

"A Misfit at Morcove" Grand Long Morcove
School Story Inside

The SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN 2^d

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Week ending
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EVERY TUESDAY



ZILLAH'S MIDNIGHT SEARCH

A dramatic incident from
this week's grand long com-
plete Morcove School story

FIVE MAGNIFICENT STORIES WITHIN

Grand Long Complete Story of Betty Barton and Co.



"Good Night, Girls!"

AN exciting evening had ended for the girls of Morcove School.

Half-term night had been the occasion for the usual concert—a particularly fine one, or so the large audience packing Big Hall had seemed to think.

Now, in one dormitory and another, it was to the accompaniment of much chatter that girls had prepared for bed.

But not all this bed-time talk was of a light-hearted kind. Not every girl could think only of the concert; not every girl could lightheartedly hum the tunes which had been sung.

In the big dormitory in which slept the Fourth Form many a young heart was heavy, many a mind busy with anxious problems.

Even Betty Barton—their captain—spoke in a voice that betrayed marred happiness.

"Well, good-night, Polly—Madge—all of you. And it's no use worrying!"

"Oh, good-night, Betty!" Such a subdued response it was, although Polly Linton, the Form's own boisterous madcap, had contributed to it! "No—not a bit of use worrying. Must hope for better news in the morning, that's all."

"Say!" called across a girlish voice with a rather American twang in it. "Are you Study No. 12 girls still on about Pam Willoughby?"

"You're not asked to listen, even if we are!" Polly hotly answered.

There was no love lost between Betty & Co., of Study No. 12, and Zillah Raine—a new girl, lately come to Morcove from Virginia.

"I guess I had to listen to your rubbishy play!"

"And you didn't like it—you wouldn't!" was Bunny

New though she is to Morcove School, Zillah Raine has already caused more than enough trouble. Now she goes further—with results that stagger the School!

Trevor's scathing retort. "Not that we wanted your applause!"

Gurgles of laughter sounded from all parts of the dormitory. Zillah Raine had got herself so generally disliked by the Form, few could fail to be delighted at the way she was being answered.

"Bekas——"

"Oh, say, you needn't start telling me all over again!" Zillah snapped across to shrill Naomer, the Form's dusky scholar. "Great success, we know! Hit of the evening—and why? 'Bekas' you didn't mean to miss your share of the clapping—no, not even though you had heard that Pam Willoughby had taken a turn for the worse! That, I'll say, is how much some of you care for her!"

"You shut up about Pam!" exploded Polly, sitting up in bed as if minded to leap out and "go" for the taunter.

Zillah laughed.

"Seems as if the cap fits a bit?" she commented, but could draw no supporting murmurs from other girls.

Instead, more than one voice curtly supported Polly's suggestion that Zillah had better be quiet.

The lights were still on. It would be for Miss Merrick, due any moment now, to switch them off after bestowing her usual affectionate "Good-night, girls!" Polly Linton, propped upon a doubled arm, continued to glare across at Zillah.

"Very likely, Zillah Raine, if it hadn't been for you, Pam would never have been thrown from her pony at Swanlake!"

Now it was Zillah's turn to rise up in bed, looking very fierce.

"You say that again, Polly Linton——"

"Cap rather fits you this time, doesn't it?" the mad-cap gave back. "Look at her face now, girls!"

Those who did look at Zillah, saw how her normally pretty face was quite



By Marjorie Stanton

ILLUSTRATED BY L. SHIELDS

distorted by an expression of seething anger. It was a moment for the strain of hot blood, inherited from a Mexican mother, to manifest itself. Her large dark eyes glittered.

"Lie down, Polly dear," counselled Betty. "Leave her to me—in the morning."

"And you!" Zillah promptly switched her glittering eyes to the captain. "You'll do what, in the morning, say?"

"See when the morning comes, Zillah!"

She gave a sort of snarling laugh.

"You girls know a whole lot, don't you?"

"All I know is," Polly was again drawn into muttering, as she bashed a pillow before settling her head once more, "it's quite likely that you frightened Pam's pony so he threw her. She's not one who easily comes out of the saddle. I don't say you meant it—"

"You had better not say—"

"But you were probably showing off, like you always do; making such a fluster—"

There was a sharp interruption; a general "Sh!" to warn Polly that Miss Merrick's approaching footfall had been heard.

Next moment the young and adored mistress of the Form came into the dormitory.

Halting just past the doorway, she looked this way and that. Every girl as she should be—in bed and ready for sleep. More or less pretty heads everywhere, some dark and some fair, at rest upon downy pillows!

Miss Merrick smiled her satisfaction. But she again was not quite her happy self to-night; more than one observant pair of eyes could tell!

There were girls who even fancied that she was finding it hard not to appear agitated.

"No more talking, girls," she smiled, stepping back to reach a hand to the switches. "You all

did awfully well at the concert. It has left me very proud of my own Form. But now—good-night, all, and sleep well."

"Good-night, Miss Merrick; 'night!" droned her charges.

Then one of them—Betty it was—bobbed up to start an entreating cry:

"Miss Merrick—"

"Yes, Betty?"

"Nothing fresh from—from Swanlake?"

"I'm sorry, girls—no."

"I thought there might have been a 'phone message," Betty sighingly remarked, sinking back again, "to say she is better."

"The morning, girls, will be the time for good news," Miss Merrick cheerfully murmured. "I quite hope that they will have been able to get Pam a good night—half the battle, in a case like hers."

Whilst responsive murmurs came, echoing Miss Merrick's last words, she clicked off all the lights.

"Good-night, girls—good-night!"

"'Night, Miss Merrick!"

And Miss Merrick, carefully closing the door, went her way.

After the exceptional noisiness of the evening, it must have seemed to her that the schoolhouse was profoundly quiet. To seek one's own bed now might well be to find sleep at once.

But Miss Merrick, going so silently that no one could have known her to be keeping away from her bed-room, went down to that other room which was hers by day. There, without making a sound, she put a little more coal upon the fire, as if intending to be about for an hour or two yet.

She did not draw up a chair to the fireside, but stood with one foot resting upon the fender and a hand upon the mantel-edge—the attitude of one too ill-at-ease to want to sit down.

And, presently, she began to move about the room as if pursued by her thoughts.

The fire, drawing up again, lighted the room fitfully. With this flickering light she was content, even when she suddenly unlocked a drawer of her kneeshole desk, to take out a letter and read it.

But that letter was, after all, one she had read half a dozen times before. Perhaps now she was not so much re-reading it, by the light of the fire, as merely staring at the lines of writing, noting a firmness in the masculine hand that boded ill for her.

A threatening letter? If so, all the uglier was the outlook for its recipient, that the man who had penned it was revealed, by his very handwriting, as being—firm!

Miss Merrick sighed to herself, refolded the missive, and returned it to its envelope. Whilst putting the letter away once more and closing the drawer to re-lock it, her head drooped as it might have done under some great blow at her peace of mind.

HARK! There went Morcove's own melodious chimes, and now—what was the time?

She went to the window, whilst listening to the gentle ding-dong of the quarters, and held the curtains apart.

All four quarters sounded, and then—bong! the first stroke of the hour-bell went far and wide in the darkness.

Midnight!

"I had no idea," she murmured troubledly to herself. "Midnight already! And to-morrow—to-morrow I must be fit for my work, or my girls may begin to suspect."

While Morcove Slept!

MIDNIGHT there in that firelit room at Morcove School, where Miss Merrick—so young to be a Form-mistress, and yet what a success she had always been!—was still standing deep in thought.

And midnight here, in this firelit room at stately Swanlake, where ailing Pam Willoughby was lying asleep, watched over by a trained nurse.

The room door came open silently, and Pam's mother tiptoed in, causing the night nurse to turn in her chair.

No word passed. By a shake of the head, nurse instantly implied that there was no change, no hint at an improvement. So Mrs. Willoughby simply stood at her daughter's bedside, finding what comfort she could in the knowledge that her daughter seemed to be getting some real sleep—at last.

And then, suddenly, Pam's breathing altered. Eyes that had been veiled by long lashes were as suddenly wide open, and when her mother's face was offered for a closer look, there came a happy, recognising smile.

"Oh, is that you, mumsie?"

"Yes, darling. Had a nice sleep?"

"I think so, although—it was like being awake; like being back at school, the girls were all so round about me. You must be really asleep, to dream as clearly as that, mumsie?" Pam's feeble voice went on. Vaguely she knew how they had wanted her to enjoy a long sleep. "Oh, I'll soon be right again!"

"Yes, dear—yes." A loving hand passed caressingly over a forehead that was burning hot. "Turn the other way, Pam dear, and try to go off again?"

"It's hot, mumsie. Could I have some more of that lemonade?"

"Have this, my dear," pleaded the mother, taking a medicine glass from nurse's hand. As soon as Pam opened her eyes, nurse had taken up the glass and a medicine bottle.

"How did the concert go off?" Pam asked, sitting half-up to drink down the bitter dose. "Have you heard?"

"Splendidly, dear! And the Study No. 12 play was the hit of the evening—so Miss Somerfield said over the 'phone. Nasty stuff, Pam?"

"Oh, I don't mind—if it does the trick and gets me all right again soon," the schoolgirl-patient smiled. "I feel so disgusted with myself—giving all this trouble."

"Not your fault—silly girl!"

"Accidents will happen," nurse put in cheerfully.

"But the accident was days ago, and I was getting over it; then this!" Pam submitted, smiling in self-disappointment. "The time now, mumsie darling?"

"Just gone midnight, dear. And I am not going to stay, Pam, because that would only keep you awake. Turn over now, dear; lie quiet—there!"

"I hope daddy isn't sitting up all night, smoking pipe after pipe, because I'm like this," Pam said in a half-dozing way. "But I know what he is—daddy. And I do hope Betty and the others, at school, are not—"

"Hush! There, there; good-night again, dear!"

For a moment longer that loving hand patted an upturned shoulder now that Pam had turned the other way. Then, bending over to press a last kiss upon hair lying away from a hot temple, Mrs. Willoughby straightened up.

Her eyes, withdrawn from the head upon its pillow, went to the sick-room chart. The temperature line had shot upwards in the last twelve hours. And there had been no drop to register when the "clinical" was last slipped between Pam's dry lips.

But Mrs. Willoughby had fortitude. As silently as she had come in just now, she went away. Left alone with the youthful patient, nurse reached for a book and resumed some reading.

"Oh—nurse—"

"Sh, miss—"

"It's all right; I will go to sleep again," Pam promised; but it was startling to see how she had turned over to look this way, frowning uneasily. "Nurse, have I ever talked in my sleep? I mean, talked nonsense, like you're apt to do if you're sort of—feverish?"

"Only about your school, my dear—just once or twice; about other girls who are chums of yours, as I could tell."

"Nothing about—a girl named Zillah Raine, nurse?"

"She was a schoolmate who was week-ending here with you when the pony threw you; I remember being told the name," nurse softly responded. "But—no, I've not heard you talking nonsense, as you call it, about her. So now, my dear, you must close your eyes—"

"All right, nurse, I will. But if I do say anything about that girl, without meaning to," the weak voice entreated, "don't take any notice, will you? I mean, not to repeat it to my mother or to daddy?"

"Bless my soul, what a thing to ask," nurse said, forcing a smile. "But there—all right, I promise, if that will help to set your mind at rest!"

"It's good of you, nurse; thanks so much."

Pam did not speak any more. As nurse was glad to notice, this time there was no incoherent babbling like there had been at other times when the feverish girl was going off to sleep.

"So it has, then—set her mind at rest," nurse mentally commented. "I wonder why?"

DING-DONG!

The chimes again, over here at Morcove School. And now, in that dormitory which Miss Merrick had visited nearly two hours ago to say good-night to all her charges—one girl suddenly and silently sat up in bed.

Zillah Raine it was, peering eagerly about the dark room, her ears, meantime, alert for the faintest sound that might suggest—someone else awake!

But it was all right. No other occupant of the great dormitory had made a restless movement during the last half-hour. Zillah knew, for she had been lying awake, saying to herself:

"No, not yet; just a little longer—"

Before that, now and again some girl or other had turned over, becoming half-awake as she did so, and more than once a babbled word had startled this scholar who, to-night, had been waiting, waiting until she might dare!

Sound asleep, all her room-mates; many of them dreaming of the concert perhaps, and some perhaps even dreaming of that dear chum who was lost to them for the time being. Pam Willoughby, away from school—ill! After-effects of that "accident" which had really been no accident at all—as at least one girl, now fast asleep, had found out!

Zillah Raine put back the bed coverings and came feet to floor.

There was no moon to-night, and almost in groping darkness she had to creep close to the bed of that very girl who knew too much for her, Zillah's, own safety!

Here she was—the Form's own captain, lying as fast asleep as any of the rest. Again Zillah peered venomously, whilst reaching a hand to take up some of Betty's day-time clothes.

That bit of evidence without which her guilt could never be proved—was it here? So Zillah was excitably wondering, both hands searching eagerly, silently.

Get hold of what, by some fateful chance, had come into Betty's possession, and then she could snap her fingers at her. No need, then, to think any more of flight!

Betty might have other evidence which, added to this thing Zillah sought, might reveal her for what she really was. Zillah did not know for certain if this was so—but she meant to take no chances!

The search of the captain's clothes yielded—nothing! Zillah's thoughts went to Betty's study, downstairs. She must try there now, but it would mean going to that study without the captain's keys. Very significantly, the bunch of keys was not in its owner's frock pocket to-night.

Zillah knew what to make of that. The captain, as a precaution, had not kept the "exhibit" in her pocket. She must have put it under lock and key again, in her study. At the same time, she had taken good care not to retain the keys.

Out of the dark dormitory Zillah fitted. Down one flight of stairs after another she groped her way, then along a corridor just as dark.

Bit of luck for her; the captain's study was not in this main corridor. You came to it by going round into a little lobby at the far end. Such a remote position meant that one would be all the safer whilst carrying out this midnight search.

"Say, though, how am I going to manage without a light?"

Impossible! So, cunningly, she first searched about for something with which to half-mask one of the electrics, to keep the light away from the window.

A duster served the purpose. With the blind down at the window and the duster draping the lamp on that side, she had no dread of switching on.

A moment and Zillah was making testing tugs at one table drawer after another.

If the drawer came open, she did not bother further with it. There proved to be only one locked drawer—and that, she guessed, was the one to which the captain had returned the vital bit of evidence!

For ten, fifteen minutes

after that, she was pursuing the frantic, desperate search for the key. Every nook and corner she was searching, and yet only searching—in vain.

Behind rows of books on their shelves; in almost ceiling-high places that she could only reach by standing on a chair—and still she was without the keys! She inspected one or two ornaments; examined the upholstery of an arm-chair. Not there!

And so, at last, despairing of finding the keys, she turned to the table itself in a state of mad rage.

Whilst staring at the locked drawer, wondering how to set to work without making any noise, she found she was standing in her own light. She did not see why she should go on doing that, and so next moment she was starting to move the table.

Then it occurred to her that she had better tip the table half-over, so that the drawer-front would be facing upwards.

Expecting a loud slithering of drawer-contents as she heaved the table backwards, very slowly did she go about her task. Even so, some shuffling and rattling took place loud enough to leave her heart-in-mouth.

Yet it was this very noise of things sliding and rolling about in the various drawers of the table that gave her a hopeful idea.

Quickly, then, she pulled out the centre drawer,



"Nurse, have I ever talked in my sleep . . . about a girl named—Zillah Raine?" Pam asked uneasily. The nurse shook her head. "No, I've not heard you talking about her," she assured Pam. Secretly she wondered why Pam had asked that strange question.

which was not locked. She lifted it right away and reached a forearm into the aperture.

She gave a shake to the tilted table. Ah, what was that—sounding as if something bullet-like had rattled clear of the locked drawer, by falling past the half-partition!

Zillah let the table down once more on to all its legs. She put her hand in again, groping in the recess which took the centre drawer.

Why, here it was—the very thing she wanted!

Exultantly she laughed, drawing out the searching hand. It unclosed, and on the upturned palm lay—a single brazil nut, still in its hard-edged shell.

Ding-dong, the chimes sounded again. Ding-dong, and then once more—ding, dong!

Quarter to one in the morning; but Zillah's task was ended now. It had ended in triumph, security for herself, the right to laugh in the face of Betty Barton or any other girl. Now Betty was utterly powerless to do anything.

"And I guess it's going to show them," she said to herself, creeping her way back to bed; "anyone's got to be mighty smart, ever to slip it over—ME!"

Good News!

RACING downstairs early next morning, whilst all other girls were still getting dressed, Betty came upon a Morcove parlourmaid in the front hall.

"Ellen!"

"Oh, 'morning, miss!"

"'Morning, Ellen! Has there been any telephoning?"

"Not yet, miss."

"Right—thanks!"

And Betty turned back, pounding upstairs to go to her own study.

Even as she turned into the lobby which served their study, she was taking a bunch of keys from her frock pocket. It was a bunch that she had cautiously slept upon all night!

At bed-time she had secretly put it between mattress and bed.

Eflinging the door shut after whirling in, she strode to the study table and slipped a selected key into the locked drawer.

Click, the hasp went down. Hallo, though, the drawer would not come right open! Some of its contents had lodged, making it hard for her to pull it right out. She had known such a thing happen before—simply as the result of cramming in too much. But now—

She felt sudden alarm and no wonder. Desisting for the moment, she pulled open the centre drawer, and then saw that all its contents were in order.

Then some idea of what had been done in the night flashed upon her. She wrenched at what had been the locked drawer so furiously that it burst clear of impediments and came right open. Feverishly she rummaged about. But she did not find the one thing she wanted. It had vanished.

Then the madcap came rushing in.

"This moment, Betty—the news has just come through on the 'phone! Pam——"

"Oh, what, Polly? Better?"

"A much better night—hooray!" Polly waltzed and waved. "They're sure the doctor will be awfully pleased! She was in a bad way up till midnight; after that—some grand sleep; better pulse, better everything now!"

"Marvellous!" the captain acclaimed. "Oh, I say, that's great!"

"You hadn't heard?" Polly laughed on. "Or you wouldn't have been looking like you were, when I came in! Betty," with a change to sudden grave curiosity, "why were you looking so—so dashed?"

"I'll tell you," the captain said, going to the door to close it. "You and I, Polly, were at Swanlake, as well as Zillah Raine, that Saturday morning when Pam was thrown from the pony. The supposed accident happened before brekker. You and I were down after Pam and Zillah. They were at the stables together, before——"

"Yes, but—'supposed' accident, Betty? My goodness!" Polly said, looking aghast.

"I found a brazil nut lying on the yard cobbles, just where the pony had so plunged about. Overnight—at dinner, when the dessert went round—Zillah had helped herself to one brazil nut. I saw her take it; but she didn't know I had noticed. Just one nut—and she didn't eat it, either; smuggled it out of sight."

Polly parted her lips to speak, but no words would come.

"Pam doesn't easily get thrown out of her saddle, Polly."

"After my finding the brazil nut, I managed to get a look at the pony's back, on the quiet. The hair was pushed about in one place."

"A brazil nut—sharp-edged shell," Polly muttered. "And Zillah had had a chance to put it under the saddle?"

Betty nodded.

"I happen to know that Zillah held Pam's saddled pony for a minute or so whilst Pam was getting the other mount saddled. Zillah, in the belief that she was safe, even told me so herself. That was when she did the trick."

"A foul trick, if ever there was!" Polly raged. "Oh! Would anyone else ever have thought such a thing! Now—now we know her at her worst!"

"Of course, Polly, when Pam mounted her pony, the poor brute couldn't stand the pain. There was Pam's weight pressing the saddle down."

"Then see about getting the girl sent home at once!" Polly again exploded. "Before she does harm to anyone else! It's not safe to have her about the school a day longer!"

"I try not to judge her harshly," Betty said in the old temperate way. "But over this I meant to take the matter further, only—I can't now."

"Can't! Why not?"

"In the night, Zillah has been down here and stolen that brazil nut—my one bit of evidence. She knew I had it and meant to produce it to-day. I locked it away—had the keys under my bed, too, all night. But she——"

Pausing, Betty shrugged.

"She has been one too many for me, Polly. She must be as cunning as they make them—and as desperate. She got the thing out of the locked drawer by tipping the table about."

Polly nodded gloomily.

"Second time, too! This is the second time Zillah Raine has dodged the penalty of her actions. The very fact that she went to all that trouble to get the nut, even though it wasn't conclusive evidence, proves her guilt! What's to be done, then, Betty?"

"At the moment—nothing. Only be all the more on our guard against her, that's all. By the way, not a word about what I've told you, Polly. There's no knowing what might happen."

The way in which Polly received this warning told how hard she was going to find it to obey. A pause in the talk caused both girls to be aware

of the usual before-breakfast commotion in the Form quarters.

Everyone now was down from the dormitories, and all the running to and fro in the corridor, and the going in and out of studies, was particularly boisterous.

"They've heard about Pam," Betty softly commented.

Polly did not lose her heavy frown.

"Yes—Pam, our own Pam—who never would have suffered as she has if—"

"Sh!"

"But it's so rottenly unjust!" Polly flared out. "Had Pam done her any harm? Hadn't Pam even borne the blame for that other affair for which Zillah dodged the punishment? Yet I suppose the girl will still go on at Morecove!"

"It looks like it, Polly —"

"Then who will be the next?"

Ah, if only they could have guessed—could have been forewarned!

"You, Betty—you'd best look out for yourself now," Polly suddenly resumed. "She'll be ready to get you next—give her half a chance!"

Zillah Makes a Journey

AT twenty-past three that afternoon a trim parlourmaid came into the Form class-room bearing a scrap of paper on a salver for Miss Merrick.

Everywhere in the desks pens were being raced to get finished with the last lesson of the day. But at parlourmaid Ellen's entry every one of those pens was rested.

There was all the greater excitement because the Form felt that Miss Merrick had not been in normal spirits to-day.

Why it should have been so, girls could not understand. They themselves had gone wild with joy when the early morning report about Pam was made known, and that sense of gladness had endured. But in the case of their Form-mistress, after a first hour or so of brighter looks she seemed to have slipped back into a depressed and worried state.

Was it possible that she had some private anxiety?

"Oh, girls—pens down! Here is some fresh news of our Pam, just received by telephone. The head-mistress has sent it along for me to read out to you."

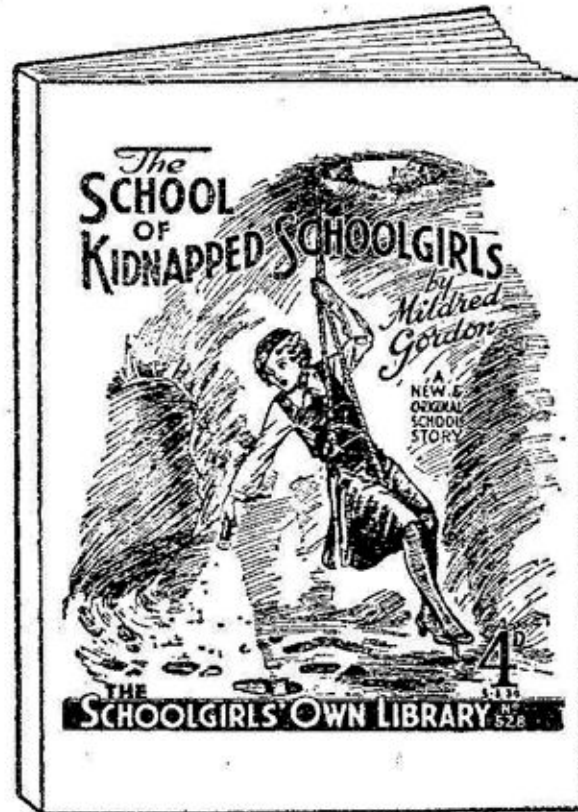
Polly, for one, flung down her pen so recklessly that it left a page of exercise-book spotted with blots. More good news, or the Form-mistress would never have suddenly looked so happy.

"The doctor, girls, is most pleased! He has told Pam's parents that there need be no further anxiety. A fortnight, and we may see her back at school."

"Hooray!" The Form stood up and cheered. "Hurrah!"

"Bekas—gorjus!" yelled Naomer. "And I

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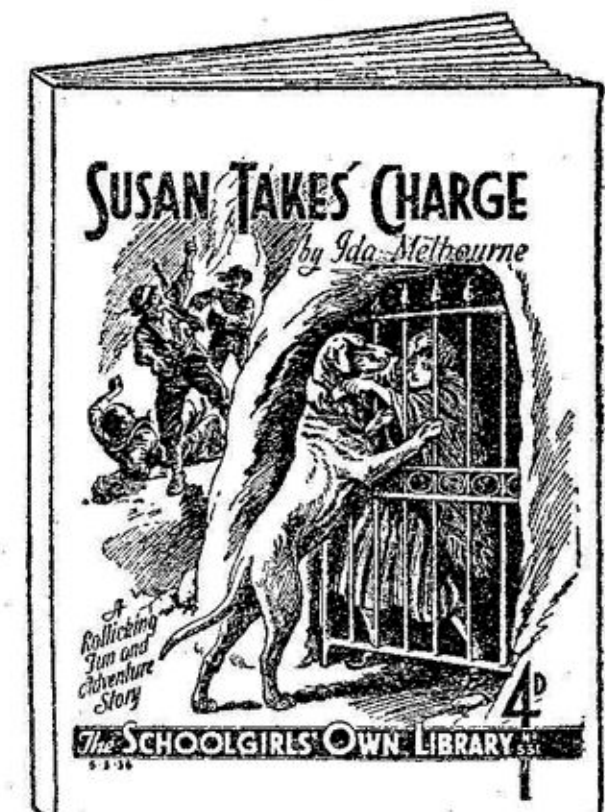


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zink we ought to be given ze day off to-morrow—to cellerbrate!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Miss Merrick laughed along with all the girls.

“At least, girls, you shall stop work now. Never mind if you haven't quite finished. Books away!”

After cries of “Thank you, Miss Merrick—thanks!” and a hurried flurry of closing books, a very joyous Form was ready for the “Dismiss!”

It came, and out of class went the scholars, scarcely in marching order.

Yet, next minute, when everyone else had flocked away, the young Form-mistress seemed to be left with some weight still upon heart and mind alike. As usual, she was staying behind to clear up at her own desk, but very listless were her actions whilst frowning at her thoughts.

The animated murmur of girls who had just gone out died away at last. A great silence was all about Miss Merrick in the class-room, and then suddenly one scholar came back.

It was Zillah Raine coming forward from the door with a mincing step, to speak to the Form-mistress.

“Yes, Zillah?”

“I'll say right now, Miss Merrick, I'm going to make a complaint, as I guess I've got the right to!”

“Complaint, Zillah?”

Miss Merrick became surprised into closer attention.

“Yeah. Miss Merrick, I'm not getting what the pop would call a square deal from the Form. There are too many girls, I guess, giving me the stony eye. And I'm not standing for it,” Zillah scowled on. “Who are they, I'd like to know? And say, what have I done that I'm being made to feel I had better keep off their sidewalk?”

“I am sorry, Zillah, if some of the girls are not being as nice to you as they might be. As a rule a new girl soon settles down very happily. There is such a nice spirit in the school, and the very fact that you have come from so far away should have made your schoolmates extra friendly.”

“Well, I can tell you the names of girls who are——”

“Would that be quite wise, Zillah?” the Form-mistress quickly demurred, realising that never before had a new girl come with complaints of this nature.

“I mean, Zillah, later on—when you understand our ways better—you might be sorry that you had not been”—“more self-reliant,” Miss Merrick nearly said—“more patient.”

Zillah Raine worked a tongue-tip round the inside of a cheek—a habit of hers when disgruntled.

“I guess I understand Morcove ways all right,” she muttered. “Thing is, some folks mayn't have so much of the patience that you kindly recommend.”

“Try to cultivate a little more of it, Zillah, and, for my part, I will do my best to make things better for you. I had no idea it was like this! But I am sure I can make everything all right for you. A word here and a hint there.”

“Say, that's sweet of you, Miss Merrick! I don't ask fairer'n that—not from you; how could I? You know,” Zillah continued, disregarding Miss Merrick's gentle hint that the interview might now close, “I was put in Pam's study——”

“I know; and that should have led to your

becoming very friendly with her chums—including the captain.”

“Huh, the captain!” said Zillah. “But I'm not wanted to mention names, so let it go! Miss Merrick, I was getting along all right with Pam, anyhow. Oh, I will say there, now, was a girl who was just my sort! We surely were the best of friends! And as for to-day's good news of her—no girl could be more pleased'n I am!”

“Very well, Zillah; then, as I advised, a little patience—knowing that Pam will be back in a week or two.”

“But, Miss Merrick—say, now, as Pam is just the one real chum I've made, couldn't I be allowed to go over to Swanlake and see her?” the American girl suddenly entreated, putting on her sweetest smile. “I'd be a whole lot pleased—so would Pam, sure!—if you'd just O.K. it for—say, Saturday?”

“As to that, Zillah. I see no reason at all why you should not be allowed to go, so I think I may say ‘yes’——”

“Gee, that's real sweet of you, Miss Merrick!”

“But, let me finish, Zillah. It is certain that the captain and others will want to do a run to Swanlake and back. You will, of course, go with them.”

“With you in charge—eh? Oh, well——”

“No,” the Form-mistress answered sadly. “I—I shall not be going. There is something—prevents it.”

To conceal sudden agitation she resumed her work of tidying up the desk, putting together several books that she meant to take up to her private room. But Zillah Raine was far too “whoopie” all at once, to notice the young lady's flurried state.

Vanity made the American girl feel that she had obtained a very special favour at the hand of her Form-mistress, and so there must be a lot of gush in return.

It was Zillah's habit to be “all over” anybody who might be able to put her on a special footing. She longed to be “teacher's favourite.”

“I'll carry these books upstairs for you, Miss Merrick. And say, wouldn't I just like to have you to tea in my study now I'm all on my lonesome with Pam away! Or isn't it the thing, Miss Merrick, for a mistress to let girls give her tea? Sure, though, you can make an exception in MY case?”

“Thanks, Zillah—of course, it's quite all right, but——” Miss Merrick paused, and added wearily: “But not this afternoon, Zillah. I'm sorry!”

“Meaning, you're not feeling so good to-day, is that it?” Zillah voiced her inference in a fawning tone. “Say, then, how about my staying around you for a bit, upstairs in your room, and just getting tea for you and doing my best to cheer you up? That's what I'll do!”

And that was what she did. There were subsequent hints from Miss Merrick that she would rather be alone, but they were put gently, so as not to hurt the girl's feelings. Zillah, taking advantage of such forbearance, ignored those hints and inflicted herself for a full hour upon her Form-mistress.

She, Zillah, did nearly all the talking. During the first half-hour she interrupted herself now and then to remark that Miss Merrick must surely be feeling better. Taking this for granted, the vain girl spent the rest of the time trying to appear “highbrow.”

Finally, she came away with several books under an arm, taken from Miss Merrick's shelves. Zillah had no intention of reading them, but she could be relied upon to throw them open in front of other girls, during the next day or two, to keep up that "culture" pose which the Form so ridiculed.

Meantime, she hoped to meet some of those other girls on her way up to the Form quarters, so as to be able to boast that she had just spent a full hour—"more than you ever do!" being implied—with Miss Merrick.

But in this Zillah was disappointed. She got to her own study without having encountered a single schoolfellow, and it needed only a minute of solitude for her to start a sullen train of thought.

Plenty of girls about, up here, but—no, they weren't troubling to come after her! "Tearing me to bits behind my back, as likely as not!"

She flopped into a chair and sat chewing a lip.



Jealous, that was what they were—all of them! That just must be the reason—anyway, as far as the majority were concerned. Betty Barton—well, of course, it was only to be expected she had a reason of her own now, and most likely she had told her chums what the reason was. Oh, well, why care two hoots about that? It could never be proved, now.

And, say! Good idea it was to be going over to Swanlake next "halfer," just as if one really were fond of Pam Willoughby! Doing a thing like that should make the Form think—how COULD there have been anything in what Betty had said about the "accident"—supposing Betty had spread it all round the school by then.

Only, was there much fun after all in going over to Swanlake? Dull! What one had been going to suffer that week-end if the "accident" hadn't cut the visit short.

Zillah drew in her feet and got up. She went to the window.

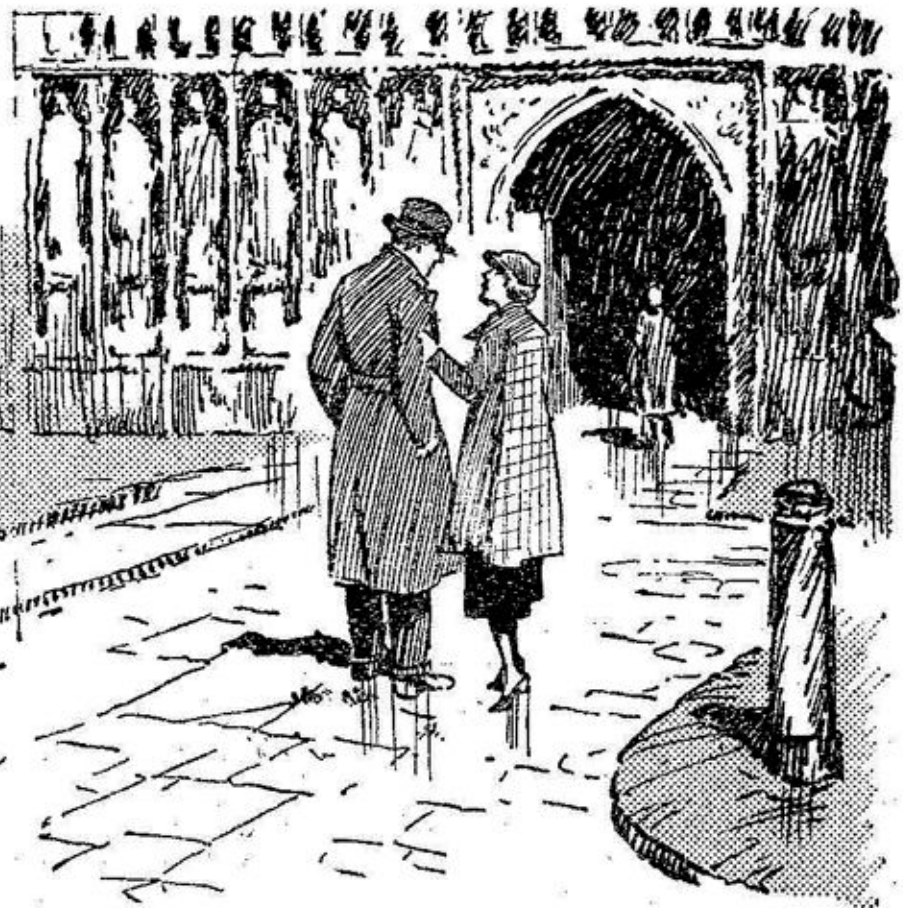
Make it Exeter instead? Anyway, one could reckon on seeing a good film besides tea-ing at a real swell café.

"I guess I will!" she suddenly nodded to herself. "And if it does get round the Form afterwards that I didn't go to see Pam after all—who cares?"

Next moment she gave her crafty chuckle.

"Say, I know what! I'll just make out that I wouldn't go because I didn't choose to mix with Study No. 12. I have my pride!"

And so a girlish voice with an American twang in it asked for a "Half-day return—first!" at the Barncombe booking office early on the following Saturday afternoon. The bicycle that had brought Zillah along full pelt from the school to



Instantly Zillah recognised the two figures. One was Miss Merrick and the other—Zillah felt certain—was the Form-mistress' brother, a man wanted by the police!

catch the one-fifty, was put by in the parcels office.

Dressed "all she knew how," she very grandly passed the ticket-barrier and sauntered to the platform bookstall for something to read on the journey. One of that morning's picture papers sufficed, for it was not worth buying a shilling illustrated, only to leave it behind at the other end.

Then she made for a first-class compartment, turning up her nose at homely folk who were travelling third. After taking her seat on the platform side of an empty compartment, she felt how nice it was to be glanced at by these third-class trippers as they drifted past.

The train, which started from a "bay," was whistled away to schedule time. There was some last slamming of carriage doors, and then—

Phee-cep! went a guard's whistle, followed by a shouted "Hold hard, there!" to the driver.

Someone had dashed on to the platform just as the train was moving off.

Zillah dropped the picture paper to her lap and glanced out of a window, then sat bolt upright.

The rich red colour left her cheeks; her black brows rose high above eyes suddenly dilating with fright.

Miss Merrick!

"First, lady?"

"No; third."

"In here then—hurry up, please!" Slam! Phee-cep! again. "Right away!"

In spite of a quickening choonk, choonk! from the engine, Zillah felt inclined to throw open the carriage-door and jump out. She never did keep her head in a crisis.

But she flopped back upon her seat, realising that to jump out whilst the train was in motion would be the very way to call attention to herself. Miss Merrick would be head-out-of-window in a moment!

Dodge her at the other end? Only thing to do now. The Form-mistress might be going to alight at some in-between station, but it was a thousand chances to one that she was making the run to Exeter. Shopping—or to keep some appointment. It flashed upon Zillah that Miss Merrick had spoken the other day of something preventing her going to Swanlake this "halfer."

All the Study No. 12 girls had gone, and she—Zillah—was supposed to be with them.

As a distraction from uncomfortable thoughts she picked up the picture-paper and began to look through it, and almost instantly a curious thing happened. She had only started to turn the pages when the name "MERRICK" seemed to leap to meet her eyes.

It occurred in a big-print heading which asked:

"WHERE IS DONALD MERRICK?"

On the Track of a Secret

ZILLA, her interest claimed by the similarity of the surname, started to read the few paragraphs under the heading.

They were sensational enough, and yet suddenly her eyes strayed from these lines of print to the opposite picture-page.

There, as part of the jumble of pictures, was the photograph of a handsome young man—just the head and shoulders. It was asked, again in large print:

"HAVE YOU SEEN HIM?"

Then Zillah read the "caption" under the printed portrait.

"An hour after Donald Merrick, 23, had walked out of his employer's office in the City, five days ago, embezzlements to the extent of many thousands of pounds were discovered by the auditors. Now the police are armed with a warrant for Donald Merrick's arrest."

A relation of Miss Merrick's? Even if Zillah had not been prone to think the worst of others she might still have asked herself that question. The surname was by no means a common one.

But the girl did say a dismissing "Can't be!" to herself, only to turn back to that news item, a few minutes later, and re-read it, wondering afresh: "Supposing he is!"

Suddenly she recollected that the Form-mistress, in the last few days, had seemed heavy-hearted. Lots of girls had been saying so. Even the good news about Pam had failed to put Miss Merrick in lasting good spirits.

And then—this excursion to Exeter, to-day! Say, putting two and two together—a bit suspicious? After all, would it be a mere shopping expedition that had prevented the Form-mistress from going to see convalescent Pam? And that girl such a favourite!

Zillah's subsequent hard thinking caused the journey time to pass very quickly. She was surprised at the quickness with which the train seemed to get her to a big station where porters droned:

"Exeter—all change, please!"

Fear of being seen by the Form-mistress made her wait a few moments. Cautious peeping enabled her to see Miss Merrick, who must have been one of the first to alight, hurrying off the platform.

Then Zillah herself showed haste. The last thing she wanted was to be seen by her Form-mistress. Fatal, if one blundered into her somewhere in the town! But, say! It would be fun to try shadowing her—just to see if she really had come to meet somebody in secret.

Another minute, and the crafty schoolgirl was only a hundred yards behind the Form-mistress in a very busy street. The pavements were thronged, or Zillah would not have risked following so closely. She was not forgetting that Miss Merrick might do some looking round.

But soon it became apparent that the Form-mistress was proceeding with a directness suggesting a definite objective—some appointed meeting-place, perhaps? She never glanced round, never hesitated which way to go. As one who knew the cathedral city perfectly well, she kept upon her way very briskly, and Zillah, step for step, still followed.

To her, the girl but lately arrived from America, the way about this wonderful old town was completely unknown. She had led school-mates to believe that she had been to Exeter before, but she hadn't. To keep after the Form-mistress, she had to go round another corner presently, and then, to her surprise, she had the cathedral itself in front of her.

And there, not far from some age-old doorway, was Miss Merrick—in talk with someone who must have awaited her there. A young man! Say, this did look as if—

For a few moments the two stood in talk, then they moved together to go into the cathedral—"and a safe place, too, I'll say, if it's the fellow the cops are after."

But was he the wanted man, Donald Merrick—was he? Or just merely someone who was "sweet" on the Form-mistress?

It had been impossible to see him close enough to be at all certain. He looked the age, though! "Yeah," Zillah smiled to herself, hoping, ill-naturedly that Miss Merrick really was involved in that trouble over the embezzlements. "Say, what about their wonderful Morcove now—if the swindler is her brother? And she a mistress! Some scandal, I guess!"

But it seemed far too risky to go into the cathedral to get a better sight of Miss Merrick's companion.

Wait about for them to come out? No. Quite likely they would sit whispering together for a couple of hours on end, feeling there could be no safer place.

Zillah went off to find the best tea-shop in the town, and from there she presently dodged to the cinema. A much-talked-of film had just been released, and it was being shown here this week.

Guided to a seat in one of the best rows, she soon became absorbed in the movie drama.

The house was crowded, and as time went on fresh comers proved more and more of a nuisance, causing so much half-standing to let them writhe past.

Presently:

"Two along there," Zillah heard an attendant whispering in the darkness, the torch being switched off. People coming into this row now—bother them! Well, she just wasn't going to move for them.

But no tiresome stooping-by in front of her followed, after all, and she irritably wondered what these latest comers meant by hanging back. What better seats did they expect? It was the best part of the house—or she wouldn't be here! A natural savagery caused her to peer aside resentfully, and then—her heart thumped violently.

Miss Merrick again—and that young man!

They were turning away, the attendant keeping with them—to see if seats elsewhere could be found for them.

It must have amazed the attendant that there had been a refusal of the seats first offered, but—Zillah herself could understand.

She had been seen sitting here—by her Form-mistress!

It became Zillah's turn to disturb nearby seat-holders by suddenly getting up to go out. She had to leave, for she knew that Miss Merrick and the young man had now been given seats farther back. They hadn't come in to see the film—of course, they hadn't! Only to be somewhere safe—out of the daylight, so that he stood no chance of being spotted. His picture must have been in all the papers this last day or two.

"But I know this," Zillah said to herself, calming down a little as soon as she had flusteredly reached the open air, "if she says anything to me, back at school—then I'll soon have something to say to her!"

From this it was a sudden leap of her mind to thoughts of a most exultant nature.

"Why, say, fool I was to feel scared! I guess I couldn't be better off than I am over this business. My own Form-mistress, and so I can just do as I please after this—not standing any lip from her!"

One Step Too Far!

DUSK was deepening into night when Miss Merrick got indoors at Morcove School.

Betty and Co. met her in the front hall, and they thought she looked very fagged. They themselves had just got back from Swanlake, and had been to the coat-room to get rid of outdoor things.

"Miss Merrick, you look tired!"

"I came on from Barncombe by the local and had to walk from Morcove Road Station. How did you find Pam, girls?"



"Miss Merrick—you're not going!" Betty cried incredulously. "Yes, Betty dear——" Betty and Polly stared at her in horror. What had happened to cause their Form-mistress to leave Morcove with such startling suddenness?

The answering chorus was "Splendid!" It had been a glorious time for the chums, and Pam herself had been so delighted at seeing them. She had been allowed to keep them round her the whole time they were there!

"I am so glad, girls. You gave her all my messages, of course?"

"And she sent her love to you, Miss Merrick! Longing to be back!"

"The dear girl! But now, I want Zillah Raine, please, if you, Betty, will let her know?"

The tired-looking Form-mistress went on to the stairs, to seek her own room on the first floor, leaving the batch of chums exchanging grave glances. Ominous, Zillah's being asked for at once, like that!

"Well, if she is in for a row, it's not our doing," Betty said, tight-lipped. "I must run up and find her."

So, next minute, the Form captain held open a certain study door just wide enough for speaking in to Zillah.

"You are wanted by Miss Merrick—at once."

"Oh, really?" said the American girl, thinking she was imitating British sang froid. Then she laughed. "Say, you guess you've been getting one in at me at last, eh? Been telling Miss Merrick that I didn't go with you all to Swanlake?"

"No one has said a word!"

"Mind my saying I wouldn't care two hoots if

they had? Wa-a-all, that is so! And now, where is this Miss Merrick?"

"In her room!" Betty spoke curtly over a shoulder as she quickly walked away, anxious to finish the conversation.

The weariness in Miss Merrick's looks—so sympathetically noted by the chums just now—did not deter Zillah from being as bold as brass when she reached the private room. Impudently she threw out:

"Here I am, Miss Merrick, right now!"

"That, Zillah, is not the way to speak to me. But I have to deal with something worse than bad manners. You did not go to Swanlake; you were in Exeter this afternoon."

Zillah laughed.

"Well, that's saving me a whole heap of lies, isn't it? Not that I meant to go to the tr-r-ouble of denying it. You see, I knew that you knew—if you get me?"

It may have been only the studied insolence, but Miss Merrick turned paler than ever. After meeting Zillah's full look for a few moments she moved about the room, speaking, at last, with eyes averted.

"You have done a very wrong thing, Zillah. Bear in mind you have put your Form-captain in a very painful position. She knew you ought to have kept with the party, and so it must be her duty to report your going off on your own. As it happens, I have been able to spare her the distress of having to report you. I myself saw you in Exeter—in a cinema——"

"Yeah!" with a nod. "And supposing I did prefer the half-day trip, not being a whole lot eager to join those girls—any harm done? Oh, it's a school with a great name, we know, but——"

"You have indulged in just such an escapade, Zillah, as Morcove can never overlook. I'm sorry, but you must be dealt with by the headmistress. We will go to her now——"

"Say, just a moment!" rapped out the culprit, causing Miss Merrick to stop dead on the way to the door and then face round indignantly.

"Zillah Raine! Is this how you mean to behave in front of the headmistress? Your impudence——"

"No; for I didn't see any headmistress in the cinema," the girl retorted as insolently as ever. "I guess I did see you, all right, though—with some guy who, maybe, is your brother? Name of Donald, perhaps?"

Miss Merrick recoiled until she was almost with her back to the wall, where she stood visibly trembling, a hand clutching a chair-back for support.

"You—oh, you cruel, wicked girl!" she gasped at last. "You have found out, then; but you haven't a spark of pity—not even for me, although, as your Form-mistress, I have done my best——"

"As my Form-mistress, you're wanting to carpet me in front of Miss Somerfield!" flashed Zillah. In a moment she had changed from sullen impudence to passionate defiance. "All right! Take me along, then! But I guess Morcove is going to lose more'n a scholar over this. As I'm sick of hearing—it's such a famous school! And so I can't see, myself, how it's going to put up with a mistress whose brother

"Now, silence——"

"I shan't! Anyone who hits me gets a hit back, see? If I'm a disgrace to the school, so are you! You, with a thieving brother wanted by the cops! He's a—what was the word?—an

embezzler! He's had thousands of pounds of his firm's money——"

Zillah's rush of words was suddenly checked—by an imploring gesture from Miss Merrick, who was reeling across to drop down into a chair at her desk.

"But why?" the girl wheedled, after watching her unhappy, stricken teacher sitting there with bowed head. "Say, you've no need to be so upset!"

She moved nearer.

"You surely see, Miss Merrick, I don't want to get you the sack! It can be all right—I've said so! You just don't want to cry like that! All you've got to do—just hold your tongue about me, and then—why, I'm sure I shan't mind what you do to try and help your brother! Good luck to both of you, come to that. He may have had all that money, but, after all, he IS your brother!"

Except for some low moaning to herself, Miss Merrick was silent now, hiding her face in her hands. Zillah could see some tears leaking between those masking fingers.

"Miss Merrick? Oh, say, that'll do! Leave it for the present, shall we?" the girl wheedled on. "But you began it, didn't you?"

Then the Form-mistress gave a last long sigh and came out of her drooping state. She stood up, drying her eyes.

"You need not stay, Zillah. The headmistress will be told about your escapade. She will also be told about—my brother. I myself am going to tell her now."

"But there's no need——"

"There is need! Not another word now. You have said quite enough to show me what you are!"

Miss Merrick was crossing to the door as she said that. With an unconscious dignity, due to the sublime courage which had come to her in this dark hour, she swept out of the room.

And Zillah, as if she had never known that human nature could display such selfless qualities, said in great astonishment:

"Well, now! Fancy her taking it like that!"

Bombshell!

POLLY LINTON was a long time away from Study No. 12. She had only gone to post a couple of letters, but several minutes passed and still the madcap was absent from the mis-called "Abode of Harmony."

When she did return it was merely to open the door wide enough to look in and see that Betty had still to come round from the other study to join the happy band.

Slam! Polly drew shut the door of Study No. 12, then rushed round to the captain's den—in wild excitement.

"Betty!"

"Hallo, Polly! Just coming!"

"But you haven't heard?" panted the madcap as her best of chums very calmly hitched back a chair and rose. "Oh, Betty darling, the most awful thing!"

"Why, what, Polly—what? Not about Pam?"

"Pam—no-o-o! But Miss Merrick—she's leaving!"

"Wha-a-at!"

"Leaving us—at once! To-night—now! Yes!" Polly rushed on. "Her things are packed and waiting in the front hall. I—I only discovered by seeing them there, and then finding that she was asking on the telephone: 'Was a car on the

way?' She must have rung up already for one to come on! Oh, Betty, do something—you must! We all must!"

Even the captain, habitually so calm in a crisis, felt utterly stunned by the astounding news.

"But, why—why is it?" Betty exclaimed at last.

"Goodness knows," Polly said with a shrug. "She won't say. I rushed to her as she came away from the 'phone. She admitted she was going, but she wouldn't say why. And by her manner—oh, I don't believe we are ever to be allowed to know!"

"I'll go down," Betty decided suddenly. "Whatever else it may mean, there can't have been a row between Miss Merrick and Miss Somerfield."

Another moment and both girls were emerging upon the main corridor, with Study No. 12's door close at hand. They heard happy voices. In there were Bunny, Paula, Naomer, and others—all so elated, to-night, after the visit to Pam, who was now progressing so splendidly. And that great joy—was it to be spoiled in a moment by this thunderbolt about Miss Merrick?

Silently Betty and Polly hastened downstairs.

"Why, the car's here!" Polly gasped. "The luggage is going out now!"

They flashed round a half-landing and simply flew down the stairs. Three seconds later they were rushing down the last flight of stairs, seeing across the front hall to the porch door. It was open, and a hired car was just outside.

The driver was even now taking up the last

THE SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN. No. 790. Vol. 31.
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AS promised, I intend this week to quote from more of the many interesting and extremely well-written letters I have received regarding the controversy over Pam Willoughby. I only wish space would allow me to publish the letters in full, but as this, unfortunately, is impossible, I must content myself with giving extracts.

"I have had SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN every week for the last four years, and I have always admired Pam Willoughby greatly. . . . She is my favourite of the 'chummery,' and I feel I know her as well as if she were my own sister. . . . Your critic says that Pam is always so calm in times of peril. I think that Pam is often afraid at such times, but her inborn courage enables her not to show it."—(Kathleen G. Rankin, Bitterne, Southampton.)

" . . . Pam is my favourite, next to Polly, and I think she is a perfect little Lady of Swanlake. I like her staid manner, and also how she goes through with difficulties. I hope many more Morcove stories will be about Pam."—(Ena Riero, Barcelona, Spain.)

"I think Pam is very nice, and a sweet-natured girl. I quite understand her wanting to be like other girls, and not swanking or flying above them. I'm sure I shouldn't consider her as a member of the Study 12 'chummery' if she did, and I know she wouldn't be liked by Betty & Co. or Jack & Co., saying nothing of Jimmy. . ."—(Eileen Young, Chelwood Gate, Hayward's Heath.)

"I admire Pam's serenity in peril very much. She has most undoubtedly a personality, and one of striking dignity."—"Kay.")

"I agree with your reader that Pam is most unnatural. . . . Another thing, Pam strikes me as being very condescending. . . . I do not agree with your reader that Pam is unaffectionate towards her parents, . . . also she is by no means ungenerous. . . . I am a great admirer of Miss Stanton's stories, and most of her characters, but I do not think that Pam is at all natural."—(Eileen Gedye, Chandler's Ford, Hants.)

"Ever since Pam entered Morcove I have been one of her most ardent admirers, holding the conviction that she is the greatest schoolgirl character on record. . . . Why do I admire her? Because, to quote Kipling,

she 'can meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two impostors just the same.'—"A Great Admirer of Pamela," Dore, nr. Sheffield.)

"First let me congratulate you upon SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN, which I consider the best paper published. . . . I consider Pam Willoughby one of the most delightful girls in Study 12. She never boasts and is always humble, despite the fact that her parents are wealthy and that beautiful old Swanlake is her home. . . . Her love and knowledge of animals (especially horses) seems greater than that of anyone at Morcove."—"Admirer of Pam," Yaxham, Norfolk.)

"I have been a regular reader of SCHOOLGIRLS' OWN for fourteen years. . . . Pam is, and always will be, my prime favourite. . . . Pam's serenity is part of her personal charm. After all, we can't all be for ever bubbling over with the joy of living. . . . As for Pam being a prig—well, words fail me!"—(E. Burman, Whitechurch, Glamorgan.)

More letters next week, dear readers, and meanwhile my best thanks to the following readers for their splendid letters on the subject:

"Pam's Fan" (Paddock); Mary Davidson and Ella Gill (Newstead); "Three Admirers" (Latchford); Yvonne Cooper (Lisbon); Jean Webb (Wordsley); Elsie Markham (Herne Hill); "Pam's Admirer" (White-moor); Phyllis Coombes (Swanage); "An Admirer of Betty and Co." (St. Albans); "Freda" (Longsight); Joan Speir (Cambuslang); Betty Baker (Hurstpier-point); Jean Gray (Chester); Marjorie Bradley (Hull); Margaret Allbrook (Buckhurst Hill); "B. R." (Cosham); Dorothy Borrowdale (Mealsgate, Cumberland); Isabel C. Boan (Catrine); "An Admirer of Pam and Helen" (Magh Eala); Iris Smith (Southall).

"Cherrol's Admirer" (Whitley Bay); Audrey Swaby (Newton Hill); Joan Tinwell (Higham's Park); "An Admirer of Pam" (Sutton Scotney); Gladys Cox (Amblecote); Joan Manderson (Dunblaine); B. Fordham (Havant); Doris Fudge (Thornford); Brenda Wood (Balcombe); Av's Philpot (Brampton); Kitty Smith (Lyme Regis); Jean Watson (Girton); Phyllis Le Sueur (Wyke Regis); Masie Baird (Otter Ferry); Nellie Hazel (Bath); Mary Shirwell Scott (Christchurch); Helen M. Wright (Sheffield).

Doreen Loding (Carmarthen); "Regular Readers"; Audrey Preedy (Stonehouse); Maria Komloo (N.W.11); "Margaret K." (Birkenhead); Joan Beddow (Berriew); Mabel Burt (Tenterden); Mollie Midgley; Audrey Brown (Sark); June Hammond (Driffield); Miss M. Honey (Wembley); Valerie Minshull (N.14); "Mystery" (Uddington); Winnie Parker (Wakefield); Miss A. Lund (Forton); Audrey Roberts (Watford); Renee Mattheys (Bournabat); Miss C. Walker (Folkestone); Dulcie Speed (Stockport).

Just a few lines about next week's stories:

First and foremost, the grand long Morcove story is entitled, "Study 12's Strange Secret," and brings the Zillah Raine series to a dramatic conclusion. Long instalments of "The School for Stage Stars" and "Her Fugitive Friend of Mystery," and magnificent COMPLETE stories of "The Crimson Shadows" and her Harum-scarum Highness, make up a fine number, which you should order now.

With all good wishes

Your sincere friend,

YOUR EDITOR.

of Miss Merrick's portmanteaus to carry it out to the car. Miss Merrick herself was here—dressed for a journey—quite alone.

Was she going away in such circumstances of sudden disgrace that good-byes had been out of the question?

Disgrace? But how could she—the mistress with such a splendid record up till now—be in disgrace!

The sound of Betty and Polly's descending steps caused her to turn to face the stairs. She was dry-eyed, but her right hand clutched a handkerchief. This they noted as they rushed across to her.

"Miss Merrick! You're not going?" was all Betty could say incredulously.

"Yes, Betty dear—"

"But—but—"

A lump rose in Betty's throat. She stood back a step as did Polly, glancing at the car-driver as he lurched away with the last bit of luggage, and then staring again at the Form-mistress.

"You will understand when I say, girls—you two, who have been, and always will be, so very dear to me," Miss Merrick faltered. "I wanted to go without seeing anyone belonging to the Form. But you are here, and so—in a minute, when I'm gone, you'll go up and tell the others for me, won't you? Say good-bye to them all for me, and say that they will be in my thoughts—always."

"Miss Merrick!" Betty cried. "Why must you go—why? Oh, there must be something we can do!"

"No, girls, nothing!" Miss Merrick said sadly. "It's useless to go rushing to Miss Somerfield. You could do no good, only harm."

"You can't go—you shan't!" Polly declared suddenly clasping an arm of Miss Merrick's. "It's not right; it's all wrong! Here's Betty, our captain—she can do something, if I can't!"

At that moment the driver came back from the car to the porch doorway, saying:

"Everything ready, miss."

"Thank you. All right, then; and now girls—it must be good-bye, and God bless you both!"

She had kissed one girl after the other whilst speaking. For a moment longer they both stood near, then Miss Merrick stepped quickly out to the car, drawing the hall door shut behind her.

The starting-away whine of the motor came instantly.

Betty and Polly darted to the door and opened it wide, peering out.

But the rear light of the car was even then a red star in the darkness, rapidly fading from sight.

SADLY Betty and Polly came back into the hall; reclosed the door. A sudden sound caused them to look towards the stairs, and they became aware of someone pausing half-way down.

It was Zillah Raine. Her expression, whilst she hesitated to come any farther, was a gaping one.

"Oh, has she gone!" came from her in a blurt-ing manner. "I—I mean—Miss Merrick?"

"What do you, then, know about Miss Merrick?" Polly sharply asked, striding across to the stairs. "How did you even know that she might be going?"

Zillah, at that, flusteredly turned and went upstairs again. There was something so guiltily evasive in her doing this, a terrible suspicion instantly seized the minds of Betty and Polly. They faced each other once more.

"That girl!" Polly fiercely muttered. "Her doing?"

"If it is—" began Betty grimly.

"We said it wouldn't be long before somebody else fell a victim. I thought it would be you, Betty. And instead it has been Miss Merrick! Actually, a mistress! Doesn't it look like that—doesn't it?"

Betty had been heeding, and she nodded.

"Then there will be something we can do after all, Polly. Bring that girl to account, and it may even mean bringing Miss Merrick—back to the school!"

Their whisperings ceased. Both girls stood looking up the stairs although Zillah Raine was no longer there.

At last Betty spoke again through taut lips.

"Yes! Once, twice she has escaped being called to account. If this is yet another case of harm done by her—"

"There is no IF, Betty; it is—it is her doing! You could tell!"

"Then"—and Polly had never seen Betty look so intensely angry—"then she'll pay for it!"

(THE END OF THIS WEEK'S STORY.)

Betty Barton and her chums have come to the conclusion that Zillah Raine is a menace to the School. But can they effectively check her selfish activities? Be sure to read next Tuesday's grand long Morcove story:

STUDY 12'S STRANGE SECRET
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