



SCHOOLGIRL SERIES No. 4

The St. Olive's Sweepstake



by
**HILDA
RICHARDS**
Authoress of **BESSIE BUNTER**

A COMPLETE 'PAM DUNCAN & CO.' STORY

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MASCOT SCHOOLGIRL SERIES No. 4

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A "Pamela Duncan & Co." Story

Published by

JOHN MATTHEW (Publishers) LIMITED
FINSBURY HOUSE, BLOMFIELD ST., LONDON, E.C.2

THE ST. OLIVE'S SWEEPSTAKE.

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CHAPTER I.

VERA SANSON'S SWEEP!

"It's only half-a-crown, Pam!" pleaded May Carhew.

"But——!" said Pamela Duncan, very gravely.

"Half-a-crown isn't much."

"I know! But——!"

"Oh, you're always butting, Pam," said May, peevishly. "But—but—but——! Are you setting up to be a billy-goat, always butting?"

Pamela laughed. But her face became grave again at once. In Study Two, in the Fourth Form at St. Olive's, there was a firm friendship: yet no two girls could have been much more unlike than Pamela Duncan and May Carhew. Pam was generally merry and bright: but she was thoughtful—and it was rather doubtful whether feather-headed May ever did any thinking at all.

Pam was sitting at the study table, working at a French exercise for Mademoiselle Monceau, when May rushed in, with a bright excited face—which was now clouded with vexation.

Which made Pam feel remorseful. She hated to play the part of a damper. But in that study she had to do the thinking for two!

"You see, May——!" she began, gently.

"I don't!" contradicted May. "You're always such a sober old judge, Pam. Where's the harm in a half-crown sweepstake?"

"I don't know that there's a lot of harm in it," said Pam, slowly, "but I know very well that Miss Ducat wouldn't allow it."

"We're not going to ask the Duck to take a ticket!" said May, sarcastically, "or the Head, either."

"If the prefects knew——"

"We're not going to ask Anemone Rance or Irene Dace to take a ticket, any more than Miss Ducat or the Head."

"We can't go against the rules, May."

"There's no rule that I ever heard of against a half-crown sweep!" said May. "I'm quite sure that sweeps aren't mentioned in the rules."

Pam laughed again. But again she became very grave.

"It's all rot!" said May, warmly. "Vera Sanson is taking all the trouble to get up the sweep. All the girls will take tickets—or nearly all. It's just fun—and the chance of a prize. Suppose we draw the favourite, Pam? Vera says that Blue Bag is the favourite for the race."

Pamela made a grimace.

"Oh, of course, you're shocked," said May, pettishly. "It's only half-a-crown for a ticket, even if we draw blanks."

"Well, a half-crown is a half-crown," said Pamela. "But that doesn't matter so much. But I don't like the idea, May—I don't like any of Vera Sanson's ideas, if you come to that. She ought not to be getting up a sweep in a school."

"Oh, I know you don't like Vera," snapped May. "Well, she's no pal of mine, either. But I don't see putting on superior airs and standing out of the sweep, when all the form are going in for it. Even Peg's going to take a ticket. And Isolda—and Gwen—and Millicent, and Brenda, and Annabel——"

Pamela knitted her pretty brows.

"And I've said that I'll take a ticket, and I've said that you'll take one, Pam. Are you going to let me down?" demanded May.

"I wish you'd keep clear of it, May."

"I tell you I've said so. Do you want me to back out, and break my word?" exclaimed May, hotly. "If we're going to be so very superior, are we going to set about it by breaking my word?"

Pamela coloured. May had her own way of arguing. If she made it a point of honour to do what she ought not to have done, it was difficult for her chum to reason with her.

"It's gambling," said Pam, at last.

"It isn't!" declared May. "It's a sweep."

"Getting something for nothing is gambling."

"Well, most of the girls won't get anything—there will be more blanks than prizes, of course. Besides——" May's eyes danced, "if getting something for nothing is gambling, you're a gambler, Pam."

"I!" exclaimed Pamela.

"Yes!" May pointed to the exercise on the table. "Mamzelle gave you that impot because she thought you were talking in class, when you weren't. Wasn't that getting something for nothing?"

Pamela had to laugh. It was not easy to keep serious with May Carhew.

"There! Now you've stopped looking like a judge just going to put on the black cap," said May. "So shell out your half-crown, and I'll get your ticket along with mine."

Pamela, grave again, shook her head.

"I'd rather not, May, really! I don't say it's wrong, dear, but—— but it's the sort of thing to keep clear of. The Duck wouldn't like it——"

"Oh, bother and blow!" said May. "I tell you I've told Vera I'll take a ticket. That settles that. Are you coming in or not? I think you ought to stand by a pal, and not put on superior airs——"

Pamela crimsoned.

"If you put it like that, May, I shall have to take a ticket——"

"Well, I do put it like that!" said May, triumphantly. "So shell out, and cut the cackle. This study always sticks together, doesn't it? I daresay there may be a row if the Duck gets wise to it. Do you want to keep out of a row when I'm landed in it? What?"

That settled it for Pamela Duncan. Loyalty always came first with Pam: and that quality in her sometimes caused a steady head to be led by a feather-head. She looked round for her little hand-bag, extracted a half-crown therefrom, and passed it across the table to May.

"Good egg!" said May, who was always slangy. "Now I jolly well hope that we shall draw first and second favourites, Pam. If we do, we shall be rolling in money, and we'll have no end of a spread at Mum Milsom's, and——and——"

"Favourites don't always win races, I believe," said Pam. "I don't know much about it, but I believe outsiders sometimes win."

"Then let's hope we shall get a really good outsider each!" said May. Her knowledge of the "Sport of Kings" was even more limited than Pam's. And she danced out of the study with Pam's half-crown, delighted to have had her way, and not thinking of anything further, as was her happy custom.

But Pam was left with a grave and troubled face. She had yielded against her better judgment—as she often did with May.

However, it was done now, and that was that. And Pamela Duncan dismissed it from her mind at last, and plunged into French again.

CHAPTER II.
PAINFUL FOR PEG!

"BLUE BAG——Booster——Jolly Junius——!"

Peg Pipping, of the Fourth, muttered the names aloud, unconsciously. Plump Peg was seated in the window-seat at the end of the Fourth-form passage. She had a newspaper in her plump hands, and was scanning it with rapt attention. She was too deeply absorbed in that newspaper to heed footsteps coming up the passage. Her fat brow was wrinkled in thought, and she seemed to be making deep calculations as she scanned the paper.

In class, Peg never displayed this absorption in the work in hand. Miss Ducat could never get her to concentrate like this on Latin. Mademoiselle Monceau had never seen her give such attention to French. Miss Moon would have been astonished had Peg ever displayed such interest in algebra or geometry. Plainly there was something in that newspaper which was much more absorbing than any subject included in the St. Olive's curriculum. Peg Pipping seemed quite lost to the world.

"Blue Bag, two to one!" she murmured. "Booster, three to one. Jolly Junius four to one. Snooker's Pride, eight to one——"

"What on earth has that little fat duffer got there?" asked May Carhew, stopping outside the doorway of Study Two, to look at Margery Pipping in the window-seat.

Pamela, who was coming up to the study with her chum, glanced at Peg, and knitted her brows. She hurried to the fat junior sprawling in the window-seat, and May followed her. And May gave a little whistle, as she caught the title of the newspaper that so deeply absorbed Plump Peg. It was the "Racing Record." The two girls gazed at it blankly.

They had seen sporting newspapers in newsagents' shops. They had never seen one within the walls of St. Olive's. Now they saw one—in the fat paws of Peg Pipping. What Miss Buss, the Headmistress of St. Olive's, would have said if she had seen it, they could not begin to imagine. It was very probable that any girl found in possession of such a publication would be sent home at once. It was simply amazing to see the "Racing Record" in the hands of a St. Olive's girl.

"Peg!" exclaimed Pamela, in alarm.

"Eh!" Peg Pipping blinked up at her, and waved a fat hand. "Don't bother—I'm busy!"

"Busy trying to get Miss Buss to sack you?" asked May. "You podgy duffer, you'd get into a fearful row if that rag was seen here."

"How could you be so idiotic as to bring it into the school, Peg?" exclaimed Pamela, in alarm and distress.

"Eh! I didn't," said Peg. "I've borrowed it."

"Not from a St. Olive's girl!" exclaimed Pamela. "No St. Olive's girl would have a racing paper. What do you mean, Peg?"

Peg Pipping chuckled.

"That's all you know," she said. "It's Vera's! I've borrowed it from her study. She keeps it under the cushion in her armchair. He, he, he! But I jolly well spotted it! I say, there's the horses here for the Squire's Cup next week—that's the race we've got the sweep on. I say, from what this chap says, Blue Bag is pretty certain to win. I wonder who'll draw Blue Bag in the sweep."

"Vera Sanson!" said Pamela. Her face set hard. "Give me that paper, Peg."

"Eh! You can read it along with me, if you like," said Peg. Here—

I say—leago—gimme that paper.”

Pamela Duncan was seldom angry. But she was angry now. She grasped the pink newspaper, and jerked it from Peg's fat hands. Then she turned and walked quickly towards Study Six, which was Vera Sanson's study.

Peg jumped up with a howl of angry remonstrance.

“Cat Gimme my paper! I say—Yoo-hooooop!” spluttered Peg, as May Carhew gave her a gentle push, and she sprawled in the window-seat again. “Ow! Cat! Wow!”

Unheeding the indignant Peg, Pamela knocked at the door of Study Six, and threw it open. There was a startled exclamation, as she did so.

Vera Sanson was sitting at the study table. Before her, on the table, was a little pile of half-crowns, which she was counting.

Vera was a slim, dark girl, rather handsome than pretty, with black hair, and strong features. Her black eyes gleamed under rather heavy dark brows, and her mouth, well-cut as it was, had a sardonic twist. She was about Pamela's age, but she gave the impression of being older than her years. She was very far from being a good influence in the St. Olive's Fourth: and between her and Pamela Duncan, the Head Girl of the Fourth, there was mutual dislike—or rather, dislike on Vera's side, distrust on Pam's.

Vera was generally cool and collected, even in dealing with mistresses and prefects; she was always cool, often with a half-suppressed insolence in her manner, which made the other girls wonder at her nerve.

But Pam's sudden entrance into Study Six startled her, no doubt owing to her occupation at the moment, and she gave a little exclamation. Then, as she saw that it was Pamela, she frowned angrily.

“Only you!” she snapped. “Do you always barge into a study like that, Pamela Duncan? I thought it was a prefect for a moment.”

“You wouldn't like a pre. to see that stack of money on your table,” snapped Pam.

Vera shrugged her shoulders.

“Pre's have to be down on a sweepstake,” she said. “I fancy they have one in the Sixth, all the same. Have you come here for your ticket? I gave it to May.”

“No,” said Pamela, biting her lip.

Vera looked at her, a mocking glimmer in her black eyes.

“You look as if you'd come to give me a sermon! It's rather late in the day for that, isn't it, as you're in the sweep yourself?”

Pamela did not answer that. She had known in advance that she would regret having given way to May's insistence. But it was, as Vera said, too late in the day to think about that. But she had not failed to note the greed in the dark face as Vera handled the money on the table, and it made her feel a deeper repugnance than ever towards Vera Sanson and all her ways.

She slammed the pink newspaper angrily on the table.

“That's yours!” she snapped.

Vera started from her chair.

Her face whitened a little. Vera was no fool, like Peg Pipping—very far indeed was Vera from being that. She knew, only too well, the danger of that paper being seen by the eyes of authority. She took a mocking, derisive pleasure in disregarding rules, and in making light of teachers and prefects: but she had no desire whatever to be sent home in disgrace.

“How dare you take my paper!” Her voice was shrill with anger and

alarm. "I'd have lent it to you if you'd asked—but——"

"Do you think I should want to see the wretched thing?" exclaimed Pamela, her eyes flashing. "I've just taken it from Peg Pipping. She had it in the passage, and any pre. coming up might have seen her with it."

"The prying little beast! She must have nosed it out—I'll make her sorry for prying in my study——"

"If a pre. had seen her, she would have been taken to the Head," said Pam. "How dare you have such a paper in the school? You are a disgrace to the form!"

Vera's lip curled.

"How can I run a sweepstake without knowing the names of the horses," she asked. "I had to get the information."

"You shouldn't be running a sweepstake at all."

"I like that!" Vera laughed derisively. "That's quite good! Satan rebuking sin! Ha, ha! Aren't you in it with the rest?"

Pamela did not answer—it was true, she was in it with the rest. Her face flushed, and she turned to the door without another word. Vera picked up the pink newspaper and folded it, and her derisive laugh followed Pam as she went.

The door closed, but a minute or two later it reopened, and Peg's fat face looked anxiously in. Vera Sanson gave her an almost deadly look, and took a grip on the folded newspaper.

"I say, Vera," gabbled Peg, as she rolled in. "I say, that cat Pamela took your paper away from me—I—I—borrowed it you know—I say, I hadn't finished going over the horses—I say, let me have it again, will you?"

"Yes," said Vera, coming round the table with the folded newspaper in her hand, her lips set and her eyes gleaming. "You prying fat worm, here it is!"

Swipe! swipe! swipe!

"Yoo-hooooop!" roared Peg, in surprise and anguish, as the folded newspaper whacked on her fat head. "I say—yaroooh! Keep off, you minx! Stoppit, you cat! Yoo-hoop!" Peg roared, and dodged wildly, but the swipes of the folded newspaper came down hard and fast as she dodged. "Will you stoppit? Wow-ow! You're a worse cat than Pam—Oh, crikey! Yaroooooh!"

Peg bounced out of the study, Vera getting in a final swipe before she slammed the door and fled.

"Ow! Cat! Wow!" floated back from the passage. And Vera Sanson pushed the pink newspaper out of sight under the cushion of the armchair, and sat down once more to count money at her table.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT'S ON IN THE FOURTH?

MISS DUCAT, Form-mistress of the Fourth, glanced over her form, and glanced again, with a slightly perplexed pucker in her brow.

There was something "on" in the St. Olive's Fourth. She was quite sure of that. She had a suspicion that some "rag" was in contemplation—"rags" were by no means unknown in the St. Olive's Fourth. And her eyes lingered on the dark, handsome, rather sarcastic face of Vera Sanson. If there was any mischief afoot, the Duck had little doubt that Vera was in it—and probably the moving spirit. But what was it?

Several times, of late, she had noticed that the Fourth-form girls gathered in twos and threes, out of class, and discussed some matter that seemed of deep interest to them. But they stopped at once if a mistress or a prefect came into the offing. Once Millicent Wade had dropped something in the form-room—it looked like a tram ticket so far as the Duck had noticed—and unaccountably coloured up, as she stooped hastily to retrieve it. On another occasion, passing the doorway of the junior common-room, she had heard Peg Pipping's voice, loud as usual—and then several voices said "Hush." But Peg had only been speaking about a blue bag—no harm in that, so far as the Duck could see. All the girls had hand-bags, and some of them were blue: and it was quite mysterious that several girls had exclaimed "Hush" when she passed the doorway—and that Margery Pipping, when she glanced in, had turned as red as a ripe apple. Other little incidents had occurred, and Miss Ducat was puzzled, and a little uneasy. And now, as she glanced over her girls in the form-room, she could see many signs of suppressed excitement. They were not excited about the lesson, which was history: that was certain.

Several times, during that lesson, Peg Pipping had whispered to other girls in the class. Peg seemed worried and anxious, and every time she thought that Miss Ducat's eyes were not on her, she whispered to somebody. Once Miss Ducat noted Vera give the fat junior a fierce look, with her dark brows contracted and her dark eyes glinting—obviously a hint to be silent. But Peg, oblivious of hints, was whispering again: and Miss Ducat, compressing her lips, suddenly rapped out her name:

"Margery!"

"Oh!" Peg gave a startled gasp. "I—I wasn't speaking to Isolda, Miss Ducat. I never opened my lips, did I, Isolda?"

The Honourable Isolda Wentworth did not reply.

"You were speaking to Isolda, Margery!" said Miss Ducat, severely.

"Oh, no, Miss Ducat! I never said a word!" stammered Peg. "Isolda knows—she heard me."

At which there was a chuckle in the Fourth.

Miss Ducat frowned.

"Margery! Tell me at once what you said to Isolda!" she rapped.

"I—I—I only said that—that—that half-a-crown wasn't much, Miss Ducat!" moaned Peg.

Miss Ducat was quite puzzled by Peg's reply: but it was no puzzle to the juniors. All the form knew that Peg Pipping was not yet provided with a ticket for the sweep: owing to the lack of the necessary half-crown for the purchase of the same. And the "draw" for the sweep was to take place in Vera's study after four—which, if the Duck had only known it, was the cause of the suppressed excitement in the form.

"You said that half-a-crown was not much, Margery!" exclaimed the form-mistress blankly. Then she suddenly understood. "Oh! Do you mean that you wanted Isolda to lend you half-a-crown?"

"Oh! No! Yes! I—I mean—!" stammered Peg.

"I do not approve of borrowing in the form," said Miss Ducat, severely. "But if you are in need of half-a-crown for any reasonable or useful purpose, Margery, you may come to my study after class and tell me. Now attend to the lesson."

"Oh! Yes! Thank you, Miss Ducat!" gasped Peg.

And she attended to the lesson—as much as she could, with the more important matter of the St. Olive's sweep-stake on her fat mind, and the dazzling hope of drawing "Blue Bag" and winning innumerable half-crowns.

May Carhew winked at Pamela, who tried not to smile.

Vera Sanson set her lips very hard. She wondered, with an inward tremor, whether even Peg was idiot enough to take advantage of Miss Ducat's kind offer, and try to raise the half-crown in that direction. It was certain that all the fat would be in the fire if she did!

"Margery!" rapped out Miss Ducat, a few minutes later.

"Yes, Miss Ducat." Margery's attention had wandered again. "I—I wasn't speaking to Gwen——!"

"You are not listening to me, Margery!" said Miss Ducat, frowning.

"Oh! Yes, Miss Ducat! I—I heard every word you said," stammered Peg.

"Indeed!" said Miss Ducat, grimly, her eyes fixed on Peg. Miss Ducat had been speaking of the reign of Charles the First, and of that monarch's unpopular favourite the Duke of Buckingham, and she did not believe that Peg had heard a word of it. "Give me the favourite's name."

"The—the favourite!" stammered Peg, blankly. Peg was thinking of the Squire's Cup and the sweep: not of the reign of King Charles. "Did—did you say the—the favourite, Miss Ducat?"

"I did! Answer me at once!" rapped Miss Ducat.

"Blue Bag!" gasped Peg.

"WHAT!" almost shrieked Miss Ducat. The whole form jumped, and Vera Sanson's eyes flashed. May Carhew burst into a laugh. So did several other girls. Peg was evidently thinking of the wrong "favourite."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" exclaimed Miss Ducat. "Margery, what do you mean by that ridiculous, that meaningless answer—tell me what you mean, at once!"

"I—I—I—that's what I—I mean, Miss Ducat," babbled Peg. "You—you asked me the name of the favourite——"

"Margery! Is this impertinence? Or have you taken leave of your senses, or what?" thundered Miss Ducat. "How dare you make such an absurd answer?"

Peg simply blinked at her. Blue Bag was the favourite—she knew that—at least so far as the Squire's Cup was concerned! Vera Sanson looked at her as if she could have bitten her—as perhaps she could have, at that moment. But it was clear that Miss Ducat had never heard of Blue Bag, the favourite for the Squire's Cup at Lowhanger Races; and luckily it did not occur to her that racing matters could possibly occupy the mind of a junior girl at St. Olive's!

"This is not merely stupidity, Margery—it is impertinence!" exclaimed Miss Ducat. "You will write out a hundred times that the Duke of Buckingham was the favourite of King Charles the First."

"Oh!" gasped Peg.

Peg, with a great effort, drove the half-crown, the sweep, and the favourite, from her fat mind, and listened to Miss Ducat almost as if she took some interest in the history of her native land.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRAW!

"OH, come on, Pam!" said May, impatiently.

Pamela Duncan was in her study after four. She did not stir as May Carhew called her from the doorway. The little pucker in Pam's brow showed that she was troubled in mind. During the three or four days since the St. Olive's sweep had been mooted, Pam had been more and more troubled about it.

"Aren't you coming?" snapped May.

"Look here, May, let's give it a miss!" pleaded Pam. "I—I'd much rather keep clear of Vera's study. I—I'd like you to do the same."

"We've got to turn up for the draw, haven't we?" said May. "What's the good of blowing half-a-crown each on the tickets, if we don't turn up for the draw? Do you want to chuck money away?"

"I'd rather throw it away, than have a hand in this, or anything else that Vera Sanson has anything to do with," exclaimed Pam, passionately. "It's all very well to say there's no harm in a little friendly sweep——"

"There isn't!" interjected May.

"Well, it's a bad thing," said Pamela. "It's making the girls excited and greedy. Vera looked like a miser the other day, counting over the money——"

"That's rot," said May. "It isn't her money! She only stands the same chance as the rest on her ticket."

Pam opened her lips, but closed them again. She hated to be distrustful: but her distrust of Vera Sanson was deep and instinctive. Vera's people were not rich, and Vera had expensive and extravagant tastes, and all the girls knew that she had often been hard pressed for money. Pam remembered only too clearly the greed she had read in that dark sardonic face: and she felt, rather than thought, that somehow or other Vera had planned that sweep as a good thing for herself.

But though she did not utter that half-formed vague thought, May was quick on the uptake, and she guessed. She gave a little cry.

"Pam! You can't think—you can't suspect—that Vera would cheat! Pam, it's a rotten thing to think of any girl at St. Olive's."

Pamela crimsoned. Put like that, she realised that she did not think so—she could not. Yet her distrust was deep, instinctive, not to be argued with.

"Besides, she couldn't," exclaimed May. "We shall all be there—we shall see the slips put in the bag—and we draw in turn. It has to be fair."

"I—I suppose so," stammered Pam, "but——"

"Vera's a sport," said May. "She'd play fair. I know jolly well that she hopes to draw the favourite—we all do. But Vera believes in her luck, and I daresay she banks on it. That's all. As for cheating——"

"I didn't say that, May."

"You jolly well thought it," snapped May, "and it's not like you, Pam, to be suspicious. You can't get over disliking Vera. You think she's a bad egg. Perhaps she is, in some ways: but this is all right. Anyhow we've taken tickets and we've got to turn up for the draw. So come on."

"I say, old dears!" A fat figure joined May in the doorway. "I say, if you've got a half-crown you don't want——!"

"Oh, scat!" snapped May. "Roll away, Peg, for goodness sake, and let's hear the end of that half-crown."

"Well, I mean to say, I want to be in it!" said Peg, in an injured tone. "You're both in it. I've asked nearly every girl in the Fourth. Look here, Pam, you lend me half-a-crown, and I'll share my hamper with you when it comes from Pipping Park."

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled May, while Pamela smiled. All the St. Olive's Fourth had heard of that hamper which was coming—perhaps—from Pipping Park. Few of the girls believed in the hamper—and fewer in Pipping Park!

"I mean it," said Peg. "I say, Pam, we've always been pals, haven't we——?"

"Not that I know of," said Pam, laughing.

"Cat! I say, May, I always liked you, you know——"

"Good!" said May. "Will you go on liking me as much, when I tell you that I've only got a threepenny-bit?"

Peg did not answer that question. She gave a snort and rolled away, leaving the chums of Study Two laughing.

"Come on, Pam," said May: and as Pam still hesitated, she grasped her friend by the arm, and almost dragged her from the study. On which Pamela gave in, and they went along to Study Six together.

They found Peg Pipping already there. Peg's fat squeak was heard as they arrived in Vera's room.

"You see, it's all right, Vera. I'll square next week—honest Injun! In fact I'll square out of the sweep if I win it. And——"

"Run away and play!" came Vera Sanson's contemptuous snap.

"Oh, all right!" Peg's fat squeak became defiant. "If you won't lend me half-a-crown for a ticket, you mean thing, I know where to get it. Miss Ducat said I could have it from her——"

"You little idiot!" came almost a hiss from Vera. "If you gabble it out to Miss Ducat, the sweep will be off, and we shall all get detentions."

"That's all right—of course I shan't say anything," said Peg. "I shall tell the Duck I want half-a-crown to give to a poor blind man. Or to put in the hospital box. Perhaps that would be better. The Duck's soft, you know, and if I tell her I want it for a blind hospital—I mean a poor old box—I mean——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the door, where Pam and May were looking in.

Peg blinked round at them.

"Keep back the draw till I've been and seen the Duck," she said. "I shall manage the Duck all right——!"

"Stop! almost screamed Vera. Her dark face was pale with anger and apprehension. "Come back, you fat fool! I'll lend you half-a-crown for the ticket."

"Oh, all right," said Peg. "Mind, I shouldn't give anything away to the Duck. I'm pretty deep, you know."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Vera. "Here it is—now shut up, for goodness sake." Vera Sanson certainly did not like parting with that coin: but evidently she preferred that to Peg seeking to raise the wind in the Duck's study! That was altogether too risky for the promoter of the St. Olive's sweep.

More and more girls arrived in Study Six. Nearly all the St. Olive's Fourth had taken half-crown tickets in the sweep. Study Six was a rather large room, but it was soon crowded, not to say crammed. Peg suggested going down to the junior common-room to hold the draw there—which was just like Peg! Vera gave her only a glare by way of answer. That draw had to be kept very secret from prefects and members of the Staff.

Sixteen girls had crammed somehow into the study. It was not easy to shut the door when they were all in—but it had to be shut. There was always the possibility of a Sixth-Form prefect coming along the passage.

Vera, sitting at the table, looked over the slips she had prepared for placing in the bag for the draw. Seven of those slips bore the names of horses—there being seven horses entered for the Squire's Cup. Many eyes looked over them, along with Vera's sharp black ones. A few of the girls were indifferent—Pam disliked the whole thing, and the Honourable Isolda Wentworth had her usual air of lofty indifference. But most were very keen.

Peg was all eyes—May Carhew greatly excited—and several of the girls, perhaps, a little distrustful of Vera, for they watched her and her proceedings with unfailing vigilance.

Millicent Wade read out the names of the horses on the seven slips—Blue Bag, the favourite, and Booster, Jolly Junius, Catnap, Snooker's Pride, Pool Ball, and Blackamoor. These, with the necessary number of blanks, were slipped into a little bag, and shaken up—several girls in turn taking a hand at the shaking, to make assurance doubly sure, as it were.

Pamela gave little or no heed—but once she glanced at Vera, and saw that her face was darkly set. A miserable doubt lurked in her mind, that perhaps the promoter of the sweep had intended to “wangle” the draw somehow for her own profit. She tried to banish it, feeling it was unjust to Vera. But somehow it lingered. It was plain, at least, that for some reason Vera was not in a pleasant humour. If in fact any “wangling” had been intended, it was impossible, under so many watchful eyes. Some of the watching eyes had, indeed, a suspicious or a greedy glint in them—the least pleasant side of every nature was roused by the spirit of gambling—and that, after all, was what is amounted to.

“I'll draw first, if you girls don't mind,” squeaked Peg, when the bag was placed on the table and all was in readiness.

“We do mind!” said several voices.

“Oh, don't be cats!” urged Peg.

“Alphabetical order!” snapped Vera.

“That leaves you till last!” giggled Peg.

“Surnames!” snapped Vera.

“That leaves me till last,” said Millicent Wade. “Oh, I don't mind—get on with it. No, it's you that's last, Isolda—do you mind?”

“Any old thing!” drawled the Honourable Isolda Wentworth. “Carry on.”

“Catherine!” snapped Vera.

And Catherine Bailey, as the first on the alphabetical list of surnames, drew a slip from the bag—gave it an eager look, coloured with vexation, and squeezed her way out of the crowded study—having drawn a blank. Then came May Carhew, next in the alphabetical list: and as she drew out, and held up her slip, she gave a joyous chuckle.

“Blue Bag!”

May had drawn the favourite.

CHAPTER V.

THE LUCK OF THE DRAW!

VERA SANSON compressed her red lips, hard. The glint in her black eyes was not pleasant, as she looked at the happy May. May's face was irradiated. She waved the slip over her head.

“Blue Bag!” she trilled. “The favourite! What price that, Pam? What?”

“Gratters, dear!” said Pam.

“Good luck,” said Gwendoline Page. “Still, favourites don't always win. Do they, Vera? You know all about racing.”

“I don't know any more than you do,” snapped Vera. “For goodness sake, get on with the draw. We can't be all night about it—there's prep. yet.” Vera's temper, only too clearly, was not at its best!

The draw proceeded. Pamela Duncan drew Blackamoor, at which there

was a laugh in Study Six. A good many of the girls, as well as Peg Pipping, had looked at Vera's "Racing Record" during the past few days, acquiring knowledge that they certainly were not expected by their parents to acquire at St. Olive's. So they knew that Blackamoor was a rank outsider, not expected by anybody to win the Squire's Cup, or even to be "placed." It was a matter of absolute indifference to Pamela, who was probably the only girl in the crowded study who would have preferred not to win the sweep.

There was another laugh when Vera Sanson drew—a blank! Vera's dark handsome face grew almost white, and her black eyes dilated. She stared at the blank slip in her hand, and threw it savagely to the floor. Some of the girls laughed—others exchanged glances—the Honourable Isolda slightly shrugged her aristocratic shoulders. Vera's face, at that moment, was hard, coarse, repellent, looking years older than her age.

"He, he, he!" came from Peg. "You won't be able to pay your bills at Oscombe out of that, Vera! He, he!"

Vera Sanson turned on the fat Peg with a blaze of fury in her face. Pamela caught her just in time, and pushed her back, before a sounding smack landed on Peg's fat head.

"For goodness sake, keep your temper, Vera!" exclaimed Pamela.

"Mind your own business!" breathed Vera.

"I say, keep her off!" yelled Peg, in alarm. "I say, tain't my fault she's drawn a blank! I never made her run up bills in Oscombe, did I?"

"Quiet, you little ass!" said Millicent. "Do you want the pre.'s up here?—"

"Well, she ain't going to smack my head because she's drawn a blank, and can't pay the milliner at Oscombe out of the sweep!" howled Peg.

"Be quiet—be quiet!" gasped Pamela.

"Get on with it," said Annabel, as Vera Sanson stood with clenched hands and flashing eyes, barely able to keep her self-control. "The sooner we're through this the better. It was a rotten idea, after all."

"Not quite the thing for St. Olive's, really," drawled Isolda.

Vera's display of disappointment and savage temper had caused several of the girls to realise that it was not quite the thing! Some of them realised, too, that to the promoter of the sweep, it was not a spot of harmless sporting fun, but a matter of serious import. Vera could hardly have betrayed more plainly that she had hoped for, or rather counted upon, better luck.

The remainder of the draw was hurried through. When it was over, the juniors crowded out of Study Six—most of them glad to get away. Only Mary Tunstall, who shared the study with Vera, remained. Mary had drawn a blank also: but she was a plump, placid girl, and not at all disturbed by her bad luck.

Vera, pale and disturbed, moved restlessly about the study, with her nails dug into her palms, biting her under-lip.

Mary looked at her, curiously.

"How did Peg know that you owe money at the milliners in Oscombe?" she asked.

"Oh, she noses everything out," said Vera, bitterly. "She may have seen the note they sent me—she sees everything! I wish I'd smacked her head now. Fancy that little idiot May drawing the favourite! The sweep would have seen me through, if—if——" She broke off. "All my trouble for nothing—and the risk too—oh, it's rotten!"

Mary Tunstall stared at her.

"Vera, you must have been crackers, if you got up the sweep to pay

your bills at Oscombe. You couldn't expect to have any better chance than anyone else of drawing the winner," she said.

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Vera. "Give me a rest." She stamped across the study, and kicked a chair out of her way, with a crash.

Mary gave her another stare, and quietly left the study. When Vera Sanson was in one of her "tantrums," she was better left alone—and Mary judiciously left her alone now.

While disappointment and bitterness reigned in Study Six, Study Two, on the other hand, brimmed with satisfaction, so far as May Carhew was concerned, at least. In that study, May pirouetted round the table, waving "Blue Bag" in triumph over her flaxen head, Pamela watching her with a smile.

"What luck—what jolly old luck!" trilled May. "Fancy me drawing the winner, Pam!"

"He hasn't won yet, May!" Pam reminded her.

"Oh, he's bound to win!" chuckled May. "Blue Bag will romp home! Your Blackamoor won't be in the running, Pam. And Vera's blank—ha, ha! Did you see her face? Vera's rather an outsider, Pam. No other girl would have lost her temper like that—even Peg didn't! Peg drew a blank too—but she didn't scowl like a demon in a pantomime. We all know how to lose—excepting Vera."

"Peg only lost Vera's half-crown," said Pam, laughing.

"Ha, ha! So she did! She's a horrid minx, blurting out like that that Vera owes money to the tradespeople in Oscombe," said May. "I suppose it's true—we all know how extravagant Vera is. I say, Pam, we're going to have a celebration when Blue Bag romps home."

"Take care of it, May! You know how you lose things."

"I'll watch it!" said May. She opened the table drawer, and placed inside it the slip bearing the name of Blue Bag. "Don't lose Blackamoor, Pam—outsiders sometimes win races, you know."

"I won't lose Blackamoor," said Pamela, smiling.

And with that, the subject was dropped, and the chums of Study Two gave their attention to prep.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MISSING TICKET!

"We shall know this evening!"

May Carhew made that announcement a few days later: to be exact, on Wednesday afternoon. Wednesday was the day of the race at Low-hanger: and at three o'clock, the Squire's Cup was to be run.

May was terribly excited that day. She had made random answers in class in the morning, and received lines from Miss Ducat. She had made still more random answers in the French set, and Mademoiselle Monceau had rewarded her with a stiff exercise in French irregular verbs. But it was impossible to dash May's bright spirits. She came out almost dancing after dinner, and very nearly waltzed Pamela Duncan round the fountain in the quad.

"How shall we know this evening?" asked Pamela. "I suppose even Vera isn't getting a telephone call from the race-course, is she?"

"Ha, ha!" trilled May. "No, hardly, old thing. But they have the evening papers in the Staff Room, and Vera has tipped Thomas, our jolly old page, to pinch one of them for her to look at. Winners in the stop-press column, you know."

Pamela made a grimace.

Knowledge of the manners and customs of the "Sport of Kings" had been spreading in the St. Olive's Fourth since Vera Sanson had promoted the sweepstake. The girls would draw together in little groups, discussing such hitherto unheard-of things as first and second favourites, outsiders, odds on or against, tipsters and tips, sure snips straight from the horse's mouth, and so on and so forth.

There was much suppressed excitement—every owner of a "horse" in the draw nourished a hope that an outsider might pull off the race. Seven girls, at least, had a chance of winning the sweep—though May's chance was head and shoulders above the rest, as she held the favourite. May had received offers of five shillings and seven and six, and even ten shillings, for her ticket—all of which offers she had declined with thanks—so sure did May feel that the favourite was going to romp home, and that she was going to receive that heap of half-crowns in Vera's study. May had, in fact, as good as spent that pile of half-crowns—at least, she had made all her plans for the expenditure: and all the girls in the Fourth were to come in for their share in the celebration which was to ensue.

If the favourite failed to "romp home," it was going to be a bitter disappointment for poor May. Someone else, however, would rejoice in her discomfiture—the holder of the winning horse. Booster and Jolly Junius had good chances—and the holders of those two horses were as eager as May for the evening paper. The whole thing was gall and wormwood to Pamela, and she longed for it to be over. Unhealthy excitement, and more than a spot here and there of eager greed, made her sick of it all: and she could not help feeling a deep and growing resentment towards Vera Sanson for having set it going.

After tea, Pam and May went up to their study. May wanted to have her ticket all ready for presentation in Study Six, when the results were known. With a bright and cheery face, May pulled open the table drawer, and groped therein for her ticket. Then she gave a little impatient exclamation, and bent over the drawer, rummaging, making papers fly right and left.

Pamela watched her in astonishment.

"What's the matter, May?" she asked. "Can't you find it?"

"It must be here," panted May. "I put it in this drawer—you saw me put it in this drawer, Pam!"

"I—I think so. I remember you opened the drawer," answered Pam. "Perhaps you put it in your bag after all instead."

"I'm sure I didn't! But—it's not here." May's face was almost pale. "I say, Pam, you go through the drawer, while I look in my bag."

Pamela went through the drawer, in which there were a lot of papers: examining every one, and clearing out the whole drawer. But May's ticket was not to be found there. Meanwhile, May turned out her bag: but no ticket came to light. The two girls looked at one another.

"Where can it be, Pam?" almost wailed May. "I know I put it in the drawer! I jolly well know I did. What's become of it?"

Pam wrinkled her brows in dismayed thought.

"Did you throw away any of the old papers in the drawer, the last few days?" she asked. "If so, you may have thrown away the ticket without noticing it."

"I didn't—I don't remember doing so, anyhow. Did you?"

"No! I should remember if I did. But you——" Pamela paused. May was really so feather-headed, that there was no telling whether she

might not have thrown away the ticket in some old exercise: or whether, indeed, she had placed it in the drawer at all. "Better search the study, dear—it must be here somewhere—I know you brought it here, at any rate."

"I put it in that drawer!" said May, with conviction.

"Well, let's look everywhere!" said Pam.

They proceeded to look "everywhere." But looking everywhere did not reveal the missing ticket. All it revealed was that "Blue Bag" was not in Study Two.

"Where can it be?" May clenched her little hands. Her usually careless face was hard with anger, disappointment, and bitter suspicion. "Pam! It's been taken away."

Pamela started as if a serpent had stung her.

"May! Don't! Don't say—don't think such a dreadful thing!" she gasped.

"I know I put it in that drawer!" said May stubbornly.

"Then it must have been thrown away with some old papers——"

"I don't remember throwing anything away. And you don't! I tell you my ticket's been taken!" said May shrilly. This was a new May—shrill and shrewd!

"Impossible!" panted Pamela. "Oh, it was rotten—rotten of Vera to start this beastly business at all! But it can't have been taken, May."

"Peg is always nosing through the studies. She may have been looking for chocolates, and found my ticket, and——"

"You mustn't think such things, even of Peg! Peg wouldn't! She's a fool—not a thief! For goodness sake, May——"

"Where's my ticket, then?" snapped May. "Where?"

"Think a minute," urged Pam. "Every girl in the Fourth knows that you drew Blue Bag—nobody else could take the sweep on your ticket. Nobody would have any object in stealing it, May."

"Oh!" said May. Her face cleared a little. "I—I suppose that's right! They all know I had Blue Bag. Vera knows, as well as the rest. She can't say I haven't won the sweep. We'd better let her know the ticket's missing, though—we don't want a fuss about it when we know who's won."

"Yes, we'd better tell her at once," agreed Pam: and the two girls went along to Study Six, where they found Vera Sanson.

Vera gave them a dark look as they came in.

"No good coming here yet," she snapped. "I don't get the evening paper from Thomas till after prep. Come then!"

"It's not that, Vera," said Pam, quietly. "May can't find her ticket——"

Vera Sanson burst into a scoffing laugh.

"She's lost her ticket? Like her, I must say! Is there anything she doesn't lose?"

"I haven't lost it!" flared out May. "I parked it in the table drawer in my study, only—only it's gone."

"Well, you'd better find it," snapped Vera. "The sweep can't be paid out unless the winning ticket is shown. You must be an utter idiot to be careless with it, as it's practically a cert. that Blue Bag will win."

"I haven't been careless with it!" exclaimed May. "But in any case, you all know that I had Blue Bag, and if my horse wins, I take the sweep."

Vera stared at her, a hard stare.

"If Blue Bag wins, you take the sweep, if you have the winning ticket," she said. "Not otherwise. The sweep's in my hands, and I can't pay out the prize money without the winning ticket being produced. You ought to know that."

"But—but I had the ticket!" May was almost in tears. "You know I had it—I drew it in this study——"

"What I know, doesn't matter a boiled bean," said Vera, coolly. "It isn't what I know or don't know that counts. The prize can only be paid out in exchange for the winning ticket—that's the law of every sweepstake. If you haven't the ticket, you don't come in at all."

"Oh, Pamela!" cried May.

"I—I'm afraid that's right, May." Pamela set her lips. "You must show up the ticket to take the prize, if your horse wins."

"But it's lost!" wailed May.

"Look for it!" said Vera. "You've dropped it somewhere. It will turn up if you look for it long enough."

"And—and if it doesn't, what becomes of the prize?" demanded May. Vera gave a shrug of her slim shoulders.

"Some other horse might win," she said. "If so, that ticket takes the prize, of course. If Blue Bag wins, the Blue Bag ticket must be shown up. Otherwise, the sweep stands over for another draw. It's the whole thing over again from the beginning—equal chances all round: and if you have the luck to draw the favourite for the next race, I advise you to put it in a safe place."

"I did—I did—only it's gone——!"

"Rubbish!" snapped Vera. "You lose everything—you'd lose your head if it would come off your shoulders! Go and have another look for the ticket. Anyhow, don't bother me about it—I've got some deponent verbs to do for the Duck."

And Vera dipped her pen in the ink again, and dropped her eyes to her work. May gazed at the top of her bent dark head, her lips quivering. Pamela took her arm and gently led her from the study.

"It's a shame—a shame!" whimpered May, as they went down the passage. "Everyone knows I had the ticket, and the money's mine when Blue Bag wins. It's a shame. Now if we have it all over again, on another race——Oh, Pam, I—I believe that's what Vera wants—she might draw the favourite next time. It's not fair."

"It can't be helped, dear," muttered Pamela. "The ticket's lost—and—and Vera has a right to follow the rules. Let's have another search for it."

And the two girls went back to Study Two: and for the next hour, they searched; only proving, finally and conclusively, that the missing ticket was not in the study. Several other girls, hearing what had happened, came in to help: and the study looked rather untidy when they had finished. But there was no sign of May's ticket. Some of the girls were sympathetic: but it was easy to see that some were far from sorry that the sweep would have to be held over again on a new race, if the winning ticket could not be produced. The misfortune of one was the benefit of another in a gamble, and that consideration blunted sympathy and hardened hearts—as was inevitable. It was, as Pamela realised, an unanswerable argument against entering into any form of gambling—even a half-crown sweepstake.

After the other girls were gone, May Carhew sat crushed, the tears in her eyes overwhelmed by disappointment and chagrin. Pamela tried to comfort her—but poor May was not to be comforted.

They had to turn to prep. at last: but the way poor May did her prep. looked like earning her more lines from Miss Ducat on the morrow. Pamela's heart was heavy; the whole thing had been a weight on her mind, and when she looked at May's face, usually so bright and careless and happy, and now so miserable and woebegone, her anger against Vera

flamed up. Why had that wretched girl started the wretched thing at all? If the Head made a discovery, Vera would most likely be sent away from St. Olive's—and Pam could have found it in her heart to wish that that might be the outcome.

CHAPTER VII.

VERA'S CONFESSION!

PEG PIPPING hurled open the door of Study Two with a crash, and burst into the study, her fat face ablaze with excitement. Prep. was over—and Pam was murmuring comfort to May—to deaf ears. Both of them started, and stared round, as the plumpest girl at St. Olive's bounced in.

"I—I say, Pam, Whackamoor's the binner!" spluttered Peg. "I mean, Blackamoor's the winner—I say, lend me five bob out of the sweep, will you, Pam? We've always been pals, haven't we? I say, Vera's got the evening paper from Thomas—she wasn't going to let me see, the cat—but a lot of girls looked—I say, you've swum the weep—I—I mean you've won the sweep—Blackamoor——!"

Pamela stared at her, blankly. May gave a cry.

"You little fat donkey! What nonsense——"

"It's in the paper!" gasped Peg. "I've seen it—lots of girls have seen it! I say, you should have seen Vera's face—furious! He, he, he! I say, it wasn't the favourite that won after all—your ticket wouldn't have been any good, May."

"Oh!" gasped May.

Pamela caught her breath. In her concern for May, she had forgotten all about her own ticket. She had drawn Blackamoor—the rankest outsider in the list. According to Peg's startling announcement, Blackamoor had won the Squire's Cup—beating the field as outsiders sometimes do. It seemed incredible.

But it was true. Five or six girls rushed into the study, with congratulations for Pam. Millicent Wade brought the evening paper, and almost pushed it under Pam's nose, and she read in the stop-press column:

SQUIRE'S CUP, 3 o'clock.

BLACKAMoor	1
BOOSTER	2
BLUE BAG	3

She looked at May. May's ticket was lost—but it would have been of no value after all—Blue Bag had come in third. May seemed hardly to realise it at first; but when she did, she laughed.

"Bother the old ticket!" she said. "It doesn't matter a straw about it now—it's no good. I'm glad you've won, Pam. I'd just as soon you won as I did! And you haven't lost your jolly old ticket, what?"

"It's in my bag," said Pamela. "But——"

"Come on," called out Gwendoline Page. "We'll all come along with you to Vera's study and see you bag the sweep money, Pam."

"Hear, hear!"

"Come on, Pam!"

May's face was bright now. The missing ticket did not, as she said, matter a straw: it was a losing horse, and of no more value than a blank. She was glad that her chum had won the sweep: it was coming to Study Two, after all. She caught Pam by one arm, Millicent caught her by the other, and they marched her up the passage to Study Six, in the midst of a crowd of girls.

"Here we are, Vera!" trilled May. "Never mind old Blue Bag—Pam's the jolly old winner. Trot out the loot!" Then she stared at Vera. "Why, what's the matter?"

Vera Sanson's dark face was white, her forehead damp. Many of the girls looked at her with concern. She looked quite ill. Her dark eyes had a frightened look in them. Pam came quickly towards her, forgetting dislike and scorn, as she saw how strange the girl looked.

"Vera! Are you ill?" she exclaimed.

"No! Yes! I—I've a headache," stammered Vera. "I—I've lost the key of my desk—the money's locked up, Pamela—do you mind—to-morrow——"

"That's all right," said Pamela, at once. "Don't bother, Vera. You do look seedy—don't bother about it at all. Come away, girls—Vera doesn't want a crowd here."

Vera seemed to choke for a moment.

"I—I'd like you to stay with me for a bit, Pam, if—if you will!" she faltered.

"Certainly I'll stay," said Pam.

And the other girls crowded away, and the door shut, leaving Pam with the sick-looking promoter of the sweep-stake.

"Can I get you something for year headache, Vera?" asked Pam. "I——" She broke off, staring blankly at Vera Sanson.

Vera had buried her face in her hands, and was sobbing. The tears ran through her slim fingers, as Pamela stared at her in consternation. It was amazing to see the cool, collected, sardonic Vera break down like this: and it was forced into Pam's mind that this was not a matter of a headache.

"Vera!" she muttered. "What—what, in goodness name——!"

Vera Sanson raised her head.

"I'm done for!" she whispered. "Pamela—we've never been friends—I know you dislike me—but—but—for mercy's sake, go easy! Don't—don't disgrace me before everybody! Don't!"

"I!" said Pamela, in wonder.

"The sweep!" whispered Vera, her face colourless, her lips trembling. "I—I thought—I hoped—it would see me through—I—I wanted the money. Then—when May drew the favourite——" She broke off, and then hurried on. "When her ticket was lost, I—I counted on a new sweep, all over again—I was certain that Blue Bag would win—everybody thought so. And now—now—now Blackamoor's won, and—and——" Her voice trailed off.

Pamela's face grew pale and hard. She was beginning to understand.

"What have you done with the money, Vera?" She knew now that the lost key of the desk was only a pretext.

"I—I had to pay that bill at Oscombe!" breathed Vera. "They—they threatened to send it to Miss Buss if I did not. I—I thought—I thought

I'd have a good chance, in having the sweep over again——" She dared not meet Pamela's eyes. "For mercy's sake, Pamela——"

"I understand." Pamela's tone was like ice. "You have used the money?"

"Yes!" barely articulated Vera.

"And you took May's ticket, so as to have the sweep over again?"

"Yes!" whispered Vera. "I—I thought Blue Bag was certain——"

Pamela rose, and stood looking at her. The once proud and disdainful girl cowered under the scorn in her eyes.

"Never mind the money!" said Pamela, quietly. "I'm glad not to touch it. Never mind that. I'll keep this secret, Vera—I shall not say a word. But listen to this—if you ever start a sweep, or anything else of the kind again, all the Fourth Form shall know what you've done. You've done harm enough in the form, and you shall not do any further harm. You would be expelled if the Head knew—you'd be cut by every girl at St. Olive's if the girls knew. I'll keep it secret—on that condition—nothing of the kind again."

Vera Sanson nodded: she could not speak. And Pamela Duncan left the study and shut the door hard. It was the end of the St. Olive's Sweep!

THE END.

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