

Treasure Hunt

by Jennifer Clare

"There's nothing to do!"
"I'm boooooored!"
"Please can we play on your tablet?"
"You are so mean!"

The twins had only been off school for a week of the summer holiday and had already exhausted their parents' patience. There had been bike rides and a trip to the park, ice creams, a longer screen time allowance, and even a movie night.

Yet now, surrounded with toys, art supplies, and books galore, the twins were hanging backwards off the couch, complaining.

Their parents looked at one another. They'd be thrilled to have ample free time to play, draw and read.

"Read the new comics Nana sent you."
"Blah."
"Start working on your summer school project."
"Not yet!"
"Well, then go clean your rooms."
"Noooo!"
"You're so unfair!"
"A bit of work never hurt anyone. And your socks smell. So gather up the washing, make your beds, and tidy up. Go!"

Aside from the grumbling coming from upstairs as the twins slammed doors and threw themselves on the furniture, there was a brief oasis of calm. Both parents breathed a sigh of relief.

"I have a plan. Tonight, when they're asleep, we'll make a map of the back garden. Let them play pirates. We won't hear from them for weeks."

"Really? I wish I had your faith! They're driving me nuts. Fingers crossed this works. Whatever it takes, count me in."

Soon after bedtime, two shadowy figures tiptoed into the backyard, walking heel to toe across the dark lawn. They wrote notes on a piece of dirty paper with a stump of charcoal and made cryptic noises such as *217 paces North by Northeast and South 47 to the tree*.

The next morning, the twins complained about not being able to watch television all day and eat chocolate spread out of the jar.

They dawdled getting dressed, knocked over a vase of flowers throwing their socks at each other, and were about to be sent to their rooms when a knock on the door revealed a wizened figure holding a small wooden box.

It shuffled back and forth, eyes down and hat pulled low. "I has something fer the young 'uns. I b'lieve this is what they were seeking."

The twins looked around, perplexed.

“The cure for what ails you lies within,” it said, shoving the box into the twins’ hands and limping rapidly around the corner.

“What is it?”

“Quick! Open it!”

“Lemme!”

“Stop squabbling. Let’s open it carefully. It looks very old.”

The box opened with a low creak, revealing a purple silk bag. Inside was a yellowing scroll sealed with a blob of black wax embossed with a faint skull and crossbones.

Carefully they prised the seal off, and unrolled the paper to find a tattered map with a big red X in the centre. Enigmatic notes were written in faded ink along the side:

N x NE 37

E 13

S x SW 42

Due W 13

SE 23

One a day to treat what ails you.

Two pillars guard the home’s egress.

Third is safety, shelter, storage.

Dig near granite to find success.

“Look – is that a tree?”

“That might be a little building.”

“And that might be a fence or a hedge.”

“What do the numbers mean?”

“And what’s that poem about?”

The twins looked out the window at the garden, then at one another.

“That could be our apple tree.”

“The little building could be the shed.”

“THERE COULD BE TREASURE IN OUR GARDEN!”

“Can we look for it? Can we?”

“Of course! Go for it! Dig for treasure in the back garden. There are tools in the shed. See what you can find.”

“But first you’ll have to figure out what all those numbers mean. No digging until you’re sure that X marks the spot.”

Finally sitting down to a cup of coffee in peace, the parents watched as the twins argued over the tools, who would be boss, who got to hold the map, and where to begin.

“You need a little coconut oil near your hairline, dear. A bit of that makeup is showing. That was a good disguise.”

“Yeah, they didn’t have a clue, did they? And listen to that quiet...Bliss.”

The children ran back into the house for their Scout compasses, grabbing two apples on their way out the door. For the next few hours, until lunchtime, they walked around and around the garden, tried to make sense of the compass, double-checked

with the map, and argued over how many steps to take and in which direction.

Their parents asked if they'd figured out where the treasure was.

"We don't know for sure."

"That poem doesn't make any sense."

"We walked all over the garden."

"You'll figure it out. Now grab those apple cores and wash your hands for dinner."

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away!"

The twins looked at each other.

One a day to treat what ails you.

"Maybe that's the apple tree! We have to start from there!"

"And the next bit could be near the pavement - Two pillars guard the home's egress.

It could mean the concrete posts holding the garden gate!"

"What's the next bit?"

Third is safety, shelter, storage.

"That could be the shed!"

"But how does it fit together?"

"I still don't know what the last bit means."

Dig near granite to find success.

"You'll have to sleep on it, and figure it out tomorrow. We're having pizza for dinner, so you two pirates will have to leave it until then."

"And tomorrow morning you need to clean your rooms properly."

"Or you'll have to walk the plank!"

The next morning the twins were up early, washed and dressed. As soon as they'd loaded their breakfast bowls in the dishwasher they went upstairs and spent a quiet hour, squabble-free, tidying their rooms and making their beds.

"Who stole our children?! I have to admit I like these two substitutes."

"It's us! We just want to get back into the garden to figure out the clues."

"We were going to take you swimming. After all, we don't want you to be bored."

"We don't need entertainment. We just want to crack on with our treasure hunt."

"Well, if you're sure.."

The back door slammed before the sentence ended.

The parents looked at one another and smiled.

Dig near granite to find success.

"What can that mean? There's no rocks here."

"Maybe there were when the map was made. It looks pretty old."

"Or we might be looking at it all wrong."

The twins tried turning the map upside down and sideways but were still perplexed.

"Let's use our senses. What do we see?"

"Nothing! That's why it's so frustrating!"

“What do we feel?”

“Impatient. We must be close to the treasure.”

“What sounds are there?”

The twins listened carefully but couldn't hear anything but children laughing at the park and the drone of a lawnmower.

“Wait...I think I've got it. You know when we're doing gardening and whoever's mowing hits something with the mower in the middle of the lawn and it scrapes?”

“What if that's the tip of a big rock?”

“That could be it! Let's go check!”

For the next few hours, there was only the clink of tools hitting rock, trowels and shovels moving earth, and grunts and huffs of exertion from the twins.

At last, the first sods were turned over, and the children began to dig.

Slowly, the tip of a large rock emerged, and the patch of dirt around it grew as they dug deeper. Soon the little hole extended half a metre.

They found worms and some beetles that ran away from the light. And finally, their hard work paid off - with a bit of rusty wire. A rock shaped like a rocket. And an old piece of Lego.

Dejected, they trudged into the house for lunch.

“Let's see your treasures, then. Nice! We can display them in this old curio cabinet. There are twelve cubbyholes – see if you can find something interesting for each one.”

“Yo ho ho. C'mon, me hearties!”

“You scurvy sea dog!”

Laughing, they ran out of the house and picked up their tools once more.

Another hour of digging produced a penny, a rusty screw, and most of an old tobacco tin.

They'd laid an old tarp on the grass for the dirt, and they periodically sifted through it with a colander from the kitchen cupboard.

There was a buckle. A small green marble. And part of a white clay pipe.

“Pirates were definitely here.”

“We've just got to keep digging!”

But before they could get started again, they were called into the house for dinner.

“So annoying. Just when we were getting somewhere,”

“That marble won't stay. It keeps rolling around.”

“I'll get a blob of Blu-Tac to stick it down.”

The twins woke up early and were back at the rock as soon as they could.

“It's got to be here somewhere. Keep digging!”

“What if it’s UNDER the rock?”

“I don’t think so. Pirates would want to be able to get their treasure easily. It’s got to be somewhere close.”

Digging diligently until noon, the twins unearthed two musket balls, a buckle, and a broken piece of pottery. Each piece was placed in the curio cabinet after lunch.

“You’re doing great. Look how you’re digging in time!”

“Yeah, but we’ve filled up all the cubbyholes with junk and there’s still no treasure.”

“Never mind. Maybe the pirates came back years ago and took it away.”

“But then why would one show up and knock on the door with a map?”

“Hmm. Good point. Well, what do you want to do?”

“KEEP DIGGING!”

The twins hurried back outside

“What are we going to tell them when they don’t find anything, CleverClogs?”

“I didn’t think about that. I thought maybe we could fob them off with a bag of chocolate coins in the hole.”

“I don’t think they’ll appreciate that. Not with how old everything else is.

“We could bury something ancient-looking.”

“Like what?”

“I dunno. We could find something at the antique market, maybe?”

“Maybe...I thought they’d have lost interest before now.”

“Me, too. Turns out our twins have perseverance.”

The trench was deep enough now to stand in and circled the rock, but the twins still hadn’t reached the bottom of it.

“I’m getting tired.”

“Me, too.”

“But I don’t want to quit.”

“No way. Let’s go once more around and see if we find anything.”

They dug for another five minutes when they heard a dull thud. Dropping to their knees, they picked at the spot with their trowels, and gradually exposed a piece of crumbling wood. Inside was a decrepit piece of leather. And inside that...

“GOLD!”

“We found it!”

Grabbing their parents and a camera, they carefully photographed the hole, then took the decaying pieces of timber and pouch and set them aside. Inside were ten gold coins.

“Ooh, twins, you did it! You actually found treasure!”

“Let’s take this to the museum and see what they can tell us.”

“You have ten Roman coins here, from Vespasian, Hadrian, and Constantine. The earliest ones date back to about 70 AD, and the rest are from around 300 BC.”

“Can we keep them?”

“We’ll have to report the find. It’s good that you took photos. We’ll send a team round to take a seismic survey and some drone images to see if there is anything else there.”

“Are we rich?”

“Probably not. But we’ll make a display here in the museum and take your pictures, and record how you found them. And there will probably be a small cash reward, as well.”

“Whoo-hoo! We can buy an xbox!”

“And I can get some plants for the new rock garden you dug for me.”