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# The MODERN BOY

EVERY SATURDAY.  
Week Ending December 5th, 1936.

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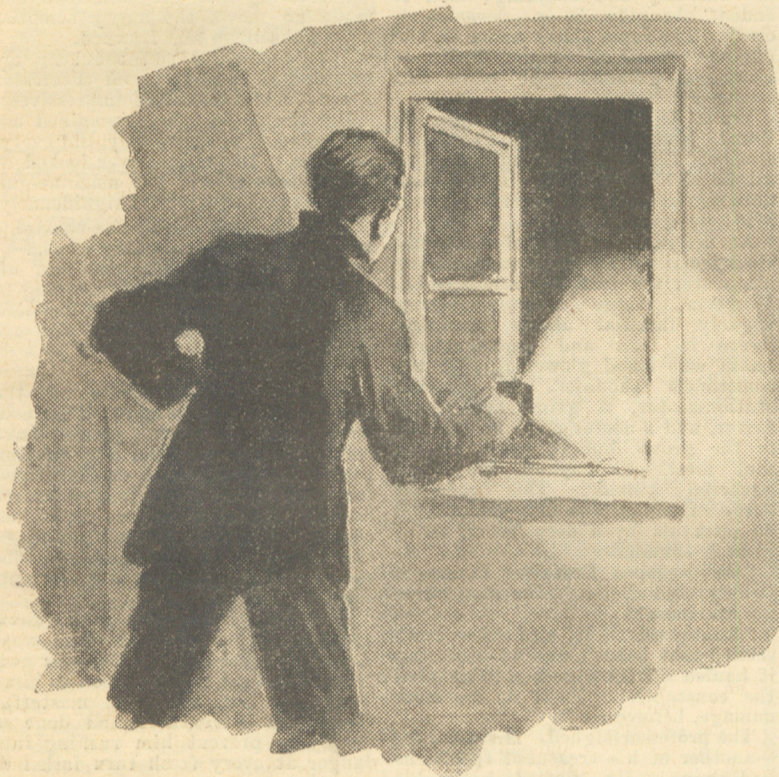


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# The SCHOOLBOY DETECTIVE



The beam of Len's torch shone out through the attic window . . .

## Just Like Pie!

"PORRIDGE!"

"Oh blow!" hissed Pie.

Len Lex, the schoolboy detective, grinned.

Porridge of the Fifth was heading for the gates, after class, when his Form-master, Mr. Silverson, rapped out his name.

Len could not help grinning, though he was sorry for poor old Pie. It was so like Pie, who was gated, to start walking out of gates right under the nose of the beak who had gated him!

Pie, of course, did not notice Silverson. The Fifth Form master was talking to Wegg, the porter, at his lodge, and occasionally patting the head of Wegg's mastiff, Biter. He was full in view if Pie had glanced towards the porter's lodge, which Pie, of course, did not think of doing. Pie marched on till Mr. Silverson's voice brought him to a dismayed halt.

Porridge had a "feud" on with his Form-master, the outcome of which was chiefly lines for Pie. Lines, unwritten, had accumulated: and now Pie had four hundred on hand, and was gated till they were delivered.

"Have you written your lines, Porridge?" asked Silverson.

"No, sir!"

"You will go back to the House at once, Porridge. If your lines are

not handed to me before preparation this evening they will be doubled."

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Pie, and he turned back.

"The swab!" breathed Pie to Len. "The awful tick! Dropping on a man like that! I'm jolly glad I screwed up his study door the other day. I believe he half suspects who did it. Blow him! I say, Lex, will you do something for me? You're not gated."

"Any old thing!" said Len, at once. "I'd ask Harvey or Banks, but they bar Rance," said Pie. "Anyhow, they're not here. But you—"

"Rance of the Sixth? What—"

Len walked towards the House with Pie, as the latter fumbled in his pocket and produced a letter therefrom. Len stared at it, and stared at Porridge. Pie was well known at Oakshott to be an absolute goat. Len wondered whether he was goat

Night after night LEN LEX has broken bounds to watch for the mysterious "Sussex Man." He completes his case in this thrilling story!

enough to be made use of by Rance, the black sheep of the Sixth, in his shady and questionable transactions outside the school. Apparently, Pie was!

"You see, Rance asked me to hand this letter to a man in Oakways," explained Pie. "It's something about a book he's ordered—a crib, I suppose—and it has to be kept rather dark. He would get into a fearful row if he was spotted getting a crib—see?"

"I see!" assented Len. He saw a good deal more than the goat of the Fifth did!

"Just hand it in at Jones' stationer's shop," said Pie. "They take in letters, you know."

"I know."

"Thanks, old man!" said Pie. And he went into the House, leaving Len Lex with the letter.

When Pie was out of sight, the schoolboy detective did not start for the gates. He followed on into the House and went to the Sixth Form studies.

Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew, Len, was at Oakshott School chiefly to trail down the wanted Sussex Man, who was suspected to be a member of the staff. With that task, and school work and games in addition, he had plenty to do. But he was prepared to put in a little overtime, so to speak, on Rance's account. His face was grim as he went into the House, and grimmer as he arrived at Rance's study.

He knocked at the door and entered. Rance of the Sixth was in his armchair, with his feet on the table. He had had time to throw his cigarette into the fire before the door opened—Rance had learned to be quick in these matters—but there was a scent of it in the air as Len Lex entered.

"What the dickens do you want?" snapped Rance, staring at the Fifth Former. Len had visited that study once before: on which occasion he had knocked Rance all round the room. Now he looked as if he was ready to repeat the performance. The Sixth Form man was much bigger than Len, but he had no desire whatever to try his luck again.

"A few weeks ago I found out that you were sending young Root of the Fourth with messages to some sporting man outside the school," said Len. "I told you I'd give you another whopping if it happened again."

"It hasn't!" snarled Rance.

"As you say, it hasn't happened

By  
**CHARLES  
HAMILTON**

again," replied Len. "But you've asked that goat Porringe of my Form to drop this note in at Jones', in Oakways." Len threw the letter at Rance. "Porringe thinks that it's about a crib. Is it?"

"Yes," hissed Rance. "It is!"

"Will you open it and let me see?"

"No, I won't!"

"I thought not! Silverson stopped Pie at the gates and sent him back to do his lines. If he'd spotted this it would have been a Head's flogging for Pie—and perhaps the sack! I fancy there's nothing in that letter to put it on you. It would be landed on the bearer, if caught. You can back horses with racing men at Oakways till you're spotted and bunked, for all I care, but you can't make use of a man in my study like that, Rance."

"There's no harm in this letter—"

"Like me to take it to Dr. Osborne?"

There was a whiz as the letter shot from Rance's hand into the fire. That suggestion evidently alarmed Rance.

Len laughed.

"Get out of that chair, Rance!" he said. "If Campion, or any other prefect, knew of this you'd be reported to the Head, and turfed out of Oakshott. It's rather a pity I'm not a prefect, isn't it? Get out of that chair!"

"Get out of my study!" hissed Rance.

"I'm waiting for you to get out of that chair! I whopped you for sending young Root. I'm going to whop you for trying to send Porringe! Will you get out of that chair?"

"No!" yelled Rance.

"I think you will!" said Len cheerfully. He grasped the back of the armchair, whirled it over, and Rance got out—with a crash.

"Now put up your hands, you worm!" said Len.

For the next five minutes it seemed to Rance that he was in the middle of a whirlwind. The table rocked, chairs flew, books and papers were scattered—and when Len walked out of the study he left an unhappy sportsman lying on his back, gasping for breath in the midst of the havoc.

#### Caught!

**D**ARK and damp, the winter night was far from attractive. Len Lex, muffled in a dark overcoat, his collar turned up, his cap pulled down, shivered a little. In the Fifth Form dormitory the Oakshott Fifth slept the sleep of the just; and the schoolboy detective would gladly have followed their example. The cold wind, with a spot or two of rain, caught him as he dropped silently from a back window, shut the sash after him, and crept soft-footed across the quadrangle.

There was a scamper, a whine—and a scuttling form, with eyes that gleamed from the dark, touched him. Len bent, patted the mastiff's head, soothed him with a whisper, and he was gone again. Len had carefully made friends with the porter's

mastiff, which was let loose at night since the Sussex Man had visited the school. And so, he had no doubt, had the Sussex Man himself, whoever he was—for he came and went without a sound from the mastiff.

Under a thick, dark oak, opposite the window of Mr. Silverson's study, the schoolboy detective settled down to watch in the cold wind and damp darkness. Few nights had passed since Len came to Oakshott without the Scotland Yard inspector's nephew keeping watch for some wakeful hours; but hitherto Len had performed his vigils indoors. But that had to be changed now, since his discovery that Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth, also suspected that the Sussex Man had his headquarters in Oakshott School, and often prowled the house at night.

Surtees, like Len, had suspected Bullivant, the games master, only to learn that he was on a false scent. Whether Surtees had formed any definite suspicion in another direction, Len did not know—but he knew that the Fourth Form master was still on the watch, with a keen and suspicious eye on Silverson's study.

Len had little doubt that at the present moment Surtees was up. Had his suspicions—like Len's—turned on Mr. Silverson, the master of the Fifth? At all events, he would watch Silverson's study, which Len knew, and Surtees suspected, was the way the night-prowler came and went, by the casement that opened on the quad.

Len, blotted in the darkness under the oak, waited, while the cold wind whistled by him. The last stroke of twelve died away, and then a pale, moving gleam caught the watchful

eye of the schoolboy detective. The study window was opening.

Len's heart gave a quick beat. All through that term he had watched for the Sussex Man—but the mysterious cracksmen had cracked no crib since Len had been at Oakshott. The term was half-through now—it was time, high time, for the Sussex Man to be heard of again. And if Silverson, the reckless secret gambler of the Turf, had to recoup himself for his late heavy losses—of which Len knew, little as Silverson guessed it—

But was it Silverson? Len Lex had had a list of four suspects—Silverson, Bullivant, Surtees, and one unknown—whose shadowy figure he had tracked to the old oak near masters' gate, in which the cracksmen's tools were concealed. Bullivant had been cleared—and Surtees, he knew now, was playing detective. The Sussex Man was one of the other two—the master of the Fifth or the shadowy unknown! And one of the two was stepping over the low sill from Silverson's study.

In the deep gloom, Len could make out only a dim, shadowy figure, as tall as Silverson's, muffled up in a coat and a cap, pulled low, the peak almost hiding the face. Silverson or the other? One of the two! Was Silverson fast asleep, at that moment, in his bedroom adjoining the study, or was this he?

The shadowy figure stepped softly down. The casement was pushed to behind him; but Len, straining his ears, heard no sound. He knew that that casement closed with a spring lock, to which only Mr. Silverson had a key. Silverson would lock it after him. But the one who stepped out



the signal that Detective-Inspector Nixon, out there in the darkness, was waiting for!

## The Schoolboy Detective

over the sill left it ajar for his return. It was not Silverson!

Softly, the tall, shadowy figure stepped away.

Who was this creeping, stealthy prowler of the night, if not the Sussex Man? Len was about to move from the oak, to follow, when a faint sound from the window chained him to the spot.

The window was open again. Another figure stepped out—bare-headed! Len set his teeth! Surtees—the amateur detective on the prowl again, barging in where he could only complicate matters and cramp the style of Detective - Inspector Nixon's nephew.

Len had to back into deep cover, and stay there. Ostensibly, he was at Oakshott as a schoolboy, not as a detective. If Mr. Surtees spotted him out of House bounds at midnight, it meant going up to the Head in the morning. His nocturnal activities would be at an end. Len blotted himself from the sight of Surtees as carefully as from the eyes of the Sussex Man.

Surtees left the window wide open. Quickly he passed the oak where Len stood, following the shadowy figure that had already gone.

Silently, Len Lex followed on behind the Fourth Form master. Not a sound came from any of the three, treading softly through the damp, clinging gloom. But the tall figure ahead was glimpsed occasionally—heading, as Len expected, for masters' gate. There it halted, squeezed into the space between the old oak and the wall, and reached up to a branch that was out of a boy's reach unless he was unusually tall, but within a man's.

As Len knew, the cracksman's tools were parked in a hollow in the top of that gnarled old trunk. It was clear enough now—the Sussex Man was going for his crib-cracking outfit as Len had seen him do once before! Yet on that night there had been no crib cracked. Was there still room for an error?

It was not for Len, at all events, to act now—he could not reveal himself to Surtees. What was Surtees going to do? Len soon discovered.

As the tall figure swung, holding to the oak branch close to the wall, Surtees made a sudden rush forward. His grasp closed on that dim figure, and dragged. The climber came crashing down.

Len watched, with intent eyes and beating heart. Was it the Sussex Man who had crashed on the earth, in the grasp of the Fourth Form master? If so, Len might have no choice about revealing himself, for Surtees, in another moment, might be fighting for his life! The Sussex Man would not be taken without putting up a desperate fight. Tensely, he watched.

The tall figure sprawled, gasping. Surtees was over him—a knee planted on his chest! A flash-lamp was in the Fourth Form master's hand. The sudden light glared on a white, startled, terrified face. Surtees gave a cry of astonishment; Len Lex barely suppressed one.

"Rance!" exclaimed the master of

the Fourth, his voice sharp with surprise. "What are you doing here, Rance?"

### Three from Four!

LEN backed away into the darkness, but he could still see and watch the strange scene by masters' gate, under the ancient oak. Len could have laughed! Not the Sussex Man, but the sportsman of the Sixth, going out of bounds at midnight! Going, no doubt, to deliver the message that Pie had been prevented from delivering!

Len understood now. That was the shadowy figure he had tracked many nights ago—Rance of the Sixth! It was not for the cracksman's bag of tools that the unknown man had climbed the oak—but only because that was an easy spot for a fellow as tall as Rance to get over the school wall!

A third "suspect" was eliminated from the schoolboy detective's list now, and one was left—Vernon Silverson! The net was closing on the Sussex Man!

Surtees' amazed voice came to Len: "Rance! You! And I thought that—"

There was a groan from Rance. He was found out now, and his dingy game was up. Surtees removed his knee, and the wretched sportsman of the Sixth staggered to his feet. He had chanced it once too often! Three or four times that term he had left and returned, secretly and safely, by the casement of Silverson's study. Once, by some chance, he had been shut out, but he had got back into the House before rising-bell, owing to the antics of the goat of the Fifth. Now he had chanced it again—and was a lost man!

It had been so urgent to be "on" for the two o'clock at Parsley the next day, and Len Lex had stopped that message sent by Porryng. But the wretched Rance was not thinking about the two o'clock at Parsley now! He was thinking of his coming interview with his headmaster, and what was to follow that!

"I—I—" stammered Rance. His voice trailed away. There was nothing for him to say. He was caught out of the House at midnight—caught going out of the school over the wall!

"Follow me, Rance!" said Mr. Surtees quietly.

Rance tottered after him, back to the open casement of Silverson's study. Len Lex flitted in the darkness behind. He was curious to see what was going to happen now. Surtees stepped in at Silverson's casement—Rance followed him. There was a sudden blaze of illumination, as Surtees switched on the electric light.

From the darkness without, Len saw him cross to Mr. Silverson's bedroom door, and tap. Len could not hear what he said, but he heard a click as the bedroom door was unlocked, and the Fifth Form master appeared, in a dressing-gown, with a surprised, startled face. Len moved closer to the open casement.

"What—Surtees—what—" He heard the startled voice of the Fifth Form master.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Silverson, but I thought I'd better call you, in the circumstances," said Surtees. "A Sixth Form boy has been using your study window for breaking bounds!"

Silverson's glance turned on the trembling Rance. The expression on his face was strange. Silverson was surprised—startled—as any master might have been by such a discovery. But the keen eyes of the schoolboy detective read much more than that in the face of Vernon Silverson.

Was he thinking that this escapade of Rance's might, by chance, have happened on a night when the Sussex Man was prowling abroad? And of what might have happened then? Len Lex fancied so. But if Vernon Silverson was thrown off his balance, it was only for a moment. That strange look on his face, in which Len's searching eyes read suppressed rage and fear as well as surprise, vanished in a moment; the next, Vernon Silverson was the grave, shocked Form-master.

"Is it possible, Surtees?" he said. "You actually found this boy Rance out—"

"I followed him by your study window, Silverson, and caught him in the act of climbing over the school wall at that old oak by masters' gate—"

Vernon Silverson started. With all his nerve and self-command, he could not suppress that start. To Mr. Surtees, if he noticed it, it conveyed nothing. It conveyed much to the schoolboy detective, who knew that the Sussex Man's tools were parked in that old oak!

"Rance, you may go back to your room," said Mr. Surtees. "You will appear before Dr. Osborne after prayers in the morning!"

Without a word, but with a face like chalk, the wretched sportsman of the Sixth tottered from the study. A few more words were exchanged between the two masters—but all, as Len noted, on the subject of Rance. Surtees did not give the faintest hint why he had been up that night; Silverson was not to know that he had been watching for the Sussex Man. Len wondered whether—now that he had made two catches and found himself each time on the wrong scent—Surtees was fed-up with playing detective. He hoped so.

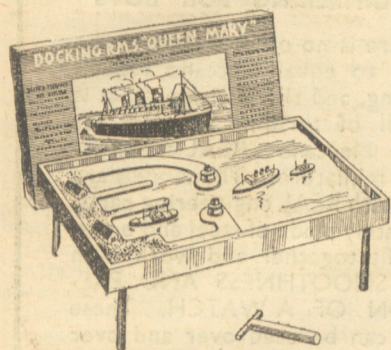
The casement clicked shut, and the two masters parted, Surtees following Rance from the study. Mr. Silverson stood, for some moments, quite still, after he had shut the study door on Surtees. Now that he was alone—never dreaming that eyes were on him from the dark outside the window—the grave expression dropped from his face like a mask. He stood breathing hard and deep, the changing expressions on his dark, handsome face telling of a wild mingling of emotions—black and bitter rage, fear and uneasiness. But the light was suddenly turned off, and the man in the study vanished in darkness.

When Len climbed in at the back window and tiptoed to the Fifth Form dormitory, he knew that his

(Continued on page 30)

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## The Schoolboy Detective

(Continued from page 26)

case was complete, or as good as complete. At long last, Detective-Inspector Nixon, of Scotland Yard, was within measurable distance of clapping the handcuffs on the wrists of the Sussex Man!

### Closing In!

**D**ETECTIVE-INSPECTOR NIXON turned his little two-seater in the mud in Parsley Lane, and followed a cart track that led away across the damp pastureland. Where that track wound through a straggling patch of leafless trees and damp brambles, Mr. Nixon came to a stop and stepped from the car.

The spot seemed absolutely solitary—no human being in sight except the man from Scotland Yard. Yet Mr. Nixon showed no sign of surprise when a voice came from the misty thickets.

"Hallo, Bill!" said the voice.

Mr. Nixon grinned, and plunged into the thickets. He shook hands with his nephew, at the same time searching his face with keen eyes.

"Well?" said Mr. Nixon. Bill was a man of few words.

"Well! All's well, Bill!" answered Len. "I've kept you waiting a long time, but I think, on the whole, it was worth the term's fees at Oakshott. I've had a good time there, Bill. I'm in the first eleven."

Mr. Nixon grunted. He had not come there to talk football.

"I've made some jolly good pals, and I'm getting on well in class. I can't say I like my beak—nobody likes him much! Still, it looks like a new Form-master taking the Fifth this term, probably before long!"

Mr. Nixon glared.

"You chattering young monkey! Have you got the Sussex Man?"

"In my pocket!" answered Len.

Mr. Nixon did not take that answer literally. His look became keener—more eager—and he drew a deep breath.

"Bullivant?"

"Innocent as one of the pretty little lambs you can see skipping on these Sussex downs!"

"Surtees?"

"A well-meaning but rather fat-headed young man, who fancies himself in the role of amateur detective!"

"The nameless one?"

"No longer nameless—Rance of the Sixth, a blackguard of the first water, now sacked from Oakshott, and out of the way!"

"Silverson?"

"You've rung the bell!" said Len, with a nod.

"Sure?"

"Did I ever pull your leg, Bill?" asked his nephew reproachfully. "Have I ever sold you a pup? Bill, I'm surprised at you!"

Detective-Inspector Nixon grinned.

"Go it!" he said.

"Three from four leaves one, Bill—that's simple arithmetic, not beyond

the intellectual powers of Scotland Yard!"

"Have they thrashed you at Oakshott, Len?"

"No!"

"Ah," said Mr. Nixon, "that was a mistake! They ought to have! Carry on!"

Len chuckled, and went on:

"Silverson doesn't know I know—I should hate to mention it to him—but he loses money on horses as fast as the Sussex Man annexes it by cracking cribs. He goes out on half-holidays on his motor-bike—business, not pleasure, Bill! A careful sportsman, the Sussex Man, he surveys the country very thoroughly before he opens his campaign. And if he sets out in the direction of Parsley, his motor-bike may be spotted parked in Trant Woods—the opposite direction, Bill!—by a stout lad who has had the advantage of training under the keenest and brightest detective-inspector at Scotland Yard!"

"Young ass! Get on!"

"Last week," said Len, "Silverson dined with Lord Trant at Trant Elms. A little interior knowledge of a wealthy mansion, Bill, is always useful to a bloke in the Sussex Man's line of business.

"We park our motor-bike in Trant Woods, carefully covered up from sight, when we're supposed to be in quite a different spot," he went on. "Later, we dine with Lord Trant. And we're sorely knocked out by heavy losses on the Turf. I wonder, Bill, whether his lordship of Trant is booked for a midnight call?"

"The fattest crib in this part of Sussex, barring those that the Sussex Man has already cracked!" said Mr. Nixon.

"Next on the list, perhaps!" said Len. "Who knows? Now, to come down to brass tacks, Bill, I've thinned it down to Silverson! The Sussex Man is just as easy to catch as a weasel. It's no good knowing his name and address, if you can't fix it on him! I've handed you his name and address, Bill—you've got to do the fixing!"

"Suppose that a man about your size, Bill, was hearing the chimings at midnight, in the vicinity of Oakshott, and kept one eye open for a light to show from a certain window—"

"Well?"

"That would be a tip that the Sussex Man had started. Putting salt on his tail in the dark is another matter. He can't honk out on his motor-bike at night, without telling all Oakshott. Shanks' pony for the Sussex Man, Bill. Having seen that light in the window, you stroll back to the little car you've got parked somewhere handy, and beat him to it. You're at Trant Elms well ahead of him, Bill.

"Of course, to err is human. He mayn't go to Trant Elms, but I think he will. If he doesn't, we try again, Bill, another time. But if he does—"

Mr. Nixon breathed deep.

"The Oakshott Fifth will be glad to get a new beak!" remarked Len

(Continued on page 32)

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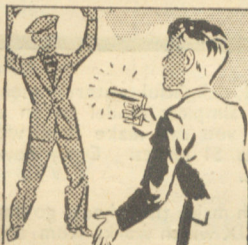
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## The Schoolboy Detective

(Continued from page 30)

Lex casually. "Nobody likes Silver son! He's got stealthy ways."

Mr. Nixon grinned.

For five minutes more, uncle and nephew talked in the thicket. Then Mr. Nixon returned to his car and vanished.

Not till a quarter of an hour later did Len Lex stroll out of the thicket, on the other side, and saunter away. He dropped in at the sports shop in Oakways on his way back to the school to collect a new football.

"Got it?" asked Banks of the Fifth, when Len came in.

"Here!" Len displayed the Soccer ball.

"You've been a jolly long time walking down to Oakways and back!" said Harvey. "Stopped to jaw?"

"Well, yes, I stopped to jaw a bit!" admitted Len. "Let's punt this footer about till tea, shall we? It's a jolly good ball, I believe."

And they did.

### The Light in the Window!

THE man who moved in the darkness made hardly a sound. Had the schoolboy detective been—as he had often been—on wary watch near that study door, his keen ear might, no doubt, have picked up a stealthy movement in the midnight silence. But there were no ears to hear as the dark figure crossed Mr. Vernon Silverson's study to the window and stood there, face pressed to glass, for a full minute before opening the casement.

The casement opened softly. The dark figure stepped over the low sill, and with the faintest of clicks, the spring-lock closed behind. The dark figure flitted away. A murmur of a soothing voice, as a dog scampered in the gloom, then silence.

The dark figure stopped under the ancient oak near masters' gate. A sinewy arm reached up, the figure swung on a branch, and groped in the dark. When it dropped back, there was something in its hand—something that disappeared under a long dark coat. Then the gate, to which only masters had a key, opened and shut softly.

The man who crept away in the misty, winter night left Oakshott School sleeping behind him—with an exception. A minute after masters' gate had closed, Len Lex stood by it, listening. Not a sound of a footstep on the road outside—the prowler of the night was as soft-footed as a cat. Misty darkness and silence had swallowed him.

Five long minutes the schoolboy detective waited. But there was no sound; the man was gone. Then he squeezed between the old oak and the wall, and worked his way up, with legs and elbows pressed on the wall and the trunk.

He reached the top of the massive trunk where the branches jutted, drew from its place the wooden cover wedged over the cavity in the oak,



and groped into the cavity within. It was empty! The bag of cracksmen's tools was gone!

Len drew a deep, deep breath. This time there was no room for an error. The man who had clambered there had taken the Sussex Man's tools! The man who had stepped from Silverson's casement—who? Len knew, but he was going to be sure. He dropped from the oak, and glided back to the House.

Silently, a shadow in the dark, he glided to the back of the building, where he had dropped from an obscure window to keep his watch—a watch kept night after night, and rewarded at last! Softly he drew himself in at that window.

The House was very silent and still. He trod soft-footed down the big corridor, and turned into Silverson's passage. The study door opened silently and closed again after him.

Without a sound, he crossed the study to the door of the bed-room adjoining. He turned the door-handle; it was locked. With an ear to the keyhole he listened for the faintest sound—but there was none—no breathing of a sleeper, no faint creak of a bed as a sleeper stirred. He tapped.

If, against all his belief, Silverson had been there, he must have awakened at that tap. And if so, and Len heard him stirring, he had to beat a prompt retreat—leaving Silverson to believe that it was a "rag" of some reckless japer. But, as he expected, he heard nothing!

Silverson had not awakened—because Silverson was not there!

The door was locked—the key gone! But a locked door did not stop him. He had come prepared for that. His hand slipped into his pocket, then approached the lock, and there was a click. Len pushed the door open a few inches and flashed on his torch.

The beam of light fell on Silverson's bed. It had not been slept in!

Five minutes more, and Len was far from Silverson's quarters. He was in an attic over the Fifth Form dormitory, of which the little window looked over the tops of the Oakshott oaks, and gave a view, in the daytime, of fields and woods and rolling downs. Now there was nothing to be seen but cloudy sky. At that window, Len turned on the light of his torch, and the strong, steady light shone far into the winter night.

No eye within the House, even if wakeful, could have seen it. And the Sussex Man, well on his way to crack the marked out crib, was out of sight of Oakshott before then. But a watchful eye, Len knew, would spot that light—an eye that had watched and waited for it, dark night after night. Unless Detective-Inspector Nixon failed, the hunt was up—and Bill Nixon would not fail!

For five minutes that steady light shone from the high attic window—though one minute was enough, or more than enough. But the school-boy detective allowed a margin. Did he hear, far off in the night, the

(Continued on next page)



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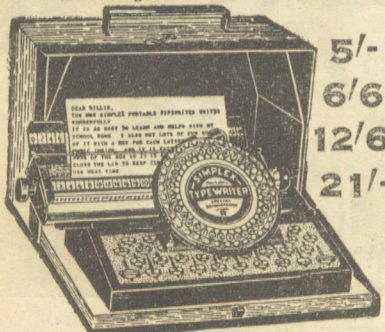
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## The Schoolboy Detective

throb of a car? He fancied that he did, and he shut off the light.

The schoolboy detective had done his work—the rest was up to Bill! Ten minutes more, and Len Lex fell asleep in the Fifth Form dormitory.

### A Surprise for the School!

"SEEN Silverson?" asked Pic.

"No," replied Len.

"Nobody has! Weird, ain't it?"

It was, as Pic declared, weird. The Fifth Form master had not turned up to prayers, or to breakfast, or to take his Form. It was rumoured that he was absent. Banks had heard that his bed had not been slept in, which looked as if he had been out for the night. Harvey had heard that Dr. Osborne had had a telephone call from Trant—several fellows, in fact, had caught agitated words uttered by the Head to members of his staff. Something, it was clear, was up—Silverson, it seemed, had disappeared, nobody knew how or why.

After third school, every fellow in the Fifth asked every other fellow what the dickens had become of Silverson, and nobody could answer the question.

"Old Bully looks bucked!" remarked Harvey.

Len smiled.

Mr. Bullivant was talking to Mr. Surtees in the quad. He certainly looked bucked—he was actually grinning!

"What about it now, Surtees?" he was heard to say.

"Sorry, old man!" was Surtees' reply. "You know what it looked like! I own up I never thought of Silverson! I'm amazed now."

Which was so much Greek to fellows who caught the words.

"You men," said Pic to his friends, "there's something up! You needn't grin, Lex—you're a bit of an ass, and you never see anything! What do you think I've found out? Inspector Stace, of Parsley, was here this morning while we were in class—and another man came with him—man named Dixon or something—"

"Nixon?" asked Harvey. "I've heard of that Johnny—the Scotland Yard man who was after the jolly old cracksman—"

"That's it—Nixon! Well, they've been here, and what do you think they wanted?" Pic paused for dramatic effect. "They went rooting over Silverson's rooms."

"Not really?" asked Len.

"Really!" assured Pic. "Something's happened to Silverson, and the police have taken it up. That's perfectly clear to me. I tell you you needn't grin, Lex—I'm absolutely certain of what I say."

It was after dinner that the news trickled in of a happening at Trant the previous night. The Head and his staff, no doubt, had known it earlier—everybody had noticed how worried and worn the Head looked, and how the various members of the

staff gathered and talked in low voices.

The Sussex Man had been taken!

He had been taken, it seemed, at the open safe at Trant Elms—Lord Trant's mansion. How the police had tracked him, how they had known that he was there, had not transpired. It looked as if they had been forewarned, and the man had as good as walked into their hands! Detective-Inspector Nixon's hand had dropped on his shoulder while he was in the very act of lifting his lordship's bonds and other valuables from the safe.

The cracksman who had had so long and successful a run was in the hands of the police, and Sussex was likely to see no more, for many years to come, of the Sussex Man. Which was good news, though further details that followed were not so welcome, and indeed made Oakshott fellows rub their eyes and wonder whether they were dreaming!

"Silverson!" said Porryng, in almost a hollow voice. "Our beak! I never liked him, but—but—Silverson! Oh crumbs!"

"What about Silverson?" asked Len Lex.

"He's the man—the Sussex Man!" Len Lex raised his eyebrows.

"Pulling my leg?" he asked.

"Fathead! It's all over the school!" said Pic. "I say, Banker, have you heard—"

"I've heard!" said Banks.

"Can you beat it?" said Pic.

"Silverson—our beak! I never liked him—too much like a cat, for me!"

"It's a bit of a knock for the Head," said Harvey. "An Oakshott master—still, it's a jolly good thing he's been bowled out!"

"But how the dickens did they spot him?" asked Banks.

"Yes, tell us that, Pic, old man," said Len. "I'm fearfully interested!"

"Nobody seems to know," said Pic. "But those Scotland Yard sportsmen are awfully deep! That man Nixon must have spotted him somehow! It may come out how he did it, but it beats me. You see, he's not been seen anywhere near the school, and not a soul inside the school knew anything, or suspected anything—not even me! I never liked the man, and never trusted him—but I never dreamed of anything of this sort, of course—and I'm pretty keen! How the dickens they put salt on his tail I can't guess. Can you, Harvey?"

Harvey shook his head.

"Any suggestions, Banker?"

"No!" said Banks. "You got any idea, Lex?"

"Lex?" said Pic, laughing. "Fat lot Lex knows about it! He don't even seem able to get it into his head that Silverson was the Sussex Man at all, now I've told him! Lot of good asking Lex!"

And the schoolboy detective laughed, and left it at that!

Meet Len Lex and his chums again next Saturday—in the EXTRA-SPECIAL BUMPER CHRISTMAS NUMBER! See "The Editor Talks," page 22, this issue.