

"KILDARE of the Foreign Legion!" *Grand Story Inside*

The GEM

EVERY
WEDNESDAY.

2^d



POWERFUL LONG STORY OF TOM MERRY & CO.'S AMAZING—

KILDARE *of the*

CHAPTER 1.

By Air to Algeria!

TOM MERRY, the captain of the Shell Form at St. Jim's, glanced at his watch.

"The cars ought to be here soon!"

"Good!"

"I twust the dwivahs wealise we have to be at the aewodwome in time for lunch, deah boys!" exclaimed Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of the Fourth, anxiously. "It is neahly half-past nine alweady, and we have got to dwive sixtaty miles or so—"

"Don't worry, Archibald; those autos will be around for us soon, I guess," drawled Cyrus K. Handcock, the junior from New York City.

Arthur Augustus adjusted his monocle and surveyed Handcock stiffly.

"Pway wemembah that my name is not Archibald!" protested the swell of St. Jim's, with asperity.

"Sorry, Clarence!" grinned the American.

"Bai Jove! My name is not Clarence, eithah!"

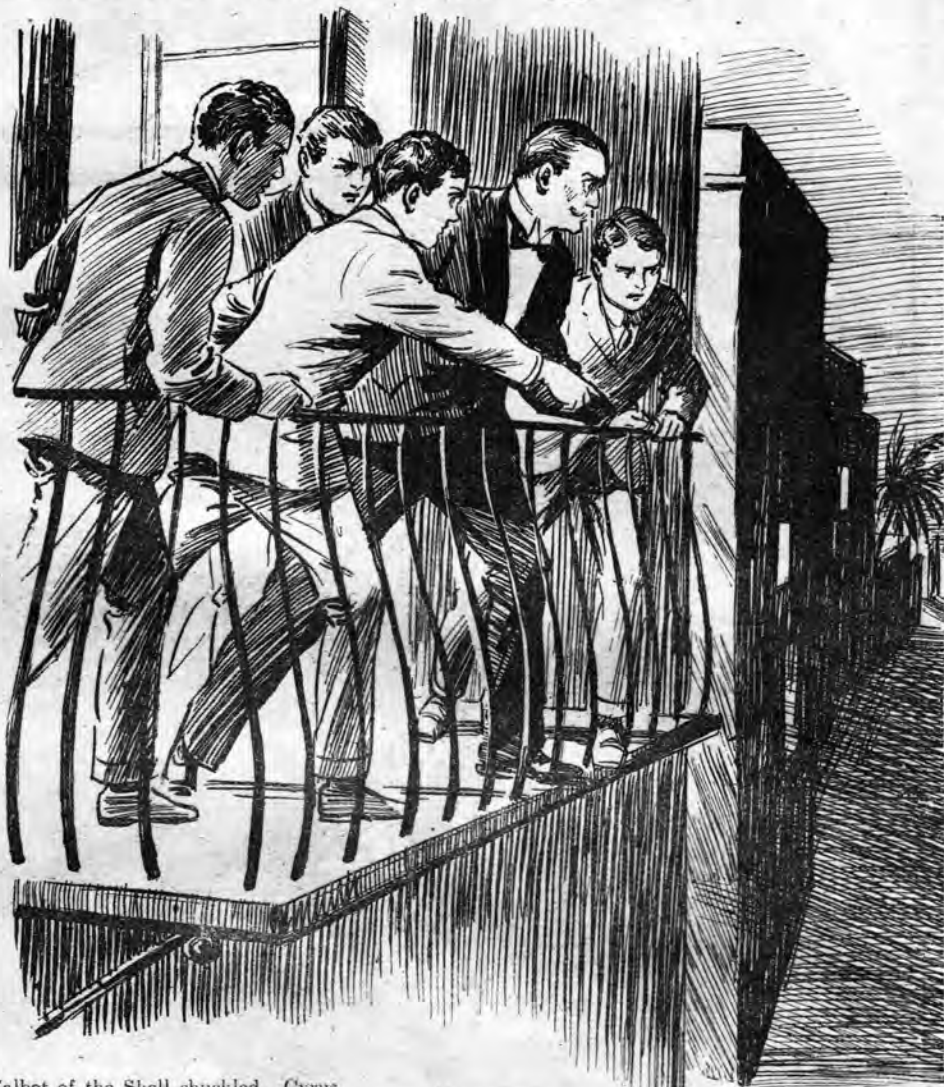
Tom Merry & Co., and Blake & Co., and Talbot of the Shell chuckled. Cyrus K. Handcock's little habit of forgetting—or seeming to forget—the swell of St. Jim's real name, was always a source of great exasperation to the Hon. Arthur Augustus.

The chums of Study No. 10, of the Shell, and of Study No. 6, of the Fourth, together with Reginald Talbot, were gathered at the top of the steps that led down into the quad from the doorway of the School House. They were wearing

their caps and coats. Arthur Augustus, however, was sporting a gleaming topper, as usual; and piled by the foot of the steps was a big stack of luggage.

From the appearance of things, a stranger might have assumed that St. Jim's was breaking-up for the end of the term. Taxis were passing in and out of the gates, bearing fellows away, with luggage, and old Taggles, the school porter, was being kept very busy helping the taxi-drivers to pile the various portmanteaux and baggage on to the roofs of their vehicles. "Which I says is, it's

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very thirsty work, young gents!" was a remark which Ephraim Taggles had been making very constantly, usually with the gratifying result intended—that of a silver coin or two passing from the cheerful St. Jim's fellow in question to Taggy's ready palm! But despite all appearances, it was not the end of term.

An unusual state of affairs had occurred at St. Jim's.

There had been three cases of scarlet fever at the famous school, and to prevent an epidemic breaking out, St. Jim's was being temporarily closed down—to the delight of the juniors in particular, and perhaps to most of the seniors as well!

On all sides the faces of the departing fellows showed their satisfaction at this unexpected holiday. But the faces of Tom Merry and his companions at the top of the School House steps were an exception to that rule.

Tom Merry's face was thoughtful—almost troubled. The usually cheery countenance of Jack Blake, the leader of

A tiny garrison, in a crumbling fort, somewhere in the African desert. Surrounded by Bedouins . . . Parched with thirst in the ghastly heat . . . Tom Merry & Co. carry on in this gripping, long complete yarn of St. Jim's.

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—ADVENTURES IN THE SANDY WASTES OF THE GREAT SAHARA!

FOREIGN

By
MARTIN CLIFFORD.

LEGION!



the Fourth, was equally grave. Even Monty Lowther, the humorist of the Shell, was not bubbling over with the delight he might have been expected to have shown.

There was reason for their thoughtful looks!

Some weeks ago, Eric Kildare, the popular captain of St. Jim's, had been convicted by weight of circumstance of cheating in an important Sixth Form exam. Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., at any rate, had always refused to believe in his guilt; but the Head and Mr. Railton, the Housemaster of the School House, had reluctantly been forced to believe in the captain's rascality—with the result that Kildare had been deprived ignominiously of his rank as captain of the school. Stripped of his honour, Eric Kildare had cleared out one night, leaving St. Jim's for good.

For weeks his whereabouts had remained a mystery. But at last the truth had become known. Kildare had joined the famous French Foreign Legion in Algeria—was now a soldier of that strange regiment of outcasts of all nationalities, whose headquarters were at Sidi-bel-Abbes, on the edge of the vast sandy wastes of the great Sahara.

Sir Napier Wynter, Kildare's uncle, had decided, on learning of his nephew's whereabouts, to go at once to Morocco in an attempt to persuade the ex-captain of St. Jim's to return to England, if not to the school.

Sir Napier was the controller of a company that had been formed to start a transatlantic passenger airship service; and it was in the S 1001, the company's new airship, now undergoing its long-distance trials, that he had planned to travel to Africa.

With him he was taking George Darrell, Kildare's greatest friend, who had been elected captain since the latter's disappearance from the school, and also Rex Saville, another nephew of his.

Saville, who was Kildare's cousin, was a newcomer to the Sixth Form—and no one, least of all Sir Napier, dreamed that it was through Rex Saville's treachery that Kildare had been convicted of cheating in the Hilton Medal exam.

Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co. were also going on board the great dirigible in its search for Eric Kildare, and Reginald Talbot had been included in the party at the last minute.

Darrell and Rex Saville had joined the airship the previous evening, and the juniors were off now to the distant aerodrome where the S 1001 was moored.

Thrilled though they were at the prospect of the flight to Algeria, the grave purpose of their air voyage kept them from feeling exuberant, as they otherwise would have felt.

Though they were all firmly convinced of Kildare's innocence of the charge made against him, the ex-captain of St. Jim's was still regarded by the Head and most of the school as a convicted, dishonoured cheat—and there seemed no hope of clearing his name.

"It's rotten!"

Manners suddenly broke the silence that had fallen with that glum remark.

"About old Kildare?" queried Tom Merry, with knit brows. He nodded. "Yes, it's rotten. But it'll buck him up a lot when we get to Algeria, to find that so many of us believe in his honesty even now!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

"Sir Napier's idea is to buy him out of the Foreign Legion, isn't it?" queried Herries.

"Yes," nodded Tom Merry. "The question is, will Kildare agree to letting his uncle buy him out?"

"I doubt it," put in Talbot quietly. "Well, we'll see when we find him!"

"Hallo, here's Baggy again!" exclaimed Monty Lowther, with a sudden grin.

A fat, disconsolate figure was rolling across the quad towards the group on the steps of the School House.

Ever since it had been settled that Tom Merry and his

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friends should go to Algeria on board the S 1001, with Sir Napier Wynter, Baggy Trimble had been trying hard to persuade them to let him join the party! It was not Kildare he was interested in—Baggy neither knew nor cared whether Kildare was innocent or guilty. But the idea of a trip in the great dirigible appealed to him far more than the thought of returning home during the closing-down of the school! He would have given his ears to have been going with the others, but so far his efforts to convince Tom Merry & Co. that his company was indispensable, had failed miserably.

Baggy blinked at the group of juniors with what was intended for a charming and persuasive smile as he rolled up the steps.

"I say, you chaps, I—I'm sure you were only joking when you said you—ahem!—didn't like to trouble me to go with you to look for Kildare!" murmured Baggy eagerly. "I jolly well think Kildare was innocent, and I think it would do him good to hear me say so in person," he added impressively, "so I'll come—"

"Think again, porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Blake—"

"Nothing doing, Baggy," said Tom Merry impatiently. "You're not wanted, and you're not coming!"

"Oh, really, Tom, old chap—"

"Anyway, the giddy airship wouldn't even float with you on board, fat tub!" grinned Monty Lowther.

"Ha, ha, ha! No!"

"Oh, really, Lowther—"

"Pway buzz off, Twimble! I can assuah you that we are not goin' to change our minds and agree to takin' you along! I considah—"

"But there's lots of room on board," urged Baggy in an eager tone. "Why, there's room for fifty on that blessed airship! I jolly well think—"

"Well, there may be room for fifty, but that's not enough room for your fat body!" said Digby. "If there was room for a hundred, it might have been possible to squeeze you on board!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Baggy Trimble went red with wrath. He saw that argument was useless.

"Yah!" Baggy waved a plump fist at the grinning group at the top of the steps. "Beasts! If you ask me, Kildare jolly well is a rotten cheat, anyway—"

Baggy broke off with a startled yell as Tom Merry, his brow suddenly thunderous, stepped forward. Tom certainly did not intend to let the Falstaff of the Fourth blackguard the name of Eric Kildare in his presence.

"You fat cad—"

But Baggy did not wait to listen to what Tom had to say. He turned to scuttle away down the steps. But Tom Merry's boot shot out, and Baggy Trimble sailed down the steps like a high diver.

"Yaroooooooooh!"

Had Baggy been diving into the swimming-bath he would have been all right. In fact, it would have been a beautiful dive! But, unfortunately, he had to land, not in water, but on gravel. There was a terrific concussion that seemed to shake the very buildings of St. Jim's as the fat Fourth-Former arrived at the foot of the steps.

"Oh! Wow! Whoooooops!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter from the group above. And at that moment two large cars came driving in at the gates.

They were the cars which Tom Merry had hired from a garage in Wayland to drive the party over to Fenleigh Aerodrome, a distance of about sixty miles. A light, open van followed into the quad, hired from the same garage, to take their luggage along.

"Here they are!" exclaimed Digby eagerly.

The cars drew to a standstill, and the juniors hurried down the steps. Baggy, scrambling to his feet, was in the way, so Baggy got knocked down in the process and trampled upon. When at last he did manage to scramble to his feet again, panting and snorting with rage, it was to see Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Reginald Talbot piling into the cars, which drove off briskly for the gates.

"Oh, the rotters!" groaned Baggy. "They've gone!"

Near him, the driver of the van, assisted by old Taggles, was stacking the departed juniors' luggage into the waiting vehicle which would shortly be following. A sudden gleam came into Baggy's eyes.

"My hat!" he breathed, "I—I'll risk it!"

The last suitcase was soon piled into the van, and Taggles rolled away. The driver climbed into the driving-seat, where he sat for a moment lighting a cigarette before setting off after the two cars.

Baggy seized his chance.

He cast a swift, furtive look round him. There was no one to notice, however. He rolled swiftly forward, and

caught hold of the back of the van just as the driver slipped in the gear.

The van rolled forward.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Baggy.

He was almost jerked off his feet, but he managed to save himself, and broke into a rapid run as the van moved off. With a tremendous effort that almost wrenched his fat little arms from their sockets, the Falstaff of the Fourth made a spring and hauled himself, puffing and gasping, up on to the luggage.

"Done it!" panted Baggy.

Hastily he cowered down, concealing himself among the baggage. The van turned out of the gates and sped swiftly away down Rylcombe Lane.

Comfortably ensconced amid the luggage, well hidden from sight of anyone, Baggy Trimble was off to the aerodrome!

CHAPTER 2.

Baggy the Stowaway I

"H E, he, he!"

Baggy Trimble gave a snigger of satisfaction.

It was three hours later, and he had had by no means an uncomfortable journey. Never for moment had the driver, on the other side of the wooden partition, dreamed of his uninvited passenger. And the van was a fast vehicle; it had overtaken the cars near the start of the journey and arrived at the aerodrome well ahead of Tom Merry & Co. and the others.

"He, he, he!"

Baggy, as the van turned along the approach road to the aerodrome, could see the S 1001 at its mooring-post—a huge floating cigar of silver-white, gleaming in the sunlight. His eyes widened with excitement.

"And those rotters wanted to keep me from going with them!" he muttered. "Yah! Mean beasts! I'll jolly well show 'em! The thing is, they're jealous because Sir Napier likes me. That's what it is!"

As a matter of fact, on the occasion before, when Sir Napier Wynter had had dealings with Baggy Trimble, Kildare's uncle had taken anything but a fancy to the fat junior! But Baggy was far too obtuse to realise that fact.

The van came to a standstill by some low buildings. Baggy did not wait. He scrambled swiftly out. And when the driver stepped down leisurely from his seat and glanced casually at the fat figure rolling off towards the gates, he did not for a moment guess that he had unwittingly provided transport for that fat youth all the way from St. Jim's.

A uniformed official stopped Baggy at the gates, with an inquiring glance. Baggy tilted his fat little nose into the air loftily.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm for the airship. A pal of Sir Napier Wynter, you know. How do I get up to it?"

"I'll take you to the mooring-mast, sir," murmured the official quite deferentially. "Sir Napier is on board."

Baggy followed the man until they came at last to the foot of the mighty steel mast that tapered up to where the great dirigible floated, casting its shadow over the wide stretches of grass below.

"The lift will take you up, sir."

"Thanks!" grinned Baggy.

He entered the lift, and was borne upwards silently and swiftly.

At the top of the mast a dark corridor of girders led him through into the nose of the airship. His heart was beating fast, but he had all his wits about him. Baggy might be dense and stupid as a general rule, but he had a certain cunning cleverness at his disposal at times such as this.

"I am—hem!—Tom Merry!" he announced glibly to the airship steward who met him. "Sir Napier is expecting me, you know."

"Very good, sir!"

The man knew that Sir Napier Wynter was expecting a party of youngsters, one of whom was named Tom Merry, and he turned quite unsuspectingly to lead Baggy on board.

"Sir Napier is at present in the captain's cabin, with Commander Dawson," explained the steward. "Perhaps you would care to wait in the saloon or on the promenade deck?"

"Right-ho! I'll wait on the promenade deck," nodded Baggy.

The promenade deck of the S 1001 was deserted as the steward left Baggy peering down through the great mica windows at the tiny buildings of the aerodrome far below.

The moment the man had gone, Baggy got busy.

He was by no means sure that Sir Napier Wynter would be willing to take him. But he did not mean to take the risk of refusal!

Baggy's idea was to hide somewhere until the airship had set off. It would be impossible to drop him overboard then, and he realised that the S 1001 would not be turned back and moored again for the sake of putting him off, however unwanted he was on board.

He had no idea of his way about the airship; but luck was with him. A minute's exploration took him to the little cabins, each with two sleeping bunks, and it was beneath one of these bunks that the Falstaff of the Fourth concealed himself with a cunning grin on his fat face.

He knew that Tom Merry and the rest would be along very soon now, so it was highly unlikely that it would be realised on board that the supposed Tom Merry, who had arrived first of all, was missing. Sir Napier would come out from the captain's cabin to find Tom in the airship, no doubt; and the steward would be unlikely to notice that the first arrival had disappeared.

When the S 1001 began its voyage to distant Algeria in search of Eric Kildare Baggy Trimble would be on board!

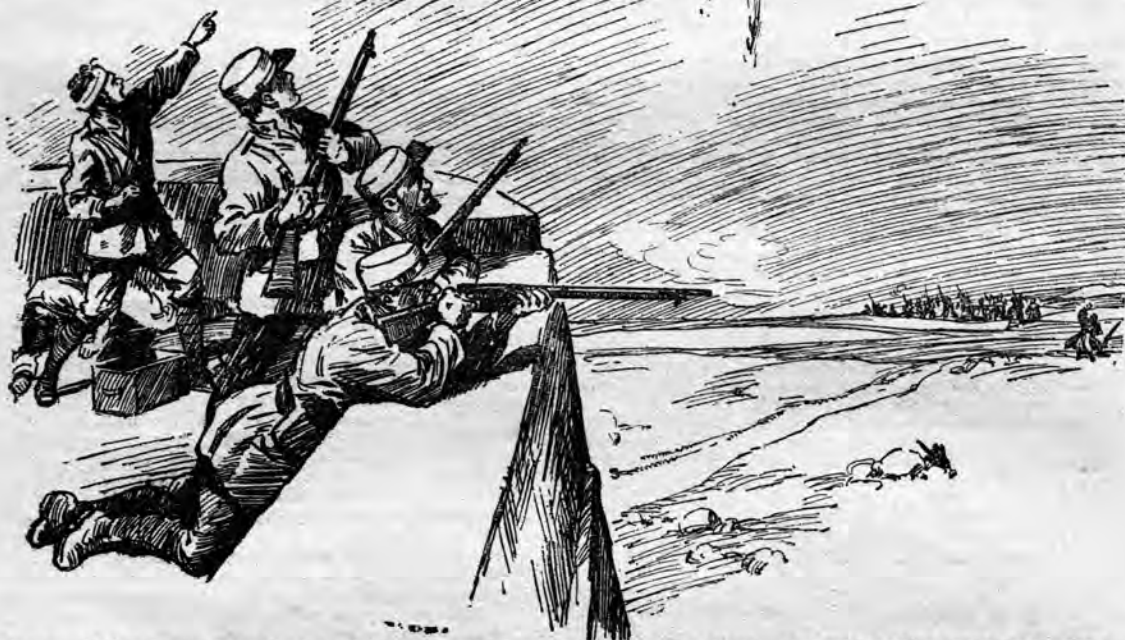
"Heah we are, deah boys!"

"What-ho!"

The two cars containing Blake & Co., Tom Merry & Co., and Talbot had arrived at the aerodrome.

"My hat! Isn't she a beauty?" breathed Monty Lowther, his eyes on the great dirigible floating like a gigantic silver cigar from the distant mast.

The juniors, as they jumped out, gathered in a silent group, staring up, fascinated, at the huge airship.



A tongue of flame came from the fore starboard engine and licked the silver fabric. In a moment the whole nose of the S 1001 was ablaze!

"I guess she's the cat's pyjamas!" muttered Cyrus K. Handcock at last. "Come on, buddies! Let's get aboard her!"

"Yaas, wathah!"

A few minutes later the juniors were being carried up inside the tremendous mooring-mast, in the lift.

Their eyes were gleaming excitedly as they passed through into the interior of the airship.

"If it wasn't so rotten about poor old Kildare, this would be the rippingest thing we've struck for a long time!" muttered Manners eagerly. "It's like being on a blessed liner. You can't realise you're on an airship, hardly!"

A steward led them to the saloon, situated between the dining-room and the asbestos-lined smoke-room, with the promenade decks running along either side of those three big compartments. They stared round with excited eyes.

As Manners had said, it was rather difficult to realise that they were actually on board any type of aircraft! Though most of the fittings were constructed of aluminium, for the sake of lightness, everything seemed so solid and comfortable that it was hard to believe they were actually afloat in mid-air, high above the ground.

"So here you all are!"

The pleasant voice of Sir Napier Wynter broke in on their eager talk. The juniors glanced round, to find that the baronet was crossing the saloon towards them, a smile of welcome upon his strong, pleasant face, with its close-clipped grey moustache. He was followed by George Darrell, the new captain of St. Jim's, and Rex Saville, Eric Kildare's cousin, the new Sixth-Former.

Sir Napier shook hands with his schoolboy guests, and Darrell nodded to the juniors in a friendly way.

"Hallo, young 'uns!" he exclaimed. "So you've turned up all right? Isn't this airship just fine?"

"Bai Jove, wathah!" nodded Arthur Augustus D'Arcy,

adjusting his eyeglass to beam round. "I considah it quite wippin'!"

Rex Saville had not nodded to the juniors. He was a handsome fellow, with smooth, fair hair and a languid manner. He considered it, apparently, above his dignity to nod to youngsters of the Fourth and Shell.

He glanced at his uncle.

"When do we start; Uncle Napier?" he inquired, in the almost fawning voice he usually employed when addressing his wealthy uncle. "I shan't feel satisfied until we are actually on our way to poor Eric."

In his heart Rex Saville would have given a good deal not to be going on that trip to Algeria. Kildare knew that it was he who had deliberately and cunningly caused the ex-captain of St. Jim's to be branded as a cheat and ignominiously deprived of the captaincy. Kildare had told no one of what he knew concerning his cousin; but Saville had certainly no wish to come face to face with Eric Kildare again!

Kildare had given his rascally cousin a terrible thrashing for his villainy before leaving St. Jim's; but he had contemptuously told Saville that he had no intention of

accusing him of his dastardly deed, since he was unable to prove it.

Rex Saville dreaded, however, that if Kildare were found at Sidi-bel-Abbes he might change his mind and tell what he knew!

Nevertheless, he had not dared refuse his uncle's offer that he should go in the S 1001. To have done so might have looked odd. His one hope, now that he was committed to it, was that, when they arrived at the headquarters of the Foreign Legion, Kildare would be found to have been ordered off into the desert, to some place inaccessible even to the giant airship.

"Poor Eric!" he murmured hypocritically. "I only hope that he can be persuaded to return to England! Whether he was guilty or not of cheating in that exam—"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Sir Napier, glancing at him with suddenly gleaming eyes. "Of course he was innocent!"

"I sincerely hope you are right in thinking so, Uncle Napier," said Saville, as if reluctant to confess that he could not feel so sure himself.

Tom Merry surveyed Saville with tight lips. He disliked the polished Sixth-Former instinctively, though he did not dream, any more than the others, that it was actually Rex Saville's treachery that had disgraced Kildare, and been the direct cause of the ex-captain's midnight departure from St. Jim's.

"We start in an hour's time," said Sir Napier, glancing at his watch. "In the meanwhile, we'll have lunch. I fancy it is ready now. Is your luggage being brought on board?"

"I guess so," nodded Hancock.

"Good! Then come along to lunch."

The airship's officers were busy preparing the dirigible for flight, so that Sir Napier and his guests from St. Jim's were alone at the meal served in the big dining-saloon. It was quite a merry meal, so far as most of them were concerned. They were not thinking so much now of Kildare's disgrace as of the fact that before long they hoped to be seeing him again.

Saville alone, seated between his uncle and George Darrell, seemed rather silent. And he alone knew the reason for that silence and the faint shadow at the back of his pale blue eyes!

After lunch the juniors gathered on the starboard promenade deck, and followed, as far as they could, with eager interest, the business of getting the great dirigible under way. It was with scarcely a tremor of the aluminium floor on which they were standing that the S 1001 cleared her mooring-mast at last, and turned her glittering length towards the south.

"We're off, bai Joye!" breathed Arthur Augustus, staring down through the windows at the dwarfed buildings of the aerodrome drifting past beneath them.

The faint hum of the airship's six engines could be heard—a low purr. Steady as a rock, the S 1001 was sailing faster now. The aerodrome dropped behind, and they were passing over trees and fields, gradually rising. A wisp of white clouds streamed by the windows.

Tom Merry drew a deep, long breath.

"My giddy aunt! Isn't this great?"

There was a sudden, breathless ejaculation from Monty Lowther.

"L-l-look!" gasped Monty.

A fat figure had come rolling into view at the far end of the deck.

"Trimble!" yelled Tom Merry. "It—it's Trimble!"

CHAPTER 3.

Southward Bound!

THE School House juniors stared at Baggy Trimble as if he were a ghost as he rolled towards them.

There was an uneasy look in Baggy's eyes, though he tried to conceal his uneasiness with a greasy smirk. But there was a certain amount of gleeful triumph about his manner, too, as he halted before them, blinking from one to another of the group.

"He, he, he! Yes, it's me!" Baggy coughed. "Hem! I—I knew you chaps were only joking when you pretended you didn't want me to come. I knew how disappointed you'd all be not to have me with you, you know! When you accidentally left me behind—"

"A-a-accid-d-dentially!" stuttered Talbot.

"Yes," nodded Baggy. "When you accidentally left me behind, as I say, I jolly nearly decided not to come! But I knew what a terrific blow that would be to you all—particularly to you, Tom, old chap—"

"T-to me?" stammered Tom Merry dazedly.

"Yes, old chap. So I made an effort and got along here in time. I—hem!—thought I would give you a pleasant

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surprise, so I didn't let on I was on board at first, you see—"

Tom Merry found his voice at last.

"You—you fat hound!" he ejaculated. "So you stowed away? You—you—you—"

Words failed the captain of the Shell. He reached out and grasped Baggy by the ear. Baggy gave a yell.

"Oh! Yoop! Leggo, you beast—"

"Bump him!" gasped Tom. "We can't get rid of him now, but we can jolly well make him wish he'd never come!"

"Bai Jove, wathah! I considah—"

"He deserves to be dropped overboard!" hooted Blake.

"Bump the fat rotter!"

Despite his struggles Baggy was seized by half a dozen willing hands and swung into the air.

"Ow! Leggo! I—I—I— Oh crumbs! Yarooooop!"

The aluminium floor of the promenade deck of the S 1001 may have been light, but it was hard, nevertheless. Baggy discovered that fact as his shiny trouser-seat landed upon it forcefully.

"Whooooops! Yow! Yah! I won't be bumped—"

"That's where you're wrong!" gasped Herries grimly.

Bump!

"Waroooooooooooooh!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Yarooooop!"

It was a very aching and dishevelled Baggy who was allowed to collapse on the floor at last in a palpitating heap. The juniors glared down at him angrily as the airship swept on through the low-lying clouds.

"Oh, you beasts!" moaned Baggy. "Grooooh! I'm dying! My back's broken in two places—"

"Good egg!"

"Oh, really, Lowther!" Baggy emitted a heartrending groan. "I tell you I'm dying! Everything is going dark! My past life is flashing through my brain."

"Then you must realise at last what a fat porpoise you are!" grinned Blake.

"Oh, really, Blake—"

There was a step on the deck behind them. Sir Napier Wynter had appeared, strolling in their direction. At sight of Baggy Trimble sprawled on the floor an exclamation broke from him.

"Good gad! Who is this?"

Tom Merry glanced round quickly, and coloured. Tom did not want any unpleasantness on board, for everyone's sake, richly though Baggy deserved to get into trouble with Sir Napier Wynter. But it was impossible to conceal the truth.

"Ahem! A stowaway, sir!" mumbled Tom awkwardly.

Baggy scrambled up, and blinked at Sir Napier uneasily. Now that he was actually face to face with Kildare's uncle Baggy felt a tremor of panic.

"I—I—I— That is—" he stammered.

"Good gad! A stowaway?" ejaculated Sir Napier.

"Why, it is that boy Trimble!"

"I guess it's him all right," drawled Hancock laconically, with a dry grin.

Sir Napier's face went stern, and Baggy quaked. But the next moment the baronet's lips twitched into a smile. He burst into a laugh.

"You young rascal."

Baggy gave a gasp of relief.

"I—I knew the other chaps would like me to be with them, sir," he explained eagerly. "I'm such a popular chap, you know, sir—always the life and soul of the party. I—I thought I'd give everybody a pleasant surprise—"

"I see!" said Sir Napier dryly. He knew that Baggy was actually anything but the popular figure he was describing himself as being, and in any case he could have told from the faces of Tom Merry and the rest that they were anything but delighted at discovering Baggy on board. But since the Falstaff of the Fourth was on board Sir Napier felt it was better to hide his natural annoyance. "Well, you are here now, Trimble, so I suppose you will have to stay!"

"Thank you, sir!" grinned Baggy. "That's what I thought, sir! I—I mean—"

But Sir Napier had already turned away. The juniors surveyed Baggy grimly as the baronet vanished from the deck.

"There you are!" sniffed Baggy. "I told you he'd be jolly glad to see me!"

"Why you fat frog!" snorted Blake. "He's making the best of it, that's all! Pleased to see you? I don't think!"

"You're jolly lucky he was sporting enough to take it so well, Baggy," put in Tom Merry quietly. "Well, now you are here I hope you'll try to make yourself as decent as possible for once!"

"Hear, hear!" nodded Manners. "We shan't put up with any of your usual behaviour, porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Manners—"
"Br-r-r!"

And the juniors moved off along the deck, watching the green countryside slip by beneath them as the S 1001 cruised on through the upper air, southward bound. Baggy, left alone, glared after them. But his glare changed to a sudden broad grin.

"He, he, he! I said I'd show 'em! And I jolly well have!"

He certainly had! There was no possible doubt that Baggy Trimble had scored this time—no possible doubt whatever!

CHAPTER 4.

Above the Mediterranean!

THE giant airship was high above France, sailing smoothly through a clear starry sky, when the juniors at last turned in that night.

Lying in their aluminium bunks, two to a cabin, they could hear the humming engines of the dirigible purring on through the darkness above the few far-scattered twinkling lights of the countryside beneath. Despite the thrill of knowing that they were on board an airship, bound for the mysterious continent of Africa, it was not long before they were all fast asleep. And the next thing they knew was that it was daylight once more.

Tom Merry and Lowther emerged from their cabin in pyjamas and dressing-gowns, on their way to the bath-rooms. Manners and Handcock, Blake and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, appeared almost simultaneously, and together the six of them hurried out eagerly to the promenade deck.

"My hat—the sea!" ejaculated Blake, as he peered down through the big, slanting windows.

Far below, flashing in the brilliant sunshine as waves rippled the deep blue, could be seen a glorious stretch of sea. The S 1001 had crossed France from north to south in the night, had already left the French coast behind her, and was sweeping on towards the coast of Africa, high above the shimmering Mediterranean!

"Talk about giddy speed!" chuckled Monty Lowther. "Tewwific!" agreed Arthur Augustus. "Bai Jove! I want my bwekkah, deah boys!"

A fat figure rolled out on to the deck behind them. "I say, I'm frightfully peckish!" grunted Baggy. "When the dickens is breakfast going to be ready? I call it rotten bad management to let those blessed stewards slack in bed till all hours, when I want my breakfast! I've a jolly good mind to complain to Sir Napier—"

"We warned you, Baggy," said Manners calmly. The next moment Baggy Trimble gave a startled yelp as he was seized by Manners and Tom Merry and Handcock and whirled into the air.

"Leggo!" panted Baggy in dismay. "I—I was only saying I was peckish—"

"We warned you you'd got to behave yourself on this trip," grinned Tom. "Grumbling from you is barred!"
"Bump! Bump! Bump!"

"Oh! Yarooooough!"

Baggy roared as his pyjama-clad figure smote the deck. He was bumped nearly a dozen times, however, before he was released. And by that time even Baggy realised, perhaps, that in the S 1001 his fellow-juniors did not intend to put up with Baggy's usual behaviour, even if they did so at St. Jim's. He limped disconsolately to the bath-rooms, growling to himself. But he was certainly not heard grumbling again before breakfast was ready in the dining-saloon. He was evidently learning his lesson.

At breakfast everyone on board seemed to be in high spirits, with the sole exceptions of Baggy Trimble and Rex Saville. Baggy was sulkily silent—still sore and aching from his recent bumping! And Kildare's cousin was very quiet for reasons best known to himself.

Breakfast on board the giant airship was amazingly like breakfast in some up-to-date hotel! The airship seemed scarcely to be moving, for all they could feel in the saloon, despite the fact that the airship was crossing the Mediterranean at somewhere in the neighbourhood of eighty miles an hour.

The meal over, the juniors crowded out once more to the promenade decks. After a visit to the control-room, Sir Napier joined them, together with George Darrell and the elegant figure of Rex Saville.

There was a sudden exclamation from the new captain of St. Jim's.

"Look!" cried Darrell eagerly.

Far ahead, dim on the horizon, a blurred line of land could be seen.

Sir Napier drew a deep breath.

"We are nearly there!" he muttered. "That is Africa!"

With excitedly gleaming eyes, the juniors watched that distant streak on the horizon drawing slowly nearer and more distinct, as the great airship raced on at eighty miles an hour beneath the blazing blue sky. Africa! Soon they would be at Oran, the Algerian coast town, at which the S 1001 was to come to earth again.

And fifty miles only beyond Oran lay Sidi-bel-Abbes, the sun-baked little town on the edge of the terrible wastes of the Sahara, where was quartered the main body of the famous Foreign Legion.

Whether they would find Eric Kildare at Sidi-bel-Abbes, or whether the dishonoured ex-captain of St. Jim's had by now been ordered to some far-off outpost in the desert, they could only wonder.

There was at least one of those on board who hoped that Kildare would not be found at Sidi-bel-Abbes—who could even hope that the ex-captain of the school would never be seen by any of them again! Rex Saville's eyes were gleaming strangely as he told himself that there was more than a chance of his hated cousin meeting his end in some fight in the desert at the hands of the Arab tribes with whom the men of the Foreign Legion had ever to contend.

"A few hours more and we shall be at Oran," said Sir Napier quietly. "It will not take us long to travel on by land to Sidi-bel-Abbes."

He dropped an affectionate hand upon his nephew's shoulder. Saville started queerly.

"Why, you are a mass of nerves, Rex!" breathed his uncle, in astonishment. "What ever is the matter?"

Saville forced a smile.

"It is only the anxiety, Uncle Napier," he answered.

"I—I am so anxious about poor old Kildare!"

"Of course! I understand!"

"Bai Jove!" Arthur Augustus glanced at his chums through his monocle with gleaming eyes. "I nevah thought, deah boys, this time last week, that we should be awwivin' in Africa a week latah! Wathah not, bai Jove!"

"You're right, Gussy," nodded Tom Merry quietly. "And let's hope that when we get back to St. Jim's, it'll be to bring old Kildare with us!"

"Hear, hear!" muttered Reginald Talbot.

"I guess you've said a mouthful," nodded Cyrus K. Handcock.

Beneath the brazen sky, the great dirigible S 1001 swept on, bearing with it the eager party who had left the shores of England in search of Eric Kildare, of the Foreign Legion.

CHAPTER 5.

Legionary No. 4413.

AT a little table of a cafe in a dingy side street of Sidi-bel-Abbes, Legionary No. 4413 of "La Legion Etrangere," the French name for the famous regiment with which France polices the Sahara, sat sipping a cup of thick black coffee, watching the street with shadowed eyes.

The sun had set an hour ago, and a crescent moon had risen above the stifling little town. But Sidi-bel-Abbes still sweltered in a suffocating heat. From the distant barracks, the note of a bugle came to the ears of Legionary No. 4413—otherwise Eric Kildare, late captain of St. Jim's.

The little cafe was almost deserted. At a near-by table, two Spahees, native cavalymen in their flowing burnouses, with bronzed faces and glittering black eyes, were seated; and a civilian, evidently a Greek, was sipping coffee in another corner. The street, too, was almost deserted. Now and then the shadowy figure of some Arab passed by, or a man in the red and blue uniform of the Foreign Legion; but on the whole, the little alley, silvery white in the moonlight, was silent and empty.

A sudden hard smile twisted Kildare's lips.

He had been thinking of St. Jim's.

How far away it seemed! He had only become a legionary a few weeks ago; and yet St. Jim's and all that name stood for, seemed cut off by immeasurable time and distance. Years might have elapsed since that fateful evening when, in his study in the Sixth Form passage, he had faced the accusing eyes of Dr. Holmes and Mr. Railton—that evening when, later, he had accused his cousin of his treachery and read in Rex Saville's eyes the truth of that accusation!

That had been his last night at St. Jim's.

With a sudden shrug, Kildare raised his cup to his lips and drained it to the dregs. He rose to his feet, and left the cafe, striding out into the dusty alley, and turned towards the distant barracks.

He had not gone many yards before he came to a dead halt. A stifled exclamation escaped him, and his face,

already tanned with the African sun, turned oddly pale. He stood like a fellow in a dream.

For a voice had come to his ears—a voice which he could not fail to recognise, but had never thought to hear again!

"You know, deah boys, I considah—"

Kildare passed a hand dazedly across his eyes, beneath the peak of his kepi. Was he dreaming? Was his brain playing him some strange trick?

But the next moment, as a group of figures turned into the alley from a cross street, Kildare knew that it had been no hallucination of his troubled brain!

It had really been the voice of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy of St. Jim's! D'Arcy himself was coming towards him now, in company with Tom Merry and Monty Lowther and Manners and Reginald Talbot and Cyrus K. Handcock, the American junior—half a dozen youngsters whom he had believed to be hundreds of miles away!

They had already seen him, and recognised him, despite the uniform. He stared at them dazedly. A moment later, four other youngsters had come into sight behind them—Blake, Herries, and Digby, and the fat figure of Baggy Trimble, the Falstaff of the Fourth.

"My hat!" he heard Blake yell. "It's him!"

The next moment Legionary No. 4413 was surrounded, there in that shadowy street of Sidi-bel-Abbes, on the edge of the Sahara, by nine juniors from St. Jim's.

"Good heavens!" breathed Kildare wonderingly. "How the dickens—"

His startled face broke into a queer smile. He held out his hand, and Tom Merry was the first to grasp it. The faces of the juniors were alight with joyous excitement.

"Kildare! So we've jolly well found you—"

"Great Bohunkus! I guess this is a lucky break—"

"Bai Jove, this is wippin'!"

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy was surveying the ex-captain of St. Jim's through his gleaming monocle with a beaming smile. Even Baggy Trimble looked excited and pleased! Kildare stared from one to another of them as though he still could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Is this a giddy dream, kids?" he exclaimed, rather hoarsely. "Hang it, I can't believe it yet!"

"Oh, we're real, all right!" grinned Monty Lowther. "I'll show you!" He reached out and pinched Baggy Trimble's fat ear, and Baggy gave a yell. "See? Baggy couldn't squeal like that if he wasn't real, could he?"

"Ow! Lowther, you beast—"

"Great Scott!" muttered Kildare. "But what does it mean? How on earth—"

"We came here to find you," said Tom Merry quietly. "The school is shut up for a while—scarlet fever. And we've come with your uncle, Sir Napier, to find you—"

"My uncle?" echoed Kildare hoarsely. "Is he here, too?"

"Sure!" grinned Handcock. "And Darrell, I guess. And your cousin, Saville—"

"Saville?" Kildare's eyes gleamed with a sudden queer light, swiftly veiled. "But—but—"

"We came by air," went on Tom Merry. "In the S 1001—your uncle's airship, you know. Sir Napier has gone off to the barracks to find out what he can do about you, and Darrell and your cousin have gone with him. We've been having a look round on our own."

Kildare stared from face to face. There was a twisted smile on his lips.

"But why have you come to find me?" he muttered, almost impatiently. "I've left St. Jim's for good! I want to drop out—utterly! That's why I came here and joined the Legion; it is a regiment of outcasts. After what happened at St. Jim's, after I was branded as a cheat—"

"Look here, Kildare," broke in Tom swiftly, his eyes levelled steadily at Kildare's lined face, "we don't believe you were guilty! You can believe that, can't you? None of us thinks you really cheated. And so we wanted to bring you back. Your uncle wants you to return to England, perhaps even to St. Jim's—"

"Back to St. Jim's?" ejaculated Kildare, and laughed. It was a harsh sound. "Never!"

His eyes were hard. But suddenly they softened as he dropped a friendly hand on Tom's shoulder, glancing round at the little group.

"It's great to know that you youngsters believe in my innocence," he said quietly. "It means a lot to me, knowing this. But I can't return. Everyone else, at any rate, believes the worst of me!" Again his voice hardened. "I'll never go back! Besides, I've signed on for the full number of years in the Legion—I couldn't get out now if I wanted to."

"Oh deah!" Arthur Augustus surveyed Kildare rather miserably. "This is wotten!"

"Your uncle could buy you out, Kildare," put in Reginald Talbot quickly.

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The ex-captain of St. Jim's shook his head. He smiled in a bitter way that Tom Merry's heart ached to see.

Kildare had changed since last they had met. His very soul had been embittered.

"I've made my bed," went on Kildare harshly, "and I shall lie on it."

"But—"

"It's no good trying to persuade me to let Uncle Napier buy me out," Kildare shrugged. "It is too late, in any case."

"How is that?" breathed Tom Merry.

"There's trouble brewing in the desert, so I've heard," answered Kildare quietly. "The Arabs are in revolt. Already my company has been ordered off to a place called Fort Chabrol, a little sun-baked mud fort far out in the desert sands. I leave Sidi-bel-Abbes to-morrow night!"

CHAPTER 6

Into the Desert!

"HERE they come!"

Sir Napier Wynter's voice was a little hoarse. Together with his nephew, Rex Saville, and George Darrell, and the ten juniors who had accompanied them in the S 1001 from England, Sir Napier was standing on the gaily lighted terrace of a cafe overlooking one of the broad main thoroughfares of Sidi-bel-Abbes.

It was the sound of a nearing band and the rattle of drums that had brought the sudden exclamation to his lips.

Sir Napier and the little party from far-off St. Jim's hurried to the low, ornamental balustrade, staring up the road. Brilliant moonlight was flooding the little town. Across the street feathery palm-trees were swaying lightly in the hot wind that had travelled over a thousand miles of scorching desert sand; that pitiless waste of sand into which Kildare's company of the Foreign Legion was marching out that night.

The crash of the approaching band grew nearer, and with it could be heard the tramp, tramp, tramp of marching men.

Sir Napier's face was queerly strained.

He had seen his nephew the previous night; but all his attempts to persuade Kildare to allow himself to be bought out of the Legion had been in vain. Darrell had been unable to induce his old chum of the Sixth Form at St. Jim's to change his mind, too. Kildare had made his bed, and he would lie on it—so he had told them bitterly.

Saville had not seen Legionary 4413, alone of the party. He had made an excuse for avoiding doing so.

Tramp, tramp, tramp!

The men of the Legion came swinging along, four deep, to the crash of the band. They were led by a mounted officer, sword drawn; behind the Legionaries came a troop of Spahes, on superb Arab horses. From Monty Lowther there broke a sudden, breathless cry:

"There he is!"

He flung out a pointing hand with an excited gesture.

His eyes were fastened on the outside figure of the rear rank of the columns of four, swinging past where they stood; a figure with overshadowed eyes staring straight ahead as he marched firmly on to the beat of the band.

It was Eric Kildare.

"Eric!" muttered Sir Napier.

It was impossible for Eric Kildare to have heard his uncle speak his name. But some instinct must have told him of their nearness. He glanced towards the terrace, and a swift change came over his face as he caught sight of those standing there.

A faint smile appeared on his lips.

"Good-bye, old chap!" cried Darrell. "Good luck—"

"We may never see him again!" groaned Sir Napier.

There was a sudden queer sound from Rex Saville.

As the uniformed figures marched on up the street Kildare's eyes had suddenly met those of his cousin, staring down at him from the lighted terrace.

Saville seemed to recoil for a moment, and his face paled. Kildare's own face had hardened. He looked away at once, his eyes fastened once more straight ahead. But that strange look that had passed between the two cousins had not escaped the notice of Sir Napier Wynter. He stared at Saville in astonishment.

The roll of the drums grew fainter as the tramp of marching feet passed on towards the gates of Sidi-bel-Abbes.

Out through the gates the men of the Legion swung, on to the great military road that leads southwards to the desert.

The last of them vanished, and the crowds that had collected to see them march out of the town raised a cheer and began to disperse. On the terrace of the cafe Sir Napier gripped Rex Saville's arm.

"What is the matter?" he breathed. "Why did you and he look at each other—like that?"

Saville shrugged. He had recovered his composure wonderfully. His sleek smile came.

"Why, Uncle Napier, I don't understand!"

"There had been no trouble between you two before Eric left St. Jim's?" Sir Napier was eyeing him fixedly.

"None, of course! We were always the best of friends!"

The baronet released his hold of Saville's arm. But there was a shadow of doubt lingering in his eyes still.

"So he's gone!" said Darrell quietly.

His face was deeply troubled. He knew only too well that Eric Kildare had marched out of Sidi-bel-Abbes, possibly never to return. With the Arabs in the south rising in revolt, the gallant little company that had swung with rhythmic tramp of feet out into the desert before their eyes might none of them return!

Sir Napier nodded.

"Yes. He has gone. Our journey here has been in vain."

Tom Merry, glancing with worried eyes from face to face, started suddenly. He had noticed a queer gloating gleam in the pale blue eyes of Rex Saville. The look died away almost at once. But in that moment Tom Merry knew that Saville was glad to have seen his cousin march out that night to the danger of death!

He said nothing of what he had seen to anyone as Sir Napier and the St. Jim's party made their way in unhappy silence back to their hotel. But a vague suspicion had stirred in Tom's mind. He remembered very vividly that fierce fight between Kildare and Saville on the ex-captain's last evening at St. Jim's. He had never known the reason of that fight between the cousins. No one had known it. But now Tom was wondering; could it be that Rex Saville was the person responsible for Kildare having been accused of being a cheat, and so of his downfall?

It was a startling thought!

It still lingered with odd persistence in Tom Merry's brain as he fell asleep that night in the sultry heat of Sidi-bel-Abbes.

They returned to Oran next day. Sir Napier intended to wait there a week at least, in the hope of hearing news of Kildare's company.

But when that news came it was grim indeed.

The company of the Foreign Legion which they had seen march out of Sidi-bel-Abbes that night had been ambushed in the desert by rebel tribesmen and cut to pieces. A bare handful had escaped to the temporary safety of Fort Chabrol, where they were holding out gallantly against the overwhelming numbers of Arabs that hemmed them in. Legionary No. 4413 was one of the survivors—had been mentioned especially for his bravery in the wireless report from the officer in charge of the beleaguered garrison of the little fort—so Sir Napier's immediate inquiries revealed.

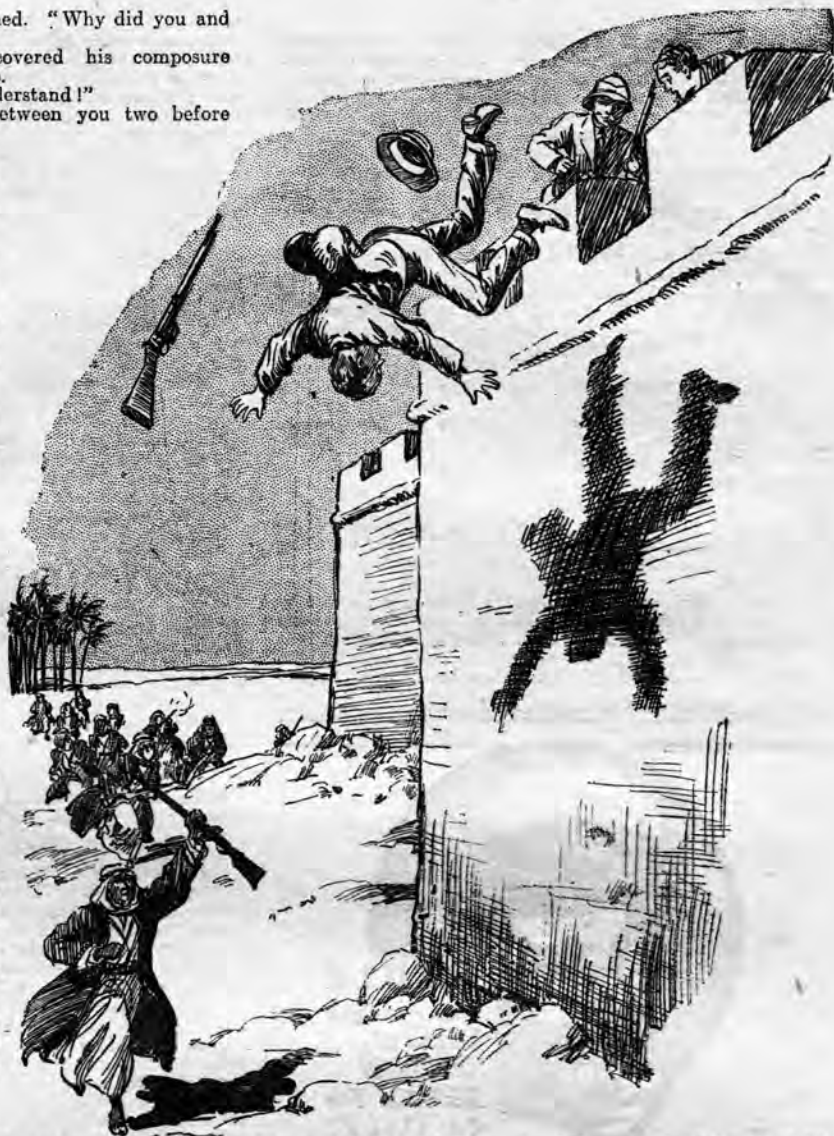
"Bai Jove, this is wotten!"

In Sir Napier's room at their hotel in Oran, where they had gathered to discuss the alarming news, Arthur Augustus D'Arcy adjusted his eyeglass and surveyed his fellow juniors, the two Sixth-Formers, and Sir Napier Wynter with a startled and anxious face.

"This is wotten!" repeated the swell of St. Jim's breathlessly. "Kildare cut off in a wotten fort hundreds of miles out in the desert, by the webels! Oh cwumbs!"

"What are the chances of rescue, sir?" asked Tom Merry in strained tones. "Is there any—any hope at all?"

"It's terrible!" broke in Rex Saville, with every appearance of desperate anxiety. "But all we can do is to wait for further news, I suppose, and hope for the best. We can do nothing."



With a scream, Rex Saville toppled through the embrasure, and went hurtling to the sand below!

Sir Napier rose to his feet. His face was grim. He crashed a clenched fist down upon the table beside him.

"You are wrong, Rex," he said crisply. "We can do something!"

His eyes gleamed as he glanced round the ring of St. Jim's fellows. Something in his tone caused their look of blank despair to change suddenly to eager hope.

"What do you mean, sir?" cried Darrell swiftly. "What can we do?"

"The airship!" answered Sir Napier. "The S 1001!"

"Great Scott!" breathed Tom Merry, as he suddenly guessed the idea in the baronet's mind. "You mean—"

"I shall offer the S 1001 for use of the French authorities at once," came the quiet answer. "My airship could reach the fort in a day, where marching men would take twelve days at least. We'll turn the S 1001 into a war dirigible, by thunder! And in it we'll fly to the relief of Fort Chabrol!"

CHAPTER 7.

To the Rescue!

"WE shall not be long now, monsieur!"

Colonel Montaigne, of the French Army, standing beside Sir Napier Wynter on the star-board promenade deck of the S 1001, spoke in a voice that held a quiver of eagerness.

The giant airship was flying high above the great sea of sand that stretched to the horizon on all sides beneath

them, flying southwards at a hundred miles an hour through the blazing African sunshine to the relief of Fort Chabrol.

The French authorities had jumped eagerly at Sir Napier Wynter's offer to place the dirigible at their disposal for the purpose of going to the rescue of the little garrison cut off in the heart of the desert by the teeming swarms of rebel Bedouins. With a score of French soldiers on board, under Colonel Montaigne, loaded with bombs and fitted up with machine-guns, and carrying a big store of war supplies, the S 1001 had wasted no time in getting away on its grim task.

George Darrell and Rex Saville were standing near the baronet and the little French officer, staring down through the mica windows at the limitless, undulating wastes of sand that reflected the sunlight glaringly. There was nothing to break the monotony of the desert—not a tree, not a thing, only the vast stretches of rippled sand, lying in waves and ridges as far as the eye could reach. But soon now, according to Colonel Montaigne, they would come into sight of Fort Chabrol, where the remnant left of the ill-fated company of the Foreign Legion, which the St. Jim's party had seen swing out of Sidi-bel-Abbes to the crash of the band, was fighting for life against desperate odds.

"If only we're in time!"

It was Tom Merry who spoke.

The captain of the Shell was standing with the rest of the party of juniors on the other promenade deck, watching the level horizon with troubled eyes for the first sign of the little fort.

Sir Napier had wanted at first to leave the juniors at Oran. But they had persuaded him to allow them to come in the airship after a good deal of difficulty. The fact that Oran was not, perhaps, too savoury a place in which to leave a party of schoolboys had at last decided Sir Napier

to agree to their eager wishes. Besides, he did not contemplate that there would be any actual danger on board the S 1001. The very sight of the giant dirigible, it was hoped, would strike terror into the Arabs; if not, the first few bombs dropped were reckoned to do so.

Baggy Trimble, alone of the juniors, had not been eager to accompany the others. Baggy was distinctly scared at the whole idea. But Sir Napier had not been willing to let Baggy remain alone at Oran, and Baggy himself was not sure that he wanted to be left alone there, either. Even the airship on its flight to the beleaguered fort was better than that, Baggy had thought, and so he had come. But there was a very uneasy expression on his fat face now, as he stood with the others by the big, slanting windows, peering down at the desert.

"I—I say, you know," squeaked Baggy nervously, "it would be frightful if anything went wrong and we crashed! We'd be miles from anywhere in all that sand—"

"Ring off, porpoise!"

"Oh, really, Blake, I don't think Sir Napier ought to be taking the risk!" sniffed Baggy. "If you ask me—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Manners. "I suppose you always would start worrying about your own rotten skin! What about those poor chaps in the fort, cut off by the Arabs, facing death hundreds of miles from anywhere, and Kildare one of them?"

"Oh, y-yes, I know!" squeaked Baggy. "But, really—"

"Oh, bump the fat wottah!" suggested Arthur Augustus. "I guess that's a swell idea!" grinned Cyrus K. Handcock cheerfully.

Baggy gave a frightened gasp and scuttled hastily away, diving into the saloon for safety. The juniors smiled rather grimly and returned to their watch through the windows.

At either end of the deck a machine-gun was mounted at a window, so that, with the windows opened, they would command a big range of ground beneath. Three French soldiers were standing by each gun, talking in low, excited tones in their own language.

"Blessed if I can understand a word those chaps are saying!" muttered Monty Lowther, with a grin. "Our French at St. Jim's is all right, we know, so it must be that French people can't talk French properly, if you ask me!"

The juniors chuckled.

As Lowther had humorously pointed out, the gabbled, excited sentences of the "poilus" seemed a very different thing from the comparatively simple French which the Fourth and Shell had to deal with under Monsieur Morny, the little French master at St. Jim's!

"What about trying one of those chaps with 'Avez-vous la plume de ma tante?'" grinned Blake.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors chuckled again. Their nerves were taut, and it was a relief to laugh. But their faces went grave again very quickly as, with eager eyes, they searched the dim, level horizon, misty with quivering heat.

No sign of life in all that wilderness of sand, and yet, somewhere ahead, over the rim of the desert, the desolate wastes of the burning Sahara were alive with men. Somewhere still farther to the south lay Fort Chabrol, surrounded by the rebel tribesmen, with a handful of the Foreign Legion fighting for their lives within its walls.

And one of that desperate garrison was Legionary No. 4413.

The deck seemed to sway a little beneath their feet as the speed of the giant airship was increased still more by the hand of its commander in the control-room. At over a hundred miles an hour the S 1001 swept on over the rolling waste of sand far below, deeper and deeper into the lonely heart of the Sahara.

"If only we're not too late!" said Tom Merry again hoarsely.

No one answered him. They all realised only too well the dreadful chance that when at last they arrived at the little fort it might be to find its defenders dead to a man, slain by merciless Arab hands.

From one of the French soldiers by the fore machine-gun there broke a sudden shout:

"Voilà! C'est Chabrol!"

He had flung out a pointing hand.

Far away on the rim of the desert a tiny shape had appeared. Fort Chabrol!

CHAPTER 8.

In Fort Chabrol!

CROUCHING in an embrasure of the mud wall of Fort Chabrol, Legionary No. 4413 crammed a fresh clip of cartridges into his rifle and thrust the butt once more to his shoulder. The rattle of firing slackened as another rush of the attacking Arabs broke and retreated in wild disorder before that withering hail of bullets,



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Leaving the huddled shapes of their dead scattered over the sand the Touaregs raced back to the shelter of the sand dunes and the little oasis near the fort. A bugle rang out sounding the "Cease fire!"

Kildare lowered his rifle, empty again. He pushed back his kepi and wiped the perspiration from his eyes before cramming another clip into the magazine.

At the embrasure beside him a legionary had toppled backwards a few moments before, a bullet in his neck. He lay a crumpled, lifeless heap, still grasping his rifle. He was not the only one.

Kildare peered out over the sand dunes.

There was no sign of the Arabs now, though an occasional bullet came whining over to the fort from where the Touaregs lay hidden, to thud against the mud embattlements.

The voice of a "sous-officier" was roaring out orders. It was Sergeant-Major Kutz, who was in command of the garrison now, since his two superior officers had both died the day before from Arab bullets. Kutz was an Austrian, an old soldier, who had been in the Legion for years, and the defenders of Fort Chabrol could not have wished for a more competent commandant.

"Corporal Rais!" barked Kutz. "Take the men down in three batches for food! Come back at the double if you hear the 'Assembly' blown! Corporal Zimmerhoff, replenish ammunition! See to the wounded, Grandbois and Cortaz!"

The dead and the wounded were borne away, their places being taken by fresh men. But the numbers of the defenders were terribly few. Soon there would be no one to replace further casualties.

Kildare, crouching at his post, his glassy eyes aching from the glare of the sun that danced and shimmered maddeningly over the sand, took a mouthful of water from his water bottle, with cracked lips.

Fort Chabrol was one of the farthest outposts in the wastes of the Sahara. It was built in a square, with a little courtyard in the centre surrounded by the soldiers' quarters, armouries, and "casernes." The flat roof above these was guarded by the embattled wall, behind which the majority of the garrison were crouching now, the pitiless African sun beating down upon them with a heat that was appalling. Though the sun was dropping towards the western rim of the desert, behind the little parched oasis of palms on that side of the fort, it was hotter than at midday. The water in the water-bottles was hot and foul, and since dawn more than one man had suddenly begun to rave and laugh wildly, seized with the dreaded "cafard"—the desert madness that attacks white men in such infernos of heat as Fort Chabrol.

These victims of "la cafard" had been locked in the cells below. Already some had died. With those of the garrison who had been picked off by the Arab bullets altogether the defenders had been reduced to about fifty men—a pitiful handful who still kept the tricolour flag flying above the fort against the attacks of at least a thousand foes!

"Well, they seem to be taking a rest now, anyway!" muttered Kildare to himself, as the minutes dragged on and there was still no sign of a return to the attack on the part of the Arabs.

A grim smile flickered at the corners of his dried lips.

"They know they've got us like rats in a trap," he told himself with a shrug. "They can afford to wait, of course. They know it'll be days before the relief can get here. I suppose we've each of us got about one chance in a million of living till reinforcements can turn up."

Again he shrugged.

To the ex-captain of St. Jim's it had all seemed like some strange nightmare, ever since his company had fallen into the ambush when nearing the fort.

He still marvelled at the fact that he had been one of the lucky ones on that occasion. In that desperate fight Kildare had stared death in the face many times before at last he and the remnant of his company, together with the few left of the other company they had come to relieve, and who had sallied out to their aid, had fought their way to the shelter of Fort Chabrol. The casualties since then had reduced their total numbers by half. A hundred men had gained the fort, and only the desperate fifty remained.

Kildare took a dozen clips of cartridges from the man who was going round the wall replenishing them with ammunition. There was plenty of that, fortunately—they were not likely to run short of cartridges, at any rate.

He closed his aching eyes. His head was splitting with the heat; even the wall beside him seemed red-hot. Coloured lights seemed to be swimming in his brain. Out of them there arose, queerly, a picture of the cool playing-fields of St. Jim's, stretching green to the rush-grown banks of the River Rhyll, with the grey old buildings of the school rising behind the ancient elms.

A bitter smile appeared on Kildare's lips. He wondered if St. Jim's would ever learn of his fate, after he had fallen to an Arab bullet, or been cut up by some bronze-faced ruffians' swords, after this fort had fallen.

He opened his eyes wearily. For some moments everything seemed to sway and dance in a shimmering mist. As the mist cleared from his brain something on the distant horizon—a black speck against the brazen sky—suddenly drew his gaze.

He peered out wonderingly. Was it some hallucination brought about by the merciless heat? He passed a hand across his eyes and looked again.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "It can't be—it can't be!"

There was an exclamation from the man in the next embrasure. He was an American, whom Kildare knew and liked—a man named Hardy. His eyes were fastened, glittering, on the same distant speck in the sky. He turned his nut-brown face to Kildare.

"Geel!" he muttered through cracked lips. "Do you see that? It's an airship, I'll swear! Or am I jest dreaming?"

From one of the corporals there had broken a sudden excited shout. He, too, had seen what Kildare and the American legionary had seen. The Frenchman flung out a pointing hand, waving his rifle above his head. Sergeant-Major Kutz appeared from the armoury at the shout, and came thundering up the steps on to the roof.

Already the speck was growing swiftly larger.

A yell broke from the legionaries—cracked, hoarse shouts from parched throats. Glazed eyes were fastened on the approaching dirigible. Faint and far away through the hot air could be heard now the rising hum of its engines.

In a flash Kildare realised the truth.

"The S 1001!" he panted. "It must be!"

From Sergeant-Major Kutz there broke a thunderous laugh. His big figure in its dusty uniform, kepi set rakishly over one eye, stood with legs thrust wide by one of the embrasures, heedless of the possibility of an Arab bullet from the opposite sand dunes.

"An airship!" he bellowed. "It is coming to us, mes amis! It is coming to our rescue! We are saved!"

An echoing cheer rang out round the bullet-pitted walls of Fort Chabrol!

CHAPTER 9.

Down in Flames!

BRILLIANT silver in the sunlight, the S 1001 was bearing down on the little fort at incredible speed.

What the Arab swarms that ringed in the fort thought of the great airship's arrival on the scene the legionaries could only wonder, for there were none of their enemies in sight. The Touaregs were all hidden among the sand dunes and in the near-by oasis.

With roaring engines the S 1001 came dipping down towards Fort Chabrol.

Hoarse, excited cries broke out again from the defenders. They waved their kepis and their rifles, cheering through parched lips, delirious with delight. They had not expected relief to come for days, by which time the chances were that the fort would have fallen to the repeated attacks of the Arab hordes. The sight of the airship had been like a reprieve to men under sentence of death.

Kildare's eyes were gleaming as, with a hand shading his face, he stared up at the great glittering silver shape swooping down to a lower altitude, travelling more slowly now.

"Uncle Napier's on board for a cert!" he breathed.

The engines droned rhythmically above the heads of the yelling legionaries as the S 1001 swept round in an astonishingly narrow curve immediately above the fort. A number of Touaregs had appeared now from the trees of the oasis, their dark faces gazing upwards as if fascinated.

There was a sudden shattering roar among the sand dunes. A great fountain of sand spouted skywards. It was followed by another and another—the sound splitting the silence of the desert with deafening effect.

"Bombs!" panted Hardy, the American.

Kildare drew a deep breath.

Evidently from the airship the rebel tribesmen were visible enough. As the S 1001 slowly circled round, again and again the crash of bombs roared out. A few minutes later the sand dunes could be seen from the walls of the fort to be alive with frightened Arabs making for the oasis.

A sudden rattle of machine-gun fire rang out from the airship.

The sand among the retreating tribesmen could be seen spurting viciously as the hail of bullets fell among them. Many of the brown-faced hordes dropped and lay where they were, sprawled on the sand.

The hoarse cheers of the men in the fort were drowned in the staccato rattle of the machine-guns and the thunderous crash of bombs.

From the oasts a number of Arabs mounted on camels had ridden out of the trees, retreating among the dunes. There was a wild clamour on all sides, and some of the Bedouins were kneeling with their rifles at their shoulders, firing back at the airship. A sudden bugle-call brought the legionaries back to the embrasures.

"Rapid fire!" roared Sergeant-Major Kutz.

A burst of firing broke out from the embattlements of Fort Chabrol.

The Arabs, in their excitement and terror, had forgotten the danger of exposing themselves to the eyes of those within the fort. All their attention had been taken for the time being by the airship. But now they paid dearly for their forgetfulness.

A fresh hail of bullets flew in among them as they exposed themselves to the rifles of the legionaries, in their mad rush to the shelter of the oasis, five hundred yards away from the fort. The trees were crowded with men, and now that the first panic was passing a dangerous storm of bullets was flying up from Arab rifles towards the glittering silver shape of the dirigible.

To have flown high would have meant that bombs dropped from the airship might easily strike the fort; so the S 1001 had had to come low to be effective as a fighting unit.

Kildare, as he refilled the magazine of his rifle, snatched a glance up at the airship. He could see faces looking down, could see the tiny hatch through which the bombs were being dropped upon the tribesmen. Then, just as he was about to put his eye back to the sights of his hot weapon, something he saw riveted his gaze upon the circling dirigible.

A gasping cry broke from Eric Kildare.

A flicker of crimson flame had leapt out near the foremost starboard engine of the S 1001. It licked against the silver skin—and suddenly the envelope had burst into a blazing, smoking patch of fire, spreading with ghastly swiftness. In a few moments the flames were running back beneath the airship. Already the nose was a mass of fire.

From the ramparts of Fort Chabrol there broke a strange cry, like the groan of a stricken man, as the legionaries saw the disaster that had overtaken their ally in the sky.

The rifle-fire from the embrasures died away in a moment, as all eyes were riveted upon the burning airship. Kildare's face was dazed with horror.

The machine-guns had ceased to bark from the airship with an ominous suddenness. The sound of a faint explosion came to the ears of the legionaries—and from the Arab hordes around the fort there burst a wild, fanatical shriek of triumph as the great airship lurched and staggered, and dropped slantingly towards the earth, with flaming envelope.

The legionaries stared dumbly. Never for a moment had they considered the chance of the great dirigible failing in its task of driving the Arabs off in disorderly retreat. The odds against any of the wildly fired bullets from the rebel swarms striking a vulnerable part of the airship had been so remote. But the one-in-a-hundred chance had happened! One of the bullets had evidently struck a petrol pipe, the spark from the impact of metal on metal igniting the petrol instantly—with the result that the S 1001

was now crashing to the sand dunes, a helpless, flaming wreck.

"My heavens!" breathed Kildare.

He felt physically sick. The horror of that sight had numbed his brain. Though he did not for a moment guess that the juniors from St. Jim's were on board the airship he realised how certain it was that Sir Napier Wynter, his uncle, was on board—perhaps his old chum, George Darrell, as well!

The blazing airship struck the dunes barely a hundred yards from the fort.

Instantly there was a rush on the part of the tribesmen towards it. The fate of those on board, who were still no doubt safe enough if they could get clear of the dirigible before the flames from the burning nose swept the whole length of it, would be certain enough if the Touaregs reached them now!

"Rapid fire!" bellowed Sergeant-Major Kutz.

From the walls of the fort there burst the rattle of rifles. Kildare, pressing the trigger and ejecting the smoking cartridge-cases as swiftly as his fingers could work, had no time to glance towards the wrecked dirigible again until he had to cram a fresh clip of ammunition into the magazine. As he did so his eyes leapt towards the airship.

The ex-captain of St. Jim's caught his breath.

A group of running figures was racing stumbly across the burning sands towards the great door of the fort.

Kildare could make out the tall figure of Sir Napier Wynter, the figures of George Darrell and Rex Saville. There were a handful of men in French uniforms, as well as the crew of the airship. But what struck him a blow of staggering surprise was the sight of Tom Merry & Co. and Blake & Co., Talbot and Baggy Trimble, racing towards the fort with the rest.

"Great Scott!" gasped Kildare. "The youngsters!"

Baggy Trimble, even at that distance, could be seen to be whimpering with terror. Tom Merry and Handcock were supporting him on either side as they ran.

And over the sand, to cut them off, a party of Touaregs were rushing with wild yells.

Kildare saw the French soldiers from the airship turn and form a covering party, firing back with their rifles at the pursuing Arabs. And he saw, too, beyond that race for life, the mighty shape of the ill-fated dirigible S 1001 caving in like a pricked bubble as the flames licked along its silvery flanks. He could hear the roar of the flames as they consumed it.

From somewhere near him came the roaring voice of Sergeant-Major Kutz:

"Corporal Cortaz! Take a dozen men! Open the doors below! At all costs, let in those from the airship and keep out those Arab hounds! Quick, man!"

Corporal Cortaz, a grizzled old veteran of the Legion, saluted smartly, and led his men swiftly down one of the narrow flights of stone steps that gave access to the roof from the courtyard. Kildare was one of the dozen. They raced across the blazing courtyard to the great gates set in the thick wall, fastened with huge beams of wood. In a few moments the doors were flung wide.

"On to your knees!" snarled Cortaz, dropping on to one knee himself as he gave the command. "Rapid fire!"

At either side of the gateway, leaving the centre clear for the party from the airship to enter, Kildare and the rest of Corporal Cortaz's little party dropped down and raised their rifles, firing rapidly past the approaching fugitives at their yelling pursuers.

Potts, The Office-Boy!



The Arabs answered their fire with a few haphazard shots. Corporal Cortaz clapped a hand to his shoulder, and another of the legionaries sagged over, shot through the heart. A bullet hummed past Kildare's ear as he jerked out a scorching cartridge-case and rammed the bolt of his rifle home again.

He picked off one of the foremost Touaregs with a cool shot—saw the brown-faced scoundrel toss up his arms and topple sideways into the sand a moment after he had squeezed the trigger.

Only thirty yards or so separated the party from the airship and the sandy gateway where the legionaries knelt, covering their retreat as well as they were able.

As they raced stumblingly forward Kildare saw one of the French soldiers with them collapse face downwards, shot through the back. The next moment the tall figure of his own chum, Darrell of the Sixth, staggered and fell.

Kildare gave a hoarse cry.

Darrell had been at the rear of the racing group, and nobody seemed to have noticed him fall.

The ex-captain of St. Jim's saw his friend writhe and almost stagger up. But the effort was more than the wounded St. Jim's senior could accomplish. He dropped again and lay still, evidently senseless.

Kildare sprang to his feet.

He knew only too well what Darrell's fate would be were his chum to fall into the hands of the Arabs. A death by torture would be his end—a death unspeakable. Kildare would sooner have levelled his own rifle and slain his friend with his own hand than have seen him fall into the hands of these glittering-eyed desert fiends!

With Sir Napier and Colonel Montaigne bringing up the rear, the exhausted fugitives raced in through the gateway—St. Jim's juniors, the crew of the airship, and the French soldiers. The face of Rex Saville was quivering with terror as he almost collapsed in the courtyard.

"Shut the gates!" he panted wildly. "Shut the gates—"

Sir Napier had caught sight of Kildare for the first time; but already the ex-captain of St. Jim's was running out from the fort to where the inert figure of George Darrell lay face-down in the hot sand.

"Eric!"

But Kildare was out of earshot. It was doubtful if he even heard the angry roar from Corporal Cortaz that followed him.

"No. 4413—come back!"

Whether Kildare heard that command or not, it made no difference. This was a case where Kildare felt himself more than justified in disobeying the order of his "sous-officer."

The distance between himself and Darrell was about the same as that between Darrell and the foremost of the oncoming Touaregs. As he ran, the ex-St. Jim's skipper whipped up his rifle, firing from the hip. A bullet took the leading Arab in the leg, and he staggered and fell.

"Good old Kildare!" breathed Tom Merry, watching from the gateway.

There was something almost like a sob in Tom's voice.

Again Kildare fired, and a second of the tribesmen was bowled over, to lie groaning in the sand. Then Kildare was standing over his senseless friend.

As half a dozen brown-visaged scoundrels with fluttering burnouses closed in upon him, long swords in their hands, Kildare raised his rifle to his shoulder, and pressed the trigger. There was a click—nothing more; and with a

sickening sense of hopeless despair he realised that he had used the last cartridge in the magazine.

There was no time to load it with another clip of cartridges; the Touaregs were almost on him.

Already Sir Napier Wynter, grasping the situation, had turned and was racing back to where Legionary No. 4413 was standing astride the still form of Darrell of the Sixth, Corporal Cortaz was at his side, and hot on their heels raced Legionary No. 4095—Hardy, the American.

Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Reginald Talbot stood watching with riveted eyes. But Baggy Trimble had crumpled up, and was lying moaning with fright in the shadow of the high mud wall.

Kildare had swung his rifle up, holding it by the barrel. He whirled it round his head, and an evil-faced Arab, who sprang at him with uplifted sword, was knocked flying. The next Arab suffered a similar fate; he collapsed over the figure of his companion with a cracked skull.

But the others were closing in. Two of them sprang together, one on either side of the gallant figure of Legionary No. 4413—and Tom Merry closed his eyes. He was sure in that moment that Kildare was finished.

But Sir Napier Wynter's automatic barked out at the same instant, and the flying lead found its mark. One of Kildare's attackers reeled back as a result with upflung arms. The other was sent spinning from the butt of Kildare's whirling rifle. And a second later Darrell had been dragged from between his legs by Sir Napier and the American legionary.

"Back, Eric—back! We've got him!" shouted Sir Napier fiercely.

He swung the unconscious St. Jim's senior across his back, and raced stumbling for the gateway of the fort. The American, the French corporal, and Kildare followed, firing as they came. As if by a miracle of Providence, none of the wildly aimed bullets that were hissing round them found a mark, even though one tore the cloth of the corporal's sleeve. A minute later they were in the fort, and the great doors had closed with a crash.

With baffled yells, the Arabs hurled themselves at it. But a withering fire from the parapet above decimated their numbers in a moment, and they broke and ran. A third at least of the wild figures in the white burnouses never reached the safety of the dunes, thanks to the deadly shooting from the fort.

In the stifling little courtyard, Kildare and his uncle gripped hands without a word.

"You are a fool, No. 4413!" snarled Corporal Cortaz, wiping the perspiration from his tanned, grizzled features. "But, mon ami, you are the kind of fool we like in the Legion!"

And with a dry grin he thrust out a gnarled hand and grasped Kildare's.

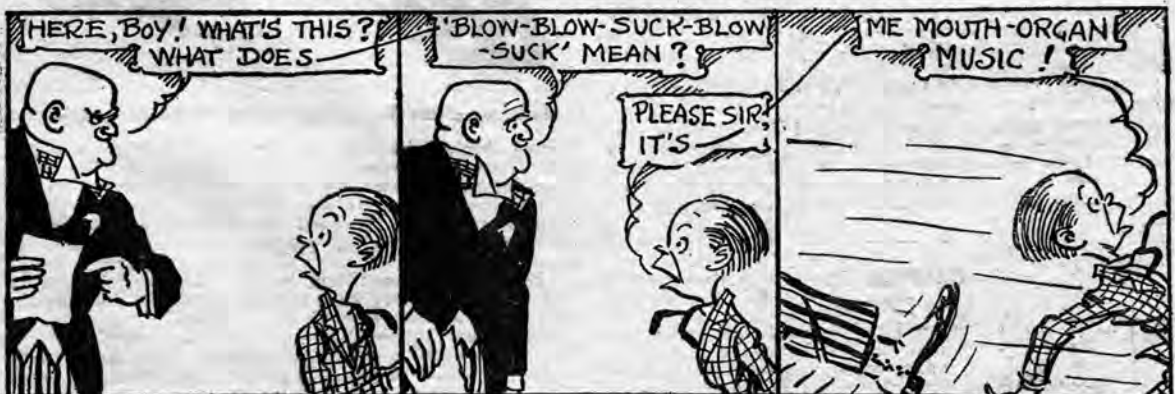
"Bai Jove, that was gwand!" panted Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, in a voice that was rather unsteady. "Thwee cheeahs for old Kildare, deah boys!"

And in the sun-scorched yard of Fort Chabrol, the St. Jim's juniors gave a breathless cheer for their old captain!

Sergeant-Major Kutz had come striding down from the parapet. He halted before Colonel Montaigne, and saluted, with military precision. The wiry little French officer returned the salute.

"I congratulate you, sergeant-major," he said crisply, in French. "The republic is proud of you and your gallant men! If ever we leave this fort alive, France shall know of your brave service. I will take charge myself now."

Musician ?



Let us pray that the reinforcements that are coming to us may arrive in time to keep the flag flying!"

Near them, Kildare and Sir Napier Wynter were kneeling beside the figure of George Darrell. The latter's eyes opened, and he smiled faintly as he recognised the legionary at his side.

"Kildare, old chap—"

"Quiet, old man," said Kildare hoarsely. He smiled a little unsteadily. "You're all right now. A blessed bullet grazed your napper, that's all. You'll have to take things quiet for a little, old boss."

"The—the rotters got in a lucky shot, eh?" muttered Darrell. "Brought down the S 1001 like a blessed pigeon—rotten luck—"

His voice trailed off, and his eyes closed. He sighed faintly. His senses had slipped away again, and he was unconscious in Kildare's arms.

From the roof came the notes of a bugle, sounding the "Cease fire!" The Arabs had retreated to the shelter of the sand dunes around the fort, and there was nothing left to fire at, except the occasional distant flutter of a white burnous among the palms of the oasis.

In the shadow of the mud wall, Baggy Trimble crouched whimpering.

Tom Merry glanced across at him, and smiled grimly.

He could imagine that Baggy was wishing very heartily now that he had never been a stowaway on board the ill-fated airship. It was, perhaps, poetic justice for Baggy to find himself in the besieged fort, out there in the wastes of the scorching Sahara, beneath the pitiless glare of the African sky, instead of safe at home in England!

Tom stared round at the dishevelled figures of the legionaries on the roof, crouching by the embrasures; at the shadowy doorways of the dark rooms that opened on to the courtyard; at the look-out platform, the highest point of the fort, with the flagstaff rising from it on which the tricolour floated lazily in the breathless air. So this was Fort Chabrol!

For a moment a grim thought crossed Tom Merry's mind.

Would this little outpost fort in the desert be the grave of them all—of Sir Napier Wynter and his two nephews, of Darrell, and the juniors and the crew of the airship, and the soldiers with them? Would they ever leave it alive?

Or would Arab lead and Arab steel accomplish its terrible work—leave not one of them alive to tell the tale of the fall of Fort Chabrol?

Despite himself, Tom shuddered.

He was no coward. But he knew only too well that the lives of them all were on the knees of the gods.

His eyes fell on Rex Saville. Kildare's cousin was standing silent and frightened by himself, apart from the others. He was looking across at Eric Kildare, and Tom suddenly realised that the two cousins had not greeted one another—had so far exchanged neither a word nor even a look. In a moment he remembered the queer suspicion that had come to him at Sidi-bel-Abbes, when they had seen that ill-fated company of the Foreign Legion march out into the desert.

Could it be that it was Saville who had been the person responsible for Kildare's wrongful disgrace, and consequent flight from St. Jim's?

Somehow, the conviction was strong in Tom's mind that he was. How else could the two cousins have fallen out so bitterly? Knowing Kildare as he did, Tom realised that the ex-captain would never have publicly accused his own cousin of that rascality.

"It must be that!" he told himself fiercely.

He watched Kildare and Sir Napier carry Darrell into the "caserne" under the direction of Sergeant-Major Kutz. When after a while they returned to the glare of the courtyard, Tom saw that for a moment Kildare's eyes met those of Rex Saville. Instantly Saville's eyes dropped, and he turned away.

"I'm right!" Tom told himself, his last shadow of doubt gone. "Oh, the hound—the hound!"

And then a queer, grim smile touched Tom Merry's lips. A strange, grim jest of Fate to bring together the two cousins, betrayer and betrayed, to face death in one another's company, their secret guessed by none but Tom Merry, there in that little mud fort in the heart of the Sahara!

CHAPTER 10.

The Cousins!

NIGHT had fallen on Fort Chabrol. The full moon streamed down into the little courtyard and on to the castellated walls, where doubled sentries were pacing to and fro. But most of the legionaries were down in the caserne, for the Bedouins of the Sahara,

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though they fear no human foe, nor death itself, have a superstitious fear of moonlight, and do not, in consequence, attack by night. For a few hours, till dawn came, the little garrison was safe.

There had been no further attack made since the wreck of the airship, whose charred remains lay now among the sand dunes, gaunt and weird, skeleton-like.

The St. Jim's juniors had been given a long shed on the cooler side of the courtyard to sleep in—if any side of the little yard could be called cooler than another, with the night as close and stifling as a baker's oven. And not many of them were sleeping. Though Baggy Trimble was snoring at one end of the shed as if he were safe in the Fourth Form dormitory at St. Jim's, and Manners, Digby, and Herries had somehow managed to drop off at last into a fitful doze, the rest of them were lying sleepless, turning restlessly in the suffocating heat.

"Listen to Baggy!" came the voice of Monty Lowther through the darkness. There was a chuckle in Monty's voice. Even their present circumstances could not quite damp the cheery spirits of the humorist of the Shell. "He sounds like a fog-horn! Let's hope he scares off those



Headless of the bullets raining all round him, Kildare supported

blessed Arabs with that snore of his. They're a superstitious lot, Sir Napier was saying. Maybe they'll get the wind up if they hear old Baggy making that row!"

"Chuck something at him, somebody!" growled Blake, with a gasp. He mopped his perspiring face in the darkness. "How the fat porpoise can sleep in this heat beats me!"

"Oh, let him alone!" cut in Tom Merry. "As long as he's asleep we shan't have him babbling with funk at the idea of being stuck through by an Arab."

"That's so," agreed Blake. "Poor old Baggy! It looks to me," he added quietly, "as if that's what's pretty likely to happen to all of us. It'll be days yet before the relief party arrives—"

"Don't let's talk about it," interrupted Manners in a level tone. "While there's life there's hope."

"Heah, heah, Manners, deah boy!"
 "I guess that's the spirit!" came the voice of Cyrus K. Hancock. "After all, even though the airship crashed, buddies, we're some help. The crew of the airship can all hold a gun, and if it comes to that, I guess we can, too. I know I won't let any pesky Arab get fresh with me without showing him what an American can do!" he finished grimly.

"Rather not!" muttered Tom Merry. "We'll sell our lives dearly, if the worst comes to the worst!"

A figure loomed up in the shadowy doorway. It was the



rted the figure of his cousin as the rope was hauled up swiftly from above.

figure of a soldier of the Foreign Legion. They could see the uniform silhouetted against the moonlight. When he spoke, they recognised the voice of Eric Kildare.

The ex-captain of St. Jim's strode into the long shed, peering round.

"I heard you youngsters talking," he said quietly. "Just looked in to tell you to keep your peckers up. We're in a tight corner; it's no good denying it. But we can still give a good account of ourselves, you know. I—I feel I ought to say I'm sorry, too. It's through me that you are here—"

"Oh, rats!" retorted Reginald Talbot swiftly. "How long is it before we can hope for the reinforcements?" he added in a voice that almost concealed the anxiety of that question.

"It is a five-days' march from El Kafali, where they're

coming from," Kildare replied in a strained tone. "They left a couple of days ago. Marching forty kilometres a day, if they can manage that in this heat, they'll be here in three more days."

Three days! There was not a junior who heard those words who did not feel his heart sink.

"Better try to get some sleep, kids," muttered Kildare. "And, once again, I—I'm sorry!"

He strode out into the courtyard before anyone could reply.

Kildare had just been relieved from sentry duty on the roof. But he felt he could not sleep. The caserne was like an oven. He crossed to a shadowed corner near the gates and sat down, removing his kepi, and gulped some water from his water-bottle. As he lowered it from his lips, a dark figure moving in the shadows near him caught his eyes.

It was not one of the legionaries. The next moment he had recognised his cousin, Rex Saville.

Saville, clearly, had not noticed him. Kildare realised that his cousin, unable to sleep, tormented by the heat and his cowardly fears for his own skin, had come out from the room he was sharing with Sir Napier Wynter to pace the courtyard with his torturing thoughts.

"Hallo, Rex!" he said in level tones.

There was a startled gasp from the shadows. Saville had swung round, peering towards him. Kildare rose slowly to his feet, replacing his kepi at a comfortable angle, and crossed towards his cousin, a grim smile playing at the corners of his lips.

"Well?" muttered Saville hoarsely, half defiantly, as his cousin halted before him, surveying him in the gloom, where the high mud wall cast its shadow.

"I never thought I should be seeing you so soon after our meeting at St. Jim's," said Kildare with a bitter grin. "And even after we'd met at Sidi-bel-Abbes I never thought I'd see you yet again so soon!" He laughed. "Poetic justice, eh, Saville? Here we are, cooped up together in this rat-trap of a fort, with death staring us in the face—"

Saville broke in with a frightened, almost sobbing breath. "Scared?" asked Kildare curiously. "Not got much pluck, have you, Saville?" Again a bitter laugh broke from him. "You're better at breaking into other people's desks, and that kind of thing, I seem to remember, than you are at facing death!"

There was contempt in his tone. Saville flinched, and glanced round in a frightened way.

"Not so loud!" he whimpered. "You said you wouldn't tell anyone about—about—"

"About how you deliberately made me appear a cheat, back there at St. Jim's?" snapped Kildare. "No, I shan't tell anyone. Don't be afraid of that. What's the good? Anyway, I dare say we'll all be dead as mutton in another forty-eight hours at most. There are hundreds and hundreds of Touaregs out there, Saville—hundreds of 'em. And they mean to get us. They don't mind how many of 'em get killed so long as they end by killing us!"

Kildare had no intention of tormenting his cowardly cousin by reminding him of the facts of their position. His face softened the next moment, as a whimpering sob escaped from the other's dried lips.

"You hound!" cried Saville almost incoherently. "You are trying to torture me! I can't stand it! I can't die! I can't—I can't!"

He seemed to collapse at the knees. Huddled at his cousin's feet, he covered his face with his hands. His shoulders shook.

"Oh, great Scott!" muttered Kildare.

Though he despised his cousin, and had suffered injury at his hands, he felt a sudden rush of pity for the cowering figure. He dropped on one knee beside him and laid a steady hand on his shoulder.

"Quiet, old chap!" he said in a voice so friendly that Saville glanced at him in sudden, startled surprise. "Pull yourself together! We're all in this. Face it with a stiff upper-lip. We may come out of it yet, safe as houses. And, remember, there are French and Germans and Americans and all sorts of fellows in this fort. Let 'em see the British can face a thing like this as well as anybody!"

"I—I'll try!" moaned Saville, trembling.

"Get in and get some sleep," suggested Kildare quietly. "It'll do you good."

"I can't sleep!"

"Have a shot. You've not got so much to worry about as some, Rex. You're not so badly off as—old Darrell, in there with the wounded." For a moment Kildare's voice seemed to break. "And think of those kids—Tom Merry and the other youngsters. They're facing things like the young bricks they are. Don't let 'em think you're windy!"

Saville rose to his feet and stood quivering. Without a word he turned and slouched back to his quarters. Legionary No. 4413 watched him vanish with a strange look on his tanned face.

There went the fellow who had betrayed him—there went the fellow who had disgraced him utterly in the eyes of St. Jim's, hundreds of miles away in peaceful England! His own cousin!

And yet, despite the long weeks of bitterness that Kildare had known since that night when he had fled from St. Jim's in the dead of night rather than face the contempt of his school—the school he loved so well—somehow, he suddenly realised, he felt no bitterness now towards Rex Saville. All that had died within him. For what did it matter, after all, out here in the burning moonlit wastes of the Sahara?

Kildare stared round at the shadowy walls of the little fort. Beyond those walls the sands were alive with Bedouins—fanatical tribesmen who believed that to die in fighting the white infidels was the sure way to paradise! Men who had no fear of death, and who outnumbered the defenders of Fort Chabrol by more than twenty to one!

Knowing that, what did it matter that his name was stained, since that stain was unjust? For soon—so Kildare could not help but believe—they would all be dead, every human soul in Fort Chabrol, slain by murderous Arab hands!

CHAPTER 11.

In Desperate Straits!

IT was soon after dawn that the tribesmen attacked again. A yell from the sentry on the look-out platform brought the little garrison back to the walls, and a hail of bullets greeted the oncoming Bedouins as they raced towards the fort across the undulating sands in the early sunlight.

After a protest from Colonel Montaigne, Sir Napier Wynter had been given a rifle, and had taken his place at one of the embrasures. So had most of the airship's crew. But Rex Saville stayed below, his face ashen as he listened to the rattle of firing and the whine of bullets across the courtyard, and the occasional cry of a stricken man.

It had been a shock to Sir Napier to find that Saville was an out-and-out coward. But he had said no word to his nephew as he had taken his own place on the roof, to fight with the legionaries against the oncoming odds.

Though Tom Merry and most of the juniors had personally tried to persuade him to the contrary, Colonel Montaigne had flatly refused to allow the British schoolboys and their American chum to join the men at the walls. They could do nothing but sit and listen, safe from the bullets that were ricocheting across the courtyard, their faces strained and set, in the dark, stifling shed.

"It's getting hot, deah boys," muttered Arthur Augustus D'Arcy, as the rattle of rifle fire within and without the walls increased in intensity.

Tom Merry nodded silently.

They could hear the roaring voice of Sergeant-Major Kutz encouraging his men. There came the shriek of a man who had taken a bullet in the throat, and dropped lifeless on the roof as his scream still echoed in the courtyard.

There was a moan of fear from Baggy Trimble.

Baggy, white-faced and shaking, was sitting at the long table in the shed, with his head in his hands. He had never been so terrified in his life before—had never, perhaps, had so much reason for his fear. Tom Merry glanced at him impatiently. Then his face softened, and he dropped a friendly hand on the fat Fourth-Former's shoulder.

"Pull yourself together, Baggy, old chap!"

Baggy raised a clammy face to the captain of the Shell. "Are—are they breaking in?" he gasped, almost incoherently.

"Of course not! Those chaps up on the walls are keeping 'em off," said Tom, with an assurance he could scarcely feel. "It's all right! They'll beat 'em off!"

Tom rose to his feet and crossed to the doorway, where the burning sunlight streamed down.

The noise of the fight was dying down. Evidently the Arabs were retreating again, unable to get past that withering fire from the defenders' rifles. But many of the embrasures were empty now—and near each of the vacant places lay a dead or wounded man.

Tom's eyes searched the walls feverishly. But to his relief he saw both Eric Kildare and his uncle were still alive and unharmed.

There was a step behind him. Monty Lowther had joined Tom in the little doorway. His face was pale.

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"Looks as if they've beaten 'em off all right," said Tom in a strained voice.

Lowther nodded.

"Yes. But at a cost."

Tom Merry did not reply.

It was clear that repeated attacks from the hordes of tribesmen that hemmed in the fort must sooner or later reduce the numbers of the defenders to so few that a time would come when there were insufficient men left to beat the Touaregs off. When that happened Tom could picture the dark, evil figures with claw-like hands and glittering eyes that would come swarming up the walls and enter the fort, to slaughter the handful remaining.

He shuddered.

"And the relief party can't get here for three days," muttered Lowther hoarsely. "It's a pretty slim chance, Tommy."

Tom Merry nodded, with shadowed eyes.

Throughout that day of burning heat and glaring sun the desperate little garrison of Fort Chabrol kept their enemies at bay.

Again and again the tribesmen hurled themselves from the shelter of the sand dunes and the oasis in reckless efforts to gain the walls. Time after time they were driven back, leaving their dead huddled in the sand, till the ground around the fort was thickly littered with still forms.

But though they suffered so heavily, the Bedouins' numbers seemed inexhaustible. And at every attack the Arab bullets took their toll.

When at last the sun sank in a quivering haze behind the rim of the Sahara there were less than thirty men left to defend the walls. Many of those were wounded, too, though not so badly that they could no longer hold a rifle. Kildare had been fighting since midday with a bandaged head, for a ricocheting bullet had grazed his temple. And his friend, Hardy, the American legionary, was dead.

The night dragged past, suffocating and breathless.

In the commandant's room Colonel Montaigne paced restlessly to and fro as the sun rose again upon the bullet-pitted walls. Sir Napier Wynter sat watching him with drawn face.

"I do not like it, mon ami," muttered the gallant little Frenchman, with a gesture. "That boys should risk their lives up there on the walls, fighting grown men—"

He broke off, biting his lips, frowning. Sir Napier nodded.

"It is bad, colonel," he agreed quietly. "But I should permit it, nevertheless. Consider this—we have insufficient of your legionaries left to man the walls; to-day the fort will fall unless fresh hands can be found to hold a rifle. If the fort falls, these boys will be slaughtered in any case—these desert villains know no mercy! It would be a horrible death which these poor youngsters would have to face then. Better far to let them die decently from a merciful bullet, monsieur, fighting with the men!"

"Perhaps you are right," muttered the Frenchman hoarsely.

"I think so, monsieur. Besides, if you allow them to go to the walls it is just possible that we may be able to beat off the Touaregs successfully to the last—until the relief party comes. If so, we shall be saving many lives. For without these boys' aid we could never hope to last out the day."

"That is so," nodded Colonel Montaigne. His face was haggard, his eyes strangely bright. "I see that you are right. Since they are so anxious to fight with the men, these brave boys shall be given rifles at the next attack, and shall help to hold Fort Chabrol and keep the flag flying!"

Sir Napier rose to his feet without a word. His face was set. Only he himself knew what it cost to face the prospect of allowing the boys he had brought from England to fight on the walls of the little sun-baked fort in which they were all so helplessly trapped.

"If one of those youngsters dies—"

Sir Napier muttered the words to himself, standing outside the commandant's room, staring across towards the shed where the juniors were still sleeping. The rising sun left the courtyard in shadow; but it touched with a golden gleam the flagstaff on the look-out platform, and glowed rosily upon the tricolour of France floating above.

"If one of those youngsters dies I can never return to England alive myself," the baronet told himself steadily. "I shall see to it that I die fighting, whatever else may happen!"

CHAPTER 12. The Coward!

IN a shadowy angle of the high mud walls Rex Saville stood listening to the clamour of the attack, half crouching, as if anxious to escape being seen.

But all those at the embrasures of the wall were far too busy with their grim task to notice the slinking figure of the one coward in Fort Chabrol.

The Arabs had not waited long after dawn to renew their persistent mad attacks. At this time Tom Merry & Co., Blake & Co., and Reginald Talbot were on the roof with the men of the Foreign Legion, kneeling with rifles in their hands, joining in that desperate fight for life.

Except for the fat form of Baggy Trimble and the wounded men, Saville alone was not helping to beat off the brown-faced horde!

Baggy had pulled himself together in a most unexpected way. The perpetual shadow of danger and death that hung over all had dulled him, perhaps, to a full realisation of it, after those long, stifling hours within the square mud

Staring up, he saw a grizzled old legionary collapse lifeless—saw another stagger back and fall beside him, mortally wounded. His teeth chattered, despite the stifling heat.

"Oh!" he sobbed. "Oh, my heavens—"

One of the legionaries, jamming a fresh clip of cartridges into the magazine of his rifle, glanced round, down towards where he stood.

It was Eric Kildare.

At sight of his cousin skulking in the shadows the tanned face of the ex-captain of St. Jim's set in grimly contemptuous lines.

Saville could read that look, even at the distance. He shrank back with a frightened mutter, and saw Legionary No. 4413 turn again to the embrasure at which he knelt and resumed firing into the hordes of attackers that were pouring in waves across the sand dunes.

Saville leant against the wall, quivering.

That look from his cousin's eyes had seared his very soul.

He had hoped that it would not be noticed that he was not on the wall playing a man's part. It had been a vain

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walls. He was now making himself really useful with the wounded.

Of the wounded men, only those who were almost insensible, or totally so, had failed to drag themselves back to the embrasures, to continue fighting till they dropped. Darrell of St. Jim's, his head bandaged, was sick and ill; but he was kneeling at an embrasure beside Kildare's, face white and set, firing steadily into the Arab swarms that encircled the fort with a yelling ring of hundreds of men.

Infuriated by their losses of the previous days, the Touaregs were making a more desperate attempt than ever before to gain the walls.

While hidden snipers from the oasis and the sand dunes poured bullets towards the fort, a horde of others had hurled themselves across the intervening space. Some had already reached the foot of the walls, only to be shot down from above as they tried to swarm up on one another's shoulders. Screams and yells came to the ears of Rex Saville from the Arab swarms, striking cold terror into his heart, bringing a clammy sweat to his ashen face.

hope! As his glassy eyes ran shrinkingly along the opposite parapet, where the St. Jim's juniors were mixed with the men of the Legion, he saw the kneeling figure of Tom Merry glance round for a moment and catch sight of him—saw the contempt that came into Tom's face as it had done into Kildare's.

Tom, cramming a clip into his rifle, glanced at the fellow beside him, saying something. It was Jack Blake. Blake, evidently as a result of Tom's words, glanced round a moment later to where Saville was.

They were talking about him, it was clear, despising him! Saville felt a burning shame surge through him. Even the juniors were playing a man's part—while he skulked in the safety of the courtyard!

A coward! Yes, he knew he was a coward!

His eyes were burning strangely as he watched the few juniors in sight, rifles to their shoulders, working away feverishly at helping to beat off the Arab attack. Bullets were whining over their heads, thudding against the parapet.

Tom Merry, Blake, Arthur Augustus D'Arey, Monty

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Lowther, and Hancock—they were all visible from where he was pressing himself against the shadowy wall. They had scarfs tied round their heads to protect them from the blazing sun above, their faces were burnt and streaming with perspiration as they fired rapidly, fingers manipulating the bolts of their rifles as coolly as though at rapid-fire practice with the O.T.C., at far-away St. Jim's.

They were facing death as pluckily as the oldest veteran of the Foreign Legion, Saville told himself bitterly. While he—

Even as he watched them, with a queer envy, he saw Monty Lowther reel back.

A bullet from the sand dunes had grazed his head, stunning him.

Swiftly Tom Merry laid down his rifle and knelt beside his wounded chum. He dragged Monty into the shadow of the castellated wall, and bathed his temple with water from the water-bottle slung at his side. There was nothing more that he could do. After a minute or so, with his chum lying beside him, Tom Merry snatched up his rifle once more and continued firing down through the embrasure.

A look of sudden, desperate resolve came into the weak, handsome face of Rex Saville.

The sight of those juniors fighting with such reckless courage had brought home to him how despicable his own cowardice was. Even his cousin's contemptuous look had failed to nerve him sufficiently to throw off his terror; but the sight of Tom Merry & Co. with the legionaries on the opposite wall had succeeded in doing so.

"I—I'll do it!"

Saville staggered from the wall towards one of the flights of steps that led up to the roof. His knees were shaking under him as he stumbled up it. Once he nearly turned back. But he nerved himself with a heroic effort, and came at last to the broad, flat space behind the top of the wall.

A row of kneeling figures, and three crumpled shapes of dead legionaries met his gaze. The rattle of firing echoed in his ears as he staggered towards one of the dead men. Not till he had taken the rifle from the cold fingers and turned to an empty embrasure did Saville see that one of the kneeling figures near was watching him. His Uncle Napier.

"Rex!" he heard Sir Napier breathe. "Good fellow! Well done!"

There was a light in his uncle's eyes that alone made his supreme effort of courage worth while to the coward who had seen nothing but contempt in the eyes of his companions for so long.

Saville picked up a dead legionary's kepi and thrust it on his head. He dropped on to one knee, thrusting the rifle out through the embrasure. There was a full bandolier lying near him, and he crammed a clip into the empty magazine.

Peering along the rifle, he could see that a second hot attack was being launched from the surrounding dunes. Thick swarms of men, in fluttering burnouses, were flying across the sand towards the fort.

He pressed the trigger of his rifle, and the butt kicked against his shoulder as the bullet sped on its grim mission into the brown-faced horde.

A wave of hot excitement thrilled through him, setting his blood pulsing through his veins. His eyes were alight, and in a moment his terrors had fled.

Working the bolt and trigger with swift fingers, Rex Saville forgot his own danger as though it had been no more than an evil dream. All he was conscious of was that he was playing a man's part with the rest. No one should call him a coward again, either by word or look!

Rex Saville had found himself!

The last bullet in the magazine flew on its way. He jerked out the smoking cartridge-case, snatched another clip from the bandolier, and thrust the cartridge home.

Below, one or two of the attackers had reached the wall. But they were in insufficient numbers to have any chance of swarming up it, and they were shot down by the men above. Other evil-faced villains were still swarming across towards the wall, however, and there was not a moment's rest for those at the embrasures.

Crack, crack!

Saville's rifle spoke twice, and then again. He was about to press the trigger once more when a sudden burning pain seared his chest. He staggered, with a scream that his own ears did not hear, and in that moment he knew that a bullet had found him.

The rifle clattered from his hands. He tottered forward, and collapsed through the narrow embrasure, hurtling senseless to the sand below.

From Sir Napier Wynter there broke a cry of breathless horror as he saw the crumpled figure of his nephew lying at the foot of the bullet-gashed wall—outside the fort, in the path of the oncoming hordes!

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CHAPTER 13.

Atonement!

"MY heavens!"

Sir Napier stared down with horror-stricken eyes.

The Touaregs were closing in on the fort with fiercer determination than ever, and in thicker numbers. Some of them would be certain to reach the foot of the walls, despite the hail of bullets that had greeted the appearance of this fresh wave from the sand dunes. And Sir Napier knew only too well what fate would meet Rex Saville, lying senseless outside the fort, were these desert fiends to get to him.

Screaming and yelling, the brown-faced desert fighters were closing in rapidly.

The pitifully little handful of defenders were firing into the advancing swarms coolly and steadily. Nearly every bullet found a mark. But there were so few defenders left that their foes could certainly not be beaten off now that they had launched an attack in such huge numbers.

It looked as though the fort might fall at almost any minute.

But Sir Napier Wynter's mind, at any rate, was filled for the moment with thoughts of his nephew, lying there insensible in the path of the attack.

He sprang back from the wall, glancing round swiftly for Sergeant-Major Kutz. The Austrian was not far away, rifle in hand. Sir Napier seized him by the arm.

"A rope!" he barked. "I must get a rope! I am going down to him—to my nephew—"

"You are mad!" panted Kutz. "There is no sense in sacrificing yourself! You would never save him!"

"I mean to try!"

Sir Napier's face was set like stone. But his expression changed as he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to find the tall figure of his other nephew, Eric Kildare, standing at his side with blazing eyes.

"You shall not go!" cried Kildare hoarsely. "I'm going down to him! Hold the rope!"

Already Kildare had got possession of a long, thick rope that was coiled over his arm. He flung it through an empty embrasure, and it snaked down towards the sand below. On all sides, the staccato rattle of rifle-fire made a grim chorus in the sunlight.

Sir Napier looked into Kildare's eyes, and saw that his nephew's mind was made up.

"Very well," he said quietly. "You go, Eric." He silently gripped his hand. He knew only too well that the chances were that Kildare would never return to the fort alive. "I don't know what the trouble was between you two fellows; there was something wrong, I know. But this wipes all that out. I know that's why you want to go—"

Kildare nodded. He did not speak.

"It is madness!" muttered Kutz. "But go, if you must!"

He seized the end of the rope, helping Sir Napier in the task of holding it, as Eric Kildare swung out through the embrasure, and began climbing swiftly down towards the inert figure below.

Bullets thudded against the wall on either side of him as he swung down hand over hand. But though the Arabs were firing at him, their aim was wild, and he reached the burning sand in safety.

Saville's was not the only still form huddled under the wall. The crumpled figures of dead Bedouins lay near him. Kildare raced across the few yards that separated him from his cousin, and bent swiftly over him.

"Rex!" he breathed.

He saw his cousin's eyes open. They were glazed in a way that turned Kildare's heart suddenly cold.

Saville recognised him. His lips moved, and a faint smile appeared on his handsome face.

He tried to speak. But the words were too faint; Kildare could not hear them, with the crack of rifles ringing out perpetually above his head, as the defenders of the fort strove desperately to keep back the advancing Arabs who were pouring across the dunes towards the fallen white man and his reckless would-be rescuer.

If once those savage figures reached Kildare and Saville, the two cousins would be cut to pieces horribly.

For an instant Kildare stood with his shadowed eyes fixed on the ragged advancing line—a tall, lithe figure in a dishevelled uniform, head bandaged beneath his kepi, face grim and unafraid. Then he stooped and seized his cousin in his arms.

A wild yell arose from the Arabs as they saw their hoped-for prey trying to escape them. They came on all the harder, leaping over the dead bodies of other Bedouins in their path. But already Kildare was swinging up towards the embrasure from which he had descended, clinging to the rope with legs and one arm, supporting the

figure of his cousin in his other arm, as the rope was hauled swiftly in by willing hands above.

A rain of bullets poured towards him, as the baffled Touaregs halted and raised their rifles to their shoulders. The ex-captain of St. Jim's felt a bullet tear the calf of his leg, felt another graze his cheek, and another strike his shoulder with a moment of burning agony. It was the shoulder of the arm that supported Saville, and he felt it weaken and go numb. But he held on somehow—and then his almost senseless cousin was taken from him, and he found himself collapsing or to the roof of the fort, safe behind the castellated wall.

He put a hand to his wounded shoulder, and his fingers came away stained with blood.

He heard a hoarse, wild yell. It came from Tom Merry, not far away, and it was taken up by the rest of the juniors and the legionaries as well. But it scarcely penetrated Kildare's brain as he dropped beside Rex Saville, a burning anxiety at his heart, his own wounds forgotten.

He remembered too vividly the glazed look that he had seen in Saville's eyes, there at the foot of the scarred mud wall. Did it mean—

"Eric!"

Saville, lying on the hot roof in the narrow strip of shadow flung by the top of the wall, was smiling as his eyes met his cousin's. He held out an unsteady hand. Kildare gripped it, and found that it was strangely cold.

"Rex, old chap—"

"You—you went down to—to save my life," muttered Rex Saville in a low, queer voice. He surveyed the tanned face bent down to his own in a strange way. "After—after all the wrong I have done you! Gad, Eric! What wouldn't I give to have done a thing like that before I—pass out!"

"What do you mean?" cried Kildare almost roughly. "You're all right, old man! You're not going to—to—"

The words choked in his throat. Saville smiled and shook his head.

"It's no good telling me that," he answered huskily. "I'm done for."

Sir Napier was kneeling beside him, too. The three of them were alone, there on the roof of the sun-baked little fort. The handful of legionaries and the juniors from St. Jim's had returned to their desperate task, and rifle-fire was crashing out from each of the four walls as the tribesmen swarmed around the fortress.

"Uncle Napier—"

Saville's voice was strangely quiet as he turned his head a little, glancing at his uncle.

"What is it, Rex?" answered Sir Napier hoarsely.

"There's something I want to tell you before I—while I can. When you get to England—if you lick these Arabs—tell Dr. Holmes—"

His voice trailed off weakly. With an effort he gathered his failing strength together.

"You never believed Eric guilty, did you?" he muttered. "That exam business—he was innocent all right. That copy of the question-paper that made it seem as if he were guilty—I was responsible for that! I put it in his desk."

"My heavens!" breathed Sir Napier. "Rex, what do you mean? You can't mean that—"

"I do. Pretty foul of me, wasn't it? I—I'm sorry now I did it. But—but—"

Again his voice trailed off. His eyes closed, but opened again weakly. He smiled, his eyes returning to Kildare's face. His cold fingers fastened on to his cousin's hand.

"Well, that's off my chest. If you get out of this, old man, your name will be cleared all right. It's good to know that. You always were a better chap than I was. I suppose that's why I was fool enough to hate you. I don't now, anyway—now it's too late—"

A ricocheting bullet passed terribly near them, but the rifle fire was dying down. Despite their desperate onslaught, the Arabs had found the gallant little garrison too full of fight, even yet, despite their losses. They were retreating now in wild disorder across the dunes, to gather again for a fresh attack. A hoarse cheer followed them from the parched lips of the defenders of Fort Chabrol.

"They've beat 'em off again?" queried Saville. "Good-bye, Eric, old chap! Forgive me if you can. I—I'm going now. Funny, isn't it, you an' me together out here in this forsaken spot? Never thought we'd—"

His head fell back, and his eyes closed. Kildare lowered

the inert form, and his own eyes were misty. Sir Napier's hand was at Saville's heart. His eyes met those of the ex-captain of St. Jim's.

"He's—gone!" he said thickly. "Poor chap!"

Rex Saville had died with a smile upon his lips, knowing that he had at last righted the wrong that he had done to Eric Kildare.

The bugle sounded the "Cease fire." There was not an Arab left in sight around the fort, save the dead. They had retreated to the shelter of the dunes and the oasis. Colonel Montaigne turned to the man on the look-out platform.

"They have vanished?" he cried in French.

The legionary on the platform saluted.

"Yes, my colonel. They have gone back to their holes, like the rats they are. There is not one in sight." He stared round, and suddenly his gaze became riveted, fastened on the north-east. "Sacre bleu!" he gasped.

Far out on the hazy horizon his keen eyes had detected a swirl of dust. He stared intently, and suddenly a wild shout broke from him. He whipped off his tattered kepi and waved it madly above his head.

"Heaven be praised! The relief party is in sight! They are making for the fort! We are saved!"

The regiment of Spahees, who had come to the relief of Fort Chabrol, arrived there in due course, to find not an Arab in sight. Touaregs had seen them coming, and had decamped on their camels at top speed in their ragged hundreds!

They had arrived hours before they were expected, having come from Tokuto, not El Kafali, as had been expected, and Tokuto was more than a day's journey nearer. But they had certainly arrived in the nick of time. Another twenty-four hours and they would have come to find Fort Chabrol a charred ruin, littered with the bodies of its gallant defenders.

As it was, though Monty Lowther and Blake and Talbot were wounded, as well as Darrell and Kildare, not one of the St. Jim's party had died in the fighting, with the sole exception of Rex Saville.

But though he had died he had cleared his honour, and in so doing had lifted the shadow that had hung so blackly over his cousin's name. He had made atonement.

When, nearly three weeks later, Tom Merry & Co. and the rest of the little party that had left England in the S1001 returned home to St. Jim's—the school having reassembled during their absence—the whole story had reached England before them, and St. Jim's was thrilling with the news. They had an amazing reception, the whole school turning out, from the Head downwards, to welcome them back, safe and sound, despite the dangers they had passed through under the brazen sky of Algeria.

But even their welcome was nothing compared with that of Eric Kildare when the stalwart skipper returned some time later to his old school.

He had been rewarded for the part he had played in the defence of Fort Chabrol by a Croix de Guerre, as had the other legionaries who had taken part in that desperate siege. And, further, in grateful recognition of the fact that Sir Napier had put the S1001 at the service of the French authorities, although it had failed to save the fort itself, the French General Staff had granted Legionary No. 4413 an honoured discharge from the Legion, although his period of service was not over by many years.

Fortunately for Sir Napier Wynter, the S1001 had been fully insured by London companies, and so there was not ruination staring him in the face, as the juniors had at first imagined. There was nothing bar the sad memory of Rex Saville's brave death to mar their delight when welcoming Kildare back to St. Jim's.

He resumed his old position as captain of the school at once, since Darrell willingly resigned his own claim. And in the election that followed, not even Gerald Knox dared put up in opposition to Eric Kildare of the Foreign Legion!

THE END.

(By Jove, you fellows, Tom Merry & Co. had a narrow shave that time! There's another thrilling yarn next week when you will meet "The Man from Angel Alley!")

DON'T MISS:

"THE MAN FROM ANGEL ALLEY!"

NEXT WEEK'S THRILLING YARN OF ST. JIM'S



Now, you fellows, rally round and help to defeat the Oracle! Remember, "A Failure a Day Knocks a Shilling Off His Pay!" Join my great economy campaign!

IT was very snappy this morning, chums, when I hoisted the old whiskers from under the bed-clothes, and I was thankful I gave up shaving years ago. No fun, shaving, this weather, believe me. Even the office-boy has decided to wait until the warm weather sets in, before he starts experimenting with his brother's razor.

As I was saying, it was very snappy on the wrong side of the eiderdown, and the Ed. was snappy, too, when I arrived at the office, and so was the dog. It seems to me that the more we are together, the snappier we'll be. The old Ed. didn't waste any time sending for me. "Come in, Whiskers," he bellowed sweetly, "and bring your brains with you." When I got into the sanctum he yelled out:

"Now, my lad, have you ever seen a sea-serpent?" He fired this at me so suddenly that I couldn't remember whether I had or I hadn't, so I said I wasn't sure. "Have you ever been on the sea?" he asked. "Serpently I have," said I—"I mean, certainly, sir; but as for seeing sea-serpents—well, what a thing to ask an elderly, respectable old chap like me first thing in the morning."

"Come, come," said the Ed., "a Plymouth reader is asking us whether there are such things!" I immediately tried to think of everything I knew about sea-serpents. "Well, sir," I began, "the old Norsemen believed that there were sea-serpents—they called them the 'So-Orm's'—and these creatures were said to be 200 feet long, and in the habit of rising out of the water and snapping up odd sailors here and there from the decks of the ships. Of course, that wants a bit of swallowing, sir, what do you think?"

"The sailors wanted a bit of swallowing, no doubt," snapped the Editor. "I suppose these sea-serpents never actually existed?"

"I wouldn't say that," I told him, looking very profound. "All kinds of theories have been put forward to explain the appearance of sea-serpents, and some people have even gone so far as to suggest that the bold mariners who reported seeing them had had a nightmare or something, while other folk said they were just pulling our legs. A school of porpoises swimming one behind the other might easily be mistaken, at a little distance, for some sort of snake-like monster swimming through the water. An uncle of mine, who used to work on a whaler catching whales, once told me of how when he was in the Pacific the crew saw a sea-serpent swimming through the water. The captain of the whaler sent some men out to harpoon it, but instead of harpooning it, they brought it back with

sea, it would look like an immense snake. Sometimes the Gulf Stream carries these pieces of alga across to Europe, and that explains why people see sea-serpents when they're bathing at Yarmouth."

"Here's a query from Harry Fox, of Falmouth. He says that a chum of his tells him that at his school they don't use a cane, they use a ferule, and he wants to know how they manage that? He always thought a ferule was the metal cap on the end of an umbrella."

"I'll make that all quite clear for our friend Harry," I told the Ed. "The metal cap on the end of an umbrella or walking-stick is a ferrule—two R's, you understand, but a ferule—only one R—is a flat piece of wood like a wide ruler, used in some schools for punishments. In the old days it was a cane made from the stalk of a plant called the 'ferula' or giant fennel. Rather a painful subject, Ed.; what's the next query?"

"The next teaser is a question about flying-fish, flying-foxes, and flying-squirrels." "But that's three questions, Ed.," I remarked, "and that's not fair. When you engaged me you didn't tell me I'd have to answer three questions all at one go."

"If you don't answer these you will go!" snapped the Ed.; so I forthwith got the old brain to work, and began:

"The flying-fish, sir, is sometimes a kind of gurnard and sometimes a king of herring. In flight, the fins of flying-fish do not flap up and down like a bird's, but remain still."

"How fast can they go, Whiskers?" asked the Ed.

"Much faster than a ship, sir, but usually not farther than about 500 feet at a time. They've been said to leap on to the decks of ships, but this only happens when they are carried up by a rough wind. The flying-fox, as it's called, is really a bat. In the day-time this curious creature hangs head downwards in the trees, and looks like a bunch of withered leaves or fruit. In the night-time they wake up and get busy, eating any fruit they can find. In some parts of the East the natives catch them while they're asleep in the trees, take them home, and cook them."

"Doesn't sound too good to me," said the Ed. "What do they cook the bats in—batter?"

"No, sir, butter's better for bats, believe me. You may not think so, Ed., but these bats taste like hare, so I've been told. The natives cook them in spices."

"A chap must be off his bat to eat one," growled the Ed. "Now, what about the flying squirrels?"

"They are very much like ordinary squirrels in appearance," I explained, "excepting that they have a parachute-

like arrangement stretching between their fore claws and their bodies. This enables them to make flying leaps from the tops of trees to the ground. And now, sir, if you don't mind, I'll be flying away for a bit of lunch."

"That's a good one," said the Ed.

"It's quite true, anyway," said I.

"On the coasts of America there is a particular kind of seaweed, known as alga, which grows to a length of 400 feet, and has a large bladder head. If one of these huge lumps of seaweed got washed out to

"You wait a minute, my lad," said the Ed. "I've another little job for you. Who is our best medium-paced bowler?"

"In my opinion, George Geary."

"Can you tell Charles Reed what cowry shells are like?"

"Cowry shells are often mentioned in yarns about savages," I told the Ed. "They are small shells about half an inch long, white outside and blue inside, and have been used a great deal among primitive tribes in place of money. If you were editing the GEM in the Fiji Islands, for instance, you'd pay me in cowry shells every time I answered a teaser from one of the readers."

"Now, can you tell a Northampton reader why the man who steers a boat is called the 'cox'?"

"Cox is short for coxswain, which is pronounced cox'n and should be spelt cockswain, a cock being a small boat. In the Navy the coxswain is a petty officer, he being the officer in charge of the ship's boat and crew."

"A reader who lives at Sherwood, in Nottingham, wants to know whether a hypnotist could hypnotise himself by looking at his own reflection in a mirror?"

"No, sir," said I, "I don't think that would be possible, though I know some people come over queer when they see themselves first thing in the morning."

"I expect that's why you gave up shaving, isn't it, Whiskers?" gurgled the Ed. "You couldn't stand the strain of seeing your clock every morning. Well, well, I'm not surprised. Now then, Arthur B., a Macclesfield reader, wants you to tell him how cartoons of footballers are drawn?"

"With a pencil and a piece of india-rubber, I expect," said I. "Most cartoonists study their subjects very closely before drawing them, and very often use photographs to help them get the likeness. The questions seem very easy to-day, sir."

"Yes," the Ed. remarked. "None of our readers seems to be able to baffle you, my lad. What's a dirk? Can you answer that one for George Gill, of Golders Green?"

"Easy," said I. "A dirk is a dagger, worn by Highlanders as an ornament in their dress."

The old Ed. frowned when he found that I was answering up without hesitation. "No chance of cutting down your money, I can see," he growled. "The only thing I can reduce is your whiskers. One of our readers, Willie Samways, has been to Madame Tussaud's waxwork exhibition. He wants to know, he says, whether Madame Tussaud is still alive, and why our whiskery friend, the Oracle, is not on show there. Perhaps you can explain these points?"

"I can, sir. Madame Tussaud, who founded the famous waxworks that bear her name, died eighty years ago. She was the wife of a Frenchman, and came to London during the days of Napoleon. There's no doubt, sir, that I shall appear there in time, but up to the present no one has done a wax model of me."

"Don't you believe it," snorted the Editor. "If they stuck you in the wax-works all the other models would melt."

"All right," said the Ed., "that'll do for to-day. You can take your whiskers for a walk."

ANOTHER SMASHING FOOTBALL AND FLYING YARN!

YOUNG THUNDERBOLT!

And his Team of Butterflies



By
ARTHUR S. HARDY.

CHAPTER 1.

Clif Steals a March!

POLICE-SUPERINTENDENT ROBINS handed in the result of his thorough investigation into the burning down of the hangars at the Butterfly Airplane Works with an air of finality.

"There isn't any doubt in my mind that the fire was started by an incendiary," he said, leaning over the desk and looking intently at Mr. Harland Jackson, inventor, designer, and builder of the famous Butterfly airplanes. "but there isn't even half a clue as to his identity, and unless someone 'squeals,' I don't see how we are going to lay hands on the rascal, Mr. Jackson."

"I could do that myself inside one minute," said the airplane inventor.

"Meaning that you would arrest Garside, who is employed at your works?"

"Yes."

"The man's a shifty rascal. His cousin, Snarler, who used to train the City football team, is in gaol awaiting trial for attempting to destroy your Mayfly waterplanes. I haven't must doubt about his being concerned in the fire, sir, but he's baffled us at every turn. Can't you get rid of him?"

"My son Clifford thinks it much better to keep him on at the works. We can avoid trouble with the other hands that way and we can keep an eye on him."

"I think you're right, sir. If the man is guilty, he'll give himself away sooner or later. We've got him marked down, and we shall continue to comb for evidence."

The hangars attached to the trial ground or aerodrome at the Butterfly Works had been destroyed by fire last Friday night. Instantly suspicion had attached itself to one of the hands, a man named Garside, who was a clever workman and a capable pilot; but when the police had visited his lodgings, within a few minutes of the outbreak of the fire, they had found him in bed, and his landlady had declared that he had only gone out once earlier in the evening, and had not been away from the house more than a few minutes. The hangars had been burned right out, destroying a fleet of Butterfly Minor planes which

were housed in them, and the Butterflies football team, which was playing in the City colours, had been obliged to fly to Southchester in a giant Albatross Butterfly plane, instead of making the journey in the fleet of Minors, which had been their original intention. Harland Jackson saw in the whole ugly business an attempt to damage the reputation of his famous Butterfly plane, and he believed that the Clipper Airplane Manufacturing Company was concerned in it.

"But we've got no proof, Clif," Harland Jackson said to his son, as soon as Superintendent Robins had left the office, "and I don't see how we are going to get any, unless Snarler, who is in gaol, should change his mind and squeal."

"He'll never squeal, guv'nor," Clifford Jackson spoke with absolute conviction. "All the same, I'll bet Clippers paid him handsomely for his attempt to burn the Mayfly waterplanes, and I'm certain his Cousin Garside is in Clippers' pay."

Clif's father paced the room impatiently.

"Yet we can't do a thing!" Robins said just now that Garside has been spending money like water. He earns, roughly an

average of £7 a week at the works. He's just bought a car which cost him £225, and he paid cash. Told Robins he won the money betting. How can we get him?"

Clif Jackson swung himself off the arm of the club chair in which he had been lounging and glanced at his wrist-watch.

"We've got to be patient," he said. "Now, if you'll excuse me, pater, I'll get along. I've got an appointment with the editor of the Steeltown 'Daily Telegraph' at eleven."

Harland Jackson's eyes widened in astonishment, then he laughed.

"You will have your little joke, Clif," he cried. "As if the editor of the Steeltown 'Daily Telegraph' would come all those miles to interview you at the Butterfly Works! Besides, what would a kid like you have to talk about? Football, I suppose. 'Young Thunderbolt Tells Our Readers

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KIDNAPPED!

They've caught the Kid napping this time, but he isn't called Young Thunderbolt for nothing!

How to Score Goals.' 'Young Thunderbolt on Why it is Safer to Take a Football Team by Air than to trust to a Train.'

The curly-haired boy reached for the door, and turned with a grin after opening it.

"I'm going to tell the editor all about your new Helicopter Butterfly Airplane. He's not coming to me. I'm going over to him. I'm going to give him a lot of dope. There'll be two columns at least about your new invention in to-morrow's early edition, and the Butterflies will get another boom."

"Here, but— Hi!" shouted Harland Jackson, as the door slammed.

When he reached the show-rooms, where Sandy McFarlane was showing some clients the superior points of the Butterfly planes, Harland Jackson saw his son's heels vanishing through a door which opened on to the flying ground. By the time he was half-way across the aerodrome, Clif was climbing into the cockpit of his Butterfly Minor.

"Now, listen, Clif!" panted Mr. Jackson, as he looked up. "You mustn't talk a lot of rot to the editor of the Steeltown 'Daily Telegraph.' I—"

Clif started the machine off, and as he taxied away waved his hand over the side of the fuselage.

"Can't stop, dad!" he cried. "Tell the mater I'll be home to tea."

The next moment the dandy little air-bus was rising into the wintry sunshine, which struck fire out of its bright enamel and burnished metal, and a few seconds later it was but a speck in the sky. Mr. Harland Jackson swung round on Hank Parsons, the pilot who acted as trainer to the Butterflies football team.

"What the devil did you want to start that engine for?" he stormed. "Surely you must have heard me shouting?"

"Young Thunderbolt told me to, sir," answered Hank.

"Told you, be dashed! It seems to me that boy of mine does exactly what he likes with the lot of you!"

"It's his own airplane, sir."

"And who gave it to him?" raved Clif's father. "I did, on his birthday. And now he's going to make a fool of himself by pulling the leg of the editor of one of the most distinguished newspapers in the country!"

Hank smothered a laugh and set his lips. "I wouldn't worry about Mr. Clifford if I were you, sir," he said. "I'll admit he's only a schoolboy, but he's got his head screwed on all right, he has. A boy who can get himself nicknamed Young Thunderbolt because of the way he can score goals, and who can run a League team which wins almost every game it plays, when the City started with thirteen consecutive losses, before the Butterflies team took their place, can be left to look after himself, I reckon."

Mr. Harland Jackson opened his lips to answer, but on second thoughts turned and walked away without another word.

CHAPTER 2. The Night Watch I

THE thought of his son talking a lot of hot air to the editor of a celebrated daily newspaper sent a cold shiver down Mr. Jackson's spine.

He did not doubt Clifford's cleverness, but, after all, he was only a schoolboy, lacking in experience. No doubt the editor would be discreet. Clif talk to him about the new Helicopter airplane, indeed! Why—

Finding concentration on his work disturbed by the thought of Clif's visit to the editor of the newspaper, Mr. Jackson decided to ring up the paper, and within a few minutes was through. A voice answered him in somewhat muffled tones. For two minutes by the clock Harland Jackson talked and ended with:

"That's all right, then, as long as you understand that you are to publish no article dealing with the Butterfly planes unless it is authoritatively sanctioned by me."

"Certainly!" said the voice at the other end of the wire. Then came a muffled laugh, which sounded very familiar—his son Clif's laugh.

One often hears another person speaking when one rings up on the telephone. Mr. Jackson signed some letters, wished his secretary good-night, and motored home in the dusk. As he neared his house, which lay in spacious grounds some distance from the town, an airplane sped by overhead. Its head and tail lights winked at him as it circled and then swooped. It was Clif coming home.

Clif's father went out to the shed in the grounds and found Clif folding up the wings of his plane and running it into the hangar on its tail trolley.

"What did you say to that editor?" demanded his father.

"I gave the Butterfly planes a fine ad.," replied the boy, looking radiant after his rush through the air.

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"H'm! I thought I'd ring him up and put a stop to any nonsense," growled Mr. Jackson, who failed to notice the twinkle in his son's eyes.

In the morning, just before breakfast, Mr. Harland Jackson spread open his copy of the Steeltown "Daily Telegraph," and there, smiling out of the centre page, was his son's pleasing face. At the head of the double columns which contained the interview big black type stated:

"Future Of Flying!"

Great New Helicopter Airplane! Young Thunderbolt, The Flying Footballer, Reveals Great Secret Of The Butterfly Works!"

Clif's father looked at it, rapidly gathered in the substance of some of the earlier paragraphs, and glared at his son.

"How did this get in?" he snapped, slapping the page with the back of his hand.

"Oh, a secretary took down what I said. I sanctioned it, and the editor printed it," replied the boy.

"But I told the editor over the phone that nothing was to go through without my approval."

"I know. But the editor gave the receiver to me, and I told him it was all right."

"You eat your breakfast quickly, young 'un," said Clif's father, "and keep out of my sight for the rest of the day, or—I wouldn't have had any of this stuff printed in the paper for worlds."

Young Thunderbolt emptied a cup of tea and grinned.

"It's too late to stop the edition now," said he—"and think of the ad. your planes will get, guv'nor."

His father did not answer. His eyes were fixed upon the paper.

"The plans of this wonderful new Butterfly airplane are kept in the safe in my father's office at the Butterfly Works," Clif had said; and the paper had printed:

"I cannot do more at the moment than say that when this airplane is ready it will revolutionise flying. It will enable the town dweller, with only a moderate-sized garden, to keep a plane in little more space than is required for a tool shed. He will be able to run out his plane, unfold its wings, and have his air-bus ready for flight within the space of a few minutes. Then he will climb into the cockpit and soar straight up into the air and over the roof tops. Confining brick walls or oak fences will not hamper him, and by a clever arrangement of controls he will be able, on his return, to drop sheer down on to the croquet or tennis lawn, even in the teeth of a raging gale."

Purple in the face, Harland Jackson shook the paper at his son.

"And you told them that!" he roared.

"What's the matter, pater?" said the boy, as he sipped at a cup of scalding tea. "Nobody is likely to turn out a Helicopter plane of that sort for another twenty years! Think of the ad."

His father would not trust himself to reply, but set off for the Butterfly Works by car, in a towering rage, a few minutes later. He did not want any of his plans for building new airplanes to be disclosed just yet—least of all like that. His Helicopter plane was as yet a dream.

Clif had not come near the offices that day. He was down at the City football ground talking to Hank Parsons, who had been putting the Butterflies team and the City's professionals—who were for the time being acting as City Reserves—through their paces.

"Hank," he said, "you saw the interview in the 'Telegraph'? Well, the chief is angry with me about that."

"Needn't be, with plans for a plane like that locked up in his safe. I suppose," said Hank, "all that secret work which is going on in the experimental factory's to do with the new bus, eh?"

"I dare say. But listen, Hank. I said all that about the new plane on purpose. If Garside is in with Clippers I reckon some attempt will be made to get at those plans. But I don't want to say anything to the pater about it. Hank, I'm going to watch all night. But as I shan't be able to keep that up will you come in with me, share and share about?"

Hank's good-natured face stretched in a beaming smile, and his great strong hand sought the boy's.

"You bet I will, Thunderbolt!" he cried.

That afternoon, just before dusk, Clif flew over to the Butterfly Works, left his private air-bus in the middle of the flying ground, which was illuminated throughout the night, and passed into the works. He was admitted by Roberts, the grizzled night watchman, with whom he had already had a talk.

He spent the night alternately dozing and reading, as he lolled in a comfortable armchair in the secretary's room adjoining his father's private office. In the morning, just after daybreak, he flew home. The next night Hank took his place. Nothing suspicious occurred, and the only sound that either of them heard was made by the night watchman Roberts on his rounds.

Clif found his dad as stiff as starch these days, for Mr. Harland Jackson had been having a dust-up with the editor of the Steeltown "Daily Telegraph," and was generally peeved about that flying article, even if the way people were talking about his son secretly pleased him.

"Up early, weren't you, Clif?" he said, when Young Thunderbolt flew home after his second all-night's vigil at the works.

The boy stifled a yawn. His eyes were heavy, and he seemed a little dull—for him.

"Thought I'd like to be, guv'nor," he answered.

"You must have started when it was almost dark. Cold, too. You must be careful, my boy."

The end of the week came, and a record crowd packed the City football ground to see the Butterflies play the Hammers. The Hammers were in the upper half of the League table. They had a smart team, and last week, in a dazzling game, had smashed Sheffield United by 4 goals to 1. In spite of his feeling a little drowsy Young Thunderbolt hurled himself into the game with such dash and brilliance that he was able to trick the clever West Ham defence, and carry the ball through, to score with one of his unstoppable shots, with the game only two minutes old.

The Butterflies never looked like cracking up after such a splendid start, and after leading at half-time by 2 goals to 1 they ran out winners of a fast and dashing game, scoring 5 goals to 2, the City climbing yet another place up the table and getting almost clear of the danger zone. And how the crowd cheered when the flying footballer, Young Thunderbolt, led his team of football pilots in.

From the banks Crook Garside — so named because his nose had been broken and flattened years ago—looked on sneeringly.

"I can't see why a lotta men go crazy over a stuck-up, bouncy kid like that!" he growled. "Look at all that swank of his in the paper this week! Someone will cut 'is comb for 'im soon, and then we'll see how loud he'll crow!"

A man leaning on the same crush barrier looked hard at Garside.

"Employed in the Butterfly Works, aintcher?" he asked.

"Yes. What of it?"

"You oughta be ashamed of yourself, talking about a clever kid that way, that's all."

Garside turned and left the rail with a mocking laugh.

Half-way through the following week Sandy McFarlane, the manager of the Butterfly show-rooms, stopped Clif and told him that he was looking a bit washed out.

"Your father's bin telling me, laddie," Mac remarked, "that you're hardly ever in the works during the daytime, and that you're sleepin' most afternoons and gettin' up in the sma' hoors tae fly. Why?"

"Because I like it, Mac," replied the boy, stifling a yawn.

And at that very moment Crook Garside was pumping the fireman on day duty.

"I hear a night watch has been instituted at the works apart from Roberts, the night-watchman," Garside said. "Young Thunderbolt and Hank Parsons take turn and turn about."

"Who told you that?" asked the fireman.

"Hank himself," Garside lied.

The fireman eyed him doubtfully.

"Well, it's true," he said. "They keep watch on the chief's office. They're guarding those plans!"

Garside laughed and was satisfied. Doubt was turned to certainty, rumours he had heard, and things he had seen, confirmed.

CHAPTER 3.

Trapped!

IT was agreed upon between Clif and Hank Parsons that Clif should watch at the works on Thursday night, and Hank on Friday, this arrangement providing a full night's rest for Clif on Friday, which was necessary if he wanted to lead the Butterflies team to victory against the Boro', away, on Saturday.

As usual, Clif flew over from home after the works had closed, so as to have his plane there ready for the morning, then went back to dinner at home, and afterwards came to relieve Hank who had watched from dusk to 10 o'clock. At home Mr. Jackson believed Clif was safe in bed.

"There's not even a mouse stirring, boy," said Hank, as he wished Clif good-night.

Clif settled down with a book. At midnight the watch-



As Clif tore round the tail of his machine, a group of figures surrounded him. The next moment something struck the youngster a terrific blow on the head!

man made his rounds. At one o'clock a brilliant moon shone down on the Butterfly Works, striking fire out of its countless window panes.

And at two o'clock Clif was startled by the sound of an airplane engine whirring loudly out on the testing ground. He ran to the window which overlooked the aerodrome and looked out. He could see his air-bus standing out boldly in the middle of the great open space. Its propeller was whirling rapidly.

The boy was out of the office in a flash and tearing along the corridors and through the factories till he reached the door which was guarded by the watchman's box.

Roberts wasn't there, and the door was locked. Turning the key which was set in the lock, Clif raced through the open door, cut on to the aerodrome. He tore towards his machine.

Only when he was quite close to it did he notice some figures standing on the far side of the plane, and as he did not at once check his rush, he headed straight into danger.

"Who are you?" he shouted, as he tore round the tail of his beloved air-bus. "Why—"

A stunning blow sent him reeling. A cloth came down over his head, and a moment later he was bound, gagged, and bandaged.

His attackers never said a word, but strong arms lifted him up into the plane and bundled him into the rear cock-

pit. A few seconds later the plane began to move, and Clif knew that he was floating in mid-air in his own machine, and being taken, goodness only knew where, by some unknown enemy—who at all events knew how to fly.

CHAPTER 4.

The Eleventh Man!

IT was P.-c. Green, whose round, by special orders, included a tour of the Butterfly Works, who found the door open. On further investigation, he came upon the night watchman trussed up and gagged in a corner of the show-rooms.

Roberts was dazed, and could only say that, just after strange sounds had attracted him, he was attacked from behind, stunned, and bound hand and foot.

Together they toured the works, found that the private offices had been broken into, and the door of the safe opened by means of a blowpipe. The blowpipe and the gas-cylinder which had fed it were found on the floor. The melted door of the safe gaped open. The safe had been rifled. The telephone-wires had been cut, and communication with Mr. Harland Jackson had to be made from another room.

Harland Jackson came along to the works at once, arriving almost at the same time as Superintendent Robins. His face was white and he was obviously shaken—not by news of the burglary, but because he had discovered, on visiting Clif's room, that the boy was not in the house.

His plane had gone from its shed.

"I'm afraid something dreadful has happened to my boy, Robins," he almost choked. "Roberts, the night watchman, has just told me that Clifford has been watching at the works to-night."

He gloomily examined the empty safe. All the money which had been stored in it, all his private papers and his plans, had been stolen.

"Money could not have bought many of them," he told the police-superintendent. "If Clippers have got hold of them they may be able to beat me at my own game."

No fingerprints or other clues had been left behind; the blowpipe and the gas-cylinder told them nothing. The marks on each had been made by fingers sheathed in rubber gloves.

When Hank turned up he explained how he and Clif had kept watch.

"You should have told me, Hank," said Mr. Jackson sternly. "I'd have paid anything rather than have my boy take such a risk!"

"He wanted to take it, sir," gloomed Hank. "And they must have flown away with him in his own plane. Thousands and thousands of people must have heard the plane going by. The pilot would have to bring it down somewhere. Somebody's bound to see it. We'll hear from Clif soon."

But Friday came and went and no news came to hand. The wireless SOS's brought no response. Clif and his Butterfly Minor plane had vanished completely.

Meanwhile, the City Football Club had to play Northboro' away from home.

"I suppose you had better take the team to Northboro', Hank," said Clif's father. "We've got to carry on."

"We'll all fly over in the big Albatross plane, sir, on Saturday morning," said Hank. "And perhaps we shall hear from the laddie before then."

But no news came. At eleven o'clock on Saturday morning, just as the strengthening sunshine began to pierce a heavy ground mist, the big plane, piloted by Hank, and carrying the Butterflies football team as passengers, started off from the Butterfly Aerodrome. It left without a cheer, but the good wishes of the workmen went with it.

Garside, the suspect, went out to see it go. His sour face twisted into a vicious smile.

"I hope they come down before they reach Northboro'!" he snarled.

"Garside, I've a guid mind to lay rough hands on you!" said Sandy McFarlane, restraining himself with some difficulty.

Garside faced him, snarling.

"Well, how would you feel if you'd done nothing and had been detained and questioned by the police for twelve solid hours?" he snapped.

"If I were you," shot back Sandy, "I should feel as if I deserved it!"

Hank landed his team safely at the Northboro' Aerodrome, whence they motored into the town. There they ate an early lunch before starting for the football ground.

No news came, and at last Hank had to take his team on to the field. A huge crowd deafened them with their mighty cheering.

Hank spun the coin the Boro' captain gave him—and

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won. He chose the end from which the wind was blowing. The teams lined up, and the referee was just about to blow his whistle when a familiar droning made Hank look up sharply. In the distance he saw a speck moving against a bright blue sky. It flashed nearer. It was an airplane flying very low—it was Clif's airplane!—and instead of paying attention to the game, Hank gave a frenzied leap and pointed.

"Half a minute, boys!" he yelled. "Here comes Young Thunderbolt. He's gonna play after all."

The Butterfly Minor, all gleaming enamel and flashing metal, crossed the football ground at about the height of the stand, while the footballers looked up, waiting, and the crowd yelled themselves hoarse.

A hand fluttered over the side, and something dropped on the muddy turf almost at Hank Parsons' feet.

"Will come on to the football ground as soon as possible. Stick to it.—Clif," Hank read on the crumpled paper.

Hank pointed after the disappearing plane.

"Boys," he cried "he'll be here ready to play in less than twenty minutes. I'm gonna change my clothes. Thunderbolt will take my place. Play up ten men, and keep the scoring down. Young Thunderbolt will show 'em how to score in the second half."

Such was Hank's faith—he did not believe that Clif Jackson could fail.

So the Butterflies started to play their League game one man short. Bunny Coot in goal, Biffer Soanes and Irish Kelly at back, and Dribbler Hanson at centre-half did their best. But the Boro', with eleven men playing right on the top of their form, were too good for them, scoring a goal after five minutes' play, and adding a second in seven minutes.

The ten men played like demons, but seemed to be hopelessly handicapped when, twenty minutes after the start, Young Thunderbolt came running on to the field, rosy-cheeked and bright-eyed, and looking as fresh as a daisy.

"You all right, Clif?" asked Hanson.

"Fine, Dribbler, and not too tired to stand this game," answered Young Thunderbolt, which news so heartened the Butterflies that they scored a goal within the next minute.

Just before half-time they equalised the scores, but they could not win the game, the end coming with the scores level at three goals all.

Clif did not wait to bathe and change after the game. He just slipped some clothes over his football things, and pulled on a pair of street boots and an overcoat. In the twilight he flew for home, cheered by thousands who had waited to watch him start.

When he came down he found his father waiting with his car.

"They phoned the glad news through from Northboro' the moment you arrived, Clif," said Harland Jackson, hugging his boy close to him as the car sped on. "How did you manage to get free, and where did you find your aeroplane?"

"Who ever it was stole my plane, left it on Beechmore Common, after heaping furze and bracken over it. I was tied up and gagged in the cockpit, and I'd be there now, if a ranger hadn't happened to catch sight of the unusual pile, and come to investigate. He freed me just in time for me to get a bite to eat and fly to Northboro', a little bit late for the match," Clif explained.

"And you don't know who attacked you, boy?"

"There were several men, guv'nor, but I had no time to identify any of them."

"They rifled my safe and stole my plans, Clif."

The boy laughed.

"They stole some dud plans which I drew myself. The blue prints they stole are not worth a snap, dad," said Clif. "Of course, it was all rot about that Helicopter plane; but I only had that put in the paper to draw the thieves into raiding the works. I thought I'd be able to catch the gang red-handed; but they were a bit too smart for me. The plans of your real new plane are safe at home, locked up in a trunk in my bed-room, guv'nor."

Harland Jackson beamed.

"You're a wonder, my boy!" he cried. "And I'm proud of you. But our enemies have got the better of us this time."

"Only for a moment, dad," replied Clif sleepily. "At least, we know that some of 'em can fly. Maybe we'll be able to round up the lot of 'em soon."

The dinner Clif ate that night would have fed a platoon. Afterwards he went straight to bed. And in his dreams he fancied that he had caught all his enemies red-handed. It was hard luck to wake up and find that they had not a single clue that really mattered.

THE END.

(Now look out for next week's GEM and another smashing yarn of Young Thunderbolt—you'll enjoy it!)

OUR BREATH-TAKING FOOTBALL AND DETECTIVE SERIAL!



By

HEDLEY SCOTT.

(Opening Chapters
Retold on Page 26.)

The RANGERS' RECRUIT!

Ferrers Locke Steps In!

"NOW, just tell me the story in your own way."

Those were the first kindly words Bill Hartley had heard since the previous evening. With haggard face that bespoke lack of sleep and a troubled mind, he gazed at the stern, shrewd face of his visitor.

"There is so little to tell," said Bill wearily. "Nobody believes a word of what I say."

"You still have friends, my boy," broke in the kindly voice. "Major Carstairs is terribly upset about this business. He believes in you, and so do I, for the major and I are old friends, and we don't make mistakes when we sum up a man. And, by the way, your chum, Freeman, is mighty keen to let you know that he thinks the whole thing is a—a bloomin' swindle and a shame, to use his own words."

Bill's face brightened somewhat. He called to mind the reputation of the man who now confronted him.

Ferrers Locke was the private detective who had never lost a case!

Then that puzzled wrinkle took possession of Bill's brow again, as he thought of Major Carstairs. But for that peculiar letter from the major Bill would never have been placed in such a hole!

"Now, start from the beginning," said Ferrers Locke gently. "Tell me all your movements from the time you and Freeman parted—he to go to the talkies, you for your walk. You see," added the great detective, "I know that much already."

Quietly and concisely Bill told the full story. Ferrers Locke heard him out without interruption.

"I'll ask the sergeant to let me have a look at that

letter from Major Carstairs," he said briskly, when Bill had concluded. "You say it was taken from you with your other things?"

"Everything was taken from me," said Bill, "and the letter was in my inside coat pocket."

Ferrers Locke was absent for about five minutes. When he returned there was a reassuring smile on his clever face. In his hand he held the letter—as Bill thought.

"Here we are, Hartley," said Locke, "here's your letter—what?"

He opened the folded notepaper, and turned it all ways for Bill to see. Bill started to his feet.

"Why, it's blank paper!" he ejaculated, in amazement. "That can't be the one—"

Ferrers Locke smiled.

"I have not the slightest doubt that it is the one," he returned, "but the rogue who sent it took care to use an ink that fades away entirely within a specified time. You see"—turning the envelope to view—"there's nothing to be seen here, either."

"But—but—" began Bill, in utter perplexity.

"You are sure you didn't carry any sheet of blank paper with you?" asked Locke.

Bill nodded.

"Quite sure. In my jacket pocket was a wallet, a pawn-ticket for my watch, and the letter from Major Carstairs."

"As I thought," said Locke, with a smile. "But there's one thing the perpetrator of this letter overlooked when he used his invisible ink, namely, that his finger-prints weren't invisible. Under the microscope I'll wager we'll find more than one finger-print, for he had to fold the letter. See, here are the faint outlines of prints."

"I say, things are looking up," said Bill, his eyes shining with new hope. "Do you think you will be able to clear me, Mr. Locke?"

The detective placed a

kindly arm round Bill's broad shoulders.

"I'll undertake to set you free within two hours from now," he said briskly. "Keep your pecker up, my dear chap. The Stamford Bridge crowd will give you a terrific ovation this afternoon!"

"You mean that I'll be free and able to play—to play this afternoon?"

"I do!"

And before Bill Hartley could recover from the pleasant shock of that announcement the cell door once again had clanged to. But there was hope in Bill's heart now.

THE GEM LIBRARY.—No. 1,196.

BILL HARTLEY IN A CELL!

But it's a sell for the police when Ferrers Locke proves they've got the wrong man!

Ferrers Locke was on the trail; if the greatest detective of the age could not prove his innocence, no one could!

To the astonishment of the other prisoners in the adjoining cells Bill broke into a light-hearted whistle. And, strange to relate, no one in authority raised any objection to this infringement of the rules.

Within the prescribed two hours a key rattled in the lock and the warden's face beamed a friendly smile.

"Step this way, sir!"

Bill noted the change in the man's manner, and his heart leapt high with hope. In a breathless rush he burst into the presence of the station inspector, the sergeant, and Ferrers Locke. The latter gave Bill an encouraging smile, the inspector and the sergeant glances of apologetic congratulation. And in that moment Bill knew that Ferrers Locke had kept his word.

"Perhaps I had better tell our young friend what has happened," said Locke.

The inspector nodded acquiescence.

"In the first place," began Ferrers Locke, "I went along to the house in Eaton Square, where the robbery took place. Quite a number of finger-prints were left behind by our enterprising burglar. He ransacked the bed-rooms pretty thoroughly where, I am given to understand, most of the stolen jewellery was kept, and the finger-prints coincide with those left on the sheet of notepaper—the remains of the letter sent to lure you to Eaton Square. That, for a start, my boy, lets you out, for we have checked the prints against your own."

Bill's face radiated.

"Clue number two concerns your rather fiery mop of hair. Our burglar friend left a few strands of reddish hair in one of the rooms he plundered. Under the microscope those strands of hair do not compare at all favourably with the texture of your own individual brand of hirsute adornment," continued Locke, with a smile.

"But—" Bill was attempting to voice the hundred and one questions that surged to his lips, when Locke silenced him with a gesture.

"Point number three lies in the fact that Mr. Entwistle distinctly states that his assailant walked with a slight limp. Point number four concerns the jewellery. Of the whole haul—a pretty considerable one, I understand—only one article was found on you."

"Well I'm blessed!" gasped Bill. "But who could have—"

"Mr. Locke is of the opinion that an enemy of yours has framed the whole thing from the beginning to end," ventured the sergeant, somewhat shamefacedly. "For myself, I am sorry that you have been so badly inconvenienced, and—and—and—"

Ferrers Locke took up the story again.

"It is very obvious that someone who bears a grudge has schemed this very cunningly," he remarked. "The finger-prints in our possession are not traceable to a known criminal, but undoubtedly your enemy is a practised hand at the game, and, moreover, one of a gang. Who he is and who his associates are I'm going to make it my business to find out!"

Bill passed a bewildered hand over his forehead.

"I must be dense, Mr. Locke, but for the life of me I can't imagine how all this was schemed. Neither can I fasten on a motive."

"The first is easily explained," said Locke, with a smile.

"Someone who knew the movements of both yourself and Freeman, waited for the latter to go out. Doubtless he was watched and seen to go to the talkies. Secondly, the letter—a clever forgery, I should imagine, for it to deceive you—was thrust through your letter-box. Thirdly, the robbery at No. 6c was already planned and carefully timed. Moreover, the success of the plan necessitated that an alarm should be raised; that one of the occupants of the house, at least, should be able to identify you. The master mind behind this plot saw fit to impersonate you. A little make-up, skilfully applied, a red wig, and the imposture was complete. He did not wear a hat, for obvious reasons. Coolly he ransacked his crib, deliberately attacked the unfortunate Mr. Entwistle without making any attempt to conceal his identity, timed his get-away to the prearranged plan, counted on your punctuality, and bumped you off the pavement when he knew that the police-officer was hard at his heels."

"And— I remember now!" said Bill excitedly. "He gave me a lift under the jaw as we fell. I thought it was an accident at the time."

"That was to befuddle you until the policeman arrived," said Locke. "Meantime, the diamond necklet was planted on you, and the rest looked easy. Mr. Entwistle and the maid identified you, and there was every prospect of your serving a long sentence for robbery with violence. In fact, there was every likelihood that the judge would have sentenced you to the cat, for robbery with violence is a crime that the police are determined to exterminate."

"Good gad!" Bill's face whitened at the thought.

"All this goes to prove, Hartley, that you have made a bitter enemy of someone who will stop at nothing to satisfy his revenge. It proves, to my mind at least, that he is a consummate scoundrel, well versed in the arts of crime and fairly well acquainted with your movements and your relationships. How else the forgery of Major Carstairs' handwriting and the knowledge that you would keep the appointment?"

"Who the deuce can it be?" Bill muttered the question repeatedly.

"That is where you can help us," said Locke. "Is there any man you have quarrelled with recently?"

"Buxton!" Unconsciously the name left Bill's lips.

Locke smiled.

"I'm afraid he's not our man, although your friend Freeman was the first to suggest him. My assistant made a few inquiries as to Buxton's movements last night. But Buxton was at the theatre with some of his swell friends at the time No. 6c was visited, so we can leave him out."

"It beats me!" confessed Bill. "Why anyone should go to such lengths is beyond me. I'm not aware that I've done anyone such a bad turn as to warrant this hitting below the belt."

"At the moment it is a mystery, my boy," said Ferrers Locke. "But, patience! I never leave a case until I have worked it to a satisfactory conclusion. My reputation is at stake!" he added, with a smile.

"And Mr. Locke has never met a failure yet!" the inspector chimed in, with an expansive smile. "He'll get his man sure enough, you mark my words, Mr. Hartley!"

But a lot was to happen before the inspector's words came true.

"Here he comes!"

"Give him a reuser!"

"Hurrah!"

As the Cashton Rangers doubled out on to the springy turf at Stamford Bridge, a tremendous roar went skywards. Not one of the seventy thousand enthusiasts but was prepared to give a hearty welcome to the Cashton Rangers' recruit. The newspapers had made the most of Bill's sensational arrest and release, and the public was prepared to make a hero of Bill Hartley on the spot.

"Good old Bill!"

"Play up, Ginger!"

Bill, used as he was to football crowds, began to feel wobbly at the knees. He had hardly recovered from the shock of his arrest and subsequent release, but he had begged Major Carstairs to let him play. The final word, however, lay with Sandy, and the dour old Scotsman had merely ejaculated his usual "Humph!" when the matter had been broached—and here Bill was! Tich Freeman was wild with delight. He had believed in his chum all the way through. In fact, Tich had been the first to greet Bill on his release, although Major Carstairs was a very close second.

The Cashton Rangers warmed to the ovation given them as they punted the ball about. The majority of them sympathised with Bill, despite the accusation Marchant Buxton had made against him the day before.

Buxton himself did not betray his feelings in the matter, although he had been hard put to it to suppress the fury that consumed him when Bill had turned up in the dressing-room. But in the most exclusive section of the giant stand sat Adolph Haverswood, brooding and sullen, and not a little alarmed. He told himself that he had laid his plans carefully; that nothing could prevent Hartley serving a long stretch. Yet here he was a free man, released without a stain on his character, receiving the plaudits of the multitude! Right well, then, did Adolph Haverswood call to mind Robert Burns' famous phrase: "The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft a-gley." As yet, however, Adolph Haverswood had no knowledge that it was due to Ferrers Locke's intervention that his plans had miscarried.

THE OPENING CHAPTERS:

BILL HARTLEY, a six-foot edition of brawn and muscle, with a head of flaming red hair, is "sent down" from Oxford. On arrival home, Bill quarrels with his father and leaves for London to find work. En route he falls foul of Marchant Buxton, a wealthy man about town, who was really behind the plot that resulted in Bill's dismissal from the Varsity. Buxton swears revenge for the knockdown blows Bill dealt him. In London, Bill is instrumental in stopping two smash-and-grab raiders from getting away with a rich haul. At the police station he meets an old friend in Major Carstairs, Chairman of the Cashton Rangers F.C., who offers him a trial with the eleven. Bill strikes his top form and is signed on by the club, only to find that his old enemy, Buxton, is the Rangers' centre-forward. In answer to a letter from Carstairs, Bill goes to Eaton Square, where he is bumped into by a runaway thief. To his astonishment he is mistaken for the thief, and taken to the police station where a diamond necklace is discovered in his overcoat pocket. In consequence of this, Bill is placed in a cell and left there in bitter solitude and despair.

(Now read on.)

That information would have been enough to send Marchant Buxton's immaculate friend flying the country.

Another roar of boisterous welcome echoed round the densely packed mounds of humanity as the blue-jerseyed Chelsea eleven, with Andy Wilson at their head, trotted out.

"Come on, the Blues!"

"Let's hear from you!"

Then from the Cashton Rangers' contingent burst a final full-throated bellow as the two captains were seen to shake hands with the referee preparatory to spinning the toss.

"Play up, the Rangers!"

"Good old Ginger!" Bill had speedily earned a nickname.

"Hurrah! They've won the toss!"

The teams lined up, a hush fell on the expectant crowd, the whistle shrilled, and the famous London team kicked off. Bill Hartley was playing his first game as a full-blown professional!

Excitement surged through Bill the moment the ball swung into action. Forgotten was his personal animus of Buxton, the amateur. As Buxton's inside partner, red-headed Bill was determined to give of his best.

Yet Buxton, nursing his hatred close to his mean soul, was equally determined that he would freeze out the newcomer. But the friendly smile he flashed at Bill gave no indication of what lay in store between now and the end of the game.

"Ginger for Pluck!"

"COME on, the Blues!"

The dense masses in the stands lifted their heads and opened their lungs in one sustained bellow. And not to be outdone the Cashton Rangers' contingent rallied and gave tongue to a tidal wave of noise that mingled with and outlived the uproar from the Chelsea enthusiasts.

"Come on, the Rangers!"

The game had been in progress scarcely five minutes; but to every spectator there was given full promise of a match of matches. Both elevens were at the top of their form;

keyed up to a state of physical fitness and the fighting will to win. So far, however, each line of half-backs had held the raiding forwards.

Bill Hartley followed every move of the game with a practised eye; his ready sense of anticipation found him always in the right position for receipt of the "perfect pass." Yet Bill could not kill the suspicion that quickly took root in his mind that Marchant Buxton had on at least four occasions deliberately withheld a pass that should have been tapped to his inside-right.

The suspicion grew to a certainty, when Rodger, the six-foot centre-half of the Chelsea side, allowed Buxton to slip past him. Here was Buxton's chance to sling the ball to Hartley—the red-headed forward being unmarked, and Bishop, the International half-back of the "Blues," in an ideal position for bottling up the Rangers' inside-left, should Buxton pass to him.

To Bill Hartley this was the obvious move in the game. Yet the ball never came, and Bill, to say nothing of the Rangers' supporters, had the mortification of seeing Buxton easily dispossessed by the Chelsea full-back.

In the few seconds that elapsed while the play was transferred to the Rangers' half-back line Bill trotted alongside his old enemy.

"Why didn't you pass?" he asked mildly. "I was unmarked."

Buxton scowled at him.

"You'll get no passes from me, you hound!"

There was no time for more. With a pleasing "boomph," the ball left the foot of Moulton, the Rangers' left-back, and sailed straight for Bill. Up went his shock of red hair to meet it, to deflect it with a cunning twist of the neck to the expectant feet of Tich Freeman.

But Bill's head never touched the ball. Buxton barged into him at the vital moment in what seemed to be an over-eager attempt to possess the whirling sphere, and grassed

him. Immediately the Rangers' fans gave their gratuitous opinion of such antics.

"Clumsy idiot!"

"Why didn't you leave it to Ginger?"

"Wake up, eyeglass!"

The ball, meantime, sailed on to land within a foot of the Chelsea left-half. In a flash he had fastened on it, tricked Buxton's belated effort to wrest it from him, and punted up-field to where Andy Wilson patiently waited. For the next few moments it was football with a vengeance. Like the wizard he is, the Scottish International waltzed round the Rangers' half-back, adroitly evaded a dangerous sliding tackle from Dunstall, the Rangers' centre-half, and planted the ball with effortless ease right at the feet of Alec Jackson.

"Shoot, Jackson!"

Sixty thousand throats voiced the command, the appeal, the encouragement, according to the taste of the individual. But every one of that sixty thousand was satisfied with the result, for Jackson, with the speed of a hare, raced for



As Bill got his head to the ball, Marchant Buxton deliberately charged and sent him flying!

goal, completely bewildered Moulton, who rushed at him, and pumped in a ground shot that taxed the keenest eye to follow, so fast was it.

Down went the Rangers' custodian in a kneeling heap; up went an apprehensive gasp from the onlookers, to be lost in the tumultuous roar that synchronised with the ball swishing wickedly against the back of the net.

Chelsea had opened the score!

And that goal was, in effect, a present from Buxton. Bill knew it; Buxton knew it; Tich Freeman made no bones about it.

With an angry face, he swung up to the amateur.

"You dirty rotter!" he snapped. "If you hadn't done your best to muck up Bill's play that goal would never have come off!"

"Easy up, Tich," said Bill quietly. "He can't help being a rotter; he was born one, and he's yellow all through!" As the two sides lined up again Bill whispered a few words to Tich:

"He's not going to lose us the match, old son. The game's only a quarter of an hour old. A side has played ten men before now and won the day. Savvy?"

He winked and smiled encouragingly, and Tich's unbridled fury sobered down.

For the next five minutes of play Chelsea undoubtedly had the better of it. The one goal deficit had temporarily upset the morale of the visiting team. Still, Bill waited patiently. His chance came at last.

THE RANGERS' RECRUIT!

(Continued from previous page.)

Tich Freeman deftly tricked his man and tapped the ball to his inside partner.

"Go it, Ginger!"

"Ginger" did go it! With a burst of speed that surprised the spectators, he darted off at a tangent, took the hefty charge that Rodger, the centre-half, hurled at him with a grunt, and sped on.

A swift glance round the field as he ran, and then he lobbed the ball to his wing again about five yards in advance of Tich Freeman, who was scudding along the touchline under full speed.

Law, the Chelsea left-back, saw the threatened danger and plunged forward to intercept the pass; but he was a fraction of a second too late. Tich Freeman reached the ball first, flicked it through the full-back's widely spread legs, recaptured it, and hurtled on.

A pass, knee high, curled over to Bill Hartley. He was on it in a flash, shouldering off the despairing half-back who jumped at him like a rocket, and steadying it for a shot at goal.

In the goalmouth danced the eager and very much alive skipper; and straight at his charge flashed a terrific, scorching shot that wrenched his wrists almost out of their sockets.

But Millington was an old hand. The way he gathered that rocketing ball bespoke the trained and experienced craftsman. There was no time to get his foot to it, for Bill was leaping at him like a leopard. Instead, he curled his hand and wrist round the slippery leathern sphere and threw it to Smith, his full-back. That worthy punted up-field, and the expectant Rangers' supporters groaned. Yet hardly had their disappointment found expression than Dunstall, the Rangers' pivot, leaped high up in the air and deflected the ball to his inside-left who had fallen back.

"Oh, good man, Dunstall!"

The Rangers' inside-left surveyed the field and lifted the ball again to Bill. This time there was no mistake. Swinging into his stride, Bill sped for the goal like an express train. From five yards out he loosed a shot that sent Millington, the Chelsea keeper, leaping frantically to the far corner of the net.

At the same moment the two backs descended on Bill like an avalanche. He went down in a smother under that double charge, with all the wind knocked out of him; but through the mist he saw the jubilant fans on the mounds and terraces; heard them singing his praises; saw Millington disconsolately pick up the ball that had beaten him.

One all!

The Chelsea spectators and the Rangers' contingent freely and enthusiastically mingled their plaudits. It was a great goal. As Bill scrambled up and shook his flaming red head Tich Freeman thumped him on the back.

"Oh, boy, that was great!"

Bill grimaced and limped back to the centre of the field. With the exception of Buxton, his team-mates voiced their appreciation wholeheartedly. Buxton contented himself with a scowl and a muttered imprecation.

Then once again the ball was in motion. At full pressure the Chelsea forwards attacked. The Wilson, Gallacher, Cheyne, and Jackson combination provided football of the highest quality. But the obstinate resistance of the Rangers' back-line held out, whilst Howard Turner, the goalie, eclipsed himself. At half-time the score was still "one all."

In the dressing-room during the interval Major Carstairs

was jubilant. Even Sandy permitted himself a smile, but the smile faded swiftly as he came face to face with Buxton.

"Now, look here, Buxton," he said severely, "I ken ye no like Hartley. But ye're playing for the Rangers. He'll pay for feedin'."

Buxton made some attempt at an excuse; but the dour old Scotsman had passed on.

When the teams lined up for the second half Buxton told himself that Hartley would receive no passes from him. And so it proved. True, on several occasions he swung the ball in Bill's direction; but he made it very apparent, to Bill, at any rate, that he stood no earthly chance of reaching the ball before a Chelsea defender fastened on to it. To the crowd it appeared sometimes—as Buxton intended it should—that Hartley was slow to take advantage of his opportunities.

Bill, ever too quick to lose his temper, horrified the crowd by advancing upon Buxton after one of these "passes" with clenched fists. But Tich's appealing voice restrained him just in time. The action, however, did not escape the attention of Dunstall, the Rangers' captain.

"Cut that out, Hartley!" he said magisterially. "What do you think you're doing?"

Bill flashed an apology at him and then felt his ears burn as Buxton's sneering face dwelt on his for a second.

Dear would Bill have liked to stretch that grin into something considerably more painful to its wearer. Then his footballing senses returned.

From a scramble of players the ball suddenly swished over to him. Off he darted at a tangent, weaving a pattern round Bishop which left that old hand at Soccer and Soccer-finesse, gasping at its audacity. Then, to the satisfaction of the crowd, Bill swung the ball to the feet of Buxton.

It was a laudable endeavour in the circumstances, for it looked a certain goal for the unспорт-manlike amateur. But Buxton fumbled it hopelessly, and away went the Rangers' hopes of a victory as Law, with a hefty kick, cleared to his left wing.

Buxton ground his teeth as some of the jeering remarks from the crowd reached him, and flashed a bitter look at Hartley.

"Why the devil didn't you place the ball better?" he snapped vengefully. "You didn't give me a chance—you didn't mean to!"

"Liar!" retorted Bill contemptuously, and trotted off.

The battle went fast and furiously after that mistake of Buxton's, and the Rangers' goal had innumerable hair-breadth escapes. Still the winning point would not come. Up in the stands and on the terraces the crowds yelled themselves hoarse with excitement. This, indeed, was a match—a match that symbolised the newspaper scribes' description of "Chelsea luck." Their forwards could do everything but score. Their passing was superb, their control was a sight to see, but the stolid defence of the Rangers and a slice of luck prevented the winning goal. Both teams were glad to call it a "draw" when the final whistle blew, and as the twenty-two mudstained, weary players trooped off to their respective dressing-rooms, the crowd cheered them vociferously. To Bill they gave a "special" burst of applause that sent the crimson to his cheeks in a flow of embarrassment.

"Good old Ginger!"

"Ginger for luck!"

"Hurrah!"

(Good old Ginger, nothing can keep him down for long! But he's got a dangerous enemy in Buxton, and there's trouble coming! Whatever you do, boys, don't miss next week's thrilling instalment!)

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