

THE SCHOOLBOY 'TEC!

BY

CHARLES HAMILTON



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Who is the "Sussex Man"—the burglar who cracks cribs without leaving a trace? Try as they will, Scotland Yard cannot corner him. But LEN LEX, of the Fifth Form at Oakshott School, determines to succeed where the Yard has failed, and in doing so, encounters fun as well as danger!

CHAPTER 1.

Through the Window!

PORRINGE sat up in bed, in the Fifth Form dormitory at Oakshott, and listened. The stroke of one had boomed through the quiet night from the clock-tower across the quad. It died away, followed by deep silence. Faintly, in the long dim dormitory, came the sound of the regular breathing of many sleepers.

Peter Poringe, more familiarly known in the Oakshott Fifth as "Pie," was the only fellow awake. But he had good reasons for being sleepless that night—six good reasons, in fact. He was still feeling severe twinges from a "six" administered by his Form-master in prep.

Having listened for a long minute,

Poringe put a long leg out of the bed. He kicked a chair in so doing, and there was a jarring sound of scraping chair-legs on the oak floor. That was Poringe all over. What he had on that night required silence and caution. It was like Poringe to begin by making a row.

A sleepy voice came from the next bed.

"Is that you, Pie, you ass?"

"Shut up, Harvey!" whispered Poringe.

"You're not going?" demanded Harvey.

"I jolly well am! You coming?" whispered Pie.

"I'd watch it!"

"Well, don't wake the dorm!"

"No need!" Harvey's tone was sarcastic. "You'll do that!"

Pie groped for slippers. He dropped one, and there was a light thud. He grabbed after it, knocked his head on the chair, and uttered, sharply and distinctly: "Wow!"

A third voice chimed in. Another sleeper had awakened.

"Who's that? Is that that goat Porringe?"

"Shut up, Banker!"

Like Harvey, Banks of the Fifth sat up instead of shutting up.

"Well, you ass!" said Banks. "You're really going down to Silverson's study?"

"Didn't I say I would?"

"You'll wake him, fathead! You know his bed-room's next to his study. You'll barge something over, and wake him first shot. Don't you know what a clumsy ass you are?" argued Banks.

"I shan't make a sound." Porringe moved cautiously. "Dash that chair!" There was a jarring sound again. "Blow it! I shall be jolly careful, of course. But if that tick thinks he can give me six for nothing and get away with it he's jolly well mistaken, see?"

"It wasn't for nothing!" Harvey pointed out. "You were assing about in the passages when you ought to have been at prep."

"Oh, shut up!" grunted Porringe. "I'm going! The blighter's going to find his study inked when he turns out in the morning! There's a quart bottle in his bookcase cupboard—I've seen it there. I shan't leave any in the bottle."

"You'll spill half of it over your trousers. Silverson won't have far to look for the giddy culprit."

"Oh, rot!" growled Pie, and stole softly out of the dorm.

The interior of the House at that hour of the night was a well of darkness and silence. But Pie was not afraid of the dark. Ass and duffer he might be—and in the opinion of his friends certainly was: but he had

heaps of nerve. He felt his way along walls, and groped at banisters. He stood, at last, in the corridor on which Mr. Silverson's rooms opened. He opened the door and stepped into the study.

It was a large and handsome room, the Fifth Form master's study at Oakshott. It adjoined his bed-room, the door of which was opposite Porringe as he entered. On his right was a large casement window. The blinds were not drawn, and a glimmer of starlight came in through the panes. It was only a dim glimmer, but it gave Pie light enough for what he had to do.

Cautiously he stepped towards the bookcase. Below the bookshelves was a cupboard, which contained what Pie wanted. He stooped down and opened the cupboard. He knew just where that quart bottle of ink was. But Pie's groping hand, instead of closing on a large bottle, knocked over a pile of school books, which thudded to the floor.

"Oh, scissors!" breathed Pie.

His eyes turned in terror on the communicating door. His heart thumped as he listened for a sound from the bedroom. But there was no sound. After a long, long moment Pie breathed again.

He groped, and this time found the bottle he wanted. He lifted it out, removed the cork, and stepped round the table to his Form-master's armchair, which stood by the fireplace.

Clang! Pie's heart almost died in his breast. He had kicked against the fender, and a poker had rolled over. Once more he stood rigid! This time the game was up—that row would have awakened a heavy sleeper.

He could hardly believe in his good luck when silence, unbroken, followed the clang! No sound came from the next room!

"By gum!" breathed Pie.

Safe as houses, after all! It was sheer luck that Silverson was sleeping so soundly that night! But Pie was

very careful to make no further sound as he poured ink into the seat of the armchair.

Then he turned to the table. That was to get the next lot. And then, for the third time, he stiffened up, rigid, as a sound came to his ears.

For a second Pie fancied the sound came from the bed-room door. The next, he knew that it came from the window.

Petrified, he stared at the window.

The middle casement had swung wide open. A black shadow darkened the orifice. A figure was stepping in over the low stone sill!

Danger from Silverson in his room Pie was prepared for and watching for. But he had never dreamed of this. Back into his mind flashed at that awful moment the recollection of a series of burglaries in the neighbourhood of Oakshott School—the work of some unknown prowler of the night, never yet detected. Oakshott fellows had sometimes discussed whether the mysterious burglar would ever pay the school a visit. Pie, staring with horrified eyes at the dark figure stepping in at the window, knew.

He could not stir. He could only stand there petrified, motionless, the bottle in his hand, staring at that dark, slinking figure that entered with the stealthy silence of a cat.

The man did not see him—did not know that he was there—evidently had no suspicion that the room was not empty. He turned at the window, closed the casement, and locked it. Even in his dumb terror that action struck Pie as strange.

Swiftly, the man turned from the window again. As he did so, a gasping sound came from him as he saw the white face that stared at him in the darkness. For a split second he stood arrested—then there was a sudden spring and a swift blow. Porridge of the Fifth knew nothing after that, for he lay like a log on the study floor, stunned and senseless.

CHAPTER 2.

The Detective's Problem!

DETECTIVE - INSPECTOR WILLIAM NIXON, of Scotland Yard, grunted, wrinkled his brows, and grunted again. Sitting on a bench in his suburban garden, under a spreading chestnut tree, Mr. Nixon was thinking, and the expression on his fat and rather shiny face indicated that his thoughts worried him.

When Mr. Nixon was worried, he grunted. His grunts had been almost continuous for an hour or more. They reached the ears of a youth of about sixteen, who was sitting in a hammock under the chestnut tree, reading. As Mr. Nixon betrayed those signs of mental stress, Len Lex gave less and less attention to his book, and more and more to his uncle. And at last, pitching the volume into the grass, Len spoke:

"Give it a name, Bill!"

Inspector Nixon started. He had quite forgotten that his nephew was there. He stared round at Len, and gave another grunt.

"Young ass!" was his reply.

Len smiled. Slim, athletic, rather handsome, Len did not look much like his uncle, the Scotland Yard inspector.

"They haven't got him yet?" asked Len.

"Got whom?" grunted Mr. Nixon.

"The Sussex Man."

Inspector Nixon gave another start. He fixed his eyes suspiciously on the smiling face of his schoolboy nephew.

"What the dickens do you know about the Sussex Man?" he grunted.

"All that the newspapers know, and perhaps a little more!" answered Len. "I hoped you'd bring him back with you, Bill!"

"How'd you know I've been after him?" demanded his uncle.

"You've been down to Sussex!" Len chuckled. "You went the day after the latest report of his jolly old activities. You left your table covered with newspaper cuttings—every report of every crib cracked by the Sussex Man since

he started in business two years ago. I've read the lot. You came back in the worst temper I've ever seen you in—and that's saying a lot, Bill. Am I wrong in guessing that you went after the Sussex Man, and wasted three days of your valuable time?"

Mr. Nixon gazed at his cheerful nephew. He tried to frown, and only succeeded in grinning.

"You've read the case up?" asked Mr. Nixon.

"Every word! Shall I give you the history of the Sussex Man?" smiled Len. "About two years ago, the silver was lifted from Greenwood Manor, in Sussex. That was the first shot. Since that time, at intervals, there have been mysterious burglaries, all within a radius of about thirty miles, from Greenwood in the north to Lowcroft in the south—Baye in the east to Woodway in the west. All of them in Sussex—all of them performed in the neatest possible manner by a joker who never left a trace. Not the remotest clue to his identity—they call him the Sussex Man for want of any other name. Now, for the first time, two jobs on the same night—one at Oakshott School, the other at Woodway Court, eight miles away. What did you discover?"

"The Woodway Court job was a safe—clean cracked and no trace left—not discovered till morning. The Oakshott job, the same night, was more out of the usual run, owing to the action of the boy Porrynge. This boy was found stunned in his Form-master's study about one in the morning. His Form-master, a man named Vernon Silver-son, sleeps in the bed-room adjoining the study. He was awakened by a heavy fall—got out of bed and switched on the light, looked into his study, and found the boy Porrynge insensible on the floor.

"He gave the alarm at once. But he did not suspect a burglary at first, as there was no sign of any intruder. He was absolutely puzzled at finding Porrynge in that state in his study—

senseless, with a bruise on his temple. He gave the alarm. The boy was taken back to his bed, and when he recovered consciousness, told what he knew."

"Which was——"

"He confessed that he had gone down to rag, as he called it, his Form-master's study. It seems that ink had been spilt about the room—young ass! While he was there, a man entered by the window, spotted him, and knocked him senseless. That was all he knew till he woke up in bed."

"He saw the man?"

"A dark figure in the dark." The inspector grunted. "That's the limit of the description he's been able to give."

"Not very helpful," said Len. "Was there a robbery?"

"None! No doubt the rascal heard Mr. Silver-son turning out after he had knocked the boy down. Must have cleared off by the window as he entered—it was found unfastened afterwards. Porrynge appears to have inadvertently prevented a robbery—at the cost of getting his nut cracked. Lucky for the headmaster, if not for Master Porrynge!"

"And it was the Sussex Man?"

"Not much doubt about that. It's on his beat—right in the centre of the district he always works, in fact. A locked window was opened from the outside, clean and neat—no trace left—his style all over. Porrynge was knocked out by a fist blow on the temple. That's how the butler at Shooter's Fell was knocked out. He never saw who hit him. Porrynge did. But what he saw is no use. And the rascal was wary—wary as we know the Sussex Man to be. He got in, and got out, without alarming the dog."

"The dog?" repeated Len.

"Since the Shooters Fell affair, Dr. Osborne had ordered the porter to let his mastiff run loose at night," explained the inspector. "A big, rather fierce brute. I've seen him, of course. He was relied upon to give the alarm if the Sussex Man should pay Oakshott a visit."

"And the mastiff gave no alarm?"

"Nobody heard him bark, at any rate," grunted Mr. Nixon. "The Sussex Man won't be spotted so easily as that! He came, and he went, as he always does—like a shadow."

"And the local police?"

"They've asked our help. A fat lot of good it has been to them, so far!" grunted Mr. Nixon. "It's got us all beat! The Sussex Man will never be heard of again till his next job. Then he will get away with it, as clean as a whistle!"

"Unless a schoolboy happens to come down in the night again and spot him at his game!" said Len.

Detective-Inspector William Nixon stared at his nephew.

"Do you think the Sussex Man will turn up at Oakshott School again in a hurry?" he hooted. "Do you fancy that a kid in the school will happen to be awake and up, even if he does?"

"Yes," answered Len.

"Yes?" repeated Bill Nixon dazedly.

"The answer is in the jolly old affirmative, Bill. I'll bet you ten to one in doughnuts that the Sussex Man will turn up at Oakshott School again, and that a boy in that school will have an eye very wide open for him. I know the boy—a bright lad. He's not an Oakshott boy yet, but he's going to be. You're going to fix that, Bill. You know his name."

"Do I? What is it?"

"Len Lex!" answered the inspector's nephew.

CHAPTER 3. The Clue!

THERE was a long silence. Len's words seemed to have taken the inspector's breath away. When he broke the silence at last it was to grunt, a deep frown wrinkling his brow. For the first time since kind-hearted Bill Nixon had taken charge of his orphan nephew he was angry with him. Having grunted, and grunted again, he spoke:

"That will do, Len! You're only a kid, but you ought to know better than to cut your little jokes when a man's worried. And if you think it's funny——"

"I don't!" said Len. "I'm not joking. I'm going to help."

"What the dickens do you mean?" grunted Mr. Nixon.

"This, Uncle Bill!" said Len quietly. "Here am I, nearly sixteen, landed on your hands because I'm a penniless orphan, and you're just the kind-hearted old duffer to share your last bath bun with a hard-up relative——"

"Don't talk rot!" hooted Mr. Nixon.

"You'd have pinched and scraped to keep me on at an expensive school if I'd let you, and you jolly well know you would! Now I'm willing to give you your head to the extent of a term at Oakshott—on business lines. Now that the Sussex Man has put his foot into it, I'm going to help you land your fish, Bill."

Detective-Inspector Nixon forgot he was angry. An extremely alert look came over his plump face. He leaned forward.

"Len! You've seen something I've missed? Good lad! I'm sorry I spoke so sharp, Len—I might have known you wouldn't pull my leg when I'm troubled. What have I missed?"

"They call him the Sussex Man," said Len, "because all his cribs are cracked in Sussex—the same old beat. No reason for that, except that he's tied down to the quarter where he lives—and where, as he's never been spotted or even suspected, it's clear that he keeps up respectable appearances when he's not on the warpath. He lives in Sussex, and now he's as good as handed you his card, Bill!"

"Len!" breathed the inspector.

"You're getting lazy, Bill!" admonished his nephew. "You've overlooked the dates of the ten jobs done by the Sussex Man. Five jobs last year. Dates: one in February, one in March, one in June, one early in July, one in October. That right?"

"Right!"

"Same number this year, counting the two latest—one in March, one in June, one in the middle of July—and now these two in October.

"Well, then, Bill, look at those dates, and read the Sussex Man's address!"

Inspector Nixon's jaw dropped. He gazed at his nephew open-mouthed. Astonishment, for a long minute, held him dumb.

"The—the—the dates?" he stuttered at last. "What are you giving me, Len? How can those dates tell a man anything, except that the Sussex Man works all the year round?"

"Every one of those dates, Bill, is between the beginning and the end of an ordinary school term. The Sussex Man," grinned Len, "takes his holidays at the same time as schoolboys and schoolmasters."

"A—a—a school!" said Mr. Nixon. "A post in a school, covering up his real game! Len!"

Len Lex took a note-book and pencil from his pocket. He proceeded to make a rapid sketch. His uncle watched him.

"What the dickens is that, Len?" he demanded at last.

"A sketch map of part of Sussex. Look." Len held out the sketch map. "I've marked every crib that the Sussex Man has cracked in the last two years. Look at it, old man."

Mr. Nixon looked at it. In fact, he devoured it with his eyes. But his expression did not reveal that it conveyed anything special to his mind.

He saw that ten places (Greenwood, Parsely, Bingham, Trant, Baye, Oakshott, Woodway, Shooters Fell, Lowcroft, and Charne) were marked, and that with the exception of Oakshott, each had a number after it.

"The numbers," said Len, "are miles

—"

"From where?"

"From Oakshott School, in the centre."

"Oakshott School!" repeated the inspector. "Yes, Oakshott's right in the centre of his beat. A thirty-mile

beat from end to end—but worked from the centre, never outside fifteen miles."

"Exactly. Given a school as his headquarters, to begin with—"

"Given a school!" repeated Bill Nixon. "Yes, you make that out, Len! Likely, at least, from the dates—all in the school term."

"And finding a school in the centre of the beat," said Len, "doesn't it look as if the Sussex Man worked round from Oakshott, Bill? Now he's put his foot in it, and told you so."

"Has he?" said Bill dubiously.

"Woodway Court was robbed that night, Bill. The man that Porrhinge saw getting in at the study window was not after a crib. He was a nightbird coming home to roost. He knocked the boy out, not to clear his way to a crib, but to prevent recognition. The boy might have had a flashlamp—very likely had! He couldn't run the risk. He tapped him hard and quick."

"But—"

"And the proof is, what the mastiff did!" added Len.

Bill Nixon blinked.

"The mastiff did absolutely nothing!" he answered.

"That's the proof!" said Len. "The dog knew him and did not bark!"

Mr. Nixon leaned back against the chestnut tree, wrinkled his plump brows, and was silent for many minutes. Len Lex swung in the hammock. Mr. Nixon was thinking over his problem from a new angle now.

"You'll pack your box to-morrow, Len," he said at last.

CHAPTER 4.

Study No. 81

"LEEKS?" asked Porrhinge of the Fifth.

"No; Lex!"

"Lex!" repeated Pie. "That's a queer name."

"Queerer than Porrhidge?" asked Len.

"Porrhinge, fathead, not Porrhidge." said the Oakshott Fifth Former, with

a frown. Harvey and Banks, standing in the doorway of Study No. 8, grinned.

The new boy at Oakshott had arrived that day while the fellows were in Form. Dr. Osborne had brought him to the Fifth Form Room to present him to Mr. Silverson. The Fifth had looked him over; and he had looked over the Fifth. He was unpacking books in Study No. 8 when Porridge & Co. came up after Form.

To the Head, as to the rest of Oakshott, Len was a boy who had left his last school with an excellent reputation. His uncle had entered him at Oakshott chiefly, it was to be gathered, because of the extremely healthy situation of that establishment in the Sussex Downs.

Len was rather glad to find that he had been assigned to Porridge's study. The police were in possession of all that Porridge could tell them, but Len thought it probable that in the careless talk of the study little overlooked details might come to light—trifles that might have an importance unsuspected by Porridge.

But if Len Lex was pleased to find himself in Porridge's study, Pie, on the other hand, was far from pleased to find Len Lex there. He did not seem in the least gratified to learn that the new fellow was assigned to Study No. 8! His friends, Harvey and Banks, shared his feelings. Who the dickens was this fellow, who blew in after the term had started, and fellows had settled down, and barged into a fellow's study? There was comfortable room for three in Study No. 8, though sometimes Porridge was requested by his friends to hang his long legs out of the window. Four was a crowd.

So Porridge's idea was to point out to the new kid, gently but firmly, that old Silverson had made a mistake in bunging him into Study No. 8. That mistake could be rectified by shifting himself and his belongings along to Study No. 7, where there were only two fellows, Borrow and Worrall. Silverson would give him leave if he asked.

Pie was going to point this out, gently but firmly. But the back-chat he received from the new fellow caused Pie to cut out the gentleness and concentrate on the firmness. He turned to Len again.

"Look here, young Leeks——"

"Looking, young Porridge!" answered Len cheerfully.

"If you call me Porridge again, I'll jolly well punch your head!" roared Pie. "Look here, Silverson can't have meant to plant you in here. He must have meant Study No. 7. See? The best thing you can do is to get along to Study No. 7. I'll help you carry your books, if you like!" added Pie, more graciously. "Silverson's sure to let you change if you like——"

"But I don't like!" smiled Len.

"Well, I do!" snapped Porridge. "We don't want you here, if you want me to be plain——"

"My dear man, I don't want you to be plain. Nature must have wanted it, I suppose, to give you that set of features."

"You cheeky tick!" exclaimed Porridge; and he made a warlike stride towards the new boy.

Harvey and Banks stepped in quickly and pinned his arms.

"Chuck it, Pie!" said Harvey. "Don't rag! You don't want to get into another row with Silverson."

"I don't care two hoots for Silverson! I suppose I can punch a new tick if I like!" roared Porridge.

And, breaking loose from the detaining grasp of his friends, Pie made a jump at Len Lex.

It was like Pie to overlook a stack of books which Len had placed on the floor in the process of unpacking.

He stumbled over those books; and, instead of reaching the new fellow with his hands, he hurtled at him and reached him with his head.

The crown of his head tapped on Len's waistcoat. In a split second, Len had thrown an arm round his neck. Pie, staggering wildly, found his head in chancery, tucked away under

the new fellow's arm. He staggered and struggled and wriggled.

"Oh! Ow! Oh!" spluttered Porringe. "Let go my head! Leggo my napper!"

Porrige, lean and long, was nearly a head taller than the new fellow, though Len was sturdy enough. Len had twice his muscle. He held the captured neck with a grip that Pie could not begin to unloose, with all his frantic efforts. Pie only succeeded in very nearly garrotting himself. His face was crimson, his eyes bulging, and he gurgled for breath. He spun round Len, his long legs thrashing wildly. Harvey and Banks yelled with laughter. Three or four more of the Fifth came along the passage and looked in, and yelled, too. Pie gurgled and gurgled.

"Urrgh! I'll punch you! I'll slog you! Urrgh! Leggo my napper, will you?" gurgled Pie.

"Not till you make it pax."

"Better make it pax, old man, before your napper comes off!" suggested Banks.

"I — I — I'll — urrrrgghh! Oh, scissors!" gasped Pie. "Leggo—you're cracking my neck! I'll make it pip-pip-pip-pax! Do you hear, you rotter? Leggo!"

Len let go, and Pie tottered away from him. He leaned on the study table, gasping for breath, his face like a fresh-boiled beetroot. As he recovered his breath a little, he clenched his hands. But "pax" was sacred. Pie gave the new fellow a long, expressive look, and stalked out of the study, still gasping for breath. His friends, chuckling, followed him, and Len was left to finish his unpacking.

CHAPTER 5.

The Suspected Man!

"GOOD dog! Good dog!"
Len glanced round. It was after tea, and he was taking a walk round his new school, on his

own. He wanted to give Oakshott the once-over, and pick up the lie of the land.

He had stopped to speak a word or two to Mr. Wegg, the school porter, at his lodge near the great bronze gates. A rather burly man in a bowler hat and overcoat came in, and stopped to pat the porter's dog in passing.

Wegg's big mastiff was not an attractive-looking animal. Len had already made overtures of friendship, but Biter rather looked as if he would have liked to live up to his name. But he nuzzled his rough head quite good-temperedly under the broad palm that patted it; and Len quietly watched the burly, red-complexioned man who fondled Biter. The man gave Wegg a nod as the porter touched his hat, took no notice whatever of Len, and walked on to the House—a burly, stocky figure with a firm and heavy tread.

"Who's that, Mr. Wegg?" asked Len casually. "A master here, I suppose?"

"Mr. Bullivant, the games master, sir!" answered Wegg.

Len strolled away, with his hands in his pockets. He was faintly interested in Mr. Bullivant, games master at Oakshott School. Biter, the mastiff, had been running loose the night of Porringe's midnight adventure, and had not barked. Len was interested in any man at Oakshott who took particular pains to keep on amiable terms with Wegg's mastiff.

Lock-up was early; the autumn evenings were drawing in. The sound of a bell and the scurrying of feet warned Len that it was calling-over, and he joined the mob pouring into Hall. Mr. Silverson, the master of the Fifth, was taking the roll. He was a dark, handsome man in the early thirties, with a slight dark moustache.

"Spot his boiled shirt?" Len heard Banks whisper to Harvey. "He's dining with the Big Beak to-night!"

Mr. Silverson called the names and hurried away immediately he had

finished roll. Len went with a crowd of his Form to the senior day-room, where, he found, the Fifth Form most did congregate. When the bell rang for prep, he was left alone there.

As a new boy, he had no preparation that evening. Not till the Fifth were well on with prep did he saunter out in the direction of his Form-master's rooms.

Inspector Nixon, in his official visit to Oakshott, had examined the room by which the Sussex Man had entered, and where Poringe of the Fifth had been found unconscious. Len was keen to give it a careful survey, and the opportunity had come, on the first evening at Oakshott. Mr. Vernon Silverson, at dinner in the Head's house, was safely off the scene.

Mr. Silverson's rooms were the only two in the passage off which they opened. Once in that passage, a fellow was safe out of the general view. Len tapped lightly at the study door. There was, as he expected, no reply to the tap, and he opened the door.

The study was dark, only a faint glimmer coming from a dying fire, and a fainter glimmer from the casement window. Len stepped in, and closed the door quietly after him.

He stepped across to the bed-room door opposite and tapped. Silverson, by some remote chance, might be in his quarters; and the new fellow in the Fifth could not afford to take chances. But there was silence.

If his theory was correct, that the mystery man was an unsuspected inmate of Oakshott School, Mr. Silverson's study offered an almost ideal mode of egress and ingress. Anyone could cross that room, stepping lightly, to or from the window, without much danger of awakening Mr. Silverson in the next room. It was easy—still more easy, Len reflected, if the Sussex Man was Silverson himself.

Mr. Silverson was his Form-master, but the schoolboy detective was prepared to find the Sussex Man in any adult inmate.

As he stood in semi-darkness, Len reconstructed Poringe's midnight raid and its sequel.

Had that goat, Poringe, noticed in which direction the intruder turned from the window—whether towards the bed-room door or the passage door? A great deal depended on that, if he had. Did the Sussex Man, when he left his unsuspected lair, issue from Silverson's bed-room, or did he come from some other quarter, down that secluded passage, and cross the study from the passage door to the window?

Len stood deep in thought, the ruddy glow of the firelight playing on his face. All was silent. Oakshott was a rather rambling, ancient building, and the Fifth Form-master's rooms were somewhat secluded from the rest of the House. His heart gave a sudden throb as the study door opened. A bulky figure stepped in and closed the door again swiftly and silently.

For one bitter instant he fancied that Mr. Silverson had returned from the Head's house and fairly caught him. His presence in the unlighted study would be hard to explain to his Form-master. The next, he knew that it could not be Mr. Silverson entering his own study so swiftly and silently and without turning on the light. Silverson was slim, almost dapper, and this was a burly man.

As the startling newcomer turned from the door, Len saw his face—the stout, red face of the man he had seen fondling the porter's mastiff—Bullivant, the games master.

Mr. Bullivant saw him at the same moment.

They faced each other—two startled faces lighted by the ruddy gleam from the fireplace. Len heard the burly man draw a quick, hard, choking breath.

The boy drew back sharply. He remembered what had happened to Poringe. But the burly games master did not lift his hand—did not approach him. He knew, of course, that Len had seen his face—it was as clearly

revealed to Len by the firelight as Len's to him. He stood like a man thunderstruck, rooted to the floor, staring at the boy, unable to speak. If ever Len's eyes had read guilt and terror in a face he could read them now in the face of Mr. Bullivant, games master of Oakshott.

What did it mean? What could it mean, but one thing? Bullivant, of course, knew that Silverson was over in the Head's house that evening. Would he, but for Len's unexpected presence, have crossed to the window, to step out? Was another "crib" marked down by the Sussex Man to be cracked that night? Len's heart beat fast.

"Who are you?" Mr. Bullivant spoke at last. "What are you doing here? Who are you?" His voice came cracked and husky.

"Lex of the Fifth, sir!" said Len, in quite a casual tone.

"Lex! I have not seen you before—are you a new boy?" The man was pulling himself together.

"Yes, sir! I came to-day."

"You are in the Fifth? What are you doing here, in your Form-master's study, in his absence?"

"I've no prep, sir, on my first day, and I was looking round. No harm done, sir, I hope?"

"Have you played some foolish trick here?"

"Oh, no, sir! You'll see I've done nothing if you switch on the light."

Mr. Bullivant did not switch on the light.

"You should not have come here, Lex! Possibly, as a new boy, you know no better, but you should not have come here. Mr. Silverson would be very angry if he knew. However, as you are a new boy, I will not report your action to him. You must not let it occur again."

"Thank you, sir," said Len humbly. "I shouldn't like to get into a row on my first day here."

He did not need assuring that Mr.

Bullivant would not report him to his Form-master. He was quite sure that the games master did not want Mr. Silverson to hear of his own visit to the study.

"I fancied that some rag was going on." Mr. Bullivant was quite cool now. "I heard a sound in the room, and knowing that Mr. Silverson was absent, stepped in to see."

"Oh, not at all, sir!" said Len. "On my word, sir, I was not thinking of a rag, or anything of the kind."

"Very well, Lex. I accept your word. You had better go."

Mr. Bullivant opened the door again. He followed the new Fifth Former from the study. They went out of the passage together, and Mr. Bullivant walked away at once to his own rooms, which were on the first staircase. Len Lex went back to the senior day-room—with plenty of food for thought; thought which, however, was driven from his mind when, at the end of prep, a crowd of the Fifth came scampering in. And Len, dismissing the Sussex Man and all his works, ceased to be a detective and became a schoolboy again.

CHAPTER 6.

That Goat, Porrhinge!

LEN LEX spotted Porrhinge, of the Fifth, and wondered what Porrhinge fancied he was up to. Len, a detective as well as a schoolboy, was quick on the uptake. He was not easily puzzled. But the strange proceedings of "Pie" Porrhinge puzzled him—and might have puzzled Len's uncle, Detective-Inspector Nixon, and the rest of Scotland Yard. For they really were inexplicable.

Morning break at Oakshott School was nearly over. Any minute the bell might ring out for third school. But at the moment nearly everybody was out of doors in the fine autumn morning. Len, sauntering into the House,

with his hands in his pockets, saw nobody but Porrhinge!

Pie was standing at the corner of a rather dusky passage that branched off the big corridor. With a manner of extraordinary stealth and caution, he put his head round that corner, glanced up the passage, and popped his head back again, like a tortoise popping back into its shell. Less than a minute later he repeated the performance. Another minute, and he did it again. Len watched him with interest and curiosity.

That dusky passage led to the rooms of Mr. Vernon Silverson, master of the Fifth Form, and nowhere else. Pie's Form-master was in his study, from which, naturally, he would emerge when break ended, to go to the Fifth Form Room. He would come round the corner behind which Porrhinge lurked. If Pie's mysterious actions meant anything, they meant that he was watching for Mr. Silverson to come. But why, was a mystery. Why should Porrhinge care two hoots whether Mr. Silverson was coming away from his study or not? Yet it was clear that Porrhinge was fearfully keen about it.

Len had been only a few days at Oakshott. But he had not been there a few days without learning that Porrhinge was regarded as rather a goat in the Fifth Form. And he had not shared Study No. 8 with Porrhinge during those few days without noting that Pie was justly so regarded. Pie, undoubtedly, was a goat. Still, his present weird proceedings were surprising, even in a goat. It was well known that Pie had a feud on with his beak. But if this stealthy vigil at the corner of Silverson's passage had anything to do with his feud, it was not easy to see the connection.

A door was heard to open and shut. Silverson was coming from his study at last. The bell had not yet rung, but Silverson was always punctual, and generally early. Evidently, Pie heard

the sound of Silverson's door. He did not look round the corner again. He backed away from it.

Round the corner came the dark, handsome face and sinewy, supple figure of Vernon Silverson. At the same moment, Porrhinge of the Fifth shot forward. Before the master of the Fifth even saw him, he crashed.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Len Lex.

He understood at last. That was Porrhinge's game—barging over the beak as he came round the corner. Of course, he was going to pass it off as an accident. It was a scheme worthy of the intellect of the goat of the Fifth. If Mr. Silverson believed that that barge was an accident, he was a much simpler man than the schoolboy detective judged him to be.

Pie, at all events, got away with the barge. Mr. Silverson, taken utterly by surprise, went over backwards. He gave a gasping howl, and landed on his back. His mortarboard flew off, two or three books he was carrying under his arm flew in two or three directions, a fountain-pen shot from one pocket, letters and papers from another, and Silverson, lying on his back, kicked his feet in the air.

Porrhinge, stumbling from the shock, dropped on his knees. The barge was nearly as winded as the bargee. Len Lex gave a gasp of laughter. The sight was, for a moment or two, extraordinary and striking—Silverson on his back, kicking the air, Pie on his knees, blinking at him dizzily. But the scene lasted hardly a second. Mr. Silverson sat up, then leaped to his feet. The breathless surprise in his face changed to an expression which revealed that Vernon Silverson had a temper that needed to be kept in control. At the moment, it was out of control. He fairly flamed at the gasping Pie.

"Porrhinge! You—you—you—"

"I—I— Sorry, sir! I—I—" Pie staggered up. "I was coming to your study, and—and— I say! Oh!"

Porringer jumped back as Vernon Silverson came at him. But he did not jump fast enough. A grip of steel fastened on his collar.

"You dare to say that it was an accident! Upon my word! Porringer, I—"

Mr. Silverson wasted no more time in words. Pie, gurgling, was whirled round the corner and whirled up the passage to the master's study. They disappeared from Len's view.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Len.

He was sorry for poor old Porringer. It was only too clear what was going to happen to the goat of the Fifth.

Len went along to the corner. He picked up the various articles that Mr. Silverson had dropped, with the intention of returning them to his Form-master. Among them was a printed card, folded double, and the schoolboy detective's eyes remained fixed on it.

A bell clanged in the distance, and from Mr. Silverson's study came the whacking of a cane on trousers, and a succession of painful, dismal yelps. But Len Lex did not heed; his startled eyes devoured the card in his hand.

It was the official programme of the races held at Parsley, seven miles from Oakshott School. Yesterday was Wednesday, the first of the four days' racing at Parsley. Len opened the card. Inside were the races for the day, with the lists of the horses. The three o'clock race was called the Parsley Plate, and there was a pencilled tick against the name of one of the horses—Bonny Blue!

Whoever had bought that programme had evidently selected Bonny Blue to back. And that programme had fallen from the pocket of the Form-master of the Fifth Form at Oakshott.

An Oakshott master at the races on a half-holiday. The thoughts of the boy detective, who was at Oakshott on the trail of the mysterious and very much wanted burglar known as the

"Sussex Man," moved swiftly. He dropped the card to the floor again and placed one of the books over it.

That discovery had quite changed his intention of taking the fallen articles to Mr. Silverson. Vernon Silverson would hardly like to know that a boy in his Form had seen it; still less did the schoolboy detective want Mr. Silverson to know. He walked along the corridor, stopped at a window, and stood looking out into the quad, with one eye on Mr. Silverson's passage.

Round the corner from that passage came Porringer, limping and wriggling. Only too plainly, Mr. Silverson had dealt faithfully with the goat who had barged him over.

"Ow! Ooooooh! Wooooooh!" mumbled Porringer, as he limped past Len.

A moment more, and the master of the Fifth came round the corner. He stopped to pick up his scattered property. Len, facing the corridor window, was not looking at him. But the corner of his eye was on the master of the Fifth. Mr. Silverson's face was still red and angry. But as he picked up the books and saw the race-card under one of them, and realised that he had dropped it, his expression changed. His startled look and the swift, stealthy glance he gave round him, did not escape the schoolboy detective. The race-card disappeared into a pocket instantly.

Len's back was to him as he came up the corridor. Mr. Silverson gave him a sharp rap on the shoulder, and Len looked round.

"The bell has gone, Lex. Why are you not in your Form-room?" snapped Mr. Silverson. "Go at once!"

"Yes, sir!"

There was no indication in Len's face that he noted the searching look his Form-master gave him. He turned and walked away, that searching look following him. But Mr. Silverson, no doubt, was satisfied that the boy, standing at a distance, could not have

seen the race-card lying on the floor under a book. He was, in fact, quite satisfied on that point, and the school-boy detective was satisfied also.

CHAPTER 7.

Safe for the Night!

"I'M going!"
 "You're not!"
 "Who's going to stop me?"

hissed Porrhinge.

"We are!" answered his friends, Harvey and Banks, simultaneously.

A light glimmered in the Fifth Form dormitory. As it was nearly midnight, no light should have been burning in Oakshott School—least of all in the dormitory. But it was only a candle-end that sputtered on a washstand. Harvey had lighted it when he heard a move from Porrhinge's bed.

A good many of the Fifth were awake, listening and grinning. Harvey and Banks were arguing with Pie. Pie, deaf to argument, had turned out of bed, and had his trousers on over his pyjamas. Len Lex, his head on his pillow, but his eyes wide open, watched him curiously. Len had his own reasons for not wishing his Form to be wakeful at midnight's hour. The schoolboy detective had work to do at Oakshott of which the other fellows knew nothing, and most certainly he did not want a goat like Porrhinge barging in. He hoped that Pie's friends would succeed in persuading him back to bed.

But it did not look very hopeful. Pie might be a goat; but he was a very determined goat. He glared defiance at his friends, stooped, and glared under his bed for a pair of rubber shoes he had placed there in readiness. They were not to be seen.

"Where's my shoes?" hissed Pie. "Have you hidden them, you cheeky ass?"

"Guessed it in one!" assented Banks. "You're not going on the jolly old warpath to-night, Pie!"

"Nor any other night!" said Harvey. "Will you tell me where those shoes are, Banks?" hissed Porrhinge.

"No," answered Banks, "I won't."
 "Then I'll jolly well go in my socks."

"For the love of Mike, Pie, have a little sense!" argued Harvey. "You tried this game at the start of the term. How did it turn out? You barged into Silverson's study when a burglar was barging in at the window. He knocked you out—might have knocked out your brains, if you had any!"

"Think that's likely to happen again, fathead? Think a burglar will come burgling to-night?" snorted Pie.

"Well, he might," said Harvey. "It was the prowling blighter they call the Sussex Man, and he's never been caught. And Silverson's study is the easiest way in and out of the House, after lock-up."

"Rot!" grunted Pie. "I'll chance it, anyhow. I tell you, I've got it in for Silverson. He nearly took my skin off this morning, and then he jawed me in Form for not sitting still after a six like that!"

"You'll get another six to match if you wake up Silverson at this time of night!" chuckled Bird of the Fifth. "He's a light sleeper."

"That's all rot!" answered Pie. "The night I raided his study, I knocked over some books, and banged the poker over on the fender, and he never woke up in the next room. He sleeps sound enough."

"He woke up when the burglar johnny biffed you," said Harvey. "It was Silverson found you lying there stunned."

"Well, I dare say there was a row when I fell down!" said Pie. "But he slept all through the noise I made in his study. Anyhow, I'm going."

On the previous occasion, Pie had failed in his scheme of ragging the beak's study owing to the utterly unexpected intervention of the Sussex Man—the mysterious burglar who had prowled in that part of Sussex for

nearly two years, undetected and uncaptured. But that, really, was not likely to happen a second time. Pie was prepared to take such a remote chance as that.

Len Lex sat up in bed.

"Hold on a minute, Porrhinge!" he said. "Isn't there one thing you've forgotten? Even if Silverson doesn't spot you while you're ragging his study, won't he guess who did it—as you tried it on before?"

"Let him!" answered Pie recklessly.

"You howling ass!" said Harvey in measured tones. "You were let off last time because of that crack on the napper that the Sussex Man gave you. But the Head won't let you off again. You'll be up for a beak's flogging."

Even that warning had no effect on Porrhinge. He trod towards the door of the dormitory in his socks. Harvey and Banks exchanged a look, jumped after him, hooked him back to his bed, swung him off the floor, and deposited him on the bed with a bump. Porrhinge sprawled there and gasped for breath.

"Now will you go back to bed, or not?" asked Banks.

"Not!" said Pie firmly.

"We're jolly well not going to sit up watching you—I can tell you that!" hooted Harvey.

"Who wants you to?" jeered Pie.

"What about tying him down with a sheet?" suggested Len.

There was a chortle as the new fellow made that suggestion. Porrhinge's eyes turned on him with a withering glare.

"You cheeky tick! I'd like to see anybody tie me down with a sheet!" he roared. "Just you try it on, and see!"

"Done!" said Len.

He stepped from his bed. Harvey and Banks chuckled. All the Fifth were sitting up in bed now, grinning. It was quite an entertainment, by the glimmering light of the candle on the washstand.

Pie made a bound from the bed and jumped at the new Fifth Former.

"You cheeky tick!" he gasped. "I've been going to whop you ever since you came! Now I'll jolly well do it!"

Pie's fist, which was big and bony, came crashing at the new fellow's nose. Len knocked it up, and it passed over his head, and they came together with a crash, chest to chest. The next moment—Pie never knew how—he was back on his bed; another moment, and Len was sitting on his chest. He smiled down at Pie's infuriated face.

Porrhinge struggled frantically. But he was pinned, and he struggled in vain. Harvey and Banks, chuckling, grasped his wrists and pulled them to the sides of the bed. A sheet was passed under the bed, and two of its corners were knotted to Pie's wrists. Then Len got off his chest. Pie made a desperate effort to rise. But with his wrists tied down at the sides of the bed that effort was unavailing. Pie was safe for the night.

"That chap Lex has jolly good ideas!" chuckled Banks. "You're all right now, Pie, old bean. You'll be glad of this in the morning."

"Will you lemme gerrup?" came in hissing accents from Pie.

"Not till rising-bell, old scout," grinned Harvey. "Think how nice it will be in the morning, not to be going up to the Head for a flogging."

"Think I'm going to stay like this all night?" howled Pie frantically.

"Sort of!" assented Banks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll smash you to-morrow. I'll smash that new tick. I'll—I'll——" Pie choked with fury.

Banks blew out the candle. The Fifth Form, chuckling, settled down again—all but Porrhinge. For the next quarter of an hour Pie's voice was heard in mingled urgings and pleadings and furious threatenings. Sounds of struggling and wriggling were

heard, and the creaking of a bed. Sleepy chuckles mingled with those sounds.

But Porrhinge was quiet at last. He could not get loose, and he had to make the best of it. The goat of the Fifth had been saved from his own fat-headedness by those rather drastic measures, and that was that! The Oakshott Fifth were asleep again by the time Pie gave up his unavailing wriggling and struggling; and Pie, tired out by his efforts, settled down at last to get what sleep he could.

But there was one fellow in the dormitory who was not sleeping. When all was quiet, Len slipped from his bed in the darkness, making no sound. No ear in the Fifth heard the door open and shut; no man in the Form dreamed that there was a member of the Fifth absent from the dormitory.

CHAPTER 8.

The Shadow in the Dark!

BOOM! came heavily, dully, through the misty autumn night. It was one o'clock—dark and still. All was silent in the vast pile of Oakshott School, save for a rustle of old ivy and the vague and indefinable sounds of the night. In the little side passage on which Mr. Silverson's rooms opened, Len Lex was thinking of giving it up and going back to bed. But he was patient.

Every night since he had been at Oakshott, Len had left his dormitory, leaving a dummy in his bed to delude any waking eye. It was in the small hours that the schoolboy detective hoped, and expected, to make a discovery sooner or later. For, sooner or later, the Sussex Man would be on the prowl again; and any man in Oakshott School who prowled by night was going to receive the special attention of Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew. For it was a fixed belief in Len's mind,

for good reasons, that the mysterious burglar had his headquarters in the school.

Already there were two men at Oakshott under Len's suspicion. One was Bullivant, the burly games master, whom he had seen stealthily entering the Fifth Form master's study at night, an action unexplained, unless Bullivant had intended to leave the House secretly by the study window—in which case he was the man Len wanted.

The other was his own Form-master, Vernon Silverson. Easiest of all for Silverson to get in and out unseen by his study window, hardly more than a foot from the ground. And the race-card told its own tale. An Oakshott master who attended race meetings and backed horses had to keep such activities very secret; and a Public school master was not a man who should have had such secrets to keep!

It was, at least, a glimpse that all was not as it should have been with the Fifth Form master of Oakshott. And how was it that he had slept so soundly on the night of Porrhinge's raid? Had he been in the next room, or was his the shadowy figure that had entered by the casement and knocked Pie out to keep him quiet?

These two members of the Oakshott staff were ticked off in Len's mind as possible "suspects." But he was only feeling his way, so far. There was a numerous staff at Oakshott School; some of them Len hardly knew as yet. Every man was going under his scrutiny as opportunity offered.

Meanwhile, if the Sussex Man was an inmate of the school, as he believed, he would not prowl again without Len's knowledge. Blotted in the darkness of that side passage, the schoolboy detective could not fail to spot any man who came to Silverson's study door in the small hours. And if Silverson himself stirred in his room, Len's keen ear was not likely to lose the faintest sound.

The quarter chimed. It was then that Len realised, with a quick thrill at his

heart, that he was not alone in the darkness.

It was instinct, more than anything else, that told him so. He had heard nothing. If Silverson's study door had opened and shut, it had done so without the faintest sound. Whether the unseen one had come from that direction, or from the big corridor, he could not tell. But he was there. Softly, faintly, Len's straining ears picked up the sound of subdued breathing.

He made no move, no sound; he hardly breathed—though it seemed to him that the beating of his heart must be almost audible. Who was it that tenanted the blackness, so close to him, unseen?

Not Porrhage? Even if Porrhage had got loose and carried out his intention of a raid, he would not have come silently like this.

Listening, he knew that the unseen one was standing by the study door. Len would have given much for a glimpse of that. But he could see nothing. Faintly he made out a blacker shadow in the blackness—that was all—six or seven feet from him. Then it was gone.

The faintest of footfalls told that it had turned the corner into the big corridor—the corner where Pie had barged Silverson that morning. Len turned the corner the next moment, silent as a shadow.

Silverson was the only man on the staff who had rooms on the ground floor of the House. Len guessed that the shadow he was tracking was making for the staircase. And he was right. He heard the creak of a stair. The schoolboy detective stepped cautiously up the stairs behind the flitting shadow. On the big landing above he paused to listen.

A beam of light suddenly stabbed the blackness of the landing. It was the tiny beam of a small flashlamp.

It shot out into the dark, not three feet from Len—but not towards him.

His heart leaped almost to his throat, as he knew that the shadow had heard some faint sound, or had been warned, like Len, by an instinct that he was not alone in the dark. The bar of sudden brilliance was turned directly away from the schoolboy detective. But it was turning slowly. The man who held the torch was going to sweep the wide landing with a circle of light—and in a few seconds that circling beam would reach Len's face and reveal him there to startled eyes.

And then the man would know! Easy enough for a master to give some explanation of being up in the night—some tale that he suspected a fellow of being out of his dormitory!

Not so easy for a new fellow in the Fifth Form to explain! If this man's actions were innocent, he would report Len in the morning to Dr. Osborne, and all Oakshott would know of Len's nocturnal activities. But if he was guilty, he would know that he was watched—and by whom.

Len had only seconds in which to decide and act—but one second was enough for the schoolboy detective. As the hand holding the flashlamp came round, Len made a single step nearer and struck it suddenly, sending the flashlamp spinning from the fingers that held it. It fell on to the landing with a clatter that sounded, in the stillness, almost like thunder.

He heard a startled gasp as he leaped back. Another leap and he was on the upper staircase which led to the dormitories. The flashlamp had not gone out; it gleamed brightly as it lay on the floor. The man who had dropped it bent over it to pick it up. As he stooped, the light of it was, for a flashing second, full on his face.

Len, looking back through the banisters of the upper staircase, saw him. It was Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth Form!

The man had risen again the next moment, the flashlamp in his hand, panting, and circling the light round

him. Len, crouching close on the upper stairs, was hidden by the banisters. But Ralph Surtees did not even glance towards the upper staircase. Whatever he was thinking, it was clear that he was not thinking that it was an Oakshott boy who had struck the flashlamp from his hand. Twice he flashed the light round the landing in a circle; then the direction of the beam, as it moved, showed that he was making for the passage on which the masters had their rooms. The light vanished up that passage.

Len Lex breathed hard and deep. Softly he trod up the stairs and back to his dormitory. No one awakened as Len slipped quietly into bed.

But it was long before Len slept. Silvester—Bullivant—and now Surtees! Why was the Fourth Form master up in the night? Why had he raised no alarm when the flashlamp was struck from his hold by an unseen hand? For whatever reason he had been up, if it was an innocent one, surely he would have raised an alarm at that sudden attack?

Len, as he fell asleep at last, was wondering whether he would hear, on the morrow, that the Sussex Man had been at work again on his "beat," of which Oakshott School was the centre. If, on the morrow, there was such news, the schoolboy detective calculated that he would not have to look far for the mysterious burglar—no farther than the study of Ralph Surtees, master of the Fourth Form at Oakshott!

CHAPTER 9.

Pie on the Warpath!

PIE was wrathful. At brekker he refused to look at, or speak to, his faithful chums, Harvey and Banks. He ignored their existence with disdainful scorn, and if his eyes chanced to fall on them he looked at them as if they were not there. But he did not ignore Len Lex. He gave

Len significant glances, indication of what was coming to him later.

Towards his old friends, disdainful scorn sufficed to express Pie's deep resentment. But something of a more drastic nature was called for in the case of a new tick who had had the unexampled cheek to suggest tying Pie to his bed to keep him out of mischief. Every day since that extremely cool new fellow had been in the Oakshott Fifth, Pie had considered the advisability of whopping him. Now he ceased to consider it. He was going to do it.

On the way to the Fifth Form room that morning, Poringe dropped a grim warning in Len's ear:

"Look out!"

Len did not look, or feel, unduly alarmed as he sat with the Fifth that morning and did Latin prose with Silvester. But he was rather pleased when, Pie having exceeded even his usual record of blunders, Mr. Silvester told him he would be kept in over break. Pie was fearfully annoyed; but it was a relief to Len, who did not want a scrap with the goat of the Fifth.

Len rather liked Poringe. He was such an ass that nobody could help liking him. Len hoped that, later in the day, Pie would have recovered his temper and banished thoughts of vengeance.

The vengeful Pie did not see him again till the Fifth went back to their Form-room in the afternoon. Pie sat at a distance from Len, and so was unable to whisper his wrath. It was near time for dismissal when Pie thought him of a method of communication. He wrote a note on the fly-leaf of his "Selected Poems," folded it in four, with a couple of pen-nibs inside to give it weight, and tossed it over to Len.

It was scheduled to drop on Len's desk, just in front of him. But even in so simple a matter as this Pie was, as his friend Harvey described it, cack-handed! That message did not reach Len Lex. It travelled half the distance,

and was stopped in transit by the back of Hobbs' neck.

Hobbs of the Fifth, suddenly rapped on the back of the neck by he knew not what, naturally jumped. He also ejaculated:

"Ooooh!"

"Porrige! What are you doing? How dare you throw inkballs in class!" thundered Mr. Silverson.

"Oh, scissors!" groaned poor Pie. "It—it wasn't an inkball, sir."

"What? Hobbs, hand me that—that missile at once."

The "missile" was handed over. Pie looked on in dismay as the Form-master unfolded it and the pen-nibs dropped out on the floor. Then Mr. Silverson read the following:

"You beestly tick! I'm going to nock you into the middle of next week after class."

"Upon my word!" exclaimed the Fifth Form master. "Porrige! How dare you threaten Hobbs in this way! Porrige, you will be detained for an hour after class. I shall set you an exercise in English spelling, since you seem to be unacquainted with the orthography of your own language."

"I—I—" stuttered Porrige.

"Silence! If there is any more of this I shall cane you, Porrige."

There was no more of that! Pie sat tight for the rest of that "school." When the Fifth went, Pie remained. Really, it began to look as if he would never get to close quarters with that tick Lex! He fumed, and almost foamed, over that hour. Never had an hour seemed to contain so many minutes, all unusually long. But the hour elapsed, and Pie was free at last; and he bolted up to Study No 8 in the Fifth. He was bound to catch the tick in the study at tea, and vengeance, long delayed, would be satisfied at last.

Len, still with the cheery hope that Pie would cool down, given time, tea'd in Hall!

Pie did not cool down. So many disappointments and delays, far from cooling him, had the opposite effect. After tea, he hunted Len Lex with deadly persistence. Len, spotting him from the distance, faded out of the quadrangle.

Near Masters' Gate there was a clump of oaks. One of them grew close to the old stone wall, which its branches overtopped. Len disappeared behind that oak. He was as keen to dodge Pie as Pie was to run him down. It was not, as Pie suspected, funk. Len had a punch that would have curled Pie up like a note of interrogation. But he did not want to hand it out to Porrige if he could possibly help it. He was going, if he could, to steer clear of Porrige till prep.

At prep, he had to meet the wrathful Pie in Study No. 8, and if Pie was still asking for it he would have to have that for which he asked. But Len still nourished a hope that Pie might cool down before prep.

Between the big oak and the wall he stood and smiled. He could hear Pie's voice, inquiring loudly whether anyone had seen a funky, sneaking tick. Then Pie came through the oaks and spotted him.

"Oh, there you are!" shouted Porrige. "Dodging a chap all over the shop! Now look out!"

As Porrige came on, Len looked at the oak. Had a branch been within reach he could have swung himself up. But there was no branch within reach of a boy's grasp; even a man, unless tall, would have had to stand on his toes to reach the nearest. And the trunk was smooth, and gave no hold. It was safe to say that no Oakshott boy had ever climbed that particular oak. But the schoolboy detective knew a trick of climbing that required both skill and practice—both of which he possessed.

Pressing knee and elbow to the wall on one side, knee and elbow to the tree-trunk on the other, Len pushed up

between the two. The space between tree and wall was hardly more than a foot. It was not an easy feat, though simple enough to an agile fellow after practice. Len went up quite quickly, put a hand on the top of the wall, reached a branch with the other—and sat in the tree, smiling down at the astounded Pie.

"Oh!" said Pie, staring. "Look here, come down, you tick! Do you hear me, you rotten funk? I'm going to whop you for tying me up last night! I'm going to push your silly face through the back of your silly head! Will you come down, or do you want me to come after you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Len—he could not help it—at the idea of the goat of the Fifth putting up that difficult climb.

"I'll give you something to cackle for!" hissed Pie.

He plunged between the thick oak and the stone wall, and started. At the fifth attempt, he got right off the ground and gained a foot in altitude. Then he slipped down and landed on the earth. His shoulders landed first with a heavy whack, the back of his head immediately afterwards, with a loud crack.

"Yooo-hoooo-hooooop!" roared Porry.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Len.

Porry sat up dizzily and rubbed the back of his head.

"You just wait, you rotter!" he gasped. "I'll get you at prep! I'll mop up Study No. 8 with you! Ow, my napper!"

Rubbing his suffering napper, Pie limped away through the oaks. Len smiled, and sat where he was. The thick branches hid him from the quad, and from the school windows.

Just above the height of the wall, jutting branches, where they left the parent trunk, made quite a comfortable seat. Len settled down there, to sit at his ease, with the idea of giving Pie plenty of time to clear off. To his startled surprise, the solid-looking wood

yielded under his weight. He was up again in a twinkling, resting a knee on a solid spot, his first idea being that he had had a narrow escape of falling into a trunk which was unsuspectingly hollow below.

The next moment, Len had partially dislodged a chunk of wood. That chunk, as he could see now, was wholly detached from the surrounding wood; it was, in effect, a lid over a concealed space. As he prised the chunk out of its position, Len knew that he had made a discovery and he guessed what it meant.

The chunk lifted, a hollow in the oak trunk, about a foot deep, was revealed. At the bottom of it lay a leather case.

Len lifted the case and opened it. There was a gleam of polished steel instruments. The schoolboy detective was holding in his hand the burglar's outfit of the Sussex Man!

Wary the Sussex Man was well known to be—wary as a fox. Safe, carrying on unsuspected as a member of the staff of Oakshott School, he yet envisaged the possibility of suspicion, of a search. Len knew now that a search would reveal nothing in his quarters in the House. It was in this secret hiding-place that he kept the tools of his trade ready to his hands when he crept out under cover of darkness, hidden so cunningly that only a remote chance could have revealed the secret. And, even revealed, it gave no clue to the man!

For a long minute Len Lex gazed at the gleaming steel. Then he closed the case, and replaced it where he had found it. With assiduous care, he replaced the chunk of wood that formed a lid to the hidden hollow in the oak. Not a sign was left that it had been disturbed. The Sussex Man was wary, but all his wary cunning would not tell him that this hidden secret was known.

Len slipped down from the old oak to the ground. No more attention, if he could help it, was going to be drawn to that oak. He hurried

through the trees, and almost ran into Pie, waiting, as he had suspected, on the other side.

"Got you, you tick!" roared Pie, as he rushed.

How he came to stumble over Len's foot, Pie never knew. But he did stumble, and by the time he resumed the perpendicular the elusive tick had vanished once more. Pie had to leave it, after all, till prep!

CHAPTER 10.

Painful for Pie!

"YOU ass!" roared Harvey. "You goat!" hooted Banks. Porringe of the Fifth gave no heed. On his face there was an expression of absolutely inflexible determination.

It was "prep" at Oakshott School. In Study No. 8, in the Fifth, Harvey and Banks had sorted out the books required for the same. Pie Porringe sorted out no books. Pie placed two pairs of boxing gloves on the study table—useful articles, in their way, but obviously not required in prep.

Pie, it was clear, was not thinking of prep. He was thinking of things far more strenuous.

His study-mates surveyed him with intense exasperation. Len Lex, the new fellow in the Fifth, had not yet come into the study—the boxing gloves were ready for him, when he came. A study row, in prep, might have quite serious results. It might bring up a prefect. It might bring up Silverson, the master of the Fifth. Pie cared for none of these things! He was on the warpath, and that was that!

"You—you—you cuckoo!" said Harvey. "Do you think you're going to scrap with that new chap in prep?"

"Not my fault!" answered Pie. "He's been dodging me all day. You jolly well know that I've been hunting him all over Oakshott. He's got to come up for prep. Then I shall get him."

"And what about prep?" hissed Banks.

"Blow prep!" answered Pie recklessly.

"We've got Latin bilge to do for Silverson——"

"Blow Silverson!"

"And maths bilge for Rodd——"

"Do you want Silverson to scalp you again in Form?"

"He's always scalping me," said Pie. "He's got a down on me, as you jolly well know. I'd have got my own back on him last night if that new tick hadn't tied me down on my bed with a sheet—and you helped him! Call yourselves pals? I've a jolly good mind to whop you as well as Lex!"

"You couldn't whop one half of Lex, you ass!" hooted Harvey. "He's been keeping out of your way all day because he doesn't want to damage you."

Pie's eyes gleamed. It was true, but it was not tactful.

"You'll see!" said Porringe grimly. "That tick's been funking it all day, and now he's got it coming to him. He doesn't seem in a hurry to come up to prep, anyhow!"

The study door opened, revealing the handsome face and slim, athletic form of Len Lex, the new fellow in the Oakshott Fifth. Pie, who had his back to the door, did not see it open and did not see Len step in.

"I shouldn't wonder," he went on, "if he cuts prep! If he does, I'll get him in the dorm to-night! He can't cut dorm. What are you grinning at, you silly asses? You jolly well know that he's been funking all day, and you jolly well know that he funks coming up to the study now. If he doesn't, why doesn't he come? I'll bet you two to one in doughnuts that he cuts prep and chances it with Silverson. What the thump are you grinning at, blow you?"

Harvey and Banks were not the only ones who were grinning. Len, standing behind Porringe, was grinning, too.

"You'd lose that bet, Porrhinge!" he remarked.

"Oh!" gasped Pie, startled. He spun round. "Oh! You're here, are you?"

"Sort of!" agreed Len.

"Well, now you're here, you know what you're going to get!" said Porrhinge. "I've been going to whop you ever since you came, but I've let you off—"

"Carry on with the good work!" suggested Len. "Go on letting me off, old chap. I'll do the same for you."

Harvey and Banks chuckled. Pie did not chuckle. He picked up the gloves. Grimly frowning, he held out a pair to Len.

"I suppose you'd rather have the gloves on?" he said. "We generally do here. But if you prefer the bare knuckles, I'm your man!"

"Now, look here," said Len persuasively, "if we hadn't stopped you going down from the dorm last night to rag Silverson's study, you'd have been up for a Head's flogging to-day. You've got out of that."

"You're not getting out of this!" said Pie. "Will you put those gloves on or not?"

"I can't do my prep with the gloves on!" Len pointed out.

"Never mind prep now!" said Porrhinge. "If you're so jolly keen on prep, you shouldn't have dodged out of my way all day. Prep can wait!"

"You howling ass, Pie!" said Harvey.

"You shut up, Harvey!"

"You blithering cuckoo!" said Banks.

"You shut up, Banker!"

Len laughed. There was no help for it. All that day he had dodged the wrathful Pie, hoping that his irate temper would cool down. Instead of which, it had reached boiling point. Len Lex took the gloves and slipped them on. He was glad to have the gloves on. He liked Pie, wrathful as Pie was, and did not want to damage him more than he could help. But in Pie's present exasperated and vengeful mood, it was likely to be difficult to

avoid giving him some, at least, of what he was asking for.

"You going to keep time, Banker?" asked Porrhinge, shutting the door.

"I'm going to do my prep, fathead!"

"You going to keep time, Harvey?"

"I'm going to do my prep, ass!"

"Well, we shall have to manage without!" said Pie. "You ready, you tick?"

"Go it!" said Len resignedly.

Porrhinge went it. Harvey and Banks had declared that they were going to do their prep; but they did not begin. They sat and watched—and grinned. Old Pie had heaps of pluck and tons of determination. But in boxing he had a windmill style that was entertaining as a spectacle, but hardly useful from a pugilistic point of view.

It was obvious to Harvey and Banks, though not to Pie, that the new man in the Fifth could make rings round him if he liked. They had seen Len with the gloves on in the gym with Oliphant of the Sixth, the best boxer at Oakshott, and he had held his own. So they calculated the warlike Pie's chance of victory at rather less than nothing.

Porrhinge made a whirlwind attack. His arms, which were long, laid it on rather like flails. He left the other fellow all the openings he could possibly want, and a few more; and Harvey and Banks looked on, expecting to see him jolted off his feet, and charitably hoping that it would be a lesson to him. But Len, with a cheery smile on his face, contented himself with defence. He did not yield an inch. Neither did he advance. He just stood where he was and brushed off Pie's whacking fists like flies.

This went on for some minutes, till Pie was gasping for breath. He was putting tremendous vigour into that attack, though it did not seem to be getting him anywhere. He gasped, he panted, and finally he dropped his hands and stepped back.

"Time!" he gasped.

"Time we got on with prep?" asked Len.

"No, you tick!" gasped Pie.

"You'd better give him best, old man!" chortled Banks.

"I'll watch it!" gasped Pie.

"You won't give me best?" asked Len.

"No!" roared Porrhinge.

"Well, look here, I'll give you best, then, and let's call it a day," suggested Len. "You win!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Harvey and Banks.

Pie foamed. Really, it was quite a generous offer, as it was dawning even on the goat of the Fifth that he could not tap the new fellow unless the new fellow wanted to be tapped! But Pie was not disposed to accept it. He was going to whop that cheeky new tick, whether he could or not!

"Come on!" he hooted.

And Porrhinge made a desperate rush. So tremendous was the onslaught this time that Len had either to knock Pie off his feet or give ground. He gave ground, and Pie drove him back to the study door, after which he could retreat no farther.

Now he had to tap Pie to keep him off—and he tapped him on the nose, on the chin, in the eye, and on the ear and on the chest—a series of taps, none of which Pie saw coming till it came. All the while, not one of Pie's frantic punches reached the smiling face in front of him—and chuckle after chuckle came from Harvey and Banks as they watched.

Those taps bewildered and infuriated Pie. Foaming, and regardless of taps, he hurled himself at the new Fifth Former delivering a terrific drive right at that cheery, smiling face. Had it landed there it would undoubtedly have done a lot of damage, for it would have jammed Len's head back against the solid oak of the study door. But Len's head was not in the way when Pie's crashing fist came. That fist passed his ear, with several inches to spare,

and landed on the oaken door. And the yell that Porrhinge uttered as it crashed awoke many echoes.

"Yooo-hooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Harvey and Banks, almost in hysterics.

"Ow! Wow! Ooooh!" roared Pie. "Ow! My knuckles! Ow! Oh, you swob! Wow!"

"Not my fault," said Len. "I never asked you to punch the door!"

"Ow! Ooooh! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pie hurled off the gloves. It was lucky for him that he had had them on! Had his bare knuckles given the oak that terrific whop, the result could not have failed to be fearfully painful. It seemed painful enough as it was. Pie's first impression was that all his fingers had been driven back into his wrist, which was broken in several places. On examination, however, it proved to be not so bad as that. Nothing was really damaged, but there was a pain—a very distinct and emphatic pain—and Pie sucked his fingers almost frantically.

"Going on?" asked Len.

"Oooogh! Oooogh! Woooooh!" was Pie's only answer. Apparently, he was not going on.

Len peeled off the gloves, and sat down to prep. Harvey and Banks grinning, started work at last. But it was quite a long time before Pie began. That long time he spent in sucking his aching fingers. And when, at last, he started prep, he left off every now and then to suck those painful fingers and ejaculate "Ow!" or "Wow!" or "Yow!" The whopping of the new man in the Fifth was unavoidably postponed.

CHAPTER 11.

Swamped with Glue!

"THE Sussex Man!"

Len Lex started, ever so slightly, as he caught the name, coming into the hall after prep. Three masters were standing in a group

in conversation, and the subject of their conversation was the mysterious burglar who, for nearly two years, had prowled and plundered undetected.

The three masters were Silverson, master of the Fifth, Surtees, master of the Fourth, and Bullivant, the games master. Len's eyes dwelt on them for a moment—Silverson, dark and slim and handsome; Bullivant, stocky, red-faced, with rather bulging light blue eyes; Surtees, sturdy, boyish in looks, the youngest "beak" at Oakshott, a keen footballer, and very popular.

The schoolboy detective was deeply interested in all the three. Unless he had been led astray by the clues he had been able to pick up during his week at Oakshott, one of the three was, in point of fact, the mysterious Sussex Man himself, owner and user of the outfit of burglars' tools that Len had spotted hidden in the old oak near Masters' Gate.

None of the three glanced at Len—merely one of the fellows coming into hall after prep. Even if they had known that he was the nephew of Detective-Inspector William Nixon, of Scotland Yard, they would not have been likely to guess that it was as a detective that the new fellow had come to Oakshott School.

Only for a split second Len's eyes dwelt on the three. Then he became interested in one of the ancient portraits of former headmasters that adorned the old oak walls. But as he gazed at the dim lineaments of that bygone beak, Len's ears picked up the talk of the three. It was odd to think of the unknown Sussex Man discussing himself with unsuspecting colleagues on the Oakshott staff.

Each of the three was a "suspect" to the schoolboy detective. Of each he knew something that pointed the finger of suspicion. Silverson, secretly a backer of horses at the races, owner of the study which Len knew was the mystery man's way of egress and ingress, when the Sussex Man was on the prowl—Bullivant, whom he had spotted

in the dark in Silverson's study, and who had displayed unmistakable terror at being spotted there—Surtees, whom he had recognised, only the previous night, prowling after one o'clock in the silent and sleeping House. One of the three—but which?

Bullivant was speaking in his deep, rolling voice:

"The Sussex Man. Why do they call him that?"

"They must call him something," remarked Mr. Silverson, with his slightly sardonic smile—the smile which made Fifth Form men refer to him often as a sarcastic beast. "Apparently, our efficient police know nothing of him, except that his peculiar enterprises have taken place chiefly in Sussex."

"Entirely in Sussex, Silverson," said Mr. Surtees, "and always within a certain radius."

"Is that the case?" asked the Fifth Form master indifferently.

"Oh, quite! If you drew a chart from Greenwood, in the north, Lowcroft, in the south, Parsley, in the west, and Woodway, in the east, you would enclose the whole sphere of the Sussex Man's activities," said the Fourth Form master. "That is his beat—roughly thirty miles by twenty."

"I believe you are right, Surtees," said the games master. "According to that, Oakshott is the very centre of his beat."

"Exactly," assented Surtees.

"No wonder he gave us a look-in, then!" said Mr. Silverson. "Indeed, we should rather have had a right to feel neglected if he hadn't!"

Surtees laughed, but Bullivant's mastiff face remained quite serious. Mr. Chowne, the master of the Shell, joined the group.

"You would not be amused, Silverson, if he came again," said Mr. Chowne. "He would certainly have cracked the Head's safe that night but for the fact that a boy in your Form was up, playing some silly prank,

and there was an alarm. I have advised you to have a bolt placed on your study window."

"They say that lightning does not strike twice in the same place, Chowne. Neither, from what I have heard of him, does the Sussex Man."

"You overlook one thing, Silverson. On all previous occasions the rascal has succeeded in his object. Here, he failed, owing to the boy Porrhinge being up that night. He may try again."

"I have said so more than once," interjected Bullivant.

"And I agree," said the master of the Shell.

"Nevertheless, the simile of the lightning holds good," said Mr. Silverson. "Next time—if there is a next time—why should be pick on my study specially?"

"That is easily answered. Your study has a casement window quite near the ground, in a spot screened by trees. It is perfectly easy to step in and step out, once the casement is open."

"There is an excellent lock on it, Chowne."

"That did not stop him. Locks are nothing to such a man. But if you take my advice, you will have a strong bolt placed on that casement," said the master of the Shell. "It may prevent you from having a very disagreeable alarm some night, Silverson."

"I will think about it," said the Fifth Form master carelessly. "But such a precaution, my dear Chowne, would only lead him to choose another window if he came again. I should be securing my night's repose at the cost of someone else's."

"Yours, perhaps, Chowne," said Surtees with his boyish laugh. "You may be asking for trouble, my dear fellow."

Harvey and Banks came in, and, seeing Len, took him by the arms and walked him up the hall. It was a demonstration of friendliness, to show that they did not share the hostility

of their chum, Pie. Len smiled cheerily, though he would willingly have heard more of that interesting conversation among the beaks.

"Where's Porrhinge?" he asked.

"Busy in the study," Harvey chuckled. "His paw's turning blue and he's rubbing it with embrocation. Poor old Pie! Jevver hear of such a goat?"

"You're safe for a bit, Lex!" grinned Banks. "Even Pie won't undertake to whop you one-handed. Goodness knows what his fist will be like to-morrow. Fancy a chap punching an oak door! Ha, ha, ha!"

Len laughed. He was really sorry for Pie. But there was no doubt that the goat of the Fifth was funny. But while he laughed and chatted with Harvey and Banks, he was thinking of what he had just heard. Why had not Silverson taken the advice of the master of the Shell? Carelessness, because he did not believe that the burglar was likely to come again? Or wariness, because the Sussex Man dared not to run the remotest risk of that casement being fastened against him during a nocturnal absence?

Porrhinge was rather late in Hall that evening. The goat of the Fifth had been doctoring his bruised "paw," and there was a lingering scent of embrocation about him when he came in—greeted by a general grin from the Fifth Form fellows. Harvey and Banks had told the tale of the scrap in the study, and all the Fifth were grinning over "Pie's latest," as Harvey named it. But Pie had not spent the whole time in Study No. 8 doctoring his paw, as his chums soon learned. They joined Pie when he came in, and Harvey, winking at Banks with the eye that was farthest from Pie, asked him how his poor paw was.

"Rotten," said Pie, "absolutely gammy. But I can use my other hand, as that d'ck will jolly soon see."

"Dear man!" said Banks. "You're not going to whop him one-handed?"

"There's more than one way of kill-

ing a cat!" said Porrhinge darkly. "Wait till we get to the dorm!"

"You've been japing in the dorm!" exclaimed Harvey. "Oh, you ass! You'd get six from Silverson if you were spotted going up to the dorm before time. You jolly well know it's a strict rule."

"Think I turned on a light?" snorted Pie. "I wasn't spotted, anyhow. And my right hand was good enough to shove a quart of liquid glue into that tick's bed."

"Wha-a-t?"

"I've used your bottle of liquid glue, old chap. You don't mind?"

"Lex will!" gasped Banks.

"Well, I want him to!" said Pie. "Perhaps he'll be sorry for being such a cheeky tick when he shoves his legs into the glue. What? Ha, ha, ha! Wow!"

Pie chuckled, his chuckle turning into a yelp as his damaged paw gave a severe twinge.

"Well, you ass!" said Harvey. "That bottle of liquid glue cost me two-and-six."

"Ask Lex for the two-and-six!" grinned Pie. "He's going to get the glue."

"Oh, you goat!" said Banks. "There'll be a row about it. Sheets and blankets all sticky with glue—oh, you priceless goat! The House dame will get her wool right off to-morrow!"

"Let her!" said Pie cheerfully. "Lex will get his wool off to-night, I fancy—unless the glue sticks it on—ha, ha!"

Pie, in spite of the twinges in his paw, was looking forward rather gleefully to dorm. As he had said, there was more than one way of killing a cat—and that cheeky tick, who had not, after all, been whopped in the study, was going to get a surprise when he went to bed. A fellow who stuck his legs into a sea of liquid glue was absolutely certain to feel sorry for himself.

Other fellows as well as Pie looked

forward to dorm—for Pie did not keep his jape a secret. Only Len Lex, in fact, was left in the dark—and when the Fifth Form went up to roost, he rather wondered at the grinning looks on many faces. Harvey and Banks, though they regarded Pie as a priceless goat for even thinking of such a jape, were not going to spoil it by putting the new fellow on his guard. Neither was any other man. Indeed, all the Oakshott Fifth were quite keen to see Len turn in that night—and when Len did turn in, he was puzzled to see every eye in the dormitory fixed on him, with almost breathless anticipation.

Pie gloated as Len's legs disappeared under the bedclothes. Now there was going to be a startled yell, and a wild jump.

But there wasn't. Len stretched out in bed, as usual, and put his head on the pillow. If the glue was there evidently he had missed it so far. Pie could only wait for him to turn over. Yet he was absolutely certain that he had emptied that bottle of liquid glue into the very middle of the bed, to which he had groped in the dark an hour ago. It was amazing that Len had not shoved his legs right into it. But it seemed that he hadn't.

"You priceless ass!" whispered Harvey. "He hasn't got it! Have you shoved it into the wrong bed?"

"Oh, don't be a fathead!" grunted Pie. "I counted the beds from the end, in the dark—Lex's is the seventh—"

Mr. Silverson, whose duty it was to see lights out for his Form, looked in for a moment.

"I am waiting!" he said, and stepped away again.

There was a rush of the fellows not yet in, to tumble into bed. A sudden and startling thought struck Harvey. It was true that Lex's bed was seventh from the end. But from the other end, Pie's was the seventh. If that goat had counted from the wrong end—

Pie was plunging in. ●

A startled yell woke the echoes of

the Fifth Form dormitory. Every eye, hitherto directed at Lex, turned on Pie. His actions were amazing. He yelled. Bedclothes flew off right and left. Porryng sprang from the bed like a jack-in-the-box. He was streaming with sticky fluid. It was sticking the legs of his pyjamas to his long limbs. Swamped with glue, Pie stood spluttering wildly, while from the rest of the Fifth came a roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Evidently the goat of the Fifth had counted the beds from the wrong end of the dormitory.

CHAPTER 12.

The Laugh's on Pie!

ACCORDING to Shakespeare, it is sport to see the engineer hoist by his own petard. The Oakshott Fifth certainly seemed to think so. As Pie stood wriggling, drenched with liquid glue, they roared, and yelled. The dormitory almost rocked with merriment. Harvey and Banks nearly wept. Len sat up in bed, staring. Every other fellow shrieked.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" gasped Banks. "Oh, that priceless goat! His own bed! Oh, crumbs! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You owe me two-and-six, Pie!" yelled Harvey. "You got the glue. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Fifth.

"Oh, crumbs! Oh, scissors!" gasped the hapless Pie. He stared down at his sticky pyjamas, wriggling horribly. Liquid glue was running all over him. There was a sea of it in the bed he had jumped from. Sheets were soaked—blankets horrid to the touch. "Urrrh! I—I say, how—how the thump— My bed, you know! Oh, criekey!"

"Which end did you count from?" shrieked Harvey.

"Oh!" gasped Pie.

He understood. He had been

hurried, and he had been in the dark, and he had made that little mistake. If ever there was a chance of making a mistake, Porryng of the Fifth was not the man to miss it. He had not missed this!

"Oh!" gasped Porryng. "Oh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mr. Silverson stepped in, frowning. Roars of merriment in the dormitory at bed-time were quite out of place, in the opinion of a beak.

"What is this disturbance?" rapped the master of the Fifth. "What—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence! Silence! What—"

But really it was not easy for the Fifth to be silent. Porryng, the goat of Oakshott, was famous for his blunders; but really, this was the limit. For a fellow to park a quart of liquid glue in his own bed by mistake was altogether too rich, even for the goat of Oakshott. Silverson's voice was drowned by howls of merriment.

"Will you cease this uproar?" exclaimed the Fifth Form master. "What— Why, what is that, Porryng? You are drenched with— with— with what?"

"Gug-gug-gug-glue, sir!" gasped Pie unhappily.

"Glue! Upon my word! Someone has placed glue in your bed! Will you boys be silent?" shouted the Fifth Form master. "If you are not silent, I will detain the whole Form to-morrow afternoon."

That dire threat restored silence, if not gravity. Only subdued chuckles were heard as the Form-master advanced to Pie's bed, and stared at it, horrified.

"Outrageous!" he exclaimed. "Scandalous! This is not a joke— this is an act of stupidity—of idiocy! Who has done this? Whoever has done this may have fancied it a practical joke—it is nothing of the kind. Porryng, do you know what stupid and senseless boy has done this?"

"I—I—I kik-kik-kik-can't say, sir!" stammered Pie, while the rest of the

Fifth almost suffocated with suppressed laughter. Pie was not likely to give his own name as the stupid and senseless boy wanted. As it was his own bed that was glued, he was fortunately safe from suspicion, so far as the Form-master was concerned.

"I shall inquire into this tomorrow!" snapped Mr. Silverson. "You cannot sleep in the bed in that state, Porringe. Everything must be changed. I will give instructions. You had better wash yourself. You are in a revolting state. Whoever has done this shall regret it."

Mr. Silverson strode angrily from the dormitory. During the next quarter of an hour, while Pie was washing off glue and a new bed was being made for him, the Fifth were almost weeping. When, at last, lights were turned out, unusually late, chuckles and chortles continued to run from bed to bed.

"For goodness' sake," exclaimed the exasperated Pie, "shut up, and let a fellow go to sleep! I made a mistake —"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Pie.

But it was quite a long time before the Fifth shut up. However, slumber claimed them at last, and there was silence in the Fifth Form dormitory.

CHAPTER 13.

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.

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.

"Oh! Ow! Oh! Ow!" roared Root, as he stopped them both.

"Now," said Harvey, "get out!"

Root got out, without stopping to make any further inquiries after old Bully.

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 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.

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."

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 this 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 there 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 a secret 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 jemy 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," he said. "If I'm interrupting you, Bullivant—"

"Yes! No! It's all right, Silverson—I'm through with the 'phone," stammered 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.

CHAPTER 14.

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 a 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 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 up to the Oakshott standard in many ways. Len's business at Oakshott was to trail down the Sussex Man. He had 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 easier for he had Rance tabulated in a 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 Sigers.

"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 re-

mained 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—a cigarette in one hand, a paper in the other. 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!" 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."

"I 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 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.

CHAPTER 15.

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 head-master. 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 he could not venture to do. If he were 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 Porrhinge of the Fifth!

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

Porrhinge 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." Porrhinge 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 to Ha, ha! If he spots any man near his study, he may think—ha, ha!"

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

"Silverson's always awfully keen about that evening paper of his," P

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

Porryng 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 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 large type, there was so such name as Popper. A moment later he found it, in smaller type. He read:

230. 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 remem-

bered 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 Porringe 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 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 across the word "proximor" 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 sit-

ting 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!

CHAPTER 16.

Pie's Latest!

LEN LEX was talking Soccer with Harvey and Banks when Porringe came out of the House. There was to be a pick-up game that afternoon on Big Side, and Len was keen on it. Oliphant, the captain of Oakshott, had told him that he would be wanted, which was Oliphant's polite way of intimating that he would give the new man in the Fifth a chance of showing what he could do.

Pie, after a glance round, came directly towards the group by the old

oaks. He carefully ignored Len. Harvey and Banks were his chums. But Len, though in the same study, was the object of Pie's concentrated hostility. At the moment, however, Pie was not on the warpath. He still had a "game" fist, due to his little error a few days ago, when a tremendous punch, intended for the new fellow's head, had landed on the door of Study No. 8.

"I want one of you chaps to keep cave!" said Pie, addressing his pals.

As loyal chums, eager to back up a comrade, no doubt Harvey and Banks ought to have both spoken at once, offering eager services. But they didn't! They did not speak at all. They exchanged a look expressive of a sort of comic dismay; then both looked at Len, who grinned.

Then all three looked at Porrhage. They could not help noticing that Pie did not present quite his normal aspect. He looked bulgy and bumpy. All his pockets were full of something or other. His jacket sagged with hidden burdens. His trouser pockets bulged out from his rather lean, long legs. The goat of the Fifth was loaded with unseen cargoes.

As they looked at him, something slipped from an over-stocked pocket, and dropped to the ground with a light thud. It was a bottle of gum. Porrhage hastily stooped to retrieve it. In doing so, he exuded two more similar bottles, which thudded down to the quadrangle, but did not break.

"Blow!" said Pie.

Hurriedly he gathered up the fallen articles, and crammed them back into his pockets. Three pairs of eyes gazed at him in wonder. The nature of Pie's mysterious cargo was revealed. It looked as if Pie had been raiding all the studies at Oakshott, snaffling all the gum he could lay hands on. Why, was a very deep mystery. Nobody at Oakshott expected Pie to have any sense; they knew him too well. But this seemed rather the limit, even for the goat of the Fifth. Even Pie was not ex-

pected to be suddenly afflicted by an insatiable desire for gum!

Having crammed the bottles out of sight hurriedly, Pie looked round with a watchful and stealthy eye, uneasy that other eyes might have seen the incident. Mr. Silverson, his Form master, was walking at a little distance in conversation with Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth. In another direction, Bullivant, the games master, stood talking to Oliphant. Dr. Osborne, the majestic Head himself, was crossing with stately pace towards his house.

"Oh, crumbs!" said Pie breathlessly. "Think they noticed?"

"Nobody was looking this way," said Len comfortingly, while Harvey and Banks simply stared.

Clearly Pie did not want to be spotted in possession of all the gum. He was like him, of course, to display under the eyes he least desired to see. That was Pie all over.

"It would be a bit of a swizz if the did!" breathed Pie. "Silverson would guess at once. He's as sharp as a razor."

"What the dickens are you up to, y'ass?" asked Harvey. "Have you been round all the studies burgling the gum bottles?"

"All I could find," assented Pie. "That's why I want one of you men to keep cave. If they spotted me showing it into Silverson's stink-bike, I should be up before the Head. I don't want that."

"Fan me!" murmured Banks.

They began to understand. The members of the Oakshott staff possessed motor-bikes — Silverson and Bullivant. These were garaged in the Bicycle-house in a separate apartment from that which housed the bikes, inaccessible from it. A fellow going to the bike-shed for his jigger could, if he liked, pass into the adjoining apartment where the motor-bikes were garaged. Such a fellow would not, of course, desire anyone to enter by the outer door of the motor-bike shed.

the same moment. It was necessary for a pal to keep "cave" on that outer door.

"Catch on?" smiled Pie. "Silver-son's going out on his stink-bike this afternoon—he often does on half-holidays. At least, he thinks he is! I think he isn't! If he can get that jigger to go with about a gallon of gum in the tank, he's welcome. My idea is that he will be flummoxed."

"You mad ass!" said Harvey, in measured tones. "Take all that gum back to the House, and get shut of it. Forget all about it."

"Are you going to keep cave for me, Harvey?"

"As soon as I feel frightfully keen on a Head's flogging, old chap, I'll go to Osborne and ask for one. Until then, leave me out."

"Are you going to keep cave for me, Banker?"

"I'll watch it!" said Banks.

"Don't be cads!" urged Pie. "I can't carry on without a man to keep cave, you know that!"

"Quite!" agreed Harvey and Banks. "We know that!" And happy in that knowledge, Harvey and Banks turned and walked away.

"Will I do, Porringe?" Len Lex asked politely.

Pie looked at him. This new fellow was altogether too cool for a man who hardly knew his way about the school, and he needed whopping for his cheek—and Pie was going to give him the whopping when his game fist was quite mended. Still, it was jolly useful to have a man keeping cave while he doctored Silver-son's motor-bike. Pie was reckless, but he felt uneasy at the idea of being suddenly caught while he was doctoring that jigger. He decided to make use of the offer.

"Come on!" he said.

They walked away together. Mr. Silver-son, still walking and talking in the quad, did not even glance at them. There was nothing whatever suspicious in two fellows going round to the bike

shed. They reached the building, and Len took up his stand near the door of the motor-bike shed, while Pie went in at the other door.

In a few minutes he heard a sound from within. Pie had passed from the region of bikes to the region of motor-bikes by the communicating doorway. Already he was busy with gum. Bottle after bottle was being emptied into a tank intended for a much less viscous fluid. Len smiled faintly as he kept watch and ward, prepared to whistle instantly if a beak appeared in the offing.

Pie might have wondered why the new fellow was so obliging. Len Lex certainly did not intend to tell him.

Several times when Len had seen Vernon Silver-son clear off on his motor-bike, he had wondered what his destination might be, and wished that he could shadow him there. A man on a motor-bike could not be shadowed by a schoolboy with only a push-bike available.

But if Silver-son found his motor-bike in the state to which Pie plotted to reduce it, he would have to go by some less rapid means of transport, if he went at all. In which case the school-boy detective was not likely to figure in the pick-up game on Big Side, reluctant as he would be to cut footer.

Len was as keen as Pie that the reckless japer should not be interrupted. And it really seemed that, for once, Pie's luck was in. Two or three fellows came along to the bike shed and wheeled out their jiggers. But neither Silver-son nor Bullivant showed up. It looked as if Pie was, for once, backing a winner.

He was twenty minutes in the shed. Then he emerged, grinning and sticky.

"All serene?" he said, as he joined Len.

"Quite!" said Len. "You've done it?"

"Jolly near a gallon of gum," chuckled Pie. "If Silver-son gets that bike going this afternoon, he's a

miracle-worker! I don't know where he goes on these trips of his, but wherever it is he won't get there in a hurry this afternoon. I think I'll go and get a wash—I'm a bit sticky!"

"More than a bit," said Len, surveying him. "If Silverson saw you now he wouldn't need telling much."

Pie, chuckling explosively, cut off. Len sauntered away, his hands in his pockets. Cayley and the rest were still punting the ball, and Len joined in. He missed a kick, stumbled, and came down with a crash. He rose from that crash limping, and pressed a hand to his knee.

"Hurt?" asked Harvey.

"Ow!" was Len's reply. "Wow!"

"Well, dash it all, you're an ass, Lex!" said Banks. "If you've crooked your knee you'll have to stand out of the pick-up! Oliphant won't let you play dot-and-carry-one!"

"Rotten!" said Len. "Can't be helped, though. I hope Oliphant will give me another chance."

He limped away. He did hope, fervently, that Oliphant would give him another chance another time. But he was not thinking of that. He was thinking that a man deprived of his motor-bike could be shadowed that afternoon, and that there was work other than Soccer for the nephew of Detective-Inspector Bill Nixon of Scotland Yard!

CHAPTER 17.

Porringer All Over!

BULLIVANT, the Oakshott games master, had a deep, powerful, rolling voice. Even in ordinary conversation it had great carrying powers. Now Bullivant was not talking, he was roaring—and the roar was terrific.

He stood in the doorway of the motor-shed, his face, always red, absolutely scarlet with rage as he inquired of the heavens and the earth who had done this?

Oakshott men came from far and wide, gathering round. Oliphant and his merry men, going down to foot were deflected from their course, came crowding to see what the rumour was about. Fags of the Shell, Fourth, the Third came in the myriads. Beaks came—Silver, Surtees, Chowne, Rodd—even W. the porter, came over from his lodge.

Len Lex, probably, was the only Oakshott man out of the range of Bullivant's roar. Len had wheeled out his bike some little time ago—his damaged knee, which kept him out of the pick-up, not apparently debarring him from going for a spin. That spin, however, did not take the schoolboy detective out of sight of Masters' Gate.

"Senseless, unscrupulous, rascally, outrageous!" roared Bullivant. "Motor-cycle! I was about to go off with it! I cannot use it! Some rascally scoundrel, has filled the tank with gum!"

Porringer almost fell down.

"Gum!" said Mr. Silverson. "What you say gum?"

"Gum!" roared Bullivant. "I mean gum, and I mean gum! I have an appointment this afternoon, and a trick has been played—this outrage has been perpetrated! I will not tolerate it! I will place the matter before Osborne! I will demand——"

Harvey and Banks looked at each other. The goat of the Fifth looked quite sick. They knew what had happened. Motor-bikes, no doubt, were much alike. But nobody but Pie would have mistaken one for another in the course. If there was room for a mistake, the remotest chance to blame Pie was not the fellow to miss it.

"Oh, scissors!" muttered the other happy Pie.

Others of the Fifth, as well as Harvey and Banks, looked at Pie. Half the Fifth knew that Porringer had gathered bottles of gum that day for dinner. It was gum that had been used. Nobody, of course, was going to mention it in the hearing of his

Later, they were going to mention it. Cayley, who was nearest Pie, kicked him to go on with. Pie hardly noticed it. He was too overwhelmed with dismay and remorse.

How long Bullivant would have roared on remained unknown. His lung power was practically inexhaustible. But three o'clock chimed out from the clock tower. This reminded that time was passing, Bullivant checked his explosive wrath. He had said that he had an appointment that afternoon. As he had relied on his motor-bike to take him there, he was likely to be late anyhow.

"Silverson! If you are not using your machine this afternoon——"

"Unfortunately," said the Fifth Form master, "I am using it, Bullivant, and have, in fact, come to take it out now."

Mr. Silverson passed Bullivant, going into the motor-shed. A smile came over his dark, handsome face as he glanced at Bullivant's machine—not only filled up with gum, but overflowing with the same. He was glad that his own jigger had not been selected by the unknown japer. His face was quite grave again when he reappeared in the public eye with his jigger.

Sympathy, indignation, general condemnation of the outrage, perhaps, afforded Mr. Bullivant some consolation. More, no doubt, would have been afforded him by the loan of the Fifth Form master's motor-bike. A good many fellows thought that Silverson might have let old Bully have that jigger. He had said nothing about any appointment—and if he was only going for a spin, really, he might have stood down. Evidently, that did not occur to Silverson himself. He gave Bullivant a sympathetic murmur as he passed him again, then his machine was heard chug-chugging on the road. Silverson was gone. Bullivant remained.

Oliphant came to the rescue.

"If my push-bike would be any use, sir," said the Oakshott captain.

He hoped that it would; like everybody else, he liked old Bully.

"Your push-bike, Oliphant!" said the games master. "My dear fellow, that's very good of you. Yes, certainly, I shall be very late if I walk. I am much obliged to you, Oliphant."

"Not at all, sir! I'll get it out."

Oliphant got it out. Bullivant thanked the captain of Oakshott again, took the jigger, and wheeled it down to the gate. The crowd broke up, excitedly discussing the amazing, unprecedented happening.

"If I new who'd japed old Bully," said Oliphant, "I'd scrag him! I'd strew him all over Oakshott. But we're going to play footer, you men—come on."

Sixth Form men who were named for the pick-up followed Oliphant at once. Fifth Form men who were in the game did not follow immediately. They gathered round Porrhinge with grim and significant looks.

"You unspeakable scug!" said Cayley. "What did you do with all that gum you were grabbing after dinner?"

Pie groaned. Remorse was heavy on his heart.

"I never meant——"

"We've got to play footer now," said Hobbs. "We'll see you afterwards, Porrhinge. Take that to go on with."

"And that!" said Worrall.

"And that!" said Cayley. "And that!"

Pie might have fancied for the moment that he was the football. Harvey and Banks did not kick him. They were his chums, accustomed to bear with him. Every other boot lunged at Pie, some of the fellows hacking one another in their eagerness to land one on Porrhinge. But for the fact that Soccer called, there really might not have been much left of Pie. In the few minutes they gave him his indignant Form-fellows made

Porringer realised to the full what the life of a Soccer ball was like! They left him sitting in the quad, gasping for breath, wondering dizzily whether he was still in one piece.

CHAPTER 18.

The Man in Trant Wood!

ANYONE coming out of Oakshott by Masters' Gate or the great gates would not have seen Len. Anyone who had seen him would not have known, without a second glance, that he was an Oakshott man. Len's bicycle was parked out of sight behind a hedge. Len himself was ensconced in the branches of a tall elm, fifty yards from Masters' Gate. Foliage was thinning in autumn winds, but the thick branches gave good cover, and no passer-by would have been likely to spot him.

His Oakshott cap was in his pocket, and a cheap dark blue cloth cap was pulled down over his forehead. On one of his cheeks was a criss-cross of sticking-plaster, as if to cover cuts. It was sufficient disguise to delude a casual eye, especially from a distance.

Lying along a stout branch, Len watched the road where it ran past Masters' Gate. The distance was considerable, but his eyesight was good. If Vernon Silverson came out on foot, or if he came out on a borrowed push-bike, Len was going to spot him with ease. And Pie's jape, seemingly successful, left him in no doubt that Mr. Silverson would do one or the other. And he was keen—very keen—to shadow Silverson.

Vernon Silverson had the distinction of being first and foremost on the schoolboy detective's suspected list of three. Surtees, he knew, prowled at night. Bullivant, he knew, had secrets to keep. But Silverson, to his certain knowledge, had recently lost a large sum in backing a horse for a certain race—and Len had seen him white,

and almost stunned, by his disaster. Had Len Lex felt disposed to lay a bet with himself on the subject, he would have laid two to one that Vernon Silverson, of the suspected three, was the Sussex Man.

And if the man, who was a secret and most unlucky gambler, met his losses by helping himself at night, it was time for the Sussex Man to be heard of again. Every time the Sussex Man struck it was in secret, unseen; he knew his ground like a book, which implied careful scouting, patient watching, before the time came to crack the crib. Was that the reason of Silverson's trips on his motor-bike on half-holidays? Len was inclined to think that it was—and if, on this occasion, Silverson went less rapidly, the schoolboy detective was going to know where he went, and what he did when he got there. He could have blessed Pie for that remarkable jape.

But as he heard the chugging of a motor-bike, and stared down from the elm, he ceased to give Porringer his mental blessing. For the man on the chugging stink-bike was Silverson, and he shot away at his usual speed—a speed which made it useless for Len to think of dropping from the elm and getting to his hidden jigger.

Len stared after him from the branches blankly. That ass, Pie! What had he done? Not, evidently, what he had set out to do—for there was Silverson, scudding away, vanishing in the dim distance—far beyond the hope of shadowing.

Len's lips set hard. He had laid all his plans, only to discover at the finish that Porringer had, after all, fozzled it—as he always did! He could have found distinct pleasure at that moment in punching the goat of the Fifth right and left. It had been such a chance to spot the Sussex Man, if Silverson was the Sussex Man—scouting round the locality of the next crib—and it had gone phut!

So there was nothing doing that

afternoon in the shadowing line. Surtees was referee in the pick-up on Big Side. And it was no use thinking of Bullivant, because he, like Silver-son, had a motor-bike on which he would go, if he went at all. Len could no more shadow Bullivant than Silver-son.

But could he not? Looking down from his high branch, Len started at the sight of the games master wheeling out a push-bike. Even at the distance he could read the red wrath in Bullivant's face. A grin dawned on Len's own. He was intensely exasperated, but he could not help grinning as he realised what must have happened in the motor-bike shed. Silver-son on his motor-bike—Bullivant on a schoolboy's jigger. It spoke for itself, and he knew now that that unbelievable goat, Porringer, must have doctored the wrong machine.

"Oh!" breathed Len. "The goat—the priceless goat!"

He was keenly disappointed, for it was Silver-son that he wanted to shadow. But he wasted no time, nevertheless. He slithered down from the elm and hooked his bike out of the hedge. Bullivant, also, was his game, though lesser game than Silver-son. The fact that he himself, like nearly everybody at Oakshott, found that he liked old Bully personally made no difference. Personal likes and dislikes counted for nothing when it was his business to spot the man on whose shoulder the hand of Detective-Inspector Nixon was to drop.

Bullivant rode at a good speed. He was a powerful man on a good jigger, and he was in a hurry. But Len kept him in sight. He did not want to do more than keep him in sight—so long as he did not lose him, the farther off he was the safer. At a backward glance Bullivant would never have recognised the cyclist behind him in the shabby cap with the sticking-plaster on his face as an Oakshott Fifth Former. But a fellow could not be too careful.

As it turned out, the games master did not cast a single backward glance. Obviously, it never crossed his mind for a moment that he might be followed. If he was—as Len doubted, now that he had learned so much about Vernon Silver-son—the Sussex Man, he was feeling quite secure. His destination, and what he did there, would probably reveal what he was and what he was not. Len found himself hoping that, whatever might transpire, it would enable him to take the name of James Bullivant off his list of suspects.

Ten or eleven miles ran under the wheels. They were getting to Trant, about eleven miles to the east of Oakshott—the scene, as Len well remembered, of one of the Sussex Man's "jobs"—all of them within a certain radius of Oakshott at the centre.

Was the Sussex Man going to give the locality of a former exploit the once-over, with the idea of another raid in the same place? Len hoped not, but it would be easy to see what Bullivant did when he got to Trant.

But Bullivant did not reach Trant. The old red roofs of that little sleepy Sussex town were in sight when the games master turned off the road into a bridle-path through a thick, leafy wood. He disappeared from Len's sight, and Len, turning the corner a minute or two later, spotted a notice posted on a tree-trunk: "NO CYCLING." Bullivant, evidently, had not heeded that prohibition—neither did Len. But he was doubly cautious now. Old Bully was not likely to be recklessly disregarding of local bylaws. He was more likely to walk where the law required walking, and Len did not want to overtake him. He slowed down.

He was glad of his caution a few minutes later. At a turn of the bridle-path about a hundred yards from the road he saw Bullivant wheeling his bike. Len dropped from his machine on the instant and walked and wheeled. Another instant and he backed, pushed

his bike behind a mass of hawthorns, and followed it out of sight. For Bullivant, thirty feet ahead of him, had stopped, and a man leaning on one of the trees had stepped towards him.

Behind the hawthorns, Len Lex breathed hard. Bullivant, he knew, had not seen him—not once had the games master looked back since leaving the school. But the other man, whoever he was, evidently a man whom Bullivant had come there to meet, might have glimpsed him. With his heart beating a little faster, Len listened intently. The deep, rolling voice of the games master came to his ears: "Let us step into the wood, then, Roger."

It was an answer to something Len had not heard—the other man spoke low. Perhaps he had said that there was someone on the path. Len heard a rustling sound; they were going into the wood.

"Roger!" breathed Len.

It was the name Bullivant had spoken a few days ago on the telephone in Common-room. Roger was the man who wanted money, the man whose voice on the 'phone at Oakshott had startled and alarmed the games master. Len Lex was extremely keen to have a look at Roger. A needy relative—a blackmailer—a confederate in the burgling line? Any of these things Roger might be, and the schoolboy detective was going to know.

Leaving his bike hidden in the hawthorns, Len threaded his way through the wood along the path without emerging into it. He came abreast of the spot where the games master had stopped, and peered out from brambly thickets. The first object that met his view was a bicycle leaning against a tree. Bullivant had left it standing there while he went into the wood with Roger on the other side of the bridle-path.

Len pushed on a dozen yards farther, and cut across the path into the opposite trees. He was now on the

same side of the path as Bullivant and his unknown acquaintance. A rolling voice that he knew well boomed in the trees close at hand. From a thick mass of willows and tall ferns, Len peered at two figures standing under the trees—and hardly breathed, so near was he to them.

Bullivant had his back to Len. The other man, younger, slimmer, leaned on an ash-trunk with a cigarette in his mouth. Len saw his face very clearly—a rather handsome face, with a weak chin and dark shadows under the eyes that told of late hours. He was well dressed in dark clothes, with a touch of dandyism. There was a fleeting resemblance in his face to the features of the games master—they might have been relatives. Bullivant was speaking:

"Nonsense! Rubbish! There was no one on the path! If there had been, what of it? You are a bundle of nerves, Roger! Pah!"

"Someone was on the path—a boy, I think—and I have not heard him pass, Jim." The voice was sulky, with a querulous note in it. "Don't you care if a constable's hand drops on my shoulder?"

Len drew a deep breath. So Roger went in dread of an officer of the Law tapping him on the shoulder! A friend, probably a relative of the games master of Oakshott, went in fear of the police! Mentally the schoolboy detective relegated Vernon Silverson to a back seat. That goat, Porrynge, had served him well, after all.

"Don't be a fool!" came Bullivant's deep growl. "You're in no danger of that, as you know, or ought to know!"

"How do I know? I know I'm sick of this! Are you going to see me through?"

"I'm going to see you through. Keep off the telephone, and don't expect to see me. It won't be long now."

"How shall I know?"

"Keep your eyes on the newspapers!" There was a strange, almost terrible note in the games master's deep voice. "When you see in the papers that the Sussex Man has cracked the crib at Oakshott, then you will know that I have the money."

CHAPTER 13.

The Hidden Jigger!

MASTER of himself as the schoolboy detective was, he could not restrain a start as those words reached him in the deep voice of the Oakshott games master. Silverson? Surtees? They were blotted out now. This was a confession. It was what he wanted to learn; yet, somehow, it came like a blow to him. It made him realise how much he had wished that "old Bully" would not turn out to be the wanted man. He started—and the next moment there was a sharp exclamation from Roger.

A slight—ever so slight—rustle in the willows was enough to alarm the weak-chinned man, whom Bullivant had called a bundle of nerves. He made a spring from the tree he was leaning upon, passed the games master, and plunged into the willows—guessing, or at least fearing, that someone was there—and at the same instant Len backed away, and dodged round the trunk of a massive beech, vanishing.

"Roger!" Bullivant's voice came deep and angry. "What—"

"There was someone—"

"Nervous fool! There was nobody."

"I tell you, Jim, I heard—a rabbit, perhaps, but I heard. Let us look round, at least. I tell you there was someone—something!"

The voice was shrill with alarm.

Len Lex, flitting from tree to tree, was beating a rapid retreat. He had not been seen, and if he was not seen, it would pass as a false alarm—as, indeed, Bullivant at least believed that it was. Behind him the schoolboy detective heard a trampling and a

rustling. One, if not both, of them was searching, and the sooner he was far from the spot the better.

There was no more shadowing to be done now. To get back to his bicycle and disappear from Trant Wood as fast as he could drive the pedals was his clue. But he did not head direct for the bridle-path. He had to make sure of throwing the searchers off his track first. He plunged deeper and deeper into the wood, following a roundabout route, taking advantage of all the cover that the thick woodland afforded.

When at last he stopped to listen, there was no sound. If Roger, and perhaps Bullivant, still searched, they had failed to find a trace of him; they were nowhere near at hand. More slowly, but still cautiously, Len threaded his way among the trees and brambles, circling round towards the bridle-path.

When, through the trees, he glimpsed the open path a little distance in front of him, he did not step into it. There was danger of Bullivant coming back along the path. He had to be sure the coast was clear. He threaded a way through a thicket of willows on the edge of the path, to wait and watch before he emerged. His hand struck something as he parted the drooping branches. He stopped and stood as if petrified. Standing hidden in that clump on the edge of the path was a motor-cycle. The ghost of a motor-bike could not have startled him more.

He stood perfectly still, forgetting, for the moment, what he had just seen and heard. For he knew that motor-bike. It was Vernon Silverson's. There was no sign of Silverson—he had concealed his machine there and gone—probably long ago. Len Lex gazed at it with almost bulging eyes.

Mr. Silverson had ridden away from Oakshott to the west, on the road to Baye or Shooter's Field. Trant was direct to the east of the school. Silver-

son must have covered a wide circle of country—a small matter on so speedy a machine. But why? Why was the motor-bike hidden in a thicket in Trant Wood? Where had Silver-son gone on foot, after parking it there? And why?

The schoolboy detective felt his brain in a whirl. He had wondered where Silver-son had gone that afternoon. He knew now. But why—why? But for what he had heard, only a quarter of an hour ago, with his own ears, he would have said that the Sussex Man was scouting in Trant, the destined scene of his next exploit.

A man with no secrets to keep did not park his motor-cycle in the depths of a thicket. It was parked there because it was urgent that no one should see it. But why? It was not, it could not be, because he was the Sussex Man—after what Len had heard Bullivant utter. Len was not often at a loss, but he was absolutely perplexed as he stood staring at Silver-son's motor-bike.

He stirred. Whatever this might mean, Bullivant was his man, and he had to get clear without risk of being spotted. He pushed through and scanned the bridle-path. It was clear—there was no sign of Bullivant or his companion. Len ran across, reached his bicycle where he had left it hidden in the hawthorns, and, after another careful survey of the path, mounted and rode swiftly away to the Trant Road. It was a relief to spin out on to the open road and head for Oakshott as fast as he could go.

Not till he had covered a good six miles did Len stop. Behind a wayside hedge he removed the sticking-plaster from his cheek, and changed his cap. He was now within school bounds again, and an Oakshott man once more. Remounting, he rode on more slowly. Bullivant might see him now, and it did not matter.

When he was still a mile from Oakshott, he heard a bicycle on the road

behind him, and Bullivant rode by. The games master glanced at him and slowed down, riding by his side.

"Weren't you in the pick-up this afternoon, Lex?" he asked.

Whatever he was—and how could Len doubt what he was, after what he had heard in Trant Wood?—he was the games master of Oakshott now. A man with a sense of duty, so far as the school games were concerned, at least.

"No, sir. I had to stand out. I knocked my knee in a punt-about!" answered Lee innocently.

"It has not prevented you from cycling, Lex, I see. I hope you are not a slacker. I thought you were keen. I like to see a boy keen. You have a chance for the first eleven, Lex. I advise you not to lose it."

"Thank you, sir," said Len. "I'm going to try hard."

The games master nodded and shot off. Len followed, more slowly. Bullivant had not the remotest idea that he had been to Trant that afternoon. Len could almost have found it in his heart to wish that he had not been. He was conscious that, in spite of what he now knew, he still liked old Bully, the man who, whatever he was, worked hard at his duty, and took a keen interest in every footballing fellow at Oakshott. Len felt that it was unjust and unreasonable, but all the same, he could not help wishing that the words he had heard from Bullivant in Trant Wood had been uttered by Vernon Silver-son!

"Ow! Oh, crumbs! Ow!"

Such was the sound that greeted Len as he came into Study No. 8. He stared. Harvey and Banks were sitting on the study table, grinning. Porrynge was sitting on the floor, leaning against the wall. Apparently he had been extended on the floor, and had dragged himself into a sitting position, and could get no farther. He looked a wreck. His face was ink. His hair was a dusty mop. His jacket

was split up the back. His trousers were dusty and crumpled. Several detached buttons lay on the floor round him. He gasped for breath. It looked as if Pie had been through a rather exciting time.

"Just too late to see the fun, Len," said Harvey. "Nearly all the Fifth have been here. That goat started out to gum Silverson's stink-bike, and gummed old Bully's."

"And the Fifth have jolly well let him know what they think of it," said Banks.

"Ow!" moaned Pie. "It was a mistake—I keep on telling you it was a mistake—I meant it for Silverson—ow! I wouldn't hurt old Bully for worlds! Wow! You men ought to have stood by a pal! Wow!"

"Stood by you!" growled Harvey. "Why, we're always standing by you, trying to keep you out of trouble. But you're such a silly ass that it is impossible. You make a mess of the simplest thing, and then growl at us because you get it in the neck. For two pins I'd give you another whopping for your cheek. You jolly well deserve it!"

"Rather!" agreed Banks. "But I think that you've had enough. If I didn't jolly well think so, I'd jolly well kick you now."

"And so would I!" said Len. Which was, perhaps, a little ungrateful, considering the discovery the schoolboy detective had made, owing to Pie's little error with the gum. But, oddly enough, that was how he felt.

CHAPTER 20.

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 Porridge 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 Porridge.

"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' remonstrations, "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 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 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, fat-head!"

"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 to. 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.

"Urrrgh! Who—is that Porrhinge?" came a muffled, gurgling, unrecognisable voice. "Urrrgh! Is—is— Who— Urrrrrghh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pie.

He came racing up the path. Len stepped off it. Porrhinge 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.

CHAPTER 21.

Not So Funny!

STUDY No. 8 in the Fifth echoed to the sounds of mirth.

Porrhinge 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 and 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 Caley. "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. 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 recognisable 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 foaming.

"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—whop!

"Ow! Oooh! Ow! Wow! Whooh! Whoooooop!" 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 it sit up—perhaps!

CHAPTER 22.

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, 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.

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 cracksman to prowel 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 sort, 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 Lex 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.

CHAPTER 23.

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 some-

thing 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 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 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 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?

CHAPTER 24.

Painful for Pie!

PORRIDGE 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 prefect feel sorry for himself. It was Champion of the Sixth who had incurred Pie's wrath this time. Champion had given Pie "six" that evening for bursting a bag of soot over Rance, the sporting member of the Sixth. Pie had fairly asked for a whopping by this lawless proceeding, but nevertheless he felt very indignant and sorry for himself. He vowed vengeance upon Champion.

And Champion 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, probably, that Silverson had turned out 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 Porraine 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 rotter 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 unbolts, 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. Champion 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, Porrhinge 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!

CHAPTER 25.

Nipped in the Bud!

"SILVERSON'S away to-night!" Porrhinge of the Fifth made that statement, in the senior day-room, to his friends Harvey and Banks. His look, and his tone, as he made it, were both extremely significant.

But that significance seemed lost on Banks and Harvey. Harvey merely said "Is he?" and Banks made no remark at all. Obviously, they were quite indifferent to the fact that their Form-master, Mr. Vernon Silverson, would be away from Oakshott that night.

"I heard him telling Surtees," added Pie. "Bit of swank, you know. He's dining with Lord Trant, over at Trant Elms, and staying the night."

"Then he won't have an eye on us in prep this evening," remarked Banks. "I wonder how he got invited? Bit of a pusher, old Silverson."

"Well, it's all right, isn't it?" said Pie.

"All right for Silverson, if his jolly old lordship stands him a good dinner."

"All right for me, I mean."

"Has Lord Trant asked you, too, Pie?" grinned Harvey.

"Oh, don't be an ass! I mean it's the chance I've been waiting for, all this term, to get my own back on Silverson."

Len Lex grinned. Really, Len could not help grinning. This was so exactly like that goat Porrhinge!

Len was sitting in the bay window of the day-room, which was wide open to admit the fresh air and the sunshine. He had a view of the quadrangle and of the gravel path that ran under the window—and of a burly, red-faced gentleman who leaned against an adjacent buttress, reading a letter.

That gentleman was Mr. Bullivant, the games master of Oakshott. And, through the open window, every word spoken inside floated out to his red ears. Len noticed him give a little start as he heard Pie's statement that Silverson would be away that night, as if he were interested in that little bit of news—as very likely he was! There was no doubt that Bullivant heard—and no doubt that he heeded.

From where he sat, Len's eyes had been on Bullivant for some time. He would have given a good deal to know what was written in that letter which "old Bully" was reading so intently. He wondered whether it was from the mysterious "Roger," whom he had seen Bullivant meet in Trant Woods. He could not see the letter, but he could see the games master's face, and watch the varying expressions thereon.

Intent on the letter, it evidently did not occur to Bullivant that eyes might be upon him from an adjacent window—or perhaps he did not care. To all Oakshott, Len was simply Lex of the Fifth; and Bullivant had never taken any special notice of him, except in games.

Bullivant put the letter into his pocket and turned towards the window.

Porringer had a very heavy "down" on the new man in the Fifth. Lex was, in Pie's opinion, a cheeky new tick who needed keeping in his place. Nevertheless, Len would gladly have saved him from announcing his intention of ragging his Form-master, in the hearing of another master.

Len put a finger to his lips, and with the other hand pointed to the open casement. That was as plain a warning that there were ears outside to hear as any fellow could have wanted—any fellow but Porringer. But Pie was not quick on the uptake. He gave Len a stare, but, without taking any other notice of him, rattled on:

"You men remember I started in to rag Silverson's study at the beginning of the term—that night the burglar came. That was a ghastly frost. I——"

"Shut up!" hissed Harvey and Banks together. They were quicker on the uptake than their chum Pie. They could not see Bullivant from where they stood, but they understood Len's action.

"Let a fellow speak!" said Pie. "It jolly well won't be a frost to-night, with Silverson away—see? I'm going down from the dorm——"

Pie broke off. A red face and a pair of hefty shoulders were framed in the open window. Mr. Bullivant was looking in, his rather bulging light blue eyes fixed on the dismayed Pie.

"Oh!" ejaculated Porringer.

"Oh, you goat!" murmured Banks.

"Oh, you fathead!" breathed Harvey.

"Porringer!" Bullivant's voice, loud and deep, boomed through the day-room, and caused every fellow there to look round towards the window. "Porringer, I heard what you said."

There was a subdued chuckle from the Fifth Form men in the room. They had all heard what Pie said to Harvey and Banks. That did not matter, of course—Pie did not care if all the Fifth knew. They knew all about his feud with Silverson—it was, indeed, a standing joke in the Fifth—but it was rather a different matter if a beak heard!

"You are a reckless young rascal, Porringer!" boomed Bullivant. "Have you forgotten that on the night you went down from your dormitory to play a foolish prank in your Form-master's study—you were struck down by a burglar—the man who is called the Sussex Man? Cannot such an experience teach even you common sense? I have a great mind, Porringer, to take you to your Form-master at once and report your words to Mr. Silverson."

Pie goggled at him in deep dismay. What would happen if his proposed enterprise was reported to Silverson made Pie feel quite faint. Silverson had a hefty hand with a cane, as Pie knew only too well from sorrowful experience.

"Oh, sir!" gasped Pie. "I—I——"

"I am unwilling," said Mr. Bullivant, "to cause a boy trouble with his Form-master. But I have no alternative, Porrynge, unless you give me your word not to leave your dormitory to-night, under any circumstances whatever. You are a very stupid boy, but I can take your word."

Pie breathed again. Old Bully's bark was always worse than his bite.

"Oh, yes, sir, yes, certainly!" gasped Pie. "I give you my word, sir—word of honour, sir."

"Very well," said Mr. Bullivant. "I shall accept your word, Porrynge, and trust you." He disappeared from the window.

"Old Bully's a good old bean," said Banks. "He never lands a man in a row if he can help it. But, by gum, you're the man to ask for it, Pie!"

"Was there ever such a goat in Oakshott or out of it?" asked Harvey.

"Hardly ever!" chuckled Banks.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fellows were all laughing. Pie did not join in the laugh. It was seldom that an Oakshott master had a night away from the school during the term. This glorious chance of getting his own back on Silverson was never likely to recur. It was a blow to Pie! Owing to old Bully's kindness of heart, he had got off cheaply—he fairly wriggled at the idea of being reported to Silverson. Still, it was a blow. Porrynge's face was long—while the rest of the day-room roared.

CHAPTER 26.

Quick Work!

"LUCKY man!" said Surtees.

"The nobility," said Mr. Chowne, "never honour me."

Vernon Silverson, the master of the Fifth, smiled, with perhaps a trace of smug satisfaction. It was rather a distinction to be asked to dinner by Lord Trant, at Trant Elms. His lordship was a governor of Oakshott, and, on his rare appearances at the school, was

treated with marked respect by every member of the staff.

Mr. Bullivant, coming into Hall, did not join the group of masters. Bullivant seldom joined a group that included Silverson, if he could help it. There was no actual dispute between the two, but the big, burly, loud-voiced games master had nothing in common with the dark, handsome, and rather elegant Form-master. But though Bullivant did not join the group, he hovered within hearing of their voices.

Len Lex, who wandered into Hall after him, hovered also, at a respectful distance, taking a letter from his pocket and reading it. Bullivant did not notice him—there were dozens of fellows about, and Len was only one of them. But Len was noticing the games master, with quiet intentness. His idea was that Bullivant desired to confirm what he had heard from Porrynge at the day-room window—to make sure, in fact, that Silverson really was going to be away that night. Bullivant was looking at a painting on the wall, but Len had no doubt that he was using his ears, rather than his eyes.

If that was what James Bullivant wanted, he was gratified. Silverson, Surtees, Chowne, and Bailey were all talking on the subject; and anyone who heard that conversation could be left in no doubt, after a few minutes, that Vernon Silverson was dining with his lordship at Trant Elms that evening, and that his lordship had asked him to stay the night.

Len was not surprised when Mr. Bullivant, after a few minutes, ceased to be interested in the painting and walked out of Hall.

On which, Len, too, ceased to be interested in the letter he had taken from his pocket, and left Hall also.

Mr. Bullivant walked along to Common-room, went in and shut the door. Len, passing that door a minute later, loitered. There was no sound of voices from within—most of the beaks, he knew, were in Hall. But there was a sound, to the schoolboy detective's

intent ear, of the scratching of a pen. Which was enough for Len, and he went on his way, and left Mr. Bullivant to write his letter at the Common-room desk undisturbed.

He went out into the quad, with a thoughtful pucker in his brow.

At a distance from the House, Root, Sidgers, Tulke, and other heroes of the Fourth Form were punting an old footer about before tea. Len stopped near the school wall and watched the fags at their game.

At the spot where he stood, he had one eye on the school letter-box in the wall. If Mr. Bullivant, after writing his letter, came out to post it himself, he would not do so unseen. And if the address on that letter was one that he did not want other eyes to see, he was sure to carry it out to the box himself. In which case, Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew was going to know to whom that letter was addressed.

Any fellow noticing Len would have fancied that he was mildly amused by the antics of the Fourth Form men with their old football. His face gave no clue to his thoughts.

But he was thinking hard! A week ago he had shadowed Bullivant in Trant Woods, and seen him meet an expensive-looking young man with a weak chin whom he called Roger. He had heard Bullivant tell Roger, in so many words, that he would "have the money," and that Roger would know it when he saw in the papers that the Sussex Man had cracked the crib at Oakshott School. What did that mean—what could it mean—except that Bullivant was the Sussex Man, and had his own school marked out for the next "job"?

Bullivant had made sure that Silverson would be absent that night, and then at once had gone to write a letter. Did that mean that the certainty of Silverson's absence had brought him to a decision, after long delay? And did that letter refer to it? The school-boy detective was going to know if he could. And he thought that he could!

"Here, send that ball this way!" shouted Root. A hefty kick had sent the footer right across to where Len stood.

Len, smiling, kicked it back to the fags, carefully dropping it nearer the letter-box. The figure of Bullivant appeared in the distance towards the House, coming across. If he had a letter to post, it was not to be seen. But he came straight across to the wall, obviously heading for the box.

Root & Co. were not more than four or five yards from the box, scrambling round their footer. Len drew a little nearer to them. Bullivant, passing the noisy mob, stopped to speak.

"A little less kick and rush, Root!" said the games master. "Even in a punt about you may as well remember that Soccer is a scientific game."

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Root.

Bullivant walked on. His hand went to his pocket as he neared the post-box. Len's eyes glimmered. He had no doubt that the letter Bullivant had just written was one of which he did not desire other eyes to see the address. Once dropped in the box, it was safe from all eyes but those of the officers of the Post Office. But it was not in the box yet.

Standing in front of the box, Bullivant drew a letter from his pocket and lifted it to the slot. At the same instant, Len Lex stepped into the mob of fags and kicked the footer. There was a howl of protest from Root & Co., which died away in a gasp of horror at the result of Len's kick. For the footer, shooting from that kick like a bullet, banged on Bullivant's shoulders from behind and sent him stumbling against the wall; and as he threw both hands to the wall to save his face, the letter dropped to the ground.

Len reached it almost in a bound.

As the games master, spluttering, turned, Len picked it up and handed it to him, the address downward. One swift glance had been enough for Len, and the name and address on the envelope were written in his memory;

"Robert Barker, Esq., 10, John Street, Trant."

"Who—what—what——" spluttered Bullivant.

"Awfully sorry, sir!" gasped Len. "I hope you weren't hurt, sir! My fault entirely! Your letter, sir!"

Bullivant almost snatched the letter from Len's hand. His glance shot to it as he snatched, and noted that the back was uppermost. As clearly as if he had spoken, Len read his thought that the boy could not have seen the address. Another second, and the letter was dropped in the slot.

"Did you kick that ball, Lex? How could you be so clumsy?" exclaimed Mr. Bullivant angrily. "I am not hurt, but you have made my coat muddy——"

"I was going to show the fags a kick, sir," said Len humbly. "I'm afraid I was a bit clumsy——"

"Well, well! There is no harm done," said Mr. Bullivant, gruffly but good-humouredly, and he walked back to the House.

Any other beak would have made a fuss about that "accident"—Silverson, certainly, would have given him six. Old Bully had let it go with a gruff word or two. Len had never liked old Bully so much as he did at that moment. His face was clouded as he walked out of gates. It was utterly rotten luck to like and admire a man whom it looked like being his duty to trail down to a just punishment.

CHAPTER 27.

Putting Bill Wise!

THE man who sat in the little green Austin bore no resemblance whatever to Detective-Inspector William Nixon, of Scotland Yard. Had he done so he certainly would never have driven the car within a mile of Oakshott School. For though Bill Nixon did not know the Sussex Man, it was quite on the cards that the Sussex Man knew Bill Nixon.

But Bill's nearest and dearest relative would not have known him now, with his horn-rimmed spectacles, straggling moustache, and red cheekbones. Even Len would not have known him had he not been watching for him and known what to expect.

Len, strolling in Bingham Lane with his hands in his pockets, glanced at the green Austin and the horn-rimmed driver, and made no sign. Neither did the man in the car make any sign. Len walked into the field behind the willows that bordered the lane, and the horn-rimmed man backed his car on to the wide grass verge and descended from it, a little camera in his hand.

Anyone who had passed that rather solitary spot might have supposed that the motorist was going to take some snaps, as people often did, of the high downs rich in the autumn sunset, or of the deep woods that swept away towards Greenwood and Parsley. The horn-rimmed man opened the camera, all ready, as he walked into the field behind the willows. Once there, however, he nodded and grinned at Len, and the camera remained in his hand, unused.

"I got your call, Len, and came all out," said Bill Nixon. "You've not a lot of time before lock-up at your school, I think?"

"No," said Len. "I'm glad I got you, and you came quick, Bill."

"I was waiting to hear from you, chief!" grinned Bill.

Len chuckled. He had walked quickly down to Oakways village and put a call through to Greenwood 101. Anyone who might have overheard him doing so would have heard him say that he had not received the football boots, as promised, and request that they might be delivered without further delay. Which certainly would not have sounded, to the most suspicious ear, as if it meant that Len Lex was waiting for his uncle, the detective-inspector, at a certain pre-arranged spot.

But that was exactly what it did mean—and here was Bill Nixon. Len chuckled as his uncle playfully addressed him as "chief," but he became serious again at once.

"First of all, any news of Roger Bullivant?" he asked.

Bill eyed him over the plain lenses in the horn-rimmed spectacles.

"I thought you knew only the first name, Len, so far," he said.

"I've just seen a letter addressed to Robert Barker," answered Len.

Bill Nixon blinked for a moment. Then he grinned and nodded.

"Good!" he said.

"It doesn't always work," murmured Len—"not with a sportsman in the underworld, always changing his name. But our good Roger isn't that kind of a sportsman. I've told you what he's like—rather a young dandy, with expensive tastes, keeping up a certain position—not used to aliases. Lots of things about him marked with his initials, I should say. Which might excite remark in his lodgings if he wore a name beginning with other initials. If a landlady noticed Jack Jones or Tom Robinson, with a hanky or a collar marked R. B., she might smell a mouse. The same initials, Bill—for lots of reasons."

Bill nodded.

"And," said Len, "pretty certain in this instance, as Robert and Roger both begin with an R, and we knew Roger! If they stuck to R, why not to B? And B stands for Bullivant, Bill, and there was a certain resemblance between Roger's features and old Bully's—though one looks like a rabbit and the other like a mastiff. Have I got it right, Bill?"

"Right as rain," answered Mr. Nixon. "After I got your tip about Roger I put them wise at the Yard, and they sorted out a list of wanted Rogers for me. Six of them in all—one surnamed Bullivant."

"And—"

"Bank clerk," said Mr. Nixon tersely.

"Capital and Provincial Bank, Bristol. Bolted three months ago—four hundred pounds short—backing horses."

"He looked it," said Len. "Young brother or nephew of old Bully!" His face was pensive for a moment. "Bill, old Bully is a splendid man, in a lot of ways."

"A splendid cracksman, at least, from what you heard him say to Roger," said Mr. Nixon, with a sharp look at his nephew.

"Yes. But I'm not satisfied, Bill. And there are the others—I've kept you posted in details, Bill—the others have a lot to explain. We're not through yet, Bill."

"No," agreed Mr. Nixon; but he eyed his nephew very keenly. "You liked this man Bullivant, Len?"

"Can't help it," said the schoolboy detective. "Everybody likes him—a gruff old bear, with a roar like a bull, but a heart of gold, Bill—that's genuine whether he's a cracksman in his spare time or not. If I have to get old Bully, Bill, I shall be sorry that I ever went to Oakshott."

"Don't be a young ass, Len."

"I'll try not," Len grinned. "Look here, leaving out what I heard him say to Roger in Trant Woods—I admit that it stumps me, but leaving it out—what else? Roger's on the run—skulking in a little country town ten miles from his relation's school, sticking his relation for money. Unscrupulous young scoundrel, landing his troubles on a better man—"

"Who knows what he's done, and if he's an honest citizen, ought to hand him over to the police," grunted Mr. Nixon. "Carry on."

"Roger wants money—most likely to cut and run abroad, and get clear. Bullivant's standing by him. I had it from the man's own lips that he'd given Roger two or three times the amount of his salary as games master at Oakshott. Any way out—except the Sussex Man's way?"

"I've gone into that," grunted Bill. "Shareholders' lists—and a precious"

mountain of work. But I've got it. In the last three months, four sales of shares traced to James Bullivant, Oakshott. The man had some private means, which he's sold out."

"The Sussex Man needn't have done that, Bill! The Sussex Man has other ways of raising money."

"I know," grunted Bill. "But——"

"Everything's against old Bully, including his own words. But all the while I feel in my bones that he isn't the man. If you said to any Oakshott man, Bill, that old Bully would touch a shilling that wasn't his own, that Oakshott man would dot you in the eye. But for the sake of another man, perhaps——" Len mused.

"Wash it out!" growled Inspector Nixon. "Young Roger's been in trouble for three months. The Sussex Man's been on the prowl for two years!"

"You've got me, Bill," sighed Len. "But granting that there's a sporting chance that old Bully is only a soft-hearted old bear, landed in deep waters by an unscrupulous young scoundrel, that's where you come in, Bill. Tip some of your official friends to call on Mr. Robert Barker, No. 10, John Street, Trant, and collect the goods."

"We want the Sussex Man," said Bill. "But Roger Bullivant will be welcome to go on with. The goods will be collected to-night."

Len smiled.

"Old Bully wouldn't thank me, I'm afraid, if he knew," he remarked. "But he will be better off without Roger, and good old bean as he is, he can't be allowed such amusements as helping absconding bank clerks to get away from the tribe of Nixon. What?"

"I should say not!" grunted Bill.

"Then we'll leave it at that," said Len. "Gather up Roger and tuck him away where he belongs, and we shall see what we shall see, Bill! Now I'll cut, or Lex of the Fifth will be late for roll-call."

Bill grinned, and shook hands with his nephew. The green Austin whizzed

away. Not till it had disappeared in the distance did Len emerge from beyond the willows, and saunter away in the direction of the school. He sauntered carelessly, with his hands in his pockets, but he arrived at Oakshott before old Wegg came out to close the gates, and was in good time to answer to his name when Mr. Chowne called the roll in Hall.

CHAPTER 28.

The Raider!

THE boom of eleven strokes from the old clock-tower of Oakshott reached two wakeful ears in the Fifth Form dormitory, and Len sat up in bed. He listened for a few moments to the sound of steady breathing from other beds—then slipped out, silent as a spectre, dressed, and put on rubber shoes that made no sound. He delayed a minute or two to fix up a dummy in his bed, for a fellow could not be too careful, then he was gone from the Fifth Form dormitory.

At that hour all Oakshott was silent and still. One or two masters, perhaps, might be still up, in their studies, but Common-room was closed and dark. The last light in the passages was turned out at eleven. When Len, therefore, looked out on the big landing, at a quarter past, he looked into a well of darkness. But he was wary—very wary. Surtees might be night-prowling—only a few nights ago he had run into Len, and collared him, and, amazingly, believed that he had collared Bullivant. If he had discovered that that was a mistake, he had not, at all events, discovered Len.

There was no danger from Silverson, who was ten or eleven miles away, at Trant Elms. But there might be danger from Surtees—or from the unknown who was nameless on the schoolboy detective's list—and Bullivant. For Bullivant, it was absolutely certain, was going to walk abroad that eventful night—whatever his ob-

ject. Not that Len expected Bullivant to be on the move yet. He was certain to wait till a later hour—the later the safer. But Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew left nothing to chance, and he was on the trail as soon as it was quite safe to get out of his dormitory.

Silverson's passage was his objective. He reached it, but he did not, as on other vigils, linger in the passage. Silverson away, it was safe to enter Silverson's study; there were no ears to hear in the bed-room adjoining. A door opened and shut without a sound, and Len Lex was in the Fifth Form master's study, a shadow in the glimmer of autumn starlight that fell in at the casement window.

He knew that he had to wait, and he was patient. Quietly and carefully, he selected a spot. There was a screen standing in a corner, and Len arranged it to suit his purpose. Behind it, he was blotted from sight, with just sufficient space left to watch the whole room without revealing himself. In the dark corner he placed a chair, to sit on while he waited. It was useless to tire himself by standing.

But if his limbs were at rest, his brain was busy. He was going to make a discovery that night, he knew. But what? That was still on the knees of the gods!

If Bullivant was the Sussex Man, his game, in all likelihood, would be the Head's safe. That was in Dr. Osborne's study, nowhere near where Len was keeping watch. But in Silverson's study Len knew that he would spot him. His desire to ascertain that Silverson would really be absent that night meant, and could mean, only one thing—business in Silverson's quarters.

Silverson's casement, with its low sill on the quad, was, as Len knew, the way the Sussex Man came and went. It might mean that the cracksman did not intend to crack the Oakshott crib, as his words in Trant Woods implied, but had decided on another quarter.

It might, more likely, mean that he intended to leave traces in Silverson's study of an entrance from outside—the way the Sussex Man had come the night Porrhinge had been knocked out. For he could not, of course, allow the slightest suspicion to arise that it was an "inside job."

Everybody, in the morning, would know that the Sussex Man had come and gone—but they were to believe that he had come, as before, from the outer darkness, and disappeared into it again. Whatever Bullivant's intentions might be, Len would get into touch with him by watching in Vernon Silverson's study. There was no doubt of it.

He waited. Midnight boomed through the misty night. As the slow minutes after midnight crawled by, the schoolboy detective was more than ever on the alert. But another long hour dragged its slow length by and there was a boom of one. Silence again—and slow, endless minutes, and then—

Then Len knew that the door of the study had opened and closed.

Someone stood in the study, in the darkness.

He felt a thrill at his heart. All was dark, save for the pale glimmer at the uncurtained window. But a swift glance round the edge of the screen showed him a burly form standing by the door, with head bent to listen; and he knew that the subdued, laboured breathing he could hear came from Bullivant.

The faintest of clicks reached his ear.

In the name of wonder why had Bullivant turned the key in the lock? If he was going out, it did not add to his security. Nobody was likely to come to that door—but if anyone came, the locking of the door was more likely to awaken suspicion than to allay it, for that door was never locked. Moreover, how could it be locked in Silverson's absence, except by a surreptitious

intruder in the study? If Bullivant was the Sussex Man, the Sussex Man seemed to have forgotten his usual wary cunning.

Len listened. Bullivant was at the window now. To step out and fetch the cracksman's tools for his work, or to leave the window unfastened, as an indication that a thief in the night had entered from without? The latter, for having unfastened the casement and left it ajar, the massive figure stepped back.

There was a faint swish of rings on a rod. The starlight was blotted out. Bullivant had drawn the long, dark curtains across the window. Why? Len gave up trying to guess. He heard a rustling, and knew that the man was carefully arranging the dark hangings, and that it could only mean that he was going to turn on a light, and dreaded that a gleam of it should escape by the window.

Why a light? Len drew a deep, deep breath.

The master of the Fifth was known to have money. He had a rather expensive motor-bike. He dressed well—very well indeed. Yes, he had money—and Bullivant, like everyone else, knew it.

Len knew now what he was going to see in Silverson's study, and his heart was like lead. All was grist that came to the mill of the Sussex Man—a large sum in the Head's safe, a small sum in a Form-master's desk. This was the man he had hoped, and trusted, was guiltless.

There was a gleam of sudden light.

An electric flashlamp was gleaming on Silverson's desk. It was a large, strong, massive desk, of solid oak, and safely locked with a patent lock. Keys to fit such a lock would not be easy to come by. There was a faint scraping as a key slipped into a lock.

Len hardly cared to look. He knew what was going on, and he was sick at heart. Old Bully—the most popular man at Oakshott—the man he liked,

admired, respected. It was only a matter of hours since he had said to Bill Nixon that he felt in his bones that Bullivant was not the wanted man. What would Bill think of that when he knew? He had to force himself to peer from the edge of the screen in the dark corner.

Bullivant's profile was towards him. The red face, the prominent light blue eyes, glimmered in the light. The red face was not so red as was its wont—it was as pale as its complexion allowed it to be. There were clots of perspiration on the broad forehead, though it was a cold night. The rather thick lips were set, but when they parted they quivered. The man was labouring under a stress of emotion. A thief in the night—but a thief breaking through moral bounds for the first time, conscience-stricken at his own actions, horrified at himself—that was what Bullivant looked. Yet the Sussex Man, surely, had had time to get used to his work? It was nearly two years since he had started to prowl.

Click!

The desk was unlocked.

Whatever plunder might be in it lay at the prowler's mercy. Bullivant did not stretch out his hand. He stood as if petrified. He stirred at last, and a fantastic shadow danced, as his large, heavy hand came across the light. But it dropped again, and the shadow was still. Then, like a man suddenly making up his mind, he plunged his hand into a pigeon-hole in the desk and jerked out a small bundle of papers. And Len knew that he had looked into that desk before to know so exactly where to find what he wanted.

Standing there with sweating brow, he rustled the edges of a little bundle of banknotes as he counted them. His back was partly turned to Len's corner now, but the watcher saw his face—and saw the drops that trickled down the red, rugged cheeks, sweat from his damp brow.

The banknotes shook and rustled in his hand as he counted them. Len saw his lips move. He uttered the faintest of sounds, but, with the motion of the lips to help, Len guessed the words—two hundred.

He had taken two hundred pounds from Vernon Silverson's desk. It was a large sum for a Form-master to keep in his desk. No doubt a man with sporting speculations always on hand required to keep some ready money within reach.

The light vanished.

Len heard a sound in the darkness. It might have been a grunt, but it sounded to his ears like a groan. Then a shuffling of soft footfalls towards the window. A swish of rings—the curtains were drawn aside again.

Pale starlight glimmered in once more, revealing a massive black shadow which crossed to the door. A faint click of the key as it turned back, and the door opened and closed.

A few moments later it opened and closed again without a sound. Len Lex stepped into the passage as a bulky figure turned the corner out of it into the big corridor.

That figure made no sound. Bullivant, like Len, was wearing soft rubber shoes. From the tall corridor window a glimmer fell on Bullivant, then he passed on into darkness. Len ducked below the level of the window as he followed.

Where was the man going now? Only the Head's study was worth the Sussex Man's while, where there was a safe and substantial loot. But he was not heading in the direction of the Head's study. He was making for the stairs. Had he already cracked Dr. Osborne's safe before his visit to Silverson's quarters? It looked like it, for otherwise he had deliberately passed over a large prize for the sake of a small one—which was unthinkable.

Anyhow, it was clear that he was going back to his room now. A creak or two in the dark was enough for Len.

In the passage above, Bullivant's door closed softly. Len Lex trod silently back to the Fifth Form dormitory.

His work was done for the night.

Dr. Osborne glanced up at a tap on his study door in morning break.

"Come in!"

Lex of the Fifth entered.

"What is it, Lex?" asked the Head, in a kindly tone.

Len did not state why he had come to the study. He had been waiting for news of the burglary before he acted. And there had been no news. Mr. Silverson was not yet back from Trant Elms. Len had expected the news to come from the Head. It had not come. Dr. Osborne was much in his study in the mornings—it was unimaginable that he would not have discovered that the safe there had been cracked by eleven o'clock. If he had not discovered it, it had not been cracked.

Len had to see for himself. But that was not an explanation he could make to the Head of Oakshott, who was far from dreaming that there was a detective in the Fifth Form. Len, however, was not short of a reason for looking in.

"May I have leave out of bounds, sir, as far as Shooter's Fell, for a bike ride this afternoon?"

"You must ask your Form-master, Lex."

"Mr. Silverson isn't back yet, sir."

The Head smiled.

"Then postpone the matter till he comes back, Lex."

"Very well, sir."

Len left the study.

The Head's safe had not been touched in the night. There was going to be no alarm of a burglary till Silverson came back. Len walked away with his brain in a whirl. The games master had taken two hundred pounds in banknotes away from a

Form-master's desk—and left the Head's safe, a rich prize, untouched.

Was Bullivant the Sussex Man? If he was, what did it mean? If he was not, what did his actions mean? It seemed to the schoolboy detective that he was in deep water—out of his depth! But he did not call up Detective-Inspector Nixon on the telephone that morning!

CHAPTER 29.

Something Up!

"SOMETHING'S up!" said "Pie" Porringe.

The Oakshott fellows did not need the goat of the Fifth to tell them that. After third school that morning, everybody at Oakshott School knew that something was "up."

What had happened, nobody knew—unless it was Lex of the Fifth, the schoolboy detective. But Len, who knew most, said least. Pie Porringe, who knew least, said most.

"Bet you," said Pie, to a group of Fifth Form men in the quad, "that it's a rag on Silverson."

Rags on Mr. Vernon Silverson, the master of the Fifth, occupied much of Pie's thoughts—Pie having a "feud" on with his Form-master. But nobody else imagined that it was merely a rag that had happened. Obviously it was something much more serious than that.

"You priceless goat!" said Harvey. "Do you think that a rag would make all the beaks look like a lot of moulting owls?"

"It's something jolly serious!" said Banks. "But what? Somebody going to be sacked, perhaps."

"Have they spotted Rance of the Sixth, at last?" asked Cayley, and there was a laugh.

There were plenty of Oakshott fellows who could have told the Head much more than he knew about Rance.

"Bet you," said Pie obstinately, "it's

a rag on Silverson! Look what a chance it was! Silverson was away last night at Trant Elms. He only came back this morning in time for third school. Why, I was going down from the dorm to rag his study myself, only Bullivant heard me saying so, so I couldn't—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, though, I fancy it's got something to do with Silverson," remarked Harvey. "There was no row on before Silverson came back—and everybody can see there's jolly well a row on now."

"I saw Silverson going in to see the Head, and he was looking awfully solemn!" declared Pie. "Bet you anything—"

"Well, all the beaks are looking awfully solemn," said Banks. "Look at Bullivant—he looks quite sick this morning."

"Yes, but I noticed old Bully was looking sick before Silverson came back, and nothing had happened then. That's got nothing to do with it."

"There's old Bully, with Silverson!" said Harvey. "I wonder what they're chinning about? I'd like to know!"

All eyes were turned on the two masters, passing at a little distance, deep in conversation. Clearly, they were discussing the mysterious happening—whatever it was! Len Lex—a silent member of the Fifth Form group—gave the two masters a very intent look. Mr. Bullivant, the games master, usually red and ruddy, had quite a pale, worn look. Mr. Silverson, the slim, dark, handsome master of the Fifth, looked rather graver than usual, otherwise his customary self. What Silverson was saying did not reach the ears of the Fifth Formers. But "old Bully" had a stentorian voice, and a remark from him reached every ear.

"The Sussex man! Of course it was the Sussex Man!"

Mr. Silverson was seen to nod assent

as they walked on—leaving the Fifth Form group staring, and almost breathless with excitement.

"I say, did you hear that?" gasped Harvey. "Did you hear old Bully say 'the Sussex Man'? I say, that's the burglar the police can't get hold of! The man who got in at Silverson's window one night and knocked old Pie out when he was there ragging! I—I say, has there been a burglary?"

"Oh, rot!" said Pie. "Old Bully's got the Sussex Man on the brain. I've heard him say a dozen times that the Sussex Man would come again some time, because he had to skip that night he came without pinching anything. What I think happened is this—a rag on Silverson——"

"Fathead!" said all the Fifth Formers together.

"I jolly well think——" hooted Pie. "You jolly well don't!" contradicted Harvey. "You jolly well can't, old man! Forget it!"

The dinner-bell rang. The Oakshott men went into Hall, in a suppressed buzz of excitement. Whispering ran up and down the tables.

The rumour was spreading that there had been a burglary over-night. Dozens of times the name of the Sussex Man emerged from the buzz. Every fellow was anxious to get out of Hall and hear the latest.

After dinner, fellows collected in eager groups. Root of the Fourth told a cluster of juniors that he had heard that the Head's safe had been blown open with dynamite, and thousands of pounds pinched! On the other hand, Lamson of the Shell pointed out that the Head had been seen several times that morning, and had not apparently turned a hair!

Porringer of the Fifth stated his belief that nothing had happened but a "rag" on Silverson, pointing out that there had not been a whisper of anything unusual before Silverson came back from Trant Elms! Which was undoubtedly true.

But even Pie was staggered, and there was a delicious thrill of excitement all through Oakshott, when a taxicab drove in at the gates, and a stocky man in uniform was seen speaking to Wegg, the porter. Word ran like wildfire that a police inspector from Parsley had arrived. Scores of eyes were on that official as he went into the House.

Inspector Stace was shown into Dr. Osborne's study. Upon which Root of the Fourth declared triumphantly that he had gone there to examine the fragments of the safe, blown all over the shop! But the Parsley inspector was in the study only a few minutes. Then about fifty pairs of eyes beheld him in company with Mr. Silverson, proceeding with that gentleman to his quarters.

Eager fellows ventured as far as the corner of Silverson's passage, but the door of the Fifth Form master's study was shut, and they saw and heard nothing of what went on within. Other fellows eyed the study window from the quad and were rewarded with a glimpse of the inspector examining the window with very close attention! Harvey of the Fifth, who was blessed with very keen eyesight, declared that he also spotted the inspector examining Silverson's desk.

The bell that rang for classes had never been more unwelcome to the general ear of Oakshott. But it did ring—and the fellows had to go to the Form-rooms, leaving the Parsley inspector to carry on.

"Old Bully was right!" said Banks, as the Fifth gathered at the door of their Form-room. They had to wait for their beak, who was still in his study with the Parsley inspector.

"How's that, Banker?" asked Len Lex.

"Why, he's said umpteen times that the Sussex Man would come back to try again, because he muffed it the time he came before!" said Banks.

"I've heard him," agreed Harvey, "lots of times! It's the Sussex Man, all right, and there's been a burglary in Silverson's quarters. It's jolly queer that he left the Head's safe alone, though. Must have—you can see that nothing was found out till Silverson came back."

"Might have been alarmed," said Cayley.

"They jolly well ought to catch him!" declared Banks. "What are the police doing, I'd like to know, letting him run on like this? They had a Scotland Yard man down last time. What was his name—Dixon or something?"

"Nixon!" said Harvey.

"Yes, that was it—Nixon! Detective-Inspector Nixon! Must be rather an ass not to have copped that burglar by this time!"

"Awful ass!" agreed Harvey.

Len Lex grinned. The Fifth Form men were in blissful ignorance of the fact that they were discussing Detective-Inspector Nixon in the presence of his nephew! And that Len Lex had been sent to Oakshott specially to catch the much-wanted Sussex Man, who was believed to be a member of the staff.

"That was before you came, Lex!" remarked Banks. "It happened the week before you blew into Oakshott. Now it's happened again—"

"Bet you it hasn't!" said Porringe. "Looks as if they think so, as they've sent for a bobby. But I jolly well think that it will turn out to be just a rag on Silverson—"

"You silly ass!" hooted Banks.

"Well, that's what I think!" declared Pie. "Silverson being away last night, some chap ragged his study, and they think—"

"Fathead!"

"Ass!"

"Hallo, here comes Silverson!"

And the discussion ceased as the Fifth Form master arrived and the Fifth went into their Form-room.

CHAPTER 30.

Len—And Another!

"WHY are you not at games practice with the others, Lex? You should not be idling about here."

Mr. Bullivant spoke severely. Why Lex of the Fifth was loafing about the gate, with his hands in his pockets, after class, the games master of Oakshott did not know. And Len Lex, most assuredly, was not likely to tell him. Bullivant, wheeling his motor-bike down to the gate, spotted him there and frowned at him, and rapped at him. Old Bully was always a bit of a tartar, specially to fellows whom he suspected of slacking.

Len, certainly, was not slacking. He was quite keen to join in the Soccer practice that was going on. But there were other tasks for the schoolboy detective, and one of them was to see James Bullivant safely off—with a view to certain proceedings, in his absence, which could not proceed while old Bully was within the walls of Oakshott School. So when Mr. Bullivant went down to the cycle-house, Len Lex strolled down to the gate—and there he was!

"Idling — slacking!" rapped Bullivant. "Go away at once, Lex, and change, and join in the pick-up."

"Yes, sir!" said Len meekly.

He walked up the path slowly. Mr. Bullivant frowned after him, wheeled his motor-bike out, and disappeared. Then Len came to a halt—and listened. The chug-chug-chug of the motor-bike came from the road. Bullivant was going. With a faint smile on his face, Len walked back to the gate, and looked out. The bulky figure of the games master was disappearing up the road in the direction of Trant.

Len watched him out of sight, and the smile faded from his face, leaving it clouded. His heart was heavy. The schoolboy detective was at Oakshott to spot the Sussex Man, and now, to

all appearances, he had spotted him—which certainly should not have been a weight on his mind and his heart. But it was! He liked old Bully, with all his aggressive ways—liked him still, in spite of what he knew. Against his own reason, against all evidence, that liking made him cling to a hope that Bullivant was not, after all, the man Detective-Inspector Nixon wanted.

Was there a hope? The night before, hidden in Silverson's study, he had watched the man open Silverson's desk with a key, and take out two hundred pounds in banknotes, and had watched him set the window ajar, to give the impression that the thief had come from outside.

All Oakshott knew, by this time, that Silverson had been robbed during his absence at Trant Elms, and that the robbery was set down to the Sussex Man—one more on a long, long list extending over a period of two years! Only Len knew the truth—and he had said no word. But was Bullivant, after all, the Sussex Man?

Len could not doubt it—till he had learned, in the morning, that the Head's safe had not been touched. If he was the Sussex Man, why had he spared that safe? The general belief was that the cracksman had taken some alarm, and fled with his work unfinished. But the schoolboy detective knew that that was not so.

Why had he, if he was the Sussex Man, contented himself with what was, after all, a trifle—leaving valuable loot untouched? Until he could find an answer to that question, Len Lex intended to say nothing—even to his uncle, the Scotland Yard detective-inspector, who was waiting eagerly for news. He had to know more.

Now that Bullivant was gone, the coast was clear. Len walked back to the House—but not to the changing-room, as the games master had bidden him. As he went in, he passed a group of masters—Silverson, with Surtees, the master of the Fourth, and Mr.

Chowne. They were discussing the affair of the night—he heard the name of the Sussex man—a name that was on almost every lip at Oakshott that day.

"Bullivant declared, many times, that the Sussex Man would pay us another visit!" Mr. Silverson was saying. "Evidently he was right."

"If you had taken my advice, my dear Silverson, and had a bolt placed on your study window——" said the master of the Shell.

The Fifth Form-master smiled.

"I doubt if that would have stopped the Sussex Man, Chowne!" he answered.

"I also!" said Mr. Surtees. "I doubt it very much indeed."

Len Lex passed on, unnoticed by the masters. He went slowly up the staircase. Both Silverson and Surtees were on his list of "suspects"—but what became of his suspicions now that he had actually seen Bullivant at work? And the dim figure that he had tracked, one night, to the oak-tree where the cracksman's tools were hidden. Who and what was that—if Bullivant was the man?

Of the four suspects, three had to be eliminated—and surely what he had seen in the night had done the work of elimination? Yet, in spite of himself, the schoolboy detective still doubted!

But he was going to know! In the upper passages, there was no one about. Most of the fellows were at games practice, and not likely to come in before tea. In a few minutes Len was in the passage on which three of the masters' rooms opened—Bullivant's, Surtees', and Chowne's. The coast was clear. Len stepped softly along to Bullivant's door, opened it, stepped in, and closed the door after him.

More than once the schoolboy detective had looked for a chance of giving the games master's room the "once-over." This was his chance. He knew that the games master was gone to

Trant—ten or eleven miles away. He had plenty of time. Bullivant, with two hundred pounds in his pocket, had gone to see Roger—to provide that absconding bank clerk with the means to flee the country.

Len knew it as well as if Bullivant had told him so. And he knew, too, what Bullivant did not yet know—that Roger Bullivant had been already taken by the police, on the information Len had supplied to Detective-Inspector Nixon. That startling discovery awaited the games master when he arrived at Trant, and inquired for "Robert Barker" there. Bullivant was not likely to linger at Trant, after he made that discovery; but he could hardly be back under an hour or more. That was twice the time Len needed for what he had to do.

Once in Bullivant's room, the schoolboy detective lost no time. If there was a clue to be found in that room he was not likely to miss it. Nothing in the way of a burglar's tools, of course—he knew that the Sussex Man kept his bag of implements parked in the hidden recess in the old oak near Masters' Gate. But something, perhaps a letter, an address, or a pass-book revealing a secret bank account.

In the two years that he had been at work within a fifteen-mile radius of Oakshott, the Sussex Man had cracked many cribs, and got away safely with a great deal of loot, which he must have turned into money. Somewhere there must be a fence—a receiver of stolen goods—with whom he had dealings; and there might be a letter, or a fragment of a letter, from that quarter. Somewhere the profits of this strange trade must be banked—doubtless under an assumed name—unless the money went as fast as it came in!

But if that was so, it pointed rather to Silverson, with his losses on the Turf, than to Bullivant. Yet Bullivant was short of money, for he had been unable to take Roger what he needed, until—in his own words—the Sussex Man had got to work again!

But in thirty minutes, every one of which the schoolboy detective spent in keen search, he discovered nothing. There was nothing—absolutely nothing—in Bullivant's room to hint at any secret activities or connections outside his work as games master of Oakshott.

Len was standing in the middle of the room, looking round to make sure that he had missed nothing, when there was a footstep in the passage outside.

He started, catching his breath. Bullivant could not be back yet—unless something unexpected had happened to stop him on his way to Trant. It was one of the other masters—Chowne or Surtees—going to his room! But the unexpected might have happened! If the door opened, and Bullivant saw him there—

A wooden wardrobe stood across a corner of the room. Its edges almost touched the wall on either side. But it was not heavy. Len shifted it a few inches, backed behind it, and was completely hidden from sight almost in a moment. With beating heart, he listened. The footsteps stopped at the door. The schoolboy detective was deeply thankful that he had hunted cover, as the door opened.

A light, almost stealthy step entered the room; the door was closed quickly and quietly. He heard a low breathing—a sound of soft movements, as someone moved about the room. He listened in amazement. Who, beside himself, had entered Bullivant's room secretly and surreptitiously, in his absence? It was not one of the fellows ragging—a goat like Porringe might rag Silverson's quarters, but nobody would dream of ragging old Bully. Who was it, and what did it mean?

Minutes passed, while Len listened, and wondered, to soft, stealthy movements, flitting all over the room. He heard drawers pulled out, lids lifted. The unseen one was searching the room—as Len had done!

He—whoever "he" was—stopped at the wardrobe in the corner, and Len suppressed his breathing. He heard the door of the wardrobe opened—heard a rustling and brushing, as the coats hanging within were examined. Ten minutes ago, Len had gone through every pocket in that wardrobe. Now, someone else was repeating the performance. The wardrobe shut again—the searcher had found no more there than Len had found. Faintly to his ears came a mutter:

"Nothing! Nothing! And yet I
—"

Only a few muttered words, but Len knew that boyish voice. It was Ralph Surtees, the master who mysteriously prowled the House at night—who, one night, had collared Len in the dark, and mistaken him for Bullivant! And now he was searching Bullivant's room.

Surtees moved back to the middle of the room. Len knew that he was standing there, looking about him, and considering! It was clear that he was in search of something, whatever it was, and might look behind the wardrobe! Len listened, with beating heart.

Footsteps came towards the corner again. A hand appeared at the side of the wardrobe, to pull it out a little farther from the wall—evidently so that Surtees could glance behind it. In a few moments more his eyes would fall on Lex of the Fifth, hidden in the corner!

Len acted swiftly. Whatever Surtees' game was, the schoolboy detective could not afford to be discovered. As the Fourth Form-master's hand appeared in sight, pulling, Len placed both his hands on the back of the wardrobe, and shoved with all his strength.

There was a startled yell from Surtees, as the wardrobe crashed over on him. Len shot from the corner to the door, tore it open, and darted out. The door slammed behind him, and Len

Lex did the passage like the cinder-path, and went down the stairs three at a time. There was a panting, gasping, and scuffling in Bullivant's room—but he did not hear it as he flew. He was in the lower passage, and dropping into a casual saunter, when he heard a door above him open—Bullivant's door.

Len smiled, and walked into Study No. 8.

CHAPTER 31.

Painful for Pie!

SO far as Harvey, Banks, and Len Lex, Pie's study-mates in Study No. 8, could see, there was nothing of an amusing nature on hand. It was the hour of prep, and the three were sitting down to their books when Pie came in, his face wreathed in smiles, and chuckling again and again like a series of Chinese crackers.

"What has that goat been up to?" asked Harvey resignedly.

"Give it a name, Pie!" said Banks.

"I've done him this time!" chortled Pie. "Ha, ha! If I haven't done him right in the eye, you can use my head for a Soccer ball. Ha, ha!"

"Thanks! I've no use for a wooden football!" said Banks. "You've done what—and whom?"

"That swab Silverson!" grinned Pie. "I tell you, he's gone for his stink-bike now to scoot across to Parsley!"

"Anything funny in that?" asked Harvey, with a stare.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Pie. Evidently the goat of the Fifth saw something funny in it.

"How do you know he's gone to Parsley?" asked Harvey.

"You'll laugh when I tell you! Silverson got a telephone call that Inspector Stace wanted him at Parsley—in connection with that burglary last night, you know! Not that I believe that it was a burglary."

"Fathead! How do you know Silverson got a call?"

"Because I put it through!" roared Pie. "Ha, ha!"

Porringer's three study-mates stared at him. They blinked at him. They almost goggled at him.

"You—you put it through!" gasped Len Lex.

"Little me!" gurgled Pie. "Ha, ha! I suppose you know Wegg's got a 'phone in his lodge. Well, Wegg was out, and I dropped in and used his 'phone. I put the call through to Common-room, asked for Silverson, said I was Inspector Stace, and told Silverson he was wanted at Parsley to see a man taken into custody in connection with the burglary in his study. How's that for high?"

They gazed at Pie.

"Silverson fell for it!" gurgled Porringer. "Fell for it right away! Said he would come immediately—and he did! I've just seen him go!"

"You'll get a flogging!" said Harvey.

"Who's to know?" grinned Pie. "And that isn't all, either! I'm giving him a quarter of an hour to get clear, and then I'm going down to his study to leave a note for him."

Porringer dipped a pen in the ink, and started on a sheet of impot paper. In large capitals, he traced the words:

"SOLD AGAIN!"

Overflowing with mirth, the cheery Pie grinned at his staring study-mates. They could only gaze at him.

"You—you're going to stick that in Silverson's study!" exclaimed Len.

"That's the big idea! He will know, when he hikes in at Parsley, that his leg's been pulled! And he will know, when he finds this on his study table, that it was an Oakshott man did it. That's all he's going to know!" chuckled Pie.

"Better leave well alone!" said Len, laughing.

"When I want advice from a new tick," said Pie, "I'll ask for it! You can shut up, Lex!"

Len laughed, and shut up. As a

hunter of trouble, Pie excelled any other man at Oakshott. Still, if he was absolutely determined to hunt for trouble, it was not Len's business to stop him.

Porringer blotted the paper he had written, and rose. Len shrugged his shoulders, but Banks and Harvey expostulated together:

"Chuck it, Pie! If you're spotted out in prep——"

"Silverson ain't in to spot me!" grinned Pie. "Don't you worry! Safe as houses, old beans! Think of Silverson's face when he comes back in a fearful rage and finds this note on his table! Ha, ha!"

And Porringer left No. 8. Oakshott men were not supposed to go out of the studies in prep, so Pie was very cautious as he went. Mr. Silverson's rooms being on the ground floor, he had to go down the stairs. On the landing he passed Mr. Bullivant—but the games master was standing at the landing window, looking out into the dim autumn evening with his back to Pie—and Pie passed unseen.

In the big corridor, which Pie had to pass through to reach Silverson's passage, two Sixth Form men stood in talk. One was Rance, the other was Campion. Rance did not matter, but Campion was a prefect, and head boy of the House, and he mattered very much. Porringer dodged into a near-by window recess, and waited impatiently for them to clear. The head boy's voice came to his ears:

"I'm not sure, Rance, or you'd hear more about it! But I'll tell you this—I believe it was you I spotted at the Magpie, and I warn you to be careful."

"I've never been near the place," said Rance sullenly.

"Well, if you haven't, all right. But I believe you have—and you know what you would get from the Head! Where were you going, this very minute, when I stopped you?"

"Can't a man walk in the corridors?"

"Not in a corridor leading to a

study with a window on the quad, when the beak the study belongs to has gone out," said Campion, in a very significant tone. "I'll walk with you back to your own study, Rance."

Porringer was glad to hear them walk away together. He peered out—the coast was clear. He cut down the corridor at a trot and reached Silver-son's passage. Once in that passage he was safe, for it led nowhere but to Silver-son's rooms. But he realised that he had had a narrow escape of running into Rance of the Sixth there. Rance's manners and customs were pretty well known, or guessed at, by a good many fellows, and Pie knew what Campion suspected—that Rance had intended to slip out by Silver-son's window. However, the head boy had effectively put the stopper on that, and Pie was all right now.

He went into Silver-son's study and shut the door after him. The room was dark, only a pale glimmer of the stars shining in at the casement. Pie groped across the study, knocked over a wastepaper basket, bumped into a chair, and reached the table. Then he groped under his jacket for the paper he had carefully hidden there.

He groped in vain. The paper was no longer under his jacket. He had tucked it safely there out of sight when he left Study No. 8; he had kept his arm pressed down to pin it there coming down, but no doubt it had slipped out when he dodged into the window recess to avoid Campion.

Losing that paper in transit was Pie all over. To go back along the corridors, looking for it, when he was supposed to be in his study in the Fifth at prep, was risky. But he could not write a fresh note in Silver-son's study without turning on a light, which was riskier still. If there was no one about, it would be all right.

Pie crept to the door and looked out. He crept along the side-passage to the corner of the corridor and peered round. Then he dopped back

his head, like a tortoise popping back into its shell. Big and bulky in the lighted corridor stood Mr. Bullivant. He was staring at a sheet of paper he held in his large, red hand. Pie did not need telling what that paper was. Evidently old Bully had come along and picked up the paper Pie had dropped, and was now wondering what "Sold Again!" might possibly mean.

Breathing hard, Pie backed into Mr. Silver-son's study once more. That paper had gone beyond recovery. He was sure, at least, that Bullivant had not spotted him, and old Bully would never guess what that paper was intended for. He would know that Silver-son had gone out, but he could not know how or why.

"Blow!" said Pie.

It was more than annoying. If he was going to leave a note for Silver-son at all, clearly that note had to be written in Silver-son's study. It couldn't be written in the dark. Pie debated in his mind whether he could venture to strike a match. If some beak was walking in the quad, and saw the glimmer in Silver-son's window, it was as good as giving himself away. But he was not going to be beaten. There were pens and ink on the table, and plenty of paper there.

Standing with his back to the window, to screen the light therefrom, Porringer struck a match. As he did so the study door opened.

Pie stood transfixed, the burning match in finger and thumb! Mr. Bullivant walked into the study, obviously expecting to find no one there—and stopped, still holding the door in one hand, staring blankly at the burning match, and Pie's startled face behind it.

Porringer was simply pertified. Not for one fleeting instant had it crossed his mind that Mr. Bullivant might be coming to Silver-son's study. But there he was, staring at the startled Pie, with a face suddenly white.

The match burned down to Pie's

fingers unheeded. Startled as he was, and chiefly concerned about himself and the consequences of being caught in his Form-master's study, Pie could not help being struck by the look on Bullivant's face. It might have been a grisly spectre at which Bullivant was staring, in the glimmer of the match, to judge by the petrified expression on his ghastly face.

The pause was awful—unbearable. It lasted only seconds, though it seemed hours to Pie. It was broken by a sudden fearful howl from Porrhinge as the unheeded match burned his fingers. The match went out.

Next moment Bullivant switched on the electric light and strode across the room at Porrhinge. Terror, if it had been terror, was gone from his face now—no longer white, but red with rage. He grasped Porrhinge.

"You—you——" His voice came husky. "Porrhinge! You—you young fool! Playing tricks here—what? You startled me! Fool!"

"Ooooh!" gasped Pie. "I—I——"

Holding him with his left hand, Bullivant grasped Mr. Silverson's cane from the table with his right. That cane rose and fell. Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Pie, surprised, amazed, and hurt, yelled. He had never seen old Bully in a rage like this before. He could not begin to understand it. Silverson might have whopped him hard—but old Bully! It amazed Pie, but his amazement was not equal to his anguish. He howled, he hopped, he roared! Bullivant was laying it on as if he fancied that he was beating a carpet.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Pie. "I say—yow-ow! Stop it! Yoo-hoop! Oh, my hat! Yow-ow-wooop!"

Whack! Whack! Whack!

Olyphant of the Sixth looked in at the door, startled. Pie's wild yells were heard far and wide.

"What—what's up?" exclaimed the Oakshott captain. Two or three more

seniors appeared in the passage behind him.

As if recalled to himself, Mr. Bullivant threw down the cane. He released Pie's collar, and the hapless goat of the Fifth staggered towards the door, panting and spluttering. Mr. Bullivant calmed himself.

"I caught this boy playing foolish tricks in his Form-master's study, as he has done before, Oliphant," he said. "Mr. Silverson being out, I have dealt with him for his folly. Go back to the Fifth, Porrhinge, at once!"

"Ow!" gasped Pie. "Wow!" He forgot at that moment that he liked old Bully! "Look here, you've no right to cane me! You jolly well know——"

"Go at once!" rapped Mr. Bullivant in a voice that made Porrhinge jump. And Pie scuttled out of the study.

Mr. Bullivant followed him out, turning off the light. Oliphant and the other fellows exchanged rather curious glances as the games master went. It was really unusual—indeed, extraordinary—for old Bully to take a Form-master's business into his hands in this way. Even if he had chanced to spot a japer in a Form-master's study, he had no right to cane him. Old Bully had not seemed himself at all that day, and obviously he had lost his temper. Which was rather a puzzle to the Oakshott men.

In Study No. 8, three fellows looked up from Livy with grinning faces at the sound of Pie returning. He had gone quietly—but he made plenty of noise as he came back.

"Ow—ow—ow—wow!" announced his arrival. He tottered into the study, gasping, wriggling, almost writhing. Three fellows chuckled.

"Silverson come in and snaffle you?" asked Harvey.

"Ow! No! Wow!" moaned Pie. "That old ass Bullivant! Ow!"

"Bullivant?" exclaimed Ler Lex. He started, staring at Porrhinge.

"He barged in—ow!—and nailed me—wow! What was he doing there, I'd like to know—yow—ow! He's got no business in Silverson's study—yoo—hoo! I jolly well told him he'd no bizney to whop me—wow!—but he did—ow—wow!"

It was quite a long time before Pie was able to settle down to Livy, and then he did not give that great author the concentrated attention that so great a classic deserved.

CHAPTER 32.

The Unexpected!

LEN LEX, as he heard the chimes of midnight, wondered whether he was wasting his time, and whether he might not as well have been in bed in the Fifth Form dormitory as keeping watch in Silverson's passage.

For more than an hour, Oakshott School had been buried in silence and slumber. At half-past eleven, the schoolboy detective had taken up his watch, sorely puzzled and perplexed.

He was at Oakshott School to solve the mystery of the Sussex Man, but it seemed to him that mystery was piled on mystery. Silverson, Surtees, Bullivant, and ope whose name and identity he had never yet been able to discover—that was his suspected list. But which was the man? Bullivant, according to overwhelming evidence. Yet why had Bullivant gone to Silverson's study that evening, taking advantage of the Fifth Form master's absence?

He must have had some object—what? Whatever it was, he had had to abandon it, finding Porringe there. Mr. Silverson had returned shortly afterwards, very angry at having been tricked on the telephone, but, fortunately for Pie, never guessing who the trickster was. Not until he had gone to bed would Bullivant have another chance of visiting the study

secretly—and Len, as he waited and watched in the dark passage, wondered whether he would come.

In the silence that followed the midnight chime, Len heard a faint sound in the study. Was Silverson stirring from his bed-room, adjoining the study? Or had Bullivant come earlier than Len had ventured out of his dormitory, and was he in the study now? Or was it another—Surtees or the unknown one—returning from the night prow! by way of the casement? Whoever and whatever it was, someone was in the study, moving softly and stealthily across the room to the door!

Even as Len listened to the faint sound from beyond the door, there came a tread from the corridor turning into the dark little passage. A cautious tread—but the tread of a big and heavy man—the tread, Len had not the faintest doubt, of James Bullivant, games master of Oakshott.

Len backed into the deepest shadow and listened, his heart throbbing. Bullivant was approaching the study door from the outside, a lighter step was approaching it from the inside, and when the door opened in a moment or two from one side or the other, they would meet face to face in the dark!

Len felt a thrill run through his veins. Two of the night prowlers of Oakshott were about to meet unexpectedly. One of them was Bullivant, but the other—who was he?

Bullivant's hand reached for the doorknob as the door swung open from within. Taken utterly by surprise, the bulky man stood and gasped—a gasp that was echoed by another as a black shadow coming through the doorway, collided with him.

Bullivant's voice came in strangled tones:

"Silverson—you! For mercy's sake, silence, I beg of you, Silverson—silence!"

In the belief that he was discovered

by the Fifth Form master, Bullivant stammered he hardly knew what. But the next moment he must have known that it was not Silverson who came from the study. Whoever it was backed for a second, as startled and utterly confounded as Bullivant by the unexpected encounter. Then, springing forward, he thrust fiercely at the games master, sending him staggering.

A split second more, and the unseen one was racing into the corridor, and Bullivant, thrown completely off his balance, staggered across the passage. Len heard him bump against the opposite wall. And he heard another sound—that of a stirring in the bed-room that adjoined the study. Mr. Silverson was stirring.

The sound of a creaking bed reached Bullivant's ears and warned him that Silverson was moving. He was not discovered, as for one terrible moment he had supposed; but discovery was imminent if he lingered. Len heard his breathless gasping die away up the corridor.

It was time that the schoolboy detective was gone also. But he remained a moment to pull the study door silently shut. If Silverson turned out of bed, he would discover nothing amiss. Then Len hurried away. As he tiptoed up the dark staircase he heard a panting breath in the shadows, and knew that it was Bullivant, going back to his room. But of the other—the shadowy figure that had darted out of Silverson's study—there was no sound or sign!

Who was it? Someone who must have gone out by Silverson's casement before Len took up his watch, and who had returned at midnight. Who?

Len Lex slipped into bed in the Fifth Form dormitory. Late as the hour was, it was long before he slept. He was beginning to wonder whether the mystery of Oakshott was too deep for him—whether the handcuffs would ever click on the wrists of the Sussex Man!

CHAPTER 33.

Picked for the Eleven!

"GRATTERS, Lex, old man!" exclaimed Harvey and Banks, clapping their studymate on the shoulder.

"Rot, if you ask me!" said Pie Porringe, shaking his head.

"Nobody asked you, sir, she said!" sang Len Lex, and there was a laugh from the fellows gathered round the notice-board at Oakshott School.

It was morning break. That afternoon Parsley were coming over to Oakshott to play the first eleven, and the list was to be up in break. Generally it was posted earlier; but old Oliphant was undecided about his outside-right, and had been deep in consultation with Bullivant, the games master, on that important matter. Everybody wanted to know who was going to be the happy man, and there were about twenty fellows hoping to see their names there.

There was some surprise when the name proved to be L. Lex, of the Fifth Form. Len Lex was a new fellow to Oakshott that term, and though he had hoped, he had hardly expected to get into the first eleven. Certainly he was a good footballer, and had been assiduous at games practice, and had attracted the favourable notice of old Bully, who had a keen eye for a fellow's form.

Len went out into the quad, feeling rather as if he were walking on air.

Mr. Surtees, master of the Fourth, gave him a nod and a smile, as he came out into the winter sunshine.

"Gratters, my boy!" said Surtees. He was the youngest man on the staff, and rather boyish in his ways.

"Thank you, sir!" said Len. "It's a bit of luck for a new man."

In that happy moment he hardly remembered that Surtees was on his list of suspects.

His own Form-master, Mr. Silverson, was in the quad. But Silverson did

not offer congratulations. He was not keenly interested in Soccer, though he occasionally acted as referee in a match.

Silverson was talking to Chowne, master of the Shell, and Len, as he passed, caught the name of the Sussex Man.

Len Lex did not want to think about the Sussex Man just then. He wanted to think about Soccer, and his good luck in getting into the team.

It was not a detective, but a school-boy pure and simple, who went to the changing-room early in the afternoon to get ready for the Parsley match. Len had changed, and was waiting near the doorway with Harvey and Banks, when Pie looked in, a grin on his face. Pie, clearly, was up to something!

"No end of a lark, you men!" grinned Pie.

To the astonishment of the three, he half-drew a screwdriver from his pocket, and shoved it hastily back again. In his other hand he displayed, for a moment, a gimlet.

"I've got screws in my pocket!" he whispered.

"You goat!" said Banks. "What on earth's the game?"

"Silverson!" grinned Pie. "Don't let it out, of course! What about screwing up his study door?"

"Screwing up his study door!" gasped Harvey. "Oh, my hat! Think he won't spot you?"

"Not this afternoon," said the astute Pie. "I've just heard that Bullivant has asked him to referee the match—you know old Bully's a bit off his feed—and Silverson agreed! And when Silverson goes in after the game, will he be able to get into his study? He will not!" chuckled Pie.

"You ass!" said Banks.

"You goat!" said Harvey.

"Come on, you men!" said Oliphant. The footballers went out of the changing-room, and Pie was left grinning.

CHAPTER 34.

A Surprise for Pie!

PORRINGE was probably the only fellow in the House. Standing at the window of Study No. 8, Pie watched the gathering crowd on Big Side. The Parsley match was a big event in the Oakshott list, and few Oakshott men were likely to miss it.

Pie himself would have been there had he not had more urgent business on hand. He watched from the study window, and heard the pheeep of the whistle as Silverson started the game. Bullivant's massive shoulders towered over the crowd. He was watching the game, though he had asked the Fifth Form master to take his place as referee.

When the game had got fairly going, Pie groped in his pockets to make sure that screwdriver, screws, and gimlet were still there, then left the study.

Silverson was the only master who had rooms on the ground floor. Pie passed nobody as he walked along the big corridor, and once he had turned into Silverson's passage all was safe—nobody ever came there but the Fifth Form master, now fully occupied on Big Side.

Absolute safety and lots of time—nothing could have suited Pie better. Half an hour would be ample, tough as the old oak door was. Then Pie would join the crowd on the football field, and who would know that he had lingered in the House at all? Nobody, so far as Pie could see.

Silverson's door opened inwards, so it had to be screwed from the inside. Pie stepped into the study, shut the door, and started. It was easy enough to escape, after his work was done, by way of Silverson's casement into the quad. There would be no eye to see him leave. Pie had provided himself with a dozen screws, all of them long and strong. After he had driven them in, he was going to bang on them to destroy the slots in which the screwdriver was inserted. The task of get-

ting them out again after that would be some task! Pie chuckled at the thought.

He found the work rather hard. The oak was old and tough. It was not easy to drive the gimlet in. By the time Pie had made one hole and driven a screw therein through the door into the frame, his palms were aching, and there were signs of coming blisters. He decided not to use the whole dozen screws, after all. Five or six would be enough!

It was a cold day, but Pie was perspiring by the time the second screw was driven in to the head. Undoubtedly it was hard work. More than a quarter of an hour had passed, a laborious quarter of an hour. Pie started slowly on the third screw.

It was half-way in, when Pie gave a sudden start and dropped the screw-driver in his surprise and alarm. There was a footstep in the passage!

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed the startled Pie.

Who the thump would be coming to Silverson's study? Nobody had any business there but Silverson, and Silverson could not possibly be coming. That tread, too, was too heavy for Silverson. It sounded more like old Bully. But old Bully couldn't possibly have left the football ground while the Parsley match was in progress. But it was somebody! Pie, on one knee just within the screwed door, was transfixed.

The door-handle turned. He heard a surprised grunt as the door failed to open. There was no mistaking that grunt. It was old Bully!

Pie hardly breathed. What the thump did the games master want in Silverson's study? He knew that the Fifth Form master was not there. Obviously he was not coming there to see Silverson. What else could he want?

Whatever he might have wanted, it was clear that Bullivant did want to enter that study. It could not have

occurred to him that it was screwed inside, and it would have been very unusual for Silverson to lock the door and take the key away with him. Doubtless Bullivant supposed that the door was jammed somehow, for Pie heard it strain and creak as a powerful shoulder was pressed on the other side.

But though Pie had, so far, driven in only two screws, they more than held the door fast. Indeed, something like a battering-ram would have been needed to get it open from the outside. It strained, creaked, but did not stir. Pie heard a breathless grunt from the passage. He grinned. Old Bully was a hefty man, but he could not shift a screwed door.

For a long minute Pie, silent himself, heard the games master breathing hard outside the door. Then there came a sharp tap, and Bullivant's voice:

"Who is there? Is someone there?"

Porringer was not bright, but he was too bright to answer that question. The silence of the tomb was Pie's cue. Bullivant, no doubt, had reached the only possible explanation of the mystery—that some practical joker had got into the study and fastened the door somehow. Pie was not going to tell him who that practical joker was!

Another grunt, then receding footsteps. The games master was going. Pie chuckled softly. Then he ceased to chuckle, and crammed the screw-driver, the screws, and the gimlet into his pockets and cut across to the casement. Ten to one Bullivant would walk round to look in at the window and spot who was there. The bare thought of being spotted and handed over to Silverson's tender mercies made Pie feel quite cold all over.

He opened the casement, stepped out over the low sill, and drew the casement shut after him. The spring-lock closed with a snap. Only Silverson had a key to that lock and could open the casement from outside. Sometimes he entered the study that way.

using it as a french window. Outside, Pie cast a swift glance about him, then cut across to the nearest of the ancient Oakshott oaks, and blotted himself out of sight behind the massive trunk.

He was in safe cover, and grinning serenely, when a heavy tread came along from the direction of the House doorway. It stopped at Silverson's window. Peering round the oak, Pie spotted the games master, standing at the window, staring in. He spotted something else, too—Bullivant's hand gliding over the lock, in the evident hope of finding it unfastened. Pie was quite mystified. Really, it looked as if Bullivant was so keen on getting into Silverson's study that he would have got in by the casement had it been practicable. It was, however, impracticable; and, with an angry and annoyed grunt, the games master turned and walked away.

"Well, my only hat!" murmured Pie.

He watched from a distance. Bullivant was going back to the football field. Whatever his object was, he had been unable to carry it out, and he had gone back to the football. Pie, wondering what it all meant, but extremely glad not to have been spotted, cut into the House to deposit his tools in Study No. 8, then made his way down to Big Side to mingle with the crowd there.

A roar from the Oakshott crowd greeted him as he arrived, Bullivant's deep voice loud above the rest.

"Goal!"

"Well kicked, Lex! Good man!"

Len Lex had bagged the first goal for Oakshott. There was old Oliphant, at centre-forward, on his back; there was Harvey, inside-right, staggering under a Parsley charge, and nobody to take a pass. Len shot from the wing, and the crowd roared as it got home.

Pie had no doubt that, in Len's place, he would have bagged two, if not three, goals by that time. But he

joined generously in the roar of applause.

Len's face was flushed and ruddy, and very merry and bright, as he went back to the centre of the field with the Oakshott men. He was enjoying the game and doing well for his side. Oliphant, if he had had any doubts, knew now that old Bully was right.

It was not till well on in the second half that Parsley equalised, and it was almost on the stroke of time that Oliphant, with a pass from Len, put the pill in. When Silverson blew the final whistle, Oakshott were winners by two goals to one.

Pie followed his friends to the changing-room.

"It was all right, you men," he told them, grinning.

"All right!" repeated Harvey. "I should jolly well say it was—two goals to one is all right!"

"I mean my rag on Silverson——"

"Oh, blow Silverson, and blow your silly rags!" said Banks.

Everybody was full of Soccer and the victory over Parsley, and it was not till tea-time that Pie had a chance of importing the news of his wonderful exploit in Silverson's study. Then Harvey told him that he was a goat, and Banks that he was a howling ass. Len, who said nothing, thought the more—not about Pie's rag, but about what Pie mentioned as a trifling detail—the fact that Bullivant had tried to get into the study and failed. Len knew now why old Bully had got Silverson to referee in that game.

CHAPTER 35.

"You are the Sussex man!"

MR. SILVERSON'S eye seemed to linger on Porrhage when he put lights out for the Fifth that night. Pie noticed it, perhaps with an inward tremor. He wondered whether his beak had thought of him in connection with the rag in his study. It was quite probable that Silverson

had, knowing the goat of the Fifth as he did.

Still, there was nothing to go upon. Silverson himself had seen Porrhinge on the ground during the Parsley match—plenty of fellows had seen him there most of the time. Nobody had specially noticed that he hadn't been there all the time. There had, of course, been a fearful row about the screwing-up of a Form-master's door. The reckless ragger was booked for a Head's whopping if discovered! Pie could only hope that he wouldn't be discovered.

After lights were out, and Silverson was gone, there was a buzz of voices in the Fifth Form dormitory, Pie's rag, and the row it had caused, almost ousting the Parsley match as a topic. Every fellow in the Fifth by that time knew who had done it.

Often and often had Pie set out to make Silverson sit up, but generally something or other had gone wrong. This time it was a winner, and Pie was immensely bucked. Silverson had had to get into his study by the casement and let in the porter by the same means to draw the screws before he could get his study door open. It was no end of a rag, though not so tremendous as Pie had planned, owing to the interruption he had had.

"If only Bully hadn't barged in," said Pie, "I'd have had a dozen screws in the door with the heads knocked flat. And I can tell you Silverson mightn't have got that door open for days! Ha, ha!"

"What the dickens did old Bully want there?" asked Cayley.

"Goodness knows! But if he hadn't barged in—"

"Rot!" said Harvey. "It can't have been old Bully! You dreamed that part of it, Pie!"

"I tell you I heard him at the door, and afterwards he came round to the window."

"Fathead!" said Banks. "What would old Bully want to sneak into

a man's study for? He wouldn't! Bet you old Bully never missed a minute of the Parsley match."

Len Lex, with his head on his pillow, was not joining in the talk, but he was not asleep. Neither did the schoolboy detective intend to sleep. Hardly a man in the Fifth doubted that Pie had made one more of his usual idiotic mistakes. It couldn't have been old Bully who had tried to get into Silverson's study while Silverson was out. But Len did not doubt.

This was the third time to Len's own knowledge that Bullivant had tried to visit that study secretly since the night he had taken the banknotes from the Fifth Form master's desk. And while the Fifth were talking Len Lex was thinking, and asking himself why?

Keen as the schoolboy detective was, he could find no answer to that question yet. If Bullivant was the Sussex Man, no doubt he used Silverson's casement for egress and ingress, as Len had suspected from the first. But that did not account for visits to the study in the daytime. And how astutely he had made sure that Silverson would be off the scene that afternoon by getting him to referee in the Parsley match! But why?

The Fifth Form dropped into slumber at last—all but one member of that Form. No one in the dormitory heard a sound when Len Lex slipped out and made his way down dark staircases. Hardly a night since he had been at Oakshott had the schoolboy detective failed to keep watch on the study by which, he knew, the secret burglar came and went. He was less likely than ever to fail now.

But he knew as he stood outside Silverson's study in the dark that if Bill Nixon had known all that he could have told him, Bill would have said that the case was as good as complete. Was he wasting his time hesitating to act because he liked the man

against whom all suspicion seemed to point? Yet, if Bullivant was the man, why did Surtees prowl the House at night, and who was that unknown fourth suspect whose shadowy form had clambered over the wall by the old oak where the cracksman's tools were hidden?

And Silverson, too—the secret gambler whom Len had seen white and stunned by his loss, whose motor-bike he had spotted parked in Trant Woods when Silverson was supposed to have ridden it in the opposite direction. No, all the suspicion was not against old Bully, in spite of what Len had seen him do; there was still a chance.

And yet when Len, in the dark, heard a footfall and a sound of deep breathing, he knew that it was Bullivant who was coming.

He could see nothing, but he knew that it was the games master who stood within three feet of him at the door of his Form-master's study.

The door opened softly. From the casement came a glimmer of the winter stars. It revealed the bulky form as a massive shadow standing in the doorway.

Bullivant was listening. He was in fear of hearing a sound from Silverson's bed-room, which adjoined the study. But there was no sound from that direction.

But from the corridor from which Bullivant had turned into the passage came a faint sound. Bullivant did not seem to hear it, or heed it, but Len did. He backed deeper into the shadow at the end of the side-passage, knowing that another prowler was abroad.

Suddenly from the dark shot a beam of light.

It was a flash-lamp, and its beam fell full upon the bulky form standing listening in the study doorway. It did not reach Len, blotted in the dark at the end of the passage. It was concentrated on Bullivant. He whirled round with a low, choking sound

between a gasp and a sob, and the light was on his face, usually ruddy as a cherry, now as pale as its complexion allowed it to become.

"Surtees!" Bullivant breathed the name in a husky whisper.

"Caught!"

Ralph Surtees' voice did not sound boyish and pleasant as usual. It vibrated with scorn, and mingled with the scorn was a note of triumph.

Len, blotted in the dark, could only wonder. He remembered the night when Surtees, prowling the House in the small hours, had grabbed him in the blackness and mistaken him for Bullivant. The young master was making no mistake this time. But what did it all mean?

"We'd better call Silverson, I think," said Surtees, in the same biting, contemptuous tone. "I'd better have a witness to this!"

"For mercy's sake, no!" Bullivant's voice was barely audible. "Give me a chance, Surtees—give me a chance! You don't understand—you can't understand!"

"I think I understand only too clearly!"

"You do not—you cannot!"

"No need to waste words!" said the Fourth Form master crisply. "I've known this the whole term. I had suspicions last term—but did not know what man to fix them on. This term, I knew! I've kept watch, three or four nights every week—ever since the night the boy Porrhinge was knocked out by the Sussex Man. I knew I should nail you at last."

"Silence—silence! Silverson will wake—"

"Let him, and the sooner the better! The game's up, Bullivant—and this time the police will get their hands on the Sussex Man!"

"The Sussex Man!" repeated Bullivant.

"Do you think I don't know? You are the Sussex Man, and I've found you out!"

CHAPTER 36.

Guilty!

LEN LEX hardly breathed. His eyes were on Bullivant's face—white, tormented. He saw amazement dawn in that tortured face. Guilt he half-expected to read there—Surtees wholly expected it. But it was blank amazement they saw. Len felt his heart lighter. In Surtees' face surprise dawned—and a trace of doubt.

"You're mad!" Bullivant's voice came husky, but firm. "Is that what you think? Oh, you're mad!"

"You deny it?"

"Oh, you're mad!" breathed the games master.

Then he gave a sudden start as there was a sound from the bed-room across the study. Hurriedly, though softly, he drew the study door shut.

"Quiet! Silence—silence! Silver-son's awake!" He groaned out the words. "Surtees, I can explain—give me a chance! For mercy's sake, don't disgrace a man who's more unfortunate than guilty; guilty, I own up, but not as you think—nothing like what you think! Give me a chance!"

For a second the Fourth Form master gazed at him. There was the sound of a movement from the study. Surtees suddenly shut off the light.

"Follow me!" he said. "I will hear you, at least!"

He stepped back into the big corridor. The burly games master almost tottered after him. After him, a flitting shadow in the blackness, went Len Lex. The side passage was dark and deserted as the study door opened from within. Three pairs of ears in the long, dark corridor heard. But the study door, after opening, closed again. Possibly the Fifth Form master, after what had occurred that afternoon, suspected another rag when he heard sounds in the silence of the night. But, if so, he was reassured by the darkness and the silence, and he shut the door. Len heard a sobbing gasp. It told of the relief of the games master when he

knew that Silver-son had gone back to bed.

Surtees' voice came in low tones.

"Come up to my study!"

The light gleamed again as he led the way up the stairs. Bullivant followed him. Not till they were in the passage above did Len Lex follow. He reached the upper passage in time to see Surtees switch on the light in his study and shut the door.

Surtees' bed-room adjoined his study, and there was a door on the passage. Silently the schoolboy detective stepped in by that door. The communicating-door between bed-room and study was half-open. Light shone in from the study. Len could see Bullivant—sunk in an armchair, looking like a man beaten, down and out. He could not see Surtees, who was out of range.

"I've said that I'll hear you, Bullivant!" came Surtees' voice. "It's useless, but I'll hear you. I know who you are—I've known for weeks. I suspected long ago that the Sussex Man had his headquarters in this school. It was too wild an idea to hint to the police, even if I had wanted to drag the name of Oakshott in the mud. But——"

Bullivant raised his head.

"The Sussex Man—in this school! Oh, you're mad!" he muttered.

"I knew—or as good as knew!" said Surtees quietly. "A good many people have remarked that the Sussex Man's beat lies within a fifteen-mile radius of Oakshott—the school in the centre. But I thought a little further than that. I noted that the date of every burglary was in term time—the Sussex Man gave his beat a rest in the holidays. I don't say that the significance of this struck me at once—but it did strike me in the long run. So far as I know, it has struck no one else."

The schoolboy detective, in the dark, adjoining room, smiled. It was that very circumstance that had struck him and brought him to Oakshott School on the trail of the mysterious burglar.

"The night the boy Porrhinge was

struck down in Silverson's study my suspicions came to a head," went on the quiet voice. "If, as it looked to me, the Sussex Man was making Oakshott School his hide-out, I determined to nail him.

"When I discovered that you prowled at night, Bullivant, I knew that I had spotted my man! If I had been able to find evidence, such as burglar's tools or hidden loot, you would not have had so long a run—but you were too wary for that—I knew that I should have to catch you in the act. Had I been on the watch the night Silverson spent at Trant Elms, and his study was robbed in his absence, you would have been caught red-handed—"

A groan came from the bowed figure in the chair.

"Even now I do not understand why you cleared out Silverson's desk and spared the Head's safe. One must have been as easy as the other to the Sussex Man. But there is no room for doubt. You are the Sussex Man?"

"I am not the Sussex Man!" said Bullivant. "You must be mad to believe that he is an inmate of Oakshott! You have said that you will hear me. It's not as you suppose. My young brother Roger was wanted by the police for a robbery at the bank where he was employed. He was hiding under an assumed name at Trant. He had to have money to flee the country. I had to help him. I was at the end of my resources. It was the Sussex Man coming here that put the horrible thought into my mind. Silverson's known to have money—to keep a sum in his desk—and—and— I fell!

"I hoped that it would be put down to the Sussex Man. I made it look as if it was the work of an outside thief. I set the window ajar. I—I—" The husky voice trailed off.

"You are asking me to believe that you robbed Silverson and no one else—that you are not the Sussex Man?"

"It's the truth!"

"Then why"—the question came

with a scornful snap—"more visits to that study if you were not going out by Silverson's casement?"

"You don't know all!" The games master's voice came husky, broken. "I had the money—the theft was put down to the Sussex Man, as I planned. Silverson, whom I feared most, had no suspicion—none at all. But I might have known that I should be punished. I had the money—but it was too late!

"When I got to Trant with two hundred pounds in stolen banknotes in my pocket, it was only to find that Roger had been taken by the police the night before. How they tracked him I do not know. I came back with the banknotes still in my pocket, a thief for nothing—nothing! Then there was only one thing left—and you have prevented it!"

"I?" exclaimed Surtees.

"You!" said Bullivant bitterly. "I tell you, it was only to save Roger that I touched the money. It was too late to save him. What could I do but put the money back where it belonged? I tried more than once, but it was not easy to undo what it had been only too easy to do. This afternoon I got Silverson to take my place on the football field—and tried again. Then to-night—"

Bullivant lifted his head.

"You fool!" he said. "You've been watching for the Sussex Man—mad enough to fancy that he is an inmate of Oakshott. But for you, the banknotes would have been back in Silverson's desk this night. I tell you, I'd have cut off my hand sooner than have touched them, except for the boy's sake."

"If I could believe that—"

The bulky figure rose unsteadily from the armchair.

"I've told you the truth, Surtees! Judge me as you like, but keep silent and give me a chance. To-night it is impossible, but to-morrow— You will believe me when you hear that Silverson has found his money."

"If you are not the Sussex Man"—

Len could hear the doubt in Ralph Surtees' voice now—"if I have been led on a false scent, it is you who led me. If you've told the truth, there are others who prowl the school at night, and I have further to seek. I half-believe you, and you shall have your chance. For the present, at all events, I shall say nothing."

Len Lex slipped quietly away, and he was out of sight when Bullivant came heavily along to his room and the door closed after him.

Len had a lighter heart. He knew now. His faith in old Bully, after all, had not been misplaced. Old Bully had sinned, but he had been more sinned against than sinning. And it was Len who had saved him from ineradicable guilt; for it was he who had caused the arrest of Roger Bullivant. From that moment the unhappy man had been thinking only of undoing what he had done—Len knew that that was the truth, and old Bully's name was taken from his suspected list!

And Surtees? Len smiled as he slipped silently into his bed in the Fifth Form dormitory. Surtees had been playing detective, suspecting Bullivant, and never dreaming that he was placing himself under suspicion. Two names were gone from the schoolboy detective's suspected list of four. Two remained—Silverson and the unknown one. It would not be long now before he had definite news for Detective-Inspector Nixon.

"If Pie's right——"

"Now, how," said Harvey argumentatively, "could Pie possibly be right?"

Len laughed. They were in the quad, in break. Mr. Bullivant, leaning on one of the old oaks, hardly noticed the Fifth Form fellows as they came along. Certainly he did not know that Lex of the Fifth was steering his companions in that direction.

"Porringer has been saying all along that it was a rag on Silverson." Len spoke carelessly, apparently unobser-

vant of the games master. "Not a burglary at all, but just a rag on Silverson. Isn't that so, Porringer?"

Bullivant gave a start. His eyes turned on the Fifth Formers.

"Pie's a goat!" said Banks. "That's just what Pie would think with a brain like his! Why, even Pie himself isn't ass enough to mess about with money for a rag. Lex, you're a fathead! If it was a rag, the money would turn up again. Has it turned up?"

"Not yet," said Len. "But if Pie's right, and it was only a rag, those jolly old banknotes will turn up somewhere about Oakshott. No end of a jest if Silverson found them on his window-sill or under the telephone in Common-room—what?"

"Well," said Harvey, "if those banknotes are ever found under the telephone in Common-room, or anywhere else, I'll believe that it was a rag on Silverson. But not till then!"

"Hardly!" grinned Banks.

The Fifth Form fellows strolled on. Bullivant stood looking after them, a strange expression on his face. Was there a useful hint in this careless talk which he had heard by chance as they passed him?

The bell rang for third school. The games master went slowly into the House, and it was into the deserted Common-room that his footsteps led him.

It was Mr. Chowne who made the amazing discovery when he went to the 'phone after third school. A quarter of an hour afterwards, all Oakshott knew that Silverson's banknotes—supposed to be far away in the greedy grasp of the Sussex Man—had been found in a bundle under the telephone in Common-room! It was not, after all, a theft, but a rag—an unusual and extraordinary rag. Nobody could doubt that when the banknotes were left there to be found.

Who had perpetrated the amazing rag remained a mystery. Most fellows

thought that it must be Pie. Only Pie, they considered, was goat enough to do anything of the kind. Porrhinge protested that he knew absolutely nothing of it, and he found one believer, at least, in Len Lex.

CHAPTER 37.

Just Like Pie!

"PORRIDGE!"

"Oh, blow!" hissed Pie.

Len Lex grinned.

Porrhinge 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.

Porrhinge 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, Porrhinge?" asked Silverson.

"No, sir!"

"You will go back to the House at once, Porrhinge. 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 Porrhinge. Pie was well known at Oakshott to be an absolute goat. Len wondered whether he was goat 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 arm-

chair, 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 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 Ple 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 Ple—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 turned 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 Lex walked out of the study he left an unhappy sportsman lying on his back, gasping for breath in the midst of the havoc.

CHAPTER 38.

Caught!

DARK 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 cracksman 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? 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 bed-room 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 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—bareheaded! 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?"

CHAPTER 39.

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 Porrhage. 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 bed-room 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 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!

CHAPTER 40.

Closing In!

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR NIXON turned his little two-seater in the mud in Parsley Lane, and followed a cart track that led away across the damp pasture-land. 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

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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 chimes 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 Lex

casually. "Nobody likes Silverson! 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.

CHAPTER 41.

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 arm. 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 cracksman'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 schoolboy detective allowed a margin. Did he hear, far off in the night, the 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.

CHAPTER 42.

A Surprise for the School!

"SILVERSON?" asked Pie.

"No," replied Len.

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

It was, as Pie 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 Pie 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?" Pie paused for dramatic effect. "They went rooting over Silverson's rooms."

"Not really?" asked Len.

"Really!" assured Pie. "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 traced 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 Porrhage, 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 Pie.

"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, Pie, old man," said Len. "I'm fearfully interested."

"Nobody seems to know," said Pie. "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 Pie, 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!"

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

HANDS OFF!

"DEATH shall come on swift wings to him that toucheth the tomb of Pharaoh."

Thus runs the ancient warning of old Egypt. Is there anything in it? Folk may scoff at the threat contained in this "curse" when they sit at home at ease, but would they feel quite so cocksure that it is only blarney if they were to be engaged in digging up the remains of some centuries-dead ruler of ancient Egypt?

We may not believe in the power of anyone who has passed from this world to influence in any way the lives of living people. But things that have happened quite lately take a lot of explaining away.

There is the remarkable series of mis-adventures that have befallen many people who have taken part in the discoveries in the Valley of the Kings, at Luxor, in Egypt. More than 3,000 years ago there was placed in a great tomb there a golden coffin containing the remains of King Tutankhamen, and legend has it that the warning quoted above was uttered during the ceremony.

The Touch-me-not Stone.

Fifteen years ago that tomb was opened, and about nineteen people who were more or less directly connected with the excavations have since died.

A few years ago some workmen engaged in road widening in England had to shift a very old stone upon which was graven a threatening warning. There was a tremendous fuss made about it in the newspapers before the job was done, and then nothing out of the ordinary happened. And in all probability nothing ever will.

Bewitched Motor-Car.

Tragic happenings have certainly followed other things than mummies

and stones. There is at least one famous diamond notorious for the ill-luck which seems to follow in its wake whenever it changes hands. It is called the Hope Diamond—and everyone who handles it hopes that it won't be bewitched so far as he or she is concerned.

Even a motor-car has seemed to be bewitched. It is in the car in which the Archduke Francis Joseph and his wife were assassinated just before the outbreak of the Great War, in the summer of 1914, and it was that shooting which led up directly to the outbreak of hostilities. After the War it was sold, but the purchaser seemed to be dogged by such ill-luck that he promptly got rid of it.

The man who finally bought it was driving it when it broke down, for no reason which he could discover. So he got a couple of horses and had them hitched to it. They had just started to tow it home when the engine started up again, the horses bunched, and the car crashed and turned turtle, the motorist losing his life.

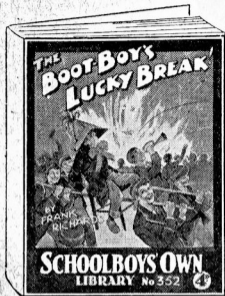
The Frog's Leg.

It is still the custom in many outlandish parts for natives to place themselves under a spell, as it were, when giving evidence at a trial. In Sumatra the oath which a witness utters compares with anything which old Egypt ever produced. Holding a frog's leg on a stick, the witness delivers himself in this wise:

"As the frog is dust"—referring to the remnants of the frog whose leg he holds—"as nothing remains of it but a fragment, so may I be crushed, killed and broken asunder if my oaths are lies."

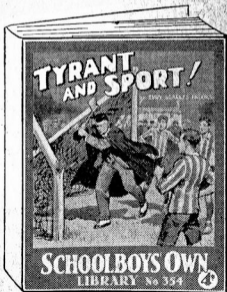
Reverting to things said to be actually bewitched, there is a gold-mine in New Mexico whose successive owners have fallen on great misfortune. No less than five of them have, at different times, been discovered headless.

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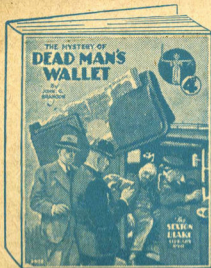
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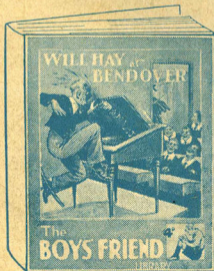
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