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"PAM WILLOUGHBY'S
PROBLEM"

Magnificent Long Complete Morcove
School Story, By Marjorie Stanton

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2^d



THE WATCHER IN THE SHADOWS

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THE FIRST OF A FINE NEW SERIES OF LONG COMPLETE MORCOVE SCHOOL TALES FEATURING, BETTY BARTON AND CO. OF THE FOURTH FORM

Pam Willoughby's Problem



The serenity of Swanlake, the stately ancestral home of Pam Willoughby, is suddenly disturbed by peculiar happenings. And, in the absence of her parents, Pam feels it her bounden duty to prevent a great wrong being done, and to solve, with the loyal aid of her chums of Morcove School, this strange secret of Swanlake.

Chums Out of School

A MARCH wind blowing and the clouds flying high.

Patches of Spring sunshine picking out bits of the rolling moorland, making the gorse look like all the gold in the world.

What an afternoon, this, for Morcove's mid-week "halfer."

And Betty Barton, captain of the Fourth Form, and her chums of Study 12 were putting the half-holiday to good use, too.

This was the headmistress' own roomy car that was romping Betty & Co. to stately Swanlake, home of tall Pam Willoughby.

They would soon be there, now that they were finishing with the lumpy road that ran all across the lonely moor. No more pot-holes after this, and so elegant Paula Creel, who liked to recline in peace, would not have that dusky imp, Naomer Nakara, almost bobbing into her lap over and over again.

"Time?" inquired madeap Polly Linton gaily.

"Half-past two," announced Helen Craig.

"Is that all! Then we shall have bags of time in hand when we get there. I am just enjoying this, girls."

"It makes a change from games, for once."

"A welcome change, yes, wather, Betty deah. Somehow, with the awwival of Spwing, I always feel— Owp!" as the car took the last bump on the rough road.

A Complete Morcove School Story by MARJORIE STANTON

"He was a good one, he was!" chuckled Naomer, who had not failed to bounce against Paula, considerably squashing her. "Hooray!" she cheered, at the same time filching out a pastrycook's paper bag that looked as if it might contain half a dozen buns.

Polly glared.

"What have you got there, Naomer?"

"Food for ze swans at Swanlake. Bekas every time we go over to Pam's place I love to feed ze swans."

Said Polly grimly:

"I thought you were going to start in yourself."

"So I am," sparkled Morcove's royal and ever-hungry junior, opening the paper bag. "Bekas I must just see that ze stuff is all right for ze swans. Only some stale stuff from our corner cupboard in Study 12, but— Ooo, gorjus!"

From which it will be inferred that Naomer

had come upon at least one prize tit-bit, too good for swans.

Paula, trying to sit clear of the greedy one so as to avoid being smothered with crumbs, did a sudden slide to the floor of the car.

"Owp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lovely car," said Polly, sinking back and at the same time using Paula for a footstool. "Miss Somerfield was a sport to let us have it."

"I say—Owp! Geals!"

"Gets along so much faster than the school bus."

"Geals—"

"Hallo, where's Paula?" the madcap suddenly asked in mock dismay. "Has she fallen out?"

"Stahp it!" squealed the oft-teased duffer, writhing upon the floor amongst many playful feet.

"I say, what shall I look like when I get there! Betty deah, healp!"

"Keep still, can't you!" Naomer stormed at the human footstool. "Giving me India-gestion."

"Oh, let me have the child!" pleaded Polly, suddenly changing to a mothering concern for Paula. "Did they then?"

"Dweadful!" groaned Paula, now that she was being nursed like a child. "Haow I wish I had nevah come, bai Jove! Weally and twuly, I—"

"Here you are; have zat!" said Naomer, crushing a morsel of stale bun into Paula's pretty mouth.

"Spa—ooch! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chauffeur must have heard the laughter pealing again, but he took no notice. He had not been in the headmistress' service all these years without getting to know the meaning of half-holiday spirits.

"But we must behave now," Polly said with a change to mock decorum a few minutes later, "or we shall disgrace you, Pam."

Tall Pam Willoughby gave her serene smile.

"I was just thinking, nothing could be better than for that girl we are going to bring back with us to Morcove to see us all so jolly. I expect she feels a bit nervous—shy."

"Like a new girl at the start of term, Pam?"

"Oh, shyer than that most likely, Madge," answered Pam. "You see, she has never been away from home before, and it's a home tucked right away in the woods at Swanlake; quite the loneliest cottage on the estate."

"I seem to remember," Betty nodded. "The woodman's cottage you said it was?"

"That's right. Muriel Floddon's father is our woodcutter. A great, strong, splendid man, very quiet. His wife is a dear," Pam supplemented. "As for Muriel herself, I'm sure she will make a real treasure for Miss Somerfield after a bit of training."

"It sounds a nice arrangement," Polly broke out heartily. "Since the Floddon's wanted their Muriel to train for domestic service, I am sure nothing could be better than for her to come along to Morcove, to be on the staff. The fact that you're at the school, Pam."

"I hope it'll help, in a way," smiled "the little lady of Swanlake," as Morcove had dubbed the high-born junior. "Of course, we would have liked to have her at Swanlake, but my people were going abroad, which made it awkward."

Tess Trelawney, who was the one with a keen eye for the picturesque, offered one of her rare remarks.

"If I owned Swanlake— Look, there it is,

with the sun upon it, I simply couldn't go abroad."

"You might have to," laughed Pam lightly. "And even have to let the place to strangers, as mother and dad have done. We're getting frightfully poor."

"Poor!" snorted Polly.

"But so we are. Dad told me back in the winter how much goes out in taxation. I nearly had a fit. And, of course, he simply can't think of reducing the labour."

A smooth swish round to take the main entrance, and then the car went purring up the rising, mile-long drive.

The great old beeches lining either side of the way were still in their wintry state; only the graceful branches, ending in a delicate tracery of bare twigs, broke up the sunshine. In the open park black cattle were ranging over age-old turf that was vividly green.

"Muriel was to be waiting for us at the house," Pam murmured. "But she may have felt she must hang about at home at the cottage up to the last moment. I should want to do that, I know."

"Ditto me!" said others in chorus.

"In which case, I'll slip across to find her," Pam added. "It won't take me above a quarter of an hour, and— It's all right, though," with a sudden happy smile. "There is Muriel Floddon at the house porch."

"Pam, shall we see anything of the people who have rented Swanlake whilst your parents are abroad?" Betty suddenly asked.

"I don't know."

"What are they like?"

"Again you've got me," smiled Pam. "I don't know, and I am rather curious to find out."

These Two!

"THERE'S a car at the door, Lawrence. Will it be someone—"

"For us? No; never mind that car, Elsie. It's only the one from Morcove School."

"Oh, of course. I was forgetting. That woodman's daughter is to be fetched away this afternoon."

But the speaker remained concerned enough to go to one of the high windows of this grand library at Swanlake, standing to watch those who now alighted from the car.

The sunshine slanted in upon a young woman of excessively modern type. Her auburn hair was the last word in coiffures; her figure was as slim as could be.

From behind her spoke a fine-looking man—her husband—as he lighted a cigarette.

"Never mind about that, Elsie. We have something more important—"

"But I want to see what sort of girls they are at Morcove School. I can see the Willoughbys' Pam. What a pukka girl she is. But some of the others who have come look quite nice."

Turning away from the window young Mrs. Eastman was like the leading actress in a drawing-room play as she sauntered to the cigarette-box and selected a choice Virginian.

"Matches, Lawrence."

"There you are," Lawrence Eastman muttered, tossing across the box with fuming impatience. He had the appearance of being a highly-strung man, given to chewing a lip and knitting very black brows.

"No, Elsie, as I was saying; we have been here just a week already, and yet—"

"One moment. I suppose those girls will understand; they are welcome to a cup of tea before they go back."

"Oh, confound the girls! The sooner they are out of the way the better!"

"My dear Lawrence, we must do the decent thing. We needn't tell the world that we are mountebanks, even if we are. I'm going to be, for the time being, the hostess of Swanlake."

Saying it flippantly, Elsie Eastman crossed to a bell-press and touched it.

In a few moments a very youthful maid, pretty in a dark, foreign way answered the ring.

"Oh, is that you, Zelie?" drawled the temporary hostess of stately Swanlake.

"But, yes, miladi. It is that the parlourmaid has her day out to-day. So, I take duty; I do not mind"—with a shrug, as if knowing herself to be meant for far higher duties.

"You are a good girl, Zelie. And how long have you been at Swanlake?"

"I? Oh, la-la, how long shall I say? It is since Mrs. Willoughby brought me from Paris, one year, two months and one week, oui."

Young Mrs. Eastman smiled carelessly.

"You remember very well, Zelie."

"Miladi, it is that I have good reason to remember, oui. Ah, it has been wonderful, my life here! Mrs. Willoughby, so kind; the master—always the smile."

"Then I wonder Mrs. Willoughby hasn't been jealous at times of her French maid, Zelie. You are very pretty, Zelie."

"Merci, milad! Also their daughter; her, I adore, ah, oui!"

"Pam Willoughby? Talking of whom, Zelie—she has just turned up from her school, I fancy? Well, we do not wish to be disturbed, my husband and I. But you might let it be known; they can stay to tea if they like."

The French maid curtsayed very prettily and withdrew.

A happy excitement was in her expressive eyes as she hurried away to convey the hospitable message. She was going to see the daughter of the house, after all this time—several weeks since the adorable Pam went back to Morcove School at the start of term.

All in a flutter of joy was the young heart of Zelie Duval. Life had been dull of late. It had not been possible for Mrs. Willoughby to take her, Zelie, with her on the business trip aboard. But at last, at last here was mademoiselle, home again for one hour, at least.

"And she will make a fuss of me, I know," Zelie rejoiced to herself. "She always does."

A medley of girlish voices was audible from the spacious front hall, towards which Zelie went with this eager step and smile of expectant pleasure.

Then as she advanced upon the crowd of girls in the hall that smile of hers faded. She stopped dead, and no girl could have been quicker in showing a put-out expression.

She had found Pam Willoughby talking to Muriel Floddon, the woodman's daughter, in a very friendly manner. Now Pam turned round.

"Hallo, Zelie! Everything going all right with you? By the way, Zelie, whilst I'm here. I wish you'd look out that old fawn raincoat of mine. It would do for me at school. But what's the matter?"

Pam was wondering why her mother's French maid looked so pettish.

"The fawn raincoat, ah, oui," Zelie responded

dully. "In one minute. And I am to say, mademoiselle, that you must all have tea before you go."

"That's very nice of them," Pam commented. "You hear, girls? But it's early for a cup, don't you think?"

"Unless we have tea now and anuzzer tea when we get back to Morcove," came Naomer's typical suggestion. "Bekas after all, eet is a long time since dinner."

"And you had nothing to eat on the way, had you?" Polly twitted the ever-hungry one. "Pam dear, could we just run down to the lake? It must be looking lovely a day like this."

"Of course. And Muriel here shall come with us," Pam cried, with a meaning look that her chums were quick to understand. "To say goodbye to the swans."

"Yes, wather!" beamed Paula.

It became a moment for Pam to look extremely happy. In the goodness of her heart she wanted to make Muriel's going away from home and the entry upon a new phase of life as pleasant as an outing with friends. Betty and the rest were in absolute agreement with this idea, as Pam had felt sure they would be. And it meant great delight to see them all uniting to put shy Muriel quite at ease.

Then suddenly Pam noticed Zelie, standing apart in a tense attitude, eying Muriel jealously.

"You needn't stay, Zelie."

"Oh, tres bien—very well."

Pam thought, as she saw the French girl flounce away: "And you need not behave like that,



"I would give my life for you!" Zelie told Pam tensely. "And yet you do not care for me as you care for that girl Muriel!"

either." But she did not give utterance to the words. After all, Zelig was Zelig, a good sort, but so very French.

"Come on then, girls, down to the lake!" Pam was saying next moment, proposing to make a rush out into the sunshine; and then she noticed that Zelig had turned back.

"Well?"

"Pardon, mademoiselle, but is it that the girl from that cottage will take tea with you and your friends?"

"Don't call her 'that girl from the cottage,' Zelig; you know her name," laughed Pam. "Yes; Muriel will certainly have tea with us—twenty minutes from now, say."

The French girl, with a toss of her head, walked away again.

"Zelig!"

"Oui, mademoiselle?"

Pam signed to the others to go on and she would catch them up. Then she stepped to meet returning Zelig.

"What's the matter, Zelig? I don't like to see you behaving like this in front of my chums. They won't think well of you."

"Oh, la-la, does it matter what they think of me?" burst out the foreign girl in a strung-up manner. "So long as they think well of—bah, a mere woodman's daughter!"

"Zelig!"

"Oh, mademoiselle—mademoiselle!" And suddenly Zelig was in tears. "I am a monster, oui! It is that I cannot bear that you should pay so much attention to that girl."

"But this is absurd, Zelig. Come, come!"

"She goes with you to Morcove School," the foreign girl said in a choking voice. "I cannot go, no. I, who would give my life for you, as you know—as you know. And yet you do not care for me, as you care for that doll!"

Pam sighed under her breath forbearingly before speaking again.

"Not another word, Zelig, please, or I shall be upset. I hope I have always been nice to you; but you mustn't expect to be the only one. Put yourself in Muriel Floddon's place—"

"I put myself in her place!" gasped the French girl, tossing her head again. "I would not be—I could not be."

"Well, supposing I had been in her position to-day?" smiled the little lady of Swanlake. "It wouldn't have been easier for me to leave home and go out into the world if a pack of snobbish schoolgirls had come to fetch me. Besides, my mother is away, and so it's all the more up to me."

Pam would have walked away then, but the French maid suddenly seized her hands.

"Mademoiselle!" And tears splashed upon those small white hands as they were being kissed passionately. "Pardon, I entreat! It is as I say, I am a monster to be so jealous. But where it is you, you—ah, how can I help it!"

"Yes, well, I'm afraid you must try, anyhow," Pam smiled uncomfortably. "There, there, Zelig, be a good girl. I really must go."

A bit trying, having to deal with a girl like that. But it was no use giving another thought to it all, when here one was, home again, for this one sunny hour, and the old place looking so dear; daffodils, thousands of daffs, nodding in the breeze, and wallflowers out all along the terrace.

Pam took a run that brought her to her chums at the lake-side, just as Naomer was starting to

feed the swans, whilst Muriel Floddon came in for Betty's friendly remark:

"You'll love it at Morcove."

"Oh, I'm sure I shall!" the woodman's daughter was answering just as Pam came up. "I've heard so much about the school at different times. I only hope that I shall be able to please, so that I'll be kept on."

There was not a scrap of vanity or arrogance in Pam Willoughby, or she might have betrayed a grand pride in being looked at so shyly and yet so devotedly by Muriel Floddon.

But it was part of Pam's kindly tactfulness to stand back, as it were, at present, leaving Muriel to be talked to by the other girls.

By the end of the day the woodman's daughter would be in the midst of nigh two hundred school-girls. So it was just as well to let these few draw her into talk, putting her more and more at ease.

At the same time Pam did feel that she would like to have Muriel to herself for a talk, only by-and-bye would do for that. Bedtime, perhaps. Nice to contrive to slip off and find Muriel, going to bed for the first night in her whole life away from home.

That would be just the moment, Pam felt, when Muriel would be feeling a wee bit down, never mind how pleasant everything had been made for her. Just the moment, in fact, when one could hint: "I'm here as well, you know, Muriel, if ever you should want a friend."

"Zere you are, greedy zings, ze last snack, so make ze best of him!" came Naomer's cry to the swans presently.

Then she screwed the empty paper bag into a ball and shied that into the water.

"Bekas talk about me being greedy."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Still, Naomer, you could do with that cup of tea?" Pam inferred blandly.

"And cake, if there is any. And a cream-bun. Anyzingk; I don't mind what eet is, so long as eet is something to eat."

"Eat—eat!" echoed Polly scornfully. "Girls, what about dumping Naomer in the lake? A porpoise is all she is."

All which, Muriel understood, was the purest playfulness as between chums. She was laughing; she became infected with the prevailing jollity, and ran as skittishly as any back to the great mansion.

Tea was ready on the long tables in the oak-panelled dining-room. The French girl looked pale and petulant as she stood by, whilst the schoolgirls and Muriel sat down.

Tactfully Pam said a kind: "Thanks, Zelig," everything being all right.

Then Zelig went out, hands and teeth alike tightly clenched. She had seen the woodman's daughter given a seat between Pam and the Form-captain, and raging jealousy had recurred.

A little after this the dining-room door flew open and young Mrs. Eastman sailed in, all smiles.

"Have you got all you want, you girls? How are you, Pam Willoughby!" she specially greeted the daughter of the house. "Our first meeting, isn't it? You know who I am, of course. My husband and I, we are simply charmed with the life here. Swanlake is perfect!"

"I'm glad you like it, Mrs. Eastman. It's nice for mother and dad to have someone here whilst they are abroad."

"You must come over again some time," gushed Mrs. Eastman. "Perhaps you could manage a

week-end? Or you could come over after school one day and sleep the night."

"I should like that awfully."

"I'll drop you a note. Well, make a good tea, all of you. And so you are the girl"—suddenly stepping round to the back of Muriel's chair—who is going to train for service at Morcove. I hope you will be very happy, my dear. Chance to become matron of a big school like Morcove later on."

The remarks, if genuinely sympathetic, were hasty, nor did the brilliant young lady afford Muriel a moment for any reply. In her stately manner, as if accustomed to be the object of all eyes. Mrs. Eastman made her exit.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Paula. "Dwesses weall."

"Clothes aren't everything," said Polly. "Neither are looks, for that matter," rejoined Helen Craig. "Still, Pam, I—I suppose she is very nice."

"Yes, well," was Pam's non-committal response, "any more tea, any of you?"

And about the temporary tenants of Swanlake nothing more was said.

The Friend of Jealousy

"ZELIE!"

"Oui, mademoiselle?"

"We're off back to Morcove now, Zelic," said Pam. "I just wanted to say good-bye to you. Hope it's not dull for you?"

"Is it that you will come over again soon, mademoiselle?" the French girl asked very wistfully.

"Why, it's quite likely, I fancy. Mrs. Eastman has been good enough to say she'd like to have me for a night or so."

Pam would not ask Zelic how she liked the Eastmans; would not put any inquisitive questions.

"Good-bye then, Zelic, and be happy."

"Adieu, mademoiselle," murmured the French girl very sadly.

Instantly she turned to hurry away, whilst Pam let a scampering step take her out to the car. Her chums were there with Muriel.

"Got all you want, Muriel?"

"Yes, miss, thank you."

"But I haven't—bother!" Pam now exclaimed ruefully. "I must run back for that old fawn mac of mine—"

"Miss, let me go."

"No, Muriel; I know just where it is. Zelic put it out for me on a chair in the hall."

"Then I shall find it easily!" was the cry with which the woodman's daughter sprinted across to the porch.

It was a lightning action that rendered it



Mrs. Eastman floated in, radiantly lovely and very friendly. "So nice to see you all!" she gushed. "And I wanted to ask you, Pam: Can you come over to Swanlake for the week-end?"

needless for Pam to do anything, so she waited with her Morcove chums at the car.

"I do like Muriel!" exclaimed Betty heartily. "Yes, wather, bai Jove! A weal wipper, what?"

"She will get on splendidly at the school, I'm sure," predicted Polly. "The others will take to her."

Meantime, Muriel had run indoors and could see the old raincoat, lying upon a carved chair over by the drawing-room door.

She nipped across, her light step making no sound upon the thick Turkey carpet that was one of the priceless Swanlake antiques. Another moment and she would have been running back with the coat; but a voice came from the drawing-room, and the nature of the faintly-audible remark struck her to stillness.

She knew it was Mrs. Eastman who had spoken just then to Mr. Eastman. The young couple were in the drawing-room, the door of which was closed.

"We might be able to pump the girl to see if she knows anything about it," were the words that had startled Muriel.

"Girl—what girl?"

"Pam Willoughby, of course."

"Oh, ah! I thought you might mean that French maid."

"As if Zelic would know anything about a

thing like that. But Pam's heir daughter, and there is the difference," Muriel heard the young wife add. "Anyway, I shall invite her over. Just as well I spoke of doing so."

"It might help us," came the deeper voice of the man very faintly.

The talk seemed to be lapsing now. In any case, Muriel felt suddenly horrified to find herself listening to words not meant for her ears. She had never done such a thing before in her life; would not have done so now, only—how strange, how disquieting those few remarks had been.

She moved away, carrying the coat over one arm; and then surprise of a different sort again arrested her.

At the back of the hall someone was standing quite still to watch her. The shadowy archway where that figure lurked, the ferocity in the white face—somehow, it all gave Muriel a sense of being in danger of attack.

She paused as a wayfarer through the jungle might pause, aware of a tigress, crouching to spring.

"So, miladi!"

It was uttered with annihilating mockery by Zélie as she came, a step at a time, across the hall.

"So! You also are going now to Morcove? You, to be going to live where you will see Mademoiselle Pam morning, noon and night."

"Why not?" gasped Muriel faintly. "Why shouldn't I?"

"Oh, la-la, you are good enough for anything, is that it?" Zélie laughed softly and fiercely. "That is droll, very. The woodchopper's daughter, she will soon be the lady's maid, why not! And so, Zélie Duval must look out for another place, oui! Who will want Zélie Duval, when there is one so much better. English, see you, and a woodchopper's daughter, oui!"

"I don't know why you are like this," Muriel fired up spiritedly. "I have done you no harm."

"No harm? When it is that I am nobody now!" hissed the French girl. "No harm, when you are saying all the time to yourself: 'Aha, already I am the favourite! Soon I shall be with Mademoiselle Pam, always, always!' But you will find how I can fight you."

"I never knew anybody like you, Zélie Duval. Oh, I am not going to stay and be—"

"Go, then—go!" Zélie quivered, pointing to the outer doorway. "Go, before I scratch your eyes out. I could—I could! It is that I so despise you, hate you. And remember," she darkly added, "that I said it!"

For the life of her Muriel could not help looking back at that fierce face as she hastened for the open air. It was retaining her shocked attention so steadily now, she felt sure the tigress look was photographing itself upon the walls of her brain.

To-night, when in bed at Morcove School, away from home for the first time in her life, sleeping under a strange roof, she would be haunted by that face, so terrible in its expression of deadly jealousy.

Even when she got back to the waiting girls, to find them all so pleasantly disposed, the misery caused by Zélie's jealous outburst still remained, causing a pallor that Pam noticed.

"What's the matter, Muriel? You look upset." "Oh, nothing, miss—nothing," she pleaded flustered. "I'm sorry if I have been keeping you I—"

"That's all right, Muriel. But jump in now, anyhow, and then you'll soon be at Morcove, feeling that it's quite like home from home."

Pam said that blithely, fancying that Muriel had been overcome with trying emotions at this moment of going away from Swanlake into an entirely new life.

But the hour would come when the little lady of Swanlake would know exactly what had transpired when Muriel was fetching the coat. And in that hour Pam Willoughby would feel that, having been told, she had also been warned of something just in time.

Her New World

ALL Morcove School was mustered in Big Hall.

Line behind line the various Forms were ranked, making a sea of faces for Muriel Floddon to scan in a thrilled way.

It was the last muster of the day before girls were dismissed to the dormitories. The semi-devotional nature of the assembly accounted for Muriel's attendance, along with other members of the staff.

There was no irksome compulsion, but from matron and housekeeper down to the youngest maid in cap and apron there was a set place in Big Hall every night at this time. So the clear sweet voices of those who formed Morcove's domestic staff could join the scholars in the singing of a hymn or two.

To what a different world had Muriel come, from her own humble home in the woods on the great Swanlake estate.

The original thrill had not yet worn off, although several hours had passed since she came under Morcove's roof for the first time in her life.

Her first evening. And the housekeeper and others had been so kind and considerate, not finding a hundred and one jobs for her to do at once or being all instruction.

She had been allowed this first evening to get to know her way about the place and to settle down nice and happily.

Nor had it been possible to feel homesick, when there was so much brightness and life around one. Not only had she sensed a jolly team-spirit amongst the staff; in her ears all the time there had been the gaiety of the scholars themselves, their laughter ringing out, their friendly cries to one another, a constant and delightful animation everywhere.

She could see Pam Willoughby at this moment standing tallest of all in the Fourth Form line. Those chums of hers were shoulder to shoulder just there, even as they went right through the term, Muriel was sure, shoulder to shoulder in the deeper sense.

The singing ended with a last Amen, and the organ's mellow pealing ceased. A murmurous blessing from the headmistress, and then Muriel could open her eyes again to see the Forms start to march out.

"Right-turn!" for the Fourth Form at last, and there went Pam and the rest of them.

"Good-night, Pam Willoughby!" was Muriel's unvoiced, fervent wish.

Her young heart was very full. This red-letter day in her life had shown her how very kind most people are. But none so wonderfully kind as Pam Willoughby, who might have been so aloof, born to such a great position, the only child of the Willoughbys, and their heiress.

Now the last Form had filed out, and the staff

could leave by its own door. There was one pleasant "Good-night!" after another for Muriel to respond to in the next minute or so; but a certain parlourmaid would go upstairs with to-day's new recruit, chummily seeing her right to her quarters.

That was Ellen, Morcové's favourite amongst the scholars—a deserving favourite. Parlourmaid Ellen was such a "sport." If she could get you out of a scrape at any time, she would.

"I'll tell you something, Muriel," whispered kindly Ellen, when they were parting for the night upstairs. "Housekeeper was looking at that needlework you were doing this evening. She thinks it wonderful, such a stitch. In the morning I will— Oh!" Ellen broke off with a little start as a footfall made her turn round. "Who's this then—one of the girls? Oh, Miss Pam!"

"Against the rules, I know," smiled Pam serenely, as she came up on tip-toe. "But I did want to say good-night to Muriel."

"Well, I haven't seen you," chuckled sportive Ellen, promptly stepping away.

"That's a girl to have for a friend, Muriel," commented Pam, after Ellen had vanished. "And this is your own little bed-room. Now aren't you going to be happy at Morcové, Muriel?"

"Oh, awfully happy, miss! I couldn't have believed!"

"My mother knew what she was about, Muriel, when she put you forward for this vacancy. You'll find that nothing is forgotten than can add to a girl's comfort and happiness. And I am sure that if any girl deserved the chance, you did. If anything should occur that is upsetting let me know, won't you, Muriel?"

"It won't, miss; all the same, it is kind of you to—"

"Not at all. By the way, Muriel, I have been thinking. When you looked so upset, on the point of leaving Swanlake this afternoon, was it only a sort of parting wrench, after all?"

Then a hesitancy in the woodman's daughter made Pam continue quickly:

"So there was something else? Muriel, I wish you would say what. I mustn't hang about, but I'm just wondering; did you have words with that French girl Zolie Duval?"

"I— She— But it wasn't only that, miss." Muriel suddenly got over all her faltering and spoke with a rushing earnestness. "I have been thinking all this evening that perhaps I ought to tell you, miss. When I went back for your rain-coat I could not help hearing that lady and gentleman in talk—"

"Mr. and Mrs. Eastman?"

"Yes, miss. It was so strange to hear them talking about—about pumping you."

Pam stared.

"Pumping me? About what, Muriel?"

"I'm sure I can't say, miss. It's why I felt so uneasy, for it was as if they were—well, up to no good."

"But this—this is amazing!" breathed Pam. "Are you meaning that Mr. and Mrs. Eastman are not the right sort of people to be renting Swanlake?"

"Your father and mother, miss, knew all about them?"

"But they didn't, Muriel. The Eastmans were simply sent along by the agents. And now you say that they want to pump me about something. I'd like to know what."

"Mrs. Eastman was saying to her husband that she'd have you over for a night, and that would be the chance. He seemed to agree, seemed to be glad there was that chance. As if—as if matters were hung up for the time being," Muriel added softly. "That's all I overheard, miss. I hate prying, and felt ashamed, and yet—"

"I quite understand, Muriel," nodded Pam quickly. "It was only because the talk seemed to mean harm to Swanlake that you listened. Now I shan't be content until I have been over to Swanlake and have been pumped."

She was rubbing her forehead thoughtfully, as she turned to hurry away.

"No, I just can't imagine what it means, Muriel. But I'm fearfully glad you let me know. It has put me on my guard. Good-night, Muriel, and sleep well—your first night away from home."

"And it is home from home, miss, as you girls said it would be."

Pam flashed a smiling glance behind her, glad to have heard the woodman's daughter respond so happily. Then she made a silent rush for it to the Fourth Form dormitory.

She had not been missed. The dormitory was in its habitual state of riotous jollity, with Paula Creel's bed as the centre of some pillow-fighting. Why it had to be Paula's bed always, Paula herself had often wanted to know.

In due course Miss Everard appeared upon the turbulent scene to pretend great anger. But lights-out took place without anyone having been lined, and then in the darkness, Pam, whilst desultory chatter went on amongst other girls, could give her mind entirely to what Muriel had told her.

Those Eastmans! What on earth could they want to pump her, Pam, about! Were they up to no good at Swanlake? If so, that was a nice thing, with dad and mother abroad.

Eastman—Eastman! No, Pam herself had never heard of them before they became temporary tenants of Swanlake. They had been total strangers, too, to dad and mother. "Been out in India a good deal, so I'm told," was all dad had been able to remark about them.

Pam, casting her mind back now, had a sudden belief that the Eastmans' connection with India had served as a kind of social recommendation to her father. He had spent many years in India, and had a partiality for people who had done the same. Quite natural, come to that.

"But," Pam ruminated, shaking up her pillow, "they can't really be quite the right sort, wanting to pump me. How soon can I get over to Swanlake again, I wonder? At the week-end? Betty will play steam if I back out of next Saturday's hockey match. Still, this Swanlake business seems a bit serious."

But Pam was not to have to wait for the week-end before seeing more of the Eastmans.

The very next day, at tea-time in Study 12, where Pam had a seat on the more decorous side of the table, who should suddenly enter, after a tap, tap at the door, but Mrs. Eastman.

"Oh, don't get up, girls!"

But, of course, they all rose as she floated in, radiantly lovely and so very friendly.

"Nice to see you all doing yourselves so well," she rippled. "You know, I was motoring this way, and I thought I'd just pop in to see that woodman's daughter. She seems to be perfectly happy. Then I thought I would look you up, Pam Willoughby, whilst I was about it."

"Will you let us give you a cup of tea, Mrs. Eastman?" suggested Betty.

"Oh!"

"Yes, bekas, we can easily squeeze up ze bit. And we had ze jolly good tea at Swanlake yesterday, don't forget, at your eggssence. Queek, Paula, move up."

"Owp!"

"But really, girls," laughed the bewitching visitor, "I mustn't stay even for a cup of tea. All I wanted to ask, Pam—can you come over to Swanlake for the week-end? We'd so like to have you. You can tell us so much about that lovely place. You've nothing on, I take it, after midday, Saturday?"

"If I could make it Friday—just Friday night, Mrs. Eastman," was Pam's counter-proposal, inspired by eagerness to hasten developments. "There's a match on Saturday afternoon that I very much want to play in."

"Make it Friday evening then; all the better!" cried Mrs. Eastman gaily. "I'll see the head-mistress on my way out. We shall send a car, of course, and deliver you back Saturday morning in good time for school. Oh, and if the head-mistress would rather two or three of you came, we shall like that all the better."

Betty had poured out a spare cup of tea and was now offering it.

"You must, Mrs. Eastman."

"So nice of you," she purred, accepting the tea to drink it standing. "No, I won't sit down."

"Mrs. Eastman, were you and your husband in India at one time?" Pam seized the chance to inquire casually. It was a bow drawn at a venture, but it might help.

"We were, yes. And so was your father, it appears."

Pam nodded.

"Dad has heaps of friends who have been connected with India. I rather wonder that he had not heard of you."

"Ah, India! India is a big country," laughed Mrs. Eastman. "But he may have met people out there who were quite well known to us. Talking of that, we were looking through the Swanlake Visitors' Book the other evening, and what names are there, Pam. Names to conjure with in India. Er, there is a certain Professor Donkin; he was at Swanlake a little while back?"

"Oh, Professor Donkin, yes," Pam nodded and smiled. "A dear. He stayed a month with dad before going out to Egypt. You know Professor Donkin?"

"Only by repute," said Mrs. Eastman, returning her empty cup to the table. "He is the great Egyptologist, of course. Marvellous man for books of the dead, and all that."

"Only he has turned to India, I fancy, in the last few years," Pam threw out, with studied carelessness. All the while she was watching for any sudden start on the part of Mrs. Eastman. "Ancient India is more his hobby now. It fascinates me to hear him talk."

Pam's heart suddenly throbbed. Mrs. Eastman had given that slight start, betraying quickened interest.

"Really? When you come over to Swanlake, Pam, you must tell us about Professor Donkin. Tell us some of the things he told you. Anything to do with India—so fascinating, as you say. Well, I must fly. Ta-ta, girls."

"HAVEN't they any children?" Betty exclaimed, after the door had closed behind Mrs. Eastman. "Just a young couple like that, renting Swanlake. Can't think what they can want with a place as big as that."

"Wather stwange, bai Jove!"

"Now you speak of it," said Pam, "so it is."

Polly Picks Lucky

GREAT excitement in Study 12 an hour later. It had been intimated by the Form-mistress that Pam Willoughby could go home to-morrow, Friday, evening; but one other girl must companion her.

And Pam, she absolutely refused to undertake the invidious task of choosing a chum.

"We must draw lots for it, that's all," Betty had decreed. "Nothing can be fairer than that."

"Um!" the madcap had grimaced. "I'm never the lucky one, somehow, over draws."

Still, it was Polly who was even now making out the little slips of paper to go into the hat that Naomer was away seeking.

One spill, and one only, was to have a cross marked upon it. The girl whose name was called from a list when that marked spill was drawn would be the winner. Meantime, there was the excitement of acute suspense.

"I hate to be selfish," sighed Helen, "but, oh, I would like it to me be!"

"Bai Jove, I have a new fwock, geals, that would look wather weal at the Swanlake dinner-table to-morrow night, what!" mused Paula.

"My new apwicot—"

"You can lend it to me if I'm the winner," jested Polly, shuffling the finished slips together.

"Imagine me in apricot, girls. Ha, ha!"

Then Naomer whisked in.

"Queek, here you are!"

"I say, I say! Stahp! That's my hat!" was Paula's alarmed cry. "Betty deah—geals! I should like to know why it must be my hat."

"Bekas he was kicking about on ze floor in ze coat-room."

"Wha-a-a-at! Howwows!"

"Ha ha, ha!"

"Sit down, Paula," commanded Polly sternly.

"I believe you are creating this scene, hoping to be able to cheat. Give me the hat, Naomer."

"No, bekas I am going to—"

"Give me—"

"Ah, bah, take him zen!" said Naomer, hurling the hat, much to Paula's further grief.

"Insuffable! Dwp it, Polly! I didn't mean dwp it litewally!" Paula raved. "Stahp this—"

"Oh, fussy!" exploded the madcap. "I'm sick of hearing about your apricot frocks and your hats. Take the blessed hat, and wear it!" she said, hurling it across the study.

"Yes, take him and wear him!" yelled Naomer, picking up the luckless hat. "Like that!"

And with both hands she jammed it upon Paula's head, so violently that poor Paula sat down with more celerity than gracefulness.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Order, order!" the madcap now requested solemnly. "Some of you girls are everlastingly making game of Paula. I think it very bad taste on your part. She's peculiar, we know. But if she likes to wear a hat indoors—"

"I don't! I'm fwufious!" raved the oft-teased one, scattering various chums by her wild jumping-up.

"I am woused! I— Look at this hat of mine. Look at it!"

"There's one thing about it I like," said Polly

sweetly. "It isn't apricot. Come, come. Be serious, children. The study—attention. For the next trick, ladies and gentlemen, I require a hat. Yours, madame?"

"Certainly not! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eat all right, go ahead, bekas I am sitting on her," Naomer remarked, bouncing up and down on Paula's lap. "Now zen, everybody, see me draw ze winning ticket, gorjus!"

Betty called the first name on the list.

"Judy Cardew."

Polly took a slip from the hat and shook her head. A blank.

"Helen Craig," went on Betty. "No? Tess? Madge? Well, then, Naomer?"

"Blank!"

"Not fair. Bekas—"

"Sh'rrn!"

"But what ze diggings, I want zat over again!"

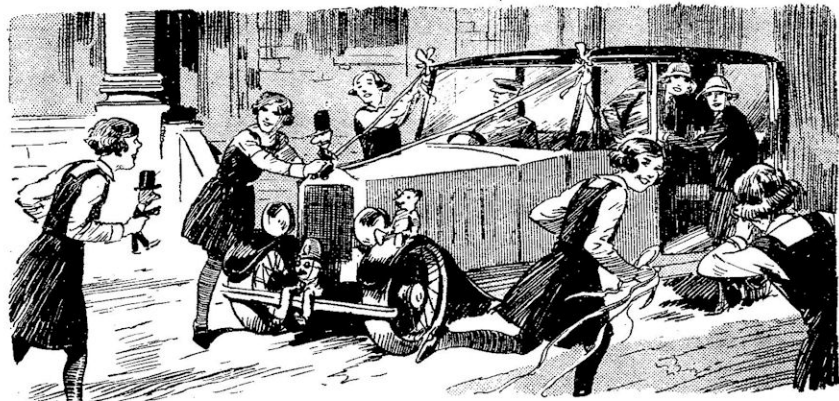
irate Paula. "I have had wonderful luck in a draw."

From this sort of banter the madcap suddenly changed to a quite serious suggestion that perhaps she ought to give up her lucky place to one of the other girls. Not Naomer, no. For Naomer had made those charges of "cheating." But wouldn't Pam have somebody with her less likely to "drop bricks" and generally discredit Morcove? Staid Madge, for instance or Tess?

Pam, however, without dropping any "brick" herself, was able to insist upon Polly's being the one to go with her, and Polly accordingly remained the envied one.

It was an envy infecting the whole Form. There was playful booing up in the dormitory that night and the same next morning.

With mock sarcasm various girls said to Polly that they supposed she would manage to stay over the week-end with Pam at Swanlake. And Polly, with an angelic smile, said quite likely.



The car that was to take Pam and Polly to Swanlake was soon being suitably "decorated" by laughing Fourth-Formers—just as if the occasion were a wedding!

Betty, above the peal of laughter, called the next name on the list.

"Polly."

Polly picked another slip from the hat, glanced at it, and looked immensely pleased.

"See?" she said, showing it round. "A cross."

"Not fair! Ooo, I like zat—cheating! Bekas you held ze hat, and had ze slips, and—"

There came a fearful howl, overriding all other sounds, as Polly disposed of the accusation of cheating by thrusting Naomer headlong into Paula's lap.

"Wow-owp! Gah, my hair! Healp!"

"You must, Naomer, be more careful!" said Polly, hauling the dusky one clear of the dishevelled duffer. "Let me put you to rights, Paula darling, and then if you care to let one good turn repay another, perhaps you can lend me a frock for to-morrow evening? Apricot is my favourite colour."

"Groo! Look heah, geals—"

"Have you heard?" Polly spoke on sweetly to

But the Form was at its best in the way of demonstrating when the car from Swanlake turned up for the girls towards five o'clock.

Girls who had come out to games after tea came swarming off the field to form a mob full of make-believe indignation. Pam and Polly, each with a small bag packed an hour ago, would be off now.

"So don't forget, hoot zem!" was Naomer's own shrill incitement to disorder. "Bekas what ze diggings, some girls have all ze luck."

"Hear, hear!" the crowd agreed. "Ha, ha, ha!" "But who is that man who has come in the car with the chauffeur?" one or two juniors now wondered.

He proved to be no other than that very worthy man, Muriel's Flodden's father. Hearing that a car was running to Morcove he had put in for a lift there and back, so as to be able to see his Muriel for a minute or two.

Some of the girls took him in hand, showing him the way to go to find Muriel without delay.

Meantime out came Polly and Pam by the front door of the schoolhouse, smiling in bland anticipation of facetious cheers. Great fun, really, to be treated to such a send-off.

Only there shouldn't have been this delay, enabling the demonstrators to go to unexpected limits with their fun.

Pam and Polly were delighted to know that Muriel's father was here, and they wanted him to have a nice little talk with the staff's new recruit. But this waiting about for him was soon leading to a decoration of the car, as if it were a wedding.

Paper streamers were forthcoming. So were various mascots, to be hung upon the bonnet and the headlamps.

Amidst shrieks of laughter all this impromptu fun went on, the Swanlake chauffeur preserving as impressive a look as was possible. As for Polly and Pam, they simply had to grin and bear it.

At last the woodman came running out, to resume his seat next to the chauffeur.

Mr. Floddon was obviously amazed at seeing a dummy figure adorning the bonnet of the car and a shoe hanging on to the luggage-grid. But he had begun to understand by the time he was at the car and was touching his cap to its juvenile passengers.

"Miss Pamela, I hope as how this is allowable, my coming over to Morcove?" he pleaded in a bluffly respectful way. "You see, missy—"

"Of course, Mr. Floddon; and will you ride inside with us?" Pam invited cordially. "I'd like to talk about Muriel."

"Why, thankee, miss, then I will." Jumping in, he pulled the door round—slam! And what a cheer went up as the car glided away.

"Bekas," yelled Naomer, starting to run beside it down the drive, "best of luck, Polly. Best of luck, Pam. Hi, and zink of me when you are having dinner to-night!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Hoocay!" the attendant mob cheered again, eapering to keep up with the car. "You lucky girls. Boo! Ha, ha, ha!"

In the car Muriel's father grinned sheepishly.

"All for a bit o' fun, seemingly. Ah, and my Muriel has been telling me," he confided elatedly, "what happy times you young ladies do have."

"Is Muriel herself happy, that's the question?" smiled Pam.

"Happy, miss! I've never seen her happier, and that is saying something. She looked bonny, did my Muriel, and pretty in that cap and apron; pretty isn't the word for it."

"Another time, when I am running over to Swanlake," Pam murmured, "I must try and get her leave to come with me. Altogether, you're not sorry that you have let her go to Morcove?"

"Not I, miss. I certainly wished her to go into the house at Swanlake, with your parents abroad as they are. But the folk that are there now—"

The woodman broke off with a sudden apologetic look.

"I beg pardon, Miss Pamela. I ought not to have said—"

"It's quite all right, Mr. Floddon. But what don't you like about Mr. and Mrs. Eastman then?"

Pam had no scruples about discussing them now. It was her duty to find out all she could from all possible sources.

For a moment or two the woodman kept silence,

his brown hands clasping his knees. Sitting opposite Polly and Pam, he seemed to them to fill completely that opposite seat, he was such a giant of a man, swaying a good deal, too, with the easy motion of the car.

"It's not for me, Miss Pamela, to sit in judgment on my betters," he said; and Pam thought: "If they are your betters."

After further hesitancy he continued:

"Only there's strange goings on, missy."

"In what way?"

"Perhaps I'm making a big mistake, though," he frowned, "and you'll be laughing at me in a bit. Maybe you young ladies are going over there this evening to a party that's being given?"

"We haven't heard that it's to be a party, have we, Polly? No, Mr. Floddon," Pam smiled on, "I was just asked over as belonging to Swanlake, and this chum of mine is keeping me company."

"I see, miss. Then there's not going to be anything like a—a fancy dress affair?"

"Fancy dress!" cried both Morcovians.

"I just wondered, all of a sudden like, whether that was the meaning of it, young ladies. For this is how it is; last night I was out and about pretty late, having a bit of keepering to do for the master's head-man."

"It's the busy time, of course," Pam nodded. "Well?"

"Well, young ladies. As true as I sit here, suddenly I sees a man in the moonlight, all dressed up like an Indian. Turban, miss, and all the rest just like is worn by any of those big pots from India—begging your pardon for the word—as has been down to Swanlake at various times on visits to the master. At first I thought the Eastmans must have got a visitor of the same sort, staying for a bit; but no! I found out this morning; nothing of the kind."

"Then how very extraordinary!" said Pam, to whom Polly was turning in similar amazement. "What did the man do whom you saw in the moonlight, Mr. Floddon?"

"Made off, miss. Ay, was gone in a flash, and I thought that a bit odd, too. You don't think, Miss Pamela, that it could have been Mr. Eastman himself, wearing a sort of fancy dress? Trying it, so to speak, having a fancy dress party in view?"

Both girls burst out laughing.

"Oh, it couldn't be!" cried Pam.

"Then I'm hanged if I know how to account for it all," exclaimed Mr. Floddon bluffly. "What I do know is, I didn't imagine it. Ah, and this was at one in the morning, you must understand, young ladies, and yet when I came out of the woods and looked towards the mansion there were lights still burning."

"As late as that?"

"I'd like just to add, Miss Pamela, this is the first I've said about it to anyone. Any inquiries I have made, I've been careful not to say why I was asking, like."

A pause followed that was to endure for a long time, the car speeding by the rough road across the moorland wastes.

What had been said was much too personal to Swanlake for Polly to have felt like butting in. As for Pam, she felt she must take time for thought.

A fleeting idea came that the Indian might have been one who was at the end of his tether in this country, and so he had made his way down

to Swanlake. Pam's father had many a time helped destitute Indians.

But even if such a one had only got to Swanlake late at night, after tramping from some seaport or from London, why had he not shown himself at the house in the morning?

The fact that no Indian had been seen since, except by the woodman, and then only at dead of night, compelled Pam to dismiss the idea of a "down and out" as being untenable.

Who, then, was the mysterious visitant? Or was he no stranger to the place after all, but really Lawrence Eastman dressed up as a native of India?

Why on earth, though, should Mr. Eastman masquerade in such a strange manner? Rehearsing for a fancy dress party—that was too absurd. There were no fancy dress parties at this time of year, and anyway, Pam must have heard if one were being given by chance in the district, say, for charity.

Puzzling, unfathomable business altogether. And all the more disquieting because vaguely she had the feeling that it was associated with those suspicions of hers which had grown up round the Eastmans.

Nothing more was said about it all during the run to Swanlake. Pam was going to confide in Polly right enough; but this was neither the time nor the place for doing so.

Just inside the Swanlake gateway the car was stopped to set down the woodman. From there he could "leg it" by a short cut to his little home in the woods. After jumping out he saluted the two girls very politely, and his looks told them how he had appreciated the trip.

"Nice man, Pam."

"Oh, rather! He has been at Swanlake all his life. Father values him greatly."

"That was an amazing thing he told you about last night in the woods, Pam."

The little lady of Swanlake smiled her serene smile.

"Yes, well, Polly darling, we will talk about all that later. I can see Mrs. Eastman waiting at the porch."

Mrs. Eastman was waiting, laden with a mass of flowers culled from gardens full of spring blooms. She drew attention to her huge bouquet by exclaiming stageily:

"See what I have been stealing, girls."

"If you never steal anything more than that from Swanlake," smiled Pam, "my people won't mind!"

Just as well to have made such a playful retort. Pam was thinking next moment. She was sure that Mrs. Eastman had changed colour slightly.

"So glad to have you, Pam dear!" the lovely lady gushed. "And this is a chum of yours who was here the other day?"

"Polly Linton."

"How d'you do, Polly. If there is one name I like more than another, it is Polly. Well, Pam, you are at home, so I am sure I don't need to show you to your room. Polly will have one next door to it?"

"That's what I thought," said Pam lightly. "Hallo, Zelig!"

The French maid had appeared, eager to take the girls' luggage upstairs. Her nature was to be either very vivacious or very sullen. Now she was all happy animation.

Attending the two girls to their rooms Zelig soon showed that she was all for hovering around Pam. Twice Pam counselled the French girl to

go and see after Polly, and twice Zelig came back after only a few moments' absence.

"It is that your friend has no need of me, she say," Zelig laughed excitedly. "Voilà then, it is that I can do all the more for you, mademoiselle. Ah, how I am happy that mademoiselle is home again."

She chattered on, whilst busy at a wardrobe. "Mademoiselle would wish to wear—"

"Oh, anything will do, Zelig; not my best, it's only an ordinary evening. They've no company coming?"

"No. They live—ah, so quiet; it is death in life, mademoiselle, to me. But it must be that you let me dress you to your best, so that they may see—"

"Zelig, no," insisted Pam with amiable firmness. "Run away now."

"How then!" And the French girl stood very still after flashing round to stare. "It is that you do not want me any more? Ah! But if it were that woodman's daughter!"

"Oh, Zelig, don't start again about Muriel Floddon or I shall be really cross."

"Mademoiselle, pardon, pardon! But you know—"

"Yes, Zelig, I understand. And I don't like such silly jealousy. Be a good girl!"

"It is impossible!" the French maid cried out with a gesture of wild despair that accorded with her miserable tone. "Impossible for me to be good. I am bad, wicked; I am a monster. There is that in me here!" And she beat her chest with her hands, stamping passionately. "It will drive me mad. She is with you at that school. She comes between you and me. Oh, mademoiselle, mademoiselle!"

"Zelig, control yourself."

"I cannot, I tell you!"

Then Pam showed her birth and her upbringing. She simply walked out of the room, instead of ordering Zelig out of it, and serenely sought Polly next door.

"Coming out for a few minutes before dinner, Polly? Coming round to the stables and the kennels?"

"Rather, Pam. But what's all the row about with that French girl?" chuckled Morcov's madcap.

"One of her attacks," smiled Pam. "Never mind Zelig; I've something more important to talk about than her stupid jealousy of Muriel Floddon."

And whilst in the sunset light the two schoolgirls were roaming around out of doors, finding favourite ponies to make a fuss of and favourite dogs to pet, the one confided to the other her suspicions in regard to Swanlake's temporary tenants.

Guarded Talk

"NOW with you two girls here I shall expect to have some music."

It was young Mrs. Eastman's sweetly-smiled remark as she got to Swanlake's beautiful drawing-room with Pam and Polly, after the rise from dinner.

"You both play, of course, girls?"

"I don't; Pam does—wonderfully," Morcov's madcap stated flatly.

"Then, Pam dear, you must let me hear one of your pieces. It is so nice to have a little company," gushed the temporary hostess of Swanlake, subsiding into a deep armchair. "My husband leaves me a good deal to myself of an even-

ing. He is a great reader, and it is such a wonderful library here."

"What does he like best to read about, Mrs. Eastman?" Pam asked carelessly, whilst she sauntered to the grand piano. "Travel?"

"Well, yes—India, of course," responded the young wife, whilst she cast off an Indian shawl from her narrow, ivory-white shoulders. "And you have so many books on India, too. By the way, Pam, you were mentioning Professor Donkin the other day."

Pam slewed round on the music-stool.

"Oh, yes?"

"He put in a good stay at Swanlake?"

"Quite a month, I remember."

"Fancy. I've heard him spoken of as the man without a moment for leisure. Wonderful man. All that he has found out about ancient peoples. And now, you say, he is in Egypt?"

"The Egyptian Government suddenly sent for him. He was here at Swanlake when the summons came," Pam said, sorting through some music.

"I wonder whatever such a man did with himself a whole month here," laughed Mrs. Eastman. "Did he shut himself up in the library every day? Or perhaps your people gave him a special room for study?"

"Yes, well," said Pam, placing a selected piece of music upon the stand. That was all she was going to answer this time. But she hoped that Mrs. Eastman would go on.

"He would find the books on India so helpful, Pam. It is Indian, I have been told, that is his particular craze now."

Pam, nodding as if not called upon to answer, put her hands to the piano keys. She struck a chord.

"How I envy your having met Professor Donkin, Pam," Mrs. Eastman interrupted the music. "I suppose he used to talk all about India—about things of which even your father knew nothing."

Pam played softly, whilst answering.

"I should think Professor Donkin knows more about India than anybody else in the world."

"That's a pretty piece you are playing, Pam. But do tell me." And Mrs. Eastman suddenly got up from her chair to cross towards the piano. "Has he published anything about India? He was always writing when he was here?"

"Was he?" Pam returning, looking up into Mrs. Eastman's face whilst still playing, slowly, softly.

"The servants say he was. I expect," laughed Mrs. Eastman, "it is to be some wonderful book on 'The Temple of the Moon!'"

"The what, Mrs. Eastman?"

"'The Temple of the Moon.'" Didn't Professor Donkin ever talk about that?" purred the wily lady. "I had an idea that that was his special craze now."

Pam dropped her hands away from the keys and rose. She plainly implied: "If you don't want music, I'm sure I'd much rather talk."

"Yes, girls," Mrs. Eastman now included Polly in the airy chatter, "it is some tremendously ancient ruin out there in India, right away in the mountains. The Temple of the Moon, its name has come down through the ages. But its origin—well, I believe that that's more of a mystery than are many of your lost tombs in Egypt, for instance."

"The Temple of the Moon!" echoed Polly in an awed voice.

But Pam, she was silent. As much as she could ever become agitated, she was agitated now. So that was it, was it, she was thinking? The Eastman's were only interested in Professor Donkin because of their interest in The Temple of the Moon.

Yes, well, after this Mrs. Eastman might pump and pump, but she would do no good.

Yet was it enough simply to keep a guard upon one's tongue? To that question Pam's whole disturbed mind was one emphatic "No!"

Towards bedtime Mr. Eastman drifted into the drawing-room. Then it would have amused both schoolgirls if it had not deepened their grave convictions to see how all the airy talk about this and that managed to work back in the end to Professor Donkin and India and the Temple of the Moon.

At last Pam and Polly went upstairs, and there the madcap learned from her chum that there must be no thought of going to bed yet awhile.

"For this is how it is, Polly," whispered Pam. "I know for a fact that Professor Donkin when he was staying here was at work upon a theory in connection with that old Indian temple. He came down to Swanlake with a lot of ancient Indian manuscripts that he had got hold of and was managing to translate."

"Dealing with the Temple of the Moon?"

"Yes, Polly. Dad let him have a special room downstairs to work in. It's that little room, if you know it, at the end of the passage that also leads to the gun-room."

"Would the Eastmans have the right to go there, Pam?"

"Oh, they have the run of the whole place, of course. Dad's own private papers are all locked away in the safe, no doubt. But what I'm thinking is this, Polly: Professor Donkin had to go away to Egypt in a hurry. It was an urgent call—"

"Yes. And so—"

Supposing he left all his papers dealing with the temple business behind at Swanlake? He may have done that," Pam whispered tensely. "I know there was talk of his coming straight back here on his return from Egypt. And supposing the Eastmans are after any papers that deal with the Temple of the Moon?"

"I get you," nodded Polly. "They have found nothing yet, that's why they had you over to pump you. But at that rate, Pam, can't we do something?"

"We must do this," was whispered back; "creep down after everybody else has gone to bed and go to the room that was Professor Donkin's study. There's a kneehole desk where he may have left papers, just the papers that those Eastmans may be wanting to get hold of."

"The drawers will be locked, though."

"Perhaps I can supply a key," Pam smiled, causing Polly's face to light up. "Mother used to have that room for her housekeeping accounts. So the key should be on a bunch that I think I can lay hands upon."

"Unless, Pam, your mother took the key off the bunch to let Professor Donkin have it?"

"Oh, bother, that's a snag!" Pam muttered ruefully. "Anyhow, we'll see what we can do. I'll come to your room, Polly dear, when I think it's time."

"Right-ho! I shall be ready."

This whispered talk had taken place in Pam's bed-room. Polly now went away to her own

adjoining room, and instantly Zelig Duval appeared to Pam.

"Mademoiselle—"

"Oh, Zelig, there is nothing more for you to do to-night, thanks. I don't want to be fussed around."

"Très bien, mademoiselle," the French girl sighed and bowed. "Enfin, I am of no use any more, no!"

"Sh! Zelig, you mustn't say—"

"Ah, it is that I am so unhappy!" came the tearful whimper. "How I am desolate, mademoiselle, that you no longer care for me!"

"But, Zelig, I do!"

"Ah, no—no! It is in your eyes; she is everything now, and I am nothing. Oh, mademoiselle," the emotional young foreigner sobbed, suddenly kneeling in an imploring attitude, "let me—let me come with you to the school! Let her return, that woodman's daughter, and let me—let me be near you at Morcove. You cannot refuse your Zelig?"

"I must, Zelig. It is really no business of mine, as you are well aware."

The French maid sprang erect from that suppliant attitude.

"But if it were in your power, how then?" she panted wildly. "Still you would favour that girl?"

"I would still wish her to be at Morcove, Zelig, yes. And now good-night. Not another word, Zelig."

She drew away to the door, sighing submissively.

"Bon soir, mademoiselle—dormez bien!" she murmured tragically from the doorway. "A million pardons for that I annoy you. It is only that I so you adore, mademoiselle, and that you tell me she is everything now, and I am nobody."

"I have not told you anything of the sort, Zelig. Good-night."

The door closed between them. Pam had such a mental vision of the French girl's going away in a drooping state, she herself heaved a deep sigh. Pretty trying, these continual upsets. It was to be hoped that Zelig wouldn't come back to start again.

As a safeguard Pam turned the key in her door.

Then she drifted about the room, giving her entire mind to that other safeguard which she hoped to carry out, with Polly's aid, before turning in.

If—in there were papers downstairs belonging to Professor Donkin and relating to the Temple of the Moon, and if—again, what a big if it was—if she and Polly could get hold of them, then there would be one thing to do with them. Take them to Morcove in the morning.

In a little while Pam stooped in front of her bed-room window to hold one of the rich hangings aside and look out into the night.

There was a good moon, and by its silvery radiance she could see much of the glorious surround of terraced gardens, the tree-studded park, and the lake. A cock pheasant shrieked somewhere in one of the distant coverts. Perhaps the keeper was about. Or would it be that Indian again?

Pam smiled, and then she felt that it must be a mistake to smile, and a perplexed frown drew



To the ears of Pam and Polly came a sudden girlish cry—a cry of fear!

her fine brows together. An Indian, Muriel's father had said, India again.

But hark! Now the Eastmans were retiring for the night. She could hear Mr. Eastman whistling below stairs, as he did his bit of the locking up, the rest have been done by servants. Mrs. Eastman, patting back a yawn or so, had already reached her bed-room.

Pam sat upon the edge of her bed and waited—waited for a long time after perfect silence had taken possession of the vast old house.

Then at last she switched off her lights and unlocked the door.

On tip-toe she crept to Polly's door, giving it a soft pad, pad with three fingers.

Open came that door instantly and out came Polly on tip-toe.

By the Light of the Moon

PAM gave a "this way!" gesture and set off. Polly followed. Not a word had been spoken, and not a sound did either girl make.

It was towards a secondary staircase in the enormous country mansion that Pam conducted her chum. They crept down to the ground floor, and only then did their wary ears pick up a sound in the house—the measured tick, tock of a grandfather clock.

There was a short length of dark passage to traverse, and then they were at the closed door of that room which Professor Donkin had used whilst a guest at Swanlake.

Pam set the door open and walked in, with Polly close upon her heels.

Bright moonlight was flooding in at the high french windows, rendering artificial light quite needless. The girls could have seen to read print, and Polly was able to take stock of the room by a swift glance around.

There were bookcases and odd bookshelves, all crammed with volumes, some in handsome bindings. Here and there an Eastern curio served for ornament.

Pam looked behind as she glided towards the kneehole desk, saying with her eyes:

"Close the door, Polly."

That precaution carried out, in a moment both girls were at the desk, finding all the drawers locked as they tried them.

"Yes, well, wait here awhile," whispered Pam.

She was as serene as ever in spite of the thrilling nature of this midnight act. Creeping out of the room, she was gone for only a few minutes, although it did seem much longer to Polly.

Always impatient for results, Morcove's madeup had begun to fume by the time her chum came stealing back, displaying a bunch of keys.

"Now!"

"Let's hope we can do the trick, Pam. Don't see how we can set about busting open the drawers if none of the keys will fit."

It was like Pam to receive this uneasy whisper in silence. Faintly smiling, she chose one of the suitable-looking keys; but it would work none of the locks.

Down went the corners of Polly's mouth as she watched. Bad beginning.

Pam tried another likely key. It proved to be as useless as the first. She selected a third from the bunch, silently slipping it into a drawer's keyhole.

A worn hasp faintly rattled back. Pam pulled open that drawer, and Polly instantly was all smiles of relief and joy.

"Hooray, Pam!" breathed the madeup. "That's something like."

A nod from Pam. By the ample light of the moon she was starting to take out papers and notebooks with which the drawer was crammed full.

Excitedly, Polly stood at the other's shoulder, looking on as more and more papers came out of the drawer.

Even Polly could tell that these were not mere housekeeping accounts and bundles of tradesmen's bills. As for Pam, a slight hastening of the inspection made it clear that she felt the scent to be hot, so to speak.

At last Polly whispered the thrilling inference: "They're the professor's?"

Pam nodded again. The papers already taken were all literary miscellanea, the handwriting a

spidery, scholarly one. Now she had come upon a small bundle, bound with red tape.

Fetching it out of the drawer she saw a label on which something had been written that evidently related to the contents of this particular bundle. There were the large, hand-printed letters:

T of M.

"Phew!" gasped Polly, as her eyes also scanned the label. "'Temple of the Moon.'"

"Yes," whispered Pam. "He seems to have put all the papers together relating to that business. I say, Polly."

"What—what?"

"There are some awfully old papers in this bundle. They look as if they'd fall to pieces at a touch. Brownish paper; strange lettering—Hindustani, I should think. We must be careful."

"But you will take them away to guard them?" Polly urged tensely. "Keep them at Morcove?"

"Yes. I feel that it is up to me to—"

And there Pam's whispering ended.

A startled gasp from Polly had sounded.

Half-turning, Pam found her chum staring towards the french windows.

She looked in the same direction, and then her own lips parted in a soundless "Oh!"

For there, at the moonlit window, a man was peering in, a dark-faced man, with black, piercing eyes. A man from the East, from India, surely, as his turban head-dress proclaimed.

Just one palpitating moment went by, with both scholars agape in a horrified manner at that sinister figure, and with him with his dark, thin face close to the glass.

Then he vanished, had turned and flashed away, and only the bright moonlight was where he had shown himself for that sensational moment like an evil spirit of the night.

"THE Hindu!"

"Yes, Polly."

"Phew, but—"

"Sh!"

Pam was remaining much the calmer of the two girls. Polly indeed was wildly excited, and in her headstrong way, rashly inclined to rush to the french windows and unlatch them.

"He's gone, Polly; let him go, dear."

"But, Pam!"

"I know; it's pretty mysterious. How I jumped when I looked and saw him."

"The same man—it must be so—that the woodman saw the other night!" Polly said under her breath. "A Hindu, right enough. Or, Pam, could it—could it be Mr. Eastman himself, after all, dressed up as a Hindu?"

"For what purpose, Polly?"

"Goodness knows!"

"That was a genuine Hindu," Pam declared calmly. "I ought to know. Dad has entertained Indian princes and such like, heaps of times here at Swanlake. And, of course, they have had their native servants with them. I would say, Polly, that that was a Hindu who is a big pot in his own country. You get to know by the face and the carriage."

"You don't mean an Indian prince?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as that, Polly. But somehow he didn't look like a low-caste Indian."

"What are we going to do about him, anyhow, Pam? Let the Eastmans know?"

"We'll decide in the morning, Polly. Best to

go slow there, don't you think? The urgent thing is to take these papers away so that they won't come to harm. I'm going to take all this bundle," said Pam softly, "that relates to the Temple of the Moon."

"I think you're wise to do that, Pam. The Eastmans are after those papers, even if the Hindu isn't. But I should say that it begins to look as if he, too, is here for that purpose. What do you say, Pam?"

The little lady of Swanlake was going to say nothing. That was the best way to get impetuous Polly to calm down a bit.

"Pam, I'll go and stand over by the window whilst you get the papers together?" Polly suddenly exclaimed in her restive manner. "In case he should come back."

"Oh, he won't do that," smiled Pam. "But it's a good idea for you to keep watch at the window. We scared him stiff, I dare say. He never expected anybody to be about downstairs. Lucky we had no light going."

"He was going to break in?"

"Looks like it, dear."

The whispering ceased. Polly tip-toed across to the french windows, and without opening them, did her best to keep a wide look-out upon the moonlit grounds.

But the vigil was not to last long. Pam, at the kneehole desk, soon got together all the papers that she meant to take away with her—to Morcove School eventually.

They would be quite safe there, for who would ever dream that a Morcove girl had such strange documents in her possession.

For the rest of the night, of course, they must be with Pam in her bed-room upstairs. She had a distinct feeling that she was not going to get much sleep, but that didn't matter for once.

"St, Polly! We can go now, dear."

"Oh, are you ready? Right-ho," whispered back the madcap, coming away from the window. "I haven't seen a single sign of him out there, Pam."

"No, well, I don't suppose you would."

Pam had answered laconically, whilst taking a last good look at the desk to make sure that it showed no trace of the night's work upon it.

The drawer that had yielded up Professor Donkin's mass of documents relating to the ancient Eastern temple was locked again. The bundle of papers and memo books was under her arm.

"Polly dear, I think I shall keep mother's bunch of keys, whilst I'm about it."

"I would, Pam. And, look here," the madcap whispered, "can't I spend the rest of the night in your room? The papers will be there? Then hadn't we better take turn and turn about at keeping awake?"

The moonlight showed Pam smiling delightedly as she tip-toed with Polly to the door.

"It might be as well, Polly dear, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind. I'm simply crazy about this affair," the madcap sent back the thrilled whisper. "Sort of thing I love."

"So long as I'm not letting you in for any big risks, Polly. Indians are funny people, especially when it is anything to do with their own country. You don't want to run into any kind of danger—"

"What about yourself?" grinned Polly.

(Concluded on the next page.)



THIS week I am able to give you full details of the great new series of complete circus stories, which starts in our next number, on sale on Tuesday. As I mentioned in a previous Chat, this new series is being written by Ida Melbourne, whose delightful tales of the adventures of Scamp and the other pets of Hardon village have proved so immensely popular.

Miss Melbourne has introduced a number of new animal friends into the series she is now writing, and as most of them are circus performers I am sure you will revel in reading of their adventures, which are both amusing and exciting.

Look out for the first story of this new series in our next issue, under the title of "TOGETHER—TOP O' THE BILL."

Once again I would ask you all if you will please, to tell your friends about this charming new feature, and also about the other fine stories appearing each week in THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

While on the subject of stories I feel I must draw your special attention to the long, complete Morcove School story which appears next week, entitled

"IN THE SERVICE OF THE SCHOOL,"

By Marjorie Stanton.

This gripping narrative, one of the finest stories Miss Stanton has yet written, continues the tale of dramatic happenings and sensations that have suddenly made Swanlake, that beautiful home of Pam Willoughby's in the depths of the country, the talk of Study 12.

Mystery has come to shadow Swanlake. The great old house, so long the abode of peace and serenity, has suddenly become the stage of a tremendous drama, in which it is the fate of certain of the Morcove girls to play an active and important part. Within the space of such a brief Chat I cannot enlarge upon details of the "plot"—and, indeed, I am sure you would rather I did not, for you will enjoy the story much better if it comes as a surprise.

Popular Pam Willoughby is, of course, the leading character in next Tuesday's fine story, and all the other favourite Fourth Formers are well to the fore. Make certain of reading this fine story by ordering now your copy of THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN.

TO MY CORRESPONDENTS.

Very heavy pressure upon space compels me to limit my brief replies. I would, however, like to thank very much the following readers of our paper for their nice letters:

NANCY JONES (Beaumaris); "A REGULAR READER (Hobbesey, N.S.); JOYCE HEDLEY (Flixton); RUBY HILL (Wolverhampton); DIANA BELMONT (Glossow); "MAD-CAP BILLY"; MARY PETTIT (Stockton-on-Tees); "BOOKWORM" (West Bromwich); JOAN (Hove); "PETER PAN" (Hull); MARJORIE COULSON (Ealing, W.5.); "A LOVER OF BETTY AND CO." (Leicester); "DULCIE" (Nr. Rochdale); "A LANCASHIRE LASS" (Burscough, Lancs.); KATHLEEN CURRIE (Edinburgh); VERA (Brundall); "TRIXIE" (Chipping Norton); "WINIFRED ROSE"; MARGARET LENCH (Small Heath, Birmingham); "GIPSY" (Redland, Bristol); DOROTHY HANSON (Punchbowl); DOREEN (Walspool, Montgomery); "AMBITIOUS" (Nr. Kendal); BETTY PULSTON (Gh.); IRIS HUNTING (South Lowestoft); MADGE MONK (Bowes Park, London); "LEBROSI" (Dumfries); JOAN MARSHALL (Welbeck).

"I'm different. Professor Donkin is a friend of dad's, and I am—well, I'm dad's daughter."

Polly dug Pam in the ribs for that answer.

"You're the one, Pam. All right, I'll hold my tongue now."

For Pam was opening the door to pass out.

A wary step or two, and then she paused, listening.

Tick, tock was again the only sound, and that so faint as scarcely to be heard. Tick, tock!

She nodded toward to her chum that it was all right for the stealthy return upstairs.

But at that very instant there came a sound that seemed to turn their blood to ice.

From somewhere down here on the ground floor a dreadful shriek had gone up, rending the night silence, a girl's shriek charged with mortal terror.

Terror Comes

"PAM! What's that?"

"Sh! Steady, Polly!"

"Yes, but—"

"That was Zelie," was Pam's agitated whisper. "I know, by the voice. That was not Mrs. Eastman or any of the ordinary servants. It was the French girl."

"Then what's happened to her!" gasped on Polly. "What is she doing downstairs at this time of night?"

"Listen; here she comes, so it's only fright; she's not hurt." Pam inferred this from the fact that Zelie could be heard rushing in this way.

"Polly, I'm off, to get these papers—"

"Yes, yes; you get away with them quick!" Polly fearlessly urged. "I'll—"

"Unless we are asked, Polly, we know nothing." "Right-ho!"

It had been the most rapid exchange of whispers. Now Pam fluttered away, with the bundle of papers under one arm and the bunch of keys clenched tightly in her other hand.

She turned a corner and was gone, and not a

sound came back to Polly, who knew her chum to be rushing up the side staircase.

Yet there was anything but silence now in the great old house. Polly heard the moaning cries of Zelie Daval for a brace of seconds longer without seeing the girl. Then like one demented, the French maid appeared, wringing her hands and casting glances behind so that she almost blundered into the Morcovian.

"Zelie!"

"Ah!"—first recoiling nervously and then rushing close. "Is that you, mademoiselle? But no, it is only her friend. Where is she?"

"Pam? In her room."

"But no, no!" dissented Zelie frantically. "For I have been to her room and she is not there."

"She is there now, so don't make a row," Polly said bracingly. "Everybody is awake and coming down, thanks to you. What's the trouble, Zelie, that you shrieked—"

"Mademoiselle, it is that I have seen a terrible thing!" the foreign girl quavered, still wringing her hands close under a white face. "I could not sleep. I went to the room of Mademoiselle. Pam—"

"So you said before."

"Ah, but hear me! I wished to ask her pardon, that I might sleep at last. I have been so wrong, so wicked. She was not here, so I say to myself: 'What is this? What does it mean?' I come down, and then—and then—"

"Yes, what?"

"I find the hall door open. How I am terrified. I go to see"—trembling from head to foot as she said it. "But it is not mademoiselle who has gone out there into the moonlight, no. I see a man, and it is the new milord."

"Who? Oh, you mean Mr. Eastman!"

"Oui, oui!" Zelie nodded vehemently. "You will find him there, struck down so! Ah, I cannot go back; it is too terrible," she shuddered. "And you, mademoiselle, stop, stop! Let others go. Mademoiselle, I was mad to say go. You are too young. Stay!"

"Be blown to that!" jerked out Polly, carried away by her usual impetuosity.

She rushed to the entrance hall and saw the great outer door standing wide open to the moonlight night.

Even if there had not been a hubbub to tell her that others were coming downstairs and would make things safe for her, she would still have done as she did. This was Polly, Morcove's most headstrong junior.

Out by the front door she ran, and before she had gone half a dozen steps in the open air she saw a prone figure in the moonlight.

It was Mr. Eastman who lay there, face downwards, inert.

Polly dropped upon one knee beside him, and in her great anxiety to know the worst—to be of help—she gently turned him over.

He moved slightly, and feebly a groaning murmur came.

"Hunda Khan!" he said faintly, as if naming his assailant. "Hunda Khan!"

At that moment, in her bed-room, Pam Willoughby softly closed a drawer into which she had rushed the bundle of papers.

There they could stay for the remainder of the thrilling night.

For the rest of this never-to-be-forgotten night at Swanlake those papers would be—safe!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.

NEXT TUESDAY

Another grand, long complete Morcove School story, continuing the dramatic narrative of the Mystery of Swanlake. Be sure to read—

IN THE SERVICE OF THE SCHOOL



BY MARJORIE STANTON