, mumbled:

"Good-afternoon!"

Then he turned back, beckoning.

He pointed to a rope halter hanging up, then made signs that he wanted something like that, only longer. A long rope, savvy! Yes, she understood. A minute, please!

And in a minute he was being handed such a fine length of rope, nicely coiled, he had to offer to pay for it, at a guess. She did not wish to take anything, but he insisted upon parting with another peseta note.

Then he was off, feeling all the better in his mind for having the rope with him. Just the right sort! In fact, most likely it was climber's rope that had been left behind by a mountaineer at the inn. Supposing, though—

Supposing he didn't catch up with Pam, after all!

But he did.

For some ten harrowing minutes he was all anxious haste up the steep mountain road, his mind visioning Pam not being overtaken and accompanied by him; Pam, coming to grief in the end, as the result of her spirited desire to aid Druquilla. Their Pam, lying bruised and broken somewhere amongst the dreadful crags:

"And I shall have done nothing," ran Jimmy's frantic mind.

Then he saw her. Oh, hurrah, there she was, and he was in time—but only just in time! She was at this very moment stepping aside from the mountain road, to venture limb and life itself amongst the riven rocks and the narrow ledges, where a false step might mean death.



"Won't you go back, Pam?" "No, Jimmy, I'll go on—with you," she answered serenely.

"Pam!"

From where he had pantingly hailed her he could see how she stiffened as she stood still, arrested by his cry. Going to be cross with him; no doubt about that. But, never mind if she was furious—refused to speak to him again, ever!—he must either get her to turn back, or else go on with her.

"Hallo, Jimmy," she smiled serenely, when he came floundering up to her. "What do you want?"

"I want you to turn back, Pam!"

"Oh, but that's impossible—"

"Pam, I know I'm a blithering ass in lots of ways; but over this—I'm right, Pam. You've got to go back. I—I order you!"

"Jimmy—"

"Pam—"

"Listen, Jimmy—"

"No, Pam! And as for Drucilla; it's all right. I'm going on after her, see? And I've got this rope."

"Oh, you've got a rope! Jimmy, you're splendid. I didn't think of a rope."

"You—you do these things," he almost groaned. "You don't stop to think—about yourself—your parents—"

He fetched a hard breath.

"I'm sorry, Pam, to have to speak like this, but you've got to be—taken care of. Saved from yourself. So, be sensible, Pam; go back—"

Pam did not answer for a moment, then she said:

"I am certain Drucilla left the road just here. I had a glimpse of her, only a minute or two before you came butting in. So we mustn't hang about in talk."

"No, Pam. I get you. Must hurry—I must! Oh, I'll spot her, for she can't be far ahead, and the going must be slow. So long, then—"

"No!" And she tossed her head. "It's no use, Jimmy. I'm coming, too. See this passageway between these rocks—"

"Won't you go back, Pam? For everybody's sake, if not for your own!"

"No, I'll go on, Jimmy—with you," she answered him, her serenity quite restored. "Don't argue."

"I might have known you'd be like this," he sighed resignedly. "Here, will you have one end of the rope?"

"What, now?"

"Yes, now!"

She took the offered coils, tying the rope about herself just above the waist. Jimmy tied the other end around himself.

"Are you sure you've tied a proper knot, Pam?"

"Oh, fussy! But have a look, to make sure, if you don't trust me," she laughed.

And so concerned was Jimmy lest harm should befall her, that he took her at her word. Then, satisfied the knot was secure, he gave the signal to advance.

CHAPTER 6.

No Retreat

"THERE she is, Jimmy!"

"Yes."

"But what an awful place she seems to have got to!"

"It's just about the summit, there. I hope she's bearing in mind that they may be patrolling both sides of the pass."

"Then we mustn't—hail her?"

"No, Pam. Bad enough, if we send a lump

of rock rattling down. Any sound—some chap on patrol might hear."

For an hour boy and girl had been clambering and writhing amongst the awesome crags and rocky buttresses, he being always in front of Pam.

The way they had come seemed to have been the only possible way anybody except a skilled mountaineer could proceed.

More than once they had wondered how Drucilla could be tackling the climb, saddled as she was—carrying the baby on her back, so as to have the use of both arms.

The little mite was done up in a bundle that looked, from this distance, like a haversack strapped to its mother's back.

"I was beginning to think," Pam murmured, letting her gaze roam from right and left, "that just here was bad enough."

"Not feeling—"

"Oh, no. Carry on, Jimmy. There's one blessing; having to think about Drucilla keeps you from going to bits."

"Can't see her now."

"No. But it's a relief to know we have come right."

"Rather. Well, now—steady, Pam."

"Right-ho, Jimmy!"

He had set off once more—so carefully, and paying such great attention to the rope—her admiration for him was boundless. A moment's carelessness with the rope, and they might have been better off without one!

Linked together. It meant that she had to follow, step by step, with extreme wariness, knowing that if she slipped and fell—she might drag him off his balance.

And now, this last hundred yards or so, to what he reckoned was the summit, was all deadly danger. These were short ledges, with perpendicular rock on one's left to shoulder against, and upon the right—a sheer drop into some sunless chasm or other.

Could it be worse for Drucilla, and so worse for the pair of them, on the Savarona side of this giant mountain? Pam tried hard to believe that it could not be worse; but something within her insisted that such exploits as this always did become worse as you went on. And if you tried to come back, at last, your nerve utterly gone, you couldn't—

"Just a sec, Pam."

"You all right, Jimmy?"

"Oh, rather. But I just want to loop the rope somehow. Got it," he commented quietly.

"You'll be all right now."

"Somehow," she said, crawling on again, "it's going to be better when we are over the summit."

"Well, of course," he spoke back, without looking round, "we shall be that much nearer home."

Home! He meant the farmhouse, of course. But the word suddenly conjured up in her mind visions of Swanlake, the house asleep in the sunshine, and the gentle undulations of the park all so expressive of the Homeland's peace and security—Ah, here was some poor animal that had died on the mountain crags; a skeleton, picked clean by birds of prey.

She shuddered past it, and then had a sloping mass of rock to climb somehow.

Jimmy, who had already overcome it, sat round and, digging his heels into niches, kept a good hold on the rope.

"Right. Come on. I've got you, Pam."

"Jimmy, I—I know you have," she faltered.

"Oh, I'm not being a coward, am I?"

"Shut up."

She laughed.

"Thanks, Jimmy. Just what I needed!"

Whilst scrambling up, her eyes half-closed to sights so dizzying that they threatened to grip her with terror, she could feel how he was pulling on to the rope.

"This was where she was when we saw her," he said, having "landed" Pam beside him rather as if she were a catch.

"Then I simply don't know how she managed it!"

"Thinking of her husband—same as you have managed it, thinking of her. Tired, Pam?"

"No! But, Jimmy," and she laid a detaining hand upon his arm, "better say it now, Jimmy. If—if it's at all worse on the other side, and Drucilla's in need of help; you think of her, not of me, won't you?"

"Here's some chocolate, Pam—"

"Couldn't! But you haven't answered—"

"I'm not going to promise anything. Talking is a mistake," he blustered. "When we might be heard."

"Oh, I can't believe there is anyone patrolling this way. Those police at the top of the pass weren't the sort to take their duties as seriously as all that. But how lovely," she could suddenly exclaim, "if we do slip by and get in with Drucilla, at the farmhouse—"

"In time for a late tea, yes. Should be possible, too," he said, stoutly optimistic. "Easier, going down."

But, a little after this, when there was the definite sense of having passed over the summit—for in that chaotic world of tumbled rocks and gloomy gullies, it had been hard to tell when the actual descent had begun—that prediction of Jimmy's was falsified. Pam's obstinate and unvoiced misgiving had been nearer the truth. Worse, this side!

Suddenly they saw Drucilla again.

They crept after each other round a projecting rock that seemed to want to push them off the narrow ledge which formed the path just there.

Drucilla was only a few yards in front of them, on the same narrow ledge; but where she stood a dreadful precipice existed. She was motionless, as if terror had robbed her of the power of movement.

"Her nerve has gone," Pam whispered. "Oh, Jimmy, good job we came!"

"Yes. We'll get to her. I don't know, Pam, but you may have to take the baby, whilst I see after her."

There was a significant silence on the part of Drucilla as they both advanced towards her along that hair-raising ledge. Her eyes were saying "Go back!" but loss of nerve had robbed her of the power of speech.

Jimmy went upon hands and knees, feeling sure that Pam would not do that unless she saw him do so. So, very slowly, he got within touching distance of Drucilla, with Pam close behind him.

Drucilla was standing up, both hands feeling the wall of rock behind her without finding any real hold. She seemed to have to stare, fascinated, into the awful void formed by the precipice.

"Here, get down on your knees," Jimmy rasped. His throat had gone very dry. "I shall give you a bit of the rope—"

"No, no!" she moaned. "Oh, why did you come! But I am ashamed—I! I cannot move!"

"Get down," he insisted curtly. "I'll pass the rope round you. You must lie flat on the ledge, so I can crawl over you, to get in front."

The poor terror-stricken woman moaned.

"And my baby!" she wailed. "Oh, I did not know it would be—like this!"

"Drucilla," Pam called out softly, "do as Jimmy says. Then I'm sure we shall all get on safely. It isn't being a coward. If you can't stand heights, you just can't. Lots of us are like it."

"I love my husband and would be with him," the young wife suddenly wept hysterically. "I had to do something; but oh, I can never forgive myself! What must you think of me!"

"There is nothing we can't understand in it at all—"

"I have brought you into danger!"

"We came of our own accord, Drucilla. You know very well, you refused to let me come with you," Pam said. "But now—do get down on to your knees—lie quite flat—"

"But I cannot! I feel—if I move even so much—I shall go over the edge."

"Shut your eyes," Jimmy bade her.

"Then I shall not see what I am doing! Oh, no, I—I must stand here. Oh, I do not know what I am to do!"

"Shut your eyes. I'm holding you—there!" Jimmy said, reaching a steadying hand to her. "Now, then, kneel down."

At last she obeyed, shaking from head to foot, as he could tell. The baby, cradled so strangely at its mother's back, awoke and gave its feeble cry. Then Drucilla wept and moaned distractedly, and that decided Jimmy.

He whispered round to Pam:

"We'll have to go back."

"Yes, Jimmy; if you can get her to come."

"Oh, I'll do that all right. I'm going to take the baby. She'll follow, if we've got the baby. So we'll all have to turn round, Pam. Will you do that?"

Pam shut her eyes as she writhed round, on hands and knees, on a ledge narrow enough to be called a "cat's creep." She could tell that he was ready to do his best for her.

"Now, just a bit—without looking round, Pam. Don't you bother about what I'm doing."

"All right, Jimmy."

A few moments after this, there was a scream from Drucilla that made Pam's blood run cold. She thought the unnerved woman had pitched over into the abyss.

Then Pam heard Jimmy's voice:

"Yes, I've got your baby. We're going back. The kid's quite all right, so come on—after me."

"Do I go on, Jimmy?"

"Yes—go on now!"

Pam had been keeping her eyes tightly closed. She opened them, unprepared for the dizzying sight that the abyss offered.

"Well, get on!" Jimmy urged.

"Just a minute, Jimmy. I feel—"

"You're not to! Crawl along. We came that way; we can go back surely!"

But Drucilla was whimpering, and that put more strain than ever upon Pam's nerve, and when she tried—really strove to obtain some power of movement—she simply could not!

CHAPTER 7.

They're Back

TO that amiable and indolent member of the Morcovite batch of holiday-makers, Paula Creel, there was something very nice in lying back, half-asleep, on a shady bank of grass not far from the farmhouse of Sierra Juez.

The day, for Paula, had been one of enforced and not unwelcome idleness. That dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, had been rather trying at times; but Naomer was off the scene at present.

As it was a full hour since tea, Paula could drowsily imagine Naomer as having gravitated to the farmhouse kitchen, there to improve her friendship with one or two servants and, at the same time, perhaps come in for a snack. Preparations for a rather special evening meal were likely to be going forward at this very moment in anticipation of the safe return of Betty and the rest.

But now a slow footfall caused Paula to open her pretty eyes to the early evening sunshine and see that stocky youth, Bobby Bloot, lounging towards her.

"Bai Jove, is that you?"

"That's me." He stated the obvious, smiling his fat smile. "Others not back yet?"

"Er—no, bai Jove! I twust eweverything is all wight with them—what? But their not being able to keep Isabel with them must have wendewed mattas extremely awkward!"

"Oh, I guess they have got along, somehow—seen the famous shrine and done everything else, too," Tubby grinned confidently. "They reckoned to be away until about now. Where's Naomer then?"

"I weally don't know pwecisely! She was heah a little while ago; but I am afraid I was cwoss with her—yes, wather! She is mad to wun waces with those two donkeys, Tubby, and you must wealise I wegawd donkey-widing as being—weall, infwa dig! Er—pway sit down, Tubby."

"But I've been sitting about all day—indoors, too."

All the same, portly Tubby accommodated himself on the grass, and then, consulting his watch—a schoolboy one, of the turnip variety—he found that it had stopped. He gave it some fifty windings, then shook it vigorously.

"Any idea how long till dinner, or supper, or whatever it's to be?"

"Er—I make it three minutes to six, Tubby," said Paula, glancing at her very dainty wrist-watch. "You poor wetch—not meaning to be wude, Tubby. But I hev felt so sowwy for you, incawcwated in that bed-woom all day."

"For a good cause," he said, with characteristic bonhomie. "Oh, and the dodge has answered, too—splendidly! Not one of the servants suspects that when Madame Almaro came upstairs it was not really to see how I was going on, but to attend to her son. By the way, Paula, he's going on splendidly."

"I am so welieved, Tubby. And I pwesume that you are supposed to be—er—weall enough to be about again now? Haw, haw, haw!" Paula chuckled.

"For the present," he nodded. "I may have to stay upstairs again in the morning. Relapse! I don't mind. I've had some lovely grub."

"Bai Jove, I am bound to wemawk, Tubby, you don't appeah to hev suffewed fwom any loss of appetite."

"No. My 'illness' didn't take me that way. 'Smatter of fact," Tubby said with pride, "I always keep my appetite. Don't you feel, Paula, that you could do with a jolly good supper as soon as the others get back? I do! I wonder what we are going to have?"

This being such a matter of concern to Tubby, it must have been an extra-special delight to him when Naomer suddenly scampered upon the scene, primed with information as to the intended menu.

Indeed, Naomer had even enjoyed sundry

"tasters" from dishes that were to come forward later on, so she was fully qualified to assure Tubby that the meal would be a "gorjus" one.

"And now—bekas eet is no good asking Lazy-bones"—this meant Paula. "But come on, Tubby, bekas ze doctor says you must have some exercise to get up your appetite!"

It needed no imaginary doctor to serve as an excuse for exercising Tubby. His very roundtudy warranted his being ambled away, quite willingly, by Naomer, who stood to him as "She-Who-Must-Be-Obeeyed."

The two donkeys were loose in one of the tiny paddocks. They came up at a commanding "Hi!" from Naomer, although her holding out a whole bunch of carrots probably had a good deal to do with such exemplary conduct.

"Zere, Tubby, what do you zink of zat?" Naomer proudly commented, feeding the carrots to both donkeys. "I like zis one ze best, bekas his teeth are not so ugly. Bekas you never know. So you can ride ze other, and when we are both mounted— Hi, what ze diggings—sweendle! Come back!"

For the dusky one's donkey, having artfully seized all the available carrots by one big grab of the mouth, was trotting away.

"Catch him for me, Tubby!"

"Will you hold this one for me, then?"

Tubby said it as if he had already obtained hold of the second donkey, whereas he and it were simply walking round each other, as it were.

Suddenly that donkey upped with his hind legs, nearly catching Tubby in his waistcoat—and was off.

"Well, zat is!" Naomer yelled disgustedly.

"Bekas, no more carrots! But they can't run far, Tubby, bekas of ze walls; so come on—queek! Get zem in ze corner over there."

Tubby was obtaining his exercise right enough now. He was breathless, sticky round the neck, by the time he, with the assistance of agile Naomer, had the two donkeys manoeuvred into that corner of the paddock.

"Now, eef you will help me to mount mine, Tubby, plis! Look out, bekas you never know! What ze diggings," Naomer shrilled, finding herself suddenly taken about the waist and lifted off the ground, "are you doing, Tubby!"

"Huh-hoisting you up!" panted he.

"You silly mutt, zat isn't ze way! No!" said Naomer, when her feet touched the grass again. "Ze best way—me climb on ze wall and you hold ze donkey, and when I have got on his back—but not before, mind!—zen you let go!"

"I don't believe you'll ever stick on. We ought to saddle them. I say, this one seemed to want to bite me!"

"Not ze bit of eet, bekas he was only asking for more carrots. Eet is ze other one that bites," said Naomer, climbing on to the top of the stone wall. "Now zen! Ze grand performance—no waiting!"

There certainly was no keeping any imaginary audience waiting. Paula had come along to look—keeping on the outer side of the paddock wall. She saw Naomer let herself down on to the donkey's back, saw the donkey bolt away with her, and Tubby go rolling over—all in a single moment.

But Naomer, finding she could stay on somehow, was soon yelling gleefully:

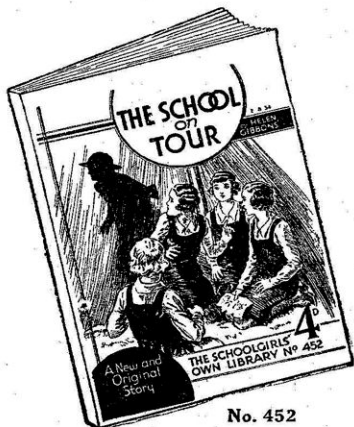
"Gorjus! Come on, Tubby—a race, a race! Hi, Paula, open ze gate for us—queek!"

"Er—"
"Queek!"

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Only hesitantly did Paula act even then; but there was really no call for any haste. Tubby had yet to get mounted, whilst Naomer's donkey galloped with her, round and round the paddock.

That Tubby was determined not to be outdone was evident from his game attempts to catch and mount his donkey whilst in full career. It dodged him, and sometimes it was more a case of his dodging it. There were moments when he got in front and was bowled aside; other moments there were when he nearly had the donkey by the tail, and as nearly got landed with a kick from a back leg.

In vain Paula wailed to him to "Stahp, stahp!" There were Naomer's counter cries commanding Tubby to "Come on, queek!" In any case, he was "not to be beat."

At last he got the donkey by both arms round the neck. Tubby's sheer weight told. The donkey not only stopped, but came nigh to sitting down on top of his captor.

Then Tubby, hopping about on one leg, kept flinging up the other, to get it over the donkey's back. At the sixth or seventh attempt he got himself hooked on by that leg, and with a masterly scramble he came erect on his frisky mount.

It would have been fairer if he could have then enjoyed a moment's breathing space. His coat, turned up at the back, revealed burst braces. But the race had started. Naomer's donkey was off and away out of the paddock, and now Tubby's mount, unbidden, dashed for the gateway.

"Gwacious!"

Paula, seeing the race start like this, wondered how it would end. Naomer was sticking on with a kind of natural aptitude. The donkey ran with her amongst some lemon-trees, came out of that orchard and went full-pelt for an olive grove.

As for Tubby, the last to be seen of him, he was going all out; or, rather, his mount was showing a spirited desire to outrun the other donkey, whilst Tubby himself, looking much too large for such a steed, was more inclined to shout "Whoa!" than "Gee up!"

Isabel came running to Paula, laughing, after both riders had passed out of sight.

"Oh, did you see those two?"

"Yes, bai Jove!"

"But they will be all right," Isabel laughed on. "The donkeys are quite safe to do anything with. We use them in many ways. Soon, you will see, they come trotting back."

Sure enough, two minutes later both equines returned, pottering home to their paddock, but they were riderless.

Paula's fear that this meant a "catastrophe" was soon dispelled. She and Isabel, proceeding to investigate, found that Naomer and Tubby had dismounted on account of Betty and others being in sight—at last!

"And I win!" the dusky one triumphantly asserted. "Didn't I, Tubby? So you owe me a box of chocolates!"

Chubby young Bloot, readjusting coat, collar and tie, acknowledged the fairness of the claim with one of his easy-going smiles. He, in fact, liked excuses for buying Naomer chocolates. Much as she relished sweets, she was inclined to "row" him for wasting his money on her, unless he could show good cause for any bit of extravagance in that direction.

"Yes, we will go to meet our friends," Isabel said in delight, starting to walk on with the two Morcove girls and Tubby. "And, you know, I feel they will have good news. I was sad when

I first get back to the farm; but since two hours I have felt so much better in myself, yes!"

"You can afford to keep smiling," Tubby commented. "Your brother is doing so well. And it's still a secret that he is under your mother's roof. Hallo, though, I don't see Pam and Jimmy!"

"No, bai Jove!"

"Then what does it mean?" was Isabel's uneasy whisper.

"They may be dawdling along together, some way behind the others," Tubby cheerily suggested. "They're great chums, those two."

"Yes, wather! Pam thinks all the world of Jimmy, bai Jove!"

"And he doesn't know it," chuckled Tubby. "And if you told him, he'd wonder why she should. Oh, he's a great lad, Jimmy is! Well, now, I suppose, we'll soon be sitting down to the great do."

"Yes—pipooray!"

But within five minutes after the re-union with Betty and the rest of the returned "hikers," even Naomer and Tubby had lost all eagerness for the evening meal. It was such sensational news that had been brought in, about Drucilla's impulsive departure from the mountain inn, and the equally impulsive setting off—first of Pam, and then of Jimmy, to follow up Drucilla.

"We decided that we must come back by the mountain road," Betty explained. "Of course, we've kept an eye open all the way; but there's not been a sign of them. It's to be hoped they will turn up all right."

"Yes, bekas—you never know!"

"If they don't turn up soon, Dave and I will go out again," Jack announced stolidly. "But—what do you say, Isabel? It might take them all this time and yet everything be going well with them?"

"Oh, yes—yes!" Isabel nodded. "Also, they may think to wait for the darkness, before coming the last part of the way."

"We'll all go out again, if they haven't turned up a little before sunset," Betty said. "Just in case they may be dead beat and want some helping along."

"But you are all so tired——"

"Oh, that's all right, Isabel. Soon feel rested," Polly declared blithely. "Say, in an hour's time."

"I shall go with as many of you as feel equal to it," Isabel gravely remarked. "Rest you must have, and a good meal. Well, it is all prepared. Let us go to the farmhouse and you shall tell my mother of the position. Oh, but I can understand," was added, with a brighter look. "My brother's wife would think: 'After dark will be best to arrive at the farmhouse.'"

"That's about it," Jack agreed optimistically. "And I back Jimmy to see Pam, Drucilla—and the baby!—safely through! Hallo, Tubby; how's Tubby?"

"Not so bad," was the cheerful response from the "invalid."

"Able to sit up and take a little nourishment, eh?" Jack jested, slapping those fat shoulders. "Stout fellow!"

Tubby, in spite of his "incawcawation," as Paula had called it, certainly showed as good an appetite as any of those who had been out on the mountains all day. But that evening meal was fated to be interrupted in dramatic fashion, before it was half over.

They were all at table, feeling cheery enough on the theory that the absentees were only hang-

ing about for the fall of night, at some spot from which they knew they could come on in safety after dark. Madame Almaro, presiding at the supper table, was joining in all the half-jocular talk as to how Drucilla and the baby were now to be housed, without suspicion being aroused that she was the wife of "wanted" Fernando Almaro.

And then, suddenly, a weary-sounding step clacked on the tiled floor of the veranda, and they all glanced towards the open glass doors to see Pam as she showed herself there—alone!

CHAPTER 8.

Bobby Does His Bit

"PAM!"

Her Morcove chums and the boys were quickest of all to jump up from the supper table.

She looked worn out—dead beat. Her face, one of such delicate loveliness and normally so serene in its expression, looked changed—haggard. And so, whilst Isabel and her mother also jumped up from their chairs, the horrified juniors exclaimed again:

"Pam!"

"Yes, well," she said exhaustedly, another dragging step bringing her across the threshold. "I'm sorry, but Drucilla's all right, anyway. And the baby."

"And Jimmy—where's he?" clamoured Polly and Judy. "What about Jimmy?"

"Steady a bit," Betty interposed. She dashed some water into a tumbler and took it to Pam. "Here, dear——"

"Oh, thanks. That's better," Pam panted, after a sip or two.

"Sit down—this chair, Pam——"

"Yes, I'd better rest while I can. Got to go out again at once—with some of you——"

"Why? Why, Pam?" was the louder clamour. They wanted to spare her, but anxiety overrode even their pity for her in this distressed state. "What's happened, then!"

"Drucilla is all right, with the baby," Pam repeated, swiftly regaining her clear voice. "I left her at the foot of the mountain, in hiding. She's coming on after dark——"

"Ah, yes!" Isabel's mother nodded. "Good! But your young friend—Jimmy?"

"I'll tell you," Pam said, after another reviving sip of water. "First, in fairness to Jimmy; he wanted me to turn back, when he caught me up, and let him be the only one to keep after Drucilla. But I wouldn't."

"No, Pam; we understand," whispered Betty.

"So we went on together and—overtook Drucilla. I—I'm not going into details. It was a pretty awkward climb, in places. On this side it got worse and worse; and Jimmy said we must all turn back. Drucilla had rather gone to bits, poor soul. But I don't know that I was any better. What with one and another of us, Jimmy had a pretty rotten time. Jimmy was simply—splendid. For a time he carried the baby."

She paused, and they saw her take her underlip between her teeth, as if she were trying not to cry.

"But we didn't go back, after all—not to the other side. We tried another way, and seemed to be coming down the mountain on this side all right, and then—there was another of those horrid, awkward places. You know the sort of thing

"Yes, wather," Paula shuddered. "Dreadful!"

"By the way, Jimmy had thought to buy a rope from the woman at the inn. We had that. We were all three roped together. It was a place where we simply had to go on, because we couldn't even turn round. And then—Jimmy was helping me, when he slipped."

"Oh!"

"He hung by the rope. He'd looped it over a point of rock, so that Drucilla and I were not pulled off our balance. He tried to climb back, but was whacked by a round ledge. Then we tried to pull him up, but couldn't do it at once. Then he called out that he was going to cut the rope, as he thought he could drop safely to another ledge."

Pam's eyes, by now, were liquid.

"He was doing that for our sakes, we knew. He—cut the rope—"

"Oh!" several of the listeners moaned, whilst others drew breath in a hissing way.

"Jimmy," Jack said thickly. "Old Jimmy!"

"I'm sure it was a thousand to one chance," Pam quavered on, "and it came off. He landed on that other ledge. By lying down flat on our ledge, I could just see over and see him. He

we did manage, but we did, or I wouldn't be here. How long have we got before it gets dark?"

"Hour and a half, say," Dave answered crisply. "You can't describe the way for us chaps to go?"

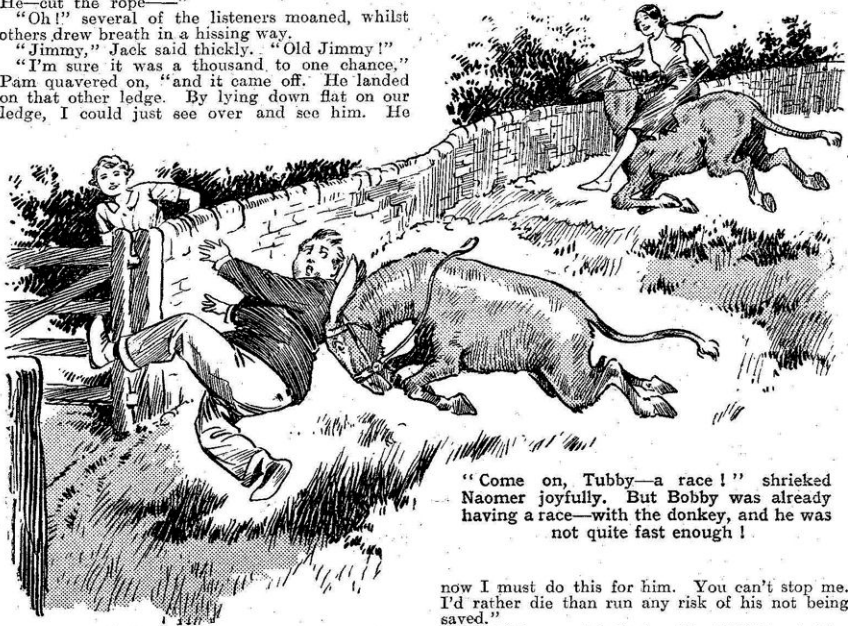
"Oh, no! Impossible. But I can come with you and show you—"

"Pam, listen here," Jack gently cut her short. "You can't go out again. You're done."

"I'm not—I'm not!"

"You give us the best idea you can, and then—remember this, we can hail him, and he'll hear us. We can shout as much as we like, what does it matter? There's no need for secrecy now. Besides—"

"I am not going to remain here. I can't!" Pam said fiercely. "He did that for me and Drucilla,



"Come on, Tubby—a race!" shrieked Naomer joyfully. But Bobby was already having a race—with the donkey, and he was not quite fast enough!

was there, and he called up that he was all right. But I believe he was hurt. He smiled, but then—he would. And so I—I want to go back now," she said, suddenly standing up. "And get him away. I want to save him. I only came on here, because I knew I must have help—a fresh rope—"

"Yes, Pam; yes, dear," Betty said lumpily. "And it's all right; we'll go with you as soon as you have had a bite and a rest. You must, you know—"

"Bekas zere is nothing like a snack, Pam, to keep you on ze go! And zis time I am coming!" Naomer declared shrilly.

"I'm going, I know that," Tubby said flatly.

"I told Jimmy, of course, that I'd come back," Pam faltered on. "But do you know, he seemed to be only thinking then about how Drucilla and I would get on. Well, I don't exactly know how

now I must do this for him. You can't stop me. I'd rather die than run any risk of his not being saved."

"He'll be saved," Jack said. "We'll get him. Shall need some lanterns."

"I will find some," Isabel said, briskly turning away to the door.

Then she came back to give Pam a quick kiss.

"Si!" Madame Almaro exclaimed, and took Pam by the arm, leading her to the supper-table.

"You will eat—ah, you must!"

"I suppose I had better. We have to wait for the lanterns, anyhow."

"What time was it, Pam, when this happened to Jimmy—roughly?" Dave presently inquired in his wise and quiet way.

"Oh, hours ago! Drucilla and I seemed to be ages after that, scrambling about as best we could. And it took me a good while to come on here after leaving her and the baby. I'm ashamed of the time it took me."

"You've a lot to be ashamed about, you have,

Pam!" Polly murmured admiringly. "You and Jimmy, between you!"

"Yes!" voiced others.
 "It won't be me and Jimmy any more—ever—unless we hurry," Pam said, rising from her hasty meal. "He is there on a sort of rock-ledge, like where an eagle might build its nest. I'll have to take you to where we shall be above him, so we can let down a rope."

Isabel came back with some stable lanterns of very ancient make. Two of them were fitted with sheets of horn instead of glass.

Madame Almaro had been busy at the supper-table, making up some supplies of food from the cold viands, for the rescue-party to take with them. Now she filled a couple of flasks with drinkables of a restorative nature.

"In this, a little cognac with the water," she remarked, "in case of need. That poor boy may be far gone by the time you have saved him. And now, as I would only be a hindrance if I came, I shall go to the kitchen and ask if there is a man or two who will volunteer to go with you. There may be one who is used to the mountains and—"

And there Madame Almaro broke off abruptly. She had detected—and they had all picked up—a murmur of masculine voices and accompanying footfalls, close at hand in the open air.

Her eyes turned to meet Isabel's, whilst several of the juniors turned to one another in sudden alarm.

"Soldiers!" Polly voiced the general belief.
 "No," said Dave, who had sharply stepped to the french windows to peer out. "Police! They're coming in this way. Why, they are some of those police who—"

He could have said the rest, but there was no need, and Dave never spoke without need. The doorway taking the french windows was suddenly filled by a pack of men, consisting of an officer, a sergeant, and several stalwart fellows corresponding to our ordinary constables, although they each had a revolver in its holster.

Even as the officer, checking the men behind him, gravely saluted Madame Almaro, Betty and her companions of the day were recognising him as the officer who had inspected their passports at the top of the pass.

He advanced into the room and conversed with

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JACK LINTON'S DARING



By Marjorie Stanton

Madame Almaro rapidly for a full minute. The rest were not only mute, but like figures in a tableau.

Then Madame Almaro turned to her daughter and the juniors.

"They have found the poor boy—"

"Oh!"

"They pulled him up. One of the men on patrol saw him through some glasses. He is now at the guard-room at the top of the pass."

"Jimmy is!" gasped Jack. "Oh, heck!"

"But why—why haven't they brought him back here?" Pam demanded, stepping forward. "It's fine of them to have saved him. I want to—to reward that man. But they shouldn't have spoiled a good deed by keeping him there!"

"No, bai Jove!"

"Bekas, what ze diggings, I hope zey haven't forgotten to give him a good feed!"

"It appears," Madame Almaro said sighingly, "he is under arrest."

"What?"

"They will not release him until they know more."

"Goodness!"

"Si!" Isabel's mother spoke on gravely. "They found him with the rope he had cut still tied round him. So they could tell that he had been linked with others. They are suspicious. Their orders are, to be very strict. They wish to know how many others there were—and who they were!"

"And Jimmy hasn't said?" cried Jack. "Good old Jimmy!"

Betty nudged Polly to look at Pam. That young face, a few minutes since so ravaged with anxiety and grief, was now irradiated as from a great inward light.

"No, my dear young friends," Madame Almaro said slowly. "Your Jimmy—he would not say anything."

One or two of them heard Pam fetch a deep breath.

"Yes, well," Pam smiled, "we can't tell these men anything."

"Oh, no!"

"Wather not, bai Jove!"
 "Bekas, eef we do—what ze diggings, zen zey will know—"

"Sh'rrp, kid!" Polly hissed. "Er—Tubby—"

"Yes, Tubby," Jack interposed genially. "Time you went upstairs to bed, Tubby!"

"I'm going," said the beefy one, who had not needed to be told what this fresh emergency meant. Fernando, upstairs, must be warned! "Good-night, all!"

The officer called out to Tubby at the latter's first step in the direction of the door. As the sharp word was in Spanish, Tubby pretended not to understand. He was going to get away from here and hurry upstairs to warn Fernando to leave at once.

"Stop!" Madame Almaro called out next moment. "You must not go!"

"Pardon?" Tubby said, going on to the door whilst he looked round, his fat face lending itself so well to an expression of stupidity.

"You must stay here, the officer says, until his men have surrounded the house."

"Can't," said Tubby. "Tell him I'm seedy!"

And, affecting sudden signs of biliousness, Tubby went out as if the order had never been voiced—one more of the juniors to play the right part at the right moment in this strange drama of the summer "hols."