

"The Treachery of Zillah Raine" GRAND LONG MORCOVE STORY INSIDE

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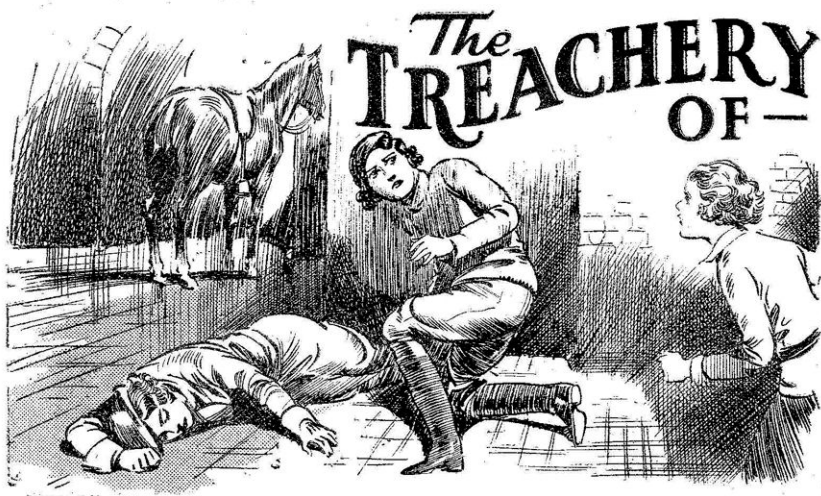


**"That's Pam's Pony! What
Can Have Happened to
Her?"**

A dramatic moment from this
week's grand long Morcove story

"THE CRIMSON SHADOWS" EXCITING COMPLETE 'SECRET SOCIETY' SERIE 3

Enthralling Long Story of the Chums of Morcove School



The TREACHERY OF —

The Secret

BETTY BARTON was putting in a useful half-hour of captaincy work, in her study at Morcove School, when Pam Willoughby found her.

"Some news for you, Betty."

"Oh, Pam! You don't mean——"

"About this week-end—yes. I'm able to have you and Polly to Swanlake for the Friday-to-Monday, as well as Zillah Raine."

Down went Betty's fountain-pen. She hitched back her chair and jumped up.

"Splendid, Pam! It will be jolly! Have you told Polly?"

"Not yet—there's been no time. I was called to the 'phone by mother, speaking from Swanlake. Then I came up here to find you."

"I rather think Polly's over at the gym. Shall we both go, Pam? She'll be thrilled to death."

"If you don't mind, Betty dear, I'll leave you to tell Polly. There's something I want to say to Zillah Raine, and this is a good time."

"Right-ho!" Betty gaily assented, and the two quitted the study together.

Together, too, they reached the door of that study which Pam was sharing, these days, with Zillah Raine—a new girl from far-off Virginia.

With a brief "See you later!" and a parting smile, Pam went in, whilst Betty sprinted the rest of the way to the stairs.

With such a radiant smile as Zillah Raine gave, the two might have been on the very friendliest of terms.

Yet it was but a few days since there had been an upset—a scene of the most violent kind—between the pair of them. Zillah it was

who had contributed all the violence. Pam preserving throughout that calm exterior which comes of depth of character. Not that Zillah realised how badly she had shown in contrast.

Here was a shallow, mixed nature, into which there entered a tremendous amount of vanity. Since the upset she had imagined she was being very forbearing by being sweet to Pam again. A "forgiveness" was implied, as Pam herself realised, and that was pretty cool—considering!

"Say, Pam, I hope you weren't being rung up just then, to say they can't have us, after all?"

"Oh, no."

"I guess I've never been more excited, now it's Thursday!"

Zillah flung aside the magazine she had been reading, and stood up—very virile, very slim and altogether pretty.

"I'm all right for evenings, Pam; there are the frocks I had for coming over on the boat. I'm just wondering, though, about mornings—supposing I want to go riding?"

"Oh, you don't want to bother about what to wear, Zillah. That 'phone message—it was to say I can take Betty Barton and Polly Linton as well."

"Is that so!" Only after a moment's pause did Zillah Raine give a nod of pretended pleasure. "Well, I guess that's all right, Pam. You know, I don't think a whole lot of those two girls; but they're your pals——"

"Two of the best girls in the world," Pam said evenly. "And now, Zillah—I want to say something: have a distinct understanding, so that nothing can happen over the week-end that will spoil it for Betty and Polly."

Because of her overwhelming self-confidence, Zillah Raine has made a false step. Now she is rapidly becoming a menace to Morcove!

By Marjorie Stanton

ILLUSTRATED BY L. SHIELDS

ZILLAH RAINÉ



The slow impressiveness of Pam's remarks had given Zillah time to change, more than she realised, to a sullen state.

"Huh! So you want to bring that all up again, do you, Pam? Well, I gotter get used, I suppose, to your funny little ways! Let's have it."

"Betty and Polly haven't the faintest idea, as you must be aware, that you did the thing for which I have had to bear the blame. Your name has never been mentioned by anyone in connection with the affair—"

"Except by you!" Zillah rejoined, souring still more. "You've had enough to say, Pam, I guess? But there, I'm not going to start another quarrel. I was put with you in this study by the head-mistress; and I'll say this—for I like to be fair! Miss Somerfield surely did the best she could for me, as you're about the only girl in the Form that is—in a way—like me!"

"I have had something to say about that affair only once, Zillah, and then it was—only to you. I thought, when I found you out as being the girl who had left me with the blame, that I might get you to do the decent thing after all. Anyone may have a lapse, I suppose. I hoped that an appeal to you—"

"Appeal!" sneered Zillah. "You forget the things you said, that night! I'm sure, the way you went for me—"

"You asked for it," retorted Pam briefly. "Anyway, we are getting away from the point. Betty and Polly will be with us for the week-end over at my home. The understanding you and I want to have is this—or the consequences may be terrible."

"Oh, say," Zillah laughed; "mountains out of molehills, Pam!"

"No, for the consequences would be really terrible for you," Pam gravely insisted. "If ever the Form should find out that I was punished whilst you were to blame—it would be more than you could do to live it down."

"Over a little thing like that! Just the give-and-take there must be, surely? You do a thing like that for me one day, and I, maybe, will do just the same for you, some other time!"

"Yes, well, big or little, Zillah, I have done this thing for you, and you need never fear that some day I shall speak out. I'm going to keep silent—that's my side of the understanding. Yours must be, that you are going to be very careful not to discuss the affair if it crops up in the talk—"

Pam broke off sharply, as if this had become a moment when she herself, by a word too many, might imperil the secret. There were approaching footfalls in the corridor, panting voices that she knew to be Betty and Polly's.

Slightly flustered, Zillah snatched up the illustrated journal so as to be able to make careless remarks about this picture or that. But Betty and Polly, as they came darting in, only took notice of Pam.

"Hoo-ray!" madcap Polly waved. "What time shall we be getting away to-morrow, Pam?"

"The car will be here just after half-past three—"

"When we come out of school—that's good! Betty and I take it for granted that we shall get leave all right," Polly panted on. "We haven't asked yet!"

"Oh, it's all fixed up," Pam serenely smiled. "Mother spoke first to Miss Somerfield, on the 'phone; put in a word for you both—"

"And a word for you, Pam, at the same time, I hope?" came Betty's earnest interjection. "Do tell us that your mother has at least been able to beg you off, over that affair of—"

"Mother hasn't heard a thing about it! Oh, and by the way," Pam hastened on, carefully keeping her eyes away from Zillah, "when we are over at Swanlake—not a word, please!"

"Not!" stared volcanic Polly. "But I think that should be just the time for the whole thing to be really gone into again—thrashed out! I'm sure Betty thinks, too. Wouldn't you, Zillah?"

Polly's drawing Zillah into the talk was done quite affably. If Pam's Study No. 12 chums were not exactly fast friends with the new girl, at any rate they were not on bad terms with her.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather we didn't even talk about it now!" Pam intervened, hastily.

"All right, Pam; I'll say no more," grimaced the madcap. "Knowing what you are! Besides, there's Bunny and Naomer and some of the others, just going into Study No. 12. Better tell 'em to be good while we're away!"

And out ran Polly.

A "Send-Off" For Zillah!

"GIRLS," was Polly's commencement of some tantalising remarks, "no rehearsals to-morrow evening!"

"Not, Polly? Why ever—"

"Yes, what ze diggings, Polly, you say, queek!"

"Not because you don't need to rehearse any more—I can tell you that," said the madcap sweetly. "I've never known some of you girls so slow at getting our play to go the way I want it! But—"

"But why, then—no rehearsal to-morrow, Polly!"

"Oh, and another thing," she roguishly deferred her thrilling explanation; "I shan't be in the team for hockey on Saturday afternoon! Neither will Betty—"

"Bai Jove!"

"If you like to ask some girls to tea, on Saturday, to make up numbers—you may," Polly blandly announced. "The walnut cake that I bought—I shan't mind if you put it out. After all, you poor souls—"

"Oh!" came Bunny's understanding shout. "You're going to Swanlake, Polly! You and Betty!"

"Sweendle! Bekas what about us? Of all ze measly sweendles!" shrilled Naomer, fetching dust out of the carpet with her stamping. "Why can't we all go!"

"Oh, would you have liked to go, kid?" Polly purred in pretended surprise. "But it is too late now. This comes of you girls being so well known to Pam's mother as real swots! Work before all else! I fancy she said to Miss Somerfield, over the phone," the teaser romanced, "she was refraining—that was the word, refraining—from asking you others—"

"I heard that we were to be asked some better time," Bunny said demurely. "When Zillah Raine would not be there!"

"Ah, but it's to be made up to us—our going with Zillah," the madcap could quickly retort. "The cooking is to be extra special! In fact, Saturday evening's dinner will be a perfect—"

"Shut up, will you!" yelled Naomer. "When you know I only wanted to go to Swanlake bekas of ze gorjus zings you get to eat, for once!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Then Betty came in, looking rather irritated. She sighed as she closed the door.

"How I do wish Zillah Raine would let me like her better, when I'm sure I want to!"

"What is it now, Betty?" gurgled Bunny.

"Oh—it's hard to say. She jars, that's all. Poor old Pam sharing a study with the girl!"

"Dago!" Polly muttered.

"Sh! Haven't I told you," the captain quite seriously whispered, "you mustn't call Zillah—"

"But she is!" the madcap flatly insisted. "It's why, she is so wonderful to look at. They always are."

"She's a queer mixture, anyhow," Madge Minden soberly murmured. "At one moment she is all highbrow; what you might even call goody-goody—"

"That's her mother," nodded Polly, sitting perched upon the table-edge. "Mexican! Ready to knife you—"

"Good gracious, Polly dear!"

"Oh, yes," the madcap nodded with mock seriousness. "They always have a dagger in their garter."

"Howwows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now for heaven's sake let's stop this talking about her!" Betty laughed. "I'm as bad—I began it. There are worse girls than Zillah Raine at Morcove, after all."

"There must be one girl who is much worse," Judy Cardew sternly murmured. "Or Pam would never have been punished for a thing she never did. Some girl could have cleared Pam—and preferred to keep silent."

"Oh, and as to anything I say about Zillah," Bunny supplemented; "it's not because I really dislike her. She amuses me, that's all."

Betty waved for silence, laughing again. "Well's that's enough, anyhow."

But Polly had to have the last word.

"We shall see," grinned Polly, "to-morrow!" There were more chuckles then. And what if there were? The girls were only anticipating a thing which the Form in general was likely to think simply ridiculous—namely, Zillah's grand preparations for the week-end at Swanlake.

Sure enough, as early as the following morning, Zillah began to look out things to take. Other girls smiled to see such an array of wearing apparel.

Expensive evening frocks, worn on the huge liner on which she had voyaged to England with Miss Somerfield, were going to be packed each in its covering of tissue-paper. Then there were all her own favourite soaps and scents, as well as underwear such as she seemed to think no other girl boasted.

Zillah did not pack at once, but kept the various things about, mostly spread over her bed upstairs in the dormitory, so that it was quite an exhibition.

Bunny was for playing a joke upon the showing-off girl, but refrained on account of Betty and Polly being due to spend the week-end with Zillah. So Study No. 12 had nothing to do with the huge display card which was found suddenly to be adorning the grand collection.

On the quiet, some prankish scholar must have gone to great pains over that card, which caused great hilarity when displayed as an advertisement:

EVERYTHING FOR

THE VOYAGE

50/-

An after-dinner rush to enjoy this little joke resulted in one of the sightseers deciding to add another ticket:

PLEASE DO NOT

TOUCH!

Shrieks of laughter started. The girls might have set about adding still more tickets; but suddenly Zillah came striding in—furious!

She looked, indeed, so dangerous that a mirthful scattering took place. There was that glitter in her large dark eyes about which Tess had spoken yesterday. Passionately the new girl tore up the offending display cards, casting the bits at Form-mates who had skipped out of her way. "Say, tell me what the joke is and I'll laugh."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's not one of you has ever had a voyage," she sneered, thus implying that jealousy, not love of fun, had actuated the teasers. "A lot of hoodlums!"

She had called them that before, without exactly causing them to be sullenly shame-stricken. Morcove would never abandon its right to ridicule vanity and over-dressing.

And, still only for fun, it was decided that after school there must be a grand send-off, with loud cheers specially reserved for Zillah and her absurd amount of luggage.

Betty and Polly and Pam were not likely to mind in the least that they must be involved in such ribald proceedings. So the Form decided.

As it chanced, Pam for one very nearly missed all these embarrassing attentions when the moment for departure had come.

She had been suddenly asked to report to Miss Somerfield.

As Pam had not seen the headmistress since that very unhappy interview which had ended in punishment being wrongly inflicted, the customary cordiality of Miss Somerfield could not be expected now. But Pam had no difficulty in appearing as composed as ever when she came into the presence of Morcove's supreme authority.

"Well, Pam, I understand you are on leave with others for a week-end at Swanlake," the headmistress began with a significant absence of the old kindly smile. "I have thanked your mother for having Zillah Raine. It will be a most pleasant and profitable experience for that girl—new to this country."

Pam acknowledged this with a polite smile.

"I hope you have nice weather, Pam. There is one thing I want to say—it is why I sent for you. Being on leave and at your own home, Pam, makes a big difference where Grangemoor is concerned. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, Miss Somerfield."

"It is quite likely that your mother may devise some means of letting Polly Linton meet her brother from Grangemoor. That sort of thing, of course, is quite all right. You girls might even visit Grangemoor—there again, it would be a sight for Zillah to see; that fine Public school! All I ask is that you do everything properly, Pam."

After a frowning pause the headmistress resumed:

"It is so easy, Pam, when one of our former mistresses is now a Housemaster's wife at Grangemoor. It is so unnecessary, at all times, for anything—underhand or indiscreet. You know why I was so angry about that affair the other day. There was no excuse—there never can be any excuse—for a Morcove girl inviting herself, as it were, to Grangemoor School, to hang about there. Suitable opportunities for your meeting Grangemoor scholars are provided. Never let it occur again, Pam."

No use protesting that it had been some other girl that day! Pam remained silent. In the distance she could hear some bursts of facetious cheering coming faintly from a crowd on the front gravel.

"Go along, then, Pam. Only once have you so disappointed me. But that, I need hardly say, made the disappointment all the more painful. My kind regards to your people. Oh, Pam—"

"Yes, Miss Somerfield?"

"I have not said anything to your mother about it all."

Pam murmured a "Thank you!" Miss Somerfield might be wholly mistaken and unwittingly unjust, but

she was a good sort for all that. Pam shot her a glance of genuine affection as she turned and went from the room.

"Come on, Pam—come on!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" the teasing crowd kept its peals of laughter going as she came running out to the car. "Hurry, Pam!"

"Bekas, you will miss ze jolly old steamer!"

"Show all passports, please!" vociferated Bunny, standing by the open door of the Swanlake Royslor. "Gangway!"

"Whoa!" some other jocular spirit shouted. "Is all Zillah's luggage on board?"

More shrieks! Pam, unruffled, got in, sitting down beside a Zillah who was trying to see what sulky indifference to the crowd's attention would do.

"Hooray!" as the door of the car was importantly slammed. "Bye, all—bye! Boo! Ha, ha, ha!"

"Stand away, there! They're off, girls! Oh, Zillah!" Bunny anxiously screamed, riding the running-board. "Your frocks—they won't get the exhaust, will they?"

How the crowd shrieked!

Bunny swung off, starting to run with the rest to keep up with the car all the way down to the gates.



Even Pam had to smile at the jocular way in which the crowd of girls were bidding Zillah and herself good-bye. "Is all Zillah's luggage aboard?" someone shouted; but Zillah herself sat back, sulky and pretending to be indifferent.

"Amongst those present," Bunny yelled, so that her voice was bound to reach Zillah through the lowered window. "Miss Zillah Raine! Miss Raine wore, for the going-away, a swagger coat of powder-blue, trimmed with—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

In the car, Pam had to sit back sharply, for Zillah was suddenly and very angrily reaching a hand across to wind up the window.

"Say, I won't forget this!" Zillah hissed.

"Neither will they, I fancy," was Polly's snorted rejoinder. "When you have been—so silly!"

So This Is Swanlake!

UNDER a sunny sky they came, in a little while, to Swanlake, the car turning in at a gateway with lodges to go smoothly up the mile-long drive.

Betty and Polly looked out eagerly now, loving a fresh sight of the old park, clumped with shade-trees, and the glimpse that was to be had of the great lake, where swans moved about with such graceful slowness, a neck snaking now and then.

But Zillah chose not to take any first peeps from the car windows. As Betty and Polly could tell, she was putting on an air of being used to something much better than anything Swanlake could offer.

Well! If she knew of anything better, they didn't! No place like home, of course; but comparisons between one's own home and Swanlake could never be considered. It would be only silly.

Zillah, at any rate, had at last to be astonished, even if she would not allow herself to appear at all impressed.

That was when the car drew up opposite a columned porch, where Pam's mother was standing in knockabout country clothes, as if she had just got back from a saunter-round. There were several dogs, all tongue-out with pleasure—Mr. Willoughby's aged Clumber, and Mrs. Willoughby's solemn Scottie, and Pam's own rascally Cocker. But—no butler, opening the great front door? How was this?

Zillah's astonishment, as the other girls could tell, was due to Swanlake being so homely, and their arrival—so informal! Betty and Polly nudged each other as they saw Zillah quite look Pam's mother up and down, during the introduction, as if thinking:

"Say, you've not much of a notion about clothes!"

Then there was Pam's making an immediate fuss with the dogs, when obviously Zillah felt that her study-mate should be going on to say a "whole lot" about her to Mrs. Willoughby. It tickled Betty and Polly to see the girl from Virginia looking almost offended at the lack of excitement.

"Well, shall we go in," Pam's mother casually suggested at last; and even then Pam herself caused delay, by getting all three dogs to run with her out to the grass and back. She returned with them, not praising her own spaniel at all for having won "paws down," so to speak. For he was quite a youngster.

"Poor Dixie's getting very slow, mumsie," Pam mourned with a most loving look for the aged Clumber.

Pam's mother paused then and looked round.

"It's his eyesight we're so sorry about."

"Oh!" Betty and Polly exclaimed together "Is he—"

"Almost blind now, girls—yes."

"You poor old Dixie," they said, joining Pam

in her pettings of him. "Paw, Dixie. Look at him, the darling!"

He sat, tongue out, breathing hard in his old age, offering a big right paw that had torn as many a rabbit burrow in its time. And then the puppyish Cocker shoved in jealousy—a case of "Dignity and Impudence," if ever there was one! But Dixie was too noble to mind, and Pam had no need really to tweak her Cocker's ears to put him in his place.

Not that she tweaked them very hard, either; just lovingly enough, in fact, to send the spaniel mad with joy. He and the Scottie started racing round and round, and this laughable diversion lasted a few minutes. Then, when the girls and Mrs. Willoughby passed into the house, all three dogs came in as well, to make themselves quite at home in the drawing-room.

"I shall have tea ready for you girls in five minutes, Pam dear."

"Right-ho! We shall be down by then."

Zillah, during her first moments under Swanlake's ancient roof—in a fine old hall where not a single manservant was on show, just fancy!—had glanced about in silence. But now, going with her school-mates up the stairs, she began to comment on what she was noticing.

"Say, you don't have carpet on the stairs! We have a crimson carpet at home on our best stairs; and it's antique, too! What's the idea, Pam, not having any carpet?"

"Oh, I don't know—there never has been!"

"I guess that's one of your ancestors, Pam; the guy up there," nodding up to a dark canvas in its dingy, carved frame. "Who would he be, Pam?"

"Oh—that! That's somebody in a uniform—Peter Lely, I think dad told me once."

"Branch of the family?"

"Who?"

"The Lelys?"

"Oh, I meant—Sir Peter Lely, you know, the painter."

"Is that so! Kind of an old master? Say, I wonder your folks don't have him cleaned up. We've got an oil painting of an ancestor of mine at home. Now he," Zillah said proudly, "used to own slaves. As far back as that, yep; before the Civil War, which he fought in, too. He was a colonel. And we always keep him clean. Only last fall, we had him regilded."

For just a moment she was to look really delighted over the way Swanlake did things. This was when she found she had been given a bedroom all to herself, whereas Betty and Polly were sharing one they had often slept in.

But there was a returning look of amused contempt for Pam to see, as she was going away to her own nearby room.

"Say, Pam! Scuse me, but I don't think a whole lot of this wallpaper. I'll say it's dingy."

"I know," Pam admitted, keeping a straight face. "But it can't be helped. In fact, it's tapestry."

"Say, is that tapestry! Then it's ever so old. I guess?"

"Yes, well!"

And that was how Pam closed the discussion, when another girl in her position might have remarked, with some "edge," that the bit of tapestry dated back to a time—when America was still unknown!

ZILLAH RAINE rejoined her three schoolmates in the drawing-room, and was probably pleased to see that she had the best of it, as to

appearance. She had changed into a party frock; they hadn't.

"But I guess you aren't always as quiet as this, Mrs. Willoughby?" was the remark with which the American girl implied a sense of dullness.

Swanlake's hostess, ever gracious, took the hint.

"I must see if I can't liven things up a little for you girls. I have asked Mr. and Mrs. Challenger to come along by-and-by. I dare say you know, Zillah; before her marriage, Mrs. Challenger was a very popular mistress at Morcove. Polly dear—you'd like to see Jack?"

"If he can bring some of his chums!" the madcap roughly stipulated.

She herself was not averse from seeing something of Dave Cardew, as well as her own brother Jack. And then there was Jimmy Cherrol—such a favourite with Pam!

"We'll have them all," Mrs. Willoughby decreed, dispensing tea at a small table. "I'll ring up Grangemoor again and ask for the 'Die Hards' to be allowed to come along. I dare say their Housemaster knows them by that name!"

She smiled across to Zillah.

"You haven't seen Grangemoor School yet?"

"No, and I guess I just want to, Mrs. Willoughby!"

What a glib lie it was, that "No." Pam knew it to be so, although Betty and Polly had not the faintest suspicion.

Yet there was no sudden faltering of Pam's hand as it just then offered Zillah her cup of tea; no lessening of ordinary politeness.

"Your tea, Zillah," said Pam cordially. "And do help yourself to anything you fancy."

A voice in the hall; the master's voice, causing old Dixie to get up at once and lumber across to be near the door when it should open. His tail wagged slowly.

And Mr. Willoughby, the Squire of Swanlake, took notice of his own particular canine chum whilst Pam came across to greet him.

"Old chap," murmured Mr. Willoughby, first reaching down to pat the half-blind Clumber. "Hallo, Pam! Week-end, this time? Splendid! Ah, Betty—Polly! How's the play?"

"You and Mrs. Willoughby must come over, sir, for the half-term concert and see it!"

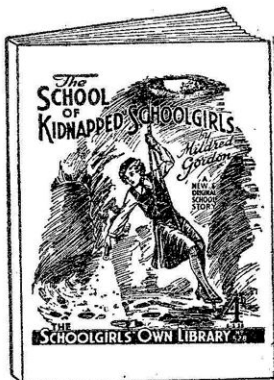
"Wish we could, but we can't! Must be in London, next week."

"And, daddy," said Pam, "this is Zillah Raine."

"Ah, yes, well—from Virginia, I'm told? I've only once been to Virginia; fine country," Pam's father said heartily, finding a seat for himself near his wife. "And how do you like Morcove?"

Zillah's way of answering would certainly have made it hard for Betty and Polly to keep from laughing; but they found themselves paying not the slightest heed.

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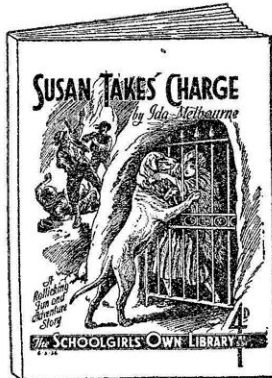


No. 529

Now on Sale—Price 4d. Each.



No. 530



No. 531

They could only give attention to old Dixie—so glad to have his master to sit beside again; the master whose frequent wanderings round the great estate he could no longer share.

Mr. Willoughby was sitting forward to stroke Dixie's silken ears. When his teacup came to hand, with just a slice of brown bread-and-butter, the squire fed the whole slice, bit by bit, to Dixie, whose eyes, even if they were fast losing their sight, could never lose their upward look of love.

It was not for Pam, as the daughter of the house, to draw Zillah's attention to this or anything else which might be typical of the Homeland's manorial life. But Betty and Polly, suddenly remembering the American girl's presence, let their eyes ask her what, as it were, she thought of Swanlake now?

They felt that she must be sensing, at last, the essential charm of a typical British country house—one of those stately homes of England where even a duke will live just as content with rural interests as will the ploughman in his cottage.

Zillah only answered with a look of impatient waiting for something showy, more exciting. And later on, when they were making a tour of the estate, she was obviously very bored. A literal looking farther afield, in her failure to appreciate immediate surroundings, very nearly proved, too, her undoing.

For, suddenly, she excitedly exclaimed, pointing beyond some treecrofts:

"Say, look—there's Grangemoor!"

"What! How do you know it's Grangemoor?" Polly sharply asked. "You've never seen Grangemoor to know what it's like?"

She paused. She and Betty were both looking fixedly at Zillah, who had lost colour for the moment.

"Or have you?" Polly asked, keeping to the same sharp tone. "Have you, Zillah?"

Dinner at Swanlake!

IT seemed as if Zillah were going to give an amused laugh; and then she frowned back at Polly, and there was that sudden passionate gleam in angry eyes.

"Say, what are you getting at, Polly?"

"Just this," was the blunt answer. "It could have been you who did the thing for which Pam here was punished!"

"I guess it could have been; but it wasn't—see?" Zillah insolently denied, with Pam standing by. "Didn't I go to Exeter that day?"

"You said you did," Betty muttered.

"Yes, well," Pam started to interpose; and Zillah promptly caught her study-mate up, mimicking the familiar phrase:

"Yes, wa-a-all!" It was a very American drawl Zillah gave the words. "Pam here knows, and so let it go at that, will you? Say, don't you two girls get trying to slip it over me, or I guess there'll be trouble."

"Right," Polly nodded, at her grimest. "We won't go into it now. We'll wait till we're all back at Morcove."

Pam glanced at her wrist-watch.

"Shall we work back to the house now? It will take us a little while."

"And I guess we ought soon to think about getting into something for the evening?" Zillah inferred, with a sudden change to expectant delight. "If those boys are coming and there's to be, anyway, a kind of a sort of purty!"

But her fondness for getting into something

dazzling, hinted at in that last remark, did not prevent her, presently, from interrupting an elaborate toilette, so as to perform a crafty action.

She had been alone in her bedroom only five minutes; had but a moment since spread out the charming frock which was her choice for the occasion—when suddenly she darted to put on her dressing-gown, to go from the room.

In her stockings feet she crept silently along to another door in the same bed-room corridor.

Stopping to put an ear to the keyhole, Zillah listened.

"But Polly," she heard the Form captain expostulating, "it will never do to go into it all with Pam, now."

"Oh, why not? I'm not for having any row with Zillah whilst we're guests at Swanlake. But I don't see why—"

"Polly dear, do be guided by me! We know what Pam is—so sensitive, such a hater of scenes. She is one of those girls who suffer inwardly over an upset, whilst some of us feel all the better for having a row and being done with it. Far better say not a word until—"

"It does seem such a rotten shame, though!"

"Think, Polly. It's all to gain and nothing to lose, by waiting until we're back at school. If we prove it then, we shall still be in good time to save Pam from the worst of her punishment—the night of the concert, you know. She is at home here now, and so really—"

"Oh, all right, Betty; not a word even to Pam, then—until we are all back at Morcove. But when we ARE back— Do you know what I think? It will only be by simply dragging something out of Pam, I do believe, that we shall get at the truth!"

"That, it seems to me, Polly, is quite likely, now—"

The listener at the keyhole straightened up—turned and tiptoed back to her own room. She reckoned she had heard enough. And she reckoned that what she had heard must keep her thinking—how to deal with Pam.

Polly and Betty, meanwhile, arrived downstairs to find Pam alone at the hall fire. At any moment now the boys were expected.

"Here they are!" Pam smiled, at sound of a sort of martial tread on the gravel in front of the porch. "They've walked."

Another moment, and it was pandemonium in the hall, for as Jack and his four best Grangemoor pals came in, two of the dogs started to rush out and then in again.

Pam's own Cocker went momentarily mad, and it was like Jack to hand the young rascal a Grangemoor cap, to take outside and leave on the drive and then come back for a Grangemoor scarf.

Jack gave him that, too; absent-mindedly, as it were, whilst joining in the first burst of talk.

"It's all right, boys," Jack said, meaning the girls as well, when it was discovered that both cap and scarf had been left somewhere outside in the dark. "I'll get 'em when I go. Jolly good of your people, Pam, to have us along!"

"Naomer not here?" Tubby inferred, juggling one of his inevitable cartons of choc-lates out of an overcoat pocket.

"No; sorry," Pam smiled. "It couldn't quite be managed."

"You'll be seeing her on Monday?" Tubby further inferred. "You might—if you don't mind—let her have these!"

"But you'll all be over for the concert!" Betty gaily reminded the boys. "Our play!"

"Yes, we're saving up for that," Jack said virtuously. "We've ordered the bouquets!"

"I don't see how Tubby can do much saving up," said Polly, "when he buys such chocs as these!"

Then it was noticed that the madcap, having already impounded the chocolates, was offering one each to the dogs.

Some fun developed, and if Zillah Raine had missed amusement at Swanlake up till now, she should have found enough jollity to satisfy her when, presently, she came downstairs—in all her glory!

But this particular moment happened to be not one that Zillah wanted to be given up to nonsense.

She felt that her first meeting with the boys should have been a far less casual affair than it

"Barncombe United."

The others were going away to the dining-room. Shy Jimmy put down the log-grabber and then stood gazing at Pam whilst she smiled to see how nicely he had built up the fire. The flickering light played upon her face.

"Pam, what's this about your having been punished?"

"Oh, nothing, Jimmy."

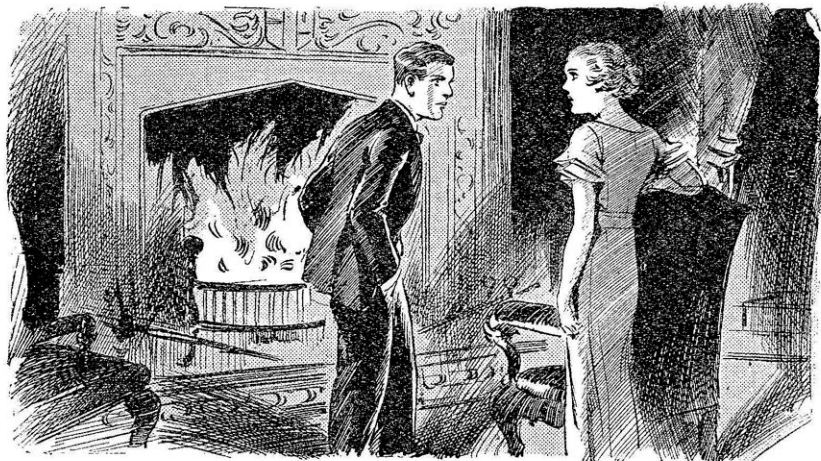
"Jack had it in a letter from Polly. You won't be in the play, will you?"

"I may not be at the concert at all, Jimmy—unless I sit with Miss Merrick or perhaps Miss Somerfield, even. That's all."

"But what happened?"

"Oh—never mind now. Of course, you won't say anything in front of mumsie or dad. They don't know."

"I shan't say anything, Pam. Only—"



"Pam, what's all this about your having been punished?" Jimmy Cherrol asked in deep concern. Pam's steady gaze did not waver. "Oh, nothing, Jimmy!" she answered. "... You won't say anything in front of mumsie or dad? They don't know!"

was made. Say! These fellows were as bad as Mr. Willoughby; thinking just nothing of meeting her for the first time. On about that old dog, too, again—the boys, now, all making such a fuss of him!

A cat suddenly whined up to the porch, and Mr. and Mrs. Challenger came in; a very young man to be "Old Tony" to his scholars, with a charming young wife who seemed to Zillah to get the all attention.

There was a homely cry, after dinner had been announced by the butler; would somebody put a log or two on the hall fire, for later on? So Jack and Tom started to dash together for the log box, but checked in football field style when they saw that Jimmy was already doing the necessary.

"Thanks, Jimmy!" Pam came across to him to say casually. "Frost to-night. You in the team to-morrow? You're playing—"

"Only what, Jimmy?"

"What I would like to do, Pam; I'd like to—do something for you, about it all."

Pam laughed.

"Oh, you can't do that! There's even nothing I can do myself."

Almost there was the gaiety of a Study No. 12 tea-time at dinner at Swanlake that night.

"Old Tony's" presence put no constraint upon the Die-Hards; he and Mr. Willoughby were, in fact, boys again together.

Mrs. Willoughby had her own charming way of encouraging lively chatter, whilst Mrs. Challenger gave Zillah—sitting next to her—every chance of making herself heard.

"I suppose you ride, Zillah?" was one more kindly inquiry, at the very end of the meal. "Fond of it?"

"Fond! I should say I just am! And what I want to do: come to Swanlake again, some time, when there's a hunt."

"Perhaps you'll be able to get a ride in the morning," Mrs. Challonor gently suggested. "Pam has a pony."

"I've been thinking of that," nodded Zillah. Dessert was on offer. Zillah, finding a dish of nuts and fruits in front of her, suddenly helped herself to one Brazil.

Only one, and that one she did not crack, but strangely smuggled out of sight.

Only one girl noticed her action, and, noticing, frowned in puzzlement—that was Betty Barton.

And Zillah Laughed—

"Oh, say, Pam! You going riding?"
"Just a run across the grass and back, Zillah. Would you like—?"

"I'll say I would, Pam!"
It was Saturday morning—very early. Not for another hour would the gong be calling Swanlake's schoolgirl guests to the breakfast-table. Meantime, the groom was away getting his breakfast, which accounted for Pam herself getting her pony ready in the stables.

"Say, I like the look of your pony, Pam!" cried Zillah. So that Pam was tempted to say: "Yes, but if you must shout—don't stand so near."

"Isn't there another I can have, Pam?" the American girl clamoured, going to look in over the half-door of a loose box. "Oh! Say, Pam, this one's just asking me to have him out!"

"Yes, well," said the little Lady of Swanlake, making a final adjustment of her own Robin's saddle, whilst he showed a good deal of freshness on the yard-cobbles. "Will you hold this little fellow, Zillah, and I'll get young Flitters there ready."

"Perhaps you had better, as he doesn't know me," Zillah said, turning back to take over Robin. "Although I guess I was saddling my own pony before ever you knew the first thing about geese. Say, I haven't seen Betty or Polly!"

"They were only just awake when I looked in," Pam remarked, hurrying to the harness-room.

She came away from it with everything for the second pony, and went into his box. The smell of the leather was sweet to Pam's nostrils; so was the scent from a truss of hay lying by, and the faint rock of the stables. The load of saddlery was by no means light; some girls would have staggered under its weight. In her own virile, wiry way, Pam did everything very briskly and expertly, speaking to Flitters softly the whole time.

Still haltered, he was perfectly steady during the rapid buckling on, only dipping his fine head now and then, as if giving understanding nods to all Pam was saying.

So, in a minute or two, she led him out into the cobbled yard, where the bright morning sunshine caused him to frisk in delight. Meantime, Robin seemed to be remaining very restless, held by Zillah, and the latter gave him some jabbing checks to make him stand.

"Don't do that," Pam spoke across to her American schoolmate. "Here's Flitters for you, Zillah."

"Right! And is Flitters wanting to be up to tricks as well? If he is—" said Zillah, gleaming her eyes at the mount. "Say, I guess I'm going to make the neighbours stare, Pam, the guy I must look for riding!"

"There are no neighbours," Pam serenely

responded, holding both ponies now. "Got him? Careful out of the yard, then. I'll follow, then, and I had better show you the way."

"Oh, say, I'm not needing any lessons!" laughed back Zillah, cantering her pony out to a gravel drive that had a wide grassy verge. "You can catch me up, Pam—if you can!"

But Zillah had scarce voiced the boastful challenge, when she sharply reined-in Flitters.

Not yet clear of the yard, she held him in check so as to be able to slow round in her saddle—looking back in a scared way.

Pam was mounted now, but Robin simply would not have her to ride him.

There was far more than the ordinary friskiness of a young pony, or Pam would soon have had the mastery.

Robin was peculiarly ill-at-ease, irritated—maddened!

He reared and plunged, so that his schoolgirl mistress, before the staring eyes of Zillah, came near to being catapulted out of the saddle.

There had been that first moment when Zillah, checking and looking round because of a significant patter of hoofs on the cobbles, had looked frightened. But now—she laughed.

Pam heard the laugh, and she would remember it to her dying day. A heartless, even an evil, laugh it was, with a note of hysteria in it.

"Robin, come up!" Pam tried to calm him, herself still so calm. "Steady, then, boy—steady now."

But he reared again, pattered backwards a full yard on his hindfeet, then came down upon his forefeet and upped with his hindlegs—determined still to throw her off. He swung about, with his head plunging.

"Robin!"

Up he rose again, on his hindlegs, this time so sleepily that Pam felt him losing his balance. She made one last effort to do her best with him, and very nearly she saved both herself and him. But there was a strange frenzy such as she had never had to cope with before, in any mount, and her strength was not equal to the demand.

So, next moment, he slipped in his wild rearing, and he and she went crash to the yard cobbles, Pam lying asprawl but clear of him for a half-second; but then the poor creature, kicking wildly as if in pain, rolled over in her direction.

Betty and Polly, just then, were coming round from the house to the stables at a happy scamper.

They were laughing together at being down so late. Those Swanlake beds of theirs—too comfy for words!

"Hallo, though!" Betty suddenly gasped, whilst Polly emitted a dismayed:

"Goodness! That's Pam's pony!"
A saddled but riderless pony had dashed out of the stableyard just as they were coming to the entrance round an angle of the old buildings.

Had Betty and Polly been a moment sooner, they would have been in danger of being knocked down. As it was, the runaway went bolting past within a yard of where they stood. He galloped a short distance, then checked and simply pattered this way and that, as if uncertain of himself.

But the two girls were no longer watching him. In rising alarm they had gone the few steps farther that enabled them to see into the stable yard.

And what they saw was a sight which filled them with horror. Zillah, on her knees beside Pam, who was lying prone upon the cobbles!

Vaguely Betty and Polly were aware of a second pony that was in an upset state; but he could not dash off as he had been hastily tied to a ring-bolt in the wall.

"Zillah!" jerked both Study No. 12 girls as they rushed up. "Oh, is she badly hurt? What happened?"

"She came off, and he just about rolled over her. Well, I'm sure surprised! I thought she could ride?"

"So she can!" Polly said fiercely. "What do you mean?"

"Oh, don't squabble!" Betty pleaded. "Pam dear—Pam! Oh—she's unconscious. We'd better—"

"You stay!" cried Polly. "I'll run to the house and tell them—"

"Yes, dear. I shan't move her—in case."

"Say, I had no chance to do anything," Zillah exclaimed. "I was already riding the other pony—the one there. I jumped off and tied him as soon as I saw what was happening."

"Then the one that bolted was Pam's pony? Oh, there he is again," Betty amazedly remarked; "come back all by himself!"

"Say, he looks sorry, doesn't he?" Zillah almost laughed, starting to walk towards Robin, who stood hesitant at the yard-entrance, panting hard. "I guess I'd better catch him."

"Careful, Zillah!"

"Oh, say, don't give me any advice. That was what Pam was doing—better if she hadn't!"

Betty winced. How cruelly Zillah seemed to be able to speak about Pam, when she, poor girl, was lying here like this, her eyes still closed!

"That pony, Zillah—is that Pam's own Robin?"

"So she said."

"Her usual mount! Then I can't imagine why it should have happened!"

"Neither can I, I guess," smiled Zillah, taking the now passive Robin to lead him to his stall.

"Say, look, he's quiet enough with me, Betty! Just all it means, I guess—pride before a fall!"

Grave News!

AT Moreove School there was, first, only a sudden sensational rumour.

It went through the school like wildfire, just before the march-in for Saturday morning classes. Pam, at home at Swanlake, had met with a serious accident!

Then, just before "break," came news, official, if not very definite.

Pam's own Form had it from Miss Merrick in the class-room, where they listened in a sudden, dramatic silence to their Form-mistress' words.

"I wish I could feel entitled, girls, to assure you that there is no cause for real alarm. There



"Say, what's the idea?" Zillah protested. "I'm not going to be ordered about by——" Betty flashed a look of contempt at her. "You'll come upstairs to my study this minute," she insisted, and something in her tone made Zillah feel she had better obey.

have been further telephone messages. The head-mistress is, and will be, keeping in close touch with Swanlake. At any rate, we may be devoutly thankful that our dear Pam, who will now be so anxiously in our thoughts, suffered no injuries to the head and had no bones broken."

A sighing sound went over the whole class, expressing that amount of relief, at any rate.

"The Form captain, with Polly Linton and Zillah Raine, are returning as soon as possible. When they get in, no doubt they will be able to tell us much. Meantime——"

And a slight gesture, made by a mistress whose voice had emotionally died away, told the Form that it could go out now.

Quietly—how quietly the rows of desks were vacated, although this was the Form that would often dare to be so noisy.

A few of the hushed girls gathered about her, on their way to the door, and she was then even more of a fellow chum of Pam's, rather than a mistress, in all that she had to say. But it amounted to nothing more than heartfelt sympathy, for she had no details to give, amplifying the more official statement of a minute ago.

So even those lingerers came away from the class-room at last, to drift out into the open air and the sunshine. And, very soon, there was something else to attract their attention.

A car had come in off the road. It was the Swanlake Roysler, with Betty, Polly and Zillah.

There was a rush to be at the porch in time to greet its passengers, and many succeeded in mobbing round the three girls as soon as they had alighted.

But Betty and Polly, much as they wanted to satisfy the clamour for fuller news, could not remain in talk. Betty, in such grave circumstances, had to seek Miss Somerfield at once, and Polly felt bound to find Miss Merrick.

As for Zillah Raine, she chose to go into the schoolhouse without a word to anyone. It may have been her way of paying out Form-mates for the way they had ridiculed her yesterday.

So it was not until after the midday dismissal that Morcove got its first-hand account of the accident.

Even then, Zillah proudly declined to supply her own story, as the one eye-witness. It was from Betty and Polly girls learned details which Zillah, in the first excitement at Swanlake, had imparted to those two chums.

Morcove's anxiety was far from dispelled—could not be, when the latest as to Pam's condition was so very disquieting. She had been thrown, not to grass, but on to the yard cobbles, and then the pony had almost rolled over her.

Doctors now in attendance had to deal with a case of serious shock, with the possibility of extremely grave developments. At the best, Pam would not be back at school for some days.

By Monday morning, however, there was reassuring news of Pam, causing a welcome break in the dark cloud that had hung over Morcove. In Study No. 12 it was decided to go on with the final rehearsals of the play for the concert.

Over Sunday, Pam's chums had been feeling that they would have no heart for the comic play, even though she might be going on all right. But they had only to hear she was, at any rate, no worse, and a great gaiety and enthusiasm came flooding back into all minds.

Carry on! It was, of course, what Pam herself would have wished them to do.

But one thing Study No. 12 could not do, in the absence of Pam, and that was—got her righted in the eyes of Miss Somerfield!

Over there at Swanlake Pam must lie upon her bed of pain, whilst here at Morcove School the actual culprit for whom Pam had had to suffer must still go about unexposed.

Was Zillah that culprit? Study No. 12 was convinced of it now; but there could be no going into the matter until Pam returned.

The fact that the offence, for which Pam had been blamed, was now nearly a week old, made it all the more imperative for Betty and Polly to be careful how they went to work.

That Polly should be at daggers-drawn with the American girl, whilst the matter was so held up, did not surprise Betty. On the other hand, Polly was really surprised at Betty herself being so cold to Zillah.

The captain had such a reputation for conquering feelings due to mere suspicion. Time after time, Betty had fair-mindedly insisted that a girl was innocent until proved guilty, and must be treated accordingly. Yet in the present instance, as Betty's chums noticed, she could not help becoming exasperated at the mere sight of Zillah.

But Betty had more than one suspicion in regard to the new girl. There was another—so appalling in its gravity that the captain had not breathed a word about it, even to her chums.

The time would come!

Meanwhile, something reposed in a locked drawer

of Betty's table, in her own study; something she was quietly saving up—for that time!

The Show Goes On I

It is half-term night at Morcove School.

Up the drive cars are purring, to set down parents and others who have a fond regard for the famous school—some having come a great distance to attend the concert.

And now it is a big batch of arrivals from Grangeover that goes crowding in; Mr. and Mrs. Challenger, with some of the boys! The latter keep with their housemaster and his wife until the very hearty welcome by Morcove's head-mistress has been received. Miss Somerfield is on hand to greet everybody, and Messrs. Jack Linton and Co. come in for the old cordial smile.

The Die Hards, quite prepared to take their stand at the back of Big Hall, start looking about for Betty and Co. They end by encountering all the chums of Study No. 12 in a very excitable state and with not a moment for talk. It must be "See you later!" for the play is down for the first half of the programme, and this means that the Morcove comedienne must go behind at once.

So the five chums, left to their own devices, feel they may as well at once find places at the back of the auditorium; and then suddenly one of the boys—following last through the crush—feels his arm plucked detainingly.

That boy is Jimmy Cherrill, and he faces round to find that Betty has slipped back to have a word with him, without her chums.

"You can tell me, Jimmy, and I'll promise to keep it from the others until the concert's over," Betty whispers. "You called at Swanlake to inquire, on the way here? And Pam—fresh anxiety, is that it?"

"I—I wish you hadn't asked me," mumbled Jimmy distressfully. "Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Challenger did get the school bus to come via Swanlake. They went in; we chaps stayed outside."

"But you know what they were told, Jimmy? Out with it!"

"Oh, Betty, we made up our minds not to say a word, so that you shouldn't be upset before the concert. Your play and all that—"

"It was good of you boys to want to hide it from us," Betty earnestly murmured; "but I could tell. Jack and Tom are only forcing their usual fun. As for you, Jimmy, I caught you looking—oh, wretched. You didn't know; you were in a dream, like—"

"Well, the truth is Pam has taken a turn for the bad. I'm sorry, Betty," Jimmy mumbled on. "I'm frightfully sorry for all of you, as well as for Pam herself. She—you—"

"But hurry now and join your pals," Betty softly urged him. "And I must be quick, or Polly and the rest will be shouting for me. I shan't say a word to them yet."

The swift exchange of earnest words had taken place in the thick of an inflowing crowd that was all chatter and laughter. Betty felt that the talk with Jimmy was so subdued, in such a hurriedly it could scarcely have been overheard. But now, as she turned to work her way out against the incoming audience, it annoyed her to find that a certain Form-mate had been standing by—straining to catch every word.

For that girl was—Zillah Raine.

So certain was Betty that the American girl meant to get busy with her ton up, she conquered the dislike of speaking to her and said:

"Here! Not a word until after the concert—I warn you!"

Zillah, checking in the act of turning away, spoke over a shoulder disdainfully.

"Nothing must spoil that rubbishy play you're giving, is that it? Say, that's a nice way of showing how much you care—about Pam Willoughby!"

"I've warned you," Betty frowned, and then abruptly left Zillah, lest they should get to high words.

It was no time for an upsetting scene. Carry on! And, thank goodness, Polly and others were going to remain in ignorance until the interval, at any rate.

Already they had retired to a tiny dressing-room behind the temporary stage, and so they were not likely to come in contact with Zillah or anyone to whom that girl—if she flouted the warning—might have given the upsetting news.

So Betty reckoned; but she did not allow for a malicious audacity which, five minutes later, brought Zillah herself to the dressing-room.

Disregarding all angry cries of: "Clear out, can't you!" the new girl spoke sneeringly from the doorway to all who were dressing-up.

"Say! You're going to give the play, after all, are you?"

"Why shouldn't we?" glared Polly and others. Then Zillah smirked:

"Oh, sorr-ry! If Betty hasn't told you, of course, then it's no discredit to you. But I've just heard—"

"Zillah Raine!" stormed Betty; and the others had never seen their captain so flying at a girl. "Get out!"

"But if you haven't told them, why shouldn't I let them know?" Zillah insolently cried, keeping her stand at the half-open door. "Pam Willoughby is worse, and so the decent thing would be, surely—"

Slam! Betty closed the door, after reaching Zillah and forcibly thrusting her away.

Then the captain turned round and saw her chums standing mute and still, their looks of horror in tragic contrast with comic attire already donned.

"Betty!" some of them quavered at last. "That hateful girl has only told you all so as queer the show we were going to give," Betty said passionately. "Spite—jealousy—anything but sympathy for poor Pam."

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. No. 789. Vol. 31.

Week ending March 21st, 1936.

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My Dear Readers

GOODNESS me! Letters—dozens of letters—scores of letters—battalions of letters! And still they come!

Perhaps I need hardly mention what the main topic is, dealt with in each and every one—the great "PAM WILLOUGHBY" controversy.

You all remember how it started, through a reader sending in a criticism of Pam, extracts from which were published in these pages.

A few days later the avalanche started, and, by the volume of correspondence I have received, I know full well how deeply interested you all are in the subject.

Realising that you very rightly regard the matter as one of first-rate importance, I got Cuthbert to get carefully through all the replies and tabulate the voting for and against Pam, as it were.

The result, to date, is as follows:

Strong supporters of Pam	80 per cent.
Partly for and partly against ...	13 "	"
Against Pam ...	7 "	"

In other words, of every hundred letters received, eighty-five are wholeheartedly in favour of Pam, thirteen partly like and partly dislike her, and seven dislike her.

The result, of course, is very gratifying both to me and to Miss Stanton, especially as Pam plays such a prominent part in the Morcove stories.

At the same time, I would like it to be clearly understood that neither Miss Stanton nor I in the least minded receiving criticisms of Pam. Editors, and authors, too, can only meet their readers' requirements if they know what readers like, and it has always been my policy to ask for frank letters, in which the writer says exactly what she thinks.

Here, then, are extracts from one or two letters. I only wish I could quote from them all; but obviously that is an impossibility, unless I leave out the stories in SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN for a week or two! I shall, however, publish other extracts during the next few weeks, as space permits.

"The reader who wrote the letter about Pam is being unfair. . . Evidently the reader has never heard the quotation, 'Empty vessels make the most sound.'"

. . . As for saying that Pam shows no affection for her friends and relatives, well, if she read the story about Billy Charteris, Pam's cousin, she might change her opinion. . . Pam has a nice personality, and interests me a lot. I consider her the most likeable member of Study 12, . . . and I vote for more stories about Pam."—Margaret Pullen (Southend-on-Sea).

"This is my opinion of Pam. I think she is one of the most likeable of the Study 12 chums. I admire her for not taking advantage of her parents' wealth.

Although she does not talk a lot, I am sure she thinks all the more, only she keeps it to herself, and does not shout it out as, perhaps, Polly and Bunny would. . . Although I am 17½ years old, I am still a regular reader of S.G.O., and am more than pleased when Pam and Jimmy are in the foreground."—A Pam and Jimmy Admirer" (New Malden, Surrey).

"I disagree with the reader who has expressed her opinion of Pam Willoughby so freely. I like Pam's serene manner. In emergencies, a person who is cool is needed. . . My chums agree with me that Pam is perfect for the title, 'The little lady of Swanlake'. If she were always giving money and being luxurious, she would be a 'swank.'"—Audrey Smith (Oldham).

My best thanks to the following readers for most interesting letters on the same subject:

Irene Mumford (Cwmndau, Aberdare); Kathleen Buck (Tooting, S.W.17); "Constant Reader" (Walton Park, Clevedon); Joan Clifton (Lacey); Pamela Easton (Highgate, N.6); "Miss Seventeen" (Norton, Woodrears); Kathleen Bishop (Etingham, Surrey); "Admirer of Pam and Jimmy" (Greenwich); Madge Pearson (Newton-le-Willows, Yorks).

Audrey Eoulham (Horden, Norwich); Sheila Fox (Hanwell); Doreen Horlock (Enfield); "An Admirer of Pam" (Golders Green); Audrey Preedy (Stonehouse); Elsie Butler (Oldham); Muriel Wyatt (Purley, Surrey); Daisy (Mount Pleasant, Co. Antrim); Edna Burman (Whitechurch, Glam.); "Kay"; "An Interested Reader" (Rake, Liss, Hants); Jessie Ellerker (Bournville); "The Terrible Tomboy" (Lostock Hall, nr. Preston); Eileen Young (Chelwood Gate, Hayward's Heath); Audrey Smith (Oldham).

More acknowledgements on page 314.

Space will only allow of my just mentioning next week's programme of stories. The grand long Morcove story is entitled, "A Misfit at Morcove" and deals with the further "adventures" of that strange girl, Zillah Raine. Splendid COMPLETE stories of her Harum-scarum Highness, and the daring Crimson Shadows, and long instalments of our two popular series, complete a splendid programme which you are bound to enjoy.

YOUR EDITOR.

"What is the news—really?" Polly asked. "Just that; Pam's worse," Betty tensely answered. "And now—I don't wonder you are looking as if that settles it, and we simply can't go on. But, girls—if we don't go on, Zillah Raine will be as pleased as Punch."

"We shall give the play," Polly said; and there were murmurs from others in support of that sudden desperate resolve. "If only because of Zillah—doing her best to slash us up—we'll struggle through somehow!"

"There's another thing," Betty pointed out, growing quite calm again; "if we take our play out of the programme, some explanation must be given to the audience. The real reason may become known—and then everybody will be wretched. Oh, come on, all, as you say! We'll manage!"

And, although it meant for each such a struggle to bear up as they were never likely to forget, manage they did.

Punctually the curtain rose upon their screaming farce, and for twenty minutes the girls kept a packed audience in convulsions of laughter.

It was as if no company of amateur actors could have been in better form for a piece that was sheer rollicking nonsense.

"Ha, ha, ha! Bravo! Bravo, Study No. 12! Bra-vo!" and tremendous clapping.

At last the curtain had fallen.

"So awfully good! Screamingly funny!" Old and young alike were exclaiming in delight, whilst still laughing and clapping. "How ever could they do it!"

How, indeed!

"Hurrah!" a great cheer greeted playwright Polly and her chums as they came before the curtain to hold hands and make their bow. "Bravo, Betty and Co! Polly Lin-ton! Bravo!"

The hit of the evening, so far—and likely to be the best thing in the whole programme! That was what people were saying, whilst they kept on clapping, insisting upon the players returning to make another bow, and still another after that.

Yet it was Polly who grimly muttered—going from the front of the curtain for the last time; "Over—at last!"

To which each of her chums added a just-as-fervent:

"Yes—thank goodness!"

Betty did not return with the rest to the dressing-room. In her stage attire, she gave them all the slip and hurried round to a door serving the back of the hall.

Her roving eyes soon picked out Zillah Raine, sitting in the back row, where she had the Grange-moor five standing just behind her. The American girl was smiling round to speak to the boys when Betty got to her.

"I want you, Zillah—yes, now."

"Say, what's the idea? I'm not going to be ordered about by—"

"You'll come upstairs to my study this minute," Betty sternly insisted. "Refuse, and I shall bring something down here to show you. Something," she added, "from Swanlake!"

Then Zillah's cheeks lost their rich-red colour. She got up, casting her eyes at the boys as if inviting them to ridicule Betty's "officiousness." But the five preferred to study Betty's expression instead of Zillah's.

"I'm coming with you only because I guess it's time I had a word to say to you, Betty," the new girl muttered when they were going upstairs together. "I'll say you've been just too rude to me, lately, for my liking."

Betty received this in silence. It was a silence that became all the more impressive as they mounted flight after flight. The pleasant hum of the interval, downstairs, finally died away. These two girls came upon no one else, up here in the Form quarters.

In the captain's study, when they reached it, there was a strange stillness.

"You couldn't wait with that bad news," Betty said to Zillah fiercely, "although you knew the spreading of it could only do harm—upset everybody. Very well! Now I don't see why I should wait—until Pam is about again and back at school."

"Who wants you to wait?" Zillah challenged darkly. "I'm ready whenever you like, to have it out with you and Polly and anyone else; ready to prove that I couldn't have been the girl who dodged the blame that day."

Betty, who had unlocked and was opening a table drawer, gave a silencing gesture.

"It isn't that, Zillah Raine."

"Oh, isn't that? It was the insolent retort. "Say, then, just what is it, I'd like to know?"

"It is—this!"

Betty, extending a hand, unclosed it.

And there on the upturned palm was, of all things, a single brazil nut—still in its sharp-edged shell.

"You know where I found that?" she said, looking steadfastly at Zillah. "Then you know what to expect—to-morrow!"

Without waiting for any blustering retort, she pocketed the strange "exhibit" and walked out of the study. When, half a minute later, Zillah herself left the study, she emerged upon a deserted corridor. Now she seemed to be the only person on this upper floor of the schoolhouse.

Smiling to herself in a haggard way, she turned, into her own study—the one she had shared with Pam. But all Zillah did, after clicking on the light, was to stand lost in thought.

At moments the nervous smile faded, to show itself again.

"To-morrow," she had been told. "To-morrow—"

Bluff—would that save her? It might. But suppose it didn't? Supposing that Barton girl had proof upon proof?

Suddenly Zillah went to her study door. The concert interval had ended; sounds came up to her from the packed hall to tell her that the second part of the programme had commenced with an item delighting the audience.

She closed the door softly and sat down, a thoughtful look on her face.

Betty would be watching her closely now. Zillah smiled. Two could play at that game and, if Zillah knew anything about it, it was a game that she would win!

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[END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.]