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# RANGER

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LAUGHS AND THRILLS GALORE IN THIS TIP-TOP SCHOOL YARN!

# The Fourth Form at GRIMSLADE!



## THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLLOW TREE!

### Just Like Fritz!

"**T**WENTY bounds!" murmured Fritz Splitz.

Jim Dainty grinned.

He was looking for Fritz, and now he had found him.

Fritz von Splitz was standing under the big, shady oak, opposite the stained-glass windows of Big Hall at Grimslade School. He had a newspaper open in his fat hands. His saucer-eyes were glued on an advertisement in that paper. It was headed:

"**£20 REWARD!**"

"Twenty bounds!" repeated Fritz. "Mein gootness! How mooch duck could I puy for twenty bounds! Himmel!"

Fritz sighed happily at the thought of the dazzling amount of tuck that could be obtained for the sum of twenty pounds. And that sum was offered by Squire Craggs, of Grimslade Chase, to anyone who could find the gold plate that had recently been stolen from his mansion.

"Mein gootness! If I could vind tat cold plate, and pag tat reward, how I would eat, and eat, and eat!" sighed Fritz.

Jim Dainty had a cricket ball in his hand. He was going down to games practice, and he was looking for the fat German to shepherd him down to the same spot. Fritz was too absorbed to observe Dainty's approach. The "Black-slade Gazette" was held up before his

fat face, his eyes glued on those fascinating words "**£20 Reward!**"

Jim Dainty swung up his arm, still at a little distance, and tossed the cricket ball—intending it to drop on the newspaper, and knock it out of Fritz's fat hands. That was what he intended—but that was not what happened. For Fatty Fritz moved at the same moment, unexpectedly, and the cricket ball, instead of dropping on the newspaper, dropped on the fat pimple of a nose that adorned the face of Friedrich von Splitz.

The startled yell that came from Fritz awoke most of the echoes of Grimslade School. It rang across the quad, from White's House to Redmayes' House.

"Whoooop!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Jim.

"Ach! Peastly pounder!" roared Fritz, clapping his damaged nose. "I tinks tat mein poko he is broken! I have vun colossal bain in mein poko!"

The cricket ball had dropped at Fritz's feet. He stooped and grabbed it up, and brandished it in the air.

"Now I giff you te same on your peastly poko!" he roared.

"Hold on, you ass—" Jim Dainty dodged—but really it was not necessary to dodge. Fritz, as a bowler, might have hit the side of a house, but only if the house had been quite near at hand.

With vengeful intent, Fritz hurled the cricket ball. Had it smitten Jim

By FRANK RICHARDS

(AUTHOR OF THE POPULAR BOOK-LENGTH STORIES IN THE "MAGNET," FEATURING HARRY WHARTON AND CO., AND BILLY BUNTER OF GREYFRIARS.)

Dainty's nose, certainly that nose would have been hurt. But it did not go within yards of Jim.

Crash!

There was a terrific crashing and splintering of glass. Jim Dainty jumped almost clear of the ground when he saw where that cricket ball had gone! It had gone clean through the stained-glass window, and dropped into Big Hall amid a shower of broken glass. "Mein gootness!" ejaculated Fritz, in horror.

"You—you blithering cack-handed Boche!" gasped Jim Dainty. "You've done it now!"

"Ach! I have not tun it! It is you tat have tun it!" gasped Fritz. "It was all your fault, peast and prute!"

There was a shout in the quad at the crash of the broken glass. Fellows came rushing up from all sides.

"My giddy goshes!" shouted Ginger Rawlinson of Redmayes' House.

"What's this game?"

"That fatheaded Boche—"

"Tat peast and a prute, Tainty—"

"My hat! Here comes Sammy!" exclaimed Dick Dawson.

Dr. Samuel Sparshott, the headmaster of Grimslade, came striding up. He stared at the smashed window, and fixed his eyes grimly on the two juniors of White's House.

"Which of you did this—Dainty or Splitz?" barked Sammy Sparshott.

"Tainty!" yelled Fritz.

"Dainty! Did you—"

"I dropped the ball on Fritz's nose, and the silly ass chucked it back at me, and it went through the window!" answered Jim.

"Then you are equally to blame!" said Dr. Sparshott. "You should not play tricks with cricket balls in the quad—especially near expensive stained-glass windows. The window will be repaired—and paid for."

"I tink tat Tainty—"

"The oost," said Dr. Sparshott grimly, "will be about twenty pounds!"

"Mein gootness!"

"And your parents will be called upon to meet it! Let that be a lesson to you!"

Jim Dainty, very dismayed, went into Hall to recover the cricket ball. Fritz Splitz rolled away in a state of panic. He hardly dared to think of the effect on his "beoples" in Germany if they received a bill with an "extra" of ten pounds on it. Neither was it agreeable to Jim Dainty to think of such a bill going home to his father. But the damage was done—and that was that!

### Rivals for the Reward!

"**A**NY luck?" asked Dick Dawson.

"No!" grunted Jim Dainty.

He threw himself into a chair in Study No. 10 in White's House. He was dusty and tired.

It was several days since that little accident with the window. The window was under process of repair. Every day—and nearly every hour of every day—Fritz Splitz had told Jim Dainty that it was up to him to pay for the damage. And every leisure hour had been spent by Jim in rooting through Middlemoor

Wood, in search of the plunder that had been taken from Grimsdale Chase.

If he could only have found that plunder, the reward of twenty pounds offered by Squire Craggs would have seen him through. But—he couldn't!

"Blessed if I think the stuff's hidden in that dashed wood at all!" growled Dainty. "I've combed the blessed place from end to end—and so have a hundred other fellows."

"But they ran the thief down in that wood, and didn't find anything on him," said Dawson. "They've got the man, but not the loot! He planted it in the wood somewhere!"

"But where?" grunted Jim. Dawson shook his head. That was a question nobody could answer. Smug Brown, who had robbed the squire, was in prison; but he kept his own counsel. The police had searched the wood again and again—in vain! Local inhabitants had searched it. The Grimsdale Boy Scouts had turned out in force, and spent half-holidays rooting through the thickets. Nothing had come of it. If the loot was there it was hidden deep.

"I'll cut the cricket on Wednesday, and have another try," said Dainty. "I'll put in the whole afternoon."

"Not Wednesday," said Dawson. "Ginger & Co. are going on Wednesday."

"Blow Ginger!"

"But Sammy—"

"Blow Sammy!"

The rival Scouts of Grimsdale had done more scragging than scouting when they first started hunting for the lost loot. So Dr. Sparshott had ordered the rival troops to take turns at the game.

On Wednesday it was the turn of the Redmayes Scouts—according to the Head's order! Still, there was no reason why a White's fellow should not take up the search that day—if he liked to risk getting "six" from Sammy! Jim was going to chance it.

When Wednesday afternoon came round most of the White's juniors were putting in the afternoon at cricket. Ginger Rawlinson paraded his Scouts in front of Redmayes' House. Jim Dainty strolled down to the gates, with his hands in his pockets, and his manner very casual. For Ginger & Co. he did not care a bean; but he was wary of Sammy.

"Dainty!" Fritz Splitz rolled after Jim, calling to him. "Stop you minute. I've gumming mit you to be vood!"

Jim Dainty turned, and glared at the fat German as he came panting up.

"You silly ass!" he snapped. "Do you want to tell that Redmayes crew where I'm going? Shut up, fathead!"

"But I tinks tat I gum." gasped Fritz. "I tells you tat mein beoples in Chermany vill not pay for tat window tat is broke, and I tinks tat perhaps I find tat cold blate."

"Buzz off!" roared Jim. "And take that for a start!"

"Ach! I peast and a prute!" shrieked Fritz. "I vill not be kicked on mein trousers! I vill—yaroooh!"

Fatty Fritz fled for his fat life. Jim Dainty turned out of the gates and started down Middlemoor Lane at a trot. He wanted to be away before Ginger & Co. took the trail.

Fatty Fritz dashed back into the quad till he was suddenly stopped by Ginger Rawlinson, who playfully planted his Scout's staff on the spot where Fritz had packed away his dinner.

"Ach!" gasped Fritz. "Ooooooh!" He sat down suddenly with a terrific bump.

"My giddy goloshes!" ejaculated Ginger. "Did you fellows feel the school shake?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Peastly pounder!" gurgled Fritz Splitz. "You vas vun pigger peast tan Teinty before! Tat peast kick me because I vant to go mit him to vind te blunder!"

"What's that?" exclaimed Ginger.

"Has Dainty gone after the loot? The cheezy ass—it's our day to-day!"

"We'll jolly well scrag him!" exclaimed Streaky Bacon wrathfully. "Come on!" shouted Ginger.

And the Redmayes Scouts started in haste. Fritz Splitz grinned after them. Perhaps the fat Fritz had not exactly intended to give Jim away to the enemy. But undoubtedly he derived satisfaction from thinking of what would happen to Dainty when the Redmayes men found him.

Ginger & Co.—more the a dozen of them—went down Middlemoor Lane at a rapid run. Jim was going at a trot; but they soon sighted him.

"There he is!" exclaimed Ginger. "We'll teach the cheezy tick to hunt for the loot on our day!"

The Redmayes men went racing after Jim. The White's junior looked back and stared at them. Evidently they had spotted him, and roomy as Middlemoor Wood was, he would not be able to give them the wide berth he had intended.

Dainty turned and ran on. "Stop, you White's tick!" roared Ginger, sprinting ahead of his comrades.

"We're going to scrag you!" That was really not the way to induce the White's House junior to stop. Jim raced on, and after him raced the red-headed junior of Redmayes. He turned from the lane and scrambled up the steep bank to the wood, with Ginger close behind.

The grassy bank was steep, and Jim, in his haste, stumbled and rolled down again. He jumped up like a jack-in-the-box, and scrambled up the steep bank once more. But Ginger was at his heels now, and he reached after the White's junior with his staff, and lunged—hard!

"Ow!" roared Jim Dainty, as he got the business-end of the staff in the middle of his back.

He staggered, missed his footing, and came crashing down the bank again; so suddenly that Ginger had no time to dodge. He crashed on the Redmayes junior below in the lane, and Ginger Rawlinson gasped like a punctured tyre. He went down on his back, and Jim sprawled across his chest.

"Lemme gerrup—ooogh!—leggo!—stoppit!" shrieked Ginger, as Dainty grasped a handful of herbage from the bank and rubbed it over the red-headed junior's crimson face, muddy roots and all. "Ooogh! Grooogh! Yaroooh! Whoop!"

There were stinging nettles in the handful Jim had grasped. He had not noticed them. But Ginger did. Rubbed on the face, they were noticeable at once—and Ginger roared and yelled frantically.

"Ooogh! Leave off! Whoop! I'm stung! Wew! Rescue, Redmayes! Buck up, you silly slackers! My giddy goloshes! Yaroooh!"

Streaky Bacon put on a desperate spurt. But Jim Dainty jumped off the yelling Ginger, scrambled once more up the steep bank, and disappeared into the wood before the Redmayes crowd reached him. Ginger staggered to his feet, clawing at his face, and roaring.

"Oh! Ow! Wow! After him! Never mind the loot—hunt for that White's tick! We'll scrag him bald-headed!"

And Ginger led the way, and the Redmayes Scouts plunged into the wood after Jim Dainty.

### Unexpected!

"O H, my hat!" gasped Jim Dainty.

Pressed close to the trunk of a big ancient oak, in the heart of Middlemoor Wood, he listened. He was in cover; but his cover was not likely to save him long. There was rustling in the wood on all sides, and the sound of calling voices. Jim wiped the

perspiration from his face, and breathed hard.

The whole thing was utterly rotten, from Jim's point of view. At any other time he would not have objected to a "rag" with Redmayes. But that afternoon he wanted to hunt for the lost loot from Grimsdale Chase. The bill for the broken window was known now; it amounted to nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence. Stained glass, it seemed, was rather expensive. Jim did not want his share of that bill to go home. Vastly he would have preferred to solve the difficulty by finding the lost loot, and claiming the reward from Squire Craggs.

"My giddy goloshes!" Jim heard Ginger Rawlinson's voice through the thickets. "Here's a giddy track—we're close on him."

Jim pressed himself against the oak. They knew he was at hand, and were spreading in a circle to surround him. A red head came glimmering through a mass of hawthorns, hardly a yard away—and Ginger Rawlinson gave a yell.

"Here he is!"

He jumped at the White's junior. There was a yell from Redmayes as they came scrambling, and tearing through bush and briar towards the big oak. Ginger's grasp was on Dainty's wrist when a fist that felt like a lump of lead crashed on Ginger's chin, and he went over backwards as if he had been shot. Jim scrambled desperately up the trunk of the oak.

Ginger leaped up. He stared after the clambering junior, reached after him with his staff, and jabbed.

"Ow!" gasped Jim.

He scrambled on a branch. He received another jab as he did so, and gurgled. Then, with swift presence of mind, he grabbed the end of Ginger's staff, and with a sudden wrench tore it from his hand. Hanging from the bough, he jabbed at Ginger in his turn, and there was a yell from the Redmayes junior.

Jim Dainty scrambled higher up the tree, still keeping possession of Ginger's staff. A dozen feet from the ground there was a flat space on the central trunk, where great branches jutted in all directions. That seemed to Jim a good spot for holding the fort. But before Jim could gain that spot, there was a sudden grasp on his ankle.

"Got him!" panted Sandy Bean. "Hold him while I get up!" roared Ginger scrambling up hurriedly after Bean. But Bean did not hold him.

Jim jabbed with the staff, and Sandy let go hastily. Dainty scrambled up higher. He reached his goal—and then the unexpected happened! Instead of standing on solid wood, he found himself falling.

Not for an instant had he dreamed that that ancient oak was hollow! In the centre of the great trunk yawned a huge gap, invisible in the deep shadow of the foliage—till Jim found it by plunging into it. He had no chance to save himself. Before he knew what was happening he was shooting down into the interior of the hollow tree.

Bump!

He fell only about six feet, but it was a horrid jar when he came to a stop. Dust of rotting wood, and a mouldy smell, almost choked him, and he was in dense darkness. He rolled over dizzily, banging his head against something in the hollow trunk—he did not know what it was, and did not care at the moment. He sat up, gasping and dazed.

"Oh crickey!"

"Where is he?" came Ginger's yell. Ginger was clambering in the oak. "Where the dickens—He's vanished!"

"Look out!" yelled Jim breathlessly.

"The tree's hollow—I've fallen in."

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!"

There was a good deal of room in the hollow trunk, but Jim had no fancy for Ginger bumping down on him from

above. Luckily, his warning came in time. Ginger groped in the gloom of the foliage, and felt the opening. He stared down into the black interior.

He could not see Jim there—but Jim, looking up, could see Ginger. And he made the Redmayes junior aware of that fact by lunging up with the staff. It caught Ginger on the chin, and the red-head disappeared from Jim's view instantly, and there was a howl.

"Come on!" shouted Dainty. "Ow! He's in the tree! Wow! It's hollow!" gasped Ginger. "The tick's jabbed me with—wow—that beastly staff! Mind how you go, or you'll tumble in! Wow!"

There was rustling and brushing all through the big oak as the Redmayes Scouts scrambled up into the branches. Streaky Bacon ventured to peer over the gap, but he jerked his head back quickly as there was a lunge from below. "Come out of that, you White's tick!" roared Ginger.

"Come and fetch me out!" yelled back Dainty.

But none of the Redmayes Scouts felt disposed to tumble headlong into that dismal hollow, with the staff lunging from below.

"Well, we've got him!" said Ginger. "He can jolly well stay there as long as he likes—we've got him, all right, if we wait for him."

"What-ho!" chuckled Streaky. And the Redmayes Scouts descended from the tree. They gathered in a group under the big branches. Ginger closed one eye at his followers.

"Time we got back to tea," he whispered, "but don't make a sound going—let him think we're watching for him. He can stay there till call-over—or all night if he likes."

Grinning, the Redmayes Scouts stole away on tiptoe. Not a sound reached Jim Dainty to tell him that they were going; and he had no doubt that they were waiting and watching for him.

He did not intend to emerge and fall into their hands; but it was very hot and stuffy and uncomfortable in the hollow tree.

He decided to clamber out and find a perch in the branches above. As he moved in the rugged hollow in the trunk, his foot struck against the unseen object on which his head had banged when he fell. He would have supposed that it was some jutting lump of wood; but to his surprise, there was a sound of a metallic clink.

"What the thump—" gasped Dainty.

He stopped and groped at the object. His hands felt over the shape of a small cloth bag. And as he felt over it, there came again that sound of a clinking of metal.

Jim's heart bounded.

His hands almost trembled with eagerness as he felt in his pocket for a box of matches. He struck a match; and the flickering light showed him a bag lying in the dusty hollow of the tree. He fairly grabbed at it and tore it open. The match went out; but he struck another, and the light gleamed and glimmered on shining yellow from the bag—gold plate!

"The loot!" panted Jim.

There was no doubt about it—he had found the lost loot! That Redmayes rag, which had prevented him from hunting for it, had quite unexpectedly landed it in his hands!

Jim Dainty chuckled with glee. He fastened up the bag again and slung it over his shoulder by the strap. Then he proceeded to clamber up the rugged side of the hollow tree; and emerged at last into the branches.

"Pax, you Redmayes men!" he shouted. "I've found the loot!"

There was no answer. Ginger & Co. were nearly a mile away by that time. Jim slid down the trunk and dropped to the ground. Dusty and untidy, but immensely bucked, he started for

Grimslade School—with the bag of loot slung over his shoulder!

"Good!" said Sammy Sparshott. The Head looked at the dusty junior who stood in his study; he looked at the bag which Jim Dainty had placed on his table and opened—he looked at the gold plate that belonged to Squire Craggs. And his look expressed great satisfaction.

"Good!" repeated Sammy. "I will telephone to the police station at Blackslade and ask Inspector Rawson to call and collect Squire Craggs' property. I shall claim the reward for you, Dainty."

"And it will pay for that window, sir!" said Jim.

"Quite!" said Sammy. "You may, of course, dispose of your reward as you think fit!"

"Thank you, sir!" murmured Jim.

"But—" Sammy smiled pleasantly, and reached for his cane. "But it was against your headmaster's orders that you went in search of the lost loot to-day, Dainty. I believe I have mentioned to you before that discipline is discipline, and must be maintained. Will you oblige me by bending over that chair?"

"But," gasped Jim, "you said you were pleased—"

"So I am," said Sammy. "Very pleased indeed! Nevertheless, discipline is discipline! Bend over—thank you!" Whack! "I am quite pleased with you, Dainty!" Whack! "I am glad of your success." Whack! "I shall have great pleasure"—whack—"in handing you the reward!" Whack! "But orders are orders, all the same!" Whack! "You may go, Dainty!"

"And Jim Dainty went—wriggling!

(What happened when Erta von Spittle ran off with the headmaster's cake? See next week's rollicking Grimslade story by popular Frank Richards!)

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