

"TRAPPED IN VENICE!" THRILLING ADVENTURES OF ST. JIM'S FLYERS IN ITALY— **INSIDE.**

The **GEM** 2^D





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him at The GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Be as candid as you like—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature John Blunt himself! But keep your letters **SHORT**, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No payment can be returned.

E. T. Yates, of St. Anne's-on-Sea, Lancs, writes:
Who'm I like? I'm 5 feet 4 ins., well built, rather strong-headed, but seem to drop in for it at games, grammar, and spelling, etc. Could the burly Gerald Crooke fight Grundy?

ANSWER: Funny you should mention Grundy, who is also strong-headed, etc., but 2½ ins. taller than you. No, Crooke couldn't lick Grundy, if Grundy was looking!

"Interested Reader," of Kingsbury, writes:
Could Talbot beat Grundy? And is Crooke poor like Mellish?

ANSWER: Talbot could beat anybody but Tom Merry. Crooke is rather a "poor fish," but financially he's well heeled.

Paula Jacqueline Barrowcliffe, of Edgbaston, Birmingham, writes:

1. How old is Talbot? 2. Marie Rivers? 3. List of Shell studies, please. 4. When will Greyfriars be published in the GEM again? My favourites are Levison, Clive, Cardow, Roylance, and Talbot (the last named especially). Will you tell them so? Ahem!

P.S.—I'm twelve now. The photo was taken two years ago. Hope you won't think it too awfully horrid!

ANSWER: 1. 16 years 1 month. 2. I'll ask her. 3. (in answer to you and many others): School

House. Study No. 2: Frere, Lucas; No. 3: Grundy, Wilkins, Gunn; No. 4: Finn, Lennox; No. 5: Gibbons, Scrope; No. 7: Racke, Crooke; No. 8: Boulton, Walkley; No. 9: Talbot, Gore, Skimpole; No. 10: Merry, Lowther, Manners; No. 11: Noble, Glyn, Dane, New House. No. 1: French, Jimson; No. 2: Thompson; No. 3: Clampe. 4. Ask the Ed. None of your favourites thought you looked horrid—quite the reverse!



Miss Paula Barrowcliffe, of Edgbaston.

G. E., of Alexandria, writes:

Thanks for printing my letter. Kerr is my favourite. Will you remind him, Jack, that I'm Scottish, too, and love reading his stories? Thanks for measuring Wynn and Trimble for me. Didn't it take you at least five minutes to go

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right round Wynn's circumference? Hoots, Jack, you're a braw lad. Guid nicht the no mon!

ANSWER: It was no trouble going round Wynn. I merely stood still, paying out the measure while he revolved. Get the "measure" of the nice picture you enclosed of the s.s. Karna. Are you aboard her, then? Can't see you on deck. Kerr says he'd like to investigate. Alexandria is "a wee bit too lang a way" to walk. If you'd care to send your ship, now! Guid luck, mon!

Donald Seligman Wats (well, that's how I read it, old chap!), of Upper Rathmines, Dublin, Ireland, writes:

1. Biggest cad in the Fourth?
2. I'm ten. What Form would I be in?
3. Average age of the Shell?
4. Are there any Irish boys at St. Jim's?

Sorry I haven't a better photo.

ANSWER: 1. Tie between Mellish and Trimble. 2. There is no First Form at St. Jim's, and you'd have to be eleven to join the Second. 3. About 15½. 4. Pat Reilly and Micky Mulvaney (Fourth), Phelim Hooley (Third), and Kildare, school skipper.



Donald Seligman, of Dublin.

J. D. T. G., of Birmingham, writes:

What would you do if two elders were talking about a subject in which you had no interest every day for a couple of years? I shall be looking for your answer. Thanks!

ANSWER: I might consider camping in the garden, living in the attic, or even running away to sea. But if I just couldn't get away I should probably go crackers and start talking to the birds and the flowers. French of the Shell says that in a similar position he let his persecutors see him having a chat with an oak-tree and then told them it was more interesting than they were, anyway! You have my sympathy.

VENICE, QUEEN OF THE ADRIATIC, PROVIDES A PICTURESQUE SCENE FOR THE THRILLING AND HUMOROUS ADVENTURES OF THE FLYING SCHOOLBOYS OF ST. JIM'S. POWERFUL, NEW, EXTRA-LONG STORY.

TRAPPED *in* VENICE!



The bound juniors looked at their captor in silence. Both of them had plenty of courage, but there was something sinister in the solitude of the lonely waters and the silence of that masked, cloaked figure.

CHAPTER 1.

Bumps for Gussy!

WATS!" Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, the ornament of the St. Jim's Fourth, made that mark with emphasis.

"Now, look here, Gussy—" said Tom Merry.

"I repeat, wats!"

"Look here, fathhead—" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"You know what an ass you are!" pointed out Monty Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Before we've gone a hundred yards you'll have your pocket picked!" booted Herries.

"Wubbish!"

Seven St. Jim's juniors were in the foyer of the Hotel Fiesole, in the Piazza Castello, at Turin.

The flying schoolboys were in the city of Turin for a couple of days before taking off again in the Silver Swallow for Venice.

Six members of the St. Jim's party were arguing with the seventh—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The argument was growing warm.

In the bright and sunny May afternoon, Tom Merry & Co. were about to take a walk in Turin to see some of the sights of that city. They were all ready to start. But that argument had to be settled first.

That argument was on the subject of the black box—that mysterious little black box which had so mysteriously come into the hands of Arthur Augustus, and which had had so many narrow escapes since it had been in his aristocratic hands.

That little box was in Gussy's pocket.

That, in Gussy's opinion, was the safest place for it.

Gussy had that opinion entirely to himself. Six fellows were of opinion that it was the unsafest place that could have been sorted out in the whole of the wide world.

"Now, do have a little sense, Gussy!" urged Harry Manners.

"That's asking too much of Gussy!" said Monty Lowther, with a shake of the head. "Be reasonable."

"I can tell you," said Digby, "that I'm getting

Kidnapped in Venice by an unknown enemy—the sinister man in black!—Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Jack Blake find themselves the victims of the latest daring attempt to get hold of the mysterious little box entrusted to Gussy!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

fed-up with that blithering black box, Gussy! It's haunted us all through the hols!"

"Same here!" agreed Blake. "But after Gussy has stuck to it so long, we're not going to let him make a present of it to the first pickpocket he meets in Turin."

"If you think I am likely to have my pocket picked, Blake, I can only remark that you are an ass!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You had it picked in Paris!" hooted Blake.

"And in Cannes!" said Herries.

"How you fellows keep on arguin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "Fwom the way you talk, anybody might think that I was some careless, thoughtless youngstah like you chaps! We're wastin' time! Pway let us start!"

Arthur Augustus made a step towards the swing doors that gave egress on the sunny Piazza Castello. Six juniors promptly lined up in front of him.

There were other guests in the foyer of the Hotel Fiesole. Some of them glanced round at the schoolboys, some with smiles and some with raised eyebrows. Arthur Augustus coloured with vexation.

"Weally, you fellows, you are makin' ewevybody stare!" he said. "Pway do not kick up a wow heah! You should wemembah that you are not in the Fourth Form passage at St. Jim's now!"

"If we were," said Blake, "we'd jolly well bump you for being such an obstinate ass!"

"Let's bump him, anyhow!" suggested Herries.

"Bai Jove! Pway wemembah your mannahs in a foweign city, among a lot of foweigners!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"You're not going out with that mouldy black box in your pocket!" hissed Jack Blake. "We've had worry enough about that putrid black box! We're not going to have you raising Cain all over Piedmont and Lombardy because some dago has pinched that black box off you!"

"Now, pway listen to weason!" urged Arthur Augustus. "The black box is in no dangah now that bwute, Giuseppe Fosco, is knocked out and cannot get affah it again. Nobody knows anythin' about it except you fellows and Pawson. Nobody is affah it now. It is all wight. Now, let us go!"

"We're not going," said Tom Merry, "until you have handed that blinking black box over to the manager of the hotel, to be locked in his safe till we come in again."

"Wats!"

"That's sense, Gussy!" urged Manners.

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"Safety first, you know!" he said. "Nothin' like the mastah's eye, and all that. I pwomised that American chap that the box belongs to to keep it safe and secwet, and I am bound to stand by my word. It is up to me to keep it in my own hands and see that nothin' happens to it. Now, pway wing off!"

"No good talking to him!" said Blake. "Bump him!"

"Weally, Blake——"

"Are you going to have that box locked up in the hotel safe while we're gone out?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Wathah not! I wepeat that it is all wight!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus impatiently. "As a mattah of fact, I asked Pawson his opinion, and he said he wegarded it as pwudent for me to keep it in my own hands."

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"Bother Pawson!" grunted Manners.

"Bless Pawson!" said Tom Merry.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy turned his eyeglass very severely on the Shell fellows.

"I twust," he said, "that you wespect Pawson's judgment. Pawson is my patah's valet, and absolutely welied on by my patah. He is in charge of this partay, and he has played up in a weally wondahful way all thwough the hols. I place absolute weliance on Pawson's judgment."

"Where's Pawson now?" asked Manners.

"I think he has gone out, Mannahs. And it is high time that we went, too. If you kids will stop talkin' wot——"

"Will you hand that box over?"

"Wubbish!"

"Will you——"

"Wats!"

"Bump him!" said Tom.

Arthur Augustus jumped back in alarm. Two or three dozen pairs of eyes were on the St. Jim's crowd by this time. Bumping a fellow was not an uncommon process at St. Jim's, but it was extremely uncommon in such a place as the foyer of the Hotel Fiesole, in Turin. It was likely to cause quite a lot of attention to be concentrated on the juniors from St. Jim's.

"You uttah asses!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway wemembah where you are! Pway wemembah—— Yawwooh!"

Arthur Augustus spun in the grasp of six pairs of hands. He spluttered wildly as he spun.

Bump!

"Oh ewikey!"

"Now, you fathead——"

"Oh cwumbs!"

Bump!

"Ooooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "You wuffians! You feahful wottahs! You've got ewevyboday starin' at us! Welease me! I—— Yawwooh!"

Bump!

There was no doubt that the St. Jim's party were stared at. Eyes seemed to be popping from staring faces.

"Now will you hand that beastly black box over to the manager, to be locked up while we're gone out for a walk?" demanded Tom Merry.

"Ow! No——"

Bump!

"Wow! Yaas!" spluttered Arthur Augustus. "Yaas, you wottahs! Oh, yaas! I will do anythin' to stop this howwid shindy! Yaas! Oh ewikey! Yaas!"

"Good man!" said Tom Merry, laughing. "You'll be glad or it later, Gussy."

"Gwooooooh!"

Arthur Augustus staggered to his feet. His noble face was crimson. His monocle fluttered at the end of its cord. His tie was no longer straight. He was breathless and fearfully exasperated. Worst of all, he was the centre of a crowd of staring faces.

"You uttah asses!" he gasped. "You feahful wuffians! I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin' all wound! I wegard you——"

"Speech may be taken as read!" said Blake. "Buck up, Gussy!"

"I wegard you——"

"Cut it short!"

"I wegard you——"

"You can give us your kind regards later!" suggested Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, wats!"

Arthur Augustus had yielded the point—wrathfully and indignantly, but he had yielded it. And the black box was duly locked up in an attache-case, and the same handed over to the manager of the Hotel Fiesole, to be locked up in the hotel safe, and then the St. Jim's party fared forth—one of them still fearfully exasperated, but the other six relieved in their minds on the subject of that troublesome black box.

CHAPTER 2.

Trouble in Turin!

"E VVIVA Mussolini!"

"Evviva il Duce!"

"Bai Jove! I wondah what that means, deah boys?" remarked Arthur Augustus, as the roar of voices rang in the ears of the juniors in the Corso San Maurizio of Turin.

Tom Merry & Co. had walked from the Piazza Castello, round the Giardino Reale, and were sauntering along the wide and sunny Corso when they came on the buzzing crowd.

"That means 'Long live Mussolini!'" said Tom. "There's a speech or something going on. You've heard of Mussolini, I suppose?"

"Yaas, I believe I've heard the name somewhere!" said Arthur Augustus. "I do not seem to wemembah where. Oh, yaas, I wemembah hearin' about him on the wadio; he is some dago who is always waggin' his chin, I think."

Tom Merry chuckled. "Better not say that in this crowd, Gussy. Some of the people may understand English, and they won't like it!" he said. "They think no end of him in Italy—or fancy they do, at any rate!"

"Evviva il Duce!" came the roar.

"Anybody know what a doo-chay is?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Il Duce—the leader," said Tom. "Same as Fuehrer in German. Hitler's a Fuehrer and Mussolini's a Duce—same thing."

"Bai Jove! I should like to see the chap while we're in Italy," said Arthur Augustus. "Now I wemembah, I have heard that he is fearfully fat—fatter than Fatty Wynn at St. Jim's. It would be wathah intewestin' to see somebody fattah than old Fatty!"

"Evviva il Duce!"

"I don't think the jolly old Duce is on view!" said Monty Lowther. "It's somebody making a speech about him! Blowing off his mouth for him."

The juniors mingled in a swaying, jostling, perspiring, excited mob.

On a high balcony, draped with flags, a man stood, addressing the multitude below. It was evidently some political speech, but as it was of course in the Italian tongue, Tom Merry & Co. understood little if any of the words that reached their ears. But every now and then they caught "il Duce"—and at every mention of the Duce the mob swayed and roared and applauded.

That magic name excited the wildest enthusiasm—though exactly how deep that enthusiasm was was another matter. Probably a good deal of it was the natural effervescence of the excitable Latin nature.

Anyhow, they roared and cheered and swayed and waved, punctuating the speech with terrific outbursts.

"Keep together, you chaps!" called out Tom Merry, as the crowd jostled round them. "Don't get separated."

"Yaas, wathah! Pway stick to me, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I shall be feahfully wowwied if any of you get lost."

There was a surge in the crowd, and three or four dusky-skinned Italians pushed against Arthur Augustus. Two or three more pushed between him and his friends.

"Bai Jove! Pway do not push me like that!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Pway do not be so vewy wuff!"

He struggled to rejoin his friends.

But half a dozen Italians had closed round him, and they were hustling him farther and farther away from the rest of the party.

"Gussy!" came Tom Merry's shout over the mob.

"Where are you, Gussy?" called out Blake.

"Oh, bai Jove! Oh cwikey!"

To Arthur Augustus' amazement, two of the Italians pinioned him by the arms, three others pushed round, and he was fairly shoved and hustled through the surging, shouting crowd.

Hardly knowing what was happening to him, the swell of St. Jim's felt himself hustled away till they emerged from the crowd, under an arched passage between two buildings. He dragged at his arms, but they were held in muscular hands.

"Evviva il Duce!" came another roar from the crowd on the Corso.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped the bewildered Gussy.

He was jammed against the wall under the arch, and three of the Italians stood screening him from the street, while the other two held him, and a thievish hand ran through his pockets.

Then Gussy understood.

It was a gang of pickpockets who had gathered round him and hustled him away, with the intention of going through his pockets.

"Bai Jove!" gurgled Arthur Augustus.

He was quite powerless to resist. The dusky rascals held him as in a vice.

At that moment he was deeply thankful that he had yielded to the importunities of his friends and allowed the black box to be locked up in the hotel safe. It would have been at the mercy of the thievish fingers that were groping over him.

His loose cash disappeared in a few seconds. But the thievish hands still groped.

Then one of the dusky faces bent closer, and a voice hissed in his ear:

"La scatola nera—dov' e?"

Arthur Augustus fairly jumped.

He knew what "la scatola nera" meant! It meant "the black box." He had heard the words more than once from Giuseppe Fosco, the dago who had tracked the flying schoolboys across the Continent.

But he had not expected to hear those words again. Giuseppe Fosco lay in a mountain village in the Italian Alps, knocked out, a sick man, likely to be many months on his back. The St. Jim's party were done with Giuseppe Fosco.

But evidently they were not done with seekers of the black box! It was not merely to pick his pockets; it was in search of the mysterious black box that this gang of crooks had seized on him in the crowd on the Corso.

"Dove e?" hissed the voice in his ear. "La scatola nera—capite? Dove e?"

"You uttah wottah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I have not got it on me, thank goodness! Go and eat coke!"

"La scatola nera?" Then the language changed to English. "A black box that you shall

have—you carry along in one pocket—I do not find him! You shall say where shall be one black box.”

“I have left it at the hotel, you wottah!” gasped Arthur Augustus.

“Cospetto!”

Whether the pickpocket believed that statement or not, he left nothing to chance. The thiefish fingers groped again, and Arthur Augustus was thoroughly searched. But no black box came to light, and the gang had to be satisfied at last that it was not on the schoolboy.

As soon as that was clear they pulled him away from the wall, tripped him up, and dropped him, with a bump, on the ground.

“Oh cwikey!” spluttered Arthur Augustus.

He sat up dizzily.

But the gang of pickpockets no longer met his view. They had darted out of the archway and disappeared into the crowd on the Corso.

“Oh, bai Jove!” Arthur Augustus spluttered for breath as he scrambled to his feet. “The uttah wottahs! Oh, bai Jove!”

He stood for a couple of minutes to recover his breath. Then, still rather dizzy, he emerged from the archway into the thronging crowd to look for his friends.

“Evviva! Evviva il Duce!” came a roar.

“Oh, bothah the Duce!” murmured Arthur Augustus. “I wondah where the othah fellows are? They will be gettin’ lost at this wate.”

He threaded his way through the mob. But seeking anybody in that surging, swaying, roaring crowd was rather like seeking a needle in a haystack.

It was not till half an hour later, when the speech from the balcony had come to an end and the crowd began to disperse, that Arthur Augustus was able to move about with freedom and hunt up and down the Corso San Maurizio for Tom Merry & Co. And then he did not find them.

CHAPTER 3.

Trying It On Monty!

“THE ass!” sighed Jack Blake.

“The chump!” said Herries.

“Same old duffer!” remarked Digby.

They were, of course, discussing Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

After missing Arthur Augustus on the Corso, Tom Merry & Co. had looked for him for a couple of hours, naturally without finding him. Then they returned to the hotel, in the hope of finding that Gussy had returned there. But Gussy hadn’t.

Now they were standing on a high balcony of the Hotel Piesole, on which their rooms opened, looking down over the Piazza Castello, in the hope of seeing the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim’s appear in the offing.

Blake, Herries, and Dig had no doubt that Gussy had got separated in the crowd on the Corso, and would wander in sooner or later. All the other fellows had kept together. It was, Gussy’s friends agreed, just like Gussy to get detached. So while they waited for him to turn up they filled in time by telling one another what they thought of him.

Monty Lowther, perhaps by way of consoling them told them that Gussy had got lost on the Corso, as a matter of course—! That brilliant pun did not seem to afford the Fourth Form

fellows much comfort. They left off slanging Gussy for a minute or two to acquaint Monty with what they thought of him and his fatheaded puns!

Tom Merry and Manners, leaning on the bronze balustrade, looking down into the square below, were wondering uneasily what might have happened to D’Arcy.

The other fellows only supposed that he had got lost in the crowd, and would wander in later. But Tom and Manners were anxious. They knew—that the others did not know—that the knocking out of Giuseppe, the dago, had not put an end to the perils that haunted the footsteps of the possessor of the mysterious black box.

Manners’ face was clouded.

It was Manners who had first spotted the fact that Pawson—the perfect, incomparable Pawson—the faithful manservant whom Lord Eastwood had placed in charge of the St. Jim’s party, was after the black box—as relentlessly as Giuseppe had been.

Tom Merry had found it hard to believe at first; but Manners had convinced him. The other fellows knew nothing of it, least of all Arthur Augustus D’Arcy.

“Gussy ought to know!” Manners muttered in a low tone. “He ought to be put on his guard against that double-dealing rascal! But—”

“It’s no good, old chap!” said Tom, shaking his head. “Gussy wouldn’t be able to get it down. That rogue has deceived Lord Eastwood to such an extent that he has trusted us out here with Pawson. It’s no good telling Gussy that he’s not to be trusted.”

“I know!” grunted Manners. “But— Look here, Tom, we’re going on to Venice to-morrow; after that, we hop off home. Pawson hasn’t much more time to get hold of that dashed black box, and goodness knows what measures he may take. Something’s happened to Gussy now. I jolly well know why Pawson went out before we did. It was to get in touch with some rotter or other that he knows in this place and put him on to Gussy.”

“I shouldn’t wonder! But—”

“Bet you Gussy’s pockets were cleaned out in that crowd on the Corso!” said Manners. “If we hadn’t made him park the black box in the manager’s safe here it would be a goner.”

“Very likely!” agreed Tom.

“Well, look at it!” grunted Manners. “We’ve put paid to Pawson, so far. We’re not going to let him rob the chap who’s standing us this ripping trip. But time’s drawing in now, and goodness knows what he may get up to. Or—” Harry Manners paused. “Suppose we see Gussy, and that mouldy black box, safe through this trip, and he gets home with it!”

“That’s the most we can do,” said Tom.

“Well, then,” grunted Manners, “that lands Gussy at home at Eastwood House for a couple of days before the new term at St. Jim’s. Pawson will be in the house—his father’s valet. We shan’t be there to look after him. Pawson will snaffle it off him before he goes back to school.”

Tom was silent.

“Gussy ought to be told,” said Manners. “But—will he have sense enough to believe what I tell him?”

“He couldn’t swallow it, Manners. I couldn’t, at first. Blake and Herries and Dig would laugh if you told them. So would Monty. It sounds too awfully thick. Nothing doing, old fellow! Pawson—”

“Hush!” breathed Manners.

And Tom Merry was silent as a portly figure came out on the balcony. They glanced at Lord Eastwood's man.

"Is not Master Arthur here, sir?" asked Pawson, with his deferential cough.

"We missed him in the crowd," said Tom. "I suppose he will come in later."

He watched Pawson's plump face as he answered.

But if Pawson as Manners was certain, and Tom suspected, knew anything of what might have happened to Arthur Augustus that afternoon his plump face told nothing.

"Very good, sir!" murmured Pawson.

Manners, none of the fellows would take it in. Try it on Monty, and see what he says. Then you'll see."

Monty Lowther was coming along the balcony. He joined his two chums at the balustrade.

"What are you two confabbing about?" he asked. "Something fearfully serious?"

"Yes," said Manners.

"Tell your Uncle Montague!" said Lowther. "Not worrying about Gussy, are you? He will wander in all right—with his pockets picked! But he's only got to ask Pawson for more cash. Pawson is his jolly old banker."

Manners gave Tom a look, and Tom nodded in



"Oh cwikey!" gasped the bewildered Gussy. He was jammed against the wall under the arch, and three of the Italians stood screening him from the street, while the other two held him, and thievish hands went through his pockets.

And he stepped back from the balcony. Only for a second his eye lingered on Manners' frowning face as he went.

"That rogue knows that I suspect him!" muttered Manners when Pawson was gone. "I've known that for some time. He knows it's not by accident that I've barged in more than once when he would have got his paws on Gussy's box. Look here, Tom, Gussy's got to be put wise."

"N.G.!" said Tom. "It would only mean a row with old Gussy! He would simply go off at the deep end." He paused. "Look here,

reply to the unspoken question. Manners made up his mind to try it on Lowther.

"Look here, Monty," he said, in a low voice, "I'm going to tell you something I found out when we were in Paris, and have known ever since. Don't jump when I tell you—and don't stare round; Pawson's not far away! What do you think of Pawson?"

"The perfect manservant!" answered Lowther. "Fine old character—probably the only one left in these degenerate days. Lord Eastwood knows where to pick up a good man."

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Manners gave a snort and Tom Merry laughed. "Trying it on Monty" did not seem to promise much success, so far as putting Gussy wise was concerned.

"You don't seem to like him a lot, Manners," went on Lowther. "I've noticed that. Blessed if I know why. I never came across a man so useful and obliging."

"He's after Gussy's black box!" grunted Manners, taking the plunge, as it were.

Lowther jumped. Manners had warned him not to jump. But he did jump! He almost bounded!

"Is that a joke?" he asked at last.

"No, ass!"

"Mad?" asked Lowther.

"I told Tom some time ago. He knows it as well as I do."

"Fathead!" said Lowther. "What on earth's got such a potty idea into your head, Manners? You don't believe in any such rot, Tom?"

"Yes," said Tom.

"Then you're as big an ass as Manners! For goodness' sake, Manners, don't breathe a word of such piffle to Gussy!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

Manners breathed hard. Astonishment and incredulity were mingled in Monty Lowther's face. Obviously, he did not, and could not, believe a word of it.

"Well, I know what I'm talking about," said Manners, "and I'll tell you this, Monty; Pawson has fixed up something for Gussy to-day, and that's why he got separated from us in the crowd. He will come in and tell us that his pockets have been picked!"

"Very likely! He asks every pickpocket he meets to go through his pockets. Is that all you've got to go on?"

"No, lots of things! There's no actual proof, but—"

"I should think there wasn't!" said Lowther. "It's utter rot, old chap. Just piffle—bosh! Get it out of your head as soon as you can—and don't say a word about it to Gussy! Blessed if I make you out. It isn't like you to be a suspicious ass!"

Manners glared.

"So I'm a suspicious ass, am I?" he growled.

"Well, dash it all, what do you call yourself, saying a rotten thing like that about a man like Pawson?" exclaimed Monty Lowther hotly. "The man who's seen us through this trip, and played up splendidly all the time. Think Lord Eastwood would have sent us out here with a man who wasn't to be trusted?"

"He's taken Gussy's pater in!"

"Rot!"

"He plays a manservant's part, and plays it jolly well—rather too well, I think," said Manners. "Under cover of that he's a crook—"

"Chuck it, old chap!"

"And I jolly well guess, too, why he got his place with Lord Eastwood," said Manners deliberately. "I suspect jolly strongly that he was after the Nizam's Diamond—and would have got it, too, only that Chicago crook got it first, and got away with it."

"You've made Tom swallow all this?" ejaculated Lowther. "Tom, old man, you're getting soft! Manners, old chap, forget it! Don't be an ass!"

"A suspicious ass?" snorted Manners.

"Well, yes, a suspicious ass, to put it plainly!" said Lowther. "Just get the silly idea out of your head as fast as you can."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,632.

And with that Monty Lowther walked away along the balcony, not disguising the fact that he had had enough of the subject.

Manners took a deep breath. He looked at Tom, who smiled faintly.

"That's how Monty takes it!" said Tom. "Not much good telling Gussy!"

"No!" said Manners.

"Hallo!" shouted Blake. "Here comes Gussy!"

CHAPTER 4.

Gussy Knows How!

"YOU uttah asses!" That was Arthur Augustus' first remark as he came out on the balcony.

Gussy looked tired. He looked warm. He looked a little cross. Gussy had not had a happy afternoon.

"So you've turned up like a bad penny!" said Blake.

"Anything left in your pockets?" asked Dig.

"My pockets have been picked—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Did we tell you so?" grinned Herries.

"But that does not mattah vevy much—it was only a few hundred liwe," said Arthur Augustus. "But I have been feahfully wowwied about you chaps! How did you get lost like that?"

"Did we get lost?" gasped Blake.

"I have been huntin' for you all ovah Tuwin!" said Arthur Augustus. "If you fellows had kept with me, it would have been all wight, and you would not have got lost—"

"Who got lost?" roared Blake.

"You fellows did, and I have been huntin' you all ovah the shop!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "I was goin' to the police to ask them to make inquiries for you—"

"Oh crikey—"

"But as I do not speak Italian, I thought I had better come back here for Pawson—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And then I was told that you had come in a couple of houahs ago! And I have been searchin' for you ewewywhah—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Howevah, I am glad to find you safe!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have been feahfully wowwied about you, but it is all wight now. We are vevy late for tea! I twust you fellows will be more careful anothah time, and not wandah out of my sight."

"You blithering ass!"

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"You howling jabberwock—"

"Here comes tea!" said Tom Merry, laughing, as Pawson and three or four Italian waiters with trays came out on the balcony. "We've waited for you, Gussy."

"I trust, sir, that you have had no disagreeable experience this afternoon," murmured Pawson.

"Yaas, wathah, Pawson! I was gwabbed by some wuff and bwutal wottahs, and hiked into a beastly cornah, and wobbled of ewewythin' I had in my pockets," said Arthur Augustus.

Manners' eyes were on Pawson, and he did not fail to note the gleam that shot into the eyes of that perfect manservant.

"Gussy asks for these things to happen!" remarked Blake. "We all knew he would have his pockets cleared out this afternoon."

"If you duffahs hadn't wandahed away—"

"Fathead!"

"I am vevy sorry to hear this, sir!" said

Pawson, in a smooth voice. "I will, if you desire, sir, go at once to the police and see what can be done towards recovering the black box—"

"Oh, that's all wight, Pawson! I haven't lost the black box, vewy fortunately," said Arthur Augustus cheerfully.

Pawson gave a start

"You—you have not—" he stammered.

"No, that's all wight."

"But—but I understood you to say, sir, that everything in your pockets had been taken!" said Pawson.

"Yaas, but the black box wasn't in my pockets."

"Oh!"

"Vewy fortunately, I left it behind in the hotel, Pawson! Wasn't that feahfully luckay in the cires?"

"Oh, yes, sir! Quite!"

"But the most wemarkable thing, you fellows, is this!" went on Arthur Augustus. "Those wottahs who hustled me into a cornah and went through my pockets know all about the black box! Isn't that peculiah?"

"Is it?" said Manners dryly.

"It seems vey peculiar to me, Mannahs! Now that we are through with that wotten dago Giuseppe, I thought, of course, that I was done with the wowwy of that beastly black box for the west of this twip! Nobody else is aftah it, as far as I know."

"Sure of that?" grunted Manners.

"Weally, Mannahs, I was feelin' quite suah of it! But I know diffewent now," said Arthur Augustus.

"How do you know?" demanded Monty Lowther. He had rather a startled look. "What makes you think the pickpockets were after that black box?"

"One of them asked me for it, Lowthah, after they had gone through my pockets without findin' it. He called it the 'scatola nera,' like Giuseppe. He was suah I had it on me, the wottah!"

"Your coffee, sir!" murmured Pawson.

"Thank you, Pawson! Don't you think it vewy odd, Pawson, that anybody in Tuwin should know anythin' about that black box?"

"Very odd, sir, unless Giuseppe may have passed the word among his associates, sir!" suggested Pawson.

"Bai Jove! That's it, of course!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pawson thinks of ewevythin', you fellows. That wottah Giuseppe is knocked out, and he cannot get aftah that beastly box again—but he has put a lot of othah dagoes on the twack! Don't you think so, Pawson?"

"It appears vey probable, sir."

"You know, I nevah thought of that! I was quite surpised and mystified! But Pawson's suggestion explains the whole thing! It's quite surpising' how Pawson thinks of ewevythin', isn't it?"

"Well, it's pretty plain!" said Blake. "Giuseppe's pals are after it, if Giuseppe isn't! We're going to be haunted by dagoes, after that mouldy box, till we get back to St. Jim's."

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No feah!" he answered. "We're not goin' to have the west of this twip spoiled by one beastly dago aftah anothah gettin' aftah that box. I am goin' to get wid of it! I know how to beat the wottahs! You wemembah that when we left Pawis I sent it on to Cannes by wegistahed post, to wait for us there—and that

kept it safe while we were twippin' through France! I am goin' to do the same thing again."

"Register it to Venice?" asked Tom.

"Bettah than that, deah boy! I have thought this out! We are not goin' to be wowwied by a lot of dagoes in Venice. I am goin' to send it to the school."

"To St. Jim's?" exclaimed Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! You see, that Amewican chap who got me to mind it for him can't know anythin' about our bein' abwoad for the hols. When he turns up to ask for it again, he will turn up at St. Jim's, of course. So I shan't want it till we get back to school."

"That's so!" agreed Blake. "Every man here will be jolly glad to see the last of it, Gussy."

"What-ho!" said Herries, with emphasis.

"Aftah tea," said Arthur Augustus, "I am goin' to pack it up and send it off by wegistahed post, addressed to the school—to me, you know, care of the headmastah. It will be safe with Dr. Holmes till I return to St. Jim's. And it will be all weady to hand ovah when that Amewican chap turns up and asks for it! Don't you think that wathah a good ideah, Pawson?"

"Excellent, sir!" said Pawson. "In dispatching a registered packet from a foreign country, sir, it is necessary to fill in certain papers, giving a description of the article. It can be described as a curio, which, I presume, is what it is, sir—a carved box. I shall be vey happy sir, to assist in the matter, as I am acquainted with the language."

"Yaas, I was goin' to ask you, Pawson! When I have got the packet weady, pewwaps you would be kind enough to take it to the post



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office and fill in the papahs in Italian, and send it safely off."

"I shall be very pleased, sir!"

"Thank you vewy much, Pawson."

"I am quite at your service, sir."

Manners caught his breath.

Arthur Augustus had thought of that bright idea for getting rid of the worry of the black box! There was no doubt that he would get rid of it with a vengeance, if it was entrusted into Pawson's hands to post!

"No need to bother Pawson, Gussy!" exclaimed Manners. "We can manage it all right! We can get a man at Cook's office to fill in the papers in Italian. Let's trot out after tea and get it done."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that! If it would be a bothah to you, Pawson——"

"Not in the least, sir!"

"But we are always twoublin' you for somethin', my deah chap——"

"It is a real pleasure to me, sir, to be of service to you."

"Yaas, I have noticed that, Pawson! You weally are a vewy good fellow! Then I will leave it to you, Pawson, to wegistah the packet to England."

"Thank you, sir!"

Manners opened his lips—and shut them again. He did not speak again during tea on the balcony.

He sat in gloomy reflection. Arthur Augustus, in the innocence of his heart, was going to entrust the black box into the hands of the man who, as Manners knew, had been scheming and plotting for weeks to get possession of it! It was impossible to open Gussy's eyes—the effect on Lowther was a plain indication of how Arthur Augustus would receive such a communi-cation. After all its narrow escapes, after all its strange vicissitudes, the mysterious black box, at long last, was a goner.

CHAPTER 5.

So Does Manners!

"TOM!"
Tom Merry followed Manners into his room. The other fellows were still at tea on the balcony.

Manners' face was set. Tom's was worried. His thoughts were exactly the same as Manners'—but he did not see that anything could be done. But Harry Manners' eyes were glinting. He had been doing some thinking over tea—and he was not quite beaten yet.

"Tom! You know as well as I do that if that packet with the black box in it is trusted to Pawson it will never reach the post office."

"I know!"

"We can't let it go on."

"If we say a word to Gussy, old man, not only he won't believe it, but he will make it a special point to trust Pawson all the more because doubt has been cast on a man he trusts!" said Tom quietly. "You know Gussy! Speaking to Gussy would only make him absolutely determined to trust Pawson with that packet. You know that, old chap."

"Don't I!" grunted Manners. "We can't stop him! But—when Gussy's got that packet ready, Tom, he's going to ring for Pawson and hand it to him to take to the post office. That will be the end of it."

Tom nodded.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,632.

"Well, there's more than one way of killing a cat!" said Manners. "I'm going to help Gussy pack that mouldy black box! He will want another box to shove it in for the post—I've got one here! I'm going to help him! I want you to stand by——"

"I don't see!"

"I've got it pretty clear!" said Manners. "That black box is going home to England, addressed to Gussy, care of Dr. Holmes at St. Jim's. But it's not going in the packet that Gussy packs!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

"The silly ass as good as told me to mind my own business at Cannes when I saved it for him!" grunted Manners. "Never mind that! I'm going to put paid to that rogue; Gussy's not going to be diddled with his eyes shut! You keep an eye on me, Tom, while we're doing the packing, and when I say 'Where's the sealing-wax,' get Gussy's attention away somehow."

"But——"

"Don't butt like a billy-goat!" said Manners irritably. "I'm going to save Gussy's box for him whether he likes it or not! That's that! You play up and help me through."

"O.K.!" said Tom.

They returned to the balcony, Arthur Augustus had risen from the tea-table. He felt in his jacket pocket.

"I'd better get that box packed at once," he remarked.

"Got it about you?" asked Manners.

"Yaas, I asked the managah for it as I came up! I've got it heah! Bai Jove, though, I shall want somethin' to pack it in!"

"I've got something," said Manners. He held up a little thick cardboard box. "Just the thing, Gussy."

"Bai Jove! The vewy thing! I shall want some sealin' wax, too——"

"Here you are; I got it out of my suitcase ready."

"Bai Jove! You are a vewy thoughtful chap, Mannahs. Do you happen to have a piece of stwing?"

"There you are!"

"Thanks, deah boy! Now it won't take a few minutes."

Arthur Augustus went into his room from the balcony. Manners followed him in, and Tom Merry stood in the doorway.

Tom had a glimmering of the plan that had formed in Manners' mind. Whatever it was, he was ready to back up his chum in carrying it out. It was the last chance of saving the mysterious black box.

"Bai Jove! I shall want some papah to w'ap the box in, though!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps I had better wing for Pawson——"

"I've got some!" said Manners. "Here you are."

"Weally, Mannahs, old chap, you seem to think of evewythin', just like Pawson! Pewwaps it's catchin', what?"

The cardboard box was laid on the table. Arthur Augustus wrapped the little oval black box in tissue paper—also thoughtfully provided by Manners—and placed it inside the cardboard box. Then he put on the cardboard lid.

"That's all wight!" he remarked.

"Right as rain when it's wrapped up!" said Manners. "Where's the sealing-wax?"

Tom Merry, at the door on the balcony, gave a start as he heard the signal words! He drew a picture postcard from his pocket.

"Gussy!" he called out.

Arthur Augustus turned round from the table.

"Yaas, deah boy!" he answered.

"Come here a minute, will you?" called Tom Merry.

"Yaas, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus stepped out on the balcony, leaving Manners for the moment alone with the packet.

Manners whipped the lid off the cardboard box, hooked out the little ebony box within, and slipped it into his pocket.

In place of the black box he jammed a small apple inside the cardboard box and replaced the lid.

It was the work of hardly more than a moment.

From the balcony Tom Merry's voice was floating in.

"Got your fountain-pen about you, Gussy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Lend it to me a minute to address this post-card."

"Wight-ho!" said the unsuspecting Gussy. "Twot in with it when you've finished—I shall want to address that packet."

And Arthur Augustus, having sorted the fountain-pen out of his pocket and handed it to Tom Merry, stepped back into his room.

Manners was breathing rather hard.

If Gussy reopened that cardboard box he would spot at once that the black box was gone from inside it and that an apple had taken its place. But there was, of course, no reason why D'Arcy should do so—and he did not!

The cardboard box lay, to all appearance, just as he had left it hardly more than a minute ago. Arthur Augustus proceeded to wrap it carefully in the brown paper, much to Harry Manners' relief, and then Manners held a match while he tied it and sealed it, and sealed all the knots on the string.

"Done with that pen, Tom Mewwy?" called out Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, here you are."

Tom Merry had addressed the picture postcard of Turin to his old governess, Miss Priscilla Fawcett, at home. He handed the fountain-pen back to D'Arcy in the doorway.

Arthur Augustus proceeded to address the packet with his own name, care of Dr. Holmes at St. Jim's.

"That's all wight!" he said. "Now I'll wing for Pawson."

Manners went out on the balcony and joined Tom Merry there. Lowther and the three Fourth Formers had gone down to stroll in the piazza.

Tom gave his chum one glance as he joined him. Manners, with a grin, tapped his pocket. It was not necessary to speak.

A couple of minutes later Arthur Augustus' voice floated out to them.

"Heah's the packet, Pawson! I weally don't like givin' you all this extwa twouble—"

"No trouble whatever, sir!" came the smooth reply.

"You are a feahfully obligin' chap, Pawson."

"It is very kind of you to say so, sir."

"I can wely on you to wegistah that packet safely, Pawson. It will be a gweat welief to get it off my mind."

"I have no doubt of it, sir."

"You see, it will be quite safe at St. Jim's with my headmastah, and I shall only have to ask him for it when I go back next term. I think it is wathah a bwright ideah, Pawson."

"It could not be improved upon, sir."

"I am vewy glad to heah you say so, Pawson, because I wely upon your judgment vewy much indeed."

"You are very kind, sir!"

"Well, there it is. Twot off with it, Pawson, and give me the wegistahd weceipt when you come back."

"Immediately, sir!"

A door was heard to close. Then Arthur Augustus came out on the balcony, with cheery satisfaction in his face.

"That's all wight!" he remarked. "I've got that beastly black box off my mind for good now. You fellows comin' down? The othah chaps are walkin' in the squah."

"I've got a letter to write," said Manners. "We'll follow on."

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus went back through his room to the stairs. Tom Merry looked at Manners, and Manners grinned.

The black box was in his pocket. Pawson, opening that registered packet surreptitiously in his own room before taking it to the post, was going to find a diminutive apple therein. Manners cheerfully wished him joy of his prize.

CHAPTER 6.

In the Air!

"WE'RE off!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

remarked Monty Lowther thoughtfully.

The Silver Swallow had taken off once more. On a bright May morning the passenger plane soared to the clouds, and the St. Jim's fellows looked down from the windows at Northern Italy spread below them.

Piedmont was dropping behind; Lombardy was outspread under the winging plane, heading for Venezia, on the far Adriatic.

"Bai Jove! Does this wemind you of a twip to Scotland?" asked Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "The scenewy here is all wight, of course—vewy good indeed—but it is hardly up to Scottish scenewy, in my opinion."

"I mean, travelling in Ayr!" explained Monty Lowther.

"I do not wemembah havin' been in Ayrshire, but I have heard that it is a vewy fine county," said Arthur Augustus.

"You're travelling in air now, fathead!" hooted Monty Lowther.

Tom Merry and Manners chuckled at Monty's little joke, as was their duty as loyal chums. But Arthur Augustus seemed perplexed.

"My deah chap, you're dweamin'!" he said. "We're travellin' in Italy—or, to be more pwecise, ovah Italy! Kerr says that Ayr is vewy fine, but I have nevah travellid in Ayr—"

"A-i-r!" hooted Monty. "Air! We're travelin' in the air, aren't we?"

"Yaah, wathah! But what has that to do with the county of Ayr, Lowthah?"

"Nothing, fathead! Nothing, chump! Nothing, ass!"

"Bai Jove! Are you gettin' watty about somethin', Lowthah?" asked D'Arcy, turning his eyeglass on the funny man of the Shell in surprise. "I do not see anythin' to get watty about. I was simply inquirin' why this twip in Italy weminded you of a twip in Scotland, which

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is a vewy diffewent and, in my opinion, a vewy supewiah countwy. What is the wesemblance?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! What are you fellows laughin' at?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "There is nothin' funnny in Lowthah thinkin' this countwy wesembles Scotland, though it weally doesn't. Pewwaps the Alps are a bit like the Gwampians—"

"It's a pun!" shrieked Lowther.

"Bai Jove! Is it? Where is the pun?"

"A-y-r—Ayr; a-i-r—air!" said Monty Lowther laboriously. "Travellin in Ayr—travellin in air! Got it now?"

Arthur Augustus still seemed puzzled. He wrinkled his noble brow in an effort of thought.

Leaving him to it, the other fellows looked down from the windows, getting a bird's-eye glimpse of the great city of Milan as they swept on eastwards. Manners looked down thoughtfully at Milan.

"Can't drop in everywhere," he remarked; "but I'd like to have taken a photograph of the cathedral in Milan—the Duomo, as they call it. Make a jolly good picture. I—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from Arthur Augustus, in a sudden trill of laughter.

Six fellows glanced round at him.

"What's the joke?" asked Blake.

"Ha, ha! It's wathah funnny, you fellows!"

"I wasn't joking," said Manners, staring at him. "The cathedral at Milan makes a ripping photograph—"

"I was not laughin' at your wemark, Mannahs," said Arthur Augustus. "In fact, I did not heah what you said."

"Then what's the cackle about?" asked Tom Merry, mystified.

The juniors had already forgotten Monty Lowther's little joke on Ayr and air.

"It's weally quite funnny when you think it out," said Arthur Augustus. "I did not see it at first. Twavellin' in Ayr, you know, and twavellin' in air! It is weally funnny! Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared six fellows.

Arthur Augustus, apparently, had been pondering over Lowther's joke for the last ten minutes, and it had dawned on him at last.

When it dawned on him he laughed.

His laugh was ten minutes late, but there it was.

But the idea of Gussy's noble brain taking ten minutes to grasp it, and of the swell of St. Jim's bursting into that belated chortle, made the other fellows yell.

"Yaas, isn't it funnny?" said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" echoed the six.

"I must wemembah that," continued Arthur Augustus. "I will tell Pawson when he comes into the cabin. It will cheeah him up a little, pewwaps. Have you fellows noticed that Pawson does not look so bwight as usual?"

"Doesn't he?" said Dig.

"No; he seems wathah wowwied about somethin'; I cannot help thinkin'," said Arthur Augustus. "I noticed it first yestahday when he bwought me the wecept for that wegistahed packet—"

"Did you?" asked Manners blandly.

And Tom Merry looked down from the window at Milan vanishing to the west.

"Yaas." Gussy nodded thoughtfully. "It seems wathah widiculous, but I could not help

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,632.

thinkin' at the moment that Pawson was annoyed about somethin'."

"I wonder what!" said Manners in the same bland tone.

"Yaas, so do I," assented Gussy. "You fellows wemembah he offahed vewy kindly to take all the twouble of wegistahin' that packet home. So it cannot have been that. Pawson likes doin' things for a fellow. He cannot have thought that he was bein' put on or anythin' of that kind when he offahed his services so vewy kindly. Pewwaps he had some twouble at the post office. Anyhow, I could not help thinkin' that he was wathah ewoss about somethin'."

Manners winked at a drifting cloud.

He had no doubt that Pawson had been cross—fearfully cross—after examining that packet and finding nothing but a small apple inside. It was enough to make any pilferer cross.

The scream of it, in Manners' opinion, was that Pawson was quite helpless in the matter. He must have been utterly puzzled and perplexed to know where the black box actually was, and why D'Arcy had registered a small apple home to England, care of his headmaster at St. Jim's.

But he could make no possible attempt to elucidate that mystery, for he could not, of course, admit to D'Arcy that he had opened the packet before taking it to the post office in the Via Alfieri in Turin.

Pawson must be in a state of hopeless puzzlement, and no doubt he had found it difficult to conceal his deep and intense annoyance at snaffling a small apple when he had counted with absolute certainty on snaffling the black box.

"Pawson's such a weally splendid chap, you know!" went on Arthur Augustus. "Look how he's seen us through this twip! Nothin' too much twouble for him! He was even willin' to take charge of that beastly black box at the wisk of gettin' that wotten dago aftah him—though, of course, I could not allow anythin' of the kind. But it shows how devoted a chap he is."

"Yes; I remember he was quite keen on it," assented Manners, with a cheery grin. "But is anything the matter with Pawson to-day?"

"Not exactly the mattah with him, Mannahs, but he certainly does not appeah quite so cheewy as usual. Pewwaps it will cheeah him up when I tell him that wathah wippin' joke of Lowthah's."

"Perhaps!" murmured Blake.

Pawson, who had been with the steward, came into the cabin a little later. All the juniors glanced at him. One or two of them had noticed that Pawson did not seem quite his usual bland and urbane self that day. Only Tom Merry and Manners knew why, but they had a fairly clear idea of the bitter rage and disappointment that was hidden under the impassive exterior of Lord Eastwood's man.

"Pawson, my deah chap—" said Arthur Augustus.

"Sir!"

"I twust you feel well to-day, Pawson?"

"I am quite well, thank you, sir!"

"Nothin' happened to wowwy you, I hope, Pawson?" asked the considerate Gussy. "I cannot help thinkin' that you are not lookin' quite so cheerful as usual."

Pawson looked at Arthur Augustus. For a moment his gaze was so penetrating that it seemed as if it would pierce the innocent countenance of the Honourable Arthur Augustus to the thoughts behind. But the next moment the plump eyelids drooped over the piercing eyes.

"Not at all, sir!" said Pawson.
 "By the way, Pawson, Lowthah has made a wathah wippin' joke," said Arthur Augustus. "I am goin' to wepeat it to you. I am suah you will think it feahfully funnay!"
 "I shall be honoured, sir!"

"Lowthah said that this twip weminded him of twavellin' in Scotland, Pawson. Can you guess why?"

"I fear not, sir!"
 "Because we are twavellin' in the sky!" explained Arthur Augustus. "See? Twavellin' in Ayrshire, and twavellin' in the sky! Ha, ha!"

Pawson's face remained wooden. But from Tom Merry & Co. came a howl.

Arthur Augustus' rendering of Lowther's pun struck them as much funnier than the pun itself! Evidently, Gussy's aristocratic brain had not retained a very accurate recollection of that little joke, to be retailed to Pawson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "See the point, Pawson! Twavellin' in Ayrshire—twavellin' in the sky! Bai Jove, though, went on Arthur Augustus, "it does not sound so funnay now as when Lowthah said it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry & Co.

"Weally, you know, it does not sound funnay at all now!" said Arthur Augustus, quite perplexed. "I thought it was vewy funnay—and now it does not sound funnay at all! Isn't that cuwious, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry & Co. chortled! But Arthur Augustus did not chortle. He was looking quite puzzled. He could not make out why that joke, which had seemed funny when propounded by Monty Lowther, did not seem funny at all when he repeated it to Pawson!

CHAPTER 7.

Voices on the Lagoon!

"ONCE more upon the watahs, yet once more," said Arthur Augustus, "and the waves bound beneath me—"

"I don't notice it," said Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Not going to be seasick, Gussy, in a gondola?" asked Dig.

"Certainly not, you ass! I was wecitin' poetwy!" said Arthur Augustus crushingly. "Have you fellows nevah wead Bywon?"

The sunset lay red on the Lagoon of Venice. The Silver Swallow had been left on the mainland, and Tom Merry & Co. were on board a gondola, floating out to the City of the Sea.

Behind them lay the Italian mainland; ahead of them the Queen of the Adriatic! They could have crossed to Venice by train for the "ferrovia" spanned the lagoon, but every fellow in the party preferred to cross by gondola, and in the gondola they were crossing.

Baggage was piled by the little cabin amidships. Two gondoliers, swarthy men in black



As soon as Blake and Arthur Augustus reached the cabin, the man in the porter's cap and the gondolier, following them in, grasped the two schoolboys. "What the thump—" gasped Blake. "We've been twicked!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

hats, wielded the immense oars that swung the craft slowly along, one on either end of the gondola.

The sun was sinking behind the Italian mountains. The lagoon was a sheet of crimson and gold. In the distance the innumerable buildings of Venice glowed in the sunset.

The juniors rather expected Pawson to turn on his supply of inexhaustible information. They knew that Pawson had been in Venice before—Pawson seemed to have been everywhere.

But for once Lord Eastwood's man had nothing to say. He sat in the little cabin, while the juniors sat in the open, and the gondoliers swept the long, heavy oars with slow strokes.

All the fellows had realised by that time that Pawson was not quite his usual self. He was respectful and attentive as ever, but strangely silent, and his face, so far as it had any expression at all, was thoughtful—and, indeed, gloomy.

Something had disgruntled Pawson, and the least observant of the party had noticed several times how his keen eyes had turned searchingly on the kind and innocent face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Even Gussy himself had noticed that.

However, the juniors were not thinking of Pawson at the moment. They were looking at Venice as they approached the strange city of islands and canals, where the streets were of water, and the conveyances were afloat. And Arthur Augustus was moved to poetry!

"Once more upon the watahs, yet once more,
And the waves bound beneath me, like a steed
That knows its widah!"

"A very fat horse, do you mean?" asked Monty Lowther.

"Bai Jove! No! That is Bywon's poetry, Lowthah. There is nothin' about a vevy fat horse in it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

"But it must be a very fat horse if it knows it's wider!" argued Monty. "If it's wider than other horses it must be a fat horse."

"I did not say widah, you ass, I said widah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They don't have horses in Venice!" said Herries. "You can't get a horse there for love or money."

"You jolly well can!" declared Monty Lowther.

"Just drop into the lagoon——"

"What——"

"Then you'd catch a cold," explained Monty Lowther, "and if you catch a cold you'd get a little hoarse!"

"Weally, Lowthah, this is not an houah for punnin'. This is a feahfully womantic spot!" said Arthur Augustus. "There is a lot about Venice in Bywon! I stood in Venice on the Bwidge of Sighs——"

"What size?" asked Lowther. "The bridges in Venice are all sizes, I believe, according to the size of the canals."

"You uttah ass! You have no poetry in you, Lowthah! The Bwidge of Sighs in Venice is feahfully womantic and histowic. Pwisoners used to pass acwoss it fwom somewhere or othah to somewhere else or othah, or somethin'. There is a pwison, or somethin', and a chap called What's-his-name made a wonderful escape from it, once upon a time. But listen to what Bywon says:

"I stood in Venice, on the Bwidge of Sighs,

A palace and a pwison on each hand."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,632.

"Well, that was some balancing trick!" exclaimed Lowther. "How the dickens did Byron hold up a palace and a prison on each hand? Must have been a jolly strong chap!"

"You misappwehend, you ass! It does not mean that he had a palace and a pwison on each hand, but on eithah side of him——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It does, weally, you fellows——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bywon says, too, that the gondoliers used to sing verses of Tasso," went on Arthur Augustus. "These chaps in the gondola don't seem to be singin'—only gwuntin' vevy now and then! Bai Jove! There goes the sun! It's watah watah to appwach Venice by starlight!"

The gondola was about a mile from the shore when the sun disappeared, and the red died away on the lagoon. Bright and shining, the stars of the south came out in the dark blue vault of the sky.

The sea rolled deep and dark. Other craft disappeared from sight as the night shut down on the Adriatic. Far distant, there was a glimmer of the lights of Venice. In the soft southern evening there was no doubt that the scene was romantic.

The gondola rolled on in the most leisurely manner to the sweep of the long oars. Every now and then, through the dusky gloom, came the echoing call of some gondolier.

But no voice was heard raised in song, Arthur Augustus, who seemed to have mugged up Byron specially for this trip to Venice, listened for bursts of melody from the gondoliers, but heard none. Perhaps things had changed since Byron's time. Certainly the two gondoliers on the St. Jim's craft were not melodious. They only grunted every now and then as they tugged at the heavy oars. Not by the widest stretch of the most romantic imagination could their grunts be considered melodious.

"Bai Jove! Is that a gondolier singin'?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly as a distant voice floated across the shadowy lagoon.

The juniors listened.

From somewhere on the shadowed sea came the voice, but it did not sound any more melodious than the grunts of the gondoliers. It sounded like a voice raised in wrath.

Tom Merry & Co. could not distinguish the words. But the distant voice did not sound to them Italian. They peered across the lagoon through the velvety dusk, but could not make out a craft.

But the other craft seemed to be drifting nearer, for the voice came more clearly, and they distinguished the words:

"You thundering asses!" was what the voice said.

"Bai Jove! That cannot be a gondolier singin'!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The voice was English, as undoubtedly the words were. And the voice had a familiar ring to the juniors. It seemed to them that they had heard it before somewhere.

"Of all the thundering goats, you two fellows take the cake!" came the voice from the unseen craft on the dark lagoon. "I've told you about fifty times that those lights are on the mainland! Are we going back to Venice, or are we going to land in Italy? Want to call on Mussolini?"

"I've heard that voice before somewhere!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, watah! Pewwaps it's somebody we

know! Wathah wippin' to wun into a fellow you know in foweign parts."

"Look here, Coker—" came another voice, in goaded tones.

"Don't jaw, Potter!"

"Look here—" came a third voice.

"Shut up, Greene!"

"I tell you," came a howl, "that those lights are the lights of Venice, and you're going directly away from Venice!"

"Don't be an ass, Potter!"

"You're pulling for the mainland!"

"Don't be an idiot, Greene!"

"I tell you—"

"I said shut up!"

"Coker, you ass—"

"Didn't you hear me say shut up?"

That cheery conversation reached the ears of Tom Merry & Co. across the shadowy waters. They chuckled as they heard it.

"I know who they are now!" said Tom. "I remember seeing that chap Coker when we've played cricket over at Greyfriars! He's a Fifth Form chap, I believe. They're Greyfriars fellows in that boat."

"They seem to be in twouble of some sort!" said Arthur Augustus. "Wathah wippin' to wun into Gweyfwians chaps out heah, especially if we can help them out of twouble. I suppose they're on holiday out heah."

"Look where you're going, Coker!" came a roar. "I can see a light—we're heading for some gondola—"

"Do you think I'm likely to run into a gondola, Potter?"

"We ought to have a light on board—"

"We should have if I'd known you fellows would keep the boat out after dark, wasting time by pulling in the wrong direction—"

"We were pulling back to Venice—"

"Don't be an ass!"

"And now you're pulling for Italy—"

"Don't be a chump—"

"Look where you're going, I tell you! Do you want to land us at the bottom of the lagoon?"

"Oh, don't be a— Oh, crikey! What's that? Oh, my hat!"

Crash!

"Bai Jove!"

"Look out!"

The St Jim's gondola rocked and shook from stem to stern as an unseen craft shot out of the darkness and crashed into it amidships.

CHAPTER 8.

Greyfriars Chaps!

CRASH! Bump! Clatter!

"Look out!"

"Hold on!"

"You mao ass!"

"Bai Jove!"

Tom Merry & Co. were all on their feet. The two gondoliers were shouting in alarm. Pawson came rolling out of the little cabin. The gondola had a lantern hung at the prow, but it was only a glimmering light. All round was deep dusk.

From the darkness came wild yelling. The rowing-boat containing Coker, Potter, and Greene of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars School had fairly crashed on the gondola and was now bumping on its gunwale.

Something was crashing in that boat!

The St Jim's juniors, peering through the gloom, had a dim glimpse of two long legs thrashing the air.

The shock of the collision seemed to have tumbled Coker over. He was on his back in the bottom of the boat, his legs sticking up in the air. Potter and Greene were rolling and scrambling. The boat was shipping water right and left as it rocked from the crash.

"Gerroff my head!" came Coker's frantic roar. "Who's tramping on my head? Yaroooooh!"

"You mad chump—"

"Hold on, Potter! We're capsizing—"

"Yarooooh!" Coker's legs disappeared and his head appeared from the bottom of the boat. "Which of you silly idiots stamped on my face?"

"Blow your silly face! We're going down!" yelled Potter.

"This way!" shouted Tom Merry. He reached out and got a grasp on the gunwale of the rocking boat.

"Yaas, wathah! This way, you fellows!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"By gum! There's English in that gondola!" came Potter's gasp. "Thank goodness! By gum! I'm wet."

"I'm soaked!" roared Coker. "I'm drenched! Somebody stamped on my face—"

"We're half-full of water!" spluttered Greene. "Oh, you idiot, Coker—here, hang on to that gondola—"

"I've got hold!" called out Tom Merry. "Hang on, you fellows—keep her in."

Manners and Lowther grasped the boat's gunwale. It was afloat with water, from the seas that had been shipped. Potter, Greene, and Coker floundered and splashed.

"Will you give us a lift in that gondola?" shouted Potter.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Come aboard!" called out Blake. "We're heading for Venice, if that's where you want to go."

"Thank goodness! You mad ass, Coker—"

"How could I help barging into the blinking gondola when I was rowing!" roared Coker. "Think I've got eyes in the back of my head! You fellows ought to have warned me."

"We did warn you—"

"Oh, don't jaw! Get hold of something and bail out this boat! Think I can row you back to Venice sitting up to my chest in water?"

Potter and Greene did not heed that. They seemed to have had enough of Coker's rowing on the lagoon. They scrambled into the gondola, drenched and dripping.

Coker, from the flooded row-boat, roared.

"Where are you, Potter? Where are you, Greene? Didn't you hear me say bail out this boat?"

"We'll give you a lift to Venice, Coker!" called out Tom Merry.

"Who the dickens are you?" snorted Coker. "And how do you know my name?"

"I'm Tom Merry, of St. Jim's—"

"Never heard of you—"

"Well, I've heard of you!" said Tom, laughing. "Step into our gondola, Coker, and we'll give you a lift to Venice."

"I don't want a lift to Venice! I'm going to row back to Venice! How can you give me a lift to Venice when you're going in the other direction?"

"You fathead!" came an exasperated yell from Potter. "It was you going in the wrong direction! This gondola is heading for Venice."

"Don't be a silly ass, Potter! Anyhow, I don't want a lift. Get back into this boat and bail out."

"Rats!"

"Fathead!"

"We'll take your boat in tow, Coker!" said Tom. "Come on—you'll be rather wet in that boat."

"It's all right if it's bailed out! Are you coming back, Potter?"

"No, fathead!"

"Are you coming back, Greene?"

"No, ass!"

"Ooooooogh!" There was a sudden splutter from Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth as he lost his footing in the rocking boat and went over. A terrific splash followed, and there was quite a waterspout. The St. Jim's party in the gondola were splashed right and left.

"Oh ewikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Grooogh!" came gurgling from the boat, where Horace Coker wallowed in water.

"Urrrgh! Oh gum! Yurrrgggh!"

"Dwaggimout!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"He will be drowned at this wate."

"Urrrrgh!"

Arthur Augustus leaned over the side of the gondola. Coker of the Fifth surged up in the flooded boat, spluttering. Arthur Augustus made a grab at him, missed his collar, and got hold of a mop of wet hair.

"I've got him, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Hold on to the boat while I pull him in!"

"Yaroooh! Leggo my hair!" shrieked Coker. "You're pulling my hair out by the roots! Who's got hold of my hair! Yoo-hoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I am twyin' to save you, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I— Yawwooh! Oh ewikey! Whoop!"

Hands from the darkness clutched at Arthur Augustus. At the same moment, the boat gave a wild plunge and Coker went over again. He wallowed, dragging Arthur Augustus over the side of the gondola into the boat!

There was a terrific splash as Gussy joined Coker in the boat. They wallowed together.

"Bai Jove! Oh ewikey!" yelled Arthur Augustus. "I am dwenched! That mad duffah— Oh cwumbs! Help!"

Blake and Herries grabbed at Arthur Augustus and dragged him back. They landed him in the gondola in a lake of water. Arthur Augustus sat there, streaming and gasping.

"Ooogh! Oh ewikey! Ooogh! That sillay ass—gwoooooh!"

"Get that ass Coker in!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Oh, leave him to drown!" came from Potter of the Greyfriars Fifth. "That will keep him quiet! Do leave him to drown!" Potter seemed to be getting ferocious.

But Tom Merry & Co. grasped Coker, sprawling half-suffocated in the flooded boat, and hooked him into the gondola. Coker sprawled there in the midst of a considerable quantity of the Adriatic, spluttering wildly.

"Pawson!" called out Tom.

"Sir!"

"Tell the gondoliers to take that boat in tow."

"Very good, sir."

Pawson spoke to the gondoliers in Italian. A rope was tied on to the boat, and it drifted astern. Then the gondoliers swept the lagoon once more with the long oars, and the gondola resumed its leisurely progress towards the distant lights of Venice.

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CHAPTER 9.

On the Grand Canal!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY, drenched from head to foot, wrapped in a boat-cloak, sat in a state of mingled wrath and discomfort. His eyeglass gleamed indignation at Coker of the Fifth.

Gussy was feeling horrid. His clothes were in an awful state. Water was trickling down his aristocratic back. He was glad enough to lend a helping hand to fellow-countrymen in distress in foreign parts, but he was feeling very much inclined, at the same time, to punch Coker's head.

Coker sat steaming, and in the worst temper ever.

As the gondola glided into the Canal della Giudecca, between the city of Venice and the island of Giudecca, even Coker had to admit that they were, really and truly, heading for Venice—from which it was clear that Coker had been rowing in the wrong direction when he ran into the St. Jim's party.

But that discovery did not improve Coker's temper. He seemed to think that it was, somehow, Potter and Greene's fault. He was considerably bumped, he was fearfully wet, and he was very much annoyed.

Pawson, after a curious look at the three seniors of Greyfriars School, who were complete strangers to him, went back into the little cabin.

"Having your hols out here, you fellows?" asked Tom Merry, by way of polite conversation, as the gondola glided on.

"Yes—week's trip to Venice, you know," said Potter. "We've got three days more before we go back, if Coker doesn't drown us."

"He will, if he can!" said Greene. "I hardly expect to see Greyfriars next term."

Snort from Horace Coker!

"It's all your fault entirely!" he said. "We ought not to have been out after dark without a light on the boat! Whose fault was that? How long did you fellows stand arguing on the quay before you'd agree to come out without a boatman? We started late! Then you had to take the wrong direction, getting back—"

"We were going right for Venice, when you grabbed the oars and headed for Italy!" yelled Potter.

"For goodness' sake don't jaw, Potter! You've jawed quite enough, I think. Jaw, jaw, jaw!" said Coker bitterly.

"First," said Greene, "he headed down the Adriatic—I think he wanted to pop in at Albania and see how the scrapping was getting on there. Then he headed for Italy! Anything but Venice—"

"If you fellows hadn't argued—"

"Bai Jove! I am feahfully wet! I shall be vevy glad to get a change! I am weally feahfully wet!"

"Serve you right!" said Coker, peering at the swell of St. Jim's. "What did you want to tumble into my boat for, like a clumsy young ass?"

"Oh, bai Jove!"

"I won't smack your head," said Coker. "You jolly well asked for it, and I've a jolly good mind to! But I won't."

"Weally, Cokah—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Now I'm going back soaked to the skin, all through you two silly asses," went on Coker, "and we never got to San Geronimo after all,

owing to your wasting time gabbling and arguing."

"San Geronimo?" said Tom Merry. "Is that one of the sights here?"

"Oh, no!" answered Potter. "It's some dashed rock out in the Adriatic—nobody there and not worth seeing! That's why Coker wanted to go there—because nobody else ever does, and it isn't worth the trouble."

"A man at the hotel told me it was a special place to visit!" hooted Coker.

"He was pulling your leg."

"Look here, Potter—"

"And even if it was worth seeing, you couldn't have found it without a boatman."

"I fancy I can find my way about better than a dago boatman, Potter. I don't think much of the dagoes here! Dirty lot—they never wash. We'll have another shot at the place to-morrow."

"Not without a boatman!" said Potter and Greene together.

"Don't argue!"

Tom Merry & Co. smiled in the dusk. It struck them that a holiday with a chap like Coker was likely to afford more excitement than enjoyment. It was really a little difficult to guess why Potter and Greene were having a trip to Venice with Horace Coker—unless, perhaps, Horace was standing the tickets for the trip! That might have explained it.

"Bai Jove! We're gettin' in at last!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, as the gondola, at long last, rolled across the wide Canal di San Marco and headed into the Grand Canal.

Lights were gleaming on the Grand Canal. Venice looked like a fairy city to the eyes of the St. Jim's juniors. On all sides the buildings towered sheer from the water.

Potter and Greene stood up and looked about them. Coker gave them a glare.

"Can't you fellows sit down?" he inquired. "Want to stare round like tourists that have never been farther than Margate?"

"We're going up the Grand Canal!" hooted Potter.

"Well, why shouldn't we go up the Grand Canal?"

"Because our hotel's on the Riva, fathead, and we're turning our backs on it!" snorted Potter.

"Oh!" said Coker. "Well, I want to get a change! I'm wet! You St. Jim's fags tell your gondoliers to put in at the Riva dolly Thingummy."

"The which?" ejaculated Tom Merry.

"I hardly think the gondoliers would catch on, Coker!" remarked Monty Lowther gravely.

"It's the Riva something-or-other!" growled Coker.

"The Riva degli Schiavoni," said Potter. "T'other side of the Place of St. Mark! It's nearly half a mile out of these fellows' way, Coker, if they're going up the Grand Canal."

"I want to change my wet clothes!" roared Coker.

"Bai Jove! So do I, Cokah!"

"Shut up!" said Coker.

"Eh?"

"If you were a Greyfriars fag, instead of a St. Jim's fag, I'd smack your head for barging in."

"Bai Jove!"

"Have you bought this gondola, Coker, since these chaps pulled you in?" inquired Greene.

"Shut up, Greene!"

"We'll send you back in the gondola after we've

landed at our hotel!" said Tom Merry. "Is it far up the canal, Pawson?"

"No, sir! A few minutes!"

Coker grunted! But perhaps even Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth realised that he could not give commands on somebody else's gondola! Tom Merry & Co. were polite and obliging, but they did not want Gussy to sit in his wet clothes for another hour to save Coker a few minutes—important person as Coker apparently was!

So the gondola rolled on up the Grand Canal, and stopped at the steps of the Hotel Veronese. There the St. Jim's fellows landed, and facchini carried the baggage into the hotel—once a mansion of some ancient Venetian nobleman.

The Greyfriars fellows stayed in the gondola. Pawson, having been informed where they were staying, directed the gondoliers to take them down to the Hotel della Riva, on the Riva degli Schiavoni.

"See you chaps again, perhaps, if you're staying in Venice!" said Potter politely. "Many thanks for the lift home."

"Are you going to stand there jawing, Potter, while I'm sitting in wet clothes?" inquired Coker.

"Good-night you fellows!"

Tom Merry & Co. stood on the steps and watched the gondola glide away down the Grand Canal again. Voices floated back from it as it went.

"I'm wet through—"

"Serve you right!"

"All your fault, you pair of dunderheads—"

"For goodness' sake, shut up, Coker!"

"I'm not sure these gondoliers are going right—"

"Want them to head for Albania or Jugo-Slavia?"

"Look here, Potter—"

"Oh, give us a rest!"

"Of all the dunderheaded dummies—"

The voices died away down the Grand Canal. Tom Merry & Co. chuckled.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. "Those fellows, Pottah and Greene, seem civil chaps; but Cokah— Oh cwumbs! Cokah is the limit! Weally and twuly, I should hate to have a holiday with Cokah!"

On which point Tom Merry & Co. fully agreed with Gussy. If anything could have added to their satisfaction at arriving in Venice, it was parting with Horace Coker of Greyfriars when they arrived there. It did not occur just then to any of the flying schoolboys that they were going to have reason later to be extremely glad that Coker & Co. of Greyfriars had made that trip to Venice!

CHAPTER 10.

Trapped in Venice!

"WARM!" murmured Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! But wippin'!"

"Oh, topping!"

There was a blaze of brilliant sunshine in the Place of St. Mark, at Venice. Tom Merry & Co. were sauntering in the piazza, with great satisfaction to themselves.

They had had quite a busy day. They had explored the Doge's Palace and the cathedral; they had crossed the Bridge of Sighs; they had looked in at the ancient prisons; and Manners

had taken endless photographs of the Campanile, the Qaudriga, and almost everything else on which he could focus his camera.

Now, in the warm afternoon, they strolled in the Piazza di Sammarco, and threw crumbs to the pigeons, and enjoyed life.

For the first time on that flying trip that troublesome black box was off Arthur Augustus' mind.

Manners, in the intervals of photographing everybody and everything, wondered sarcastically how Pawson was occupied in the hotel while they were absent.

He had no doubt that Pawson was going carefully through the baggage in search of the black box. It amused him to think of Pawson's perplexity on that subject.

At Turin, Pawson had dispatched the registered packet and brought the receipt to Gussy. But Manners knew that he had examined it first, and found that it did not contain the black box. He was quite aware why Pawson was so silent and thoughtful since leaving Turin. Pawson must have been in an absolutely puzzled and non-plussed frame of mind.

He had had to post the packet and bring the receipt to keep up appearances. But he knew that the black box had not gone in it. He did not, and could not, know that Manners had later sent another registered packet which did contain the black box.

Pawson must believe that the black box was still with the St Jim's party, as what he had posted was only a small apple.

It gave Manners a sardonic amusement to think of the double-dealing rascal rooting after the black box which was already hundreds of miles away.

He wondered what Pawson would do when he had satisfied himself that the precious article was not hidden in the party's luggage. No doubt he would conclude that it was still in D'Arcy's keeping. Certainly he could have no knowledge of the trick Manners had played in the packing of that packet.

Whatever steps Pawson might take, the black box was safe from his clutches. That was a keen satisfaction to Harry Manners. He was welcome to go on rooting after it as long as he liked.

But Manners just now was not thinking of Pawson and what Pawson might do. He was taking his umpteenth photograph of the Campanile in the Place of St. Mark; and when Manners was taking a photograph, all lesser matters vanished completely from his mind.

Arthur Augustus had provided himself with buns from one of the cafes in the piazza, and was throwing crumbs to the numerous pigeons, when a "facchino," in the gold-laced cap of a porter of the Hotel Veronese, tapped him on the elbow.

Arthur Augustus glanced round at him.

Gussy was on his guard against all dagoes, but a porter from the hotel at which the juniors were staying did not, naturally, excite his suspicions, and the name of the hotel was on the man's cap.

"What is it?" asked D'Arcy. "I mean, che cosa e?" Arthur Augustus had picked up a few words of Italian.

"Il Signore Pawson," said the porter. "He bring one telegram, from Inghilterra he come."

"Bai Jove! Where is Pawson?"

"He wait with a gondola, sir, while I look find the signore."

The Gem Librarian.—No. 1432



Having felled the Italian, Coker was on board the felucca and dragged it away. "Oh crikey!" he gasped at 1

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Potter; and

"Take me to him at once!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Where are you going, Gussy?" called out Jack Blake.

The other fellows were gathered round Manners.

"Pawson's brought a telegwam, Blake," answered Arthur Augustus. "If it's frowm the patah, it may be news that they've found the Nizam's Diamond, you know: the patah knows I am feahfully anxious for news about it. You wemembah the patah was wobbed of a feahfully valuable diamond just befoah the Eastah holidays—"

"Don't I!" grinned Blake. "By gum, I'd be jolly glad to hear that Lord Eastwood has got it back, Gussy!"

"A telegwam looks like it, Blake. The patah would hardly telegraph about anything else. Twot along with me, old chap."

"Yes, rather!" said Blake. "You're not wandering about alone in Venice, Gussy."

"Weally, Blake, it is all wight, as this chap is frowm the hotel, and Pawson is waitin' for me a few steps away."

"I'm coming with you, all the same."

And Jack Blake walked with his cham as Arthur Augustus followed the hotel porter.

From the Place of St. Mark it was only a short distance, by way of the piazzetta, to the Riva



at moment. He grabbed hold of the heap of sailcloth
t of Blake and Arthur Augustus thus suddenly revealed.
ambered on board, followed by Greene.

fronting the Canal di San Marco, at the opening of the Grand Canal.

Dozens of gondolas were to be seen out on the blue waters or lying beside the mole, ready to take on passengers.

The porter led the way across the mole to a gondola which rocked on the water at a little distance from all others. There were two gondoliers in it, standing with their long oars ready to push off. Pawson was not to be seen on the craft.

"Il Signore Pawson, he in a cabin," said the porter.

The two juniors stepped on the gondola. The doorway into the little cabin in the centre of the craft was open, though the windows were covered with blinds, perhaps to exclude the bright sunlight.

Blake and D'Arcy stepped into the little cabin, expecting to see Pawson there with the telegram.

The cabin was empty.

"Bai Jove! Where's Pawson?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Blake stared round.

"That fathead's brought us to the wrong gondola!" he said. "There's nobody here! Why—what—"

The man in the porter's cap followed them into the cabin. One of the gondoliers came in at his heels. Grinning, but without a word, they grasped the two schoolboys.

The other gondolier immediately pushed off with his oar, and the gondola shot out on the canal.

"Bai Jove!" howled Arthur Augustus. "What the—"

"What the thump—" gasped Blake, struggling in the grasp of the man in the porter's cap. "What—"

"Oh cwikey! We've been twicked!" stuttered Arthur Augustus, struggling in the grasp of the gondolier. "Leave go, you wottah! Oh cwumbs! You feahful wuffian— Yawwooh!"

Arthur Augustus went down with a bump. Blake went down the next moment. He shouted at the top of his voice, but a rough, dusky hand was pressed over his mouth, silencing him. Another rough hand was pressed over D'Arcy's. They had no chance in the grasp of the two burly dagoes, and inside the cabin they were screened from the sight of scores of people on the Riva.

The man in the porter's cap grinned down at them.

"Va bene, signorini!" he said. "You are not to hurt. No. It is to see someone that you go. Yes. You have no fear."

"You fwithful wottah! Do you think we are afraid of you?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Let me loose at once, you wascal!"

Both the juniors knew now how they had been tricked. The man in the porter's cap evidently did not belong to the Hotel Veronese at all; the gold-laced cap was a trick. Pawson was not there; his name had been used to trick them into this trap. It was Arthur Augustus who was wanted; Blake had been seized with him because he had accompanied him.

But resistance was futile. Still struggling, the two juniors were bound, and left lying on the cabin floor.

The gondolier stepped out of the cabin and took up his long oar to help to row; the man in the porter's cap sat down, grinning at the prisoners. The gondola rolled on as fast as two gondoliers could move it, past the mouth of the Grand Canal, past the Punta della Salute, and through the canal between the Giudecca and the island of San Giorgio into the Laguna Veneta—the open, spacious lagoon of Venice.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus, wriggling in his bonds. "Where are the bwutes takin' us, Blake?"

"Goodness knows!" grunted Blake. "Looks as if we're going out to sea!"

"The feahful wottahs! There wasn't any telegraph, you know—it was just a twick, usin' Pawson's name to get us into a twap! Bai Jove! Do you think these dago wottahs are aftah the black box, Blake?"

"What else do you think they're after, fathead? Think they're taking us out to the Lido for a bathe?"

"Weally, Blake, it is no use gettin' watty!"

"Blow that black box!" hooted Blake. "I thought we were done with it when it was packed off home! Blow it!"

"Yaas, but these dago wottahs don't know that it was packed off home! They think I've still got it!"

"Blow it—and blow them!"

"Bai Jove! I'm jolly glad it's out of their weach, anyhow!"

"Yes, that's one comfort!" admitted Blake.

It was the only comfort they had as the gondola floated on, urged by the long oars, till

more than an hour later they felt it bump against another craft—and come to a stop—far out on the lagoon!

CHAPTER 11.

The Man in the Mask!

"**A**NDIAMO!" grinned the man in the porter's cap.

He rose from his seat. Blake and Arthur Augustus, with their hands bound behind them, were sitting on the cabin floor. The Italian grasped them and jerked them to their feet.

He pushed them before him out of the cabin. They stared round.

The gondola was floating on the wide lagoon that lay red in the setting sun. Far away on the horizon was a glimpse of land. In another direction the smoke of a steamer could be seen. Evidently they had been brought to a considerable distance from Venice.

One of the gondoliers was holding to the gunwale of a small boat that rocked beside the gondola. In the boat sat a man, at whom the two juniors looked at once. They could, however, see little of him. A boat-cloak shrouded him from head to foot, and a slouched felt hat hid his face.

He sat with the oars in his hands, without looking up or speaking. But they could guess that this man, whoever he was, was the enemy who had planned the trap. The gondola, the gondoliers, and the man in the porter's cap had been his instruments—and he had waited on the lagoon for the two juniors to be brought out to him.

"You go in a boat, yes," said the man in the porter's cap. "That is the signore who want you to come, yes!"

The two schoolboys were swung one after the other into the boat. They stumbled and sat down there.

The gondola moved off immediately. It swung round and with long sweeps of the oars glided away in the direction of distant Venice. The two juniors were left with the silent man in the cloak, rocking in the boat on the lagoon.

They looked at him in silence. Both of them had plenty of courage; but there was something sinister in the solitude of the lonely waters and the silence of that black figure wrapped in the cloak. They felt their hearts beat faster.

It was not till the gondola was at a distance that the man raised his head and looked at them under the brim of the slouched hat.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus, startled; and Blake caught his breath.

The face under the slouch of the hat was masked.

A mask of black velvet covered it from the forehead to the chin, with only a slit for breathing and two eye-holes, through which a pair of keen eyes glinted at the prisoners.

What the man was like, it was impossible to guess. Both the juniors took it for granted that he was some dago who had had word from Giuseppe about the black box. But they could not tell who he was. The velvet mask over his face and the black boat-cloak shrouding his figure completely hid him from their sight, except for the glint of his eyes.

Jack Blake gave a wrench at the cord that knotted his hands behind him. The gondola

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with the ruffians on board was gone, and there was only this strange, silent man to deal with, if the prisoners could have got their hands loose. But he wrenched at the cord in vain.

"Nothin' doin', deah boy!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Anyhow, the wottah won't get the black box!"

Still without speaking, the masked man laid in the oars and moved towards the two juniors.

He proceeded to search Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Arthur Augustus' eyes gleamed with wrath and indignation; but it was impossible to resist.

"You uttah wottah!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "If you are lookin' for the black box, I can assuah you that you will not find it. You have had all your twouble for nothin', you wascal!"

The masked man did not seem even to hear him. At all events, he did not heed.

"The black box is not in my pockets!" hooted Arthur Augustus. "I have not got it with me at all. It was sent home by wegistahed post fwom Tuwin. If you want it, you had better go and look for it in England! Got that, you wottah?"

The masked man made him an angry gesture to be silent.

"Not much good telling him that, Gussy!" grunted Blake. "Think he's likely to take your word about it?"

"Bai Jove! I twust that even a wotten dago would not have the cheek to doubt my word, Blake!"

"Fathead!"

"Weally, Blake—— Bai Jove! The wottah is wumplin' me howwibly! I would give him a feafuhl thwashin' if my hands were free!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The masked man continued to search him with great thoroughness. He examined even the lining of his jacket when the pockets were drawn blank, as if suspecting some secret hiding-place.

But if he was searching for the black box, as undoubtedly he was, he had no luck. He seemed unwilling to be convinced that it was not there, and he went on with the search savagely long after it was quite plain that there was nothing to be found.

He desisted at last, and the juniors heard him breathe hard under the mask. Still he did not speak, and they wondered at his silence.

Silent as he was, they could read in the burning eyes through the eye-holes of the mask that he was consumed with rage.

Evidently, he had fully expected to find what he sought on the swell of St. Jim's, and seemed puzzled as well as savagely and bitterly enraged and disappointed.

Why, was rather a puzzle to the juniors; for though he evidently did not believe the statement that the black box had been sent away by post from Turin, he could not—so far as they could see—know that it had not been left in the baggage at the hotel.

But it was clear that, for some reason, he had counted as an absolute certainty on finding it on Arthur Augustus.

Leaving Arthur Augustus at last, he turned to Blake, and proceeded to search him also.

The search was less thorough than in D'Arcy's case; but it was careful enough. Had Blake been carrying the black box for his chum, it would certainly have come to light.

But nothing of the kind, of course, was found;

and the masked man at last sat down again, breathing hard—though still as silent as if he had been dumb.

By that time the sun was sinking down behind the Dead Lagoon in the west, and dark shadows were creeping over the Laguna Veneta.

The masked man picked up the oars at last and slipped them into the rowlocks. Taking no further heed of the two juniors, he began to row. Darkness shut down like a cloak over the lagoon as the boat glided on.

The two juniors sat silent, peering into the darkness of the waters. Far away, Venice was gleaming with lights, glimmering like a fairy city from the sea. Silently, the masked man pulled on towards the glimmering lights.

CHAPTER 12.

Missing!

"THAT ass Gussy—" said Monty Lowther. "Blake's with him!" said Digby.

"Another ass!" said Lowther.

"Fathead!" said Digby and Herries together. Tom Merry & Co. were gathered on the steps of the Hotel Veronese, looking out rather anxiously on the Grand Canal.

They had missed Blake and D'Arcy in the Place of St. Mark and returned to the hotel, expecting to find them there. But they were not there; and when they inquired for Pawson, to ask him if he knew anything of them, they learned that Pawson was absent. Now they watched the canal with anxious eyes—wondering what might have happened to the two.

Tom Merry and Manners were standing at a little distance from the others. Tom was looking worried; Manners very thoughtful.

"What do you think, Manners, old man?" asked Tom at last.

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Pawson's out!" he said.

"No reason why he should stay in while we're out seeing the sights."

"Oh, no, no, none at all!" said Manners sarcastically. "He just happens to be out when something's happened to Gussy."

"Blake's with Gussy; he was keeping an eye on him—"

"I know. That only means that they've got them both," grunted Manners.

Tom drew a deep breath.

"Look here, what do you think's happened, then?" he asked.

"I don't think anything about it. I know what's happened," answered Manners coolly.

"Pawson knows that the black box never went in that packet home. What he thinks about it I don't know; but he knows that much. He believes that it's still about. He's gone through every inch of our baggage while we've been out seeing the sights. He knows it's not in the hotel. So he thinks it's on Gussy."

"But he knows that Gussy thinks that the black box has gone home!" said Tom.

"He doesn't," answered Manners. "He's not likely to fancy that Gussy never knew what he was packing."

"Blessed if I know what he did think!" confessed Tom.

"Same here! But he's known for a long time that I suspect him, and he may have thought that I've put Gussy wise, and that Gussy fixed up that dummy packet to fool him—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"It looks like it—to Pawson," grinned Manners. "Suppose Gussy had sense enough to see that Pawson was awfully interested in that black box! He might fix up that dummy packet and send Pawson to post it, to make him believe that the black box was gone."

"Gussy would never dream of such a trick, fathead!"

"I know he wouldn't; but Pawson doesn't know that! Cunning rogues always think other people are cunning. It looks like it, and that's enough for Pawson. You've noticed that he's been different since posting that packet in Turin. Even Gussy's noticed that—"

"Yes, we all have! But—"

"He thinks he's not trusted now as he was," said Manners. "He thinks that even that fathead Gussy has got a glimmering of sense at last! He doesn't know him so well as we do, you see!" added Manners, with deep sarcasm.

"But—" said Tom.

"Anyhow, he knows the black box wasn't in that packet, and thinks that it's still around," said Manners. "Bet you Pawson banks on it as an absolute cert that Gussy has it in his pocket to-day, as it wasn't left at the hotel."

"Hallo, here comes Pawson!" called out Monty Lowther.

A gondola glided up to the steps and Pawson stepped out. The juniors gathered round him at once as he landed.

"Seen anything of D'Arcy?" asked Digby.

Pawson raised his eyebrows.

"Is not Master Arthur with you?" he inquired.

"No; he went off somewhere with Blake," said Herries. "You've seen nothing of them, Pawson?"

"I am sorry, no!" said Pawson. "Probably they will come in later. It is very easy to lose one's way in a foreign city."

"If some blessed dago has got after them—" said Lowther.

Pawson coughed.

"It is hardly possible, sir! But if they do not come in shortly I will certainly have inquiries made."

Pawson disappeared into the hotel.

The St. Jim's juniors remained watching the gliding gondolas on the Grand Canal. Pawson, it seemed, was feeling no great concern, and, in view of his devotion to Arthur Augustus, that was rather reassuring to Gussy's friends.

But it was not reassuring to Manners, or to Tom Merry, in the circumstances. They watched the canal with anxious eyes, hoping that every gliding gondola would stop at the steps and land the two missing juniors. Innumerable gondolas passed up and down the Grand Canal, but they watched in vain for the missing juniors. Monty Lowther came across the steps to his chums, at length, with a worried brow. Herries and Digby stared down the canal with growing uneasiness in their faces. It was all very well for Pawson to say that the missing juniors would probably come in shortly. But the evening was getting on now, and they had not come! Why did they not come?

"You fellows think something's happened!" asked Monty Lowther, eyeing Manners and Tom Merry.

"Blessed if I know!" said Tom. "Gussy may have walked off somewhere, and Blake gone after him, but—but—"

"Yes; something's happened," said Manners quietly.

"Well, what, if you feel so sure about it?" asked Lowther.

Manners made a gesture towards the portico of the hotel.

"Better go in and ask Pawson that!" he said sarcastically. "He knows—and I don't!"

Monty Lowther gave a start.

"Manners, you ass! Are you thinking of that rot you talked at Turin?" he exclaimed.

"I'm thinking of what I told you at Turin—and it's not rot!" answered Manners. "Pawson has fixed this up, and wherever Blake and Gussy are Pawson could lay his hands on them if he liked!"

"What utter tosh!"

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Here he comes!" muttered Lowther, as a portly figure came out of the portico. "For goodness' sake, Manners, not a word of that piffle for Pawson to hear!"

Pawson came down the steps. There was a faint smile on his fruity face, a glimmer in his eyes.

"I do not think you need be alarmed, gentlemen," he said. "I have been on the telephone to the Ufficio di Polizia—"

"The what?" asked Dig.

"The police station, sir! They have been kind enough to make some inquiries, and it appears that a youth answering to Master Arthur's description was seen on the Rialto a short time ago—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Herries, greatly relieved.

"If Gussy was there Blake would be with him. They're all right, then!"

"I have no doubt of it, sir," said Pawson smoothly.

"But where's the Rialto?" asked Dig. "We haven't done the Rialto yet."

"It is a bridge farther up the Grand Canal, sir—a very interesting ancient bridge, mentioned in Shakespeare's 'Merchant of Venice,'" murmured Pawson. "Perhaps you young gentlemen might like to take a gondola up the canal and see whether anything is to be seen of Master Arthur there, sir."

"Might as well, as wait about here!" agreed Herries.

"Let's!" said Dig.

"I'm on!" said Lowther, as Pawson went lower down the steps to signal to a gondola. "You fellows coming? Just like Gussy to moon about on the Rialto, and forget time and space."

"Come on, Manners!" said Tom.

"Oh, all right!" jeered Manners. "We shall see the Rialto, at any rate! Gussy's in the other direction, or Pawson wouldn't send us up the canal! Come on, let's go and see the Rialto by night. It will amuse Pawson, at any rate!"

"Rot!" said Lowther.

A gondola rolled up the Grand Canal, heading for the Rialto, with Tom Merry & Co. on board. Pawson stood on the marble steps and watched it go, with a faintly ironical smile on his plump face.

CHAPTER 13.

The Prisoners on the Felucca!

"BLAKE, deah boy—"

Grunt!

"We seem to be in a feahful scrape, Blake."

Grunt!

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"I'm awf'ly sowwy I've landed you in a old chap! It wasn't you those wottahs washed. What are you goin' to do, old fellow?"

"Stick here!" grunted Blake.

"I am getting wathah cwamped."

"So am I."

"It's wotten!"

"Putrid!"

"But what are they goin' to do with us?" asked Arthur Augustus. "They can't keep us heah for evah."

"Ask me another!"

Blake knew no more than Gussy on that point. All either of them knew was that they were in a bad scrape, and that there seemed no getting out of it.

Under the gleaming stars, shining brightly in the vast dome of the sky over the Venetian lagoon, the two juniors lay in the bottom of a fishing craft that swung to anchor.

The heavy lateen sail was down. The fishing-boat hardly stirred to the wash of the lagoon.

There was only one other on board—a black-bearded, black-haired, greasy-faced Italian seaman, who looked like a pirate to the eyes of the schoolboys, with a red rag bound over his black mop, and a knife in his sash.

More than an hour ago the two juniors had been passed up the side of the little felucca by the masked man in the boat. The black-bearded seaman had pitched them down, and, for additional security, bound their legs as well as their arms. During that operation the masked man had looked on, standing up in the boat, and holding on to the felucca's gunwale. Then he had beckoned to the Italian, who leaned over the side to speak to him; and only the faintest of faint whispers reached the ears of the juniors.

They had wondered a little, from the silence of the man in the boat, whether possibly he was dumb! Now they knew that he was not, as the two whispered together.

But the whispering was brief. The masked man pushed off in the boat, sat to the oars, and vanished into the shadows of the lagoon.

More than an hour had passed since then. Blake and D'Arcy lay where they had been flung, hardly able to stir a limb.

The Italian sat on a tiny half-deck at the stern, smoking cigarettes, one after another, almost without cessation. Every now and then he gave the bound schoolboys a glance, and grinned.

Both the juniors were getting severely cramped. Both of them were getting hungry. Both were anxious and uneasy.

They were being kept prisoners on that felucca, anchored far out in the lagoon. Why, and for how long, they could not tell. With every slow minute that passed their discomfort increased.

"How long is this goin' to last, I wondah?" mumbled Arthur Augustus. "Our fwiends will be gettin' feahfully anxious about us by this time, Blake."

"They must have gone back to the hotel long ago!" grunted Blake. "Pawson may be able to do something when we don't turn up."

"Yaas, wathah! Pawson is a wondahful chap!" said Arthur Augustus, brightening at the thought.

"Only they're more likely to think that we're wandering about Venice than parked in a dirty old boat out on the lagoon!" groaned Blake.

"They can't know anything about our going on

a gondola. It was all spoof about that telegram, of course—nobody knows anything about the trick that was played on us. Even Pawson won't guess that we're not on shore."

"It's wotten! But Pawson will go to the police if we don't turn up, old chap!"

"And they'll inquire all over Venice for us—not over the lagoon!" grunted Blake.

"But what's their game, old fellow?"

"Blessed if I know—unless they're going to park us here till you cough up that mouldy black box!"

"Oh cwikey!"

The mutter of their voices drew the attention of the Italian. He leaned over from his seat on the half-deck.

"You do not like?" he asked, grinning.

"Bai Jove! That dago speaks English, Blake!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I nevah thought of that!"

The Italian gave him a scowl. The word "dago" evidently displeased him. But he grinned again the next moment.

"You do not like?" he repeated. "It is not to be of comfort with a cord that tie a leg and an arm. Si, si! In the morning you not like much! No! The night is long when one is tie with a cord on an arm and a leg! Non e vero?"

He chuckled, and lighted another cigarette.

"Il signore come back more late!" he went on, evidently alluding to the unknown man in the boat. "You tell him what thing he wish to know, you all right! You no tell him that thing, you stay like that! Always you stay like that till you tell the signore the thing he wish to know."

"Oh ewumbs!"

"One day—two days—many days!" grinned the black-bearded man. "Always you are tie with an arm and a leg, till you tell that signore the thing he wish to know! Si, si! That is what he say to me to tell! Yes!"

And the greasy rascal leaned back and resumed smoking cigarettes, leaving the hapless juniors to digest that information.

They understood now.

The man in the mask, whoever he was, did not believe that the black box was out of reach. He had failed to find it on Arthur Augustus, as it was plain that he had fully expected to do. Arthur Augustus was to be kept a prisoner on the felucca till he revealed where the black box was to be found.

"By gum! We're for it!" muttered Blake. "The brute is as good as putting us to the torture—keeping us tied up like this! What shall we be feeling like by dawn?"

"Oh cwikey!"

"The blighter thinks that mouldy black box is still around—no good telling him again that it's gone home to England!" groaned Blake. "He won't believe that! We couldn't hand it over if we wanted to! I dare say he thinks one of the other fellows is minding it for you, and he wants to know which—to nab him as he's nabbed us!"

"Oh scissahs!"

"Queer that he didn't tell us so himself, instead of leaving word with this dago!" muttered Blake. "Why doesn't the rotter want us to hear his voice? That's what it comes to. Might be some man staying at our hotel for all we know, and we might spot him by his voice if we heard it! Something of that sort! We're for it, Gussy!"

"Yaas, wathah!" groaned Arthur Augustus.

They fell into dismal silence.

It was clear to them now what was intended. And there was no hope, for, although the man in the mask refused to believe it, the black box was out of reach, hundreds of miles away.

Long, long minutes passed. Another dismal hour crawled by. They thought of their friends and Pawson—doubtless searching for them up and down Venice. But there was no hope in that. Even Pawson—the incomparable Pawson—would never guess that they were bound hand and foot lying in the bottom of a dirty felucca, far out on the lagoon.

Suddenly, from the darkness and silence of the lagoon, came an unexpected sound! It was a voice—a familiar voice, and it said—or rather shouted:

"You thundering asses!"

The two juniors gave a simultaneous jump! They knew that voice!

"We should have been back long ago if we'd gone in a boat! You would have this dashed crawling gondola! I'd have rowed you—"

"Help!" yelled Blake.

"Help!" shrieked Arthur Augustus like an echo.

The black-bearded Italian was jumping at them. He had grabbed up a heavy sail-cloth, and he flung it over them, and crammed it down. They were silenced at once, but those two desperate cries had rung far across the lagoon before they were silenced.

CHAPTER 14.

Coker to the Rescue!

HORACE COKER, of the Greyfriars Fifth, stared round over the shadowy lagoon. Potter and Greene, stared round in surprise. The gondolier stared, but swung on his heavy oar, heading for the distant lights of Venice. Probably he did not understand the meaning of the cry in English; at all events, he did not concern himself about it!

Horace Coker did!

"Did you fellows hear that?" exclaimed Coker.

"Yes, rather," answered Potter. "Somebody calling for help—"

"In English, too!" said Greene.

"Stop, you silly owl!" shouted Coker to the gondolier. "Haven't you any ears? Deaf? Stop, you monkey-faced chump!"

He grabbed the gondolier by the arm, and made the man understand by his actions, if not by his words. Perhaps it was just as well that the native of foreign parts did not understand Coker's language. It was seldom complimentary. Coker had no high opinion of foreigners—and he was not accustomed to concealing his opinions.

"Che cosa?" asked the gondolier.

"I don't know what a cawser is, and don't want to!" retorted Coker. "My hat! Why these foreigners don't learn to talk a sensible language beats me! Gabble, gabble, gabble, in their silly lingo!"

"There's some sort of craft yonder!" said Potter, peering through the gloom. "Some sort of a fishing boat at anchor."

"Somebody fallen overboard, perhaps—" said Greene.

"It's not anybody overboard—it's somebody on that old tub," said Coker. "Here, gondolier, head for that boat—see? Don't gabble at me like a parrot, but just do as I tell you! Even a fatheaded foreigner ought to have sense enough to do as he's told, I think."

"He doesn't understand English!" Potter pointed out.

"Don't jaw, Potter, while I'm trying to make this fool of a foreigner see sense! Get going, you owl!" roared Coker.

The gondolier understood none of the words. But he understood a pointed finger, and he nodded, and swung his oar, and the gondola swept round to the anchored felucca.

Over the side of the felucca, a black-bearded face stared angrily.

There was a babble of rapid Italian between the black-bearded man and the gondolier. Without understanding the language, the Greyfriars seniors could see that the man on the felucca was angrily ordering the gondola to push off.

The gondolier seemed disposed to obey. Horace Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth was not in the slightest degree so disposed.

He grasped the gunwale of the felucca with a sinewy hand and held on. The two craft floated close alongside.

"Now then, what's up here?" demanded Coker, staring at the angry, black-bearded face. "Who was that called for help?"

"Cospetto! You go 'way!" snapped the black-bearded man. "What you want, English fool?"

Coker crimsoned.

"By gum! Hear what he said, you fellows? I'll give him English fool! Look here, you unwashed dago, who's on this craft?"

"Nessuno! Nessuno! Me only!" yapped the Italian.

"That's a lie!" said Coker in the plain language he was accustomed to use. "Somebody called for help—in English, too! I believe there were two voices! Don't you fellows think so?"

"I believe so," said Potter, "but—"

"You go 'way!" shouted the black-bearded Italian savagely, as Coker put his elbows on the gunwale; and he gave the Fifth Former of Greyfriars a violent shove back.

But Coker was not easy to shove back; he held on, spluttering with rage.

"Would you fellows believe it?" gasped Coker. "A dirty dago daring to lay hands on a Greyfriars man! Why, I'll mop up his dirty craft with him!"

"I—I say, hold on—"

"Don't be a fool, Greene! What's that wriggling under that canvas, you dirty dago?" roared Coker. "What have you got hidden there? What sort of foul play are you up to, you monkey off an organ?"

Coker clambered. He had heard a cry for help in English from that felucca. Something was wriggling and writhing under a heap of sail-cloth. That was enough for Coker. He clambered over the gunwale.

"Look out!" shrieked Potter.

"Coker!" yelled Greene.

A knife flashed in the bright starlight. Coker tumbled back faster than he had clambered up.

The black-bearded man leaned over the gunwale, flourishing the knife. Coker glared at him from the gondola.

"Andate—you go 'way!" hissed the man on the felucca. "You come on aboard, it is a knife!"

"By gum!" gasped Coker.

"Let's get back to Venice, for goodness' sake!" exclaimed Potter. "We can report this to the police, Coker—"

"Don't be an ass, Potter!"

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"Keep clear of that sticker, you chump," gasped Greene.

"Don't be a fool, Greene!"

"Look here—" yelled Potter and Greene together in alarm.

"Will you shut up?" roared Coker. "Didn't you hear somebody on that tub yell for help? Think I'm leaving him to it? Think I'm frightened of a dirty dago with a bread-knife? I'll show him! Where's that boathook?"

"Coker, old chap—"

"Coker, you ass—"

"I said shut up!"

There was a boathook on the gondola. Coker grabbed it and returned to the charge. The gondolier stared at him, holding his oar. Potter and Greene held on to the gunwale of the felucca, gasping. Coker lunged at the black-bearded man, who jumped back just in time.

Coker clambered and got a leg over the gunwale.

The Italian came at him again with the knife. Coker jammed the boathook fairly on his chest, and the black-bearded man, with a yell of agony, stumbled backwards and fell against the gunwale.

Coker was on board the next moment. He grabbed hold of the heap of sail-cloth and dragged it away.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped at the sight of the two St. Jim's juniors thus suddenly revealed.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Potter; and he clambered on board, followed by Greene.

"Help!" gasped Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! Help, Cokah, old chap!" panted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

The black-bearded man was up again, knife in hand.

Coker turned towards him; he did not wait for an attack if the ruffian intended one; he rushed at him with the boathook and bowled him over.

The Italian went down yelling, the knife flying from his hand. Potter jumped at it and promptly pitched it over the side into the lagoon. Coker did not seem to care a boiled bean for the dago's sticker, but it was a great relief to Potter and Greene to see the last of it.

"Look after those kids!" called out Coker. "I'll handle this beauty! By gum, I'll boot him all over the shop!"

Coker proceeded to suit the action to the word. His boot fairly crashed on the black-bearded man. The Italian bounded up, spitting with rage—only to go over again under a terrific jolt from a fist like a leg of mutton; then Coker resumed the booting process.

Potter and Greene cut the two St. Jim's juniors loose. Blake and D'Arcy scrambled up.

"Get into our gondola, kids," said Potter. "We'll give you a lift to Venice. One good turn deserves another—what?"

"Bai Jove! We're fearfully obliged to you fellows!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"What-ho!" gasped Blake. "You Greyfriars chaps have got us out of an awful scrape!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Looks like it," agreed Greene. "Hop into the gondola. Don't quite kill that dago, Coker; it's against the law here to slaughter dagoes."

Blake and Arthur Augustus thankfully dropped into the gondola, the gondolier blinking at them. Coker was still booting the Italian on the felucca. The howling man scrambled out on the bowsprit at last to escape, and Coker gave it up at that.

He jumped into the gondola, stumbled over Blake, and sat down—suddenly and hard.

"You clumsy young ass!" he roared.
 "Eh?"
 "Sticking your legs all over the shop! Haven't you any sense?"
 Blake looked at him, but he did not tell Coker what he thought of him. Coker had just rescued him, so Blake manfully suppressed his feelings.
 "Push off!" hooted Coker to the gondolier.
 "Do you want to stay here all night? Think you haven't kept us late enough for our dinner as it is? Get a move on, fish-face!"

The gondola glided away towards the lights of Venice. The black-bearded man was left howling strong expressions in his own language, but his voice soon died away behind.

"Cokah, old chap, we're feahfully obliged to you!" said Arthur Augustus.

Coker stared at him.
 "Did you call me old chap?" he inquired.

"Yaas, wathah!"
 "Well, don't! I don't like it from fags!"

"Oh, bai Jove!"
 And Arthur Augustus sat silent as the gondola rolled on to Venice.

feahful time!" said Arthur Augustus. "I was all wumpled and wuffed—"
 "Somebody after the black box?" asked Manners.

"That's it!" said Blake. "And we should still be tied up like turkeys on an old tub out in the lagoon but for that Greyfriars ass—Coker—"

"Coker!" exclaimed Tom Merry & Co. together.

"Yaas, wathah! That chap's mannaahs are feahful," said Arthur Augustus. "But bai Jove, he was the wight man in the wight place! But his mannaahs are weally feahful!"

"Tell us what's happened."

Blake and Arthur Augustus told the story together.

"We've been back half an hour," Blake wound up. "Coker gave us a lift here. Pawson told us you'd gone looking for us up the canal—"

"Yes; I rather thought we ought to have looked in the other direction," remarked Manners satirically. "Was Pawson awfully surprised to see you?"

"Yaas, wathah! I think Pawson must have

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"THE MAN IN THE MASK!"

Who is the mysterious man in black seeking Gussy's little box? Read how he is unmasked in the final thrilling adventure abroad of the flying schoolboys of St. Jim's.

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CHAPTER 15.

Safe and Sound!

TOM MERRY jumped.

"Gussy!" he yelled.
 "And Blake!" exclaimed Herries.

Tom Merry & Co. were coming back from the trip up the Grand Canal to the Rialto. They had seen nothing of the missing juniors on the Rialto, or round about the Rialto, and they returned at last in the faint hope that Blake and Arthur Augustus might have returned in their absence.

That hope, faint as it was, was realised as they arrived at the marble steps of the Hotel Veronese. On the steps stood two familiar figures, waving to them as they came.

The five juniors crowded ashore; they surrounded the Fourth Formers. They greeted them—expressively!

"You silly asses!" said Herries.

"You thumping chumps!" said Dig.

"We've been thinking that something had happened to you!" hooted Lowther.

"Has anything?" asked Tom.

"Yaas, wathah! We have been through a

been fearfully anxious about us," said Arthur Augustus. "He fairly jumped when we walked in. He weally looked as if he could hardly believe his eyes, you know. I am afraid he has been dweadfully anxious. You know how devoted Pawson is."

"Don't I!" grinned Manners.

"After this," said Monty Lowther, "we'd better keep a chain on Gussy—"

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"And another on Blake—"

"You silly ass!"

"We'd better be jolly careful to keep all together, at any rate!" said Tom Merry. "That mouldy black box is going to haunt us all through the hols."

"Yaas, wathah! You see, we hadn't the faintest ideah who that bwute was in the boat. I wondah who the blightah was?"

"Ask Pawson," suggested Manners. "Pawson knows everything, you know!"

Arthur Augustus laughed. It was not likely to dawn on his noble mind that Pawson was the very man to have answered that question.

THE END

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THE TRAIL OF DANGER!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

A faint trail represents the only hope of rescue from death for Frank Richards!

Their Missing Chum!

THE full, round moon was high in the sky, and the light fell in a silvery flood upon the Lawless Ranch and the wide green grasslands. It wanted only a couple of hours to dawn.

But there was one at least in the silent ranch-house who was not sleeping. Bob Lawless stood at his open window, looking out upon the moonlit plain and the dim mountains in the distance.

Bob could not sleep. He was thinking of his missing chum, Frank Richards. Where was Frank? He had ridden away from Cedar Creek School the previous day, and from that hour nothing had been seen or heard of him.

"Bob!"

The rancher's son turned from the window as Vere Beauclerc's voice spoke in the dim room behind him. Beauclerc had thrown himself on Frank's bed; he had come home with Bob that night. But he, too, had not slept.

"Yes, Cherub?" said Bob in a low voice. "You're awake, then?"

"I haven't slept," answered Beauclerc quietly.

"Can you hear anything, Bob?"

"Only the wind in the larches."

"I thought I heard a horse."

Vere Beauclerc slipped from the bed and joined his chum at the window. His eyes swept the moonlit plain without.

"Listen!" he muttered.

He held up his hand.

Faintly from afar came a low sound, and as it drew nearer it could be recognised as the tattoo of horse's hoofs.

"By gum, you are right, Cherub!" muttered Bob, his eyes gleaming. "It—it can't be Frank, surely."

The two schoolboys watched eagerly from the window. Closer and closer came the tattoo on the plain, and at last a dim form loomed up in the moonlight. It was a riderless horse, heading for the ranch-house.

Bob caught Vere Beauclerc by the arm.

"Frank's pony, and without Frank!" he muttered. "I guess I'm going down."

"Quiet!" said Beauclerc. "No need to wake the house, Bob."

The chums of Cedar Creek quitted the room silently and crept down the stairs. Cautiously Bob Lawless removed bolt and chain on the massive door of the ranch-house. The fresh night wind blew in as he drew back the door.

"Brownie!" called Beauclerc.

He ran out and caught the horse.

Brownie rubbed his muzzle on the arm of his master's chum. Beauclerc stroked the pony's glossy neck.

"But where's Frank?" muttered Bob Lawless. "If Brownie could only speak!"

Beauclerc was examining the pony attentively.

"Look at this, Bob," he said. "Brownie's bridle's been taken off; he's been roped up. There's the trail-rope loose round his neck.

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He's been tied up, and he's guarded through the rope."

"By gum, you're right, Cherub!"

"Whoever roped in Brownie knows where he's become of Frank," said Beauclerc. "Brownie was captured, and Frank was with him then. Brownie has got away, and Frank hasn't."

"But who? Why?"

"Goodness knows! But Mr. Smith, with whom Frank rode away from Cedar Creek, must be at the bottom of it," said Beauclerc.

Bob knitted his brows.

"He looked a harmless galoot enough, Cherub. He came into the school to ask for a chap who could speak French to interpret for him, because he'd found a French-Canadian hurt on the trail."

Bob shook his head. "It was sheer chance that Frank went with him. Miss Meadows called him out from the class. If the man was a stranger to Frank, why should he hurt him?"

"I don't know," admitted Beauclerc. "But I believe that if we found Smith we should find Frank."

"We're going to find Frank," said Bob, setting his teeth. "If Brownie was taken along with him—and it looks like it—Brownie's come from where Frank is now. And he's left a trail, Cherub."

"I was thinking of that."

"The dew's thick on the prairie," said Bob, his eyes glistening, "and this light is as good as daylight. If I can't pick up the trail you can call me a Chinaman! We'll leave Brownie with Billy Cook, and take the trail, Cherub. What do you say?"

"Good man!" said Beauclerc. "That's my idea, too. We'll borrow a gun from Billy Cook."

Bob Lawless led the pony away towards the ranch foreman's cabin, Beauclerc following. He knocked lightly at Billy Cook's door. The chums did not want to awaken Mr. Lawless, who would probably have demurred when he heard of Bob's scheme.

"Hallo!" came from within the cabin.

"Wake up, Billy!"

"You, Bob. Has Frank come home?"

"No; but his pony has."

"Gee-whiz!"

The door opened, and Billy Cook looked out, rubbing his eyes.

"Here's the pony, Billy," said Bob Lawless. "We're going to try to pick up his trail. Tell popper, and you can come after us. I believe Frank's in bad hands."

"You get back to bed," advised Billy Cook. "Leave this hyer business to me, Bob."

"Take the pony," answered Bob.

"I guess I'll wake your popper and put it to him," said the ranch foreman. "I reckon he won't let you go humping on any trail before morning, and on your own."

Billy Cook led the pony away, and Bob slipped into the cabin. He knew where the ranchman kept his rifle and cartridges, and in a few seconds he emerged with the rifle under his arm and the cartridge-belt slung over his shoulder.

"Come on, Cherub!"

"I'm with you, Bob!"

The two schoolboys started at a run. Where the pony's hoofs had trampled the wet grass the trail was plain and glistening in the moonlight, and they were able to proceed at a trot and keep it under observation.

For some distance the trail led them without a pause till the sombre shadows of the timber received them. Then Bob Lawless halted.

"Sign" was difficult to find amid the tangled undergrowths of the wood. But here and there the snapped twigs and trampled herbage showed where the pony had forced his way, and even so slight a sign as the dew shaken from a bush was enough for the keen-eyed Canadian.

Even when the moon had set Bob Lawless still pushed on, though slowly now, and with hesitation. But as the early rays of the rising sun penetrated the shadows of the wood his task was easier. Slowly but steadily the chums of Cedar Creek School pushed on into the sombre depths of the almost untrodden forest.

The Last Hope!

FRANK RICHARDS stirred and awoke.

Towards dawn the schoolboy prisoner had fallen into an uneasy slumber, rolled in the blanket in the grass. The sound of movements awakened him, and he sat up in the grass.

Before his eyes was the log cabin in which the French-Canadian, Jules Clement, lay bound, a prisoner. Mr. Smith and his companion, Bocus Bill, were talking in low tones near him.

Frank glanced at them, and then looked away

towards the sombre woods that surrounded the lonely cabin. He thought of Brownie, and wondered whether he had reached the ranch, and whether the trail he had left would help his friends to find him. Upon that faint hope everything depended, even life itself.

Bocus Bill left his companion, and went round the cabin. A minute later there was a loud exclamation, and the ruffian came hurrying back.

"The kid's pony's gone, boss!"

"You fool! Didn't you tether him?" growled Smith.

"I guess I put the trail-rope on the critter!" snarled Bocus Bill. "The brute's bitten it through and vamoosed."

"Well, it matters little," said Smith. "Our critters are safe, I suppose?"

"Yep!"

"Then it's O.K.!"

As the sunlight strengthened Smith and Bocus sat down to a hurried breakfast outside the cabin. They did not heed Frank Richards. When the hasty meal was finished, Bocus Bill untied the rope that fastened Frank Richards to the tree.

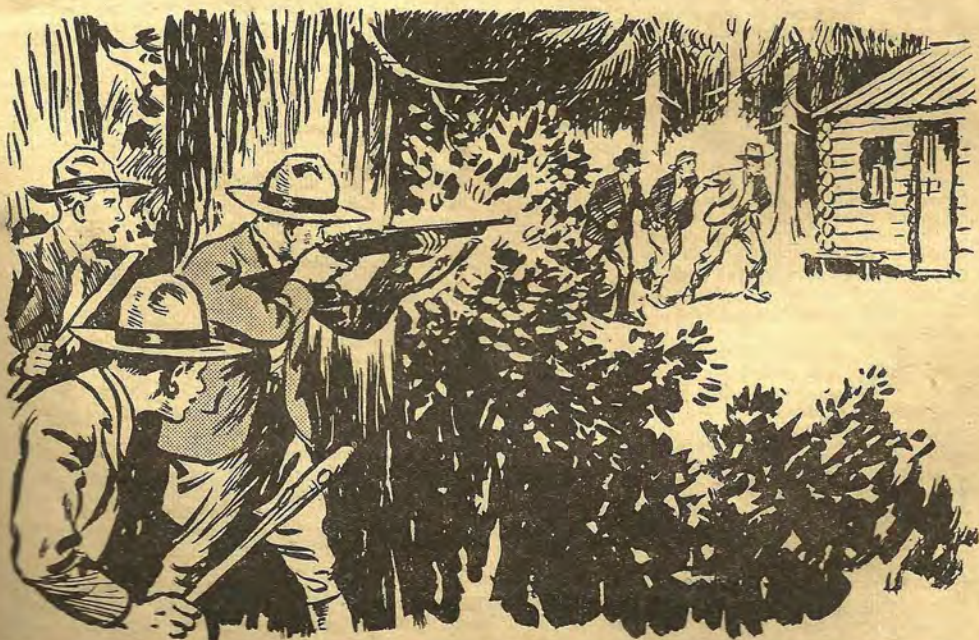
The door of the cabin was opened, and Smith strode in. The French-Canadian miner was lying on the earthen floor, bound securely. His pale face turned towards the adventurer when he entered.

"Bring the boy here, Bill."

"Yep."

Frank Richards was brought in.

"I guess I want you to talk to the galoot again, sonny," said Smith. "Last night the critter agreed to lead us to the place where he



"I guess they're on hand!" whispered Bob Lawless; and he lifted the rifle to his shoulder. The moment for action was at hand now. From the wood "Mr. Smith" and Bocus Bill appeared, with the French-Canadian tottering between the two ruffians.

hid the bag of dollars. We're taking him along with us now. Tell him in his lingo that if he tries any game on us, it will be the last game he will ever play on this earth!"

Frank Richards translated the threat. Clement shrugged his shoulders.

"On verra," he said.

"What does he say?" growled Smith.

"He says you will see."

"I guess we will, and I guess he will wish he'd never been born if he tries to pull the wool over our eyes."

At a sign from the adventurer, Bocus Bill unbound the Canadian, and led him from the cabin, with his arms, however, still secured behind his back.

Smith proceeded to bind Frank Richards to the log bench in the cabin. Evidently the schoolboy was to be left there while Clement was taken away by the two rascals.

Smith left the cabin, and the door was closed and wedged fast with a chip of wood outside.

Frank Richards sat on the bench. His life hung by a thread in the hands of the two desperadoes from the mines. When he had served his turn as interpreter, and was wanted no longer, he knew what to expect. The life of a schoolboy could not stand between the thieves and their safety.

Frank listened to the sound of receding footsteps and the rustling of the underwood as the two rascals departed with their prisoner. Then silence fell.

Dimly through the interstices in the rough walls of the cabin the sunlight penetrated. From without came the chirping of birds, the sounds of the awakening of life of the new day.

Frank Richards thought of Cedar Creek School, of the boys and girls who would soon be arriving there, little dreaming of the peril in which their schoolfellow lay. He thought of his chums, too—his chums who would not have shrunk from any danger, however great, to save him.

Had Brownie arrived at the ranch? Had the gnawed rope told them the tale? And were they even then seeking to pick up the trail of the pony in the grassy plain and the tangled woods? The hope was slight.

For some time he made attempts to loosen his bonds, but the roping had been done too carefully, and he desisted at last, with aching arms and heavy heart.

Wearily and restless he sat and waited, expecting soon to hear the sound of the kidnappers returning, but hoping against hope that he would hear the voices of his friends.

Suddenly he started. Outside the cabin there was a faint sound, and he knew that it was a cautious footfall. Was it the footstep of friend or of foe?

Tracked Down!

"HANG it!"

Bob Lawless muttered the words savagely.

Beaulerc did not speak; he watched his chum in silence. To him the woods told nothing. He was not so skilled as the Canadian lad in woodcraft.

But even Bob seemed beaten at last. Twice he had lost the trail and found it again, but now, for the third time, he was at a loss. Right and left he tried, but no sign met his keen gaze.

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"I guess it looks as if we have come out at the little end of the horn this time, Cherub," he muttered. "But we're not giving in."

Beaulerc nodded.

"We've got to find it, Bob," he said.

"By thunder, we're going to find it!" said Bob, between his teeth. "Hallo! What's that?"

He started forward as his eyes fell upon a tiny object in the herbage. It was a small green lizard, wriggling painfully on the ground.

"It's hurt," said Beaulerc.

Bob Lawless nodded.

"I guess I'm sorry for Mr. Lizard," he said. "But here's luck! Put him out of his pain, Cherub."

Bob's face was brighter.

"That poor little beast was hurt," he said. "He's been trodden on, Cherub. What was it trod on him?"

Beaulerc started.

"I guess," said Bob, "that we're on the track again. I guess, old Cherub, that it was a hoss put his hoof on that poor old lizard—Brownie, in fact. He's passed this way, though the ground's too hard just here to keep a trace of him. Brownie was heading for the ranch—that's west of here. So I reckon, Cherub, that if we look east of here we shall pick up Brownie's trail again."

"Let's try," said Beaulerc hopefully.

Bob Lawless glanced up at the sky and started. One glance was enough to give him his direction. Slowly and carefully he searched through the wood, eastward of the spot where the unfortunate lizard had been found. A sudden exclamation of satisfaction escaped him.

"Look here, Cherub!"

He had reached the spot where the underwoods were thicker, and he triumphantly pointed out a broken twig.

"Something's passed," he said; and he pushed on.

Thicker and thicker the wood lay before them, and they had to force their way through; but that was all to the good, for in the thick underwoods there were ample traces where a horse had passed.

Bob Lawless halted suddenly.

"Quiet!" he whispered.

Beaulerc looked at him. The rancher's son raised his hand and pointed. Through the openings of the trees they made out part of the outline of a log cabin in a little glade ahead.

"I guess that shebang belonged to some trapper in the old days," Bob whispered. "But I reckon somebody else is using it now, eh? This looks like the end of the trail, Cherub. Quiet! If Frank's there, I reckon somebody else is there with him, and it's a shooter we shall want now."

Bob Lawless hurriedly examined the rifle, and held it ready as he pushed on silently and cautiously, Beaulerc at his heels. They came to the clearing, their eyes looking keenly about them. There was no sign of life, save two horses tethered at the back of the cabin.

"Two of them, then," muttered Beaulerc. "They must be in the cabin, Bob."

Bob shook his head.

"Look at it," he whispered. "There's a wedge jammed under the door outside. Somebody's shut up there, but, whoever it is, he's a prisoner."

"Frank!" muttered Beaulerc.

"We're going to see. There's nobody about, excepting the horses, that's a cert."

The two schoolboys ventured out into the glade

at last, and reached the door of the cabin. Bob Lawless drew away the wedge.

"Open the door while I keep the shooter handy, Cherub. We're not taking chances," he whispered.

Beaulerc threw open the door, and the barrel of the rifle was levelled in at the little doorway.

There was a shout within:

"Bob! Beau, old man!"

"Frank!"

The two schoolboys rushed in. Frank Richards' eyes danced.

"Bob!" he panted. "Oh, but I'm glad to see you! Get me loose—they may come back!"

Beaulerc's knife was already at work on his bonds. The rope fell in fragments round him, and Frank Richards sprang to his feet, rubbing his numbed limbs.

"Thank goodness you've found me!" he exclaimed. "Was it Brownie's trail that led you here, Bob?"

"Correct!" grinned Bob Lawless.

"Good old Brownie!" said Frank. "It's a treat to see you chaps, and no mistake!"

"Same here, Franky!"

Frank Richards looked hastily out of the cabin. The forest lay silent and deserted round the clearing.

"They're not back yet!" he breathed. "When they come—"

"Hadh't we better clear out before they come?" said Beaulerc.

"No; there's another chap in this fix," said Frank. "A Frenchman named Clement. You remember that villain Smith who came to the school to ask for somebody who could speak French to interpret for him. He told Miss Meadows it was a French traveller injured on the trail. That was a lie!"

"I guessed it," muttered Beaulerc.

"There are two of the rotters," said Frank hurriedly. "They had a French-Canadian miner here—a chap who couldn't speak English. They wanted to rob him. As they didn't understand French, I asked him other things besides what they told me to ask him, and found out all about him."

"That was cute," said Bob.

"He was at the Cascade mines, and had a claim there," explained Frank. "He got news that his father was ill in the east, and sold his claim and started home with the money on him. Those two villains followed him from the mines and laid for him in the forest. He got away wounded and hid the bag of dollars in the timber somewhere, and when they ran him down and captured him, they did not know where to look for the money. So they wanted an interpreter to get the information out of him."

"I see."

"They would have tortured him to make him speak," said Frank. "But we worked it between us—speaking in French—that he should pretend to be willing to guide them to where the money was hidden to gain time. It had to be left till morning. Soon after dawn they started, taking Clement with them. That was hours ago."

"Then the Frenchy isn't going to let them bag the dollars?" asked Bob.

"No; he's fooling them."

"When they find that out—"

"I don't think they will hurt him till they've got their hands on the money," said Frank.

"If they find the dollars, I believe they will

shoot him dead to save their dirty skins; but if they don't find them, they'll bring him back here to torture him."

"Then this is where we take a hand in the game," said Bob quietly. "It's up to us, you fellows. You're game?"

"Yes," said Beaulerc.

"You bet!" exclaimed Frank. "I'm glad you've got a rifle, Bob. Mind, those rotters will shoot."

"So shall I," answered Bob laconically.

"We'd better get hold of something, Frank," said Beaulerc.

Frank Richards nodded.

In a few minutes the two had cut themselves cudgels from the wood. It was the best they could do, and then with beating hearts, but cool hands, the chums of Cedar Creek waited for the return of the ruffians.

For Life or Death!

BOB LAWLESS closed the door of the log-cabin and jammed the wedge into place.

"I guess we'd better let those galeots think it's all as they left it," he said. "They won't know anybody's been here till they see us—and my rifle is the first thing they'll see of us."

"Good!" said Frank Richards.

The three chums, keeping their eyes on the woods about them, moved away from the cabin to a clump of trees within a dozen yards of the door. Taking cover in the underwoods, they waited, out of sight, and watching the cabin.

They hardly spoke as they waited. An hour had passed, when a rustling in the wood came faintly to their ears. Bob gave his comrades a glance.

"I guess they're on hand!" he whispered.

He lifted the rifle to his shoulder, and the muzzle looked out from the foliage, directed towards the cabin. Frank Richards drew a deep breath, and his hand tightened its grip on the cudgel. The moment was at hand now.

From the wood, at a little distance, three forms emerged into sight. Bob Lawless and Beaulerc recognised one of them, Mr. Smith, who had come to the lumber school the day before with his lying tale in quest of an interpreter. They could guess who the other two were—Bocus Bill and Clement.

The French-Canadian was walking between the two ruffians. He tottered a little as he walked. His pallor and the bloodstained bandage above his head gave him a ghastly look.

Bocus Bill was helping, or, rather, dragging the miner along by one arm. The ruffian was evidently in savage mood, and Smith was scowling furiously. The search for the hidden bag of dollars had been unsuccessful; probably the two ruffians realised that Clement had been leading them only on a wild-goose chase.

The French-Canadian tottered on towards the cabin, and Bocus Bill flung him roughly into the grass near the door.

Smith stood looking down upon him, with bitter rage and malice.

"You've had your chance, my buck," he said. "I guess you'll be sorry you wasted our time. You don't get another chance. With the fire burning your feet, I guess you'll tell the frozen truth next time!"

"Stow the chinwag, boss!" grunted Bocus Bill. "The galoot don't understand!"

"I'll make him understand soon!" said Smith. "Get the boy out to interpret while I build the fire."

"Yep."

The words came clearly to the hidden schoolboys. They left no doubt as to the savage intentions of the ruffians.

Smith began to gather a heap of brushwood in a little pile close to where the prisoner lay, while Bocus Bill dragged at the wedge under the cabin door.

Bocus Bill strode into the log-cabin and disappeared from view. Next moment he came striding out of the little doorway. A revolver glittered in his hand now, and his savage eyes swept round the clearing.

"Boss, he's vamoosed!" he exclaimed.

Smith turned back, his arms full of brushwood.

"Impossible! The door was fastened!" he yelled.

"He's lit out, I tell you! Somebody's been here!"

The ruffian was glaring round as he spoke, his revolver raised, evidently ready to shoot at sight.

Bob Lawless hesitated no longer.

Crack!

From the clump of trees came the sharp, ringing report, and it was followed by a fearful yell from Bocus Bill. The bullet tore through his brawny shoulder, and the ruffian went reeling back into the log cabin, and crashed upon the floor.

"Thunder!"

Smith spun round, his eyes seeking the smoke of the rifle, to find whence came that sudden shot. His revolver was raised ready to shoot. Over the glittering barrel his eyes were glaring. The white curl of smoke from the clump of trees caught his eyes at once, and he fired shot after shot without a pause.

The bullets tore through the leaves and branches. But the three schoolboys were in cover behind the trunks, and Bob Lawless was hurriedly but deftly jamming a fresh cartridge in the rifle. He peered cautiously round the trunk. His rifle was raised again.

Five shots had cracked out almost in as many seconds. Smith was reserving his last shot, and springing for cover himself. But he was too late. Even as he sprang towards the nearest tree, Bob's rifle rang out sharply, and he went with a crash to the ground, and lay groaning.

"I guess he's got that in the leg," said Bob Lawless coolly, as he put in a fresh cartridge.

"Come on!" muttered Frank.

The three schoolboys ran out of cover swiftly towards the cabin.

"Amis—mes amis!" exclaimed the French-Canadian joyfully.

Smith raised himself on his elbow. His leg had been broken by Bob Lawless' bullet, and he was unable to rise; but he supported himself on one elbow, and in the other hand he gripped his six-shooter, his eyes blazing over it.

"Drop that!" shouted Bob Lawless.

Whiz!

Frank Richards hurled his cudgel even as Bob spoke. The heavy billet of wood crashed into Smith's face, and he rolled over, his revolver exploding harmlessly as he fell.

"Look out for the other!" exclaimed Beaulere.

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Bocus Bill was groaning just inside the log-cabin.

Bob Lawless led the way, and his rifle covered the wounded ruffian. Bocus Bill had half-raised his revolver, but lowered it again as the rifle-barrel bore full upon him.

"Let up!" he panted. "Let up! I guess I pass!"

"You'd better!" said Bob Lawless grimly. "Take away his shooter, Frank!"

Frank Richards took away Bocus Bill's revolver and the knife from his belt.

"A moi! A moi!" the French-Canadian was calling.

The three schoolboys hurried out to him. Smith, wounded as he was, was trying to creep away into the forest; but he was very quickly stopped.

Beaulere opened his knife and cut the Frenchman loose. Smith's hands were tied with the same cord. He lay in the grass, white with pain, and his eyes glittering at Frank Richards & Co. like a reptile's.

"I guess this is our win!" grinned Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards helped the French-Canadian to his feet as soon as he was freed from the rope.

"All serene!" he said, smiling. "Voici mes amis, Monsieur Clement. Maintenant vous etes libre."

"Je vous remercie, mon enfant," said the French-Canadian. "Mon Dieu! Bons enfants, tout trois!"

Bob Lawless grinned.

"I guess I savvy that much French," he said.

"Right-ho, old scout! We're three of the most bon—I mean, three of the best."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The chap doesn't seem fit to travel," remarked Bob. "I guess you'd better look after him while I fetch somebody from the ranch. I reckon I shall find the popper and Billy Cook hunting for the trail. See that those two galoots don't get away, Franky. I'll leave you the rifle."

And Bob Lawless started on the home trail.

Jules Clement sat in the grass, his back resting against a tree, his white face very bright in the sunlight.

Frank Richards searched the log cabin, and found food for the Canadian, which he ate ravenously. And then Frank gave his attention to the two wounded ruffians. The schoolboys bound up their wounds as well as they could, receiving in return curses and savage scowling, which did not trouble them, however.

It was an hour later that Bob Lawless returned. He did not come alone. Mr. Lawless and Billy Cook and a couple of the ranch cattlemen were with him.

"Safe, Frank?" exclaimed Mr. Lawless.

"Yes, uncle—thanks to Bob!" answered Frank Richards.

"When I found Bob gone, I promised him the biggest trail-roping of his life!" growled the rancher. "But as it's turned out, I'm glad he tried it."

He turned to the French-Canadian, and spoke to him in his own tongue. Then he gave directions to his men.

"Get those scallawags down to Thompson, and hand them over to the sheriff. Better stick them on their horses and lead them. You boys can come with me. We're going to help Mr. Clement get back his dollars."

((Continued on page 36.))



In the wooden gallery there was a sudden gleam of light, and Jack Drake & Co. caught sight of two crouching figures under a shuttered window. "Thieves!" whispered Rodney.

Lost!

"I'M tired!" Tuckey Toodles made that announcement.

The sun had sunk behind the sierras of the South American mainland, and night lay upon Trinidad and upon the wide waters encompassing the island. In the harbour of Port of Spain the old Benbow rode at her cable, and the juniors of the school ship were in their hammocks, with the exception of the three who had been missed at roll-call.

Jack Drake, Rodney, and Tuckey Toodles were still tramping on the wooded hillside, seeking in vain a path back to the town they had recklessly quitted earlier in the day.

Night had fallen with tropical suddenness, and after the sun was gone they had little hope of finding their way, though they still tramped on. They were tired, and their clothes were torn by prickly bush, and one voice at least was loud with complaints.

For about the fiftieth time Tuckey Toodles announced that he was tired. But Tuckey received little sympathy from his companions in misfortune. If he was tired, they were tired, too—a fact which Tuckey seemed to leave out of consideration altogether.

"I'm tired!" repeated Toodles crescendo, as he received no reply from the two Fourth Formers.

"Give us a rest!" growled Rodney. "It's all your fault we're lost! If you hadn't cheeked the back-driver he wouldn't have deserted us and left us here!"

"There'll be a row over our not getting back to the Benbow!" grunted Drake. "I shouldn't

DRAKE & CO.'S NIGHT OUT!

By Owen Conquest.

wonder if Mr. Packe sends a search party for us. Nice for us—to-morrow!"

"Never mind to-morrow!" groaned Tuckey Toodles. "I'm tired and hungry!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"You fellows are horribly selfish!" said Toodles pathetically. "You don't seem to care a bit if I'm walked off my legs! I'm not going any farther! I'm going to sit down!"

"Better keep on," said Rodney. "You don't want to get lost by yourself, I suppose?"

"Well, suppose you fellows join hands and carry me?" suggested Tuckey Toodles brightly.

"Carry you!" murmured Drake.

"C-c-carry you!" stuttered Rodney.

Toodles nodded.

"That's the idea," he said. "You join hands, you know, under me and carry me along; only be jolly careful not to upset me. You know what clumsy asses you are!"

"You—you—"

"You see, I'm tired," said Toodles. "I think you ought to carry me after tiring me out like this. Are you ready?"

"Oh!" gasped Drake. "Yes, we're ready. Join paws, Rodney."

"What the thump—" began Rodney hotly.

Jack Drake & Co. find excitement
when they are lost at night on the
cutskirts of Trinidad!

Jack Drake closed one eye at his chum, and Rodney grinned assent.

"Oh, all right!" he said. "Here you are!"

Tuckey Toodles purred with satisfaction.

"Stoop a bit," he said.

"That all right?" asked Drake meekly.

"Yes, that's all right."

Upon the clasped hands of the chums of the Fourth, Tuckey Toodles took a comfortable seat, steadying himself by catching at the shoulders of the Fourth Formers.

"Ready?" he said. "You can start now. Mind you go steady."

The chums raised him up. It was no light task, for Toodles was the heaviest weight in the school at sea, and it would certainly have been an impossibility to carry him very far. But they hadn't any intention of carrying him far. They carried him as far as the nearest prickly bush, which was about three feet away. There they unclasped hands under him.

"Yarooop!"

Tuckey Toodles let out a demoniac yell as his

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support gave way and he flopped into the prickly bush.

"Yow-ow-ow! Help! I'm stung! I'm bitten! I'm scratched! Yoop! Drag me out! Oh dear! Help!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah! You awful rotters! Oh dear! Yoop!"

Tuckey Toodles scrambled out of the bush. He brandished a very fat fist at the grinning juniors.

"You rotters! You did that on purpose!" he roared.

"Got it first time!" chuckled Drake. "Would you like us to carry you any more, old top?"

"Yah!"

"There's another bush close by," suggested Rodney. "We'll carry you as far as that with pleasure!"

"Yah! Rotter!"

Tuckey Toodles was tired of being carried. He tramped on, supported by his own fat legs, with his chuckling comrades, every now and then emitting a deep groan, which ought to have touched the hearts of the Fourth Formers, but didn't.

In the Dead of Night!

"HARK! What's that?"

Tuckey Toodles stopped suddenly with a gasp. From the shadowy trees close to the three juniors there came a sudden sharp cry.

Drake and Rodney halted, too, staring rather unsteadily into the gloom. They grasped the sticks they carried, very much on their guard. Tuckey Toodles backed behind them.

"Is it a—tiger?" he gasped.

"Fathead! There are no tigers here! Hark!"

The sharp, screaming reply was repeated, so close that it made the juniors jump. There was a rustle in the thick tropical foliage.

"Look out!"

"What—"

Drake and Rodney struck out at the dark shape that loomed out of the trees. An enormous owl fluttered by, with another piercing howl, and disappeared in the shadows.

Jack Drake burst into a laugh.

"An owl! My hat!"

"A dashed owl!" gasped Rodney.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Is it—is it gone?" spluttered Toodles.

"Yes, you blessed funk!" growled Drake. "It was only an owl—a silly owl like yourself! You disturbed it with the silly row you were making!"

"Oh!" said Toodles. "Well, I think I'd better have a rest before I go any farther. You fellows keep watch."

And Tuckey sat down.

"Is that a python Toodles is sitting on?" asked Drake, peering down into the shadows.

Tuckey leaped to his feet with a frantic yell.

"A pup-pup-python!" he howled.

"All serene! It's only a branch," said Drake, with a chuckle. "Now you're up you may as well come on."

"You awful rotter, you were pulling my leg!"

"I'll pull your ear next if you don't stop grousing. Do you think you're the only part of this outfit that's tired?"

"Well, it serves you rotters right!" grumbled Toodles. "You shouldn't have dodged Mr. Packe yesterday, when he was showing us the sights. I say, I don't like Trinidad! I wish I was home at Toodles Towers."

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"I wish you were!" growled Rodney.

Drake chuckled. Tuckey Toodles' description of home scenes were always on the superb side, and it was curious that they had grown more and more superb the farther the Benbow sailed from Old England. Toodles Towers was a new addition, which had come into existence only since the Benbow had reached West Indian waters.

"This blessed island could be jolly nearly put into the park at Toodles Towers," grumbled Tuckey. "I wish I was back there, with the butler serving me a magnificent supper on gold plate. I say, when do you think we shall come to a house, Drake?"

"How should I know, ass? I don't even know if we're going right for Port of Spain. We may be wandering off into the middle of the dashed island, for all I know!"

Tuckey groaned.

"Well, I'm going to take a rest," he said. "I can't keep on; I'm tired. I'm going to sit on this log and rest."

And Tuckey Toodles prepared to sit down. Just as he was about to squat on the log the log moved, and Tuckey jumped up with a howl of terror. A hideous head whirled round towards the schoolboys.

"It's a snake!" panted Rodney.

Jack Drake lashed out with his stick, and there was a horrid, hissing sound as it crashed on the reptile's head.

"Run for it!" panted Rodney.

The three juniors ran, plunging wildly through the tangled shrubberies. There was a sound of hissing and thrashing behind them, but if the reptile was in pursuit, they soon outdistanced it. But they did not stop running till they were a good quarter of a mile from the scene of the encounter. Even Tuckey Toodles forgot that he was tired, till at last they slowed down, panting for breath.

"Wha-a-at was it?" he stuttered.

"A python, I think."

"Ow!"

"We've had a jolly narrow escape," said Drake soberly. "My hat! It isn't all a joke, wandering about the wilds in the tropics after dark. Better not sit on any more logs, Tuckey, in case they turn out to be pythons."

Toodles shuddered. Tired as he was, he was not tempted to sit down again.

The juniors tramped on wearily. It was midnight now, and it was probable that Port of Spain was in bed and asleep, as well as the school on board the Benbow. Perhaps just then the chums of the Fourth regretted that they had yielded to the temptation to leave Mr. Packe's party, and travel off on their own to explore the environs of the Trinidad capital.

"If we could only see a light somewhere!" said Toodles. "I say, doesn't this look like a road?"

"My hat, it does—and it is!" exclaimed Drake.

The tramping trio came out into a beaten track, and they followed it with renewed hope. It led them into an open road, and they followed the road, hoping that it led towards the city.

"Here's a gate," announced Toodles, halting.

It was a green-painted gate, set between two stone pillars, and shadowed by a gigantic ceiba-tree.

The schoolboys stopped. Evidently they had come upon one of the country houses that dot the hillsides out of Port of Spain; but there was not a twinkle of light to be seen, and it was clear that all the inhabitants were asleep.

"We're going in," said Toodles. "At least, I am. I'm jolly well going to ask for a night's lodging."

"I—I suppose we can go in," said Drake, hesitating. "I've heard that Trinidad folk are very hospitable. Blessed if I like waking anybody up at this time of night, though."

"Rats!" growled Toodles.

He pushed the gate, and found that it was not locked. Drake and Rodney followed him in, and the gate shut behind them. Before them was a drive, winding among the beds of luxuriant tropical flowers. In a few minutes they sighted the house beyond—a handsome villa, glimmering in the starlight, with a wooden gallery built for shade, and the windows opening into the gallery. Broad steps led up to it, the house being raised some little distance above the ground, as is usual in Trinidad.

Jack Drake scanned the building, hoping to see a sign that someone was stirring, late as the hour was.

"Come on!" mumbled Toodles. "We're jolly well going to knock 'em up, and ask for a bed!"

"Hold on a minute—"

"Look here—"

"Shut up, you fat idiot!" whispered Drake fiercely. "There's somebody there! Look, Rodney!"

In the wooden gallery there was a sudden gleam of light, which evidently came from a lantern that had been turned on. For a moment the startled schoolboys caught sight of two crouching figures under a shuttered window; then the light vanished, and all was gloom again.

They stood still, their hearts beating fast. Even Tuckey Toodles was silenced by the sight of those two crouching, sinister figures that had been revealed for a moment by the glimmer of the lantern.

Benbows to the Rescue!

"THIEVES!" whispered Rodney.

Tuckey Toodles backed a little into the shadow of a clump of mangoes beside the path. Drake and Rodney remained where they were, tensely watching.

There was no doubt about it—the crouching figures at that hour of the night outside the window could mean nothing else. The wandering schoolboys had arrived at the villa at the very moment when thieves were at work.

As they watched in silence the lantern winked out again, and they caught another glimpse of the thieves. Both of them were in sear-faring garb. One was kneeling, at work with some tool on the window-shutter, and his back was towards the juniors. The other, bending over him and holding the lantern, was a swarthy Spanish half-breed.

Darkness again.

"What are we going to do?" muttered Rodney. "We can't leave the rascals to rob the house."

"No fear! Hark!"

There was a faint sound in the distance.

Leaving the shadow of the trees, the juniors stole on tiptoe towards the house. Silently they reached the foot of the wooden gallery, the floor of which was on a level with their heads. There was a vague sound of movements, and a low muttering of voices above, and the juniors realised that the thieves had succeeded in opening the window-shutter.

They hesitated, not knowing what to do. As

they stood in painful uncertainty, there was a sudden sound of commotion from the house. A sharp cry of alarm, and a Spanish oath, came to their ears. The sound of a struggle followed.

That put an end to their hesitation. There was violence being done within a few yards of them, and it was no time to hesitate.

"Come on!" panted Drake.

Gripping his stick, he ran to the steps and leaped up them, with Rodney at his heels. They came into the outside gallery with a rush.

Lights gleamed from an open window—one of the green-painted shutters stood wide open. Within, on the floor, stood a lantern, evidently placed there hurriedly by one of the rascals as the alarm was given.

A burly, brown-faced man was struggling on the floor with one of the intruders, and the other—the half-breed—the hovering round them, a knife in his hand. The swarthy ruffian was watching his opportunity to strike, while from the other parts of the house came already the sounds of alarm.

As Jack Drake burst in at the open window the Spanish half-breed was about to thrust with his knife at his comrade's adversary. But the sudden appearance of the Benbow junior caused the ruffian to start back.

Before he could recover from his surprise, Drake lashed out with the stick, catching the dusky wrist, and the knife clattered to the floor. The half-breed, with a growl of rage, flung himself upon the junior.

"Back up, Rodney!" panted Drake as the swarthy ruffian gripped him and bore him backwards.

He went down with a crash, the clutching half-breed upon him, and Rodney sprang to his aid at once. The two juniors and the half-breed rolled on the floor together, while the struggle between the other rascal and his adversary went on.

Voices were calling in the house now, and the door of the room was burst open, and a throng of negro servants appeared, some carrying lamps. A lad of about sixteen was first in the room.

"Father!"

"Help here, Arthur!"

Drake and Rodney had the half-breed down now on his back, and Drake was kneeling on his chest. But the other ruffian, realising that his game was up now, tore himself loose and made a bound for the window. In an instant he was outside, and was running hard round the gallery to the steps, to vanish into the darkness of the grounds.

The man he had been assailing staggered breathlessly to his feet, with the assistance of his son.

"Father, you're not hurt?"

"No, no, my boy!"

The burly gentleman turned to the startled crowd of black servants at the doorway.

"Search the grounds for him! Go at once—all of you!"

There was an excited howl from the negroes.

"We catch him Mass' Cazalet."

Then there was a pattering of bare feet, and a shouting of voices in all directions.

Meanwhile, the Spanish half-breed had sullenly given up the struggle. The two juniors were too much for him, and he was helplessly pinned under them on the floor.

Mr. Cazalet stared rather grimly at the scene.

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"Got him!" said Drake, looking up. "You seem to have secured him, my boy," said the Trinidad gentleman. "Arthur, get a cord and tie up that rascal's hands."

"Yes, dad."

"We'll hold him for a bit, then, sir," said Rodney. "The rotter's as slippery as an eel."

The half-breed scowled up savagely at his captors. In a minute or less Arthur Cazalet hurried back into the room with a cord in his hands, and the captured rascal's hands were tied behind him. He was marched away by a black servant. Then Mr. Cazalet turned to the juniors.

"You seem to have done me a service, young men," he said. "May I inquire how you came here?"

"Certainly, sir," answered Jack Drake cheerfully. "We'd lost our way, and were thinking of knocking you up to ask for shelter when we saw those two rascals at your window. So we chipped in."

"Thank you very much. I fancy that half-breed would have used the knife if he had not been stopped. You have saved me from robbery—perhaps something more serious. You are very welcome here," said the Trinidad gentleman, with a smile. "It was my good fortune that led your footsteps in this direction, I think."

There was a roar of voices in the starlit grounds, and Arthur Cazalet ran to the window.

"They've got him, dad!"

"Good! A couple of ruffians off some foreign ship in the harbour, I suppose," said Mr. Cazalet.

"I saw that ruffian as he jumped out," said

Arthur. "He had a patch over one eye. I think I should know him again."

Jack Drake started. There was a man on board the Benbow with only one eye, and for a moment Drake wondered whether it was Peg Slaney who had been concerned in the attempted robbery.

He watched rather eagerly for the appearance of the prisoner as the jubilant negroes dragged their captive towards the house and up the steps into the gallery outside the window. But a moment or two later a terrified and dismayed howl enlightened Drake and Rodney.

"Yah! Leggo, you dashed niggers! I ain't a burglar—I tell you I'm Rupert de Vere Toodles, and I ain't a burglar at all!"

"Here's de thief, Mass' Cazalet!"

And the hapless Tuckey Toodles was bundled bodily in at the french window, with three or four brawny negroes grasping him.

In Clover!

"A BOY!" exclaimed Mr. Cazalet in wonder.

"Yaroorh! Leggo! I ain't a thief!" howled Tuckey Toodles. "Leggo! Don't I keep on telling you I ain't a burglar, you silly niggers?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Drake.

"Oh, you're there, Drake, are you, you rotter?" gasped Tuckey Toodles. "Tell these lunatics that I ain't a burglar, you beast! Oh dear!"

"Do you know this boy?" asked the planter, looking at Drake.

Drake chuckled.

"Yes, sir; he belongs to our school. We left him in the garden when we ran in to tackle the thieves."

Mr. Cazalet smiled.

"Oh, I see! My servants have made a mistake, and allowed the thief to get away while they seized your friend. Release him at once, Sambo; he is a friend of these young men. Search the grounds again."

The chattering negroes crowded out, and Tuckey Toodles sank down on a chair and gasped for breath.

"Groooh! If this is the Trinidad hospitality I've read so much about, I don't think much of it!"

"I'm sorry for the mistake, my young friend," said Mr. Cazalet kindly. "My servants naturally did not know you—"

"Ow! Wow!"

"You will remain here for the night," continued the planter. "I will give instructions for a room to be prepared for you at once. If you have lost your way, and have been wandering, no doubt you are hungry—"

"Yes, rather!" said Tuckey Toodles promptly. "Famished, sir!"

"Come with me," said Mr. Cazalet. "Arthur, my boy, you may go back to bed."

"Right-ho, dad! Good-night, you chaps!" said Arthur Cazalet, with a frank smile and a nod to the chums of the Benbow.

"Good-night!" answered Drake and Rodney cordially.

Mr. Cazalet put on a dressing-gown and led the way, and the three juniors of the Benbow were not sorry to sit down to an ample meal of cold chicken and other comestibles. Over that very late supper Drake explained how they had



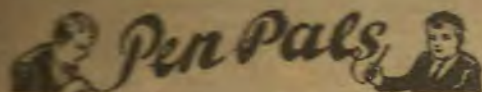
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"come to lose their way, Tuckey Toodles putting in pathetically that it was all Drake's fault.

"But I don't mind, as it's turned out," said Tuckey, beaming. "It's worth a licking from old Packe to have a spread like this!"

"Well, I cannot say I'm sorry you have lost your way to-day, as it has turned out," said Mr. Cazalet, with a smile. "So you belong to the Benbow in the harbour?"

"Yes, that's our ship, sir," said Drake. "It's a school at sea, you know. When we're at home, we're St. Winifred's."

"I dare say you've heard of St. Winny's, sir?" said Tuckey Toodles, with his mouth full.

"I have heard of St. Winny's certainly," said Mr. Cazalet, with a smile. "I happen to be an old boy of St. Winifred's."

"Really, sir!" exclaimed Drake and Rodney together.

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"It is very nearly thirty years since I left," said the planter, with a smile, "so I cannot suppose my name is familiar to you—John Cazalet."

"I know the name, though, now I think of it," said Drake. "I've seen it in the school roll. You were captain of the school in your time?"

The planter nodded. "I am glad to meet St. Winifred's boys," he said. "I hope you will look on my house as your home while your ship remains at Trinidad."

"Jolly glad to!" said Tuckey Toodles, without giving his companions a chance to speak.

"You're very kind, sir," said Drake.

"And I suppose you are likely to get into trouble on the ship for leaving your party in the town as you did?"

"Oh, we don't mind a licking, sir!" said Drake. "I'm sorry if Mr. Packe has been worrying about us, that's all!"

"You will not want to rise early after staying up so late," said Mr. Cazalet. "If you like, I will ride down to Port of Spain early in the morning, and visit your ship. Possibly I can obtain your pardon, when I acquaint your master with the service you have rendered me to-night."

"Oh, good!" said Toodles.

"You're awfully good, sir," said Drake gratefully. "Of course, we'd rather not be hauled over the coals if we can help it. But it's giving you a lot of trouble."

"Not at all. I shall be glad to see St. Winifred's afloat," said the planter, with a smile. "Now, if you are finished supper, Sambo shall show you to your room."

So the three juniors bade good-night to the

hospitable planter, and followed black Sambo to the room that had been prepared for them.

"We seem to have fallen into clover," remarked Jack Drake, as the door closed behind the black major-domo. "Those beds look comfy—better than the bush I thought we should have to sleep in!"

"Yes, rather!" said Rodney, with a smile. "They seem jolly nice people here, too!"

There were cool pyjamas laid out on the beds, and mosquito-netting rigged over them. Nothing had been forgotten for the comfort of the guests, sudden and unexpected as their visit was. Jack Drake & Co. turned in with great satisfaction.

And in about a minute and a half the three were in deep slumber, from which they did not awaken till the sun was high in the heavens; and a new tropical day was blazing down upon Trinidad.

Next Week: "TAKING TUCKEY FOR A RIDE!"

THE TRAIL OF DANGER!

(Continued from page 30.)

"Good!" said Bob.

And while Smith and Bocus Bill were taken away by the cattlemen, the rancher and the schoolboys started with the French-Canadian through the forest.

Clement was smiling and joyful now. In company with the rustlers, he had failed to find the hiding-place of the bag of money; but he did not fail now. Within an hour they stopped at a hollow tree in the heart of the timber, and Clement turned to Frank.

"Tei," he said. "Voulez vous—"

"You bet!" answered Frank.

He squeezed himself into the hollow trunk and groped for the bag. In a couple of minutes it was handed out to the miner.

"Good!" said Mr. Lawless. "Maintenant, monsieur, vous allez chez moi."

"Merci, monsieur!" answered Clement gratefully.

And the miner from Cascade was taken to the Lawless Ranch for the attention he so badly needed.

Bob Lawless rubbed his eyes when he rose from the dinner-table some time later.

"We didn't get much sleep last night," he remarked. "I feel sleepy. Hallo, popper! What is it?"

The rancher pointed to the clock.

"School!" he answered.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" said Bob Lawless. "Blessed if I hadn't forgotten school. I say, popper, we shall be a bit late for afternoon lessons!"

"Better late than never!" answered Mr. Lawless cheerfully.

And Frank Richards & Co. rode away to Cedar Creek School, and the rest of the afternoon was spent in Miss Meadows' class.

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Printed in England and published every Wednesday by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription rates: Inland and abroad, 11s. per annum; 5s. 6d. for six months. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Ltd., and for South Africa: Central News Agency, Ltd.—Saturday, May 27th, 1939.