

42 Success

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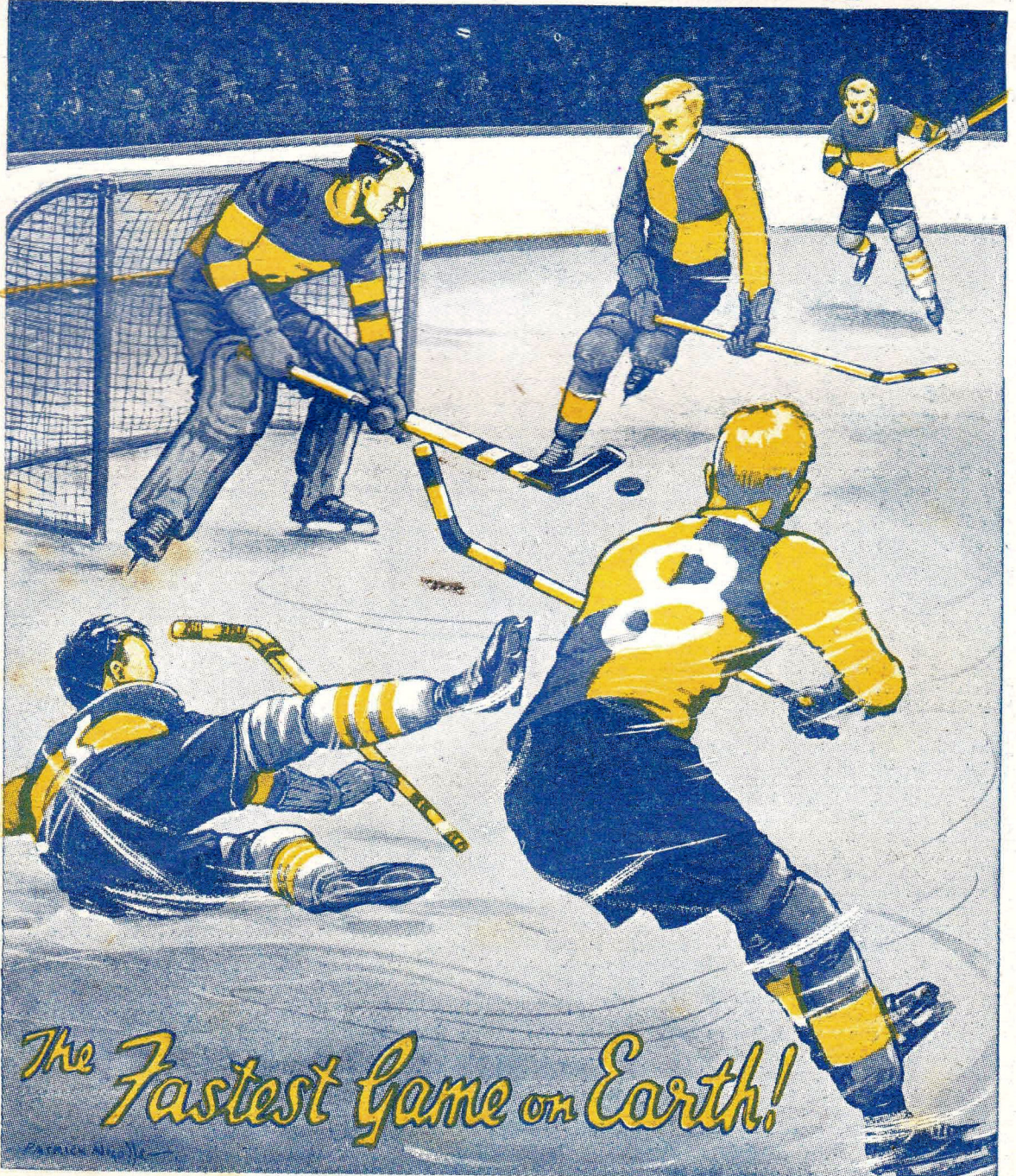
of FIGHTING PLANES of the WORLD—INSIDE!

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The Fastest Game on Earth!

Patricia M. Helle

The mystery of the "Sussex Man" deepens. To LEN LEX'S list of suspects is added a fourth—an Unknown who breaks out of Oakshott School at night and returns unseen by—

The SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE

By
**CHARLES
HAMILTON**

Soot for Somebody!

"THAT tick Lex—"
Len Lex, the new fellow in the Oakshott Fifth, started at the sound of his own name, in the misty quadrangle.

It was not yet dark, but there was a thick grey autumn mist over the Sussex downs, and it hung like a veil over Oakshott School. Lights were on in the studies, glimmering from many windows, but at a little distance from the House visibility was not good, and a fellow had almost to grope his way.

The ancient oaks, for which Oakshott was famous, loomed up dimly, stretching branches like spectral arms. Len, heading for the letter-box in the school wall, walked slowly, desiring to run neither into a tree nor into any person who might happen to be out in the quad in that damp, dismal, clinging mist. And so it was that the voice of "Pie" Porringe of the Fifth reached him before he reached the spot where Pie stood. He stopped—Pie still invisible, though not more than a couple of yards away.

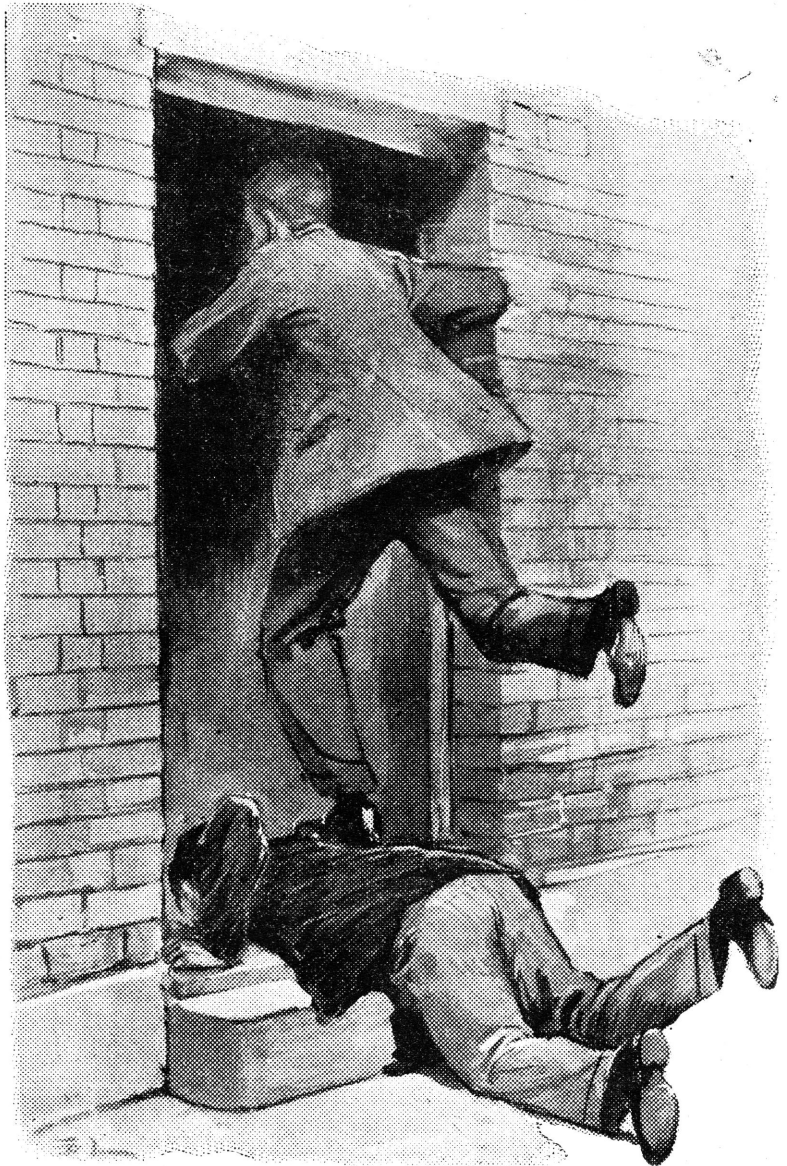
"Oh, chuck it!" came Harvey's voice.

"That tick Lex—" repeated Porringe.

"Look here, Pie!" came Banks' voice. "We're getting fed up with your rows with that man Lex, in Study No. 8. Chuck it, see?"

"That tick Lex," Pie went on, heedless of his chums' remonstrances, "may be along here any minute, and I've got the bag of soot specially ready for him. If you men don't want some, you'd better go while the going's good."

Len Lex, standing still in the concealing mist, grinned. Since Pie had landed himself with a game fist by punching the study door in error for Len's head, he had been off the fighting list, and his long-promised scrap with the new man had not yet come off. Evidently Pie was turning to other methods. It was like the goat of the Fifth to talk it over in the



Pie, half in the doorway, felt a boot treading in the small of his back as somebody passed over him and ran into the lobby.

hearing of the fellow for whom his kind intentions were intended. That was Pie all over! He had said that Lex might come along any minute. It did not occur to him that Lex had come!

"No end of a lark on that cheeky new tick!" Pie went on. "You see, this mist gives a man a chance. No good walking up to a man in broad daylight to buzz a bag of soot at his

napper! What? But he won't see it till he gets it! Fancy his face! Ha, ha!"

Len chuckled inaudibly. The schoolboy detective was at Oakshott on serious business. He had been entrusted by his uncle, Detective-Inspector Nixon, of Scotland Yard, with the task of catching the elusive burglar known as the "Sussex Man," and whom Len suspected was a

The Schoolboy Detective

member of the Oakshott staff. But there was no doubt that the goat of the Fifth supplied comic relief.

"You goat!" said Banks. "Do you call it a lark to muck a man up with soot?"

"Yes, I jolly well do!" declared Pie. "I can't whop him, so long as I've got a game fin—"

"You couldn't whop him anyhow, fathead!"

"Never mind all that!" said Pie. "You men stand clear—I tell you Lex may come along any minute."

"How do you know?" demanded Harvey. "He's not likely to come out in this putrid mist, I should think."

"I spotted him writing a letter in the study. He always posts his letters himself—I've noticed that. He can't be long, if he's going to catch the collection. Look here, shut up—if he comes along, he may hear us talking!"

Len Lex chuckled another inaudible chuckle. That obvious consideration had occurred to Porrhage a little late.

"Look here, Pie, you ass, there'll be a row!" pleaded Harvey. "Don't play the goat! Suppose Silverson sees him all mucked up with soot—"

"Let him!" said Pie. "Silverson won't know who did it, will he? Why, Lex won't know himself, if he wants to tell Silverson! How's he to know? As soon as he comes along, I mop this paper bag in his chivvy, and it bursts! He won't see me, in the fog—and after he's got the soot, he won't see anything for a good long while! What? Ha, ha!"

"Oh, you ass!" said Harvey.

"You goat!" sighed Banks.

"Better clear off," said Pie. "I'm going to do it, and you can jaw till you're black in the face—as black as Lex is going to be—ha, ha! But it won't stop me. You may get some if you stick here. Don't go up the path—you may run into Lex. I tell you he may be along any minute."

There was a sound of departing footsteps—not up the path. Harvey and Banks, having done their best to make Pie see reason, and failed—as per usual—cleared off and left him to it. Their footsteps died away, on a roundabout route back to the House.

Lex stood where he was, considering whether to circle silently round Pie, and get to the letter-box beyond, post his letter, and circle round again, leaving the goat of the Fifth to wait, till he was tired of waiting. This seemed rather a sound scheme; and Len was deciding on it when he heard a footstep on the grassy path behind him. The weather tempted few fellows out of the House, but some fellow was coming—perhaps a fellow with a letter to post.

It would be like Pie—exactly like him!—to overlook that possibility, and bung the bag of soot at an indistinct figure in the mist before he recognised it. Len did not want that soot himself—neither did he want any other Oakshott man to have it. He turned, with the intention of giving a warning. A tall Sixth Form man,

muffled in an overcoat with the collar turned up, loomed in the mist, and Len's keen eyes recognised Rance of the Sixth. Rance started, as he almost ran into Len, gave the Fifth Former, as soon as he saw who he was, a black and bitter look, and passed on. After that scowl of bitter enmity, Len let him pass—unwarned.

It was not because Rance of the Sixth was his enemy—though Rance had been bitter enough since the day Len had thrashed him in his study, as a tip not to send fags on messages to racing men outside the school. Since that date, the schoolboy detective had kept his eye on Rance, and seen that Root of the Fourth carried no more such messages. Now he let him walk on unwarned—for what seemed to him good reason.

Rance had no letter in his hand for the post—neither did a fellow usually muffle himself up in an overcoat to cross the quad. Rance was going out! The school gates were locked—no man was allowed out after the gates were locked, without special leave. Rance was not heading for the gates—he had no exeat! He was going out of bounds—taking advantage of the mist to interview some sporting friend. That path led direct to the school wall—and Rance was going over the wall; there were certain spots where a tall fellow like Rance could negotiate it.

Breaking bounds to see some undesirable acquaintance outside the school was risking the sack—and it seemed better for Rance to get the soot than to get the sack! Len Lex smiled—and said nothing. He waited—wondering whether Pie would be goat enough to buzz that bag of soot at the wrong man in the mist!

Len need not have wondered whether Pie's goatishness was equal to such an error. Pie's goatishness was equal to anything.

Crash! Smash!

Len heard the sound of a bursting paper bag. It was succeeded by a horrible gasping gurgle, and the sound of a heavy fall. Rance, taken utterly by surprise by the reception of the bursting bag of soot, had gone over on his back.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a triumphant yell from Pie.

"Urrrggh! Who—is that Porrhage?" came a muffled, gurgling, unrecognisable voice. "Urrggh! Is—is—Who—Urrrgggh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pie.

He came racing up the path. Len stepped off it. Porrhage scudded by him, and vanished through the mist towards the dim glimmer of the House. Horrible gurgling came to Len's ears. Guided by the sound, he walked round it, and posted his letter. The horrible gurgling continued unabated. Len walked round it again, and walked back to the House.

Not so Funny!

STUDY No. 8 in the Fifth echoed to the sounds of mirth. Porrhage had arrived in his study, laughing. He was still laughing. The absolute success of his jape

on the new man—the mental picture of what Lex would look like when he tottered back to the House—made Pie almost weep. Harvey and Banks grinned. They liked the new man, Lex—still, a jape was a jape, and it undoubtedly was funny to think of him tottering into the House drenched with soot.

Other Fifth Form men, hearing the sounds of revelry from Study No. 8, looked in to ask what the merry jest was. Pie, hardly able to speak for laughing, told them. Cayley, Hobbs, Fane, Simpson, Bird, Worrall roared, like Pie. It was, of course, an absolutely idiotic jape—like all Pie's. Still, it was funny to think of Lex getting the soot. No fewer than nine fellows, in Pie's study, were grinning, chuckling, laughing, or roaring, when a quiet voice was heard at the door: "Tell a chap the jolly old joke!"

Len Lex strolled in.

Nine pairs of eyes were fixed on him at once. One pair—Pie's—almost started from their owner's head. The merriment died a sudden death. There was no trace of soot about Lex. There were traces about Pie—on his fingers, and on his jacket, and on his trousers. A fellow could not handle soot without getting a bit sooty. But there was not a single, solitary trace on the new man.

Len Lex, always clean, neat, natty, looked as clean and neat and natty as usual. Obviously, he had not had time since that tremendous jape had come off to clean off the soot and change. Obviously, therefore, he had not got the soot! But Pie, at least, knew that somebody had! Pie's jaw dropped. Len's cheery voice broke a dead silence:

"Aren't you going to tell a chap the joke?"

"Oh!" said Pie, in a gasp. "Oh! You—you— Oh scissors!"

"You never got the soot?" gasped Harvey.

"Soot? What soot?"

"That goat has been pulling our leg!" grunted Cayley. "He was making out that he buzzed a bag of soot over you in the fog."

"So—so I did!" gasped Pie. "So I jolly well did! At least, if it wasn't Lex it was—was somebody!"

"Oh gosh!" yelled Banks. "Did you get somebody else? Oh, my only winter bonnet!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Again there was a roar of laughter in Study No. 8. This time Pie did not join in it. Pie was done with merriment. He was wondering, in ghastly dismay, who had got the soot. Somebody had! The dreadful possibility that it might have been a master occurred to Pie! Surtees—Bullivant—Bailey or Luce—Rodd—or his own beak, Silverson—suppose it had been one of them! Pie almost fainted at the thought.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Fifth Form men. Pie no longer saw anything funny in this; but to the other men it seemed funnier, than ever. Pie's face alone was enough to make a stone image laugh. Who had got the soot? Up till the moment when Len Lex walked into Study No. 8, Pie had had no doubt—not the slightest shadow of doubt—that Lex had got it.

He could see now that Lex hadn't! But who had?

"Oh, you goat, Pie—you priceless goat!" almost sobbed Harvey. "Somebody must have gone down to post a letter. Ha, ha, ha! Didn't you look at him?"

"Look?" said Pie. "How was a fellow to see in that dashed fog? Besides, I had no time. I just let him have it. I only hope that it wasn't a beak! If—if—if it happened to be Silverson—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Fifth Formers. The bare suggestion that the master of the Fifth might have captured the soot seemed to take them by storm. They roared.

There were footsteps in the passage—voices. A sound like the growl of an infuriated dog was heard. Then the voice of Campion of the Sixth—head prefect of Oakshott:

"We'll soon see! Come into his study."

"I tell you it was Porrhinge!" The savage growl was barely recognizable as the voice of Rance of the Sixth. "I tell you—"

"Well, come on!"

All eyes were turned on the doorway of Study No. 8. Two figures appeared there—one, the rather dapper figure of Campion; the other, taller, and most extraordinary in its aspect. Soot clothed it like a garment. Soot floated round it. Head and face and overcoat were smothered with soot. Really, it was difficult to recognise Rance in his garment of soot. But it was Rance.

Merriment was subdued in Study No. 8. It was a serious matter when the head prefect was called in. But no fellow, looking at Rance, could be quite serious. Rance himself was serious enough. He was almost frowning.

"Look here," said Campion. "You

can see what has happened to Rance. He says a man in this study did it. Was it you, Porrhinge?"

"Oh crumbs!" said Pie, gazing at Rance. He was glad—intensely glad—to see that his worst forebodings were not realised. It was not a beak; it was not a prefect. It was a Sixth Form man—which was serious enough. But it might very easily have been worse!

"I tell you I know it was Porrhinge!" howled Rance. "Besides, he's got soot on him now—look at him!"

Campion looked.

"How did you get that soot on you, Porrhinge?" he asked.

"Oh crumbs!" said Porrhinge.

"It's pretty clear!" said the head prefect. Campion had his official ash under his arm. He slipped it down into his hand. "Porrhinge, I suppose you're the biggest idiot in Oakshott or out of it, but even you ought to have sense enough to know that you can't mop a bag of soot over a Sixth Form man! Bend over that chair!" Campion swished the ash.

"Oh!" groaned Pie. "Oh crumbs!

I—I say, Campion, I never meant—"

"Did you mop that soot over Rance

or not?"

"Yes; but I never meant—"

"Bend over that chair!"

Five minutes ago, Pie's merry roar had been waking the echoes of the Fifth Form studies. Now a boiled owl would have had nothing on Pie for serious solemnity! In the lowest of spirits, Pie bent over the chair—the traditional attitude for whopping!

Up went the ash. Down it came! Scientifically, the head prefect of Oakshott laid on the six. Whop—whop—whop—whop—whop—whop!

"Ow! Ooh! Ow! Wow!" "hoooh! Whooop!" came from Pie, in accompaniment to the rhythmic whopping of the ash.

Campion tucked the ash under his arm again.

"You play the goat like that again, Porrhinge, and I'll take you to the Head!" he said. With that dire threat, Campion walked out of the study, followed by Rance, leaving a sooty trail behind him.

"Ow!" Porrhinge rose and wriggled. "Ow! Ah! Ow! Wow! That beastly little shrimp, Campion, knows how to whop! Oooooogh!"

The Fifth Form men, chuckling, crowded out of the study—to tell the tale in other places and evoke loud merriment. Pie sat down—and rose again hurriedly. His study-mates smiled.

"Wow!" said Pie. "Wow! Ow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pie glared at Len.

"You tick! I'll make you sit up yet! Wow! And that shrimp Campion, too! Wow!"

"You're going to make us sit up—and you can't even sit down!" said Len, laughing. "Better give us both a miss!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"—from Harvey and Banks.

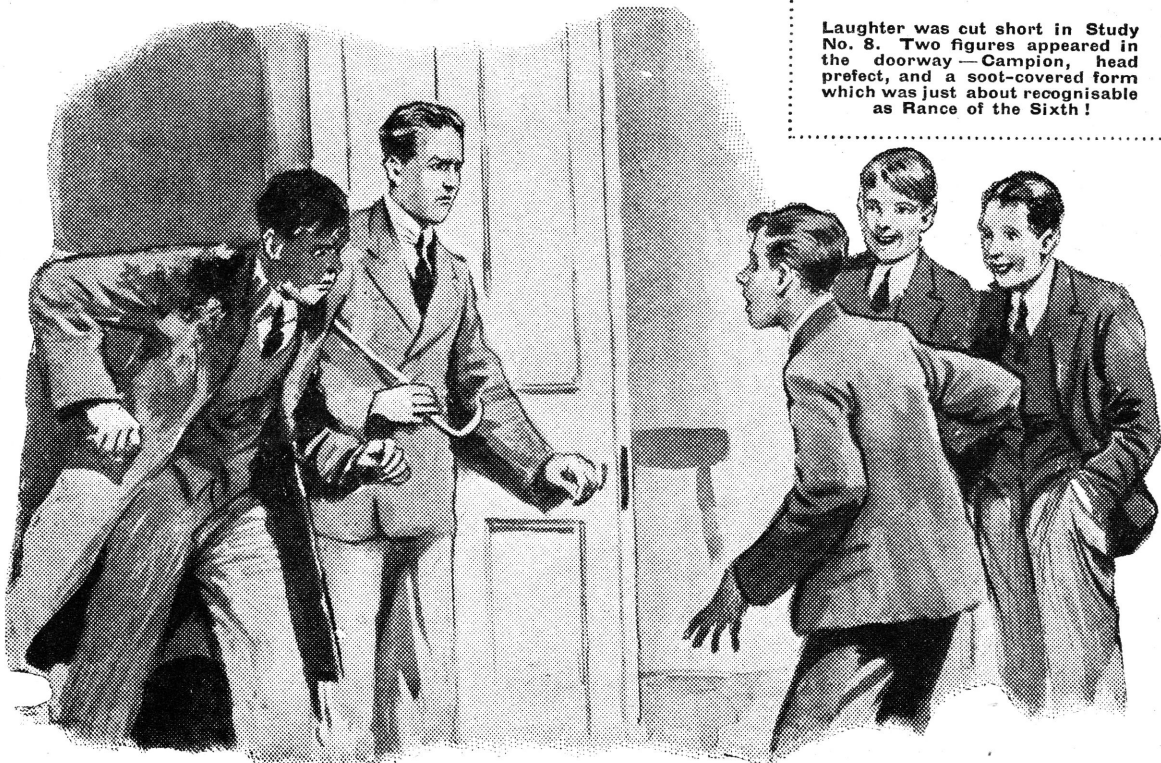
"Oh, shut up!" hissed Pie. He wriggled and moaned. It had been a severe "six."

Pie stood to his prep that evening. He was still wriggling when the Fifth went to dorm. For which Campion of the Sixth was going to be made to sit up—perhaps!

The Midnight Prowler!

LEN LEX, the schoolboy detective, was patient—and he needed all his patience for the task he had set himself. Blotted in the darkness,

Laughter was cut short in Study No. 8. Two figures appeared in the doorway—Campion, head prefect, and a soot-covered form which was just about recognisable as Rance of the Sixth!



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he leaned on the wall of the passage, near the door of Mr. Silverson's study, when midnight boomed dully through the misty night.

Many a night since he had been at Oakshott had Len watched in the dark in that passage, by the study which, as he believed, was the Sussex Man's mode of egress and ingress. And he had made discoveries—more than one; yet of little help, for one seemed to cancel out another.

Twice had Bullivant, the games master, prowled by that study in the dark—for what reason, unless a secret exit from the House at the hour when the Sussex Man was wont to walk abroad? But Surtees, master of the Fourth, had prowled also, and Len had seen him, and narrowly escaped being seen by him. What weighed against one, weighed against the other—but both could not be the Sussex Man!

And there was Silverson, who, from his bed-room adjoining the study, could use it easiest of all—Silverson, who had disregarded Mr. Chowne's advice to have a bolt placed on the casement by which the Sussex Man once had entered—Silverson, who gambled on the Turf, and whom Len had seen stricken white and dumb by an overwhelming loss.

Three suspects for the nephew of Detective-Inspector Nixon to choose from—Surtees possible, Silverson probable, and Bullivant—old "Bully," the games master—something like a "cert." The man Len liked—whom all Oakshott liked—but the man whom Len had seen meeting the mysterious "Roger" in Trant Wood—whom he had heard say, in so many words, that he would "have the money" when the Sussex Man "cracked the crib" at Oakshott School!

Having heard that from the games master's own lips, could the schoolboy detective doubt? Yet every time he saw red-faced, loud-voiced old Bully on Big Side, he doubted, in spite of reason.

But a climax was coming—he felt that!

If the Sussex Man was Bullivant, his next "job" lay in Oakshott itself, and Len had only to watch. If it was Silverson, his recent heavy loss on the races indicated that it was time for the mysterious cracksmen to prowling again—and if he prowled at Trant, Len was not likely to forget that he had seen Vernon Silverson's motor-bike hidden in Trant Wood the day he had shadowed Bullivant.

If it was Surtees— But there, all was vague!

Len had been long enough at Oakshott now to have given every other man on the staff the once-over, and there was no hint of a suspicion in any other case.

Len listened. His Form-fellows in the Fifth Dormitory were sleeping, little dreaming that Len was out of the dorm. All Oakshott School was sleeping—except Len—and possibly another! Some night, sooner or later, the Sussex Man would prowl—and Len knew that it was likely

to be sooner rather than later. He waited, watched, listened for a sound from the passages—a sound from Silverson's study—any sound in the night stillness. And a sound came—a soft, shuffling, stealthy step that came down the corridor and turned into Silverson's passage.

Len's heart beat. This was not, at all events, Silverson. He would enter the study, if he was up, from his bed-room that adjoined. Bullivant or Surtees? If the former, his own words had said that the job was to be in the school, and he could only be coming to give an appearance of an outside entrance at the casement where the Sussex Man had entered before—to hide thereby the fact that it was an "inside job."

If that unseen figure in the dark left the House, it could hardly, therefore, be Bullivant. In that case, Surtees! Len would have given much for a glimpse of the newcomer's face—but the darkness was impenetrable. He could see nothing—only hear. But his ears were keen.

He knew that the study door had opened and closed again. The unseen one listened. There was a faint sound within—the faintest of sounds—no gleam of light. Whoever it was dare not risk waking Mr. Silverson.

Faint as the sound was, Len knew that it came from the study window. Bullivant, leaving it ajar as a false clue? Or Surtees, going out? Or—for he did not exclude the possibility—some man on whom his suspicions had not yet fallen? He had to know—for if the man was going, he had to follow. Soundlessly, he opened the study door an inch.

A glimmer of pale starlight through the mist without showed the casement window. It showed the middle casement open and a dim figure silently stepping out—a figure that, from its height, might have been either Bullivant's or Surtees'. The sill was hardly more than a foot from the ground—the figure stepped easily out and drew the casement shut. There was no sound of a clicking lock—but Len knew that Silverson, doubtless for good reasons, kept that spring-lock well oiled. Yet he had an impression that the casement had been left unfastened.

Not Bullivant, planting false traces for the police! He did not need to step outside to do that. This man was going out, and the schoolboy detective was going after him. There would soon be proof. If the unknown headed for the old oak by masters' gate, where Len had discovered the bag of burglar's tools hidden, it would be clear. If he did that, he was the Sussex Man.

Len stepped into the study, closed the door, and crossed swiftly to the window. The casement was unfastened. He had thought so—yet it was startling to find it so. Only Vernon Silverson was supposed to have a key to that lock. The casement was left unlocked for re-entrance. No one was likely to discover it unlocked, and close it, at such an hour. But the remotest risk was not in keeping with the wary cunning of the Sussex Man. Len,

for a moment, stood in perplexed doubt. But there was no moment to lose if he was not to lose his quarry. He opened the casement, stepped out, and left it unfastened behind him.

The dim figure had vanished in mist and darkness. That mattered nothing; the Sussex Man could not prowl abroad without the tools of his trade, and Len knew where they were hidden.

Swiftly, silently, he threaded his way through misty darkness to masters' gate, near which stood the old oak, close to the wall. In the cunningly hidden hollow at the top of the trunk where the branches jutted was the bag of tools—where Len had found it and left it.

He heard through the mist a sound of panting breath. So far from the House, his man was less stealthy. He crept closer, and peered; and dimly, vaguely, made out a figure that reached up and clambered into the old oak. A brushing, scuffling sound of a climber, then a light sound of dropping outside the wall. Whoever the man was, he was outside the school now—gone in the night!

To shadow him farther in the mist and darkness was impossible. Neither was it necessary. He was gone. And as soon as Len knew who was missing from his room in the House he would know who the man was. Quietly, he made his way back to the House, stepped in at Silverson's study window, closed the casement, and fastened the lock. A few moments more and he was out of the study, standing in the darkness of Big Corridor, considering his next step.

A Struggle in the Dark!

JAMES BULLIVANT, games master of Oakshott School, stirred uneasily in his sleep, awakened, and opened his eyes. He half-lifted his head from the pillow and stared round him in the gloom. Old Bully's slumber had been troubled. Whether he was the Sussex Man or not, there was that on his mind that banished peaceful slumber.

A dream, strangely and terribly realistic, had tormented his sleep—a dream of stealthy movements in the dark, and of a constable's lantern suddenly shining upon him, revealing his face and his guilt. So real was that vision that when he was awakened and stared about him, he could hardly believe that it was a dream. He breathed panting breaths as he looked about his shadowed room. But all was dark and quiet. It was only a dream, and Mr. Bullivant sank his head on the pillow again.

But it had not been all a dream. For a single instant a light had gleamed on his sleeping face. Len Lex, outside his door after that fleeting glimpse, listened to the sound of Bullivant stirring—and was glad to hear him settling down again. Old Bully had awakened, but the light, and Len, had been gone before his eyes opened. The schoolboy detective, standing in the dark passage, knew now that it was not Bullivant who had gone from the

House that misty night. Not Bullivant—that was certain now—but who?

Not Silverson, whose room adjoined his study. Of the schoolboy detective's list of three, only Surtees remained. He stepped silently along the passage towards the Fourth Form master's door.

He bent his ear at that door to make sure that if there was anyone within, he slept. And then he realised that the door was ajar. Silently he pushed the door open. Within, all was blackness. He listened. But there was not the faintest sound of breathing. He had to risk a light—but there was little risk. If, against all probability, Ralph Surtees was in his bed, he would not see who was behind the sudden flash of light, even if he was awake.

Len's flashlamp glittered over the bed for a fraction of a second. The bed was turned back, as if it had been slept in. But it was unoccupied. The master of the Oakshott Fourth was not in his room.

Len knew now! Surtees, the boyish young Form-master—a man who, on his looks, Len would have said was as straight as a die—was the man whom he had spotted prowling in the dark!

Standing there in the dark, satisfied at last that he knew the Sussex Man, he was conscious of a stealthy sound—a cautious footstep. Before he could make a movement, some unseen figure knocked against him in the dark. Only at the last instant had he heard the man coming—and the man, whoever he was, had neither seen nor heard Len, as that collision in the dark showed.

He heard a startled, gasping breath. The unseen man had been taken by surprise, as well as Len. But he was quick on the uptake, for his grasp was on the schoolboy detective at once. Len's brain was in a whirl. Who was this—who? If Surtees was out, who was this?

While that question hammered in his brain, Len gave grasp for grasp. He was strong and sturdy, but it was an athletic grip that was on him. Locked in a fierce, desperate wrestle, they staggered across the passage, from the wall to the banisters, from the banisters to the wall. Whoever this was he must not learn that Lex of the Fifth left his dormitory at night to keep watch in the House. He could turn on no light now—both his hands were fully occupied grasping the schoolboy detective. Len's one thought was to break loose and escape unseen!

"By gum, I've got you this time!" came a low, hard-breathing voice. "You fool! Give in—give in! Do you want to wake the House? Bullivant, you fool, give in, I tell you!"

Len's brain seemed to spin. Hard-breathing, husky from exertion as it was, he knew the voice of Ralph Surtees, master of the Fourth! It was not Surtees, then, who had gone out by Silverson's window. This was Surtees—and he fancied that he had got hold of Bullivant! In the name of wonder, why?

In that passage, on which only

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masters' rooms opened, he might naturally fancy that anyone into whom he ran in the dark was a member of the staff. But why Bullivant? It seemed to Len, in that bewildering moment, that the mystery of Oakshott was beyond all fathoming.

But this mistake, amazing as it was, spelt safety from suspicion for the schoolboy detective, if only he could escape unrecognised. Could he?

"Give in, you fool!" breathed the man who grasped him. "Are you mad, Bullivant?"

Len relaxed his struggle, as if in obedience. He stood limp. One hand still grasped him. The other released its grip—to get hold of a pocket flashlamp. Len had no doubt. Surtees thought that he was Bullivant, and that he had given in. But he was not Bullivant, and he had not given in.

He was playing for a chance to get loose, and this was it. From limp surrender to desperate effort he passed in a split second—driving both hands against Surtees' chest, and at the same moment hooking his leg. The Fourth Form master went backwards, and Len tore himself loose and ran past Bullivant's door to the landing.

He knew that in a matter of seconds Surtees would be up, his light flashing on. But less than seconds were enough for the schoolboy detective. He dipped below the landing level as a beam of light shot through the dark, and crouched on the stairs.

Had Surtees followed, and flashed the light down the stairs, he could never have escaped unseen. But he knew that Surtees would not. He knew that the beam of light would stop at Bullivant's door. It did!

He heard the door open. Surtees, in the absolute certainty that it was Bullivant who had been in his grasp, had gone straight to the games master's room, nothing doubting that he would run his man down there. Len listened and then peered above the landing level. Bullivant's door was wide open, and light streamed out. Surtees had switched on the electric light as he went in. Len wondered breathlessly what would be Bullivant's reaction to that—Bullivant, who knew as Len knew that he had not been out of bed that night!

He heard the deep, rolling voice of the games master in startled tones. Old Bully's powerful voice carried far.

"Surtees! Is that you, Surtees? What the dickens! What are you up at this time of night for? What do you want?"

Len could picture old Bully, sitting up, amazed, his red face glowing in the light, his pale blue eyes bulging with astonishment. He could picture, too, Surtees' disconcerted surprise at finding the games master in bed, and going to pretend that he had not left it!

"Look here, Bullivant"—Surtees' boyish voice was uncertain in tone—"you're not going to make out that

The Schoolboy Detective

you haven't been out of this room?"

"I haven't been out of this bed since half-past ten!" boomed Bullivant. "What do you mean?"

There was a long pause before Surtees answered. Perhaps a doubt smote him. The answer came at last.

"I heard somebody—I thought it was you! If you say that you haven't been out of this room—"

"I've said that I haven't been out of this bed! And I don't thank you for disturbing me! It's not so easy to sleep, anyhow. For goodness' sake go back to bed and don't be a fool!" came the games master's testy answer.

The light was shut off. Surtees stepped out and closed the door. Len Lex whipped down to the lower stairs. But his caution was not needed. He heard another door close above—Surtees had gone back to his own room. For whatever reason he had prowled that night, his prowling was over. The schoolboy detective was left, unseen and unsuspected, to puzzle out, if he could, what that strange episode might possibly mean—and to ask the unanswerable question—who had gone out into the night by Silverson's casement?

Painful for Pie!

PORRINGE sat up in bed and blinked in the glimmer of dawn. It was not yet rising-bell, and there was no sound of stirring in the House. Looking up and down the Fifth Form dormitory, Pie saw that every man in the Form was fast asleep, which was satisfactory to Pie. For though a fellow could, of course, trust his pals not to give him away, a fellow could not, on the other hand, be too careful when he was going to make a perfect fool of himself. And Campion was going to feel just as sorry for himself as Pie could make him.

Slipping quietly from bed, Pie drew on trousers and shoes and a coat, and left the dormitory.

He left the Fifth sleeping soundly—soundest of all, perhaps, Len Lex. For Len had remained up, and on the watch, till six o'clock boomed from the clock tower—waiting and watching for a sound of the returning night prowler.

That prowler, when he returned, had found Silverson's casement locked against him. Obviously, he had no key, or he would not have left it ajar. But the Sussex Man would not be stopped by a lock. Finding the window fast, he would suppose,

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probably, that Silverson had turned over for something, noticed that the casement was ajar, and shut it.

Whatever he might suppose, he had to get back into the House—and Len pictured him stealing back to the bag of burglar's tools hidden in the oak, selecting the instrument he needed, then opening the casement and entering. Then emerging into the passage, where the schoolboy detective waited and watched—to be tracked to his room in the dark! And on the morrow, a report for Detective-Inspector Nixon, of Scotland Yard! Not Silverson—not Surtees—not Bullivant—for it seemed, now, that every clue had been false! But, whoever he was, known!

And it had not happened! Hour after weary hour had Len waited, till sleep almost sealed his eyelids, and the man had not come! Or had he, leaving the locked casement alone, effected an entrance in some other spot—could even the stealthiest burglar have done so without the faintest sound reaching the keen ears of a watcher, waiting and listening with every sense on the alert? It was not likely. Yet he had not come!

With the glimmer of dawn coming through the misty windows, Len had had to give it up—he could not risk an early housemaid, or any other early riser, spotting him prowling in the House. But Pie Porringe was not thinking of early housemaids as he trod down the stairs, grinning. He went into Study No. 8 and emerged with something in his hand. That something was, in itself, quite a harmless article—nothing more or less than an egg. Taken internally, it would have been not merely harmless, but nourishing. It was externally that Pie intended that shrimp Campion to take it!

The grin was wide on Pie's face as he arrived at Campion's door in the Sixth. Pie had it all cut and dried. There was light enough now for a fellow to take aim. To open Campion's door, land the egg on his face as he lay in bed, escape unseen before the prefect got his eyes fairly open—what could be easier? Nothing—till Pie turned the handle of Campion's door and found that it was locked inside.

Pie was not beaten yet, however. He trod quietly along the passage and down the steps to the Sixth Form lobby. That lobby had a door on the quad. Sixth Form windows were out of reach, though on the ground floor. But what about throwing up a pebble or two at Campion's window, bringing him there to look out and see what the dickens it meant—and letting him have the egg as he looked out? The morning mist was almost as thick as it had been over-night—Campion would never see him clearly enough to know him. Neither would he see Campion clearly—but he only wanted the dimmest glimpse to land the egg. It seemed sound to Pie.

He unbolted, unchained, and unlocked the lobby door. He did it as quietly as he could. But the bolt scraped, the chain jingled, the lock clicked sharply. Then he stepped out into the dank mist, through which the early sunrays glimmered. Looking

back into the doorway, Pie listened, on his guard in case those sounds might have been heard from within. It never occurred to him that they might have been heard from without.

And so it came to pass that Pie got the surprise of his life!

Who it was that barged into him from behind and sent him sprawling on his face in the doorway, Pie never knew. That somebody did was certain, for it happened!

Pie fell half in and half out, his long legs sprawling on the earth, his knees banging on the step, his nose raking the doormat within. And not only the doormat! For the hand that held the egg struck first, smashing the egg on the mat, and it was into dislocated eggshell and streaming yolk that Pie's features plunged, as well as into the rough surface of the mat.

Dizzy with amazement, suffocated by egg and doormat, Pie was dimly conscious of a boot treading in the small of his back as somebody passed over him and ran into the lobby.

He lifted a dizzy, eggy face from the doormat. Egg clogged his vision, but he had a split second's glimpse of the back of an overcoat as a tall figure vanished through the lobby into the House. Who it was, Pie had not the remotest idea.

Whoever it was, Pie's game was up. Campion was not going to be deluded to his study window to get that egg—Pie had got the egg: it was streaking all over his astonished and exasperated face.

With feelings that could have been expressed in no known language, Porringe tottered in at the door, dabbing egg from his eyes and nose. Almost he forgot to shut the door—but he remembered and turned back. It would hardly do to leave it open. He replaced chain and bolt, turned the key, and trod away, still dabbing egg. He got back to the Fifth Form dormitory and, breathing fury, washed.

He was still washing when the rising-bell clanged and the Fifth Form turned out. Some of the fellows were surprised to see Pie already up and busy with his ablutions. He did not tell them why.

Len Lex turned out, with heavy eyes, to a tiring morning. More troubling than loss of sleep and fatigue was the sense of defeat—of puzzling perplexity. The schoolboy detective had a list of three "suspects," against every one of whom existed strong suspicion—but now there was a fourth man in the case, of whom he knew nothing, and at whose identity he could not even begin to guess.

No one was missing from the House that morning—whoever it was that had been out in the night was back in his usual place, and Len Lex did not know how. And keen as Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew was, it never crossed his mind that the goat of the Fifth could have told him how!

Next Saturday—Whilst his dormitory sleeps, Len keeps watch for the mystery-man—and sees Two Hundred Pounds vanish from a Master's desk!