

SUPER NEW ST. JIM'S SERIES STARTS TO-DAY!

The **GEM** 2^P

**THE FLYING
SCHOOLBOYS!**

*Tom Merry & Co.
Set Off On Their
Great Holiday
Adventure.*





Blake Answers Back!

Jack Blake's here to answer your letters and deal with your queries. Write to him, c/o The GEN. PUBLISHING HOUSE, Faringdon Street, London, E.C.1. He is confident as possible—Jack Blake likes a plain speaker, being by nature a Jack 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 and no replies given by post.

H. E. R., of Bristol, writes:

Here are a few queries about Tim Stars:

1. How old is C. Aubrey Smith?
2. What is his latest film?
3. Why did he make it?
4. What's his next?

ANSWER: Four favourite film stars appear in *St. C. Aubrey Smith*, *C. Aubrey Smith*, *C. Aubrey Smith*, and *C. Aubrey Smith*.

1. *C. Aubrey Smith* is well over seventy.
2. He appeared in *The Duke of Wellington* in "Sixty Glorious Years" recently.
3. Why not ask him?
4. You might ask him that, too.

"Temper," of Hull, Yorks, writes:

As a regular reader, I noticed "Fighting Fit," of Doncaster, challenged all comers. I am 13 years of age, 5 feet 6 inches in socks, and weigh about 7 stone. I fancy myself as a boxer, though I've had no training. I challenge "Fighting Fit," and I fancy I shall take some of the toughness out of the tough guy, when we meet!

ANSWER: Your "Arsenals" still echoes round the study! I surely commented in the notice of "Fighting Fit," who may—or may not—accept your challenge. If he does, I'd like a ringside seat, where I can see the "shelling" and watch the loser "sink." I should get some boxing tips, though. If you don't know how to fend with your "left," you may come "right" up against it! You've got pluck, and I'd hate to see you follow the seconds "out"!

D. C., of Cleckheaton, Yorks, writes:

First I had pneumonia, then angina pectoris. I don't know how I pulled through, because then I had tuberculosis with appendicitis. They gave me sulphate and phosphate and plumbum. It was the hardest spelling bee I was ever in!

ANSWER: I can sympathise with you. I had no answer here but that Slick Sully slept soundly when they said Sully stepped Slick Sully. I was then asked to imagine an imaginary newspaper manager imagining managing an imaginary penicillin, on top of which would I say that the 50th week's worth sleeps well? It was the hardest non-contradicting bee I've been in!

The GEN. LITERARY.—No. 1425.

R. F. F. ("Old Reader and Staunch Supporter"), of Westlake, writes:

I am asking two straightforward questions. Will you give me two straightforward answers, instead of evading them with humorous remarks?

1. Is Martin Ulfred dead? Rumour maintains he is, and many of my older friends remember the stories and characters now appearing.
2. What has happened to the Greyfriars film which were to have been made?

ANSWER: I passed on your letter to the Editor, and this is what he says:

"Far from being dead, Mr. Martin Ulfred—yes, the genuine Martin Ulfred who wrote the very first *Tom Merry* story—is at the present moment writing a new series of St. Jim's stories for this paper. The first story appears in this issue."

The Greyfriars film has been shelved for the time being. Personally, I think a St. Jim's film would be better.

John A. Cross, of Coulsdon, Surrey, writes:

I'd be very pleased if you would answer these queries:

1. Are there any other masters at St. Jim's besides Dr. Holmes, Mr. Ralston, Mr. Hatchell, Mr. Selby, Mr. Latham, and Mr. Linton?
2. Who is the captain of the Fourth?
3. What position do you play in the Junior Football XI?
4. Why does D'Arcy wear an eyeglass? Has he defective eyesight?

ANSWER: I'm very pleased to tell you:

1. You're mixed up Mr. Percy Cunningham, the master of the Second; also Monsieur Moran, the French master, and Herr Schneider, the German master.
2. Little one.
3. Inside-left.
4. The "pious" old truth is that Stang's eyesight is as good as yours or mine. The eyeglass is merely an ornament. But D'Arcy seems to "see" the world through his "window" in a much more lively light than you follow, don't you think?

EXCITING OPENING YARN OF A GREAT NEW SERIES OF TOM MERRY & CO.'S EASTERN HOLIDAY ADVENTURES ABROAD!



"A chap hardly realizes that he is up in the air at all," said Arthur Augustus. "Wannin' bettah than a vevy good cab on a vevy good road—not a jerk—not a wobble—yawwooch!" Gussy broke off with a yell as the plane dipped and he staggered.

CHAPTER I.

Startling!

TOM MERRY jumped. "Look out!" he gasped. Manners and Lovelock jumped at the same moment.

They had just time. The three Shell fellows of St. Jim's were standing in the footpath where it turned off from Rycombe Lane through Wayland Wood.

Down the road, from the direction of the school, a motor-bike came roaring at a dizzy speed.

The chums of the Shell were discussing the

Easter holidays and a packet of toffee at the same time. They glanced at the motor-bike as it came with a rush and a roar, naturally expecting to see it whiz by and disappear down the road.

Instead of which, it swung round into the footpath without even a warning honk.

It was enough to make fellows jump.

Even push-bikes were not allowed on that woodland path—though they were sometimes seen there. But no motor-cyclist in his senses would have dreamed of taking such a path. It was narrow; it was winding; it was obstructed here

The chums of St. Jim's are all set for a grand holiday cruise on the Continent in an air liner! But their tour is not to be without its thrills and dangers—due to Gussy becoming involved in an affair of mystery!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

and there by trailing, gnarled roots of ancient trees; anybody might have been coming along—in which case an accident was almost inevitable.

That the motor-bike, especially at such a speed, would turn off the road into that dusky footpath could not have occurred to any fellow—until it happened!

The machine swung—or, rather, spun—round the corner. It rocked and looked like crashing, but it roared on. The man in the saddle either did not see the schoolboys or did not heed them. He roared down on them, and they jumped for their lives. They had just time to leap clear as the machine roared by.

Tom Merry staggered against a tree; Monty Lowther stumbled against another on one side of the footpath; on the other side Manners caught his foot in a root and went headlong into a bush. There were thorns in that bush. Tom Merry and Lowther gasped; Manners yelled.

Tom had a glimpse of the rider as he flew. All he glimpsed was a black moustache over a hard-set mouth; then the man was gone. The captain of the Shell, gasping, stared after him. He saw the machine rock again, and for a moment expected a crash; then it vanished round the winding way and was lost to sight, its roar booming back through the trees.

"The mad ass!" gasped Tom.

"The dangerous maniac!" spluttered Lowther.

"Ow! Oh crumbs! Oooh!" came from Harry Manners, struggling among thorns. "Oh, my hat! I'm scratched! By gum! Ow!"

His clams rushed to the rescue. They dragged Manners—cursing, breathless, excited, and exasperated—out of the bush. He rubbed scratched hands and glared in the direction of the vanished motor-bike.

"By gum! I'd like to punch that mad idiot's head!" gasped Manners. "What the thump does he think he's up to? Must be mad as a batter! Ow! I've got about a million scratches—"

"As many as that?" asked Tom Merry, laughing.

"Well, a dozen at least! Might have knocked us over, the petty idiot! Look at my hands! Look here, let's get after the silly brute—"

"Can't race with a motor-bike, old man—"

"You can't join in a race, slyhow, Manners, old man!" said Monty Lowther, shaking his head.

"Why can't I?" roared Manners.

"You're scratched!" explained Monty affably.

Tom Merry grinned. Manners did not grin; he glared. Good, bad, or indifferent, Monty Lowther never could resist a pun. But Manners at the moment seemed to have no use for puns; he glared at the humorist of St. Jim's as if he could have bitten him.

"You silly ass!" he roared. "You funny idiot! You—"

"Hallo! Here comes another sportsman in a hurry!" exclaimed Tom Merry.

From the direction of St. Jim's, visible in the distance, came a little tree-seater. That was the direction from which the motor-bike had come, and the car was moving at the same dizzy speed. Dust flew in clouds in the lane as it came rearing on.

The St. Jim's juniors stood looking at it. The car, at all events, could not turn into the footpath as the jigger had done; there was no room for it to pass. The driver was hunched over the wheel, staring straight ahead; the man at his side—a man with a swarthy face and bright, black eyes—

seemed to be watching in all directions at once, his eyes as quick and sharp as a hawk's.

It came into the minds of the juniors that the car was in pursuit of the motor-bike. Obviously the swarthy man was watching for something on the road; and pursuit behind him accounted for the motor-cyclist taking that mad rush into a woodland footpath where a car could not follow. But for that, he would have been sighted—if not run down—before the village of Rycombe was reached.

The swarthy man spotted the three juniors under the trees and touched his companion's arm. There was a greasing of brakes; the car skidded to a halt a dozen feet past the spot where Tom Merry & Co. stood. The swarthy man leaped down and ran back to them.

They watched him as he came. They could see that he was a foreigner—Italian or Spanish, on his looks. Obviously he was going to ask them something—and they guessed what he was going to ask.

"That dago's after the sportsman on the jigger," murmured Monty Lowther. "What?"

"Looks like it," agreed Tom.

"I hope he's going to push his face in!" granted Manners, rubbing scratched hands. "I hope he's going to mop up Sussex with him! I'd lend him a hand if he wanted it! Ow!"

"Hold on, though!" said Tom quietly. "That mad ass on the jigger seemed in a fearful hurry to get clear. It's no bimsy of ours to put any body on his track—"

He broke off as the foreigner passed up.

"So vi place—" The man began breathlessly in his own language, but switched off immediately into English. "You shall see a motor-cyclist that pass by this way? He pass by? Yes?"

"Friend of yours?" he asked Monty Lowther politely.

"Si, si! Amico mio—one very good friend that I lose of the sight!" exclaimed the Italian, the glint in his black eyes betraying his words. "I miss him on one road. You shall see him?"

"We've seen him," agreed Lowther. "If you mean a man with a black moustache—"

"Si, si!" exclaimed the Italian eagerly.

"On a motor-bike—"

"Si, si!"

"Going all out—"

"Si, si, si! You shall see him, then?"

"Yes, rather! He passed us not five minutes ago, going like the wind!" answered Lowther affably.

"Gracie!"

The Italian waited for no more. He whirled round and ran back to the car. He was hardly in it when it roared on again.

Monty Lowther winked at his clams.

"That dago sportsman seemed to gather from what I said that the jigger went past us down the road," he remarked. "I never said so; I said he passed us going like the wind five minutes ago. So he did."

Tom Merry laughed.

"He wouldn't be likely to guess that the mad ass turned into this footpath," he said. "Goodness knows what he's after him for; not for any friendly reason, that's plain enough. Now, about Easter—we've all agreed that we're going with Gussy—"

And the Co. resumed the discussion of that important matter, and dismissed that startling episode from their minds—though they were to be reminded of it later in a manner still more startling.

CHAPTER 2.

D'Arcy's Trust!

"**B**AI Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Crash!

"Oh crumbs!"

The elegant ornament of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's stopped and stared blankly. That terrific crash rang and echoed through Wayland Wood, and it caused the swell of St. Jim's almost to bound. For one startled moment Arthur Augustus absolutely forgot the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere.

It was just as well for Arthur Augustus, as a matter of fact, that the motor-bike crashed when and where it did. In a few seconds more it would have been roaring down on him, and Arthur Augustus would have had to do some lively jumping.

Arthur Augustus had walked over to Wayland after class that day. He had urgent business in Wayland—he had to see his tailor, Blake and Horries and Digby had all declined to accompany him, in that walk, having— for reasons incomprehensible to Gussy—no desire to hang about in a tailoring establishment.

But D'Arcy had spent a happy hour. He was particularly pleased with a particular pair of trousers, which were the very last word in elegance, in D'Arcy's judgment; and in such matters D'Arcy's judgment was final. He was thinking, with a pleased expression on his noble face, of those trousers as he walked homeward by the footpath through Wayland Wood.

But he forgot not only the repose which stamps the caste of Vere de Vere, but the trousers, too, as a motor-bike whirled towards him round an abrupt curve of the footpath ahead. It crashed the next second.

For almost a mile, since passing Tom Merry & Co., that motor-bike had careered on, escaping disaster at every whirl of the wheels. Disaster came suddenly on a jutting rock that trailed right across the footpath where it turned.

In horror, Arthur Augustus stood staring as the machine crashed into the trees, overturning and jamming there, and roaring and thrashing like a trapped animal. The rider flew in the air and crashed into a thicket—and stayed there!

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The wick was! The frightful one, to be within' a motor-bike in a place like this! Bai Jove! He might have run right into me!"

Arthur Augustus, with a gleam of indignation

in his eye behind his eyeglass, walked on—with the intention of telling that motor-cyclist what he thought of him.

But he abandoned that intention at once as he reached the thicket into which the man had crashed. From that thicket came a groan which told of injury, and D'Arcy's wrath evaporated on the spot.

The man was hurt! It would really have been surprising if he had not been hurt. The groan sounded as if he was badly hurt. Wrath, in Gussy's kind heart, changed immediately into compassion.

The man was struggling in the thicket, groaning as he struggled. His left arm hung like a broken stick, and he dragged a useless leg. Two of his limbs were badly damaged.

"Bai Jove! Can I help you?" asked Arthur Augustus.

The reply to his words was startling. The groaning man ceased to struggle with the chancing brambles, shot his right hand to his hip, and in the twinkling of an eye it shot out again, with something in it that made the St. Jim's junior jump. Arthur Augustus' eyes fairly popped at the sight of the bluish barrel of an automatic.

"Stand back, you dogo dog!" came a hoarse, panting shout. "Stand back, you dog-goned dogs, or—"

"Bai Jove!"

The next instant the man saw him, and the weapon disappeared into the hip-pocket again, so swiftly that Gussy might almost have thought that he had fancied the sight of it.

"The man lifted himself on the elbow of his uninjured arm, and stared up at the school-boy, who stared down at him. Arthur

Augustus beheld a hard face, with a little black moustache over a hard mouth that looked like a gash. It was not a face that Gussy would have liked; but it was twisted with pain now, and he was all compassion.

"You have had a fearful crash," said Arthur Augustus. "Perhaps I can help you."

"Who are you?"

"Well, that does not matter very much. If I can help you—"

"Who are you?" repeated the man, almost in a snarl.

"My name is D'Arcy, if you are really curious to know. But—"

"A schoolboy!"

"Yess. I belong to St. Jim's," answered Arthur Augustus. "I shall be very glad to assist you if I can; and there is really no need for you to flourish a revolver like a silly one on the fins. It threw me into quite a fluster for a

A Special Message from Martin Clifford.

My Dear Readers,

I do not often have the pleasure of addressing you personally, but your Editor suggests that a few words from me about the new series I am writing for the GEM would be welcome—so here goes.

I won't say a lot about the new series, because if I told you what I really think about it, it would sound like blowing my own trumpet! I will leave that to the Editor! But I will say that no series I have ever written for the old GEM has given me so much pleasure and interest as this.

I have been—as good as—enjoying an Easter holiday in the cheery company of Tom Merry & Co.—skimming the skies, clipping the clouds, popping in at Paris, getting lost in the rocky ravines of the Cevennes, turning up smiling at Cannes, and coming down into a jock of troubles in Italy. I only hope that my readers will like the trip as much as I did!

I believe your Editor has told you that I promised to make the new series the best ever. Have I succeeded? That is for you to judge.

Always yours,

MARTIN CLIFFORD.

moment. I twist that you did not take me for a footpad?"

"Can you see anyone on the path?" panicked the man. "A dago—"

"There is no one here," assured Arthur Augustus.

"I guess I've dropped them, hiding this trail! Yep, I've sure dropped them!" muttered the man in the thicket, his words and accents apprising Arthur Augustus that he came from the other side of the Atlantic. "I'll tell a man I've sure dropped them! But what's the use?" He groaned again. "They'll sure catch me—they sure will! Yep! I'm telling you!"

He made another effort to rise, and Arthur Augustus stooped and gave him aid. But he sank back again with a deep groan.

"I guess my leg's broke! This lets me out! Let me lie! Say, give that path the once-over again and put me wise if you spot a dago!"

Arthur Augustus cast a glance along the dusky footpath. There was no sign or sound of anyone coming. The man had a fractured leg and a fractured arm; but it was plain that his fear of pursuit moved him more than the pain of his injuries.

"No one is comin' my deah sir!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly, "and if anyone is aftah you, you may rely on me to protect you, if veguished—"

"You young gink?"

"Eh!"

"I reckon they've missed me! They'd have had me dead to rights if I hadn't spotted this trail and hid it through the timber. Surest thing, you know! But I guess it's no odds—they'll get me now! And they'll get—it!"

"It!" repeated Arthur Augustus blankly.

"Say!" The American watched him with piercing eyes. "Say, you look a straight guy—you surely do! You can see I'm busted up. I guess you can get word to a doctor—"

"Yass, wathah!"

"But they'll get me! I'm telling you! Say, you sure look a straight guy!"

"If you mean an upwight chawwatah, I twist so!" answered Arthur Augustus.

"I'm telling you!" panted the injured man. "Say, them dago crooks are after me! They're after something I've got—and they'll sure catch it now I'm buffeted like this here. You got me?"

"Wayland is verry near at hand," said Arthur Augustus. "I will go and get help at once—and, if necessary, will call a policeman—"

"Forget it!" granted the man in the thicket. "I guess your doggoned policemen don't cut no ice!"

"You can rely on the British police!" said Arthur Augustus. "They are quite different from the American police!" he added innocently.

"Aw, can it! Look here!" The man tried to grope inside his coat. But the pocket he sought to reach was on the right side, and he could not reach it with his right hand. "Say—look in that pocket—take something out—it's sure a little box—jest a little box—"

In utter wonder, Arthur Augustus did as requested. He drew out a tiny ebony box from the pocket. It was shut; and, so far as D'Arcy could see, had no opening. It was oval in form, hardly two inches long.

"That's it!" breathed the man on the ground.

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"That's what they want—the black box! You got me? Say, you look a straight guy—and I guess I ain't a big choice now! Say, you'll park that for me—and keep it dark!"

"If it contains somethin' valuable, had I better not hand it over to the police while you are unable to look aftah it?" asked the wondering Gussy.

"Nopet! I tell you Beppe would get it—he surely would! Say, you promise me to keep that box till I ask for it again! Keep it dark—I'm telling you, if Beppe was wise to it, you'd have that dago looking for you! I'll say you look a straight guy!" His eyes searched Arthur Augustus' kind, candid face with dazzling eagerness. "I guess you'd do this for a man that's all broke up—"

"Yass, wathah! I will do anythin' you like!" said Arthur Augustus. "But I weally assure you that it would be safah with the police—"

"Can it! Will you keep it safe?"

"Yass, certainly, if you wish."

"Word of honour!"

"Yass, wathah!"

"That's good enough!" muttered the man. "That's O.K.! I guess you sure look a straight guy, and I ain't got no choice. Say, you don't see any sign of that dago on the trail?"

"Nobody is comin'."

"Beat it!" muttered the American hoarsely. "Beat it, pronto—and not a word! You get me! Keep it safe, and keep it dark! Leave word in the burg for a doctor to come to me—but don't you come back—you ride clear! I'm telling you! Maybe the dago'll be here afore the doctor! You ride clear! Beat it, I'm telling you, and don't come near here agin—chow on that!"

"But, weally—leavin' you like this—"

"You can't help me, you young gink, 'cept by sending a doc! Beat it, and don't come back! Keep that black box safe, and keep it dark! Them dago crooks are after it—I'm telling you! Keep it till I ask you for it! Now beat it—I'm telling you—beat it!"

And Arthur Augustus, slipping the little black box into an inner pocket, beat it! The groans from the thicket followed him as he walked back towards Wayland.

CHAPTER 3.

Late!

"THAT an—" said Jack Blake.

"That chump—" said Herrie.

"That fathead!" sighed Digby.

The chums of Study No. 6 were, of course, referring to Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. Anyone could have guessed that from the description.

"Where's Gussy?" shouted Tom Merry.

"Where?" repeated Blake. "Anywhore but where he's wanted, naturally!"

"Gussy ought to hear this—"

"Shut up and listen!" said Manners. "We can tell Gussy when he comes in. Quiet!"

"Peace, little ones—peace!" said Monty Leather.

"Shut up, Leather!"

Manners had plugged in the radio in the junior day-room in the School House at St. Jim's. It was the hour for "time, news, and weather." Some fellows wanted the time, some wanted to hear the news, and more were interested in the weather prospects for Easter. But every fellow in the room was interested when the words



Disaster came suddenly to the motor-cyclist, on a jutting root that trailed across the footpath. In horror, Arthur Augustus stood staring as the machine crashed and the rider flew through the air into a thicket.

"Eastwood House" came through in the announcer's voice among the news items.

Eastwood House, the residence of Lord Eastwood in Hampshire, was the home of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, his lordship's second son. Six School House fellows were going to gather at Eastwood House with the Honourable Arthur Augustus D'Arcy when St. Jim's broke up for the holidays—Tom Merry, Manners, and Leather of the Sixth; Blake, Berries, and Dig of the Fourth.

They were going to gather there for a holiday trip, and that trip was going to be the most gorgeous trip that they had, so to speak, ever tripped!

So, if Eastwood House had somehow got into the news, every fellow wanted to hear about it. The fellow most likely to be interested in news of Eastwood House was absent—Gusky had not yet come back from his tailor's in Wayland, though he ought to have been back long ago.

He had missed tea in Study No. 6. Blake had sarcastically remarked that trousers were a

greater attraction than tea—to Gusky! Now he was missing that!

"Shut up!"

"Listen!"

"Quiet!"

"Robbery at Eastwood House, the residence of Lord Eastwood——" the announcer's voice was going on.

"Oh, my hat! A robbery——"

"Quiet!"

"So far, no trace has been found of the thief or thieves. It is learned that only one article was taken—*but* that was the celebrated Eastwood Diamond—the Nizam's Diamond——"

"Phew!"

"Quiet!"

"The value of this celebrated stone is immense, and as it is unique and easily recognized, it is feared that the object of the thieves is to cut it into smaller stones," went on the announcer's voice. "Even then it would be worth many thousands of pounds——"

"What a jolt for Gussy's pater——"

"Quiet!"

It bears the name of the Nizam's Diamond, having been presented to an ancestor of Lord Eastwood by the Nizam of Nuggapur for services rendered to the Nizam in the wars in India in the eighteenth century. It is now an heirloom in his lordship's family. It is hoped that the police may succeed in tracing the jewel robbers before they can escape abroad with the purloined stone. So far, however, no clue has been discovered. "Pause! Then the announcer's voice went on: "In the House of Commons this afternoon the honourable member for Muggleton——"

Sudden silence! Manners that off the honourable member for Muggleton with a snap! Everybody was interested in the news from Eastwood House; nobody in the speech of the honourable member for Muggleton!

"Well, fancy old Gussy's pater being in the news!" said Blake. "I've seen that jolly old diamond at Eastwood House. 'Member the old bean let us have a squint at it when we went there with Gussy last week? And now somebody's snatched it!"

"This will be a bit of a shock for Gussy!" said Tom Merry. "Rotten thing to happen just before the hob!"

"Brandy!" agreed Blake. "Let's hope the blighters will be copped before we break up for Easter!"

"But where's Gussy?" asked Tom.

"Grant from Blake!"

"Gone to see his tailor! He was coming back to tea—but, of course, he didn't! Once let Gussy loose among trousers and suitings, and jacketings and waistcoatings, and the game's up! Of course, he's forgotten time and space! And calling-over, too, very likely!"

"Let's go and see if the old ass is coming in!" said Digby.

"Let's!" agreed Tom.

Six juniors left the School House and walked down to the gates. It was close on time for lock-up; old Taggles, in the doorway of his lodge, had his keys in hand. Tom Merry & Co. looked out into the road. But there was no sign of the most elegant figure at St. Jim's. Other fellows were coming in from various directions, but Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not to be seen.

"There goes the bell!" said Herries.

Three or four fellows in the road quickened their pace and cut in as Taggles came down to shut the gates.

"Now, young gentlemen——" Six fellows were standing in the way of the gates. Taggles gave them a grunt!

"Hold on a minute, Taggles, old bean!" said Tom. "D'Arcy's not in yet!"

"Can't 'old on, Master Merry!" answered Taggles solemnly. "Lock-up is lock-up, and horders is horders, as well you knows! If Master D'Arcy's late, which I shall report him to Mr. Bailton! Now you stand outer the way!"

Five juniors backed out of the gateway. Tom Merry took a last glance along the road. But he scanned the horizon in vain. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was not to be seen. Gussy was late—and looked like being later!

"Now, Master Merry——" started Taggles.

"Sister Anne—Sister Anne, do you see a bowling ass coming?" asked Blake.

Tom Merry laughed.

"No; Gussy must be still browsing among the trousers! But he might be just round the

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corner! Taggles, old bean, give a man a chance!"

"Horders is horders!" answered Taggles.

Clunk!

"Hallo!" exclaimed Monty Lowther. "Did you drop a shilling, Taggles?"

The old St. Jim's porter turned round quite quickly.

Lock-up was lock-up, and orders were orders, but a shilling, on the other hand, was a shilling. Taggles was not exactly aware that he had dropped a shilling. But he was prepared to believe that he had.

"Oh! I dessey I did!" said Taggles. He blinked with his ancient eyes at a glimmering coin on the earth near Monty Lowther's foot.

"If one of you young gentlemen didn't drop that shilling, I must 'ave it!"

"I didn't!" said Tom Merry.

"Nor I!" said Manners.

"Not mine!" said Blake. And Herries and Digby shook their heads.

But they all looked at Monty Lowther. Five fellows had a strong impression that Monty had dropped that shilling. Perhaps he thought it was worth that sum to keep the gates open a minute or two longer, in case Arthur Augustus 'Now in!

"No, I never dropped a shilling!" said Monty Lowther. "I hadn't a shilling about me, in fact!"

At that statement, the looks on five faces grew quite expressive. If Monty Lowther had not dropped that coin, it must have fallen, like manna of old, from the sky. They were certain, at any rate, that old Taggles hadn't dropped it.

But Taggles naturally was satisfied that he had, and must have, as every fellow present disclaimed ownership.

"Then it's mine!" he said. And regardless of lock-up being lock-up, and orders being orders, Taggles let go the gate and came to pick up the shilling.

He bent his ancient form, grunting—Taggles did not bend quite so easily in the twentieth century as he had bent in the nineteenth! He bent, grunted, groped, and picked up the glimmering coin.

He bent again and heaved himself up with another grunt, a satisfied expression on his guarded countenance. But that satisfied expression changed quite suddenly. He stared at the coin in his hand—he glared at it—he rubbed it with a grunted thumb, and the silvery surface came off.

"You young limb!" said Taggles in a deep voice. He gave Monty Lowther a concentrated glare. "Young limb! You says so you never dropped it!"

"I said I hadn't dropped a shilling!" said Monty Lowther blandly. "I never said I hadn't dropped a halfpenny with silver foil wrapped over it! Did I, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Taggles scouted. It dawned upon his crusty mind that his ancient leg had been pulled to keep the gates open a little longer for the late comer. Taggles almost jumped at the gate, and there was a loud clang as it shut.

Near or far, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was shut out now! That extra couple of minutes had not saved his noble bacon.

Tom Merry & Co. cut off to the School House, but in for calling-over before the doors were closed. Arthur Augustus' place remained vacant in the ranks of the Fourth.

Mr. Railton, Housemaster of the School House, was calling the roll. There was no answering "adsum" when he called D'Arcy's name, and the swell of St. Jim's was marked absent.

Ignorant of the startling news that awaited him at the school, oblivious of calling-over, Arthur Augustus, it seemed, was still deep in trousersing!

CHAPTER 4.

Keeping the Secret!

"L ICKED!" asked Blake.

"Limes!" asked Dig.

"Or both?" inquired Herries.

Prep was on when the door of Study No. 5 opened and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came into that celebrated apartment.

Arthur Augustus' face was deeply clouded. But he shook his head in answer to the questions of his studymates.

"Nuthin, deah boys," he answered.

"You've seen Railton?" asked Blake.

"Yass."

"And you're let off, after cutting roll and getting in late for prep!" exclaimed Blake in astonishment.

"Yass! I was wiah Waitton would excuse me, in the circus," said Arthur Augustus. "You see, I should have been back in time, but I had to wait for a detach for a chap who came a crowspaw on his motor-bike, and came down wallop! As the poor chap had fractured several of his arms and legs, I could not verry well leave him to it."

"Oh?" exclaimed the three.

"So I came back by the train to Wylcombe, and as I had to wait for a train, I withah lost time!" explained Arthur Augustus. "But it's all wright."

"Why couldn't you trot back by the footpath?"

"That was where the accident happened, deah boy."

"A motor-bike on Wayland footpath?" exclaimed Blake. "By gum, he was asking for it! He was almost bound to come a crowspaw."

"He came a feabul crowspaw, deah boy."

"And you cut back to Wayland for the dog?"

"Yass."

"No reason why you couldn't have trotted back by the footpath, just the same, as far as I can see! You've had nearly as long a walk from Rykcombe, after getting there by train."

"Yass. But—"

"But what?"

"Oh! Nuthin!"

Arthur Augustus coloured a little.

In his compassionate sympathy for the man who had been wrecked in the wood and who dreaded to be robbed of the little black box, and whatever it was that it contained, he had willingly taken charge of it, and promised to keep it safe and secret.

It seemed little enough to do for a man who was crippled by an accident and in a state of anxiety and alarm. Arthur Augustus had no objection whatever to minding his property for him till he asked for it to be returned.

In the meantime, it was a secret.

Not that Arthur Augustus had the slightest fear of the mysterious digo of whom the American had spoken. But he had given his word, and his word was his bond.

Now it dawned upon his noble mind for the first time that it was a little awkward to have a secret to keep.

He had had to return from Wayland by train to avoid going near the spot again, as the man

had begged him to do, in his fear that the crooks might be on hand if he came. But clearly, he could not explain that to his chums without also explaining why; and "why" was the secret he had promised to keep.

"You had to wait for a train!" asked Dig.

"Yass!"

"Well, you'd have saved time by walking."

"Yass! But—"

"Well, what?"

"Oh, nothin'!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "Waitton's let me off, so it's all wright."

"Well, if Railton's let you off, what are you looking like a boiled owl?" asked Herries.

"Woolly, Herries, I was not awah that I was lookin' like a boiled owl!" said Arthur Augustus mildly. "But Mr. Waitton was kind enough to tell me some news that has come through on the radio. Pweyhaps you fellows have already heard—"

"Yes, we've heard!" said Blake. "Sorry, old chap! Perhaps the next news will be that they've got the jolly old diamond back."

"I trust so!" said Arthur Augustus. "The patah will be feabuldy wright. You see, he prizes the thing verry highly, not only because it's feabuldy valuable, but because it was given to an ancestah, you know, and is an heirloom in the family. It will be uttaly wright if these wottahs get away with it and cut it up to sell, or anything like that!"

Evidently it was the radio news that had brought that cloud to Arthur Augustus' noble brow!

"I shall have to w'ite to the patah at once," he went on. "Pwey make a spot of wooten for a chap at the table."

"What about prep?"

"In the circus, deah boy, I cannot wowwy about

FOOTPLATE PERIL!

Dick and Timber, the railway mad school-boys, thought it no end of an adventure when they climbed aboard the loco, opened the throttle, and went careering over the rails, seeing how fast the engine would go. But suddenly came danger. "Brake!" yelled Dick. But the loco was doing eighty miles an hour and the road ran downhill. You want to know what happens to Dick and Timber? Then read

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prop. I can tip Toby to cut out for the late collection if I write the letter now—and I must lose no time in expressing my sympathy to the patch over this awful loss. He will feel it very much, you know; and perhaps a letter from me will help him to bask up!"

"Perhaps!" murmured Blake.

Three fellows at prep filled most of the study table. But books and papers were shifted to make space for Arthur Augustus. The seal of St. Jim's sat down with his blotter open before him, and groped in the inside pocket of his elegant jacket where he parked his fountain-pen.

"Bohah!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"Lost it?" asked Blake.

"No; the clip has caught in the beastly linin'!" Arthur Augustus gave a jerk, and the fountain-pen came out of the pocket, pulling the lining after it!

"Prop!"

Something dropped from the lining as it was pulled out, and fell on the study table. It was a little oval black box.

It fell on its side, rolled, and would have rolled off the table had not Jack Blake caught it in his hand.

"Oh, lai Jove!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus in dismay. "Pway give me that box, Blake!"

"Where the dickens did you get this?" asked Blake, holding the little box in his hand and looking at it curiously. "I've never seen it before. Queer thing—it doesn't seem to open! Must open, I suppose."

"Oh! Yess! I suppose so!"

"Like a jolly old black egg, only it's not quite so big! How do you open it, Gussy?"

"I really do not know, Blake—"

"You don't know how to open your own box!" exclaimed Blake, staring at him. "I'll see if I can open it for you."

"Pway do nothin' of the kind!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in alarm. "Pway give me the box at once."

"Think I shall damage it, see?" grunted Blake.

"Oh, no! But—"

"Jolly queer thing," said Blake. "There's absolutely no sign of an opening of any sort! But it must come open, of course! If you press it all over, there may be a spring—"

"Pway don't press it, then!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in great distress. "That box must not be opened, Blake, even if you can do it! Pway give it to me at once." Arthur Augustus stretched his hand across the table. "Pway don't mess about with it, Blake, in case it might come open by accident! Give it to me at once."

Three fellows stared at Arthur Augustus in utter astonishment. His excitement and distress leaped to the eye, but were hard to understand.

"What on earth have you got in it that's so jolly secret?" demanded Blake, inclined as well as amused.

"Oh, nothin'! I mean, I don't know what's in the box; if there's anythin' at all in it! Give it to me at once."

And as Blake, staring, sat with the box still in his hand, Arthur Augustus reached at it and fairly snatched it away.

Such an action was so utterly out of keeping with the manners and customs of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy that his comrades did not merely stare at him—they goggled at him—they almost gibbered at him.

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Arthur Augustus, with a crimson face of discomfort, but with evident relief, jammed the little black box back into his pocket.

Jack Blake gave him a grim look. He was hot in the slightest degree inquisitive; it had been merely a natural curiosity that made him examine the little box that seemed to have no opening. That his drum could object to his doing so was hard to understand; but Blake had to understand it now.

"You silly, fatheaded, frazzled image!" said Blake, in measured tones. "Think I want to peep into a fellow's things, like a worm like Trimble! What do you mean, you pie-faced, glass-eyed imitation of a tailor's dummy?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Why can't a fellow look at the thing?" demanded Herries.

"It—it—it's washah a secret!" stammered Arthur Augustus. "I—I am sovvy, but—but—but—"

"Keep your silly secrets!" grunted Blake.

"Weally, deah boy—"

"And don't jaw while a fellow's doing his prep!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I said don't jaw!" roared Blake, evidently in a state of annoyance. "And when I say don't jaw, what I mean is, don't jaw!"

Blake, with a frowning brow, resumed prep. Herries and Digby, after giving Arthur Augustus a fixed and expressive stare, followed his example. And Arthur Augustus, with a crimson face, feeling extremely uncomfortable, but at the same time greatly relieved to have got the black box safe back in his pocket, proceeded to indicate that sympathetic letter to Lord Eastwood, which was going to comfort his lordship under his loss—perhaps!

CHAPTER 5.

A Strange Disappearance!

"YOU will go on, D'Arcy?" said Mr. Latham. "Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

That morning in Form, Arthur Augustus had hoped to escape his Form-master's eye! His occupation as a sympathetic letter-writer had filled in so much time the previous evening that prep had had to go!

It could not be helped—at least, D'Arcy couldn't see how it could! But it was a little awkward when a fellow was called on to contribute! Latham expected a fellow to get his work done—a way schoolmasters had! Latham's eyes, and spectacles, fixed on Arthur Augustus, in the Fourth, Form Room; and Gussy's eyes fixed rather hopelessly on "Infandum, regina, jules, renovare dolorem," etc.

There was nothing to be done but to make a dash at it. Shots, in such circumstances, were liable to miss the target!

"Infandum, regina!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The queen's infant—"

"What?" ejaculated Mr. Latham.

There was a gurgle of merriment in the Fourth. Gussy's "oo" often added to the quiet of existence in the Fourth Form at St. Jim's. But this was rather specially rich, even for Gussy!

"What? What did you say, D'Arcy?" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

"Oh evlker! I—I—I mean—"

"Terrible!" whispered Kerr. "Unspeakable."

"Weally, Kerr, I may be wrong, but terrible and unspakable are withab strong expressions."

"Kerr! Are you giving D'Arcy the translation?" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

"Oh, yes, sir!" gasped the New House junior.

"Take fifty lines!"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Oh, was that the translation?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I thought you were describin' my con as terrible, Kerr—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence in Form! D'Arcy, if you don't immediately proceed to construe—" rapped the master of the Fourth.

"Oh, yass, sir! I'm just gettin' goin'!"

Terrible. O specus-kum-am-oh deak-

lum!

That knock at the Form-room door came luckily for Arthur Augustus. The door opened, and Toby, the School House page, looked in.

Mr. Latham glanced round at him inquiringly. "Master D'Arcy is wanted in the 'headmaster's study, sir!" said Toby.

"Very well! D'Arcy, you will go to Dr. Holmes' study," said Mr. Latham, and Arthur Augustus gladly laid down Virgil and went.

Some of the juniors looked after him rather anxiously. A summons to the headmaster's study, especially during Form, meant trouble. Blake & Co. wondered what row that one had got into now!

"He, he, he!" giggled Baggie Trimble. "D'Arcy's for it! I say, what has Gussy been up to, Blake?"

Baggy Trimble seemed amused at the idea of Gussy being for it. Blake did not answer Baggie's question. He hooked a fat leg under the desk, and Baggie's amusement ceased on the spot! Baggie wriggled a fat leg and squeaked.

"Trimble!" rapped Mr. Latham. "Keep still! Keep quiet! I will have order in this class! Trimble, take fifty lines!"

After which, the fat Baggie was less amused than ever!

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy made his way to the Head's study, wondering a good deal why he was sent for. In that dreaded apartment he found his headmaster, and also his housemaster.

Both Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton looked very severely at him as he entered. Obviously trouble was in the air.

What the trouble was, D'Arcy could not imagine. His aristocratic conscience was quite clear!

"You sent for me, sir?" he said meekly.

"I did, D'Arcy!" said the Head, in a deep voice. "I have received a telephone-call from Inspector Skeet, at the police station in Wayland."

"Yass, sir!" said Arthur Augustus in wonder. He had not the remotest idea how a telephone-call from the police station in Wayland could possibly concern him.

"Mr. Railton tells me," went on the Head, "that you were absent from calling-over last evening, D'Arcy, and that you made the excuse that you had witnessed an accident to a motor-cycle and had gone back to Wayland to obtain help for an injured man."

"That was your excuse, D'Arcy!" said Mr. Railton sternly.

"Not exactly an excuse, sir, if I may make the remark!" said Arthur Augustus. "It was an explanation, sir!"

"You called on Dr. Smalley, in Wayland, and the medical gentleman lost no time in proceeding to the spot you described to him," went on the Head, with a grim brow. "He notified the police before he went, and a constable accompanied him, to take particulars of the accident."

Dr. Holmes frowned portentously.

"And now, D'Arcy, explain yourself!" he thundered. "How dared you do anything of the kind?"

"An utterly absurd practical joke, wasting the time of a busy medical man, and of the police!" said Mr. Railton.

Arthur Augustus almost jumped off the floor of the Head's study.

"Weally, sir—" he gasped.

"Inspector Skeet has complained very seriously of your conduct, D'Arcy! I understand that Dr. Smalley is also very much annoyed, as is quite natural. What do you mean by it?"

Arthur Augustus gazed at him.

"I am afraid I do not quite understand, sir!" he answered. "Have I done anything wrong?"

"Anything wrong!" repeated the Head. "A foolish, absurd, unfeeling practical joke—an untruthful excuse to your housemaster—what do you mean, D'Arcy?"

"Inspector Skeet has informed your head-

master, D'Arcy, that no such accident is known to have occurred on the footpath in Wayland Wood!" said Mr. Railton. "The doctor failed to find any injured man, and the constable failed to find any wrecked motor-cycle. They found nothing."

"Oh, certainly?"

Arthur Augustus could only blink at his headmaster and his housemaster. He felt like a fellow in a dream.

"But—but they must have found the man, sir!" he stammered. "He could not possibly have got away without assistance! He had broken several of his arms and legs—"

"D'Arcy!"

"I don't know whether the jigsaw was damaged, sir, but it was certainly jammed in the trees, bazzin' like anything."

"Neither an injured man, nor a motor-cycle, was found on the path in the wood when the constable and the doctor reached it," said Dr. Holmes. "I am told that they traversed the whole path, a mile in length, from the Wayland Road to Bycombe Lane. Some tracks were found, the inspector says, which indicated that a motor-cycle had used the path for some distance. Nothing else was found! The whole story was an absurd fabrication."

Arthur Augustus' face crimsoned.

"Did you say a fabrication, sir?" he exclaimed. "I repudiate that word, sir! I want that I am vitally incapable of a fabrication! Neither, sir, am I capable of a silly practical joke, sir, like some unthinking young-

men. If you ask any of my friends in Sunday No. 6, sir, they will tell you that I am a fellow of tact and judgment, and quite incapable of anything of the sort."

"Eless my soul!" exclaimed the Head. "Is it possible, D'Arcy, that you still adhere to your story, though no trace whatever was found of the man you described to Dr. Smalley?"

"Yass, certainly, sir."

"You repeat that you witnessed an accident on the footpath, and that you went for help for a man you believed to be injured?"

"Certainly, sir."

Headmaster and Housemaster exchanged glances. Arthur Augustus' face was crimson and indignant.

"I cannot understand how the man can have been gone," he went on. "He said he was injured, and he looked fearfully injured—he was gwanin' like anythin'. Pewwage he was not so bad as I supposed, and if the doctor did not find him there, I suppose he must have cleaved off. But I certainly left him lyin' there, gwanin' like anythin' and the jiggah bustin' in the twos."

"D'Arcy, Inspector Skout and Dr. Smalley both have the impression that they have been the victims of a foolish schoolboy joke!" exclaimed Mr. Railton.

"I am sorry for that, sir! Of course, they do not know me so well as you do, sir!" said Arthur Augustus. "I trust you do not believe that I was makin' an untruthful statement when I came in here."

Headmaster and Housemaster exchanged glances again. Really, they did not know what to think—though it was clear that, up to a few minutes ago, they had shared the belief of Dr. Smalley and Inspector Skout!

"What do you think, Mr. Railton?" asked the Head at last.

"I suppose it is possible, sir, that D'Arcy stated what he thought to be true," said the School House master slowly. "He may have fancied that there had been a serious accident, when it was only a trifling matter, and the man went on his way afterwards."

"Quite so," assented Dr. Holmes. "A foolish mistake."

"Well, sir—"

"It is a very extraordinary matter, D'Arcy, but I shall take the view that you acted in good faith," said the Head at last. "I shall accept your word."

"Of course, sir!" assented Arthur Augustus indignantly.

Dr. Holmes coughed.

"You may leave my study, D'Arcy!" he said hastily.

And Arthur Augustus left it and walked back to the Fourth Form Room, leaving his headmaster and his Housemaster still dubious, but, fortunately, giving Arthur Augustus the benefit of the doubt!

CHAPTER 6.

Figgins Is Too Funny!

"Gussy, old bean—"

"Yess, Figgins, deah boy."

"Is that a spot of dust on your hat?"

"Rai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus anxiously. "Is it?"

It was breaking-up day at St. Jim's. At Weyland Junction seven School House juniors were packed in a carriage—D'Arcy's party for Eastwood House and the gorgeous Easter trip. On the platform Figgins & Co. of the New House had come up to the carriage door to say good-bye. Figgins & Co. were catching a later train; Figgins and Kerr being bound for Water with Patty Wynn.

"Let me brush it off, old scout!" said Figgins.

"Thank you verry much, deah boy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was sporting a topper that was a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. Truth to tell, he would have preferred not to trust that beautiful topper into any hands but his.

own. But how could a fellow decline a kind offer to brush it for him?

Figgins of the Fourth took that hat to brush off the speck of dust—real or imaginary!

Six fellows in the carriage looked at Figgins with a suspicious eye. Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther, Blake, Herriot, and Digby would not have been surprised had something happened to that hat whilst it was in the hands of George Figgins. Arthur Augustus had no suspicions—he never had. Arthur Augustus had that unmistakable characteristic of aristocratic descent—an infinite capacity for being taken in!

Figgins stepped back from the carriage door to brush that hat. He turned his back for a few moments while he brushed it. Which deepened the suspicions of Tom Merry & Co.

In fact, they fully expected that topper to resemble a bushy mare than a silk hat when Figgins turned round and headed it back.

To their surprise, it was the same handsome topper, smooth as silk and gleaming spotless and speckless.

"O.K. now, old talip!" said Figgins.

"Thank you verry much, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus, as he replaced the handsome topper on his noble head. "Now that we are breakin' up for the holidays, Figgins, it is quite right and propah to forget all about House winty and that sort of thing. In fact, I don't mind sayin' that I am sorry I thrashed you the other day, old chap!"

"Did you?" ejaculated Figgins.

"If you have forgotten it, deah boy, all the better."

"I must be losin' my memory!" said Figgins. "Do you remember Gussy thrashing me the other day, Patsy?"

Patty Wynn shook his head.

"No; all I remember is you walloping him," he answered.

"Yes, I remember that," agreed Kerr.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you fellows—"

"Hallo, we're off!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the train gave a jerk. "Good-bye, Figgie! Look out for squalls next term! New House is going to get the kybosh!"

"I don't think!" grinned Figgins. "Good-bye! Have a good time in the sky! If anything happens to the plane, fall on Gussy's head if you can."

"Rai Jove! If anythin' happened to the plane, Figgins, what would be the use of a fellow fallin' on my head?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus in astonishment.

"Safer to fall on something soft!" explained Figgins.

"You uttah ass!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The train rolled out of the station, Figgins & Co. laughing and waving their caps as it went. Arthur Augustus frowned; but his frown melted away in less than a minute. Everybody was in great spirits that sunny April day.

It was going to be gorgeous. After a day or two at Eastwood House the St. Jim's party were going to embark on an air liner—and it was not going to be merely a flip, it was going to be a trip! Lord Eastwood had chartered the passenger plane for his son and his son's party, and they were going forth, like Lord Lovel in the halled, "strange countries far to see." The first hop was to be to Paris, after which they were going farther—and the flying schoolboys were going to enjoy every minute of it.

"Baj Jove! It's quite warm for April!" remarked Arthur Augustus a little later, and he pushed back his topper from his noble forehead. Six faces in the carriage wore smiles.

Arthur Augustus glanced round at them. Then he adjusted his eyeglass and glanced round again. He was puzzled.

"Nothin' funny in my womaskin' that it was warm for April, is there, deak boys?" he inquired.

"Not at all!" smiled Tom Merry.

"Then what are you fellows gwinnin' at?"

"Were we grinning!" murmured Monty Lowther.

"Yess, wathah! You are gwinnin' now!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You are gwinnin', too, Blake!"

"Only a sweet smile!" said Blake.

"You are gwinnin', Howler!"

"Only my usual happy and benevolent expression!" answered Herries.

"Wecally, I see nothin' whatevah to gwinn at!" said the puzzled Arthur Augustus.

"Somebody lend him a looking-glass," suggested Lowther.

"Wecally, Lowther, I wogard that remark as personal!" said Arthur Augustus stiffly. "In reply to such a remark I can only say wats!"

Arthur Augustus pushed his handsome topper a little farther back. He had a slight feeling of dampness on his noble forehead. It was rather warm for an April day, and he attributed it to a spot of perspiration. He could not, of course, see his forehead. Six other fellows could! Six other fellows could see dark smudges oozing from under his hat.

Gassy's noble brow was beginning to assume a strangeebra-like appearance. From which six fellows were able to deduce that George Figgins had done something more than brush off a speck of dust while that topper was in his hands at Wayland Station!

Arthur Augustus gave his friends rather a severe look, and turned his gaze to the window. There was a gurgle in the carriage. A black smudge was streaking down by Gassy's ear. He



"Say, you look a straight guy," said the injured man to Arthur Augustus. "Promise me to keep that box till I ask for it again. Keep it dark—I'm telling you, if Beppo was wise to it, you'd have that doge looking for you!"

glanced round again, and there was another gurgle at the sight of a black trickle creeping down his noble nose! Arthur Augustus frowned. Really, he could not understand all this frivolous movement.

"Hallo, we're pulling into Leham!" exclaimed Tom Merry, as the train slowed at a station.

"Gussy, old man—"

"We're stoppin'" said Arthur Augustus.

"Any fellow say choos? There's a boy with a 1283—"

"Choos!" said two or three fellows together.

The train stopped, and Gussy let down the window. At a waving hand, the boy with the tray of newspapers and chocolates shot up. Arthur Augustus rose and leaned from the window—to make his selection from the tray.

To his surprise, the boy with the chocolates gave a sudden, convulsive start, and jumped back in alarm.

"My eye!" he gasped.

"Bai Jove! What's the matter?" ejaculated the astonished Arthur Augustus.

He leaned a little farther out; and the chocolate boy made another backward jump, scattering several newspapers and boxes of chocolates from his tray. Evidently he was alarmed.

"What the deuce!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Is that kid potay? What's the matter with that kid, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ere, guard!" yelled the chocolate boy. "There's a mad bloke in this carriage—mad as a 'otter—painted up like a Injun—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the carriageful.

"Bai Jove! That fellow must be cracked!" gasped Arthur Augustus. He turned round to his companions. "What are you laughin' at, you duffahs! There's nothin' to laugh at, is there?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Tom Merry & Co. They seemed to think that there was Gussy's face by that time was streaked all over with the ink that had exuded from under the lining of his hat. His aspect was really remarkable. It was no wonder that it had alarmed the newspaper boy.

"Weally, you fellows—"

"What's up 'ere?" The guard ran up. "What—why—who—how— Here, you come out of that! What ayclim did you get out of, I'd like to know!"

"Are you addressin' me?" howled Arthur Augustus in indignant wrath.

"I am that!" roared the guard. He stared in at the window. "Are you young gents looking after him! His keepers—or what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! Are they all cracked here?" gasped Arthur Augustus. "What do you mean by addressin' me in that impertinent mannah?"

"What do you mean by paintin' of yourself like a blossomin' zebra?" demanded the guard. "Ere, the train's got to go on! Are you gents looking after him, or not?"

"Oh, yes!" gasped Tom Merry. "It's all right, guard! We're taking every care of him. All serene!"

"Well, the sooner you get him safe to his ayclim the better!" granted the guard. "He'll be frightenin' the passengers!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus fell rather than sat in his seat
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as the train rolled out of Leham; he was quite bewildered.

"Is—is—is anythin' the matter, deah boys?" he stammered. "I feel thrown into quite a flitch. That man must be cracked! It has thrown me into quite a perspiration. My face feels quite damp—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Pweay stop that ridiculous movement! What are you weakin' at like that, you wital ones!" howled Arthur Augustus.

He drew a handkerchief from his pocket and passed it over his face, which was feeling quite damp; then he gave a convulsive bound as he saw the state of the handkerchief. A moment before it had been spotless. It was not useless now; it was smudged all over with black ink.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I—I say, look at that! It is inkay! Is there any ink on my face, you fellows?"

"Is there?" gasped Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus gave another wipe, making the handkerchief inkier and spreading the ink streaks all over his noble countenance. He had looked like a zebra before; now he looked rather like a Hottentot. He gazed at the inkly handkerchief in amazement and horror; then he sorted out his pocket-mirror and gazed into it.

"Goodness gracious!" he ejaculated faintly. "Is—is—is that my face? It is—is—is all black! Bai Jove!"

"Did you wash this mornin', Gussy?" gurgled Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

Arthur Augustus removed his hat; he gazed at it and into it. The expression on his face as he gazed made the juniors shriek.

"Great Scott! There is ink in my hat!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "It is all inkay inside! It was all white when I put it on—"

"If it was all white then, it is all black now!" gurgled Monty Lovcher.

"I mean it was all white, not all white, you see! How did that ink get into my hat, you fellows! This is a very remarkable mystery. How could that beastly ink have got into my hat! Can any of you fellows guess?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ask Figgins next term," suggested Blake. "I dare say he could guess."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bai Jove! That awful wotah was playin' tricks with my hat—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see anythin' to laugh at in playin' wotah tricks with a fellow's hat!" roared Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I will give him a feakful thwashin' next term! I will give him a biggah thwashin' than I gave him last time! Bai Jove! Look at my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look at my face—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And stop cacklin'!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. Tom Merry & Co. looked at the hat and they looked at the face, but they did not stop cackling; they couldn't. There were sounds of revelry in that carriage till the party changed trains, and Arthur Augustus at last was able to get a much-needed wash. And he finished the journey in his cap.

CHAPTER 7.
The Days Again!

"KNOW that chap?" murmured Monty Lowther.

"What-fo?" answered Tom Merry and Manners together.

It was the following morning at Eastwood House. Tom Merry & Co. were going the Silver Swallow the once-over.

The Silver Swallow rested, magnificent and imposing, on the tarmac at the private landing ground at Eastwood House. It was not the largest of passenger planes, but it was very large, with accommodation if needed for eighteen passengers as well as its crew of two pilots and steward. So there was going to be plenty of room—though, as Blake remarked, Gussy's baggage was likely to take up most of it.

The door of the passenger cabin was open, and the steps in place. Arthur Augustus was in the baggage-room, looking after some of the baggage already put in. Blake was sitting in the pilot's seat to fancy himself an air pilot. Dight and Horries were in the cabin. Having explored the interior, Tom Merry, Manners, and Lowther were looking at the plane from the outside with great delight and satisfaction.

Easter holidays in a plane were a tremendous catch. Lord Eastwood had made all the arrangements—which must, the juniors suspected, have included a very handsome bill to pay.

There was only one fly in the ointment. His lordship, for reasons unknown to the juniors, considered that they needed the care of an older person in their travels; so an older person was going with them to look after them.

Tom Merry & Co. had no doubt about their ability to look after themselves. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy had no doubt about his ability to look after the whole party. But his lordship, of course, had to be given his head—and that was that! His lordship's own special, faithful, and reliable man Parson was going as guide, philosopher, and friend, and general manager and factotum.

Which was a real sacrifice on the part of his lordship; for Parson was not only invaluable, but almost indispensable; a model to all valets and men-servants—though it was, perhaps, a sacrifice that the schoolboys would have preferred his lordship not to make.

The three Shell fellows, standing at a little distance from the great plane, were regarding the same with admiring and appreciative eyes when they became aware of a man approaching the spot and glanced round at him.

All three knew the man, at once—his swarthy face, his bright black eyes like shining beads.

It was the Italian who had jumped from the car a week ago in Rycombe Lane to ask them if they had seen the man on the motor-bike.

They stared at him in surprise and curiosity as he came up. It had never occurred to them that they might ever see that dago again—and they had, in fact, forgotten his existence.

Now they were reminded of it quite unexpectedly. Why he was in the grounds of Eastwood House, and what he could possibly want there, mystified them.

As he saw their eyes on him the Italian smiled with a flash of white teeth and came up, taking off his hat and bowing with foreign politeness.

"Buon giorno, signori!" he said—which the Shell fellows guessed to mean "Good-morning!"

"Good-morning!" answered Tom. "Do you want anything here? These are private grounds."

"Sì, sì! I take a liberty to walk in," said the Italian, bowing again. "It is here the home of the Signorina D'Arcy, I shall think."

"D'Arcy—yes," said Tom in surprise. "Is it D'Arcy you want to see?"

"Sì, sì, please, signor. If it please you," said the Italian. "I have one message to give from one man that he shall know."

The three Shell fellows looked at him. They suspected—or, rather, more than suspected—that the Italian had been in hostile pursuit of the man on the motor-bike when they had seen him last. That had given them the impression that he was some sort of a lawless character.

But he was civil, in fact, effusively polite, and looked harmless enough—rather like an Italian waiter in his best clothes.

"D'Arcy's in the plane," said Tom Merry, after a pause. "I'll give him a call if you've got a message for him."

"Gracie tanto, which is to say, many thanks," said the Italian, with another bow.

Tom Merry stepped towards the door of the plane, and called:

"Gussy!"

"Yass, deah boy!"

"Man with a message, old bean?"

"Wright-fo!"

Arthur Augustus appeared at the cabin door. He glanced at the Italian in surprise, and came down the steps.

The swarthy man came towards him, bowing as if moved on springs.

"The Signorina D'Arcy?" he asked. His black, beady eyes scanned the face of the swell of St. Jim's with the keenest interest.

Evidently he had never seen Arthur Augustus before, but his interest in him was deep.

"Yass, my name is D'Arcy," answered Arthur Augustus. "What—"

"You shall belong to—what you call?—la scuola—a school—what shall it call?"

"St. Jim's," said Arthur Augustus.

"Va bene! Now I shall know it is all correct, as my amico—my friend—he say," smiled the Italian. "You are figlio—son—of his Lordship Eastwood—non a yes?"

"Yass; but what—"

"Che bella cosa!" grinned the Italian. "A son of his lordship—che bella cosa. My friend he shall not know that—no." He made a gesture towards the Shell fellows. "One word of private in an ear. It is a message."

"Wulfbish!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pray speak out before my friends, if you have anything to say!"

Arthur Augustus was patient and polite, but he was getting tired of bowing and grinning from that unexpected visitor.

"E la scuola nera!" said the Italian, sinking his voice.

Arthur Augustus stared at him blankly.

"The what?" he ejaculated.

"What you call the black box—la scuola nera—"

Arthur Augustus jumped. He had almost forgotten the existence of the little black box.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "Dai Jove! What the thump do you know about it?"

He glanced at Tom Merry & Co. and the Shell fellows politely looked out of hearing, in a state of considerable astonishment.

"Avete la scuola nera—you have the black

box?" exclaimed the Italian, his beady, black eyes fairly glittering.

"I fail to see how you know anything about it," answered Arthur Augustus. "It is a screw, as a matter of fact, and I certainly do not intend to mention it to a stranger."

Arthur Augustus' hand went involuntarily to the inner pocket of his jacket as he spoke.

The little black box was there, safe and sound, and thus reminded of it, he felt for it to ascertain that it was safe.

The Italian's grin, as he did so, showed nearly every tooth in his head. The dago hardly needed telling now that Gussy had the black box.

"It is a message," he explained, watching D'Arcy like a cat. "My friend, the American, who was hurt when he made a fall from a motor-cycle, he lie very ill in my house, and he send you a message, to hand over the black box he place in your keeping, to take to him."

"Oh, you know that chap who came a croppah!" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Si, si! Amico mio—he is my good friend. I nurse him in his malady," said the Italian. "He beg me to find you—to ask for what he give you to care for. I go to a school, I ask, I learn. I find that it is to son of Lordship Eastwood that he give it—the bella cosa. I come to take."

The Italian held out an eager and greasy hand.

But Arthur Augustus did not place the black box therein. Arthur Augustus was simple and unscrupulous, but not to that extent.

"I'm afraid I cannot do anything of the sort," he answered. "I am afraid that chap's propensity for him will be asks for it back. I should not be likely to hand it to anyone else. Besides"—Arthur Augustus gave the Italian quite a sharp look—"he said that a dago was affah him, to wash him—that is why he handed it to me. Perhaps you are the dago."

The Italian's eyes glittered. That term did not seem to please him. Also, he could see that Arthur Augustus did not intend to part with the scatola nera on such easy terms.

"You will not give!" he asked.

"Certainly not, until I see the croppah again," answered Arthur Augustus. "It is really ridiculous to ask me. I trust I am not a suspicious chap. But how do I know that you come from him! I—Yavooch!"

Arthur Augustus broke off with a yell of surprise and wrath as he was suddenly intercepted by the Italian springing on him like a tiger.

There was a crash as he went down on his back, and achievish hand shot into the pocket he had felt in a few minutes ago.

A moment later the black box was in the swarthy fingers, and the Italian was running across the airfield like a deer, leaving Arthur Augustus sprawling on his noble back, and spluttering.

CHAPTER 8. Mysterious!

"AFTER him!" roared Tom Merry.

The chums of the Shell had witnessed that startling scene in utter amazement.

But they did not waste a second. As the Italian ran, they ran, pelting on his track at top speed.

Blake and Herries and Dig, who had seen it

from the place, tumbled headlong down the steps and joined in the chase. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy sat up, spluttering.

"Oh croombs! Oh croiky! Affah him, deah boys! Get that box back! Oh, bat Jove! Oh, the howwid wascal! He has wuined my necktie! Oh croombs!"

Arthur Augustus tottered up to join in the chase; but he was far behind. Blake, Herries, and Dig were strung out behind the Terrible Three. They had no chance of overtaking the fleeing thief. But the three Shell fellows were close behind him, and Tom Merry was running like the wind. Fast as the dago ran, the captain of the Shell gained on him.

The running man was heading for a gate on the Easthorpe road. He had almost reached it when Tom reached him, and grabbed at his shoulder from behind.

The dago leaped sideways, and turned, panting, with blazing eyes like a wild animal at bay.

"Abbiato cura!" he spat out. "Abbiato cura—take one care—"

Tom Merry's fist, crashing in the swarthy face, cut him short, and the Italian went spinning over, and crashed on the ground.

He gave a yell as he crashed, the black box spinning several yards away.

"Bag him!" shouted Lowther.

"Collar the brute!" parted Manners.

The Italian was on his feet with the activity of a cat. He gave one desperate glare at the three juniors rushing on him, and at the black box that lay on the ground.

But he had no chance of getting hold of it again. He had barely time to dodge before he was grasped.

He leaped away, dodging and twisting, and, with a desperate bound cleared the gate, and tore down the road.

"O.K.!" gasped Tom Merry. "He's dropped it! Here it is!"

Manners and Lowther came to a halt, gasping for breath. Jack Blake came puffing up as Tom Merry picked up the black box.

"What the thump—" he gasped. "He pinched something from Gussy—"

"This!" said Tom, holding up the little box. "What the dickens is it? And what the thump did he want it for?"

"Oh, that!" said Blake. "I've seen that before in the study at school. That was, Gussy, had—"

"That's it," said Herries. "I remember it. Blessed if I know where Gussy got it from, but that's it!"

"Something the siffy was keeping secret from his pals," said Digby. "Gussy, you howling ass, what does this mean!"

Arthur Augustus came up, breathless.

"Have you let him go?" he gasped. "You utah asses! He has wubbed me! Which way did he go?"

"Here you are, fathead!" said Tom Merry. He held out the black box. "He dropped it when I tapped his back."

"Bat Jove!" Arthur Augustus almost grabbed the black box. "The awful wottah! I was taken quite by surprise, you know. That howwid dago came here to pinch it, bat Jove!"

The black box disappeared into Gussy's inside pocket, followed by staring eyes from his comrades.

"What is it?" asked Lowther.

"D—it—it's a box, deah boy," stammered Arthur Augustus. "A—a—a box, you know. Just a—a—a box!"

"We can see it's a box, fathead! But what did that dago want it for?"

"I weally do not know. It does not look very valuable to me," answered Arthur Augustus. "Perwaps there is somethin' valuable inside it."

"Don't you know what's in your own box?" exclaimed Tom Merry.

"It is not my box, Tom Morrey."

"Not yours!" yelled Blake.

"Pway don't wash at me, deah boy! I have mentioned more than once that I dislike bein' washed at?"

"If it isn't your box, what are you doing with it?" howled Blake.

"Keopin' it in my pocket, deah boy. I weeven," added Arthur Augustus, "that I cannot explain all the cires. You see, I have promised to keep it dark. Ouhawise, I should tell you that this box was confided to my care by a chap who was afraid of bein' washed of it! But, as I have promised to say nothin', pway don't ask me any questions."

They gazed at him.

"A chap who was afraid of being robbed of it!" gurgled Blake. "What chap?"

"I think he was an American, Blake, as he used very queer expressions, and talked through his nose! But I am sowsy that I cannot tell you anythin' about him—and weally, I think I had better not even mention that he was an American. The least said, soonest mended, you know," said Arthur Augustus sagely.

"Oh, erroy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I do not see anythin' in that remark to cause movement," said Arthur Augustus, in surprise. "It's all wright, as that awful wottah never got away with it! Pway come back and look at the plane!"

"What on earth," said Tom Merry, "has that howling sea got mixed up in now?"

"Something—goodness knows what!" said Blake. "This is what comes of letting him go out of our sight! I've said a lot of times that we ought to keep him on a chain!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Are you going to tell us what it all means, you fathead?"

"I object to bein' called a fathead, Blake, as I have told you more than once before—"

"I object to your being one, as I've told you more than once before—"

"Wats?"

With that reply, Arthur Augustus turned and walked back to the Silver Swallow. Tom Merry & Co. followed him in a state of great wonder.

Evidently Arthur Augustus was mixed up in something of a mysterious nature—equally evident, he did not intend to tell his astonished pals what it was. He was keeping a deep, dark secret, though, in view of Gussy's inimitable way of keeping a secret, they had no doubt that it would come out sooner or later a little at a time. They had to leave it at that!

"You've put all Gussy's luggage on board, Pawson!" exclaimed Blake.

"Yes, sir!"

"Then good-bye to this trip; we shall never get off the ground."

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus cheerily.

It was a glorious April day. The St. Jim's air trippers were about to start. Seven faces were merry and bright. Lord Eastwood, seeing his son and his son's friends off, had a pleasant smile on his face. Pawson was in the plane—the steward was in, and the two pilots. All was ready for starting on the first hop. One after another, the juniors said good-bye to his lordship—whose pleasant, smiling face gave no indication of inward worry or trouble over the loss of that wonderful stone, the Nizam's Diamond.

Arthur Augustus was last in, and he stood with a thoughtful frown on his brow. Apparently he was trying to remember something, and could not quite think what it was.

"All ready!" said Tom Merry. "Forgotten anything, Gussy?"

"There was somethin' I was goin' to say to my patch!" said Arthur Augustus. "I do not seem to remember what it was. I have been wathah weewid wash the luggage. I should not like to show up in Fwance without a decent hat! You are sush you put the hat-box in, Pawson!"

"Quite, sir!"

"Well, I know you are a very reliable man, Pawson—but it would be wathah feahful to arrive in a foreign country without a decent hat! Perwaps I had better look in the baggage-room to make sush."

"This way, sir!"

The door was closed, the steps removed; the engine singing sweetly. With hardly a perceptible jerk, the Silver Swallow taxied along

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CHAPTER 9. Up!

"PAWSON!"
"Sir!"
"Are you sush all the luggage is on board?"
"Quite, sir!"

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the tarmac. Tom, Merry & Co. looked from the windows, and could hardly believe that the plane was rising, so smoothly did it leave the earth.

But it was rising—they viewed the tops of trees, and the old red roofs of Eastwood House. His lordship disappeared—the air field disappeared—the red chimney-pots of Eastwood House disappeared.

"We're off!" said Tom.

"Like a jolly good car!" said Blake. "Only better."

"Ripping!"

"All serene, Gussy!" asked Blake, as the swell of St. Jim's hurried back into the cabin. "Covered the silk hats!"

"Yess, the luggage is all right, dear boy!" answered Arthur Augustus. "Pawson is really a very valuable man. But I have just remembered what I was goin' to say to the patch! (Upon the door, will you?)"

"Eh!"

"What!"

"I was goin' to express the hope that the police would recover the Niame's Diamond for him before we come back!" explained Arthur Augustus. "That was what I was tryin' to remember, but the luggage put it out of my mind, you know. It won't take a minute—"

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

"Woolly, you fellows—"

"Can't open the door now?" grumbled Blake. "You'd better get your pater on the long-distance phone from Paris—"

"I am goin' to speak to him before I go, Blake! I am goin' to jump out for a minute—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the jinxes.

Arthur Augustus evidently had not noticed yet that the plane had taken off! The idea of Arthur Augustus jumping out for a minute, when they were already nearly a thousand feet up, made the jinxes yell.

"Woolly, you fellows, I fail to see any reason for this ridiculous movement!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly. "I insist on steppin' down—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep away from that door, foolhead!" roared Herries.

"It's all right—it's locked," gurgled Blake. "Gussy isn't going to commit suicide this trip!"

"Bal Jore! I wish the steward would not be in such a hurry to lock the door! Pawson!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Pwey call the steward and ask him to unlock this door!"

Pawson blinked at Arthur Augustus. Pawson was a rather pretty man, with a plump face. His plump face registered amazement at D'Arcy's request.

"But, sir—" he gasped.

"Pwey do not waste time, Pawson. It would be wathin' arrestin' to start off on a holiday without expressin' a wish that the patch would recover that very heavy loss! Pwey call the steward at once!"

"But—" stammered Pawson.

"You are wastin' time, Pawson! Will you call the steward immediately!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus warmly.

"Oh! Very well, sir!"

Pawson called along to call the steward asidden. Tom, Merry & Co. sat and roared. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy surveyed them through his eyeglass with a very severe look. How long it would be before it dawned on his noble brain

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that the plane was up, the jinxes did not know—but it did not seem to be drawing yet.

"You wanted me, sir!" asked the steward, coming into the cabin.

"Yass, Wawling! Pwey open that door for me!"

Rawlings jumped.

"Open that door?" he repeated.

"Yass! Please lose no time!"

"But—but, why—what—why—" stammered the steward.



In a moment the black box was in the sturdy fingers of the steward—a door—leaving Arthur Augustus sprawling on the ground.

"I want to jump out!"

"Jump out!" yelled the steward.

"Yass!"

Rawlings gazed at Arthur Augustus like a man in a dream! Tom, Merry & Co. shrieked. The steward was not likely to open that door, for a passenger to jump out from the height of a thousand feet!

"I wish you fellows would not cackle at everything I say!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I regard it as ridiculous! Steward, open that door at once, please! I've forgotten something! I want to jump out—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "It's all right, steward!" gurgled Blake.
 "Gassy doesn't want to commit suicide! He doesn't know we're up yet."
 "Oh!" gasped the steward.
 "Bai Jove! Are we up?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I really did not notice that we were up! Are we really up, Wawoohoo!"
 "Look at the altimeter, sir!" gasped Ray-
 Egan. "Over a thousand feet!"
 "Oh, cookey?"

CHAPTER 10.

Wonderful!

"THE sea?"
 The Silver Swallow soared over the lake Channel. Tom Merry & Co. gazed down from the windows of the cabin at the billows rolling far below—dotted here and there with a sail or the smoke of a steamer—tray in the distance. Far away as yet, a line of cliffs marked the coast of France.

"Bai Jove!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "This beats railway trains and Channel steamers, dear boys!"

"What-ho!" agreed Blake. "Best idea you ever had for a holiday trip, Gassy! The jolly old plane's running as smooth as silk!"

"Yass, wawah! A chap hardly swallows that he is up at all! Wimmie! bettah than a verry good ome on a verry good woad—not a jerk, dear boys—not a wobble—not a— Yawoooooh!" yelled Arthur Augustus suddenly.

The plane dipped.
 Hitherto, the Silver Swallow had been running so smoothly that it was, as Dig remarked, like sitting in the study at St. Jim's. So that dip came rather unexpectedly. The jinxed chivald hobb—Monty Leather clanking hold of Arthur Augustus, who tumbled.

"All right—I've got you!" exclaimed Monty. Probably Arthur Augustus would have recovered his balance had he that prompt assistance from Monty Leather. As it was, he didn't! He went over, and over with him went Leather, sprawling.

"Oh?" gasped Arthur Augustus dimly. "Bai Jove! Leggo, you see! Oh cookey! Gwawoff! You are crumplin' my waistcoat! You are crumplin' my jacket! Oh cookey!"

The Silver Swallow dipped again. Perhaps that was the reason why Monty Leather clanked wildly at Arthur Augustus, sprawling over that hapless youth and rumpling and ruffling him right and left.

"I've got you all right, Gassy?" gasped Leather.

"Yawook! Leggo! You uttah see, I know you've got me—I want you to leggo!" shrieked Arthur Augustus. "You are crumplin' my jacket—you are crumplin' my necktie—you are crumplin' my waistcoat— Oh cookey! Dzag-gawoff, you fellows!"

Monty Leather scrambled up at last. Arthur Augustus sat up in a rather dazed state, gasping for breath. He groped for his eyeglasses, which fluttered at the end of his cord, jammed in in his eye, and fixed it on Monty Leather with a concentrated glare.

"You uttah see!" he bawled.

"That's how Gassy thanks a chap for helping him!" said Leather resignedly. "That's what Gassy calls gratitude!"

"I did not require any help, you uttah see! You pushed me awah!" roared Arthur Augustus. "I should not have gone oval if you had not wobbled me, Louthah! Now look at my delectah—all wuffed and crumpled! I regard you as a dangerous idiot, Louthah!"

"You can regard me in any character you please to assume for the purpose, of course!" agreed Leather.

"Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Bai Jove! You misundahstand me, you see! I mean—"

"Never mind what you mean, old toop! Let
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apers of the Italian, and then he raced away across the airfield like a sprinting on his noble back and spluttering.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Tom Merry & Co. Arthur Augustus looked at the altimeter. It registered over a thousand feet! He looked from the windows. He gazed at far-away tops of trees, at a railway line that ran like a thread, at a river that looked like a silver streak.

"Bai Jove!" he ejaculated.
 "Still want to jump out, old bean?" gurgled Blake. "Or have you changed your mind?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Wats!" said Arthur Augustus. He had changed his mind.

no help you up. What are you jerking away for when a fellow's going to help you up?"

"If you grab my yah, you sully 'em, I will punch you in the eye!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Keep off, you dangerous manias!"

Arthur Augustus scrambled up assisted. He smoothed his ruffled clothes and dusted it, breathing wrath. But a sudden shout from Monty Lowther caused Gussy to forget even his rumpled clothes for a moment.

"Great Scott! There's a ship going down!" exclaimed Lowther, pointing from the window.

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus jumped to the window and stared down. "Is it a ships'ack? Perhaps we may be able to render assistance. Where is it, Lowthah?"

"Look!"

Arthur Augustus looked—at a steamer that was rolling down the Channel far below, leaving a trail of black smoke in the April sunshine. He looked—and looked again! The steamer rolled placidly on its way, with no sign of ships'ack that Arthur Augustus could discern.

"What the thump do you mean, Lowthah?" he exclaimed. "That ship's all right! It is not a ships'ack!"

"Can't you see it's going down?" asked Lowther.

"Certainly not! It is not goin' down at all! What is the match with it?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"Nothing, that I know of! But it's going down——"

"It is not goin' down, you ass!"

"Look at it, you fellows!" exclaimed Lowther.

"Isn't that steamer going down—the Channel?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It is—it *is*!" grinned Blake. "Look at it, Gussy! It's going down the Channel all right!"

"You uttah 'em, Lowthah! Did you mean that that steamah was goin' down the Channel?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Eh? What did you think I meant?" asked Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh wats!"

Arthur Augustus resumed smoothing out his rumpled clothes. That steamer, undoubtedly, was going down—but not in a manner to cause alarm!

Monty Lowther seemed to be in a merry mood that bright morning. There was a cheery grin on Monty's face. The other fellows noticed that he was holding something in his hand, unnoticed by Arthur Augustus, who was busy with his rumpled clothes.

Standing with his back to the swell of St. Jim's, Monty opened his hand to reveal the contents to the other fellows. They stared at a little black box that was momentarily revealed.

"You ass, Monty!" exclaimed Tom Merry, laughing.

Monty closed his hand over the black box again. The juniors knew now why he had rolled over Arthur Augustus and rumpled him. Evidently Monty had abstracted the mysterious black box during the rumpling process—quite unknown to Arthur Augustus. Not for a moment did it occur to Gussy that that little black box was no longer in his jacket pocket.

Monty gave his friends a cheery wink. He stopped to a seat on which Arthur Augustus had deposited his silk hat. There was a gurgle from

the juniors as he dropped the little black box into the hat.

They waited for what was going to follow. Nothing followed for ten minutes or more, by which time Arthur Augustus had restored himself to his usual sassy and spotless state and rejoined the fellows looking from the windows at the shining blue sea and the coast of France.

"You fellows like to see a trick?" asked Lowther.

"Weally, Lowthah, I have had enough of your tricks, for one!" said Arthur Augustus severely.

"I mean a conjuring trick!" explained Lowther.

"Go ahead!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

He could guess that that conjuring trick had something to do with a black box.

"It's simple, but a bit puzzling till you know how to do it!" said Lowther blandly. "The idea is to make something disappear out of a fellow's pocket and appear somewhere else—while standing six feet away from the fellow. Think you could do it, Gussy?"

"I am quite sure that I could not do it, Lowthah, and I am quite sure that you could not do it, either!" answered Arthur Augustus. "It is absolutely imposs!"

"A good conjuring trick always looks impossible till it's explained," said Monty. "What will you bet on it, Gussy?"

"I will not bet on it at all, dear boy, betwixt betin' wathah a wester ideah; but if you can do anythin' of the kind, I will eat my hat!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically.

"You're witnesses to that, you fellows!" said Lowther. "Now stand six feet away from me, Gussy—everybody can see that I don't touch you—can't even reach you. Put your hands behind you—that's right! I'll put mine behind me. Now I can't touch you, can I?"

"Wathah not! And if you can make something disappear out of my pocket without touchin' me, I will eat my hat, and your hat atah it!" declared Arthur Augustus.

"Name something in your pocket," said the conjurer, while the other fellows looked on with grinning faces.

"My fountain-pen!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Oh! This trick can't be worked with a fountain-pen——"

"I wathah thought not!" said Arthur Augustus sarcastically.

"Name something else——"

"My handkerchief."

"Oh! It won't work with a hanky, either. It has to be a wooden article," explained Lowther. "Your head won't do—that's not in your pocket——"

"You uttah me!"

"Anything else made of wood——"

"What about that black box?" asked Marrows, joining in the game, as it were. "Is that still in your pocket, Gussy?"

"Vaas, wathah!"

"That will do, then!" said Lowther. "Now, stand quite still, Gussy, and keep your eyes wide open! I wave my hands and say *hey presto!* and the box vanishes out of your pocket."

"Wats!"

"And will be found somewhere else. Let's see—you will find it in your hat over there!" said Lowther. "Now, stand still, and fix your eyes on me!"

"Wathah! You cannot do anythin' of the sort, Lowthah! It is uttably impossable, and

you know it vevy well! You are talkin' wot?" explained Arthur Augustus.

Lowthah waved his hands in magic circles. "Hey presto!" he exclaimed. "Going—going—gone! Did you feel it go, Gussy?" "I certainly did not, Lowthah, and I am quite assured that it is not gone!" answered Arthur Augustus. "Nobody could perform such a trick! It is absolutely imposs! Wubbish!"

"Feel in your pocket!" said Lowthah. "It is quite unnecessary to feel in my pocket, Lowthah, when I know perfectly well that the box is there all wight!"

"Feel in it, all the same?" said Manners. "You're bound to put it to the test, Gussy! Let's see!"

"Oh, all wight! But it is uttah nonsense, as Lowthah certainly could not perform such a trick!" said Arthur Augustus, feeling in his pocket. "The box is here all wight—and— and— Oh! Ah! Bai Jove! Where is that box?"

A startling change came over Arthur Augustus' aristocratic face. In utter amazement, he groped in the inside pocket of his jacket. He drew out a fountain-pen, he drew out the lining! But he drew out nothing else! There was nothing else to draw out.

The expression on Gussy's face was really extraordinary. Tom Merry & Co. watched him with great interest, suppressing their emotions. Arthur Augustus stood thunderstruck.

"Gone?" asked Lowthah.

"Oh, yess!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "This is— is vevy vevy odd! It is vevy extraordinary! The box is not in my pocket! What—"

"Look in the hat!" said Lowthah.

"Wubbish! It cannot be in the hat! That is all wot! I must have dropped it, or somethin', and I could not possibly have dropped it into the hat— Bai Jove! Where is that box?"

"Look in the hat!" chorused the juniors.

"Oh, all wight! But it is uttah wot— it cannot possibly be in the hat!" said Arthur Augustus. "That hat is six or seven feet away from me! How could it possibly be in that hat? However, I will look!"

Arthur Augustus stepped to the hat. He looked into it. He did not expect to see the black box there. Really, if it was there, it looked like magic. Gussy did not, of course, believe in magic. So the box couldn't be there. He jumped almost clear of the cabin floor as he saw it there.

"Oh gwanks!" gasped Arthur Augustus. He gazed into the hat like a fellow in a dream. Slowly he picked the black box out of the hat.

He held it up, staring at it as if he could hardly believe his eyes or his eyeglasses. There was a yell from the rest of the party. They could suppress their emotions no longer. The expression of dazed bewilderment on Arthur Augustus' face was too much for them.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"It—is—it was in the—the hat!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is vevy vevy remarkable!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fail to see any cause for laughter, you fellows! That is vevy an extraordinary conjuniv' trick!" said the amazed swell of St. Jim's. "I vevy should not believe it if I had not seen it. It is most extraordinary!"

"Quite simple if I explained it," said Monty Lowthah blandly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Blake.

"Bai Jove! Do you know how Lowthah did it, Blake?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Sort of!" gurgled Blake.

"I admit that I am quite in the dark! It appears to me vevy like magic!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now I am waiting for you to eat your hat, Gussy!" remarked Monty Lowthah. "I'll let you off eating mine after it—I shall want it in France!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors.

"Oh!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I was vevyah hasty in sayin' I would eat my hat if you could perform that conjuniv' trick, Lowthah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But vevyly, you know, it seemed absolutely imposs! It beats you hollow! It is the most extraordinary conjuniv' trick I have ever seen! Vevyly, it beats me to a frazzle! It is vevy wonderful!"

"It would be still more wonderful, too—if—"

"If what, Lowthah?"

"If I hadn't pinched that black box out of your pocket while you were rolling on the floor and put it in the hat!" explained Lowthah.

"Wha-a-a-!"

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

Arthur Augustus stood as if transfixed for some moments, while the juniors yelled. Then, as he realized how his noble leg had been pulled, he made a rush at Monty Lowthah.

Tom Merry and Blake grasped him just in time.

"Hold on!" gasped Tom.

"Wellas see!" roared Arthur Augustus, straggling. "I am goin' to thrash that uttah ass—bai Jove! I will give him a fearful thrashin'!"

"Check it!" gurgled Blake.

"I refuse to check it! I—"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Monty. "If Gussy think it's polite to thrash his guests—"

"Oh!" Arthur Augustus remembered that Monty was his guest. "Bai Jove! Wellas see, you fathoms! I will not thrash him, in the eyes! But pray undahstand me, Lowthah, you leg-pullin' ass, if you were not my guest, I would give you a fearful thrashin'! In the eyes, I will not!"

"I breathe again!" murmured Monty.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus frowned, and six fellows smiled, as the Silver Swallow soared onward over the coast of France.

CHAPTER 11.

THU FOR TAD?

ARTHUR AUGUSTUS grinned. For over ten minutes he had been frowning. Now his noble brow cleared, and he smiled—the smile expanding into a grin.

Below the skylight was spread the fair land of France, and Tom Merry & Co. were watching the scenery unroll beneath their eyes with unflagging interest. But as that expansive grin relaxed the frowning face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, they gave him their attention. Something, it seemed, was working in the powerful

brain of the Honourable Arthur Augustus—something of a humorous nature.

"Would you fellows like to see another conjurin' trick?" asked Arthur Augustus blandly.

"A conjurin' trick!" repeated Tom Merry.

"Yass, wathah! Powwaps I can perform a conjurin' trick as funny as Lowthah's!" smiled Arthur Augustus. "One good turn deserves another, you know!"

"Go ahead!"

"I shall woguish a straw hat! You have brought a straw hat, Lowthah!"

"Yes; it's packed in my baggage," answered Monty. "We've all got straws!"

"Would you mind gettin' it out?"

Monty Lowther gave the oval of St. Jim's a look. Then he smiled, and nodded genially.

"Anything to oblige," he answered. And Monty stepped along to the baggage-room to unpack a straw hat. The juniors were travelling in pairs, but they all had straws packed for the holidays in sunny lands. Arthur Augustus' straw was, like all his other possessions, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

Five fellows glanced after Lowther as he went, and then looked at the smiling face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

That there was something on was plain to all, from the merry twinkle behind Arthur Augustus' eyes.

But what was on was, so far, rather a puzzle, except that it was as clear as noonday that the astute Gussy had some scheme in his masterly mind for giving Monty Lowther tit for tat for his trick with the black box.

"What's the game, Gussy?" asked Blake.

"You will see as soon as Lowthah comes back with his straw hat!" answered Arthur Augustus, with a cheery chuckle. "Lowthah is so fond of conjurin' tricks, I trust that he will enjoy this one! Ha, ha!"

Monty Lowther came back into the cabin with a straw hat in his hand. Arthur Augustus turned his eyes on it.

"That's wight," he said. "Wait a minute!" Arthur Augustus groped in his trousers pocket, apparently to make sure that something was there which he required for this wonderful trick, as well as a straw hat. "Yass—that's all wight! Now, I really think this trick is quite as wonderful as yours, Lowthah! I am goin' to bash in the crown of that hat!"

"Are you?" ejaculated Lowther.

"And then, with a touch of my hand, I put an absolutely unbroken crown on it again!" said Arthur Augustus.

"You couldn't!"

"I undahstake to do so, Lowthah! If you are afraid to take the wick with your hat, I cannot perform the trick, of course. But I can wally do exactly as I say."

Six fellows gazed at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! That it was possible to bash in the crown of a straw hat, and then with a touch of the hand put an absolutely unbroken crown on it, was really incredible! No conjurer could possibly have performed that trick.

"Honest injus!" declared Arthur Augustus. "It is up to you, Lowthah, to let me caway on, just as I did you, you know. I guarantee that awh the crown is knocked in, I will put an unbroken crown on it, merely with a touch of my hand! It will be quite simple when I explain."

"Well, if you can do that, old bean, you ought to be conjuring on the balls," said Monty Lowther. "Go ahead, anyhow."

"You do not mind wiskin' the hat?" grinned Arthur Augustus.

"Not at all!"

"You silly wa, Monty!" exclaimed Manners. "If that hat's knocked in, it's done for!"

"Careful not letting Gussy play a trick with my hat!" grinned Blake. "I dare say he could do the first part all right—not the second."

"I undahstake to do so, Blake!"

"How-aree!"

"Well, here's the hat!" said Monty Lowther. He placed it on the cabin floor at D'Arcy's feet. "I'll take your word for it that you can do it, Gussy, and chance it with the hat!"

"Wight-ho!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. He rose to his feet, and lifted an elegant foot over the crown of the straw hat.

"You'll lose that hat, Monty!" said Tom Merry. "Of course he can't do it—that hat will be a goner."

"I'm chawing it!" said Monty. "Carry on, Gussy!"

Arthur Augustus carried on. He brought down his foot with terrific force on the hat! He put his heel into that stamp.

Crunch!

It had been a very handsome straw hat a moment ago! After that awful crunch it was a wreck. The crown was smashed right in, stamped almost out of all semblance to the crown of a hat!

"Oh crumbs!" ejaculated Manners. "There goes your straw hat, Lowthah, you fathead! A lot of jolly old magic will be wanted to set that right again."

"How the thump are you going to mend that crown, Gussy, you clump!" demanded Digby.

Arthur Augustus chuckled.

"I did not say that I was goin' to mend that crown, Dig! I said that I was goin' to put an unbroken crown on it, with a touch of my hand! I trust you fellows can rely upon the accuracy of my statement."

"How are you going to do it, then?" roared Blake.

"It is quite simple, deah boys!" chuckled Gussy.

His hand came out of his trousers pocket. There was a five-shilling piece between finger and thumb! Grinning from one ear to the other, Arthur Augustus held it up to view. Tom Merry & Co. stared at it!

"Hey, powee!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

And he stooped and laid the five-shilling piece on top of the ruined hat!

"What the thump—" gasped Tom Merry.

"That is a crown, deah boys!" chuckled Arthur Augustus. "A five-shillin' piece is a crown, as you are probably awah! Two-and-six is half-a-crown, and five shillin's is a crown!"

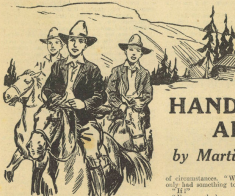
"Oh crakes!"

"Lowthah is not the only fellow here who can pull a fellow's leg!" grinned Arthur Augustus in great glee. "I said that I would put an unbroken crown on that hat! There it is! And if Lowthah likes to wath that hat with that crown on it—ha, ha, ho!"

Arthur Augustus roared.

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at him! That handsome straw hat lay a wreck and a ruin. Arthur Augustus, undoubtedly, had put an unbroken

(Continued on page 23.)



After a perilous
voyage in a run-
away balloon,
Frank Richards &
Co. land safely
—only to come
up against worse
peril in the form
of—

HANDSOME ALF!

by Martin Clifford.

In the Clouds!

"WERE in for it?"

Bob Lawless broke the long silence with that remark.

Frank Richards nodded and Vore Beauders gave an expressive shrug of the shoulders.

There was no doubt that the crums of Cedar Creek School were "in for it." Darkness had fallen on the hills and plains. Through the deep gloom the runaway balloon drifted on the wind, keeping on, hour after hour, to the North-West, as the wind blew it.

Many a long mile behind lay Cedar Creek School—and somewhere in the great distance was Hiram K. Chowder, the American gentleman to whom the balloon belonged.

Whether Mr. Chowder would ever see his balloon again was a question, and whether Frank Richards & Co. would ever see their homes again was a still more serious question.

Seated in the swinging car, holding on as it rocked in the wind, they had watched plain and hill and forest glide away beneath them. Before them lay the boundless North-West, far away the great Cascade Mountains, and beyond them the Pacific slope and the great ocean.

"That jay!" went on Bob morosely. "What did he want to get blown away in his silly balloon for and get landed in Thompson Valley, hey?"

Frank Richards smiled faintly.

"Mr. Chowder couldn't help that, Bob."

"I guess he ought to have helped it!" growled Bob. "And I guess we were a set of jays to bother about catching his old balloon for him. And we were a bigger set of jays to get into the blessed car at all. And as for that villain Guden, who cut us adrift, I'll make his face look like a clam-pie when I get back."

"When?" said Frank.

"Oh, we'll get back!" said Bob, who had the great gift of never being depressed by any kind

of circumstances. "We're not dead yet. If we only had something to eat!"

"Hi!"

"I've searched round the car," said Beauders. "There's nothing to eat—nothing at all in the way of food."

"I'm hungry!"

"Same here!" said Frank feelingly.

"Still, it's a lark!" said Bob.

"I don't feel very lucky just now."

"I wouldn't mind, only they'll be anxious about us at home," said Bob, with a cloud on his brow. "They may think we've come to harm."

"Pretty sure to, I should say."

"That's rotten!"

"Really!"

"Still, they will be chippy when we get back," said Bob, looking on the bright side again. "And it's no end of a lark to be carried off in a runaway balloon!"

"I jolly well wish we were in Thompson Valley instead of in this balloon!" said Frank. "Thompson must be a hundred miles behind by this time."

"A good bit more than that, I guess," said Bob coolly. "I don't know the rate this thing travels at, but there's been a strong wind behind us for twelve hours or more. We shall see the Cascade Mountains in the morning, you can bet your boots!"

"And if we pass over them—"

Bob grinned.

"The Pacific!" he said. "After all, we've never seen the Pacific Ocean, Franky. It's a great sight."

"Br-r-r!"

"Well, I'm going to sleep," said Bob, yawning. "No good ever came of growling and worrying. Wake me up if we fall and break our necks, will you?"

"Fathead!" said Frank, laughing.

Bob Lawless rolled himself in the rugs in the bottom of the car.

It was weary work sitting in the car and
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watching the black darkness below. The swelling mass of the great gas envelope hid the stars from their sight overhead.

It was safe enough to lie down in the car; it was swinging with a gentle motion as the balloon rolled onward. Deep and steady breathing announced that the cheery Bob was fast asleep. Frank Richards looked down on him with a smile.

"May as well do the same, Beau," he remarked.

"I was just thinking so," said Beauclerc.

"Nothing to keep awake for."

"There's a rug apiece, anyway," said Frank. "It's jolly cold up here. I think I can sleep, though."

The two schoolboys joined Bob Lawless on the floor of the car. Frank Richards, however, took the precaution to run a rope across the car, over them, in case of dangerous oscillations. Then he settled down to sleep.

Through the darkness of the night the balloon drifted on. The three schoolboys slept soundly. They were fatigued, and hunger could not keep them awake. They slept on through long hours of darkness.

When Frank Richards opened his eyes at last he blinked in dawning sunlight. It was morning—the bright keen morning of Canadian spring. Frank sat up in the car. He threw off the rug and scrambled to his feet. It was chilly, but the sun was growing warmer.

Bob Lawless yawned and sat up.

"Hallo! Where are we?" he murmured.

"Goodness knows!" answered Frank.

He looked over the rim of the car. Rocky uplands, intersected by streams, patched with dark forest, met his eyes, and in the distance, in the West, great mountains barred the horizon.

"Oh, I'm hungry!" said Bob.

"No breakfast this morning!" remarked Beauclerc.

"Looks like it. There's one comfort, though."

Said Bob. "No school to-day."

Evidently Bob Lawless, at least, was determined to keep an eye on the silver lining to the cloud.

Landed at Last!

FRANK RICHARDS gazed downward at the vast panorama outspread below the drifting balloon. It was a magnificent sight, one of the wildest and most picturesque regions of British Columbia.

Bob Lawless-jerked his thumb to the West.

"The Cascade Mountains," he said. "There's no other range that size between the Fraser and the sea."

Frank whistled.

"Then we're a good way from home," he said.

"We've got to get something to eat," said Bob.

"I shall begin on one of you if you don't get something soon. We've got to go down somehow, Franky."

Frank knit his brows thoughtfully.

"There doesn't seem to be any settlements," he said. "Not much good landing there, Bob, if we could do it. We couldn't walk home, hundreds of miles, I suppose. And there's nothing to eat."

Bob granted.

"Put me down there and I'll soon find something to eat," he answered. "I wish I had my

gun here. But I can scare any animal that ever hopped or crawled. And there's plenty of game, at any rate. But how are we going down? That valve thing won't work."

"Suppose we wait till we come in sight of settlements?" asked Beauclerc.

"And suppose we don't sight any till we're carried into the Cascade Mountains?" answered Bob. "It's safe to land hereabouts, anyway. Besides, we can ascend again if we want to by pinching out some of those sacks of sand."

"Yes, that's so."

"We'll try again," said Frank.

Frank took hold of the valve-cord and pulled it. But the valve was jammed and did not move.

"Same as before," he said.

"Look here, we've got to work the dashed thing!" said Bob. "Let's all grab it and tug. Something's bound to go."

Frank and Beauclerc looked very serious.

"The whole contraption might collapse and let us down with a rush," said Frank. "I don't want to land in a jelly."

"It's a good thousand feet to drop," said Beauclerc.

"But we can't keep in the air for the rest of our natural lives," said Bob. "Let's try it, and chance our luck."

"I—I suppose we'd better," said Frank.

"All together, then?"

The three schoolboys grasped the valve-cord and tugged, putting all their strength into it. This time they were successful. There was a cracking sound, and it was followed by a sudden rush down of the balloon.

"Hold on!" yelled Bob.

They held on for their lives. The balloon was spinning downwards. Below them the earth seemed to be rushing up to meet them. Thin, silver streaks suddenly leaped into streams and creeks, dark patches into great forests.

The sudden descent made them giddy. Frank caught at the cord again. It occurred to him that the valve could be closed to make the descent slower. There were several rods, and which to pull he did not know. He dragged at them all in turn while the car rushed downward.

Fortunately the descent was arrested. Right down to within fifty feet of solid earth the car rushed, and then it slowed and stopped and floated.

Bob Lawless gasped. Even his face was white.

"I—I guess that was a close call!" he panted.

"We're still going down," said Beauclerc.

"Not so fast, though," gasped Frank. "Oh, my hat! I—I don't want to go through that again!"

Under the car the earth was close now. A green plain lay beneath them, dotted with clumps of trees, and they caught sight of gobblers among the grass. An antelope looked up from a creek where it stood drinking, stared at the balloon, and bellowed.

"There's our breakfast, if I had my rifle!" said Bob Lawless regretfully.

"Nothing here but an axe," said Frank. "You'd better get after the next one with an axe, Bob."

"Oh rats!" answered Bob. "I say, we're landing all right. We shall touch earth in a few minutes."

The balloon was drifting on slowly, and approaching the earth gradually but surely. It touched—at last, but the contact gave it a fresh

impetus, and from the bump on the ground it shot up to a height of fifty feet.

"Sold!" grinned Bob, holding on to the car. "Next time does it slick."

But the next time did not do it. The balloon bumped and rose three times in succession before the car finally touched the ground and rested there, almost on the verge of a silvery brook in a sunny woodland glade. But it rested at last. "We've got to fasten the contraption first, somehow," said Bob. "The grapnel's lost."

"There's bound to be a spare one in the car," said Frank.

A hurried search disclosed a big iron hook with a rope attached. Frank fastened the hook over the side of the car, and caught it in a gnarled root of a tree by the creek. The rope was fastened to the car.

"All safe now," said Bob. "But I'll run a rope down to that root; that hook might pull loose."

The car was safely held, and Bob jumped out, with another rope in his hand. He ran it round the big root that cropped out of the earth, and knotted it securely. Then he detached the hook and threw it into the car.

"Safely anchored!" he said cheerfully. "Jump out, chaps!"

Frank and Beaulere joined him on the greenward, glad enough to stretch their legs on solid earth. The balloon, lightened of their weight, strained at the rope, but it was firmly held.

"I guess this is better," remarked Bob. "Anybody got any idea where we are?"

"Give it up," answered Frank.

"After all, that's not the important question. Grab comes first," said Bob. "This wood is full of birds, and I know how to cook. You fellows build a fire while I look for game."

And the hungry three were soon busy.

The Man With the Ear-flaps!

"I GUESS I feel much better!" Bob Lawless made that remark a couple of hours later. He was lying on his back in the grass, staring up at the blue sky, across which a great eagle was winging its flight.

The camp-fire had died down, the sun blazed on the glade, and it was warm. The three schoolboys had eaten a hearty meal. It was a primitive one, but they were too hungry to mind that.

Bob Lawless had scared a couple of birds in the wood, and they had been cooked over the fire. Bob was a postmaster at that kind of thing.

"Same here!" said Frank Richards. "If it wasn't for the people at home being anxious about us I shouldn't mind how long this lasted. It's better than school, though I like Cedar Creek."

"I've often thought of having a holiday up in the North-West," said Bob. "It's a splendid idea—hunting, fishing, shooting, canoeing—everything! What price coming this way in the summer holidays—not in a balloon, of course?"

"Ripping!" said Frank.

"Good idea!" assented Beaulere. "I'd like to know where it is, though. It looks as if nobody has ever been here, not even an Indian."

"Wrong!" said Bob.

"You've not seen anyone?" exclaimed Frank, sitting up.

"No; but I found a track in the wood when

I was after the birds," answered Bob. "Somebody has been through these woods last night."

"A Redskin!"

"No; white man."

"How do you know?" asked Frank.

"If it was a Redskin it would be a moccasin track," answered Bob. "It was a boot track—a white man's boot, and a good size, too. I didn't pay much attention to it. I was after the gophers. But I guess a white man came down to the creek last night and hoisted it off eastward in the morning. That's the way the trail went."

"I wish he stayed to see us," remarked Frank. "He might have given us a tip how to reach some kind of town."

"The country mayn't be so lonely as it looks," observed Beaulere. "If there's one white man about there may be others."

"Hallo!"

Bob Lawless sat up suddenly, shading his eyes with his hand, and looked away through the opening in the trees. His chums followed his glance.

"A white man!" exclaimed Beaulere.

"Not the man who made the track I saw," said Bob. "That ghost was on foot, and this pilgrim is mounted."

The schoolboys watched the stranger as he advanced. The horseman had suddenly ridden into sight from behind a clump of timber. He drew rein, staring blankly at the sight of the balloon, and then gave his horse a touch of the spur and came on at a gallop.

The chums rose to their feet, waiting for his arrival. They were glad to see the white man in that solitude, but as the horseman came closer their feelings were mixed. He was young, with a dark, handsome face. He was dressed in buckskin jacket and trousers, and his face was shaded by a wide-brimmed stetson hat.

A glimmer under the shadow of the hat puzzled the schoolboys at first, but as the man came nearer they found that the glimmer came from ear-rings. They had seen Mexicans with ear-rings before, but this fellow evidently was not a Mexican.

His face, handsome as it certainly was, was not one to inspire confidence. There was a rifle attached to his saddle, and the butt of a revolver showed from a holster in his belt, as well as the handle of a knife. He did not look like a hunter or a trapper, or a trader, or a prospector. It was rather difficult to tell what he was. But one thing could be guessed. Whatever his business was, he was what is called in the West a "bad" man. His bold, reckless face and gleaming eyes, the curve of his well-cut lips, told as much.

"By gum!" murmured Bob Lawless. "I guess I'd just as soon not meet that pilgrim. He looks like one of the sports from a frontier camp. What can he be doing here?"

The stranger rode up with a clatter of hoofs and drew rein right by the schoolboys at the last moment. He had made a pretence of riding them down, but the three did not budge an inch, standing grimly where they were, and the horse was snorting almost in their faces as the man drew in. Each of the three were conscious of a feeling of hostility.

"Hallo!" said the horseman, as he halted and stared at the trio.

"Hallo to you!" answered Bob.

"How did you get here?"

Bob pointed to the balloon.

The man stared at the balloon.

"How did you get here?"

Bob pointed to the balloon.

The man stared at the balloon.

"I guess that beats me," said the horseman, staring at the balloon. "I've seen them down South, but never in this here region. I guess I haven't seen a balloon since I lit out from Frisco three years ago."

"There's your chance, then," said Bob gravely. "No charge for looking at it."

The man stared at him.

"Not too much of your lip, youngster!" he said. "I don't take lip from a kid of your heft."

"No!" said Bob, with polite inquiry.

"No, sir!"

The dusky-faced man in the ear-rings slid from his horse and stood for some moments staring at the balloon, and then about him. There was a peculiar watchfulness in his keen face, and his eyes were never at rest.

"Had your breakfast?" asked Frank Richards, breaking the silence. "We've got a little left, if you haven't."

The newcomer smiled.

"I guess I've fed," he said. "I guess I'm looking for a galoot, and I guess you children may have seen him. A galoot six feet high—wounded, I reckon, and on foot. Have you seen such a guy?"

"We've seen nobody," answered Beaulieu.

"A friend of yours?" asked Frank.

The man grinned, showing a dazzling set of white teeth.

"I guess that's neither here nor there," he replied. "I guess I want to find Bill Lomax, alive or dead. He came this way. I calculate he must have struck this creek last sundown. And you've not seen him?"

"No."

The man knitted his brows. His restless eyes watched the boys' faces, as if to read there whether they were speaking the truth.

"Did you say the man was wounded?" asked Bob Lawless, very quietly.

"I reckon."

"How was he wounded?"

The man with the ear-rings showed his white teeth again in a smile that was not pleasant to see.

"I guess he was standing in front of a six-shooter when it went off, sonny," he answered.

Bob's eyes gleamed.

"Your six-shooter, perhaps?" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps," assented the newcomer coolly.

Frank Richards uttered an exclamation.

"You shot him?" he cried.

"I guess, sonny, that the best questions you ask, the better it may be for your health," said the man with the ear-rings. "I don't savvy where you come from, but if you've been in the camps up and down the Cascade Range you've maybe heard my name—Alf Carson. You'd hear me spoken of as Handsome Alf."

Frank's lips curled a little. He had never heard of the man, naturally, but he could guess that "Handsome Alf" enjoyed a certain amount of notoriety of an unpleasant kind in his neighborhood, and was conceited on the subject.

"Never heard the name?" asked Carson.

"Never."

"Well, if you'd heard it you'd know that Handsome Alf is not the galoot to be fooled with," said the man with the ear-rings. "I guess you're going to tell me what you know about Bill Lomax."

"But we know nothing about him."

"He must have struck this creek about sun-down. He had a Colt bullet in his carcass some-

where, and I guess he must have been almost done when he got this far. How long have you been here?"

"Two or three hours."

"And you've not seen him?"

"No."

Carson pointed to the remainder of the breakfast.

"I guess you went afield looking for those birds," he remarked. "Didn't you see any signs in the wood?"

No answer.

The man's black eyes glittered.

"You saw signs?" he snapped.

"No good asking us questions," said Bob shortly. "You're as good as earned that you wounded the man you are looking for. Do you think we would help you find him if we could?"

"I guess you'll help me, sonny, if you can," said the man with the ear-rings, with a deadly look at the Canadian schoolboy. He loosened the revolver in his belt, and drew it out. "You've seen Bill Lomax's trail. Where?"

Bob Lawless shut his teeth and faced the desperado calmly. He did not answer.

"You've seen his trail?" shouted Carson.

"Yes," answered Bob. "At any rate, I've seen his trail."

"Big six in boots?"

"Yes."

"That's the galoot. Where?"

"I'm not going to tell you," answered Bob quietly. "You can do your dirty work without any assistance from me, Mr. Handsome Alf Carson!"

The man looked at him and turned the cylinder of his revolver with a little click, as if to ascertain that it was in good order. Then his dusky hand rose, and the six-shooter was levelled at Bob.

"You'll walk before me, sonny, and show me that trail," he said slowly and distinctly, "and if you don't get a move on I'll drop you just where you stand. Savvy?"

Hands Up!

BOB LAWLESS drew a quick breath. The three schoolboys were pale now. The hammer of the revolver rose slightly, the black eyes of Carson gleaming behind it.

"I guess you'd better speak!" he said, showing his teeth.

Very Beaulieu had fallen back a pace, and his right hand was behind him. His hand was groping in his hip-pocket, where he kept his clasp-knife. He knew that he could not get to close quarters with the ruffian to use that weapon.

The revolver was levelled at Bob, but as a twinkling the ruffian could have changed the direction of the weapon, if Beaulieu had advanced towards him. But Beau was not thinking of that. He was thinking of using the closed knife as a missile. It was a terrible moment, but the Cherub was as cool as ice; his nerve never faltered.

His hand came out of the hip-pocket with the clasp-knife gripped in it—still hidden behind him. Alf Carson's eyes were fastened on Bob, though the other two were within his line of vision.

"You hear me, sonny?" he said.

"I hear you," answered Bob quietly.

"I guess I'm after Bill Lomax. I'll wing the three of you as soon as look at you," said Carson savagely. "Do you think I'm fooling?"

"No."
 "Get a move on, then!"
 Bob Lawless did not stir.
 "I'll count two!" said Handsome Al, with an oath. "And then— One—"

Whiz!
 Very Beauclerc's hand shot up and forward. The closed clasp-knife flew through the air like a bullet, and struck Carson between the eyes.

Crack!
 The impact of the heavy knife on the ruffian's brow was like the crack of a whip. With a yell of pain, the startled ruffian staggered back, his arms swaying downward. He pulled the trigger instinctively, but the bullet drove into the soil at his feet.

With the spring of a tiger, Bob Lawless bounded at him, acting on the instant. His fist caught the staggering man well under the chin, and drove him backwards. Alf Carson crashed on the ground, and even as he touched earth Frank Richards was trampling furiously on his

Beauclerc. "I'll shoot you like a dog if you don't!"

Alf Carson's hands went up quick enough. "Clasp your hands over your head," said Beauclerc. "Sharp, now!"

The ruffian, grinding his teeth, obeyed. "Keep them like that," said Beauclerc quietly. "Take his knife away, Frank."

"Good old Cherub!" gasped Bob.
 Frank Richards advanced towards the baffled ruffian, whose eyes glinted at him like a reptile's. But the levelled revolver was within four feet of him, and Beauclerc's look was deadly. Handsome Al's life hung by a thread, and he knew it. He made no resistance as Frank Richards detached the hunting-knife in its case from his belt.



Frank Richards swung up the axe when Bob Lawless and Beauclerc were in the car. Crack! The keen edge of the axe fell upon the rope, but it did not part. Crack, crack! Handsome Al and his gang were firing wildly as they galloped on, and the bullets whistled round the schoolboys!

right arm. The revolver was kicked away in a twinkling.

The ruffian, yelling with pain, scrambled up, his hand dragging at the knife in his belt. But very Beauclerc had pounced upon the revolver. His hand closed on it, and he raised it, and the tube bore full upon Alf Carson's chest.

"Touch that knife and you're a dead man!"

Beauclerc's voice rang out sharply, with a deadly ring in it. He meant every word. The hammer was rising under the pressure of his finger, and in another instant the bullet would have sped.

"Hold your hand!" pointed the man with the ear-rings.

"Put up your hands, you scoundrel!"

"I—I—"

"Up with them, I tell you!" rapped out

"Take the rifle from his saddle, Bob."

"You bet!" grinned Bob.

"Take away his cartridges, too."

"I'll see to that," said Frank. "Keep the rotter covered, Cherub."

"Bely on me."

The man with the ear-rings ground his teeth, but he made no move. Life was dear to Handsome Al, and his life was trembling in the balance.

Bob Lawless detached the rifle from the saddle, and a case of rifle-cartridges. Frank took a smaller case of revolver-cartridges from the man's belt. Bob slid a cartridge into the rifle.

"I guess I'm ready for him now," he remarked. "No more of your monkey-tricks, Mr. Handsome Al, or I'll make you look a little less handsome, by gum!"

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"I'll get you for this!" muttered the ruffian, clinking with rage.

"You've left him no weapons!" asked Beauclerc.

"No fear!"

"Good! You can get on your horse, Mr. Carson, and ride away," said Beauclerc. "And if you're not out of range in five minutes I'll fire!"

"Give me my rifle!"

"I'll give you a bullet from it, if you like," grinned Bob Lawless. "These weapons are better out of your hands, my buck."

"You young thief!"

Smack!

Carson uttered a yell of rage as Bob's open hand smote him across his dusky face. He seemed about to spring on the schoolboy, and Vere Beauclerc pressed the trigger a little. The hammer rose, and the ruffian, suddenly white, jumped back.

"Stop!" he panted.

"Just in time!" said Beauclerc grimly. "Get on your horse, you scoundrel, and clear!"

"And if you want your shooting-iron, you can call at the Lawless Ranch, in the Thompson Valley, and ask for them," said Bob. "Now, yamosee, you skunk, or I'll give you a hiding with your own trailraps before you go."

Without another word Handsome Alf stepped to his horse and mounted. He gave the chums of Cedar Creek one deadly look and rode away.

They watched him till a dip of the plain hid him from sight.

A Narrow Escape!

"**B**Y gum!" said Bob Lawless, with a deep breath.

The schoolboys' hearts were still beating fast after the horseman vanished from sight.

Frank Richards glanced at the balloon.

"I fancy you'd better clear," he observed. "That ruffian may not be alone here, and if he comes back with others—"

"Just what I was thinking," said Bob. "This section isn't healthy."

"Hold on!" said Beauclerc quietly. "What about the man he was speaking of—Bill Lomax! That must be the man whose trail you saw in the wood, Bob."

"I reckon so."

"If he is wounded it is quite likely that he's still near at hand."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Oughtn't we to look for him?" asked Beauclerc. "He may be lying helpless in the wood, within a mile of us. If that murderous villain has friends near, as is very likely, he will soon be on the track again. The man's life is threatened; you can see that."

Bob Lawless nodded.

"You're right, Charub; but it means that we may get landed in a fight with a gang of ruffians," he said.

"We're armed now."

"Yes; but—" Bob nodded again. "You're right, old chap. It's up to us, if there's a wounded man in danger of his life. What do you say, Frank?"

"Look for him," said Frank Richards at once.

"It's a cinch!" said Bob.

"Let's hustle to where you found the trail, and follow it," said Beauclerc.

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"Right!"

Leaving the balloon and the camp behind, the three schoolboys started for the wood, Bob Lawless leading the way. In the heart of the wood they came upon the trail that Bob had discovered hours before. It was still fresh and easily traced.

A heavy man, with dragging feet, had passed that way; the track was deep in the soil. And as the schoolboys followed it, Bob Lawless pointed to a clot of dark blood, here and there, on the leaves of the thickets. The wounded man had left traces of his passage as well as his footprints.

"Badly hurt, I should say," said Bob, in a low voice. "I guess that he can't have got far in that state."

They pressed on. The trail led them down to the waters of the creek, about a quarter of a mile from their camp. There the deep tracks in the mud indicated what had happened. The wounded man had stopped there to drink, and doubtless to wash his wounds. In the mud the trail led away again up the stream and turned into the wood once more, taking the schoolboys nearer their camp.

"Hark!" exclaimed Frank suddenly.

There was a thick copse ahead of the schoolboys, and the trail ceased there. From the thicket there came the sound of a rattle. As the schoolboys stopped, a hoarse voice, faint with weakness, hailed them from the thicket.

"Stand back, Handsome Alf! You've found me, you hound! But if you come in front of my shooter—"

Crack!

A random bullet rang through the foliage.

"Hold on, man!" shouted Bob. "Friends!"

"What! Who are you?"

"Friends!" called out Frank Richards.

"Don't shoot!"

A bearded face, white and stained with blood, peered from the thicket over a glimmering barrel. Two deeply sunken eyes scanned the schoolboys. As the man discerned them clearly he lowered his weapon.

"I reckoned it was Handsome Alf and his gang!" he muttered. "Did my bullet go near you?"

"Not within ten yards," grinned Bob. "Your hand isn't steady, old man!"

"Are you Bill Lomax?" asked Beauclerc.

"That's my name, sonny. I've never seen you before."

"Then you're the galoot Handsome Alf is after," said Bob. "And we've come to find you and look after you. You're hurt!"

"I'm wounded."

"We've met your Handsome Alf," explained Bob. "We had a row with him, took his shooting-iron away. You say he's got a gang with him?"

"There are four of them."

"My, but!" said Frank Richards. "The sooner we get away, the better. We're not looking for a pitched battle."

"Can you walk, Mr. Lomax?" asked Beauclerc.

"I guess I can crawl!" The man emerged from the thicket, dragging himself with an effort. "I got a bullet from Handsome Alf's revolver. I drew it out last night by the creek; but I've lost blood. I crawled here and could get no farther. When I heard your steps—"

He shivered. "How did you get here?" he asked.

"Dropped from the sky," said Bob.

"What?"

"We were in a runaway balloon," explained Frank Richards.

"By gosh!" ejaculated Bill Lomax.

"If you'd care to trust yourself in it, we'll take you where Mr. Handsome Alf can't get after you," said Bob. "Is it a cinch?"

"I'll say!" was the big American's answer.

"Lend us your rifle," said Bob. "Take the rifle, Franky, and if you see Handsome Alf, let it fly without stopping to ask questions."

The bearded man leaned heavily on Bob's sturdy shoulder. Without losing a moment the schoolboys headed for their camp. The crook was their guide, and in a quarter of an hour more they came to the edge of the wood.

Bill Lomax's eyes opened wide as he caught sight of the balloon in the distance.

"By gosh!" he repeated.

"There it is," said Frank Richards, with a smile. "Once in that, Mr. Lomax, Handsome Alf will not have much chance of getting on your trail. What is he trailing you for, anyway?"

Lomax's eyes gleamed.

"He's after my strike in the Cascade Mountains," he said. "I'm a prospector, and I've made a rich strike. Handsome Alf got wind of it. They've been on my trail for three days. And yesterday they found me, but I got away again. I guess I should never have got back to Last Chance, though, if you hadn't met me."

"Last Chance?" Bob repeated. "Is that far from here?"

"Two days' ride down the range."

"No good to us, then. I reckon it will have to be the balloon," said Bob. "Come on! By gum, can you hear anything, Frank?"

"Heads!" said Frank.

"Hurry!"

From the plain in the distance came the echoing sound of horses' hoofs at a gallop. The wood hid the riders from sight, but it was clear that Carson was returning with his gang.

"Cut ahead, Franky, and get in the car," breathed Bob. "Be ready to cast off. Get the axe to cut the rope—there'll be no time to waste it."

Frank hesitated a moment, loath to leave the rest; but Bob was evidently right, and he obeyed. He ran his hardest for the balloon and reached it, clambering into the car. He pitched out bag after bag of sand, and the balloon strained hard at the rope. With Lomax's additional weight in the car it would not have risen, and it was necessary to get rid of the ballast, and there was no time to lose.

The balloon was the one chance of escape, and Frank had to risk pitching out too much. The car had risen a foot from the ground, as the balloon struggled to escape upward, but the rope held it there.

Frank placed the axe in readiness to cut through the rope, and then stood, rifle in hand, waiting with fast-beating heart.

Bearders was on Lomax's other side now, and he and Bob were helping the wounded man along. The big miner was making great efforts, the sweat pouring down his face, white under its brown.

They had almost reached the car when the



THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

Let the Editor be your pal. Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letter: The Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

HALLO, Chums! Well, you saw how the opening yarn of Martin Clifford's great new series in your hands, and I don't doubt that, like me, you have had no time in reading it; and that, having read it, your reactions, like mine, was to feel a longing to get going on the next story. That's as it should be, proving that the author has made a really successful job of the writing—and that we should ever expect Martin Clifford to do otherwise. But I think he has been—what shall I say?—extra successful in telling this story.

Having whetted your appetite and got you wondering about the mystery of the black box, and what is going to happen to the St. Jan's chums in Paris, we will take a glance at next Wednesday's yarn. First of all, it bears the title:

"PERIL IN PARIS!"

The story is packed with fun and thrills, and it is still longer than the one in this issue. Mr. Clifford became so absorbed in writing it that he forgot time and space. But you can rely on me to get in every word of the story. It's much too good to cut. But I'm beginning to wish the Gem had elastic pages!

The flying schoolboys land safely in Paris, and proceed to see the sights of the gay city—Arthur Augustus adding not a little to the gaiety thereof! But all the time is the French capital, Tom Merry & Co. are menaced by a sinister agency, and they have little doubt that he is after their mysterious black box. Now Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus are trapped in the underworld of Paris, and how they brist themselves in deadly peril from the apaches, makes very exciting reading, and I will leave you to enjoy the fun and thrills to the full.

"GUN LAW!"

The scene shifts from "Gay Paris" to the wilds of North-West Canada, where Frank Richards & Co. are also having a thrilling time in their runaway balloon. Fortunately for the Cedar Creek chums, the balloon comes in useful in eluding Handsome Alf and his gang—but not for long. Gun swarms from a bullet hole, and the balloon drops to earth again, giving the gangsters a chance to catch up. Then it's a case of gun play, and Frank Richards & Co. are not found wanting when it comes to fighting it out with bullets!

"THE MUTINY SHIP!"

From North-West Canada the scene shifts again to the Atlantic. What happened to Jack Drake when Barbary's fatal blow sent him overboard? Barbary is too scared to raise the alarm, and it is not till calling over that Jack is raised, by which time he is nearly a long mile behind the Redoubt. Meanwhile, Jack is swimming for his life, but the struggle seems hopeless—until a rescuer appears out of the night. Jack is rescued, only to discover that he has jumped out of the flying-jan into the sea—for there is a mutiny aboard, and the mutineers have gained full control of the ship!

You cannot fail to enjoy every word of next week's great yarn, so see that you order early, chums. All the best!

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Drake uttered a startled cry as Daubeny's fist landed in his face with savage force. The blow fairly tore him from his precarious hold, and he plunged downwards from the maintop!

Done in the Dark!

"TOODLES!"

"Sure!"
"Turkey, you fat rascal!"

"Sure!"

The old Benbow was ploughing the waves of the Atlantic, under the stars, and Jack Drake and Dick Rodney had come into No. 3 Cabin to turn in.

Turkey Toodles was in bed already—in Drake's hammock.

The boys of the Benbow had to sling their own hammocks themselves, and Turkey Toodles did not like the task—or any other task that called for exertion.

Drake and Rodney had slung their hammocks early, and gone to the Common-room to chat till bed-time, and the astute Toodles had slipped in a few minutes earlier and bagged one of the hammocks already slung.

Now he was fast asleep, if his resonant snore was to be relied upon as proof.

"The cheeky ass!" exclaimed Rodney. "Roll him out!"

"I jolly well will," said Drake wrathfully. "Stand clear!"

Turkey Toodles woke up suddenly. He had not heard Drake shout at him, but he contrived to hear that observation.

"I—I say, Drake, old chap—" he stammered.

"Oh, you're awake now!" said Drake sarcastically.

"You—you woke me up, you know. I say, don't roll me out, you beast! I'm going to have this hammock to-night!"

"Get out!"

"I'm ill!" said Turkey Toodles pathetically.

"I've—I've come over suddenly seasick, and I—I—"
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LOST AT SEA!

By Owen Conquest.

had to turn in in a hurry. Don't be a beast, old fellow, when a chap's ill."

"Gammion!" growled Drake.

"If you're ill you don't want the hammock next to the door," grinned Rodney. "You tried it before, and you said there was a draught."

"I—I—in fact, I've taken this hammock because there is a draught," said Toodles. "That's it—I don't want to be selfish, you know. I think Drake's entitled to the best place for once."

"You've taken my hammock to save slinging your own, you lazy boulder!" growled Drake.

"Not at all, old fellow. I simply don't want to be selfish—I mean I'm ill—beast, in fact!" urged Turkey Toodles.

Drake burst into a laugh.

"You fat slacker, you can stay there if you want to," he said. "But for goodness' sake don't roll out any more whoppers!"

Turkey Toodles grinned contentedly, and settled down in Drake's hammock. He did not mind a

*Overboard at night in mid-Atlantic!
Jack Drake's spot of bother with Vernon
Daubeny ends in disaster for Jack!*

little plain English, so long as he did not have to turn out. That was the great point.

The other hammock was slung, and Drake and Rodney turned in as Mr. Pocke came down into the junior quarters to see all lights safely out.

By this time the Benbow fellows were quite accustomed to the roll of the ship, and they dropped off into a sound sleep in a very few minutes after turning in.

Turkey Toodles' sleep more resounded through the cabin once more in genuine earnest this time.

But all the schoolboys of the Benbow were not sound asleep, though Mr. Pocke and Mr. Varnam supposed that they were. Half an hour after lights out there was a faint sound outside the door of No. 8. It was the sound of a cautious knuckfall. The door was tried, and opened silently, and three dim figures loomed up in the gloom. Had anyone in the cabin been awake, it was too dark to recognise Daubeny, Egan, and Torrence of the Shell. In the deep gloom the three Shell fellows stood and listened by the open door.

"Safe as houses!" whispered Vernon Daubeny.

"They're fast asleep. Quiet, though."

"You know Drake's hammock?" murmured Egan.

"You bet—the one nearest the door. I made a note of that."

Torrance and Egan stood outside the doorway, while Vernon Daubeny, silent with his bare feet, stepped into the cabin. In the gloom he could only make out faintly the shapes of the three hammocks.

Silently he passed at the nearest hammock to the door, and opened his pocket-knife, grinning. The edge of the blade was laid to the rope supporting the foot of the hammock. With a steady hand Daubeny sawed at the rope.

Not for an instant did he dream that the occupant of the hammock was not the junior he hated. It was Drake's hammock—he knew that, and that was enough for him.

Tuckey Toedles was deep in a happy dream; he was dreaming that Mr. Cappe had given him a free run of the school canteen. He smiled in his sleep, under the influence of that beneficent vision. The vision was suddenly interrupted.

Crash!

Bump!

"Yoop! Yaroooh! Help! Fire! Murder! Yaroooooh!"

The silence of Cabin No. 3 was changed into a wild uproar. In the terrific outbreak of yells from Tuckey Toedles, a soft chuckle at the door was unheard.

"Yah! Oh! I've killed! The ship's sinking! Yoocoop!"

Drake and Rodney started out of sleep on the instant.

"What the thump—?"

"What the dickens—?"

"Yow-or-wooooop!"

Tuckey Toedles was rather hurt with his sudden bump on the floor, but he was more startled and frightened than hurt. He had not the slightest doubt that the Bombow had struck on a rock, and was going down. He rolled on the floor, yelling, and his paw came in contact with an ankle. He clutched at that ankle, as a drowning man might with a straw.

"Yow! Help! Yow!"

The ankle was striving to escape from the cabin. It did not belong to Drake or Rodney, who were not yet out of their hammocks. It belonged to Vernon Daubeny.

Daub had intended to send out of the cabin the instant his knife was through the rope. But the rope had parted suddenly while a strand still remained to be cut—assisted by the terrific weight of Tuckey Toedles in the hammock. Daubeny had been knocked backwards by Toedles as he pitched out, and he struggled in the darkness to get to the door, but the door had shut to in the roll of the ship, and Daub blundered on it in the dark and feared it closed. Before he could get it open, his ankle was clutched by Tuckey Toedles.

Outside, Egan and Torrance had fled to their own quarters, supposing that Daub was after them. But he wasn't! He was in the terrified grip of Tuckey Toedles, dragging in vain at his captured ankle.

"Help!" shrieked Toedles. "Don't leave me here to drown, you beast! Yow! Ow! Help! Don't desert an old pal! Yaroooh! Help!"

Daubeny had the door open now, but with such a sheet-anchor on his ankle he had no chance of escaping.

Tuckey, in the fixed belief that the ship was sinking, and that he had hold of one of his comrades who was deserting him in this extremity, clung to Daub's ankle for dear life.

He yelled for help as he clung. There were

sounds of startled voices from the other cabins as Tuckey's terrified howl rang out.

Daubeny passed with fury. He groped for Toedles in the dark, and succeeded in getting hold of him, and began to punch him savagely, to induce him to let go his hold. His punches had the effect of rebounding Tuckey's roars.

In other amazement, Drake and Rodney turned out, bumping against the struggling pair in the dark. Drake groped for his electric torch and turned it on.

The Misfortunes of Toedles!

"HELP!"

"What the—?"

"Yoop! Help! Leave off hitting me, Drake, you beast! Don't desert an old pal! Help!"

"Daubeny!" yelled Drake, as the light flashed on the strange scene. Tuckey Toedles blinked in the light dazedly.

Daubeny had already discovered that it was not Drake he had cut down; Tuckey's yell had told him that. He had paid his visit to Cabin No. 3 for nothing, after all—or rather, to pay the penalty of an attempt that had not come off. Dick Rodney jumped to the door and put his back to it. There was no escape for Vernon Daubeny now, even when Tuckey's terrified clutch on his ankle was released.

"Daubeny!" repeated Drake, as the light gleamed on Daub's savage, ferocious face. "Shut up, Toedles! You'll have the watch on deck here in a minute! Dry up!"

"The ship's sinking—"

"Ass! The ship's all right."

Toedles sat up dully.

The light restored his courage a little, and he realised that the Bombow was not taking the last plunge into the watery recesses of Davy Jones' locker.

"I—I've had an awful bump!" he gasped. "Mum-mum-my hammock's come down! You silly ass why didn't you put up the hammock properly! Ow! I'm nearly killed! Yow-ow!"

"The hammock was put up all right," said Drake. "It's been cut down, you see—(Drake's why Daubeny's here.)"

Daubeny approached the door, but Dick Rodney did not move. He clenched his hands, ready for Daubeny, and the back of the Shell did not attempt to force a passage.

"I'm hurt!" moaned Toedles. "I—I've broken my back, I think. Also my—my collar here. I can feel the pieces—"

"See that red doesn't get out, Rodney, while I look at Toedles."

"You bet!" said Rodney.

Drake rolled Tuckey over, to see whether he was hurt. He had two or three bruises, but otherwise he was undamaged.

"You're all right, you blessed mangle-er!" growled Drake.

"I'm not all right," howled Toedles wrathfully. "I'm battered and bruised all over! I think I'm dying—"

"Die quietly then, for goodness' sake!"

"Why, you—you heartless beast!" shrieked Tuckey. "I jolly well won't die quietly to please you! Yarooooop!"

"Hush! You'll wake the whole ship!"

"I don't care—I'm hurt! Yoop!"

"Do you want Packs here, you fat idiot!" howled Drake.

"I don't care! Yarsoosh!"

"What the thump's the row here?" came Sawyer major's voice through the keyhole. "You'd better check in. Pucke's coming with a light."

"You hear that, Toedles? Shut up!"

"Yarsoosh!"

Daubeny turned quite pale. His trick in Cabin No. 8 had turned out disastrously in every way. He was caught in the act, and the master of the Fourth was coming. He knew what Mr. Pucke would think of the trick he had played in cutting down a hammock containing a sleeping Fourth Former.

Drake gave him a look of scorn.

"Get out of sight!" he muttered. "If Pucke finds you here it's a dogging for you—and serve you right. But get out of sight. We won't give you away."

Daubeny looked round wildly. Drake pushed him into a corner, where he was nearly hidden by Rodney's hammock. Rodney and Drake stood before him, to cover him as much as possible. Angry as they were with the black sheep of the Shell, they had no intention of betraying him to the Form-master.

"Toedles!" said Drake, in a fierce whisper, as the Form-master's footsteps approached the door.

"Yarsoosh!"

"If you mention Daub I'll skin you to-morrow!"

"You-oo-oo!"

The door opened and Mr. Pucke appeared, his lamp gleaming into the study. Behind the lamp Mr. Pucke's eyes were gleaming, too. Mr. Pucke was not in a good temper.

"What is this disturbance?" he exclaimed angrily. "Rodney—Drake—why, what—what—what are you doing on the floor, Toedles?"

"You-oo-oo!"

"Get up immediately!" snapped Mr. Pucke. "Toedles' hammock came down, sir," said Drake, hoping that Mr. Pucke would not think of making an examination and learning exactly how it had come down.

In the corner Daubeny scarcely breathed. Fortunately, Mr. Pucke was casting the light of his lamp upon Tucky Toedles, sprawling on the floor, and in the shadowy corner, behind the hammock and the two Fourth Formers, Daubeny was pretty well hidden.

Mr. Pucke's anger vanished at the sight of the fallen hammock, which accounted for the uproar.

"You should be more careful, Toedles, in securing your hammock," he said severely. "Are you hurt?"

"Frightfully, sir!"

"If you are really hurt, Toedles, you had better come and see the doctor—"

Tucky Toedles recovered immediately. The last time he had occasion to see Dr. Pankey, that humorous gentleman had put him on a diet—an exceedingly thin diet. Tucky Toedles did not want any more of Dr. Pankey's peculiar sense of humour.

"Oh, I—I—I'm not so bad as all that, sir," stammered Toedles hastily. "In—in fact, sir, I'm all right now."

"Then replace your hammock and go to bed!" snapped Mr. Pucke.

"Ow! Yes, sir! Ow!"

"I will remain and show you a light. You may help him, Rodney and Drake."

Daubeny, in the corner, nearly ceased to The Gem Librarian.—No. 1,825.

breath as he heard that. Discovery seemed inevitable now. But again Jack Drake came to the rescue.

"I've an electric torch here, sir," he said. "We can manage all right with that, sir."

"Oh, very well!" said Mr. Pucke genially. Mr. Pucke had been called away from a social gathering in the gun-room, and he was anxious to return to it. "Very well, Drake. Good-night, my boys!"

"Good-night, sir!"

Mr. Pucke retired, closing the door after him, in happy unconsciousness of the fact that there was a trembling culprit in the cabin. Vernon Daubeny gasped aloud with relief as he went.

"You can count on me, you can," said Jack Drake contemptuously. "I'll show you a light while you splice that rope and fix up the hammock."

"I'm not going to do anything of the sort!" muttered Daubeny.

"You'll get the rope's-end if you don't!"

"Give him the rope's-end, anyhow!" exclaimed Tucky Toedles warmly. "Isn't he going to be punished for cutting me down and nearly killing me?"

"To-morrow for that," said Drake. "I'll call you to account to-morrow, Daub. I know whom you meant to cut down—it was my hammock. It's a bit too dangerous a trick to play, and you're going to have a lesson, you can! Now fix up the hammock, or we'll rope's-end you till you howl before we kick you out of the cabin."

Vernon Daubeny gritted his teeth, but he had no choice but to obey. In savage silence he set to work, and the hammock was shipped again at last. Rodney and Drake watched him grudgingly. Tucky Toedles rabbing his brains the while.

The work was done at last, and Drake examined it and pronounced it satisfactory. He opened the door quietly.

"Get out!" he said curtly.

"I—I say, Drake, mayn't I kick him out!" spluttered Tucky Toedles. "I'm frightfully injured—"

Drake laughed.

"Go it!" he said.

Daubeny dodged to the door. Tucky Toedles plunged after him, and kicked with all his might. The Shell fellow stumbled out of the cabin and fell, and there was a heap of anguish in Cabin No. 8. It came from Tucky Toedles.

"Ow! Oooooooh!"

"What on earth's the matter now?" exclaimed Drake testily.

"Ow! Wow! My toe!"

"Bother your silly toe! What's the matter with your toe?"

"Ow! I—I forgot I hadn't a shoe on!" wailed Toedles. "I've put my toe out, kicking that loaf!" Ow, ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Drake and Rodney turned in again, and Tucky Toedles, still bewailing his latest injury, followed their example. There was no further visit from Daub & Co. that night. In his hammock in the Shell quarters, Daub had settled down to an uneasy night, full of disagreeable anticipations of the morrow.

Daub Is Not Keen!

LESSONS were on deck the next day, with the white sails of the Beehive humming overhead as the juncos sat in class. The old ship ploughed her way west by south, with

Captain Topcastle, in his spruce uniform, walking the quarter-deck, his keen eyes generally on the sails or on the sea, and oblivious of the school.

Boys and masters had got their sea-legs now, and the school work went on as in the old days at St. Winifred's shore. Even Monsieur Ploss, the French master, the staunch sufferer from the dreaded mal-de-mer, was well and cheerful, and was no longer heard muttering in his cabin: "Mais c'est affreux! J'en meurs! Holas!"

Most of the Bonbow fellows looked very cheery, but there was one in the Shell who wore a moody brow. That one was Vernon Daubeny. His trick in Cabin No. 3 having been a ghastly failure, the penalty remained to be paid—and the hour was at hand.

Careless and good-natured as Jack Drake was, he did not mean to pass over the incident of the night. Turkey Toodles' bumps and bruises called for redress, and the chums of Cabin No. 3 felt that Daub required a lesson, lest he should be tempted to repeat his proceedings.

Daubeny of the Shell was not looking forward to that lesson with any pleasure. He even preferred the lessons he was receiving from Mr. Yarnswor, the master of the Shell, and was sorry when classes ended that morning.

Most of the Bonbow fellows knew by this time what had happened in Cabin No. 3, and they were looking forward to a "scrap."

After lessons Daubeny walked away to his quarters, but a crowd of juniors gathered round him on the deck.

"Don't hurry, Daub!" called out Sawyer major of the Fourth. "Drake wants to speak to you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Daubeny gave the Fourth Formers a fierce look. "Drake can go and eat cake!" he said.

"Here you are, Drake! Daub's waiting for you!" sang out Sawyer major. "But he's rather pressed for time!"

And there was another laugh.

Jack Drake came up to the group. Daubeny met his glance with a bitter look.

"You cut down my hammock last night, Daub," said Drake quietly. "It happened to be Toodles who was in it, but you meant it for me. You meant to sneak away without being seen."

"But I jolly well collected him!" interjected Turkey Toodles. "Presence of mind, you know."

"When will it suit you to have the gloves on, Daub?" asked Drake.

Daubeny did not answer immediately, and Sawyer major struck in:

"Daub would prefer to fight on land. He is willing to put it off till we arrive in South America."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon Daubeny's eyes blazed.

"I'll fight you when you like, you Fourth Form cad!" he said, between his teeth. "Now, if you like."

He advanced towards Drake with his hands up. Drake backed away.

"We should be stopped if we began here," he said. "You know that as well as I do. There's half a dozen of the seven men staring at us now."

"Bit too palpable, Daub, old chap!" grinned Sawyer major.

Daubeny gritted his teeth.

"Make your own arrangements then, hang you!" he said. "I'll meet you where you like, any time you like, and give you a jolly good hidin'!"

"Hear, hear!" came from several Shell fellows.

"After lessons, down below, then," said Drake.

"Yes, confound you!"

Drake turned on his heel and walked away with Rodney. Daubeny lounged off to his study with a scowling face, followed by Egan and Torrence. The latter two were looking rather queery at their great chief.

"Dash it all, Daub," muttered Egan, as they came into Cabin No. 3 in the Shell, "keep a stiff upper lip. Don't let the Fourth say you're afraid of their man."

Daubeny turned on him savagely.

"Who's afraid of him?"

"Well, you didn't seem very keen on a scrap, at any rate," answered Egan sarcastically.

"I've scrapped with Drake before, and had the worst of it," growled Daubeny. "I'd rather keep clear. Those fags don't mind goin' about with a cut lip, or a black eye; I do. If you're so jolly warlike, Egan, you can take it on. You were with me last night, though those cads don't know it."

"My dear man, I wouldn't think of puttin' myself ahead of you," said Egan blandly. "You're our giddy champion. Besides, I don't suppose you know there'd be trouble if you were caught cuttin' a chap's hammock."

"It would have been all right if that fool Toodles hadn't been in the wrong hammock. I'd rather keep clear of Drake—"

Egan winked at Torrence.

"I'd rather keep clear of Drake," repeated Daubeny, with a dangerous look, "but I don't care about keepin' clear of you, Egan, and if I have any of your dashed impudence, I'll mop up the deck with you!"

"Order in the study!" murmured Torrence.

"Don't let us begin ragging in the merry family circle. Have a smoke, Daub, old chap. The smokes haven't run out yet."

Daubeny refused, with an angry gesture, and left the cabin, leaving the two Shell fellows to smoke, and comment upon Daub's "cold feet."

It was not exactly "cold feet" that troubled Daubeny. He had faced Drake before, and had on that occasion received a licking. He did not want to repeat that experience—neither did he wish to carry the marks of the fight about him for a week or two. A swollen nose or a shady eye marred the beautiful elegance upon which the buck of the Shell prided himself. Certainly he should have thought of that before he paid his visit to Cabin No. 3; it was rather late now.

The more Daubeny thought of the coming fight, down under the lower deck of the Bonbow, the less he liked the prospect. It worried him during afternoon lessons on the poop, and drew his attention several times from Mr. Yarnswor.

After school there was an extra class for the fellows who cared to join it—the Spanish class held by Dr. Pankery. An attendance at the Spanish class was not compulsory, a good many of the fellows gave it a miss, and likewise Vernon Daubeny had not bothered with it. Now he gave in his name to the medical gentleman, and joined the class—and Egan and Torrence grinned when they saw it. The Spanish class filled in a little more time and put off the fight with Drake.

Then came tea, which Daubeny & Co. had in their cabin-study, Daub's ample supply of cash allowing him a free run of the canteen kept by Mr. Capps. The three bucks were at tea when Fog Slaney, the one-eyed steward's mate, squinted into the cabin.

Daubeny gave him an angry glare.

"What do you want, hang you?" he snapped.

THE GUN LUMBER.—No. 1, 1923.

"Message from Master Drake, sir."

"Hang Drake!"

Stanley refused.

"Master Drake says he is going to wait for you down below, sir," he said.

"Oh, get on!"

Stanley withdrew, and Daubeny went on with his tea with a gloomy brow. Outside, the sun was red on the Atlantic. Daubeny did not seem to observe the half-concealed grins of his study-mates, as he went on with his tea very slowly indeed.

The sun was going down, and Egan lighted the ship's lantern that swung in the cabin from an iron hook driven up into the deck overhead.

"Time we got a move on, I think," Torrence yawned at last. "The Fourth will be comin' here to drag us out."

"You fellows can go!" snapped Daub.

"And you?"

"Toll them I'm comin' when I've had a smoke."

"I say, I wouldn't smoke just before a scrap," said Torrence. "Think of your wind, old chap."

"That's my bimey," answered Daubeny sourly.

"Oh, all right!"

Egan and Torrence quitted the study. They found most of the Fourth and Shell gathered in the space under the lower deck that was selected for the fight. Two or three lanterns shed a light there. A general chorus greeted Egan and Torrence.

"Where is he?"

"Down!" answered Torrence.

"Time he came, I think," remarked Sawyer major.

Drake and Rodney filled in the time by putting on the gloves, and boxing. But Vernon Daubeny did not arrive. Sawyer major cut off at last to "wake him up," as he expressed it; but he returned with the news that Daubeny was not in his cabin, or to be seen anywhere.

"Funkin' it, by gad!" Egan whispered to Torrence, who shrugged his shoulders.

Drake peeled off the gloves, with a frown.

"I say, let's go and hunt him up!" exclaimed Turkey Toedles. "Daub's got to be licked! Look at these fearful bruises! Daub did that! He's got to be walloped! Let's hunt Daub!"

And the juniors, chuckling, started off in a crowd to "hunt Daub."

Struck Down!

JACK DRAKE went on deck with Dick Rodney, without giving much thought to Daubeny of the Shell. The juniors, regarding the matter as a tremendous lark, were hunting about the ship for the missing Shell fellow, and entering into the spirit of the thing, and making quite a game of it. Drake glanced up at the main and topsail drowsing overhead. The Beaufort was ploughing on under easy sail, her red and green lights gleaming on over-darkened sea.

"That ass Daub is hiding himself somewhere, I suppose," Drake remarked.

"I shouldn't wonder. He doesn't want to have the gloom on. I shouldn't wonder if he's gone out on the bowsprit, and will come down at bedtime with a yarn about having forgotten the appointment below."

"You fellows seen him?" howled Turkey Toedles.

"No," answered Drake.

"Come and help me, then! What are you The Gem Library.—No. 1,625.

looking for!" demanded Turkey Toedles warmly. "Aren't you going to lick Daub for giving me those fearful bumps?"

"Well, if Daub's as keen in keeping off——" said Drake hesitatingly.

There was a scornful hoot from Turkey.

"Yah! You've got cold feet now, have you, as well as Daub?"

"Why, you fat rotter——"

"Then I'll jolly well lick Daub myself if I find him!" exclaimed Toedles.

"For your own sake you'd better not find him, then," said Rodney, laughing.

"You come and help."

"Oh, all right! Coming, Drake!"

"Oh, brother!" said Drake.

Rodney joined in the search with the other fellows, and as it went on, several of the juniors called to Drake to help. They were very anxious to root Daub out of his hiding-place. A "scrap" was a very welcome entertainment in the evening.

Jack Drake did not feel inclined to join in the game. His anger never lasted long, and he was already thinking of letting the matter drop, as his enemy seemed unwilling to come up to the scratch. He went into the chains to climb into the maintop, as he often did in the evening, to look over the starlit sea. Drake was quite at home in the rigging of the Beaufort. The juniors were encouraged to learn to be seamanklike when it did not interfere with the seamen's duties. Drake caught the ratlines and clambered up to the maintop, and the boatswain called to him from the main deck as he went.

"Mind your eye there, youngster, in the dark!"

"Right-oo, Mr. Piper!" called back Drake cheerfully.

Although the breeze was an easy one, it felt stiff enough to the junior hanging on the shrouds. The Beaufort was rolling a little, and sometimes, in the trough of a large wave, there was a glimmer from her cross-trees to the dark waters below. But there was no danger for Drake, and he climbed on to the top. Most of the Beaufort fellows, at that point, were accustomed to passing through the lighter's hole; but Drake's head was steady, and he did not think of that. He bent back out under the top, and climbed on, exchanging the deck below, in the sailorlike way.

As his head came over the level of the top, he gave a start and stopped. A pair of gleaming eyes looked at him from the black shadows.

"You rat! What do you want?"

It was Vernon Daubeny's voice.

"Oh!" ejaculated Drake. "You here, Daub?"

Daubeny stared at him awfully. It was natural, in the circumstances, that he should suppose that Drake had guessed his hiding-place, and had come there specially to root him out.

Drake put an arm forward to climb into the top, and Daubeny made a forward move.

"Keep off, you rotter!"

"Don't play the goat, Daub. I'm coming in."

"You shan't, hang you!"

"Like to come below to settle our little difference!" grinned Drake. "You've disappointed all the fellows. They were looking forward to a scrap. They're hunting for you between the decks now."

"I—I forgot——"

"Ha, ha, ha! Are you going to tell the fellows you forgot?" chuckled Drake.

Daubeny panted with rage. Without stopping to think, he struck out savagely at Drake's laughing face, just over the level of the top.

Drake uttered a startled cry. Daubeny's fist

(Continued on page 36)



A few letters which bring together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging views on matters of mutual interest. If you wish to reply to a notice published here you must write to the Pen Pal abroad. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and sent to the GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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THE FLYING SCHOOLBOYS!

(Continued from page 22.)

"crown" on it, so far as that went. Arthur Augustus evidently could put in some leg-pulling when he set his noble mind to it. This was forgotten. Leather had pulled his leg! Now he had pulled Leather's—and pulled it hard!

"Ha, ha!" chortled Arthur Augustus.

"Wash! Wash! Wash! what?"

"Frightfully funny!" agreed Monty Leather.

"Ha, ha!"

"Well, you see," said Manservant, "don't you mind that hat being smashed in?"

"Why should I?" asked Leather.

"Well, I should jolly well mind, if it were mine!"

"So should I, if it were mine!" asserted Monty Leather cheerfully. "But why should I mind if Gussy smashes on his own hat?"

"What?" yelled five fellows.

Arthur Augustus jumped.

"Whose hat?" he y-bled.

"Yours, old chap—"

"Mine—mine! Why, you fiendish wretch, I asked you to fetch your swab hat! Did I not ask you to fetch my swab hat?"

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"I thought that perhaps something might go wrong with that conjuring trick—"

"You—you—!—oh wretched!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Arthur Augustus peered up the hat! He gazed at it! He turned it over and read his own name inside! He gazed at it—speechless! The expression on Gussy's face was really extraordinary as he gazed. He had not, after all, pulled Monty's leg—he had pulled his own! And that beautiful straw hat was a wreck and a ruin! Words failed Arthur Augustus.

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

"Oh corker!"

"Jolly entertaining trick!" said Monty Leather heartily. "Let's see you do it again, Gussy! I'll fetch another hat—I noticed several in your bag—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—wretch! You—you—frightful bounder! You—you— Look at my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"My swab hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—" Words failed Arthur Augustus again. Speechless, he stood gazing at the wreck of a hat—while the other fellows yelled, and the Silver Swallow soared on over the sunny land of France.

Next Week's Reading: "PERIL IN PARIS!"

The Gem Library.—No. 1,685.

LOST AT SEA!

(Continued from page 35)

landed on his face with savage force, and the blow fairly tore him from his precarious hold.

The shell fellow gave a convulsive start as Drake's face suddenly vanished in the darkness. He had not meant to break Drake's hold. He had not thought at all as he struck savagely and recklessly; but as Drake's cry rang out, and his face disappeared, Daubery realised what he had done. With a sick lurch in his breast, he recoiled in the main-top, listening with shuddering nerves for a crash on the deck—a crash that would tell of sudden and terrible death.

But it did not come.

Jack Drake was awestruck, and the Benbow, surging on, had left him behind even before Daubery realised what had happened.

He listened in deadly fear. The splash had not been noticed, and in the darkness nothing had been seen. The wind was freshening, the sails billowed, the ropes dragged and creaked. Nothing was known—yet! But it was half an hour before Daubery, with trembling limbs and white face, ventured to drag himself from the main-top, and scuffle down the shrouds. He crept below to his cabin and locked himself in.

The Benbow plunged on her way, and the junior, who had given up the search for Daubery, gathered in the Captain's room, half-dreaming that one of their schoolfellows had lost the number of his nose, and that a white-faced, stricken youth was shuddering in his cabin, thinking of the hapless boy who had plunged into the sea, now many a long mile behind the old ship.

Next week: "THE MUTINY SHIP!"

HANDSOME ALF!

(Continued from page 35.)

harmless rime sweeping into sight, round the end of the wharf. Handsome Alf rode aboard, spurring sagaciously. He had a rifle in his hand now. Behind close rifle four rough hoboemen, rifle in hand like their leader.

Lomax was at the car now, and Bob and Ben were helping him in. Frank Richards grasped him and dragged him over the beam of the great wicker basket, and he sank down, gasping, on the bottom of the car.

Crack!

Curry's rifle rang out and the bullet sang by. "Quick!" painted Frank.

Bob Lawless rolled headlong into the car, and Vere Boushore sprang in after him. Frank Richards swung up the axe.

Crack!

The keen edge of the axe fell upon the rope where it passed over the edge of the car. The rope branged, but did not part.

Crack, crack! The rullians were firing wildly as they galloped on, and the bullets whistled round the schoolboys.

Frank Richards dashed at the rope again, and it parted with a loud twang. The next moment he stumbled over and fell, as the car, suddenly released, was dragged upward by the soaring balloons, as if a giant hand had plucked it away from the earth.

Up and up and up, swinging and rocking; while below on the earth the huffed rullians rode to and fro, firing into the air in impotent fury after the victims who had escaped them.

Next Wednesday: "GUN LAW!"



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