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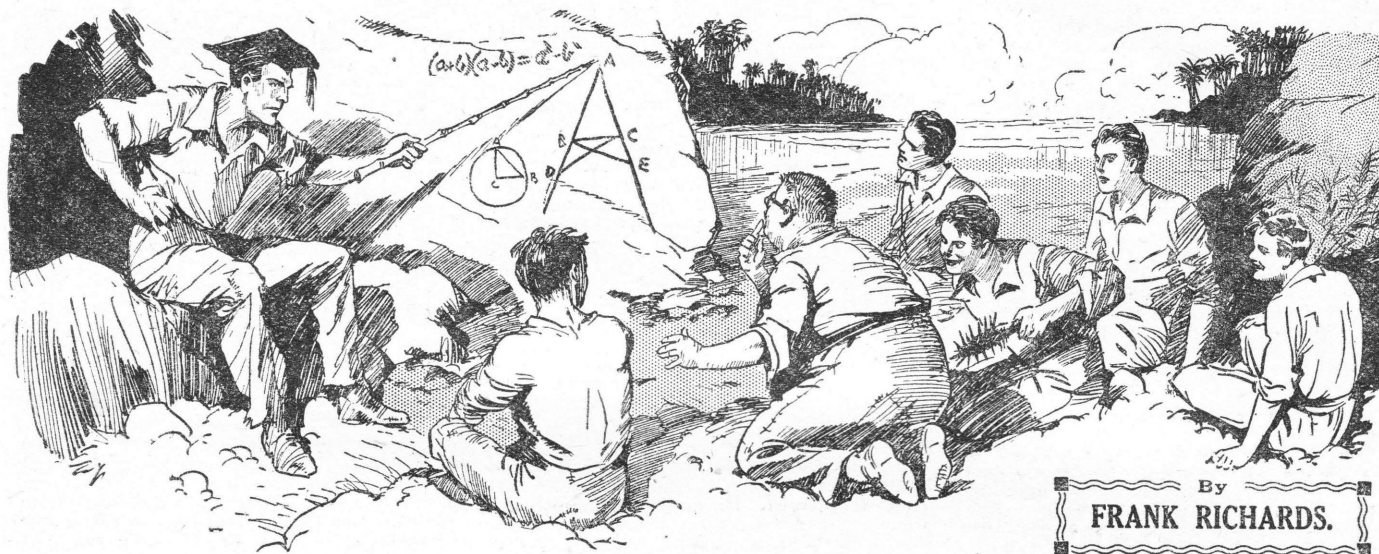
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By
FRANK RICHARDS.

The Mystery.



feelings in his face, and he looked it.

Standing before the hut built by the Grimslade castaways on the shore of the unknown island in West Indian seas, Dr. Sparshott's glance swept over the white beach, the shadowy jungle, the leaping stream, the wooded slopes of the island mountain, in the rising sunlight. His brows were knitted over the searching eyes. Sammy was puzzled—hopelessly puzzled—and the schoolboys knew it.

The disappearance of three of the shipwrecked schoolboys on Castaway Island was a problem that Sammy could not solve.

Fritz Splitz had been lost, and, in hunting for him, Jim Dainty and Dick Dawson were lost also. Fatty Fritz was a fellow to lose himself anywhere; but Jim Dainty certainly was not, neither was Dick Dawson. What had become of the three was a mystery—which Sammy had to find out.

Had Ezra Sarson, the old enemy of the castaways, been still on the island, Sammy would have known what to think. But Sarson had sailed away weeks ago in the schooner that had gone down in the hurricane. Sammy doubted whether he still lived, and certainly did not guess that he had returned secretly to the island.

"We'll find them, sir!" said Ginger Rawlinson confidently. "It's rather like those White's duffers to lose themselves." Even on Castaway Island, Ginger did not forget that he belonged to Redmayes House at Grimslade School.

Sammy smiled faintly. "We must find them!" he said. "I cannot account for their absence; they must have wandered far afield. Possibly Splitz may have wandered to the other side of the island; and Dainty and Dawson may have picked up some trace of him, and followed it, and been overtaken by night. At all events, they must be found without delay. I shall cross the island to the western side; you three boys will search on this side. Take food for the day with you, and return here at sunset. Keep together."
"Yes, sir."

Dr. Sparshott followed a jungle path round the southern side of the great hill that filled the centre of the island. He disappeared from sight in a few minutes. Ginger & Co. packed rations in their rucksacks and started for the stream that ran down through the palm grove from the hill; it was shallow enough to be easily forded.

As they stepped into the water Sandy Bean stopped and looked up the stream towards the waterfall in the ravine. There was a thoughtful expression on Sandy's face.

"Come on, fathead!" said Ginger. "No time to waste!"

"I've been thinking," said Sandy. "I believe Dainty had an idea yesterday of looking for Fritz in the cavern up the ravine. I wonder—"

"Well, if he did, he can't be there now!" said Ginger, staring. "It's not two hundred

**"OH WHERE, OH WHERE
CAN THEY BE?"**
**THERE ARE NO LESSONS ON
CASTAWAY ISLAND NOW—ALL
DOCTOR SAMMY SPARSHOTT'S
PUPILS HAVE DONE THE DIS-
APPEARING TRICK!**

yards away; he could have come back to camp if he liked. Even a White's House fathead couldn't lose his way following the stream down, I suppose."

"Sammy seems to think that something's happened to them," said Sandy. "And I'm blessed if it doesn't look like it! If they went rooting about in the cavern, there's a lot of holes they might have tumbled into."

"All three of them—one after another?" grinned Ginger. "They're not such silly owls as that!"

"Well, it won't take long to go up to the cavern and have a squint," argued Sandy. "I think—"

"You think too much, old Scotch bean!" said Ginger. "Leave the thinking to me and come on!"

And Ginger Rawlinson marched on across the stream, and Streaky went with him. Instead of following them, however, Sandy Bean turned upstream and reached the cascade. It was easy to clamber up the bulging rocks, in spite of the falling water—the juniors

had done so many a time. Sandy was clambering actively up, when Ginger looked round and missed him.

"My giddy goloshes!" exclaimed Ginger, exasperated. "That silly ass has gone off on his own, and Sammy told us to keep together! Sandy, come back, you fathead!"

Sandy Bean vanished in the spray of the waterfall. Ginger and Streaky halted on the bank, staring the way he had gone.

"Going after him?" asked Streaky.

"What's the good of getting soaked for nothing?" growled Ginger. "We'll wait for him here; he won't be long—it's only a step up to the cave past the waterfall. And I'll jolly well kick him when he comes back!"

"Same here!" agreed Streaky.

They sat down on the rocks by the stream to wait for Sandy to return. Above the waterfall they could see nothing but the high, rugged sides of the narrow ravine. Just above the tumbling water a rocky shelf ran along one side of the ravine to the cave where the skeletons had been found, and where it was believed that the treasure of King Christophe of Hayti was hidden. It would not take Sandy long to reach the cavern and come back, and they waited.

Suddenly Ginger bounded to his feet, with a startled cry. From the dark ravine above the waterfall came a ringing shout:

"Help!"
"My giddy goloshes! What—?"
"Help! Rescue, Grimslade!" came the desperate shout again.

"What the giddy thump—" gasped Streaky.

In utter amazement the two juniors stared up the ravine. The shout was not repeated again. Silence followed, broken only by the murmur of the tumbling water. Ginger caught his breath.

"Something's happened to Sandy!" he breathed. "Come on!"

He raced up the stream, with Streaky at his heels. They clambered recklessly through the falling water of the cascade.

"Sandy!" panted Ginger, dreading he knew not what, as he reached the rock ledge above the cascade.

There was no answer. Ginger dashed the water from his eyes and stared blankly along the narrow path. No one was in sight.

"Where's Sandy?" panted Streaky Bacon, joining him on the ledge, dripping water.

"Must be in the cavern! Come on!"

They raced up the rugged ravine towards the cavern's mouth. They reached it and stared into the gloomy opening. The light of the sun penetrated only a short distance; beyond was darkness.

"Sandy!" yelled Ginger.

Only the echo of his voice replied. There was no sign of Sandy Bean; neither within nor without the cavern was there a trace of him. Ginger and Streaky stared at one another with startled, amazed faces. Sandy Bean had vanished! He had been within hearing—they had heard his desperate cry for help—but he was gone, vanished as if the earth had opened and swallowed him up. What did it—what could it mean?

No Go!

"MEIN gootness! I vas so hungry!"

"Oh, shut up!"

"But I vas so hungry as neffer vas before!" wailed Fritz Splitz.

"If I do not have sometings to eat mit meinself I shall be vun tead Cherman!"

"Do you think we're not hungry?" hissed Jim Dainty.

"Peast and a prute!" moaned Fritz.

No doubt Friedrich von Splitz was hungrier than Dainty or Dawson. He had more space to fill—and that space was terribly empty. Anyhow, Fritz was not worrying about the other two prisoners; he was fully occupied in worrying about his podgy self.

How many hours had passed since Ezra Sarson had imprisoned them in that den of darkness the three prisoners did not know. It did not seem like hours—it seemed like days, weeks, years.

Whether it was night or day on Castaway Island they could not tell. Not a glimmer of light came to relieve the blackness in that rocky tunnel in the wall of the cavern. In darkness and despair the long hours passed—but to Dainty and Dawson, at least, the darkness and hunger were not the worst.

They knew—what Sammy Sparshott did not yet suspect—that Ezra Sarson, the scoundrel who had scuttled the Spindrift, had returned secretly to the lonely island in search of the treasure of King Christophe of Hayti. They knew that he was waiting and watching for a chance to "get" Sammy by trickery; and they feared for the life of the headmaster of Grimslade. They knew, too, that if Sammy fell their own lives were not worth a rush. It was only his fear of Sammy Sparshott that held the ruffian's hand.

But the juniors had not been idle during those long, long hours. Jim Dainty had found Dawson's bonds with his teeth and had gnawed and gnawed at the knots, with aching jaws, till at last they were loosened. Sarson had bound their hands securely before driving them into the dark den and had left them

bound; but time and patience had done their work, and Dick Dawson, at last, had his hands free.

He was rubbing his numbed, aching wrists, while Fritz moaned and groaned and mumbled, and thought with anguish of the fat sausages of his native land.

"That villain may come back any minute and shift the rock he's blocked us in with," muttered Jim. "With our hands free we might have a ghost of a chance. If you've got your penknife, Dick—"

"I've got it!" Dawson fumbled in his pocket. "Roll this way, old chap—I'll get you loose quicker than you did me."

In the darkness the penknife sawed at the cords. In a few minutes Jim Dainty's hands were loose. He took the penknife and groped for Fritz Splitz. The fat German was released in his turn.

It was something to have the free use of their limbs. Fritz rubbed his fat wrists and mumbled.

"Mein tear Tainty, if you have sometings to eat in your buckets—"

"Nothing!" growled Jim.

"Mein tear Tawson—"

"Oh, dry up!"

"Peastly prute! I vas so hungry—neffer have I had so colossal a hunger!" groaned Fritz. "I tink tat I tie!"

Leaving the fat German to groan, Jim Dainty crawled along the narrow tunnel that led to the cavern. He groped with his hands over the great rock with which it was blocked. Dawson crawled to his side, and together they exerted their strength, pushing at the rock. But it was immovable.

They remembered that the Frisco ruffian had had to exert all his strength to shift it from outside. From within it was impossible to shift it a fraction of an inch.

"No go!" muttered Dawson, at last, panting from his efforts.

Jim gritted his teeth.

"He'll come back sooner or later! We know his game—getting the fellows one after another till he gets Sammy alone. That's what he's after. If he gets another prisoner he will bring him here, and then—"

"It's a chance!"

How long they lay there, waiting, with Fritz mumbling in the darkness behind, they never knew. But suddenly there was a glimmer of light in the dense darkness.

It came from the cavern. Closely as the great rock closed the opening of the tunnel there was some space left. Through that little rift came the glimmer of lantern-light. Jim caught his breath.

"He's coming!"

Faint sounds reached them now from beyond the rock—shuffling footsteps and the murmur of a voice. They caught the husky, savage tones of Sarson.

"I guess I got you safe! You give another squeal, you gink, and you won't know what hit you."

"You rotten rascal!" They recognised the voice of Sandy Bean. "You've got me, but wait till Sammy Sparshott spots you."

"I reckon I'll be getting a bead on him about the same time!" chuckled Sarson. "Stand there, you gook."

There was a grinding sound as the great rock moved in Sarson's grip. Dainty and Dawson shut their teeth hard. Once the rock was moved they had a chance now that they were free—a desperate chance, but they were ready to take it.

But the ruffian was on his guard, as wary as a fox. The great rock shifted slowly, inch by inch, Sarson panting as he shifted it. But he did not roll it wholly aside. When it had moved about a foot he ceased, picked up the lantern from the floor of the cavern, and flashed the light into the tunnel. No doubt it had occurred to him that the prisoners might have released themselves from their bonds by that time, and he was taking no chance.

"By the great horned toad!" snarled the ruffian as the lantern-light gleamed on two white and desperate faces in the tunnel in the cavern's wall. He whipped a revolver from his belt. "Get back! Get back to the end of the tunnel, you ginks, or I'll riddle you."

Sandy Bean stood in the lantern-light, his hands tied behind him. He could not help. The ruffian's eyes blazed with ferocity as he aimed the revolver at the two juniors crouching in the tunnel. Jim Dainty's eyes gleamed at him.

"Fire, if you dare!" he said between his teeth. "Sammy will hear the shot, and know that you're here!"

But Sarson did not pull the trigger. He reversed the revolver in his hand, reached into the tunnel, and struck with the butt. The savage blows drove Dainty and Dawson back. They scrambled back hastily out of reach, panting with rage. Had the ruffian moved the rock wholly aside, as they had hoped, they would have had a chance. But there was no chance—the rascal had been too wary for them.

Trusting the revolver back into his belt Ezra shifted the rock a little farther, leaving barely space for Sandy Bean to crawl in. He stood beside the opening, the clubbed pistol in his hand again, ready to strike if a head appeared from within. With his free hand he grasped Sandy by the back of his neck, and thrust him into the tunnel.

"Crawl, you gook, crawl!" he snarled.

A savage kick from his heavy sea-boot drove Sandy in. He crawled up the tunnel out of reach of the ruffian, Dainty and Dawson backing to make room for him; and there was a heavy thud as the great rock rolled into place again. In bitter silence the three juniors crawled to the wider space at the end of the tunnel, where Dainty cut Sandy's bonds.

"We're done!" muttered Dawson. "Unless Sammy gets the upper hand of that scoundrel and—"

"He will!" said Jim Dainty.

Face to Face!

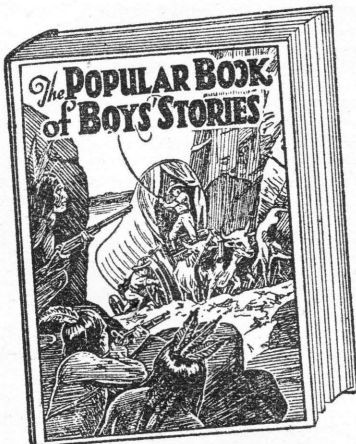
"MY giddy goloshes!" murmured Ginger Rawlinson, mopping the perspiration from his brow.

It was high noon on Castaway

Island. It had been an anxious morning to Ginger and Streaky. The disappearance of Sandy Bean utterly confounded them. Dr. Sparshott was not at hand—he had crossed to the western side of the island, and they were not to see him again till they met at the hut at sunset. There was no help from Sammy. All that the two juniors could do was to search for their missing chum, utterly in the dark as to what had become of him. That he had gone into the cavern and stayed there seemed impossible; and that he had not gone downstream they knew.

So they proceeded up-stream, the only direction in which, so far as they could

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imagine, he could have gone. He had shouted for help—yet why, when there was no enemy on Castaway Island? What danger could he have been in to cause him to utter that desperate shout?

It was a mystery to Ginger and Streaky; and as they went up the rocky ravine they scanned every fissure and chasm among the rocks, into which he might have stumbled. But they found no sign of him.

They emerged from the ravine at last on the upper hillside. In the blaze of noon they were glad to throw themselves down in the shade of a tree. There they unpacked their rations and ate; at the same time keeping their eyes open for a sign of Sandy.

"My giddy goloshes!" repeated Ginger, "I'm beginning to think that this dashed island must be haunted, Streaky. What on earth's become of the fellows?"

"Ask me another!" said Streaky Bacon.

They finished their rations, and lay in the shade, waiting for the fierce heat of noon to pass. Streaky's eyes closed, and he dozed; but Ginger did not close his eyes. He was trying to worry out the problem of Sandy's disappearance, and the more he pondered on it, the more it worried him. He rose at last, and moved about restlessly among the trees, gathering fallen coconuts under the palms. Streaky dozed on.

He awakened suddenly at the touch of a hand.

"Ready, old bean?" he murmured. "I'm ready if you are! Let's get on! Why—what—who—"

It was not Ginger who had touched him. The grip of the hand closed on him like a steel vice. Startled and amazed, Streaky Bacon sat up and stared with almost unbelieving eyes at a fierce, stubby face with sunken eyes and a gash of a mouth. Ezra Sarson grinned at him like some mocking demon.

"Don't yaup!" he muttered. "I got to get the other gink yet! You give jest a yaup, and—"

"Ginger! Look out!" yelled Streaky desperately. "It's Sarson—he's come back! Look out—oh!"

He sank down under a savage blow the next second. Stunned by that fierce, crashing blow from a knuckly fist, Streaky was stretched on the ground; and Sarson, gritting his teeth, bent over him and dragged his hands together and knotted a cord round his wrists. There was a sound of running feet, as the red-haired junior of Redmayes House at Grimsdale, came tearing back; Ginger had heard the warning cry.

"Sarson!" panted Ginger. "My giddy goloshes! That villain!"

As the ruffian rushed at him, Ginger made a backward jump, eluded him, and dodged round the thick trunk of the tree under which the juniors had camped for noon. The panting ruffian pursued him in savage haste.

His fierce grasp barely missed the Grimsdale junior as he dodged round the tree. To run was hopeless—and once in the ruffian's powerful grasp, Ginger would have been helpless. He did not pause to think—he clutched at a low branch of the ceiba tree, and clambered up desperately.

A clutching hand touched his foot and grasped his ankle as he went. With his free foot, Ginger kicked backwards, and caught the ruffian on the jaw. With a howl of pain, the ruffian released him, and Ginger shinned up the tree at lightning speed.

With his hand to his jaw, Ezra Sarson stood staring up after him. Twenty feet from the ground, Ginger Rawlinson stopped astride of a branch panting for breath, and looked down at his enemy. Then, standing on the branch, holding to one higher, he swept his eyes round over the slopes of the hill and the island beach.

From that height, he had a wide view of the Eastern and Southern shores of Castaway Island, and he had a desperate hope of catching sight of Dr. Sparshott in the distance. But there was no sign of Sammy; he was far away on the Western side.

"Come down, you gink!" Ezra dragged the revolver from his belt and took aim at the junior in the tree. "Come down, or by the great horned toad, I'll drop you with a bullet through your cabeza."

"No, you rotter!" retorted Ginger. "Shoot



Ezra Sarson drew a long, broad-bladed knife from his belt and began to hack savagely at the branch near the trunk. Great splinters of wood flew under the slashes of the keen knife, and the branch began to sag lower and lower under Ginger's weight. "Oh, you rotter!" panted Ginger.

if you like, and be blown to you! Come up after me, you rascal."

For a moment it seemed that the enraged ruffian would pull trigger. But he knew, as Ginger knew, that a shot ringing over Castaway Island would warn Dr. Sparshott of the presence of an enemy. That was all that saved Ginger Rawlinson at that terrible moment. Slowly Ezra put away the revolver and clambered up the trunk of the ceiba.

Meanwhile, Ginger climbed out farther towards the end of a long, almost horizontal branch that sagged a little under his weight. Sitting astride of it, holding with his legs, Ginger faced the trunk, swinging with a cool head twenty feet above the ground.

The Frisco ruffian reached the branch where it jutted from the parent trunk, and began to climb out along it. Five feet from the trunk his weight told and it sagged under him with a creaking sound. Sarson stopped. Ginger grinned at him breathlessly.

"Come on!" he jeered. "Come on, you rotter, if you dare! It'll break—and we'll go down together! Come on!"

Ezra gritted his teeth and came on a few feet more. But the sagging of the branch stopped him again. It was clear that it would snap from the trunk under his weight, added to Ginger's, before he could reach the school-boy. Holding on to the swaying branch like a jaguar, Ezra glared along it at the red-headed junior of Grimsdale, breathing fury.

Ginger began to rock the branch, pitching his weight first to one side, then to the other. His heart leaped with fierce hope as Sarson suddenly slipped and rolled off. But the ruffian was holding with his hands, and he hung from the branch, swinging over empty space.

Ginger rocked harder, heedless of the creaking and groaning of the straining wood. If the ruffian dropped, he could scarcely fall the distance without severe injury, and the tables would be turned on the enemy.

With his teeth set, his savage face white, Ezra was clambering back along the branch to the trunk, hand after hand. He had more than one narrow escape of a fall before he

reached the trunk. But he reached it, and clambered into safety and lodged himself there, panting and exhausted by his efforts. Ginger, sitting at the end of the swaying branch, watched him, ready for another attempt.

But Ezra did not venture on the branch again. For long minutes he remained where he was till he had recovered from the strain on his arms. Then he drew a long, broad-bladed knife from his belt, and began to hack savagely at the branch near the trunk. Great splinters of wood flew under the slashes of the keen knife, and the branch began to sag lower and lower under Ginger's weight.

"Oh, you rotter!" panted Ginger.

He was barely ten feet from the ground when the weakened branch suddenly snapped. There was a heavy bump as Ginger landed on the ground, and he rolled over and over, half-stunned by the shock. He was scrambling up dizzily as Ezra came slithering down the trunk of the tree, and, in a moment more, the grasp of the ruffian was upon him.

"I guess it's a cinch, dog-gone you!" muttered Ezra between his teeth. "I guess I got the whole crowd now, and only Sam Sparshott left—and I'll sure get him!"

The sunset was red on Castaway Island when Dr. Sparshott tramped back to the hut on the shore. But he found no one there to meet him. Sunset deepened into darkness; and the Head of Grimsdale was still alone. And, with a chill at his heart, he knew what had happened—what must have happened!

Ginger and Co had disappeared, as the others had disappeared before them—alive or dead, they were gone; and Sammy Sparshott alone was left—to solve the strange mystery and save them, or to follow them and share their fate?

(All the boys have disappeared—but Sarson has yet to deal with Sammy Sparshott. And Sammy is not the sort of merchant to be caught napping. Big thrills and surprises await you in next week's story of the castaways.)