

"THE HUNTED SCHOOLBOYS!" BIG-THRILL ADVENTURE ABROAD WITH THE ST. JIM'S FLYERS—**INSIDE.**

The **GEM** 2nd

**THE FLYING
SCHOOLBOYS
ATTACKED IN
THE ALPS!**





Blake Answers Back!

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

"Lowther Fan," of Nottingham, writes:

I wish you would tell Monty Lowther for me that out of the whole of St. Jim's I like him the best. (He will be flattered.) He has a rare sense of humour and I can't imagine him having to think up his wisecracks like you, for instance. To settle an argument, please tell me what would happen if the irresistible force met the immovable object. Thanks.

P.S.—This is my sixth attempt to type this letter. How'm I doing?

ANSWER (from Monty Lowther): Blake has kindly offered me this space. I can only bow low with my heart on my hand—sorry, my hand on my heart—and say it's nice to know you. Did you hear about the Scotsman who, when asked which political candidate he was going to cheer for, said he wouldn't give a hoot for either! I think Blake deserves a vote of thanks. He does offer to reproduce readers' handsome faces. I should prefer to print something really funny!

If the irresistible force (if any) met the immovable object (if any) there would no longer be either an irresistible force or an immovable object. So why worry? As you tried six times to type your letter, it wouldn't be a bad idea to get some typing lessons!

W. Harris, of Burton-on-Trent, Staffs, writes:

Will you have a go at these?

1. How old, and how tall is Detective Kerr?
2. Who are the captains of the Shell, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth?
3. Who are the ditto Form-masters?

P.S.—I am enclosing a photo of myself when I was in the St. Paul's choir. I am now in St. Chad's choir.

ANSWER: Delighted to receive your in-"choir"-y!

1. Kerr is 5 feet 4½ inches tall, and if you put a 1 in front of that 5, and count it as years and months, instead of feet and inches, I think you will be somewhere near his age.

2. Tom Merry, self, Lefevre, Kildare.

3. Messrs. Linton, Lathom, Ratcliff, Kildare.

W. Harris, of
Burton-on-Trent.
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P.S.—I regret I have never sung, but Gussy (who fancies he has a voice), says he is glad to see that the St. Chad's choir is "very smartly turned out." The only time I tried to get into the St. Jim's choir, as a jag, I remember I was turned out very smartly, too!

Here's luck to your larynx!

"Sports Fan," of Wallasey, writes:

Try these:

1. Do you like girls? I do.
2. Why don't you bring back "Tom Merry's Weekly" in the GEM?

3. What kind of an ass are you?

4. What is Fatty Wynn's weight?

With hisses and kisses
SS! X SS! X SS!
X SS! X SS! X SS!
X SS! X SS! X SS!
XX! BOO to you!

ANSWER: Tough guy, huh? Glad to see what you look like, anyhow. Try THESE:

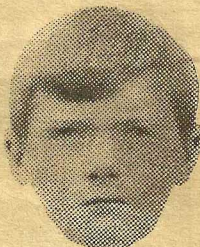
1. Why shouldn't I? Some girls are very nice indeed.

2. We'll ask the Ed. about it.

3. Not a big enough one to take you too seriously, I hope.

4. A little over fourteen stone, increasing daily, according to Figgins!

In reply to your hiss-kiss barrage, please imagine a glance of what Gussy would describe as "uttah scorn." Bow-wow!



"Sports Fan,"
of Wallasey.

BRIEF REPLIES.

G. W., of Birmingham.—Gussy was horrified at your suggestion that he bought his clothes at the new cheap store. St. Jim's wear red and white; Greyfriars blue and white. L. A., Homerton.—Tom Merry heads the list at boxing, football, and cricket. I'm too cautious to name the cleverest fellow at St. Jim's. A. Marshall, N.20.—Shell list later, maybe. "Bells of Southend."—A bell is struck every half-hour of the watch. A watch is four hours, except a dog-watch, which is two. Thus eight bells closes a normal watch.

THERE'S THRILL UPON THRILL FOR THE CHUMS OF ST. JIM'S EN ROUTE IN THE SILVER SWALLOW FOR TURIN! GREAT, NEW, LONG YARN.

The HUNTED SCHOOLBOYS!



Tom caught his breath, and his heart almost missed a beat, as he looked towards the cave-mouth. Standing full in view in the bright sunlight was a figure with a dark, swarthy face and black, beady eyes. Well Tom knew that face—it was Giuseppe Fosco!

CHAPTER 1.

A Foe in the Sky!

"**B**AI Jove! What's that?"
 "The jolly old globe!"
 "Weally, Tom Mewwy——"
 "Well, if you're particular, it's Italy!"
 "Weally, you ass——"

"If you're still more particular, it's Piedmont in Italy."

Seven St. Jim's juniors were looking down from the cabin windows in the passenger plane Silver Swallow.

The flying schoolboys had taken off that bright May morning from Cannes. Under the soaring plane, flying high, mountains were spread, vast, irregular, infinite.

France had been left behind, and the Silver Swallow was over Italy, though precisely where France ended and Italy began was not to be discerned.

It was, in fact, the same country, the division being political, not natural.

Far away southward was a loom of spacious blue that might have been

the Mediterranean. But it was mountains and mountains everywhere. High over the Alpine spaces soared the giant plane, a droning speck in the vastness.

So when Arthur Augustus pointed and asked what that was, Tom Merry told him correctly that it was the globe, that it was Italy, and that it was Piedmont in Italy.

That categorical information did not seem, however, to satisfy Arthur Augustus D'Arcy!

He screwed his eyeglass into his eye and gazed down with a fixed gaze.

"I can see somethin'!" he declared.

"So can I!" agreed Blake.

"What can you see, Blake?"

"Mountains!"

"Wats! Can you see anythin', Hewwies?"

"Yes, rather!" answered Herries.

"Mountains!"

"I am not alludin' to the mountains, Hewwies! Can you see anythin', Dig?"

"Mountains!" answered Digby.

"We're mounin' ourselves!" remarked Monty Lowther. The funny man of the St. Jim's Shell was not likely to lose a chance

Brought down in the Alps and hunted by bandits! The flying schoolboys of St. Jim's hit big-thrill adventure on their "hop" into Italy!

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

like this! Good, bad, or indifferent, a pun drew Monty Lowther like a magnet.

"Weally, Lowthah—"

"Not much use turning on the camera here!" remarked Manners. "We're too high!" Harry Manners, of course, was thinking of photographs.

"I wepeat," said Arthur Augustus, "that I can see somethin'. Pewwaps it is a bird! It seems to me to be wisin'. Pewwaps it is a plane! Can you see a plane, Lowthah?"

"No plains here till we get past the mountains," answered Monty.

"I do not mean a plain—I mean a plane, you ass—an acwoplane," said Arthur Augustus.

"Pawson!"

"Sir!"

"Is that a plane, Pawson?"

The portly Pawson stepped to the window.

Lord Eastwood's man travelled in the passenger cabin, with the schoolboy party in his charge. So quiet and unobtrusive was Pawson that Tom Merry & Co. hardly remembered that he was there—unless he was wanted. Then Pawson was always on the spot. Pawson, middle-aged, portly, with a bald spot and a fruity complexion, had remarkably good eyesight. He gazed down from the window and nodded.

"Yes, Master Arthur! That is a plane! Probably one of the Italian frontier planes on patrol duty. Certainly it is an Italian plane."

"By gum, so it is!" said Blake. "And it's coming up!"

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at the moving speck below.

It was tiny in the distance. It was a plane—though not a passenger plane like the Silver Swallow. On the vast space of the endless mountains it was the only moving object to be seen. It was distant, and far down—but it was rising fast, shooting up into the blue.

"I trust, Pawson, that our papahs are in ordah!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "I have heard that the Italians are feahfully suspicious of foweign airowraft flyin' ovah Italian tewwitow." "

"Everything is in perfect order, sir!" said Pawson. "We shall land at Turin, sir, and you will find that everything is in order."

"I am suah of it, Pawson! You are wunnin' this twip like clockwork, my deah chap."

"Thank you, sir!" said Pawson, with his deferential cough. "I trust, sir, that everything will be done to your satisfaction, and to the satisfaction of his lordship at home."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"By Jove, she's climbing!" said Tom Merry, watching the plane that seemed to shoot up like an arrow. "Coming up to have a look at us, perhaps."

The Italian plane was in full and clear view now. High as the Silver Swallow was, the Italian seemed to be aiming to go higher.

About a quarter of a mile away it reached the Silver Swallow's level, but still soared on upward. The St. Jim's juniors watched it with keen interest. It did not occur to them, for the moment, that that plane had anything to do with themselves, unless some suspicious patrol was coming up to give the Silver Swallow the "once-over" as it flew past the frontier.

Higher and higher soared the Italian till it vanished in the clouds and was lost to sight from the passenger cabin windows. A drift of cloud barred it from sight.

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Crack!

"Bai Jove! What's that?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

The juniors looked round them in surprise. That sudden crack sounded as if something had struck the plane, but in midair it seemed impossible.

"Something snapped!" said Blake.

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps I had bettah go along and speak to the pilots!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Perhaps you'd better stick where you are, and not worry the man at the wheel!" said Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"We're going on all right, even if something's snapped!" said Tom Merry. "But I wonder—by gum, there it goes again!"

Crack!

"It is weally vevy peculiah!" said Arthur Augustus. "So fah, ewevythim' has gone all wight! It isn't one of the engines."

"No! But what—"

"What do you think it is, Pawson?" asked Arthur Augustus. Pawson was standing with a very startled face.

"I can hardly make it out, sir!" said Lord Eastwood's man slowly. "I do not think that anything is wrong with the plane, but—"

Crack!

Pawson broke off as the sharp crack came again.

Rawlings, the steward, came into the passengers' cabin. His face was startled, and he glanced round as if to see whether anything was amiss.

"What's up, Wawlings?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"I hardly know, sir!" answered the steward. "It sounded like the snapping of a strut, but—"

Crack!

"Good heavens!" panted Pawson. His fruity face was white. "Are they mad?"

"Look!" yelled Blake.

The Italian plane shot into sight again. Hanging over the passenger plane like a hawk hanging over its prey, it seemed about to swoop like a hawk. It came with a rush, and the juniors' hearts leaped into their mouths at the fearful thought of a collision in midair and a downward spin to terrible death. But the pilot of the pursuing plane knew what he was about.

The smaller plane shot over the larger. As it swept over, there came puffs of white smoke in the blue—and crack, crack, crack!—and the crash of bullets on the Silver Swallow.

"Bai Jove!"

"Look—"

"They're firing on us!"

CHAPTER 2.

Forced Landing!

TOM MERRY & Co. caught their breath. The Italian plane swept by overhead and the din of firing died. But a dozen bullets had crashed on the Silver Swallow, tearing her wings, crashing on the roof of the passenger cabin.

It seemed incredible—unbelievable. It was like the act of a madman in midair! But it was only too terribly true.

For some reason, utterly amazing and inexplicable, the Italian plane was firing on the Silver Swallow, to send her crashing down on the desolate mountains.

"Are they mad?" breathed Pawson hoarsely. "They must be mad!"

The juniors stood silent, in horror. Rawlings was white as chalk. They were utterly at the mercy of that strange and unexpected enemy. Sooner or later, if the firing was kept up, it would disable the passenger plane and hurl her into the death-spin.

Perils had come in the way of Tom Merry & Co. during that exciting Easter air trip. Giuseppe Fosco, the dago, had tracked them across the Continent, in quest of the mysterious black box that was in Arthur Augustus' keeping. But they had never dreamed of anything like this.

"Pewwaps they are gone!" Arthur Augustus broke the silence at last. "They must be off their wockahs to fire on us—"

"I suppose no dashed war's broken out since we left Cannes!" said Monty Lowther.

"Oh cwumbs!"

"Not likely!" said Tom Merry. "There's always a war just coming, in the newspapers—they have to print something, and they like to make it exciting. But it never gets farther than spilling printer's ink."

"But what—"

"And why—"

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack! came the roar of firing. The Italian was sweeping over the passenger plane again, and bullets crashed.

The Silver Swallow was slanting down.

Evidently the pilot, in these strange and nerve-racking circumstances, had decided to land—if he could!

It was no country for landing! Wild, rugged, irregular mountains stretched under the plane. A forced landing was full of peril. But the most desperate landing was not so perilous as flying on under the fire of the enemy in the pursuing plane.

"We're going down!" muttered Tom Merry.

"The sooner the better, with that madman up there!" said Manners. "Some military idiot in a panic, I suppose."

Crack! Crack! Crack! Crack!

"Bai Jove! I shall be wathah glad to get out of this!" said Arthur Augustus. "They will widdle us at this wate!"

Pawson's plump face was pressed to the window. His hands were clenched. He turned from the window, his face white and set. The portly manservant was hardly recognisable at that moment. A fierce and bitter look was on the plump face, that caused the juniors to stare at Pawson in surprise.

Tom Merry and Manners were not surprised. They knew that there was more in Lord Eastwood's valet than met the eye. It was Manners who had discovered that Pawson, the perfect, was after that mysterious black box, as well as the dago. But he had told no one but Tom Merry.

"The villain!" muttered Pawson. His plump hand went under his coat-tails. All the juniors knew that Pawson packed a revolver in his hip pocket.

"That's no use here, Pawson!" said Tom Merry dryly.

Manners' lip curled. Pawson's gun was no use in such a situation; his movement was the instinctive action of a gunman!

"Quite so, sir!" said Pawson. The plump hand came empty from the coat tails. Pawson, for a moment thrown off his guard by rage, was himself again. "But when we land, sir, we may be glad that I am armed."

Crack! Crack! Crack! came from the blue. The Silver Swallow was circling down at dizzy speed, the Italian plane hanging like a hawk overhead.

"You have the black box safe, sir?" asked Pawson.

"Eh? Yaas, Pawson," answered Arthur Augustus.

That little black box which had come so mysteriously into Arthur Augustus' care had been on his mind all through the holidays. But he had forgotten it now, till Pawson reminded him of it.

"I fear, sir, that you will not retain it much longer," said Pawson.

Arthur Augustus stared at him.

"Why not, Pawson? That mad ass in that plane can't know anythin' about the box that American chap gave me in Sussex weeks ago."

"Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. He caught Pawson's meaning. "The dago—"

"In that plane?" stuttered Blake.

"I fear so, sir!" said Pawson. "The Italians on the frontier are suspicious and excitable—but no military plane would fire on a passenger plane in this way! Who ever is in that plane has been watching for us to intercept us, and force us to a landing in these lonely mountains, far from help."

"Oh ewikey!" ejaculated Arthur Augustus.

"That wotten dago!"

"But—but we left him behind at Cannes!" exclaimed Lowther.

All the juniors remembered their last sight of Giuseppe Fosco—standing on the white road at Cannes, staring up with infuriated face at the Silver Swallow as it soared to the sky. There was no doubt that the dago had been left behind in France.

"He has confederates, sir!" said Pawson. "I have not the slightest doubt that this has been worked by Fosco. Whether we land alive or dead, he cares little, I think—so long as we are brought down in these mountains."

"The feahful wottah!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

Crack! Crack! Crack! The firing sounded more distant. The Silver Swallow was seeking a landing; the Italian hovering above.

With that last outburst, the firing died off. Now that the passenger plane was forced to a landing, the enemy's object was achieved.

The juniors rushed to the windows. The earth, which had seemed so far away, was now terribly near; it seemed to be rushing up to meet them.

Wild and desolate mountains were all that met their view. There was no sign of a town, or a village, or a frontier post—nothing but the high and barren hillsides. Like a bird seeking a nest, the Silver Swallow circled and circled, questing a landing-place.

It seemed that they must crash. But the St. Jim's juniors were quiet and cool. It was a terrible and unexpected peril; but they had the courage to face it. Faces were pale but calm.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I'm feahfully sorry I've landed you fellows in this!"

"Rot!" grunted Blake. "Sink or swim together."

"We've got a good pilot!" said Manners. "That rotter up there has ceased fire—we've got a jolly good chance."

They watched and waited with fast-beating hearts. It seemed almost impossible that the

plane could land amid those wild and rugged rocks.

The Silver Swallow circled and circled. The earth seemed terribly near. There was a sudden jarring bump.

"Bai Jove! Hold on, you fellows!"

Bump!

The landing-wheels had touched earth.

Bump, bump, bump, as the plane taxied on an irregular surface of rock. But the pilot had picked as good a spot as could be found in such a region—a wide, level expanse, shut in by cliffs. The drone of the engines ceased, and the Silver Swallow came to rest—and Tom Merry & Co. looked at one another, hardly able to believe that they were still alive.

CHAPTER 3.

Danger Ahead!

TOM MERRY & Co. were glad to descend from the plane and feel the firm earth under their feet. For long and terrible minutes they had doubted whether they would ever feel the earth under their feet again.

Save for the scoring of bullet-marks, the Silver Swallow was undamaged. Looking up, the juniors could see the Italian plane gleaming in the blue. The drone of its engine floated to their ears.

But it was not descending. The enemy seemed to be satisfied with having driven them to earth; and was doubtless keeping watch to see that the passenger plane did not take off again. Every now and then the gleaming plane above disappeared—only to reappear.

The two pilots of the Silver Swallow and the steward stood in a group, staring up, and muttering together. Pawson, as he looked up, groped under his coat-tails again. But the enemy above was too far away for a pistol-shot to have had any effect on him.

"Well, we're landed!" said Blake.

"Yaas, wathah! That's somethin' to be thankful for!" said Arthur Augustus. "But where the dooce are we?"

"Echo answers where!" said Manners.

"Bettah ask Pawson! Pawson knows eweythin'!" said Arthur Augustus. "Where are we, Pawson? Is there any town or anythin' anywhah?"

"Ever been here before, Pawson?" asked Herries.

Pawson smiled his deferential smile. All through that air-trip Pawson had been a mine of knowledge. He seemed to know everywhere and everything. So, wild and untrodden as the mountains looked, the juniors would not have been surprised had Lord Eastwood's man been able to tell them just where they were.

"Yes, sir, I have been in these mountains before," said Pawson. "Indeed, I have some old acquaintances in this region."

"Pawson's a wondahful man, as I've told you fellows a lot of times!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Weally, I believe if we got landed on the moon, Pawson would know his way about there."

"Well, where are we, Pawson?" asked Tom Merry. "If there's any getting out of this, the sooner we get out the better. If it's really the dago who is after us, it won't be long before we see something of him or his gang."

"Probably not, sir!" said Pawson. "It may

take that rascal up in the plane some little time to signal our precise whereabouts; but, as you say, sir, we shall soon see something of the enemy."

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's hand slid into the pocket where he had packed the little black box. Often and often as that mysterious article had been in danger, it had never been in greater danger than now.

"Bai Jove! The blightahs won't get hold of the black box without a scwap!" he said. "But if we can get off befoah they show up, all the bettah!"

"Yes, rather!"

"The nearest inhabited place is a little mountain village called San Pietro!" said Pawson. "I am not able to judge precisely, but I should say that the distance is about ten miles. It is terribly rough going."

"That's all wight, Pawson; we can wuff it."

"You think you can find the way?" asked Lowlther.

"I am not absolutely sure, as it is many years since I have been in this region," said Pawson. "I can only do my best, sir! At all events, we may succeed in escaping Giuseppe, if we get away from this spot before we can be surrounded here."

The juniors looked round them. The spot where they stood reminded them of their sojourn in the wild Cevennes. Cliffs, rugged rocks, scattered boulders, trackless stony hillsides encircled them, with no sign of a track of any kind to be seen. No doubt a mountain shepherd could have found his way there, and perhaps Pawson could; but to the schoolboys the attempt would have been utterly hopeless.

They might have wandered for days or weeks, till they perished of hunger in the midst of that wild desolation. They remembered having read in the newspapers of a German plane that had been wrecked in that very region, and not even discovered till long afterwards.

"At San Pietro, if we reach it," went on Pawson's quiet, deferential voice, "we shall be able to obtain mules and reach a town, where we can proceed on our journey to Turin."

"Good egg!" said Tom Merry.

"Obviously, the Silver Swallow cannot take off again while that rascal is on the watch above!" continued Pawson. "But he is certainly keeping us under observation through his glasses, and cannot fail to see us leave this spot. When we leave the plane, and he makes sure that we are not returning to it, I have no doubt that the pilot will be able to take off again. In that case we shall rejoin the plane at Turin—if we succeed in getting away."

"Yes—it's us he wants, not the plane!" agreed Tom Merry. "It's getting away that's urgent—before they get us."

"Quite so, sir!" Pawson paused. "I will not disguise from you, sir, my belief that Giuseppe's associates are not far away, and that we may be surrounded by enemies before we have covered a quarter of a mile."

"It's a chance, anyhow," said Tom.

"Yaas, wathah, and it looks like the only chance we've got!" said Arthur Augustus. "I would undahtake to knock out a dago if he had the decency to keep to punchin'—but a gang of wottahs with knives is quite anothah pposition."

"Quite, sir!" said Pawson. "I suggest that you should pack a few necessary articles and a

little food in some rucsacks, and that we lose no time. I will instruct the pilots to keep watch and to take off for Turin as soon as they think the coast is clear."

"Let's get going!" said Tom.

The juniors clambered back into the plane. Obviously, the sooner they got away from that spot, the better. Indeed, at any moment they half-expected to see fierce, swarthy faces peering among the rocks.

Giuseppe Fosco had them where he wanted them now, and it was only a matter of time before he was on the spot, probably with a gang of bravoes to back him up—and the time might be hours, or it might be minutes. Not a minute was to be lost.

"Excuse me, sir!" murmured Pawson, touching Arthur Augustus on the arm as the swell of St. Jim's was about to follow the other fellows into the plane.

"Yaas, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus, pausing and looking round.

Pawson coughed.

"As you are aware, sir, it is the black box that the rascals are after," he said. "And I fear, sir, that it is not very likely that we shall get through without being stopped and searched. If you thought fit, sir, to entrust the article temporarily to my care—"

"But they would stop you, Pawson, and search you," said Arthur Augustus. "It would be as bwoad as it was long, my deah chap."

"Not quite, sir!" explained Pawson. "When we are stopped—for I fear there is little doubt

about it—attention will be concentrated on you as the person known to carry the black box. They will pay little heed to a servant, and I have no doubt that I should be able to slip away and keep the article safe, sir. The first consideration of all is, of course, to keep safe the article that has been entrusted to your care, sir."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

"In your possession, sir, it is practically certain to be taken. In mine, there is an excellent chance of its reaching safety."

"Bai Jove! You're wight, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus. "As you know these howwid mountains, it is vevy pwobable that you might be able to get away when any of us wouldn't have a chance."

"Precisely so, sir!"

"It is a weally bwight ideah, Pawson—"

"Thank you, sir."

"But I am not goin' to win the wisk, all the same. You see, havin' pwomised to take care of that beastly black box, I am not goin' to land it on any othah chap—not even a faithful and devoted chap like you, Pawson."

"I really advise you, sir—"

"It's all wight, Pawson—I can look aftah the black box all wight!" said Arthur Augustus reassuringly. "They won't get it off me vevy easily. Don't you wowwy! You go and tell the pilots what to do while I get a few things togethah. We must not lose time, Pawson."

And Arthur Augustus D'Arcy went up into the plane, leaving Pawson breathing hard.



The Italian swung the rifle to his shoulder, and the muzzle was aimed directly at the St. Jim's party. The man did not speak, but his action told them enough! He was one of Giuseppe Fosco's men, and he barred the path to escape!

Slowly Lord Eastwood's man moved off to speak to the pilots, while Tom Merry & Co. made hasty preparations for their trip over the mountains.

CHAPTER 4.

Halt!

"JAM!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas, wathah!"

"You howling ass, we're not going to pack jam! We shall have enough to carry, without jam!" roared Blake.

"Weally, Blake——"

"Sandwiches, and some canned stuff, and so on," said Tom Merry, "and a few spots of clobber! And a stick apiece! Never mind jam, Gussy!"

"Weally, Tom Mewwy——"

"Not even a silk hat," said Monty Lowther. "Even if it breaks your heart, Gussy, you must leave your toppers on the plane."

"Weally, Lowthah——"

"Buck up!" said Manners. "I've got my camera—that's all right."

"Bai Jove! Are you goin' to cawwy your camewah, Mannahs? Bettah stick to useful things, old chap!"

"Ass!" said Manners politely.

There was not in the wide world, so far as Harry Manners was aware, anything more useful or important than his camera. Gussy's mysterious black box was nothing to it!

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Aren't you going to pack anything, Gussy?" demanded Herries.

"Yaas, old chap! Wawlings, pway find me that pot of jam."

"Yessir!"

"If you think we're going to wait while you scoff jam——" roared Blake.

"I am not goin' to scoff jam, Blake."

"You're not going to carry a pot of jam, you ass!" hooted Digby.

"I am not thinkin' of cawwyin' a pot of jam, Digby."

"Then what the thump do you want a pot of jam for?"

Arthur Augustus did not answer that question—he was following the steward out of the cabin. For whatever reason Arthur Augustus wanted a pot of jam, it seemed that he was determined on having a pot of jam, and that was that.

"Ass!" remarked Blake.

"Chump!" remarked Dig.

And they left it at that. There was no time to waste on the antics of Arthur Augustus.

Hurriedly the St. Jim's juniors packed rucksacks with articles they deemed necessary for a possible stay in the wild, inhospitable mountains. A few articles of clothing, and food in a handy form, were the chief things. Even Arthur Augustus did not think of taking a top hat!

"Come on, Gussy!" shouted Tom Merry.

"Comin', deah boy!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy came back into the cabin with a pot of jam in his hand. Blake gave him a glare.

"Chuck that away!" he hooted.

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus put the pot of jam down on one of the seats. Then he joined in the packing.

Unless Gussy intended to take that pot of jam with him, it was not easy to see why he had obtained it from Rawlings. Blake was quite determined that he was not going to take it. Every unnecessary ounce had to be avoided in a hard tramp over wild and rugged mountains. If Gussy picked up that pot of jam again, Blake was prepared to grab it.

But Gussy gave no further attention to the jam-pot. He packed a rucksack, slung it over his noble shoulder, and was ready by the time the juniors were leaving the plane.

Blake gave him a suspicious look as he went down the steps. But Arthur Augustus seemed to have forgotten the pot of jam; he followed the other fellows down without even glancing at it.

Rawlings came down to see them start. Pawson had given his instructions to the pilots, who were, with the steward, to remain with the plane. Overhead, the Italian was still circling, flying low.

All the juniors knew that a watchful eye was on them from above. They had no doubt that the dago above had already signalled to the enemy, somewhere in the trackless mountains. Probably he would also signal the news that they had left the stranded plane, and the direction they were taking.

It could hardly be Giuseppe himself in the plane above; but there could be little doubt that he or his confederates were not far away.

"You are ready, gentlemen?" asked Pawson.

"Quite," said Tom Merry.

"Then please follow me."

"Wawlings!" Arthur Augustus lingered a moment to speak to the steward, as the other fellows followed Pawson. "Wawlings, I wely upon you to wemembah my instwuctions."

"Certainly, sir!" said Rawlings.

"You will leave my pot of jam just where I have placed it until I return to the plane, Wawlings."

"Very good, sir." The steward blinked at Arthur Augustus. Gussy's mysterious proceedings with that pot of jam surprised him as much as it had surprised the juniors.

"I am vewy particulah about it, Wawlings," explained Arthur Augustus. "If I find that pot of jam just where I left it when I come on the plane again I shall weward you with a five-pound note, Wawlings."

"Thank you very much, sir!" said the astonished steward.

"Come on, Gussy!" bawled Blake. "Use your legs instead of your chin for once!"

"Wats!"

Arthur Augustus hurried after the party.

Pawson, portly as he was, was striding along at a good rate of speed. He was evidently very anxious to get off the spot before the enemy appeared.

To five members of the party that only meant that Lord Eastwood's man was dutifully anxious for the safety of his youthful charges. It was what they would have expected of the perfect Pawson.

But Manners gave Tom Merry a sarcastic grin as they tramped side by side over the rugged rocks.

"The deah man's vewy keen to keep that black box out of the dago's clutches," he murmured. "Tom, old man, what on earth can be inside that box?"

"Goodness knows!" said Tom.
 "Think Pawson knows?"
 "How can he?" asked Tom, staring. "He's only seen the outside, same as we have. The dago must know, of course, as he's after it; but Pawson can't."
 "No, I don't see how he could," agreed Manners. "He's seen Giuseppe a few times, but I suppose the dago wouldn't be likely to put him wise."
 "Hardly!" said Tom, laughing.
 "He knows it must be fearfully valuable, whatever it is, from the dago being so keen after it," said Manners. "I wonder——" He paused.
 "Well, what now?" asked Tom.

"All we know of that black box, Tom, is that Gussy got it from an American who crashed on a motor-bike near the school before the holidays. The American landed it on Gussy as a last chance of saving it from Giuseppe. But——"
 "Well," said Tom rather uneasily, "what have you got in your head now, Manners?"
 "Well, he told Gussy that crooks were after him to rob him," said Manners slowly. "That much was true, as we know now. But it's a queer bisney, Tom. How do we know that the American wasn't a crook himself?"
 "Oh!" gasped Tom.

"Honest men don't scuttle like that! There's a police force in the country to protect honest men. A crook might be scuttling from his gang if he had a row with them about the loot."
 Tom caught his breath.

"For goodness' sake, not a word like that to Gussy!" he breathed. "I—I suppose it's possible——"
 "Looks more than possible to me—probable," said Manners coolly. "Gussy's just the ass to have something like that landed on him."

Tom Merry shook his head. The thought that Arthur Augustus, in his unsuspecting innocence, might have had loot landed on him by some crook who had quarrelled with other crooks about the plunder from some robbery was too dismaying. It was possible; Tom admitted that. But it was altogether too unpleasant an idea to be welcomed.

"You don't think so?" asked Manners.
 "Well, no, old chap, I can't," said Tom. "It's too awfully thick. I believe you're right about Pawson; but don't let your imagination run away with you, old fellow."
 "Fathead!" said Manners.

And they tramped on in silence. The wild and rugged way lay across a desolate mountain slope; and, looking back after a while, they could no longer see the plane. The Silver Swallow was hidden from sight by a shoulder of the hill.

Jack Blake dropped back a pace or two to speak to the Shell fellows.
 "I suppose Pawson knows where he's going," he said. "Blessed if I can see any sign of any sort of a path! But I suppose Pawson knows."
 "We're rather stranded if he doesn't," said Tom. "But I think it's all right, old bean. He's been here before."

"He seems to have been everywhere," said Blake. "Well, I hope he's got it right. Looks as if there's no end to this."

"Hallo! Pawson's stopping!" called out Monty Lowther.
 The portly figure ahead was leading the way into a narrow gorge shut in by high cliffs on either side. The juniors were now about a mile

from the spot where the plane had been left. No sign of human habitation, no sign of a human being, had yet met their eyes. They might have been lost in the midst of a boundless universe of barren rock.

So far Pawson had not paused once. He kept up the same steady, swift pace; and the juniors tramped after him in single file, or in twos. But now Pawson came to a sudden halt.

"Lost the way, Pawson?" asked Arthur Augustus.
 "No, sir," answered Pawson.
 "What are we stoppin' for, then?"
 "Look, sir!"
 "Bai Jove!"

Ahead of the party, in the gorge, a figure appeared among the rocks.
 A dark-faced Italian, with a red-spotted handkerchief tied over his greasy, black head, emerged into view.

His swarthy face was turned towards the juniors, and his black eyes gleamed at them. They had never seen the man before, but he looked a dago of the same kidney as Giuseppe.

For a moment they wondered whether he was some chance peasant of the mountains, or whether he was an enemy. But that doubt lasted only a moment. The Italian had a rifle under his arm. He swung it to his shoulder, and the muzzle was aimed directly at the St. Jim's party, a black eye gleaming along the barrel.

He did not speak. But the action told them enough. Hardly more than a mile from the forced landing place of the plane they were stopped on their way—the levelled rifle and the dusky, truculent face staring over it barring the path of escape.

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CHAPTER 5.

Sharp Shooting!

"FERMIAMO qui?"

It was Pawson who spoke. He called out the words, addressed to the man with the rifle, half-hidden by rocks, about a dozen yards ahead.

The dusky ruffian grinned.

"Si, signore, si!" he called back. And he made a gesture with the rifle, sweeping the party with the muzzle, making it quite clear that he would fire if they advanced.

"Bai Jove! What is Pawson sayin' to the bwute?" murmured Arthur Augustus. "Anybody know?"

"I think he's asked him if we've got to stop," said Tom.

"We're not stopping!" said Blake, with a gleam in his eyes. "So far as I can see, there's only one man; and one man isn't stopping seven St. Jim's chaps, even with a gun in his paws."

"Wathah not!" said Arthur Augustus emphatically, and he gripped the stick in his hand.

Each of the juniors carried a stick. But a dozen yards of rugged rocks separated them from the ruffian with the rifle, and they did not doubt that the man would pull the trigger if they did not obey his order to halt. Two or three of the party, it was certain, could be picked off like rabbits before the rest reached him if the ruffian was in earnest—and there was little doubt that he was if he was one of Giuseppe's gang.

They looked at Pawson for guidance. They knew that Pawson packed a gun and that he was remarkably skilful in the use of it.

But Pawson looked anything but warlike—perhaps because he was looking a rifle-muzzle in the face, and realised that an attempt to draw a weapon would draw a bullet before the weapon was drawn.

He called to the man in the red head-scarf again, in Italian. The man called back in the same tongue. Pawson, evidently, was at home in the language of the country. In Paris he had spoken French; in the Cevennes, the local dialect of the country; here, in Italy, Italian flowed volubly from his lips! Really, it looked as if the incomparable Pawson was equal to all occasions.

At the same time that the man in the red head-scarf talked, he watched the schoolboys like a cat. Only too clearly, he was prepared to fire if they attempted to pass farther up the gorge.

"Well, what about it, Pawson?" asked Arthur Augustus at last. "We're not stoppin' heah at that wascal's ordahs."

"Pray leave it to me, sir!" said Pawson.

"Certainly, my deah chap! But if we are goin' to wush him, pewpaws you had bettah leave it to us. You are not bound to wisk your life, Pawson."

"On the contrary, sir, I am bound to take all risks to carry out the trust reposed in me by his lordship at home!" answered Pawson. "I shall not allow my master's son to be robbed, sir, if I can prevent it. This man is one of Giuseppe's gang. He has said so. A number of the rascals have been posted in various scattered spots to watch for us when we were forced down in the plane. They have orders to prevent us from escapin'."

"We're not giving in to that rotter, Pawson!" said Tom Merry.

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"Please leave the matter in my hands, sir! The man has orders from Fosco to fire on us if we do not turn back. He will certainly do so, and he has us at every disadvantage."

"Yes, but—"

"He has ordered us to go back," continued Pawson, "and if we do so we fall into the hands of the others, behind. He intends to follow us and keep us in sight under cover of his rifle. I hope I may be able to deal with him, sir, but it will need caution, as he could—and would—put a bullet through any of us at the first sign of hostility."

"The uttah wottah!" breathed Arthur Augustus.

"Please turn back!" said Pawson.

"But weally, Pawson—"

"Play up, Gussy!" said Blake. "Pawson's skipper here!"

"Yaas, wathah! But—"

"Come on, fathead!"

The juniors reluctantly turned back. Pawson followed them, and then the man in the red scarf stepped from the rocks, where he had suddenly appeared in sight, and stepped after them to follow, the rifle half-raised to cover the party as they went.

"Oh!" exclaimed Pawson suddenly.

He stumbled over a loose rock and fell. The portly figure bumped on the earth, and Pawson gave a cry of pain.

The Italian stopped at the same time, keeping his distance and watching them suspiciously over his rifle.

Evidently, he did not intend to venture within reach and give them a chance of handling him. He had the advantage, and he was keeping it. From a distance of ten yards he was going to drive them back down the gorge, like a flock of sheep.

"Andate avanti!" he called out sharply.

Pawson made an attempt to rise. Tom Merry and Arthur Augustus gave him helping hands, and heaved the rather weighty manservant to his feet. Pawson groaned deeply and rubbed his leg.

"Bai Jove! Are you hurt, Pawson?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus—a rather unnecessary question, in view of Pawson's groan and the fact that he was rubbing his right leg tenderly.

Stooping, rubbing that leg, Pawson looked as if he had sprained a limb. But the dusky ruffian in the rear was not inclined to wait. He made an angry gesture with his rifle.

"Andate!" he repeated. "Andate avanti, presto!"

Pawson gave his hip another rub.

What happened next astonished the schoolboys as much as it astonished the Italian.

One instant Pawson was rubbing his hip; the next, a revolver was in his hand, spitting fire.

There was a terrible yell from the Italian, and he went spinning over like a shot rabbit. The rifle crashed on the rocks.

With a leaping rush Pawson—unhurt, to all appearances now—darted back, seized the fallen rifle, and swung it in the air, pitching it far away among the rocks.

"Oh cwikey!" gasped Arthur Augustus, his noble brain quite in a whirl at the startling suddenness of the happening.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Pawson—"

Tom Merry & Co. rushed back. They could hardly believe that the tables had been turned on the enemy so neatly and completely.

The man in the red head-scarf lay groaning on the earth. His dusky face was white, his black eyes rolling. Between his groans he muttered fierce curses in his own tongue.

The juniors gazed at him and at Pawson.

Lord Eastwood's man stood with the smoking revolver in his hand, a grim and rather sardonic smile on his fruity face. There was no sign of injury about Pawson now. It dawned on the juniors that his stumble and his supposed injury had been a trick to take the bandit off his guard. It had succeeded perfectly.

The man in the red head-scarf lay shot through the body. It was not a pleasant sight to school-boy eyes, but they could have little pity for a ruffian who would have shot them down unarmed.

"We may now proceed, gentlemen," said Pawson. "This rascal will give us no further trouble."

"Bai Jove!" said Arthur Augustus, quite faintly.

"Is he badly hurt?" breathed Tom Merry.

"Fairly, I think," said Pawson calmly. "I was obliged to knock him out, sir, and I could not be too particular, in view of the fact that we were under his rifle. No doubt his friends will find him—they have probably heard the shot! It will bring them here—too soon for our safety, if we delay."

"But your leg, Pawson——" said Arthur Augustus.

"My leg is quite all right, sir. I was not hurt; I was giving myself a chance of getting at my hip pocket without that rascal putting a bullet through me."

"Oh cwumbs! But, I say, we—we can't leave him heah like this, bwute as he is," said the tender-hearted Gussy. "We must do something for him——"

"I fear there is no time, sir. Pray follow me!"

"Yaas, but——"

"Come on, Gussy!"

Blake grabbed Arthur Augustus' arm. Pawson was already tramping on up the gorge, and Blake dragged Gussy onward.

The groaning of the fallen bandit died away behind them. But some minutes later, as they wound on a rugged way among the precipitous rocks, a sound of shouting from a distance reached their ears.

It told them that the bandit's confederates had found the wounded man. No doubt the shot had drawn them in that direction. Pawson hurried on at an accelerated pace, and the juniors hurried after him. They were out of sight of the gang, and amid the trackless rocks it was not easy to pick up sign and pursue them.

Once or twice again distant shouting reached their ears. But the sounds died away as they tramped and clambered and stumbled on. And when two or three miles had passed under their feet they hoped, at least, that they had thrown the enemy off the track.

CHAPTER 6.

Camping Out!

"HOT!" murmured Blake.
"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus, fanning his burning face with his straw hat.

High as the altitude was, it was hot—very hot—in the full glare of the Italian sun. Pawson,

plump as he was, tramped on without a pause and without a sign of fatigue. But the school-boys were getting tired—or rather, more than tired.

How many miles had passed under their feet since they had left the landing-place of the Silver Swallow they did not know. For the first three or four they had only thought of pushing on without delay, to escape being encircled by the gang hunting for them in the mountains. But legs were aching now with the endless tramp over rough country.

Pawson had said that the village of San Pietro was about ten miles distant. Tom Merry & Co. were good for ten miles, even with such rough going. But it seemed to them that more than ten miles had been covered as the sun went down in the west, and there was still no sign of human habitation.

More than once Pawson had been seen to pause and look about him with a frown in his brow. They could not help thinking that possibly he was at a loss—which would not have been surprising, even in the wonderful Pawson, in that trackless wilderness.

But he said nothing, and they did not question him. By that time they had little doubt that they were clear of Giuseppe and his gang, and that was so much to the good.

That, undoubtedly, they owed to Pawson. They had been watched for, and spotted, and only Pawson's quickness with his gun had saved them.

Since then he had led them mile after weary mile, and if he had failed to find the intended destination, at all events he had kept them clear of the bandits. And that was the important point. If Giuseppe Fosco was hunting for them, as undoubtedly he was, he did not seem likely to find them now.

Now they were following the high bank of a mountain torrent. Deep below, fifty feet down at least, the water swirled and foamed over the rugged rocks, on their left; on the right a steep hillside rose, barring the sky. Summit beyond summit rose against the blue in the distance.

"Bai Jove! I wondah where we are!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "I am beginnin' to feel as if my beastly legs are goin' to dwop off, deah boys."

"Same here!" grunted Blake.

"Think Pawson's lost the way?" mumbled Herries.

"Weally, it begins to look like it!"

Manners had a sarcastic expression on his face. He was as tired as the other fellows, and perhaps that sharpened his doubts of Pawson.

"Time we had a rest!" said Manners at last. "I don't see any use keepin' on like this!"

"Oh, go it, old man!" said Tom.

"What's the use?" grunted Manners. "Pawson's not leading us anywhere in particular, and we may as well sit down as walk on after him, watching his coat-tails, as far as I can see."

Tom gave his chum a quick look. He guessed what was in Manners' mind. But the other fellows only stared at Harry Manners.

"Pawson's doing his best, I suppose!" grunted Dig.

"Is he?" said Manners.

"Well, isn't he, fathead?" exclaimed Blake. "Do you think he likes hiking over these dashed mountains any more than we do?"

Manners was silent. But Tom Merry could see that it was almost on his lips to speak out.

He knew what Manners suspected—that Pawson had no intention of leading them to any human habitation—at least, until he had succeeded in getting the black box away from Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! If Manners was right, the juniors were simply being tired out in the midst of the rocky wilderness to suit the secret plans of Lord Eastwood's man.

"Weally, Mannahs, it is wathah ungwateful to find fault with Pawson," said Arthur Augustus mildly. "A man can only do his best!"

Manners opened his lips.

"Shut up, old man!" said Tom Merry hastily.

Tom could hardly imagine what would be the effect on Arthur Augustus if Harry Manners blurted out his suspicions of that faithful manservant, in whom Gussy's faith was founded as upon a rock.

"Oh, all right!" said Manners. "But I'm done! I'm not taking another step! I don't see the use, and I'm not going on."

And Harry Manners deliberately sat down. Monty Lowther, who was a little ahead, looked back.

"What are you stopping for?" he called out.

"Fed up!" answered Manners.

"Don't be an ass, old chap!"

"I won't; I'll leave that to you."

Manners sat tight. The rest of the party came to a halt. They could not, certainly, go on without Manners, and Manners refused to stir.

He was convinced by this time that Pawson was simply tiring the party out, that danger from Giuseppe was over, and that Lord Eastwood's man was now playing his own game. And Manners had had enough of it.

"Well, we can all do with a rest!" said Tom Merry.

"Yaas, wathah! But——"

"Pawson's skipper till we get out of this!" said Herries.

"Look here, Manners, old chap, put it on!" urged Lowther.

"Not a step!" said Manners.

Pawson turned back. He came towards the group, his eyes rather sharply on Harry Manners. Once, at Cannes, Tom had wondered whether Lord Eastwood's man had guessed that Manners suspected him. He wondered again now, as he noted that sharp and searching look.

Manners looked back at him quite grimly. He was tired and angry and felt that he was being made a fool of, a mixture of feelings that made him strongly inclined to tell Pawson what he thought of him.

"Look heah, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus. "If we're on the wight twack, we ought to make an effort to push on."

"I agree to that!" said Manners sarcastically. "But are we?"

"Pawson knows," said Arthur Augustus. He turned his eyeglass on the faithful Pawson. "Pway don't think that any fellow heah will dweam of blamin' you, Pawson, if you cannot find the way," he went on. "No fellow can do more than his best. But—are we on the wight twack?"

Pawson coughed.

"I regret, sir, that I am by no means sure!" he answered. "It is many years since I was at San Pietro, and it is far from easy to find a way in these trackless solitudes. I fear that you are very tired."

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"Yaas, wathah! But we could keep on, Pawson, if there is any chance of gettin' any-whah before dark."

"I'm not going on!" said Manners.

Pawson coughed again.

"Weally, Mannahs——"

"Want to take root here?" asked Blake sarcastically.

"Oh rats!" grunted Manners.

Another cough from Pawson.

"We are in hard case," he said. "But it will not improve matters to give way to temper——"

"Who's giving way to temper?" inquired Manners unpleasantly.

Another cough.

"Perhaps, Master Arthur, it would be as well to halt here," said Pawson. "I have been in hope every moment of sighting some landmark—but I must confess that I am somewhat perplexed. We have, at all events, shaken off our pursuers——"

"And we have you to thank for that, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus, with a rather grim glance at Manners.

"Thank you, sir! I hoped very much to obtain the shelter of a roof for you before nightfall, but if you feel equal to camping out for the night in these mountains——"

"We've got no choice about that!" said Manners coolly. "We may as well call it a day! I've known for some time that we shall not hit a village, or any other inhabited place, before night."

"Pway don't be watty, Mannahs——" admonished Arthur Augustus.

"Fathead!"

"I wefuse to weply to that, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "Pawson, pway believe that no fellow heah is even dweamin' of findin' fault with you. Mannahs is wathah tired, that is all. But if you are in doubt about the way, my deah chap, we had bettah camp and west."

"Very good, sir!" said Pawson smoothly. "I have no doubt that in the morning I shall be able to find the way. I have done my best, sir."

"Ewevy fellow heah knows that, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus with emphasis. "We all owe you more than we can wepay."

"You are very good, sir."

The halt having been decided on, the St. Jim's party prepared to camp. Manners, at the moment, was somewhat unpopular, but there was no doubt that the whole party were glad to rest their weary limbs. They were, in fact, tired to the bone.

Rucksacks were unpacked, food sorted out, and the juniors sat down on rugged boulders against the rock wall, the yawning gulf of the deep torrent in front of them.

It was Pawson—dutiful and indefatigable—who descended the steep rocks to the torrent for a can of fresh water from the tumbling stream. The St. Jim's fellows ate sandwiches and biscuits, washed down with fresh water, under the red glare of the setting sun.

"Bai Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus suddenly, a sandwich stopping half-way to his mouth.

"What——"

"The Silvah Swallow!" Arthur Augustus pointed to the sky with his sandwich. All the juniors stared up.

"The old bus!" exclaimed Blake.



Wary as a wolf, the bandit turned even as Manners rushed at him. A knife glittered in the starlight, snatched out instantly by the dagger. But Manners' stick crashed on the bandit's arm as the knife was raised, and the weapon went clattering to the rocks, the Italian uttering a yell of pain and rage.

"They've got clear, then!" said Tom Merry. High up, gleaming against the sunset, soared the Silver Swallow—far up, and far distant, but easily recognised by the juniors.

Evidently the pilot had found the coast clear at last, and had taken off again, as instructed by Pawson.

Probably Giuseppe and his gang had not troubled about the plane at all, after ascertaining that Arthur Augustus and his friends had left her and plunged into the trackless wastes of the mountains. It was Gussy and the black box that Giuseppe wanted, and the plane had been left to its own devices while the dago hunted the schoolboys in the mountains.

"There she goes!" said Blake.

For several minutes the juniors watched the plane, gleaming against the sunset-reddened sky, till it disappeared at last eastward.

The Silver Swallow had resumed the hop to Turin, leaving her passengers stranded in the Alpine wilderness. But it was a satisfaction to Tom Merry & Co. to see her go, and to know that the old bus would be waiting for them at Turin when they succeeded in reaching that city.

After a night's rest, they had no doubt that they would succeed in arriving somewhere on the morrow! It was a tired but hopeful party that sat on the rocky boulders, chewing sandwiches, while the sun went down and darkness deepened over the wild and desolate mountains.

CHAPTER 7.

In the Night!

"SLEEPY?" murmured Manners. Tom Merry blinked.

"Yes, rather; aren't you?"

"Oh, yes!" Manners shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not going to sleep, though."

Tom Merry sat up.

All the others were sleeping. After the heat of the day, the night was cold on the mountains, and the camping out schoolboys kept together for warmth. They had their coats, and a rug or two, and the rucsacks served as pillows. It was far from comfortable, but the flying schoolboys were tired enough to have slept soundly anywhere.

Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, were fast asleep. Monty Lowther slept as soundly as the Fourth Formers. Tom Merry was half-asleep when Manners whispered to him. Manners lay with his shoulders resting against the rocky wall by the path, his eyes open.

Pawson was at a little distance.

Indefatigably Pawson had done all that he could to make his youthful charges as comfortable as the circumstances permitted. Then he had retired to a little distance, and now lay on the rocks, his head resting on his arm, to all appearance asleep.

Starlight glimmered on the wild rocks and on the gulf of the torrent near at hand, from which

came the murmur of tumbling water in the silence of the night.

"You're not going to stay awake, old chap?" murmured Tom Merry.

"Yes!"

"You'll be like a rag in the morning," muttered Tom. "Look here, old man, we're safe from Giuseppe's gang here—"

"I'm not thinking of the dago."

"But—"

"Don't be an ass, Tom! Pawson could have landed us in some inhabited place before this if he had liked. He has deliberately led us wandering to tire us out and force us to camp out—making us tired enough to sleep soundly while he pinches the black box off that ass D'Arcy."

"Um!" murmured Tom.

"I've beaten him so far," said Manners. "Gussy as good as told me to mind my own business last time I saved that mouldy black box for him! Well, Gussy's a silly ass! But he's standing this trip, and I'm not going to see him robbed! It's me against Pawson—and Pawson's not going to win if I can help it."

Tom was silent.

"We're in a scrape," went on Manners quietly. "If Pawson gets the black box off Gussy, he will get it open somehow, and if there's something in it to make it worth his while to chuck us, and his job with Lord Eastwood, he will clear off and leave us to make the best of this."

"Oh!" muttered Tom.

"If he doesn't get it, he will lead us wandering again to-morrow," said Manners, "and then—you remember he mentioned that he had acquaintances in this region, Tom—"

"I remember."

"I've no doubt it was true—and I can guess the kind of acquaintances they are!" said Manners sourly. "If he fails to get the black box to-night, we shall run into his acquaintances to-morrow—some crew of dago crooks—"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I own up that I don't see what's to be done," said Manners. "Our only chance is to chuck Pawson, and try to get out of this on our own! Is it any good speaking out to Gussy?"

"None at all!" answered Tom. "Gussy would not believe a word of it! You know he wouldn't, Manners! The other fellows wouldn't, I think—but it's a dead cert that Gussy wouldn't! He would stick to Pawson all the more if you got his back up by telling him Pawson was double-crossing him. You know it."

"Yes, I know it!" grunted Manners. "No good speaking to Gussy! But what's to be done, Tom? I tell you, Pawson's got friends in these mountains—some gang he's had dealings with. He won't guide us to San Pietro to-morrow—he will guide us into their hands."

"If you're right, Manners, the black box is a goner, and we can do nothing," answered Tom. "Giuseppe has played Pawson's game for him by stranding us in these mountains."

"If we could drop the brute somehow!" muttered Manners. "There may be a chance of that to-morrow—it's our only chance, Tom. Anyhow, he isn't getting the black box to-night—I'm watching that."

"I'll watch, too!" said Tom.

"No need—I'll wake you if you're wanted."

"Rot!" said Tom.

And he sat up against the cliff by Manners' side and kept his eyes open. The other fellows slept on.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1631.

It was not easy for the two tired and sleepy Shell fellows to keep awake. But Manners was determined, and Tom did his best, though every now and then he nodded.

Manners did not nod! There was a grim determination in Harry Manners' heart that Pawson was not going to succeed in his treacherous game. He was going to defeat him to-night; and somehow or other he was going to defeat him again on the morrow. It was a contest of wits between them now, and Manners was not going to lose if he could help it.

He smiled faintly as he saw Tom's chin sink to his chest, and heard his regular breathing at last that told of sleep.

Manners was now the only one awake! But he did not look wakeful as he lay slumped against the cliff, his face shaded by his hat, concealing the fact that his eyes were still open.

Those eyes—heavy with drowsiness, but resolutely open—were fixed on the portly figure that lay at a little distance.

Manners was waiting and watching for Pawson to stir. He was convinced that sooner or later Pawson would stir.

And he was right! The stars of midnight were gleaming down on the camp when the portly form of Pawson moved, and sat up without a sound.

The sharp eyes from the plump face fixed on the huddle of sleeping schoolboys.

Manners did not stir. He watched.

For a full minute Pawson sat motionless, watching, listening. Then, silent, and with a catlike activity curious in so portly a man, he rose swiftly to his feet. Not the faintest sound was heard as he approached the sleeping juniors and bent over Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

Then Manners spoke:

"Is that you, Pawson?"

Lord Eastwood's man started violently.

His hand, already stretching towards the sleeping swell of St. Jim's, shot back. His face turned towards Harry Manners, and for a second the starlight showed it distorted with rage. But only for a second! His voice was smooth as he answered.

"Are you awake, Master Manners?"

"Oh, yes!"

Pawson breathed deep.

"I am sorry that you cannot sleep, sir! You will need all your strength to-morrow. I am afraid these are very uncomfortable quarters for you young gentlemen. I was just seeing whether Master D'Arcy was as well protected from the cold as possible—the wind is very chilly, sir. Perhaps that is what is keeping you awake."

"Perhaps!" said Manners.

Tom Merry's eyes opened. The sound of voices had awakened him. He gave a start as he saw Pawson standing so near at hand.

"What—" he began.

"It's all right, Tom!" said Manners. "Only Pawson looking after Gussy! You know how devoted he is to Gussy!"

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

Pawson stepped back. He stood looking at Manners, his expression inscrutable in the glimmering starlight.

But Manners fancied that he could read the man's thoughts, and he breathed hard, his fingers closing on the stick across his knees.

Unless Manners was mistaken, Pawson was inwardly debating whether to throw aside all disguise and seize the black box by force.

He carried the only weapon in the party. If he chose to stage a hold-up in that lonely and desolate spot, what was to stop him?

The black box, and its hidden fortune, would be in his hands. Unarmed schoolboys had little chance against an armed and desperate man.

Manners was sure that the thought was in his mind. But he was almost equally sure that the astute Pawson would abandon it.

He wanted to save appearances if he could. He did not want to flee with the black box, a hunted criminal, if he could contrive to get it into his hands by stealth and unsuspected. He did not want to plunge into desperate crime if cunning would serve his turn. He had only to wait!

For a long minute Pawson stood there. Then it was clear that, if he had been thinking of desperate measures, he had given up the idea.

"Good-night, sir!" he said softly.

"Good-night, Pawson!" said Manners.

Pawson moved away.

He did not resume his former position. He moved beyond a jutting bulge of the cliff to lay down to rest again.

Perhaps he was seeking a better shelter from the cold wind that blew over the mountain. He disappeared from sight, at all events, and Manners gave Tom Merry a sarcastic grin.

"You can go to sleep!" he said. "Pawson won't try that game again—he knows that chicken won't fight!"

Tom smiled faintly, and closed his eyes. He was asleep again in a few moments. Manners' eyes did not close.

CHAPTER 8.

Bagging a Bandit!

HARRY MANNERS gave a sudden start. Heavy with sleep, but determined not to sleep, he still sat, watching the jutting bulge of the cliff, beyond which Pawson had disappeared an hour ago.

In that direction the path by which the St. Jim's juniors had reached their camp wound away, winding along the foot of the steep rock wall over the rugged edge of the torrent.

Manners did not think that Pawson would try the same game again; indeed, he did not feel sure that Pawson was still at hand. It seemed likely enough to him that the man had got out of sight with the intention of stealing away down the mountain path to carry word to the "acquaintances" whose aid he would need on the morrow.

From that direction came the sound of a footfall. Someone, as yet unseen, was coming up the rugged path, but had not yet appeared round the irregular cliff.

Manners' heart beat faster.

Was it Pawson again? Pawson was not likely to let himself be heard if he was coming.

The next minute Manners knew that it was not Pawson. A wild-looking figure, with a red scarf in place of a hat, and a greasy, dusky face, appeared round the curve of the rocky wall.

It was an Italian—coming up the path, wary and watchful. And as his eyes fell on the bunch of sleeping schoolboys, he muttered an exclamation, and his black eyes glittered in the starlight.

"Che bella cosa!" Manners heard him mutter. "Ecco!"

Manners did not stir.

The fact that the dago was searching the wild

mountain paths an hour after midnight was sufficient indication that he was one of Giuseppe Fosco's gang. But his look and his muttered words of satisfaction left no doubt on the point. The dark, greasy face was full of satisfaction and triumph as he stepped softly nearer the sleepers and stood staring at them.

Evidently the search for the party who had escaped from the plane had gone on through the night. The gang had scattered to hunt for the English schoolboys—and this man, perhaps by chance, had stumbled on them.

Manners' thoughts raced.

If Giuseppe and the rest of the gang were at hand, the game was up. If this man was alone, and the rest at a distance, the game was not yet up!

There was no help from Pawson. The Italian, as he came, had passed the spot where Pawson would have been had Pawson still been there, and would have seen him. Plainly, he had not seen him. That meant that Pawson was gone, as Manners had already half-suspected.

The dusky ruffian, staring at the party, evidently supposed that all were asleep. Manners, motionless, watched him from under the brim of his straw hat, his hand resting on the stick across his knees.

If the rascal's confederates were at hand, doubtless he would call, or whistle, or give some signal to bring them to the spot. But if they were at a distance, he was more likely to leave the party sleeping, unsuspecting of danger, while he returned to guide them to their prey.

Manners waited tensely to see what the dusky rascal would do. If a troop of armed bravoës were at hand, resistance was impossible. But if this rascal was at a distance from the gang, there was a chance yet.

For a minute or more, the Italian stood grinning down at the sleepers. He was satisfied that they were all fast asleep, as they all would have been but for Manners' doubts of Pawson.

He stepped back and turned, to return the way he had come.

From that, Manners knew that the rest of the gang were not within call.

The rascal was going back to call them to the sleeping camp.

Manners set his lips hard. That spying dago was not going to bring Giuseppe Fosco and his crew to the spot if Manners could stop him.

As the Italian turned his back, Manners rose swiftly and silently to his feet, the stick in his hand. He was not giving the bandit a chance to draw his knife if he could help it.

The man was not six paces away. Stick in hand, Manners rose behind him and rushed.

Wary as a wolf, the bandit turned at a sound. But Manners reached him as he turned and lashed with the stick.

A knife glittered in the starlight, snatched out instantly by the dago. Manners' stick crashed on the arm even as the knife was raised, and the weapon went clattering on the rocks, the Italian uttering a yell of pain and rage.

He leaped back from the next lash of the stick, while the whole St. Jim's party, startled out of slumber by that sudden yell, scrambled up.

Manners struck again and again, and then the Italian, yelling under the blows, ducked under the stick and closed with him.

Manners struggled in the grasp of a man twice as strong as himself, shouting for help.

But he did not need to call. At the sight of the Italian, Tom Merry rushed to join him, and Monty Lowther was only a moment behind.

Almost in a moment Tom and Lowther grasped the ruffian, and in the grasp of the three sturdy Shell fellows he was dragged down on the earth.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "Pile in, deah boys!"

He rushed to the help of the Shell fellows, and Blake, Herries, and Digby rushed with him.

The bravo was struggling furiously, spitting out curses as he struggled. Had the knife been still in his hand, there was no doubt how he would have used it; but the knife lay on the earth, trampled underfoot. And the grasp of seven juniors was more than enough for the dago.

He was crumpled down on the rocky earth, and Manners planted a knee on him. Tom Merry and Lowther grasped his arms, and the other fellows all had hold of him somewhere. His upturned face glared with rage like a wild animal's; but the juniors had him helpless. Manners, kneeling on him, crammed a handkerchief into his mouth, and the howling curses died away into choked silence.

"Got the brute!" breathed Manners. "Keep him quiet!"

"Bai Jove! Is it that bwute Fosco?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"No; it's one of his gang, though! If he gets the rest of them here, we're done for!"

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

"You needn't call Pawson—he's not here!" snapped Manners.

"Eh?"

"Get something to tie this brute up!" grunted Manners. "No good calling Pawson—he's miles away!"

"But he must be heah, deah boy!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Oh rats! Get something and tie this brute, you fellows! We've got to make sure of him!"

The Italian was still struggling, like a trapped beast. But he had no chance with seven pairs of hands gripping him.

Tom Merry dragged the head-scarf from the greasy head, and the dusky wrists were dragged together and bound with the scarf. Then the bandit's belt was unbuckled from his waist and buckled round his legs.

"That's all right!" said Manners.

The juniors, breathless from the struggle, released the ruffian. He lay helpless at their feet, biting at the gag and glaring rage.

"If that brute was alone—" breathed Blake.

"He was alone—he was going back for the rest when I got him!" said Manners quietly. "I happened to be awake—and he thought the lot of us were asleep."

"Lucky you were awake, old bean," said Monty Lowther. "If the whole gang had spotted us, our number would be up."

"Yaas, wathah! But where's Pawson?"

"Is Pawson gone, Manners?" asked Tom Merry quietly.

"Yes; gone some time ago, I think."

"But where—why—" exclaimed Blake.

Manners did not answer that.

"It's uttah wot!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "How can Pawson be gone? He must be still asleep."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1631.

"Fathead!" said Manners.

"I will look for Pawson, you fellows! Of course he must be heah," said Arthur Augustus. "Pewwaps he is vevy tired, and sleepin' vevy soundly! He can hardly have wandahed away! I will call him."

Arthur Augustus rooted along the path for Pawson. The others went with him, leaving Manners and Tom Merry standing beside the scowling, glaring prisoner.

"Pawson's gone?" breathed Tom.

"Gone to give the tip to his jolly old acquaintances to be on the look-out for us tomorrow!" said Manners bitterly. "No good telling Gussy that, I suppose?"

"No fear! But it's lucky you were watching for Pawson—this rotter would have brought the rest of the gang down on us!" said Tom.

"We've got him safe, but—"

"But the others won't be very far away!" said Manners. "We've got to get out of this!"

Arthur Augustus came back with a very puzzled face. He was deeply perplexed.

"Pawson's not heah, you fellows!" he said. "It is vevy extwaordinawy—but Pawson seems to have gone! Pewwaps he has gone to see if he can find the wight path while we are westin'—"

"Perhaps!" grunted Manners.

"Well, we've got this beauty!" said Blake.

"He won't cut off now to tell his pals where to drop on us. But this means that Giuseppe and his crew aren't very far away—and the sooner we get out of this the better!"

CHAPTER 9.

Rough Going!

TOM MERRY & CO. stood silent, looking at one another. The bandit lay at their feet, wriggling in his bonds, foaming over the gag, unheeded. Five of the party were quite puzzled and perplexed by Pawson's disappearance, and the two who guessed his real reason and his motive could not say what they knew. To the others it seemed as if Pawson must have left them to sleep while he made an attempt to find the way they were to follow on the morrow—which, as Arthur Augustus remarked, would be just like the faithful chap!

But whatever the reason, he was gone and the schoolboys were left to their own devices. But for the appearance of the bandit they would have slept on undisturbed. But no one was thinking of that now.

"We've got to cut!" said Manners gruffly, as Arthur Augustus shook his head. "And the sooner the better."

"We cannot go and leave Pawson to miss us when he returns, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Bit of a shock for Pawson if he finds us gone and that unwashed rotter in our place!" said Monty Lowther. "But—"

"And what chance have we of gettin' anywhah without Pawson?" continued Arthur Augustus. "He is our only guide."

Manners breathed hard and deep. Tom Merry pressed his arm. It was useless—worse than useless—to speak out on the subject of Pawson. But Manners, it was plain, was strongly tempted to do so.

"We've got to go!" said Manners, almost savagely. "Put it that Pawson's gone to hunt for the path, if you like. Anyhow, he's not here!

That spying dago was on his own when we copped him, but the rest won't be far off. If we stick here till morning we shall see Giuseppe and his gang coming up that path."

"But Pawson—"

"Oh, blow Pawson!" rapped Manners irritably. "I wufuse to blow Pawson, Mannahs! I wegard the suggestion as ungwateful!" said Arthur Augustus with dignity. "Where should we be now if Pawson hadn't seen us through when we were leavin' the plane?"

"That's right enough," admitted Tom Merry. "But we can't wait here, Gussy. Whatever Pawson's gone for, he may not be back till morning, or later. We don't know when he may turn up. We can't wait here for a crowd of dagoes."

"We've got to mizzle!" said Dig. "Get going!"

"Weally, Dig—"

"Talk sense, Gussy!" suggested Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Lot of good telling Gussy that!" said Manners sarcastically. "We've got to manage without Pawson."

"Yaas, but we have no chance of findin' our way without Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pawson will be all wight. He can look aftah himself, as he knows this countwy; but we shall simply get lost—"

"Better get lost than fall in with Giuseppe!" said Blake.

"Yaas, pewwaps you are wight, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus. "We are bound to show eweyw considewation to Pawson, and we cannot let him think that we have tweeked him with diswegard. But if he finds that unwashed wascal lyin' heah, tied up like a turkay, he will pwobably guess why we staggahed along."

"It won't want a lot of guessing," grunted Herries. "Get a move on, and give your chin a rest."

A move having been decided upon, the juniors hastily packed the rucsacks and slung them on.

What chance they had of threading their way out of that rocky wilderness without a guide was problematic, but Manners, at least, was convinced that they had a better chance without Pawson than with him.

Indeed, from Manners' point of view, nothing could have happened more fortunately, for he was assured that the safety of the party consisted in getting rid of Pawson and his guidance.

Leaving the bound man biting at the gag, and scowling like a demon, the juniors started up the rocky path between the torrent and the rocky wall. They had no doubt that the bandit would be found sooner or later by his associates—and they could only hope that it would be later rather than sooner.

The rest had refreshed them, and they tramped on quite briskly under the bright gleam of the Italian stars.

The gorge they were following seemed to wind on endlessly into the endless mountains. In-accessible cliffs were on their right; the tumbling torrent on their left. It was not till more than a mile had been covered that an opening in the cliffs allowed them to turn off the rocky path and leave the torrent behind.

That they were glad to do, for so far their track was easily followed, if Giuseppe & Co. found the bound man and learned what he could tell them.

From the gorge they clambered up a rugged slope, which led them beyond the cliffs to a high, rocky, trackless upland.

Which direction it was best to take was a hopeless puzzle; they could only push on and trust to fortune. The urgent need, at the moment, was to shake off the pursuit of Giuseppe and his gang.

"Bai Jove! It's wuff goin'!" gasped Arthur Augustus as he stumbled and nearly fell.

"Rough and tough!" agreed Blake. "Never mind, so long as we get somewhere at the finish."

"Yaas, wathah, deah boy; but I am afwaid we have not much chance without Pawson."

Grunt from Manners.

"Come on!" said Tom Merry cheerily. "So long as we get a distance from that gang we can trust to luck for the rest."

They tramped on doggedly while the night grew older and the stars paled at the approach of dawn. A glimmer in the eastern sky announced at last that day was at hand. It was hard and slow going, and by that time legs were aching and the pace diminishing more and more.

They were glad to see the glimmer brighten into the rosy glow of dawn. But as the light strengthened and they looked around them nothing but wild rocks and rugged hillsides met their eyes.

"Better look for a camp!" said Manners at last. "We can't keep this up much longer."

"Just thinking so!" grinned Monty Lowther.

Manners came to a halt. At a little distance, in a high, precipitous cliff, a dark, shadowy cavern opened, and Manners pointed to it.

"We can camp cut of sight there!" he said. "When the sun's up we might be spotted from a good distance by those blighters."

"Good egg!" agreed Tom Merry. "We want a rest, that's a cert. Blessed if I can drag one leg after another much longer."

"Yaas, wathah!" murmured Arthur Augustus.

"Oh cwikey!"

Bump!

Arthur Augustus' weary legs stumbled over a loose stone and he went down, bumping!

"Oh cwumbs!" he gasped.

Blake and Herries gave him a hand up. Arthur Augustus tottered to his feet and stood staring round him.

"Come on!" said Tom. "We're camping in that cave, Gussy."

"I've dwopped my eyeglass, Tom Mewwy."

"Blow your eyeglass!" grunted Manners.

"Weally Mannahs—"

"Oh, let's look for it!" sighed Blake. "Gussy without his eyeglass would be like Manners without his camera, or a kid without his rattle—"

There was a feeble chuckle from the tired party.

"Weally, Blake, I wegard that wemark as asinine!" said Arthur Augustus. "The cord bwoke when I fell ovah, and the eyeglass wolloed away. It cannot be vewy fah off."

Five minutes were spent on that lost eyeglass! But it was not discovered. Then Manners settled the matter by marching off towards the cave.

"Come on, Gussy!" said Blake. "You'll have to manage to live without an eyeglass till we hit civilisation again. Rough it, you know."

"I am quite pwepared to wuff it, Blake, but I am vewy wewuctant to pwocceed without my monacle," said Arthur Augustus. "Howevah, if there is no help for it, a fellow must make up his mind to it. Vewy fortunately, I have anothah on the Silvah Swallow, when we get back to it."

"I breathe again!" said Monty Lowther.

"Wats!"

"You fellows coming?" called out Manners, looking back.

"Yes, ass!"

The juniors tramped into the cavern. Manners flashed on his pocket torch, revealing a great gap in the rocky cliff, with rugged walls of rock and a rugged arch above. It extended back fully a dozen yards into the solid rock.

"Safe enough here," he said.

And the St. Jim's party, tired to the very bone, threw themselves down on the rocky floor of the cave, among scattered boulders, and had hardly lain down when they were fast asleep.

CHAPTER 10.

Cornered!

"DIO mio! Dove son i ragazzi!"

Tom Merry wondered whether he was still dreaming.

His sleep had been haunted by dreams of swarthy-faced ruffians hunting among the rocks, and he woke to hear an Italian voice in his ears.

He sat up, rubbing his eyes.

It was high day on the mountains. Bright sunlight streamed in at the mouth of the cavern. Within, all was dark and shadowy; without, the rocks baked in the heat of the high sun.

Tom caught his breath, and his heart almost missed a beat as he looked towards the cave-mouth. Beyond, standing full in view in the bright sunlight, was a figure with a dark, swarthy face under a slouched felt hat, and bright, black beady eyes that glittered and gleamed.

Well Tom knew that swarthy face and those black beady eyes. It was the dago who had tracked the St. Jim's party across France—Giuseppe Fosco!

For a moment Tom fancied that they were discovered; then he realised that the dago was not looking into the cave.

He stood not more than a dozen feet away, staring across the rugged hillside, his face partly turned away.

Tom hardly breathed.

The Italian's voice in angry, disappointed tones had reached him, but the dago did not know that the schoolboys were there; he was close on the track, but he had not found them.

Had they camped in the open they would have been found beyond a doubt; but in the cavern they were hidden by shadows. And there were dozens of such gaps and fissures in the cliffs round about; Giuseppe had no more reason for searching one than another.

The slightest sound might have drawn his attention. Tom Merry was careful to make no sound. He sat silent, hardly breathing, watching the figure in the sunlight, hoping from the bottom of his heart that his comrades would not awaken. One word would have been enough to betray them.

"I piccoli furfanti, dove son!" He heard the angry muttering of the Italian again. Then Giuseppe spoke more loudly. "Luigi, stolto, dove son?"

Another figure appeared and joined the dago. Tom Merry knew him also—it was the bandit who had been left behind, bound and gagged, when the juniors had broken camp in the gorge by the torrent. Evidently his associates had found and released him, and he had led them on the track—so far as he was able. But the dagoes

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1631.

were clearly at a loss now—close as they were to their prey.

"Non so!" grunted Luigi.

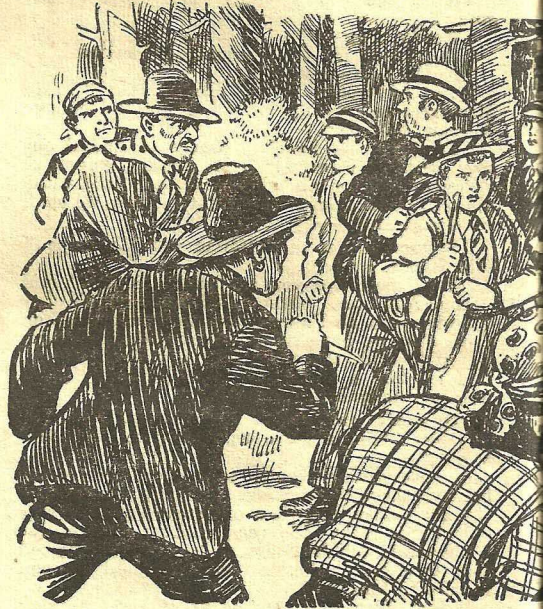
"I furfanti, i furfanti!" snarled Giuseppe.

He moved off with his companion, much to Tom Merry's relief. Another voice called from a distance. It seemed that the whole gang were at hand. But the voices died away.

Tom Merry moved at last. He stretched out his hand to Manners, placing it over his mouth before he shook and awakened him.

Manners' eyes opened, startled.

"Quiet, old chap!" whispered Tom. "They're almost on us. I've just seen Giuseppe; they're outside the cave."



"Look out!" "Oh crumbs!" "Gweat Scott!" The crew rushed out of the trees, encircling them and brandishing their rifles. "Jove!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"By gum!" murmured Manners.

He sat up.

Tom Merry moved from one to another of the party, waking them in turn with the same caution. The St. Jim's fellows were soon all awake and aware of their peril.

"Bai Jove! They've wun us down!" murmured Arthur Augustus. He groped for his eyeglass and captured only a broken cord. "Oh bothah!"

"Keep in cover!" muttered Blake. "Even if they look into the cave they won't spot us behind these rocks; if they search it we're done."

"No reason why they should," said Manners. "They can't search every cave in these dashed mountains."

"They're not gone," said Digby, as the sound of a voice floated to the ears in the cavern.

"Plain enough they don't know we're here," said Lowther. "Ten to one they'll pass on if we keep quiet."

"Hush!" breathed Tom Merry.

The juniors were as still as mice as a figure passed in front of the cave-mouth. They ducked down behind the rugged boulders with which the rocky floor was littered. Whether the bandit glanced into the cave they did not know; but he did not enter, and his footsteps died away.

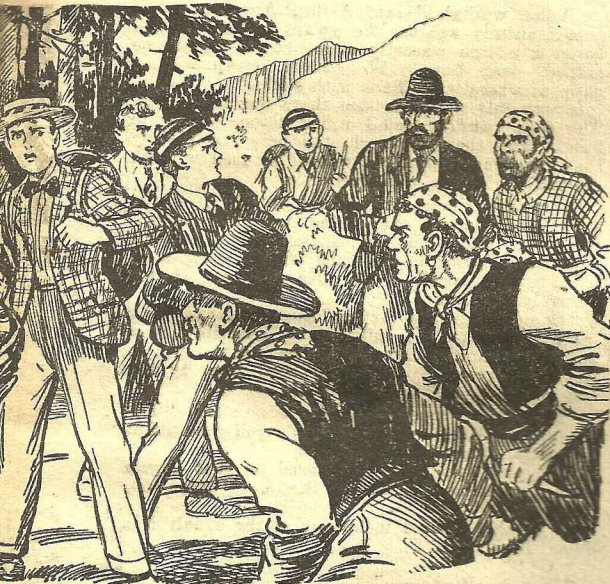
"They're searching," whispered Lowther.

"Blow 'em!" murmured Blake.

The juniors waited in tense silence. They saw nothing further, and no sound came to their ears.

Tom Merry ventured at last to crawl to the cave-mouth and peer out into the hot sunlight.

What he saw was not reassuring. Among the rugged rocks, seated or sprawling, were five



tartled schoolboys came to an abrupt halt as a wild-looking man with a knife in his hand stepped forward. Eight or nine Italians surrounded them. "Bai Jove! Are these some of Giuseppe's gang?"

figures. One of them was Giuseppe Fosco; another the man he had called Luigi; the other three, rough and wild-looking ruffians, with knives in their belts, and one of them with a rifle at his side.

Evidently they were camping. All of them looked fatigued, which was not surprising as it was fairly clear that they had been on the hunt in the mountains all through the night. A scent of garlic came to Tom; they were eating a meal as they sat and sprawled.

Giuseppe was smoking a cigar and scowling through the smoke. Tom saw him rise to his feet, cast a scowling glance over the rocky wilderness, and sink down again, muttering savagely.

Giuseppe was at a loss—that was clear. The man called Luigi, when he was found and released, had been able to point out the way the juniors had gone, and it had been easy to follow till they had turned away from the torrent.

After that, only very doubtful sign could have guided the pursuers—and Giuseppe's look showed that he was not at all sure that he was on the right track.

Tom crept back into the cave.

"Still there?" murmured Blake.

"Yes; they're camping and feeding."

"Blow 'em!"

"We've only got to keep quiet," said Manners.

"Pretty clear that they haven't the faintest idea that they're near us."

The juniors waited tensely. There was nothing for it but to wait in silence, and hope that the bandits would pass on their way.

"Look!" breathed Blake suddenly.

At a distance a slouched hat passed in front of the cave.

"Bai Jove! That's that wotten dago Giuseppe!" whispered Arthur Augustus.

The black hat disappeared again.

"Looks as if they're searching for sign," said Blake. "They won't find much on these rocks."

"Not likely!"

Again and again the sound of footsteps reached the ears of the juniors in the cavern. The bandits had finished their meal, and were searching the rugged hillside, obviously in the hope of picking up some sign that the schoolboys had passed that way.

Suddenly a loud shout rang out from a little distance.

"Ecco! Ecco!"

"Bai Jove! What is the chap sayin' 'echo' for?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I shouldn't think they were vewy intwested in echoes."

"Fathead!" murmured Manners. "It means 'Look,' or 'Behold.' It means that somebody's found something."

"Oh ewumbs!"

"Ecco!" came the shout again. "Giuseppe! Ecco!"

The juniors looked at one another. There was a babble of excited voices at a little distance. All the bandits had gathered round the man who had shouted and who had evidently discovered something.

"What the thump—" whispered Blake.

With one accord the juniors crept nearer the cave-mouth and looked out from cover of the boulders strewn there. The bandits were standing in a bunch with excited faces. One of them was holding up something that flashed back the rays of the sun.

It was a circular disc of glass, with a fragment of broken cord attached to the rim. All the juniors knew what it was—and so, clearly, did Giuseppe! He was grinning with glee.

"Bai Jove!" murmured Arthur Augustus. "The wottahs have found my monocle!"

It was D'Arcy's eyeglass in dirty, dusky fingers that flashed in the sunshine. And the grinning satisfaction in Giuseppe's face was reflected in the other swarthy visages. They heard Giuseppe's voice:

"Buono! Buonissimo! Il ragazzo e qui!"

"Anybody know what that means?" whispered Arthur Augustus.

"Yes," grunted Manners. "It means 'Good! The boy is here!' Your precious eyeglass has given us away, you fathead!"

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Game's up!" said Manners. "You can get ready to hand over that mouldy black box, Gussy!"

"Wubbish!"

"Well, if it had to go I'd rather the dago had it than the other rotter!" muttered Manners.

"What othah wottah, Mannahs? What are you talkin' about?"

"Quiet!" murmured Tom Merry.

There was little hope left now, and the juniors knew it. The bandits, certain that they had been on that very spot, were searching again—and this time they could hardly hope that the cavern would remain unexplored.

They could hear tramping feet among the rocks and calling voices. Suddenly a dark shadow blotted the sunlight at the cavern's mouth.

It was Giuseppe Fosco—looking in!

CHAPTER 11.

A Slip 'Twixt Cup and Lip!

GIUSEPPE laughed.

It was an exultant laugh.

Standing in the mouth of the rocky cavern, he stared in and laughed. So long as the bandits were at a distance, the boulders covered the schoolboys—but at a close view, they were revealed.

Giuseppe laughed loud and long.

"Che bella cosa!" he chuckled. "Piccoli furfanti, I have found you! I think that also I find la scatola nera—one black box! Yes! Oh, yes, I think! Little signors, will you have the bounty to walk out of a cave to meet a friend who is so happy to see you! Yes, I do think!"

The juniors rose to their feet.

They were discovered, and the game was up! They grasped their sticks in their hands, and Giuseppe laughed again as he saw the action.

Taking off his slouched felt hat, the dago bowed to them with mocking politeness. Giuseppe was in a mood of grinning triumph. Behind him his associates gathered, staring into the cave and grinning.

"You will put down a bastone—a stick!" grinned Giuseppe. "Oh, yes, I do think! You walk out of a cave when I ask! Oh, yes! Otherwise there is a knife—there are many knives—and there will be blood! Oh, yes! Buono giorno, piccoli signori, buono giorno! So happy a meeting with my young friends, to give a black box! Oh, yes, I do think!"

"You wotten wascal!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Giuseppe chuckled.

"You call me one name, and I so glad to see you, little signor! Non importa niente! It is a scatola nera—a black box—that I want! You give, you go your ways—I want you no more!"

"You will certainly nehav get the black box fwom me, you wotten wuffian!" retorted Arthur Augustus.

"I do think!" chuckled Giuseppe. "Many time I make to take the black box! In Parigi—no! In Cannes—no! There is a trick, and I do not get one black box! But it is not to defeat Giuseppe Fosco! Mai! Mai!"

"If you think you are gettin' hold of the black box, you uttah wottah, you are makin' wathah a mistake!"

"I think—yes, I do think!" grinned Giuseppe.

"It is what you call, in your tongue, a catch! This time it is O.K., as my American friend he say! Yes! I make one friend to fire on a plane to force him down—yes—after that, it is in my hands! You have a little black box, signore! Will you have a goodness to walk out of a cave?"

The juniors stood in a group, grasping their

sticks. It was hopeless to think of resisting the armed gang, but it went sorely against the grain to yield to the grinning dago.

But as they did not stir at his order, the grin vanished from Giuseppe's swarthy face, and a flash of ferocity came into his black beady eyes.

"I coltelli!" he rapped to his companions, and the knives were drawn at the word.

Giuseppe stepped back, while the four bandits stepped into the cave, knives in hands. From outside, the dago called:

"You put down a bastone, you walk out of a cave, or you fall under a knife! You take choice, little signori!"

Tom Merry drew a deep breath.

"Nothing doing, you fellows!" he said. "We haven't a dog's chance! We've got to bite on it."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "It goes feahfully against the gwain to take ordahs fwom a wotten wascally dago, but it cannot be helped, deah boys! We cannot swap with a gang of wascally wuffians with sticks."

It was only too clear that there was no chance. The four bandits closed round them, knives in hands, and their looks showed only too plainly that the deadly weapons would be used without hesitation if there was resistance.

In savage silence the schoolboys dropped the sticks and walked out of the cave, the bandits following them—one of them giving Arthur Augustus a prick in the back with a sharp steel point as the swell of St. Jim's moved in too leisurely a manner.

"Oooh!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

He turned on the ruffian with gleaming eyes, and the bandit threw up the knife with a menacing gesture. Blake grasped him by the arm and dragged him out of the cave.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "The cheekay wuffian— Please don't dwag me about like that, Blake!"

"Do you want to be skewered on that dago's sticker, you ass?" hooted Blake. "Come on, fathead!"

"I uttably decline to huvvy at the ordah of a dago, Blake—"

"Ass!"

"Weally, Blake—"

"Come on, chump!"

Blake hooked his noble chum out of the cave.

The juniors stood blinking in the blaze of the sun after the shadowy interior of the cave. The gang of bandits surrounded them, cutting off any possible chance of escape.

Giuseppe held out a swarthy hand.

"La scatola nera!" he said. "Give me a black box, little signor! Dio mio! It is long that I search for it, and now—"

Giuseppe Fosco broke off suddenly.

The juniors and his fellow bandits stared at him in wonder as his outstretched arm dropped to his side, a ghastly wave of pallor came over his swarthy face, and his black eyes rolled wildly.

For an instant they did not know what was happening. Then, as the report of a firearm, following the shot, rolled and echoed on the mountain air, they knew.

"Dio!" shrieked Giuseppe, clawing the air with his hands.

He staggered, his knees sagging under him, and went with a crash to the rocky earth.

The juniors gazed at him in utter horror. They could hardly realise what had happened! In the very moment of his triumph, the dago rolled at their feet, shot through the body.

Enemy as he was, unscrupulous, ferocious, and ruthless enemy, the schoolboys gazed at him with horrified faces. He would have robbed them—he would have taken their lives had they resisted—but it was terrible to see him stricken down so suddenly and fearfully.

He lay groaning at their feet.

"Bai Jove!" stammered Arthur Augustus, through his chattering teeth. "Who— Oh cwikey! What—"

From the bandits came a yell of startled fright. Their savage eyes searched the high rocks and cliffs surrounding the spot.

Who had fired that shot could not be seen. It had whizzed from the cover of the rocks at a distance, the marksman invisible. The juniors gazed round also, as startled and puzzled as their enemies.

"I carabinieri!" panted Luigi.

Crack!

Another shot rang, and Luigi gave a yelling howl as the bullet scored along a dusky cheek, leaving a deep cut and a spurt of red.

Instantly the bandit turned and bounded away! The other three tore after him.

Some marksman, high up in the rocks, was firing at them. From Luigi's words it was clear that the bandits supposed that the carabinieri had come on them. Unless it was a military patrol, it was difficult to guess who was firing on the gang of mountain bandits.

"The carabinieri!" breathed Tom Merry.

"By gum, we're in luck, if it's the military!"

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The bandits, running like hares, vanished in the distance. Giuseppe lay groaning where he had fallen, utterly unheeded by his associates in their flight. Another shot rang out, from where the juniors could not discern, fired after the running bandits, and accelerating their flight.

The schoolboys stood where they were. Strangely, suddenly, the danger had passed—the bandits had vanished, and Giuseppe lay at their feet. His groans died away into silence as he sank into insensibility.

From a ridge on the mountainside a figure appeared in sight, a smoking revolver in its hand. It was a portly figure, and it descended towards the spot where the schoolboys stood, with a nimble activity oddly out of keeping with its portliness.

"Bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Pawson!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Pawson, by gum!" gasped Blake.

It was Pawson! The juniors watched him blankly as he scrambled down from the rocks and came towards them. It was Pawson—Lord Eastwood's man, as usual, was on the spot when he was wanted!

CHAPTER 12.

According to Plan!

"**B**AI Jove! You are the wight man in the wight place as usual, Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Thank you, sir!" said Pawson. He arrived a little breathless, but cool and calm, and with his deferential manner quite unimpaired. "You are very kind to say so, sir."

"Jolly glad to see you again, Pawson!" said Blake. "But how the dickens did you get here?"

"I suppose you came back and found us gone?" said Herries.

"I twust you wealised, Pawson, why we had

bwoken camp, and did not suppose, for a moment, that we were tweating you with diswegard!" said Arthur Augustus anxiously.

"Quite, sir!" said Pawson. "I regret that I left the camp, sir, as matters turned out, but I certainly did not suppose that the bandits were anywhere near at hand. I went, sir, to see if I could discover the route to San Pietro while you were asleep, hoping, sir, to be able to do so, and to guide you there at dawn—"

"Yaas, I guessed that that was your weason, Pawson!" assented Arthur Augustus. "I twust you had some luck."

"Yes, sir; I found some landmarks at a distance, and am now quite sure of the route," said Pawson. "Unfortunately, I was unable to return to the camp till dawn, having covered a good deal of ground. I was very much distressed, sir, to find that you were gone, but I guessed the reason at once when I sighted Giuseppe and his gang."

"So you followed on," said Blake.

"Yes, sir! I had no indication of the direction you had taken, so it seemed best to me to keep Giuseppe in sight in order to be on hand if the rascals traced you," said Pawson. "I have been watching them for a considerable time, unseen myself."

Manners was watching Pawson quietly as he was speaking. Manners had no doubt that he could pick out what was true from what was false in Pawson's tale.

"I desired, sir, to avoid a conflict if possible, the odds being so very heavy!" said Pawson. "But when I saw you in their hands, I had no choice but to intervene. I am sure you will realise, gentlemen, that I had no choice but to fire from ambush, as the bandits were five to one, and I had, of course, no chance otherwise to effect your rescue."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, of course," said Blake. "Thank goodness you turned up, Pawson."

But, at the same time, the juniors glanced uneasily at Giuseppe, lying senseless at their feet on the rocks.

With five armed and desperate bandits to deal with, Pawson certainly was justified in shooting down the leader from ambush, and the dago undoubtedly deserved what had come to him. But it gave them a painful shock, all the same.

"I am now able, sir, to guide you to your destination," went on Pawson, "and it would be advisable not to linger here. The other rascals may return when they recover from their alarm."

"Yaas, wathah!" said Arthur Augustus. "But—" He glanced at the insensible dago again. "But—pway see wethah anythin' can be done for that wottah, Pawson—he is a feahful wuffian, but I twust that—that—" Gussy's voice faltered.

"Very good, sir!" said Pawson.

He bent over the dago, the juniors watching him anxiously. It was clear that Giuseppe was hard hit; and, from the way his followers had scampered off, it seemed unlikely enough that they would return to his aid. Rascal as the dago was, none of the juniors felt disposed to leave him to his fate unaided.

"You need have no fear for this ruffian, sir!" said Pawson. "He has a severe wound, but if you desire, I will bandage him, and there is no reason why he should not recover in the course of time—"

"Pway do anythin' you can, Pawson."

"Certainly, sir."

"When we get to San Pietwo, Pawson, we can send somebody to cawwy him in," said Arthur Augustus.

"Quite easily, sir, if you wish," assented Pawson. "No doubt he will recover in the course of time, though I doubt whether he will be on his feet again under six months. Perhaps you will prepare to start, sir, while I am attending to him."

Relieved in their minds on the score of Giuseppe, the juniors packed the rucksacks in the cave and prepared to start. When they were ready to go, Giuseppe still lay insensible, but with his wound bandaged, and made as comfortable as the circumstances permitted.

"How fah is it to San Pietwo?" asked Arthur Augustus when the St. Jim's party at last left the spot.

"Not more than four miles, sir!" said Pawson. "I was fortunate enough during the night to discover a certain landmark—a wood in a valley, which I remembered—on the other side of it lies the village. In two or three hours, sir, we shall reach San Pietro, without fail."

"Bai Jove! That's wippin'!"

"Thank goodness for that!" said Blake. "I've had about enough of these jolly old Alps."

The juniors tramped on cheerily after Pawson. It was a relief to them that Giuseppe's wound was not fatal, and it was undoubtedly another relief to know that he was done with now for good. Giuseppe's chase of the black box was definitely at an end if he was going to be, as Pawson said, laid up for six months or so. There was nothing more to be feared from the dago during Tom Merry & Co.'s holiday trip.

The prospect of getting out of that wilderness of mountains, and rejoining the Silver Swallow at Turin, was very cheering.

But there was one member of the party who did not believe that the troubles of the flying schoolboys were over.

Manners had a rather grim face as he tramped on by the side of Tom Merry. One peril had been escaped—but Manners had not the slightest doubt that another was ahead, little as the other fellows suspected it.

"Nothing doing, I suppose, Tom?" he said at last in a low voice. "Pawson has got us again."

"We should be in a rather bad box if he hadn't, old chap!" said Tom.

"I know that! He's knocked out the other rogue," said Manners. "Only one rascal after the black box now—a more dangerous rascal than the other, Tom. We're in his hands—unless we chuck him."

Tom shook his head.

"We can't do that, Manners. You know that Gussy wouldn't believe a word against Pawson—especially now he's just pulled us through."

"I know!" Manners knitted his brows. "We could chuck him if we liked—Gussy wouldn't, and it's Gussy that matters. You know, as well as I do what Pawson left camp for last night, Tom."

Tom was silent.

"He's fixed it up with those jolly old acquaintances of his. He knew the way out of this wilderness all the time if he'd chosen to take it! He kept us lost long enough to lay his plans! We're walking into an ambush now."

"I-I wonder—" muttered Tom.

"I don't," said Manners. "I know! After

that black box has been taken off Gussy, Pawson will lead us to San Pietro, I've no doubt. The black box will be in his pocket then! Any good telling Gussy where to look for it?"

Tom Merry laughed.

"Hardly!"

"Any good telling him now that the best thing to be done is to chuck Pawson, and try our luck on our own?"

"Guard with your left, if you do!"

Manners grunted.

Obviously there was nothing to be done. Pawson, if he was double-dealing, was master of the situation.

"Is that the jollay old wood, Pawson?" asked Arthur Augustus at last.

"Yes, sir!"

The party had been descending for some time. Now they were entering a wide valley, in which grew a thick wood, impenetrable to the eyes of the juniors, as they approached it. But Pawson evidently knew a path, for he did not pause. A little later the St. Jim's fellows were threading their way by a scarcely marked track, under heavy shady branches, a welcome relief from the glare of the noonday sun.

"All sewene now, deah boys!" called out Arthur Augustus. "When we get through this wood, we're all wight."

"We're not through yet!" grunted Manners.

"Gettin' tired again, old chap?"

"Fathead!"

"Bai Jove! You are weally not vevy polite, Mannahs."

"Bad Manners!" said Monty Lowther.

"Yaas, wathah! Ha, ha!"

Grunt from Manners. He was expecting every moment now to see those acquaintances of Pawson's.

If the village of San Pietro really lay on the farther side of the wood, Manners did not expect Arthur Augustus to get through that wood with the black box still in his possession. He had not the slightest doubt that Pawson had planned an ambush during the night, and that the St. Jim's fellows were walking blindly into it.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Blake suddenly. "Who—look out! Oh, my hat!"

There was a rustle in the thickets bordering the path. The next moment there was a rush, and the startled juniors were surrounded by a wild-looking crew, rushing out of the trees, encircling them, and brandishing knives.

CHAPTER 13.

Where is the Black Box?

"LOOK out!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Gweat Scott!"

"Pawson—"

"Oh crickey!"

The startled schoolboys came to an abrupt halt. Eight or nine swarthy Italians surrounded them, with knives in their hands. Pawson's plump hand went to his hip pocket—but came away empty! The odds were too hopeless for resistance—if Pawson had thought of resistance!

"Pray keep cool, gentlemen!" exclaimed Pawson. "Pray keep calm!"

"Bai Jove! Are these wottahs some of Giuseppe's gang or are they wobbahs, or what?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

"Please do not attempt to resist!" said Pawson

anxiously. "I will speak to them in their own language. I will ascertain—"

"I am not goin' to be wobbled."

"Shut up, Gussy, old man!" said Blake. "Leave it to Pawson. Do you fancy that you can scrap with a dozen dagoes with stickers?"

"Weally, Blake—"

"I am sorry for this, gentlemen!" said Pawson. "This part of the country is in a somewhat lawless state at present. These mountains are haunted by gangs of currency smugglers. If these ruffians intend to go through our pockets I am afraid there is no help for it."

Manners gave a sarcastic laugh, which he did not trouble to restrain.

It was quite likely that some gang of currency smugglers, coming on a party of tourists in the wild mountains, might stop them and go through their pockets. But what Manners had expected had happened. He knew perfectly well what was wanted!

The juniors stood in a group, encircled by swarthy faces and drawn knives, while Pawson addressed, in Italian, a black-bearded ruffian in a red sash, who appeared to be the leader.

The juniors understood hardly a word of the rapid babble of Italian. Pawson appeared to be arguing with the black-bearded man, who finally ended the argument with a flourish of his knife.

Lord Eastwood's man turned to the waiting juniors.

"I am sorry to say that these men—a gang of smugglers—intend to rob us," he said. "I advise you very earnestly not to resist. They will do us no harm if we hand over what we have."

"I have a vewy stwong objection to bein' wobbled by a gang of gweasy dagoes, Pawson!"

"I fear that it cannot be helped, sir!" murmured Pawson. "Please do not provoke them to violence by a useless show of resistance."

"Bite on the bullet, Gussy!" said Blake. "We're for it! Lucky we left most of our cash on the plane. These blighters don't know anything about that mouldy old black box! Let them rip!"

There was no help for it. The futility of resistance was clear enough. Even Arthur Augustus realised that, indignant as he was. Pawson, the only one who was armed, was not thinking of resistance, and it was useless for the schoolboys to think of it.

They stood silent, while two or three of the gang, putting up their knives, proceeded to search their pockets.

Such cash as was found in their pockets was taken and handed over to the black-bearded man. Manners, with a sarcastic eye, noted that Arthur Augustus was searched more carefully than the rest. He noticed that Pawson watched the searching of Arthur Augustus intently. But the black box did not come to light.

The pilfering over, the juniors expected to be allowed to go on their way. Tom Merry gave Manners a curious look.

If this was, as Manners had foreseen and declared, an ambush laid for the purpose of snaffling the black box, Pawson's "acquaintances" had overlooked it!

Manners' lip curled.

"We're not through yet!" he said coolly.

He was right!

The black-bearded man and Pawson were speaking again in Italian. The juniors caught the words "scatola nera"—which they knew meant "black box." Pawson turned to the swell of St. Jim's.

"I regret this very much, Master Arthur," he said apologetically, "but it appears that this man has heard something of the black box—no doubt from Giuseppe. He demands that it be handed over to him."

"Bai Jove!"

"This is a blow to me, sir!" said Pawson. "I had hoped very earnestly to save your property for you, sir. I feel this very much."

"Pway don't wowwy, Pawson! You couldn't help this," said Arthur Augustus. "It's nobody's fault."

"I have done my best, sir. This is a blow to me. But I fear that there is nothing to be done but to hand over the black box," said Pawson. "These ruffians are prepared to go to any length to obtain it."

The juniors stood silent. There was no help for it; the black box, after so many vicissitudes, could not be saved now.

"As they have not found it on you, sir, I presume you have concealed it," said Pawson. "May I advise you, sir, to hand it over, painful as it is for you to do so. Otherwise, it will be taken by force."

"Not at all, Pawson!"

"I can only say, sir, that these ruffians are prepared to strip and search you, and that resistance is out of the question—"

"Yaas, but I haven't the black box with me, Pawson."

"Wha-at?" stuttered Pawson.

"What?" gasped Blake.

"Oh crumbs!" exclaimed Manners.

All the juniors stared blankly at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy! Not for a moment had they doubted that the black box was there. Not for

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a moment had Pawson doubted it. Gussy's statement took the whole party by surprise.

"You—you haven't got it!" stuttered Tom Merry.

"Oh, gum!" breathed Lowther.

Manners chuckled.

"Certainly not, deah boys!" answered Arthur Augustus. "I wasn't likely to cawwy the black box about with me in these beastly mountains with that wottah Giuseppe on my twack!"

"Oh, great pip!"

"It's all wight, Pawson!" went on Arthur Augustus. "I— Bai Jove! What's the mattah with you, Pawson?"

He stared at Lord Eastwood's valet.

For once the perfect Pawson's self-possession seemed to have deserted him.

His plump face was transfigured with rage. Arthur Augustus gazed at him in blank astonishment. Never had he seen such a look before on the plump face of the perfect Pawson.

Manners understood that look, if D'Arcy did not! After all his cunning plotting, all his unscrupulous scheming, this was a knock-down blow for Pawson. And for the moment he could not control his fury.

"Bai Jove! Pawson, what—what—"

"This will not do!" Pawson's voice came hoarse. "Hand over the black box at once!"

"What?" ejaculated Arthur Augustus. "Are you mad, Pawson? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Do you think—"

Pawson checked himself. The effort he made to recover himself was plainly written in his face. But he succeeded at length, and went on more calmly. "Master Arthur, it is useless to attempt to deceive these men, who know perfectly well that the black box is in your possession. Give it up, and save violence."

Arthur Augustus gazed at him. His gaze was like ice.

"You forget yourself, I think, Pawson!" he said very distinctly. "We all owe you so much that I wegwet havin' to speak to you with sewevity. But I am not a fellow to tolewate impertinence, Pawson."

For a second it seemed that fury would blaze up again in Pawson's plump face. But he controlled himself.

"Master Arthur! I advise you—I urge you, for your own sake and the sake of your friends, to hand over the black box—"

"Are you deaf, Pawson? You have heard me say that I have not got the black box with me!"

"Where is it, then?" gasped Pawson.

"On the Silvah Swallow."

"On the Silver Swallow!" repeated Pawson, as if he could not believe his ears—as, indeed, he hardly could.

"Yaas."

"You—you left it on the plane!" gasped Pawson.

"Precisely."

"Oh!"

"You see, it seemed extwemely pwob that Giuseppe and his gang would wound us up on these mountains befoah we got through. Natuwallly, I was not goin' to let them gwab the black box if they did! I parked it on the Silvah Swallow befoah we left. It is safe at Tuwin long ago."

"Oh!" gasped Pawson.

"I entially fail to undahstand you, Pawson! I should have supposed that you would be feahfully glad to heah that the black box was safe

fwom these wascals! What do you mean, Pawson?"

Pawson stood looking at him fixedly.

Manners winked at Tom Merry, who smiled. Pawson had to realise that the black box was not present. It was a crushing blow to him. But now that he had to realise it, he realised also that it was necessary for him to play his old game—the deferential manservant—till he had another chance.

It was some moments before he could trust himself to speak. But when he did, his voice came bland and deferential, as of old.

"I am glad, sir—more glad than I can say—to hear that the black box is safe at Turin. I am really delighted, sir! I—I had no idea, of course, that you had left it on the plane. It—it never crossed my mind for a moment. I—I trust that I shall be able to make these men believe—"

"They can go on searchin' me if they like, Pawson! They will certainly not find the black box."

"You will excuse me, sir, for a—a moment's excitement, I am sure! My alarm for your safety, sir—"

"Yaas, that's all wight, Pawson—I quite undahstand! Pway don't mench," said Arthur Augustus. "You weally quite startled me for a moment, Pawson—but I quite undahstand that it was only your devotion, my deah chap!"

Pawson gave him a rather singular look and turned to the black-bearded Italian.

There was a rapid babble in Italian, but Pawson apparently succeeded in satisfying the ruffian; not a difficult matter, Manners thought, as the whole crew were in Pawson's pay! Anyhow the ruffianly gang backed into the trees and disappeared, and the St. Jim's party were allowed to proceed on their way.

CHAPTER 14.

A Very Bright Idea!

"JAM!" said Jack Blake.

"Yaas! Wawlings!"

"Sir!"

"Pway bwing me a spoon—a large spoon!"

"Yessir!"

Tom Merry & Co. gazed at Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

It was the following day, and the St. Jim's party were back on the plane.

After the ambush in the wood they had reached the end of their Alpine wanderings. Manners had no doubt that Pawson was now only anxious to get back to the Silver Swallow!

Anyhow, they were in a mountain village within an hour, where a country cart was dispatched to fetch in Giuseppe; and another, at the same time, conveyed the St. Jim's party to the nearest railway station.

The night train carried them on to Turin.

They reached that city in the morning. Pawson earnestly advised a rest at the hotel selected for the party before going out to the airfield where the Silver Swallow had landed. But Arthur Augustus was anxious to have the black box safe in his hands again now that the danger from Giuseppe was over, so out to the airfield they went.

Pawson packed them dutifully in a car, informing Master Arthur that he would await them at the hotel. But Pawson apparently

(Continued on page 36.)

FRANK RICHARDS' PERIL!

By *Martin Clifford*

When Frank Richards is called upon to act as an interpreter for a Frenchman, he finds himself involved in a matter of life and death!

Called Away From School!

"HALLO! Who's that?" murmured Bob Lawless.

All Cedar Creek School looked round. Cedar Creek was at lessons in the big lumber school-room. Doors and windows were wide open on the warm afternoon to let in the breeze from the forest.

The big school-room door had suddenly been darkened, and a long shadow fell across the floor inside. Miss Meadows glanced round, not looking very pleased. The Canadian schoolmistress did not like interruptions in lesson-time. On that point she differed from her pupils. All the members of her class—boys and girls—were quite willing to give geography a rest.

A man in riding-boots stood in the doorway—a rather tall, sunburnt man, with a thick, dark beard. He was looking into the school-room, and he raised his stetson hat as he met Miss Meadows' inquiring eyes.

"Stranger lost his way, you bet!" grinned Chunky Todgers. "He's dropped in to ask the trail to Thompson. Miss Meadows'll scalp him."

"Let's hope he'll take a long time asking questions!" yawned Frank Richards. "If some chap's sent to show him the trail, I'm the man!"

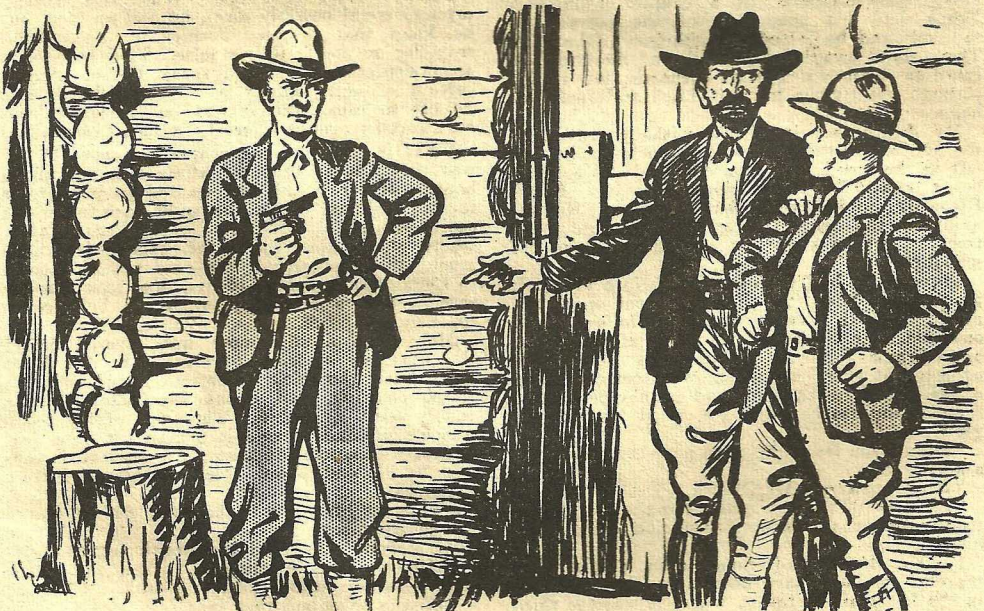
"No fear!" murmured Bob Lawless. "I'm the antelope. I'd guide him all the way to Toronto this afternoon with pleasure!"

"Same here!" said Vere Beauclerc, laughing. "Silence in the class, please!" rapped out Miss Meadows severely.

And Frank Richards & Co. were mute.

The bearded stranger advanced into the school-room, hat in hand, his manner very civil and courteous.

"Please excuse this interruption, madam!" he said, addressing Miss Meadows. "My name is Smith, and I am a stranger in this locality. Some distance from here I came upon a traveller who had been thrown from his horse and hurt. He appears to be a French-Canadian, and speaks only French. I want to convey him to his home, wherever it is, but I cannot understand a word he says. A man on the trail told me that I should find a school here; and I came here,



A thrill ran through Frank Richards as the ruffian drew the gun from his belt. "You see that, boy?" said Mr. Smith. "At a word from me, this galoot will let drive a bullet through your head! Get that into your brain, and think it over!"

madam, to ask whether any pupil who may be able to speak French would accompany me to where I left the Frenchman, to learn from him where he wishes to be taken."

Miss Meadows' face cleared at once.

"Is the man far from here?" she asked.

"About three miles," said Mr. Smith. "I intend to convey him on my horse, if I can discover where he wishes to be taken. I simply need an interpreter. Perhaps some lad—"

"Richards!" said Miss Meadows, turning to the class.

"Yes, ma'am?" said Frank Richards, rising.

"I understand that you studied French in your former school before you came to Canada?"

"Certainly, Miss Meadows!"

"Do you think you could do as Mr. Smith asks?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, Miss Meadows!" answered Frank. "I can speak French quite well enough for that!"

"Then you may go with Mr. Smith—if you are willing, of course," added Miss Meadows considerately.

"Quite willing, ma'am!" answered Frank promptly. He was more than willing.

"Very well, Richards, you may go," said Miss Meadows.

Envious glances followed Frank Richards as he left the class. The stranger, after thanking Miss Meadows warmly, followed him into the porch; and in Miss Meadows' class geography was again the order of the day.

Frank Richards took his hat from the peg, and walked out of the lumber school with Mr. Smith.

"Just a minute while I get my horse!" he said.

"Very good, my lad!"

Mr. Smith walked down to the gate, where his horse was tethered. In a couple of minutes Frank had his pony out of the corral and saddled; and he joined the stranger at the gate. They rode away together down the trail, a familiar trail to Frank Richards, for it led through the timber towards Lawless Ranch, his home.

Mr. Smith rode in silence, without a word on the subject of the distressed Frenchman he had left in the wood. He assuredly did not seem to be a chatty or very amiable man. Frank Richards did not mind that, however. He was enjoying the canter along the trail under the trees; it was a very pleasant change from the school-room.

Three miles had been covered before they left the trail. Then the bearded gentleman dismounted, and Frank Richards followed his example. Mr. Smith led his horse into the wood, and Frank followed, leading his pony. He expected at every moment now to come in sight of the distressed traveller, and as they penetrated farther and farther into the wood his surprise grew.

"Didn't you leave the chap near the trail?" he asked at last.

"No," answered Mr. Smith.

"But—" Frank paused. For the first time a feeling of uneasiness and suspicion came upon him.

If Mr. Smith had come upon a distressed traveller it must have been upon the trail, not in the heart of the forest, where it was too thick for riding.

Frank Richards came to a halt. Mr. Smith looked round.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1631.

"Why are you stopping, my lad?" he asked.

"Where is the man we're looking for?" asked Frank.

Mr. Smith's eyes glistened as he read the vague suspicion that had come into Frank's mind. He stepped back towards the boy.

"Come on!" he said.

"But—"

"You are to come with me," said Mr. Smith quietly. "Do not be alarmed. You will not be hurt, and I will give you a reward, if you wish, for your services. But you must come with me some little distance farther."

Frank breathed sharply.

"It's not a question of 'must'!" he answered.

"You're mistaken; it is. Come on, I tell you!" The man's voice rose. "Lose no time! I repeat that you will not be hurt, and I don't want to use force, but you've got to come!"

Frank Richards sprang back. A heavy hand caught him by the shoulder as he did so, and the grip of the bearded man was so hard that he almost uttered a cry of pain. In that muscular grasp the schoolboy was powerless.

"Come on!" said Mr. Smith grimly.

And he led the boy into the wood, and Frank Richards, helpless in that grasp of iron, tramped on.

The Cabin in the Forest!

NOT for a moment did the grasp on Frank's shoulder relax. Mr. Smith did not speak again. His eyes were about him, evidently watching for a sign that marked the route he was following through the forest. The led horses walked after him, through bush and bramble.

Frank's heart beat fast. What this strange mystery could possibly mean he had no idea, but he knew that the man's story of an injured traveller on the trail was false. That he needed an interpreter who could speak French seemed certain enough; otherwise Frank Richards was no use to him. But it was not to learn from an injured traveller where he wished to be taken.

What it could all mean was a puzzle, but it was pretty clear that the affair was not above board. If Mr. Smith had wanted an interpreter for any ordinary reason, he could have found one easily enough at Thompson, or at Cedar Camp, where there were plenty of French-Canadians among the lumbermen. He need not have come to Cedar Creek School to find one, save for one reason—that a schoolboy would be helpless in his hands.

More than a mile more was covered before the strangely assorted pair came to a halt at last. From the thick forest they emerged into a rough clearing, and Frank saw before him a rudely built log cabin. The door of the cabin was closed, and outside it a man sat on a log, with a rifle across his knees. He rose at once as Mr. Smith and Frank Richards emerged from the trees.

"You got him, boss?" he said, with a glance at the schoolboy.

"I reckon," answered Mr. Smith laconically.

"Kin he talk the lingo?" asked the other, with a rather curious look at Frank.

"So the schoolmistress says."

"All O.K., then, I reckon!"

"Take the horses, Bill, and then follow me in."

"You bet!"

"Bill" led Mr. Smith's horse and Frank's pony away to the rear of the cabin.

"Now, my lad," said Mr. Smith quietly, "listen to me. As you know, I've brought you here to interpret between me and a Frenchman. You know now that the Frenchman isn't an injured traveller. That was a yarn, of course, you've guessed."

"A lie, you mean!" said Frank hotly.

Mr. Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Never mind that," he said. "I wanted an interpreter, and I've got you. You're going to see a man in this cabin. You're going to ask him questions that I shall dictate to you, and tell me the answers. Understand?"

"I understand."

"You're not to tell him anything, or to ask him any questions on your own. Simply translate what I say, and his replies. Savvy?"

"Yes."

"Do as I want, and after you've done the business, you shall be set free—to return to your school, or anywhere you like, with twenty dollars in your pocket. I guess that's good pay."

"I don't want your money," answered Frank. "I wouldn't touch it. You've got me here on false pretences, and if your business were honest you wouldn't have needed to do that. If you think I'm going to help you in any rascality, you're making a mistake."

Mr. Smith gave him a grim look.

"Bocus Bill!" he called out.

"Comin', boss!"

The man came round the cabin, having tethered up the horses.

"You've got your gun, Bill?"

"You bet!" grinned Bocus Bill.

A thrill ran through Frank Richards as the ruffian drew the gun from his leather belt—a large-sized Colt revolver.

"You see that, boy?" said Mr. Smith. "Well, at a word from me this galoot will let drive a bullet through your head, as if you were a prairie rabbit! Get that into your brain, and think it over!"

Frank's heart thumped, but he did not reply.

Mr. Smith unbarred the cabin door—it was barred outside—and threw it open and stepped in. Frank Richards followed him, and after him came Bocus Bill, with the gun in his hand. The door was closed again.

Frank Richards looked quickly round him inside the cabin. It had one occupant. A man was seated on a rough stool, to which he was bound by a strong, knotted cord. His hands were shackled by a rope looped to his wrists, allowing him to move them to some extent, but not to get them free. A bandage was tied over his head, and part of his forehead, and there was a dark stain on the bandage, showing that he had been wounded. His face was pale and worn, and it had the dark complexion and Gallic features of the French-Canadian. He looked about twenty-five, a sturdy and rather handsome fellow.

His dark eyes glittered as the three came in. He did not speak, but the look he cast at Mr. Smith spoke volumes.

"I have returned, you see," said Mr. Smith grimly.

"Je ne comprends pas."

"I think you understand some English, my buck," said Mr. Smith, "whether you can speak it or not."

The French-Canadian wrenched at the bonds on his wrists; but they held fast.

"Coquin—lache!" he muttered. "Quelque jour, je—"

"That's enough. Now, Richards! Your name's Richards, I guess?"

"Yes," said Frank.

"Listen to me, Richards. You will repeat my questions to this man in French. You understand?"

"I understand."

The French-Canadian seemed to observe Frank Richards for the first time, and his glance dwelt on the schoolboy in evident astonishment.

"Mais vous!" he exclaimed. "Vous êtes garçon—ecolier, je crois—vous n'etes pas—"

"Silence!"

Bocus Bill thrust his revolver forward till the muzzle jammed on the mouth of the French-Canadian.

"Cut it out!" he snapped.

The man was perforce silent.

Frank Richards clenched his hands hard.

"Monsieur—" he began quickly.

He wanted to tell the prisoner that he was a friend, and not an enemy. But the hand of Mr. Smith was thrust across his mouth before he could say more than one word.

"Hold your tongue!" The man's eyes burned at him. "By hokey, if you say a word apart from my orders, I'll lay a trail-rope round you till you can't crawl!"

Frank Richards' eyes gleamed, but he was silent.

In Merciless Hands!

"SIT down!"

Smith rapped out the words.

Frank Richards sat on a log stool that was pushed forward for him, facing the prisoner.

"Now, repeat my questions to him!" growled Smith. "Mind, I know enough of the lingo to tell whether you do it correct or not, and whether you put anything in."

Frank Richards had his own opinion about that. If the man had had even a smattering of French, he would not have been likely to take the trouble and risk of bringing an interpreter to the lonely cabin.

"First ask him: Are you willing now to tell me what I want to know?" said Smith.

Frank Richards put the question into French.

"Monsieur, voulez vous dire maintenant ce que monsieur desire savoir?"

"Non!" rapped out the Canadian.

That reply did not need translating. Smith scowled.

"Tell him he will die here if he does not answer, boy."

"Monsieur dit, reprenez, ou vous mourrez ici."

"Alors, je meurs ici," said the French-Canadian.

"What does he say, boy?"

"He says he will die here, then."

"Obstinate fool! Tell him that I must have the ten thousand dollars, or his life."

"Monsieur demande les dix mille dollars ou la vie," said Frank.

"Monsieur peut demander," was the answer.

"He says that you can ask," translated Frank.

Bocus Bill uttered an oath, and Smith clenched his hands savagely.

The worn, bandaged face of the French-Canadian was quite calm. His eyes met those of the two rascals with intrepid defiance.

Question and answer had already given Frank Richards an inkling of how matters stood. Evidently Smith and his companion were planning to rob the French-Canadian, but had not succeeded, and the interpreter was required to extract the necessary information from him.

Even at the risk of his own life, Frank Richards would not have lent himself to such a purpose, but for the present he followed the instructions of the kidnapper. A plan was already forming in his mind for learning more of the prisoner, with a view to helping him if opportunity came.

"Tell him," said Smith, after a pause, "that he is in the hands of a desperate man, who will not hesitate to kill him if he does not tell us where the dollars are!"

By this time Frank was quite satisfied that Smith could not follow the French, and he repeated the question in that language, with an addition of his own.

"Monsieur, vous etes dans les mains, d'un scelerat qui n'hesite pas de vous oter la vie. Je suis ami."

The last three words, "I am a friend," added to the rest of the sentence were lost on Smith, as Frank expected, but they were not lost on the Frenchman. His eyes gleamed with intelligence. He understood at once Frank's object in seeking to get into communication with him under cover of question and answer, and he played up at once.

"Il peut me tuer. Je vous remercie, mon garcon."

"He says you can kill him," said Frank, without translating the last part of the sentence, which was "Thank you, my boy."

That addition passed quite unnoticed by Smith, who was evidently quite ignorant of French. It was clear, therefore, that it was safe for Frank to proceed on the same lines.

"Tell him that we know he left the bag of money somewhere in the forest!" snarled Smith.

"Monsieur sait que vous avez laisse le sac d'argent—dans le foret—votre nom?" said Frank, the last words being "Your name?"

"Alors, monsieur sait assez—Jules Clement."

"He says you know enough," said Frank.

He did not add that the Canadian had told him his name was Jules Clement.

"We want to know more," said Smith savagely. "We want to know all about it."

"On veut tout savoir," said Frank. "Peut-on faire quelque-chose pour vous?"

He kept one eye on Smith as he spoke, but it was evident that the kidnapper did not suspect that the second sentence meant "Can I do anything for you?"

Frank Richards felt quite certain of his ground now, and to every question from that man he added something of his own. To give only the English, question and answer now ran as follows, the first part of the sentence being dictated by Smith, the second part being added by the schoolboy interpreter.

"They want to know just where you left the bag of money. Where are you from?"

"Let them find it if they can. I am from the Cascade mines."

"They will force you to speak. How did you get here?"

"They cannot force me. I received news that my father was ill in Quebec, and I sold my claim and started home with the money."

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1631.

"Your life is at stake. Are you wounded?"
"Let them take it. These soundrels followed me from the mines, and yesterday they attacked me in the forest. I have a cut on the head."

"You are warned that they are in deadly earnest. Have you any friends in the section?"

"I defy them. I am a stranger here, on my way to the railway."

"You are lost if you do not answer. Don't trust them; they will not release you if you give up the money."

"Let it be so. I know that, my boy; I hid the bag safely while they were tracking me in the wood, and they will never find it."

"For the last time, will you speak? What can I do to help you?"

"I will not speak. If you are allowed to go free, take information to the nearest sheriff."

"Their patience is run out. I will do so if I can."

"I repeat that I will tell them nothing. Be careful; he is watching you."

"He says he will put you to the torture to make you speak. If I am kept a prisoner, too, my friends will search for me and may find us both."

"His tortures will not open my lips. I hope it may be so."

"You will speak under the torture. Is the bag hidden far from here?"

"I will not speak. About ten miles."

"No food will be given you. Could you put them on a false scent to gain time?"

"I will starve, then. That is a good idea; let me think. But if they find the money I fear they will murder us both."

"You will be beaten with a trail-ropo till you tell them where the bag is hidden. Spin them a yarn to keep them busy till to-morrow. If I do return to-night there will be a search."

At this point the French-Canadian's eyes gleamed, and Frank could see that the suggested idea was working in his mind.

"Tell them I could find the place where I hid the money, but only in daylight. This will gain time till to-morrow, at least."

Smith's scowling face cleared a little when the first part of that reply was translated. From the looks of the two ruffians it was easy to see that they believed that the threat of torture had caused the French-Canadian to weaken.

"I guess that's a cinch," said Smith. "Tell the galoot he shall guide us at sun-up, and if he doesn't take us to the right spot Heaven help him!"

Frank translated that threat into French, adding:

"There's a good chance that my pals may find us before morning."

"This way, younker!" said Smith roughly.

Frank Richards was led from the cabin. The door closed and was barred again on the outside.

Bocus Bill proceeded to knot the end of a trail-ropo about the schoolboy, with the evident intention of securing him for the night.

"You told me I was to go after we had finished, Mr. Smith!" exclaimed Frank.

The man grinned evilly.

"I guess I can't spare you yet," he answered. "The galoot may be fooling. And if he is, you'll be wanted to talk again, sonny. But don't you be afraid. After we've done with you all your troubles will be over."

Frank's face did not betray his feelings as he heard that remark, the hidden meaning of which was not hidden from his quick intelligence. It was his game to affect the simple and unsuspecting schoolboy; and he did it well.

"You want me to stay here to-night?" he asked.

"Correct."

"Where can I sleep then?"

"I guess the airth's good enough for you," answered Smith. "Fasten him to that tree, Bill."

"You bet!"

The rope was knotted behind Frank's back where he could not reach it, and the other end fastened to a trunk above the reach of his hands. He was a secure prisoner. A blanket was thrown to him, and when the two ruffians prepared their supper a portion was given to the schoolboy, and he ate it with what appetite he could.

But it needed all his nerve and courage to keep up an appearance of unsuspecting confidence. For he knew that he was in the hands of utterly desperate and unscrupulous rascals, and that his life and the other prisoner's were not worth a pin's head in comparison with their safety.

If the two rascals who had tracked the unfortunate Canadian from the mines succeeded in getting possession of the bag of money, would they leave these two witnesses to bring them to justice?

As he looked at the two evil, brutal faces Frank Richards felt that there was only one answer to that question. Time had been gained until to-morrow. On that interval and what happened in it depended the life of Frank Richards and the prisoner of the log cabin.

Missing!

"QUEER that Frank's not back."

"Jolly queer!" said Beauclerc, with a troubled look.

Cedar Creek School had long been dismissed. Boys and girls had gone their homeward ways, but Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc remained. They had waited for Frank Richards to return; but the dusk of the Canadian evening was thickening, and he had not come.

The chums stood at the gates, looking away down the dusky trail, with anxiety growing in their faces.

Black Sam came to bar the gates for the night, and he blinked at the two in surprise as he found them still there.

"Mass' Lawless go home," said the negro. "Mass' Beauclerc, you go home."

"Oh, bother!" said Bob. "Let's go in and speak to Miss Meadows, Cherub. This is jolly queer about Frank."

The chums went into the schoolhouse again and found Miss Meadows sitting in the porch chatting with Mr. Slimmey. The schoolmistress looked at them in surprise.

"Why have you not gone home, Lawless?" she asked.

"Frank hasn't come back, ma'am," said Bob. "That is extraordinary!" exclaimed Miss Meadows in astonishment. "But probably he has gone straight home, instead of coming back here."

"I—I don't think he would, as we didn't know," said Bob. "He wouldn't leave us waiting for him."

"He must have gone home, Lawless, as he has not come back here," said Miss Meadows. "His talk with the French-Canadian traveller cannot have occupied him long."

"I—I suppose not."

"You had better go home at once, or your parents will be anxious," said Miss Meadows.

"Very well, ma'am."

The two schoolboys went for their horses. A dim crescent of moon was showing above the forest as they rode away from Cedar Creek School. Both of them were looking troubled.

"I—I guess nothing can have happened to Frank," said Bob Lawless at last. "What do you think, Cherub?"

Beauclerc knitted his brows.

"I don't see how anything could happen," he answered. "It beats me! But I feel sure Frank wouldn't go home and leave us waiting. Of course, he might have thought we should guess."

"It's possible, I suppose."

"He couldn't have had an accident," said Beauclerc. "If he had been thrown from his pony the pony would come here. He knows his way."

"But he'd go to the ranch," said Bob, "not to the school."

"Yes, that's so. Let's get on, and we shall see whether Frank's at the ranch, at any rate. I think I'll ride home with you, Bob."

"Hustle, then!" said Bob.

They broke into a gallop and covered the distance quickly enough. Lights were gleaming from the Lawless ranch-house when they arrived there.

Mr. Lawless looked out, frowning.

"Oh, you've come home, you young rascals!" he exclaimed. "I was just thinking of sending a man to look for you. Hallo! Where's Frank?"

The rancher noted that Bob's companion was Beauclerc, and not his English cousin. Bob's heart sank.

"Isn't Frank home yet?" he asked.

"Home? No."

"Oh!"

"What does this mean?" asked the rancher. "Why hasn't Frank come home with you, Bob? Has anything happened?"

"Blessed if I know!" said Bob. "But something's happened to Franky—that's jolly certain!"

"Come in and tell me," said the rancher shortly.

The two schoolboys followed him into the house. There Bob Lawless explained what had happened in the afternoon.

"Was this Mr. Smith known?" interjected the rancher.

"No; I guess he was a stranger in this section."

The rancher knitted his brows.

"I guess it must have been O.K.," he said. "A stranger couldn't be supposed to have a grudge against Frank."

"But—but what can have become of Frank?" asked Bob.

"I guess that beats me, unless he's been thrown."

"His pony would have come home, popper. He's found his way home alone before now."

"True! Get your suppers, boys, and I'll send Billy Cook and some of the Kootenays to look for him," said Mr. Lawless abruptly.

"You're going to stay, Cherub?" asked Bob, as his father quitted the room.

"I'd like to, if a message could be sent to my father."

"I can fix that."

"Then I'll be glad to stay. I'm anxious about Frank."

The chums sat down rather dismally to supper. Frank Richards did not appear. Mr. Lawless came in after dispatching Billy Cook, the foreman of the ranch, with half a dozen of the cattlemen, to search the trails for the missing lad.

The rancher was puzzled and anxious, and Mrs. Lawless shared his anxiety.

Bob and Beauclerc would gladly have joined in the search, but Mr. Lawless bade them stay at the ranch. If the missing boy could be found the cattlemen would find him. But they did not find him.

It was long past the schoolboys' usual bedtime when Billy Cook rode up to the ranch with the information that no sign had been found of Frank Richards. It was evident that nothing more could be done till the morning, and Bob and Vere Beauclerc went to bed with heavy hearts.

Where was their chum? What had happened to him? These were questions that troubled their thoughts incessantly, and for a long time kept them from slumber.

The Last Hope!

FRANK RICHARDS was thinking of his chums in those hours. He lay in the thick grass, close by the log cabin, sleepless.

Within the log cabin the French-Canadian miner lay a bound prisoner, with the cabin door barred against him. Bocus Bill was in the cabin, sleeping in a blanket on the floor. Outside, in the grass, the man Smith was camped.

After supper and a cigarette the rascal had looked at Frank Richards' rope and then rolled himself in a blanket to sleep. He lay only a few yards from the schoolboy, and in the deep silence of the night Frank could hear his steady breathing.

But there was no sleep for Frank. The terrible danger of his position was more than enough to keep him wide awake and restless.

Escape was impossible. He had already tried to reach the knotted rope behind his back, but the work had been done thoroughly, and he could not even get his fingers on the knots. He was a helpless prisoner where he lay.

The danger had been averted till the morrow. When the rascals found that Clement was leading them on a false scent—what then? If they found him resolute in his refusal to place the money in their hands his life would be worth little, and Frank's as little. Unless help came in the interval there was but slight hope for him.

Midnight had come, and faintly through the great branches overhead glimmers of moonlight filtered down. There was a sound in the grass near Frank Richards, and he turned his head quickly. A soft muzzle was thrust into his hand, and there was a low, affectionate whinny. It was his pony, Brownie. A length of rope trailed from Brownie's neck

Frank sat up, his heart beating faster. The intelligent animal, tethered in a strange place, had known that something was amiss, and he had gnawed through the tether-rope. He had found his master, and was showing his equine delight at having found him.

Frank Richards cast a swift look towards the motionless figure rolled in a blanket a few yards in front of him. Smith did not move; he was evidently sleeping soundly.

Frank's hands were free, and he stroked the pony's nose softly, murmuring endearing words. But there was no time to lose; every second was precious.

Brownie was free, if he was not, and that knowledge had brought into Frank's mind a new hope, and a new plan. He rose softly and cautiously to his feet, still stroking the horse's neck and murmuring to him. Silently he turned the pony, patted his head, and pointed to the forest.

The pony's intelligent eyes turned upon him questioningly; he knew that something was wanted, but he did not understand what.

Frank pushed the pony away from him and struck him a smart blow on the flank with his hand. Brownie swerved away, whinnying. He turned back, and there was reproach in his glistening eyes.

Frank Richards raised his hand again. Then the pony understood the gesture. He threw up his head and trotted away into the forest, his hoofbeats almost inaudible in the grass.

Frank lay down again, his heart beating almost to suffocation. He listened with tense anxiety.

A rustle came from the forest—a sound of brushing twigs and brambles, and it died away. Brownie was gone.

A fear oppressed Frank that the affectionate animal might creep back to him, but Brownie evidently understood at last. The last faint sound of the pony brushing through the thickets died away in the silence of the night.

Far away in the forest the pony was threading his way homeward, and as soon as he reached the plain he would gallop. Long before morning he would be at the Lawless Ranch, and he would come as a messenger from the prisoner at the log-cabin.

From the lone cabin in the heart of the forest to the corral of the Lawless Ranch would lie the fresh trail of the pony's hoofs. Where Brownie forced his way through the underwood the broken twigs and crushed foliage would tell their tale, and on the open plain, wet now with night dews, the tracks would remain to reward the keen eyes of a skilled tracker.

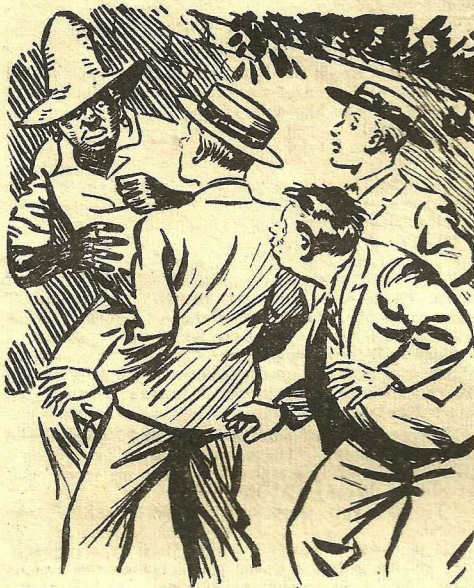
Would Bob understand?

Frank Richards thought that he would. There was the gnawed rope round Brownie's neck to show that he had been tied up and had freed himself, and that would show that the pony had been in strange hands. And where the pony had been tied up Bob would expect to find traces, at least, of Brownie's master, and if he followed the trail—

Perhaps the hope was faint, but Frank knew well his cousin's skill, and he trusted to it.

Frank Richards closed his eyes at last. Sleep came fitfully to him through the long hours, but ever, sleeping or waking, the hope was in his heart that even in this terrible extremity his chums would find him and save him.

Next Week: "THE TRAIL OF DANGER!"



Tuckey Toodles dodged frantically, with the angry black man in pursuit. Drake and Rodney looked on in dismay. "Help!" yelled the hapless Tuckey. "You fellows keep him off, can't you?"

At Trinidad!

"WHAT'S that?"
"Trinidad."

And a dozen voices on the deck of the Benbow repeated the word as the juniors stared across the sea towards the blue mountains looming against a burning sky.

"Trinidad," said Jack Blake. "That's where—"

"Where Columbus did something or other," said Tuckey Toodles, with an air of wisdom. "Columbus was the chap who discovered America, you know—"

"Go hon!"

"But he was," said Tuckey Toodles. "I don't remember what he did in Trinidad. Somebody else was there after him—I forget who, but I know it was somebody, because we've had it in class."

"It's where Sir Walter Raleigh killed the Spaniards a thumping long time ago," said Drake. "Jolly old times they were, too, when they sailed out here in ruff and trunk hose—"

"Ruff times, in fact!" remarked Sawyer major, who was a determined humorist.

"We shall get some cricket there," said Drake. "That's more in our line than slaying Spaniards and raiding the galleons. We're going to put in some time in Trinidad, Mr. Packe says, before we go up the Orinoco. That island is really a bit of Venezuela, chipped off about ten thousand years ago. And there's South America itself."

He pointed to a dim blue line in the southwestern sky.

"The Cordilleras!" said Rodney.

"Venezuela," said Daubeny of the Shell. "That's where my pater made his pile."

TROUBLE IN TRINIDAD!

By Owen Conquest.

"And here's the Orinoco coming to meet us," added Drake.

The blue waters of the Antilles were behind the school ship now; round the Benbow the sea rolled green, swamped by the mighty flood of the Orinoco pouring into the Atlantic.

Under full sail, tall and stately in her swelling white canvas, the Benbow rolled on before the trade wind.

With eager eyes the juniors watched Trinidad rising more clearly into view—cliff and mountain and forest. They were eager to tread the shores of the famous island, one of the brightest jewels in the crown of the British Empire, won in the old days from the Spaniards and the French by dint of hard blows.

It was there that Sir Walter Raleigh had landed, at the close of the sixteenth century, on his way to seek gold in the Spanish Main beyond.

Jack Drake & Co. take French leave in Trinidad, and thanks to Tuckey Toodles land in trouble with a capital T!

And there he had slain the Spanish garrison, thinking that, to use his own words, "by leaving an enemy behind him he should savour very much of the asse."

And there, two hundred years later, British seamen had landed and captured the island from the Spaniards and their French allies, and added it to the dominion upon which the sun never sets.

Onward through the Dragon's Mouth—the Boca del Drago—the Benbow surged her way, under shortened sail now. Before the ship lay the wide Gulf of Paria, which separates Trinidad from the mainland of South America.

Round into the great bay, and the Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad, lay in view, with innumerable shipping at anchor, and the town rising beyond. And then the anchors of the Benbow sank deep into yellow mud, and the school ship rested in the wonderland of the West.

A Run Ashore!

"THERE'S niggers—"

"Lots!"

"And Indians—"

"Some."

"And Spaniards—"

"Well, what about the Spaniards?" asked Drake, laughing.

But Tuckey Toodles did not laugh; he looked very serious.

"I've read a lot about the Spaniards in the West Indies," he said. "They're awfully ferocious, you know. They used to burn the Protestants alive in the Inquisition—"

"That was well over three hundred years ago, ass!"

"There's wild animals," resumed Tuckey; "all sorts of foreigners and wild beasts. I think we ought to be armed."

"Dry up, old chap, for goodness' sake!" said Drake.

"We ought to take a revolver, at least. Suppose we get attacked by brigands!"

"There aren't any brigands in Trinidad!" shrieked Drake.

"Well, I'm jolly well going to take a revolver, anyhow!" said Tuckey.

"And where are you going to get one?" asked Rodney.

"I know where Mr. Pigtop keeps his revolver. I could sneak his without him being any the wiser."

Drake and Rodney grinned.

There was leave for a run ashore for the Benbow fellows, and Cabin No. 8 were making their arrangements. Port of Spain lay glimmering before them in the blaze of the tropical sun. White walls and masses of verdure met their eyes as they looked towards the town. It was the day following the Benbow's arrival in harbour, and the juniors had not yet set foot on dry land.

Mr. Pigtop, the chief mate of the Benbow, had been talking to Captain Topcastle on the poop, and he had come down to the main deck just in time to hear Tuckey Toodles' remarks. Tuckey had his back to the mate, and did not see Mr. Pigtop or the surprised and wrathful glare which that gentleman turned upon him.

"I've seen old Pigtop put that shooter in the drawer," continued Tuckey Toodles, still blissfully unconscious of the fact that the chief mate was standing a few feet behind him, glaring at him. "I could get it easily enough. Pigtop's rather a silly old donkey, you know—Yarooop!"

A finger and thumb which felt like a vice closed on Tuckey Toodles' fat ear from behind. Tuckey spun round with a yell, and blinked at Mr. Pigtop.

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!" he wailed.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"So you're going to sneak my revolver, are you?" demanded Mr. Pigtop, still gripping Tuckey's ear and glaring at him.

"Ow! No! C-certainly not!" gasped Toodles.

"I—I wouldn't think of such a thing! Wow!"

"I'm an old donkey, am I?"

"Yes—I mean, no! Certainly not! Yow-ow-ow!"

Tuckey Toodles wriggled with anguish.

"Yow-ow! Leggo!" he spluttered. "I—I was just telling Drake that you weren't an old donkey, Mr. Pigtop—Ow! I—I was advising Rodney not to sneak your revolver—Yooop!"

Mr. Pigtop gave Tuckey's fat ear another twist, and walked on, looking very grim. Tuckey rubbed his ear and groaned.

"You awful rotters!" he gasped. "Why didn't you tell me the beast was just behind me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to complain of this!" howled

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Tuckey. "The dashed mates aren't allowed to pull fellows' ears—Ow!"

"You're not allowed to call the dashed mates old donkeys, either!" chuckled Rodney.

"I didn't know the beast could hear—Wow! I'd jolly well go and complain to Mr. Packe, but Packe's just as big a beast—"

"Toodles!"

It was Mr. Packe's voice.

"Oh dear!"

"Toodles, how dare you!" exclaimed the Fourth Form master.

"I didn't, sir!"

"What?"

"Never, sir! I didn't—I wasn't—"

"You will take a hundred lines, Toodles, and write them out when we return to the ship!" exclaimed Mr. Packe. "Silence! Another word, and I shall refuse you permission to go ashore!"

Tuckey Toodles was dumb.

Mr. Packe gave him a severe frown and passed on, leaving the fat junior blinking dismally at his cabin-mates.

"Jever hear of such awful luck!" gasped the hapless Tuckey. "On a blessed ship everybody's just at everybody's elbow! I wish we were back at old St. Winny's! Oh dear!"

"I wish you were, old fellow!" said Drake heartily.

"The boat's ready!" said Rodney, laughing. "If you're going ashore, you'd better get ready, too. Are you going to borrow Mr. Pigtop's revolver, after all!"

"In the circus, I shall go unarmed," said Tuckey. "If you fellows get into trouble, don't blame me!"

"We won't!" grinned Drake. "There won't be any danger, old fellow—if you don't have any firearms!"

A large party of the Benbow fellows were going ashore. They looked very merry and bright in their white linen jackets and trousers, and straw hats.

"I suppose there's a post office in Port of Spain, Drake?" Tuckey Toodles remarked, as he took his seat in the shore-boat with the crowd of juniors.

"Sure to be," answered Drake. "What the thump do you want a post office for?"

"I shall have to call there for a remittance," explained Toodles. "I wrote home at Barbados, asking my father to telegraph me some cash at Trinidad. I'm short of money. If it hasn't come—"

"Why say 'if'?" murmured Rodney.

"If it hasn't come, I suppose you can lend me some tin, Drake? I'm going to see you fellows through, you know, and show you the sights!"

"Certainly," said Drake. "I've got a Mexican peso that was passed on me at Barbados—you can have it!"

"How much is it worth?"

"Well, it's a bad one, so it can't be worth very much, but you're welcome to it!"

"Yah!" snorted Toodles.

Bump!

The shore-boat rocked as it bumped on a chunk of driftwood brought down to the sea by the waters of the Orinoco.

"Ow! What's that?" ejaculated Tuckey Toodles.

"Only a shark!" said Sawyer major.

"A—a—a what?"

"Lots of sharks here," said Sawyer calmly. "They bump into the boats, you know, and

knock them over, and seize the fattest chap aboard in their awful jaws—"

"Yaroooh!"

"Toodles! What ever is the matter with you?" exclaimed Mr. Packe from the stern-sheets.

"Tell 'em to pull back to the ship!" howled Toodles. "I'm not going to be devoured by sharks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Bless my soul! There are no sharks to be seen, and if there were any here they could not harm you in the boat!" said Mr. Packe. "You must not be so frightened, Toodles!"

"I'm not f-f-frightened!" stuttered Toodles. "But that awful monster, sir—look!"

"That is a piece of driftwood, Toodles."

"Oh!"

Tuckey Toodles sat down again, looking daggers at the playful Sawyer. The juniors chortled, and the black boatman grinned, and Tuckey sat with a very red face till the boat bumped at the quay, and the Benbow fellows scrambled ashore.

On Their Own!

JACK DRAKE & CO. looked round them with great interest as they walked into the town. Port of Spain was a very interesting place to the Benbow fellows, fresh from the old country and the temperate zone.

Wide streets, planted with great trees for shade; walls that swarmed with scarlet flowers; giant palm-trees, and a crowd of all nations met their gaze.

Negroes with brawny black bodies that glistened in the sun, Hindoo coolies brown as berries, Chinese and mulattos, Spanish creoles, and swarthy half-breeds jostled in the busy streets, and half a dozen languages could be heard in as many minutes.

The Benbow crowd attracted some glances from the loungers of Port of Spain—and the loungers seemed innumerable. Life is easy for the loafer in the West Indies, where the soil has but to be "tickled with a hoe to laugh with a harvest."

The Benbow juniors marched in twos and threes, under the anxious care of Mr. Packe, who had to keep his eyes open to see that his flock did not wander. But marching like a school on parade did not meet the views of all his pupils.

"What price clearing off on our own?" Drake murmured to Rodney. "After all, we're not a little girls' school, you know!"

Rodney laughed.

"I'm game," he answered. "If we turn up for the boat at sundown it will be all right, and if there's lines it can't be helped. We want to see the place on our own."

"Exactly."

There was a crashing of tom-toms as a body of negroes came tramping along, apparently engaged upon some celebration. The Benbow fellows had to crowd out of the way, and Drake and Rodney took the opportunity of turning down a side-street and scudding. In a couple of minutes they were out of sight of the anxious Mr. Packe, who was, in the opinion of the juniors, over-anxious.

"All serene now," said Drake, with a laugh, as they stopped by a garden wall, over which mangoes were growing, round a corner.

"Right as rain!" said Rodney.

"Hallo! Here comes somebody!"

There was a pounding of feet, and a fat figure came scudding round the corner. It was Tuckey Toodles, going at full speed. He crashed into the two chums before he saw them.

"Oh, you ass!" gasped Drake, staggering back. Rodney grasped the fat junior to save himself.

"You silly ass!" he roared.

"I—I say, I came after you!" gasped Tuckey. "I was afraid you'd lose your way without me to look after you!"

"Br-r-r!"

"You forgot to lend me any money, Drake—"

"I'm going on forgetting!" growled Drake.

"Well, never mind; you can pay the exes, and I'll settle up when we get aboard the Benbow again," said Tuckey brightly. "I say, there's a cinema in this town—"

"Bother the cinema! Do you think we're going indoors on a day like this?"

"Well, perhaps you're right. We'd better look for something to eat first," said Tuckey.

"You ate enough for two or three days at brekker!" answered Drake. "We're going out of the town now."

"If you're going to starve me, Drake, I don't think I shall be able to come with you!" said Tuckey, shaking his head.

"Please yourself."

Drake and Rodney started walking. In a moment Tuckey Toodles had overtaken them.

"Dear old chap, I'll never desert you," he said affectionately. "I'm sure you fellows would get into trouble without me to look after you. I don't mind waiting another half an hour for lunch, to please you."

"Make it two or three hours!" grinned Drake.

"Oh dear!"

"There's a lovely place outside the town, called the Savannah," Rodney remarked. "That's what we want, if anybody knew the way."

"Ask that nigger," said Toodles, jerking his thumb towards a tall, powerful-looking negro who was basking in the sun by the wall.

Until Toodles spoke, the big black man had looked half asleep, enjoying to the full the delights of tropical heat and complete laziness. But at Tuckey's remark he jumped up with astonishing activity.

"Who you call nigger?" he inquired.

"Here, you keep off!" exclaimed Tuckey in alarm, backing away behind Drake and Rodney.

"I have you understand, sar, me no common nigger!" said the black man, growing excited; and he danced round Rodney and Drake, with the evident intention of administering severe punishment to Tuckey Toodles on the spot.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Rodney. "Toodles, you ass—"

"Keep him off!" yelled Tuckey.

He dodged frantically, with the angry black man in pursuit. Drake and Rodney looked on in dismay.

"Help!" yelled the hapless Tuckey. "You fellows keep him off, can't you? Yaroooh! Help! Police! Yah! Oh!"

"Here, hold on, my man!" exclaimed Drake, as the negro caught Tuckey at last. "Tuckey, you fathead, apologise to the gentleman!"

The black man's anger vanished as if by magic as Drake made that tactful remark. His scowl disappeared, and he smiled.

"You gentleman, sar," he said. "Me gentleman, too. Little fat trash pollygise, all right."

"Oh dear!" gasped Tuckey.

It was rather a bitter pill for Tuckey to swallow, for Tuckey Toodles was a lofty, aristocratic youth in his own estimation, and he could scarcely bring himself to apologise to a nigger. But the nigger's fists looked like legs of mutton, and Tuckey had a haunting doubt that he might be a cannibal. So he swallowed his pill.

"Sorry!" he stuttered. "I—I—I apologise!"

"We apologise for him, too," said Dick Rodney gravely. "You must excuse his manners. He's only a silly kid, and he's been very badly brought up."

"Why, you rotter—" spluttered Toodles.

"We're ashamed of him," said Drake. "He's always getting into trouble over his bad manners."

"Why, you beast—"

"He doesn't know how to treat a gentleman when he meets one," continued Drake, with owl-like gravity. "He apologises; we apologise. Good-morning, sir!"

The juniors walked away up the street, and the negro resumed his place under the wall, quite satisfied with that vindication of his gentility. And Drake and Rodney waited till they had turned a corner before they laughed.

Stranded!

"IF you fellows think I approve of this—" began Tuckey Toodles in great disgust, when they were safe out of sight of the black gentleman of Trinidad.

"Cheese it!" growled Drake. "Why can't you learn some decent manners, you fat bouncer?"

"A blessed nigger—"

"Chap can't help his complexion," said Rodney, "and I dare say he likes it as much as we like ours. And if you call a black man a nigger here, fatty, you're liable to land in trouble; and next time we'll leave you to get the licking you ask for!"

Whereat Tuckey Toodles snorted, but held his peace.

The chums were not long in learning the route to the Savannah. They inquired of another black gentleman who was lounging near a carriage. The carriage was an ancient one, and the mule that drew it seemed almost as ancient. The lounging coachman woke up to new life as the juniors made inquiry of him.

"Me drive you," he said. "Long way—debbilish long way. Me drive you for one dollar, sar."

"Jolly good idea!" said Tuckey Toodles at once. "No good walking in this fearful heat. Jump in!"

Drake and Rodney had no time to debate the point, as Tuckey jumped into the ramshackle carriage at once.

"May as well," said Drake; and they followed the fat junior into the old vehicle.

The black driver took his seat at once, and cracked his whip, and the vehicle rumbled away through the streets of Port of Spain.

At Tuckey's suggestion a halt was made at a shop for a supply of tuck, for a picnic on the Savannah, and then the juniors drove on again.

Every joint and plank in the old vehicle creaked and groaned as it rattled along the road out of Port of Spain and across the open lands of the Savannah.

Even Tuckey Toodles—surreptitiously nibbling at the lunch-basket—was a little impressed by

the scenery that unrolled around them. Past the park and the botanic gardens, towards the hills that rose blue in the distance, they rattled on.

Port of Spain, with its busy harbour and the hum of men, was far behind, and the schoolboys, enjoying the excursion, did not think much of the distance they were covering. It was Tuckey Toodles who urged a halt at last, under the admonitions of his inner Tuckey.

"I wonder where the thump we are now?" remarked Dick Rodney, as he stepped from the carriage and stood looking round him. "A good many miles from the Benbow, anyhow. We can camp here for grub."

The carriage had left the public road, and had been following a track that led through a ravine. Under a big ceiba-tree the schoolboys unpacked their lunch-basket. The black driver came up with a grin and extended a dirty hand. "You pay me dollar, sar," he said.

"You're going to take us back presently," said Drake.

"Nother dollar to go back."

"All serene!"

Drake handed the man his dollar; the drive was certainly cheap enough. The black man sat in the carriage to his own refreshment, which he drew from under a seat. Under the shade of a big ceiba the three juniors lunched with great enjoyment.

"Now we'll have a ramble," said Drake, rising and stretching himself. "This seems a pretty solitary spot—almost in the hills. Ready, Tuckey?"

Tuckey Toodles gave a portentous yawn.

"You fellows can go and ramble if you like," he said. "I'm going to sleep."

"Slaaker!"

"Yah!"

Drake and Rodney laughed and started. Tuckey Toodles rolled himself in the grass, in the shade of the ceiba's mighty branches, and his deep and resonant snore was heard before the chums were out of hearing.

Drake and Rodney walked on cheerily. They were in an unsettled quarter of the country, and did not see a single habitation during their ramble, though once or twice they sighted smoke rising over the trees in the distance.

They were some miles from the carriage where Tuckey Toodles had camped for the afternoon, when the sun sloping down to the west warned them that it was time to return.

They found some little difficulty in picking their way back to the spot in the ravine where they had left the carriage and Tuckey and the negro driver. They found it at last, but to their surprise the carriage was not to be seen.

Tuckey Toodles was seated under the ceiba, demolishing the last of the contents of the lunch-basket as they came up.

"Hallo, you fellows back at last!" he exclaimed. "I've been waiting for you a jolly long time."

"Where's the go-cart?" demanded Drake.

"Ahem! It—it's gone," said Toodles.

"Gone! Where?"

"Back to Port of Spain, I—I think!" stammered Tuckey.

The juniors stared at him blankly.

"You utter ass!" exclaimed Rodney. "Do you mean to say you've sent the carriage away while we've been gone?"

"Nunno! I—"

"Then what's happened?" demanded Drake.

"Tain't my fault!" gasped Toodles. "I told



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the beast he was to stay, and he wouldn't! He's gone off!"

"And left us here!" said Drake. "Why, we don't even know the way back to Port of Spain, even if we could walk the distance! Look here, you silly chump, the man wouldn't go off like that for nothing. What have you been up to?"

"N-n-nothing! I—I may have called him a nigger," stammered Tuckey. "He was cheeky. So—"

"You fat idiot!"

"Well, I told him to fan me and keep the mosquitoes off," said Tuckey indignantly. "He wouldn't. So I told him he was a cheeky nigger, and he had the impudence to kick me—me, you know! I'd have given him a thumping good hiding—p'd it was so warm I didn't feel equal to the exertion. And then he drove off, you know, and never took any notice of my ordering him to stay."

"You—you—you fat idiot!" gasped Drake helplessly. "Do you understand that you've landed us? It's miles back to town, and we don't know the way!"

"'Tain't my fault! I can't help niggers being cheeky—"

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"What are we going to do?" roared Rodney. "There'll be a frightful row if we're not aboard the Benbow for the night!"

"You fellows manage it somehow," said Toodles. "So long as we get somewhere in time for supper, I don't mind. I'll take a rest under the tree while you're deciding. Only don't arrange for me to do a lot of walking. I'm not going to walk much, I can tell you!"

And Tuckey Toodles sat down again. Drake and Rodney stared at him. They were landed for the night, that was clear. The sun was already setting, and the wooded slopes round them were trackless to their eyes. Not only would they fail to answer roll call on the Benbow, but it looked as if they would have to pass the night without shelter. And with one accord, without stopping to exchange opinions on the subject, the chums laid hold of Tuckey Toodles and bumped him in the grass, and the terrific yells of Rupert de Vere Toodles rang far and wide over the darkening Savannah.

Next Wednesday: "DRAKE & CO.'S NIGHT OUT!"

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1631.

THE HUNTED SCHOOLBOYS!

(Continued from page 24.)

changed his mind on that point, for when the juniors reached the Silver Swallow they found Pawson already there!

He explained that he had thought it best, after all, to see personally to the baggage. Perhaps that was the reason why he had Gussy's suitcase open when they arrived!

Manners smiled sarcastically; but Arthur Augustus was quite satisfied. Pawson evidently had lost no time, and if the black box had been left in Gussy's suitcase, Manners did not expect Gussy to find it there—now!

Then came the surprise! Arthur Augustus picked up a pot of jam from a seat in the passenger cabin. He requested the steward to bring him a large spoon. And his friends gazed at him in wonder.

"Well, my only hat!" said Jack Blake. "I've seen a chap scoffing jam from a jar with a tablespoon—chap named Bunter, at Greyfriars, but I never expected to see you at it, Gussy!"

"Weally, Blake—"

Rawlings came back with the tablespoon.

"Thank you vewy much, Wawlings!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pway do me the favah to accept this fivah, Wawlings! You wemembah I pwomised you a fivah if you kept that pot of jam safe where I left it."

"Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!"

Arthur Augustus dipped the tablespoon into the jam. Tom Merry & Co. gazed at him; Pawson gazed at him.

A large tablespoonful was lifted out of the pot—but it was not conveyed to Arthur Augustus' noble mouth.

Something else was in the jam. It was a small object, wrapped inside a handkerchief. "Oh!" gasped Tom Merry. He guessed.

Taking the jammy handkerchief very carefully by the corner—Gussy did not like making his noble fingers sticky—the swell of St. Jim's shook it out, and a small, oval, black object dropped.

Gussy picked up the black box!

"Oh!" gasped all the juniors together.

"Ah!" murmured Pawson.

"Wathah a bwight ideah, what?" smiled Arthur Augustus. "You see, I couldn't cawwy the black box with me, as Giuseppe might have wounded us up, so it had to be left on the plane. But it was possible, of course, that those wottahs might have searched the plane! But I thought it wasn't vewy likely that they would search inside a pot of jam!"

"Oh!"

"So it's all wight, deah boys!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

"Well, my only hat!" said Blake. "So that's what you wanted a pot of jam for when we were leaving the plane—"

"I fancy nobody would have thought of looking in a jampot for it!" said Manners, laughing. "You wouldn't, would you, Pawson!"

"No, sir. It would certainly not have occurred to me," said Pawson.

"A suitcase really seemed a more likely spot," remarked Manners.

"Quite so, sir!" said Pawson, unmoved.

"Come on," said Tom Merry hastily. "The jolly old black box is all right—safe until Gussy meets the first pickpocket in Turin."

And the juniors left the plane, Arthur Augustus slipping the black box cheerfully into his pocket as he went—and Pawson's eyes following it with a fixed gaze as it disappeared.

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