

“THE MAN IN THE MASK!”

THRILLING YARN OF  
MYSTERY AND  
ADVENTURE IN  
VENICE—Starring the  
ST. JIM'S FLYERS.

*The*  
**GEM**  
2<sup>nd</sup>





# 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.

**R. Brooks, of Weymouth, writes:**  
I'm not trying to catch you out in any way, but:

1. How do Covent Garden porters get the baskets of fruit on their heads?
2. How do they take them off?
- 3 and 4. In how many countries have you travelled? What are they?
5. Who is Talbot's guardian?
6. Who is the Minister for Defence in the St. Jim's Parliament?

If you don't print this letter, I shall think you can't answer the questions. So put on your thinking cap!

**ANSWER:** It's quite easy to lift a pile of baskets on and off your head—if you have the knack. If not, it's about as easy as walking a tight-rope over Niagara Falls. I've been to Scotland and Wales, and the "Continong." Of course, the GEM "encircles" the globe! Talbot's guardian is Colonel Lyndon. Defence Minister is myself. I'm open to bright suggestions for preserving England. So put on YOUR thinking cap!

**Michael Murphy, of Newtown, Calbridge, Co. Kildare, I.F.S., writes:**

Here's a chess problem: White to mate in three moves. If you can't do it, ask Manners. Although not up to the standard of the "Magnet," I think the GEM is very grand. P.S.—If this is not printed within twenty-one days, I shall take it letters are not accepted from I.F.S. readers.



Michael Murphy, of Co. Kildare.

**ANSWER:** Patience is a virtue. Michael, boy! Hould hard now. Even for the King of the Enchanted Isles himself we couldn't print a reply in three weeks! And what about time to work out your chess problem? I've passed it

on to Manners. I'm printing your photograph to-day. Phwat more can I do, entirely, for the present?

**Robert Nishet, of School Close, Morpeth, Northumberland, writes:**

Let me have your answers back to these:

1. How long has St. Jim's existed? 2. Is Tom Merry a better boxer than Bob Cherry of Greyfriars?
3. Why don't you go in for the heavy-weight championship of the world? I'll pick up your spare parts after Joe Louis hits you and put them on Syd Walker's barrow. I'm no sneak, but tell Racke & Co. I'll report them for the sack. They'll be in a blue funk!



Robert Nishet, of Morpeth.

**ANSWER:** 1. Since the fifteen hundreds. 2. Best describe this as a meeting between an irresistible force and an immovable object. 3. Thanks, chum! But what I want to know is what would YOU do if you met Joe Louis? Drop me a postcard, chum! I can't quote Racke's reply to your threat—too utterly "blue." It was less of a "report" than an "explosion."

**Bryan Morgan, of Hampton, Middlesex, writes:**

There are only one hundred things wrong with the GEM. 1. Compare its size with the "Magnet." The GEM has about one-quarter the amount of reading. 2. You should cut out all the adverts and TRY putting in more reading matter. 3. Get rid of Lowther's stuff! He'll never make a Billy Bennett or a Max Miller. I don't suppose you will print this, but it was worth the stamp. P.S.—And I could think of another ninety-seven reasons, but for lack of time and space!

**ANSWER:** You suggest more than one thing for me to try. Here's one for you. TRY comparing the twenty-eight page "Magnet" with the thirty-six page GEM. You'll find the amount of reading matter is near enough the same. So you didn't like Lowther's fun, which was as popular when it ran in the GEM? He asks: "How does it feel to be the only chap who can't see jokes?" P.S.—Dying to know the other ninety-seven reasons. You'll be "trying" again, I hope. Oh, don't forget to order next week's copy in advance, will you?

THRILLS, MYSTERY, AND FUN IN VENICE WITH THE ST. JIM'S FLYERS! SUPER, NEW LONG STORY.

# The MAN in the MASK!



There was a sudden stirring in the trees and three figures rushed out with uplifted cudgels. At the same moment the seven schoolboys, apparently bound and helpless, leaped up. It was a complete surprise for Lodovico and the man in the mask.

## CHAPTER 1. Danger!

"ISN'T it jolly?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Jolly isn't the word," said Tom Merry.

"It's gorgeous!"

Gorgeous it was!

A silver crescent of moon sailed in the deep, dark blue vault of the sky over the lagoon of Venice.

The gondola glided gently on a sea as calm as a pond, that reflected a myriad gleaming stars.

Tom Merry & Co. were feeling merry and bright.

It was the last day but one of the St. Jim's trippers' stay in the City of the Sea, the beautiful queen of the Adriatic.

Two more days, and the St. Jim's party would be packing on board the Silver Swallow again

Who is the mystery man seeking Gussy's little black box? The flying schoolboys of St. Jim's receive a big shock when the unknown is at last unmasked.

by

MARTIN CLIFFORD

for the homeward flight. The flying schoolboys were almost at the end of their holiday, and ahead of them was the new term at St. Jim's.

In the meantime, they were enjoying life.

That day they had crossed from Venice to the Lido to bathe in the blue waters of the Adriatic. They had tea'd on a terrace overlooking a sunset-reddened sea. Now they were gliding back to Venice in the moonlight, and it was, as Tom declared, gorgeous.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was stretched elegantly on soft cushions. Blake, Herries, and Digby sat leaning back lazily. Monty Lowther had perched himself on the roof of the little cabin in the centre of the gondola, swinging his legs. Tom Merry reclined on a seat, with his head resting against the gunwale. Only Manners was on his feet; he was standing up,

scanning the moonlit, starlit sea. Only Manners was not looking lazily contented like the rest of the happy party.

"You know," remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, "this sort of scenewy makes a fellow feel feathfully poetical! There's a wippin' song about glidin' in a gondola on a moonlit lagoon. I would sing it to you fellows—"

"Help!" murmured Jack Blake.

"Weally, Blake—"

"Rescue!" gasped Herries.

"Weally, Hewwies—"

"Go ahead, Gussy!" said Tom Merry, laughing.

"I was goin' to wemark," said Arthur Augustus, "that I would sing it to you fellows, only I have forgotten the words, and I don't wemembah the tune."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Looking for Venice, Manners?" asked Tom, glancing up. "We don't seem to be getting in yet."

"Just what I was thinking," answered Manners, still watching the sea.

"The gondoliers take their time," remarked Digby. "Gondolas don't nip about like taxis. Still, you can't get taxis in Venice."

"You jolly well can!" said Monty Lowther. This was a chance for the funny man of the Shell. "You listen-in to the natives, and you'll hear them grouching about the taxes. More and more taxes every time Mussolini spreads himself a bit more. Roman empires have to be paid for!"

"Bai Jove! Is that one of your wotten puns, Lowthah?"

"No; it's one of my good ones!"

Manners of the Shell turned from watching the sea. He glanced round at the cheery, contented faces glimmering in the moonlight, with a slightly sarcastic expression on his own.

Tom Merry, catching that expression on his face, gave him a quick look and sat up.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Is anything?" yawned Blake. "Dropped your camera overboard, Manners?"

"No."

"Oh, sorry!" said Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

But Manners did not smile at Blake's little joke. He looked up and down the long, narrow craft. There was a gondolier at the bow, and a gondolier at the stern, propelling the gondola with slow, steady sweeps of the immense oars. Both of them were dark-faced Italians. They seemed to take no heed of their passengers, but every now and then, Manners had noticed, there was a glitter of black eyes turned towards them.

"You fellows look a lazy lot!" remarked Manners. "Enjoying life—what?"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Well, we've had a ripping day, and everything in the garden is lovely!" said Blake. "Nothing to grouse about, is there?"

"And we haven't had any trouble about that mouldy black box of Gussy's lately!" remarked Manners. "Looks as if we're done with that."

"Thank goodness for that!" said Dig.

"Yaas! Pwavy don't mention that beastly black box, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "I can tell you, I am feathfully fed-up with that black box!"

"And so say all of us!" sang Monty Lowther from the roof of the cabin.

"It was weally a wippin' ideah, you know, to send the beastly thing back to England by

wegistahed post when we were at Tuwin!" went on Arthur Augustus. "I can tell you, I was vevy glad to be wid of it!"

"Cough it up, Manners!" said Tom Merry quietly. "What's the matter?"

"Bai Jove! Is anythin' the mattah, Mannahs?" Tom looked uneasily at his chum.

Obviously, from Manners' look, there was something the matter—or, at least, Manners thought that there was.

"Well," said Manners slowly, "that dago, Giuseppe, who was after Gussy's black box, was knocked out in the Alps, and we're through with him. Now the blinking black box itself is got rid of, and it's waiting at St. Jim's for Gussy to collect next term. But—"

"But what?" grunted Blake.

"But there's somebody around who doesn't believe that the black box is very far away," said Manners. "We know that, from Gussy having been snaffled in Venice the other day. Since then we've had no trouble, because we've all kept together in a bunch every time we've left the hotel on the Grand Canal. But—"

"Bai Jove! You keep on buttin' like a billy-goat, old chap!"

"But," said Manners, unheeding, "there's another spot of trouble coming! You fellows notice the wind?"

"The wind?" repeated Tom Merry blankly.

"Yes, the wind."

"What on earth are you dwivin' at, Mannahs?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus, in astonishment. "There is hardly any wind; but it doesn't mattah, anyhow, as we are goin' by oars, not by sails. I have heard that this lagoon is wathah wuff in a wind, but it's as calm as anythin' now."

"The wind has been, and is, blowing from the south," said Manners.

"That," said Monty Lowther solemnly, from the roof of the cabin, "is because it's a south wind, old chap. As the bloke says in 'The Ancient Mariner':

"The good south wind  
Still blew behind."

"If you fellows stand up and look forrard you'll feel the wind in your faces," said Manners.

Tom Merry stared for a moment and jumped up. Arthur Augustus screwed his eyeglass into his noble eye, and regarded Manners in increasing surprise.

"What about it, Mannahs?" he asked. "You seem to me to be speakin' in widdles! What does it mattah whethah the wind blows in our faces or on the backs of our necks? It's a vevy soft, warm wind."

"Next term," said Manners, "when you're at St. Jim's, and Lathom is giving you geography, listen to him, old chap, and don't worry about the crease in your trousers! Geography comes in useful sometimes."

"Weally, Mannahs—"

"Is this going to be a geographical lecture?" yawned Blake. "Fancy geography on a night like this!"

"I suppose Manners is driving at something," said Dig. "But does anybody know what he's driving at?"

"Ask me another!" said Herries.

"Only this," said Manners quietly—"the Lido, where we've been, lies south-east from Venice across the lagoon. On our way back we ought to be going north-west. Got that?"

"Yaas, wathah! Weally, Mannahs, a chap does not need tellin' that!"

"Looking forrard, we ought to get the south wind under our left ears," said Manners. "But if you stand up and face the bows, you'll get it full in the face—which means, if you Fourth Form kids can understand it, that we're not heading for Venice at all, but that those two dago gondoliers have long ago turned their backs on Venice—"

"Bai Jove!"

"And they're taking us out into the lagoon, goodness knows where!"

"Oh!"

"Got it now?" asked Manners sarcastically.

All the St. Jim's fellows had got it now, and they all bounded to their feet.

## CHAPTER 2.

### 'Bout Ship!

**T**OM MERRY & CO. stood and stared across the sea.

The warm wind came from the south. They stood facing the bows of the gondola as it surged on through the sea, and the wind was in their faces. The gondola was driving due south.

Venice, from the Lido, lay north-west! It was no wonder that the juniors had not seen the lights of Venice. The stern of the gondola was turned to the City of the Sea, and every sweep of the long oars took it farther and farther away from Venice! Manners had spotted it.

No one else had been doubtful or suspicious. The juniors, pleasantly tired after a happy day on the Lido, had been taking their ease, lazily resting, and caring little how long the homeward trip took on that lovely moonlit sea.

But the discovery that they were not heading homeward at all, but were being carried out into the immensity of the Laguna Veneta, was startling. They were all on the alert now.

That the Venetian gondoliers had mistaken their course was obviously impossible. The only conclusion was that they were deliberately taking the St. Jim's party to an unknown destination.

And all the fellows knew what it meant!

It was that mouldy black box again.

That black box, so mysteriously in Gussy's possession, had haunted them all through the flying holiday. Giuseppe Fosco had been after it, like a dog after a bone.

When Giuseppe was done with they had hoped that the trouble was done with. Somebody else was after that black box, who, Arthur Augustus had not the faintest idea, though he supposed that it was some other dago, who had had the tip from Giuseppe!

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus, looking at the gondolier forrard, felt the south wind in his aristocratic countenance. "Mannahs is wight! We are goin' south!"

"Due south!" said Blake.

"I suppose you are suah that Venice is north-west from the Lido, Mannahs?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Ass!" was Manners' reply to that.

"Weally Mannahs—"

"No doubt about that," said Monty Lowther. "I've seen it on the map. We've got our backs to Venice."

"Which means," said Tom Merry quietly, "that we're being led into a trap, and that the gondoliers have been bribed to lead us into it."

"Exactly that!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove! I can hardly undahstand it!" said Arthur Augustus. "Pawson engaged this

gondola for us, you know, and I feel suah that Pawson would take care to pick out men he could wely on."

Manners gave a short, sarcastic laugh.

"No doubt about that!" he said bitterly.

Tom Merry gave him a warning look. He knew, as Manners knew, that it was Lord Eastwood's man, Pawson, the trusted man in charge of the schoolboy trippers, who was the mysterious "somebody" after the black box!

But it was useless—worse than useless—to tell Arthur Augustus so. Arthur Augustus could not, and would not, have believed a word of it.

Neither, indeed, would the other fellows.

Manners had found it hard to convince Tom Merry. He had found it impossible to convince Monty Lowther, who had laughed at the idea. He had said nothing to the Fourth Formers. It was useless.

"Well, if these dashed dagoes are pulling our legs it's hardly Pawson's fault!" said Blake. "He couldn't know that some blighter was going to get at them."

"Of course he couldn't!" agreed Herries.

"But where the thump are they taking us?" asked Dig. "And what's going to happen when we get there?"

"I'll tell you," said Manners quietly. "The blighter who's after Gussy's black box believes that one of us is minding it for him, because a few days ago he got Gussy and searched him, without finding it. He was going to keep Gussy on a felucca in the lagoon till he told him where to find it, only Gussy got away! Since then we've been jolly careful to keep in a bunch, and the result is that the blighter has planned to bag the whole bunch! That's his game, because we've left him no chance of doing anything else."

"That's it!" said Tom Merry, with a nod.

"If we let the gondoliers keep on," went on Manners, "they will run us to some lonely spot—some island in the lagoon—and to the man in the mask who got Gussy on the felucca."

"Looks like it," said Blake slowly.

"So," added Manners, "we're not letting those rascals keep on! Luckily, we've spotted their game before they've been able to join up with their confederates. There's seven of us here—enough to handle two dagoes! We've got a stick apiece! Get hold of them!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"If it's coming to a scrap we've got a good chance while we're still at sea," said Manners. "We shouldn't have a chance after they'd got to where they're going, wherever that is. We're going to make those rascals swing the gondola round and head for Venice."

"And we're going to do it now!" said Tom Merry.

"Get forward!" said Manners.

"Yaas, wathah! Buck up, deah boys; even if the wascals have stickahs about them, we can handle them all wight!"

Tom Merry, with a stick in his hand, led the way forward, to where one of the gondoliers—whose name, they knew, was Lodovico—stood at his long oar.

The man stared at them as they came, and a faint grin passed over his dusky face. Perhaps he had been wondering how long it would be before the schoolboys discovered that they were being tricked, and whether they would discover it at all before they reached their unknown destination.

Probably, but for Manners they would not have

made the discovery till it was too late! But they knew now, and they were quite prepared to deal with the rascals who were betraying them into the hands of their enemies.

"Che cosa e?" asked Lodovico; but the grin on his swarthy face told that he knew.

Tom Merry pointed northward.

"Venezia!" he said.

Lodovico shook his head.

"The man understands English," said Manners quietly. "Leave it to me to give him some English that he can't fail to understand. You black-faced, unwashed thief, turn the gondola round at once and head for Venice, or I'll crack your rascally head with this stick!"

There was a glitter in the gondolier's black eyes. Evidently he understood Manners' English—probably the plainest English he had ever heard! He did not seem to relish it.

"Did you hear me, you dirty dago?" asked Manners.

"Dio mio! You shut up a mouth, or you go to get one beating!" said Lodovico. "You keep quiet on a seat—"

"Call to the other scoundrel and tell him you're taking us straight to Venice!" said Manners.

The Italian laughed scoffingly.

"You go to a place!" he said. "To Venice—no! You sit quiet, you are not hurt. But it is to sit quiet, or you get one blow."

The gondolier in the stern was staring along the gondola, resting on his oar. He called out a question to the man forward.

"Va bene, Benito!" called back Lodovico. "Andiamo!"

Manners gripped his stick hard.

"Will you swing the gondola round and head for Venice this minute, you unwashed scum?" he asked.

"Silenzio, you!" snarled Lodovico.

The next moment he gave a fearful yell as Manners' arm shot up and the stick crashed on his head, smashing in the felt hat.

The blow sent him staggering headlong, to collapse in the bottom of the gondola. Blake caught at the oar as it slid from his hands.

"Oh, bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

The fallen man yelled and howled between pain and rage. Then he scrambled up, his right arm groping at the back of his trousers—the St. Jim's fellows could guess for what!

But they did not give Lodovico a chance of getting up with a knife in his hand. Manners crashed the stick across his greasy head, laying him half-stunned in the bottom of the gondola again. Tom Merry pounced on the half-drawn knife and flung it into the sea.

There was a shout from the other end of the gondola, and Benito came running along the craft to the aid of his confederate.

"Back up!" breathed Monty Lowther.

Half a dozen lashing blows greeted Benito as he came. Tom Merry & Co. were not standing on ceremony with the dusky rascals.

If Benito had a knife, he did not attempt to draw it. He yelled with agony as the sticks lashed, and darted back again, yelling and howling as he regained his own end of the gondola.

"Bai Jove! That wottah seems to have had enough!" remarked Arthur Augustus. "Plentay more weady if he wants it."

Lodovico raised himself on his elbow. A streak of crimson was running down his swarthy

face. His black eyes glittered at the juniors like a savage rat's.

Apparently the rascal had expected no trouble with a party of holiday-making schoolboys, even if they discovered his treachery. But he had to realise now that he was getting unexpected trouble, and more than he could handle.

He leaned on his elbow, gasped, and spat out Italian curses. Manners gave him a grim look.

"Are you heading for Venice now?" he asked. "Mai!" yelled Lodovico. "Mai!"

"I believe that means nevah, deah boys—"

"He will find that never is a long word!" said Manners. "Get hold of him and turn him over! I'm going to thrash him till he takes his oar and heads for Venice!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" grinned Blake. "Give him six, like a jolly old St. Jim's prefect."

Three or four of the juniors grasped the sprawling gondolier. He struggled and clawed savagely.

Crack!

Manners' stick landed on his greasy head with a crack like a pistol-shot. His struggling and clawing ceased.

"That's a tip, dago," said Manners cheerfully. "Lots more if you want any more!"

"Bai Jove! Don't you think you are bein' watah wuff on the bwute, Mannahs?" gasped Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, I mean to be! Roll him over."

Lodovico did not resist further as he was rolled over.

Thus placed in a favourable position for the whopping, Lodovico got the whopping! Tom Merry and Lowther held the squirming rascal while Manners laid it on.

The other fellows watched Benito, ready to deal with him if he intervened. But Benito seemed to have had enough. He sat on the gunwale at his own end of the gondola, clasping an aching head in both hands, and alternatively groaning and cursing.

Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

Probably Lodovico had never heard of a fellow getting "six." But he learned now what it was like, at all events!

He squirmed and howled. Manners put his beef into it! That gondola was going straight back to Venice, and Manners was going to thrash the treacherous rascal until he rowed it there.

It was, in fact, the only way out of the danger in which the treachery of the gondoliers had landed the St. Jim's party. The juniors could not have handled the immense oars, neither could they have been sure of steering in the right direction. Lodovico was going to do the work for which he was paid—and Harry Manners was going to see that he did it.

Manners, generally a very quiet fellow, was rather surprising his comrades. There was no doubt that he was surprising the gondolier!

After the sixth swipe Manners paused.

"Will you head for Venice now?" he asked.

"Mai!" yelled the Italian, fairly foaming with rage. "Furfante—mai—mai—mai!"

"Hold the brute!" said Manners quietly. "I fancy he will get tired of this before I do!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe, swipe! Manners laid on another six, the stick fairly ringing on the gondolier's trousers.

It was too much for Lodovico! Manners was prepared for a third "six"—Lodovico was not!

"Will you head for Venice now?" asked Manners.



Lodovico had probably never heard of a fellow getting "six." But he learned now what it was like! He squirmed and howled as Manners laid on the stick. That gondola was going straight back to Venice, and Manners was going to thrash the treacherous gondolier until he rowed it there!

"Si, si! Presto!" groaned Lodovico. "Si, signore, si!"

"Si means yaas, you fellows!"

"I thought we should get 'si' instead of 'mai' in the long run!" said Manners. "Let the brute get up! Get up, you scum, and if we don't see the lights of Venice pretty soon, look out for another thrashing!"

Lodovico staggered to his feet.

He gave Manners a deadly look, and his black eyes flashed fury at the other juniors. But the bravado had been taken out of him and he did not want any more. Muttering oaths in his own tongue, he grasped his oar and called to his comrade at the other end of the gondola.

The oars swept the water again—the long, narrow craft swung round. And now the south wind blew behind Tom Merry & Co. Venice was distant, but the gondola was heading in the right direction—as fast as the scowling, cursing gondoliers could tug at the heavy oars!

### CHAPTER 3.

#### Manners Guesses Right!

"PAWSON will be feahfully anxious about us!" remarked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, with rather a worried look, as the gondola surged over the moonlit sea. "It is gettin' awf'ly late, deah boys."

It was very late.

The pull to Venice was a long one, and the gondola was not a quick-moving craft.

Lodovico and Benito tugged at the oars, every now and then casting evil looks at the school-boys. But they did not attempt to give further trouble.

Tom Merry & Co. were watching them keenly enough. Manners had his stick across his knees ready for use.

Until the lights of Venice came in sight the juniors could only judge their direction by the wind. But the lights were gleaming now, far away to the north.

It was clear that after leaving the Lido, the gondoliers had rowed south-west instead of north-west, and then turned due south, to keep clear of Venice and of the long line of islands adjoining the Lido.

It was, therefore, a long pull to get back to Venice; and the night grew older as the gondola surged on. The juniors had intended to land at the Hotel Veronese, on the Grand Canal of Venice, quite early in the evening. It looked now as if they would land there nearer midnight.

Which worried Arthur Augustus, on Pawson's account. Lord Eastwood's man would be expecting them early—and they would arrive very late. Pawson would suppose that something had happened to them—as something very nearly had!

"All right, when we get in!" said Blake.  
 "But I suppose Pawson will be worrying a bit!"  
 "I dare say he's been standing on the steps for the last hour or two watching for us to come up the canal!" remarked Digby.

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "He hasn't!" said Manners.  
 "Eh? How the thump do you know?" demanded Herries.

"Pawson's out!" answered Manners.  
 "And how the jolly old thump do you know whether he's out or not when we haven't seen him since this morning?" exclaimed Blake in astonishment.

"Oh, I guessed!" grunted Manners.  
 "Weally, Mannahs, I entiahly fail to see how you could have guessed anythin' of the kind!" said Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Lots of things you don't see!" grunted Manners.

"Well, how did you guess, then?" demanded Blake. "I suppose Pawson would trot out while we were gone, but he would be back at the hotel by the time he expected us to get back!"

"Of course he would!" said Herries.  
 "Yaas, wathah! You seem to be talkin' out of the back of your neck, Mannahs!" said Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry pressed his chum's arm in warning. He knew what was in Harry Manners' mind. Pawson had fixed up that trickery with the gondoliers. Whatever their intended destination had been in the remote recesses of the lagoon, Manners had no doubt that Pawson was there, awaiting them.

Arthur Augustus had not the remotest idea of the identity of the "man in the mask" who had kidnapped him on board a felucca a couple of days ago. Manners knew that it must have been Pawson. Manners had no doubt that that "man in the mask" would have been awaiting them had Lodovico got away with his treachery. So he had, of course, not the slightest doubt that Lord Eastwood's man was absent from the hotel.

"You're talking rot, Manners!" said Monty Lowther very quietly. Lowther could guess what Manners had in his mind, as he had been told of his doubts of Pawson. "Just rot!"

"Think so?" snorted Manners.  
 "Yes, fathead!"

"All right! Bet you that Pawson won't be at the hotel when we get in, and that he won't be home till morning!" retorted Manners.

"But what the thump makes you think so?" howled Blake.

Tom Merry pressed Manners' arm again. More than once Harry Manners had been on the point of blurting out his suspicions of Pawson for the whole party to hear. Clearly, it was now on his lips to speak out.

But he checked himself.  
 "Well, I do think so," he grunted, "and you'll see!"

"Well, it seems to be uttah wot!" said Arthur Augustus. "If I were a bettin' chap I would bet ten to one that Pawson will be on the steps, in a fearful state of anxiety, when we get in."

Manners made no rejoinder but a grunt.

"I have noticed several times, Mannahs, that you do not seem to like Pawson vewy much!" said Arthur Augustus. "I weally cannot undahstand it when he is so vewy dutiful and obligin' and so devoted. Look how he has managed this flyin' twip—not a hitch all the way, except the twouble we had fwom that wotten dago Giuseppe.

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Weally, we all ought to be vewy gwateful to Pawson."

"Hear, hear!" said Blake.  
 "And it wowwies me vewy much to think of that good chap waitin' for us now, and wowwyin' about what's happened to us."

Grunt!—from Manners.  
 But he was silent. Again and again he had been tempted to speak out and open Gussy's eyes if he could. But what was the use when he had tried it on Monty Lowther, and Monty laughed at his suspicions? What Monty did not believe, it was certain that Gussy would never dream of believing. It only meant a row with Gussy, without convincing him in the very least.

Manners moved away towards the end of the gondola with a frown on his face. Tom Merry moved along to join him. The lights of Venice were gleaming brightly now far ahead; they were entering at last the Canal di San Marco, and the long line of the Riva degli Schiavoni lay ahead of them.

"Keep it parked, Manners, old man," said Tom in a low voice. "We've only got a couple more days, then we get on the Silver Swallow and fly home. No good upsetting Gussy for nothing."

"Think Pawson will let us?" grunted Manners.  
 "This isn't his last shot. He had this all cut and dried, Tom. You remember Gussy thought of asking those Greyfriars chaps to join us to-day in a trip out to the Lido—Coker and Potter and Greene—"

"What about that?" asked Tom.  
 "He sent Pawson with a message to them at the Hotel della Riva—"

"Well?"  
 "And Pawson came back saying that they'd gone out for the day—"

"Well?" repeated Tom.

"Well, they may have, but I don't believe it," said Manners. "You can see now that nobody was wanted to be with us on this trip—considering what was scheduled to happen on our way home."

Tom was silent.  
 "Pawson failed this time," went on Manners. "But he believes that that black box is still around; and I can tell you, Tom, that he's not through yet. He's pushed for time now, and getting desperate. He can't get any of us separately from the rest now, and so he's planned to bag the whole bunch. At this very minute he's waiting somewhere out on the lagoon—perhaps in that very felucca that Gussy was kidnapped on the other day."

"Very likely," said Tom.  
 "Gussy got away that time, because that Greyfriars chap—Coker—turned up on the spot," said Manners. "That kind of accident doesn't happen twice. Next time Gussy walks into the trap he'll stay in it. And we shall be in the same trap along with him, unless I can make him see sense in time."

"You can't!" said Tom.  
 "We've got through this time," grunted Manners. "To-morrow's our last day. Pawson will fix up something for to-morrow."

"We've got to be on our guard," said Tom.  
 "Anyhow, that mouldy black box is safe. What the thump can be in it, Manners? All we know is that Gussy got it from some American chap who was crooked on a motor-bike in Sussex before the holidays—"

"Loot!" grunted Manners. "That man was a crook of some sort, and he'd had a row with Giuseppe—over the loot. That ass Gussy had a crook's loot landed on him to take care of."



"I—I suppose it's possible."  
 "Whatever it is, Pawson knows," said Manners. "He only knew at first that the black box must contain something very valuable for Giuseppe to be after it as he was. But I feel sure that he has found out since; he got it from the dago, I expect. Tom, there's a fortune in that black box—though goodness only knows what it is! Precious stones, I fancy; the box is too small to hold anything else of much value. It ought to be opened—"

"No good telling Gussy that when he's taken it in trust for a man who got his promise to take care of it."

"No! But, anyhow, the box is in the Head's safe at St. Jim's now, and Gussy won't see it again till next term. Pawson won't, either. That's one comfort."

"Here we are in the jolly old Grand Canal!" called out Monty Lowther.

The gondola was gliding into the Grand Canal, between the Punta della Salute and the Riva. Lodovico and Benito rowed on with sullen faces. Monty Lowther came along the gondola and joined his chums.

"What are we going to do about those two rogues?" he asked. "Hand them over to the Venice police?"

"What's the good of that?" grunted Manners. "We can't prove anything against them, except that they lost their way on the lagoon. Even if they were locked up, Pawson could find as many more rogues as he wants."

"Oh, chuck it, for goodness' sake!" snapped Lowther. "Ever since you talked that rot about Pawson I'm afraid every minute that you will let out something before Gussy and all the fat will be in the fire. Gussy's standing us this trip, and Pawson's managing it. It's too thick, Manners."

"I'm not going to say anything to Gussy; he's a bigger ass than you are," granted Manners. "We're getting near the hotel now. See if Pawson's on the steps waiting for us. I've told you he isn't."

"Oh rats!"  
 The gondola glided up the canal to the water-steps on the Hotel Veronese. The hour was late, and lights were fading out along the canal. On the steps a figure stood, but it was not the portly figure of Lord Eastwood's man; it was the head porter, in his gold-laced cap.

Lodovico and Benito brought the gondola alongside the lowest step. Both of them were looking uneasy now as well as sullen. But they were done with, and Tom Merry & Co. gave them no heed as they pushed off again when the party had landed.

The gold-laced porter touched his cap. "E tadi, signori!" he said. "It is late! You are of late return!"

"Bai Jove! Where is Pawson?" Arthur Augustus scanned the steps and the portico through his eyeglass. "Suahly Pawson hasn't gone to bed!"

"Where is Pawson, Giacomo?" asked Manners. "The Signor Pawson? He do not yet return," said the porter. "He go in one gondola, it is long ago, but yet he do not return."

Manners laughed. "Pawson's out, you fellows!" he said. "Bai Jove! How vewy remarkable, Mannahs, that you should have guessed that Pawson would be out!" said Arthur Augustus in astonishment. "Yes, isn't it?" grunted Manners.

Monty Lowther gave him a rather startled look.

Monty made light of his suspicions of Pawson. But it was certainly very remarkable that Manners had guessed so accurately that Lord Eastwood's man would be absent when they returned.

"Weally it is wathah fortunate," said Arthur Augustus. "Pwobably Pawson has gone to the theatre; I wemembah he was speakin' about some show at the Teatro Goldoni. I am vewy glad that he has been spared anxiety on our account. That is weally vewy luckay, isn't it?"

"Frightfully!" agreed Manners. "Well, we won't stay up for Pawson," yawned Blake. "I'm sleepy. Who's for bed?"

Everybody was sleepy, and everybody was for bed. Tom Merry & Co. were all fast asleep when Lord Eastwood's man came back at a very late hour from wherever he had been—probably not the Teatro Goldoni!

CHAPTER 4.

Coker, Too!

"WHAT about Coker?" asked Manners casually.

"Um!" said Arthur Augustus. It was a glorious May morning in Venice. Brilliant sunshine flooded the Grand Canal and the buildings that rose from the shining water.

Tom Merry & Co. sat at breakfast on a balcony overlooking the canal. Three or four Italian waiters were looking after them; and Pawson was hovering as usual, making himself unobtrusively useful. Pawson was the only one who spoke Italian, which made him more useful than ever in Italy.

Pawson had suggested a trip for the day—the

NOT WANTED AT GREYFRIARS!

For the past week or two everything seems to have gone wrong for Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars. He's in his Form-master's blackest books, and he's quarrelled with Tom Redwing—his only real friend in the school. Now, to cap it all, his cousin and double, Bertie Vernon, whom he hates intensely—comes to Greyfriars. Little wonder, then, that the Bounder resolves to make Greyfriars as unpleasant as he can for Bertie! Read all about it in

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the sensational, 35,000-word school-adventure yarn of Harry Wharton & Co., the world-famous chums of Greyfriars, appearing now in

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last day in Venice. The St. Jim's party were going to start early and make a day of it—a day at sea. They had by this time explored Venice and its canals fairly thoroughly, and a day sailing on the lagoon and visiting the scattered islands seemed a very jolly prospect.

Lord Eastwood's man, of course, had made all the arrangements, as usual.

He had hired a little cutter, which now lay off the Riva degli Schiavoni, ready for the party. Pawson—who could do everything—could sail a cutter, and he was going with the party. And, under the inimitable Pawson's directions, Tom Merry & Co. were going to sail the cutter themselves.

Manners—who had immediately suspected a crew of swarthy dagoes, ready to turn on the party in some lonely spot—was a little puzzled.

Not a dago was to be on board. Pawson as skipper, and Tom Merry & Co. as crew, were going to sail the cutter. From early morn till dewy eve they were going to sail among the scattered innumerable islands of the Venetian lagoon—landing on one for lunch, on another for tea—and everybody agreed that it was a great idea of Pawson's, and a ripping way of spending the last day in Venice.

Then Manners asked:

"What about Coker?"

He was watching Pawson's face as he made the suggestion, and he did not fail to note a faint shadow that crossed that fruity face.

The suggestion did not evoke a lot of enthusiasm.

Tom Merry & Co. had fallen in with three Fifth Form men of Greyfriars School, who were having a holiday at Venice. Two of them—Potter and Greene—seemed civil enough fellows. But the other one—Horace Coker—was, as Arthur Augustus expressed it, rather a "corkah."

Coker, of the Greyfriars Fifth, was not a bad chap. He was quite a good chap! It was clear that he was unaware that he was an overbearing, overwhelming, obstreperous, self-opinionated ass!

But this fact, unknown to Coker and unsuspected by him, was only too evident to all other fellows who came in contact with Horace Coker.

Indeed, the fact that Potter and Greene, of his Form at Greyfriars, were spending a holiday with him could only be accounted for on the theory that Coker was standing the "exes."

On the other hand, Coker, obstreperous ass as he was, had hooked Arthur Augustus D'Arcy and Jack Blake out of a very serious scrape—knocking out a dago who was keeping them tied up on a felucca in the lagoon, under the orders of the mysterious "man in a mask" who was after the black box! Coker had rescued them out of that scrape!

So he was, to some extent, a fellow whom the St. Jim's party delighted to honour!

They were deeply obliged to Coker. They respected him. But they did not enjoy his company. They liked him—at a distance. And the longer the distance was, the more they liked him!

"Um!" repeated Arthur Augustus.

"Look what he did!" said Manners cheerfully. "He's an awful ass, and a blithering fathead. And he can't keep his mouth shut, and he can't open it without talking rot—but look what he did when Gussy and Blake were parked on that felucca. We owe him something."

"Yaas, wathah!" agreed Arthur Augustus.

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"He would enjoy this ripping trip with us!" said Manners.

"We shouldn't—with Coker!" grunted Herries. "Let Coker on board and he will want to sail the cutter, and run it on the first rock," said Blake. "And if you argue with him there's a row!"

"Useful man to have around, though, if we get into a row with any dashed dagoes," said Manners.

"We shall have Pawson with us, Mannahs. Howevah, as you say, we are undah gweat obligations to Cokah, and if he and his fwiends would like to come—"

Pawson gave his deferential cough.

"If you will excuse me, Master Arthur—" he murmured.

"Cawwy on, Pawson."

"The cutter I have engaged, sir, is very small—in point of fact it will be a little crowded," said Pawson. "We shall be able to manage very well—but the addition of three persons to the party would be very awkward. I do not see, sir, how it could quite be managed."

"Oh, we could pack in!" said Manners at once.

He closed an eye at Tom Merry—the eye that was farthest from Pawson!

Harry Manners, as a matter of fact, did not enjoy Coker's obstreperous company any more than the other fellows. He was simply going to ascertain whether Pawson was determined that Coker & Co. should not come.

If so, Manners had it clear that Pawson was plotting mischief in that trip among the islands.

"Yaas, wathah; I dare say we could pack in at a pinch," said Arthur Augustus. "If Cokah would like to come—"

"I do not think, sir, that Master Coker cares very much for the company of boys in lower Forms at school!" murmured Pawson. "He is a senior boy at his own school, and—"

"Yaas, that is vevy twue, Pawson! Still, it would be only civil to ask him. We are goin' to land for lunch on that island called—what did you call it, Pawson?"

"San Geronimo, sir."

"Yaas, San Gewonimo! I wemembah Cokah sayin' that he was goin' to San Gewonimo the day we met him—so he might like to go—"

"He has probably made the trip since then, sir."

"Yaas, vevy likely! Still, it would be only civil to ask the chap, considewin' what he did for us. Pewwaps you will get him on the telephone, Pawson, and ask him vevy politely if he would like to come."

"Certainly sir; I will do so immediately."

Pawson went into the hotel.

Manners rose, picked up his camera, and slung it over his shoulder. The other fellows looked at him.

"Time to take a few snaps along the canal before we start," said Manners.

"Bai Jove! Don't you want to heah what Pawson says when he comes back?" asked Arthur Augustus. "Don't you want to know whethah Cokah is comin' or not?"

"Oh, I can guess that one!" said Manners. "You know what a guesser I am! Coker won't be coming!"

And Manners left the party, and a few minutes later was seen going along the path on the edge of the canal with his camera.

"Weally, you fellows, I cannot quite make

Mannahs out!" said Arthur Augustus. "He seems to be makin' a habit of talkin' in widdles! He cannot possibly know whether Cokah is comin' or not till Pawson comes back and tells us."

Tom Merry smiled faintly. Monty Lowther gave a grunt. Monty could discern Manners' suspicions at work again!

However, it proved that Manners was right in his prediction. Pawson came back to the balcony at last.

"You got Cokah, Pawson?" asked Arthur Augustus.

"Yes, sir. He has declined to join the party, sir!" Pawson coughed. "From what he said, sir, I fear that Master Coker regards it as somewhat below his dignity to join a party of what he calls fags—"

"Bai Jove!"

"Cheeky ass!" said Blake.

"I twust he was civil to you, Pawson?"

Pawson coughed again.

"I fear, sir, that that young gentleman is never civil to anyone," he answered.

"Well, we've done the civil thing in askin' him!" said Arthur Augustus. "I cannot say I am sorry he has turned it down! To tell the twuth, you fellows, a whole day with Cokah would be wathah feahful!"

"What-ho!" grinned Blake.

"What an escape!" said Monty Lowther. "I suggest a vote of thanks to Coker of Greyfriars! He's going to make this trip a success!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yaas, wathah!" chuckled Arthur Augustus.

The civil thing had been done! But there was no doubt that the St. Jim's party were rather relieved to hear that Horace Coker disdained to join up with a party of fags!

## CHAPTER 5.

### Coker is Wrathy!

"**C**CHEEK!" Horace Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth made that remark for the twentieth time—if not the thirtieth.

Coker was frowning.

He was annoyed.

In a room looking out on the Riva degli Schiavoni and the sea beyond, on innumerable gondolas and the masts of shipping, the three Fifth Form men of Greyfriars School sat at breakfast.

Coker had been called away from brekker to speak on the telephone. He had not gone in a good temper—Coker did not like interruptions at meals. He had come back in quite a bad one.

"Cheek!" said Coker. "Cheek! Dashed cheek! My hat! Cheek!"

"Perhaps the man expressed it rather unfortunately," suggested Greene.

"Don't talk rot, Greene!"

Potter and Greene exchanged a glance and devoted themselves to breakfast. Silence was the golden rule in talking to Horace Coker.

As Coker was standing that week in Venice, and standing also all the innumerable little incidental expenses that cropped up in holiday-time, Potter and Greene could not very well tell him what they thought of him.

Besides, Coker really did not mean any harm. Being blessed himself with a wisdom superior to that of all other mortals, he was rather impatient with silly asses! That was all!

There was silence for a few minutes. Coker frowned over a large breakfast—but did it full justice, all the same.

Potter and Greene, as a matter of fact, would have been rather glad to see a little more of Tom Merry & Co. during that holiday in Venice.

It was true that Tom Merry & Co. were juniors, and Potter and Greene seniors; still, they belonged to another school, so the loss of dignity, after all, would not be a great matter. It would not be like consorting with Greyfriars fags!

Truth to tell, Coker felt rather the same. Anything English—even a fag—was agreeable among a lot of dagoes.

Had Tom Merry & Co. keenly sought the company of the great Horace, had they listened to his talk as to pearls of wisdom, had they done everything Coker told them, and raised no objection to Coker telling them what a set of silly little idiots they were, Coker could have got on with them all right.

So perhaps it was rather unfortunate that the unsuspecting Gussy trusted the communications into the hands of Pawson.

"Cheek!" said Coker. "I've a jolly good mind to trot round and see those St. Jim's fags and give them a piece of my mind! This is what comes of being civil to fags!"

"Have you been civil?" asked Potter, in surprise.

"You!" ejaculated Greene.

Coker, so far as his friends knew, had never been civil to anybody!

Coker snorted.

"I'm glad I came on those kids the other night when we were coming back from San Geronimo!" he went on. "Silly little asses, you know, getting snaffled by dagoes, and parked on a fishing-boat out on the lagoon. I got them out of that. I'm glad I did! It was up to me! One of them called me 'old chap.' Did I smack his head?"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"I would have if he'd been a Greyfriars fag," said Coker. "I've a short way with fags! You know that! How often have I walloped young Wharton and his gang at Greyfriars for cheek? Still, I was civil! And now—"

Coker breathed hard.

"Now their man rings me up and calls me away from brekker, and cheeks me. He says that, being in charge of the party, and trusted to look after them, he feels that he is not justified in allowing them to form acquaintances with strangers in a foreign city."

Coker snorted.

"The cheek of it!" he said. "After I got them off that old tub in the lagoon, we gave them a lift in our gondola to their hotel up the Grand Canal! That's all! Could a fellow do less?"

"But—" said Potter.

"Don't jaw! One of them is the son of a lord! Fat lot I think of lords! Am I the fellow to grease up to anybody because his father is a lord? Did I say I wanted to keep up the acquaintance? Did I say I wanted to see anything more of the scrubby gang? By Jove!"

Coker's eyes glittered over his breakfast.

"Blessed if I can make it out!" said Greene. "From what I've heard the kids say, that man Pawson is Lord Eastwood's valet—the old lord sent him out in charge of them on a holiday in a plane. He's bound to be careful, of course—with a bunch of junior schoolboys in his charge! But—"

"Blessed if I make it out, either," said Potter. "We were civil to the kids—that's all! The man seems to me to be a fool!"

"A cheeky fool!" said Coker. "I'll tell you fellows what I'm going to do! So long as we're in Venice, I'm steering clear of that St. Jim's gang! I've no use for fags—especially cheeky fags! But if by chance I come across that man Pawson, I shall smack his head!"

"Oh!" said Potter and Greene.

"Making out that I—a Fifth Form man of Greyfriars—wanted to push in, and hang on to a crew of fags!" Coker breathed wrath. "By gum! I told him on the phone what I thought of his cheek—I'd have told him more, only he cut off! The cheek of it! By Jove!"

Coker gulped his coffee! In his excitement and wrath, he did not notice that it was very hot—till he had gulped it!

Then he noticed it!

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Coker. "Oh erikey! Oooogh!"

He banged the cup down and spluttered.

It was some minutes before he resumed conversation. The coffee did not seem to have improved his temper when he restarted.

"Cheek! By gum, I've a good mind to walk round to their show and tell them just how much I want to know them! And smack that manservant's cheeky head! By gum!"

"Look here, the man's a fool, and he's put it very unfortunately," said Potter. "The kids aren't to blame! They were civil enough."

"Bet you they'd be fearfully annoyed if they knew how the man had put it!" agreed Greene.

"We're keeping clear of them!" hooted Coker. "If you chaps like being insulted, I don't! And I shall smack that manservant's head if I see him again! I mean that!"

Breakfast for the Greyfriars party at the Hotel della Riva was not a happy meal that morning! Horace Coker fumed all the time.

He was willing to admit that perhaps the St. Jim's juniors were not to blame for the tactlessness of Lord Eastwood's man. But his deepest ire was roused. He was enraged and exasperated by being warned off in this way. As if he, Horace James Coker, of the Greyfriars Fifth, wanted to chum up with a crew of fags on a holiday! It was really too fearfully insulting!

However, breakfast was over at last, and the three Fifth Formers of Greyfriars strolled out on the Riva. At a distance in the direction of the Grand Canal, a handsome little cutter was pulling out from the Mole, and they glanced at it as it slid gracefully out of the lagoon.

"That crew!" snorted Coker.

"By gum, so it is!" said Potter.

On board the little cutter they could see the St. Jim's party.

Tom Merry was at the tiller. Manners and Lowther were handling sheets. The other fellows were all to be seen on deck. Among them was a portly figure—that of Lord Eastwood's man, Pawson. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy's eyeglass caught the bright sunshine, and reflected it back.

Catching sight of the three Greyfriars fellows on the Riva, Arthur Augustus waved his eyeglass in greeting. Tom Merry & Co., their attention called to the Greyfriars trio, waved in their turn.

Potter and Greene politely waved back. Horace Coker did not. Horace Coker glared! If those fags fancied that Horace Coker wanted to know

them, Horace was the man to disabuse their minds of that idea on the spot.

"Cheek!" said Coker.

"Oh, the kids are all right!" said Potter tolerantly. "It's that fat old donkey who's put his foot in it."

"Dashed old ass!" said Greene.

"Cheek!" repeated Coker.

And he stood and glared while the cutter faded out into the lagoon.

"Signore Coker!" A gondolier, who had been loitering on the Riva, came up to the Greyfriars fellows, touching his hat.

Coker stared at him.

"Hook it!" he said. "We don't want a gondola—don't want anything! Just hook it!"

"Una lettera, signore!"

"What the thump does he mean by lettera?" grunted Coker. "Whatever it is, I'm not going to buy anything! You can't trust these dagoes."

"A lettera means a letter," said Potter.

"I don't care whether it does or not! The man's not likely to have a letter for me, I suppose—he's not a postman."

"Questa lettera, signore," said the man, and he held out an envelope addressed to Horace Coker. "Un giovane—one boy—he give una lettera—take to Signore Coker, Hotel della Riva, he say."

"Who the thump can have sent me a letter here?" exclaimed Coker. "We don't know anybody in Venice! If it's from one of that crew I—"

"Look!" suggested Potter.

The gondolier departed, leaving the letter in Coker's hand. Evidently he had been paid in advance by some person unknown for delivering the same.

Coker stared at it. Finally he opened it. Taking out the letter inside, he stared first at the signature.

"Manners!" he said. "That's one of that lot! Like his cheek to send me a letter! What the thump's he sent me a letter for?"

"Read it!" suggested Potter.

Coker grunted and read it. And as he read it, his eyes opened wider and wider, and he gasped.

"By gum!" said Coker.

## CHAPTER 6.

### The Lonely Island!

"SAN GERONIMO?" asked Tom Merry.

"Yes, sir!" answered Pawson.

"Bai Jove! Wathah like Cwusoe's Island, what?" remarked Arthur Augustus.

The cutter was running gracefully down to the little lonely island far from Venice, down the Adriatic.

The St. Jim's party had had a lively and happy morning. The cutter sailed well. Pawson—the perfect Pawson!—handled her well, and the St. Jim's fellows were quite a capable crew. They had run round the Lido, and the long string of islands extending southward from the Lido. They had tacked across to Chioggia, and then stood away to the south, into the open Adriatic; and now they were coasting within sight, though at a distance, of the mainland of Italy.

The little island that rose from the sea was a mere speck. It was low and flat and marshy, and looked as if it might be covered when waters were high in the Adriatic—as sometimes they were, the juniors having heard that even the Place of St. Mark at Venice was sometimes flooded by the sea.

Obviously it was not inhabited. There were some straggling bushes and trees, that was all, and some heaps of rubble that looked like remains of ancient buildings. It was far from an attractive spot—and some of the juniors wondered why Pawson had selected it for landing for lunch.

However, Pawson was managing the trip, and that was that! On that patch of land, hardly more than a foot above the shining waters of the Adriatic Sea, they were going to land—and explore whatever was to be explored. Pawson had said that there was a ruin dating from Roman times.

"Is there any anchorage?" asked Tom.

"Certainly, sir," said Pawson; "on the side towards the mainland. In this calm weather the cutter will be quite safe." He coughed. "The water is shallow there—we shall have to anchor some little distance out. I think you will find the island quite interesting, sir—there is a legend that a saint named Geronimo lived there in ancient times—he fled there, I think, from the persecution of Diocletian. However, I am not assured that that is historical. But there are certainly some remains of very ancient buildings."

The cutter circled round the little island, and the sail was taken in, and the anchor dropped a good distance out from the shore.

Then the dinghy—which was towed astern of

the cutter—was pulled alongside. Bags were dropped into it, and the juniors followed.

It was rather a close fit in the dinghy for seven fellows and the portly Pawson. But the sea was as calm as a pond, and they packed in and pulled to the shore of the little island.

The sun beat down on San Geronimo rather like a furnace. It was now afternoon, and it was hot in the Adriatic.

The juniors crowded ashore, and the dinghy was pulled up from the water. Arthur Augustus D'Arcy fanned himself with his straw hat.

"Wathah warm!" he remarked.

"About ninety in the shade—if there was any shade for it to be ninety in!" remarked Monty Lowther.

"We shall find a shady spot for lunch, sir," said Pawson. "Pray follow me."

The juniors followed the portly figure.

Almost in the middle of the island fragments of old stone walls were perhaps remnants of the cell of the ancient saint, Geronimo. On that spot grew a number of scrubby-looking trees, affording shade.

There the bags were unpacked for lunch. Pawson lighted a spirit-stove for cooking. Pawson's sole object in life seemed, as usual, to make himself useful.

"Perhaps you young gentlemen would care to explore the island while I am preparing lunch?" suggested Pawson.



Manners and Lowther struggled up at the same time. The effect of the drug was wearing off all the juniors now. "What the thump—" gasped Lowther. Manners gave a bitter laugh. "Trapped!" he said. Lodovico went on smoking his cigarette, watching the schoolboy prisoners.

"Yaas, wathah!"  
 "Half an hour, sir."  
 "Wight-ho!"

After a long morning on the cutter, all the juniors were glad to stretch their legs a little. Leaving Pawson at work, they scattered over the island.

Manners and Tom Merry moved away from the others, Tom smiling a little at the thoughtful shade on Harry Manners' face.

"O.K., old man!" he said, when they were out of hearing. "Pawson can't be up to any of his tricks, after all."

"It's our last day at Venice," grunted Manners. "But I can't make him out. He's got something up his sleeve—what?" Manners shook his head. "We should be in a pretty bad box if the cutter went and left us stranded here!"

Tom Merry laughed.

"I fancy even Gussy would open his eyes if Pawson went off in the cutter on his own," he answered. "Besides, what would he get out of stranding us? It wouldn't help him to get the black box."

"No; I don't get it," admitted Manners. "But I'm telling you this, Tom—we've been brought here as part of his scheme—his last shot at the black box! I don't know how he's going to work it, but that's a cert."

"Um!" said Tom.

"Why has he picked out this lonely spot where nobody ever comes? He's got a reason. If he turned on us here he's armed, and we're not."

"If he had been going to chuck up appearances and come out into the open, old chap, he'd have tried that game before this."

"Yes," said Manners slowly. "But—well, I don't get it, except that I'm sure that something's going to happen before we see Venice again. Hallo! Here's Monty! No good asking him what he thinks."

Monty Lowther joined his chums.

"Bit of a desolate spot," he remarked. "Might have picked something a bit more cheerful—what?"

"Oh, this is the most suitable spot possible!" answered Manners sarcastically. "Out of sight of everybody and everywhere; nobody likely to come. What could Pawson want better than that?"

"You howling ass!" said Monty Lowther in measured tones. "Can't you get that fatheaded idea out of your silly head?"

"No."

"Well, you're a blithering ass, and Tom is another to encourage you in it!" said Lowther sharply. "Even if Pawson was a rogue, which he isn't, and even if he was after the black box, which he isn't, he knows as well as we do that Gussy sent it home by registered post from Turin."

"Does he?" said Manners dryly.

"Well, doesn't he?" hooted Lowther. "Didn't Gussy hand him the packet to post, with the beastly black box in it?"

"No," said Manners.

"No?" repeated Lowther. "What do you mean? You know as well as I do that he did!"

Manners paused a moment. Then he spoke quietly:

"When Gussy decided to send that mouldy black box off to England, Monty, and said that Pawson was to take it to the post and register

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it for home, I knew that Pawson would open the packet and take the black box out of it."

"Then he's got it already!" snorted Lowther. "And you make out that he's still after it! Mad?"

"He hasn't got it already, and for a very simple reason," answered Manners in the same quiet tone. "I helped Gussy pack it, and snaffled it while he wasn't looking, and put an apple in its place."

Monty Lowther jumped.

"Why, you cheeky ass!" he gasped. "Gussy would be frightfully wild if he knew you'd played such a trick as that!"

"I know. He was rather wild when I saved the black box for him at Cannes," said Manners dryly. "Never mind that. Gussy fancies that the black box went home to England in that packet. When Pawson opened it before posting it—"

"He never opened it, fathead!"

"When Pawson opened it before posting it," repeated Manners calmly, "he found an apple in it; nothing else. That's why he's still after the black box."

"And what did you do with the box?" asked Lowther.

"I packed it in another packet later, and Tom and I went out and posted it. It's got to St. Jim's all right, though not in the packet that Gussy fancies it's in."

"No harm done, then," said Lowther, "except that Gussy will go off at the deep end when he finds it out, as he will do when he finds two packets instead of one at St. Jim's next term."

"I've told you, Monty, so that you will understand why Pawson is still after the black box," said Manners.

"He isn't, and never was!" grunted Monty.

"What he thought when he opened that packet I don't know," went on Manners. "I fancy he thought that Gussy distrusted him—picked it up from me, you know—and had made up a dummy packet to make him believe that the black box was safe off the scene. Gussy being kidnapped on that felucca the other day looks like it. Or he may think that Gussy gave it to one of us to mind. Or he may suspect that one of us—me, most likely—sneaked it when Gussy was packing it—exactly what I did do. Goodness knows what he thinks! But one thing's quite certain—he thinks the black box is still around, and he's brought us to this solitary spot to-day to grab it before we start home to-morrow."

Monty Lowther laughed.

"Poor old Pawson! Sweating over cooking our lunch while you're talking that awful piffle about him! I believe Gussy would hit you in the eye if you said it to him."

Manners shrugged his shoulders.

"Think we're going to be surrounded by a crew of pirates here," grinned Lowther, "or a gang of brigands from the mainland?"

Manners scanned the sea. He would not have been surprised to see a vessel bearing down on the island. But there was no sign of a vessel of any kind on the wide, rolling waters.

"Get it out of your head, old chap," advised Monty Lowther. "It's all rot—utter piffle! Whoever's after that putrid black box is some pal of Giuseppe's, getting on with the good work now that jolly old Giuseppe is knocked out. Poor old Pawson! That fruity old bean! Ha, ha!"

Manners drew a deep breath.

"We shall see!" he said. "Leave it at that."

And at a call from Pawson, the juniors gathered at the old ruin under the shady trees for lunch—an appetising and, indeed, delicious lunch, like all meals that were prepared by the perfect Pawson.

## CHAPTER 7.

## The Man in the Mask Again!

TOM MERRY stirred.

He fancied that he was dreaming.

His eyes opened dizzily. He stared up at branches of trees laced against a sky of azure blue.

What had happened?

He had gone to sleep after lunch. He remembered that. All the party had seemed sleepy. They had intended to go back to the cutter and resume their cruise after lunch, quite a short time having been sufficient for exploring San Geronimo. But they had sat resting, and Tom knew that he had nodded off to sleep.

But what had happened?

It seemed to him that he must be still dreaming, for he could not stir his limbs. He strove to move, to rise, but his arms and legs were helpless. Then, with a sudden shock, he was broad awake.

He lay under the trees, bound hand and foot. With beating heart, he wriggled up into a sitting position against a tree-trunk.

His glance wandered round him.

Six fellows lay in the scrubby grass—all asleep, and all bound as Tom was—hand and foot! The sun was low in the west, over the Italian mainland.

"Oh!" gasped Tom.

There was a low, mocking laugh. He stared in the direction of the sound. At a little distance a man sat on a mossy lump of stone, smoking a cigarette—a swarthy-faced man that Tom knew. It was Lodovico—the gondolier of the previous night.

Tom gazed at the Italian, dumbfounded.

Lodovico was on that lonely island! He must have arrived while the juniors were sleeping—so far as Tom could see. He had found them asleep and bound them. It was amazing that none had awakened.

But where was Pawson?

Tom stared round farther. He dreaded for a moment to see that the cutter was gone—that Pawson had abandoned them on that lonely island, at the mercy of the rascally Italian.

But the cutter still lay at its anchorage, out on the sea. The dinghy still lay on the shore. Pawson had not left the island.

Where was he?

Manners' suspicions came back into Tom's mind. Pawson had planned this. This was why he had sailed to San Geronimo. Had Lodovico been hidden on the cutter? That was impossible on so small a vessel without discovery. Probably he had been already on the island—hidden there, when the St. Jim's party arrived. And then it dawned on Tom's mind why the juniors had all slept after lunch. Pawson had cooked the lunch. Something had been mixed in the food to cause that slumber.

Tom sat very still.

The treachery of the gondoliers the previous night had been defeated—by Manners' watchfulness. But Manners was as helpless as the rest now. He had suspected this—foretold it. But he had been powerless to avert it. He lay a yard from Tom—as helpless as the rest.

Lodovico, grinning, waved his cigarette to the junior, leaving a trail of blue smoke in the hot air.

"You wake, signore?" he grinned. "Yes! You see me, Lodovico, one more time. You do not think? No! But you see me! Sì, sì, signore."

Tom breathed hard.

"Where is Pawson?" he asked.

"The Signor Pawson? I make him one prisoner, all the same. Yes!"

Lodovico waved a swarthy hand towards the shore.

Tom Merry did not answer that. He did not believe that Pawson had slept like the school-boys; he did not believe that Pawson was a prisoner.

He believed that Pawson was still bent on keeping up appearances, that was all—that when he had carried through his treacherous plot, he intended to fly back to England with the St. Jim's party—still the perfect Pawson, still the trusted valet of Lord Eastwood—safe from suspicion, and safe from punishment. That was Pawson's game.

Lodovico laughed, and resumed smoking.

There was a stirring, and Manners and Lowther struggled up at the same time. The effect of the drug was wearing off all the juniors now.

"What the thump—" gasped Lowther.

Manners stared round him and gave a bitter laugh.

"Trapped!" he said.

Lowther sat silent, staring.

Lodovico smoked cigarettes, watching the schoolboys with a grinning face. The three Shell fellows exchanged grim glances. Then Blake's eyes opened. He wriggled in his bonds.

"Hallo! What the dickens—you silly owls been larking while a fellow was asleep?" he grunted.

"It's not a lark, old chap!" said Tom.

"We've been trapped."

"Wha-t?"

Blake lifted himself on an elbow and stared round. He jumped at the sight of Lodovico.

"Oh crumbs!" he gasped.

There was a stirring of the other fellows now. One after another Herries and Digby and D'Arcy opened their eyes, staring.

"Bai Jove! What's all this? I seem to be tied up somehow. What the dooce—bai Jove!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Lodovico rose from the stone and stood grinning down at the staring juniors. He laughed.

"Now you all wake!" he said. "I go to call the signore."

"It's that wotten tweekowous gondoliah!" gasped Arthur Augustus. "I say, where's Pawson? What's become of Pawson?"

"Where on earth is Pawson?" gasped Herries. "Pawson will get us out of this!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Has that brute done anything to Pawson?" exclaimed Dig.

"Oh, bai Jove! You uttah wottah, where is Pawson?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus.

Lodovico chuckled.

"He one prisoner," he answered. "There is no help! Oh no! Now I call my master."

Lodovico walked away and disappeared behind the trees. Seven fellows sat or lay, looking at one another with dismayed faces.

"Bai Jove! If he's got Pawson, we are feahfully stwanded!" said Arthur Augustus. "Poor old Pawson! He will be feahfully cut up ovah this!"

"Oh, fearfully!" said Manners.

Monty Lowther gave him a look.

"You—you think—" he faltered. But he shook his head without finishing the question. Manners shrugged his shoulders. He knew, and Tom Merry did not doubt; but Monty Lowther could not believe it. As for the four Fourth Form fellows, no such thought crossed their minds for a moment.

"He says he's gone to call his master!" said Blake. "That means that sportsman who's after the black box—the man in the mask who had us on the felucca, Gussy. Well, he won't get the jolly old black box, at any rate!"

"Wathah not!"

There was a step. The eyes of all the juniors turned on the man who followed Lodovico round the clump of trees.

A black cloak was belted round him, a black velvet mask covered his face from forehead to chin, under a slouched black hat.

Blake and D'Arcy had seen him before in that guise—though what identity was hidden under the mask they could not begin to guess. The juniors stared at him in silence—a grim, eerie figure, standing black against the red of the sunset.

"Bai Jove!" breathed Arthur Augustus. "It's that wotah again—the man in the mask!"

## CHAPTER 8.

### Where is the Black Box?

**T**HE man in the mask stood in silence, staring down at the bound schoolboys. Through the eyeholes cut in the velvet his eyes glinted.

Lodovico sat on the mossy stone again, and smoked cigarettes. Tom Merry & Co. watched the masked man—with varying feelings.

To Blake and Herries, Digby and D'Arcy, he was simply a rascal who was after the black box—some associate or other of Giuseppe Fosco, and no doubt a dago.

To three Shell fellows it was a different matter.

Manners believed that the man who was after the black box was Pawson himself. If Manners was right, it was Pawson whose features were concealed by that black velvet mask.

Tom Merry shared his belief—yet now he doubted! He could not feel convinced that that grim, forbidding figure was really Lord Eastwood's man with his identity hidden.

As for Monty Lowther, he gave less credence than ever to Manners' suspicion. It seemed utter nonsense to him to connect that black figure at all with the portly Pawson.

But—Pawson or not, known or unknown—the man had the upper hand. The St. Jim's party were utterly at his mercy.

The man in the mask at length made a sign to Lodovico. The Italian removed the cigarette from his mouth and spoke.

"Signorini! The master he want one answer to one question. He demand to know where is la scatola nera—one black box!"

The masked man evidently did not intend to speak.

On the previous occasion, when Blake and D'Arcy had fallen into his hands, he had been

silent—they had not heard a syllable from him. Whether that was because he did not desire to let his voice be known, or whether it was because he did not speak English, they could not tell.

Anyhow, it was clear that on this occasion Lodovico was going to act as interpreter.

Tom Merry wondered for a moment why the prisoners were not searched before questions were asked. Then he realised that, no doubt, they had been searched already while they lay sleeping under the influence of the drug.

The man in the mask knew that the black box was not on any of them. It was probable—if not certain—that he had expected to find it on one of them.

Now that he had the whole party in his hands, it was fairly certain that he had expected to have the black box in his hands also. Tom could guess the disappointment and rage that were hidden behind the velvet mask.

None of the juniors made any reply to Lodovico.

The masked man made him another sign.

"You make one answer to one question!" said Lodovico. "The master he wait! My master he do not speak your language, for that reason I ask you one question, and me you will answer."

"We've nothing to say, except that the black box is not here," said Tom Merry. "That man, whether he speaks our language or not, knows it."

"Bai Jove! Pewwaps he doesn't, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus. "You see, when the bwute collahed me befoah I told him that the black box had been sent home by post, but if he does not undahstand English, it was pwobably so much Gweek to him."

"I jolly well believe he understands!" grunted Blake. "But sing it over again to him, Gussy!"

"You answer yes!" said Lodovico. "I have no objection whatevah to answerin', you wottah!" said Arthur Augustus. "You can tell that wascal that the black box was sent home from Tuwin by wegistahed post, and it has been in England now a long time."

There was an angry gesture from the man in the mask.

Whether he spoke English or not, he understood that language when spoken, for clearly D'Arcy's statement had an irritating effect on him.

"That is one lie!" said Lodovico. "My master he want to hear a truth! Where is one black box?"

"You cheekay wottah—" "Look here, you silly owl!" hooted Jack Blake. "That black box was posted home long ago. If you ask Pawson he will tell you that he took it to the post in Turin and sent it off."

"Yaas, wathah!" "That is one lie!" said Lodovico again. "My master he believe nothing of that! He wish to know where is a black box."

"Bai Jove! I wufuse to bandy words with a wottah who has the cheek to doubt my word!" said Arthur Augustus. "Go and eat coke!"

"You will answer a question!" said Lodovico. "There is a black box—yes! You do not carry him—no! You do not hide him in a luggage in one hotel—that also is known! I ask you if you hand him to some person to guard?"

"Wats!" "You hand him perhaps to one English that you meet in Venice to guard him?" asked Lodovico.

"Bai Jove! Does the silly ass mean Cokah?" "Yes, that is so?" asked Lodovico.

"Certainly not, you silly ass!"



"You take it to one bank, it is perhaps—or somewhere?" asked Lodovico. "It is necessary to answer where is one black box."

"We've told you!" said Digby.  
 "You make one other answer!"

The juniors were silent. Lodovico looked up at the man in the velvet mask as if for instructions.

Tom Merry gave Manners a look. Manners shook his head. He could have told what had really become of the black box. He had no intention of telling of the trick he had played with that packet that Arthur Augustus had sent to the post in Turin.

"You will not answer?" said Lodovico. "Some place there is a black box! You know well! You must speak! No! You like better than that to stay on this small island for a very long time?"

"Bai Jove!"

Lodovico waved his hand to the encircling sea, darkening as the sun went down over the Italian mainland.

"Here, no one will come!" he said. "It is not to be found here! Never it is to be found! You like to stay where there is no food, and no drink, and an arm and a leg are all tie? Yes! If you like, that is good! Forse—perhaps—in one day, two day, three day, you do not like! Vedremo!"

The man in the mask, still silent, turned away and disappeared behind the trees. Lodovico rose from the stone and followed him.

The juniors were left alone again.

"Bai Jove! This is a go, you fellows!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am feahfully sowwy I have landed you all in this."

"Blow that black box!" grunted Blake. "Bless that black box! Bother that beastly black box!"

"They can't really mean to leave us here!" said Herries.

"If they do, we'll jolly well get loose sooner or later!" said Dig. "We were silly asses to be caught napping like this."

"Yaas, wathah! I weally cannot undahstand how it was that I did not wake up when that bwute tied me up! It is weally wemakable."

"Blessed if I make it out!" said Blake. "I've never slept like that in the daytime before! I'd almost think we'd been drugged if it was possible."

"Oh!" ejaculated Monty Lowther.

He gave Manners a quick look. Manners smiled sourly, and Tom Merry nodded. Lowther stared at them, breathing hard.

"It's impossible!" he muttered. "I can't believe—"

Monty broke off. It seemed as if he had some doubts now!

The sun dipped behind the Italian hilltops and darkness shut down on the Adriatic. Through the gloom the figure of Lodovico loomed like a shadow. The man in the mask was not to be seen.

"One last time I ask!" The Italian peered down at the prisoners. "One time, before I go with my master, I ask! You say where is a black box. Yes. You do not say, and you are left on an island—one night, one day. You will find this a long time! Sunset to-morrow you see us one more time, and then you will speak—yes, I think! By then you will have hunger and thirst! I think that you will speak. Oh, yes! Is it not wiser now to speak?"

He waited a moment.

There was no answer from the juniors.

Lodovico shrugged his shoulders and disappeared into the darkness, and the St. Jim's juniors were left alone again.

CHAPTER 9.

Manners Speaks!

"W E'RE for it!" muttered Blake.  
 "Yaas, wathah!" mumbled Arthur Augustus.

Tom Merry sat hunched against a tree-trunk, staring in the direction of the cutter's anchorage. A silver crescent of moon was coming up over the Adriatic, glimmering on the low-lying island and the sea.

"They're going!" said Monty Lowther. "Leaving us here—like this! A night of it—and a day to follow! And then—"

"Bless that black box!" grunted Herries.

"Blow it!" said Dig, with deep feeling.

"Those wottahs are goin' off in the cuttah!" said Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! They're leavin' us stwarded! This is goin' to be feahful, deah boys!"

"Manners, old man—" muttered Tom.

"Well?" grunted Manners.

"Those brutes are going to leave us like this till sunset to-morrow. Nobody is likely to come here—we've not got a chance! We can't get loose!"

"I know that!"

"They mean to put us through it, and no mistake!" said Blake. "But the brute won't believe that that mouldy black box is out of his reach—and that's that!"

"Look here, Manners—" said Monty Lowther.



THE BOY THEY COULDN'T TRUST!

A curious mixture of bad and good is Ralph Reckness Cardew of St. Jim's, and a fellow not to be wholly trusted. But when he develops into a demon bowler Tom Merry gives him a chance in a big cricket match—only to find Cardew missing at the eleventh hour!

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"Well?"

"They're not gone yet. A call——"

Manners gave another grunt, and Monty Lowther sat up, peering at him in the gloom.

"Look here, Manners," he said in a low voice, "that brute doesn't believe that the black box went off in that packet from Turin. He's found out somehow; I don't know how——"

"I've told you how!" jeered Manners.

"Well, never mind that. He knows somehow, at any rate. But if you told him what you told me a few hours ago——"

"Yes, I can't help thinking the same, Manners, old man!" said Tom Merry quietly. "He mightn't believe it, of course! He might think that it was a yarn to pull his leg and get us out of this scrape. But if he did get it into his head that the black box is safe out of his reach——"

"That," said Manners, "would be as good as telling him that we know whose face is hidden under that velvet mask."

Tom Merry started.

"Oh!" he said slowly. "I—I suppose so—— but——"

"Think he'd like us to spread the news?" asked Manners sarcastically. "It's pretty uncomfortable on this island, I know. But it's rather better than being pushed off the island into the Adriatic."

Tom caught his breath.

In the distance two figures could be seen at the dinghy, evidently about to float it off and pull away to the cutter. There was still time to call before the man in the mask and Lodovico quitted the lonely island. But——

"You can't suppose——" began Lowther.

Grunt, from Manners.

"You think he's capable——" muttered Tom.

"I think he's capable of anything to keep himself safe!" answered Manners. "I've thought several times that he suspects that I distrust him. But if he knew that I know the whole bag of tricks——"

"Oh!" said Tom.

"I want to go back to St. Jim's next term," said Manners. "The Adriatic's a beautiful sea, but I shouldn't care to drop in it and stop in it! Thanks!"

"Oh!" said Lowther.

"Bai Jove! What are you fellows talkin' about?" asked Arthur Augustus, peering through the shadows. "Have you any ideah who that bwute is with that mask on his face, Mannahs?"

Manners did not answer.

"Somebody at our hotel, do you think?" asked Blake. "That would account for his keepin' mum—we might know his voice."

"I think we might!" grunted Manners.

"Some dago, of course!" said Herries. "He doesn't speak English, but I fancy he understands it!"

"I fancy he does!" agreed Manners.

"By gum!" said Blake. "If he's somebody at our hotel in Venice he might have got at the grub when it was packed, before we started! Might have shoved something in it! I can't understand our sleeping like that."

"I'm pretty sure he shoved something in it!" said Manners.

"Bai Jove!"

"But who?" said Digby. "There's tons of Italians at the Hotel Veronese. I suppose he might be any one of them."

Grunt—from Manners.

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"But what did you mean, Lowthah?" asked Arthur Augustus. "I heard you sayin' that the bwute had found out somehow that the black box wasn't in that packet posted at Tuwin."

"Oh! Nothing!" said Lowther hastily.

"It was in it, all right!" said Arthur Augustus. "Mannahs helped me pack it, and he saw me put it in—didn't you, Mannahs?"

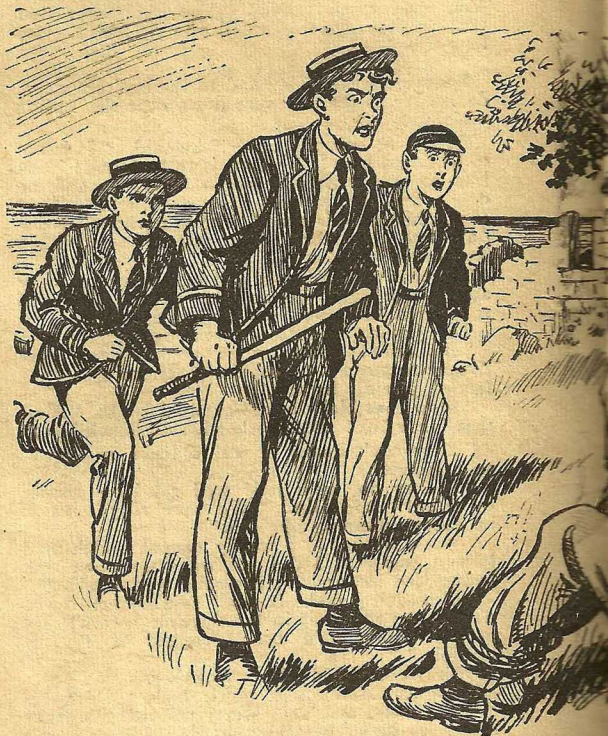
"Yes!" said Manners. "I saw you put it in, Gussy—but you didn't see me take it out again."

"Whaa-a-t?"

"Chuck it, old man!" said Tom Merry hurriedly.

"I'm not going to chuck it!" said Manners.

"I'm going to tell Gussy that much! It will get



Coker came up panting, Potter and Greene at his heels. The boys. "Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Potter. "Great pip!" warlike C

him ready for what I fancy he may find out before we're all much older."

"What the thump do you mean, Mannahs?" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "I wequiah an explanation of your words! Do you weally mean to say that you took the black box out of that packet before it was posted?"

"Yes!"

"Bai Jove! Then it nevah went off at all!"

"Yes, it did! I posted it later! I put an apple in your packet, Gussy—that was what Pawson posted. I packed up the black box in another packet later and posted it on my own! You'll find it at St. Jim's all right next term."

"And why did you play such a vevy extw-ordinary twick, Mannahs?"

"Because you were going to give the packet to Pawson to post."

"What difference did that make?"

"I didn't trust Pawson."

Arthur Augustus jumped! Then he gave a squeak of pain. His limbs were getting cramped in the tight cords, and that startled jump gave him painful twinges.

"Mannahs, are you speakin' sewiously? Did you say that you did not twust Pawson?"

"I did!"

"Are you mad, Mannahs?"

"Must be, I think!" said Blake blankly.

"Gone right off your dot, you Shell fathead? Not trust Pawson?"



stared blankly at the huddled bunch of bound school-  
id Greene. "Where are the dagoes?" demanded the  
ker.

"Mad as a hatter!" said Herries.

"Well," said Digby, "this takes the cake! Not trust Pawson to take a packet to the post! Blessed lunatic!"

"By gum, though," said Blake, "if that mouldy black box wasn't in the packet, after all, that blighter may have found it out somehow, and that would account—"

"He has!" said Manners.

"Blessed if I know how!" said Herries.

"Mannahs! I weally hardly know what to say to you!" Arthur Augustus' voice trembled with wrath. "In doin' what you did, you butted in in the most unjustifiable mannah. I could ovahlook that, as I am suah your intentions were

good! But you have said that you did it because you did not twust Pawson!"

"Yes!"

"Pawson is my father's valet—the patah has twusted him in charge of this partay! He has managed ewewythin' in the most wippin' mannah—he is absolutely reliable and twustworthy! At this vewy moment he is lying tied up somewhah, a pwisonah like ourselves! And you say you do not twust him!"

"No!"

"Are you a fool, Mannahs?"

"No; you are!"

"I wegard you as an uttah idiot!"

"Thanks!"

"And"—Arthur Augustus' voice rose—"a wottah—"

"Thanks again!" said Manners, unmoved.

"And if my hands were fwee I would punch your nose!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "You have insulted Pawson, Mannahs, which is the same as insultin' me. I wefuse to speak to you again, Mannahs!"

"Thanks no end!"

"I wegard you—"

"There goes the cutter!" exclaimed Blake.

A sail glanced on the dark blue sea, in the glimmer of the moon. The cutter was pulling out from San Geronimo. The juniors had a glimpse of two dark figures on the deck. Swiftly, as the wind caught the tall sail, the cutter faded into the dusk of the sea.

"Gone!" muttered Lowther.

"We still have a chance, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus. "I am afwaid we have no chance of gettin' loose. But Pawson is some-whah on the island—and Pawson is a wondah-ful chap! I wely vewy much on Pawson."

Manners laughed.

"I don't know when we shall get out of this!" said Arthur Augustus, his noble eyes gleaming at Manners. "But when my hands are fwee, Mannahs, I shall punch your head! I will not allow you to speak of Pawson as you have done—I will not allow such detraction of that excellent man! The minute my hands are fwee, I shall punch your cheeky, silly head!"

"That will be in the morning, then!" said Manners composedly.

"Eh?"

"Think we're getting out of this?" demanded Blake.

"Quite!"

"And why?"

"Because," said Manners quietly, "I knew that something would happen to us on this island, and I left word with Coker—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"And if we're not back at Venice to-night," said Manners, "those Greyfriars chaps will be here in the morning."

## CHAPTER 10.

### Coker Takes a Hand!

**C**HUG-CHUG-CHUG!  
"We're moving!" remarked Horace Coker.

"We are!" agreed Potter.

Sunrise was bright on the blue Adriatic. Coker & Co., of the Greyfriars Fifth, stood on the motor-boat that was cleaving the blue waters almost like an arrow.

A greasy Italian was driving the motor-boat.

Coker, Potter, and Greene watched the blue waters, looking for the first sign of the little lonely island of San Geronimo, far down the coast.

"It's up to us!" went on Coker. "I got a couple of those kids out of a scrape the other day. I'm going to get them out of this! What?"

Coker had a big, thick stick under his arm. He slipped it into his hand and flourished it in the air—rather to the alarm of the dusky Italian engineer, who ducked a greasy head involuntarily and blinked at him.

"Don't brain the engineer!" suggested Potter.

"Or me!" said Greene

"If there's any dagoes to deal with," said Coker, unheeding, "I'll handle them all right! Two or three I could handle with my fists; but there may be a gang! So I've brought this stick!"

"Keep it for the dagoes, old chap," said Potter.

"Don't be an ass, Potter!" Coker put the cudgel back under his arm. "It's rather a queer business. But I'm seeing those fags through if they're in trouble. Blessed if I quite make it all out; but what that kid said in his letter is plain enough, and it's up to us!"

Coker drew a letter from his pocket and glanced at it—for about the tenth time. It was the letter signed "H. Manners," which the messenger had handed to him on the Riva degli Schiavoni the previous morning.

That letter had caused Horace Coker considerable surprise—shared by Potter and Greene.

It ran:

"Dear Coker,—We are all going down to San Geronimo to-day, and I believe we are being led into a trap.

"If we don't get back by dark, as arranged, it will be certain.

"Will you stand by us?"

"Ring up the Hotel Veronese to-night and ask for me. If I'm not there, it will mean that I'm stranded on San Geronimo with my friends.

"Will you run down to the island in the morning, and help us out? If you can't do that, go round to the British Consul, and show him this letter. We shall be prisoners, and there may be dagoes to deal with. But I know you are the chaps to stand by fellows in a scrape.

"Yours,

"H. MANNERS."

"Queer, if you like!" said Coker. "But there it is! I jolly well thought at first that that young ass was trying to pull my leg."

"Same here!" said Potter.

"Still, a fellow was bound to see how it stood," said Coker. "And when I rang up the Hotel Veronese late last night, they hadn't come back. That shows that something had happened to them."

"Looks like it!" agreed Greene.

"I got two of the young asses out of a scrape the other day!" went on Coker. "You remember a dago had them parked on a fishing-boat out in the lagoon. It's something like that over again."

"They seem to be hunting for a lot of trouble!" remarked Potter. "Still, if they've got themselves into a scrape, we'll pull them out of it."

"A run in a motor-boat won't hurt us!" said Greene. "It's a lovely morning. I wonder if they're on the island?"

"Well, they're somewhere!" said Coker. "They

never got back to Venice! If some dagoes have got them, like they had those two the other day, I'm the man to deal with them!"

Coker gave his stick another flourish—Potter and Greene dodging out of reach!

Coker seemed rather keen to get going with that stick. Coker, undoubtedly, was the chap to stand by fellows in a scrape! Coker was going to see what was "up" on that island—and a scrap with a dago or two was by no means an unwelcome prospect to Horace Coker. Horace had rather a taste for a shindy now and then.

"There's the island!" said Potter.

"Can't see anybody on it!" remarked Greene.

The Greyfriars men scanned the little low-lying, marshy island as the motor-boat ran down to it.

No human figure was to be seen. There was little cover on the island, except the clump of trees round the old ruin in the centre. To all appearance, it was utterly desolate and uninhabited.

The motor-boat ran in and shut off close under the low shore. The greasy engineer looked round at Coker.

"Ecco, signore!" he said.

"I can't hear any echo!" said Coker, staring at him.

"He means 'here we are,'" murmured Potter.

"He said 'echo,'" grunted Coker. "Not that I care what he means! It doesn't look to me as if there's any dagoes here, or anybody else, for that matter. But we're going to see!"

Coker jumped ashore, followed by Potter and Greene. The engineer made the boat fast to a stump, and sat down to smoke cigarettes while he waited. He had been hired, with his boat, to take the signori down to San Geronimo, and had no idea what they expected to find there.

Coker & Co. were rather doubtful of finding anybody or anything as they landed and looked round them. Nobody was to be seen.

"If there's anybody here they must have heard the engine!" said Potter. "Looks to me—"

"Hark!" ejaculated Greene.

From the direction of the clump of trees in the middle of the little island came a shout:

"Help!"

"This way!"

"Come on!" exclaimed Coker. And he led the way at a run, his cudgel gripped in his hand, and the light of battle in his eyes. If there was a dago to be dealt with, Coker was prepared to crack his greasy head like a nut! Coker rather hoped that there was.

## CHAPTER 11.

### Rescue!

"LISTEN!"

"Bai Jove!"

"That's a motor-boat—"

"And help!" said Manners.

The chug-chug-chug of the motor-boat floating over the calm waters was a glad sound to the ears of the prisoners of San Geronimo.

The night had seemed endless. But what Manners had told them had brought hope and comfort to the stranded schoolboys.

Cramped in their bonds, they had slept but little through the long, weary hours. But dawn came at last; and, as the sun climbed higher and higher in the blue sky, they waited, and watched, and listened—and, at last the chug-chug of the motor-boat told them that help was coming. Louder and clearer it came, till, at length, the

engine shut off, and they knew that the newcomers had arrived. And then all the juniors shouted together.

They shouted and shouted! And there was a sound of running feet in answer to their shouting. A burly figure came cutting towards the clump of trees, and they recognised Coker.

"This way!" roared Blake.

"Here we are, Coker!"

"Bai Jove! I should nevah have thought that I should evah be so feahfully glad to see that chap Cokah——"

Coker came up, panting. Potter and Greene arrived at his heels. They stared blankly at the huddled bunch of bound schoolboys.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Potter.

"Great pip!" said Greene.

"Where are they?" demanded Coker, staring round.

"Eh? Here we are!" gasped Tom Merry.

"Don't be a young ass! I mean, where are the dagoes? You didn't tie yourselves up like that, I suppose? Where are they?"

"Gone!" said Tom. "They left us stranded here like this last night."

"Oh!" said Coker, with a grunt. There was no warlike use for Coker's cudgel after all. It was rather a disappointment for Coker.

"Precious set of young asses to get into a scrape like that!" he remarked.

"Weally, Cokah——"

"We'll soon get you loose!" said Potter. He opened a pocket-knife, and Greene followed his example.

In a few minutes the seven schoolboys were cut loose. But they remained where they were; they could hardly stir their cramped limbs.

Arthur Augustus was the first to attempt to rise. But he sat down again with a painful ejaculation.

"Bai Jove! I am feahfully cwamped!" he gasped. "Cokah, old chap——"

Coker stared at him.

"I think I told you once that I don't like 'old chap' from fags," he said. "I've come here to get you out of this, but I don't want any cheek."

"Weally, Cokah——"

"Precious set of ninnies," said Coker. "That kid Manners is the only one of you that seems to have any sense! He seems to have known that you were heading for trouble. Isn't your man Pawson looking after you?"

"I was going to speak about Pawson, Cokah! I am too howwibly cwamped to move! Please look for Pawson——"

"Is he here?"

"Yaas, wathah! Those wottahs made him a pwisonah at the same time, and he must be on the island somewhah."

"He ought to have had more sense!" said Coker. "But we'll look for him! Blessed if I know where they've parked him!"

"But we'll look! Come on, you two—if that fat old bean's here, we'd better root him out!"

Coker & Co. proceeded to search the island for Pawson—a proceeding that brought a sarcastic grin to Manners' face.

The juniors rubbed their aching limbs and restored the circulation. They were soon able to get on their feet. Coker, Potter, and Greene, at a distance, were rooting about the little island, looking for another prisoner—but quite failing to discover any trace of one.

"Bai Jove! I wondah where the bwutes put Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus.

"He's not on the island!" grunted Manners. "Weally, Mannahs, he must be somewhah on the island! Where else could he be?" demanded Arthur Augustus.

"They don't seem able to find him!" said Blake, puzzled. "And why hasn't he called out if he's here?"

"He went in the cutter!" said Manners.

"I weally do not see, Mannahs, why they should have taken Pawson away a pwisonah on the cuttah while they left us heah!"

"Lots of things you don't see!" answered Manners dryly.

"Cheese it, old man!" murmured Tom Merry.

Manners gave a snort.

Arthur Augustus' noble eye turned on him sternly.

"I was goin' to punch your head, Mannahs, as soon as my hands were free!" he said, with dignity. "I will not punch your head, Mannahs, affah what we have been thwough. But if you make any more dewogatory remarks on the subject of Pawson I shall certainly punch your head!"

"Oh, don't row!" said Blake. "Look here, Pawson can't be on the island. They must have taken him away in the cutter, goodness knows why!"

"Pwobably they thought he would find some way of gettin' us all out of this swape if they left him on the island," said Arthur Augustus thoughtfully. "Pawson is a wondahful man, you know!"

"Blessed if I make it out!" said Herries. "They can't have let him loose to get help to us. They must have tied him up on the cutter."

"He's on the cutter all right," said Manners dryly.

"Well, he must be, as he's not here," said Dig. "Goodness knows where the cutter is, though—till they come back here at sunset."

"Poor old Pawson!" said Arthur Augustus. "He must be in a feahfully distwessed state of mind."

"Oh, fearfully!" said Manners.

"The vevy first thing we must think of now," said Arthur Augustus, "is to wescue Pawson."

Manners grinned.

"Exactly!" he said. "And that's an easy one, now we're loose. All we've got to do is to wait here till they come back, collar them, and rescue Pawson!"

"Bai Jove! You are talkin' sense for once, Mannahs!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus. "That is quite a bwight ideah!"

"By gum," said Blake, his eyes gleaming, "that's the stunt! Those rotters will come back, thinking we're tied up as they left us!"

"And there's enough of us to handle them," said Dig. "We can get those Greyfriars chaps to help, too."

"Good egg!" said Monty Lowther. "And if we get hold of that sportsman in the mask we'll jolly soon get his mask off him and see who he is!"

"Exactly!" said Manners.

Tom Merry drew a deep breath. He knew what was in Manners' mind, though the unsuspecting Gussy had not the faintest idea of it.

Coker & Co. came back at last. They had searched the whole island—not an extensive task.

"The man's not here," said Coker. "Now, if

## CHAPTER 12.

## The Face Under the Mask!

you kids can all pack into the motor-boat, I'll give you a lift back to Venice."

"We're staying heah, Cokah!" said Arthur Augustus.

"What on earth for, you young ass?" demanded Coker.

"You see," explained Arthur Augustus, "our man Pawson must have been put on the cuttah when they bagged it and left us stwanded heah. They are comin' back at sunset, and Pawson will be still on the cuttah, as they will not dare to let him loose. We are goin' to collah them and wescue him."

"You young ass!"

"Weally, Cokah——"

"Fat lot of use you'd be handling a crew of dagoes!" said Coker.

"There are only two of them," explained Tom Merry, "and we can handle them all right now we're loose. But if you chaps would stay and lend a hand——"

"How do you know they're coming back at sunset?"

"They told us so. You see, they want to get something away from D'Arcy, and they're parking us here till it's coughed up."

"Oh!" said Coker. "Well, it's a jolly good idea to collar the rotters. You kids had better leave it to me. In fact, I shan't allow you to interfere."

"Weally, Cokah——"

"That's enough from you!" said Coker. "Don't argue!"

"Bai Jove!"

Potter and Greene exchanged a wink. Tom Merry & Co. looked expressively at Horace Coker.

But they contented themselves with expressive looks. Really, in the circumstances, the St. Jim's fellows could not tell that Greyfriars man what they thought of him.

"Leave it entirely to me," said Coker. "I'll handle this. It will be pretty rotten sticking on this putrid island for the rest of the day, but I'll do it. So will you, Potter, and you, Greene. I may want your help."

"Any old thing!" yawned Potter.

"But——" said Greene.

"Don't jaw, Greene!"

"But——" repeated Greene.

"I said 'don't jaw'!" Coker pointed out.

"But," howled Greene, "if they see the motor-boat——"

"Eh?"

"If they see the motor-boat they'll know somebody's on the island, and——"

"I was just thinking of that, Greene—I mean, I was just going to if you hadn't started jawing. I shall send the motor-boat back to Venice, and tell the man to come along in the morning, in case that cutter doesn't turn up. I wish you'd give a chap a chance to speak!"

"Bai Jove!"

"We'll nab the pair of them, and go back in the cutter!" said Coker. "Don't you fellows jaw! I can manage this!"

Tom Merry & Co. were under a tremendous obligation to Coker. They fully realised it. It was fortunate for Horace Coker that they did; for it was only that consideration that prevented the St. Jim's party from falling on Horace Coker as one man and bumping him hard on San Geronimo!

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A SAIL glanced on the sea in the red of the sunset.

Many eyes watched it from under the clump of trees on the little island of San Geronimo.

The cutter was returning.

"That's the cuttah, deah boys!" said Arthur Augustus, turning his eyeglass on the distant sail.

"They're coming!" said Tom Merry, with a deep breath.

"Now we shan't be long!" murmured Blake.

Horace Coker, sitting leaning against a tree-trunk in the drowsy heat, rose to his feet and stared at the sail.

"They're coming!" he said. "Now we've got to be jolly careful that they don't spot anything amiss and sheer off. I suppose even you silly fags can understand that!"

"Weally, Cokah——"

"Don't gabble! All of you squat down, and look just as if you were still tied up," said Coker. "That will take them in."

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Get out of sight, Potter! Get out of sight, Greene! If they see you standing mooning there it will give the show away!"

"And suppose they see you standing mooning there?" inquired Potter. "Won't that give the show away?"

"I don't want any jaw, Potter! I've told you that before! Park yourselves in those trees, and shut up!"

Potter and Greene faded into the clump of trees. Tom Merry & Co. were anxious for Coker to follow them, but Coker stayed to superintend the arrangements before he went into cover.

The St. Jim's fellows lay down in the grass, with the fragments of the ropes arranged round their arms and legs. To all appearance, they were as helplessly bound as when the man in the mask had left them there.

"That's all right!" said Coker, with a nod.

"Pwaj get into covah, Cokah, befoah they spot you frowm the cuttah!" said Arthur Augustus anxiously.

Coker gave him a stare.

"When I want advice from a fag I'll ask for it!" he said. "Pack it up till then!"

"Look here——" began Blake.

"Shut up, you!"

Blake breathed hard, but he shut up. Coker, in the circumstances, had to be given his head. Having reduced the fags to silence, Coker at last backed into the cover of the trees with Potter and Greene.

The cutter was running down to her former anchorage.

If keen eyes looked from the vessel—as no doubt they did—there was nothing on San Geronimo to excite doubt or suspicion. The motor-boat was long gone. Coker & Co. were out of sight. Tom Merry & Co. lay where they had been left. All was—or seemed—as it should have been.

The juniors' hearts beat faster as the cutter anchored off the shore, and the dinghy pulled to the land.

Lodovico was on the oars. In the stern sat the man in the mask, the velvet mask covering every feature, the black cloak disguising his figure from head to foot.

"So that's the man, is it?" came a voice from the trees—the voice, of course, of Horace Coker.

"Well, we'll jolly soon see what he looks like under that rig!"

"Pway be quiet, Cokah!"

"Did you speak to me, young D'Arcy?"

"Yaas, wathah! If they heah you—"

"Do you want me to step out there and smack your head?"

"Weally, Cokah—"

"Shut up!"

Arthur Augustus suppressed his feelings and shut up. Fortunately, Coker shut up also.

The dinghy was on the shore now. Lodovico and the man in the mask came up from the shore towards the clump of trees.

The St. Jim's fellows felt their hearts thump with excitement. Obviously the two rascals had no suspicion. They could see the seven schoolboys lying, apparently bound, as they had been left.

Lodovico grinned down at them.

"Buona sera, signori!" he said. "One more time you see me. This one time, I think that you tell the master what he want. Yes. You tell where there is a black box!"

The man in the mask stood looking down at the juniors, his eyes glinting through the eye-holes of the velvet mask. He stood silent while the Italian spoke, as before.

"Yes, I think!" grinned Lodovico. "You do not like, I think, that there is no food and no drink, and an arm and a leg is tie. This time you tell where there is one black box, or—cospetto!—one more night and one more day you stay—and I think you will not like. And afterwards, more night and more day, till you shall speak! What shall you say, signori?"

Lodovico paused for a reply.

It came in an unexpected form.

There was a sudden stirring in the trees and three figures rushed out, with uplifted cudgels.

At the same moment, at the first sign from Coker & Co., the seven schoolboys, apparently bound and helpless, leaped up.

Never was there so unexpected a surprise.

Lodovico gave a startled yell, and grabbed at the back of his trousers for a knife. Coker's cudgel crashed on his greasy head at the same moment, and the Italian went down like a log, stunned.

The man in the mask made a backward leap—but Tom Merry & Co. were grasping him instantly, and Potter's cudgel lashed at his head.

He went down with a crash.

"Got him!" panted Blake.

"Hold him!"

"Pin the brute!"

"Pile on him!"

The man in the mask struggled wildly, savagely, desperately. Seven pairs of hands were on him, grasping, and he had not the slightest chance. But he struggled and fought with desperate fury.

Coker & Co. came quickly to the aid of the juniors. The masked man, still striving to resist, was reduced to helplessness. Coker planted a brawny knee on his chest, while Potter and Greene held his wrists, and Tom Merry & Co. all grasped him somewhere. He panted and panted, still attempting to struggle.

"By gum! What a blessed wildcat!" said Coker. "We'll give him something to cure all that! Get some of that rope and tie his paws."

"Yaas, wathah!" gasped Arthur Augustus.

Lodovico lay where he had fallen, senseless. The masked man still writhed and twisted; but Potter and Greene dragged his wrists together,

and Manners knotted a cord round them, and another round his legs. The mysterious seeker of the black box was a helpless prisoner at last.

"Bai Jove! We've got the bwutes!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus breathlessly. "Now we can release poor old Pawson! Come on—"

"Hold on!" said Manners.

"Pway don't be an ass, Mannahs! Pawson is a pwiseonah on that cuttah, and we must not lose a moment—"

Tom Merry caught the swell of St. Jim's by the arm. Manners was untying the cord that kept the velvet mask close over the face beneath.

"Wait!" said Tom. "Wait till you've seen him, Gussy. And—make up your mind for a shock!"

"I weally fail to undahstand you, Tom Mewwy. Pway release my arm! I insist on goin' to the cuttah at once, and wescuin' poor old Pawson—"

Manners dragged the mask away.

A plump and portly face was revealed. It was hardly recognisable as the bland, urbane face the juniors knew, so furiously distorted was it with rage. But they knew it. It was the face that Manners expected to see—the face that Tom Merry expected to see—the face that Monty Lowther, perhaps, partly expected to see.

But Blake, Herries, and Digby gazed at it like fellows in a dream. They were hardly able to believe their eyes.

Arthur Augustus jumped clear of the ground. He stared at the plump face. He jammed his eyeglass into his eye and gazed at it dumb-founded. For several moments he could not speak; he could only gaze as if in a trance.

He found his voice at last.

"Pawson!" he said faintly.

It was the perfect Pawson!

High over the Italian Alps soared the Silver Swallow—homeward bound.

The flying schoolboys were in the air again.

Tom Merry & Co. were heading for home—but one passenger was lacking on the Silver Swallow, the perfect Pawson! And there was a lingering cloud on the face of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy. It was not easy for Arthur Augustus to recover from the shock of discovering Pawson's duplicity and double-dealing.

What had become of Pawson, Tom Merry & Co. did not know—and cared little.

Manners had urged handing him over to the police; but Arthur Augustus had shaken his head at that suggestion. Pawson had been left on San Geronimo with Lodovico, when the St. Jim's juniors left with Coker & Co. But before they left Venice a gondola was dispatched to take the two rascals off the island. Whatever had become of Pawson, Tom Merry & Co. were done with him—and Lord Eastwood had lost his invaluable valet—and probably, when he learned what had happened, his lordship would feel rather glad to have lost him.

"It's wotten!" said Arthur Augustus for the umpteenth time. "But there's one comfort, at any wate—there won't be any more wowwy about the beastly black box!"

And Arthur Augustus drew what comfort he could from that reflection. He little guessed the startling surprise that was awaiting him at St. Jim's in connection with that mysterious box.

Next Wednesday: "THE NIZAM'S DIAMOND!"

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# FOUR KINGS TRUMPED!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

*Four Kings thinks he's on easy money when he tries to blackmail Frank Richards. But he finds himself "trumped" in an unexpected way!*

## A Mysterious Message!

"FRANKY!" called out Chunky Todgers, as Frank Richards & Co. rode up to the gateway of Cedar Creek School in the summer morning.

"Hallo, Fatty!" answered Frank Richards.

"There's a galoot here waiting to see you!"

Frank jumped off his pony.

"Chap to see me?" he asked in surprise.

"Yep! It's Injun Dick from Thompson, and he's got a note for you!"

"Blessed if I know whom it can be from, then!" said Frank. "I don't know anybody at Thompson to send me notes. Take my pony, Bob, old chap!"

"Right you are!" said Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards walked towards the lumber schoolhouse, while Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc put the horses in the corral. Frank was surprised and puzzled. He knew Injun Dick, the Redskin loafer of Thompson, who was often employed to carry messages; but it was a puzzle who could have sent the Redskin over to Cedar Creek School with a letter for him.

He found the Apache sitting outside the porch, basking in the morning sunshine, his tattered blanket draped round him. Injun Dick rose to his feet as Frank came up.

"You've got a note for me?"

"You bet! Palface give Red chief letter for young white chief," answered Injun Dick. "You give Injun Dick twenty-five cents."

"Let's see the letter first," said Frank, smiling. "It may not be worth it!"

Injun Dick fumbled among his rags, and produced a decidedly soiled envelope. Scrawled on the outside was "Mister Frank Richards, Cedar Creek School." The handwriting was rough and stubby, and quite unknown to Frank Richards.

"You give Injun twenty-five cents," said the Apache. "Injun hump it long way on trail to bring letter to young white chief. Injun thirsty!"

Frank Richards found a quarter in his pocket and tossed it to the Redskin. The Apache grabbed the quarter, draped his tattered blanket round him, and stalked away with great dignity.

Frank Richards opened the soiled envelope. There was a rough sheet of paper folded within; not notepaper, however, but evidently part of the paper wrapping of a whisky bottle. Upon it a message was scribbled in pencil.

Frank read it and jumped. He read it again, staring blankly at the rough scrawl, and then he rubbed his eyes.

"My only hat!" he ejaculated in blank astonishment.

"Hallo, what's the trouble?" asked Bob Lawless, joining him with Beauclerc. "Somebody sent in a little bill?"

"Nunno. You fellows had better read this," replied Frank. "I'm blessed if I can make head or tail of it. Some chap off his rocker, I should think!"

Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc read the letter together, and whistled. It ran:

"Deer Mister Richards,—You ain't come hyer Hke you promised. This yar won't do, and so I tell you plane. If you'd ruther I come to yore skool and see the missus, you can bet your sox that I'll come. Now, no pesky nonsense! You'll come hyer this evening, or thar'll be trubble.

"Yores trooly,  
"FOUR KINGS."

"Great jumping gophers!" exclaimed Bob Lawless. "What does that mean, Franky?"

"That's what I want to know, Bob!"

"Who's Four Kings?" asked Beauclerc.

"Ask me another! Never heard of the name," said Frank Richards. "I suppose it's a nickname!"

"Four kings is a hand at poker," said Bob Lawless. "It's the nickname of some chap, of course. Some loafer at the Red Dog, I suppose, as he sent Injun Dick with this letter. He wants you to go to the Red Dog to see him."

Frank Richards knitted his brows. The letter simply bewildered him. He had passed the Red Dog in Thompson, but certainly he had never crossed the threshold of that establishment. So far as he knew, he was unacquainted with any of the shady habitues of the place.

"He says you promised to go there," said Beauclerc, with another glance at the letter.

"He says so," agreed Frank. "Potty, I suppose. I don't even know the man!"

"And if you don't go he's coming to the school to see Miss Meadows," said Bob Lawless, in wonder.

"He can come if he likes."

"The man's mistaken somebody else for you, I should think," remarked Vere Beauclerc. "That's the only explanation. Anyway, you're not going."

"No fear!"

"Perhaps Injun Dick knows something about it," suggested Bob Lawless. "Let's see whether he's gone."

"Good idea!"

The three chums ran down to the gates to look for the messenger. But Injun Dick had vanished. Doubtless the noble Red man was in a hurry to get back to the Red Dog with his twenty-five cents, and expend it in the purchase of the potent fire-water.

"Hallo, there's the bell!" said Bob.

Frank Richards & Co. turned back to the lumber school, and went in with the rest of the Cedar Creek crowd for morning lessons. The letter from Four Kings was left in the playground, torn into a dozen pieces.

But Frank was thinking a good deal about it during the day. The incident was quite inexplicable. He did not know Four Kings, but it was clear that the man knew him, or believed that he knew him, and expected him at the Red Dog that evening.

Frank Richards, of course, had not the



slightest intention of going there. But he wondered what step Four Kings would take if he did not go. If the man carried out his threat of visiting the lumber school there would be a scene, and Frank wondered what would come of it.

#### Four Kings Means Business!

"MAYBE there'll be a visitor for you, Franky," grinned Bob Lawless, as the chums of Cedar Creek trotted up to the lumber school on the following morning.

"I wonder!" said Frank.

Frank Richards was feeling just a little excited as he arrived at the lumber school. He glanced round quickly as he entered the gates. But there was no stranger in sight. If Four Kings intended to carry out his threat, he had not yet done so at all events.

There was a group of fellows inside the gates, engaged in an animated discussion, and Frank Richards & Co. joined them.

"Anything on?" asked Bob Lawless.

"I guess there's something on at Thompson," said Eben Hacke. "It's that claim-robber again."

"Haven't they caught him yet?"

"Nope."

"What's that?" asked Frank Richards.

"It's been going on for two or three weeks, from what I hear," explained Hacke. "Some galoot goes moseying round the claims on the creek at night, lifting the dust from the cradles. I guess there'll be shooting if the boys spot him!"

"It's a dirty trick!" said Tom Lawrence.

"The miners can't be watching their claims all night. When the pay-dirt's left in the cradles overnight, there's a chance for a claim-robber. One of the Red Dog gang very likely. They've called in Sheriff Henderson, but he hasn't found the man."

"Injun Dick very likely," remarked Kern Gunten, the Swiss. "He's the sort of galoot that would rob a claim, or anything else."

Frank Richards frowned.

"It's not quite fair to say it's Injun Dick, if there isn't any evidence on the subject," he said. Gunten grinned.

"Sorry! I forgot he was a friend of yours," he answered. And there was a laugh from the Cedar Creek fellows.

"Bosh!" said Frank. "He's not a friend of mine; but I don't see why a theft should be put down to him. There are a good many fellows in Thompson who might be doing it."

"Some galoot who's had hard luck at poker, and wants to raise the wind, perhaps, Gunten," said Bob Lawless, with a grin.

Gunten flushed crimson. He was about to make an angry reply, but he turned away instead and left the group.

Bob looked after him rather curiously. Gunten's gambling propensities were well known, and Bob had been making a playful allusion to them, but without any serious intention. He had not thought for a moment of connecting Kern Gunten with the mysterious claim-robber. But the startled flush of the Swiss struck him very strangely.

"By gum!" muttered Bob, as he left the group



Four Kings was on the point of firing when a dusky hand was thrown over his shoulder and his wrist was grasped in a clutch of iron and forced upward. Injun Dick had come to the rescue of Frank Richards & Co. just in time!

of schoolboys with his chums. "It isn't possible that Gunten—" He paused.

"Impossible!" said Beauclerc.

"He seemed struck all of a heap with what I said, and I was only joking," said Bob; "and he seems jolly keen to give the impression that it's the Redskin who moseys round at night lifting paydust from the claims. But I guess even Gunten would draw the line at that."

"I should hope so," said Frank.

"Your visitor isn't here this morning, Franky. Looks as if Four Kings is going to neglect you, after all," said Bob, laughing.

"Well, I'm rather glad," said Frank. "We don't want a scene here, though I suppose if the man came, he would see that he's made a mistake."

Frank dismissed the matter from his mind as he went into lessons. But before morning lessons were over at Cedar Creek there came an interruption. A coppery face and a tattered blanket appeared in the open doorway of the school-room.

"Injun Dick," murmured Bob Lawless.

Miss Meadows, the schoolmistress, looked up sharply.

"Please go away at once!" she exclaimed. "You have no business here."

"Injun bring letter for young white chief," explained the Redskin, pointing a grubby forefinger at Frank Richards.

"You must not come here during lesson-time," said Miss Meadows severely. "You must leave the letter on the table in the passage."

"Injun want answer."

"Then you must wait."

"All O.K., missy!" said Injun Dick. "Injun wait, you bet!"

And the Apache stepped out of the doorway, and sat down on the bench in the porch to wait.

The lesson went on. A good many glances were turned on Frank Richards, who sat with a slightly flushed face. This was the second time Injun Dick had brought him a letter, and the fact was enough to excite curiosity.

Frank did not need telling whom the letter was from, and he was feeling puzzled and angry. He was glad when lessons were over that morning, and he left the school-room with the rest.

Injun Dick was leaning back on the bench, his head resting on the wall of the porch, snoring. Bob Lawless shook him by the shoulder, and the Indian awoke.

"You've got a letter for me," said Frank rather gruffly.

"Co-rect!" said Injun Dick, dividing the word in the middle in the slangy way of the mining camps.

"Hand it over, then!"

Injun Dick passed over the letter, and his brown hand remained extended.

"You give Injun twenty-five cents," he suggested.

Frank Richards did not heed. He had no more quarters to bestow upon the fallen chief of the Apaches. He stepped out of the porch with the letter and opened it hastily. He read the message, and passed it to Bob and Beauclerc, his face dark with anger.

"That galoot again?" asked Bob.

"Yes; read it!"

The two schoolboys read the letter with keen interest, and its contents made them open their eyes. It was as surprising as the former missive.

"Deer Mister Richards,—You ain't come and you ain't wrote. Wot sort of a game do you

call this hyer? You better not fertig that I ain't fooling. I meen business from the word go, and don't you fertig it. I'm waiting for you at seven o'clock to-day at the Red Dog, expectking you arter skool. If you don't come, you watch out for trubble.—FOUR KINGS."

"P.S.—The barer of this hyer will bring your answer."

"Mysteriouiser and mysteriouiser!" grinned Bob Lawless. "Franky, old scout, this is some old pal you've forgotten."

Frank's eyes gleamed.

"I don't know the man, and I don't want to!" he said. "But there's going to be a stopper put on his writing to me!"

He turned to the Indian, who was waiting in stolid silence.

"Who gave you this letter, Injun Dick?"

"Mister Four Kings."

"Who is he?"

"Bully boy with a tin car," answered the Red man.

"What does he mean Bob?"

Bob Lawless laughed.

"It only means a first-chop galoot—a real sport," he replied. "I dare say Injun Dick's idea of a bully boy is a bit different from ours, though."

"You come?" asked the Indian.

Frank Richards hesitated.

"You won't go, surely, Frank?" exclaimed Vere Beauclerc.

"Well," said Frank slowly, "I'm fed-up with getting letters from the man. If I see him, perhaps he'll see that he's making a mistake. And, anyway, I can tell him to chuck it. Suppose we ride over there after lessons? The fact is, I'd like to know what claim the man thinks he has on me. It looks to me as if somebody's been using my name in some way."

"Well, it won't do any harm to see him, I suppose," said Bob thoughtfully.

"I'm coming, Injun Dick," said Frank, making up his mind. "Tell Four Kings that I'm coming at seven, and my friends with me!"

"You bet!"

"That's all!" said Frank.

"Injun thirsty!"

"There's the creek," said Bob Lawless, jerking his thumb towards it.

Injun Dick gave him a reproachful look and strode away.

Gunten joined the three chums.

"Do you mind if I give you a tip, Richards?" he said, in quite a friendly way. "Miss Meadows has been keeping an eye on you."

"I don't see why!" answered Frank tartly.

"Well, of course, she knows that Injun Dick hangs out at the Red Dog," said Gunten. "It's a bit queer for a fellow here to be receiving letters from that rotten caboose. Of course, you know your own business best, but if I were you I'd keep it a bit dark."

Frank Richards flushed with anger.

"I'm not receiving letters from the Red Dog!" he exclaimed hotly. "I don't know a soul there. I've been written to twice by a man I've never even heard of before, and that's all."

Gunten whistled.

"That's a queer yarn," he said. "I don't think Miss Meadows would swallow that. If you've been on a bender, and got mixed up with the Red Dog crowd, it would be only wise to keep it dark. That's my advice."

"Keep your advice till I ask for it, then!"

exclaimed Frank angrily. "You know perfectly well that I've done nothing of the sort!"

"I guess I'm only going by what it looks like," answered Gunten, with a shrug of the shoulders. And he walked away.

Frank Richards breathed hard.

"You fellows can see that this man, Four Kings, has got to be bottled up," he said. "At this rate, I shall have all the fellows thinking that I've been playing faro at the Red Dog."

"We'll bottle him up!" said Bob Lawless cheerily. "Keep your wool on, Franky! We'll take a trail-ropo and lay it round the galoot if you like."

Frank Richards laughed, and the matter dropped.

### Not Nice for Frank!

FRANK RICHARDS could not help observing that day that there was a good deal of curiosity in the lumber school on the subject of Injun Dick's visits. Perhaps Gunten had been spreading his own peculiar view of the matter. It was very probable that Frank's old enemy was not letting this opportunity pass him by.

After lessons Chunky Todgers rolled up to the chums as they were going to the corral for their horses. Chunky's fat face wore a very serious expression—an expression that was quite owl-like in its solemnity.

"Going home, Richards?" he asked.

"Not now," answered Frank.

"Look here, I wouldn't do it if I were you, Franky," said Todgers.

"Eh? You wouldn't do what?"

"You won't get any good at the Red Dog," said Chunky, wagging his head sagely. "Go straight home, old fellow, and let it slide."

Frank Richards gave him an angry look, but Chunky's evident concern for him disarmed him. Chunky was intending to give him a friendly warning.

"You ass!" exclaimed Frank, half-amused and half-vexed. "What do you think I'm going to do, then?"

"Well, folks go to the Red Dog to play faro, I believe," answered Chunky. "I guess I've heard that old Boss-Eye, the galoot who keeps the place, runs a faro-table there."

"Oh, dry up, and don't be a silly young ass!" exclaimed Frank Richards.

"Well, I reckon I've spoken to you as a friend," said Chunky, in an injured tone. "Gunten says—"

"Bother Gunten!"

Tom and Molly Lawrence passed them, leading their horses from the corral. Lawrence gave Frank Richards a rather odd look, and Molly coloured as she caught his glance.

Frank set his lips. It was evident that the story was spreading round the school that he had companions at the Red Dog, and it was bitterly annoying to him. He stepped quickly towards Tom and his sister.

"Hold on a minute!" he said. "I suppose you've heard the silly talk about me, and about Injun Dick bringing me letters."

"I don't believe it, Frank," said Molly Lawrence quickly. "I'm sure you don't know any of those wretched people at the Red Dog."

"I don't," said Frank. "Some rotter has written to me from there, threatening me, and

I'm going to see what he means by it. My chums are going with me."

"Better keep clear of the place," said Lawrence. "Miss Meadows would be mad if she heard of this, I guess."

"Look at that letter—both of you!" said Frank. He held up the second letter from Four Kings.

"Do you mean to say you don't know the man who wrote this?" exclaimed Lawrence, in astonishment.

"Not from Adam. I think somebody's been using my name, and I'm going to find out."

Lawrence nodded.

"No harm in that," he assented.

"You must be careful not to get into a quarrel there, Frank," said Molly Lawrence. "They're a very rough crowd."

"Oh, I shall be very careful, of course," said Frank.

Frank Richards' brows were knitted as he led his pony out to the trail. It was evidently high time that Four Kings and his correspondence were nipped in the bud, if Frank did not want to earn a reputation as shady as Kern Gunten's.

Frank was silent as he rode to Thompson with his chums. The whole affair mystified and worried him, and he was very anxious to have an explanation from his unknown correspondent.

They dismounted outside the Red Dog, where Injun Dick was leaning up against a post, draped in his blanket. The Redskin was half-asleep, but his black eyes opened alertly as the three riders dismounted.

"Injun hold hoss!" he ejaculated. "You put your dust on Injun Dick. Wah!"

And the Apache took the reins of the three horses, while the schoolboys went into the saloon. A man with an inflamed face and squinting eyes was behind the bar, serving two or three cattle-men with drinks. This was evidently the gentleman who bore the descriptive appellation of "Boss-Eye."

The habitues of the Red Dog glanced curiously at the schoolboys as they came up to the bar. Boss-Eye looked at them, appearing to be looking out of the window, owing to his affliction.

"What's yours, gents?" he asked.

"We don't want anything, thanks!" said Frank Richards. "We've called to see someone here—a man named Four Kings."

"You'll find him in the parlour," said Boss-Eye; and he turned away to serve another customer.

The Red Dog did not look as if it possessed such a thing as a parlour; but the schoolboys discerned a door at the farther end of the bar-room, and they passed through it into an apartment which was evidently the parlour.

It was a small room, with a dirty window overlooking a yard piled high with logs, and an atmosphere of stale spirits and smoke. The room had only one occupant—a man in rough garb and red shirt, with a stetson hat on the back of his head. As he was the only person there they guessed that he was Four Kings, and they looked at him with some interest.

He was not a pleasant man to look at. His clothing showed that he was not well off in this world's goods, and there were signs that even soap and water were beyond his means—or, at least, beyond his inclinations.

Frank Richards came up to the rough table

at which the man was sitting, his chums following him.

"Are you Four Kings?" he asked.

"I guess I'm that same galoot," drawled the man.

"Then you're the man who wrote to me at Cedar Creek School. I'm Frank Richards."

### A Startling Accusation!

**F**OUR KINGS rose to his feet as Frank Richards gave his name, his glance resting very keenly on the schoolboys of Cedar Creek.

"Ho! You're young Richards, are you?" he said.

"Yes. You've written to me twice," said Frank. "I've come here—"

"I reckoned you'd have hoss-sense enough to come hyer," said Four Kings. "You'd have done wiser to come yesterday, 'cording to your promise. I ain't a galoot to be played with, and don't you forget it!"

"What do you mean by saying that I promised to come here?" exclaimed Frank hotly. "I've never even seen you before!"

"Come off!" answered Four Kings. "I guess we know one another pretty well, Richards. But what have you brought these hyer fellows along for? They ain't no business here!"

"They've come with me to see what it means," said Frank. "I want to know what fool game you're playing!"

"You ain't keeping it secret, then?"

"Keeping what secret?"

"That business that I know about."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Frank hotly. "I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about!"

Four Kings stared at him. The man was evidently as surprised as Frank himself. Amazing at it was, it was clear that he believed there was a secret between Frank Richards and himself.

"Suppose you explain, Four Kings?" suggested Bob Lawless.

"You can go ahead. Frank hasn't any secrets from his pals."

"There's a mistake somewhere," said Beauclerc quietly.

"I guess there ain't nary a mistake," said Four Kings. "I s'pose Frank Richards is Frank Richards, ain't he? If you will have it out before these two, I don't mind. You owe me fifty dollars. Where's the money?"

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Frank. "What do I owe you fifty dollars for?"

"For not taking you to the sheriff the night I spotted you down by the creek," answered Four Kings.

Frank Richards stared at the man, dumb-founded.

"The—the night you spotted me down by the creek!" he stuttered.

"I guess so."

"Look here, Four Kings! What do you mean?" demanded Bob. "Get out a plain yarn."

"I guess I'll do that. I spotted Mr. Richards down on the creek on Monday night," answered Four Kings. "I'd have took him to the sheriff, but he begged off, and promised to come hyer with fifty dollars. He never did come, so I sent a letter by Injun Dick. That's the hull story."

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"I think you must be out of your mind," said Frank. "I certainly wasn't anywhere near the creek on Monday night. You know that I was in bed at the ranch, Bob."

"I guess so," assented Bob.

"But suppose I was down by the creek, why should you take me to the sheriff?" continued Frank. "I suppose I've got a right to go along the creek, if I like?"

"Co-rect!" grinned Four Kings. "But I guess you haven't a right to lift the dust out of the miners' cradles, sonny."

"What!" yelled Frank.

"Lift the dust!" shouted Bob Lawless.

"I guess that was the game," answered Four Kings. "I reckon I was moseying along the creek when I heard him shifting the cradles. I reckoned at once what he was doing, and I collared him in the dark. I've heard a good bit about the claim-robber, and I got my hands on him—spry!"

"You dare to accuse me of being the claim-robber?" shouted Frank Richards, hardly believing his ears.

"I guess so."

"You lying hound!"

Four Kings' eyes glittered.

"Not so much of your chinwag!" he said. "I ain't the galoot to be called names!"

"Hold on!" said Vere Beauclerc, in his quiet voice. "There's a mistake here, Frank. Keep cool. You say you collared Frank Richards by the creek, Four Kings?"

"Yes!"

"In the dark?"

"Co-rect! There wasn't a moon on Monday. I guess that's why he was monkeying there."

"And the fellow you collared gave you Frank Richards' name?"

"Yep, his own name. And he told me he belonged to Cedar Creek," grinned Four Kings. "He begged me to let him off, because of the disgrace. Well, I'm not a bad cove, and I let him off, he promising to call hyer and bring me fifty dollars. One good turn deserves another, I guess. Fifty dollars is the figure, and I'm waiting for it."

The man was evidently speaking the truth, so far as he knew it. But what he knew was not quite the truth.

"It's plain enough, Frank," said Beauclerc. "This man found some fellow robbing the claims, and it was some fellow who knows you, for he gave your name."

"I suppose that's it," said Frank slowly.

Four Kings laughed derisively.

"Is that the yarn you're going to spin, Mr. Richards?" he jeered. "That cock won't fight, so I tell yer. I let you off for fifty dollars, and I'm waiting for that fifty."

Frank Richards gave the man a look of contempt.

"On your own showing you are acting like a scoundrel!" he said. "If you found a fellow robbing the claims, you ought to have informed the sheriff at once. You were willing to let off a thief for a bribe. Well, you've made a mistake. The fellow you collared was not me, and he gave you my name to get clear himself. If you hadn't been a fool, you wouldn't have expected him to give his right name."

"I guess that's enough chinwag. I'm waiting for the spondulicks," said Four Kings.

"You won't get a cent out of me!" answered Frank contemptuously. "Go and tell your yarn

to whom you like; I don't mind. Come on, you fellows! Let's get out of this!"

The three schoolboys turned to the door. For a moment Four Kings stood still, his brutal face inflamed with rage, enraged more by the schoolboy's scorn than by the loss of the expected reward. Then he made a sudden spring, and placed himself between the chums of Cedar Creek and the doorway.

"I guess you don't go without ponying up!" he said, between his teeth.

"Get out of the way!" shouted Bob Lawless.

"I guess not."

"Then we'll jolly soon shift you!"

The chums of Cedar Creek advanced on the man. Four Kings' hand went to his belt, and came up again with a weapon in it. The schoolboys started back at the sight of the revolver.

#### Four Kings Fails!

FRANK RICHARDS & CO. stood breathing hard, facing the ruffian.

Four Kings' eyes gleamed at them savagely over the six-shooter.

"I guess you'll pony up!" he said, between his teeth.

"Don't be a fool, man!" said Bob Lawless, as calmly as he could.

"I mean business!" said Four Kings grimly.

"I let the galoot off for fifty dollars! I'm going to finger them spondulicks, or I'll know the reason why!"

"I tell you it was not I you found at the creek!" exclaimed Frank.

"I reckon that's a lie!"

"You won't get a cent out of us!" said Bob Lawless. "And you can't frighten us with your gun, either. You may as well put it away."

Bob spoke with assurance, but he did not feel so assured within. Four Kings had been drinking, and he was in an ugly mood. His disappointment had roused all the evil in his brutal nature.

The three schoolboys kept their eyes tensely on the levelled revolver. The ruffian's finger was on the trigger, and, with so much of the fiery Red Dog whisky inside him, it was quite possible that the revolver might go off under his clumsy finger, without his intending it.

"I ain't waiting long," said Four Kings, with a savage scowl. "I'm going to count three, Richards, and if you ain't ponied up then, I'm going out for your ear! You won't look quite so handsome with an ear missin'!"

Frank Richards shivered a little. The ruffian's hand was far from steady, and it was more than possible that a bullet intended for his ear might go through his head.

"One!" snarled Four Kings.

Frank Richards & Co. exchanged a look. They were calculating the chances of making a rush; but the peril was real, for it was pretty certain that the revolver would explode in the struggle.

"Two!" said Four Kings.

His eyes gleamed savagely over the six-shooter. That he intended to carry out his threat was evident.

At that moment a shadow loomed up in the doorway behind the ruffian. Four Kings, with his back to the doorway, did not see it. Frank Richards drew a deep breath. Behind the ruffian Injun Dick, the Apache, looked into the room, with a faint surprise showing for once in his stolid face.

Frank's eyes met those of the Apache over Four Kings' shoulder. The Indian nodded silently. With the stealthy tread of a panther he came into the doorway, close up behind the ruffian. The word "three" was on Four Kings' lips, when a dusky hand was thrown over his shoulder, and his wrist was grasped in a clutch of iron. The fire-water had not deprived the fallen chief of his strength.

Four Kings gave a yell of surprise and pain as his wrist was enclosed in that grip and forced upward.

Crack!

The revolver exploded, the bullet whizzing up to the smoke-stained plank ceiling. The Redskin's left arm was thrown round Four Kings' neck, and the ruffian was dragged backwards to the floor. The next moment the Indian's knee was on his chest, and the revolver, wrenched away from his hand, was looking its owner in the face.

"Let up!" yelled Four Kings. "Let up, Injun! That shooter may go off!"

"Bad, paleface!" said Injun Dick. "No shoot! Great white chief Henderson come with rope, you bet!"

"Let up!" groaned Four Kings. "I ain't no hog! I know when I've had enough!"

"Young palefaces vamoose the ranch," said Injun Dick, glancing round at the schoolboys. "Bad place for young palefaces."

"Good man!" said Bob Lawless. "You come along, Injun Dick. Let that bulldozer alone. I guess you've trumped his game."

The Injun nodded and released Four Kings. The ruffian promptly placed the table between himself and the Redskin, keeping a scared eye on the revolver.

The Apache motioned to the boys to quit the room, and followed them out, Four Kings' revolver disappearing among his rags as he did so.

Glad enough were Frank Richards & Co. to get into the street again.

"We were silly asses to go there," muttered Frank Richards. "Thank you, Injun Dick! You've done us a jolly good turn, old chap!"

"Injun good Injun!" said the Apache. "Bully boy with glass eye, you bet! You give Injun dollar. I have spoken!"

Frank Richards laughed, and felt in his pocket. He had a five-dollar bill there, and he placed it in the Redskin's coppery hand. Injun Dick's black eyes snapped as he saw it, and without another word he made a beeline for the saloon doorway.

Frank Richards & Co. mounted their horses and rode away. They breathed more freely when they were well clear of the Red Dog.

"I guess we're well out of that, Franky," said Bob Lawless. "That Injun is the real white article, and no mistake! But"—Bob paused—"I say, Frank, that galoot Four Kings believes right enough that you were the pilgrim he collared robbing the claims on Monday night. He won't let it go at this. We shall hear from him again, I guess."

"At the school," said Beauclerc, with a nod. Frank Richards' eyes gleamed.

"Let him come to Cedar Creek!" he exclaimed. "We can deal with him there—and I'll be glad of the chance!"

And that chance was soon to come!

**Next Week: "THE CLAIM ROBBER!"**

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THE CHUMS OF THE SCHOOL SHIP BENBOW ARE HERE AGAIN TO AMUSE YOU—  
AND THE LAUGH'S ON TUCKEY TOODLES!



The horse halted suddenly on the bank of the stream. That did it! Tuckey Toodles went flying over his head and plunged into the water. Splash!

### Ashore in Trinidad!

“YAW-AW-AW!”

Tuckey Toodles gave a long, deep, happy yawn.

Jack Drake and Dick Rodney sat up in bed under the mosquito-netting and exchanged a cheery grin across the airy room.

A black servant had entered, with almost noiseless feet, and thrown open the green jalousies at the window, letting a stream of air and sunlight into the room.

“Yaw-aw-aw! You fellows awake?” asked Tuckey Toodles, blinking through the white netting over his bed. “I say, this is all right, isn’t it? Better than the Benbow.”

“I wonder what the time is?” remarked Rodney.

“Close on noon, I should think,” said Drake. “We’ve had a jolly long sleep. I say, I wouldn’t mind staying with Mr. Cazalet a few days, if we could get leave from the Benbow. This would be a rather easier life than swotting Latin with Mr. Packe.”

“Yes, rather!”

“Let’s stay!” said Tuckey Toodles at once. “Mr. Cazalet has asked us, and we did him no end of a service last night, preventing thieves breaking into his house—”

“We did, did we?” ejaculated Drake. “Where were you when we tackled the housebreakers, you fat fraud?”

“I happened to be a bit behind you, Drake, that’s all. I was just going to rush in like a lion when those silly niggers collared me. I say, I think it must be awfully late, for I’m hungry. I suppose we’ve missed brekker. Still, I don’t mind, if we’re in time for lunch.”

Drake and Rodney jumped lightly out of bed.

# TAKING TUCKEY FOR A RIDE!

By Owen Conquest.

They were feeling no worse for their long wanderings of the previous day, when they had been lost on the wooded slopes outside Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad. A good night’s rest had quite restored them.

“Hallo, here’s Sambo again!”

The black major-domo came in, followed by several negro servants. Mr. Sambo was a very fat and important-looking personage. He wore a blue frock coat with gilt buttons, and carried a gold-headed stick in his ebony hand—evidently a sort of baton of authority. He grinned and bowed to the pyjama-clad juniors.

“Morning, sar!”

“Good-morning, Sambo!” said Drake and Rodney together, smiling. Toodles, who was still

As a horseman Tuckey Toodles leaves a lot to be desired—which is only too evident even to Tuckey after his horse has taken him for a ride!

in bed, grunted. The lofty and aristocratic Tuckey did not believe in wasting much politeness on “niggers.”

“Mr. Nelson,” said the major-domo, with polite correction. “Name Samuel Pericles Nelson, sar. Mass’ Cazalet call me Sambo; dat little joke, sar. Me Mr. Nelson.”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Nelson!” said Drake gravely. “My mistake!”

“Dat all right, sar,” said Mr. Nelson gracefully. “Mass’ Cazalet gone down to harbour. Say to me look after young buccra gentlemen. Buccra gentlemen like washy all over, sar?”

The juniors guessed that this referred to the morning bath, and they nodded assent. Tuckey Toodles did not nod. He did not care for morning baths, if they could be avoided.

“Where’s the bath?” asked Rodney.

Sambo pointed downwards.

“Eh? This is the lowest floor of the house, isn’t it?” asked Drake, puzzled.

“Yes, sar. Bath underneath.”

“Oh!”

“You foller me, sar!”

Slippers and cloaks were handed to the juniors, and Drake called to Tuckey Toodles.

"Come on, Tuckey. Don't you want a plunge?"

"No, I don't!" growled Tuckey. "Tubber's bad enough on board the Benbow. We ain't bound to have it here."

"You are!" grinned Drake; and he bundled Tuckey Toodles out of bed with a bump to the floor, to an accompaniment of yells from Tuckey.

"Look here, I'm not coming!" he roared.

"Get that cloak on!"

"Rats!"

"And those slippers!"

"Shan't!"

"Then you'll come without!" said Drake, taking Toodles by one fat ear. "Get a move on!"

"Yaroooooh! Leggo! I'll come!"

And Tuckey Toodles bundled on slippers and cloak and came. The juniors followed Sambo, who carried towels over his arm, out of the bedroom and down a bamboo-walled passage to the rear of the house. There, to their surprise, they found that steps led down under the building. In Trinidad most buildings are raised well above the earth, to allow a free circulation of air underneath, on account of the heat of the climate. In the space below there is often a swimming-pool, where the waters are cool and shady.

Drake and Rodney gladly plunged into the glistening water, and Tuckey Toodles, hesitating upon the brink, was jerked in by his fat ankle. The chums of the Benbow felt much better for the plunge—even Tuckey, reluctant as he was to have the pleasure.

They returned, refreshed and cheerful, to their room, where they dressed and then went to a very late breakfast—or, rather, lunch. It was laid in the garden, under the shade of a gigantic ceiba-tree. There they met the son of their host, Arthur Cazalet, who greeted them cheerily. Tuckey Toodles did not waste much time in talk—he started on the lunch, and gave it his most earnest attention—but Drake and Rodney chatted with the young West Indian, and found him very agreeable. Lunch was over when the trot of a horse was heard, and Mr. Cazalet arrived.

"Well, I've seen your master on board the Benbow, my boys," he said, with a smile. "I am afraid Mr. Packe was a little angry at your leaving him yesterday, but I told him of your courageous conduct here last night, and he has consented to overlook the escapade. And you are at liberty to remain ashore until sundown if you care to do so."

"If!" said Drake, with a smile. "Yes, rather! Thank you very much, sir!"

"My son will look after you, and show you some of the sights of the place," said the planter. And with a nod and a smile, he passed into the house.

Tuckey Toodles rubbed his fat hands.

"I say, this is ripping!" he said. "No blessed lessons to-day. I suppose you don't go to school, young Cazalet?"

Arthur smiled and shook his head.

"No, I've left. I'm learning coffee-planting now, with my father. I'm quite at your service to-day. What would you like to do, you fellows? Ride?"

"Yes, rather!"

"Then I'll see about the horses!"

"Not a bad chap, that fellow," Tuckey Toodles remarked, as young Cazalet left them. "I wonder what sort of a school he went to here? Nothing like St. Winifred's, I'll bet you! Still, as his pater's an old Winifredian, I suppose they're respectable."

"Ass!"

"Well, you have to be careful whom you mix with in these out-of-the-way places," said Toodles sagely. "It would be awfully awkward for some rough-and-ready Colonial chap to come turning up at Toodles Towers some day, claiming acquaintance, wouldn't it?"

"He would have to be jolly clever to find Toodles Towers, I think," growled Rodney. "You silly little fat ass, if you can't talk sense, don't talk at all."

"Look here, Rodney——"

"If you say another word, I'll squeeze a pine-apple down your neck!"

And Tuckey Toodles sniffed and did not say another word.

### A Very Enjoyable Ride!

THE blaze of the noontide heat was over, but it was still very warm when the horses were led out for the Benbow juniors. Four very handsome steeds were waiting, held by negro grooms, under the trees by the roadside, when Arthur Cazalet led out his friends.

Tuckey Toodles surveyed the animals with the eye of a connoisseur. As a matter of fact, Tuckey's ignorance of horseflesh was abysmal, which was rather surprising considering his descriptions of the extensive stables at Toodles Towers.

"H'm! I suppose there isn't much real horseflesh in this little island?" he remarked to the planter's son.

"Oh, we've got some rather decent horses in Trinidad," answered Arthur, with a smile.

"Not much like our thoroughbreds at home," said Toodles, with a shake of the head.

Cazalet made no reply to that remark.

"Will you fellows mount?" he said.

"I'd rather have a more mettlesome steed," remarked Toodles. "This beast looks a rather tame old dummy. Still, I dare say I can make him go!"

"I think he'll go fast enough for you," said Arthur. "Are you much of a horseman?"

"Oh, terrific!" said Toodles. "I hunt at home, you know. It would do you good to see me clearing the gates and hedges. Lend me a whip, will you? I shall have to touch up this critter to make him go!"

"Better not use the whip too much——"

"My dear chap," said Toodles patronisingly, "I know how to ride! I shall be glad to show you how to manage a horse!"

"Oh!"

"Come here, you brute!" said Toodles.

For a fellow who was going to show a Colonial how to manage a horse, Tuckey had rather bad luck. He planted a foot in the stirrup, and clambered up, but the horse shied as he did so, and Tuckey missed him. He came down on the grass on his back, with his foot still in the stirrup, uttering a wild yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Drake.

"Yow-ow-woop!"

"Try again!" chuckled Rodney. "The Toodles' style of mounting a horse is rather interesting!"

"Yah!"

Cazalet had caught the horse by the bridle, grinning. He held the animal while Toodles essayed to mount again, and a negro groom gave Tuckey a helping hand up. Tuckey was about to order the groom off haughtily, when it dawned upon his fat mind that he could not mount without assistance, so he submitted.

He was planted in the saddle at last, gasping.

"Ready?" asked Cazalet.

"I'm waiting for you," said Toodles.

"Come on, then!"

Drake and Rodney and the young West Indian set their horses in motion, and Tuckey Toodles essayed to follow. But his steed seemed to have taken a dislike to him, for he declined to move.

"Gee up, you beast!" exclaimed Toodles.

"Yah! You rotten brute, gee up!"

"Come on, Tuckey!" shouted back Drake.

"What are you hanging about for?"

"Yah! This silly beast won't move!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tuckey Toodles lashed the horse's flanks with the riding-whip to get him going. He had more success than he desired. At the lash of the whip the horse leaped forward and broke into a gallop.

"Oh dear!"

Tuckey did not lash again. He held on for his life.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

The horse's hoofs beat a tattoo on the hard road as Tuckey dashed after his chums. He overtook them, and passed them at a gallop.

"My hat! Tuckey's going it!" exclaimed Drake in surprise. "I never thought he could ride!"

"Eh? Doesn't he hunt at home?" asked Cazalet. "I thought he said so."

Drake laughed.

"Tuckey says a lot of things," he answered.

"By the way, Cazalet, if you feel inclined to punch his silly nose during the day, don't mind us!"

The West Indian laughed, too.

"Help!"

It was a wild yell from Tuckey Toodles, who was now well ahead on the road. He had lost his reins, and was clinging to the horse's mane frantically.

"Hallo, your friend's in difficulties!" said Arthur.

The juniors put their horses to the gallop. Tuckey Toodles was only too evidently in difficulties. He had no control whatever over the horse, and the animal had a fancy for galloping. So he galloped, and Tuckey clung to his back and howled for help. The clatter of hoofs behind seemed to urge on Tuckey's steed to greater efforts.

Irritating as Tuckey was, his chums did not want to see him take a tumble, and they strove to overtake him. But Tuckey's steed galloped faster, and it became a race. With Tuckey clinging wildly to his mane, the horse dashed on towards the hills, the other three riders clattering in hot pursuit.

Negroes working in the cane brake along the road looked up and stared and laughed as Tuckey swept by. A smart American buggy rattling along the road just dodged Toodles and his steed, and the driver made remarks in the American language until he was out of hearing. After that the frolicsome steed seemed to tire of the excellent road and took to grass. At this spot the road was bordered by an old sugar-plantation that had gone to grass, and the hapless Tuckey was taken into a wilderness of herbage and shrubs and prickly bush, still with the excited three on his track.

By this time Tuckey Toodles was so shaken up and confused that he hardly knew what was happening to him. But he dared not attempt to jump off, and the horse would not stop.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1633.

Through the trees ahead there was a gleam of water. Tuckey Toodles let out a howl of terror as he saw the stream glistening. It was too wide for the horse to leap, and the animal wisely did not attempt it. He rushed right on to the muddy bank, and halted suddenly.

The sudden halt did it! Tuckey Toodles went flying over his head, and plunged nearly in the middle of the stream.

Splash!

The horse trotted contentedly away.

### Back to the Benbow!

"YURRRRGH!"

That was Tuckey Toodles' remark as his head came up out of the water. The stream was not deep, but the yellow mud at the bottom was rather deep. There was about two feet of water, and nearly as much mud. Tuckey stood in it and howled.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The three pursuers came breathlessly up, and jumped off their horses. Tuckey was evidently not hurt, and they did not trouble to restrain their merriment. They roared with laughter as Tuckey stood with his fat chin over the water, and blinked at them and shrieked.

"Yah! Help! I'm drowning! Yoop! Rotters! Help!" bawled Toodles.

"Why don't you come out, then?" demanded Drake. "You can walk out, I suppose? It's not deep!"

"Grooh! I can't—I'm stuck!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tuckey Toodles floundered in the water, but as fast as he jerked one foot out of the thick mud, the other sank deeper. He was a prisoner in the middle of the stream, and for some time his comrades were laughing too much to help him.

But Arthur Cazalet detached a long and wiry liana from a tree, and, using it as a rope, threw the end to Toodles. Tuckey clutched hold of it, and he was dragged out of the mud at last. He came splashing and squelching ashore, and sank down, gasping.

"Grooh!"

"You're none the worse, old top!" said Jack Drake comfortingly.

"Ow-wow!"

"But you were going to show Cazalet how to manage a horse—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow, you rotters!" groaned Tuckey. "I'm wet—I'm muddy! Ow! I've been nearly drowned! Grooooh! This mud smells like anything! Ow!"

"It does, and no mistake!" said Drake. "You'd better go in again and have a wash!"

"Yah!"

"You'll soon get dry in this sun," said Cazalet, smiling. "Do you think you'd better mount again?"

"I'm not going to get on that wild beast!" snorted Toodles. "'Tain't like the horses I'm used to at home, I can tell you!"

"Then what the thump are you going to do?" demanded Drake. "We've come about three miles, and it's too far to walk back."

"Yah!"

"Toodles can get a lift on the road. There are plenty of carts passing," said Cazalet. "We shall have to walk back to the road."

And as soon as Tuckey felt sufficiently recovered the horses were led back to the road, where half a dollar to a negro driver secured Toodles a lift. His horse—which untold gold would not have



tempted him to mount again—was tied on behind the cart.

Drake and Rodney were certainly not sorry to see Toodles safely off, and probably Arthur shared their feelings, though he was too polite to say so. Tuckey having rolled away in the cart, the three comrades remounted their horses and rode on.

It was a very happy ride in spite of the absence of Tuckey Toodles—or perhaps because of that.

They rode as far as San Josef, the ancient capital of Trinidad, where they had refreshments at a hospitable bungalow, and the shadows were lengthening when they remounted their horses to ride back towards Port of Spain.

As the sun sank in crimson and gold towards the South American cordilleras, they arrived at the Cazalets' villa, where they found Tuckey Toodles in a rather bad temper.

"I've been waiting for you chaps," he said crossly. "We've got to get back to the Benbow by sundown, or there'll be a row. Luckily I've had something to eat. You fellows won't have time for that. Do you call it pally to desert a chap like this?"

"Bow-wow!" was Drake's reply. "I say, that chap's got away!" went on Toodles.

"What chap?"  
 "That Spanish half-breed that was caught breaking into the house last night. He was handed over to a nigger bobby to take into town this morning, and he got clear. I say, how are we going to get back to the ship? I'm too jolly tired to walk!"

"I'm going to drive you down in the buggy," said Arthur.

"Good! I'll drive, if you like," said Toodles. "I'm a splendid driver!"

Cazalet hesitated.  
 "You jolly well won't!" said Drake emphatically, before the planter's son could reply. "You can risk your own silly neck on a horse, if you like, but mine's more valuable."

"Look here, Drake—"  
 "Bosh! Dry up!"

The buggy was brought round, and the juniors took their leave of their kind host. It was Arthur Cazalet who took the reins as they drove to Port of Spain.

On the quay they found some of the Benbow fellows waiting for the boat to take them back to the ship, in charge of Mr. Packe. That gentleman frowned a little at Drake & Co., but Mr. Cazalet had evidently succeeded in placating him, for he made no reference to the escapade of the previous day.

"Here's the boat," said Drake, and he shook hands with Arthur. "We'd be glad if you'd come to see us on the Benbow, if you'd care to. We chuck lessons at four."

"I'd like to look over the ship," said Cazalet. "To-morrow?" asked Drake.

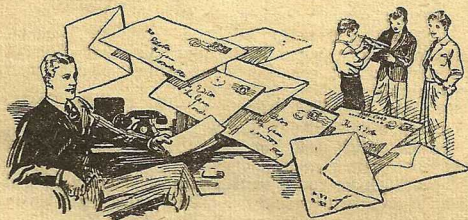
"To-morrow, if you like."  
 "Done, then. We'll expect you."

"Take your places!" came Mr. Packe's voice. The Benbow juniors crowded into the boat, and pulled for the ship. And in a few minutes more they were treading the decks of the old Benbow.

**Tuckey Tells the Tale!**

**Y**OU fellows should have seen me! I felled him with a blow—one of my terrific lefts!"

Tuckey Toodles was making those remarks as  
 (Continued on next page.)



**THE EDITOR'S CHAIR**

Let the Editor be your pal. Drop him a line to-day, addressing your letter: The Editor, The GEM, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

**H**ALLO, CHUMS! It's not often that I have a word with you nowadays owing to the extra length of the St. Jim's yarns. I have had my work cut out every week packing into thirty-six pages all the stories and features, and more often than not I have had to sacrifice my own little space. However, here we are again—feeling very cheerful after just reading a large batch of readers' letters praising in glowing terms Martin Clifford's great new series. Our author has certainly been hitting the high spots, and readers have not been slow to acknowledge the fact. As one reader wrote, "They're the best stories the GEM has ever published—and that's saying something when one considers some of Martin Clifford's grand yarns of the past!"

**"THE NIZAM'S DIAMOND"**

Well, in next Wednesday's issue he carries on the good work, when readers will have in their hands the final exciting yarn of the "flying schoolboys" series. Tom Merry & Co. have finished with flying for the present—it's time to get back to St. Jim's and lessons. But they haven't finished with that troublesome black box. The last of the excitement caused by that mysterious piece of black wood is left for St. Jim's.

For the treacherous Pawson appears on the scene at the school—and so does the American who first entrusted the black box into Gussy's care. How Lord Eastwood's late valet—thanks to Baggy Trimble—is once again thwarted in his efforts to get the box, and how Kerr takes a hand in the affair and clears up the mystery of the box, makes a thrilling climax to the series. Look out for this super new story.

**"THE CLAIM ROBBER!"**

It's a strange mystery in which Frank Richards has unconsciously found himself involved, as told in this week's gripping Cedar Creek yarn. The sequel to it is that Frank, owing to Four Kings' allegation that he is the culprit who has been robbing the miners' claims of gold-dust, is a little under suspicion at the lumber school. Frank realises that the only way to clear himself of all suspicion is to catch the claim robber. He, in his turn, has his suspicions, but the thing is to prove them. Frank and his chums thereupon watch at night for the thief—with what result you will see when you read next week's exciting story.

**"THE NEW CAPTAIN!"**

Jack Drake & Co. have certainly had some fun and excitement so far in Trinidad, and now ericket comes into the scheme of things. A match is fixed up with a junior club ashore, but then a sore point crops up. Who is to be skipper? Daubeny is junior captain, but he is too easily influenced by his pals, who made the St. Winifred's eleven a laughing-stock at home in England. Drake and Rodney don't want the same thing to happen in Trinidad. However, it is really up to Daubeny. What does he do? Read in next week's ripping yarn how he springs a big surprise in the school ship.

All the best, chums! Chin-chin!

THE EDITOR.  
 THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,653.

Drake and Rodney entered the Common-room on the Benbow that evening.

Toodles was surrounded by a crowd of juniors, most of whom were grinning. The fat Fourth Former did not see the chums enter, and he ran on cheerily:

"Fairly knocked him out, you know! Then I turned on the other like a lion."

"And what did you do to him?" inquired Sawyer, with a grin.

"Felled him, too," said Toodles. "Only he got away through the window. If he hadn't got away he would have been caught, you know."

"Not really?" asked Daubeny of the Shell sarcastically.

"Yes, really! And the old gentleman—nice old boy, you know—wring my hand, with tears in his eyes, and said: 'My gallant lad—'"

Drake stared. Evidently Tuckey Toodles was giving his schoolfellows a description of the scene at the Cazalets' the previous night, and drawing upon his fat and fertile imagination for the details.

"And what were Drake and Rodney doing all the time?" inquired Egan.

Toodles gave a scornful sniff.

"They were right off the scene," he said. "I won't say they were funky—he, he, he!—only they didn't arrive in time, you know. I had knocked out both the thieves before they came in. And the old planter said to me: 'My noble boy—'"

"Did he call you a noble boy as well as a gallant lad?" inquired Sawyer major.

"Eh? Oh, yes! He said: 'My noble lad, I thank you for your courage and devotion! You have saved my life! Henceforth—'"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see what you fellows are cackling at!" said Toodles peevishly. "You wouldn't have stood up to a pair of ferocious burglars as I did, I can tell you—Hallo! Is that you, Drake, old chap?"

## WHERE THE CARS ROAR . . .

*"Taut over the shuddering steering wheel, Bill Martyn, driving with all the reckless daring handed down to him from his family's generations of fighting men, knew that the Italians were creeping closer—that somehow he must find more speed!*

*The paddock flashed past . . . Sarkey's straight stretched ahead . . . Bill wedged his foot down on the throttle and held on—and then he heard the first trace of roughness in the M.G.'s war-song. It was hardly detectable at first but in a flash the luscious howl grew into a broken, discordant note. 'Gosh, she's packing up!' Bill groaned."*

**Want to know what happens next? Then read the great new motor racing yarn, "SCHOOL FOR SPEEDMEN," in to-day's issue of**

## MODERN BOY

Now on sale at all Newsagents **2<sup>d</sup>**.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,633.

Toodles broke off as he caught sight of his studymates. Even Tuckey Toodles had the grace to turn pink.

"I—I was just telling these fellows—" he stammered.

"You awful Ananias!" said Drake in measured tones. "You're telling whoppers, as usual! You weren't on the scene at all! You were skulking in the garden—"

"Oh, I say—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And you never showed up till it was over, when the niggers found you skulking and yanked you in!" exclaimed Rodney.

Tuckey Toodles rose to his full height—which was not great—and surveyed the chums of the Fourth with a scornful air.

"I might have expected this!" he said bitterly. "Just like you fellows to try to bag a chap's laurels! Didn't I fell one of the burglars with a terrific blow?"

"No," roared Drake, "you didn't!"

"Didn't Mr. Cazalet clasp my hand, and say: 'My gallant, noble-hearted youth—'"

"No, you fat fraud!"

"Well, the fellows will know which of us to believe, I hope!" said Tuckey loftily. "I'm going to get off lessons to-morrow to go and see the chief of police about it, and ask him whether they're found. As the chap who baffled the villains, Mr. Packe can't refuse me leave to go. Besides, I can describe them."

"You only saw one of them," said Drake—"the man who was bagged before you showed up. You didn't see the man who got away first."

"Then how is it I can give a description of him?" asked Tuckey triumphantly. "I can, you know. He's only got one eye."

"You heard young Cazalet say so."

"Only one eye!" repeated Daubeny. "There's a man on the Benbow with only one eye. Has Peg Slaney been raiding ashore?"

"Slaney was away from the ship last night," said Egan. "I know he had shore leave."

Jack Drake exchanged a quick glance with Rodney. They had thought of Peg Slaney when they knew that the attempted thief at the Cazalets' villa had only one eye, and they wondered whether the one-eyed seaman had been mixed up in the affair. From what they knew of Slaney, it was likely enough that the ruffian, on shore for the night, had entered into a rascally scheme with some associate about the harbour.

"Is Slaney on board now?" asked Rodney.

"Yes; he's bringing up some ginger-pop from the canteen now," said Torrence of the Shell. "Here he is."

Slaney entered the Common-room with a tray as Torrence spoke. Sawyer major called out to him:

"Hallo, old beauty! You had a narrow escape last night, didn't you?"

Crash!

"Look out, you ass!" exclaimed Torrence.

The tray had slipped, and the ginger-beer and glasses had gone to the floor. The steward's mate stared blankly at Sawyer major, whose words had evidently startled him.

"Wha-a-at—what did you say, sir?" he stammered.

"Hallo! Did I startle you?" grinned Sawyer.

"Ay, ay, sir!" said Slaney, recovering himself. "I don't know what you're driving at, sir!"

"Guilty conscience," murmured Torrence. "My hat! I wonder if it was Slaney?"

(Continued on page 36.)



A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging views on matters of mutual interest. If you wish to reply to a notice published here you must write to the Pen Pal direct. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to THE GEM, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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(Continued overleaf)

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Miss J. Preston, 15, Edrick Road, Burnt Oak, Edgware, **Middlesex**; girl correspondents, age 13-15; anywhere.

H. Yussuf hui Jaffar, House No. 566, Kampong Boyan, Tapping, **Federated Malay States**; age 14; interested in anything; British Empire, preferably England.

E. Sviranovsky, P.O. Box 1894, Tel-Aviv, **Palestine**; age 15-19; general topics, stamps; anywhere.

Miss A. Scard, St. Christophers, Richmond Road, Horsham, **Sussex**; girl correspondents, age 15-17; stamps, photos, and sport; British Colonies.

C. Kee, 1076, High Road, Nibong Tebal, P.W., **Malaya**; any age; various topics; anywhere; all letters answered.

Miss F. King, 63, Wilson Street, **Derby**; girl correspondents, age 20-23; reading, snaps, drawing, films, music; any country.

F. Frey, 8, Lewis Street, Brantford, Ontario, **Canada**; any age; stamps; anywhere except Canada and United States.

W. Macnab-Box, Amprior, Ontario, **Canada**, wants a Killin, Perthshire, pen pal; age 16-20; music, stamps and shaps; all letters answered.

Members wanted at home and overseas to form a correspondence club. Write to T. B. Jones, 42, Worcester Road, Manor Park, **London, E.12**.

The National Union of Labelists, 119, Brownlow Road, New Southgate, **London, N.11**, welcomes members for Match Label Club; only serious collectors required.

Please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope when applying.

Miss N. Khaw, 11, Logan Road, Penang, **Straits Settlements**; girl correspondents, age 13-18; stamps, films, postcards, general topics; British Empire, Hawaii and West Indies.

Members wanted for the International Correspondence Club; admission free. Send full details, age, hobbies, etc., to the Hon. Secretary, G. Kelvin Smith, G.P.O. Box 940, Melbourne, C.I., **Australia**.

F. Coleman, 2105, City Councillors Street, Montreal, **Canada**; age over 15; general topics, films, reading, politics, music, stamps. Letters answered in English, French or Italian; anywhere.

E. Lewis, 28, Coleridge Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, **Canada**; age 14-18; stamps; anywhere except Canada and U.S.A.

Miss S. Bates, 116, Nicholls Street, Coventry, **Warwickshire**; girl correspondents, age 11-13; snapshots, comics, sport; America, Ireland, Scotland.

L. Smith, 22, Ongar Road, Fulham, **London, S.W.6**; age 14-16; wireless; anywhere; all letters answered.

F. Wood, c/o Rutland Hotel, Burly Street, **Leeds**; dominoes, cig. cards, put-and-take, ludo; anywhere.

W. Turner, 178, Liberton Street, Carityne, **Glasgow**; age 11-15; stamps; anywhere except Great Britain.

C. Chia, 13, Kim Yam Road, Singapore, **Straits Settlements**; age 13-20; stamps, film stars' photos and snaps; anywhere.

R. Follard, 35, Gerard Avenue, Canley, Coventry, **Warwickshire**; any age; interested in anything; anywhere; all letters answered.

## TAKING TUCKEY FOR A RIDE!

(Continued from page 34.)

The one-eyed seaman squinted suspiciously at the juniors, evidently ill at ease. He left the Common-room hurriedly, and did not return with a fresh supply of ginger-beer.

Drake was looking very thoughtful as he strolled away to his cabin with Rodney, leaving Tuckey Toodles spinning a still more circumstantial yarn of the happenings at the villa outside Port of Spain.

Tin Tacks, the Barbadian coloured gentleman, was slinging the hammocks in Cabin No. 8 when the chums entered. He grinned a welcome.

"Old Tin Tacks berry glad see you ag'in, sar!" he said.

Since he had stowed himself away on the Benbow the coloured gentleman of Barbados had berthed in the fore-castle, and had been assigned to a watch; but he found time from his duties, nevertheless, to look after "Mass' Jack." He was

determined to attach himself to Jack Drake, and the junior had given up arguing on the subject.

"Tin Tacks, old man," said Drake, "did you happen to see anything of Slaney last night?"

Tin Tacks' eyes gleamed, as they always did at the sight or the mention of his old enemy.

"Me see him, sar," he said. "He go ashore."

"Did you see him when he came back?"

"Come back dis morning, sar," said Tin Tacks. "Him berry bad temper; him clothes torn. Me tink he get into a fight in the harbour. Berry bad character, sar! Him no gentleman!"

"My hat! It looks more likely than ever," said Drake. "Look here, Rodney, if Slaney was mixed up in that burglary he's got to be dealt with. Young Cazalet was the only one who got a good look at the man, and he may be able to recognise him again. He's coming aboard to-morrow."

"And then——" said Rodney. "We'll get him to look at Slaney, and see whether he knows him. If he does——"

Drake broke off suddenly at a sound in the passage without. He stepped quickly to the door, just in time to see Peg Slaney disappear round the nearest corner!

**Next Week: "THE NEW CAPTAIN!"**

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