

"THE NIZAM'S DIAMOND!" EXCITING NEW YARN OF MYSTERY,
FUN AND ADVENTURE AT ST. JIM'S.

The **GEM** 2^D

**THE
HAT-KICK!**





Blake Answers Back!

R. Douglas, of E. Finchley, London, N.2, writes:

Has anybody at St. Jim's (except Baggy Trimble) ever located Trimble Hall?

ANSWER: No--and neither has Baggy!

"Inquisitive," nr. Canterbury, Kent, writes:

1. How many boys are there in the Sixth?
2. What is Baggy Trimble's father's profession?
3. What does Fatty Wynn weigh?
4. How much pocket money do you get a month?

ANSWER: 1. About 20. 2. Trimble says his pater is "something big in the City." Big, right enough! No, not a head chef! 3. 14 st. 8 lb. at the last weigh-in. 4. Not half enough. "Quizz" again some time!

"R. S." of Victoria, B.C., writes:

I only hope your page is a permanent feature. But first, a brickbat. Why the continual doubting of Talbot? Is it fair? Now a bouquet. Lowther, Clive, and yourself are tops. Lowther for his superb comic column; yourself because you're such an all-round "swell" fellow and a grand sport. Another brickbat. How can you stand D'Arcy? Many's the time I've wanted to give him a good, swift kick. Photo herewith; it made the camera "fold up"! Good luck to you and your feature, St. Jim's, and the GEM. "Long may you reign."

ANSWER: Nobody, I think, doubts Talbot now. But he'd like to thank you for your loyal support. Spare Lowther's blushes and my own! As D'Arcy's friend, I must insist that with all his peculiarities he's "tops"---"swell"---and how! Monty Lowther has just read the jokes you enclosed, and says: "Greetings, R. S.! Must tell you: 'I've eaten beef all my life, and now I'm strong as an ox,' said Grundy. 'That's funny,' frowned Mellish. 'I've eaten fish all my life, but still I can't swim a stroke!' " Monty's gone. Loads of luck. May your "balance" (biking or otherwise) never be upset! I liked your drawing, but---staff artist's tip---for reproduction use a pen, and as few lines as poss!



"R.S." of British Columbia, Canada.
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Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him c/o 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 a John Blunt himself! But keep your letter SHORT, and enclose if possible a photo of yourself for reproduction on this page. No photos can be returned.

Victor Cox, of Twickenham, Middlesex, writes:

1. How tall and what weight is Tom Merry?
2. I am 13. What Form would I be in? And would I be bigger than the average boy in the Form? I am five feet tall.
3. How did St. Jim's get its name?
4. How old is Taggles? Good-bye.

ANSWER: 1. Tom Merry is 5 ft. 5½ ins. tall, and 9 st. 2 lb. in weight. 2. You'd be in the Third, and your height would be a good average. 3. Originally a monastery dedicated to Saint James stood on this spot, and the name was perpetuated when the school was built on the original foundations. 4. Now you want to know something no St. Jim's man has ever managed to discover---not even Baggy Trimble, the school's champion gossip! Rumour has it Taggles was left over from monastic times---but the truth probably is he is in his late sixties. Not good-bye, I hope? Make it "Au revoir."



Victor Cox, of Twickenham.

BRIEF REPLIES.

"Earnest Inquirer," Edgware.---My beard is nicely trimmed these days, thanks. H. W. & Co. at the end of the GEM? What opinions? J. Smith, Highbury, N.5.---Test of a sportsman is not whether he can hand it out, but whether he can take it. Form varies. I think I can take a jolt. Can you? J. W. C., of Cardiff.---Roylance could just beat Grundy. At footer, Saints threw with Greyfriars and beat Rookwood. "Constant Reader," of Mitcham, Surrey.---You sound tough to me; but at 13½ you'd be in the Third. Who do you resemble? Send me a picture. Connie Cooper, of S. Hackney, London.---Let you into the secret if we ever meet. J. B., of Ardrossan, Ayrshire.---Reilly collects stamps; can't quote what Wally D'Arcy said when I told him you thought him too cocky! P. A. M., of Scrooby.---One or two seniors have motor-bikes, yes. Trimble weighs just on 14 stone, and his favourite dish is ice-cream. (Lots of!)

GREAT NEW YARN OF FUN AND EXCITEMENT AT ST. JIM'S, STARRING ALL YOUR FAVOURITES IN THE FINAL ADVENTURE OF THE BLACK BOX MYSTERY!



The study door was suddenly hurled wide, and a crowd of juniors appeared in the doorway. Baggy jumped up, and his hand whisked behind him, with the black box in it. "Here he is!" exclaimed Blake. "Twimble, you fat wottah —" began Arthur Augustus. "I—I say, what's the row?" asked Trimble in alarm.

CHAPTER 1.

Back to St. Jim's.

"BARGE!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Sheer off!" roared Figgins.

"Wats! Barge those New House boundahs, deah boys!"

There was a swarm of St. Jim's fellows at Wayland Junction on the first day of the term. The train that was to take them on to the school was getting crowded. So when Tom Merry & Co. spotted an empty carriage, they naturally headed for that carriage—all the more because three New House fellows stood on guard at the door.

During the Easter holidays, House rows had been rather forgotten. But it was only necessary for School House and New House men to

see one another again to revive the same on the spot.

Figgins, Kerr, and Wynn of the New House stood on guard at the door of that carriage. They were keeping it for New House fellows.

At least, that was their idea. Tom Merry & Co.'s idea seemed to be that they were keeping it for School House fellows. Anyhow, they were going to take possession, and possession was nine points of the law, and the tenth point could be left to take care of itself.

Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther of the Shell barged the New House trio. Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy of the Fourth barged with them. Seven School House men were rather too many for three New House.

Kerr went spinning to the right. Fatty Wynn went spinning to the left. George Figgins went backwards into the open doorway, his long legs

Back to St. Jim's and lessons! The flying schoolboys return to the old school—to find that they are still haunted by the mystery of Gussy's little black box!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

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flying in the air. Three wrathful yells were blended into one.

"You cheeky School House sweeps!" spluttered Kerr, as he sat down.

"Ooogh!" gurgled Fatty Wynn, as he rolled.

"Oh!" gasped Figgins, as he landed on his back. "Ow! Wooh!"

"Shift that daddy-long-legs!" exclaimed Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tom Merry grasped one long leg; Jack Blake grasped the other. Figgy's legs were long, and gave plenty of hold. Figgy was hooked out of the carriage by his legs, his arms thrashing wildly, and his voice heard on its top note.

"Pack in!" grinned Manners.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Thanks for keeping this carriage for us, Figgy!"

"So kind of you, old chap."

Tom Merry & Co. packed in. Figgins & Co. sat up on the platform. They spluttered for breath, and blinked at the crowd of cheery, smiling faces looking out at them.

Figgins & Co. scrambled up. They were rather untidy, and rather dusty, and considerably breathless. And they had lost that carriage. Probably they had lost that train, also, for the other carriages were filling fast.

"Come on!" roared Figgins.

He charged. Figgins feared no foe, and he was too excited to count odds. He charged into the crowded carriage. But the odds were there, whether Figgy counted them or not. And the next moment Figgins sat on the platform again, with a bump that almost shook Wayland Junction.

This time Figgins did not rise again so quickly. He sat and gurgled for breath.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Try again, Figgy!"

"Fwightfully kind of you to keep this caw-wige for us, Figgy!"

"Urrrggh!" gurgled George Figgins.

Fatty Wynn gave him a hand up. Figgins stood leaning on his Welsh chum, gurgling. Doors were slamming along the train. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with a cheery grin, lifted his silk topper in polite farewell.

"Au wevoir, Figgins! Pwobably you will catch anoathah twain, if you wait long enough, deah boy," chortled Arthur Augustus.

"Urgh! Wurrgh!" gurgled Figgins.

Kerr made a sudden grab. That silk hat changed ownership in the twinkling of an eye.

Kerr of the Fourth stepped back, waving it in the air. Arthur Augustus, grabbing after it, nearly toppled out of the carriage.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, Monty Lowther grabbed him by his back hair just in time.

"Yawooh!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Just saved you, old fellow—"

"You fwightful ass, leave off dwaggin' my hair out by the woots!" roared Arthur Augustus. He jerked his noble head loose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Kerr, you wottah, give me my hat! Do you heah me, you New House swob! Give me my hat!"

"Hold on, Gussy!" howled Blake, grabbing at his noble chum. "You'll lose the train—"

"I must get my hat, Blake!"

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"Never mind your hat! We've got the carriage—"

"Wats! Leave go my arm, you fathead! I am goin' to get my hat—"

Kerr, backing across the platform, waved the silk topper in triumph. Figgins gave a breathless chortle.

"Pass!" he shouted.

Kerr passed the hat. Figgins took the pass, catching the topper with his toe, and sending it high into the air. Fatty Wynn's foot caught it as it came down, and it whirled along the platform.

"Bai Jove! Look at my hat!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Will you let go, Blake? Will you let go, Dig? Will you let go, Hewwies, you ass?"

"Can't lose the train," said Blake. "Besides, that topper will be a bushy by the time you get it!"

"I wefuse to twavel without a hat! I am goin' to thwash those New House wottahs and get that hat—"

"Keep clear of that door—"

"I wefuse— Ow! Ooogh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

His friends dragged him back as a porter slammed the carriage door. The engine shrieked. The train was moving.

"Too late, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"You uttah ass! I want my hat! That feahful wottah has bagged my hat! They are playin' football with my toppah! I insist—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a roar from the platform.

Arthur Augustus, from the carriage window, watched with anguished eyes the harrowing fate of his hat. Figgins & Co. seemed consoled for the loss of their carriage by the capture of that hat.

It had been a really beautiful silk topper when Kerr grabbed it. It's beauty was already a thing of the past. It looked rather like a concertina now.

It flew in the air, and every time it came down a foot met it, and it flew up again. But the train was moving, and there was no rescue for that hat.

"Stop the twain, you fellows!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pull the communication cord! Stop the twain, somehow!"

"I don't think!" grinned Blake.

"You uttah ass, I must have my hat! Oh cwikey! Look!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Oh cwumb! The uttah wottah! The feahful wuffian! Look!"

Figgins had the hat again. This time his kick at the hat had fatal effects. His foot went inside the hat, and emerged through the crown. The silk hat encircled Figgy's long leg.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins stood on one leg like a stork, the other in the air, with the silk hat circling the ankle. From the platform and the train came a howl of laughter. But Arthur Augustus D'Arcy did not join in it. Gussy's was the only serious face—but it was awfully and fearfully serious as he gazed his last on that hapless hat. The train rolled out of the station, and the last Arthur Augustus saw of his hat was a mere wreck of a once-beautiful topper, brandished at the end of Figgy's long leg.

CHAPTER 2.

Baggy Wants to Know !

"I SAY, Gussy——"

"Pway wun away, Twimble!"

"But what's that?" asked Baggy Trimble.

"I wecomend you not to be cuwious, Twimble. I see no weason whatevah why I should tell you that there is a black box in this packet. Pway run away!"

Baggy Trimble grinned, but he did not run away. He stood in the doorway of Study No. 6, in the School House at St. Jim's, and eyed Arthur Augustus with curious inquisitiveness.

Arthur Augustus stood at the study table, unpacking what looked like a registered packet. It was rather odd for a fellow to have had a registered packet on the first day of term.

Trimble was interested in that packet.

He was still more interested in a hamper that stood in a corner of the study.

The fat Baggy had, in fact, expected to find that study unoccupied—except by the hamper! Everybody—or nearly everybody—was in Hall; Kildare of the Sixth, the captain of St. Jim's, was on his legs, and everybody—or nearly everybody—was interested in what the captain of the school had to say. So Baggy Trimble had naturally calculated on a clear field when he tracked that hamper to its fair!

Instead of which he found the swell of St. Jim's in the study, unpacking that registered packet.

"Just come?" asked Trimble.

"No!"

"Then how did you get it?"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy paused in his task, and turned his eyeglass severely upon the fat and inquisitive Baggy.

"I have requested you to wun away, Twimble!" he said. "I object vewy strongly to your inquisitiveness. It does not mattah to you in the least whethah this packet came to-day, or whethah it has been waitin' for me heah."

"Oh! Something you sent from abroad in the hols?" asked Baggy. He peered at the label. "It's addressed to you here, care of Dr. Holmes. Is that a French stamp on it?"

"It is an Italian stamp, Twimble. Fwench stamps are not used in Italy, you ass!"

"You sent it home from Italy?"

"I wefuse to satisfy your cuwiosity on that point, Twimble! Pway wun away. The fact is, I do not desiah anyone to see the black box when I take it out, as it is wathah a secwet."

"Oh, jiminy!" said Trimble.

Arthur Augustus glanced round the study. He picked up a Latin grammar from a pile of school books recently unpacked. He poised that Latin grammar in the air and took aim.

"Where will you have it, Trimble?" he inquired.

Baggy did not seem to want it anywhere. He backed out of the study and slammed the door.

Thus relieved of the inquisitive Baggy, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went on unpacking the registered packet.

But the inquisitive Baggy was not far away!

He was, in fact, outside the study door, with an eye to the keyhole! No such suspicion crossed Arthur Augustus' unsuspicious mind.

From the packet he drew a little black box—oval in shape, rather smaller than an egg. It

was made of ebony, and did not seem to have any opening. It was, in fact, the mysterious little black box that had haunted Tom Merry & Co. all through their flying trip in the holidays—until at last it had been got rid of by sending it off by registered post, to await Gussy's return to St. Jim's at the new term.

On the first day of term the headmaster was a busy man, and Arthur Augustus had not bothered him about that packet. Now, however, that the Head was a little more at leisure, Gussy had asked for it, and it had been handed over to him.

The Head, of course, knew nothing about the mysterious black box. Probably he supposed that the packet contained some curio picked up by Arthur Augustus in his holiday travels. Anyhow, he had locked it up in his safe till the new term; and now it had been handed over to D'Arcy.

Arthur Augustus was chiefly anxious to be done with it.

All sorts of perils had encompassed the flying shoolboys in their air-trip over Europe, on account of that black box.

Giuseppe Fosco, the dago, had tracked them till, in the Italian Alps, he had been knocked out by Pawson, Lord Eastwood's valet, who was in charge of the holiday party.

That ought to have ended the trouble of the black box—but it hadn't. For after Giuseppe was done with it, it turned out that Pawson himself was after the mysterious article, and Pawson would certainly have had it but for the wariness of Manners of the Shell.

Now that he was back at St. Jim's, Arthur Augustus hoped to see the American who had entrusted it to his keeping, and hand it over and see the last of it!

"Bothah the thing!" Baggy, outside, heard the muttered words. "A fellow couldn't wefuse to take charge of the wotten thing when the man was cwocked and had a wotten dago aftah him! But, weally, I wish he would turn up pwetty soon and take the beastly thing off my hands!"

Baggy, at the keyhole, blinked at the black box in inquisitive surprise. He was quite puzzled and fearfully interested.

Arthur Augustus, with the little black box in his hand, stepped to a desk in the corner of the study.

He opened the desk, placed the black box within, and placed a heap of papers over it.

"That's all wight!" Baggy heard him murmur.

Then he crossed to the door to go down and join his friends in Hall.

Baggy executed a prompt retreat. He backed into Study No. 5 as Arthur Augustus opened the door of Study No. 6.

From that study the grinning Baggy watched the elegant figure of the swell of St. Jim's disappear down the stairs.

Ten seconds after D'Arcy was gone, Baggy Trimble was in Study No. 6. A few seconds more and the desk was open, and the black box in Baggy's fat hands.

"Oh, jiminy!" murmured Trimble.

He stared at that little black box in great surprise and curiosity. Had it been possible to open it, it would have been opened at once and its contents, if any, revealed to Baggy's inquisitive eyes.

But it did not seem possible to open it. There

were curved lines on the outer surface, but no trace of an opening.

Baggy twisted and turned it in his fat paws, hoping to get it open somehow, but it remained obstinately shut.

Baggy's curiosity was intense. He was going to know what was in that queer black box. But his interest in the hamper was deeper and keener—and some of the fellows might come up to Study No. 6. The black box could wait, the hamper couldn't!

So Baggy shut the desk and slipped the box into his pocket. He was not going, of course, to pinch it. Even Baggy had a limit. He was going to examine it at his leisure later. In the meantime, he concentrated on the hamper.

It was a well-stocked hamper from Eastwood House that Arthur Augustus had brought back to school with him.

It was much less well-stocked when Baggy had been busy on it for a few minutes!

On the other hand, Baggy's pockets were extremely well-stocked!

Baggy bulged all over, in fact! All available cargo space—as well as Baggy's mouth—was packed to capacity when the fat Baggy retreated from Study No. 6.

In his own Study No. 2 Baggy Trimble sat down to a feast of the gods! Speeches in Hall did not interest Baggy. For a long, long time Baggy was busy—getting stickier and stickier with every busy moment—and not till he had parked the last crumb did he remember even the black box!

CHAPTER 3.

The Man on the Phone!

"MERRY!"

"Yes, sir!"

It was the following day, and Tom Merry was talking with Talbot of the Shell in the quad, after morning class, when Mr. Railton called to him from his study window.

Tom left Talbot and crossed over to the Housemaster's window. There was a slight frown on Mr. Railton's face. He had been glancing to and fro from the window before he called to the captain of the Shell, as if in search of some other person.

"Do you know where D'Arcy of the Fourth Form is, Merry?" asked the Housemaster. "Will you please find him and send him to my study?"

"Yes, sir."

"You may tell him, Merry, that some person has called him up on my telephone and is waiting to speak to him."

"Oh, very well, sir!"

Tom understood the slight knitting of the Housemaster's brow as he heard that. Housemaster's telephones were not installed for the use of juniors!

Railton was apparently going to let Gussy take the call—instead of snapping off the caller, as Ratcliff, the Housemaster of the New House, would certainly have done. But he was not exactly pleased.

"Seen Gussy?" Tom called out, as he came on Manners and Lowther in the quad.

"Yes, I saw him," answered Lowther.

"Where, old bean?"

"On the Rialto, in Venice," answered Monty affably.

"Wha-a-t?"

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"But that was a bit over a week ago," added the funny man of the Shell. "Did you mean later than that?"

"You howling ass!" roared Tom. "Railton's waiting for him to take a phone call in his study. Do you know where he is?"

"No; but I'll tell you how to get him," said the cheerful Monty. "Make a noise like a silk hat and he will come running!"

"Fathead!" hooted Tom, and he went farther afield.

"Seen D'Arcy, Trimble?"

"He, he! Yes; he's rowing with his pals over by the New House," answered Baggy agreeably.

Tom Merry gave the fat Baggy a look, but he had no time to give him a kick. He cut off towards the New House at a run.

There he came on the four chums of Study No. 6. Three of them were arguing with Arthur Augustus D'Arcy—not exactly rowing, as the fat Baggy had declared. But the argument was a little emphatic.

"Ass!" Blake was saying

"Chump!" was Dig's remark.

"Fathead!" said Herries.

"I am waitin' for you fellows to allow me to pwoceed to the New House!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with dignity. "I am goin' to thwash those wottahs for wuinin' my hat yestahday at Wayland—"

"Gussy, old man!" called out Tom.

"That bwute Figgins played a wotten twick with my hat the last day of last term!" went on the indignant Gussy. "Now he has played a wotten twick with my hat the first day of this term! I am goin' to thwash Figgins—and while I am about it, I shall thwash Kerr and Wynn, too!"

Tom Merry chuckled. Arthur Augustus seemed to him to have taken on rather a large order! Thrashing George Figgins was no easy task, to begin with; and he strongly suspected that, after thrashing Figg, there would not be a lot left of Gussy for Kerr and Wynn to deal with.

"Gussy, old bean—" He grabbed Gussy's shoulder.

"Pway do not bothah now, Tom Mewwy! I am goin' to thwash Figgins and Kerr and Wynn—"

"Why not thrash the whole jolly old New House while you're about it?" suggested Blake. "They're a scrubby lot, and a whopping all round would do them good. Begin with Ratty, the Housemaster, and work down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

"Railton's waiting for you, Gussy!" bawled Tom Merry. "Somebody's on the phone for you! Does your tailor know you're back?"

"Bai Jove! If my tailah has wung me up I shall have to cut off, and Figgins will have to wait!"

And Arthur Augustus cut off to the School House, to the relief of his chums, who were uneasy about what might happen if he began thrashing George Figgins—though their uneasiness was not on Figg's account.

"D'Arcy, someone has called you on my telephone," said Mr. Railton, as the swell of St. Jim's entered his Housemaster's study. "It is some man who speaks with an American accent."

"Then it cannot be my tailah, sir," said Arthur Augustus innocently. "Pewwaps it is an American chap we met in the hols."

"He gave the name of Hoot," said Mr. Railton.

"Bai Jove! Then it isn't that chap. I weally don't know who it is, sir."

"I will allow you to take the call, D'Arcy, if it is, as the man states, a matter of urgency," said Mr. Railton. "The man stated that it is in connection with some box, and that you would understand."

"Oh, the black box!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "I undahstand, sir, but I nevah knew the man's name."

"The black box?" repeated Mr. Railton. "What do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"Pewwaps you may wemembah, sir, at the end of last term, I came on an American chap on the footpath in Wayland Wood, who was cwooked frowm fallin' off his motah-bike?" said Arthur Augustus. "He gave me a box to mind for him, and said that he would ask me for it latah, when he got about again."

Mr. Railton stared.

"This is very extraordinary, D'Arcy!" he exclaimed. "It was somewhat thoughtless of you to take charge of any article for a stranger."

"The chap was feahfully cwooked, sir, when his jiggah ewashed, and I thought it was up to me to do anythin' I could for a poor fellow who had seweral arms and legs bwoken—"

"Well, well! You may take the call!" said

Mr. Railton. "You had better return the man his box, or whatever it is, as soon as possible."

"Yaas, sir! I expect he has wung me up to ask for it, as I dare say he knows we are back for the new term now, sir."

"Very well!" said the School House master; and he left the study, leaving Arthur Augustus to take his call.

D'Arcy picked up the receiver, which was off the instrument. A nasal voice came through the moment he placed it to his ear. The man at the other end was already speaking:

"Say, you figure on keeping a guy standing here waiting for an answer till the cows come home? I guess—"

"Sowwy to keep you waitin'!" said Arthur Augustus politely into the transmitter. "You see, this is my Housemaster's telephone, and—"

"You Mr. D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"The young guy I handed that pesky box to in Wayland Wood six or seven weeks ago?"

"Yaas, if you are the same man."

"I'll say I'm that very guy!"

"Yaas, I seem to wecognise your voice," admitted Arthur Augustus.

"And I'll tell a man, I sure am wise to your toot, big boy!" A chuckle followed that remark—though why the man chuckled, Arthur Augustus did not know. "I'll mention that



Kerr's eyes fairly popped as he opened the door of the visitor's room and looked in. Arthur Augustus was lying on his back on the floor, bound hand and foot and gagged. Kneeling by the side of the swell of St. Jim's was the portly man. "Where is the black box?" he was saying. "I have searched your study and have not found it!"

a galoot wouldn't forget it in a hurry. Nope! Say, you got that leetle black box safe?"

"Quite safe, Mr. Hoot."

"That's fine! I guess I've been waiting for you to get back to your school to collect it!" said the nasal voice. "I'll mention that I'm powerful anxious to see my box again. I surely reckoned that dago Beppo would have had it off'n you."

"He twied a good many times," explained Arthur Augustus. "I weally do not know how he knew I had it—unless you told him—"

"Mebbe I told him!" grunted the man at the other end. "Mebbe he got me when I was lying all broke up in that wood, and mebbe he parked me in a place I couldn't get out of, and mebbe he asked me where it was, with a dago sticker half an inch through my skin! And mebbe I put him wise, because I surely didn't want that sticker to go in any farther!"

"Bai Jove!"

"Say, you got clear of Giuseppe?" The nasal voice had a note of surprise and incredulity in it. "That dago never got you, or got the black box off'n you?"

"Wathah not!"

"I'll say that's the noos! I'll tell a man, that's the joyful tidings! And then some! I'm telling you!"

Arthur Augustus smiled over the telephone. That black box had had a remarkable series of narrow escapes. It was no wonder that the original owner had doubted whether it was still in D'Arcy's possession.

Probably he had had little doubt that it had fallen into the thievish hands of Giuseppe Fosco. It was very plain that he was both surprised and immensely relieved to be assured that it was still safe in D'Arcy's keeping.

"It's all wight!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "If you call at the school, any time affah class, I will hand it ovah to you, Mr. Hoot."

"Mebbe you'd push it along by post?" suggested the voice on the telephone. "I'd hate to bother you at your school."

"No feah!" answered Arthur Augustus promptly.

"Say, I reckoned you was a straight guy when I trusted you with that black box!" There was a note of alarm in the nasal voice. "You surely ain't figuring on freezing on to that black box?"

"I twust you do not intend to insult me, Mr. Hoot!" said Arthur Augustus, with dignity. "I shall certainly weturn the black box to its ownah as soon as I see him. But I shall certainly not post it to anyone who asks for it on the telephone! I have vewy neahly lost that beastly black box a good many times, and I am not takin' wisks."

"I guess you know my voice—"

"Yaas, but all Ameriican voices are weird like yours, Mr. Hoot—"

"What?"

"I weally cannot tell one fwom anothah—and I certainly shall not weturn that black box to anyone but the man who asked me to take care of it. I shall certainly not wisk bein' twicked out of it! How do I know that you are the wight man, and not anothah wascal like Giuseppe?"

"Mebbe you're right, kid! But—"

"I weally do not see why you have phoned. You could have come to the school, and then—"

"You don't want a tough guy like me horning The Gem Library.—No. 1,634.

into your school, big boy. Mebbe I'll see you some time out of your school."

"But why not come to St. Jim's and—"

"I guess there's reasons! Giuseppe—"

"That wotten dago is done with, Mr. Hoot. He was feahfully damaged in the Alps, and we left him there. He won't be on his feet again this summah."

"Carry me home to die! I reckoned something had hit him! I guessed he had got it when the crowd he parked me with let me go. I'll say he was paying them to keep me safe parked, and when the pay stopped, they hadn't any more use for this baby. Yep! I guessed he had got the knock!"

"So there is no dangah fwom Giuseppe—"

"Mebbe there might be others around, and I guess I ain't running risks. Not in your lifetime! Mebbe you'd walk out of school after your class and mosey along that footpath where you first saw me?"

"Certainly, if you wish."

"It's a cinch, then! I'll be straying around that footpath at six. Suit you, Mister D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, that's all wight!"

"O.K.!"

And the man at the other end rang off.

CHAPTER 4.

Unexpected!

"TU quoque litoribus nostris—" mumbled Arthur Augustus in the Fourth Form Room that afternoon.

"Construe!" said Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir! Thou also, thingummy—"

"What?"

Arthur Augustus was not, at the moment, enjoying life.

St. Jim's was a ripping school, and Arthur Augustus was glad in a way to be back at St. Jim's. There were all the fellows to meet and greet—there was the jolly old study—there was the cricket coming on. Even the dusky old Form-room, with countless initials carved on the old oak desks, had its charm.

But only a week or two ago the flying school-boys had been soaring in the clouds on board the Silver Swallow. They had roamed round Paris, they had lost themselves in the Cevennes, they had heard a mob in Turin yelling "Evviva il Duce"—they had explored the canals and lagoons of Venice in gondolas—and, in spite of the black box, and the cunning Giuseppe and the treacherous Pawson, they had had a glorious time.

Latin in the Form-room seemed a trifle weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable in comparison.

But on the second day of the term the St. Jim's fellows were settling down to the collar. Mr. Lathom, the master of the Fourth, seemed to expect them to put the holidays behind them and transfer their interest to the knowledge they were acquiring in the Form-room.

"Continue, D'Arcy!" rapped Mr. Lathom.

"Yaas, sir! Tu quoque—thou also—litoribus—"

"Literary men!" whispered Baggy Trimble.

"Thank you, Twimble! Thou also, literary men—"

"What!" roared Mr. Lathom.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Isn't that wight, sir?"

"He, he!" from Trimble.

"Bai Jove! You little beast, Twimble, were you pullin' my leg?"

"How dare you make such a translation, D'Arcy?" thundered Mr. Lathom. "Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you are not aware that 'litoribus' means 'to our shores'?"

"Oh! Yaas, sir! I know that, sir——"

"Then why did you not say so?"

"Because I didn't know till you mentioned it, sir!" said Arthur Augustus innocently.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! D'Arcy——"

Mr. Latham broke off as there was a tap at the door and Toby, the House page, put his head into the Form-room.

"If you please, sir——" said Toby.

"What is it?"

"If you please, sir, a servant from Eastwood House, sent by his lordship with a message to Master D'Arcy, sir."

Mr. Latham gave a grunt. Lord Eastwood, the respected pater of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, was a governor of the school and a great gun in every way. Nevertheless, the Fourth Form master considered that his lordship, if he sent servants from Eastwood House with messages to his son at St. Jim's, should select the time more carefully and not let those servants with messages arrive during class!

However, there was only one thing to be done, and Mr. Latham made D'Arcy a sign to follow the House page—which D'Arcy gladly did!

Why his noble pater had sent him a message when he had left home only the day before, he did not know; but any message from home was welcome—especially if it cut short "tu quoque litoribus," etc.

"Where is the man, Toby?" asked Arthur Augustus in the corridor when he had shut the Form-room door, leaving the rest of the Fourth to Lathom and Latin.

"In the visitors' room, sir!"

"Thank you, Toby."

Arthur Augustus walked away to the visitors' room and Toby returned to his duties.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus as he went. "I wondah if it is news of the Nizam's Diamond. I don't see anythin' else that the patah can have sent me a message about!"

That was quite a happy thought, and the swell of St. Jim's hastened his steps.

He was very anxious for news of the immensely valuable Oriental stone which had been burgled from Eastwood House a few days before the Easter holidays.

That wonderful diamond, which had been presented to a former Lord Eastwood by an Indian Nizam in the eighteenth century, was an heirloom in the family and of almost untold value.

Ever since its disappearance the police had been on the track of it; but when the flying school-boys had returned from their holidays there had been no news of it at Eastwood House.

All that was known for certain was that a notorious Chicago crook who went by the name of Chicago Hank had been seen in the vicinity just before the robbery; and later had been seen in Sussex, somewhere near St. Jim's.

The belief was that Chicago Hank had snaffled that wonderful stone; but if that theory were correct, it did not seem to help much; for Chicago Hank seemed to have disappeared as completely as the Nizam's Diamond.

Arthur Augustus had hoped very much to hear that the Nizam's Diamond had been recovered when he returned from the flying trip. But there was no news of it. Now, however, he wondered whether there was news at last—as Lord East-

wood had sent a special message to him at the school.

Arthur Augustus, with that hopeful idea in his mind, hurried to the visitors' room.

He opened the door and stepped in and glanced round him.

A man was seated on a chair just within the door, and as Arthur Augustus stepped in he rose swiftly and pushed the door shut and placed his back to it.

He was a plump and portly man, but plump and portly as he was, he moved very swiftly.

Almost before Arthur Augustus saw him the door was shut and the portly back was placed to it, shutting him off from egress.

"Bai Jove!" ejaculated Gussy in angry astonishment. "Pawson! You uttah wascal! Pawson, how dare you come heah?"

It was Pawson! Pawson, whom Tom Merry & Co. had called the "perfect Pawson" on their flying trip—until they had found out that the perfect Pawson was a rogue and a rascal, after that mysterious black box!

Arthur Augustus stared at him blankly.

Pawson looked the same old Pawson—plump, portly, fruity, quietly and respectfully dressed, smooth and deferential! Arthur Augustus might almost have supposed that he had dreamed that wild adventure on the lagoon at Venice when the perfect Pawson had been unmasked.

"I trust, sir, that you are not sorry to see an old and faithful servant again for a few moments!" murmured Pawson in his smooth, respectful tones.

"You wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "It is a feahful nerve for you to come heah. Pawson! You have pwetended to

POWER!

"From the nose of the Klingstrom turbo-generator, where copper bands spun at mad speed, there rose a wisp of smoke." "Smoking now, sir!" Turner roared. "She's . . . His voice was drowned as the Klingstrom shrieked. It shuddered from end to end. More smoke spumed out. Fire licked from around the stop valve as the oil connection broke and slewed liquid to burning hot pipes. "Stop her! Stop the Klingstrom down!" Mr. Rolfe roared as he saw it. Bob and Joe saw the driver of the Klingstrom jump towards the quivering mass, but it was out of hand—running away!"

That's an extract from "Power," the grand story appearing in today's issue of MODERN BOY. Remember, there are five other great yarns as well!

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have a message ffrom my patah! You have no message ffrom Lord Eastwood! You would not dare to pwsent yourself at Eastwood House, you vogue! My fatfah would give you into custody immediately if you did."

"Pray pardon a small deception, sir," murmured Pawson.

"I will do nothin' of the sort!" snapped Arthur Augustus. "I twusted you, and you twied to wob me! You are a wotten wascal, Pawson! I nevah expected to see you again aftah we left you at Venice."

"Probably not, sir! But—"

"Stand away ffrom that door!" commanded Arthur Augustus. "I will not heah you, Pawson, and I will not speak to you! I wufese to heah one word or to uttah one syllable! Bai Jove! Have you the awful nerve to come heah aftah the black box, you disweputable wottah?"

"Exactly, sir!" said Pawson. "Pray hear me out, sir!"

"I wufese to do anything of the kind! Stand aside!"

The plump Pawson did not stir. The keen eyes in his plump, fruity face scanned Arthur Augustus. D'Arcy could guess what was in his mind and he laughed contemptuously.

"The black box is not in my pocket, you wascal!" he said. "If you think you can bag it while you are heah—"

"In your study, perhaps, sir?" suggested Pawson.

"I wufese to tell you whethah it is in my study or not, Pawson! I wufese to discuss the mattah with you! I will not remain in your wascally pwesence!" Arthur Augustus' voice rose indignantly.

"My dear Master Arthur—"

"If you do not go this instant, Pawson, I will wing the bell and send Toby to fetch a policeman!" said Arthur Augustus firmly.

"One moment, sir! I will certainly go if you desire it. But—"

"Get out, then, you wascal!"

"Only one word, sir! Is it your intention to return the black box to the American who placed it in your charge before the Easter holidays?"

Arthur Augustus stared at him.

"Bai Jove! Do you fancy that I am a wascal like yourself, Pawson?" he exclaimed. "Of course it is my intention to weturn it to him."

Pawson smiled.

"Then I gather, sir, that you have not yet done so?" he said smoothly.

"Oh! Why, you wottah—" It dawned on Arthur Augustus' noble brain that Pawson had wanted to make sure that the black box was still in his possession. "Bai Jove! I wufese to speak another word to you! Get out at once, or I will wing the bell, and— Yawwooh!"

With an activity surprising in so portly a man, Pawson leaped. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy staggered in the grip of two plump hands—which, plump as they were, had a grip like steel.

Arthur Augustus was no weakling, with all his elegant ways. He resisted with all his strength. But he was little more than an infant in the grasp of the crook who had played the part of Lord Eastwood's valet.

He was crushed down on the carpet. In spite of his struggles, a gag was forced into his mouth. In a few moments, a cord was knotted round his arms and legs.

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Unable to speak, unable to stir, D'Arcy gazed up at the plump face that looked down on him.

Pawson smiled faintly.

Kneeling beside the helpless swell of St. Jim's, he proceeded to search him. He searched him very thoroughly. Then he left him, and stepped softly to the door. The door opened and shut.

Pawson was gone. In his old days, in Lord Eastwood's service, he had visited St. Jim's more than once, and he knew his way about—he was well acquainted with Study No. 6. Arthur Augustus knew where he was gone.

CHAPTER 5.

Kerr Takes a Hand!

"IF you please, sir—"

"What is it, Kerr?" asked Mr. Lathom.

Kerr of the Fourth stood up in his place and drew a letter from his pocket. Figgins winked at Fatty Wynn, who grinned.

"Please, sir, Mr. Ratcliff gave me a letter to post, and I've got it still in my pocket!" said Kerr meekly. "May I run out and put it in the box, sir?"

Mr. Lathom frowned.

"Kerr! That is very careless and forgetful of you!" he said severely. "You are not usually a forgetful boy—but that is very forgetful indeed. If your Housemaster entrusted you with a letter for the post, you should have placed it in the box immediately. You may certainly go and post it at once, Kerr—and do not be so reprehensibly forgetful again!"

"Yes, sir."

George Francis Kerr left the Fourth Form Room. He winked at the oak door after he had shut it.

It was perfectly true that Mr. Ratcliff had given Kerr that letter to drop in the school box, and that it was still in Kerr's pocket in Form. But the Scottish junior had not, as Mr. Lathom naturally supposed, forgotten to post it.

Having got out of the Form-room, Kerr cut out and dropped that letter in the box without delay. But he did not immediately return to the Form-room.

He went up the School House staircase.

On the first day of term, the School House mob had bagged the New House carriage at Wayland. Certainly they had bagged Gussy's hat in return. But they had lost their train; the enemy had gone off in triumph leaving Figgins & Co. to wait for another train—which was a defeat that had to be wiped out. For which reason Kerr was going to give a little attention to Study No. 6 in the Fourth, and Tom Merry's study in the Shell while the proprietors thereof were in class. His first visit was paid to Study No. 10 in the Shell.

He was a quick worker.

In a few minutes he had all the books in the study outside No. 10, and was standing on a chair borrowed from Talbot's study, arranging them on top of Tom Merry's door, which was left eight or nine inches open.

It seemed probable that when the chums of the Shell came up to their study after class, they would meet with a surprise.

Having swiftly arranged that booby-trap for the benefit of the Terrible Three, Kerr returned the chair to Talbot's study, and cut along to the Fourth Form passage.

He stopped at the door of Study No. 6.

Kerr was a wary fellow. As Arthur Augustus was out of the Form-room, it was possible that

he might have gone up to his study. Kerr bent his ear to that door before turning the handle to enter—and then he grinned, and refrained from turning the handle, as he heard a movement within.

Somebody was in that study.

It could only be D'Arcy so far as Kerr could see. As Kerr intended to prepare a little surprise in Study No. 6 similar to the one in No. 10 in the Shell, he naturally did not want D'Arcy to spot him.

He stepped into the next study to wait for Arthur Augustus to clear.

He waited impatiently.

Arthur Augustus, as he had left the Form-room to see some man with a message, might stretch it a little; but Kerr, who had only left to post a letter, would be expected back very shortly.

But as it was already at least twenty minutes since D'Arcy had left, he could hardly hang it out much longer, Kerr thought; so he waited.

Five minutes passed.

The Scottish junior of the New House grew more and more impatient. Really, he could not wait much longer unless he wanted lines from Lathom. He wondered whether Arthur Augustus had forgotten that he was supposed to be in class!

Then at last the door of Study No. 6 opened.

Kerr jumped.

Peering cautiously round the door of Study No. 5, he naturally expected to see the slim and elegant figure of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy emerge from Study No. 6.

But the figure that emerged was far from slim.

Kerr gazed in astonishment at a portly man with a fruity face—that fruity face dark with angry disappointment.

Who the man was, Kerr did not know. He had never seen him before. Some School House fellows had seen Pawson once or twice; but he was quite a stranger to the New House junior.

The portly man walked away to the staircase, and Kerr gazed blankly after his portly back. As the man went down, the Scottish junior stepped out.

A less keen fellow than Kerr would have known that something was wrong. A stranger in the place had been in D'Arcy's study, where certainly he could have had no business. Unless it was a case of pilfering, it was difficult to tell what it meant.

Kerr looked over the banisters at the portly form disappearing below.

He quite forgot his intention of japing in Study No. 6. If somebody had been pilfering in a St. Jim's study, Kerr was not likely to let him get away with it. He was going to see that that portly man gave an account of himself before he went.

He trod quietly down to the middle landing, and looked over the banisters again. No one was about except that mysterious portly man. Watching him over the lower banisters, Kerr saw him stop at a door near the entrance of the School House, open it, walk in, and shut it after him.

Portly as the man was, with a good deal of weight to carry, his movements had been swift—like those of a man who did not desire to meet anyone on his way.

Kerr descended the stairs, and stood gazing at the door of the visitors' room, into which the portly man had disappeared.

He supposed that D'Arcy was there. He wondered whether this man was the servant from

Eastwood House who, according to Toby's message, had been sent by Lord Eastwood. If so, it was barely possible that Arthur Augustus had sent him up to the study for something.

But it was not likely; and Kerr had clearly seen the look of angry, savage, bitter disappointment in the fruity face when he came out of Study No. 6. There was something altogether too fishy about this, in the opinion of the keen and canny junior from Caledonia.

Was D'Arcy in the visitors' room at all? He might have gone back to the Form-room while Kerr was up in the studies.

The New House junior hesitated a long moment. But clearly he could not leave the matter where it was. He stepped to the door and turned the door-handle silently.

Without a sound, he opened the door of the visitors' room a few inches and looked in.

What he saw, in the bright sunshine from a window that stood open, nearly brought a howl of surprise from his lips.

His eyes fairly popped at the sight of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, lying on his back on the floor, bound hand and foot, and gagged.

By the side of the swell of St. Jim's the portly man was kneeling. He was speaking; and now that the door was open Kerr could hear his voice, low as it was, little more than a whisper.

"Where is the black box? I have searched your study, and have not found it. It is not there! What have you done with it?"

Kerr stood dumbfounded.

The plump hand groped over the gag and removed it. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy gasped for breath.

"Silence!" came the hissing whisper—and the plump hand grasped the swell of St. Jim's by the throat. "Fool! Blockhead! I shall have no chance of coming here again—I shall not go without the black box! Tell me where to lay hands on it or I will twist your neck like a chicken's!"

There was a faint gasp from Arthur Augustus.

"Speak—in a whisper!" hissed the portly man. "Fool—speak! Where is the black box?"

Kerr woke up, as it were. Utter amazement had held him spellbound. Now he woke to sudden action.

He threw the door wide open and rushed in. The fruity face stared round—just in time to get a clenched Scottish fist fairly on the plump nose!

Pawson gave a yell and rolled over.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, his eyes popping at Kerr. "Oh cwumbs! Is that you, Kerr, old chap? Oh cwikey!"

Pawson bounded up, his plump face distorted with rage. For a second he seemed about to spring at Kerr like a tiger. But very swiftly he realised that he had little time to escape.

He made one step towards Kerr, who faced him with clenched fists, then changed his direction, leaped to the window, and swung himself out into the quad. In hardly more than a moment he was gone!

CHAPTER 6.

One Good Turn Deserves Another!

"KERR, old man!" gasped Arthur Augustus. Kerr was springing towards the window, but he turned back at D'Arcy's gasping call.

"Welease me, Kerr. Oh cwikey——"

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"He's getting away—"

"Nevah mind that bwute—"

"But if he's snaffled something—"

"That's all wight—he hasn't! He said he hadn't found it! Pway welease me, deah boy. I'm gettin' feahfully cwamped."

"Sure he's bagged nothin'?"

"Yaas, wathah! That's all wight."

"O.K., then," said Kerr, and he bent over the swell of St. Jim's and opened his pocket-knife to cut him loose. "You don't mind if that rascal gets clear?"

"No; I would wathah he got away, so long as he doesn't pop up again," gasped Arthur Augustus. "You see, he was my patah's valet once, and I don't want a wow about it. It would make a feahful lot of jabbah. The less said about it the bettah, deah boy! He hasn't got what he came aftah, so it's all wight."

Arthur Augustus tottered to his feet when Kerr had cut him loose. He gasped for breath.

"The feahful wottah!" he gasped. "Havin' the nerve to come heah, you know, twyin' to gwab that beastly black box—"

"What on earth is the black box?" asked the amazed Kerr.

"Oh, it's wathah a secwet, weally, old chap! Othahwise, I shouldn't mind tellin' you that I have been takin' charge of the wotten thing, and that some bwute or othah has been aftah it all through the hols. Thank goodness I am goin' to hand it back to the ownah aftah class to-day, and get wid of it. It will be a twemendous welief to get wid of that mouldy black box, I can tell you. Oh, ewike! I am feahfully wuffed and wumped!"

"You're not keeping this dark?" asked Kerr. "Hadn't you better report what's happened to Railton?"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"No; as you have come to the wescue so vewy luckily, Kerr, I will say nothin' about it. That wascal is not likely to turn up again. I don't want the whole school talkin' about Pawson."

"Pawson?"

"That bwute was Pawson, my patah's valet, you know. I mean, he was befoah he was found out to be a feahful wogue."

"Oh?" said Kerr.

"But it's vewy wemarkable that he nevah found the black box, as he went up to my studay to search for it," added Arthur Augustus. "How-evah, as I put a lot of papahs ovah it in my desk, I suppose that's why he nevah found it. But it is fighfully lucky, isn't it, Kerr?"

"Blessed if I make it out!" said Kerr. "I suppose you know what you're talking about, Gussy?"

"Weally, Kerr—"

"Is that the man who came with a message from Lord Eastwood?"

"That was only a pwetence to get hold of me while ewevybody was in class," said Arthur Augustus. "But it's all wight—he nevah got the black box! I shall be able to hand it ovah to Hoot all wight."

"Who on earth's Hoot?"

"That's the Amewican chap it belongs to," explained Arthur Augustus. "He was cwocked in a cwash on his motah-bike just befoah the hols, and he gave me the black box to look aftah. I could not wefuse, in the cires, but it has been a feahful wowwy."

"What's in it?" asked Kerr.

"I haven't the foggiest, deah boy. Of course, The GEM LIBRARY.—NO. 1,634.

I could not dweam of openin' it and lookin' in it, as it was entrusted to my care. Besides, it doesn't open."

Kerr fixed his eyes on Arthur Augustus.

"You took charge of a box for a stranger without knowing what was inside it?" he asked.

"Yaas."

"I suppose that man Pawson must know, as he wants it so much."

"I don't see how he can know, unless the dago told him."

"Who on earth's the dago?"

"A wascally wottah named Giuseppe Fosco, who has been aftah that beastly black box all through the hols, till he was knocked out."

"Well, my hat!" said Kerr. "Looks to me as if there must be something awfully valuable in it."

"Yaas, that's pwetty certain, old chap! How-evah, that does not mattah to me, as the box is not my pwopahity."

"Gussy, old man, you're a prize-packet, and no mistake!" said Kerr. "But we'd better get back to the Form-room, or Lathom will be getting his hair off."

"Yaas, wathah! Don't say anythin' about this to Lathom, old bean. It's all wight now. But how lucky it was that you were out of class, too, Kerr! What were you doin' out of class?"

Kerr chuckled. He had almost forgotten his intended jape on Study No. 6. There was no time left for that now. Already, it was certain, Mr. Lathom would think that he had been a long time posting that letter for his Housemaster.

"Oh! I had to go to a study for something," he said. "Come on, Gussy, we shall get scalped!"

"Wight-ho!"

Arthur Augustus having smoothed out his ruffled and rumpled clobber, and recovered his breath by this time, the two Fourth Formers made their way back to the Form-room.

Mr. Lathom frowned as they entered.

Arthur Augustus was allowed to go to his place without comment; but the Fourth Form master called to the New House junior.

"Kerr! You cannot have been all this time posting a letter for Mr. Ratcliff. You have been wasting time, Kerr!"

"Oh, sir!"

"I shall give you fifty lines, Kerr, for having remained so long out of class!" said Mr. Lathom severely.

"Yes, sir," said Kerr meekly.

"Hard luck, old man!" whispered Figgins, as Kerr took his place in Form. "But it was worth fifty lines—what?"

"Quite!" agreed Kerr, with a grin.

Considering what he had done for Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, Kerr thought it was well worth fifty lines!

Arthur Augustus had a very thoughtful look on his aristocratic countenance as class went on. But he was not thinking of lessons; neither was he thinking of Pawson, or the black box! The result of his reflections was made known when the Fourth Form were dismissed.

D'Arcy hurried after Figgins & Co. when the Fourth were out.

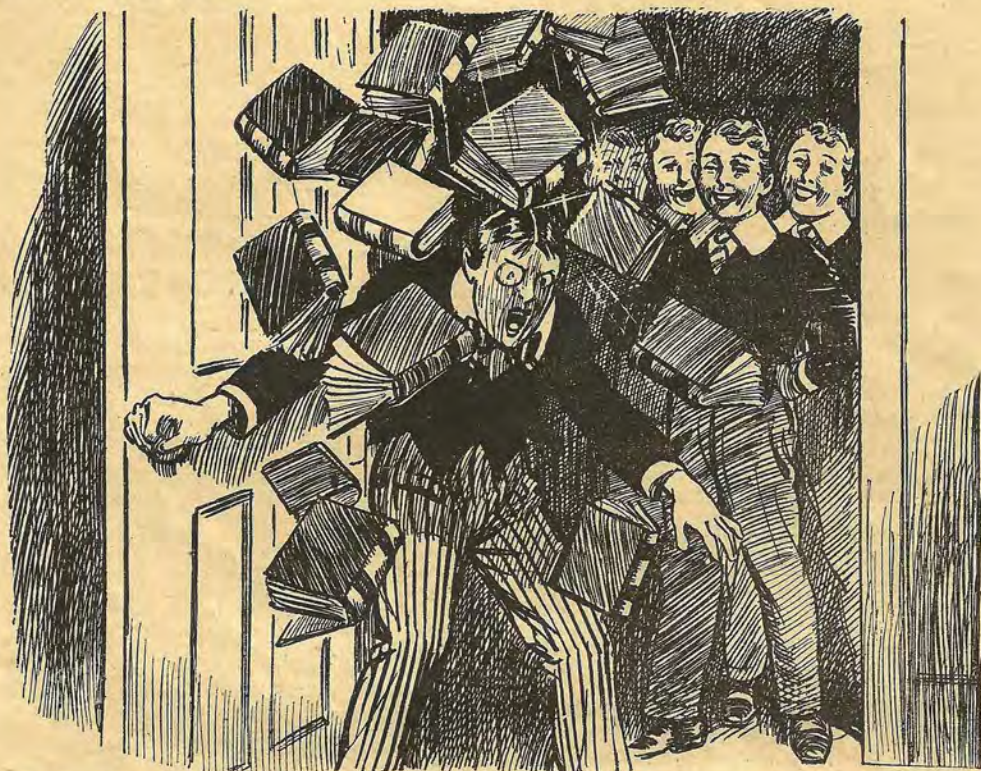
"Hold on a minute, deah boys!" he exclaimed.

Figgins & Co. held on.

"I am feahfully obliged to you, Kerr, for what you did for me this aftahnoon!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh, don't mench!" said Kerr.

"But I am bound to mention it, deah boy! I



Arthur Augustus pushed open the door of Study No. 10 and stepped in. Crash! Bang! Crash! Crash! "Yawwooooooh!" he yelled, as Latin grammars and dictionaries, and all sorts and conditions of volumes rained down on him. "Yoo-hoop! What has happened—what—oh, cwikey!"

am weally and twuly feahfully obliged," said Arthur Augustus, "and, in the cirs, I am goin' to let you fellows off!"

"You're going to let us off?" repeated Figgins.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"But we're not fireworks——"

"Weally, Figgins——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You uttah ass, Figgins! I do not mean that I am goin' to let you off! I mean that I am goin' to let you off!"

"Lucid!" remarked Fatty Wynn.

"I mean, I was goin' to thwash you all wound for wuinin' my hat at Wayland yestahday," explained Arthur Augustus. "I was goin' to come ovah to the New House, and give each of you a feahful thwashin', in turn!"

"Help!" gasped Figgins.

"Rescue!" gurgled Fatty Wynn.

"Mercy!" implored Kerr.

"It's all wight now, deah boys," said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "Don't you wowwy. I am not goin' to thwash you all wound now. I am lettin' you off entiahly. You need not be alarmed at all. One good turn deserves anothah, so I am lettin' you off."

"Oh, thanks!" gasped Figgins.

"I breathe again," declared Kerr.

"Can I leave off trembling now?" inquired Fatty Wynn.

"Yaas, old chap, it's all wight—wight as wain!" said Arthur Augustus. "I have quite given up the ideah of thwashin' the lot of you. Don't you wowwy about that at all."

"We won't," said Figgins, gurgling.

And Figgins & Co. went on their way to their own House, though why they howled with laughter as they went Arthur Augustus did not know.

CHAPTER 7.

Gussy Gets It!

"GONE!"

Six fellows in Study No. 6 in the School House looked round at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Tom Merry and Manners and Lowther were teasing with Blake & Co. Over tea Arthur Augustus had related the startling occurrence of the afternoon.

Arthur Augustus' chums were by no means sure that it was judicious to say nothing about that occurrence. But Arthur Augustus had no doubt that he was right—he never had.

He pointed out that if the affair was talked off, Railton would want to know all about that beastly black box, which might be awkward.

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But most surprising of all to Tom Merry & Co. was the news that Pawson had searched the study, and failed to find the black box—if it was there.

Obviously he had failed to find it. What he had said to D'Arcy, when Kerr came on the scene in the visitors' room, proved that. And the fact that D'Arcy had hidden it under papers in his desk hardly accounted for it. Really, Pawson was not a man to be beaten so easily as all that.

Manners suggested, rather dryly, that Gussy should see whether that black box was still where he had left it. On that point, Gussy had no doubt, as it was certain that Pawson had not found it. However, he looked into the desk to make sure. Then all the fellows in the study looked round as he gasped:

"Gone!"

"Gone!" repeated Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then Pawson had it, after all," said Dig.

"Pawson nevah had it, Dig. He came back in a feahful wage, and uttahed the most howwible thweats, and I weally do not know what might have happened if Kerr had not turned up when he did."

"Fathead!" said Manners. "If it had been in this study when Pawson searched for it, he would have had it. As soon as you said that Pawson hadn't had it, I knew it wasn't here."

"But I put it heah, deah boy. I weally cannot undahstand it."

"Somebody else shifted it after you put it there," said Manners. "Jolly lucky he did—as Pawson was scheduled to call for it."

Arthur Augustus turned from the desk and surveyed Blake, Herries, and Digby through his eyeglass.

"You uttah asses!" he said. "Have you been playin' twicks with that wotten black box?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" answered Blake.

"Lowthah—"

"Not guilty," grinned Monty Lowther.

"You are such a funnay ass, Lowthah, you might be silly fathead enough to hide that black box!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "If you have, it was wathah fortunate, as it has kept it out of the hands of that wascal Pawson. But I must have it at once, as I have to hand it ovah to the ownah this aftahnoon."

"Fathead!" said Lowther.

"I wepeat, Lowthah, that you are sillay ass enough to play twicks on a fellow, and if you have wemoved that black box, I insist upon knowin' at once what you have done with it!" said Arthur Augustus sternly.

"Well, if you really insist—" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you can fetch the black box from my study, if you like."

"I wegard you as an uttah ass, Lowthah, to take away the black box fwom this studay and put it in your studay."

"But I didn't!" protested Lowther.

"Did you, Tom Mewwy?"

"No fear!"

"Did you, Mannahs?"

"Not that I remember."

"Then I hardly see how the black box could have got into your study, Lowthah, unless you

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took it there. Who took it there, if you did not?"

"Toby," answered Lowther.

"Toby!" repeated Arthur Augustus, in amazement. "Do you mean to say that the House page took that black box to your study?"

"Yes, I told him to."

"Then it comes to the same thing, you sillay ass! I wegard you as an uttah idiot, Lowthah, to play such twicks!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Where is the black box now?"

"On the floor in my study."

"You have left it on the floor?"

"No; Toby did."

"Bai Jove, I think it uttably wotten of you, Lowthah! Whereabouts on the floor is the black box?"

"Just beside the fireplace."

"Bai Jove! Anybody might have seen it there, and anything might have happened to it!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus indignantly. "What are you laughin' at, Tom Mewwy? What are you laughin' at, Mannahs?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Tom Merry and Manners.

"Bai Jove, this is not a laughin' mattah!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in indignant wrath. "Have you seen the black box where Lowthah says it is?"

"We haven't been to the study since class," gurgled Tom. "But I remember seeing it there this morning."

"So do I," chortled Manners.

"Well, I twust that it is still safe. I will go and fetch it at once!" snapped Arthur Augustus, and he hurried out of Study No. 6.

Monty Lowther rose to his feet.

"We'd better go after him and lend him a hand," he said. "Gussy will need help if he is going to carry off our study coal-box."

"What?" yelled Blake, Herries, and Dig.

"As Gussy insisted, of course, there was nothing more to be said," remarked Monty Lowther blandly. "But do you fellows gather, from what Gussy said, that he fancies that's his black box in my study?"

"Sort of!" gasped Blake.

"It isn't. It's our coal-box. It's a box, and it's black, and if Gussy wants to borrow it, he's welcome. We don't want coal at this time of year. He can have it till next term, if he likes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But we'd better go and lend him a hand. Our black box is a good deal heavier than Gussy's black box."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the tea-party in Study No. 6.

And they followed on the trail of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, quite interested to see his face when he discovered the black coal-box in Study No. 10 in the Shell.

Arthur Augustus, in the passage, glanced back at six laughing faces. He frowned at those laughing faces.

"If you fellows think this funnay—" he rapped.

"Just a few," grinned Monty Lowther.

"You'll laugh soon, Gussy!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus marched on indignantly, followed by the chuckling six. He arrived at the door of Study No. 10 in the Shell, which stood ajar—as Kerr had left it during class.

He pushed that door open and stepped in.

Crash! Bang! Crash! Crash!

"Yawoooooh!"

The startled yell from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy woke all the echoes of the Shell studies.

What had happened, Arthur Augustus hardly knew for a moment. It seemed that the ancient roof of St. Jim's was tumbling down on his noble head!

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell from behind him.

"Oh cwikey—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Monty, you ass—" gasped Tom Merry.

"Not me!" gasped Monty. "I never did that. I never knew there was a booby-trap there. Honour bright!"

"Yoo-hoop! What has happened—what—Oh cwikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus tottered in a sea of books. Latin grammars and dictionaries, "Holiday Annuals" and "Modern Boy's Annuals," all sorts and conditions of volumes, had showered down on his head in the doorway. There were books to the right of him, books to the left of him, books all round him—he tottered in the midst of an ocean of literature!

"Oh cwums! Who—what—Oh cwikey! Oh, bai Jove!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, my hat!" roared Monty Lowther. "I know why Kerr was out of class this afternoon now! Ha, ha, ha! Much obliged, Gussy! We should have got that if you hadn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"That New House swob—" gasped Blake.

"Much obliged, Gussy!" gurgled Tom Merry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're welcome, Gussy!" gasped Manners.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Tom Merry & Co. roared. Evidently Kerr had fixed up that booby-trap for the Terrible Three—and Arthur Augustus, hurrying into the study in search of an article that was not there, had got it. And he was welcome to it—more than welcome, in fact!

CHAPTER 8.

Figgins & Co. Chip In!

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS D'ARCY gasped for breath. Tom Merry & Co. gathered up scattered volumes. The swell of St. Jim's turned his eyeglass severely upon Monty Lowther. "You uttah ass!" he said. "If you had not played a sillay twick with the black box, I should not have walked into that widiculous booby-twap! Now tell me at once where the black box is, you duffah!"

"Can't you see it?" inquired Monty.

"I cannot! Where is it?"

Arthur Augustus looked round the study, frowning. Certainly there was a black box standing by the fireplace. It was the box in which the study's supply of coal was parked. But Arthur Augustus was—as yet—unaware that that was the black box to which the playful Monty had alluded, and he gave it no heed. Of the little black box of which he was in quest, there was no sign.

Six grinning faces watched him.

"I wepeat that I cannot see the black box, Lowthah! I insist upon you tellin' me at once where it is!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus hotly.

Monty Lowther pointed to the coal-box.

Arthur Augustus stared at it.

"That's it!" said Monty cheerfully. "That's the only black box in this study, Gussy! You can have it if you like."

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I do not want your beastly coal-box, you fathead!"

"It's all right—we shan't want it till next term—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Do you mean to say that my black box is not in this studay at all, Lowthah?"

"I told you so in your study!" Lowther pointed out. "But you weren't satisfied. You insisted on having a black box. That's the only one I can oblige with. If it won't do, I can't help you in the matter, old bean."

"Bai Jove! You have been pullin' my leg—"

"What a brain!" gasped Monty Lowther. "How did Gussy guess that one, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then my black box is not heah?" roared Arthur Augustus.

"No! You can have ours if you like—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus fixed his eyeglass on Monty Lowther, with a look that ought to have withered him on the spot.

"I wegard you as a howlin' ass, Lowthah! I have a gweat mind to give you a feahful thwashin'. But I must find out what has become of that beastly black box. I have to meet that Amewican chap on the footpath in Wayland Wood at six o'clock, and hand it ovah."

"Looks as if the Yankee merchant will have to wait a bit!" remarked Blake. "If that coal-box won't do, Gussy—"

"Weally, Blake, you ass—"

"We shall have to find the genuine article! I wonder if Kerr—"

"Kerr!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Well, that New House tick seems to have been rooting about up here in the studies while we were in class. He may have been larking with it."

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Yaas, wathah! That must be it! I will go ovah to the New House and ask Kerr. The sillay ass had hidden it somewhere for a sillay joke, of course—"

"Blessed if I know what else can have become of it!" said Tom Merry. "It's pretty clear that Pawson never had it, so it must have been gone before he searched for it!"

Arthur Augustus hurried away. Kerr, it was certain, had been on the spot that afternoon, and unless the New House junior had been larking with the black box, it was difficult to guess what had become of it.

Figgins & Co. were at tea in their study when Gussy arrived in the New House. They gave him a welcoming grin as he came into the study. Perhaps they felt grateful for being let off that thrashing.

"Trickle in, old bean," said Figgins hospitably. "If you've come to tea, Fatty can do with enough for three, instead of enough for six, so there's lots."

"I have not come to tea, thank you, Figgins! I have come to ask Kerr for my black box," said Arthur Augustus severely.

Kerr stared.

"The jolly old black box that plump sportsman was asking you about this afternoon?" he inquired.

"Yaas!"

"Well, what do you mean, fathead? I don't know anything about your black box, do I?" asked Kerr.

"I wathah think you do, Kerr. It is missin' f'rom my study so it appeahs that some sillay ass has been larkin' with it."

Kerr shook his head.

"Never even seen it," he said. "Never heard of it till I heard that fat johne talking to you about it in the visitors' room. Sorry, old bean—you've come to the wrong address."

"Honah bwight?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Honour bright, old fathead."

"Bai Jove! What the dooce can have become of the beastly thing, then?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I have no more than time to walk down to the wood and hand it ovah, and I cannot find it anywhah. I shall not be able to give it to that American chap if it is lost."

"What the dickens—" said Figgins.

"What the thump—" said Fatty Wynn.

Kerr looked very curiously at the swell of St. Jim's. Kerr's keen, canny Scottish brain had been putting in some thinking since the strange incident of the afternoon.

Arthur Augustus looked at his watch.

"Bai Jove! I shall have to see the chap and tell him how it stands," he said. "I cannot keep him hangin' about waitin' for nothin'."

He left Figgins' study—leaving Figgins & Co. staring. Kerr rose to his feet—leaving his tea unfinished.

"You fellows like a walk?" he asked.

"We haven't finished tea!" said Fatty Wynn.

"Never mind that—"

"Eh? Did you say never mind tea?" asked Fatty, gazing at Kerr. He seemed to doubt whether his Scottish chum was in his right mind.

"Just that!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" remonstrated Fatty.

"What's up, Kerr, old man?" asked Figgins.

"I'm not quite sure!" answered Kerr. "But it looks to me as if D'Arcy has got himself mixed up in some jolly queer business, and that he may be landing himself in trouble. He's going down to Wayland Wood to see some American chap, who handed him a giddy box to take care of, before the holidays. Something fearfully valuable seems to be parked in it, and a whole swarm of blighters seem to be after it."

"But—"

"If there's something fearfully valuable in the box, I think Gussy ought to make sure of the owner before he hands it over to anybody," said Kerr.

"But if he knows the man—"

"I'd like to give that man the once-over! He may have got hold of the article when the owner wasn't looking!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Figgins.

"It's jolly queer for a man to hand over something fearfully valuable to a schoolboy to be taken care of! Plenty of banks and police stations, and things—unless he had some jolly good reason for keeping it private!" said Kerr dryly. "Look here, I'm going to keep an eye on Gussy, and see what sort of a scrape he's nose-diving into! Come on!"

"I'm on!" agreed Figgins.

"We haven't touched the cake yet!" said Fatty Wynn. "I say, we can catch D'Arcy up if we leave it a few minutes, and—Leggo my arm, Kerr! Leggo my arm, Figgy! I tell you—Oh, blow the pair of you!"

Fatty Wynn was led out of the study by his chums. When they came out of the New House, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was disappearing out of the gates.

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Figgins & Co. followed on.

Arthur Augustus, quite unconscious of Figgins & Co.'s interest in his proceedings, walked down Rylcombe Lane without even thinking of glancing back.

He did not observe, at a little distance from the school, a portly figure detach itself from a clump of trees and follow in his footsteps.

But the three juniors behind did!

Kerr's eyes gleamed.

"See that fat merchant?" he asked.

"What about him?" asked Figgins.

"That's the sportsman who grabbed Gussy this afternoon and wanted to get that giddy black box off him!" said Kerr, in a low voice. "His name's Pawson—he used to be Gussy's father's valet. You can see his game—he's watching for Gussy when he leaves the school."

"Oh crumbs!" said Figgins. "Then—"

"Just as well that somebody's keeping an eye on Gussy, I think!" murmured Kerr.

"What-ho!"

Ahead, Arthur Augustus turned into the footpath through Wayland Wood. The portly figure disappeared after him.

Figgins & Co. exchanged glances.

"We're on this!" said Kerr quietly. "I don't make this all out yet, but there's something in it that old Gussy doesn't dream of! We're going to do some scouting now, you men! Cut through the wood—and see that that fat blighter doesn't spot us on his track!"

And the New House trio, leaving the lane before reaching the footpath, threaded their way through the wood.

Arthur Augustus, as he walked up the footpath, had not the remotest idea that Pawson was dogging his steps; and Pawson, as he dogged Arthur Augustus, certainly never dreamed that three juniors, who were up to every dodge of scouting, were dogging him in his turn in cover of the wood. If trouble hovered over the swell of St. Jim's, there were three fellows on hand ready to help him out of it!

CHAPTER 9.

Three on the Trail!

"**B**AI Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

He was quite startled.

It was six o'clock, and at six the mysterious American was to await him on the footpath through Wayland Wood. Arthur Augustus walked up the footpath from Rylcombe Lane in the direction of Wayland, expecting to sight the man on the path sooner or later.

He saw no one on the footpath. But suddenly, at a turn of the path, where trees and thickets walled it thickly on either side, a figure emerged from cover so suddenly that it made Gussy jump a little.

The next moment, however, he recognised the man.

It was the man who had crashed on a motor-bike on that very path six or seven weeks ago. He did not seem to have quite recovered from the damage he had sustained on that occasion when he had crashed in desperate flight from Giuseppe Fosco. His right arm was in a sling, and one of his legs limped badly. Arthur Augustus knew the hard face and the black moustache. This was the original owner of that mysterious black box—though whether he was the rightful owner of what it contained was a

doubt that had not so far occurred to Gussy's unsuspicious mind.

"Bai Jove! You wathah startled me, Mr. Hoot!" said Arthur Augustus. "What were you hidin' in the twees for?"

"I guess I had a peeper open for you to mosey along, Mr. D'Arcy. Say, you jest step out of sight a piece——"

"Eh? Why?"

"I'll say there might be guys around! Step into these trees pronto! I'm telling you there might be guys around."

"I assuah you that it is all wight, Mr. Hoot!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "That wotten dago, Giuseppe, was knocked out, and he is still abwoad somewah, as I told you on the phone——"

"Oh, sure! But I guess there might be others. You jest step outer sight a piece, Mr. D'Arcy."

"Oh, all wight!"

The American backed into the trees. Three New House juniors, who were very close to the footpath, ducked into prompt cover.

Mr. Hoot—if that really was his name—had good reasons, quite apart from fear of "dagoes," for desiring to avoid the public eye, though that did not occur for a moment to Arthur Augustus.

He led the way a dozen yards into the wood, Arthur Augustus following him; and in his excessive caution he would have walked right into Figgins & Co. had they been less wary.

But the New House trio were wary enough.

They ducked low in the hawthorns without a sound.

"Weally, Mr. Hoot——" they heard Arthur Augustus' voice.

"I guess this here will do!"

The American stopped in a little open space, shut in by trees and hawthorns. It was completely screened from the footpath.

Pawson had been following Arthur Augustus along the footpath. It was probable that he would be rather at a loss when he reached the turn of the path and failed to spot him.

But Figgins & Co. were right on the spot. Had Mr. Hoot pushed through the hawthorns, he would have come fairly on them.

But the man with the black moustache naturally had no idea, and no suspicion, that three fellows were keeping an eye on D'Arcy without D'Arcy's knowledge.

He was safe from observation from the footpath, and that was what he wanted. He stopped and turned, and fixed his sharp eyes on Arthur Augustus.

Figgins & Co., hardly more than two yards from him, suppressed their breathing.

Through the interstices of the bushes they could partly see Mr. Hoot. Kerr made a sign to his comrades to remain still, and moved a little himself to get a better view of the face with the black moustache. He was very keen to see what the man looked like.

There was the faintest of rustles in the hawthorns as he moved, and he heard the American catch his breath.

"Say, what's that?" came a muttering voice.

"Only a wabbit, pwobably," said Arthur Augustus cheerily. "Nothin' to be afwaid of, Mr. Hoot. I assuah you that that wascal Giuseppe——"

"Aw! Give Giuseppe a rest! Say, you got the black box? You hand it over, and beat it!"

"I am sowwy——"

"What?"

"I wegwet vewy much——"

"Give me the black box, you young gink, and beat it! I guess I ain't got the time to hang around here!" muttered Mr. Hoot hoarsely. "What you wasting time for? Give me the black box!"

"If you will allow me to speak, Mr. Hoot, I will explain that——"

"Where is it?" snarled the American.

"I am sowwy to say I do not know at the pwesent moment!"

"What?"

The American forgot his caution for the moment. His voice was loud, sharp, and savage.

"Pway allow me to explain——"

"You young geck! You told me on the phone this morning that you had the black box safe and sound——"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You fixed it up to meet me here and hand it over! By the great horned toad, if you figure on double-crossing a guy——"

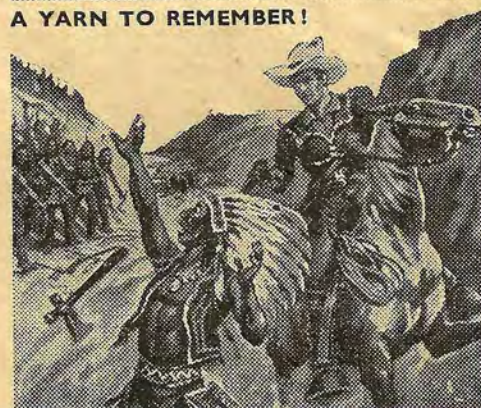
"Pway don't be a sillay ass, Mr. Hoot! I have taken the gweatest care of that beastly black box evah since you placed it in my hands, and I put it in a desk in my study at school yestahday. Some silly ass has wemoved it—for a joke on me, I suppose—so I have not been able to bwing it to you. I came heah to tell you so, so that you would not wait about for nothin'."

"Carry me home to die!"

The words came in a savage snarl.

Figgins & Co., behind the hawthorns, exchanged a silent look. The man's rage at this disappointment was only too clear. And it was clear, too, that he suspected D'Arcy of tricking him.

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"If that's the truth—" they heard a hissing voice.

"Weally, Mr. Hoot, that wemark is insultin'!" said Arthur Augustus calmly. "I am vewy sowwy that I am not able to hand ovah the black box, and I can tell you that I shall be feahfully glad to be wid of it and the wowwy of it! I have no doubt that I shall find it befoah vewy long, as it must be in the House somewhah; and if you like to call at the school to-mowwow—"

"Aw, can it!"

Kerr closed one eye at his comrades. Figgins and Fatty Wynn grinned.

All three of them could guess that Mr. Hoot had good reasons for understanding the shy violet, and that he was not likely to call at St. Jim's under the eyes of schoolmasters.

Kerr, watching through the hawthorns, could see the face with the black moustache and could see that it was working with rage.

Evidently Mr. Hoot—whose name probably was anything but Hoot—had banked on receiving the black box at that interview and could hardly control his rage at his disappointment.

But he did control it. Savagely enraged as he was he could see that Arthur Augustus was acting in good faith; indeed, had he not been he would not have been there at all. And his only chance of getting hold of the mysterious black box was to induce Arthur Augustus to hand it over. But for that consideration he would have found satisfaction in "beating up" the swell of St. Jim's—and Gussy would have been badly in need of help from the unseen three!

"Weally, I am sowwy!" Arthur Augustus' calm voice went on. "I shall lose no time in gettin' that box, Mr. Hoot—it is only some sillay ass lark-in' with it! Call at St. Jim's to-mowwow—or, if you like, I will walk out aftah class and see you heah—"

"It's a cinch, then!" came Mr. Hoot's hoarse mutter.

"I guess I'll be along here about the same time to-morrow."

"Vewy well!"

Arthur Augustus walked back to the footpath. His footsteps died away; and when he was gone, Mr. Hoot's voice was heard again by the unseen trio—uttering a long string of low but expressive expressions, which revealed how intensely annoyed and disappointed Mr. Hoot was—and how much he would have liked to "beat up" the amiable youth who had just left him, had it been prudent to do so.

CHAPTER 10.

The Secret of the Black Box!

"HANDS up, Chicago Hank!"

The man with the black moustache fairly bounded.

Figgins & Co. suppressed a gasp.

Arthur Augustus had only been gone two or three minutes. Figgins & Co. were waiting for Mr. Hoot to go, in his turn, before they stirred. The man with the black moustache was muttering oaths when that sudden sharp voice rapped.

"What the great horned toad—"

There had been no sound of a footstep, no rustle of the underwoods. The man with the black moustache had supposed himself utterly alone in the wood. He jumped almost clear of the ground as the portly figure suddenly appeared, and he stared at a levelled revolver in a plump hand.

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"Hands up, Chicago Hank!" The man with the black moustache had approached without a sound, and the portly figure had a plump hand. "Stick them up, please!"

"Stick them up, please!" came Pawson's fruity voice. "I warn you that I will shoot you down like a dog, Chicago Hank, if you give me the smallest spot of trouble."

Slowly the American raised his uninjured arm over his slouched hat. The other, in the sling, he could not raise. He stared at Pawson's plump face in rage and astonishment.

"You need not be alarmed, my good man!" went on Lord Eastwood's former valet smoothly. "I have no intention of handing you over to the police! My business with you can be put through in a few minutes and then you can go your way, wherever you please."

"You got me guessing!" muttered the man with the black moustache. "Who are you, you pesky gink?"

"My name does not matter! All I want from you, my friend, is the Nizam's Diamond!" said Pawson calmly.

"I tell you you got me guessing!"

Figgins & Co. exchanged a stare.

They knew, as all St. Jim's knew, that Lord Eastwood's celebrated stone, the Nizam's Diamond, had been purloined from Eastwood House before the holidays, and that a crook called Chicago Hank was suspected of the theft.

But that the American who had handed the black box into Gussy's keeping was Chicago Hank was a dumbfounding piece of news!

They glimpsed Pawson's plump face through



etache fairly bounded. Figgins & Co. suppressed a gasp. The American found himself staring at a levelled revolver in his hand. "That's the Nizam's Diamond!" came Pawson's fruity voice.

the hawthorns. There was a faint sardonic smile on that plump face.

"Have I got you guessing, my good man?" asked Pawson smoothly. "Then I will explain! When you changed the scene of your activities as a jewel robber from the United States to this country it was rather unfortunate for me that you centred your attention on Lord Eastwood's celebrated diamond. You caused me very great trouble and disappointment, my friend."

"Put it plain!" hissed the crook. "What you horning at?"

"For six months," smiled Pawson, "I have been in Lord Eastwood's service as his valet. This was not wholly for the pleasure of brushing his lordship's clothes. I had my eye on the Nizam's Diamond, and was waiting for an opportunity, my friend! Before my chance came the diamond went—you got in first. I actually gave up hope of ever seeing the Nizam's Diamond again—"

Pawson gave a low laugh.

It was easy to see that he was in a mood of satisfaction; indeed, almost bubbling with triumph.

But the revolver in his plump hand never wavered for a moment. The Chicago crook had no chance of taking him off his guard. No doubt Chicago Hank packed a gun. But he had no chance of getting at it.

"His lordship," went on Pawson, grinning,

"dispatched me in charge of his son, and his son's friends, during their Easter air trip abroad. Thus I learned of the black box. At first, certainly, I merely surmised that it was some sort of loot that had been palmed off into Master Arthur's keeping—a very good-hearted and unsuspecting youth, Master Arthur—a delightful lad, in fact, but not too bright in the intellectual line!"

"I'm telling you—" muttered the man with the black moustache.

"Not at all—I'm telling you!" smiled Pawson. "In my first attempts to obtain possession of the black box, I merely surmised that it contained valuables—which was plain enough from Giuseppe's pursuit of it. But when I learned that Master Arthur had received it from an American who was crooked on a motor-bike—at the very time that Chicago Hank had been seen fleeing on a motor-bike in Sussex—I glimpsed the surprising truth! I learned later from Giuseppe that my guess was correct! By a very singular chance, my good friend, it was into the hands of his lordship's son that you entrusted the diamond you had stolen from his lordship—to keep it safe from the dago."

"I guess—"

"All through the Easter holidays," resumed Pawson, "Master Arthur has been carrying his father's celebrated diamond, enclosed in that little black box, utterly unaware of the fact! Not one of his friends dreamed of suspecting such a thing. Master Arthur was too honourable even to think of opening the box which was entrusted to his care."

Pawson laughed softly.

"He would have been very much surprised had he done so. He would have seen inside it the missing Nizam's Diamond. Is not that so, my friend?"

"You pesky big stiff, I guess—"

"Keep quiet, my friend—I should have no hesitation whatever in shooting you down!" said Pawson.

"You figure I got the diamond on me, you geck?" snarled Chicago Hank.

Pawson laughed again.

"Precisely!" he agreed. "And when you have handed over the black box, with the diamond inside, you may go your way. I assure you that I have no use for you, Chicago Hank."

"I ain't—"

"Cut that out, my friend. Only this afternoon I made an attempt to obtain possession of the black box at Master Arthur's school and failed! Since then, I have watched—can you guess why?"

"I'm telling you—" snarled the Chicago crook.

"I have watched," said Pawson calmly, "in order to follow Master Arthur if he left the school to return the black box to the man from whom he received it. It was my intention to shadow him every time he left the school, for this reason—but I have struck lucky first time!"

"Not so lucky as you figure, you doggoned stiff!" snarled Chicago Hank. "I'm telling you—"

"I followed Master Arthur into this wood," resumed Pawson. "I thought it very probable that he was keeping an appointment here—and he was! I lost him on the footpath, but while I was seeking for him he walked out almost under my nose and went down the path! I need not say that I did not allow him to see me. I entered the wood where he had left it—not in the least

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doubting that I should find that American who placed the black box in his keeping. I have found him!"

Pawson laughed again—a laugh full of triumph. "You beat me to it at Eastwood House, Chicago Hank—but I have beaten you to it at the finish!" he said. "Hand over the black box which Master Arthur handed you a few minutes ago! I am waiting!"

"You doggoned, double-crossing big stiff, I guess you can go on waiting!" snarled Chicago Hank. "I ain't got it."

"You are wasting time!" said Pawson smoothly. "You may hand it over or I shall search you for it! Why give me the trouble?"

The Chicago crook gave a scoffing, savage laugh.

"I guess you can search till the cows come home!" he snarled. "You sure won't find that black box in my rags—nor the Nizam's Diamond, neither. The young gink never handed it over!"

"You are wasting time!" repeated Pawson. Evidently he did not believe a word of the Chicago crook's statement.

"Aw, get on with the search! I'm telling you that pie-faced, bone-headed young geck came and told me that he'd lost it, and just came along to put me wise that he couldn't hand it over to-day!"

"You can pack all that up, Chicago Hank! I am quite certain that Master Arthur came here to hand over the black box, and assured that he did so," said Pawson calmly. "Why waste time?"

"I'm telling you—"

"That will do!" Pawson's smooth voice changed to a sharp rap. "I will search you for it! Stir a finger while I search you, and you know what to expect!"

Figgins & Co., behind the hawthorns, looked at one another. They, of course, knew that Arthur Augustus had not handed over the black box, and that a disappointment awaited Lord Eastwood's former valet in the moment of his expected triumph. They heard rustling, brushing sounds, which told that Pawson was searching the crook.

Pawson's voice was heard at last, husky with rage, a contrast to his former smooth tones.

"You Chicago scum! Where is the black box?"

"I guess I've put you wise!" came the snarl in answer. "The young gink lost it, and came here to tell me so. I'll say it's around his pesky school this minute, you big stiff!"

The unseen juniors heard Pawson breathing hard.

Having ascertained that the black box was not on the Chicago crook, Pawson had to be convinced at last that D'Arcy had not handed it over to him. It was a heavy blow to Pawson. Again and again the black box had escaped his clutches; and now, in the moment of what had seemed absolutely certain success, it had escaped again!

Not for a moment had he doubted that Arthur Augustus had handed the black box to the man he had met in the wood, and that it was now at his mercy. And it was as far off as ever!

"You scum of Chicago!" Pawson's voice quivered with fury. "Beat it—and if you value your liberty, get out of Sussex and stay out! In an hour's time, the police will be on your track—they will not lose a chance of securing Chicago Hank! Go!"

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"I guess—"

"Your game is up here, Chicago Hank!" Pawson's voice was calm again. "Linger here, and the handcuffs will close on your wrists! The black box will have no further interest for you after that. I recommend you to make the most of the short time at your disposal!"

There was a sound of retreating footsteps.

Pawson was gone.

For a few moments after he was gone, a nasal voice was heard, muttering savage words. But Chicago Hank, no doubt, realised that he had little time to waste—and a brushing in the thickets told that he was hurrying away through the wood.

Figgins & Co. were left alone.

"Well," breathed George Figgins. "My hat! My only spring bonnet! My solitary summer chapeau!"

"This is a go!" said Fatty Wynn.

Kerr smiled.

The keen and canny Scottish junior had suspected that there was something in the mysterious affair of the black box that would bear looking into. He knew now!

"Let's get back!" he said.

And Figgins & Co. walked back to St. Jim's—with a surprise in store for their rivals of the School House. The mysterious secret of the black box was a secret no longer!

CHAPTER 11.

Easy for Detective Kerr!

"GOODNESS knows!" said Tom Merry. He shook his head.

Seven juniors in Study No. 6 in the School House were quite puzzled and perplexed.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, on his return to the school from Wayland Wood, had set his noble wits to work at once to discover what had become of the black box. His friends were all ready to help—if there was anything to be done.

But they did not see anything that could be done.

Somebody, it was clear, had removed the black box from D'Arcy's desk after he had placed it there, and before Pawson's afternoon call.

Who, and why, could not be guessed.

The juniors could only conclude that it had been done for a lark—but by whom they had no idea.

Certainly it had happened fortunately, for it could hardly be doubted that the prize would have fallen into Pawson's plump hands had it still been in the desk when Pawson searched the study for it.

Nevertheless, it had to be found!

"You see, deah boys, it places me in a vewy awkward posish!" said Arthur Augustus. "That American chap was feafully disappointed when I told him I couldn't hand it ovah—"

"No doubt," said Manners dryly.

"I am afraid he is wathah a suspicious sort of man," went on Arthur Augustus. "He seemed to have an idea that I was what he called double-ovassin' him! That is vewy howwid, you know, and I shall be vewy glad to have done with him as well as the black box! I weally must find that beastly black box, and hand it ovah to him to-morrow and get wid of the whole bisney!"

"Well, we're bound to see it again sooner or later," said Blake. "It must be in the House."

"Yaas, wathah! But where?"
 "Echo answers where!" said Monty Lowther.
 "Gussy, old man," said Harry Manners very quietly, "it's pretty certain that that box has got something very valuable in it. You ought to think twice before you hand it over to the man who gave it to you."

Arthur Augustus turned his eyeglass on Manners in astonishment.

"I do not quite undahstand you, Mannahs!" he answered. "I am bound to return the man his propahity, I suppose."

"Is it his property?" said Manners.

"Eh? Yaas, of course! What do you mean?"

"I mean this," said Manners. "It's a jolly queer business! That American man, whoever he is, was getting away from Giuseppe when he crashed on his motor-bike! Well, he may be an honest man who was afraid of being robbed—but it looks to me as if he may have been some crook who had quarrelled with his confederates over the loot—"

"Bai Jove!"

"I can't help thinking that that is possible, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, with a nod.

"The box ought to be opened when we find it," said Lowther. "Goodness knows what may be in it—but it may not belong to that Yank at all—"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"My deah chap," he said, "the man entrusted the thing to me. I promised to take care of it and return it to him when he asked for it. I am bound to do so. As for openin' it, that is imposs—it would be actin' like a pwyin' tick like Twimble. I could not do anythin' of the kind!"

"But look here—"

"My deah chap, the twouble is to find that beastly black box!" said Arthur Augustus. "It has got to go back to the ownah, and the soonah, the bettah. Pway don't wandah fwom the point! Where—"

Tap!

The study door opened, and three fellows walked in.

The School House juniors all looked round at Figgins & Co.

"Pax!" said Figgins, holding up his hand with a cheery grin. "House rows are off! Have you found that giddy black box yet?"

"Not yet!" said Tom Merry. "What do you know about it, Figgy?"

"Oh, lots!" grinned Figgins. "More than you do, I fancy! The fact is, we're taking the matter up for you!"

"Weally, Figgins—"

"You see," explained Figgins, "New House being Cock House of St. Jim's, we feel that it's up to us to look after you School House kids a little and keep you out of mischief."

"That's the idea!" grinned Fatty Wynn.

"You've come here to ask for a licking?" inquired Jack Blake. "All right—you won't have to ask twice!"

"Pax!" said Kerr, laughing. "We've called on business, really! Look here, if you haven't found that black box yet, it's got to be found! It's awfully important!"

"Yaas, wathah! You see, I've got to return it to the ownah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Figgins & Co.

"Bai Jove! What are you fellows laughin' at?" asked Arthur Augustus in surprise.

"Well, it's got to be returned to the owner, there's no doubt about that!" chuckled Kerr.

"But it's got to be found first. Perhaps we can help."

"I should be vewy glad if you could, Kerr! Bai Jove! I shouldn't wondah if Kerr can help us out, you fellows! Bein' a Scotchman, you know, he is wathah bwainy."

"Detective Kerr takes the case!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, let's see!" said Kerr. "Where did you park it, Gussy?"

"In that desk, deah boy!"

"And when?"

"Just after callin'-ovah last evenin'."

"And it was gone when Pawson called this afternoon. So it was shifted between those two times!" said Kerr. "Nobody in the House would pinch it—so either somebody's taken it for a lark, or else from curiosity, to pry into it. Who saw you put it there?"

"Nobody, deah boy."

"Anybody about at the time?"

"Twimble of the Fourth poked his silly nose in, but I cleahed him off, and the door was shut."

Kerr laughed.

"We all know Trimble," he said. "Isn't there a keyhole to that door, Gussy?"

"Bai Jove! I nevah thought of that!"

Tom Merry uttered an exclamation.

"Trimble! That prying worm! If you'd told us that Trimble had seen it, Gussy, you ass—"

"But he nevah saw it, deah boy! That is, unless he looked through the keyhole! I think he barged into the studay afterwards, because some cakes and things disappeared from my hamphah. But—"

"Suppose we ask Baggy Trimble whether he was anywhere near the keyhole when Gussy parked the black box?" suggested Kerr.

"Bai Jove!"

"Let's!" said Tom Merry; and he led the way from Study No. 6, along the Fourth Form passage to Study No. 2.

CHAPTER 12.

The Nizam's Diamond!

BAGGY TRIMBLE jumped.

Baggy was alone in his study after tea, busily occupied.

In Baggy's fat hands was a little black box, which Baggy, inquisitively, was trying to get open.

A dozen times or more since he had lifted that black box from the desk in Study No. 6 the previous day, Baggy had tried to open it, but without success.

Baggy was fearfully curious on the subject.

Arthur Augustus' mysterious proceedings with that little black box had excited his keenest curiosity, and Baggy had lifted it to see what was inside, and he was quite determined to discover what was inside.

Baggy had not expected much difficulty in the matter, and he had intended to return the black box to the desk as soon as he had peeped into it.

But he had found unexpected difficulties in the way. The box did not seem to have any opening at all. Obviously, it must have an opening, but it was not to be discovered.

As nothing had reached Baggy's ears on the subject of the missing article, he took it for

granted that D'Arcy had not missed it yet. Arthur Augustus, he had no doubt, supposed that it was still lying under the papers in his desk, where he had left it.

Now once more Baggy was fingering the black box, trying to get it open—when his study door was suddenly hurled wide and a crowd of juniors appeared in the doorway.

Baggy jumped up, and his fat hand whisked behind him with the black box in it.

"Here he is!" grunted Blake.

"Twimble, you fat wottah—"

"I—I say, what's the row?" asked Trimble in alarm. "If you're going to make out that I touched your hamper, D'Arcy, I can jolly well tell you who did—it was a New House chap—"

"Bai Jove!"

"The fact is, it was Figgins," said Baggy. "I saw him—"

"You saw me!" roared George Figgins, looking in at the doorway.

Baggy jumped again.

"Oh, I didn't see you, Figgins, old chap! I didn't mean it was you—I—I meant Fatty Wynn—"

"Me!" hooted Fatty from the passage.

"Oh crikey! No, not you!" gasped Baggy. "I—I—I mean—"

"Nevah mind the hampah, you fat gwampus!" said Arthur Augustus. "I want to know whethah you pinched my black box, Twimble."

"Oh!" gasped Baggy. "Certainly not! What do you mean by a black box? Do—do you mean a coal-box?"

"Gussy's been offered a coal-box already," remarked Monty Lowther. "But it seems that it won't do!"

"Weally, Lawtah, you ass—"

"Well, I know nothing about it," said Trimble. "I don't see why you should come to my study. I jolly well think—"

"What are you holding in that paw behind you?" asked Kerr.

"Oh, nothing! Only some bullseyes, I mean!"

"Let's have a look at the bullseyes!" suggested Kerr.

"Twimble, you prying worm—"

"Twimble, you fat wottah—"

"Collar him!" hooted Blake.

"Look here, you know— I say— Oh crikey! Oh jiminy! I tell you I haven't got it!" roared Trimble. "Leggo! It's only some butter-scotch I've got here, and— Yaroooooh!"

Bump!

Baggy Trimble sat suddenly and hard on the floor of Study No. 2. He roared as he sat.

"Oh! Ow! Oh crikey! Yaroooh! I say— Wow! Ow!"

Something flew from Baggy's fat hand as he bumped. Blake pounced on it and picked it up. He held it up to view.

"Bai Jove! The black box!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "Twimble, you pwyin', nosey wottah, you pinched it out of my desk—"

"I—I didn't!" gasped Baggy. "I—I mean—I—I was only going to see whether I could open it, that's all! I—I thought perhaps you'd like me to get it open for you, old chap! I—I was only going to do it to oblige you, really—"

"Bump him!"

"I say— Whooop!"

Bump!

"Oh jiminy! I say—"

Bump!

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"Yoo-hoop! Stoppit!" yelled Trimble. "I was only going to open it to see what was inside, and I never opened it, and— Yoo-hoo-hoop!" Bump!

Baggy Trimble was left roaring as Tom Merry & Co. returned to Study No. 6 with the black box.

"I am awf'ly obliged to you, Kerr!" said Arthur Augustus, as Blake handed him the black box. "It weally nevah occurred to me, you know, that that wottah Twimble pwied through the keyhole aftah the door was shut on him! Now it is all wight!"

"And you're going to hand that box over to the man who calls himself Hoot?" asked Manners sarcastically.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Then you're an ass!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Hold on a minute!" said Kerr. "The detective in the case takes charge of the missing article till the ownership is established!"

Kerr coolly jerked the black box out of the hand of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove! Weally, Kerr—"

"There's no doubt about it, Kerr!" said Tom Merry, staring at the Scottish junior in surprise. "That's the black box that Gussy's had hanging about all through the hols—"

"We know it all right by this time!" said Blake. "What are you driving at, you New House fathead?"

"Leave it to Kerr!" grinned Figgins. "Kerr's got something to tell you about that jolly old black box!"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Fatty Wynn.

"I weally fail to see—"

"The things you fail to see, Gussy, are like the sands on the seashore—simply innumerable!" remarked Kerr.

"Weally, Kerr—"

"I fancy Kerr will agree with me," grunted Manners. "Kerr's no fool! My belief is that there's loot of some kind in that black box."

"Wubbish!"

"Oh, you guessed that one, did you, Manners?" asked Kerr.

"I feel pretty sure of it!" said Manners.

"Wot!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Blessed if I see what you're getting at, Kerr!" said Herries. "You've found the box—but I dare say we should have found it before long. Trimble wasn't going to keep it."

"And even if he'd got it open it would be all right!" said Digby. "I don't suppose there's anything to eat in it."

"My dear chaps," said Kerr blandly, "the black box may, or may not, be the property of the man who handed it to Gussy. No objection to letting him have it back. But what's inside it belongs to somebody else!"

"How do you know?" roared Blake.

"Aren't I the detective in the case?" grinned Kerr. "I can tell you, after what happened this afternoon, I made up my mind at once to look into it and keep Gussy out of trouble!"

"Weally, Kerr, you ass—"

"And it's rather lucky for Gussy and his pater that Kerr did!" chuckled Figgins.

"I fail to see how my patah is connected with the mattah, Figgins," said Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

Kerr tapped the black box with his forefinger.

"What's in this box belongs to Lord Eastwood," he said.

"Wubbish!"
"Is that a joke?" asked Tom Merry, utterly mystified.

"Not at all!"
"How can there be anything in that box belonging to Gussy's pater?" hooted Blake.

"Lord Eastwood has never even seen it."
"What awful rot!" said Herries.

"Talking out of your hat?" inquired Dig.
"You listen to Detective Kerr!" said Figgins.

"There's something of Lord Eastwood's in that box, Gussy."
"Imposs, deah boy!"

"Blessed if I see—" said Monty Lowther.
"Well, you're going to see!" said Kerr.

"This box opens somehow or other, and I'm going to open it—"
"You must do nothin' of the kind!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in alarm. "That box was entrusted to me, and it must certainly not be opened."

"It was entrusted to you, old bean, by the crook who robbed your father, in collusion with Giuseppe, and bolted with the loot!" said Kerr. "That was why the dago was after him. It was a case of one crook double-crossing the other."

"Bai Jove! If—if you weally think so, Kerr—" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Tain't a case of thinking!" grinned Fatty Wynn. "It's the fact!"
"The jolly old fact!" chuckled Figgins.

"Let's have this plain before you open the box, Kerr," said Tom Merry. "Do you give us your word that you know for a fact that something pinched from Gussy's pater is in that box?"

"Word of honour!" said Kerr.
"That settles it, then! That box has got to be opened!" said Tom.

"I should jolly well think so," said Manners.
"But weally—it is vewy extwaordinawy—I weally do not see how Kerr knows anythin' about it!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "But your word is good enough for me, of course, deah boy! The box must be opened."

Kerr was twisting the little black box in his fingers.

It was not easy to open. Nobody had been able to detect an opening in it. Baggy Trimble had tried it a dozen times, in vain. Tom Merry & Co. watched Kerr in silence as he handled it. It was agreed on all hands now that the box had to be opened. Kerr's positive statement left no room for doubt about that.

"Jolly clever contrivance!" remarked Kerr. "The blighter wasn't taking risks with his plunder. But I fancy I've got it!"

He pressed a thumb to one end of the little oval box, and then began unwinding two halves. He had spotted the secret. The pressure at the end released the hidden fastening inside, and the upper half of the box unwound off the lower half.

All eyes were fixed on it breathlessly as Kerr removed the upper half. The mysterious box was open at last! There was a sudden, almost blinding flash of brilliance from the box, in the sunshine from the study window. And there was a general shout of amazement in Study No. 6.

"What—"
Kerr handed the box to Arthur Augustus. "The Nizam's Diamond!" he said.

CHAPTER 13.

Found at Last!

"THE Nizam's Diamond!"
Arthur Augustus stuttered out the words.

"The Nizam's Diamond!" repeated Tom Merry dazedly. "Oh, my hat!"

"The Eastwood diamond!" gasped Blake.
The crowd of juniors in Study No. 6 stared at the great diamond, blazing and sparkling from the black box.

They could hardly believe their eyes.
"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus faintly.

"It—it—it's the patah's diamond, you fellows! I've seen it at Eastwood House! It's the Nizam's Diamond, that was pinched by that Chicago crook before the hols—"

"And you've been carrying your pater's missing diamond about all over Europe on a flying trip!" gasped Blake.

"No wonder Giuseppe wanted it so badly!" said Herries.

"And Pawson, too—"

"But—but—it is the diamond, all wight!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "But—but, weally, it makes a fellow's head turn wound! How did the diamond get into that black box?"

"Chicago Hank packed it there when he pinched it," answered Kerr, "and he cleared off with it and left Giuseppe in the lurch."

"Oh!" exclaimed Tom, as a light dawned on his mind. "That man with the black moustache on the motor-bike—"

"Exactly! Chicago Hank handed it over to Gussy to keep it out of the dago's hands," said Kerr. "Of course, he never dreamed, at the time, that Gussy was the son of the man he had

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THE ROYAL NAVY

THE CLAIM ROBBER!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

Who is the unknown that robs the miners' claims of gold-dust? Finding himself under suspicion at Cedar Creek School, Frank Richards sets out to put the guilt where it belongs!

Under Suspicion!

"WHAT'S ON?"

Bob Lawless asked that question. Frank Richards & Co. had just arrived at school, and as they joined the group of Cedar Creek fellows in the playground there was sudden silence. Kern Gunten, the Swiss schoolboy, had been speaking, and several other fellows, too. A discussion was going on when the three chums came up. But the arrival of Frank, Bob, and Vere Beaulerc had the effect of a cold douche.

"What's on?" repeated Bob, looking at the group in surprised inquiry. "You were chewing the rag pretty lively a minute ago."

"Ahem!" coughed Chunky Todgers.

Gunten grinned sarcastically.

"I guess I'll tell you, if you like," he said.

"It's all rot!" said Tom Lawrence. "I don't believe a word of it. Richards ought to be told, though."

"Little me?" said Frank Richards, with a smile. "Well, go ahead!"

"Cut in, Gunten!" said Eben Hacke.

"I don't say I believe it myself, exactly," said Gunten cautiously. "But the galoot is coming here, that's a cert!"

"What galoot?" asked Bob.

"Four Kings of Thompson."

Frank Richards started. He had reason to remember that peculiar name.

"Four Kings!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, you know the man?" grinned Gunten.

"I've met him once," answered Frank Richards.

"He's a thorough rascal. But I don't see how you know anything about it, Gunten—unless that ruffian is an acquaintance of yours."

"Oh, I see the fellow about Thompson, of course!" said Gunten carelessly. "He was starting on the trail when I came to school this morning. I passed him, as he was on foot. He told me he was coming here to show you up."

"The rotten mugwump!" growled Bob Lawless.

"He says you're the chap who's been lifting gold from the claims at night, and he knows it," continued Gunten. "He says he caught you at it. He's going to give you away."

Frank Richards' cheeks reddened. Very curious glances were thrown at him by the Cedar Creek fellows. It was easy to see that few, if any, believed the allegation; but it was odd, to say the least, that Four Kings should come to the school with such a story if there was no foundation at all for it.

The unknown claim robber was a subject of much discussion in the section, but no one had thought of suspecting that a schoolboy of Cedar Creek was the guilty party.

"He says that you called on him at the Red Dog, in Thompson, to buy him off," went on Gunten. "He wouldn't touch your money."

"Oh, Jerusalem!" ejaculated Bob Lawless.

"He says that, does he?"

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"You went to the Red Dog yesterday, Richards," remarked Chunky Todgers.

"That's so," assented Frank. He looked round at the curious schoolboys, his colour deepening. "I'll tell you fellows how the matter stands. This man Four Kings wrote to me here. So I went to the Red Dog to see what his game was. He wanted to get money out of me."

"What for?" grinned Gunten.

"He thought I was the claim robber," said Frank quietly. "He was prowling round the creek one night, he explained to me, and he caught a boy there who was robbing the claims. He couldn't see him clearly in the dark, but the fellow told him he belonged to this school, and gave him my name. Of course, he gave a false name."

"Isn't that rather a steep yarn?" said Gunten.

"I don't think so. If Four Kings hadn't been a fool he wouldn't have supposed that the thief would give his own name."

"Why should he pick on your name especially?" sneered Gunten.

Frank Richards looked steadily at the Swiss.

"I think he picked on my name because he's an enemy of mine," he answered quietly. "I can't think of any other reason. The thief must have been a fellow who knew me, and my name, and had a grudge against me. You are the only fellow here who answers to that description, Gunten."

"What?"

"Don't I speak plainly?" said Frank coolly.

"That's what I suspect. I suspect that you are the claim robber, Gunten, and that you gave my name when you were caught."

Gunten's face was almost livid. There was no mistaking Frank Richards' meaning. There was a buzz among the Cedar Creek fellows.

"You—you dare to accuse me?" panted Gunten at last.

"I'm not accusing you," said Frank. "I think it's very probable. I shouldn't have spoken my suspicions if you hadn't taken this line, Gunten. But you're trying to throw suspicion on me, and so I feel entitled to speak out—though, of course, I haven't any proof. But one thing's certain—if the claim robber was a Cedar Creek fellow at all, it was you!"

"Straight from the shoulder, by gum!" chuckled Bob.

"That's a lie!" said Kern Gunten thickly.

"You know it's a lie, Richards!"

"Nothing of the sort! Someone gave my name instead of his own, and you're the fellow likeliest to do it!" said Frank. "It's just one of your rotten tricks, in fact."

Some of the Cedar Creek fellows chuckled. Kern Gunten's face was quite entertaining at that moment.

"As for this fellow Four Kings," went on Frank, "he is a scoundrel. He wanted to get money out of me to keep it dark, believing that I was the chap he caught lifting the dust from

the claims. When I found out what he wanted I answered him plain enough. And then he tried to rob us in the Red Dog, and there would have been trouble if Injun Dick hadn't chipped in, and taken his revolver away. He's no business to come here. If he thinks I'm the claim robber he should go to the sheriff about it."

"I guess so," agreed Lawrence.

"If he comes here it will be to stick me for money, if he can," said Frank. "He will get a plain answer, too! Let him come, if he likes."

"Talk of angels!" grinned Hopkins. "Ere he comes!"

A burly man had appeared in the gateway, and the schoolboys recognised at once Four Kings, the loafer of Thompson. He strode straight towards the group.

Frank Richards & Co. eyed him calmly as he came up. The ruffian fixed his eyes on Frank with a threatening stare.

"I guess you're my mutton!" he announced. "I've moseyed along to see you, Richards. This hyer is your last chance to pony up the fifty dollars you owe me."

Frank Richards' Answer!

THERE was a dead silence when Four Kings had spoken. Bob Lawless and Vere Beaulerc drew nearer to their chum, in anticipation of trouble. The other fellows looked on, wondering what was going to happen.

Frank Richards set his lips hard. The ruffian evidently believed his own story, that Frank was the fellow he had caught on the claims at night. But that was no justification for his attempt to obtain money from the schoolboy.

"I guess you'd better pay up," continued Four Kings. "Mind, I'm hyer on cold business. I'm going to the schoolmarm. Arter that, I guess I'm going to mosey round to Sheriff Henderson. Now, what's the verdict, hey?"

"You want an answer to that?" asked Frank.

"Co-rect!"

"Here it is, then!"

Frank rushed forward as he spoke and struck out. The blow caught Four Kings on the point of his bristly chin, and he went backwards like a sack of coal.

Crash!

There was a roar of rage from the ruffian as he went down on his back. His hand flew to his belt, evidently for a weapon, but he had no chance of drawing it. Bob Lawless was too quick for him, and his heavy boot clumped on the rascal's wrist in time.

A revolver went whirling through the air, and Four Kings uttered a howl of rage. The next moment Frank Richards' knee was on the ruffian's chest. Bob Lawless grasped his wrists and held them fast. Four Kings struggled, but in vain.

"Get a trail-ropo, Cherub!" shouted Bob.

"What-ho!"

Beaulerc ran up with the trail-ropo.

With the excited crowd of schoolboys buzzing round him, Four Kings had his hands securely bound together.

"Now, you brute!" said Frank Richards. "You could be sent to the calaboose for drawing a weapon here. Chuck that pistol into the creek, Chunky!"



Bob Lawless tiptoed towards the creek, lariat in hand. Then his right arm rose for the cast of the ropo. Swish! The claim robber heard the sound as he bent at the cradle, and he turned round with an exclamation of alarm. The next moment the noose descended on him.

"You bet!" grinned Chunky Todgers.
 "Now you're going to be cleared out," continued Frank Richards. "You've tried to get money out of me, and you claim to have information about the claim robber. You're going to the sheriff."

Four Kings panted.

"Trot out the horses, Bob!"

"I—I say, Frank—"

"I'm going to take him to Sheriff Henderson," said Frank Richards resolutely. "He's accusing me of robbing the claims. He can make that accusation again before the sheriff. You fellows can come if you like."

"Oh, we'll come! But the bell goes in a minute."

"Can't be helped."

"Oh, all O.K.!" said Bob. "Then we'd better get off before Miss Meadows sees this beauty."

Beauclerc was already leading the horses out of the corral.

"Come along!" said Frank, dragging on the rope that bound Four Kings' wrists together.

"I guess I'll get you for this!" yelled Four Kings.

"Will you come?"

"Nope!"

"You'll be dragged, then."

The two schoolboys put force on the rope, and the ruffian was yanked along into the gateway. The excited crowd followed.

Beauclerc had the horses outside the gate, and Frank Richards fastened the loose end of the trail-rope to the saddle of his pony. Then he mounted.

Four Kings yelled furiously as the pony started. As he refused to rise to his feet and walk, he was dragged bodily along the rough trail in a series of bumps. Naturally, he very soon had enough of that. He jumped to his feet and ran after the rider, to keep pace with the pony, panting with rage.

Miss Meadows had come out of the school-house, but the three chums were gone before she could reach the spot. Tom Lawrence explained the matter to the schoolmistress, and the Cedar Creek fellows went in to morning lessons in a state of great excitement.

Meanwhile, Frank Richards & Co. were trotting along the Thompson trail, Four Kings following at the end of the trail-rope.

As they drew nearer and nearer to the sheriff's residence, the ruffian's fury gave place more and more to uneasiness. He had no proof against Frank in the matter of the claim robbing, for his word was quite worthless, and his attempt at blackmail showed that his interest in the matter was only a rascally one. Sheriff Henderson was, in fact, the very last man in the Thompson Valley whom Four Kings was desirous of meeting.

"Let up, gents!" he gasped at last, as he trotted wearily after the horses. "Give a galoot a chance."

"Oh, keep it up!" said Bob Lawless, glancing back. "This will do you good."

"I guess I don't want to go to the sheriff!" gasped Four Kings.

"It's too late to think of that," answered Frank Richards. "You've accused me of claim robbing, and you've got to stick to it."

"I—I guess I made a mistake," mumbled the ruffian. "I never seed you in the dark that night. I took it as it was you, seeing as the galoot gave you your name. I guess I got the wrong

antelope by the tail. Let up! I'll clear out of the section, if you like. I'll go over the line. Honest!"

Frank Richards slackened rein. The ruffian had angered him, but his complete surrender disarmed the good-natured schoolboy. Four Kings had evidently come to his senses, and was convinced now that the unknown claim robber had fooled him by using a borrowed name.

Frank looked at his chums.

"Oh, let him go through with it!" said Bob. "The sheriff will be glad of a chance of nailing him. We don't want his sort loose in this section."

"I'll light out!" gasped Four Kings.

Frank halted.

"Let's give him a chance," he said. "If he clears out of Canada, that's good enough."

"Oh, all right!" said Bob. "You're a soft-hearted duffer, Frank. But let the brute go if you like."

And Vere Beauclerc nodded assent.

Frank Richards looked at the panting ruffian.

"You'll clear out of this section over the line?" he asked.

"Yep!"

"Mind, we shall look for you to-morrow, and if you're still in Thompson we go to the sheriff and make a charge against you," said Frank.

"I guess I'll vamoose," said the ruffian. "I know when I've had enough."

"You can clear, then," said Frank contemptuously.

He untied the trail-rope, and the ruffian stood free. The run after the horses had exhausted him, and he staggered away in the direction of Thompson.

Frank Richards & Co. wheeled their horses, and rode back to the lumber school. They arrived there an hour late for lessons.

Miss Meadows quietly told them to go to their places, and nothing more was said just then, but after lessons the schoolmistress called the chums into her study, and Frank had to give an explanation of the whole affair. He did so quite candidly.

"I am sorry you let the man go," said Miss Meadows quietly. "I do not believe one word against you, Richards, but I am afraid some suspicion will cling until the claim robber is caught. However, it cannot be helped now. You may go."

Frank Richards looked very thoughtful as he left the schoolmistress. He soon found that Miss Meadows was right.

A crowd of fellows wanted to know what had been done with Four Kings, and when Frank explained that he had been allowed to escape, there was a mocking laugh from Kern Gunten. The Swiss did his best to spread the impression that Frank had allowed Four Kings to go free, because he feared to take him to the sheriff, and, although he did not quite succeed, there was a lingering doubt in a good many minds.

Frank Richards, for once, was under a cloud at the backwoods school, and he was very silent and thoughtful for the remainder of the day.

The Chums Take Action!

PENNY for 'em, Franky!" said Bob Lawless, when the three chums were leaving Cedar Creek School after lessons.

"I've been thinking—" began Frank Richards, as they trotted along the trail into the timber.

"My dear chap, you've been looking like a moulting crow all day," chuckled Bob Lawless. "Are you worrying about Gunten's rotten yarns?"

"I was thinking of knocking those yarns on the head, and perhaps Gunten, too," said Frank.

"I was thinking of that," said Beauclerc quietly. "The claim robber has got to be found, Frank."

"That's it," said Frank. "Look here, you fellows, there's no doubt that Four Kings actually found a kid about my age and size at the claims the other night, who gave him my name. I can't help suspecting Gunten. It was just one of his tricks. Who else could have thought of giving my name? Only a fellow who had a grudge against me, and Gunten's the only enemy I've ever had."

"True, O chief!" said Bob. "As Gunten lives at Thompson, it's easy enough for him to sneak out to the creek at night," continued Frank. "We know he's a gambling rotter and often gets hard-up through losing his money. But Gunten or not, the rotter's got to be found, or this yarn will cling to me. We're going to find him if we can."

"My idea exactly," said Vere Beauclerc. "How are you going to work the riddle, though?" asked Bob thoughtfully. "We live a thumping long way from the creek. It won't be easy to keep watch on the claims."

"That's the only way, though," said Frank. "But as we suspect Gunten, my idea is to watch his place in Thompson, and see whether he sneaks out at night. We can't watch all the claims, but if Gunten gets out at night to go there, we can watch him and catch him at it."

"But the claim robber isn't at work every night," said Bob Lawless; "not more than once or twice a week. It looks as if it may be a big job."

"That's so; but there hasn't been a robbery for nearly a week now," said Frank. "That's a long interval, and it looks as if the thief has had a scare—and he has, of course, from Four Kings having collared him that night. Well, Gunten knows now that Four Kings has been cleared out of Thompson, and that will make him feel easy in his mind again. Well then, if it's Gunten, he's jolly likely to try it again to-night."

Bob nodded. "That's so. He'll know the coast is clear so far as that spying bulldozer is concerned," he remarked.

"If we don't spot him one night we may another," said Frank. "I'm ready to watch for a week to catch him at it. He's tried to throw it on me, and it's up to us to put the guilt where it belongs. I don't know what your pater will say about our going out at night, that's all, Bob. Uncle will have to know, I suppose."

"I can fix that," said Beauclerc. "My father's away at Kamloops, and I'm alone at the shack now. Stay with me to-night."

"Good man!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "That's a cinch! Look here, I'll cut home and tell popper that we're staying the night at Beau's shack. No need to worry him with details. And I'll get my lasso, in case we come on the claim robber."

"Good!" said Frank. And so it was arranged.

Frank Richards rode home with Vere Beauclerc, while Bob galloped on to the Lawless Ranch.

Beauclerc's home—the little wooden shack by the creek—was deserted now. The remittance

man was away, and was likely to be absent for some days.

Beauclerc and Frank Richards had supper ready at the shack by the time Bob came trotting back from the ranch. He had brought a bag with him, and his lasso, as well as permission from Mr. Lawless for the two boys to remain at the shack.

"We'll turn in early and get some sleep," said Bob as they sat down to supper. "We can get two or three hours' snooze before it's necessary to get a move on. We don't want to nod off in class to-morrow, you know."

"No fear!" agreed Frank. "If we don't catch Gunten to-night, we've got to try again."

After supper the chums turned into the bunks, and it was eleven o'clock when Bob Lawless rose and called his companions. They turned out at once.

Outside there was a glimmer of moonlight above the trees, and the creek glistened as it murmured by the reedy banks.

The three horses were saddled, and the chums mounted and rode away in the direction of Thompson. They came out of the woods into the trail that ran from Cedar Camp to the town.

A few minutes later a tramping figure loomed up in the dim light ahead.

"Somebody on the trail," remarked Bob.

"Four Kings," said Beauclerc quietly.

"By gum, so it is!"

The chums halted as they came up with the ruffian. Four Kings was tramping towards them, his back to the town. He scowled savagely at the sight of the three schoolboys.

"So you're off, my pippin!" said Bob Lawless.

"I guess I'm lighting out!" growled Four Kings, eyeing them with lowering brows. "Comin' to look for me—hey?"

"Well, I'm glad to see you're going," said Frank Richards.

Four Kings gritted his teeth and tramped on, and the shadows of the distance swallowed up the sullen ruffian.

The schoolboys rode on till the buildings of Thompson were visible in the distance. Then they dismounted, and the horses were tethered in a thicket.

"Shanks' pony now," said Bob.

It was close on midnight when the chums entered the sleeping town of Thompson. Gunten's store was closed long ago, and both the store and the house were dark. Bob Lawless led the way to the rear of the store.

Behind the store there were several outbuildings—stables, sheds, and storehouses. Among them lay a path which led from the back of the house to the waste land outside the town. If Gunten came out it was certain, of course, that he would not venture by way of the street in the front, where he might meet a belated pedestrian. If he came he would come cautiously by the back way, stealing along in the shadow of the outbuildings.

In an open shed, where a cart was upended, the three chums stopped to watch the path. They were in complete shadow, and from where they stood they could see every possible way of leaving the store from the rear.

"I guess this is where we hang on," murmured Bob Lawless. "You galoots can squat down if you like, and I'll keep watch."

But his chums were too keen for that, and all three of them remained watching.

Caught!

"HARK!"

Bob Lawless whispered the word under his breath. It was just one o'clock now. A sound close at hand had caught Bob's ear. Frank Richards and Beauclerc did not speak; they breathed hard, listening intently.

There was a faint footfall and their eyes gleamed as a dark figure flitted by. Dim as the light was, they recognised Kern Gunten. He passed within six yards of the hidden schoolboys, and tramped on quietly and cautiously.

"Follow on!" murmured Bob Lawless. "Keep in cover! He's bound to look back."

"Right-ho!" breathed Frank.

Silently the chums stepped from the shed and followed Kern Gunten's track. They kept in cover of the outbuildings till the latter were left behind, and then took advantage of trees and bushes to cover their movements.

Once or twice Gunten disappeared from sight, but they knew he was making for the creek, and it was easy to pick up the track again.

Near the creek there was a bunch of miners' shacks, and Gunten made a wide detour to avoid them.

Bob dragged his chums into the shadow of a cabin as Gunten stopped and looked round him. The claim robber did not suspect that he was being followed, but he was cautious, and probably in a state of nerves. Gunten moved on again and disappeared into the shadows.

Frank Richards drew a deep breath.

"There's no doubt about it now," he said in a low voice. "He's gone straight to the placer claims, Bob."

"Straight as a string!" murmured Bob, preparing his lasso for a cast. "I guess that galoot is going to have the surprise of his life. Come on, and not a sound!"

The moon had disappeared behind a cloud, and darkness lay upon the scene. As the chums crept on in the gloom, a faint sound came to their ears from ahead. It was the jarring of a cradle. The gold thief was evidently at work.

Bob Lawless' hand tightened on his lasso as they crept closer to the creek in the dark. Their hearts were beating faster now with excitement.

Close by the bank they were within a short distance of the claim robber, but the darkness hid him from sight. As soon as the moon emerged from the bank of clouds they would see him. He was near enough for them to hear his movements. With tense feelings they waited for the light.

A dim, silvery glimmer came from above as the clouds sailed slowly from under the moon. The light strengthened. It glimmered on the shallow creek, and on the beds of sand exposed by the wooden dams built out into the stream. Many of the cradles, mostly built of osiers from the wood, were full of "dirt," as the miners called the auriferous sand from the bed of the creek.

With long and laborious toil, the pay-dirt had been gathered up for the golden grains to be washed out in the cradles. All was as it had been left by the placer-miners when they knocked off work at sundown.

Faintly from the creek came the creaking of the cradle where the gold thief was at work, reaping the fruit of the labour of others.

The chums watched till the figure of the claim robber was clear to their view in the strengthening light. Gunten had his back to them, standing ankle-deep in wet sand as he worked the cradle.

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Signing to his chums to remain where they were, Bob Lawless tiptoed towards the creek, lariat in hand. He made no sound, but if he had done so the creaking of the cradle was sufficient to drown it.

Frank and Beauclerc watched him breathlessly. They caught their breath as his right arm rose for the cast of the noosed rope.

Swish!

Gunten heard the sound as he bent at his nefarious occupation, and he turned round, with a panning exclamation of alarm. As he did so the noose descended upon him. Before he knew what was happening the loop was over his shoulders, and Bob Lawless was dragging it taut.

It tightened round Gunten, pinning his arms to his sides, and holding him a helpless prisoner. He made a terrific, desperate wrench at the rope, and Bob dragged on it harder, and Gunten went sprawling over in the wet sand.

"Caught!" shouted Bob.

Frank and Vere Beauclerc ran forward. From the bank the three chums looked down upon the wet sand, where Gunten lay sprawling helplessly in the grip of the lasso. He was covered from head to foot with sand and mud, and panting with fear. As yet he did not know who his captors were, and he was in deadly fear for his life.

Some of the placer-miners would not have hesitated to drive a bullet through the gold thief if they had caught him at his work.

"Our game!" grinned Frank Richards.

Gunten ceased to struggle with the rope, and looked up at the trio on the bank, recognising Frank Richards' voice, and then the chums themselves.

"You!" he panted. "Frank Richards!"

"We've caught the claim robber!" chuckled Bob.

Gunten staggered to his feet.

"It—it's you, Lawless?"

"I guess so. Come out of the creek, you pesky rotter!" said Bob. "I'm going to walk you along to the cabins. The placer-men will be glad to see you."

Gunten panted as he clambered up the bank. His face was white with terror.

"You—you won't give me up?" he breathed.

"Won't we!" grinned Bob. "I reckon that's what you're here for, you thief! You're going to get your deserts now! Bring him along, you fellows!"

"Lawless," muttered Gunten hoarsely, "stop! They'll murder me—you know they will! Take me to the sheriff, if you like—not to the miners!"

Bob Lawless nodded.

"I guess that's so," he agreed. "I reckon they'd drown you in the creek like a mangy dog if they got their hands on you, Gunten. You can come along and see the sheriff."

"Let me loose!"

"No fear!" grinned Bob. "You mosey along with us, my pippin, just as you are—mud and sand and all. When you start telling lies you can explain how you got wet and sandy all over. Come on!"

Gunten quavered miserably as he followed the chums, the lasso still pinning his arms to his sides. He was at the end of his tether now.

Gunten Makes Amends!

"RICHARDS!"

Kern Gunten gasped out Frank's name as they reached the outskirts of Thompson. Much as the wretched Swiss had

injured him, Frank could not help feeling a little compassion as he looked at his white, terrified face.

"Let me off, Richards!" muttered Gunten. "For mercy's sake, don't take me to the sheriff. Think of my people—what they'll think!"

"It's too late now," said Frank. "You've tried to make the fellows at Cedar Creek believe that I was the claim robber, Gunten. You've got to take the consequences of what you've done."

"I'll take back all I've said!" exclaimed Gunten eagerly. "I'll clear you at Cedar Creek, Richards. I—I never meant to fix it on you. But when that brute Four Kings collared me that night I dared not give my own name. Your name came into my head, and I gave it."

"Possibly. But since then you've done your best to make all Cedar Creek believe that I was the claim robber," said Frank. "And there's only one way of undoing that, and that's showing up the real thief. I'm sorry, Gunten, for your people's sake; but you should have thought of that before you became a thief!"

"I'll undo what I've done. I'll—I'll own up at the school!" panted Gunten. "I—I don't mind that so much; only don't take me to the sheriff. I'll tell all Cedar Creek the truth, if you like. They won't give me away."

Frank Richards hesitated and glanced at his chums.

Vere Beauclerc did not speak, but Bob Lawless gave utterance to an angry growl.

"Rot!" he exclaimed. "Pesky rot! The galoot's tackling you, Franky, because he knows you're a soft-hearted duffer; and you're the fellow he's tried to injure. He's going to the sheriff!"

"But—I say. Bob—"

"Can't you see he's lying?" exclaimed Bob impatiently. "He'll say anything now; but if we let him loose he will deny it all to-morrow. We've got to nail him down while we've got proof."

"I suppose that's so," admitted Frank. "We can't trust you, Gunten. I'd let you off if I could, but you're too false."

"I swear it!" panted Gunten. "Look here, Richards—take me to the school as I am—you needn't even let me loose. I'll stand that—I'll stand anything. It's not long to daylight now. Take me as I am to Cedar Creek, and tell the fellows everything when they come to school."

"Oh Jerusalem!" murmured Bob Lawless.

"He's no right to ask anything of the kind," said Vere Beauclerc. "But—but there's his people, Bob. They would feel this. I don't think Gunten will try claim robbing again, so far as that goes."

"I swear I won't!" groaned Gunten. "I'm sorry I ever thought of it. I'd been losing money at cards, or I'd never have done it. I'll never go near the claims again."

Bob Lawless hesitated.

"I guess it means a night out for us," he said. "No need why we should take so much trouble over a thief!"

"Richards—" began Gunten.

"Oh, let Franky alone!" exclaimed Bob sharply. "He's a soft duffer, and he's going to let you off, if I let him. Look here, Gunten, we'll do it—you're not worth it—but we'll do it. But if you try to hedge at the school you go straight to Sheriff Henderson. If you don't own up to the whole story without beating about the bush, I'll yank you right away to the sheriff without giving you another chance. Savvy?"

"I mean business!" faltered Gunten.

"Mind you keep to that, then!"

Gunten almost sobbed with relief as the chums turned from the road into Thompson. The disgrace and shame at the school he could face, so long as he escaped the worse fate of being taken by the strong arm of the law and punished.

"You cut off and get the hosses, Franky," said Bob. "I'll keep this pilgrim in charge, and I'll take care he doesn't get loose."

Bob and Beauclerc walked along the trail towards Cedar Creek with the captured claim robber, while Frank went for the horses. He overtook them an hour later, riding his own pony and leading the other two. Then the chums kept on towards Cedar Creek.

There was a glimmer of dawn in the sky when they reached the school, but no sign of life yet about the place. They had a long wait before then ere the earliest scholars arrived at Cedar Creek.

They halted a hundred yards from the gate, in the timber. Gunten was still securely confined by the lasso. The wretched rogue of the lumber school threw himself wearily at the foot of a tree to rest.

Bob took another turn of the lasso round him, and knotted it. He did not mean to give the cunning Swiss a chance for trickery. Then the chums threw themselves in the grass, to rest in the growing warmth of the rising sun.

It was some hours later when Frank Richards sat up, rubbing his eyes. There was a clatter of hoofs on the trail. Tom Lawrence and his sister Molly came in sight, riding towards the school, with Chunky Todgers and Keller and Dick Dawson.

Frank Richards & Co. jumped up, and Gunten struggled to his feet, his face crimson. The riders halted in astonishment at the sight of the strange group.

"What the thunder's the game?" exclaimed Lawrence.

"Wait a bit!" grinned Bob. "Gunten's got a yarn to tell as soon as there's enough to hear it. Take a little rest."

In great curiosity the schoolboys dismounted, and soon there was a good crowd on the spot, as more and more of the scholars of Cedar Creek came along the trail. As soon as the gathering numbered fifteen or sixteen—all in a state of great amazement—Bob Lawless judged that it was time for the climax.

He gave the lasso a jerk.

"Go ahead, Gunten!" he said. "And remember that, at the first lie, straight you go to the sheriff!"

But the rogue of Cedar Creek was not thinking of lying now, and he faltered out his confession. He did not look up once.

"By gum!" said Tom Lawrence, in utter disgust, "so Gunten's the gold thief. And he was trying to make us think—"

"He tried to make us think it was Frank!" exclaimed Molly Lawrence. "He ought to be sent to prison!"

"I guess so!" said Chunky Todgers emphatically.

Gunten gave the chums a haggard look. Bob untied the lasso, and the Swiss stood free.

"You can vamoose!" said Bob contemptuously. Without a word more Kern Gunten tramped up the trail for home. Even the thick-skinned Swiss could not face his schoolfellows at Cedar Creek that day.

Next Week: "THE NORTH-WEST TRAIL!"
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Tin Tacks reappeared in the doorway, with Peg Slaney under his convoy. The one-eyed steward was resisting, but his resistance did not serve him much in the powerful grasp of the Barbadian. "Here's de white trash, Mass' Jack!" panted Tin Tacks.

The Distinguished Visitor!

"HERE comes Cazalet!" Lessons had finished on board the Benbow, and Jack Drake and Rodney were lounging under the awnings on the deck of the school ship as she rode at anchor in the spacious harbour of Port of Spain.

From among the shipping of the busy Trinidad port a shore boat came into view, manned by two black oarsmen, with a white youth sitting in the stern. He waved his hand in the distance to the two juniors looking over the ship's side, and Drake and Rodney waved back.

"All the grub in the cabin, Toodles?" asked Drake.

Tuckey Toodles grinned and nodded.

"You bet!" he answered. "The best spread I've seen since we sailed. Just like you chaps to stand a first-class spread for a stranger. You never do it for me—an old pal."

"Well, I expect you'll bag the lion's share, as usual," said Rodney, laughing. "Besides, Cazalet isn't a stranger. We chummed with him ashore. Is Tin Tacks in the cabin?"

"Yes, rather. He's going to be waiter, he says," answered Tuckey Toodles. "He's got himself up no end of a swell for the occasion. You needn't mention to Cazalet that the darkie is on the ship's books as one of the crew, Drake."

"Why not?" demanded Drake.

"Well, it will look better if he's taken for your personal attendant, you know," explained Toodles. "May as well let Cazalet see that we live in style on the Benbow."

"Fathead!"

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THE NEW CAPTAIN!

By Owen Conquest.

"They've got no end of black servants at their house," argued Tuckey. "Cazalet won't guess if you don't tell him. There's such a thing as keeping up appearances, Jack Drake. We have to rough it on the Benbow, but when I'm at home at Toodles Towers——"

"My dear chap, don't spring Toodles Towers on us just now!" implored Rodney. "It's too hot. Run down and see that all's ready for tea."

And Tuckey Toodles hurried down to Cabin No. 8 to perform that duty.

Daubeny of the Shell strolled up while Drake and Rodney were watching the approaching boat. He glanced rather curiously at Arthur Cazalet.

"Know the chap?" he asked.

"It's the chap who put us up when we got lost wandering around Trinidad," said Drake. "Awfully decent chap. We've asked him to tea on the Benbow. Like to come, Daub? It's quite

The captaincy of St. Winifred's cricket eleven looked like causing a spot of bother on the Benbow—until Vernon Daubeny, junior skipper, made his dramatic announcement!

a record spread. Tin Tacks has been shopping for us ashore."

Vernon Daubeny hesitated a moment. His old enmity towards Jack Drake had quite blown over, but he was not quite so friendly with Dick Rodney.

"Do come!" said Rodney.

"Right-ho, I will! Thanks!" said Daubeny. "I'll tell Egan. I was going with him to Selwyn's."

He joined Egan of the Shell on the other side of the deck. The boat was close now, and the black oarsmen fended off from the hull of the Benbow. Jack Drake threw Cazalet a line, and the planter's son came lightly on board.

"Jolly glad to see you!" said Drake, as he shook hands with the young West Indian, Rodney following suit. "Like to look round the Benbow before we go down to tea?"

"Yes, rather!" said Arthur.

"This way, then," said Drake. "It's a jolly old ship. It sailed under Nelson's flag in the

old days. You'd hardly think so to look at it now. Hallo! Here's Toodles!"

"How do you do, dear boy?" said Tuckey Toodles, in rather a lofty way. "Tea's ready, and our black servant is waiting—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Drake.

"Dry up, you silly ass!" whispered Toodles. "I say, Cazalet, I dare say you didn't know we had a black servant in our study?"

"Toodles is keeping up appearances," explained Drake ruthlessly, while the fat junior looked daggers at him.

"You—you thumping ass!" gasped Toodles.

"So that you will understand that we live in style on the Benbow," added Rodney, with a grin.

"You see, you're not supposed to guess that Tin Tacks is one of the crew," went on Drake. "That would give the game away."

"You—you burbling idiot!" spluttered Toodles, his fat face crimson. "At home at Toodles Towers I—"

Arthur Cazalet laughed.

Toodles, with an angry snort, left the juniors to make their round of the ship without his company. It was evidently useless to attempt to keep up appearances for Drake and Rodney.

They passed Daubeny and Egan on the deck, and the latter gave Drake and his companions a bitter look. There seemed to be rather a warm argument proceeding between the two Shell fellows, but it was stopped by Daubeny detaching himself from Egan and joining Drake. He was introduced to Arthur Cazalet, while Egan, with a black frown upon his face, lounged away to the Shell quarters.

After an inspection of the ship the juniors and their guest repaired to Cabin No. 8.

"Jolly, isn't it?" said Drake.

"Topping!" said Arthur heartily.

"Rather close quarters, of course," said Tuckey Toodles. "Not what we're accustomed to at St. Winifred's on shore—"

"Hallo, here's Tin Tacks!" said Drake. "My only hat! Is it Tin Tacks, or the port admiral?"

Tin Tacks came into the study, grinning all over his black face. He had, as Tuckey Toodles had said, dressed for the occasion. His appearance was really impressive. Tin Tacks had apparently modelled himself on the waiters in the Grand Hotel ashore. He was in evening clothes, and his spotless white shirt contrasted beautifully with the ebony of his complexion.

"Me wait at table, Mass' Jack," he said.

"You find ole Tin Tacks berry handy. Me wait on big grand gentleman once. You sit down. You no do anything while old Tin Tacks 'bout."

It was a merry tea-party in Cabin No. 8, and there was a buzz of cheery talk, and it was not till tea was over that Rodney asked:

"What about Slaney?"

The Benefit of the Doubt!

"SLANEY?" repeated Arthur Cazalet.

"That's a chap we want you to see while you're on board," said Jack Drake.

"One of your schoolfellows?"

Drake laughed.

"No; he's a steward's mate. He's a rather queer fish, with only one eye, and a squint in the other. I believe he's a bad egg—"

"No doubt about that," grunted Daubeny.

"Awful rotter!" said Tuckey Toodles. "He

shoved a tar-bucket against my trousers once, because I called him a clumsy beast, you know."

"Serve you right," remarked Rodney.

"Look here, Rodney—"

"Shut up, Toodles! You see, this is how the matter stands, Cazalet," Drake explained. "One of the rotters who tried to rob your father was a man with one eye. You saw him—"

"I just caught sight of his face as he cleared out of the window," said Arthur.

"Would you know him again?"

"I'm not sure. I think so."

"Well, we've an idea that Peg Slaney may be the man. He was ashore at the time, and we believe he's none too good for that kind of thing. We want you to see if he's the man. If he's a beastly thief and housebreaker, he's not wanted on the Benbow."

Cazalet nodded.

"Trot him out," he said.

Tin Tacks broke in.

"You want see dat trash Slaney here, Mass' Jack?" he asked.

"Yes; but—"

"Me bring him."

The Barbadian coloured gentleman left the cabin. Drake half rose from the chair.

"My hat! What the thump is Tin Tacks going to do?"

"Fetch Slaney!" said Rodney, laughing.

"Let him alone. He can handle the fellow all right if he won't come."

"Well, I suppose he can," said Drake, sitting down again. "If he's not the right man, we'll tip him to make up for it."

A few minutes later there was a sound of scuffling in the passage without, and Peg Slaney's hoarse voice was heard, raised in furious expostulation:

"You durned nigger—leggo! Take your black paws off me, you black lubber! By hokey, I'll—"

"Here they come!" chuckled Rodney.

Tin Tacks reappeared in the doorway, with Peg Slaney under his convoy. His powerful black hand was fastened on the back of Slaney's collar, and the one-eyed seaman was marching helplessly before him. Slaney was resisting, but his resistance did not serve him much in the powerful grasp of the Barbadian coloured gentleman.

"Here de white trash, Mass' Jack!" panted Tin Tacks.

"Let me go!" roared Slaney. "By gum, if I had a marline-spike to hand, I'd crack your nigger's skull for you!"

"Order!" said Drake. "Slaney, we want this gentleman to look at you. You know what we suspect you of, as you listened at this door yesterday."

"You ain't no call to set a durned nigger to 'andle a man!" growled Slaney. "I ain't afeared to look any man in the face—nor boy, neither!"

He bestowed a defiant glare upon the planter's son. Arthur fixed his eyes upon the hard, mahogany face of the one-eyed seaman.

The juniors watched him. If Arthur Cazalet recognised the man as the robber at Cazalet Villa, it only remained to call Captain Topcastle on the scene and hand the ruffian over to his tender mercies.

There was certainly recognition in Arthur's look, but there was doubt also.

"Well?" said Drake.

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"I think it's the man," said Arthur. "But—"

"A feller with a patch on his eye," said Peg Slaney defiantly, "looks jest like another feller with a patch on his eye. There ain't nothing in that to swear away a man's liberty on."

Arthur nodded slowly.

"That's it," he said. "As a matter of opinion, I believe that's the man, but I don't feel certain enough to give evidence against him in a court of law. Sorry!"

Peg Slaney cast another defiant look round.

"Will you tell this nigger to take his 'ands off'n me?" he demanded savagely. "I'll complain about this to the old man!"

"You can go to the captain if you like," said Drake curtly. "Let him go, Tin Tacks." "I teach him not to call free Barbadian coloured gentleman a nigger!"

Tin Tacks swung the one-eyed seaman round into the doorway. Slaney, aware of what was coming, made a rush for the passage. But he was not quite quick enough.

Tin Tacks' boot caught him astern as he went, and Slaney was propelled into the passage at a great rate, landing there on his hands and knees. There was a wild yell from the ruffian as he landed, followed by a torrent of savage threats.

"You sheer off, white trash!" said Tin Tacks disdainfully. "If I come out to you, me gib you something to remember!"

And Peg Slaney sheered off, muttering savagely to himself as he went.

"He's the man, right enough," said Drake. "I suppose he's got to have the benefit of the doubt—but there really isn't much doubt on the subject. We shall keep an eye open for the rascal in future. Now there's another matter, Cazalet—"

"Go ahead," said Arthur, with a smile.

"Cricket!" said Drake.

"Oh! You fellows play cricket?" asked Arthur, with interest.

"I should jolly well think we do!" exclaimed Tuckey Toodles. "If you'd seen me get my century at St. Winifred's—"

"It would have taken him more than a century to see you do it," said Drake. "Dry up, Toodles!"

"Look here, you ass, you're always telling me to dry up!" exclaimed Toodles indignantly.

"That's because you're like the little brook—you'd go on for ever. When we were ashore we saw some cricket going on in that quarter you call, I believe, the Savannah," said Drake. "While we're at Trinidad we'd like no end to get some cricket, if it could be fixed."

"Nothing easier," answered Arthur, smiling. "If you can put a fairly good eleven in the field, why not play us?"

"Us?" repeated Drake. "Who's 'us'?"

"The Savannah Junior Club," explained Arthur. "I'm the skipper."

"Oh, good egg!" exclaimed Drake, in great satisfaction. "If you've got a date open fairly soon—I don't know how long we're staying in Port of Spain. You see, we're going on up the Orinoco next."

"We'll make a date to suit you," said Arthur cheerily. "Let me know what date you can come, and we'll fix it up. Nothing easier."

"We shall have to ask our Form-master, of course. But he will give us a whole day like

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a shot for a cricket match ashore," said Drake cheerily. "I say, this is really good luck!"

And the talk ran on cricket till it was time for Arthur Cazalet to step into his boat to go ashore.

A Burning Question!

JACK, DRAKE came back to his study, after seeing Cazalet off in the boat, looking very thoughtful. Dick Rodney seemed unusually reflective also. They found Tuckey Toodles in the cabin, busy in finishing up the remnants of the spread.

"I'm glad we're going to get some cricket here," Drake remarked, as he sat down on the locker. "But—"

"But—" said Rodney.

"I say, who's going to be captain?" inquired Tuckey Toodles, with his mouth full of the last meringue.

"That's what I was thinking, Drake," said Rodney. "Daubeny is junior captain of St. Winifred's. But—"

Drake looked rather perplexed.

"But things have altered a bit since we put to sea," said Rodney. "Daub was elected, and most of his old team are on the Benbow, but—"

He paused.

"Daub's captain," said Drake slowly.

"Look here, Drake," said Rodney, "if we're going to play a decent team ashore the thing simply can't be left in Daub's hands. He mucked up enough matches at home, and we don't want our cricket to turn out like a movie show in Trinidad."

"I know," said Drake. "But—Daub's a good cricketer himself."

"His set are rotten players, and he always played his own set before. Look here, if you don't want to disturb Daub in the captaincy, let's get up an independent team of our own. It's our fixture with Cazalet, and we can do as we like about it."

Drake was silent.

Had he been on his old bitter terms with Vernon Daubeny he would not have hesitated to act on Rodney's suggestion. There were enough of the St. Winifred's Fourth on board the Benbow to make up a good cricket eleven. But—there was a "but" now.

"Suppose you speak to Daub, and put it to him plainly?" asked Rodney.

"I can't ask the chap to hand over the captaincy to me."

"You can't hand over the match to him, to be mucked up in his old style."

Drake rose from the locker.

"Blessed if I know what to do about it!" he said. "I've made it up with Daub, and so I can't go against him. Our sec will have to fix it up with Cazalet's lot, too, and Torrence is secretary."

"Not if we raise a Fourth Form team of our own."

Drake bit his lip.

"That would be rather a knock at Daub," he said.

"I don't see it," said Rodney rather sharply. "Daub's got nothing to do with this; he didn't even know Cazalet. Look here, Drake, we can't hand this match over to those slacking asses in the Shell to be made a mess of."

"I dare say Daub would put some good men in if we gave him the chance," said Drake slowly. "After all, we're friends now, and—"

"Daub will play his own pals if we hand the

match over to him," said Dick Rodney scornfully. "You know him of old."

"He's seemed a bit changed lately, old fellow."

"In some things, yes, but if he's changed in that I'll eat my Latin grammar!" grunted Rodney.

"Why not back me up?" said Tuckey Toodles. "Shut up, you silly ass!" roared Drake, in great exasperation.

"Daub didn't say much while Cazalet was here," said Rodney. "I could see he was thinking, though. You, like a silly ass, had to mention that Daub was cricket captain—"

"Well, he is!" said Drake.

"Oh, rot!" said Rodney with as near an approach to anger as he had ever shown to his chum. "A captain who plays silly slackers, and mucks up every match he takes in hand, isn't my captain, at any rate."

"Keep your wool on, old son. It's understood that we play Cazalet's lot, and it's understood that Daub is skipper. But I think he'll do the right thing."

"I don't," grunted Rodney.

"Well, I can't act against Daub," said Drake at last. "I've made friends with him, and he's not really a bad sort. You can speak to him, if you like, and ask him whom he's going to play."

"I will!" said Rodney.

He left the cabin, leaving Drake with rather a restless look. Rodney found Daubeny in his cabin with Torrence and Egan. Egan was speaking eagerly.

"Of course, it's our match," he was saying, as Rodney came along to the open door of the cabin. "It's a fixture for St. Winifred's, of course. Torrence will have to write and accept, and make arrangements. The fellows will be no end pleased at a match in Trinidad."

"It was Drake who got the match—" began Daubeny.

"That doesn't matter—you're captain."

"Here's Rodney," said Daub hastily.

Dick Rodney frowned as he stepped into the study. Whatever view Vernon Daubeny took of the matter, there was no doubt about the view taken by his friends.

"I've come to speak to you about the cricket, Daub," the Fourth Former said, curtly enough. Egan's lip curled.

"No business of yours, is it, Rodney?" he inquired.

"Certainly it is," said Rodney, flushing angrily.

"I don't see it. You're not on the committee, or in the team. In fact, so far as St. Winifred's cricket is concerned, you're nobody at all," said Egan insolently.

Dick Rodney's eyes glittered.

"We're not at St. Winifred's now," he said. "It's a bit different on the Benbow."

"I don't see that, either."

"We're not going ashore in Trinidad to give an exhibition of rotten cricket in your old style!" retorted Rodney.

"You won't be allowed a voice in the matter, at any rate," sneered Egan. "I suppose you've come along here to bag a place in the eleven? You won't get it."

"If we play the Trinidad team I shall certainly be in the eleven."

"Isn't that for the cricket captain to decide?" drawled Vernon Daubeny.

Rodney turned to him.

"Yes—and we're going to have a captain who'll

decide to play cricketers who can play cricket!" he exclaimed. "If Drake won't take it up we'll make him somehow."

"Oh, Drake won't!" said Daubeny, with a rather curious look. "Have you asked him?"

"Yes, rather."

"And he refused?"

"He won't act against you because you've made friends," said Rodney savagely. "He's willing to let you fool over this match, as you used to fool over the matches at home. But we'll bring him up to the mark somehow. If necessary I'll call a meeting of the fellows and demand a new election, whether Drake agrees or not."

"You won't get a majority," said Egan.

"Then we'll make up a new eleven from the Fourth and leave the Shell right outside!" snapped Rodney.

"And Drake will captain you, in that case?" asked Daubeny.

"We'll make him, somehow."

"I don't think he would do it," said Daub, with a shake of the head. "It wouldn't be quite playin' the game, you know, to step over his captain's head in that way."

"Oh rats!"

"If that's all you've got to say, Rodney, you may as well clear," said Torrence.

Dick Rodney clenched his hands.

"You'll fix this up with Cazalet, Torrence, as secretary," said Vernon Daubeny quietly. "You'll accept the match for St. Winifred's juniors."

"Right-ho!" said Torrence.

"And what men are you going to play?" demanded Rodney.

"That's already settled," said Egan, with a sneer. "The members of St. Winifred's junior eleven are fairly well-known."

"That means that there's going to be no change, then?"

"It's for the cricket captain to decide," said Daubeny lazily.

"Well, you won't be allowed to play a set of fumbling slackers as you used to!" snapped Rodney. "You can take that from me."

"Thanks!"

"As for you, Egan—"

"Oh, get out!" exclaimed Egan, jumping up. "I'm fed-up with your Fourth Form cheek! Get out of this cabin!"

He advanced on Rodney with clenched hands. Egan was not a fighting man, as a rule, but he was well aware that a conflict would help in making a breach between Daubeny and his new friends in the Fourth. Rodney for once was far from pacific. He met Egan half-way, knocking his hands aside and seizing him by the collar.

With a twist of his strong arm he jerked the Shell fellow over and spun him along the floor of the cabin. Egan gave a yell as he bumped under the table.

Rodney, with a disdainful look, stepped out of the cabin.

"You know where to find me if you want me," he said. And he walked away.

But apparently Egan of the Shell did not want him, for he did not follow to find him.

Daubeny Resigns!

"YOU fellows—"

"Dry up, Toodles!"

Drake and Rodney were at prep in Study No. 8 when Tuckey Toodles put his head in, THE GEM LIBRARY, No. 1,634.

looking excited. The chums of the Fourth were working in silence; there was rather a cloud in the study.

Rodney had explained the hapless result of his visit to Vernon Daubeny's quarters, and Drake had frowned over the explanation. He did not utter a word of blame, but he was displeased, and a rather grim silence followed. Rodney, although he admitted that Daub was not such a rotter as he had always supposed, could not banish a lingering suspicion of the buck of the Shell. He felt that his chum's unsuspecting good nature was being taken advantage of, and that made him angry. And the affair of the cricket match ashore was irritating. There seemed little use in fixing up a match with Cazalet's club if the match was to be handed over to the dandy of the Shell.

"There's a meeting in the Common-room," said Toodles, unheeding the injunction to dry up. "It's about the cricket. You fellows had better come."

"About the cricket?" said Rodney, looking up.

"Yes; Daub's called it."

"We'd better go, then," said Drake.

"You're going to back up Daubeny?" asked Rodney grimly.

Drake looked rather uneasy.

"Well, what can I do?" he asked.

"You can do the sensible thing, and make a success of the match, and let Daubeny go and eat coke."

"H'm! Let's get along to the Common-room."

Rodney frowned as he followed his chum from the study.

There was a crowd in the Common-room; nearly all the Fourth and the Shell who were on board the school ship had turned up for the meeting. Vernon Daubeny was there, with Egan, Torrence, Chilcot, Seeley, and Selwyn, and the rest of the bucks.

The bucks had satisfied and triumphant looks. They had all been talking to Daubeny on the subject, and impressing upon him that it was absolutely necessary that he should play the old team in the Trinidad match. Daubeny had been allowed to say hardly a word, and Egan was quite satisfied that the public opinion of the Shell would be too strong for any doubts Daub might have had.

Daubeny nodded to Drake with a genial grin as the Fourth Former came in, and Drake smiled back. Rodney's frown deepened. Of the old divisions in the lower school of St. Winifred's there were more of Drake's party than of Daub's on board the Benbow, and in the case of a new election there was no doubt about Drake's majority. Rodney was keenly irritated with his easy-going chum for refusing to take any advantage of the fact. And he bitterly suspected Daub of adopting a conciliatory manner in order to ward off Drake's competition, which would have been irresistible.

"Now we're all here, I think," said Daubeny of the Shell, mounting on a chair.

"Nearly all," said Sawyer major. "Go ahead!"

"One day this week we're playing a cricket match ashore," said Daubeny. "The matter's in my hands, as cricket captain. But the last election we had is a bit out of date. I want to know what fellows back me up."

"No need to go into that!" muttered Egan hurriedly, catching at Vernon Daubeny's sleeve.

Daub smiled down at him from the chair.

"But I want to go into it," he answered.

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"Look here, what are you driving at?" asked Egan in a fierce whisper. "I thought this meetin' was just to announce the match——"

"You'll see soon."

"I tell you——"

"Who's backin' me up?" continued Daubeny, paying no further heed to Egan. "Are you, Drake?"

"Yes," answered Drake immediately.

Rodney bit his lip.

"Mind, you're not bound to, Drake," continued Daubeny. "Somebody suggests that you should raise an independent team and leave me out in the cold."

"Well, I'm not going to, anyhow."

"Decided on that?"

"Quite."

"Good! I thought you'd play up," said Daubeny. "Now, gentlemen, I wanted to be satisfied on that point, because some dear friends of mine have been pointin' out, in the most eloquent way, that Drake was only lookin' for a chance of downin' me."

"You silly chump!" breathed Egan.

"Now I have an announcement to make," resumed Daubeny calmly. "It's this—I hereby resign the junior captaincy of St. Winifred's."

"What!"

"Phew!"

"I resign the captaincy," continued Daubeny quietly. "When I'm captain my dear old pals shove themselves into the eleven, and play the goat, and I'm too good-natured to shove them out——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I resign, and I'm not puttin' up again. This meetin' is called to elect a new cricket captain, and I'm goin' to vote for Drake."

"Bravo, Daub!"

"My only hat!" ejaculated Drake in astonishment. "Look here, Daub——"

"It's done, my dear fellow," yawned Daubeny, stepping down from the chair. "Now for the votin'."

Egan gave his chum a furious look, and quitted the Common-room, scarcely able to control his rage. There was a chorus of expostulation from the surprised bucks, but it was drowned by the cheers of the rival party. Dick Rodney came across to Daubeny.

"I'm sorry, Daub," he said in a low voice, "I—I was wrong. I'm afraid I never did you justice. I'm sorry."

Daub nodded.

"All serene!" he said.

The election was brief, for there was no rival candidate. Daubeny proposed Jack Drake, and called for a show of hands. And nearly every hand went up, most of the bucks following their leader's example.

"Drake's elected junior captain of St. Winifred's," said Daubeny. "I congratulate you, Drake. I won't ask you to remember me when you're makin' up your eleven——"

"You needn't, old top!" answered Drake, laughing. "Your name goes down first of all."

"What about mine?" asked Tuckey Toodles. "Remember, I'm in your study——"

"You can stay there while we play cricket, Tuckey."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the meeting broke up, and Jack Drake slipped his arm through Daub's as they left the Common-room.

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H. Sacks, Box 7558, Johannesburg, S. Africa; any age; all sports; anywhere.

C. Goh, 50, Bishop Street, Penang, Straits Settlements; music, stamps, and photography.

W. Smith, 206, Rotherhithe New Road, London, S.E.16; cigarette cards; all letters answered; anywhere except England.

W. Buckland, Lillian Rock Post Office, via Ninbin, New South Wales, Australia; age 12-14; stamps, riding, and cricket; Congo, India, Liechtenstein, Gold Coast, and Salvador.

THE NIZAM'S DIAMOND!

(Continued from page 23.)

robbed, far away in Hampshire. He couldn't have guessed that one at the time!"

"Oh cwmbs! You—you mean to say that that American chap who was clobbered on the motor-bike was—was—"

"Mr. Hank, of Chicago!" grinned Kerr.

"Oh ewikey!"

"And he landed the loot on Gussy to be taken care of!" said Manners. "Well, I was jolly sure it was loot of some kind, though I'd never dreamed of this."

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus gazed at the sparkling diamond with almost unbelieving eyes. "Bai Jove! Kerr, old man, I weally cannot imagine how you found all this out, but it was vewy lucky you did! To think that I was goin' to hand ovah the patah's diamond to the wascal who pinched it f'rom the patah— Bai Jove!"

"But how—?" howled Blake. "How did you know, Kerr?"

"The detective explains at the end of the case!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Go it, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, we're all your admiring Dr. Watsons!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Figgins & Co. told of the trailing of Arthur Augustus in the wood, and what had happened there.

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am feahfully obliged to you, Kerr! You were wathah an ass to fancy that I wequished lookin' aftah, and—"

"Eh?"

"But I am feahfully obliged to you, all the same! I shall ask Wailton to let me use the phone and let my patah know at once that the Nizam's Diamond is found. And I shall keep it vewy carefully in my pocket—"

"You'll keep it where?" howled Blake.

"In my pocket, deah boy."

"You'll keep a diamond worth twenty thousand pounds in your pocket!" roared Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! I shall have to keep it in my own hands till the patah can send for it, you know. It's feahfully valuable, so I could not possibly wely on anybody else!" said Arthur Augustus. "It's all wight, deah boys, you know what a careful chap I am—"

"We do!" gasped Blake.

"We does!" gurgled Monty Lowther.

"Take him by the neck and walk him off to the Head's study!" said Kerr. "That diamond has got to be locked up in Dr. Holmes' safe until it can be handed back to Lord Eastwood."

"Yes, rather!"

Arthur Augustus shook his head.

"That's all vewy well, deah boys," he said. "But safes might be burgled, you know. I wathah think I had bettah look aftah it. What are you gwabbin' my collah for, Blake, you ass?"

"I'm coming with you to the Head's study."

"But I'm not goin' there—"

"You are!" said Tom Merry & Co., with one voice.

And Arthur Augustus did! All his friends helped to walk him there and did not leave him till he was explaining the matter to an astonished headmaster, and the Nizam's Diamond was locked up in the safe.

THERE was an item in the radio news, the next day, to which many fellows at St. Jim's listened in with great interest—the announcement that Lord Eastwood's celebrated stone, the Nizam's Diamond, had been recovered!

There were two persons—not at St. Jim's—who heard that announcement with very deep feelings. It was a knock-out blow for Pawson and Chicago Hank!

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