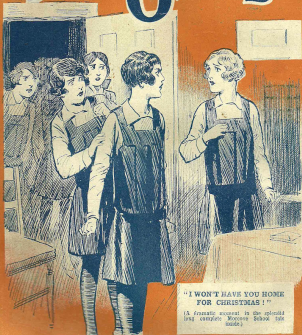


A FINE CHRISTMAS GIFT—
The Golden Annual for Girls - - 4/6

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2d



"I WON'T HAVE YOU HOME
FOR CHRISTMAS!"

(A dramatic account in the splendid
long complete "Mooney School tale
inside.")

A splendid complete story of the chums of Morcov School.



NOT WORTH HER LOYALTY!

By MARJORIE STANTON

It is a difficult choice that has fallen to Pam Willoaghty—whether to disappoint her best chums over Christmas or to desert her boy cousin in his hour of trial. Being Pam, she cannot do the latter. But is her cousin, after all, worth the loyalty that is to mean her chums' bitter disappointment?

Keeping It From Them!

It was a strange thing for Polly Linton, madcap of the Fourth Form at Morcov School, to be doing. Her air of secrecy and haste over this bit of letter-writing was most unusual.

Polly's letters were generally dashed off amidst the hubbub of the Study 12 coterie. But at this moment she was evidently glad to be alone, and anxious to finish before any of her chums came romping in.

"Something will have to be done, Jack, but I would not let them know at home, at present," she wrote on. "Can't we meet for a talk? I think we should, as soon as possible."

Dipping her pen, Polly gave a relieved glance to the still unopened door. Then she raised the pen again.

"Try to arrange it, Jack. If you can come half-way, then I expect I can manage the other half. The days are short now, but—"

A bounding step in the corridor! Quickly, Polly smooched a blotter over the unfinished letter, and she was folding up the missive, to finish it elsewhere, when Naomer Nakara whirled in.

Bang! Naomer cast away her lacrosse stick, then darted to the corner cupboard.

"Bekas, Polly. I don't know which makes you mean hungrier than the other—lacrosse or hockey!"

"I know which takes more out of you, anyway," puffed Betty Barton as she romped in, bringing Helen Craig, Madge Minden, and several others. "Pouf!"

Polly's letter was out of sight now. She was the madcap again, borrowing Betty's lacrosse stick to tip-toe after Naomer.

That little imp, just as she was looking inside the study's private larder, found her head being adroitly nipped. Polly pulled, and there were shrieks of laughter as Naomer floundered like a landed fish.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What so diggings!" yelled Naomer.

"You are not to spoil your appetite for dinner!"

"The gee, bal Jove," said Paula Creel of Naomer, "does nothing but think of food! She has been whispering about Christmas all the morning in class; dawdling Christmas puddings, with flames like a bonfire!"

"Bekas— But what so diggings?" shrieked Naomer, suddenly pointing to a tear-off calendar that was one day behind. "Ooo, queek, who has been forgetting—another day nearer!"

"Hooray, yes!" cheered Helen, as the imp tore off the leaf, bringing the calendar up to date. "Only a fortnight now—"

"Less than a fortnight, Helen!" Betty would have it remembered exactly. "Twelve days!"

"Good job, Gorjus. Bekas this Christmas—Ooo," and Naomer gave a great smack of the lips. "It will be something like for the doings, you see!"

"You weren't on the field for lacrosse-prancer, Polly," the Form captain blithely remarked to her study-mate. "Why not?"

"Other things to do!"

"I believe Polly is going in for being a poet again," joked Helen. "To recite at Christmas. The sort that begins:

"'T was the eve of Christmas,
The snow lay all around—"

Betty put both hands to her ears.

"Ah, bah, as best one I know is the one," said Naomer, "that says:

"Christmas come but once a year,
And when he does, he brings the doings."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Food again," said Paula, combing her hair.

"Weally, she's dreadful!"

Noomer snatched up one of the lacrosse sticks.

"Who is dreadful, you say, queek, Paula!"

"Er—er—when I said— Ow! When I said— Ouch! Noomer, ee— Heelp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beckas," said Noomer, with Paula's writhing head in the net of the stick, "I am going to have an apology, queek!"

The ensuing commotion enabled Polly to seize the chance to slip away. A post went out at one o'clock, and if her letter to Jack went off then, he might get it this evening.

"Now, Noomer," the Form captain gaily admonished the teaser, "if you want to do that—outside!"

So Noomer towed helpless Paula into the passage and round to a neighbouring study. It was Pam Willoughby's—much too bondoir-like a study for Paula to be yanked into it so boisterously by the innp. But Pam only laughed.

"With no compliments of no season!" Noomer said, making a present of her fouled catch to Pam.

"I am furious," Paula announced, shaking herself to rights. "Pam dear, are you weally going to have Noomer at Swanlake for Christmas? If so, weally I think I had better reconsider maitahs!"

"Oh—Christmas," smiled Pam.

"Twelve days; only twelve!" Noomer yelled, spongering back to Study II.

Pam and Paula repaired thither, together, and perhaps Pam was looking rather serious, compared with the rest, for Helen said:

"And now, here's Pam, to say that we can't go to Swanlake for Christmas, after all!"

"Groans," said Betty. "But you can't, Pam; our arrangements are all made! You wouldn't have us, when breaking-up day comes, all dressed up and nowhere to go!"

The gang was heard, and Noomer yelled: "Dinner! Ooo, gorjus; six time twelve days from now, we shall all be sitting down to a turkey!"

"Meantime," said Madge, "it's Irish stew. I think some of us had better give up talking about Christmas so soon!"

"To see the shops in Barncombe, you wouldn't say it was too soon!" cried Helen, as the chums began to trail out of the study. "And I mean to do some present-buying when school's over for the day, if I can get permish."

"Yes, wather!" With a glance to make sure that Pam would not overhear, Paula said with a certain anxiety: "Must find a nice present, grawk, for Mrs. Willoughby!"

Pam, as it happened, had dropped behind the others, and now she turned aside into her study. At the risk of being late at table, she spent a minute walking about as if in furious thought.

In this study also there was a calendar, and Pam's eyes went to it. Christmas Day was shown in a red square. And in all the year, was there a more important red-letter day than Christmas! So Pam was realizing afresh, whilst she wondered how she could save this coming Yuletide from disaster!

At last, with a little sigh which indicated that the problem was by no means solved, she quitted the room. Downstairs, she came upon one other junior who was going to be a trifle late at table. Polly Linton was shooting a letter into the post-box.

The two girls exchanged smiles; but that was all. But, if it was apparent that here were two schoolfellows who had fallen out with each other, it was equally obvious that neither girl felt any silly spite. And a keen observer would have noticed that both girls made a point of looking quite untroubled as they rejoined the others in the dining-room.

There, at the Fourth Form table, the flow of talk was as pleasant as ever, with Miss Massingham presiding in a very amiable mood. It was Helen Craig who, noticing how sweet-tempered the Form mistress seemed to be, at last decided that this would be a good moment for asking a certain favour.

"After school, Miss Massingham, I suppose those of us who want to may bike into Barncombe for some shopping?"

But Miss Massingham was not quite as amenable as all that.

"What, another run into town! Oh, I think—"

"Beckas Christmas—"

"Noomer, how often must I tell you not to interrupt! No, girls," Miss Massingham addressed the table in general, "to-morrow is a half-day holiday. Plenty of time then, surely, for you to do any shopping. After all, Christmas is—"

"Twelve days—"

"Noomer! What did I say!"

"You said, plis, plenty of time for shopping; but I think it would be better if—"

"And I think, Noomer, it will be a lesson to you if you do fifty lines by to-morrow morning. Girls, you may—die!"

To Polly, as to the rest of the Form, it was merely another instance of Miss Massingham's underlying grumpiness, that shopping had to be deferred until to-morrow. It was not until next middy that the madcap had a sudden special and secret reason for being glad that a jaunt into town on the previous afternoon had been refused.

It meant, as she knew, that the "halfer" had now been entirely set apart for a shopping expedition on the grand scale. There would be no gambs—all to the good, so far as Polly was concerned. She would have hated having to drop out of an inter-Form match; but letting the others go into Barncombe without her was going to be a very simple matter.

They might think it rather odd, unaccusable even, but that could not be helped. What she had to do was to act on a certain telegram which had come into her hands a few minutes since, the message saying:

"MEET ME ROUNDHOUSE, HALF-WAY, FOUR TO-DAY — VERY IMPORTANT.—JACK."

The Pity Of It!

TING-A-LING, ting-ling! chimed the cycle-bells.

"Careful at the gates, Noomer!"

Tr-ring, ring, ting-a-ling!

"Dash—my tyre's gone again already!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Hard luck, Elta!"

"F'll catch you up, girls!"

"Right-ho!"

And out by the school gateway rode the juniors—all except Elta Hargrove, readily wheeling her machine to where the faulty valve of that Gabby tyre could be seen to ooze more.

It was whilst Elta was getting the valve out

that Polly Linton came speeding along down the drive.

"Hallo, Polly—just look at me, at the start!"

"Oh, dear! Can I help?"

"No, thanks. You catch up with the others, Polly. What made you late at starting, then?"

"Oh— And the rest was a "not worth mentioning" shrug from Polly as she went upon her way.

A bit of a scare coming upon Etta just then! If that girl had been ready to remount, then Polly would have had Etta joining her. But it was all right; Etta would be a few minutes yet, whilst the other girls were already spinning along the road to Barncombe.

For a few hundred yards Polly followed, without overtaking her schoolmates. Then, where a by-road led off across the open moorland, she took that direction, all alone.

The Roundhouse—she knew it well. Miles to go; but, at any rate, there was to be no risk of her failing to meet her brother, thanks to his specifying that place in his telegram. It was really an old toll-house, standing at some cross-roads about equi-distant from Morcove and Grangemore schools.

Whirr, whirr! Polly pedalled almost as hard as a girl could have gone along that very second-class road. The stiffness of the journey was not going to trouble her in the least, but she was already wishing it had been possible to have companions.

Secrecy; keeping things from others, and keeping apart from them—there was nothing Polly hated more! Yet what alternative had there been to-day? None, unless she had wished Betty and the rest to know that she was very worried—about Christmas!

So she had given them the slip, letting them suppose that she would turn up in their midst in Barncombe during the afternoon.

Ah, but it was sad to think that, even now, whilst she was seeking this meeting with her schoolboy brother, simply on account of the threat to Yuletide joys, those dear chams of hers were shopping—for Christmas!

"Choosing, some of them, what they shall give Pam's mother, for having them there!" ran the distressed thought in Polly's mind.

"And, so far as I can see at present, not one of us will be able to go to Swanlake in the hole. Oh, dash!"

The exclamation had nothing to do with a puncture or any other hindrance to the desperate journey. The "bike" was running sweetly. Polly's fuming ulceness was due to her thoughts of Pamela's cousin, Billy Chartors—bether him! Cause of all the trouble!

Mile after mile Polly pedalled on, meeting no one, for at this dead season of the year the vast stretches of moorland country were in a very deserted state; on and on, with dark heather and dead bracken on either side all the way!

Polly never tired, although

there were hills in plenty. But—going back, if the talk with Jack should have served so purpose; ough, what a temper she was likely to be in then!

At last, with a good fifteen miles behind her, she had the Roundhouse showing up before her, where it stood by the cross-roads. Another minute or so and she was dismounting, giving a little post! It was warm work—and Jack would come along presently as cool as you please, comfortably astride his motor-cycle!

"Time I got myself one, I think, if I'm to be so everlastingly rushed about," she half-sadly said to herself, "trying to be things right!"

Meanwhile, she leant her cycle against the sign-post, one of whose arms said:

"To Swanlake."

Polly grimaced, reading the words.

"To Swanlake"—if they'd only let you go there! But—ah, boys are a nuisance! We would be fixed up so nicely by now; everything settled—if only—

Hark!

Ending the rather eerie silence of the lonely moors, there was the faint thrum! of an approaching motor-cycle.

A few moments, and Jack, as he pulled up beside the road, was vociferating a rather serious:

"Well, Polly? Been waiting?" he asked, loosening his school scarf now that he was out of the saddle. "Sorry I couldn't come to Morcove, and so save you the journey, Polly; but I had a match, and I have to be back for a special Fern meeting at five."

"Oh, it was all right—I didn't mind the distance. Anything, Jack if it can help matters! What do you feel now?"

"About Billy Chartors? The same."

That drew a troubled: "Oh, dear!" from Polly.



Just as Naomer was looking into the study larder, Polly nattered her with the laconic stick. "What 's diggings!" yelled Naomer indignantly.

"You can guess, Jack, that Pam's feelings are not changing. She will have it that Billy could not have done what's being said about him. And how can one argue with her—what's the use of pointing out that all your school believes it?"

"Not a bit of use," said Jack in his downright way. "She is Billy's cousin. Just as you would stick up for me, Polly, and all the more, if all my school were against me. You haven't gone for her, I hope!"

"Not to—not exactly to quarrel. We did have an argument," Polly owned gloomily. "And, of course, Christmas crepped up. Oh, Jack, what is to be done about Christmas—and it's so near now?"

"Awful! Dave and Mike and I—we were talking about it this morning. They knew I was coming along to meet you. I don't see—none of us chaps see," Jack continued, shifting his cap to delve fingers into his kinky hair, "how the dickens we can go to Pam's home in the boat. Charters will be there, and, even if he weren't, it 'ud be almost as bad. Christmas is a time for pals to be together."

"I know. Fancy, all of us—and Billy Charters, and Pam on his side, at she has every right to be—under one roof!"

After a big sigh, Polly resumed:
"I've been sort of hoping—oh, you know! That perhaps Billy Charters had been found not to have done it, after all; that perhaps the Fletcher fellow had found he was sort of mistaken!"

"Don't I wish I could tell you that, Polly!" was the wistful response. "But—no. All that's happened, in the last day or two, is that the House cap, Fletcher has insisted over and over again—because Billy will keep on denying it—that Billy did the mischief."

"You were in such a hurry when you told me, and your letters haven't put it any too clearly, Jack!" exclaimed his sister. "What really did happen last Saturday?"

"Simply this. Fletcher had an idea that Charters would float the gating order and go off to Swanlake. Sure enough, the chap did—as you know. Fletcher caught him going off, and the next thing was a blow from Billy Charters that knocked out the cap. He was muttering about Billy when they found him in the larches beside the road, and he has stuck to it ever since that Charters did it!"

Jack added disgustedly:
"It wasn't a blow given in fair fight, or I could excuse it, and I'm sure Fletcher would never have breathed a word. I tell you, Polly, we can't find a thing to be said for Billy Charters now."

"Well, I go by your opinion, Jack, of course," Polly said. "And so it's quite certain, Pam and I will never agree, and as for spending Christmas at her house—"

A despondent sigh completed the remark. For a full minute brother and sister stood mute and gloomy, vaguely conscious of the surroundings and the weather being anything but cheering influences. The moonland itself was so gloomy under a cloudy sky.

"Oh, but," Polly suddenly burst out, "we shall simply have to go to Swanlake and—and trust to luck."

"We can't do that, Polly. Nobody," said Jack, "can accept an invitation to a house and then be at war with the daughter of that house—over a relation of hers, too! Polly, we can't

go, so now we've got to arrange how to cancel Christmas at Swanlake—"

"Without upsetting the others, if possible," was Polly's quick rejoinder.

She frowned and plucked a lip.

"It's going to be hard, Jack! If we work it through major and dad, saying nothing ourselves, what on earth will the others think? We shall be bombarded with questions."

"Besides, isn't it better to be quite frank with Pam?"

"Much better, Jack. Look here, now that I've had this talk with you, and I know that it's all up, I had better—"

"Polly, I don't like the idea of your having to do it," her brother struck in. "As a matter of fact, I—I prepared a note for Pam; it's here," and he whipped it from a breast-pocket. "You read what I have said, Polly, will you?"

She did so, and whilst her face showed sadness over the nature of the note, she also revealed admiration at the niceness with which Jack had put everything.

"Yes," she exclaimed, returning the letter to its envelope. "Shall I take this, then, and give it to Pam, and then I can be ready to add anything on my own account?"

"If you would, Polly—"

"It's the best thing now, Jack. You've put things awfully well. I do so want Pam to understand that we are both terribly sorry."

At that instant a spot of rain smote Polly's head. She looked up to the sky.

"Of course it would! Just because I've come all this way—and for such a cheerful reason! Oh, Jack, everything seems just horrid all at once. I was so looking forward to Christmas. We'll not be together now."

He nodded dejectedly.

"First time for years, you and I won't be with your chums of Morocco and with my best pal of Grangemoor—Dave Lawdier. If only Billy Charters had been the right sort. What a party it would have been this Christmas! Dave, Mike Heriot, Lionel Derwent, Billy—if only Billy had been all right—"

"And just because he isn't— Oh, well!" Polly sighed. "Good-bye, Jack; I had better be off at once. I'll let you know how it goes off."

"Hope you get back all right, Polly. What are the others doing this afternoon?"

"Shopping for Christmas," she said, at the same time slipping on a feather-weight waterproof which had been strapped, folded up, in the handbags. "Buying presents for Swanlake. Oh, dash this horrid rain! Bye-bye!"

"Best of luck, Polly!"

"There's not much luck going, is there?" she jested a trifle bitterly; and then she was off once more, taking the long road back to Morocco.

Jack watched her until she was a vanishing figure in the fine rain. Then, with a regretful shrug and a muttered word or two, he went to his motor-cycle. Polly was pedalling hard in the one direction, when she heard him speeding away upon his homeward journey.

Soon she knew that the rain had set in for a steady downpour. It had all the nasty, stinging, try qualities of winter rain coming on towards dusk.

She was well protected, and of all Morocco's girls she was the very hardiest. Had this been an ordinary outing, with her usual companions, she would have been quite gay, riding home through the rain. But she was alone, and it was

a horrid upset over Christmas that had compelled the tiresome jaunt, and altogether she had good excuse for feeling "fed-up."

And then suddenly—ping! went a tyre, forcing her to hop down from her saddle in a very splashy bit of road.

"Oh, dash! Blow!"
Angrily she dragged the machine off the road, and began all the exasperating muddying procedure that a puncture away from home means.

It would be impossible to go on with frequent pumpings. And just as impossible to ride on the flat. The tyre had to come off, and somehow she must get the bad puncture patched.

Fortunately she had a puncture outfit, and she was a pretty good hand at the job. In the pouring rain, however, it was truly difficult, and when at last she was able to ride on again there was no being sure how long the tyre would hold up. The patch had not been neatly done, owing to the rain, and it was a very rough road.

For several miles, to her great relief, she got along all right. Nor was it more tyre-trouble that proved the fresh annoyance at last.

Fog!

passed them coming? She began to fancy that she had not, and then the misgiving changed to dimming certainty, and she knew that she was on the wrong road—utterly astray on the open moor—lost!

And then a jolt in the rough road worked mischief with that patched tyre. Ding! and it was flat again.

Polly got down from the machine. In the very instant that she and it were at a standstill, the dreary silence, except for the hiss of falling rain, stressed her utter loneliness. Deeper darkness seemed to come upon her in waves.

"Whatever shall I do?"

She gazed around, and then stared at the bicycle.

"Oh, bother!"



"Lost, are you?" cried the boy, as he rode up.
"I'll see if I can help you!" And then Polly recognised him. "Why," she gasped, "it's Pam's cousin—Billy Charters!"

If only she had not missed her way she would have been near enough to Moorose now, to ride the rest of the journey with a flat tyre. But—where was she? How far from the school?

By peering very closely at the dial of her wrist-watch, she was able to make out the time. Half-past five. It flashed upon her then that at any instant the school chiming might be ringing out. Would it be possible for her to hear them and so gain direction? They carried a long way, she knew.

Polly listened, raising her head to do so; but either she had already missed hearing them, or the bells were too far off after all.

Yet, suddenly, she did pick up a sound—one that told her of someone's being close at hand. Very wisely, she instantly raised an appealing cry of: "Excuse!"

"Hallo!" answered a gruff voice through the foggy darkness. "What's the trouble?"
"I'm lost!"

And then, as she waited and watched, facing the way from which that voice had come, a light glimmered at her.

It grew stronger—the light of a cycle-lamp, as someone came riding up slowly through the misty darkness.

"Lost, are you? Well, so am I," the rider laughed gruffly. "But I'll see if I can help you."

It came rolling upon her suddenly; not a thick fog, such as townspeople know so well, but the thin yet baffling white mist which rises from boggy hollows in wet seasons, or trails down from the mountain heights, to spread over moorland wastes.

Polly put on speed. Confident that she knew her way quite well, the drizzling mist merely bothered her as being likely to bring about an untimely darkness. She had allowed herself time to be back at school before the normal night-fall. But what with the rain clouds about and fog all around, the light was rapidly failing.

So much so, that presently she rode by a battered signpost without being able to read the directions. She looked towards it, if only for the sake of gaining encouragement. Not being able to discern the lettering, she did not trouble to pull up. She knew the way—straight on. It was not at that signpost but at another, which she would come to presently, that she had to remember to turn to the right.

But she rode hard for five minutes more—ten—and that important signpost did not loom towards her out of the rainy gloom.

She began to pay anxious attention to clumps of hollies and stunted birches where they grew close by the road, asking herself: Had she

"Thanks!" cried Polly. And then, with a great and gasping cry of recognition:

"Why, it's Billy Charters!"

Such a Surprise!

"THAT'S me!" said Billy, dismounting. "But who, then— Oh, I think I know! One of the Morocco girls!"

"Polly Linton— you remember," she said most unhappily. "Swanlake— last Saturday."

"Er— yes. But what on earth are you doing here?"

"Haven't I said!" was her impatient cry. Polly was tired and vexed.

"All I meant," he said wittily, "was how do you come to be here, Polly Linton?"

"Well, that's my business! I might say it is your fault," was her touchy cry. "I have been half-way to Grangemoor, to get a talk with Jack—"

"About me? Pity you didn't spare yourself the trouble, Polly Linton!"

"Pity I was ever put to the trouble, I think! But never mind me—"

"That's being silly!"

"No, it isn't being silly!" Oh, he was annoying! "When I called out, I didn't imagine I would never have dreamed that it would be you!"

"Well, I'm sorry it isn't someone else—a chum of yours!" he returned calmly. "But you'll just have to make do with me, I suppose."

"I wouldn't!"

"You had better," he advised. "Now, look here, don't be cross just because you've been silly enough to get lost! I've done the same—"

"It isn't being lost that—that makes me— Oh, dash!" Polly stamped, for the rain was coming on harder than ever. "This is an utter sickness!"

"I'll get you home, Polly. You leave it to me—"

"But if you're lost!"

"Hang it, that doesn't mean I'm lost for ever, does it?" he barked back. "I only meant I was lost for the moment. You can't get properly lost in this country!"

"Oh, can't you? I wouldn't be too sure."

He did not argue the point. Altogether, she thought he was going to prove pretty helpless, since he had fallen silent and was standing about as if at a loss what to do.

"Yes, Morocco lies over there," he announced suddenly.

Polly was astounded.

"Come on, Polly, and I'll wheel both bikes."

"But how do you know that that's the way?"

"The wind—and I could hear a ship's foghorn just then. Your school lies on the coast—"

"Oh—er—I see." He was not such a stupid, after all! "In that case," she stammered, "you needn't bother any more about me. If I keep straight on along this road—"

"I shall come, too; I must, now it's so late," he stated flatly, and took hold of his own bicycle and bars, to wheel one on either side of himself.

"They wouldn't like your turning up alone, Polly!"

"They won't like me turning up with you!"

"Oh, I shall make it all right!"

His self-confidence annoyed her again. True, he had not been at a loss just now, when she thought he was just as "whacked" as herself; but he really was a bit too-masterful; that was the word for him.

They trudged along, and their miserable plight

did nothing to draw them together. Polly was aware of herself becoming very, very cross.

Common sense told her that it might have been very serious for her if he had not come to her aid in such marvellous fashion. But it was he, Billy Charters—both of it! Why couldn't it have been anyone else? Now she was going to be beholden to him, the very fellow who was the stumbling-block to a happy Christmas at Swanlake!

They must have stopped along for a whole mile and more, without exchanging a word, when suddenly there was the welcome, if faint, ding-dong of bells.

"Morocco's chimed!" Polly broke out thankfully. "Oh, I shall be all right now! I am sure I can find—"

"All the same, I shall see you to the door—"

"But if I don't wish you to!"

"That doesn't matter. Oh, I know you hate me, Polly Linton, like they all do. But you're in this pickle, and I can guess the row there will be, unless—"

"Unless what? Do you think you can make it any better for me?"

"I think so—yes."

She laughed scathingly.

"Oh, do you?"

"Not very wet, are you, I hope?" he asked, a minute later.

"Not a scrap—thanks! Look here, Billy—why, this is the main road we are coming out upon!" was her glad cry. "So do say good-night here, and—and, of course, I'm very grateful to you. I know I haven't been nice to you. Well—"

"It wasn't expected that you'd be anything else. No one," he remarked, with cheerful resignation, "ever is—except Pam. But Pam's different from all of you, in every way."

"She's a ripper, I agree," Polly said. "And so I wonder that you don't try to be—to be less of a trial to her."

"Needless advice."

She was sure he was smiling recklessly—heartlessly, and that made her cross again.

Her next remark was a blank comment on his still keeping with her.

"I shan't say any more—knowing what you are, Billy Charters, except that it all helps to show how inconsiderate you can be. I've said I'd rather you didn't come with me to the door, but—"

"I know what's best for you, Polly Linton."

She threw up her head at that.

"Really, of course, it's to give you an excuse at your school!" she flared out. "You have no right to be out—"

"That's so; but I don't know that I'm particularly anxious to find an excuse. I shall not get hooded out of Grangemoor, if you think I'm dreaming that. The Head doesn't believe in throwing me back upon my heels at Swanlake; he's said so. Expulsion! No such luck!"

Hardened young ruffian! That was what she called him, to herself, closing her lips upon the upbraiding cries that she wanted to voice.

For a fellow as graceful as this Pam Wilmoughby was preserving a loyalty that meant a split from all her chums, sooner or later. Shame!

And now their plashing steps were taking them in at the Morocco gateway. Up the drive went boy and girl, with the whole posse-front a mass of lighted windows in the rainy darkness. They reached the porch, and whilst Polly was angrily uncertain what to do—whether to appeal to him almost tearfully to clear off, or to show a sort of dignified acquiescence, he pulled at the bell,

Is a moment the door was opened—not by a maid, and not by some girl who had chance to be handy. Of all persons in Morocco, it was—Miss Massingham!

"Polly Linton—there you are then, at last! Oh, you naughty girl, where—where—"

But Billy broke in:
"Good-evening, Miss Massingham! I thought it best to see Polly Linton right to the door, after coming upon her with a punctured bike, and rather lost in the mist."

Polly had not the least doubt that Miss Massingham's present silence arose from utter amazement at what, of course, must seem such cheek on Billy's part. It was, therefore, a staggering surprise for the disgruntled madcap when the Form-mistress spoke at last in an entirely changed and softened tone.

"You!" she exclaimed at Billy, gazing hard. "The same lad that came to my rescue the other Sunday evening, when my car let me down!"

"Well, yes, miss—"
"But come in then—come in! Polly, unless you are wet, don't go for a minute. I—this—Dear me!" bellowed Miss Massingham, as boy and girl stepped into the bright hall together.

"Extraordinary! You know"—to Billy, quite sweetly—"I never had the chance to thank you for all you did. Such a great help, you were—and then to slip off before I could get your name or—"

"Oh, that's all right; but if you really want to repay me, Miss Massingham," he said calmly, "now's the chance. I mean, you are going to excuse Polly's lateness, aren't you? It was not her fault, only bad luck. And we all have that sometimes!"

Miss Massingham, having been reminded of her own bad luck that Sunday evening, could not dispute the statement. But it was not simply a case of anger being disarmed. Until this moment, Polly had not known what a beaming cordiality the Form-mistress could show.

"Polly—"
"Yes, Miss Massingham!"
"You may run along and get out of your wet things, Polly dear. It's all right; I won't be cross—I couldn't be. Accidents will happen. I'm only so relieved that you have had this good lad to bring you safely home!"

Polly's head swam. She walked off, only remembering that she had not said good-bye to Billy when she was near the cloak-room. There she turned round.

"Er—good-night, Billy Charters, and—er—thanks!"

"Good-night, Polly! You see, Miss Massingham," Polly heard him explaining, as she pulled off her mac. "I know her. I'm Pam Willoughby's cousin, and we—we're met before—"

No more was audible, and Polly was not the one to try to overhear.

Clawing off a seeping hat, she ran fingers through her damp hair, and then paused to say bewilderedly:

"Well—I'm—dashed!"

Pam Willoughby's Sorrow!

HELEN CRAIG, after being at work for an hour on "peep," was patting her books together.

"Well, Pam, I think I shall go round to Study 12 and see if Polly is back. It's rather queer about Polly, why she gave us the slip to-day!"

Perhaps Pam was concentrating just then on her evening work, for she did not respond. Helen, however, going away, could be very sure

that her study mate was in no sultry mood. It was not like Pam to be sulky.

The door closed behind retiring Helen, and a minute later Pam dropped her pen, to sit back in her chair, musing.

A few dozes off, in Study 12, great jollity was prevailing, but Pam was not inclined to seek companionship at present. She had a lot on her mind—about Christmas, and Cousin Billy, and the certainty that Polly to-day had contrived a meeting with her brother Jack, to confer with him over the perplexing situation.

Suddenly the study-door opened and Polly entered.

"Pam—"

"Hallo, Polly—so you are back?"

"Yes. Your Cousin Billy is here, Pam; I fancy he is with Miss Smerfield at the moment. She's got to do something about keeping him the night."

Pam's brows were lifted high. She got up.

"Billy, here at Morocco?"

"And it's obvious he can't go back to Grangemoor until the morning," was Polly's rejoinder.

"Even if they thought it worth while sending for him, a car would have an awful trouble. It's an awful evening—fog as well as rain. I got lost!"

"Coming back from—a meeting with Jack?"

"Yes."

Polly met the eyes of her schoolfellow very steadily.

"I had an idea," Pam said gently, "that you must have gone a long way so as to be able to see your brother. It's a great way to Grangemoor, except by car. I can't make out how Billy comes to be over here at such a time. What on earth has he been up to now?"

"He'll tell you," Polly shrugged; "he wouldn't tell me."

"So you have been getting a talk with him?"

"Well, he came home with me, after finding me on the moor, rather lost in the fog. He would come all the way and then let Miss Massingham know."

"But isn't there an awful row about it all?"

"Not about that, Pam, anyhow. I quite expected one, but your cousin—it seems he is the one person who is in Miss Massingham's good books!"

A mirthless laugh escaped Pam.

"That—that's wonderful, considering!" she said. "Miss Massingham, of all people, thinking a lot of Billy, of all scapegraces!"

"There's a reason," Polly answered. "It was Billy who came to Miss Massingham's help the other Sunday evening. She's frightfully grateful. Billy did a fine thing there—I will say that. Oh, and he saved me from a rowing just now. I like to be fair!"

"Thanks!" Pam nodded, very nicely.

But now a pause ensued—a painful silence. Polly was thinking of the note written by her brother, which she had with her at this moment.

Should she hand it to Pam or not? After Billy's saving her, Polly, from a rowing, better not, perhaps? And yet—Oh dear, what a problem it was to know what to do!

"Your meeting with Jack!" Pam resumed at last, softly. "It was on account of—Christmas?"

"Er—yes, Pam. But this evening I—really, I don't feel I can talk about it all. I expect you'd like to find Billy!"

"And I expect you want to go to Study 12?"

"Oh, not particularly, Pam."

Both girls, by their tone, were showing how they grieved for the split between them. Polly drifted out and along to Study 12, where Neemar

capped all the outcry from others by shrieking: "What so diggings! You take a hundred-million lines, Polly! What do you mean by it! You say, quack!"

"And you haven't got yourself expelled?" was Helen's mock incredulous cry.

"Bei Jove, Polly—"

"Unoshybubbiest creature!" Naemer accused the madcap. "Beckas you went off on your own instead of coming with us to buy so Christmas doings! And look—quack, let me show you!"

The Insp darted to a table drawer and pulled it open. She pulled out, with a sort of reverential care, a cardboard box.

"My present for—sh—Mrs. Willoughby, for having us for Christmas?" Naemer whispered, removing the lid of the box. "Gorjus, isn't he, Polly? You say, quack!"

"I beg everyone's pardon, and all that," Polly said lightly, after genuinely admiring a whole collection of Christmas gifts which her chums had purchased; "but I had to get hold of Jack somehow to-day, and that made me late back."

"But why, Polly—why?"

"Oh, fog—a puncture as well—"

"Polly," said Betty, "I meant, why rush off to meet your brother as you did?"

"Oh, never mind. I'm tired, after the fog it was to get home. Missed my tea—"

"What!" yelled Naemer, in sheer horror. "No tea! What so diggings, enough to kill you, Polly, quack! But wait so bit, and I will get you something." She dashed to the cupboard. "You shall have a gorjus spread, and I will keep you so company!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Twist Naemer to make it six for herself and half a dozen for— Womp, ow!"

For, as a means of silencing Paula, Naemer had suddenly hurled the first missile that came to hand—a dough-nut. It caught Paula a glancing blow on the head, leaving sugary crystals in the elegant one's hair.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am furious!" announced Paula, getting up in great indignation. "And now I certainly will not spend Christmas with you gobs! When I am not being wumped about, I am being treated as if I were a—~~an~~ Aunt Sally, yes, wacker!"

"Good-bye, Aunt Sally, and a Merry-Christmas when he cument!" sang out Naemer, as Paula stalked out.

A certain boudoir-like study presented itself to the teased one's mind as being a perfect haven of peace. She would go and look in on Pam. Nibs, sweet girl, Pam.

"Er—Pam dear, do you mind if I—?" But Paula, having opened Pam's door, was finding that study deserted.

Paula liked peace and quietude, but she did not like solitude! She was soon back in Study 12.

"Whack's Pam, then, gals?"

"I think I know," answered Polly. "Gone down to get a word with her Cousin Billy—for he's here!"

"What!" gasped the others. "Billy Charter—here?"

Then Polly explained once again.

Meantime, Pam was ending a futile look-round for Billy downstairs by tapping at the door of the headmistress' own sanctum. It was like Pam to intend to ask, quite coolly, for permission to see Billy.

The inquiring tap was not answered; but suddenly the door was opened, and there stood—Billy himself!

"Hallo, Pam?" he said brightly, if not with a smile.

She looked past him into the room.

"Miss Somerfield—"

"Back in a minute. She told me to stay here whilst she arranged what's to be done with me. You'd better come in and wait, if you want her," Billy advised.

"Yes, well," Pam said, and walked in, facing round upon Billy as he followed her away from the door.

"Polly told me you were here, Billy. But she couldn't say how you came to be all this distance from Grangemoor at the end of the day! What on earth have you been up to now?"

"Biking, that's all," was his gruff response. "I got away directly after dinner to have a good ride."

"And you came all this way to Merceve! Why?"

"There was nowhere else. I felt like it."

To Pam, that answer served as a candid explanation of much that Billy himself was hardly conscious of feeling. A vague longing to get as far away as possible from Grangemoor; of coming Pam's way, simply because—well, he and she hadn't fallen out—yet!

"I'm awfully sorry about this, Billy," she told him sadly. "Surely you will get into a big row!"

"I don't see why! If a chap chooses to spend a halfer doing a bike-ride, who's the harm? And I couldn't help the fog coming on!"

"They'll say that you should have been prepared for the shortness of the day and bad weather—not gone so far."

"They'll say—let them say it then! If it's not one thing, it's another."

"Billy—"

"Pam, I don't want you to bother about me—"

"But I must! And before you go, I must have a word with you about—about that Fletcher business. How is that fellow now?"

"Right as rain again."

"I'm so glad! It was a dreadful thing to happen! If he and you had been fighting properly—?" She paused. She studied his frowning face, whilst his eyes were kept turned away.

"Billy, you know that I take your word for it; you did not do that harm to Fletcher?"

"I know you do, Pam, and it's good of you."

"Oh, no; only the right thing. But if you didn't do it, Billy, then who did? How did it happen?"

"I don't know. I doubt if it ever will be known. Fletcher must know, but he won't say—won't go back on what he has said from the first."

"And the rest of your school—masters and boys alike?"

"They believe Fletcher, of course. I say, Pam, had you better stay here? Miss Somerfield is none too pleased about me. I don't want you to be mixed up in any—"

"Oh, that's all right; I don't mind. I'm only thinking—a bit troubled, Billy—about Christmas. It will soon be here! And—"

"I know," he nodded. "But don't you go falling out with any of your chums on my account, Pam."

There it was again—the fine side of his character—the good amidst the dross. Oh, there was not the slightest doubt, Pam was saying to herself, whilst a sort of glow went through her; so was better than others believed him to be.

"Yes, well," she murmured cordially. "I really had set my heart on this being a specially jolly

Christmas, Billy. It was to be your first Christmas in the Old Country. How I would love to show you what Christmas really is to all of us over here in the depth of winter, with snow, and heaps of winter sports, parties, and parties—"

Billy was listening, staring as if she had conjured up wonderful visions.

"Christmas didn't mean much in the Pacific," he said. "It was roasting hot—a pretty lifeless time for everybody. Besides, there were never enough whites to make up parties."

Pam tapped him on the shoulder.

"You shall have a decent Christmas for once, Billy, whatever else happens. It's up to me—"

And there she checked, hearing Miss Somersfield's step at the threshold of the room.

Not To Be!

PAM'S headmistress was obviously a little displeased at finding her here. But that displeasure vanished as Pam blandly remarked:

"How many lines, please, Miss Somersfield? You shall have them by the morning. Only, hearing that Cousin Billy was about the place—"

"Where he shouldn't be at all—and a nice mood his headmaster is in, too!" Moreover's very human principal added, giving Billy a look of mingled reproach and forgiveness.

"But there it is!" she added, with faint amusement. "You mustn't mind the porter making up a bed for you in his quarters, Billy Charter; there's nowhere else!"

"Oh, Billy won't mind," laughed Pam. "A coconut mat would do—wouldn't it, Billy? He comes from where they grow them—at least, the coconuts."

"Never mind where he comes from," smiled Miss Somersfield. "The question is—where will he go to, in the end, if he goes on like this? Billy Charter, you're a trial!"

"You won't forget, Miss Somersfield, that he's my cousin!"

Miss Somersfield began to suspect that Pam, with her adorable roguishness, was making too easy a conquest of indignation.

"Go along with you, Pam!" she said laughingly. "And say good-night to Billy now, for you won't see him again. His headmaster would have me put him in the coal-collar, for punishment, I do believe!"

"Headmasters must be awful people," said Pam, drawing off to the door. "So different from headmistresses! Good-night, Billy, if I don't see you again. Hope you sleep well on that coconut mat!"

"Good-night, Pam!"

She closed the door and went with her high step along the passage. Her smile lingered. Somehow or other, she felt extraordinarily happy all at once—like her old self again. Why? It must be, she pondered, because Billy was the right stuff at heart.

Strangely enough, Miss Mainspring had taken a great fancy to him! And then the headmistress—she had wanted to be angry, and had only been able to laugh about it all.

Surely, then, he was going to get himself liked by his schoolfellows at last, and by her, Pam's, friend? Between now and Christmas—oh, if only it could be so! And something seemed to whisper to her that it would be so. Polly—even she, after being got out of that scrape by him, would be more amenable.

As if to justify such sudden hopefulness, when Pam got upstairs again she found Polly coming away alone from Study 12, ready to ask with meaning gentleness:

"Pam, can we—got a talk?"

"Yes, certainly, Polly; in here, dear!"

And two seconds later they were alone together in Pam's study.

"Well, it's like this, Pam," Polly rather blurted out—"about Christmas. I don't see how, after all, the arrangements can be altered."

"I can only say, Polly, it will break my heart if any of you do cancel your visit to Swanlake," was Pam's earnest response. "I've just been saying to Billy, I did hope that this Christmas would be just splendid."

There was a rather emotional silence.

"I saw Jack to-day about it all," Polly suddenly exclaimed. "But since then, I—I've been thinking, bees feeling, we can perhaps manage—if only for the others' sakes, Pam!"

"Yes, well—"

"There is such a thing as agreeing to differ, isn't there? And at Christmas—even people who have fallen out with each other, Pam—they—they sort of—"

"I have set my heart on making this a jolly Christmas for you," murmured Pam. "And I will! You shall have a decent Christmas, whatever happens, Billy!"



"Oh, yes! It's the one time in all the year—"
 "Well, then?" Polly was being swept on now, to her own great joy, by a great tide of goodwill. She knew that cold reason would say that what Billy had done for her this evening could count for little, set against what he had done at Grangemoor. But she didn't want to be guided by reason, only by the desire to make things more happy all round.

"Well, then, Pam, suppose we—"

"Just a sec., dear!"—for someone was tapping.
 "Come in!" Pam called out, and another junior entered.

It was Elsie Ashby. Rather hastily—for she was aware of her interrupting a private, serious talk—she handed Pam a note.

"That's yours, Pam, I think."

"Mine!"

Elsie's only response was a look implying that she knew no more than that she had picked up the note somewhere about the schoolhouse.

Again Pam said, "Just a sec., Polly, whilst I look at this." And Polly, as Elsie went out, was glad enough to be given time to stand in thought, not looking at Pam, but frowning at the carpet. Polly's endeavour was to prepare quite a little peace-making speech for when the talk should be resumed.

Then, suddenly, she was startled by hearing a furious gasp from Pam. At the same time, Pam's hand crumpled up—what? Good gracious!—for Polly suddenly realised. That note from Jack!

"Pam—"

"Your brother has written me a—"

"But, Pam, listen! I was keeping the letter back! I was not going to deliver it—after all! Oh, how—where—careless of me to drop it!" Polly railed against herself wildly. "But I came in wet, and changed, and the note must have fallen—"

"I understand," broke out Pam bleakly. "And it does you credit, that you meant to keep the note back. All the same, it is just as well I have read it."

"No, Pam; not now! Not after the way you and I have just been talking."

"Jack is different from you!" Pam said fiercely. "He shows a different spirit altogether."

"I don't think so. Only, he belongs to Grangemoor—"

"I don't care if he does, and if all Grangemoor is behind him, I won't stand—"

Pam paused to uncrumple the letter. She read aloud from it, in snatches, her eyes fiery.

"Your brother says he is very sorry, and all that, but—'one must go by what the House captain says.' I, for one, Polly, must go by what Cousin Billy says, and Jack shall know it! Then again—it isn't a case of failing to hit it off with Billy." No, it's a case of not giving him a chance!"

"Pam—"

"If you will wait one minute," the Swanlake girl said, sitting down at the table in a passionate way, to snatch pen and paper. "I will get off my answer to this letter, at once."

"No, Pam! Oh, listen! Jack put everything nicely, I'm sure!"

Pam rested her pen for a moment, looking up. "But he put it—clearly. My Cousin Billy tells her, as well as being a brute! Yes, well, I don't agree!"

She wrote on again furiously, suddenly finished with a dashed-off "Pamela Widdoughby," and blotted the note. She fished it into an envelope,

and stood up to go to the door, but Polly barred the way.

"Let me see that note, Pam, please! I know what was in the one to you—"

"There it is, then. After all," Pam said tensely, "you've got to know. You'll no more be able to come to Swanlake now for Christmas than I will allow Jack to come, or three for whom he speaks! Dave, Michael—they shan't, even if they want to!"

And then a door that had been opening slowly, unnoted by either Polly or Pam, came wide open. They saw Betty, Madge, Naomer—several others besides—all crowding at the threshold.

"Pam!" was the horrified cry with which Betty came into the room. "Polly! This quarrelling! What does it mean?"

"It means," said Pam, "you can none of you come to Swanlake for Christmas!"

Loyalty Thrown Away!

THE words, though so quietly spoken, had been like the bursting of a bomb.

Every one of the girls felt the ensuing silence as an appalling stillness after a great crash.

They turned to one another, but they did not speak. It was Pam who ended the dramatic silence by resuming quietly:

"You will want to know why. Well, unknown to you, an upset between Polly and myself has been going on for several days—over Billy. You others, when you know how matters stand, are bound to side with Polly and her brother and his chums. I don't expect anything else. So Christmas at Swanlake can't possibly offer any pleasure now."

"Let me speak," Polly burst out tensely. "Girls, I have wanted to patch it up. I've tried hard—I really have. But one thing I can't do, and that is take sides against my own brother and his chums, when they have the whole of their school behind them in their opinion of Billy."

She turned to Pam.

"Pam, it's all over. You can't fly into a rage against Jack, when he doesn't deserve it, and expect me to keep in with you. He wrote nicely—"

"But unjustly!"

"No, Pam! You must admit—"

"I shall admit nothing," Pam dissented, shaking her head, "until I have it from Billy himself that he doesn't deserve my support."

"I'm going!" Polly said rather wildly to the staring girls. "You stay and hear all that Pam has to say. And try—try, if you can, to believe that she's in the right and Jack and the rest are in the wrong."

"But, Polly—"

"What's she diggings?" Naomer almost yelled. "No Christmas at Swanlake, and all because of Billy! Ah, bah, that is a nice wash-out if you like!" Pam—Polly—

"Gently, dear," Madge entreated Naomer; but Polly, as she hurried out, heard the dusky one going off into an almost hysterical state of grief over the spoiled Christmas.

Not one of them followed Polly as she drifted off downstairs, and she was glad. She wanted to be alone.

She hoped that the fact that they were not possessed of brothers at Billy's school would make it possible for them not to fall out with Pam as she had done. They, at least, might be able to go to Swanlake after all.

Even so, she felt tragically certain that they would all side with her, which meant that their

intended Christmas at Swanlake really must be cancelled. For she was not simply siding with Jack by reason of a kind of blind devotion to a brother, whether he was in the right or not. She was siding with him for reasons that would seem eminently right in the eyes of all her chums.

And now, suddenly, when she had drifted aimlessly downstairs, it gave her a bad turn to find herself face to face with Billy.

But, though she did not feel like talking to him after what had just happened, she marched straight to him.

"I'd like you to know," she said breathlessly, "I was not ungrateful for what you did for me this evening. I was bearing it in mind a few minutes ago, talking with Pam. But she expects—and it's quite natural that she should, being your cousin—that we girls should be entirely for you, against what your school thinks. So far as I'm concerned—with a brother at Grangemoor—that's impossible!"

"And the other girls?" Billy asked thickly.

"I'm hoping against hope that they'll not fall out with Pam on your account, as I and my brother have. For the sake of Christmas—for they're all invited, as, of course, you know."

Polly would have turned away then, for she had no desire to heap reproaches upon his head. But he voiced a strange request quickly:

"Will you wait just a minute, Polly? I—a little thing you can do for me."

"Wait here!"

"Please. I can go into the dining-room—in fact, I was told to go there and get some supper. I'll write it there—just a message to Pam, as I can't very well see her to speak to, to-night."

Now was it more than a minute before he came out of the dining-room, to hand Polly a folded note, the mere leaf of a pocket-book. As she received it, she thought he looked very pale. His sunken eyes seemed to tell of great inward misery.

"If you'd let her have that, Polly, straight away!"

"I will."

"Good-night!" he spoke after her, a little wistfully.

"Oh, good-night!" was her softened response.

Something had told her—it must have been that look in his eyes—that his wretchedness came of self-shame, and so she pitied him. He was guilty—if only he would confess his guilt and so be no longer the rock for so many friendships to be wrecked upon!

Upstairs she sped, and came to Pam's study just as Betty and the rest were leaving. One face after another Polly scanned, and in each she read that which could only mean the one thing. These other girls—they were on her side, not Pam's. They had left Pam, after telling her so!

Polly went into the study. Had Pam been wiping sudden tears from her eyes? If so, it was



Elsie Ashby handed a note round the door. "That's yours, Pam, I think?" she said. Pam took it while Polly waited. If only Polly had known what that note was!

the first time that she had ever given way to such emotion.

"Pam," said Polly tremulously, not displaying the note for a moment. "The colors—"

"You go to them, Polly. They—they're your chums, not mine now."

"Oh, Pam!"

"Yes, well, it can't be helped. I'm Billy's cousin, and I'm sure I know him better than any of you, and even better than his own schoolmates. He's not the one to have done what they've condemned him for doing."

"And Christmas?" Polly asked tragically. "Is it quite off, Pam—I mean for Betty and all the rest?"

"Quite off. There would not be a moment's real happiness for them. I'm sorry!"

"What we shall all do!" Polly exclaimed. "And you, Pam! But talking about it now can do no good. Here's a note that your Cousin Billy asked me to bring up to you. I came upon him downstairs."

"Thanks, Polly!"

Then, left alone, and with the door closed, Pam dazedly opened the little note and gave her eyes to it. Billy had scribbled it hastily, the pencil pricking through the paper as it lay on a soft tablecloth.

"Dear Cousin Pam,—As I can't get hold of you to speak to-night, this is just to say that you mustn't go to bed before you have made it all

right between yourself and the other girls for Christmas.

"Had I seen that my denial about the Fletcher affair was going to spoil Christmas for you and the rest, I never would have denied it. That really is the truth.

"You will guess what I mean by that, so don't stand up for me any more. I'm really not worth it.

"BILLY."

She looked up from the appalling words, and her young face was stricken.

His confession!

There it was, between the lines, for her to guess so easily, as he had said she would! Had he known what the widespread consequences of his pretending innocence would be, he would have confessed from the first!

"Poor Billy!" escaped her; but gradually she hardened. From pitying him for his state of mind at this moment, she began to feel how deplorable he had been. The pain and misery he had caused through his cowardice! Long-standing friendships almost wrecked! Yuletide arrangements all cancelled! Nothing but strife between friends!

Suddenly Pam strode to the door and opened it. She went to Study 12. Her quiet entry created a sudden stillness where all had been sorrowful murmurings.

"Girls," she said steadily, "I'm awfully sorry now in a different way. I've been in the wrong. It's all right about Christmas. You'll all come to Swanlake—you must!"

"What!"

"Bai Jove—"

"What so diggings! Ooo, gorjus, hecraay—"

"Sh!" Some of them put a gentle check upon overjoyed Naomer. "But, Pamela—only a minute or two ago—"

"Yes, well, since then I have had this," she said, and displayed the note. "My Cousin Billy tells me that I never ought to have stood up for him."

"He has—confessed!" cried Polly. "Oh!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Um!" let out a few of them.

It was more than a little awkward for them all; more than difficult to know what to say. Billy had confessed, so they were told, and that was a matter for tremendous relief. But Billy was still—Pam's cousin!

"Perhaps, Polly, you'll give me back that letter I wrote to your brother? It won't go now, of course," Pam said. "I beg his pardon, I beg everybody's pardon—"

"What so diggings! Pam—"

"Oh!"—and Pamela suddenly kissed Naomer, as that excitable little thing rushed at her and clung to her lovingly. "But isn't it a blessing that the whole trouble is over—in time?"

"Gorjus! Hecraay! Quock—quock, everybody!" Naomer shrieked, waving her hands to lead the cheering. "Bekas, Christmas at Swanlake after all! Hecraay—come on; let him rip! Hip, hip—hecraay!"

For the moment, the others had not got it in them to do any cheering; but soon there was a complete recovery of the society's usual high spirits, Pam herself encouraging her chums to be nothing but joyful. And so, in the end, the boisterousness was loud enough to be heard below by someone who must have come to the foot of the stairs to listen.

Billy Charters! *

When at last he knew beyond all doubt what those joyous sounds from above meant, he turned away. And, although a big sigh escaped him, it was not a sorrowful one.

He must have been feeling tremendous relief over something attempted, something done.

"It was the thing to do," he thought to himself in his loneliness. "And perhaps—perhaps, after all, I'll be able to get that fellow, Fletcher, to speak the truth, in time for Christmas!"

But would he? Or would Christmas find him beneath Swanlake's hospitable roof, only for him to know that Pam scorned him even more than others had done, since she must think of him as one who had proved—NOT WORTH HER LOYALTY!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

Has Billy, then, confessed to something of which he is not really guilty? If so, are Pam and her chums to do him a grave injustice, all over Christmas? You must not miss reading next week's splendid complete Marcové story to learn what happens now. It is entitled, "The Mistake Pam Made!" Order your SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN far next Tuesday now!



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