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CRASHING CARS TO MAKE THEM SAFE!—See page 10

The SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE

Strange words over the telephone put Len Lex on his toes with excitement. . . . Is the unknown "Sussex Man" close at hand?

By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON**

Asking for It!

ROOT, of the Fourth, put his head into the senior day-room and hooted:

"Anybody seen old Bully?"

About a dozen Fifth Form men stared, or rather glared, round at Root. Albert Root was known to have more nerve than was good for a junior. Thrice, at least, that term, Sixth Form prefects had whopped him for side. But this was the limit—bawling in at a senior doorway, as if he were yelling to some mob of fags in the Lair.

Harvey of the Fifth looked round for a missile, while the other men glared at Root. Even Len Lex, the new fellow in the Fifth, rather shared the general indignation. Len was more a detective than a schoolboy, though Oakshott knew it not, but he was a Fifth Form man, too.

But there were excuses for Root.

For a quarter of an hour, he had been in search of Mr. Bullivant, the games master, without finding him. His valuable time was being expended in that vain search. In the junior room, otherwise the Lair, there was a feast toward—one of those feasts which the fags enjoyed ever so much more than good provender in Hall.

Root knew, only too well, that the other fags would not be waiting for him. If he were much longer finding Bullivant there would be hardly the tail of a sardine left for him. It was really no wonder, in the circumstances, that Root forgot the fitness of things and, looking in on the Fifth as a last resource, inquired at the top of his voice whether they had seen old Bully.

Nobody answered Root's question. It would have been beneath the dignity of the Fifth to do so. Harvey picked up a cushion. Banks picked up a hassock. The missiles flew together.

Harvey and Banks were both pretty good shots. There was no doubt that cushion and hassock would have



From behind the curtain Len Lex watched Mr. Bullivant, who, when he heard the voice that came over the wires, gave a jump and glanced anxiously at the open doorway.

landed simultaneously on Root, hurling him out of the doorway, back into the obscurity from which he ought never to have emerged—but for Porrynge. But Porrynge, at the same moment, hurtled at Root with the intention of booting him—quite a praiseworthy proceeding on Pie Porrynge's part, but unfortunate in the outcome, like most of Pie's proceedings. For it brought him exactly in the line of fire, and cushion and hassock, instead of landing on Root of the Fourth, crashed together on Porrynge of the Fifth. The cushion got him on the back of the head, the hassock in the middle of the back, and Porrynge, with a startled yelp, rolled over at Root's feet.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Root. "Ha, ha!"

"Ow!" Pie sat up dizzily. "Wow! What silly ass buzzed those things at me?"

"Oh, you goat!" gasped Banks.

"Oh, you fathead!" said Harvey.

Root chortled. He was amused—so amused that he forgot for the moment his anxiety to find old Bully. But

Root would have acted more wisely in retiring to a safe distance before he indulged his merriment. Cayley of the Fifth made a rapid stride, grabbed him by the collar, and hooked him bodily into the room. Root ceased chortling quite suddenly.

"Oh! Leggo!" squeaked Root. "I say, I've got to find old Bully! Surtees sent me to find him. He's wanted on the phone in Common Room— Leggo!"

"Hand me that 'Times,' Lex," said Cayley. Holding Root's collar with his left, he stretched out his right for the "Times."

A copy of the "Times" was laid every morning regularly on the table in the senior day-room. But it was not for purposes of perusal that Cayley wanted the newspaper now. That solid publication, carefully folded, answered admirably the same purpose as a prefect's ash.

"Here you are!" said Len.

"Now, you cheeky little scug!" said Cayley.

"I say, you chuck it!" gasped Root. "I tell you I've got to find old Bully!"

There's a man waiting for him on the phone, and Surtees called me in and said—Ow, you beast! Wow!"

Whack! Twisting Root over the table with his left, Cayley applied the folded "Times" with his right, scientifically and energetically. Root roared.

"Ow! Leggo! Think you're a prefect, Cayley! Ow! Wow!"

"Make it six!" said Harvey.

"I'm going to!" said Cayley. And he did. Six from the "Times" was not so bad, perhaps, as six from Oliphant's ashplant—but it was sufficient to make Root wish that he had remembered decorum and the fitness of things, anxious as he was to find old Bully and get done with him.

"Oh! Ow! Oh! Ow!" roared Root.

"Now," said Cayley, "get out! And if you come sidling here again, I'll give you double six!"

Root got out, without stopping to make any further inquiries after old Bully. He wriggled as he went down the passage, to pursue his search for the games master in other places.

He left the Fifth Form men laughing. Len Lex strolled out of the room and followed Root down the passage, smiling. At the corner he overtook Root, who had stopped, grabbed Lamson of the Shell by the sleeve, and was excitedly inquiring of Lamson whether he had seen that old ass, Bully.

Bullivant, the games master, was generally popular at Oakshott, but he was not, at the moment, popular with Albert Root of the Fourth Form. Lamson hadn't seen Bully. He said so, at the same time requesting Root to keep his grubby paws to himself.

Lamson walked on, leaving Root exasperated. There was little hope, by this time, of even the tail of a sardine when he got back to the Lair. Len Lex tapped him on the shoulder.

"Looked in the Head's garden?" he asked.

"Eh? No!" growled Root.

"I saw him going that way after class."

"Oh! Why couldn't you say so, then? You Fifth Formers always were a lot of stuffed dummies!" yelled Root, and scuttled off before the Fifth Form man could boot him.

Mr. Surtees, the boyish-looking master of the Fourth, came along from the direction of Common-room. He called to Len:

"Lex! Do you know where Mr. Bullivant is? He is wanted on the telephone."

"I've just told Root where to find him, sir."

"Oh, very good!" Mr. Surtees paused. "Lex, will you go to Common-room and tell the man on the phone that Mr. Bullivant is coming?"

"Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Surtees walked on and went into the Prefects' Room. Surtees, who played football with the Sixth, was often in that room, which was the resort not only of the prefects, but of the Sixth Form games men. Len Lex glanced after him as he went for

a moment, and then walked quickly away to Common-room.

Two on the Telephone!

LEN LEX stepped into Masters' Common-room and closed the door after him. The room was vacant. Tea was over and cleared away. Only Mr. Surtees had been still there when the telephone-bell rang, and now he was gone. A newspaper on the table, open at the page that gave football reports, showed why that athletic young man had been lingering. The telephone, on the desk in the corner, had the receiver off, and Len stepped at once to it and took it up.

Five minutes ago, Lex of the Fifth had been a Fifth Former among other Fifth Formers—a schoolboy and nothing more. Now he was purely and simply the nephew of Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon of Scotland Yard—the schoolboy detective, who was at Oakshott to get on the trail of the "Sussex Man."

Unless the schoolboy detective was in error, that mysterious burglar was a member of the Oakshott staff, and unless his clues had led him astray, he had narrowed down the field of search to three suspects—Bullivant, Surtees, and his own Form-master, Silverson. An urgent telephone call for Mr. Bullivant was, therefore, a matter of the deepest interest to the boy detective, who considered the chances exactly one in three that James Bullivant was the mysterious burglar who had been wanted for nearly two years by the police.

As a schoolboy, Len would have disdained to play the part of Nosey Parker. As a detective, he could afford to lose no chance of getting on the track of his man. And he was a detective now as he took up the receiver and spoke into the phone.

"Hallo!"

"Is that you, Jim?" came a voice over the wires. "I've been hanging on here twenty minutes, at least. Why—" The voice broke off. "Is that you, Jim?"

"Mr. Bullivant will be here in a few minutes," said Len into the mouthpiece. "Please hold on."

"Oh! Right!" came a grunt.

Len put the receiver down. He had done as Mr. Surtees had asked. Lex of the Fifth would naturally have left the Common-room then. The schoolboy detective did not leave it. Bullivant had not arrived—Root could hardly have delivered his message yet. There were several minutes yet to elapse before Bullivant came. Certainly, any other master might have stepped in at any moment. The schoolboy detective had to take his chance of that. Quietly, quickly, he glanced round the Common-room. There was a heavy curtain at the window—and the window was a way of retreat in case of dire need.

The schoolboy detective slipped behind the curtain. The window was closed and fastened. Len unfastened it, to be ready in case of need. Outside, there was a drop of six feet, into a shrubbery.

Two or three minutes later, there

came a heavy tramp, and the door of the Common-room was thrown open. Unseen himself, and unsuspected, Len glimpsed the games master as he came in—his red face and aggressive square jaw. Bullivant left the door wide open as he tramped across to the telephone. That did not look like a man with secrets to keep.

He grabbed up the receiver.

"Hallo!" Bullivant's deep, rolling voice filled the room. "Who's there? What's wanted?"

Len, of course, heard nothing of what was said at the other end. But round the curtain he watched Bullivant. He saw the master give a jump. Hurriedly, Mr. Bullivant put down the receiver and strode back to the door, and shut it. Len's eyes gleamed. Evidently, the voice on the phone—that of the man who knew him familiarly enough to address him as Jim—had startled the games master. He had not expected to hear that voice, but now that he heard it he was taking care that no one should overhear the talk on the phone. A man, after all, who had secrets to keep!

"You fool!" Bullivant was speaking into the telephone again, but his bull-voice was subdued. Anyone outside the door could not have heard his words. "You fool! Are you mad? You've rung me up—here—"

Len would have given much to hear the answer.

"You fool!" went on Bullivant. "Can't you think of the risk? Good heavens, man, are you out of your senses? Here, at Oakshott—"

A faint murmur from the instrument was audible, but no words for Len's ears. The other man was speaking.

"I know—I know!" Bullivant was barking again. "Money—always money! Have you ever wanted anything else when I've seen you? You've had more than the total amount of my salary here, and you know it! Twice as much—more than twice as much!"

Detective-Inspector Nixon, if he could have heard that, would doubtless have asked himself where the games master of Oakshott had obtained more than twice as much as his salary at the school. Perhaps he had private means; perhaps, as the Sussex Man, with a mask on his face and a jemmy in his hand, he had helped himself. The schoolboy detective wondered.

Over at the telephone, Bullivant's red face was redder, his bulging light blue eyes gleaming. He had a hasty temper, and his temper was evidently excited now. His strong hand gripped the receiver as if he would crush it. He snorted as the other man talked over the wires.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he growled, and then, suddenly: "Quiet! Ring off—cut off! Cut off, Roger, you fool!"

The Common-room door opened.

Bullivant jammed the receiver back as Mr. Vernon Silverson, the master of the Fifth, came in. His face was flushed and flurried as he looked round at the Fifth Form master. Mr. Silverson slightly raised his dark eyebrows.

"I did not know anyone was here."

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he said. "If I'm interrupting you, Bullivant—"

"Yes! No! It's all right, Silver-son—I'm through with the phone," hammered the games master.

He moved to the table and fumbled with the newspapers there. Mr. Silverson glanced at him curiously. Len could see that his Form-master was struck by Bullivant's obvious confusion. A slightly sardonic smile crossed the Fifth Form master's dark, handsome face. He went to the desk where the telephone stood and sat down, dipping a pen into the inkpot.

The games master, standing at the table, turned over newspapers idly. Len could see his profile, and could read in his face the uneasy fear that "Roger," whoever Roger was, might ring up again, while Silverson was there. But there came no tinkle from the bell. Roger had evidently taken the hint, and cut off.

For several minutes there was no sound in the room but the rustle of the papers as the games master turned them, and the scratch of Mr. Silverson's pen as he wrote at the desk. The Fifth Form master, it seemed, had come there to write letters—quite a normal proceeding, but rather unlucky for the fellow who was parked behind the window-curtain, and wanted to go when Bullivant was gone.

The games master turned from the table at last. He glanced at the back of Silverson's dark, well-brushed, bent head, and the look of dislike on his red face was not to be mistaken. Then he walked out of the room and shut the door after him.

Len waited. So long as Silverson was there he was unable to stir, and Silverson appeared to be a fixture. But appearances were deceptive. When the door had closed on Bullivant the Fifth Form master rose to his feet, laying down the pen. He stood for a few moments, as if listening, and then took up the receiver. The schoolboy detective knew then that he had come to Common-room to phone, but had not chosen to let that fact become apparent to the games master. The writing of letters had been a pretence until the games master was gone.

"Greenwood five-O-five!" said Mr. Silverson. The schoolboy detective made a mental note of that telephone number. Greenwood, he knew, was fifteen miles from Oakshott—the scene of one of the Sussex Man's exploits. "Is that Greenwood five-O-five?" asked Mr. Silverson, a moment or two later. Clearly, he wanted to be quite sure of the number before he spoke. The answer was in the affirmative, for he went on:

"Lion, Tiger, Popper, Coot."

Len Lex had not, of course, had the faintest idea what his Form-master was going to say on the phone. But if he had tried to guess, his wildest guesses would not have been anything like that.

That astounding message, however, was all that Mr. Silverson had to say on the telephone. He listened for an answer, said good-bye, and put up the receiver. Then he walked out of

the Common-room, with his usual quiet but swift tread, and was gone. He left the door open behind him, and in the doorway appeared Chowne, master of the Shell, and Rodd, the maths master. They did not enter, but stood at the doorway, talking.

Quietly, Len Lex turned to the sash behind him, slipped it up, and dropped out into the shrubbery.

A Row in the Sixth!

RANCE, of the Sixth, put his head out of his study doorway and called "Boy!" Rance's study was within easy calling distance of the Lair, and there was no doubt that his voice carried the distance. But if his call was heard in that delectable quarter where the fags congregated, it was not heeded. No one came. Frowning, Rance repeated the call in a louder note: "Boy!"

Len Lex smiled as he came down the passage. After his unobtrusive exit from Common-room by way of the window, Len had slipped into the House again by the door of the Sixth Form lobby. Thus it happened that he appeared in the offing when Rance called "Boy!" He was not surprised that no fag came hurtling along in hurried obedience to the call. The new fellow had only been two or three weeks at Oakshott, but he had already run the rule over most of the school, and he had had an eye—not a favourable eye—on Rance of the Sixth.

Most of the Oakshott men were thoroughly decent, but there are black sheep in every flock, and Rance was not up to the Oakshott standard in many ways. Len's business at Oakshott was to trail down the Sussex Man. Had it been his business to track down a Sixth Form man who dabbled in betting, smoked in his study, and had dealings with undesirable characters outside the school, his task would have been easy, for he had Rance-tabulated in a very short time.

Had it been Oliphant, or Campion, or Devereux who called "Boy!" there would have been a scamper of feet at once. But Rance was not liked. When his horses let him down—as horses so often do—Rance's temper was bad, and his fag had the benefit of it.

"Boy!" shouted Rance.

Still no boy came; and the Sixth Form man glanced at Lex.

"Here, Lex, you'll be passing the junior room—look in and tell Root to come, will you?"

"Right-ho!" answered Len. And he walked on, turned the corner of the passage, and arrived at the door of the Lair. He did not like Rance, but he could not refuse to perform a small service when asked civilly, and he stopped to deliver the Sixth Form man's message. The door of the junior room was half open, and from within several voices reached his ears. Loudest was Root's:

"I'm jolly well not going! You go, Tulke!"

"I'll watch it!" said Tulke.

"You go, Sidgers."

"Think again!" said Sidgers.

"Look here, you're jolly well next on the list, and if I was out you'd

have to go. I might have been still hunting for old Bully, and then—"

"Well, you ain't hunting for old Bully, are you?" asked Sidgers. "You're Rance's fag, and you've got to go. If it's one of his rotten messages, I'm not keen to carry it for him."

"Think I am?" hooted Root. "Surtees stopped me the other day when I had one of his notes, and I can tell you I was in a funk."

Len Lex put his head in.

"Rance wants you, Root!" he said.

Root glared. He would have liked to tell that Fifth Form man to mind his own business, but he had a wholesome respect for Fifth Form boots. He glared and he grunted, but he cut out of the Lair and went along to Rance's study in the Sixth.

Len did not go on his way. He remained for some minutes in thought, and then followed Root. He was in time to see that youth emerge from Rance's study, a scowl on his face, and head for the door on the quad. Albert Root had not, however, covered half the distance when a hand on his shoulder from behind stopped him. He turned to stare at Len.

"What the thump do you want, Lex?" he snapped. "I'm in a hurry—something for Rance."

"I know," said Len, with a cheery nod. "But hold on—I want you."

"Do you?" said Root. "Think I fag for the Fifth? Go to sleep and dream again." He jerked at his shoulder.

But fingers that were rather like steel held that shoulder. Len smiled at the junior's exasperated face.

"Rance has given you a note?"

"Find out."

"To hand to somebody outside the school?"

"Ask Rance!" snarled Root. Bitterly as he resented the service he had to perform for his fag-master, Root was not giving anything away—especially to a cheeky, meddling man in the Fifth.

"Right—I'll ask him," said Len gently. "Come along!"

To Root's surprise and horror, he led him back to Rance's study. Root was reluctant, but he had to go.

"Look here, you ass," breathed the alarmed Root, "you let me go—see? It's no bizney of yours, is it? What are you barging in for? I say, Rance will scrag you if you butt into his affairs! I say—"

Unheeding, Len led the fag back to his fag-master's study. The door was closed. Len turned the handle and flung it open. Rance had settled down in an armchair, a cigarette in his mouth and an open newspaper in his hands. He gave a jump of alarm as the door opened so suddenly, and cigarette and newspaper both disappeared promptly from sight—but not before Len had seen both, and seen that the newspaper was entitled the "Racing Guide." Up jumped Rance, startled and angry, towering in wrath. Rance was a very tall fellow—six inches, at least, taller than Len, who was quite sturdy. His additional inches did not, however, alarm the new man in the Fifth.

"What the dickens—" hooted Rance.

"I say, Rance, I couldn't help it!"

Pie went towards Root with the intention of booting him. But somehow or other he got in the way of the flying cushion and hassock, and went down with a crash!



squeaked the terrified Root. "I say, I never told him anything! He just dragged me back here—"

"Let that kid go, Lex! What the dickens do you fancy you're up to?" exclaimed the angry Sixth Form man.

Instead of letting Root go, Len propelled him into the study and shut the door. Rance watched him in amazement and rage.

"Will you tell me what this means, you cheeky tick?" roared Rance.

"Just going to," said Len quietly. "I haven't been here long, Rance, but long enough to pick up a thing or two about you. Don't you catch on to it that you might get a fag into serious trouble by sending him on your messages to people outside the school?"

"Why, you—you—you—" gasped Rance. "Has the Head been picking new prefects out of the Fifth Form?"

"I'm barging in entirely on my own!" said Len, with cheerful calm. "Root, you've got a note from Rance. Hand it out."

"Shan't!" hissed Root.

Rance came across the study, his eyes blazing and his fists clenched. He had seen little of the new man in the Fifth so far, and knew nothing and cared nothing about him. It was absolutely amazing to Rance for the new fellow to barge in like this into his personal affairs. He was prepared to make it clear that it did not pay.

"Let go Root!" he snapped. "Get out of my study! I give you one second before I throw you out. Won't you? Out you go, then!"

Rance, towering over the Fifth Form man, grasped him. Root grinned. He expected, as Rance expected, to see the meddling Fifth Form man go whirling. Instead of which, Len, with his free hand, planted an upper-cut on the Sixth Former's chin which sent Rance staggering across the room till he reached the farther wall, banged on it, and slid to the floor, gasping.

"Oh gum!" gasped Root.

"Oh!" gurgled Rance. "Oh!" He sat gasping, his hand to his chin.

Root's eyes were dancing. This was something to tell the other junior men when he got back to the Lair!

"Give me that note, Root."

"I say, Rance, I can't help it, can I?" said Root, and handed it over like a lamb. Rance, clasping his chin,

did not speak. Len threw open the door, and twirled Root towards it.

"Cut!" he said. "If you ever carry those notes for Rance again, look out for my boot!" He pushed Root out of the study and shut the door after him. He turned towards Rance, now staggering to his feet.

"You rotten scug!" said Len, in measured tones. "If I were a Sixth Form prefect I'd report you to the Head and get you sacked! As the matter stands, I'm going to thrash you if you don't stop this game. See?"

"There's nothing in that note—a message to a tradesman!" gasped Rance. "You dare to interfere between me and my fag—"

"If it's a message to a tradesman, Rance, I'll apologise before I leave this study," said Len. Coolly, he tore the envelope open, and took out the folded sheet inside. Rance made a spring at him.

"Leave that alone! Don't you dare—" he panted. He jumped back from a set of knuckles which, as he had discovered, rather resembled wrought iron.

"Anything secret about a message to a tradesman?" asked Len. He held up the note. In a backward-sloping hand—Rance was very cautious in these matters—was written: "Popper, a quid each way." That was all, but enough, evidently, for the man who was to have received it. And Len's eyes gleamed at the word "Popper." Popper, obviously, was a horse, which Rance was going to back both ways—or had been going to! Popper was also one of the mysterious words that Mr. Silverson had spoken into the telephone. The schoolboy detective saw light.

"So you send messages to your tradesmen to back a horse both ways,

Rance!" said Len banteringly. "I think that if Dr. Osborne knew it he would take that tradesman off the school list—what?"

"You rotter! You—you—" panted the sportsman of the Sixth.

"I can guess the kind of tradesman who was to have got this!" said Len. "And you'd send a kid in the Fourth to see him! You won't, Rance! You never will again!" Len tossed the note into the study fire. "Don't do it any more, Rance. I shall hurt you if you do!"

The Sixth Former came at him with a rush. Len met him with right and left. Rance was no weakling, and he knew something about boxing, but in three minutes he had been driven right round the study under a rain of knocks that came home like a hammer, and he finished on his back on the rug, with his head in the fender.

Len, smiling, looked down at him—but it was a grim smile. He had had some knocks, and his knuckles ached a little. Rance lifted his head from the fender, and put a shaking hand to a crimson-streaming nose.

"More?" asked Len politely.

"Get out!" panted Rance.

"Right! Don't forget what I've told you."

Len Lex walked out of the study, leaving Rance sitting on the rug, his nose buried in his handkerchief. He was breathing rather hard, but smiling cheerfully, as he went down the passage. Rance he dismissed from his mind at once. He had made an enemy at Oakshott, and it did not worry him in the very least. He was thinking of that telephone message in Common-room—the mysterious message spoken by Vernon Silverson.

Lion—Tiger—Popper—Coot! That

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it was a code of some sort, was, of course, obvious—the kind of code designed for telegrams and used on the telephone by Silverson from motives of caution, in case of listening ears. A code by which the Sussex Man communicated with a confederate? Len had wondered. Now, thanks to Rance of the Sixth, he had a clue!

Popper was the name of a horse that Rance had been going to back, as was revealed in the note taken from Root. Was it a coincidence, or was it the same Popper to which Silverson had referred? Len knew that Vernon Silverson had had a programme of the Parsley races in his possession a week or two ago—a straw which showed the way the wind blew. A schoolmaster was not supposed to dabble in racing matters; still, one swallow did not make a summer! But a man who habitually plunged on the Turf—that was a very different matter.

Was it a racing code, arranged with some firm of Turf accountants, that Silverson had used on the phone? "Lion," perhaps a sum of money. "Tiger," win or place, or both. "Popper," the name of the horse. "Coot," an understood signature, registered with the racing firm!

If it were so, it turned a suspicion into a certainty; it meant that the Fifth Form master of Oakshott was deep in racing transactions—up to his neck in gambling on the Turf. In which case, Bullivant and Surtees were going to be relegated to back seats in Len's list of suspects, front place being reserved for Mr. Silverson. Plungers on the Turf did not, as a rule, gain thereby; generally they had losses to meet, which could not be met out of a Form-master's salary, however liberal.

Len smiled when he saw Rance in Hall that evening, with a nose that was red and raw. He did not like Rance; but he felt quite obliged to him for having helped him to score one more point in his game at Oakshott.

Also Ran!

LEN LEX heard a chuckle over his shoulder. It was the following day, after class, and he was standing at the window in the corridor, near the corner of Silverson's passage, looking out into the quad, and rather amused by what he saw there.

What he saw was quite a normal sight at Oakshott—merely his Form-master, Silverson, standing in conversation with Dr. Osborne, the headmaster. Dozens of fellows saw the two beaks talking, and gave no heed. Mr. Chowne, passing at a little distance, glanced at the Fifth Form master with a faintly envious eye. It was rather a distinction for any member of the staff to be selected for a chat, in full view of the whole school, by the majestic Head.

But Len had an idea that Mr. Silverson would have been exceedingly glad to cut that chat short—which, of

course, he could not venture to do! If he was anxious to get away, he certainly could not give his mighty chief the slightest hint to that effect. Len, who could see his face clearly from the window, read nothing in it but respectful attention to the great man who was honouring him. But there were hidden thoughts behind that well-controlled face—unless Len was in error in supposing that Silverson's Popper was, so to speak, Rance's Popper!

For the evening papers had been delivered at the school, and Silverson, booked by the Beak, had not yet looked at the paper which was placed on the table in his study—for Silverson, as the schoolboy detective had not failed to learn, had his special evening paper put in his study, and did not join in the scramble for the news in Common-room.

And Len had little or no doubt that Vernon Silverson was extremely anxious to look at that evening paper—at the column which gave the Stop Press news and racing results! If Silverson's Popper was the same as Rance's Popper, Silverson would want to know how he had fared—whether he was first, or second, or third, or also ran! Keen as his desire must be, there he stood—held by the Big Beak with invisible bonds!

And then Len heard that chuckle over his shoulder—a chuckle he knew—the joyous chuckle of Porrynge of the Fifth!

He glanced round from the window, and looked at Pie, wondering what that ineffable goat had been up to now.

Porrynge was coming out of Silverson's passage—so called because only Mr. Silverson's rooms were on it. There was ink on Pie's fingers, a smear of ink on his collar, and a wide, expansive grin on Pie's face. Evidently, Pie had seen that Silverson was kept away by the Big Beak, and had taken advantage of it to slip into Silverson's study and play the goat there—Pie's mission in life being to play the goat in every sort of imaginable way. This, Len guessed, was another move in his "feud" with Silverson.

"I say," Porrynge grinned at Len, forgetting, in his joyful mood, that he was at daggers drawn with the new man. "I say, better clear off from here, Lex, before Silverson comes in. Ha, ha! If he spots any man near his study, he may think—ha, ha!"

"What the dickens have you been up to, Porrynge?" asked Len. Porrynge, it was only too clear, had been up to something—something with ink in it!

"Silverson's always awfully keen about that evening paper of his," Pie chortled. "Blessed if I know why—he don't know one football team from another. Still, he is! I've heard him rag young Toots for being a minute late bringing it to his study! Ha, ha! He won't get much news out of that paper this time—not unless he can read it through the ink. Ha, ha! I say, I'd like to see his face when he finds his jolly old evening paper

soaked in ink! What? But I'd better not stop here."

"Not," said Len, "with that smear on your collar, and half a pint of ink on your fingers and cuffs."

"Eh, what?" Porrynge jumped, and stared at those signs of guilt, which, apparently, he now observed for the first time. "Oh, great Scott! I'm off!"

Porrynge scuttled. Certainly, had Silverson seen him then, he could have been left in little doubt as to who had inked his evening paper! Even the goat of the Fifth realised that!

Len laughed. He glanced from the window again. Silverson was still standing there, deep in "jaw" with the Big Beak. He was safe, for a few minutes, at least—and Len cut down the side passage to the study, and looked in. He was interested in the latest goat-like proceeding of the goat of the Fifth to an unusual extent. He gasped as he glanced into his Form-master's study. Pie had done his work thoroughly. Toots, the page, had left the paper folded on the table. Now it was spread out, and over it flowed and glistened a lake of ink.

Ink covered it like a sea, soaking through the paper, obliterating the print. Pie had not used merely the inkpot that stood on the table—he must have taken the big bottle of ink, also, from the bookcase cupboard. Whatever might be the news that Mr. Silverson was keen upon, he was not likely to derive much information from that particular copy of the evening paper.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Len.

He cut back to the corridor window. Looking out, he saw that Mr. Silverson was still talking to the Head! Mr. Chowne, after hovering for some time, had joined them. Dr. Osborne's remarks were now addressed to both Silverson and Chowne. Len, with amused eyes, noted that the Fifth Form master was, with infinite tact, detaching himself from the group—moving a little back, nodding instead of speaking—gradually, slowly but surely, landing the Head on Chowne instead of himself! In this manoeuvre he was assisted by Mr. Chowne's keen desire to be seen in conversation with the Big Beak; and by the Big Beak's utter unsuspectingness that any man on the staff could possibly want to get away from his distinguished presence.

Silverson got away at last. Chowne, striving hard to get the Big Beak's sole attention, got it. They moved together, deep in talk—and Mr. Silverson was able to detach himself and walk to the House. He disappeared from Len's sight at the doorway.

Pie had warned Len that it was safer not to be seen on the spot, considering what had occurred in the study so near at hand. But Len was too interested in his Form-master to think of stirring. He remained at the window, gazing out at a rather rich autumn sunset over the old grey buildings and ancient oaks of Oakshott, and did not seem to hear the hurried footsteps that passed behind

(Continued on page 30)

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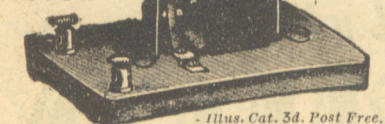
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The Schoolboy Detective

(Continued from page 6)

him up the corridor. Once inside the House, Mr. Silverson was hurrying to his study.

He passed behind Len at the window, turned into the study passage, and Len heard him hurry into his study and slam the door. The next moment he heard a loud and angry exclamation, audible even through a shut door and along a passage. Silverson had found that inky paper! Another moment, and Len heard a door crash open again, and hurried, angry feet coming out of the passage.

Lex ceased to be interested in the sunset over the old grey buildings, and glanced round from the window. He started a little at the fury in Vernon Silverson's face as he came out of the side passage into the corridor. Pie's jape, it was clear, had disturbed his Form-master deeply—the happy Pie had hit harder than he had dreamed in blotting out the latest news with a sea of ink!

"Lex!" Mr. Silverson almost yelled. "Lex! Was it you? Have you been in my study?"

"In your study, sir! No, sir!" answered Len. He had glanced in, but he had been careful not to enter.

"Someone has—some young rascal—upon my word!" Mr. Silverson controlled himself. Lex, the quietest and most orderly boy in his Form, was hardly to be suspected of so absurd and reckless a prank. "Lex! Please go to Common-room—and fetch me one of the evening papers. Please go quickly."

"Certainly, sir."

Len went as quickly as his Form-master could desire—he ran down the passage, and vanished in a moment. Mr. Silverson, breathing wrath and impatience, went back to his study.

If the schoolboy detective had had any doubt that Vernon Silverson was keen and anxious to see his evening paper, it would have been gone now. His keenness and anxiety were only too clear. But, impatient as he was, he was master of himself. He had not gone to Common-room to get another paper—he had sent that obliging member of his Form who happened to be at hand. He could hardly have looked at the racing results in Common-room, under the eyes of three or four other beaks—neither could a Form-master very well rush in, grab a paper, and rush out! Any other news he had been keen upon, he could have looked at in Common-room, indifferent to anyone's eyes; but not the racing news! He had as good as told Len what the news was that he wanted to see—though, certainly, he had not the

remotest idea that that member of his Form was interested in the matter at all, or likely to give it a thought!

Len arrived at the door of Common-room. Four beaks were there—Surtees deep in football, Rodd, Mr. Luce, and Mr. Bailey all deep in their papers. Len stepped respectfully in.

"Please, Mr. Silverson has sent me for a paper," he said, and picked up a spare paper.

Mr. Rodd nodded; no one else heeded him, and he left Common-room with the newspaper in his hand.

He had hurried there, but he did not hurry back. In the passage he glanced swiftly at the Stop Press column. If Silverson's Popper were, indeed, Rance's Popper, the name ought to be there—and it was! Swiftly he glanced down the list of results of races run that day; but among the winners, given in larger type, there was no such name as Popper. A moment later he found it, in smaller type. He read:

2.30.—SNOOKER, BONNY BOY, CATNAP.

Also ran: Bloomer, Gay Dog, Popper, Lyndale.

Rance of the Sixth, he reflected, as he ran back to Mr. Silverson's study, ought to be pleased that Root had never delivered his note to his book-making friend outside the school. Rance, if he had seen an evening paper, was no doubt feeling glad, after all, that that cheeky new man in the Fifth had barged in. His precious Popper was in the "also rans." And if Silverson's Popper was identical with Rance's Popper, Silverson had lost whatever sum was represented by the word "Lion" in his code.

Len reached Mr. Silverson's study, breathless. The Fifth Form master was standing in the doorway, waiting for him.

The master almost snatched the newspaper from Len. His hand was on the door to slam it, when he remembered to say "Thank you, Lex!" Then the door slammed.

Len walked back to the corridor window, a faint smile on his face. Outside, in the quad, he saw Porridge talking to Harvey and Banks, with an expansive grin on his face. Evidently, he was telling his chums about his jape in Silverson's study. Len could not hear what Harvey and Banks were saying; but he could guess, from the expressions on their faces, that they were not paying Pie compliments. Very probably they were pointing out to him that he was a howling ass and a priceless goat!

But Len, though he watched the three with a smile, was thinking of

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The Modern Boy

30

24/10/36

the man in the study—the man who, the day before, had telephoned to Greenwood 505, "Lion, Tiger, Popper, Coot." He could ascertain later whether Greenwood 505 was the telephone number of a firm of Turf accountants. But he had no doubt about it. He was wondering what was the precise effect on Vernon Silverson of discovering Popper in the also rans.

Was there any doubt now? He thought not. But he was going to make sure. Any fellow had a right to go to his Form-master's study and ask him a question. As it happened, there had lately been an argument in Study No. 8. Harvey had come on the word "proximior" in a crossword puzzle composed by somebody or other in the Latin language. It was a new one on Harvey, and Banks declared positively that there was no such word, and that the puzzle-merchant was a leg-puller. Which did not seem probable to Len!

So with that interesting question up his sleeve, as it were, Len walked along to Mr. Silverson's study, tapped lightly, and opened the door.

He fully expected to see, before Silverson had time to get on his guard, some sign in his face of the effect of Popper's appearance in the list of "also rans." But he was startled at the signs he saw! Mr. Silverson was sitting at his table, his face white as chalk, staring blankly at the "Racing Results" in the Stop Press column of the paper before him. He looked like a man stunned.

It was only a glimpse, as the door opened. But it was a glimpse that told the schoolboy detective more plainly than words could have done that Vernon Silverson had gambled recklessly and lost, and that the racing results that evening had given him a knock-out blow! Only a glimpse—for as the door came fairly open the Fifth Form master sprang to his feet, and the white pallor in his face was banished by a flush of sudden rage.

"Who's that? Lex! How dare you disturb me? Go away! Shut that door! Go away at once!"

"I was going to ask you, sir—"

Mr. Silverson grasped the door, and shut it in his face. Vernon Silverson, generally quiet, self-controlled, was, for the moment, a lump of jumping nerves! The door slammed so suddenly and hard that Len had to jump back to save his nose.

That narrow escape of his nose did not worry him as he walked away, a grim smile on his face. He knew now what he wanted to know; and Vernon Silverson, master of the Fifth Form at Oakshott School, was now first and foremost on the Schoolboy Detective's list of suspects!

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Congo Treasure (Continued from page 29)

feel—ahem!—that some slight punishment is necessary, but I am desirous of making it as light as possible. Shall we say that you may name your own punishment?" He drew himself up. "What punishment, then, do you suggest?"

"Three months' leave, sir," said Jamieson unblushingly.

It is on record that Squadron-Leader Brentwood was speechless for two minutes. At the end of that time he was able to see things in a sporting light—and the chronicler of this strange adventure needs only to add that Jamieson got it!

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