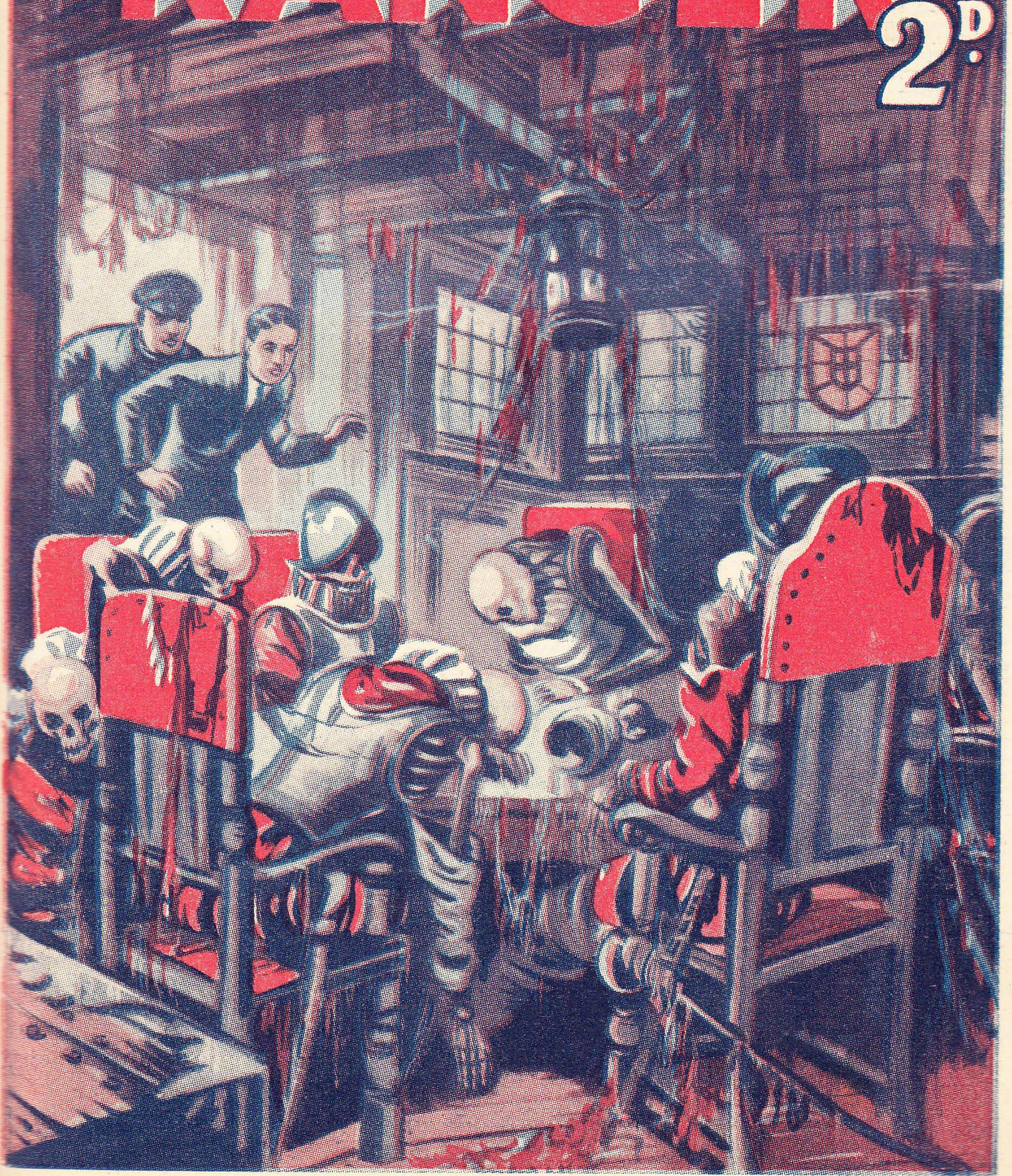


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The RANGER 2^D



THE CHEERIO CASTAWAYS!

By FRANK RICHARDS.

A Surprise Attack!



"S" TICK 'em up!"

Dr. Samuel Sparshott, headmaster of Grimslade School, fairly jumped. Had Dr. Sparshott been in his study at Grimslade, instead of sitting by a camp-fire on the beach of a West Indian island, he could hardly have been more taken

by surprise than he was at this moment.

The starry, tropic night was dusky over Castaway Island. The wooded, island hill, the palm groves, and the jungle, were lost in shadow. Where the sandy beach sloped up from the bay to the hut the Grimslade Castaways had built, backing against a high rock, a camp-fire blazed and flamed, casting lights and shadows.

Round it sat the shipwrecked schoolboys and their headmaster, finishing supper. Fritz Splitz was nodding sleepily over his last morsel; Ginger, Bacon, Bean, and Dick Dawson were talking in low tones; Sammy Sparshott, sitting on a log, with an empty pipe in his mouth, was gazing at the fire and thinking.

Doubtless he was thinking of Jim Dainty, who had cleared off on his own, and defied his headmaster to bring him back. But all thought of the rebel of Grimslade was driven from his mind as that cool, quiet, but menacing voice came out of the velvety shadows of the tropical night.

"Don't start anything, schoolmaster!" came the voice, as Dr. Sparshott jumped. "I guess my gun's looking at you! Stick 'em up!"

"My giddy goloshes!" breathed Ginger Rawlinson.

And Fritz von Splitz, wide awake all at once, stared with his saucer-eyes distended.

Dr. Sparshott did not "start" anything! He glanced round over his shoulder, quietly, calmly.

In the circle of the firelight a figure stood—a squat figure, with a hard, tanned face under a peaked cap. A revolver was levelled at the headmaster of Grimslade, a finger on the trigger—and an eye, steady as steel and cold as ice, glanced along the barrel.

There was a revolver in Sammy's own belt, but he did not attempt to touch it. His life hung on a thread, and Sammy, cool and determined as he was, was not the man to ask for more trouble than he could handle.

He gazed quietly at the gangster. Who he was, where he had sprung from, were mysteries to Sammy. The castaways on the beach of East Bay had seen and heard nothing of the aeroplane that had landed on the western side of the island that afternoon. The sudden appearance of a new enemy on the lonely island had taken them completely by surprise.

"I reckon I said stick 'em up, schoolmaster!" said the squat man, in a dangerous tone. "You asking for it?"

"Not at all, my good man," said Dr. Sparshott calmly, and he put up his hands over his rattered mortar-board. "My boys, sit where you are!" he added. The juniors were stirring, and Ginger Rawlinson had dropped a hand on a palm-wood cudgel.

The man with the gun grinned, and stepped nearer, keeping the headmaster of Grimslade carefully covered. Behind him another figure came out of the shadows—a swarthy, French half-breed. The castaways, looking at him,



Even as Jim Dainty slashed at his headmaster's bonds, the gunman woke up and peered at Dr. Sparshott suspiciously.

recognised him as their old enemy, Captain Luz.

There was a knife in the half-breed's dusky hand, and the look on his face told that he was keen to use it. The squat man, still keeping his ice-cold eyes on Sammy, spoke to Luz over his broad shoulder:

"Keep that sticker away, bo! I guess I'm running this!"

"Morbleu!" snarled the half-breed. "I tell you, Stack, that that man, that schoolmaster, defeated me and my whole crew. Will you let him live to defeat you also?"

THE GRIMSLADE CASTAWAYS CAPTURED BY TREASURE- SEEKERS!

"I guess I'm a bigger man than you and your crew all lumped together, old-timer!" answered the gangster coolly. "I got the schoolmaster where I want him. Quit chewing the rag, and take a rope to him. Put that sticker away, or you won't know what hit you."

Luz, gritting his teeth, obeyed. The knife was sheathed, and the half-breed unwound a coil of cord from his arm. Dr. Sparshott was cool, but there was a deadly glint in his eyes.

"One moment, my friend!" he said. "May I ask who you are, and what you want here, where you have no business?"

"Yep! I guess you can call me Slim Stack, and I'll say I've had business on this here island, when I was a rum-runner," answered the American, with a nod. "Rum-running ain't the lay now, though. I guess we've dropped down from the sky to give you the once-over. I got from Luz that there's treasure on this island, and you've raised it. If there's more'n I can carry away in my plane, I'll leave you the leavings, schoolmaster—"

Bang!

The revolver was suddenly deflected towards Ginger Rawlinson, and it roared with startling suddenness, awakening a thousand echoes on

the island, the report rolling back like thunder from the wooded hill.

Ginger gave a yell. He had grasped his cudgel, with the intention of hurling it at the gangster's head, and giving Sammy a chance. But, though the icy eyes were watching Dr. Sparshott, Slim evidently saw the action from the corner of his eye. Instantly the smoking revolver was bearing on the headmaster again. Sammy half rose.

"Keep 'em up!" drawled Slim. "The young guy ain't hurt—jest a lesson to him not to get too fresh!"

Ginger was rubbing his right arm, numbed by the shock. The bullet had crashed on the cudgel, knocking it from his hand. Evidently Slim Stack was "no slouch" with the revolver.

"Oh, my giddy goloshes!" breathed Ginger. "Kindly sit still, as I have told you, my boys," said Dr. Sparshott sharply. "Leave this to me. Mr. Stack, you have the upper hand, and I am not a man to run my head against a stone wall. But if harm is intended to the boys under my charge, I shall take my chance against your gun."

"I'll say you're a cool guy, allowing that my gun is lookin' you in the eye!" grinned Slim. "But I guess the boys ain't coming to no harm—unless I do first. I kinder reckon that if that black-jowled half-breed is left cock of the walk, he will feed 'em to the sharks before you could say 'No sugar in mine.' But me, I'm the kindest guy you ever struck."

Dr. Sparshott gave him a hard, searching look. Then he nodded curtly. The half-breed stepped towards him, cord in hand, and the Grimslade headmaster made no resistance. It was sudden death to resist.

Luz bound the headmaster's wrists together, knotting the cord hard and tight. Plainly enough, he would rather have used his knife, but he dared not cross the will of the cool, cold-eyed gangster.

"Now the boys!" rapped Slim.

"Mein gootness!" groaned Fritz Splitz. "Tat is so bad as nefer was before. I wish tat I vas pack in Chermany!"

Ginger & Co. and Dick Dawson were bound, their hands behind their back.

"Leave out the Dutchman!" said Slim. "I guess we want somebody to wait on us, and he don't look a lot dangerous."

"Ach! I was not dangerous vun leetle biece, and I waits on you mit bleasures!" gasped Fritz Splitz. "I tinks two times before I giffs you any droubles after."

"I figured that from the look of you, Dutchman!" grunted Slim. "You give any trouble, and you won't live long enough to tell any guy about it. Now we got the whole bag, old-timer." He put the revolver back into his belt. "Say, schoolmaster, I guess I want to know where you've parked the treasure that King Christophe, of Hayti, sent to this here island a hundred years ago."

"You are in error," said Dr. Sparshott quietly. "We have found no treasure on this island."

Captain Luz's black eyes flashed at him. "It is a lie—you have found the treasure." His hand flew to his knife.

"Let up, you doggoned breed!" snapped Slim. "I guess if they've lifted the treasure, we'll spot where they've parked it! We got the whole bunch now, as safe as that young guy we left tied to the tree on the other side of the island. It's our say-so!"

Dr. Sparshott started. "Dainty! You have seen—" he began. "Did you figure he might hump along and let you loose?" grinned Slim. "Forget it. We cinched him first, and left him safe—I guess he won't get loose afore I go back to-morrow and call for him."

Dr. Sparshott set his lips. Perhaps a thought had been in his mind that the rebel of Grimslade, free on the island, might learn what had happened and attempt to help.

"They have the treasure," muttered Luz savagely. "I tell you—"

"I guess the schoolmaster will tell us where to pick it up, bo, when I ask him," smiled Slim. "He is sure a cool guy; but there's ways of makin' a guy talk! I reckon he can chew on it till morning. Ye've sure arrived just in time for supper, and that fat guy is going to hand it round."

"Ach! Ja wohl!" gasped Fritz Splitz. The fat Rhinelander proceeded to get supper for the two rascals, and wait on them hand and foot—one glance from either being sufficient to strike terror to his podgy heart.

Sammy Sparshott and the other prisoners lay in the sand with bound hands, looking on in grim silence.

Up to Jim Dainty.

JIM DAINTY halted in the shadow of the palm grove, and looked towards the ruddy glow of firelight in front of the castaways' hut. Friday, the monkey, halted when his master halted, picked up a nut, and cracked it. Friday, in his hat and cotton trousers, made a queer figure. He had followed Jim across the island, hardly noticed by the hurrying, anxious Grimslade junior.

Now, panting, breathless, with a beating heart, Jim watched the camp from behind a palm trunk, and wondered what he should do. Unknown to his captors, his monkey pal had found him where he had been left bound to the tree in sight of the landed plane on the western beach. Friday had saved him; but whether he could help his friends, was another matter.

He was unarmed save for a stick, and he had two armed and desperate men to deal with. If he could but have escaped in time to warn Sammy! But one glance at the camp showed that he was too late for that.

Watching the scene in the firelight, he made out the tall figure of Dr. Sparshott, and the figures of the four juniors, evidently bound prisoners, from their attitudes. Slim Stack and Captain Luz sat on logs by the fire, smoking after their supper. Fritz Splitz, the only one of the castaways left free, moved to and fro, his terrified saucer-eyes turning continually on the two ruffians.

For long, long minutes, Jim Dainty watched; his heart heavy, but his mind made up.

Headstrong, obstinate, wilful, ungrateful, he had rebelled against his headmaster, his friend and protector. He was going to make up for that, if it cost him his life. Somehow, he was going to help Sammy. But how?

The fat figure of Fritz Splitz moved out of the circle of firelight. Fritz had a bucket in his hand, and was heading for the stream for water. Slim Stack had read the fat Rhine-

lander's character at a glance, and knew that there was no danger from him.

Having waited on his new masters during supper, Fatty Fritz was fetching water now, to wash up plates and dishes. The two ruffians did not even glance after him as he went. He dared not even run away; on Castaway Island, circled by the Atlantic, there was no escape for him, if he did.

A gleam shot into Jim Dainty's eyes. He gestured to Friday to remain where he was, and the intelligent ape, understanding, squatted in the darkness under the palms.

Jim threaded his way through the trees, taking care to keep out of sight from the camp, and reached the stream that tumbled down from the ravine in the hill. Stepping into the water, which reached to his knees, he crept along, ducking his head low, and reached the spot for which Fatty Fritz was heading, long before the fat German arrived there.

Castaway Island was hot by day, but cold by night; and the water chilled Jim Dainty to the bone—but he hardly noticed it. Standing knee-deep, his head ducked below the steep bank, he waited until Fatty Fritz arrived.

"Fritz!" whispered Jim Dainty.

The fat German gave a violent start, and the bucket clattered from his hand, rolling down the stones beside the stream. His startled saucer-eyes blinked through the gloom.

"Mein gootness! Vas tat Tainty?" he gurgled.

"Yes! Yes! Quiet!" whispered Jim. "Don't let those scoundrels suspect that I'm here, fathead!"

"Ach! But I hear tem say tey leaf you pound to a dree, on te odder side of te island—"

"I'm here now. I'm going to help Sammy somehow!" breathed Jim.

"But you vas up against Sammy, and Sammy vas going to give you vun colossal whopping—"

"Never mind that now, ass! Sammy can give me all the whoppings he likes, if I get him out of that scrape!"

"Ja wohl! But I tink you petter go away," mumbled Fritz. "If tey tink tat I see you, and speak to you, tey—" His teeth chattered.

Jim Dainty gritted his teeth. If it had been Ginger, or Bacon, or Bean, or his chum Dawson! But Slim was not likely to leave any of those fellows at liberty. It was because Fatty Fritz was what he was that he was loose—and Jim had to make the best of it.

Fritz was blinking at him in uneasy terror, evidently anxious for him to go.

"Look here, Fritz," whispered Jim, "you can help—"

"Ach! I tare not!" moaned Fritz. "Tat

derrible man Stack, he is vorse tan tat peast and a prute Sarson—he is vorse tan all te peasts and prutes! I vas prave, like all Chermans, but—"

"Listen, you fat idiot!" hissed Jim. "They'll have taken Sammy's gun, of course. But there's the second revolver, which Sammy keeps loaded, in the chest in the hut. Have they found that?"

"Nein! But—" yammered Fritz. "Get hold of it, hide it about you somewhere, and come down here with the bucket again."

"Ach! I tare not! Subbose—"

"Oh, you rotten funk!" groaned Jim. But there was no time, and no use, for reproaches. "Look here, get hold of that gun, and drop it out of the hut window. I'll scout along later and pick it up. You'll do that, Fritz?"

"I—I—I vill dry!" groaned Fritz. "But—but go away, Tainty—I tink perhaps tey look tis vay—blease go away."

Jim backed away into the darkness along the stream. Fritz Splitz filled his bucket and took his way back to the camp, dreading that Slim or Luz might notice, with suspicion, how long he had gone. In his agitation he spilled half the water before he got back; but he was relieved to see that neither of the ruffians even glanced at him.

Fritz hardly knew whether he dared attempt to carry out Jim Dainty's instructions, for fear of what the ruffians might do if they caught him at it. Yet he knew that upon Jim hung the only chance of turning the tables on the new masters of Castaway Island, and he tried to screw up his shaky courage to the sticking-point.

He went into the hut at last, carrying plates and dishes. Through the open doorway the firelight illuminated the interior dimly. The seaman's chest in which the second revolver was kept was out of the line of view from outside.

Fatty Fritz laid down his plates and dishes on the table and moved towards the chest. The shutters of the window were open—it was easy to drop the "gun" through the bars unseen. Fritz Splitz hesitated long, but at length he raised the lid of the chest and groped inside.

The six-shooter lay there, and his fat hand touched it. He cast a terrified blink over his shoulder to the firelit doorway. As he did so a shadow fell within, and a squat figure stood there. With a squeal of terror Fatty Fritz turned from the chest, dropping the lid with a bang.

Slim Stack gave him one look that sent cold shivers down his back, stepped to the chest, and raised the lid. He picked up the revolver that lay within and turned on the German junior. Fritz Splitz dropped on his podgy knees.

"Ach! Tat you shoot me not!" howled Fritz, yammering with terror.

"You looking for this here gun?" asked Slim grimly.

"Nein, nein! Neffer!" wailed Fritz. "I look in tat chest for a gan of peef because I vas hungry mit meinself before."

The gangster regarded him with cold, searching eyes. He was puzzled. That Fatty Fritz had been looking for the gun with the intention of using it as a weapon was manifestly impossible. Neither could he have hoped to make an attempt to hand it to Dr. Sparshott under the gangster's eyes.

Slim glanced into the chest. The cans of beef, kept by Dr. Sparshott as a reserve of provisions, had been stacked away there since the time when a mischievous monkey had raided them. A slow grin came over Slim's hard face, and he gave a nod.

"You let that beef alone, bo!" he said. "I guess that grub's for your betters! Git!"

He dropped the revolver into his pocket. Fritz Splitz staggered away, more dead than alive with fear. He collapsed into his bunk. The half-breed was dragging Dr. Sparshott in at the doorway, and, having pushed him in, he stepped back and drove in the other prisoners.

They were allowed to go to their bunks, but the suspicious half-breed made a careful examination of their bonds before they were left in peace to sleep, if they could. Fritz Splitz was now bound like the rest.

"I guess, schoolmaster, that I'm cinching



A BLACK OUTLOOK—

for the prisoners of the chums of St. Jim's! But there's never any quarter asked or given when Tom Merry & Co. and their old rivals of the Grammar School get on the "ragging" warpath! You simply must read "WHAT PRICE VICTORY?"—the lively long yarn of footer, fun and adventure which appears in

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that hammock," drawled Slim. "If you can't sleep on the floor you can sure spend the time thinkin' what will happen to you if you don't cough up the treasure at sun-up. I'm a good-tempered guy, but I'm surely here on business! You get me?"

"We have found no treasure on this island," answered Dr. Sparshott quietly.

"You'll guess again, I reckon, when my partner Luz lights a slow fire under your feet," grinned Slim.

The headmaster of Grimslade made no answer to that. Slim Stack barred the door of the hut.

In the Night!

THE dull red glow of the fire died slowly away. Jim Dainty, once more in cover under the palms, watched and watched.

All was silent at the hut, and the camp-fire was dying out. The hour was late, and he knew the two rascals from the plane had camped in the hut with the prisoners—they were most likely sleeping by that time. But the prisoners were not likely to be sleeping any more than Jim Dainty was.

Had Fritz succeeded in doing as he had asked? That was the crucial question. Or had the fat German's nerve failed him?

With a loaded revolver in his hand Jim was prepared to make an attempt to hold up the ruffians who had taken possession of the castaways' hut—to fire on them, if need be. If only Fritz Splitz had done as he was bidden!

Sure at last that the ruffians would be asleep Jim moved out from the palms. If he was going to help his friends it had to be while he had a chance of taking the enemy off their guard. On the morrow they would learn that he had escaped and would be on the watch for him.

He crept forward silently, and there was a scuttling sound behind him that made him turn swiftly. Friday, the monkey, was following him. Jim waved him back.

"Stick there, old bean," he whispered, pushing Friday back and patting and stroking him.

The monkey understood, if not the words, the actions, and squatted down again obediently. Jim left him in the shadow of the palms, and crept towards the hut.

Hardly a glimmer of a dying ember came from the camp-fire. But the starlight was enough for Jim. He crept to the door of the hut and listened. Within he could hear the snoring of Fritz Splitz. The fat Rhinelander, at all events, was fast asleep.

He crept round the hut to the window. The shutters had been closed and fastened on the inside. Slim Stack assuredly did not fear the presence of an enemy on Castaway Island. But caution was second nature to a man accustomed to carry his life in his hand.

Jim Dainty stooped below the window and groped in the darkness. Every inch of the ground was covered by his groping hand, but there was no weapon to be found. Fritz Splitz had failed him!

He rose to his feet again, breathing hard. He had hoped that the fat German would play up, but the hope, after all, had been faint.

Standing close by the window, he listened. The shutters were slatted for ventilation, but he could see nothing within—all was pitchy dark. Slim and Luz, there could be little doubt, were sleeping—there was nothing to

keep them wakeful. But the others—surely they could not sleep—especially Sammy!

Jim made up his mind at last to risk a whisper. He put his lips close to one of the slits in the palm-wood shutters.

"Dr. Sparshott! Are you awake?"

It was a scarcely audible whisper. But it reached the keen ears of a bound man slumped against the wall inside. There was the faintest movement. Then came a whisper:

"Is that you, Dainty?"

"Yes, sir."

"My giddy goloshes!" Jim heard a whisper from Ginger. He had been right—the prisoners were not asleep.

"Silence!" breathed Dr. Sparshott.

Softly and silently Sammy shifted his position till his head was close to the window. "Dainty! It is you! Take care—they are asleep, but may awaken at a sound."

"I understand, sir! Can I help you?" Jim breathed the words through the narrow slit. "Oh, sir, you'll forgive me for having been such a fool—such a rotter! If I can only help you now—"

"Never mind that! Have you a knife?"

"Yes, yes!"

"If you can get a hand through the shutter and get at these cords—my hands are bound behind me!"

"I'll try, sir."

Dr. Sparshott moved again, with the greatest caution. Slim Stack, in the hammock, was asleep; the half-breed, on a pile of blankets, snored. So far, the faint whispering had not disturbed their slumbers.

Jim Dainty, listening with intent ears, caught the faintest of sounds and knew that Sammy Sparshott was standing by the window-shutter, his bound wrists as close as he could get them to the slit. Jim drew the knife from the sheath in his belt, his heart thumping but his hand steady, his head cool.

He squeezed his wrist through the slit in the shutter. It was a close fit, but he got it through. His fingers touched the bound wrists of his headmaster and, guided by the touch, Jim slid his knife between them. The cord was thick and strong, and trebly knotted. The keen edge of the knife sawed at it.

The juniors in the hut, silent as death, waited with beating hearts. Fritz snored on. If only the ruffians did not awaken—

There was a faint sound as the knife sawed at the knotted cord. No sound passed Sammy's set lips as it scraped his skin. Sammy Sparshott was still and silent as a statue, though his heart beat fast. A minute—a couple of minutes—and once his hands were free— He knew where to lay his hand on a bludgeon, and then—

"Won't be a moment now, sir," breathed Jim Dainty.

There was a creaking as the hammock stirred. The whispering, faint as it was, had reached the wary ears of the human wolf who slept there; Slim Stack was stirring! He was awake!

Sammy felt his heart sink. But he did not stir. There was a chance yet. Was the gangster suspicious? He could see nothing in the dark.

Suspicion was second nature to Slim. Dr. Sparshott heard him heave his weight from the hammock. A match scratched, and in its flicker the gangster looked round the hut. The half-breed's eyes opened, and he stared at him from his bed of blankets. Slim's eyes were

fixed on Dr. Sparshott, standing with his back to the window-shutter.

"Say, what the deep pit!" snapped Slim. He put the match to a candle on the table and stepped towards the headmaster of Grimslade, his hand on his revolver-butt. "Say, you, what—"

Dr. Sparshott smiled.

"Have I disturbed you?" he drawled. "Really, I am sorry, but I have been unable to sleep."

There was nothing in Sammy's attitude as he leaned on the window-shutter to betray the fact that a knife, held by the junior outside, had been sawing at his bonds a second ago. Jim Dainty, as he heard the voices within, ceased to saw and was silent and still. Sammy's manner was cool and careless—there was a smile on his face. Captain Luz gave a yawn.

"Morbleu!" he muttered sleepily. "What is it, mon ami? They are safe?"

"I guess I'm goin' to be sure of that," grunted Slim.

He laid a rough hand on the headmaster's shoulder and pushed him aside. He stared at the window. Jim's knife had disappeared—the junior outside was still as a mouse.

Slim examined the bars that fastened the shutters, evidently with a suspicion in his mind that the headmaster had been endeavouring to shift them with his bound hands. But the bars were intact in their sockets. The cold, hard eyes turned on Dr. Sparshott again. Slim was suspicious, but he was puzzled.

"Morbleu! Get to sleep!" muttered Luz. "We have work to do to-morrow."

The gangster nodded.

"I guess it's O.K.," he said. "But I ain't trusting this schoolmaster guy a whole lot, bo! I guess I'll see he's safe."

Dr. Sparshott shut his teeth hard. He was facing the ruffian, but Slim's sinewy grasp turned him, and the gangster stared at his bonds in the candlelight. A spluttering exclamation of rage broke from him as he discerned the fact, plain enough now, that the cords round Sammy's wrists were cut half-through by a knife.

"Jumping Jehosopha!" roared Slim. He hurled Dr. Sparshott headlong away and spun round towards the window.

Sammy made one fierce, desperate effort to wrench apart the cord at his wrist. But it was in vain—the knife had not bitten deep enough for that. He was still a prisoner.

As the gangster, with a face of alarm and fury, dragged at the window-bars with one hand, his revolver in the other, the Head of Grimslade shouted:

"Save yourself, Dainty!—Run for your life!"

An oath sputtered from Slim. He dragged open the shutters and leaned out, throwing up his revolver for a shot. Jim Dainty, at his headmaster's word, was running. The gangster had a glimpse of a shadowy figure that fitted in the dim glimmer of the stars.

Bang! roared the revolver, sending thunderous echoes along the silent beach. Spurts of sand splattered over Jim Dainty as he ran, desperately. But he was still running, and as the revolver roared again and again he vanished into the darkness of the palms.

(Hard luck, Dainty—but you can bet he'll have another shot at rescuing the Grimslade Castaways from their enemies in next week's exciting story. Yes, sir!)

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