

“BECAUSE OF HER COUSIN”
Marjorie Stanton's Long Complete Morcove School Story Inside

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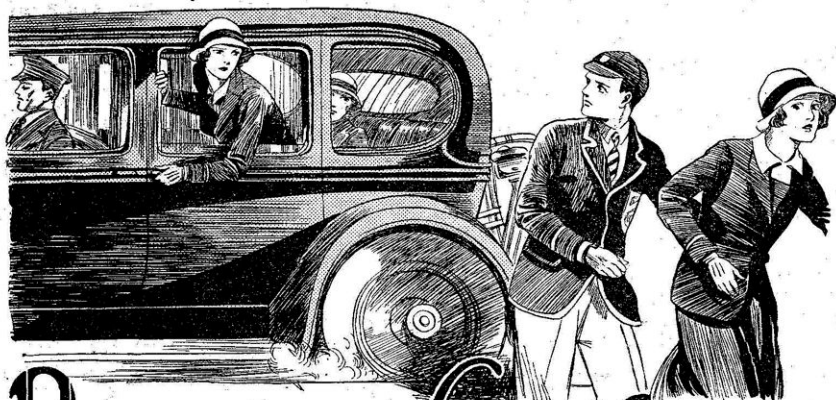


CAUGHT— BREAKING BOUNDS

One of many dramatic situations in Marjorie Stanton's long complete Morcove School story within

JUST OUT: THE 'SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN ANNUAL—6/-

The Chums of Morcove in a Powerful Complete School Story



BECAUSE OF HER COUSIN

By MARJORIE STANTON

AS if things were not already difficult enough for Pam Willoughby, newly-appointed Form Captain, she has now to face the problem of Billy Charters, her wastrel cousin—a good-for-nothing, and yet Pam knows she must offer him a helping hand.

CHAPTER I.

Pam At Her Post

"PAM! Have you thought any more about that suggestion of mine?"

"Oh, yes, Etta; I want to have a talk with you, but do you mind—not now?"

"Of course! Any time, Pam—and I didn't know you were busy."

Pam Willoughby, newly appointed Form captain, was very busy!

She had two other schoolmates seeking advice at this very moment when Etta Hargrove had looked in at Study 12.

Etta effaced herself. Soon the pair of consultants would be gone; but there would be other callers, some really anxious for a word with Pam, the rest mere time-wasters.

And in between these scraps of talk with so many different callers, Pam had jottings to make in her captain's notebook, and various other activities with pencil and paper.

As busy as all this was Pam, after a Monday morning in class with the rest of the Form. But she was not the least bit flustered. A full time job, this captaincy to which an overwhelming majority of the Form had appointed her, replacing one who had been unable to come back to Morcove School this term, owing to a taxi-smash in London.

But Pam Willoughby was proving a fit successor to poor Betty Barton, now lying in a London hospital as the victim of that crash.

Girls had been saying so, over the week-end; they were saying so this morning. "We couldn't have done better!" Here was Biddy Loveland, ready to say the same, as she met madcap Polly Linton in the Form corridor.

Biddy had just come away from Study 12, after claiming a minute of the new captain's crowded hour. Polly was on her way to that study, she being a co-tenant of it.

"Really, Polly, it's wonderful to see how Pam is tackling everything!"

"And nothing," Polly sparkled rejoicingly, "will do Betty more good, up in London, than to hear that Pam has got everything—at her fingertips!"

"You'll be writing to Betty, Polly?"

"One of us Study 12 girls writes to Betty each evening, Biddy."

"Give her my love, won't you?"

"I will!"

Biddy scampered on up the corridor, whilst Polly passed down it, to the last door on the left-hand side. This was Study 12.

"Why come in like that, Polly?" she was blandly asked by the new captain.

"Like what?"

"Not like the madcap! If Betty were here—"

"Gosh, you make me realise suddenly," grimaced Polly. "I never did show much consideration for Betty's having so much to do as

captain! There must have been times when she blossomed—and Naomer, and Paula!

"Then please don't show any consideration now," Pam entreated, with that adorable smile of hers. "I shall hate it, if you start any tip-toeing sort of business! Where's Naomer now, Polly? Where's Paula?"

"I gave them the hint to—"

"Oh, ridie, Polly. It's poor Betty who needs quiet, not I. Talking of Betty, I'm beginning to hope now that she may be able to return some time this Term, after all. The news of her is good, Polly."

"It is, Pam—thank goodness. But really, Pam, even if she became well enough after the accident to come back to school, I can't imagine her being fit enough to take on the captaincy again."

"She could just figure as captain, we girls doing the donkey-work. Say what you think of this team-list for next Wednesday, Polly dear?"

"Against Barncombe House, isn't it, next Wednesday?"

"On their ground—yes."

Polly scanned the list, and soon nodded in emphatic approval.

"A jolly good team, I'd say. We ought to whack 'em, Pam!"

"As Betty would say: 'We'll manage!'"

Pam put some papers away, and then hitched back her chair, rising.

"Now I want to find Etta. You liked that suggestion of hers, didn't you, Polly, for the next meeting of the Literary and Dramatic?"

"Why do you ask me?"

"Because you know, Polly, Betty always asked you!"

"I could never understand why! If any girl knows what a born ass I am, Betty does!"

"We all know what you are, Polly," smiled the new captain. "Like your brother Jack—fond of fun; but that doesn't mean you can't be serious. They should have made you captain, or Etta, or failing her—"

"Anybody else but you, Pam? But we knew what we were doing, Pam. And you—you know what you were being let in for?"

"I did!" Pam smiled back, passing out with that graceful step which lots of other girls tried to acquire and couldn't.

Polly Linton—she was not one of those who aspired to being as graceful as Nature had fashioned tall Pam. The madcap now hoisted herself on to the table-edge, that being a favourite perch of hers.

The study door opened again, and a dark-haired, dark-faced head first presented itself, investigatively.

Then the entire impish figure of dusky Naomer Nakara came in.

"Not here zen?" she whispered.

Polly glared.

"But I'm here!"

"You—booh!" said Naomer, abandoning all her unusual decorum. "Hi, Paula, eet quite all right! We can get a snack!"

"I was not aweah," beamed amiable Paula Creel, floating in. "that I had expressed any desire for wetfishment; only a wealcome west, yes, wather! After a half-hour in the gym," she imparted to Polly, "that I can simply gewagd as uttably pwestwating, bai Jove!"

"Look here, you two," Polly said, with that mock-stern look which she liked to confer upon these two study-mates. "Pam has been saying

that she doesn't want us to be at all considerate, any more than we were considerate towards Betty. But if Pam says so to you—take no notice, see?"

"I am perfectly agreeable, Polly deah, to refrain from making any wov at any time! I hate wovs and unwulness, as you must be aweah!"

"Eef you ask me, Polly," shrilled Naomer, coming away from the corner cupboard with a juicy apple, "eet is your who always starts ze rows! You and your ruler!"

"Me and my ruler," said Polly, taking up the foot-length of ebony in a fond way. "And I can still use it, too! No risk of breaking any of Pam's best china, or damaging her furniture. She has refused to have the things in here—"

"Yes, sweendle! Bekas, I zought eet was going to be gorjus, having such granjeer in Study 12!"

Polly hopped down from the table. She heaved an admiring sigh.

"One of the best things about Pam, over her taking on the captaincy, has been her moving in here without shifting all her lovely belongings here."

"Yes, bai Jove! I shall nevah fowget, geals, the way she quietly came in, to take Betty's place in this study, welinquishing such a chawming study as she had next door! But Pam," said Paula, "is like that."

"She's just splendid."

"So even eef we have got a new mistress zat we don't azackly like," Naomer was shrilling, when the door flashed open, disclosing the very person to whom the far from complimentary remark applied.

Paula Creel, the only one of the three girls in a chair, stood up.

"So I should think," observed Miss Josephine Kitten bleakly. "Lounging in an easy chair like that!"

"Some wather stwenuous exewcise, Miss Kitten—just recently—"

"No excuse!" rapped out Miss Kitten, being one to see no excuse for anything, at any time. "Pam Willoughby—not here then?"

"No, Miss Kitten," said Polly demurely. "I fancy she went to one of the other studies."

The new mistress, withdrawing into the passage, saw the new captain emerging from a study right at the other end. From there Pam went briskly round to the stairs, and although Miss Kitten hastened, she did not overtake the leader of the Form on the way downstairs.

But, when the captain's hand was applying the last of four drawing-pins to a notice on the green-baize board, in the spacious front hall of the school-house, Miss Kitten sauntered up.

Behind their pair of horn-rimmed glasses, Miss Kitten's eyes looked first at the notice, then at Pam.

"This, Pam Willoughby, is not the notice I ordered you to put up, at midday to-day?"

"No, Miss Kitten; it is only the team-list for next Wednesday."

"Where is your resignation as captain, Pam Willoughby?"

"I told you," was the calm yet spirited answer, "I have no intention of resigning."

For a long moment they faced each other.

"Very well then," Miss Kitten said, with ill-suppressed ferocity; "I must see the headmistress about you!"

"Very well then," said Pam.

And she walked away.

CHAPTER 2.

One Thing And Another

A N hour later several girls came racing to Study 12, knowing that Polly was there.

"Hallo, hallo," the madcap said, interrupted at some letter-writing.

"But, Polly—there's a row on!"

"There is? What about?"

"Pam!"

Then the madcap slipped the unfinished letter between the sheets of her blotter, and rose up, agape.

"Pam—in a row?"

"Yes! We don't know what it's all about—haven't the faintest," one of the breathless girls panted. "But she has to see the Head."

"Where is Pam now?"

"She was out on the field. Miss Kitten herself went out there, to order Pam to report to Miss Somerfield. We ran to find you."

"Bekas, swendle, eef Pam is to have to resign!"

"Have to do what!" gasped Polly.

"It's spreading through the Form like wildfire," Biddy Loveland said. "A rumour that Pam's resignation has been called for!"

"Never! Oh, what rot," Polly exploded.

"I'll come down with you all."

"Yes, queek—queek!"

Naomer's streaking up the corridor may have had something to do with the others' helter-skelter rush for the stairs. In any case, Polly was never one to dawdle.

Some more girls were coming out of studies, having just heard the sensational news. They joined in the run downstairs, too excited for words, their looks expressive of utter incredulity.

A bombshell for the Form! Something to leave the girls flabbergasted—this about their new captain!

Then, like most crowds that rush about simply because they have been carried away by excitement, the girls found that they might almost as well have stayed still.

All they got, for their whirlwind rush downstairs, was the sight of Pam Willoughby calmly coming in off the field. Miss Kitten walked with her, and was pale and stern; but Pam herself—

Could there have been anything in the rumour after all? She was so perfectly unperturbed! Her cheeks had still their lovely rose-petal colour, when she might have been expected to look rather white.

The girls stood by, on either side of the hall, and she passed, with Miss Kitten, quickly disappearing into the passage which led to Miss Somerfield's private room.

"Bai Jove—phoo!" Paula palpitated, finding herself amongst special chums, in the crowded hall. "But it can't be twue, gals!"

"I don't know so much," Polly frowned. "Miss Kitten looked—nasty!"

"Miss Kitten is—nasty," someone stated flatly. "But what on earth can she have to complain of, in Pam!" the madcap stamped. "Gosh, Miss Kitten had better not—"

"No, bekas, eef she does—'Up, ze Form!'" Naomer shrilled, in a thorough revolutionary tone. "Go on ze strike, hooray!"

"Sh'rrp, kid! But—" After a frowning shake of the head, Polly spoke on: "It's a row, right enough."

"But what about?" clamoured several girls amazedly. "What's Pam been doing?"

"Goodness knows!"

"We're not going away," Polly took it for granted. "We are going to wait."

"Yes, wather!"

"And give her a cheer when she comes out?" Helen Craig suggested.

"What ze diggings, come to zat—why not give her a cheer now, everybody!"

"Yes, let's!"

And impulsively, in their fondness and admiration for the new captain, all present promptly shouted as with one voice:

"The captain! Pam—hurrah!"

MISS KITTEN came quickly out of the headmistress' private room, prepared to demand the meaning of such an uproar.

She found, however, so many of her girls massed in the front hall, presenting a calm, not to say a bold, front, her nerve rather forsook her.



"Eef you ask me, Polly," shrilled Naomer, "eet is you who always starts ze rows! You and your ruler!"

Miss Kitten was a bit "jumpy" to-day. She was aware of this. Almost she wished that she had not been quite so precipitate in deciding to deprive Pam Willoughby of the captaincy.

That girl certainly had serious charges to answer; but it was a question whether she would not come off best by disdaining to answer them! Such was the complete faith which the very headmistress seemed to have in her.

"Don't make a noise, girls," was all Miss Kitten said, to the waiting throng in the hall; and then she went back to the room where she had left Pam facing Miss Somerfield.

"You must clearly understand, Pam," the headmistress was saying; "your Form mistress is quite right when she insists that the second offence, after a severe warning, calls for drastic action. If I can find no excuse for what you did; if any assurances of yours fail to satisfy me, then indeed I shall have to relieve you of the captaincy. What have you to say, Pam?"

"It's quite true, of course, that I did run out of doors towards dusk, one evening early in last week, to speak with my Cousin Billy."

"He had not come over on any understanding that you would—"

"Oh, no, Miss Somerfield. I was very surprised—a bit upset, in fact—when I discovered that he was down there at the gates. Perhaps you know, he has come back from the East, where his parents are, to be on my people's hands again. It's a pity, but Billy didn't seem to realise that he ought to report his arrival at the school—ask for me, properly."

Miss Somerfield turned to the new Form mistress, submitting by her looks: "Nothing very dreadful in all this?"

"The first offence I was prepared to—er—condone," Miss Kitten hastily remarked. "I could and did make allowances—the cousinship, and so on. It could not do Morocco any good, of course, for one of its girls to be seen—"

"I didn't want to be seen!" Pam flashed.

"No, but you were," smiled Miss Kitten. "And just as well, perhaps. However—"

"Yes, let us go on to the second offence," Miss Somerfield nodded. "Early on Saturday evening, Pam, you went out alone—rather secretly, shall I say?—and met a boy who was merely a friend?"

"I met him, Miss Somerfield, quite by chance. It was Jimmy Cherol—"

"Oh, yes; I know him, of course; he has been over sometimes, when Polly's brother Jack has— Why, to be sure, he was one of the four who turned up at the school last Saturday afternoon, I think?"

"Yes, Miss Somerfield."

"And I gave permission for them to stay to the tea-party you were giving, as the newly-appointed captain. By the way, Pam, you slipped away from that party to go out of doors?"

"I did."

"Not expecting to meet this Grangemoor boy, you say? Yet you did meet him—and he was without his chums then?"

A nod from Pam. "Steel true and blade straight," this Pam, standing arraigned before her Headmistress! Miss Kitten, beset with the inevitable uncomfotableness of an informer, longed to see the "culprit" finching.

Well, perhaps she would be cornered in the end. Impossible to believe that Miss Somerfield had been all these years headmistress of a school like Morocco, without knowing when to be strict!

"Why—if you did not go out with the intention of meeting the Cherrol boy—why did you go out?" Miss Somerfield asked, sternly enough. "Even slipping away from your own party to do that!"

"On a wet evening, too," Miss Kitten stressed. "I am afraid I can't explain," Pam shrugged. "If I could have explained, I would have done so at the time—to Miss Kitten."

"In other words, you can no more tell me, than you could tell her?"

"So Miss Kitten can be sure," Pam calmly rejoined; "I meant no disrespect to her. Oh, and I hope she isn't thinking I am relying on your being an old friend of mother's, Miss Somerfield. Nothing like that."

The headmistress smiled gravely.

"If you had done wrong, Pam—"

"I'd wish to stand the racket, yes."

"But wasn't it, to say the least, setting a bad example—and you the captain; Betty's successor!—to do as you did last Saturday evening? Wasn't Miss Kitten entitled to offer you the alternative; your resignation as captain, or else the affair to be brought to my knowledge?"

"Oh, yes, and I chose the latter."

Miss Somerfield made a slight movement that placed her closer in front of Pam.

"Yes or no, Pam; have you anything to be ashamed of?"

"No, Miss Somerfield!"

The headmistress took a retiring step, and turned again to Miss Kitten.

"You did not think, perhaps, to put that question to the girl? Well, I have put it to her," Miss Somerfield said, smiling gently; "and her answer satisfies me—completely. You may go, Pam."

Miss Kitten expected an impudent, triumphant glance to be flung at her. "See?" She still did not appreciate Pam's quality. All Pam did was to give a bow to her headmistress, and then pass from the room.

"It would be a great mistake at any time," the headmistress said, as the door closed, "not to allow for Pam Willoughby being the girl she is."

"And I am afraid I made that mistake," Miss Kitten exclaimed—not regretfully but tartly.

"I am afraid you did," was the half-laughed answer. "But don't let that distress you unduly. It was a pardonable mistake, in one as new to the school as you are, Miss Kitten, and so there need be no feeling of humiliation."

No humiliation! The new mistress could hardly refrain from an "I like that!" as she now quitted the room.

No humiliation! When at this very moment she could hear the new captain being gaily hailed by a mob of ardent admirers, whose very cry seemed to mean:

"Hands off Pam!"

But if Miss Kitten had to feel more than humiliated—galled and exasperated—she had also to realise that such feelings must be crushed down, masked by a smiling exterior.

She went by the crowd of girls in the hall, whilst they were still flocking around Pam, and there was a "Don't mind me!" smile for all of them. As if they were likely to mind her witnessing the demonstration!

"What was the row about, Pam? Do tell us?" girls still clamoured.

"Yes, queek, Pam! Bekas—"

"We heard that your resignation was being demanded, Pam!"

"Oh, did you? Who started that rumour?"

Pam could not find out then; but later in the morning she obtained proof that the Denver sisters had seemed, at the time, specially qualified to say what was going to happen. And it hadn't happened after all!

Even if it had, Pam would never have confronted Fay and Edna. Like most members of the Form, Pam disdained the odious pair. Like Betty in her time, Pam would only deal with Fay and Edna quite formally, as captain.

Both girls, it could be taken for granted, would glory in having scenes with the captain, and if a violent squabble could take place in front of lots of other girls, so much the better.

There was proof of this when the Form came out of class at midday. The sisters, out before Pam, turned round when she did come away from the class-room, to treat her to impudent, provoking grins. She took no notice, with the result that Edna presently turned up in Study 12.

"I haven't an appointment, I know," Edna grinned at the captain, who was alone just then. "But as you couldn't stop and speak, coming out of class—"

"I shall never have any time for squabbling with you or your sister, Edna. What do you want now?"

"A little less of your swank, I might say! My name is in the team-list for next Wednesday, isn't it? Well, I don't wish to play hockey that afternoon."

"But you're a good player, Edna. I wanted you to be in the team."

"That's a fib, anyhow," Edna said insultingly. "You'd never dream of taking me along with the rest, on Wednesday, only you have to go with the team yourself—and you want to have an eye on me!"

Pam stood up.

"Now, look here, Edna—"

"Oh, pretence! But that sort of a look doesn't cut any ice with me! I'd say it before the whole Form—"

"Yes, and you would like to say it, with a crowd round, we know," Pam assented calmly.

"Because it's true!" Edna panted, losing self-control as she saw how composedly Pam was facing her. "You're afraid that on Wednesday—a halfer—I may be seeing that cousin of yours, unless I'm tied to some hockey-ground or other! But if I want to see him, I shall see him, so there!"

"I might remind you, Edna, that you have never really been introduced to Billy Charters. Miss Somerfield is very good about our association with Grangemoor boys. Only there is, quite rightly, a rule—"

"One that doesn't apply to you, does it? Very conveniently!" Edna sneered. "You're his cousin, of course! But as it happens I have been introduced. He introduced himself to me, last Saturday, at the Creamery." Edna wound up with a triumphant laugh. "That's the fellow your Cousin Billy is!"

Another dismaying pang for Pam, her heart saying: "That's the sort of fellow Billy has become." She had a sudden mental vision of the scene in that teashop—an authorised resort for Morcove girls, where of course girls were relied upon to conduct themselves decorously.

But this Edna—and Billy at a loose end, done with caring about propriety.

"As captain, Edna, I feel I must keep your

name in the team-list," Pam said quietly. "Games are not compulsory, but—"

"As captain, you can say that, and as Billy Charters' cousin—you're mighty glad to be able to say it, aren't you?" Edna blazed out.

"You're jealous, that's what you are. It's the same jealousy that made you rush out of doors last Saturday evening, for fear of my being with Billy—as I was, I don't mind admitting it!"

"I know you were."

"Yes, and wouldn't you have liked to—"

There was a dramatic interruption. The door flew open, letting in Polly at a rush.

"Pam! Telephone—"



"Where is your resignation as captain, Pam Willoughby?" demanded Miss Kitten.

Pam was about the only girl in the school who could be told that she was wanted on the 'phone, without getting into a panic.

"If it's Billy Charters, remember me to him!" Edna said impudently, following Pam out of the study. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The taunting nature of the remark, ignored by Pam, took infuriating effect upon Polly. Left alone in Study 12, she clenched her fists as if there were some girl she would like to "go" for. Who that girl was, the headstrong one subsequently explained when Paula and Naomer came in together.

"That Edna!" the madcap emitted fiercely. "If Pam doesn't wipe the floor with her one day—I shall! And Pam won't—of course she won't!"

"Wather not, bai Jove! Another Betty, for keeping her temper, yes, wather! But pway don't look like that, Polly dear!"

"I must! Now it seems that Edna has got to know Pam's Cousin Billy! She's the last girl in the world to help him to—"

Polly's lips clipped off the rest. Pam had quietly re-entered.

She was smiling regrettably.

"Yes, well, pity, girls! That was mother on the 'phone, wanting to know if I could go over to Swanlake with a few of you, on Wednesday afternoon, if she sent the car."

"And you said—"

"Had to say—imposs!" Polly was answered. "The match."

"M'yes," grimaced the madcap. "There is that, of course!"

"Sweendle!" cried Naomer. "Bekas, we get all ze hockey we want! Eet isn't every day you get a tea like zey give you at Swanlake! And, burzides, we might have seen ze boys! Zeir school is close to Swanlake."

"We would have seen 'the boys,'" Pam acknowledged. "That was mother's idea in wanting us to go over. She has Mrs. Challenor coming to tea from Challenor's House—"

"Miss Everard that was," Polly exclaimed; "our Form-mistress, before she married Mr. Challenor."

"And a jolly sight better meestress zan Miss Miaow!" shrielled the dusky one. "Mi-a-ow!"

"The idea was for me to take you, Polly, and Judy, so that you could see your brothers—"

"And me, so zat I could see Tubby, of course?"

"Yes, well," Pam nodded and smiled. "But the match comes first, doesn't it?"

Polly suddenly asked:

"Was Billy Charters to be there?"

Pam let a moment or two go by before answering. Then:

"I'll be as frank with you girls, as mother was with me, just now on the 'phone. Her whole idea was to give Billy a chance of having the right companions, under the right conditions. He is—causing dad and mother a lot of anxiety. There's a sort of—wildness—come over him. I hate to talk about it."

"Poor Billy," murmured Polly. "And he was such a decent fellow—at one time. Often in rows at school; but that was only because he was simply—well, like Jack might be!"

Pam, over by the window now, nodded without looking round. The others could guess the look which was hers.

A bell rang downstairs, and it meant a summons to all four of them, with the rest of the Form, in connection with something in the day's routine.

But Pam implied that she would like her study mates to go, and she would follow—in a moment.

So they went away, although Polly almost immediately turned back. Re-entering the study, she closed the door.

"Pam, couldn't you at least go over to Swanlake, on Wednesday, and not mind about the match?"

"Polly dear, how could I—the captain. What would the Form think of me?"

"After all though, that's your own home. And Billy Charters—he hasn't a sister. I can see so well what your mother is aiming at, Pam."

"I will do all I can for Billy," Pam turned round to state gently. "But I must, at the same time, think of the Form. So there it is, Polly, and on Wednesday—we shall all be at the match."

"Then I shall tell the Form," cried Polly.

"For I think it perfectly splendid of you, Pam—"

"Don't be so silly, Polly! And don't you say a word—"

"Oh, but I shall!"

And Polly did so, never imagining— Ah, if

only she could have imagined what it would mean in the long run!

If only she could have been warned that in performing this act of goodwill towards the captain, she was doing the very thing that would lead on to Pam Willoughby's—downfall!

CHAPTER 3.

Pam's Home—And Billy's

"GOOD-BYE, Pam! Ta-ta!"

"Yes, Pam—hope you have a nice time!"

For Pam Willoughby, now that the Wednesday "halfer" had come round, was off to Swanlake after all!

A most pleasing thing had happened with dramatic suddenness, earlier in the day, to account for the captain being able to "give the match a miss."

An amiable "Pens down, girls," during morning class, had been followed by such a gracious announcement from the new mistress, the Form had felt it must revise its opinion of her considerably!

"About this afternoon, girls," Miss Kitten had said sweetly. "It appears that several of you, in the team for the away match, could have gone to Swanlake on the kind invitation of Mrs. Willoughby, only you put games before pleasure. I have had a talk with Mrs. Willoughby on the 'phone, and I am sure you will all agree with what I said; Pam at any rate should be left free to go."

Immediate murmurs of emphatic approval!

All the girls who counted for anything in the Form had thought so from the first; the post of captain must not penalise Pam to that extent, especially as she had been so willing to stand by the team and play for it.

"The others who were invited—I am afraid it would seriously deplete the side of some of its best players," Miss Kitten purred on, still so surprisingly gracious. "So they, I am afraid, must remain in the team. As for you, Pam Willoughby—"

Pam stood up in her desk.

"But, Miss Kitten, please—I had quite decided—"

"Very good of you, I'm sure! The Form appreciates your devotion to its interests, Pam! But one substitute can be found, no doubt, and if you will kindly name some girl to captain the team on the field, that will be all right."

"Polly then," Pam promptly suggested, and a round of applause went up which Miss Kitten did not trouble to quell.

Afterwards, she had even allowed some whispering to go on in class time, being aware that it was partly due to her being voted, "not such a bad sort, after all!"

So now the Swanlake car was whirling Pam away to her own ancestral home for the afternoon, whilst most of those girls who were booked for seats in the school bus, to run them to Barncombe House for the match, were waiting on the front drive.

"So nice for Pam to have been able to get home after all," Judy commented delightedly.

"Nicer if we others could have!" Polly grimaced. "But I'm only joking. That would have made too big a hole in the team, I suppose."

Etta flashed round, laughing.

"You, Polly! You ought to feel very proud—acting captain for the afternoon!"

"So I am! And I expect to feel prouder still at the end of the match—when we've won! If we lose," Polly added, putting on her grimmest look, "I won't own any of you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ah, bah, we shall win!" Naomer rashly predicted. "And zen, to collebrate, you will stand us all a tea at ze Creamery, Polly! Bekas, we don't want to stay to tea at zat other school; no school teas for me, on half holidays, zank you!"

"Right!" Polly said blithely. "And as it is certain we shall win, we'll reserve tables at the Creamery on our way through the town."

Some of the waiting girls cheered. But all this delight over the prospect of a jolly time, after the match—it was suddenly and ruthlessly dispelled by Biddy Loveland, when she came running up with the horrifying news:

"She's coming with us!"

"Who is coming with us?" questioned half a dozen of the girls, although Biddy's very looks and tone had made it clear enough.

"Miss Kitten is!"

"Never!"

"Oh, help!"

"Sweendle! Bekas, what ze diggings—"

"Most twyng, weally," sighed Paula.

"But what's the idea!" gasped one of the others. "Miss Kitten would not have come, had Pam been going with us surely?"

"Oh, no," said Edna Denver, condescending to take part in a general conversation for once.

Edna was in the team for the afternoon, hence her waiting with the rest, for the bus to come round from the garage. But she had a way of being too grand to speak on most occasions when she had to mingle with schoolmates.

For that showy aloofness she was now paid out by her present companions. They saw that she wanted to say quite a lot, and they let her see that they didn't wish to hear.

"I happen to know," Edna blurted out, half a minute later; "as there had to be somebody—either the real captain, or a mistress—to go with us—"

"Good job Pam didn't know about this!" Polly exploded. "Gosh, wild horses wouldn't have dragged her to Swanlake!"

"No, bai Jove!"

"Oh?" smirked Edna, stepping away and then returning. "That's all you know!"

"And what do you know, to the contrary?" the madcap demanded fiercely.

"Yes, Edna—out with it!" was the angry clamour.

"Oh, I!" she shrugged. "I only know what Miss Kitten happened to mention—that Pam had got round her mother to ring up again, and pester—"

"I don't believe it!" Polly almost shouted. "That isn't Pam!"

"No!" dimmed other players. "No!"

"Oh, very well! Here comes Miss Kitten. If you like, you can ask her!"

"Shan't do anything of the sort," Polly stamped, looking as black as thunder.

"Yet I think we ought to ask her," said Eva Merrick.

Polly treated that girl to an open-mouthed look. So that was starting, was it? A waning faith in Pam!

"You can ask Miss Kitten; I shan't! How is it she was so nice about it all in class, if, as Edna says, she has been pestered? How is it, come to that, Miss Kitten has only told Edna and not the rest of us?"

Edna smiled provokingly.

"I happened to be asking Miss Kitten if I could be free directly after the match. To meet—well, my sister!"

The laugh with which Edna followed this was too much for Polly. She understood its meaning, and suddenly she flew at Edna.

Too late Judy and others cried out a warning: "Polly!" In vain they tried to make that hot-tempered girl let Edna go.

Miss Kitten was upon the scene whilst Polly was still shaking Edna so that that girl could hardly have known whether she was upon her head or her feet.

"Polly Linton!" came the new mistress' scandalised cry. "How dare you! Stop, I say; stop, this instant!"

"Well then!" the madcap shouted wildly, sending Edna spinning, "she shouldn't try her beastly cheek on me! The wretch!"

"Now you will go indoors!" Miss Kitten decreed, sternly. "Go on, Polly Linton! You don't come with us to the match. You will be dealt with by me when I get back!"

"If I'm still here!" Polly was saying to herself, passionately, as she strode away.

Already she had rashly decided: jump on a "bike" and go after Pam to Swanlake—thing to do now!

Oh, but what a maddening business it all was, and then to know that Pam, by her very nature, was so unfitted to cope with any traudcers! "The only way to treat that Edna is the way I treated her just now—"

Nor was the busload of Morcovians very far upon its way to Barncombe House before Polly, on her bicycle, was pedalling hard for Swanlake.

There was one moment when Polly remembered that she had been ordered to stay indoors. "Gated, am I? It looks like it!" And she laughed.

At another moment she felt uneasiness reducing her to utter wretchedness. Was it an unwarranted pessimism that made her feel things were in great danger of going all wrong for Pam? No!

One knew the Form—how sensitive it was to any slight or slur; how it detested false pretences.

And now it looked as if Pam was to figure as a captain who had said one thing, fully intending another.

"Oh, but I'm glad," Polly exulted to herself, as she tore along on her machine. "I'm glad I've done this!"

She was tired, though, by the time she turned in at the entrance to Swanlake's main drive.

The carriage-way was an uphill one the whole mile to the house, through the lovely old deer-park.

Polly had to dismount and, stalling her machine against one of the grand beeches, go on foot.

Suddenly she saw Pam, all by herself on the grass except that she was fondling a pony of hers that ranged the park.

It must have startled Pam to see Polly, but she did not come racing across to that good chum of hers. The "little lady of Swanlake" conferred a dismissing pat upon the shaggy pony, and sauntered to meet Polly.

"What does this mean, Polly dear?"

"Oh, Pam," blurted out the madcap, "I just had to come on after you. For one thing, I was stood down from the team for the match, at the last moment. Miss Kitten caught me going for Edna Denver."

"You shouldn't have done that, Polly—"

"I know I shouldn't! Oh, of course, it's far better to be like you—like Betty and others," Polly fumed. "Yet, is it, Pam? All this refusing to fight girls with their own weapons—where's it going to leave you?"

She spoke on, fiercely.

"I wish now that I hadn't told the Form that you had put the match before the invitation for Swanlake! It made the girls think more highly of you than ever, Pam!"

"I begged you not to!"

"I know you did, Pam"—glumly. "And now it's making it all the worse for you, for it's being said that you must always have intended to come here this afternoon—not go with the team."

"Said by whom, Polly?"

"Edna Denver! But it's Miss Kitten's doing really. Pam, you didn't get your mother to pester over the phone, so that Miss Kitten would feel that she must free you from the match? Yet that is what the Form is being told now, and it is damaging you in their eyes."

Pam's brilliant smile came.

"I'm in a trap, am I? Yes, well, let's go up to the house, Polly dear, and we will get some tea. No one has turned up yet from Grangemoor, but they should be here any minute now."

"Who's coming—do you know? I mean, Pam, if you were only expected from Morcove—"

"Quite," Pam nodded. "I'm afraid your brother won't be here. Neither will Dave nor Jimmy and Tubby. Only my Cousin Billy."

"But are you sure he will be here?" Polly questioned anxiously. "For Edna Denver was telling me something with her eyes, back there at Morcove; it's why I flew at her! Pam, I'm certain, after the hockey-match she's hoping to meet Billy. She's wangled permission to go off to rejoin her sister, but that's all bunk. Her eyes were boasting about—about Billy! And, Pam, we don't want that sort of thing, do we?"

"But, of course," Pam murmured, "that's the game Edna is playing now. Just because she knows that my people and I have got to pull Billy together, she is out to keep him as he is."

"How did they meet, Pam?"

"Oh, don't ask me, Polly."

"I wish to goodness," the madcap raged, "the Denver girls had never come to Morcove! Rotters themselves, they'd like others to be—rotters. But can't your Cousin Billy see what she is like? The other fellows had the Denver sisters weighed up at once!"

"Ah," Pam said, "but Billy is in that state now; he likes girls to be—like that. Of course, he shouldn't be having anything more to do with us girls than your brother and the others have. Billy should be all for games, like Jack and the rest, and all the nicer towards us girls for not being—oh, don't let's talk about it, Polly."

Heavy was Polly's frown as she walked on with Pam, up the autumn-yellowed avenue to the great and stately old house.

No serenity about Polly! She was spoiling for a fight that would leave Pam's enemy routed.

The noble facade of the mansion came into view, and suddenly Polly realised that here was the home of Billy Charters, waster!

What an extraordinary freak of fate it was, that a house so rich in honourable associations with the country's might and glory, so famed for the chivalry and quiet dignity of succeeding generations of Willoughbys, should be now, also, Billy's home as well as Pam's!

Stranger still, to think that of all girls who might have been fated to suffer the shock of owning a cousin like Billy, in his present fallen state, it had had to be—Pam!

As the two girls mounted the few shallow steps in front of the main door of the mansion, Mrs. Willoughby met them.

"Yes, mother, here's Polly, turned up on her bike after all!"

"There now, and your brother not coming!" Pam's mother deplored. "But how are you, Polly darling. You must enjoy yourself whilst you are here, anyhow. I am afraid you two won't be meeting your former mistress, either! Mrs. Challenor has just rung up to say that she is prevented from coming."

"Oh, what a shame!" Pam cried. "We might have gone to the match after all, Polly!"

"Billy should be in presently, on his bike," Mrs. Willoughby remarked. "He has been getting some footer this afternoon, I'm glad to say. But as he knows you're here, Pam, he is to come on afterwards. I don't know why Mrs. Challenor has had to cry off. I hope there is no bother at their school, but she spoke as if she had just had—an upset."

"Polly could do with a cup of tea at once, mother; we needn't wait for Billy?"

"Of course not, my dears. And I think you should ring up Grangemoor, Pam, to let Polly's brother know she's here. Nice for them to meet."

Mrs. Willoughby passed down the steps, whilst the two girls went indoors.

Pam took Polly upstairs to get a journey's end tidy-up. It was Pam's own beautiful bed-room where Polly was left alone to get the wash and run a comb through her hair.

Morcove's madcap was not "great" on admiring things like age-old tapestries and antique Persian rugs; but vaguely in that room, and when going downstairs again, where Willoughbys of ancient days looked upon her from their richly carved frames, she felt impressed.

Pam's home—and Billy's now.

"I got Jack himself on the 'phone," Pam blithely announced, meeting Polly at the foot of the stairs. "They're awfully decent at Grangemoor. He's coming along now."

"And any of the others?" Polly asked eagerly.

"I'm not sure," Pam said calmly. "Your brother, for him, was a bit flustered on the 'phone. Billy, Jack said, has already left to come on here."

"Oh, then can't we wait, Pam?"

A maid was taking in tea, to the drawing-room.

"No," Pam hospitably decreed. "You've had a long ride, Polly!"

So, half a minute later, Morcove's madcap was relishing a very welcome cup of tea, whilst a cakestand offered some of those dainty eatables the mere description of which, Polly knew, would make Naomer's mouth water by-and-by. Patefois sandwiches, and home made marzipan—"delish!"

It was as well the two girls had not waited, for Billy did not come in. Polly marvelled how Pam could keep herself from being on the fidget. There was no anxious drifting to the window; they did not talk about him even.

"Wonder if we've won the match, Polly! Miss Kitten didn't do our side any good by outing you like that."

"I'm afraid I'm not thinking about the match, Pam!"

"But if they haven't won—what am I to say, next time I write to Betty! We used to win all our matches, Polly."

"We hadn't Miss Kitteen, then!"

"Oh, she's not so bad. The fact that she doesn't like me doesn't mean that she—"

Pam broke off there, quietly rising—guessing why the parlourmaid had appeared at the great room's threshold.

"Right, Hetty, thanks. Jack's here, anyhow, Polly."

They went out to him, and there was a great shock for Polly as she saw her brother's looks.

Usually, he was full of fun, starting to patter nonsense in the first moment of any meeting. Now he was what he would have called "hipped."

"Come and have some tea, Jack—"

"Oh, no, thanks, Pam. I—I've got to get back—"

"What nonsense," she said. "When Polly's here and needn't go for an hour or more."

"I'm sorry, Polly-wolly, but I've really only biked across to see you and Pam for this one minute," Jack said rapidly. "There's a first-class row on at the school—in our House, too."

"Then that," Pam exclaimed, "is why Mrs. Challenor had to cancel her visit here this afternoon? But you boys are not in it?"

"Yes, we are," Jack gloomed. "At least, one of us is, and that means that the rest of us— Well, his packet must be our packet too, of course."

"One of you four, Jack?" his sister questioned eagerly. "Which one then?"

And the answer came:

"Jimmy Cherrol."

CHAPTER 4. Blow Upon Blow

POLLY'S eyes flew to Pam. And now at last a blow from Fate, coming on top of so many others, had slightly paled those lovely cheeks.

"Yes," Jack clipped. "I just hate having to tell you; but you'd be bound to hear. Poor old Jimmy—one of the last fellows to deserve—"

"Why, what has happened then?" clamoured Polly. "A fight?"

"If only it were nothing worse than that," Jack said, with a wry face. "No, Jimmy is in trouble over missing sports club funds. He was suddenly asked for them a couple of hours ago, and he couldn't produce them."

"But surely!" Pam cried, "they don't suppose that he has spent the money!"

"They do—"

"Absurd! Oh, positively too ridie! Even if Jimmy weren't as honest as the day—he has



"We know, Dave and I; Billy Charters is the thief, Polly!" Jack confided wretchedly.

plenty of pocket-money. Just as if he would even be tempted to spend money that wasn't his own."

Jack nodded, looking grim.

"Yes, Jimmy has a good allowance, we know. But like a good many of us chaps, he gets spent up. Then he has to wait for the next remittance."

"Well?"

"Mr. Challenor has had all this business to go into. Mind you, Challenor's a decent House-master—one of the best. But it seems that Jimmy has been caught without the club money, at a time when he is sweating on a remittance. So it looks just as if he had been using the club money, meaning to pay it back when the remittance came."

Pam seemed to Polly to be standing an inch taller.

"Mr. Challenor has jumped to that conclusion, has he?"

"I don't know—hope not," Jack fumed. "But Jimmy's gated. Chaps are saying things. Why Dave and Tubby haven't come along with me, now—they felt they must stand by Jimmy. And I—I want to get back to him, too. It's a dashed shame, that's what it is."

"Foul!" Polly stamped. "Oh, botheration! One thing on top of another—and it all hits at you, Pam!"

"Yes, well, no need to—"

"But what can we do?"

"I know what we can do," Pam said quietly. "Go along to Grangemoor, both of us, and see Mrs. Challenor—our Miss Everard that was. She'll listen to us, Polly."

"Oh, if we could do that—it would be something!" Polly exclaimed striking her hands together. "You say you want to get back there, Jack?"

"Rather!"

"I'll see if we can have the car for a bit," Pam said, hastening away. "If we can, take in Grangemoor on a run back to Morcove—that will be the thing, Polly. Your bike can go on behind. I'll find Barclay."

He was the Swanlake chauffeur. Pam vanished, and then Jack stood closer to Polly, speaking tremulously.

"I couldn't say it in front of her, Polly; but this theft of the money—for there has been a theft, of course—"

"Yes, of course!"

"Challener doesn't like to think so. A theft, you see, is a thousand times worse for the whole school, than mere unauthorised borrowing by the chap who was entrusted with the money. Though, mind you, that's considered an awful thing, Polly."

"So it would be, if Jimmy had done it—"

"The Head has been saying—this is known, Polly—that money held in trust is sacred. You mustn't borrow it, even if you know you can pay it back next day. But Jimmy always held the money on those lines—we chums of his know he did! We've known him go for a week, quite spent up, and the club funds in his study-drawer all the time."

Polly nodded.

"But what—what couldn't you say, Jack, in front of Pam?"

He glanced around warily, before answering.

"Billy Charters—he's the thief."

"Oh, Jack!" Polly gasped. "Oh, no—no, Jack!"

"Yes," her brother insisted tragically. "It's a cert, and it's a nice thing, Polly; oh, it's just about enough to disgrace Swanlake for ever. Dave and I—we know!"

Polly gestured that she could not bear to hear more; yet in the next moment she was panting:

"Yes—go on; tell me!"

"Dave and I know when the money was taken, and by whom. By Billy Charters, just before dinner at the school to-day. He has been allowed the freedom of our study. We chaps have wanted to do all we could, to keep a hold on him, pull him round a bit. But the rotten swab—"

"Jack!"

"Ah, but so he is!" Polly's brother raged on, walking about wildly. "He's a no-gooder, and you can't do anything for him. Look at this fine place that's as good as home to him now, and he'd rather be meeting a bookie in some tobacconist's shop, or some little minx in a café. I could take him, and I could—Gosh, what I wouldn't like to do to him, Polly! He hasn't turned up. He's off somewhere—spending that money, most likely."

Jack's voice suddenly broke.

"He's done this, and Jimmy must suffer, Polly! You see? Although we are certain, we can't prove it. Even if we could; to save Jimmy we'd have to bring all this disgrace upon Swanlake—upon Pam and her people!"

"It's awful," Polly cried. "Terrible! Poor Jimmy! And Pam—now—"

"Well, I shall get away back on my bike now," Jack said, with a rallying sigh. "I may see you at the school, Polly. If not—"

"Tell me this, Jack, before you go; does

Jimmy Cherril suspect Billy Charters, the same as you and Dave do?"

"Oh, Jimmy's as certain as we are; and yet he's been imploring us not to go making any accusations against Billy. He says, we must think of Pam. It's frightful, to see him. He is thinking all the time—about Pam—"

"Sh!" Polly whispered. "Here she is."

PAM's graceful step brought her towards the brother and sister.

"We'll get away. Don't see any sign of Billy. And it's all right about the car, Polly."

"D'you think, afterwards, we could go home to Morcove via Barncombe?"

"That's just what I had thought we might do," Pam responded lightly. "But mind, Polly dear—if we do, no scenes!"

So Pam now expected to find Billy, ultimately, in Barncombe. Marvellous, how calmly she was taking everything.

In the car with her, doing the short run to Grangemoor School, Polly could detect nothing emotional about her chum and Form captain.

"What opposites we are!" Polly reflected; and then came the wondering thought: Which was the more wearing upon the nerves—her way of meeting troubles, or Pam's? Illnesses were worse when they struck inwardly. So perhaps Pam was suffering all the more, by keeping her feelings so private?

Chauffeur Barclay set them down in a paved courtyard on to which Challener's House looked, with its diamond-paned windows and arched doorways.

Most of the boys were at tea in their studies, and some of their talk and laughter sounded hollowly from a building so very old and hole-and-cornery.

But there were a few fellows coming out of doors again already, and they doffed their caps to Pam and Polly, knowing them both.

Nice fellows, all of them. Morcove—Swanlake—and now Grangemoor School; all three places alike in being character-making.

And yet Billy Charters was adrift again, at this very moment. So Polly was sadly realising, as she stepped with Pam to a private outer door, serving the Housemaster's own old-world quarters.

Then Jack came riding into the courtyard, and at sight of him again Polly instantly decided:

"Pam, I shall stay out here with Jack, whilst you get a talk with Miss Everard—I mean, Mrs. Challener. She'll see me afterwards, perhaps."

"If you like, Polly. You're having a rotten halfer."

"What about you?"

"I'm different; mustn't expect much else now."

Pam pressed a bell, and gave her name to the maid who answered the ring. Would Mrs. Challener be kind enough to see her for a minute?

"She has a caller at present, miss. But perhaps you wouldn't mind waiting?"

"Thank you."

A door to the right of the narrow hall was thrown open by the maid to admit Pam, who thought as she entered that this study, with its book-lined walls and littered desk, was deserted.

Then she saw a Grangemoor scholar standing about, evidently under orders to "report" to his Housemaster. The boy was looking at the rows of books in a bookcase; but he shyly turned round to acknowledge Pam's presence.

And—it was Jimmy Cherril.

NEITHER he nor she emitted any cry of surprise. For a long moment they simply looked at each other.

"Pam," he said at last. "You haven't come here—about me?"

"Yes, well, Jimmy," she said very gently. "I was at Swanlake, as perhaps you know, and I—I just thought I'd run round in the car to see my old Form-mistress."

Somehow the miserable light in that old-fashioned, small-windowed room seemed to Pam like the wan light which might filter in upon a prisoner in his cell.

Yet Jimmy had no abject appearance. It gave her a great heart-throb to realise that even under these adverse conditions, Jimmy looked fine and manly—so different from Cousin Billy.

"But you've heard about me, I dare say?" Jimmy said huskily. "Pam, you're not to let it worry you. I'm seeing Mr. Challenor again, in a minute. He's to go into the matter more thoroughly."

"And you'll convince him, Jimmy—of course you will," Pam nodded and smiled. "As if you could possibly have made use of that club money. But who," she asked, with a sudden direct look, "stole the money, Jimmy? That's the question!"

"It's not a question I can answer, Pam."

"Not, Jimmy?"

She would not take her eyes off him, and so his, for once, wavered and fell aside.

"We all like to do our best for others, Jimmy. I know father and mother have been helping lame dogs over stiles all their lives. But if the lame dog—has an owner, so to speak; then it's not up to other people so much, is it, to do the helping?"

"I don't know what you're driving at, Pam. All I know is, it had better be believed that I did borrow the money, meaning to pay it back when my remittance came."

"Oh, no, Jimmy—"

"Yes, Pam. I'm going to get the other chaps—Jack and the rest of my special chums—to agree to that. Theft in the school is a thousand times worse disgrace for the school."

"That depends, Jimmy! If the thief happened to be—an outsider."

"Oh, nobody on the staff did it."

"I wasn't thinking of the staff."

Pam suddenly moved round the centrally-placed desk to stand at arm's distance only from Jimmy.

"You mustn't keep anything back from me, Jimmy."

"I wish you'd go away, Pam," he implored thickly. "I don't want to—"

"No, of course you don't. But, listen. I may be wronging somebody by an awful conclusion I've jumped to. So, in fairness, either tell me if my suspicion is—is an injustice to that person or not. You can say, if you will."

"I'm not saying—anything!"

He shifted away from her, then came back a step.

"Look here, Pam, my way is best! It's a storm that will blow over. Anyhow, I can live down what disgrace there may be, after a time. You've got to see this; in my case, it isn't stealing—"

"No, it's what they call misappropriation, I suppose. But it's as bad—"

"Pam, it isn't!"

"Jimmy, it is. Grown-up people go to prison for that. Why should you let yourself be condemned for a thing as bad as that, allowing yourself to be considered untrustworthy, dishonest?"

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"Well," and he snapped his fingers. "I want to; I prefer, Pam—"

"Oh, but I shan't let you, Jimmy."

"Oh, Pam, he said imploringly. Then he laughed hollowly. "There's one thing, Pam, you can't save me, much as you want to. You've no proof. Why, you're worse off there than Jack and Dave are."

"Yes, well," Pam said, "I shan't rest until I've obtained proof, that's all. Meantime—"

The door opened.

"Mrs. Challenor will see you now, miss."

"Oh, right-ho. Good-bye then, Jimmy," smiled Pam, moving away from him to the door.

Then she turned back to him. The maid was outside the room.

"Jimmy. You're—you're being splendid—"

"Pam, don't," he said, staring hard at a bookshelf again. "It's all right, Pam. Don't think of me. Think of *him*."

And so they parted, Pam going out of that room rather blindly, sighing silently.

CHAPTER 5.

The Way of The Waster

FOR a town of the size of Barcombe, Mr. Christler's jeweller's shop was quite an attractive one.

A portion of the window fronting on to the quaint old high-street even had its steel-grid protection from smash-and-grab raiders.

Mr. Christler repaired watches and clocks, and had an annual contract with Morcove School to keep all its timepieces in order.

He also did quite a fair business in wedding and birthday presents, whilst in the holiday season people were in and out of his shop all day, buying gifts.

All the working clocks in Mr. Christler's shop were indicating a quarter to five when the bell at the shop-door gave its warning tinkle.

Mr. Christler, at work upon a gold repeater, whipped a brass-rimmed magnifying glass out of his right eye and rose, to attend to two customers who had sauntered in.

A schoolboy and a schoolgirl; Grangemoor and Morcove!

"Afternoon," beamed Mr. Christler.

"That wrist-watch in the window—"

"The—er—which, sir?"

"Oh, better fetch the whole tray out—"

"Some not bad things here, Billy," commented Edna Denver, inspecting a show-case whilst the wrist-watches were being got at by the proprietor.

"Quite good, in fact. But, Billy, you're not to be extravagant! You were awful, to make me come in with you, and—"

"Shan't be about, most likely, when it's your birthday," Billy Charters laughed. "Yes, that's the lot," as Mr. Christler set down the charming array. "And here's the one, Edna, you fancied, I think?"

"I didn't dream you'd drag me in, to do this!" she laughed prettily. "He wants to choose a wrist-watch for his cousin, Mr. Christler!"

"Oh, I see!" with a smile and a bow. "Well, I can guarantee anything in the way of wrist-watches for twelve months. May I—?" And he took the selected watch from Billy's hand, to display its merits.

"Nine carat gold, sir—"

"You're not to, Billy; much too much! Besides," Edna said, devoting her eyes to a tray of necklaces in the counter showcase, "wouldn't she rather have something more in this line? These necklaces with the bluish stones—"

"Imitation, of course," said honest Mr. Christler. "But very dainty, don't you think? We find there's quite a fashion in them. And quite suitable for a schoolgirl—on occasion. Forty-two and six."

"What do you say, Edna?"

"They're awfully sweet. I should think she would love it! But—"

"Make it that," Billy Charters recklessly decided.

Mr. Christler bowed, and took one of the fashionable necklaces to put it in a pretty little case, amongst cotton wool. He then proceeded to do it up in white paper and sealing-wax the package.

"At any time, sir, if you should wish to change it, I'd be perfectly pleased. Thank you! Good-day; good-day, miss. Er—excuse me, sir!"

This halted Billy Charters on his way out of the shop with Edna Denver. He faced round.

"One of the half-crowns you gave me, sir," said the jeweller, ringing it on a wooden part of the counter. "Cracked."

"What d'you mean—bad?"

"Well, no, hardly, sir. But I question whether the bank would—"

"Oh, come on then, let's have it back; and I'll give you another," Billy said, with a gruff laugh. "Fancy that now. How did I get landed with a cracked half-crown! Is this one all right?"

Mr. Christler most suavely implied complete satisfaction, and Billy turned to Edna again, muttering something that made her titter.

"But I would never have thought it of you, Billy; getting landed with a cracked half-crown—by some other boy at the school, I suppose! Or was it that bookie you told me about? He, he, he!"

"No, it wasn't the bookie, because I haven't had a winner yet," Billy chuckled. "Here, don't hurry, Edna—"

"But, Billy, I must find my sister Fay now!"

"Well, can't I help you to find her? There's no hurry!"

"There is!" They were mirthfully arguing, now, outside the jeweller's shop. "And Miss Kitten, if she came by, would have a fit to see me with you, Billy, it's been awfully jolly. That was a lovely tea at the Creamery—"

"You want this little thing I've bought you—"

"Oh, Billy, it was extravagant of you! Do you really mean it for me?"

"You had a cheek, I must say," he grinned, "making out that I was choosing something for Pam. You're a saucebox, Edna, no mistake."

"Oh, I'm not. I'm good, really, only you're doing your best to spoil me, Billy. Besides, you'd prefer to give it to Pam, now wouldn't you?"

"Would I! Edna, how soon can I see you again?" he pleaded gaily. "And you must be wearing this, next time we do meet. Tell you what; after dark I'll bike along to Morcove, and you manage to slip out—"

"Billy, you're awful!" But she was smiling in a thrilled way. "Shall I, though? Fay's a sport; she might make it all right for me—"

"Then do, Edna—do!"

"There are iron stairs—the school's fire escape," she whispered. "With push-bar doors on the landings. Look here, if I can—but I don't promise—"

"No, but you'll manage it. And don't mind if it's raining," he was chuckling the final instructions, when a passing car attracted his attention by a sudden scream of the brakes.

Then, recognising the car, he became rather drop-jawed. The Swanlake car, with Barclay at the wheel! And it was Pam—riding with some other girl—who had signalled to Barclay to draw up at the kerb.

"I'm off, Billy; ta-ta, and thanks ever so," Edna said hurriedly, and walked away.

At the same instant, Pam got down from the car where it had pulled up, a few yards further on. She came alone on the High-street pavement to confront Billy, just outside the jeweller's.

"Hallo, Pam!" her wastrel cousin grinned feebly. "Not wanting me, are you?"

"You might wait," Pam said calmly, "whilst I go in here."

And she entered the jeweller's shop.

In the moment or two that it took Pam to enter the shop, she did a strange thing with swift secrecy.

A thumb of hers pressed hard upon the glass of her costly platinum wrist-watch, deliberately fracturing the glass.

She reached the jeweller's counter, smiling as she unstrapped the watch from her wrist.

"I've just managed to break this, Mr. Christler. Shall I leave it with you, and perhaps you would clean the watch whilst you're about it?"

"Certainly, miss."

As he inspected the watch's interior through his magnifying glass, Pam had time to notice that he had been going to return a tray of wrist-watches to the window, and that some necklaces suitable for a girl had obviously been looked at by a recent customer.

"These are rather attractive, Mr. Christler."

"Aren't they?" he submitted. "And very popular too, as presents, I find. I have just sold one to a young gentleman—from Grangemoor School, I fancy."

"Oh, have you?"

"As an intended present for his cousin, I was told."

Pam received this quite calmly. Yet she was the girl who, with the ready-mindedness of a detective, just now, had broken her own watch on the way into the shop, as a pretext for obtaining a few words with the jeweller.

"If I look in next time I am passing, Mr. Christler? The end of the week?"

"Certainly, miss! Good-day, and thank you!"

Then Pam passed out to the pavement, where Cousin Billy was waiting. He seemed as if he

would have liked to slip away but had been chained to the spot by guilty uneasiness.

Her steady look made him resort to a one-sided grin.

"Why, what's the matter?" he blustered. "You don't like it, because I've been meeting some other girl, is that it, eh? But she's more my sort than you are. Swanlake gets me down."

"Will you," Pam asked steadily, "make me a solemn promise, Billy?"

"Not to meet her again?" he guessed. "Not likely! Or were you meaning a promise to meet you, Pam? I don't mind, for once, and I don't suppose she will!"

"If I send you some money, as soon as I can make up a sufficient sum—will you solemnly promise, Billy, for your own sake and the sake of Grangemoor; for the sake of that boy, too, who is being wrongly suspected of—"

"Here, what's the idea!" Billy jumped down her throat, with sudden sullenness. "What are you driving at, Pam?"

"The idea is, Billy, that you should repay the money you have stolen—"

"Pam, you're a rotten little beast to—"

"I think I can be sure of sending the money," she cut him short, still unruffled. "You had better, Billy—you had better be quite sure of doing the right thing with it, that's all. Good-bye, Billy, and I'll try not to let you down."

Even in such a moment as this, she did not fail to voice those farewell words with appealing tenderness.

All the nobility of her nature warned her; without infinite forbearance there could be no saving him. If possible, he must never see disgust in her eyes. Otherwise, should the moment come some day when a longing awoke in him to be restored in the sight of decent people, he would remember any past look of loathing and would feel deterred from creeping back.

So, on the point of rejoining Polly in the waiting car, Pam turned and waved to him, as if cousinly affection between them were still a very real thing.

"Right-ho!" he called along the pavement to her as he swung about to go the other way. "You write to me, Pam, ha, ha, ha! Ta-ta!"

Bravado made his laugh a noisy one for the quiet High Street. Similarly, he flourished a hand very gracefully towards Pam as she entered the car.

Then he had to pull himself together very sharply, another motor hooting him out of the way—for he had been going to cross over.

It was a private motor-bus that went by, slowly, and as he glanced at it, still grinning, he saw several schoolgirls looking out of the window.

The Morcove team, returning from the match!

CHAPTER 6.

Polly's Way—and Pam's

"AND we lost, bai Jove!"

"So they tell me, Paula."

"Yes, wather, Pam deah; a most wegwettable occuwnence—"

"A proper sweendle, eef you ask me! Bekas, we had to have zat Miss Kitten with us, all ze time! Ze whole halfer—a proper washout!"

Paula Creel and Naomer Nakara had a moment since come into Study 12, to find Pam and Polly already there. But the captain and the madcap had been only half a minute in advance of the returned team, in getting upstairs.

"I'm sorry it was like that about the match," Pam feelingly commented. "I'd have given anything for a win."

"But you'd better not let ze other girls hear you saying that," Naomer warned. "Bekas, zey are rather ratty about you going to Swanlake after all, zis afternoon."

"Howeyah, don't let that wowwy you, Pam deah—"

"Oh, I'm not worrying," smiled the captain.

"Some of the geals are certainly disgwintled, yes, wather," Paula deplored, making use of pocket-comb and mirror as she rested in the best armchair. "Miss Kitten, you see, wather confirmed that wemawk of Edna Denver's, about your having persuaded your mother to pester over the 'phone."

"I see!"



"Yes," said Mr. Christler amiably, while Pam studied the necklace, "I have just sold one to a young gentleman from Grangemoor School."

But Polly could not show any of Pam's serenity—was it likely.

"Ugh!" Polly stamped. "Gosh, I'm working up for something!"

"As for me," Naomer shrilled; "don't zink I am complaining against you, Pam! You couldn't help eet, we know. But eet was a swoendeel, all ze same! No going to ze Creamery for tea, after ze match! What ze diggings, we couldn't even stop ze bus to lay in any stock of pastries and cakes! Miss Kitten with us all ze time!"

"Poor all of you," Pam sympathised. "I'm afraid that my captaincy—"

"None of that!" Polly fiercely requested; and then she looked particularly belligerent as the door opened, revealing a parlourmaid.

"Yes, I know, Ellen; Miss Kitten wants to see me!" the headstrong one guessed grimly. "I'll come! I'm ready!"

"I shall go with you," said Pam.

"What!" Polly glared. "This is my funeral, Pam!"

"As captain, then, I'm coming to your funeral," was the calm remark which closed all argument, and they went from the room together.

In the corridor there were some of the girls who were just back from the match. Disgruntled, certainly! Two or three, observing Pam and Polly, went into a study and closed the door.

Instantly, Polly rushed to that very door, threw it wide round in front of her, and spoke into the room, hotly.

"There's no need!" Polly exploded. "Pam isn't a bit to blame!"

"Oh, isn't she!" sulked Eva Merrick.

"No, she isn't! There's Pam's own word for it, she didn't pester her mother into pestering Miss Kitten for leave-to-day!"

"Oh, of course," said Pat Lawrence, "if Pam says that—"

"But I should have thought," Polly rushed on, "you could have done without waiting for Pam's word!"

"Come away, — Polly," Pam herself now requested, arriving at her chum's elbow, at that doorway. "Mustn't keep Miss Kitten waiting—"

"Bother Miss Kitten!"

Again they set off together, and now several girls in the corridor manifested such an undiminished faith in their captain, a "That's better!" smile could come to Polly's face. But she chose to look as grim as before, when entering Miss Kitten's room along with Pam.

The Form-mistress' brows went up as she looked first at the captain.

"I didn't want you, Pam."

"No, Miss Kitten, but I thought I might come. If it's about Polly's cycling to Swanlake—"

"It is about Polly Linton's breaking bounds, when I had gated her! Polly, I am astounded, shocked! When I saw you getting out of the Swanlake car—your machine tied on behind—I could hardly believe my eyes! Now I must punish you severely."

"Before you do that, Miss Kitten," Pam interposed, "I'd like to say something."

"I want no Form captains here, begging off their favourites!" rapped out Miss Kitten. "Really, Pam, unless you want me to be quite cross with you—"

"I only want you to be quite fair to Polly. It was only my account that she cycled after me to Swanlake. She wished to get at the truth about

a thing affecting me most seriously in the eyes of the Form."

"Oh, you and your position in the eyes of the Form!"

"That's all very well!" Polly now flared out. "But any captain should be given a chance, not have her position—underrmined by—by—"

"Girl, how dare you!"

"Why did I go for Edna Denver this afternoon?" rushed on the madcap furiously. "Simply because she said that Pam had only pretended to want to play for the team, rather than go home to Swanlake! Edna said she had it from you, that Mrs. Willoughby had been asked by Pam to pester you to free her for the afternoon. I knew it couldn't be true, and I went over to Swanlake determined to get the whole story squashed! That's why I went, and now you know!"

"And you had no business to go! No more excuse for that, than there was for your flying at Edna Denver! I take full responsibility for what Edna said. And so you, Polly Linton, for taking too much upon yourself, will now—"

"Please, Miss Kitten," Pam again interposed. "You say you take full responsibility for what Edna Denver said. In that case, it looks as if I can't pass over the matter, as I would have preferred to do. I did not get round my mother to pester you over the 'phone, Miss Kitten, and I'm positive that mother didn't ring you up of her own accord."

"Have you asked her?" panted the Form-mistress.

"No; I didn't have the opportunity, as it happened. But I can ring her up now—"

"I may refuse to let you telephone!"

"Yes, well, then I can telegraph. You cannot stop me from sending a telegram."

Polly's one sensation at this moment was that of boundless admiration for Pam—never so fine as now, when she was captain, and with this new Form-mistress to deal with!

Pam's composure—it was, after all, the best weapon with which to fight. One's own violent, bull-at-a-gate methods—nothing like so effective!

"But, as I say," Pam resumed coolly, "I am quite ready to let the matter drop, if you will do the same, Miss Kitten?"

"You forget yourself, girl! Making your offer to me to let the matter drop!"

"But I'm the injured party, I think?"

Again, what a rapier thrust! It was as if Miss Kitten's foil had been struck from her hand. Beaten!

"I—I am disappointed in both of you," she said at last bitterly. "But we will let the matter drop, if only because I do not wish to involve Edna Denver, who appears to have spoken quite innocently—perhaps exaggerating a little. Never let it occur again, Polly Linton! You may both go."

Pam bowed her head before withdrawing; Polly appeared to forget. But she was not called back. Miss Kitten had eyes only for Pam just then; the captain—that girl, the one with whom the conflict was!

That girl, victorious in this latest encounter, as she had been victorious before, so that one must send after her a look which expressed the secret vow:

"Another time, Pam Willoughby—another time!"

ON the way back to the stairs with Pam, the madcap burst out laughing.

"How perfectly lovely, Pam!"

"Quiet, Polly," smiled the captain. "And you're not to say a word—"

"Oh, Pam, do let me—"

"No! Isn't there enough else, dear, without all that?"

Then Polly's merriment subsided. She held Pam very lovingly by the arm on the way upstairs.

As they turned into the Form corridor, they saw Edna Denver leaving a study to return to the one which she shared with her sister.

Edna loitered, letting Polly and Pam draw nearer. When they were quite close, she fingered a pretty necklace of bluish stones that they had never seen her wearing before. And she looked Pam straight in the eyes, smiling.

"My goodness," Polly fumed, clenching up her fists again, after she and Pam had passed on. Did you see that, Pam?"

"You leave things to me, dear."

"Perhaps I had better!" Polly said, remembering how Pam, within the last few minutes, had dealt with Miss Kitten!

CHAPTER 7.

The Captain To Reckon With

EDNA DENVER went into the study. Her sister Fay was there, writing a letter.

The pen raced along as if the wielder of it had much to say to somebody.

Who that somebody was, Edna knew, and she waited until the letter was finished.

At last Fay's letter was disposed of, and Edna could begin:

"Look here, Fay darling, you can do that for me?"

"Oh, do what?" But Fay was not really offhand. The sisters were always ready to help each other, such a partnership enabling them to get many a stolen pleasure that would otherwise have been impossible.

"Just for something to do, Fay, I want to slip out if I can."

"You mean, just to let him see you wearing the necklace!"

"All you've got to do for me, Fay," whispered the younger girl gleefully, "give me the all clear for coming in again. Take a look round—after I've been gone about half an hour. Then, if it's safe for me, switch off the light for a few secs in this study."

"What would the captain say, I'd like to know!" Fay jested. "Oh, go on with you then. And whilst you're about it, you can give him this note to give to Bertie, at Grangemoor."

Bertie Denver was their cousin—a "big noise" at Grangemoor some time back; but the advent of Mr. Challenger as Housemaster had altered all that.

"Note, do you call it!" grinned Edna.

"None of your cheek," Fay retorted blandly.

"If you're going, go. I want to get my bath presently; I'm dying for a gasper."

"Wish me luck then," said Edna.

She crossed to the door, putting her sister's note in a pocket.

"He won't be there!" Fay predicted.

"Oh, won't he! He's a lad, Billy Charters is!"

Left to herself, Fay subsided into an easy chair, looking amused over her sister's intended

escapade. It would be her, Fay's turn another time. So they "worked" things by means of the useful alliance.

As for Edna, she was rejoicing that the dry nightfall was making it possible for her to slip out of doors without first resorting to the coat-room below.

Ready to pass anyone with a perfectly innocent air, she went upstairs to the dormitory floor. On that landing were push-bar doors giving on to the outside iron stairway that was Morcoe's fire-escape.

For emergency reasons, the doors could never be made fast, and so there was a strict rule—honourably observed by the girls as a whole—that only in an emergency must they use the stairway.

"Dash!" Edna said to herself, as she reached the landing. For some girl or other was there—hanging about too! All Edna could do was to pass on, pretending she had to go to the dormitory.

Three or four minutes she waited in the otherwise deserted dormitory, chafing over the vexatious delay.

She fancied that girl on the landing was Tess Trelawney—one of the Study 12 chums, with a passion for painting. Bother the girl; was she still there?—studying the night-sky, or some rot of that sort!

Edna went back, and the other girl was still there, and it was Tess right enough. So all Edna could do was to go downstairs now.

"Must slip out by a ground-floor door, that's all," she had decided desperately. "I know! The west-side door, at the end of the passage."

But, half-way along that dim-lit passage, she realised that two girls were standing about at the far end of it, chatting lightly. Why, botheration, two more of the Study 12 chums—Polly and Naomer, this time!

A sudden gust of rage swept through Edna. Was it only by chance that she had found herself baulked in this direction also?

She turned back. Very well; now it must be a class-room window! Some of the sashes were always kept raised, during the evening, to give the room a thorough airing at a convenient time.

The room, as she had expected, was in darkness. Tip-toeing in, she flitted across to the windowed side. A lower sash was raised a foot or two, offering an easy scramble over the sill.

She was at that open window, the fresh night-breeze fanning her face—and then the lights came on, and a girl who had entered made for the stationery cupboard.

Another of the Study 12 chums! This time, it was Helen Craig. Edna swung round in mingled fear and rage.

"Raining?" Helen civilly inquired, half-smiling.

"No!"

Not another word passed. Helen seemed to have a lot to do at the stationery cupboard, and it became Edna's savage conviction that it was no use her waiting about for the girl to go away. Baulked again!

Then, when Edna emerged upon the front hall, she saw that a Study 12 girl was even acting as a kind of sentinel for the front door.

Paula Creel was finding the anthracite stove imparting a comfortable glow, it appeared, that

could not be obtained from steam-heated radiators in the studies. But, of course, she was only there—to watch!

Edna returned upstairs in a raging state. She re-entered her own and Fay's study and bad-temperedly banged the door upon the outer world.

"Why, what?" stared Fay. "Goodness, Edna, you were not—caught?"

"It's that Pam!" the younger sister seethed. "The wretch has posted chums of hers to watch every possible way out for a girl wanting to do—what I was going to do!"

"Never!"

"Upstairs, downstairs," Edna raged on. "I can't move, for Study 12 girls!"

"And Pam herself—"

"I haven't seen her, no. But I will see her!" And Edna suddenly stamped round to whip open the door and pass out.

In her maddened state, she reached the door of Study 12 without knowing what she was going to say, what satisfaction could be achieved by seeking the captain.

But this furious sense of being baulked—saved against her own will from the folly intended—it took her into Study 12 with a heightened look of anger.

Pam was there at the table, alone. She looked up calmly from some letter-writing. All Edna could say, in answer to the questioning raising of fine brows, was a snarled:

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"You're very clever, aren't you?"

"Not at all," Pam said, laying down her pen. "Knowing you as I do, Edna, and knowing my Cousin Billy—what he is at present—anybody might have guessed that he'd be hanging around this evening."

"And it's your business, is it, to stop me if you can?"

"You being in my Form—that's my job, amongst others."

Edna turned away to the door, then swung round again.

"You're very wonderful, aren't you, Pam Willoughby? You, with all your friends to help you!"

"I'm very lucky to have such friends."

Out went maddened Edna then, and slam! went the door, pulled shut behind her.

She returned again to her sister, who was at the study window, peering down into the night-bound grounds.

"He has a nerve, that boy friend of yours, Edna," the elder sister laughed softly. "He's actually waiting down there."

Edna could not look amused. She darted to the window, raised the sash, and put forth her head. After a few moments, her sister saw her making signs with a flourished hand.

"I'm going to drop a note down to him," Edna muttered tensely, coming to the table. "He's waiting to pick it up. And he shall know," she added passionately, starting to scribble on a half-sheet, "who is to blame for this. His wonderful cousin, the captain!"

"Then it's all off, for this evening?" Fay inferred, lightly. "Good. I can get my bath and a smoke—at last!"

She went from the study, whilst Edna finished the hasty note, then weighted it and, back at the window, dropped it down to Billy Charters.

"Can't be done this evening," she had written. "Pam has prevented me. Let me know about Saturday.—E."

"And I'll know what he'll say to himself, when he reads that!" was her fierce murmur, as she drew in her head and softly lowered the sash.

The measure of her disappointment over an escapade that would have been so thrilling was the measure of her abiding rage against Pam.

"But I'm glad!" Edna exclaimed to herself presently, prowling the room like a caged tigress. "I'm glad! He'll be as wild as I am—and as keen, after this, to pay her out!"

Nor was she making any mistake there.

At that very moment Billy Charters said to himself, as he stuffed the note away after reading it:

"Pam to blame, is she? Right! I'll jolly well pay her out for this!"

PAM, who was even then writing to her mother, to obtain money which could be secretly passed to Billy, that he might restore what he had stolen!

And yet the words voiced by him were charged with the same unreasoning anger that had been Edna's!

He could waste his stolen money over that girl, worthless friend that she was. But as for Pam, his own cousin, striving so hard to save him from himself—he was only going to pay her out!

END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.