

ASKING FOR THE SACK!

By CHARLES HAMILTON



SCHOOLBOYS' OWN
LIBRARY No 371

4 0 39

4^D

Super New Series of Stories

—dealing with the thrilling holiday adventures of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's on a Continental air tour, is appearing now in

The GEM

A gripping story of the schooldays of famous Frank Richards in the backwoods of Canada is always to be found in

The GEM

And a tip-top tale of the boys of the Benbow, the floating school voyaging in South American waters, is contained every week in

The GEM

3 Good reasons why the average boy reads this famous school-story paper—

3 GOOD REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT TO-DAY!



On Sale Every Wednesday.



At all Newsagents

- - -

Price 2d.

ASKING *for the* SACK! PEAL D



By CHARLES HAMILTON.

Why does ERIC TUNSTALL, grandson of Sir Gilbert Tunstall, want to be sacked from Oakshott School? That is what LEN LEX, the schoolboy detective, wants to discover!

CHAPTER I.

Guilty or Not Guilty?

"ANOTHER case?" asked Len Lex.

"I don't know," was the reply.

The schoolboy detective raised his eyebrows. That, certainly, was not the answer he had expected from his uncle, Detective-Inspector Nixon, of Scotland Yard.

It was the last day of the holidays. Len Lex was spending his last evening with his Uncle Bill. On the morrow morning he was going back to Oakshott School for the new term. Bill Nixon was a busy man, but he had kept that last evening clear for his

nephew. The inspector sat at ease in a deep armchair on one side of the crackling log fire; on the other side, Len straddled a chair, leaning his arms on the back and eyeing his uncle.

They had been talking of various matters; but that Mr. Nixon had something special to say, which he had not yet uttered, had been clear for some time to Len.

"You don't know, Bill?" repeated Len.

"No!" said the inspector. "I don't know whether Eric Tunstall is a young rascal who has got no more than he deserves, or whether he has been the

victim of unscrupulous scheming—with more to come!”

“That,” said Len, “sounds interesting, Bill!”

“If the former is the case,” went on Mr. Nixon, “he is not worth a second thought. If the latter, there is—or may be—a case for you to handle, Len.”

“Me?” said Len.

“Tunstall is going to Oakshott this term. You will see him to-morrow, if you look for him, at your school!” explained the inspector. “He is a boy of your own age, and I understand that he will go into the same Form.”

“Who is he?”

“One of the grandsons of Sir Gilbert Tunstall, baronet.”

“And what has he done?”

“According to himself—nothing!”

“Then what is he supposed to have done?” smiled Len.

“Nearly everything, I think, that he ought not to have done, at his last school,” said Mr. Nixon. “You will be careful, of course, to say nothing of what I am going to tell you. If the boy is innocent, as he maintains, he has a right to a chance—and it would do him a lot of harm at Oakshott to have it known that he was expelled from his last school.”

“Sacked!” Len exclaimed. “But how can a fellow sacked from another school wedge in at Oakshott, Bill? The Head wouldn’t stand for it, surely.”

“Sir Gilbert Tunstall has some influence with the Oakshott governors, and it has been arranged.”

“Um!” said Len, with a grimace.

As a detective, he was prepared to believe any man innocent till he was proved guilty. As an Oakshott fellow, he did not like the idea of a fellow sacked from another school butting in at Oakshott!

“What was his school?” he asked.

“Higham, in Yorkshire. Oakshott being in Sussex, he will be a long way

from his previous surroundings, among people who cannot possibly have seen him before, and will be able to make an entirely fresh start. Nobody at Oakshott has ever seen him—and probably only the headmaster has heard his name even. If his own tale is true, he will be able to make good there, unless—”

Bill Nixon paused, and grunted.

“Unless what?”

“I’d better tell you how it stands,” said the inspector. “It’s rather a mix-up. Young Tunstall was taken before his headmaster, last term at Higham, found guilty of betting, breaking out, pub-haunting, and blackguardism generally—and expelled. The evidence must have been complete enough to satisfy his headmaster. He was sent home in disgrace.”

“My hat!” said Len. “And that’s the sportsman they’re landing on us at Oakshott, is it?”

“But—” said the inspector.

“Of course, there’s a ‘but,’ or you wouldn’t be interested in it,” agreed Len. “Where do you come in, Bill?”

“As a friend of old Sir Gilbert—I handled some matters for him when he was a company director in the City, years ago, and he sent for me to ask my advice—unprofessionally, of course. He doesn’t exactly believe, but he hopes, that there may be some truth in what the boy says.”

“What does he say?”

Len was getting deeply interested now.

“His tale is absolute innocence. He puts the whole thing on his cousin, Herbert Varney—another Higham boy. He cannot offer a jot of evidence—cannot lay a finger on a single thing that Varney may have done—and has to admit that it is all suspicion on his part—but he feels certain of it. And this,” said Mr. Nixon, “is where the shoe pinches! If Sir Gilbert comes to believe that young Tunstall is a disgrace to his name, he will disinherit

him like a shot. In which case, twenty thousand pounds a year will, some day, go to the other grandson. They are both orphans, and the old man has no other near relations."

Len Lex whistled again.

"Thick, Bill!" he said. "Whatever sort of a merchant this Varney may be, no schoolboy could plan or carry on a scheme like that. Too thick! If there's anything in it, there's a nigger in the woodpile. This is a man's game—crook's game—and a clever crook at that! Any line on him?"

"None!"

"Was Varney in the same Form at Higham?"

"Yes; both boys in the Fifth Form."

"What sort of a reputation in the school?"

"His school reports have been consistently good—ordinary, but good. But so had Tunstall's till the last term."

"And Tunstall denies the whole thing?"

"From start to finish—but he can only say that he believes Varney fixed it all on him somehow. They've always barred one another, it seems."

"How much does the old bean swallow?"

"As much as he can! The fact appears to be that he is fond of the grandson who bears his own name and will inherit the title, and has only a sense of duty towards the other. In common justice, he cannot take notice of an accusation against his other grandson, founded on no evidence whatever. At the same time, he clings to the favourite boy, and hopes for the best. Anyhow, he realises that it was a mistake to send them to the same school. Young Tunstall will be on his own at Oakshott."

"And Varney stays at Higham, up in Yorkshire?"

"No! In view of the disgrace reflected on him by his cousin's expulsion, he wanted to leave, and his grandfather consented. He asked to

be allowed to go to Oakshott, but that, of course, could not be permitted, in the peculiar circumstances. The idea is to keep them safe apart. He is being allowed to travel with a tutor—a Mr. Stacey—instead of going back to school this term. They have already gone abroad."

"So Varney is safe out of his cousin's way?"

"That's it!" said Mr. Nixon. "And if, by some remote possibility, young Tunstall's tale is true, he should make good at his new school—unless he—"

"Unless," said Len slowly, "there is a nigger in the woodpile—a man behind the scenes, playing Varney's game for him. In which case, he might look for an opportunity of fastening something on Tunstall at his new school—while Varney's keeping up an impeccable alibi, travelling abroad."

"You get me, Len! It sounds a bit fantastic, but—well, I've seen the boy, and liked him!" confessed Bill Nixon. "He struck me as a decent sort of lad, bewildered by the position he found himself in. There's a sporting chance, Len, that he's telling the truth—that the whole thing is an unscrupulous scheme to double-cross him out of a fortune! And if that's the case, and there's any more of it, I want my nephew at Oakshott to have his eyes as wide open for the nigger in the woodpile as he had them open for the Sussex Man once upon a time."

Len nodded slowly.

"At Higham, Varney could have worked it, with a man behind to help—but a man outside the school, with no help inside, couldn't have much chance at Oakshott," he said. "But—it's possible! I'll prop my eyes open, Bill!"

CHAPTER 2.

"Make him let go!"

PORRIDGE of the Oakshott Fifth dropped his ticket, plunged after it, dropped his bag, stumbled over it.

and sat down. These performances occupied Porrhinge exactly one minute; and he had rather less than a minute in which to catch his train. Having fielded his ticket and his bag, "Pie" Porrhinge rushed on the platform at Westwood, in time to view the guard's van disappearing down the line.

"Blow!" said Pie.

It was, of course, Pie all over. Pie had a genius for losing things, especially trains.

He stood and gazed after the vanishing train in great dismay. Plenty of Oakshott fellows were on that train, going back for the new term—among them Len Lex, who was in his study at Oakshott. Carefully had Pie arranged to pick up the express as it passed through Westwood. Pie was a gregarious fellow, and he wanted the company of his friends on the journey down. This was the result of his careful arranging.

"Blow!" repeated Pie.

He had an hour to wait for the next train. That hour seemed, to Pie, the longest hour he had ever experienced. Walking up and down a windy platform was not exhilarating. Every other minute he glared at the clock. It was no use looking at his watch, which—being Pie's—had stopped. It seemed to Pie that that hour contained more than the usual allowance of minutes, and that all the minutes were unusually lengthy.

But the express boomed in at last. It was like Pie to be at the extreme end of a long platform when it came in and stopped. He rushed for it. Breathless, he grabbed a doorhandle. And it did not turn!

With his bag in one hand and the doorhandle in the other, Pie wrenched desperately! It was just his rotten luck for the beastly thing to be jammed.

"Blow!" roared Pie.

Another passenger came along, but seeing Pie struggling in vain to get

that door open, passed quickly along to the next carriage. Pie wrenched and wrenched.

He could see that there were two passengers in the carriage. One, a boy of his own age, sat on the farther side. On the near side sat a man. The man was looking out through the glass at Pie. Really, seeing the school-boy's difficulty, he might have helped. But he made no movement. Pie glared at him through the window, thinking him the last word in disagreeable swabs, for sitting there doing nothing, while a fellow in danger of losing the train was struggling to get the door open.

Then it suddenly dawned on Pie that the man was holding the doorhandle on the inside. That was why it would not turn! It was not jammed at all! That unspeakable swab was holding it.

Pie spluttered with wrath.

"Let go!" he roared. "Let me get in, see? Do you want all the railway? My hat! Will you let me get in?"

The man within gave no sign of having heard. Pie gave him deadly looks through the glass. The face within was not a pleasant one. It had a sharp chin, a sharp nose curved rather like a vulture's beak, and close-set eyes of gimlet like keenness. It was a hard face—the face of a man with a hard and inflexible nature.

For some reason, best known to himself, he did not want another passenger in the carriage; and with a ruthless disregard of the rights of the travelling public, he was keeping Pie out.

Pie almost foamed. He was going to lose this train, as he had lost the earlier one, because of that frightful swab!

The boy on the other side of the carriage, was glancing across. He was a rather nice-looking lad, with pleasant features and dark eyes. He half-rose from his seat, and Pie, encouraged, yelled to him:

"I say, you—make him leggo that handle, will you?"

The dark-eyed lad came across the carriage.

"Look here let that chap in!" Pie heard him say. "Why can't he come in? Let go that doorhandle."

The vulture faced man gave no heed, His grasp on the handle inside did not relax. Doors were slamming along the train. There was no time to rush for another carriage.

"Make him leggo will you?" roared Pie.

The boy in the carriage hesitated a moment. He seemed as puzzled as Pie by the inexplicable ill-nature of the man who was keeping the Oakshott fellow out. Then suddenly making up his mind, he grasped the man's arm and wrenched his grasp from the door-handle.

In a split-second, before that grasp could close again, Pie had the door open. He hurled his bag in and plunged headlong after it. He had hardly landed when a porter slammed the door after him, and the train was in motion.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Pie.

He picked himself up, panting for breath. The dark-eyed boy, with a faint smile went back to the farther corner, and sat down. Pie plumped into a seat, still gasping, and glaring belligerently at the man who had tried to keep him out.

The look on that individual's hard, vulture-like face was, for a moment, extremely unpleasant and threatening. Apparently accepting the inevitable, the man leaned back in his corner seat, taking no notice whatever of Pie. The Oakshott man's defiant and scornful glares were wasted on an impassive profile.

Having recovered his breath, Porrynge picked up his bag and slammed it on the rack. Then he looked across the carriage at the boy who had come to his aid.

"Thanks!" he said.

"Not at all!" The boy smiled. He

had a very pleasant smile. "You had a right to come in, if you liked."

"I should jolly well say so!" said Porrynge, with another glare at the silent man in the corner. "Keeping a chap out of the train—my hat! I've lost one train already to-day, and I've got to get to Oakshott."

"Oakshott!" repeated the boy.

"You're going to Oakshott! You mean Oakshott School?"

"That's it!" said Pie.

"So am I!" said the boy, smiling again.

"Oh!" Porrynge regarded him with new interest. "New man?"

"Yes."

"You're joining up rather late, aren't you?" said Pie. The boy looked about sixteen, which was much later than the usual age for joining up at Oakshott. He was as old as Pie, who was in the Fifth. "Been to school before—since your prep school, I mean?"

To Pie's surprise, the boy coloured at that simple remark. Before he could answer, the man in the corner seat broke in:

"Can you tell me what is the next station on this line?"

Porrynge looked round at him. The man spoke civilly enough, as if he had already forgotten the little trouble that had occurred. Pie was a placable fellow. As the man spoke civilly, Pie answered civilly.

"Blackwood," he said.

"We stop there?"

"Yes; a minute's stop."

"How long before we get there?"

"Only a few minutes, I believe."

"Thank you!"

Pie transferred his attention to the boy in the other corner again. The latter was looking out of the window at the wintry landscape. He was not smiling now—a clouded and rather moody look had come over his hand-

some face. Pie was a talkative fellow, and he had taken, rather a liking to the boy who had saved him from losing the train. So, as the boy did not speak, Pie started again.

"I say, know anybody at Oakshott?" he asked.

"No!"

"You've seen the beak?"

"No; I've seen nobody at Oakshott. I live at the other end of the country. I've been at school before." The boy coloured again. "I'm going into the Fifth Form."

"That's my Form," said Pie. "There's some jolly decent chaps in the Fifth—Lex, and Harvey, and old Banker. I say—"

"You are sure this train stops at Blackwood?" came an interruption from the hard-faced man. Pie looked round again.

"Yes—if you look out of the window you'll see it by this time," he answered. "The train stops there, all right. I know this line."

"You get out at Blackwood?"

"No." Pie stared at him. "I change at Greenwood for Oakshott—that's thirty miles on yet," he answered. Pie turned to the boy again. "You stick to me," he said. "There's two changes for the school—Greenwood and Bingham. I'll see you get your train! And, I say— Ow!" howled Pie suddenly.

The man in the corner had risen to his feet, as if in preparation for leaving the carriage when the train stopped at Blackwood. He stumbled as the train jerked and fell against Pie.

Pie howled as he was squashed back in his seat. His hat fell off, and rolled on the floor.

"Oh, sorry!" gasped the vulture-faced man as he righted himself. "I lost my footing—"

Pie gave him a glare, and stooped to recover his hat.

The train ran into Blackwood Station, and stopped. The man threw the carriage door open.

What happened next caused Poring's eyes almost to bulge from his face. The hard-faced man reached up to the rack, grasped Pie's bag and pitched it out on the platform.

Pie stared at him, as if mesmerised. He was too astounded to move for a moment or two.

"You—you—you—" gasped Pie at last. "You silly ass! What are you up to? That's my bag! By gum!"

Poring rushed to the door and leaped out to recover his property.

The bag had rolled across the platform. Pie tore after it, recovered it, and rushed back to the carriage. He had just time to jump in again before the train started, but he found the carriage door shut. The carriage window was down, and the man inside, reaching out as Pie grasped the handle, gave him a rough push, which sent Poring sprawling backwards.

Bump!

Pie sat down on the platform, hard and heavy. His bag flew in one direction, his hat in another. He sat and spluttered wildly. The last door slammed, and the train moved on. Pie, still sitting and spluttering breathlessly, had a last glimpse of a hard face with a vulture nose looking back at him. Then the train was gone.

Pie staggered up. He was astonished, amazed, but he was more enraged than either! He had lost that train, after all, and he had another hour's wait before him for the next express to Greenwood.

Speechless with amazement and rage, Pie stood and glared after the train. He wondered dizzily whether the man was some lunatic—really, there seemed no other way of accounting for his extraordinary actions. Lunatic or not, Pie would have liked to get within punching distance of his

vulture nose. But that nose was far out of his reach, and Pie could only wait for the next train with feelings inexpressible in any known language.

CHAPTER 3.

Very Odd!

"SEEN that goat?"

Harvey and Banks of the Fifth asked that question together as Len Lex came into Study No. 8. Len grinned as he slammed down a bundle of books on the study table. He could guess that it was Porrhinge to whom his friends alluded.

"No," he answered. "Hasn't old Pie blown in?"

"Haven't seen him. Wasn't he coming with you?" asked Banks.

"He was," agreed Len. "But that depended on Pie picking up my train as it came through his station. Pie's not the man to catch anything but a cold."

"Oh, Pie can catch trains—the wrong trains!" said Harvey. "I dare say he's in the wrong train—perhaps getting to the wrong school. May arrive at Eton or Harrow. There's no knowing what Pie will do!"

It was a cold day, with a keen wind from the Sussex downs, and a nip in the air. In fact, it was almost cold enough for a fire. Len Lex sat on a corner of the table, swinging his legs.

Study No. 8 was looking a little untidy, the first day of term—all sorts of things scattered about and not yet put away, open bags on the floor, a Soccer ball on the window-shelf, a pair of football boots on the mantelpiece. But the ruddy glow of the fire made it look very cosy and homely, and Len was glad to find himself back in the old study with his old friends. And, "goat" as old Pie undoubtedly was, his three pals wished that he were there, helping with the unpacking of books and other ornaments.

"Seen anything of a new man, you fellows?" asked Len. He had had an eye open for Eric Tunstall since getting in at the school, but had seen nothing of him so far, or heard of him.

"Eh? I believe there's three or four new ticks this term," answered Banks. "I think I saw some wandering about. Mostly for Surtees, I believe."

"I don't mean a junior," said Len. "I've heard that there's a new man coming into the Fifth."

He did not add that he had heard it from Detective-Inspector William Nixon.

"Oh! First I've heard of it! Man doesn't often come straight into the Fifth. I hope Chalmers won't stick him in here. We're four already, counting Pie as one—and with his feet he really counts as two!"

"One or two of the studies have five men," said Len casually, "and this is the biggest in the Fifth."

As Lex of the Fifth, Len did not want to be crowded in his study; but, as Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew, he rather wanted to have Eric Tunstall under his eye. Len, though his comrades knew it not, was a detective as well as a schoolboy.

"Oh, rot!" said Harvey. "We don't want the fellow here, bother him! Chalmers can shove him anywhere else he likes along the passage. I say, let's go down and see if that goat Porrhinge has blown in yet!"

Let's!"

The three chums went down. Oak-shot School was buzzing with the noise of first day of term—trampling footsteps, calling voices, banging doors, and bumping boxes. The three exchanged greetings with a dozen fellows as they went, but did not spot Porrhinge among them. But when they came to the open door of the senior day-room a well-known voice fell on their ears

"Lost two trains!" It was Pie's voice. "That's why."

"Only two?" asked Cayley's voice. "That's not up to your average, is it?"

And a chuckle followed. Len and Banks and Harvey went in. There was Porringe newly arrived, and apparently in a state of excitement and indignation.

"Oh, here you are!" said Pie, as he spotted his friends. "I say, would you believe it? Man chucked my bag out of the train, and I had to jump after it and lost the train! Jevver hear of anything like that?"

"Never!" grinned Len. "These things only happen to you, Pie, old man!"

"If I ever meet that man," said Pie, "I'm going to pull his nose. He's got a nose like a beak, and I'm going to pull it! Seen the new man yet?"

"Eh? You heard of a new man?" asked Len.

"He was in the carriage," explained Pie. "Decent sort of chap—I liked him. He must have got in long ago on that train. He told me he was coming into the Fifth."

"You liked him?" asked Len.

He had no doubt that it was Tunstall whom Pie had met on the train. It was not likely that two new men were coming into the Fifth that term.

"Oh, yes—jolly decent chap!" said Pie. "That nosey parker was trying to keep me out of the carriage, and the chap helped me to get in. Jelly good-natured, I thought. I'd like him in the study."

"Rot!" said Banks. "If they shove another man in Study No. 8, you'll have to hang your feet out of the window."

"What was the chap's name, Pie?" asked Len.

"Blessed if I know! Might have asked him, only that nosey swab kept on interrupting when I was speaking to him. And then he shifted me out at Blackwood, chucking out a fellow's

bag!" Pie breathed hard. "By gum I'll pull that beaky boko of his if I ever see him again! I say, I'd better go and see Chalmers. I'll ask him if the new man's here! He was jolly decent, and a chap might be friendly."

Harvey and Banks remained in the day-room, talking to other new arrivals, but Len went along with Pie to his Form-master's study. He was rather keen to hear all he could of the new man. Pie's description was that of a rather agreeable fellow, good-natured and obliging. And the fellow, so far as Len could see, could be no other than Tunstall—the real or supposed black sheep of Higham.

Mr. Chalmers, the master of the Fifth, blinked at them through horn-rimmed glasses as they presented themselves. He had already seen Len; but Porringe had to report his arrival and hand over the usual medical certificate which, by some happy chance, he had not lost on his way to Oakshott. After which Mr. Chalmers glanced at a list on his desk.

"All my Form are now in with the exception of a new boy," he said. "Possibly he has arrived and has not yet reported to me." Mr. Chalmers blinked at Pie and Len. "I think you might look for him and send him to my study if he is here."

"Certainly, sir," said Len.

"I was going to ask you about him, sir," said Pie. "I met him on the train, coming here—I suppose it was the same chap, though I didn't know his name. He must be here before this. What's his name, sir?"

Mr. Chalmers referred to his paper again.

"Tunstall," he answered — "Eric Tunstall."

"We'll find him, sir," said Pie. "I know him all right. I'd like you to put him in my study, sir, if you haven't arranged anything else."

"Yes, sir, we'd like him in Study No. 8," said Len Lex. He had his own reasons for backing up Pie's request, though inwardly he wondered what Banks and Harvey would have to say about it.

"Eh? Yes! Very good. I will make a note of it," said the Fifth Form master, and Len and Porringer left the study.

"Chap must be here!" said Pie, as they went down the corridor. "He was on the train I lost, and must have got in an hour ahead of me! Come and help me look for him, Lex. Chap wants to be friendly, after he was so jolly good-natured."

Len Lex willingly went with Pie to look for the new man. He was quite keen to see the fellow who had been expelled from Higham for disgraceful conduct, but to whom Pie had taken a liking. Pie was a goat, and nearly every known kind of an ass; but he was not the fellow to take a liking to any fellow who was not pretty decent. Pie's impression of him was a point in his favour, in the opinion of the school-boy detective.

But they failed to find Eric Tunstall.

Up and down and round about they went, looking for a new man who did not know his way about. They found, easily enough, half a dozen new "men" for the Third and the Fourth—sheepish new "kids" in the Lower School. But of a new senior man they could learn nothing. They asked every Fifth Form man they met—they inquired of Root of the Fourth and Lamson of the Shell—they even asked Oliphant of the Sixth, captain of Oakshott, and Campion, head boy. They went down to the porter's lodge and asked old Wegg. They went to the matron's room and asked Mrs. Simpson. But nobody had seen or heard anything of Tunstall—and they had to give it up.

"It's weird!" said Pie, quite puzzled. "You see, the chap stayed on the train

—Nosey Parker shifted me out, but that chap stayed on, so he must have got to Greenwood an hour ahead of me. Even if he lost a train or two, he ought to be here by now. Some fellows are asses enough to lose trains!"

"They are!" agreed Len gravely.

"Well, then, where the dickens is he?" asked Pie. "It must have been Tunstall on the train—he said he was coming into the Fifth here, anyhow. Weird, ain't it?"

"Quite!" said Len. "Better go and tell Chalmers he's not here."

They repaired to their Form-master's study again. Mr. Chalmers gave a rather worried blink through his horn-rimmed spectacles as they made their report.

"It is very odd," he said. "Very odd indeed! I understand that Tunstall travelled down from Yorkshire yesterday, and stayed the night with his grandfather's solicitor in London, who put him on the train for the school this morning. It is very odd that he has not arrived. Please send him to me at once if you see him."

But they did not see him, and they went into Hall with Harvey and Banks, and for a time forgot his existence.

CHAPTER 4.

On His Neck!

PORRINGER stared. Then he glared. The darkness had closed in on Oakshott School and most of the fellows were downstairs in Hall, though a few were in the studies.

Porringer, having forgotten the existence of the new man for some hours, had suddenly remembered him. Leaving his friends in Hall, Pie went round to have another look for the new Fifth Former.

Having been a new man himself once upon a time, Pie knew the value

of a helping hand and a friendly word on a fellow's first day at a school. Full of benevolent intentions, therefore, the goat of the Fifth set out on another voyage of discovery. Tunstall, if he had blown in, was certainly not in Hall, so Pie drew the studies.

Hence his stare, and his glare, at the present moment! Throwing open the door of Study No. 8 to give that study the once-over on the chance that the new man might have blown in there, Porrhinge gave a sudden cough as a strong, thick whiff of tobacco-smoke impinged upon his lungs. It was enough to make any fellow stare and glare!

Smoking, of course, was strictly forbidden at Oakshott. It was also considered bad form in the studies. There were fellows who smoked, like Levett in Study No. 9—a fellow rather barred in the Form. In Study No. 8 it was unheard-of. No man belonging to that study ever put on a cigarette. And whoever was smoking now in Study No. 8 had not smoked one cigarette, but many, to judge by the thickness of the atmosphere therein.

Pie coughed, choked, stared, and glared—and stamped into the study. If that swab Levett fancied that he could do his putrid smoking in Study No. 8, Pie was the man to undeceive him!

But it was not Levett of the Fifth. The fellow who sprawled in the armchair, with a cigarette between his lips, was a stranger to Porrhinge. He was a fellow of about Pie's own age, but rather weedy in build, extremely well dressed, even to a touch of dandyism. Finding a stranger in the study, Porrhinge would naturally have expected him to be Tunstall—but this fellow was not the fellow he had met on the train.

Who he was, Pie did not know—and did not care! Whoever he was, and wherever he had come from, he was going to learn at once where he got off. Porrhinge stood in front of him,

glaring at him through a haze of cigarette smoke.

"You putrid tick!" said Pie.

The fellow in the armchair gave him a careless glance. He did not remove the cigarette from his mouth, as he answered:

"Hallo! Who are you, and what's biting you?"

"I'm Porrhinge," roared Pie, "and this is my study! And if you fancy you're in a tap-room, you swab, you're jolly well mistaken, see? Get out of this, and take your filthy smoking with you."

"I'm quite comfortable here, thanks!" drawled the fellow in the armchair.

"You won't be, if I begin on you!" roared the indignant Pie. "Why, you tick, if a beak or a prefect came up, we might all get into a row, with the study reeking like this. Get out of it! I tell you, I'll shift you fast enough, if you don't travel quick."

And as the stranger did not stir, Pie wasted no more time in words. He jumped behind the armchair, grasped the high back, and tilted it forward.

The fellow moved fast enough then. He gave a yell as he rolled headlong out of the tilted chair. The cigarette dropped on the carpet, and there was another yell as the fellow put his hand on it. He bounded to his feet, his face red with rage.

"You meddling fool!" he roared. "What the dickens do you fancy you're up to?"

"Get out of this study!" hooted Pie. "You fool, I won't! Why should I? I——"

"Won't you?" said Pie grimly. "I don't know why you've picked this study specially to smoke in, but I jolly well know that you're going out of it. And if you won't go on your feet, you'll go on your neck."

"I tell you——"

"You needn't tell me anything—I'm telling you! Outside!"

"I tell you——"

"That's enough!" Porrynge rushed at him. Whoever the fellow was—not that Pie cared a hoot who he was!—he was going out of that study, and he was going out on his neck, if Pie could handle him—and Pie fancied that he could. In a twinkling, Pie had a head in chancery and was whirling the fellow doorward.

Weedy as he looked, the fellow did not lack resisting power. He struggled fiercely in Pie's grasp, and punched, him furiously in the ribs. Pie punched, in return, at the face under his arm. They trampled wildly about the study. Chairs were knocked over, piles of books upset, the table rocked as they bumped into it. The din rang along the passage, and fellows who happened to be in their studies came along to see what the uproar was about.

"What's the game, Pie?" inquired Cayley of the Fifth. "Which of your pals have you got there, and what's he done?"

"Let go!" came a yell from under Pie's gripping arm. "Will you let go, you mad idiot?"

"Not till you're outside, you putrid tick!" gasped Pie.

"Who is it?" yelled Hobbs of the Fifth. "Is that the new man?"

"I don't know who he is!" gasped Pie. "Never seen him before—but I jolly well know he's not going to smoke in my study! Butting into a man's study to smoke! By gum, I'll show him!"

The other was resisting strongly. But Pie, with a concentrated effort, got him to the door. Five or six Fifth Form men were clustered there, looking in and grinning. They backed away hastily, however, as a whirling figure came flying out, giving it room to fall.

It crashed!

Porrynge stood panting. He had said that the cheeky intruder should go out on his neck, and on his neck he had

gone! Pie stood panting, breathless from his exertions, but victorious. He clenched his fists, ready for his enemy if his enemy came on again.

But the fellow who had been hurled headlong out of the study seemed to have had enough. He sat up, spluttering for breath, and Hobbs kindly gave him a helping hand to get on his feet. Then he stood, panting and unsteady, the Fifth Formers eyeing him curiously. He gave Pie a glare of fury, turned, and slouched away down the passage, panting breathlessly as he went.

Porrynge in Study No. 8 opened the window and waved a newspaper about to clear off the smoke, after which he resumed his search for the new man in the Fifth.

CHAPTER 5.

Pie All Over!

"IS he here?" asked Pie.

Len Lex, Harvey, and Banks had come up to the study after the speeches in Hall. They were unpacking a hamper that Harvey had brought back with him, with intent to dispose of the excellent contents of the same. Pie, having rooted all over Oakshott once more, came back to Study No. 8, put his head in at the door, and asked that question. But a glance into the study showed that "he" was not there.

"It's weird!" declared Pie, as he came in. "I've seen Chalmers again, and he says that the man has come. The fellow's seen Chalmers, and the Head, and the dame, and was told that this was his study. You men seen him?"

Three heads were shaken. Harvey turned a cake out of the hamper, and cut it; and Pie thoughtfully helped himself to a slice.

"Beats me!" he said. "What's become of the chap? If he's come, he must be in the House somewhere. If he couldn't find the study, I suppose he's got a tongue in his head to ask

Must be a bit of an ass to get lost like this! I suppose we shall spot him when they call roll again. But it's weird."

"Pie, old man, you've been picking up bad habits in the hols," said Banks sternly.

"Eh? Wharrer you mean?" demanded Pie.

"The study smelt of baccy when we came up."

"Think it was me?" snorted Pie. "I found some swab here smoking, and chucked him out on his neck, too."

"A man smoking in our study?" exclaimed Harvey. "Who?"

"I don't know—never seen him before! Some new tick, I suppose," answered Pie. "But here he was, sitting in that armchair, and smoking away like a furnace. I heaved him out."

Harvey and Banks stared at Pie. Len Lex blinked at him.

"There's only one new man in the Fifth," said Len, "and that is Tunstall."

"Eh?" said Pie. "It wasn't Tunstall—at least, it wasn't the chap I met on the train. That must have been Tunstall. Haven't I told you that he told me he was coming into the Fifth here? That's why I asked Chalmers to put him into this study."

"You got Chalmers to land him on us?" hooted Banks.

"Yes, I jolly well did!" retorted Pie. "Why shouldn't I, when he's a thoroughly decent chap, and did me a good turn? I don't know who that smoky swab was, but he wasn't the chap on the train. Now I come to think of it, he was rather like him, but he wasn't the same chap."

They gazed at Pie. If a new man had planted himself in that study, it was obvious—to the three, if not to Pie—that he must be the new man in the Fifth, whom Mr. Chalmers had sent to Study No. 8. And as there was

only one new man in the Fifth, it was equally obvious that the fellow must be Tunstall, whether Pie had met him on the train or not.

"You—you priceless goat!" said Harvey, in measured tones. "You've met somebody on a train who spun you a yarn, and pulled your silly leg, and wasn't coming to Oakshott at all—and you've landed a smoky swab on this study in consequence. Is that it?"

"That's it!" said Banks. "Pie all over!"

"Rot!" said Pie. "That chap on the train was straight as a die—he wasn't pulling my leg. Think I'm a fool?"

"Yes, rather!" answered his three friends together.

"I wish I'd asked him his name now," said Pie. "I should have, only that nosey parker kept on interrupting. But that chap was all right. He's the man that's coming here, and Chalmers said his name was Tunstall."

"Then who was the swab you found here?"

"How should I know?" snapped Pie. "Never seen him before. Might be a new man for the Shell—a bit overgrown. I don't know who he was, and don't care—only I know I jolly well shifted him."

"If he wasn't Fifth, you fathhead, what was he doing in a Fifth Form study?" shrieked Banks.

"Eh? Smoking," said Pie. "I've told you so!"

"Oh, you goat!"

"Oh, you ass!"

Len Lex grinned. Whomsoever Pie might, or might not, have met on the train, there was no doubt that the fellow he had found in Study No. 8, and shifted therefrom, was the new man in the Oakshott Fifth. So far as Pie's friends could see, somebody on the train had pulled his leg with a yarn about coming to Oakshott—why, was rather a mystery, except that Pie was a fellow born to have his leg

pulled, and looked it. And having taken a liking to that leg-puller, Pie had asked the Fifth Form beak to plant the new man in Study No. 8—a fellow he had never seen before, and who was, by his own description, a smoky swab. That was exactly Pie—Pie all over!

There was a step in the passage, as Pie's friends stood gazing at him. A fellow whom three of the Fifth Formers had never seen before appeared in the doorway, a parcel of books under his arm. Pie, however, had seen him—it was the "smoky swab." Pie glared at him, and the other three looked at him curiously and inquiringly.

He gave Pie a scowl.

"Look here——" he began.

"So you've come back here?" said Pie. "Want another smoke, you putrid tick? I don't know why you've brought your books here, but if you bring them into this study, you go out on your neck again, and I'll jolly well shy them after you!"

Len Lex watched the new fellow keenly. Pie's brain was not quick on the uptake, and he had not got it yet; but the other three knew that this must be Tunstall of the Fifth! And if he had started at Oakshott, his first day there, by putting on cigarettes in his study, it looked as if the head-master of Higham had known what he was about when he sacked him.

Detective-Inspector Nixon had seen Tunstall, at Tunstall Hall up in Yorkshire, and the boy had made a favourable impression on him. Len wondered why, for he himself was by no means favourably impressed by this fellow.

The new fellow glanced at the three.

"You belong to this study?" he asked. "Then you'd better tip that fool, if he's a friend of yours, to stop playing the goat. I've been barged out once, and if it happens again, I shall speak to the Form-master."

"You're Tunstall?" asked Len.

"That's my name."

"I've told you," said Pie, "to keep out! You come in here again, and out you go on your neck, same as before!"

"You silly ass!" roared Banks. "You can't keep a man out of his own study! You asked for him to come here, and he's come."

"I didn't!" howled Pie. "It was that chap on the train——"

"That chap on the train, fathead, if there was a chap on the train at all, and you didn't dream it, ass, was pulling your leg, goat, and isn't coming to Oakshott at all, chump!"

"That smoky swab——"

"That smoky swab, if he's a smoky swab, belongs to this study now, and you've done it, and we're jolly well going to bump you for it! Bag him!" hooted Banks.

"I say—— Leggo, you silly asses! I say—— Oh! Ow!" roared Pie.

The new fellow came in and landed his books on the table, with a grinning face. Pie did not oppose his entrance. Pie was wriggling wildly in the hands of his exasperated friends, who were bumping him on the carpet—which, in their opinion, was what he richly deserved. Anyhow, it was what he got!

CHAPTER 6.

Pie Pipes Up!

MR. CHOWNE, master of the Shell at Oakshott School, was taking roll in hall. Chowne was plump, but he was curt and irritable, and he snapped the names off almost as if he were biting them off. "Adsum" had been answered to every name till he came to that of Eric Tunstall, the new fellow in the Fifth Form. Then there was a pause.

The Forms stood ranked in their places, Campion of the Sixth, head boy, standing beside Chowne as he called the roll, his ash under his arm.

Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth, was speaking in an updertone to Olliphant, captain of Oakshott. Otherwise there was silence, save for a buzz or murmur now and then from the mob of the Lower School. The Fifth Form, as became their dignity as seniors, were quiet and sedate, though probably as keen as the juniors to hear the last of Chowne's squeaky voice, and scamper out. But there was a low murmur of whispering in the Fifth when Tunstall failed to answer to his name.

Len Rex glanced round. The Schoolboy Detective had his own reasons for being interested in Tunstall of the Fifth, who had come that term, only a few days ago. Banks and Harvey, and Porrhinge, Len's chums, looked round, too. The new fellow belonged to their study, No. 8.

"He's not here!" whispered Banks.

"He went out just before lock-up," whispered Porrhinge. "I saw him."

The sharp voice of Mr. Chowne came down the hall again, as he repeated the name, in a raised tone of annoyance.

"Tunstall!"

"Adsum!" came back from the ranks of the Fifth.

And Chowne, satisfied, went on calling the names.

Len Lex, Banks, and Harvey concentrated their gaze on Pie Porrhinge. Pie winked at them. Pie, in the cheery kindness of his heart, had chanced it, and answered for the absent Fifth Former. It was fearfully good-natured of Pie, for he loathed Tunstall. But old Pie was all good nature. He would have done his worst enemy a good turn, without stopping to think of risk.

Luckily, Chowne was in haste to get through, and suspected nothing. But they saw the eyes of Camplon of the Sixth turned in their direction. They dreaded to see him speak to Chowne. That particular prefect had

a very keen eye, as wrongdoers at Oakshott knew only too well. To their relief, Camplon said nothing, though they were sure he scented a rat. Chowne squeaked on, and the danger was past.

It was the rule at Oakshott for all the school to keep their places till the last name was called. Roll-call over, they swarmed out. Porrhinge grinned complacently. He had got by with it. Tunstall, when he came meandering in later, would not be walked off to the Head. Pie was as pleased as if he liked Tunstall, instead of loathing him.

In the senior day-room, where the Fifth Form congregated, Pie's friends surrounded him, gazing at him more in sorrow than in anger. They liked Porrhinge — everybody at Oakshott liked old Pie, except Tunstall, the new man, who seemed to like nobody. They liked Pie all the more for having, as he happily fancied, done a good turn to a fellow he disliked, at considerable risk to himself. But they wondered, as they had often wondered before, how any fellow could be such a price-less goat as Porrhinge of the Fifth.

"What's the row?" asked Pie, glancing from face to face. "It's all right for that swab now. Chowne took it like milk!"

"Fathead!" said Banks.

"Well, you can call a fellow names, old Banker, if you like," said Pie warmly. "But I call it decent to see a fellow through a scrape, even a swab like that man Tunstall."

"You think you've seen him through?" asked Len.

"Eh? Yes! I tell you Chowne lapped it like milk."

"And how," asked Len, "is Tunstall going to get in without letting all Oakshott know that he cut roll? If you'd played this potty trick at first or second roll, all right; but what's the good of playing it at lock-up roll, when you know the man is out of gates?"

"Oh!" said Pie, taken aback.

Porringer hadn't thought of that. He had acted, as usual, without thinking. Slowly his jaw dropped, and his face registered dismay.

Tunstall could not possibly have the faintest idea that a friend in need had answered for him, and when he came back, he would ring at the school gates for old Wegg to let him in. The porter, of course, would take his name, to be reported. Whereupon the fat would be in the fire.

"Tunstall's going to be lagged," said Harvey, "and we shall have our beak inquiring who answered for him in hall. Tunstall will get lines, and you'll bend over in the Head's study, Pie."

Pie gave a wriggle, as if in anticipation.

"Jevver hear of such an idiot?" appealed Banks.

"Never!" said Harvey.

Len Lex strolled across to the window—a big casement that looked out on the quad. He gazed out into thickening dusk. He was thinking of Eric Tunstall, coming back late, but more of poor old Pie, who had meant well, and could not help being a goat. There was one chance for both of them. If Tunstall knew, he could get in over a wall, unseen and unsuspected, and the situation would be saved.

Stepping down from the casement was a quick and easy matter, but it was, unfortunately, what the beaks called breaking out after lock-up—an awfully serious matter at Oakshott, as at any other school. But that was what Lex was thinking of. One word to Tunstall before he got in would be enough.

Len paused a moment or two. But if old Pie could run risks for a fellow he loathed, Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew could run risks for a pal he liked. Len pushed the casement open.

"Hallo! What's the game?" asked

Cayley of the Fifth, who had sat down by the window.

"Shut it after me, old bean, and keep mum!" murmured Len. "I'm going to tip that new man, and keep Pie clear, if I can."

He dropped out and vanished. Cayley whistled and shut the window.

CHAPTER 7.

A Hunter of Trouble!

LEN LEX shivered, grunted, and experienced a strong desire to punch the head of Eric Tunstall. There was a cold wind from the Sussex downs, and a clammy mist in the air. Hatless and coatless, just as he had slipped out of the House Len had little protection against either, and he was not enjoying life. Moreover, he had taken it for granted that Tunstall would be along in ten minutes or so; but after half an hour had passed, he still saw nothing of him.

The fellow could not have passed unseen. Len had parked himself in the trees by the roadside, almost opposite the school gates—now shut for the night. From which direction Tunstall came, he was certain to hear him, and see him, before he arrived at the gates. What the dickens was keeping him? Any fellow might be a few minutes late—but no fellow need be half an hour late, and more. Another half-hour, and Len was due for prep in Study No. 8—and he could hardly stay out longer than that, if Tunstall did not come. If he had not been missed already, he would be missed then. But surely the fellow could not mean to cut prep, as well as roll? Not, surely, unless he was deliberately asking for trouble.

So far as Tunstall was concerned, Len would have gone in, and left him to it. But for Pie's sake he hung on, impatiently watching the dusky road.

What was Tunstall up to? Not late back from a walk—he was a slacker of the first water, and little given to walking or any other form of exercise. His chief pleasure seemed to be smoking cigarettes in the study, for which all the fellows in Study No. 8 had booted him in turn. Len fancied that he could guess only too well what Tunstall was up to. The grandson and heir of Sir Gilbert Tunstall had been sacked from Higham School, in Yorkshire, for breaking bounds, betting, and so on. Len knew that, though nobody else at Oakshott knew it.

The Schoolboy Detective's keen ear caught the sound of footsteps on the shadowy road. The footsteps came from the direction of Oakways, near which lay the Peal of Bells, a rather unsavoury inn strictly out of bounds for Oakshott men. Len Lex stepped out from the trees, and looked along the road. It was a schoolboy that was coming, through the deep dusk—lounging along at a leisurely pace, with his hands in his pockets, plainly in no hurry. As he came closer, Len saw that it was Tunstall, and he stepped out into the road to stop him.

"Hold on, Tunstall!" he said quietly.

The new Fifth Former gave a start, and stopped. He peered at Len, and recognised him.

"You—out of gates!" He was a rather good-looking fellow, in his way, but there was a sneering expression on his face that detracted considerably from its good looks. His sneer now was very pronounced. "You—of all people! I thought you were rather a model character, Lex."

Len's eyes gleamed for a moment.

"I've been waiting for you!" he snapped. "I suppose you know you're late for roll, Tunstall?"

"Quite! I can stand the racket!" drawled the other. "No bizney of yours, Lex, that I can see."

"A fellow answered for you in hall, and they've not missed you yet. If you cut in, in time for prep, it's all

right. I can show you a way in. That's why I'm here. We can get in over the wall by the fives court. Come on—there's no time to lose."

Tunstall stared at him blankly. He did not stir. Unpleasant fellow as he was, Len expected him to look pleased at a chance of escaping punishment. But he did not look pleased. He scowled.

"Don't you understand?" asked Len impatiently.

"I've not asked you to meddle, that I know of," answered Tunstall coolly. "Leave me alone, can't you?"

"You ass! Do you want to go up to the Head?"

"No bizney of yours."

"You fool!" breathed Len. "Haven't you any sense? Why, I can smell baccy about you now! Think the Head won't spot it. Do you want to be booted out of Oakshott?"

"I want you to mind your own business, and leave me to take care of mine," retorted Tunstall. "I never asked you to answer for me in hall!"

"Think I'd be ass enough, if you did?" snapped Len. "It was that goat Porrhage sang out for you, and he will get into a fearful row for doing it, if you're spotted."

"The meddling fool! I'm asking no favours of him, or of you, either!" said Tunstall stubbornly. "Go your way, and leave me to go mine."

He brushed past Len Lex, and walked on towards the school gates. Len stood as if rooted to the road. The fellow was going to ring for Wegg to let him in—after the way of safety had been pointed out. It was so puzzling as to be bewildering. Was the fellow going to risk the sack for the sake of mere obstinate ill-nature? If that was what he wanted, he could have it—if Pie had not been involved!

Len stood rooted with astonishment for a moment or two, then he cut after the new Fifth Former at a rapid run, and grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Stop!" he snapped. "You're going to ring at the gate and let old Pie be hauled up for trying to do you a good turn?"

"He should have minded his own business."

"He should!" agreed Len, with bitter scorn. "A cad like you wasn't worth bothering about. But, as it happens, he didn't—and you're not going to land him in a row. You're going in over the wall!"

"I'm not!" said Tunstall savagely. "I'm going to do as I jolly well choose. I'm going to ring to be let in."

He wrenched his shoulder loose, and ran for the gates. Len, panting wrath, shot after him, and grabbed him again. Tunstall, with a snarl of rage, struck him in the face. It was the last straw.

Len hit out. Full on the new fellow's angry, sneering mouth his fist landed, and Tunstall pitched over on his back with a crash.

CHAPTER 8.

Strong Hand Methods!

IT was seldom that Len, cool and calm by nature, lost his temper. But it was in a blaze now.

He disliked this fellow, as all Study No. 8 did; but it was party for his sake, as well as Pie's, that he had taken the risk of breaking out after lock-up. And this was the fellow's thanks. Anything like good-nature or gratitude he did not expect from a sneering, cynical fellow like the new man in the Fifth. But he had expected him to play up, as a matter of course, for his own sake, if for nobody else's. And he was going to play up, if Len could make him.

Tunstall staggered to his feet. He gave the Schoolboy Detective a bitter look—and turned towards the gates again. Len leaped into his way.

"Will you let me pass?" hissed Tunstall.

"No! You're coming in with me, over the wall!" answered Len. "You can come before I thrash you, or after. That's your choice—and if it's scrapping you want, come on."

Tunstall came on. Whatever his motive, he was determined to have his own way. He came on, hitting out fiercely—and Len Lex met him with left and right.

For one minute Tunstall stood up to Len, urged on by savage temper—then the yellow streak in him showed, and he backed off. He dropped his hands and stood panting.

Len followed him up.

"Keep off!" muttered Tunstall. "Keep off, you bully! I've chucked it. Don't touch me!"

"I wouldn't touch you with a barge-pole, if I could help it!" answered Len contemptuously. "You're not nice to touch! But you're coming in with me—"

"I tell you I won't!"

"And I tell you that I'm going to thrash you till you do."

Tunstall backed across the road.

"You rotter! You meddling rotter! I'll shout to the porter—he will hear me from here!"

"Do," said Len—"if you want to be thrashed till you can't crawl on your hands and knees!"

Tunstall did not shout. The gleaming eyes and clenched fists were only a foot from him, and he dared not. Only too clearly, Lex was going to be as good as his word.

The bad hat of Higham, now the bad hat of Oakshott, stood panting and gasping for breath. Len waited a few moments, and then grasped his arm.

"Are you coming?"

"You can let go my arm! I'll come!"

"I'd trust you as soon as I'd trust a fox! Come."

With a grip on a weedy arm that

was like a steel vice, Len Lex led the new Fifth Former up the road, turned into the lane that led by the Oakshott fives court, and stopped where a low wall, in the deep shadow of one of the ancient oaks for which the school was famous, offered an easy climb.

Tunstall, with his free hand, mopped his nose with a handkerchief. That handkerchief was deeply dyed with crimson. Brief as the combat had been, he had collected a good many damages.

"We get in here!" snapped Len.

"You go first—"

"Shut that! Get in."

Tunstall gritted his teeth and clambered up. Len clambered by his side, with a wary eye on him, ready to grab him if he tried to drop back. As he fully expected, Tunstall did try—only to be grabbed by the collar. After which Len dragged him, without ceremony, headlong over the wall, and they dropped within together.

"Let go!" Tunstall hissed shrilly. "You rotter! I'll yell for a prefect—"

"The prefect will have to carry you in, if you do!" said Len. "You're not going to make a sound till we're inside the House. You can yell as loud as you like then—and if you give me any lip I'll give you something to yell for. Now shut up!"

Breathing rage, the new man was led away in silence, Len's grip on his arm again. In the quad, Len suddenly dragged him behind a tree as two figures looked up in the glimmer of lighted windows. Bullivant, the games master, and the master of the Fifth paced by unseeing. Len heard the fellow at his side catch his breath, and read his thoughts; he was thinking of drawing the attention of the masters. Len's grip closed on the imprisoned arm till the bones almost cracked—and Tunstall was silent.

Voices and footsteps died away as

the two masters walked on. A couple of minutes later, Len and Tunstall were under the window of the senior day-room. The casement was partly open, and Harvey was peering out anxiously. He gave a gasp of relief at the sight of the two dim figures outside.

"Douse that gilm, Banker!" he called.

The light was shut off suddenly. Surprised and protesting voices were heard all over the room. The light was turned on again in a few moments—but in those few moments Len had clambered in, dragging Tunstall after him, and Harvey had shut the window.

"Cayley told me," said Harvey. "I've been watching! You're back none too soon for prep." He stared at Tunstall's scowling face and crimsoned nose. "You two been scrapping?"

"Sort of!" admitted Len.

"I say, this is all right!" chuckled Pie, grinning at them. "Right as rain now! I say, Tunstall, it's all serene—I answered for you at roll, and nobody knows—"

"You meddling fool!"

"Eh? What?" ejaculated the astonished Pie.

Tunstall tramped across the room and went out at the door, leaving Pie staring after him blankly!

CHAPTER 9.

A Hot Chase!

"LOOK out!" roared Harvey. Porringe did not look out. He was holding his bicycle in the middle of Trant Lane, his eyes fixed on the back tyre. The tyre was as flat as a pancake. Its state annoyed Pie, and seemed to surprise him. He had mended a puncture in that tyre just before starting out with his friends for a spin, and was surprised to find the tyre quite flat again, only three or four miles from Oakshott. His

friends were not surprised, as Pie had mended the puncture!

Len, Harvey, and Banks had dismounted to wait, and had leaned their machines against the roadside fence. But Pie stood in the middle of the road with his deflated jigger—and forgot that the road was not wholly reserved for the use of Oakshott cyclists. A little, green Austin came along from Trant—hence Harvey's roar, which Pie did not heed.

"Blow!" said Pie. "That rotten puncture—it's broken out again! I say—"

Len Lex and Harvey interrupted him. Len grasped the bike and swung it to the roadside. Harvey grasped Pie and pitched him over on the grassy bank beside the road. These prompt proceedings, though annoying to Pie, left the road clear for the car that came buzzing along.

Pie sat on the grass and spluttered. His friends smiled down at him. The little Austin glided by. Pie, sitting on the bank, faced it as it passed; the other three, looking at Pie, had their backs to it. As his eyes fell on the man who drove it—a man with a beaky nose—Pie gave a sudden bound.

"Him!" he ejaculated.

The car glided on. The driver had not even glanced at the group of schoolboys at the roadside. He drove on towards Greenwood, unheeding. Pie scrambled to his feet, staring in wild excitement after it.

"It's him!" he gasped.

"Him? Who, fathead?" asked Banks. The three looked round at the car. But they had only a back view of it, and could not see the man who drove. Pie had seen him, and had apparently recognised him—a hostile recognition.

"That rotter!" gasped Pie. "That tick! That beaky blighter— By gum, I'll smash him!"

Pie broke off. He made a stride at his bike, remembered its condition,

turned to the other bikes, and grabbed the nearest. It was Harvey's. Pie whirled it into the road, threw a leg over the saddle, and shot away after the Austin.

"Bring that bike back!" shrieked Harvey.

Pie did not heed. Grinding at the pedals, he shot in pursuit of the green Austin.

"Is he potty?" gasped Banks.

"Is he ever anything else?" sighed Len. "After him!"

Len and Banks rushed for their machines, mounted in hot haste, and shot after Porringe. Harvey was left with Pie's deflated machine, spluttering with wrath.

The green Austin was going at a good speed, though not all out. Behind it, about fifty yards, flew Pie in pursuit. About the same distance behind Pie, Len Lex and Banks ground at their pedals.

Foot by foot, Porringe overhauled the car. His pursuers kept pace, but that was all they could do. A mile flew under the flashing wheels. Then there came a rise in the road, up the hill towards Greenwood. The car rose to it without slackening—but it was a different matter with a push-bike. Pie began to lose the ground he had gained. Len, putting on a spurt, shot ahead of Banks and came level with Pie, labouring up the hill.

"You potty ass!" gasped Len. "Chuck it! What are you up to? Stop!"

"It's him!" panted Pie.

"Who?" yelled Len.

"Him!"

"Him" — whoever "him" was—seemed to be the object of Pie's bitterest hostility. Pie's teeth were set, his eyes gleaming. He laboured at the pedals, going all out. Len could only have stopped him by grabbing at him, with disaster to both. He rode level, prepared, at all events, to butt in

if Pie did succeed in getting at the man in the car.

Half a mile on, the road levelled again, and Pie picked up speed. The Austin was now a considerable distance ahead, and only a fellow with a very hopeful nature could have fancied that there was a chance of running it down. Pie, undaunted, flew on; Len flew on at his side. In the rear, Banks came pedalling after them. The dust flew from the rapid wheels. Pie was red, spluttering for breath. He put every ounce into it, his long legs going like machinery. But he was not gaining an inch now.

There came a dip in the road, and the Oakshott fellows free-wheeled down it, getting a much-needed breather, and relief for their legs. Down they went at a dizzy speed. Len yelled again:

"Will you chuck it, you fathead? What are you up to?"

"It's him!" Pie, having recovered a little breath, expended it in speech. "That tick! That cheeky rotter! Pitched my bag out of the train first day of term—made me lose the train! I told you fellows! I'll smash him—I said I would! And I jolly well will!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Len.

He understood now. He had forgotten Pie's weird adventures on the first day of term. So had Pie—till the sight of the man in the green Austin recalled them. That motorist, it seemed, was the man with the beaky nose, who for some unaccountable and inexplicable reason had caused Pie to lose his train coming back to school after the holidays. Pie had hardly expected ever to see the man again. Now, unexpectedly, he had seen him. The smashing process was the next item on the programme, if Pie could get at his enemy.

At the end of the dip was another rise, over the downs to Greenwood. The Austin took it like a bird. Not so the push-bikes. It was little more

than a green speck in a cloud of dust far up the hill. Pie, apparently still hopeful, slogged on.

"You idiot!" hissed Len. "Stop! We've left old Harvey about four miles back! Will you chuck it, you fathead?"

Pie slogged on, without answering. It was a rut in the road that caused Pie to chuck it—suddenly! Len jammed on his brakes and jumped down as Porringe sat in the road beside a clanging jigger.

"Oh!" gasped Pie. "Ow!"

Banks arrived, and dismounted. He glared at Pie as if he could have eaten him.

"You mad ass!" he gasped.

"He thinks that motorist was the man who lost him his train, first day of term!" said Len.

"The goat! Most likely he wasn't! If he was, does the mad ass think he can haul a man off a car and punch him?"

"Yes," gasped Pie, "I jolly well do! I'm going to!" He staggered up and grabbed the bike. "He's heading for Greenwood, and I dare say I shall pick him up there!"

Len and Banks exchanged glances. This enterprise, which seemed attractive to Pie, seemed to his friends one to be nipped in the bud.

"Harvey's waiting, miles back——" said Len.

"Never mind Harvey now!"

But Len and Banks did mind Harvey! Likewise, they were quite determined that Pie was not going to amuse himself by punching a motorist.

"Will you come back?" demanded Banks.

"No," said Pie. "I won't!"

Argument, it was clear, was futile. Only action was useful—action was prompt and effective. Len Lex twirled Porringe away from the bike and sat him down on the spot from which he

had just risen. Pie, surprised and exasperated, sat and gasped. By the time he was on his feet again Len and Banks were riding down the hill, Len taking the disengaged bike with him. Banks, having a hand free, waved farewell to Pie.

"Here, I say! Bring me back that bike!" yelled Pie.

He started to run in pursuit. Pie, as a pursuer, had little luck; but he was a stickler. Not till the cyclists were out of sight did he sit down by the roadside for the rest he sorely needed.

CHAPTER 10.

Six of the Best!

THE door of Study No. 8 shook and groaned as Pie banged on it, but it did not open. Banging on a locked door might be a relief to the feelings, but did not, of course, produce any effect on the lock.

Pie, with flaming face, banged and banged again. His comrades smiled—but Pie was far from smiling. He was in an extremely bad temper. It had been a day of disaster. First, that rotten puncture had let him down, then that offensive tick with the beaky nose had escaped his just wrath, then he had had to walk miles and miles, rejoicing his friends at last in a mood to handle them even more severely than he had desired to handle the man in the Austin. Only the fact that they had mended his puncture while they waited for him averted vengeance. The spin had had to be cut very short, and Pie came in very cross, to find the door of his study locked against him.

Tunstall was in the study, and Pie could guess why he had the door locked—the outsider was smoking there! Called on to let the just owners of the study into the same, Tunstall did not unlock the door, and did not even take the trouble to answer.

Bang! Bang! Bang! went Pie's

infuriated fist on the panels. It was past tea-time, and most of the Fifth were in their studies. Most of them looked out of their doorways at that terrific banging from Study No. 8. A dozen voices inquired what the row was about.

"That swab!" hissed Pie. "Keeping a man out of his study while he smokes! Jevver hear of such neck? I'll mop him up! I'll spificate him!"

Bang, bang, bang, bang! Harvey and Banks joined in the pounding on the door.

Len Lex stood watching them, more puzzled than angry.

The din was tremendous, and obviously could not go on much longer without drawing either a master or a prefect to the Fifth Form studies. Really, it looked as if that was what Tunstall wanted. But how could he want it? The study reeked with smoke—and he would have to open the door at the voice of authority. A master barging in would march him off straight to the Head. A prefect would either march him off to the Head or give him a whopping. In either case, the fellow was booked for bad trouble. If it was imaginable that a fellow wanted to be sacked, Tunstall was heading for exactly that!

Bang, bang, bang! Thump, thump! Kick! Bang! Pie, wildly excited, seemed bent on hacking a way through the thick oak. Harvey and Banks thumped, while Pie kicked. Strong as the oak door was, it groaned and creaked under the combined assault. The fellow within paid no heed. He knew—he must have known—that the din could not pass unheeded. He could not fail to know what the outcome would be. What was his game? Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew was very keen, but he was not keen enough to penetrate this puzzle.

"Cave!" called out Cayley from his door. "Here comes a pre!"

Campion came along the passage

with a knitted brow. The head boy of Oakshott was wrathful.

"Stop that row!" he roared. "What the dickens do you think you're up to? Do you know you can be heard all over the House? Gone mad, or what?"

The battering at the study door ceased. Campion arrived on the spot, glaring at the four. He had his ash under his arm. It was uncommon for a prefect to whop a Fifth Form senior. Nevertheless, Campion looked extremely inclined to do so at this moment.

Smoky swab as Tunstall was, nobody wanted to hand him over to the tender mercies of a prefect. But the fat was in the fire now. As none of the four answered, Campion slipped the ash down into his hand. Then, no doubt realising that the Fifth Formers had not been banging on the door simply for amusement, he turned the door-handle and divined the trouble.

"What's the door locked for?" he snapped.

No answer. Then the prefect gave a sniff. A scent from the locked study smote him. With a very grim face, he tapped on the door.

"You in there, Tunstall? Open this door!"

A Sixth Form prefect was not to be denied. The door opened, revealing Tunstall, standing in an atmosphere thick with cigarette smoke, and with a half-smoked cigarette between thumb and finger. Campion stared at him dumbfounded. Pie & Co. and a dozen Fifth Form men stared at him. There were other fellows at Oakshott who disregarded rules. But cool impudence like this was the limit. There was a moment of deep, tense silence. Then the head prefect spoke quietly:

"You locked these fellows out of their study while you smoked here?"

Tunstall made no answer to that. He dropped the cigarette from his fingers and put his foot on it. Every fellow there had seen it, however.

Campion of the Sixth stepped into the study. The new fellow moved back with a sullen face. Pie and his friends stepped in after Campion. The prefect's presence saved Tunstall from what was due to him. Pie and Banks and Harvey gave him grim looks. Len watched him curiously. He could not understand this—and the Schoolboy Detective was not used to being up against a problem he could not solve. Tunstall's face was sullen, his eyes furtive; he was uneasy and scared. Yet he had asked for this—deliberately asked for it. Why?

"You rotter!" Campion spoke in quiet, measured tones. "A silly fag might put on a cigarette, but this——" He glanced round the study. It was not a matter of one cigarette, or of two or three. A dozen stumps lay on the fender, with as many burnt matches. The room was in a haze. The fellow had sat and smoked and smoked till he must have smoked himself almost sick. Campion was angry and contemptuous; but he was as much surprised as either. This was a new thing in his experience.

"If you weren't new here, I'd take you straight to the Head!" he said, after a pause.

"I'm ready to go to the Head!" muttered Tunstall.

Len's gaze, fixed on his furtive face, grew more concentrated. Any other fellow thus caught would have been glad to get through with six from a prefect's ash. From the headmaster he had something much more severe to expect. Yet Tunstall preferred to go to the Head. What, in the name of wonder, was the fellow's game? Eric Tunstall, sacked from Higham, had barely scraped through at home by protesting his innocence. Sacked from Oakshott after that, he was booked for disinheritance. And he was heading for the sack about as fast as a fellow could!

Campion was swishing his ash. He intended to deal with this matter himself; he did not want to take a fellow

who was only a few days at Oakshott to Dr. Osborne.

"Shove that chair over here, Porringe!" he said. "Thanks! Tunstall, bend over that chair!"

"Look here——"

"I don't usually speak twice!" said the head boy.

"I'd rather go to the Head!"

"You silly ass!" Cayley spoke from the passage. "The Beak would take the hide off you if he knew this. Might sack you, you dummy!"

Len, watching, saw the momentary glint that came into Tunstall's eyes. A fellow could not want to be sacked—especially a fellow who was going to be disinherited if he came a second mucker. Why was this fellow asking for what he could not possibly want?

Campion pointed to the chair with his cane.

"If you'd been a bit longer at Oakshott, Tunstall, you wouldn't be keen on going up to the Head," he said. "I suppose you don't understand what it means. Anyway, I've told you what I'm going to do. Now bend over!"

"I've said that I'd rather——"

"It's not what you'd rather, but what I'd rather! Bend over that chair this minute!" roared Campion.

Slowly, sullenly, reluctantly, the new fellow bent over the chair. Up went the ash, and it came down, laid on with the scientific precision that came of long practice. The "whop" sounded through the study like the crack of a rifle. It was followed by a fearful howl from the unlucky recipient. He wriggled and howled and squirmed.

The Fifth Formers looking on exchanged glances of contempt. The fellow had asked for it, begged for it, but he had not the nerve to stand for it. A fag of the Third would have been ashamed to make such a fuss over a licking. A fellow who was wildly reckless, and at the same time wanting in courage, was rather a phenomenon,

Howling, wriggling, and squirming did not save him. Six whops came in steady succession. Campion of the Sixth put his beef into it. By the time he had finished there was little doubt that Tunstall was sorry that he had asked for it.

"That's that!" remarked Campion, tucking his ash under his arm again. "Next time, look out for a real whopping. Better not have any next time."

He walked out of Study No. 8, leaving Tunstall wriggling and gasping. Even Pie thought that he had had enough, and raised no hand as the new fellow wriggled out of the study. The chums of Study No. 8 did not have his company at tea, for which they were duly thankful.

Three of them forgot him. But Len Lex was thinking of him, and he was asking himself the question, to which there seemed to be no answer—why did Sir Gilbert Tunstall's grandson want to be sacked from Oakshott School?

CHAPTER 11.

The House in the Wood!

"I KNOW!" said Pie.

Porringe of the Fifth always knew!

"Oh, rot!" said Harvey.

"You jolly well know what a blithering ass you are, Pie," said Banks. "Let's go by the road."

Len Lex, the Schoolboy Detective, smiled and said nothing.

The chums of Study No. 8 were in rather a scrape. They were at least seven miles from Oakshott School, and it was exactly one hour to calling-over. They were all sturdy fellows and good walkers, but they were not going to cover seven miles in an hour, especially as they had already done a good deal of walking that afternoon.

Following the road meant seven miles and a row when they arrived late

at the school. A short cut across Greenwood Down would save half the distance, and save their bacon—if anybody knew that short cut. Porrhinge declared that he did. His friends doubted it.

It was all Pie's fault, in the first place. Having spent the afternoon in Greenwood, they could have gone back by train. But Pie suggested catching a certain motor-bus at a certain corner, and they walked three miles out of Greenwood to catch it. No motor-bus was, however, to be caught, or even spotted on the horizon. No doubt Pie had mistaken the time that it was scheduled to pass that corner. So they walked on, as there was nothing else to be done, till Pie stopped at a track that led off from the road, over the rugged, grassy downs. This, Pie declared, was a short cut, which would land them in the lane between Oakways village and Oakshott school.

"We've passed half a dozen tracks like this," said Banks. "I don't see how you know which from which."

"Well, I do!" said Pie. "Come on!"

"What do you say, Lex?" asked Harvey.

"Might as well," answered Len. "We shall be late, anyhow. There's a sporting chance that Pie knows what he's talking about."

"I know this cut," said Porrhinge, "like the back of my hand. As soon as we get over that hill, we shall see the flagstaff of Oakshott in the distance. Perhaps you'll believe me then."

"Yes—then!" grunted Banks. "We'll jolly well scrag you, Pie, if you lead us a dance over the downs."

Porrhinge had already turned off the road. His friends followed him, hoping for the best. The grassy downs rose before them. Here and there cattle could be seen, but there was no sign of a human habitation. It was as lonely a stretch of country as any in Sussex, just the kind of place, as Pie's friends bitterly reflected, that Pie would choose for losing his way! Pie, however,

marched on with confidence, like a fellow who knew.

The track was, at least, clearly marked. It was a rugged footpath, obviously never intended for vehicles of any sort. But Len Lex noted that there were tyre tracks in the dry mud and crushed grass. A car had passed that way some time or other. The driver must have found it an extremely bumpy and jolly route.

"You can see it's all right," said Pie. "Farm-carts come this way."

"How do you make that out?" asked Len. He had very keen eyes, but he could discern no trace whatever of a farm-cart.

"Look!" Pie smiled and pointed to the track. "You don't use your eyes, old fellow. Can't you see the wheel-marks?"

"Oh, my hat!" chuckled Len. "My dear ass, those marks were made by a motor-car's tyres."

"Rot!" said Porrhinge. "As if a car would come this way!"

At the beginning, the path had seemed to lead in the direction of distant Oakshott. Now it was winding away into illimitable space. A small belt of woodland loomed up as they tramped round the hill.

"I don't seem to remember that wood," remarked Porrhinge.

His friends were not surprised to hear it.

"But it's all right!" added Pie, perhaps with a trifle less confidence than before. "Once we're past that, you'll see."

They reached the little wood. The track ran into it. A hundred yards more, and a building, hitherto hidden by the trees, dawned on them. The track ran up to a gate—and ended there! Further progress was barred by the building and the fenced garden that surrounded it.

Porrhinge came to a halt, and gazed at the lonely building with feelings too deep for words. His friends gazed at Pie, also with feelings too deep for words.

"Well," said Pie, "this beats it! I'd have sworn this was the way! I know that short cut like the back of my hand——"

"This," remarked Len, "looks as if you do!"

They moved on to the gate and leaned on it.

"Look here, we might get a lift," said Pie. "They've got a cart or something—we saw the wheel-marks, and——"

"A car!" said Len.

"Well, whatever it is, the man might give us a lift in it, for a tip," said Pie. "Might turn out jolly lucky we got here, after all."

Porrige had a hopeful nature.

Len Lex scanned the little building. It was an old, one-story cottage, covered with thick ivy. A thin spiral of smoke rose from a chimney-pot. That looked as if the occupant was at home. A locked shed, at a short distance from the house, was probably used as a garage, for there was no doubt that there was a car about the place. It was possible that, if the occupant of the house in the wood was amenable to tips, he might run the Oakshott fellows to the school in his car. It was a happy thought.

"Let's ask, anyhow," said Pie.

"No harm in asking," agreed Len.

He pushed at the gate and found that it was locked. Glancing at it, he saw that the lock was almost new.

"That's to keep out tramps," remarked Pie. "Don't blame him, in a lonely place like this. But we're not tramps, and I dare say he won't mind if we get over. We've got to go up to the house."

Pie vaulted over the gate. He had hardly taken three steps when the front door flew open. Evidently the Oakshott seniors had been observed from a window. A man came quickly out. The look on his face dashed their hopes of getting a lift. He was a well-dressed man, and not bad-looking, except for a

nose that curved rather like a vulture's beak, his most prominent feature. His eyes gleamed with anger as he came quickly down the garden path to meet Pie.

"What do you want here?" he snapped. "Who the dickens are you? How dare you trespass here? Get out at once, or——"

What happened next took Len, Banks, and Harvey utterly by surprise. Without waiting for the man to finish, Porrige made a sudden rush at him, hitting out right and left.

"Got you, have I?" roared Pie. And he punched and punched, with terrific energy.

CHAPTER 12.

On the Warpath!

THE three at the gate stood petrified. They stared at that sudden, unexpected, amazing scene, like fellows in a dream. The man from the house had looked annoyed, ill-tempered, and they would not have been very much surprised had he pushed Pie out. But they were simply astounded to see Pie take the offensive.

"He's mad!" stuttered Banks, at last. "For goodness' sake, collar him!"

The three scrambled over the gate.

The man of the house was probably as surprised as the Oakshott fellows by Pie's sudden outbreak of fury. But he was as enraged as surprised, and he was pitching into Pie with the greatest energy.

Pie was not a whale on boxing. He used his fists rather like flails. But he had a hefty punch and unlimited pluck. The man was fast getting the upper hand when Len and Banks and Harvey rushed to intervene.

Pie was being driven back under a shower of savage punches, and a terrific jolt on the chin sent him spinning into the arms of his friends. Harvey caught him and gave him sup-

port, and Len and Banks stepped between him and the enraged man.

"Hold on!" gasped Banks. "For goodness' sake——"

"Chuck it!" gasped Len.

The man with the beaky nose seemed disposed to charge the lot of them, but perhaps he realised, angry as he was, that that was too large an order. He stopped, and stood panting, a trickle of red running from his beaky nose.

"You young hooligans!" he panted. "I will have you given into custody!"

He had cause to be angry; the Oakshott fellows had to admit that. They could not begin to understand what Pie meant by it.

"Awfully sorry, sir!" gasped Banks.

"Shut up, Banker!" roared Pie. "Who's sorry, you ass? Harvey, leggo! Do you hear me, you fathead? I've not finished with him yet!"

"You have!" said Harvey, tightening his grip. "You mad ass, what do you mean by it?"

"I'll hack you if you don't leggo!" roared Pie. "It's him! Can't you understand, you dummies? It's him!"

"Who?" shrieked Banks.

"Him!" yelled Pie.

"Get off my premises!" shouted the man with the beak.

"Wait till I get at you, you swab!" roared Pie, struggling in Harvey's grip. "I'll teach you to chuck a fellow's bag out of a train and make him lose his train! I'll teach you!"

"Oh!" gasped Len.

They understood now. This man, evidently, was the one who had played that extraordinary trick on Porringe on the first day of term. They remembered that Pie had told them that he was a swab with a vulture's beak.

"That man!" exclaimed Banks.

"You—you ass! I'm going to wallop him!" roared Pie. "He hasn't had enough yet! Will you let me get at him, you dummies?"

The man seemed to be struck by Pie's words. Evidently he had not, till then, recognised Porringe as the fellow he had met on the railway.

"You! You young fool!" he muttered. He made a movement, and Len stood like a rock in his path. The Schoolboy Detective was a rather more formidable opponent than Pie.

"Hold on!" said Len quietly. "If you're the man who played that rotten trick on the railway, you've only got what you asked for. You made that chap lose his train and get to the school late—and I'd like to know what you did it for, too."

"The young fool forced himself into my carriage—I turned him out!" snarled the man with the vulture nose. "I know now that you are Oakshott boys. If you do not leave my premises instantly, I shall report this outrage to your headmaster."

With that the man turned and went back into the house. At the sight of his enemy escaping, Pie gave a roar of wrath and struggled afresh. Harvey and Banks found it quite hard to hold him. However, he was held, and the man went in, slammed the door, and was lost to view.

"Let's get out of this, for the love of Mike!" groaned Banks. "Looks like getting a lift there—I don't think!"

"A good hour late for roll, and a complaint going to the Head!" said Harvey. "Pie, you priceless idiot——"

"Oh, come on!" said Len.

Pie was released, and the three turned to the gate. Not so Pie! He shot up the path and reached the door. There was an iron knocker on the door. Pie proceeded to handle it with vigour.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Len.

They rushed after Pie, grabbed him, and by main force dragged him away from the door.

"Bump him!" hissed Harvey.

Porringe sat down on the gravel, hard, and roared.

"Will you chuck it now?" howled Banks.

"No!" gasped Pie. "I won't! I'm going to smash him! I'm going to knock that beak of his right through the back of his cheeky head! You know what he did? Barged me out of my train, coming back to Oakshott. Chap in the carriage I wanted to see again—and that swab whizzed me out before I could find out what the chap's name was!"

"Blow the chap in the carriage! Some spoofing ass—he told you he was coming to Oakshott, and he never came. Stop him!"

Pie bounced up. His friends barred him from the door. Pie rushed round the building. They cut after him.

Had Porrhinge found a window open, no doubt he would have performed a nose-dive and landed inside before he could be grabbed again. But there was no open window. There was not even a window available to break—if Pie had thought of going to that length—for every window was covered by a thick wooden shutter, locked on the inside. There were only four windows—two at the front and two at the back. Every one was strongly shuttered.

The dweller in that lonely house seemed to take ample precautions for safety. So far as the Oakshott fellows could see or hear, he was the only person there. There was a back door, but it was bolted. Porrhinge raced right round the house—his pals on his track. They reached the front of the house again, and Pie, in despair of finding an entrance, restarted with the knocker. Bang, bang! Before a third bang could wake the echoes, his friends had grabbed him. This time they did not let go.

No doubt Pie had cause to be wild. But this, in the opinion of his friends, was going altogether too far. The man in the house did not emerge again, neither was a word heard from him. But the Oakshott fellows had not forgotten his threat to complain to their

headmaster. What Dr. Osborne would say—and do—when he received that complaint, Pie did not think; but his friends did. Grasping Pie, they propelled him down the path to the gate, and dropped him, with a bump, outside.

Pie was up like a jack-in-the-box. But they were over the gate after him in a twinkling, grabbing him again.

"Come on!" said Len.

"I won't!" roared Pie.

"I think you will!"

Pie did. Len and Banks held his arms. Harvey planted his boot on Pie's trousers. Thus urged, Pie went. He went objecting, but he went. Leaving the house in the wood behind, the Oakshott fellows tramped back to the road.

It was a weary tramp, and tempers were sore when they reached the road—with seven miles yet in front of them. Even Pie, by that time, was beginning to think that it might be as well, after all, to head for Oakshott. Released by his pals, he trudged on with them, with a frowning brow. His friends had only one solace—the prospect of slaughtering Pie when they got in. Possibly Pie's life was saved by the happy circumstance that they picked up a lift in a farmer's cart for the last four miles.

CHAPTER 12.

A Sudden Shock!

THERE was Livy in Fifth Form prep that evening, and Titus Livius was one of those classical sportsmen who need close attention. But Study No. 8 were not giving him much.

The chums were tired out, and had a hundred lines from their Form-master for cutting roll; and they anticipated—not with pleasure—a call before the Head on the morrow, when he received a complaint from the man with the beaky nose. That the complaint would come, they had not the slightest doubt. Goodness only knew what view Dr. Osborne would take of the affair, but

one thing seemed certain—that he would not view Pie's goings-on with approval! That was a safe bet!

And Pie, so far from being in a repentant mood, not only slanged his loyal comrades, but announced his intention of looking for that nose-bleeder again on the very next half-holiday. Argument was going on in Study No. 8 when Tunstall loafed sullenly in. The four sat round the study table, across which flew uncomplimentary remarks, to and fro, like a shuttle in badminton. Tunstall, coming in, interrupted the game, as it were, and they all glared at him. There were other fellows at Oakshott who were disliked, but no fellow so thoroughly disliked as this new man was in his own study.

Conversation—or rather, slanging—lagged after Tunstall came in. But Pie, rubbing his nose, which was damaged, was thus reminded of his grievance, and restarted after the interval.

"That cheeky rotter——" he said.

"Oh, shut up, old man!" groaned Len.

"If you want me to buzz this ink-pot——" hissed Banks.

Tunstall glanced round with a sneering grin. Trouble in that usually chummy and happy circle seemed to please him.

"Look at my nose!" said Pie. "He punched it!"

"Didn't you punch his?" hooted Harvey.

"Ycs, and I'm jolly well going to punch it again!" said Pie. "You men can back me up, or not, just as you please; but next half-holiday I'm going to that house in the wood on Greenwood Down, and—— What the thump is the matter with you, you silly swab?" Pie broke off, glaring at Tunstall.

The new fellow had jumped—or, rather, bounded—with such a sudden start that he shook the table. Banks gave a howl as blots dropped from his

pen. Harvey, dipping for ink, missed the inkpot and jabbed the table with his nib. All four stared, or rather glared at Tunstall. They had not supposed, or dreamed, that their talk had any interest for him; and now they could see that it had, they did not know why. Tunstall's face had gone as white as chalk, and his eyes seemed to pop at Porrhage. The Schoolboy Detective's keen eyes read fear, startled terror, in his look.

"You're going—where?" exclaimed Tunstall. "What—what did you say?"

"I wasn't speaking to you!" yapped Pie. "I don't want to speak to you. Mind your own business."

"You said——"

"Never mind what I said. I never said it to you. Shut up."

"You know the place Porrhage was speaking of, Tunstall?" asked Len Lex. "You know the man there?"

Tunstall looked round at him. He was still white and startled, and his effort to pull himself together was visible. What was the matter with him was a puzzle in which Banks, Harvey, and Porrhage were not interested. Len Lex was interested—keenly.

"No," Tunstall stammered. "I'm new here—I haven't been about much——"

"Except to the pub down at Oakways!" put in Harvey. "You've learned your way in and out of the Peel of Bells."

"No bizney of yours." Tunstall was recovering himself now. "I—I thought Greenwood Down was out of bounds—so I was—was surprised when Porrhage said——"

Harvey gave him a look.

"I don't know why you're telling lies, Tunstall," he said, "but I know you are! Shut up!"

Tunstall gave him a venomous look. But he shut up. Prep was resumed, but the new Fifth Former was even more neglectful of it than usual, and his sallow face remained troubled and clouded.

Len knew—most of the Fifth knew—that the new man had already made disreputable acquaintances outside the school. Was the vulture-nosed man at the house in the wood one of them? It seemed unlikely, but that Tunstall knew the house in the wood, distant as it was, and new as he was at Oakshott, was plain.

Detective-Inspector Nixon had asked his nephew to keep an eye on the fellow who had been sacked from Higham, and who was expected to do better at his new school. But, so far, the School-boy Detective had only found him to be a puzzle to which there seemed to be no answer.

CHAPTER 14.

"I'm jolly well going!"

CAMPION of the Sixth, head boy of Oakshott School, grinned. He was coming up the gravel path outside the bicycle-house at Oakshott. The door of that building was wide open. From the interior, voices could be heard in tones of excited argument. There were four voices, all speaking at once; but loudest of all was that of Porringer, the Goat of the Fifth. Pie was fairly shouting:

"I'm going! See? You swabs can come if you like, or you can stick here and let me down! I don't care! I'm going!"

"You silly ass!" came Len Lex's quiet voice.

"You goat!" That was a roar from Harvey.

"You priceless idiot!" A yell from Banks of the Fifth.

"You can call a fellow names!" Pie was bawling. "I'm going! I told that nosey tick I'd punch him if I came across him again! Well, I've come across him again. I'm going over to that house on Greenwood Down——"

"You're not!" Three voices hooted in unison.

"I jolly well am! I don't care if he comes up to the Head! Let him, if he likes! I'm going over——"

Campion stepped into the doorway, a grin on his face, his official ash under his arm. Porringer stopped in mid-bawl, as it were. Even the Goat of the Fifth realised that an expedition the object of which was to punch a man's face had better be kept from the knowledge of prefects!

"You men seem to be arguing!"

Len Lex, the schoolboy detective, was looking very curiously at Campion. He could see, what did not occur to his friends, that the head boy had not barged in by chance. Campion had come there specially. From which Len—Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew—deduced, correctly, that Campion knew what was on, and had come there to stop it. Somebody who knew of Pie's warlike stunt had put the head boy wise.

"These chaps," said Pie, "keep on jawing! They're too jolly slack to bike as far as Greenwood—that's what's the matter with them. See you later, you men!"

Pie grasped his bike and lifted it from the stand. Hitherto, his three friends had prevented that action. In the presence of a prefect they did not intervene.

"Hold on!" said Campion. "Where are you going, Porringer?"

"Spin over to Greenwood."

"Seeing anybody there?"

Porringer hesitated. Obviously, he could not tell the head boy that he was biking over to Greenwood to seek out a man and punch his face!

"Well?" said Campion grimly.

"Well, a chap might see a chap," stammered Pie.

"Quite!" agreed Campion. "You fellows were late for roll yesterday. You came in with a prize nose, Porringer, and you've still got it. You had a scrap with somebody yesterday round about

Greenwood, and you're going over to-day for some more of the same—what?"

Pie breathed hard.

"I suppose a man can go out on his bike, after class, if he likes, Campion!"

"A man can," assented the prefect, "but not to hunt for trouble. You're gated, Porrhinge!"

Harvey and Banks grinned. Argument and persuasion were wasted on Pie. But gating was an argument that he could not disregard. Gated, he could not visit the house in the wood on Greenwood Down and punch the face of the dweller therein. Which was a great relief to Pie's friends.

"I—I—I say, look here, Campion," exclaimed the dismayed Pie, as the head boy was turning away, "I don't know how you got on to this, but—but I'll explain. I found a vulture-nosed rotter over at Greenwood yesterday who played me a dirty trick first day of term—slung my bag out on to a platform, and when I tried to get back into the train after rescuing my bag, the rotter pushed me over and made me miss the train.

"Well, I found him over at Greenwood yesterday. These asses dragged me back to school before I could punch his head, so I'm going over to-day to do it!"

"Oakshott seniors," said Campion, "are not allowed to go out hunting for trouble, and punching people's faces. I'm glad I've got on to this. If you punched the man's face, and he brought it here to show the Head, it would mean a flogging. You're gated!"

Campion walked away. Pie stood holding his bike and glaring after the departing prefect. He looked round at his friends.

"How did Campion get on to this?" he growled. "Some swab must have told him! Some rotten sneak! Well, I'm going, all the same!"

Porrhinge wheeled his bike to the door. Len Lex, Banks, and Harvey exchanged

a look, and hurled themselves at their chum.

Len hooked away the bike and swung it back to the stand. Harvey and Banks grabbed Pie, and hooked him away from the bike. Pie resisted fiercely.

"Lend a hand here, Lex!" gasped Banks.

Len lent a hand. Porrhinge still resisted, but the three of them were rather too much for him. They walked him out of the bike-shed. He still surged and heaved, but he went. There was no warlike expedition for Porrhinge of the Fifth that afternoon.

CHAPTER 15.

Tunstall's Motive!

"LEN, old son, you're growing very dense!"

Len Lex made that remark to himself, angrily and discontentedly. There was a furrow in the brow of the school-boy detective as he stood, hands in his pockets, apparently interested in nothing in particular, but with a keen eye taking in Tunstall of the Fifth.

Tunstall, the new fellow at Oakshott, was loafing by an open doorway at a little distance. That door gave access from the quad to the senior day-room, which was under the Fifth Form studies. Dr. Osborne, the headmaster of Oakshott, had stepped in some time ago, doubtless to speak to some of the seniors there. It looked as if Tunstall was waiting for him to come out.

The new fellow constituted a problem that deeply intrigued the schoolboy detective; and seldom as it was that Len found himself up against a problem he could not solve, he had to admit that Eric Tunstall, so far, beat him.

If Tunstall failed to make good, he would be disinherited, in his cousin's favour. And so far at Oakshott he had done everything possible to land himself into trouble—smoking in Study

No. 8, which he shared with Len & Co.; breaking bounds; cutting roll-call, and visiting a low public-house.

Several times other fellows had done him good turns, keeping him out of rows, and he had repaid them with bitter and malicious animosity.

And what was his connection with the vulture-nosed man at the lonely house on Greenwood Down? He had betrayed the fact that he knew the man. Now somebody had tipped Campion about Pie's warlike intentions—and Len knew that it must be the new fellow who had done so. He wanted to keep Oakshott fellows away from that lonely house on the down. Why?

He loathed Pie, and would have been glad to land him in a row—which almost certainly would have been the result of that expedition had Pie carried it out. Why had he tipped Campion, and put a stop to it?

Len despised the shady, dingy, blackguardly tick from the bottom of his heart. It was galling, humiliating, to be beaten by such a rank outsider. Yet the fellow had him hopelessly puzzled.

Tunstall made a sudden movement, ceasing his slack loafing. Len watched.

Dr. Osborne emerged from the doorway. His glance fell on Tunstall, and he frowned slightly—an expression which told the schoolboy detective clearly what opinion he was forming of the new man in the Fifth. But Tunstall did not seem to see the Head—though, as Len was perfectly well aware, he had been waiting and watching for him to come out. He did not look at his headmaster, or seem in any way aware of his approach. He loafed away, a little ahead of Dr. Osborne, his hands still in his pockets.

One hand came out of a pocket. Something dropped from it. It was a small packet, and it lay on the path, behind Tunstall, as he loafed on.

Len's eyes—and Dr. Osborne's eyes—fixed on that packet. It was a packet of cigarettes! The Head undoubtedly

supposed that the dingy fellow had dropped it by accident; he could hardly have imagined otherwise.

But Len Lex knew it was no accident. This was what the fellow had been waiting for! It seemed contrary to sense to suppose that a fellow, with so much at stake, wanted to be sacked. But Len had been driven to that astounding conclusion already—and now he had proof of it.

Dr. Osborne came to a stop. He glanced at the packet on the path, then called:

"Tunstall!"

The new Fifth Former gave a start and turned his head.

Len watched his face. There was nervous uneasiness in it. The fellow had done this intentionally; he had known that the Head would see that packet and call him back. But at the same time, the wrath of the headmaster scared him. He had little nerve and no courage—which, with utter recklessness, was a strange and surprising combination.

"Did—did you call me, sir?" stammered Tunstall.

"I did, Tunstall! Come here!"

Tunstall came, with lagging steps.

CHAPTER 16.

Pie Plays Up!

"O H gum!" murmured Pie Poringe, as he stared down from the window of Study No. 8.

The window-sill was almost directly over the buttress on which Lex of the Fifth was leaning. Pie spotted him there—and the idea had come into his playful mind of making Lex jump by dropping a cushion on his head from above.

So behold Pie at the study window, cushion in hand—ready. Grinning, he looked down. Then he observed Tunstall loafing by the day-room doorway.

Pie loathed Tunstall—and he strongly suspected him of having tipped Campion about that intended expedition to Greenwood Down. He decided to let Tunstall have it instead of Lex. Pie took aim. Luckily, he dwelt long on that aim—which saved him from catching Dr. Osborne as he emerged from the doorway. By great good fortune, the cushion did not whiz as the Head emerged—and at sight of the Head below, Pie dropped it in the study behind him.

Tunstall was going—the Head was going—so there was nothing left for Pie, but to return to his original idea of dropping the cushion on Lex. He waited for the Head to get off the scene first, however. And then Pie ejaculated "Oh, gum!" as he witnessed the incident of the cigarette packet.

He watched breathlessly as the Head called Tunstall back. This time the smoky swab had fairly done it! Pie, forgetting that he loathed the fellow, felt quite concerned for him as he stood furtively uneasy under the Head's grim glare. Dr. Osborne's deep voice floated up to Pie.

"Pick up that packet, Tunstall—hand it to me."

The new man picked up the packet and handed it, in silence, to his headmaster.

"You dropped this, Tunstall!" said Dr. Osborne.

"Did—did I, sir?" stammered Tunstall.

"You did, Tunstall! Now, listen to me," said the Head sternly. "You have been here only a short time, Tunstall, but my attention has been very particularly directed to you. I have discussed you, very seriously, with your Form-master. I have had to take note of reports from prefects. I have been driven to doubt, Tunstall, whether you can be allowed to remain at this school. Now evidence of your conduct has met my own eyes!"

The new Fifth Former shifted un-

easily, but did not speak. He was scared by his headmaster, and his look certainly did not indicate that he had deliberately planned all this. Len Lex knew that he had, though he could not begin to guess why. Such an idea did not, naturally, occur to the Head, or to Porringe at the study window.

"I shall now," pursued Dr. Osborne, "take the matter into my own hands and make a strict investigation, Tunstall. If it should prove that your possession of these cigarettes is merely an isolated act of thoughtless folly, you will be given an imposition and the matter will end there. But if I find any further evidence of bad habits on your part, I shall send you away from Oakshott. You will now go to your study, Tunstall, and I shall accompany you."

"Very well, sir," stammered the Fifth Former.

He moved away towards the door of the House—passing Len as he went, the Head rustling after him. Len's eyes were on the sallow, furtive face as the delinquent passed him, and he could read that furtive face like an open book. Tunstall was scared, uneasy, but inwardly gloating. His game was to get himself expelled, without appearing to desire anything of the kind—and he was getting away with it. They passed on to the doorway, leaving the schoolboy detective sorely perplexed.

Porrige, at the window, had heard every word. In three or four minutes they would arrive in Study No. 8, where Dr. Osborne would inspect Tunstall's belongings. That was the finish for the rotter. Pie knew, without looking, that in Tunstall's box in the corner there was evidence enough to sack a dozen fellows.

Pie had a kind heart. It would be ever so much more agreeable in Study No. 8 if that tick was turfed out, but Pie couldn't and wouldn't see a man sacked, if he could help. He jumped across to Tunstall's box.

Half a dozen packets of cigarettes,

five or six racing papers, a couple of race programmes that hinted of actual visits to the races, met his eyes. And there was a sheet of paper, covered with writing in Tunstall's hand—a list of horses, with the odds marked.

By his own hand the fellow would be condemned, if the Big Beak's eyes fell on that. If the mad ass had actually wanted to leave himself no hope, he could not have been more thorough about it!

The sight of that heap of rotten rubbish tempted Pie to leave the miserable blackguard to his fate. The sooner he was kicked out of Oakshott, the better. But it was only for a moment. The next, Pie was grabbing those incriminating articles from the box in frantic haste.

What to do with them? Where to shove them out of sight? Nowhere in that study! Pie grabbed up a satchel intended for school books, crammed the things into it, and jumped towards the door. Footsteps were coming up the passage. He jumped back!

Those footsteps must belong to the Head and Tunstall, and he dare not be seen leaving the study with the satchel.

He remembered Len, under the window. If Len was still there—

Pie bounded to the window and leaned out, satchel in hand. Len Lex was still there, deep in thought about something, apparently. Pie gasped with relief.

Len Lex came out of that deep reverie with a jump as a satchel dropped at his feet. He glanced up and his eyes fixed in amazement on Pie's excited face, staring down. Pie pointed to the satchel—made wild gesticulations—he dared not call, for the Head was almost at the door.

Len Lex, luckily, was quick on the uptake. For a moment he wondered whether Pie had taken leave of his senses, then he caught on. He stooped, picked up the satchel, put it under his arm, and strolled away.

Pie, breathless with relief, turned from the window—to face Tunstall and the Head as they entered Study No. 8.

CHAPTER 17.

Booted Down the Passage!

HARVEY and Banks were standing at the door of Cayley's study, talking to that Fifth Former, when Tunstall came along, with the Head fustling and frowning behind him.

They looked on with grim faces as Tunstall went into Study No. 8 and the headmaster followed him in. No fellow wanted an expulsion in his Form, especially in his own study, and Harvey and Banks would gladly have kicked Tunstall for getting himself sacked. But they knew that it could mean nothing else now. The Head, obviously, was there to inspect his personal belongings, and the result was a foregone conclusion. All Study No. 8 knew what the beaks would find, if they came to look.

They went along to the doorway of Study No. 8 and stood looking in. Pie was standing with his back to the open window, looking rather red and breathless. Dr. Osborne seemed unaware of Pie at the window, and of Harvey and Banks at the door. His attention was fixed on Tunstall—and from Tunstall it went to the box in the corner, on which the name "E. Tunstall" was plainly painted. He pointed.

"Open that box, Tunstall!"

Tunstall hesitated. His manner was that of a fellow who feared what would come to light. Len Lex, had he been there, would have read it more accurately. Len knew that the fellow wanted to be sacked—unsuspected of wanting it! Len would have known that he was playing a part to keep up appearances. But his hesitation was taken at face value by those who were present.

"You hear me, Tunstall!" The Head's voice was deep. "Open that box at once."

"Very well, sir!"

Harvey and Banks hardly breathed as Tunstall crossed to the box in the corner. They knew what would come to light—what must come to light! To their surprise, Pie winked and grinned at them from the window behind the Head's back. What the unexpected wink implied, Pie's friends had not the remotest idea.

Tunstall lifted the lid of the box, throwing it back, and stepping aside for the headmaster to look down into it.

Three or four more Fifth Form men gathered behind the two at the doorway, looking in. All the Oakshott Fifth knew Tunstall's ways, and knew what this meant. All the spectators—excepting the happy Pie—waited with bated breath for the storm to burst.

Dr. Osborne's face was dark with suspicion as he looked into the box, but it cleared. He doubted the new fellow in the Fifth—doubted and suspected him; but he was glad and relieved to find no grounds for doubt and suspicion. For a long moment the Head looked, then he turned to Tunstall, with a much kinder expression than before.

"You may turn out that box, Tunstall," he said.

Tunstall was so utterly taken aback by the change in the Head's manner that he could only goggle at him blankly.

But an imperative gesture from the Head drove him to the box, and his eyes almost started from their sockets as he looked into it. There were various articles—books and other things—in the box, but nothing was to be seen that any Oakshott fellow might not have had. Like a fellow in a dream, Tunstall turned out the box.

The Head desired to make sure that nothing dubious was hidden there—and nothing was! The incriminating articles had been in full view, on top

of the other things, before Pie's masterly hand got to work! Nothing came to light that would have speckled the most spotless reputation!

"You may replace those things, Tunstall." The Head's tone was still kinder. "Now, if there is any other receptacle in this study belonging to you, please point it out."

Tunstall shook his head.

"N-nothing, sir!" he stammered.

Harvey and Banks exchanged an astonished look. That sudden visit must have taken the "bad hat" by surprise—he could not have got ready for it! They had fully expected him to be bowled out—he looked as if he had expected it himself.

Dr. Osborne scanned the dismayed, furtive, uneasy face. It was difficult to read; but any fellow might have looked confused and troubled, with his headmaster searching his study.

"I shall not doubt your word, Tunstall," said the Head, after a pause. "But for your own sake I must clear up this matter definitely." He glanced at the door. "Harvey!"

"Yes, sir!" stammered Harvey.

"You have heard Tunstall's answer. Do you bear it out?"

"Oh, yes, sir!" said Harvey. "Tunstall's got nothing in this study to keep things in, except that box."

"Thank you, Harvey!"

The frown was gone from Dr. Osborne's face now. The senior of whom he had heard such dubious reports had passed the test. It was a relief to his mind.

"Tunstall," he said quietly, "I am sorry that your own conduct has made you subject to suspicion. You have only yourself to blame, as you must realise. The matter ends here. You will write an imposition for having had cigarettes in your possession. I shall mention it to your Form-master. And I hope, Tunstall, that you will after all do well at Oakshott!"

Tunstall stood dumb. Dr. Osborne rustled out of the study, the seniors in the passage respectfully making way for him. He rustled away to the stairs, and then disappeared. Len Lex passed him on the study landing, and came up the passage, a faint smile on his face. That smile widened as he looked into Study No. 8 and read the dismay and suppressed disappointment and rage in the face of the delinquent. Len tossed an empty satchel on the table. Porringe gave a cheery chuckle.

"Some fellows," remarked Banks, "have all the luck! I thought that swab was fairly copped when the Head blew in."

"So did I!" said Harvey. "I'd have given any fellow ten to one in dough-nuts, that the Beak would find enough in that box to sack half Oakshott."

"Ha, ha!" chirruped Pie. "So he would, old beans, if I hadn't been here! Ha, ha!"

They looked at the gleeful Pie. Tunstall had been utterly mystified. Now he began to see light!

"You!" he breathed. "What did you do? Did you——"

He choked.

"I can tell you," explained Pie. "I'm sick enough of seeing you in this study! But I wasn't going to see a man sacked."

"You—you——" stuttered Tunstall.

"But what——" yelled Banks.

"Ha, ha!" Pie chortled. "I say, if the Beak knew—ha, ha! He would feel like sacking me instead of that swab, what? Ha, ha! You see, I spotted it all from the window, and chucked Tunstall's tripe down to Lex in time—just in time—in that satchel."

"You priceless chump!" moaned Harvey. "If you'd got spotted, getting that putrid tick out of a scrape——"

"Near thing!" said Pie. "But a miss is as good as a mile! But, I say, we don't want a bunking in this study, what? Not even that tick! But it was

jolly near it—and my idea is that that sweep ain't going to disgrace this study, so what about booting him up the passage?"

Tunstall had been standing with clenched hands, struggling to hide the rage he felt, as he learned what Pie had done. At those words, however, he turned quickly to the door.

"Pie," said Harvey, "talks sense sometimes. Go it!"

Three boots crashed on Tunstall as he dodged out of the study. He went staggering and yelling into the passage; and the three followed him up. They followed as far as the study landing, where Tunstall, howling, dodged away among the Fourth Form studies and escaped.

Len Lex grinned. The fellow who had planned to get the boot had got a booting instead. But what could it all mean?

CHAPTER 18.

Limping Home!

PORRINGE grinned as he wheeled his bicycle out on Saturday afternoon. There was a Form match on, on Big Side, and Harvey, Banks, and Lex were playing in the Fifth Form eleven. Pie was not. Harvey, who captained the Fifth Form side, had received the offer of his chum's services, and had replied that the next time he played marbles, he would be glad to avail himself of them, but not till then!

Which reply led Porringe to tell Cedric Harvey, at considerable length, what he thought of him and his intelligence. Nevertheless, there was a cheery grin on Pie's face as he set forth on his own, with his figger. He would rather have played for his Form, but with his three comrades kept busy, he was at liberty to carry out the deferred expedition to the house on Greenwood Down.

His wrath against the "nosey tick"

was quite unabated. The man had been so utterly and needlessly offensive—causing Pie to lose a train, cutting short his acquaintance with a fellow to whom he had taken a liking, and whom he had never seen since. Punch—that nosey tick's unpleasant face seemed, to Pie, an urgent matter—all the more because of the opposition he had received on the subject. Opposition did not cause Pie to doubt his wisdom—it made him obstinate.

He rode away in quite a cheery and anticipative mood.

Campion had gated him, to put the stopper on that warlike expedition. But that was several days ago, and the head boy had said nothing on the subject since—perhaps having forgotten it, or supposing that Pie had. That gating, Pie considered, no longer held good; or, if it did he was prepared to disregard it.

Anyhow, he was going to bike over to the house in the wood, on the down, and if he had the good fortune to drop on the vulture-nosed man, he was going to push that beaky nose through the back of the tick's head. It did not occur to Pie that perhaps he couldn't!

Seven miles along the Greenwood road, Pie arrived at the track that led off across the downs, round the base of a hill, to the wood where the lonely house inhabited by his enemy was situated. As he turned his bike into the track, Pie became aware of a cyclist ahead.

He had a back view of that cyclist, who was plugging along the rough track at a distance ahead of him. As the path led nowhere but to the house in the wood, and did not extend beyond it, it looked as if the cyclist was, like Pie, going there. He was certainly not the nosey tick—it was not a man at all, but a boy on a bike; and Pie, gaining on him, had him in clearer view, and was struck by something familiar about him.

The fellow wore a cap which did not

show the Oakshott colours, so it did not occur to Pie at first that it was an Oakshott man. The sound of his figger reached at last the ears of the fellow in front, who looked round.

"Tunstall!" ejaculated Pie.

He was surprised to see that seedy slacker so far from the school on a bike. He was still more surprised to see him in that lonely spot. And why he had changed his school cap for one with no distinguishing marks was a mystery to Pie. Greenwood Down was not out of bounds, so there was no reason, as far as Pie could see, why an Oakshott fellow should want to keep dark the fact that he belonged to Oakshott. But it was no business of Pie's; and, surprised as he was, he thought only of passing the fellow and whizzing on his way.

He saw the startled look that came over Tunstall's face. If Pie was surprised, so was Tunstall—indeed, a fellow might have fancied from his look that he was alarmed. Pie wondered whether he knew that nosey tick at the lonely house.

Tunstall dismounted from his bike and stood holding it in the middle of the rough track, staring back at him.

Pie waved a hand to him to stand aside and let a fellow pass. Tunstall did not stir. Pie shouted angrily. The track itself was rough enough, but off it the ground was still rougher and more broken. Pie did not want to have to go round the fellow. But Tunstall blocked the path and did not move.

"Shift, you swab—shift!" Pie bawled.

Tunstall did not shift. He stood there, holding his bike by the handlebars, his eyes glinting at Pie like a rat's. Pie was not, perhaps, an observant fellow; but it did dawn on him that the fellow knew where he was going, and did not want him to go there.

Pie had the choice of getting down and shifting Tunstall out of the way.

or of going round off the narrow track. He was strongly tempted to do the former with a hefty punch or two; but his business, after all, was with the nosy tick at the shuttered house, not with Tunstall. So Pie suppressed his wrath and turned from the track—bumping on exceedingly rough ground. What happened next took him completely by surprise.

Tunstall rushed his machine at Pie as he passed. The front wheel of his bike crashed on Pie's left leg and foot.

Pie crashed. His right arm banged on a stone—his right ear embedded itself in a patch of nettles. His right leg, under the crashing bike, felt as if it was broken in fifteen or sixteen places. Sprawling in the rough herbage, under the clanging bike, Pie squirmed, and yelled with pain.

Tunstall dragged his machine back, whirled it round, facing the way he had been going when Pie first sighted him, and in almost frantic haste he clambered on, found his pedals, and drove at them. He had stopped Pie—stopped him in the most thorough manner—and he was in desperate haste to get out of Pie's reach now that he had done it.

Pie sprawled and roared. But he staggered up, pitching off the bike, that pinned his right leg. He staggered to his feet, and made a wild rush at the fellow who had up-ended him. But Tunstall by that time had got going. Pie might have reached him before he got up speed, but Pie's right leg crumpled and he pitched over instead. Tunstall shot away on his bike, and as Pie sat dizzily up, the fellow disappeared up the track round the base of the hill.

"Oooooogh!" gurgled Pie.

He picked himself up—more slowly and carefully this time. His right leg was not, he discovered, broken in fifteen or sixteen places, after all—it was not broken in one place. It was intact—

but it was badly bruised, and felt fearfully painful—so painful that it almost made Pie forget the bang on his elbow and the sting of the nettles on his ear. Pie rubbed it, and squealed.

"Wow! Ow!"

He limped to his bike. Game leg or no game leg, he was going after that swab to smash him up into small pieces. Even the nosy tick at the house in the wood did not matter now—he was going to smash that utter blighter who had barged him over with his bike.

But alas for Pie! Tunstall's bike had not been damaged—but Pie's jigger had crashed, and crashed hard. The pedal was badly twisted, and the handlebars wanted setting to rights. Breathing fury, Pie got the handlebars right, but the bent pedal was a different matter. It went round, but it scraped as it went, and it was only too clear that that bike was not going to be a going concern till Pie had expended a lot of effort on it.

"The swab!" gasped Pie. "The sweep! Barging a fellow over—I—I—I—I'll—I'll——" There were no words in any dictionary with which Pie was acquainted that could have expressed his feelings. He spluttered fury.

The worst of it was that he had to let the swab get away with it! That was the unkindest cut of all. Pursuit with a disabled jigger and a game leg was not practical. Later, at Oakshott, he would be able to deal with Tunstall as he deserved, but at the present moment the blighter had the whip-hand. He was gone, and there was no hope of running him down.

Neither was Pie thinking any longer of carrying on with his hostile expedition to interview the nosy tick! Pie was game, and he was a sticker—but he had to realise that he was in no condition for hunting trouble. On his game leg, the nosy tick could have pushed him over with his little finger. It was not worth while to limp a mile over the rugged down for that!

Pie dragged, twisted, and yanked at the pedal till it scraped a little less as it revolved. Then, limping, he wheeled his bike back to the road. Once off the rugged down and on the level surface of the highway, he mounted, but the ache in his game leg was severe and he had to go slowly.

And despite all the strength he had expended on straightening the bent pedal, it still knocked slightly at every revolution. But listening to the knocks, Pie began to imagine them to be his blows hammering home on Tunstall's nose. The thought cheered him up, and at every knock he chanted: "Take that!"

Chanting, he forgot all about his game knee—until he came to a hill and put extra strength into the downward thrust of the pedals. Then he was forced to remember it! An extra-special twinge of pain shot through his knee, and he started so violently that he capsized his bike and sat down forcibly in the road.

Groaning dismally, he mounted again, and trundled on the long, long way to Oakshott. At every rise, his game leg failed under the strain, and he had to get down and push.

He was on the last of the long miles when a cyclist overtook him, shot past, and whizzed on ahead. It was Tunstall, wearing his school cap again now. Pie shook a furious fist after him as he went, but he was gone in a flash.

After him, at a snail's pace, trundled the weary Pie, comforted, so far as he was capable of comfort, by the prospect of what he was going to do to Tunstall of the Fifth when he got in!

CHAPTER 19.

A Dreadful Suspicion!

"THE goat!" hissed Harvey, of the Oakshott Fifth.

"The chump!" breathed Banks.

"Oh, the ass!" said Len Lex. "The silly ass! The howling, unlimited ass!"

They were, of course, alluding to Porrhinge of the Fifth. Any Oakshott fellow who had overheard their remarks would have guessed that at once. The description fitted so accurately.

The three members of Study No. 8 had played in the Form match that afternoon. Porrhinge, whose keenness on games was not equalled by his proficiency therein, hadn't. Pie had been left on his own, and in the stress of an arduous match his friends had forgotten him. They remembered him when they came out of the changing-room, looked for him, and found him not. For some time they went round about Oakshott, asking fellows whether they had seen Pie. Nobody had. Then they looked into the bicycle-house to ascertain whether his jigger was gone. It was! Then they looked at one another with deep feelings.

"The priceless goat!" said Harvey. "Just because we hadn't an eye on him! You know where he's gone, of course!"

"Over to Greenwood Down!" said Banks.

"To kick up a shindy with that nose-y sportsman!" said Len Lex.

They had no doubt of it. Since Porrhinge had discovered his old enemy at the lonely house on Greenwood Down, Porrhinge's fixed idea had been to root him out and punch his face. Barely had his friends succeeded in restraining him—till now! They had gone even to the length of sitting on him, on the study floor, to keep him off the warpath. This afternoon, Pie had had his first real chance of getting away from his friends! Evidently, he had jumped at it.

By this time, probably, he had also jumped at the man in the shuttered house, if he had found him at home!

It was utterly dismaying to Pie's

friends. That vulture-nosed man, no doubt, was an offensive swab. He had lost Pie his train on the first day of term for no apparent reason. Pie's friends sympathised, to a certain extent, with his desire to punch the swab's beaky nose. Still, it was clear that such drastic proceedings could not proceed without a fearful row to follow. Pie did not care about that. His friends did. They knew where he was gone—they had no doubt that he had reached his destination by this time, distant as it was—and they wondered dismally what might be going on there. They had an awful vision of the Goat of the Fifth coming home in charge of a policeman!

Harvey and Banks ran through a list of opprobrious epithets, addressed to the absent Pie, Len Lex wrinkled his brows in thought. The Schoolboy Detective was accustomed to rapid judgment and quick decision. Pie had to be stopped, if possible. He had to be brought off before he gave the beaky man a prize nose to show to the headmaster of Oakshott.

"Cut the cackle, old beans!" said Len, breaking in on his chums' remarks about Pie. "We've got to get after Pie, and snaffle him!"

"Too late, fathead!" replied Harvey. "He's been gone two or three hours. Even Pie wouldn't take that time to cover seven or eight miles on a bike!"

"He's there long ago," said Banks. "And if the man hasn't let him in, he's prowling round, same as he did before, trying to get at him!"

"But the man mayn't be at home," said Len. "And if we catch Pie prowling—well, we'll give him prowling!"

Harvey and Banks looked at one another. They had played a hard game that afternoon, and were not yearning for a hard ride to follow. They were concerned for Pie, as well as intensely exasperated with him; but the prospect was not attractive.

"Eight miles there, and eight miles back!" growled Harvey.

"Might cut off a mile by taking the bridle-path through Oakways Wood!" suggested Banks. "Three-quarters of a mile, anyhow!"

"Cyclists aren't allowed there, except wheeling the jigger!" said Len. "Think of the jolly old by-laws!"

"Oh, blow the by-laws!" said Harvey and Banks together.

But Len shook his head. The nephew of Detective-Inspector Nixon of Scotland Yard felt bound to respect laws, by or other.

"Stick to the road," he said. "Lamson of the Shell was stopped on that bridle-path last week riding his jigger. He had to get down and walk. We don't want to lose time trying to save it!"

"Oh, you're an ass!" said Harvey and Banks. But when the three wheeled out their machines and mounted, they kept to the highway.

They rode at a good pace, heading for Greenwood. A quarter of a mile from the school a cyclist passed them, and gave them a stare of dislike. It was Tunstall of the Fifth, the new fellow at Oakshott.

"What's that slacker doing on a bike?" said Harvey. "Bet you he hasn't done three miles!"

Len Lex glanced over his shoulder, at Tunstall's back, as the new Fifth Former rode on towards the school. Tunstall had come from the direction of Greenwood, and it occurred to Len that he might have seen something of Porringer.

"Might ask him if he's seen Pie——" he began.

"Oh, don't waste time!" grunted Banks. "We don't want to speak to that cad!"

Tunstall, slacker, black sheep, and bad hat generally, was a member of

Study No. 8, but he was barred in that study. A minute or two more and he had disappeared in the direction of Oakshott School, and the three forgot him as they pedalled on.

After seven miles by the road they reached the spot where the path branched off, across the rugged down, hardly marked except by the tyres of the car belonging to the man at the lonely house. The winding track was rugged, and they jolted along it. It was not an agreeable ride—by no means a route they would have taken as a matter of choice.

But they had no doubt that they were on Pie's trail—for the tracks of a bike were to be seen on the rough path. Evidently, a cyclist had been there before them, and they could not doubt that it was Pie. That path led nowhere but to the lonely shuttered house.

They came round the base of the hill. The belt of woodland, in which lay the shuttered house, loomed before them. The house itself was not yet visible, but as they rode into the wood they saw the building—the windows closed with shutters, as on their previous visit; a thin spiral of smoke ascending from the old red chimney indicating that the place was occupied.

The gate was closed. They dismounted, leaned their machines on the fence, and looked round them. Firmly convinced that Pie was there, they had, naturally, expected to see him. But there was no sign of Pie, and no sign of his jigger. There was no sign of any human being. The spiral of smoke from the chimney indicated human presence—but that was all.

"Where the thump is that blithering goat?" hissed Banks. "He can't have gone back to the school—we should have passed him on the road."

Len Lex shook his head. The School-boy Detective was puzzled.

Pie, certainly, had had time to get

through a shindy and ride back to Oakshott. But in that case why had not his chums passed him on the road? And if he was still here, where was he?

Harvey turned quite pale as a sudden, awful, overwhelming suspicion dawned on his mind.

"I—I—I say, c-c-can the man have given him in charge?" he gasped. "He—he said he would, the other day, if Pie came back again."

"In charge!" gasped Banks. "Gosh, what a mess!"

They gazed at one another in horror. The bare thought of Pie marched off to Greenwood Police Station in charge of a constable was unnerving. It was an awful possibility. If that had happened, what would happen to him afterwards at Oakshott, did not bear thinking of!

"Oh, my hat!" said Len. "Look here, we've got to know what's happened to the old ass. That sportsman at the house will tell us if we ask him. Come on!"

The gate was locked, but Len vaulted over it. His comrades followed him. They hurried up the path to the porch. If Pie had been there—and they had no doubt that he had—the man at the house must know what had happened, and he was their only source of information. He was a far from agreeable man, and he had made it very plain that he did not want callers at his lonely dwelling—but that could not be considered now. They reached the porch, and Len grasped the heavy iron knocker on the door and banged.

The door did not open. There was no sound from within, after the echoing of the knock had died away.

"The brute won't answer!" growled Banks.

"I'll make him, if he's there!" said Len, between his teeth. "It was his fault that old Pie's made a fool of himself—he started the trouble, first day of term. I'll make him answer!"

Bang, bang, bang! The iron knocker fairly crashed. The din rang through the wood that surrounded the shuttered house; it echoed over the grassy down. Len Lex was putting his beef into it. And as there came no reply from within, he put in more and more beef! Bang, bang, bang!

CHAPTER 20.

Crocked, but Game!

CAYLEY of the Fifth grinned. He was lounging in the doorway of the bicycle-house at Oakshott, when a clinking sound drew his attention, and he glanced round. He grinned at the sight of a Fifth Form man wheeling in a bike. That Fifth Form man looked as if he had hit trouble, and hit it hard. His bike was damaged. Its owner's limp showed that he was damaged, too. And the expression on his face showed that Porrhage was in a fearfully bad temper.

"Spill?" asked Cayley, grinning.

Pie came to a halt, slammed the jigger against the shed, sank on the bench outside, and rubbed his knee, breathing fatigue and fury.

"No!" he answered. "Knocked over! Has that tick come in?"

"Which?" asked Cayley.

"That tick—that swab—that worm—that rotter—that putrid bounder!" said Pie.

"Your friends are all out, I believe," grinned Cayley. "They've been looking for you all over the shop, and then they went out on their jiggers, half an hour ago—"

"I don't mean them, you ass! I mean that swab—that pig—that toad—that new rotter Tunstall!" yapped Pie.

"Yes, he came in soon after your pals went out. Want him?"

Porrhage glared. Clearly he wanted

Tunstall. He looked as if he wanted him to boil in oil.

"What do you think he did?" he gasped. "That cad—that funky swab Tunstall! Butted his bike into me on Greenwood Down—knocked me over—damaged the bike—gave me a game leg!" Pie gasped. "I've had to walk most of the way back. Game knee! I thought I'd never get in! I'd never have got in, I think, only I cut off the last mile by coming through Oakways Wood by the bridle-path. I had to wheel the jigger—I couldn't ride—any farther with this knee—so that was all right. But for that, I think I should have dropped! Ow!"

"Well, my hat!" said Cayley, staring

He would not have been surprised if Pie had had a spill. Nor if he had run into a vehicle, a hedge, a wall, or another cyclist. Pie was the man for such things. But he was surprised to hear of Tunstall's performance. The new fellow in the Fifth was a reckless ass in some ways—the way he fairly asked for the "sack," for instance. But he was not reckless in the way of asking for fistical combats. Far from that. It was amazing to hear that he had thus provoked Pie's destructive wrath.

"What on earth," said Cayley, "did he do it for?"

"Dunno! It was on Greenwood Down—near that house with the shutters—you know—What are you sniggering at, you ass?"

Cayley was chuckling. All the Oakshott Fifth knew of Pie's feud with the "beaky blighter" at the shuttered house on the down.

"So that's where you've been!" chortled Cayley. "That's why your pals rushed off after you—what? Ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up, fathead! If they've gone after me, they've missed me. Must have gone by the road, while I was

coming through Oakways Wood. Just like the silly asses! I say, that swab Tunstall had been up to the place himself—goodness knows why—and he stopped me going! Got away on his bike, after barging mine over! He didn't want me to go there, the cheeky cad—as if it's any bizney of his! I'll show him!"

Pie gave his painful knee another rub, and, leaving Cayley grinning, he tottered away to the House.

He wanted Tunstall of the Fifth—he wanted him at once—and he wanted him bad! Why Tunstall had taken such drastic measures to keep him away from the house on the down, Pie did not know, and did not care. He knew that he was going to whop the swab until he couldn't crawl. He was going to whop him till Eric Tunstall felt, all over, as Pie was feeling in his right knee.

With these deadly intentions fixed in his mind, Porrhinge tottered on the warpath. Fellows grinned as he went into the House. Pie looked rather a wreck, but he could see nothing funny in a state of wreckage. It seemed that other fellows could.

"Been under a lorry?" asked Oliphant of the Sixth sympathetically.

"Seen Tunstall?" asked Pie, without taking the trouble to answer that frivolous question.

"That new man? He went up to the studies."

Pie limped to the stairs. He would have preferred to find Tunstall on the ground floor. Stairs, in the state of Pie's bruised and swollen knee, presented difficulties. But Pie faced the stairs manfully. He would have trailed Tunstall, at that moment, if he had had to follow him up to the top of the Eiffel Tower. Up went Pie—slowly but surely, gurgling occasionally as his leg twinged.

"Dot and carry one!" remarked Root, of the Fourth, over the banisters of

the study landing. There was a chortle from a group of fags.

Pie gave them a glare. He could give them nothing more—in his present state. He limped across the study landing. The fags laughed. It was unusual to be able to chip a Fifth Form senior, and get away with it. Pie, obviously, was in no condition to give chase. Root & Co., of the Fourth, were not going to miss this rare treat.

"Here came an old man from Seringapatam," sang Root, "with one leg shaking!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the fags.

Porrhinge, resting on his sound leg, glared round at them. He would, at any other time, have charged those fags, and sent them scattering with vengeful smites. Now he could not have run a yard after a fag. Standing stork-like on one leg, Pie glared.

Root, greatly daring, banged a school book, which he had under his arm. It tapped on Pie's chin, and he gave a roar of rage. The fags gave a roar of laughter. Pie, forgetting his game leg, made a dash. He had to remember the game leg the next moment. It crumpled, and Pie was extended at full length on the landing. He yelped as he sprawled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked Root & Co.

"Wow!" howled Pie. "Wow!"

Root fielded his book. He tapped Pie on the back of the head with it, and bounded out of reach. Pie staggered up on one leg. He hopped at them. Root & Co., yelling with laughter, retreated up their passage.

Porrhinge stopped. He turned, and limped away to the Fifth. He owed all this to that tick, Tunstall. It was one more item for that unspeakable swab to pay for. Breathless with fury, Porrhinge limped on to Study No. 8 and hurled the door of that apartment wide open.

Tunstall was there, smoking a cigarette—he never dared do that when the other fellows were in—but he did not

seem to be enjoying his smoke. There was a deeply uneasy expression on his sallow face.

As the game-legged Fifth Former limped in, Tunstall gave a start, threw his half-smoked cigarette into the grate, and jumped to his feet. Promptly he placed the study table between him and Porrhinge.

"You rotter!" gasped Pie. "You swab! Barging a man over on his bike! I'm going to smash you! You wait a minute! Ow!"

He limped painfully to the table, and rested a hand on it. From the other side, Tunstall eyed him. He had been in terror of this meeting. Now his terrors evaporated. Pie came round the table at him, keeping one hand on it for support.

Tunstall retreated round the table. It was easy enough to keep out of the reach of a fellow with a game leg. Pie panted with rage.

"You swab! You tick! You funk! Will you let me gerrat you?" he hooted.

Now that he was no longer between the new man and the door, Tunstall stepped towards the doorway. He looked back, grinning. Pie, leaving the table, limped at him, and to his intense satisfaction, Tunstall did not scoot out of the study. He stood in the doorway, and Pie reached him.

In other circumstances, the weedy, seedy slacker of the Fifth would have doubled up in Pie's grasp. Now it was Pie who doubled up. As he stood, unsteady, Tunstall gave him a violent shove, and Porrhinge went over on his back, with a crash.

He hit the study floor hard. He sprawled on his back, dizzy and spluttering. Tunstall laughed, and walked out of the study.

"Ow!" groaned Pie. "Ow! You cad! Stop! You rotter, come back! Do you hear, you putrid tick? Ow! Wow!"

He sat up, grabbed at the table,

helped himself up on his sound leg, and limped to the door. Tunstall was disappearing across the landing, to the stairs, laughing. Pie clung to the doorpost, and gasped.

In Pie's present mood, it seemed impossible to let vengeance wait! But he had to let it wait! With feelings inexpressible in any known language, Pie turned back into the study, and slumped limply into an armchair.

CHAPTER 21.

The Shuttered Room!

"GO it!" said Banks.

Len Lex was going it.

Bang, bang, bang! went the iron knocker on the door of the lonely house in the wood. Nobody within that house—or for a considerable distance round—could have failed to hear it. Thunderous bangs woke every echo. That there came no answer from within did not convince the Oakshott fellows that no one was there. They supposed that the man with the vulture nose did not choose to answer.

Quite unaware of Pie's strange misadventures, the three were convinced that he had been there—and that he had not gone back to Oakshott. The traces of a bike they naturally supposed to be traces of Pie's bike—knowing nothing of Tunstall's visit to the place. And knowing nothing of Pie's game leg, they never imagined him wheeling it home afoot, and thus taking the bride-path where cyclists were not allowed to ride. Either he was still at the shuttered house, or he had departed for parts unknown—possibly in official custody—so far as they could see. And they were going to know, from the man in the house—if banging with an iron knocker could do it.

But Len Lex stopped at last. The thundering echoes of the knocker died away.

"Is the brute there, after all?" muttered Len.

"Just sticking there, and waiting for us to go!" said Harvey. "That's the sort of unpleasantness he is. We'll jolly well see, anyhow!"

Leaving the door, the three Oakshott fellows moved round the house, looking at the windows. They were protected by thick wooden shutters, fastened inside. In so solitary a spot, it was no doubt natural for the nosy man to be careful; but he certainly seemed to have taken excessive care to keep possible intruders out of the building. All was silent within, and though the spiral of smoke from the chimney told that a fire was burning, it looked as if the house was unoccupied. To make sure, Len banged with his knuckles on each shuttered window as he passed it.

"Hark!" he exclaimed suddenly.

He had banged on the shutter of a back room. From within, a faint sound came to the keen ears of the Schoolboy Detective.

"Did you hear that?" breathed Len.

"Eh? I heard nothing!" said Banks doubtfully.

"Same here!"

Harvey shook his head.

Len held up his hand.

"Listen!"

They bent their heads, listening intently. In the silence, a sound came again from the shuttered room. Exactly what it was, even Len could not have said. It was such a sound as might have been made by a dog stirring within; but a dog, assuredly, would have barked, or growled. It was not a dog. Something living, at all events, was there. The sound ceased—and was renewed. This time another and more definable sound came with it—a scrape, as if a chairleg had moved on a floor. Then silence again.

The three stared at one another. There was something strange, something almost uncanny, in this. If they could have supposed that some helpless invalid, hardly able to stir, in his

chair, had tried to move, in answer to the rap at the window, that would have accounted for it.

"Queer!" murmured Harvey. "That can't be the man! Somebody's there, though."

"After all, we don't know that he lives alone here," said Banks. "We saw nobody else when we came, that's all. Might be some doddering old bean, afraid to open the door."

"I wonder!" said Len.

"Nothing doing, anyhow!" said Harvey. "If the brute's there, he doesn't mean to answer."

"He's not there," said Len. "Somebody is, but not that beaky blighter. If we can get a squint into the garage, we can see whether the car's gone."

Close by the house was a building, little more than a shed, where they had no doubt the car was kept. But the double doors were locked, and further secured by a padlock. There was a small window, but it was shuttered, like the windows of the house. They found it impossible to get a glimpse into the interior. The three Oakshott fellows stood and looked at one another, dubious, angry, exasperated.

"If he's gone out——" began Harvey.

"He has!" said Len. The Schoolboy Detective had no further doubt of that.

"Might have gone to Greenwood with Pie!" muttered Banks. "I don't see how he'd get a bobby here—no telephone wires! Might have bagged Pie, and run him across to give him into custody."

"Goodness knows!" said Len. "Anyhow, we shan't find out anything here. It will be a close fit to get back for roll-call."

They went back to their bicycles, worried, anxious for Pie, but at the same time feeling an intense desire to boot him. What had happened to the Goat of the Oakshott Fifth? Who was the mysterious occupant of the shuttered house, who stirred, as if with

difficulty, at the knocking on his window, and yet did not speak? It was a strange puzzle, but one thing at least was clear—there was nothing doing, and they could only ride back to Oakshott School in dread of what news they might hear of poor old Pie when they got there.

They covered the ground at unusual speed, on that ride back to school. The bell was ringing for calling-over when they got in at last, tired, breathless, anxious. With a last spurt, as it were, they barged into Hall, just as the big doors were closing. Fifth Form men looked curiously at their crimson faces, and an utterly unexpected voice greeted them from the ranks of the Fifth.

"I say, you've only just done it, you fellows! You're jolly late."

They gazed at Porringe.

He was there!

"Porringe!" gasped Len.

"Pie!" howled Banks.

"Pip-pip-pop-Pie!" stuttered Harvey.

Pie nodded.

"You see——" he began.

"Silence!" called out Camplon of the Sixth. The Fifth Form master was calling the roll.

It was no time, or place, for slaughtering Pie. That had to wait till after call-over. Three tired, aching, infuriated Fifth Formers looked forward to it with eager anticipation.

CHAPTER 22.

Not to be Found!

PIE, unslaughtered, told his tale later, in Study No. 8. His chums were, in the first place, disarmed by the sight of poor old Pie limping out of Hall after roll, on a game leg. They spared him, provisionally, as it were, till Pie had time to explain. After which they were too amazed to do any-

thing but stare at him blankly. Len Lex, already puzzled and perplexed by the new man in the Fifth, saw his puzzlement and perplexity trebled—which was very unpalatable to the Schoolboy Detective, seldom at a loss for a solution to a problem. As for Harvey and Banks, they fairly blinked.

"But why the thump," articulated Harvey, "should Tunstall care two hoots whether you went to that house on the down or not?"

"Don't ask me!" said Pie. "I don't know. I know he did. He stopped me by crocking my jigger, and me, too, and I'm going——"

"I fancied he knew the Johnny there," said Banks. "He gave it away in his ugly face when he heard us talking about the man in this study. But that's no reason why he should play a dirty trick to stop you going there."

"So this silly owl," said Len, "was walking his bike by the bridle-path, while we were going all out on the road. I dare say he'd only just got off the road when we passed—and that tick Tunstall was coming back from the house on the down when we passed him. But why——"

"He passed me coming back, before I turned into Oakways Wood," said Pie. "I'd have had him off his jigger and mopped him up there and then only he didn't stop."

"Haven't you strewn him in fragments all over Oakshott already?" asked Harvey. "What have you let him live for?"

"He pushed me over, in this study," said Pie, breathing hard. "With this leg, you know, I went right over—whoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" said Pie bitterly. "Funny, ain't it? Well, it won't be funny for that swab when I get him. He'll have to come up for prep—and I suppose I can rely on my pals to see that he

doesn't dodge a chap who can't hop after him on one leg? I'm going——"

"Better leave it over till your leg mends, old man!" said Len, laughing.

"I'm not going to leave it over a minute after I can get at that cur!" said Pie. "You wait and see!"

His friends waited—but they did not see. According to rule, Tunstall had to come up to the study for preparation. The four naturally expected him to come. They did not expect him till the latest possible moment, in the circumstances—but they did expect him. They were disappointed. He did not come.

Prep had little attention from Pie that evening.

After prep he sallied forth—his friends in his company.

In the senior day-room they looked for Tunstall, and in Hall, but found him not. He had cut prep—a rather serious matter—obviously because he dared not show up in the study, and must have lain pretty low to avoid being spotted out of his study, but where was he now? No doubt he knew Pie would be on his trail, as soon as prep was over, and was dodging Pie—but how, and where?

The hunt went on, with growing merriment—it was getting to be quite a joke towards dorm.

It was Oliphant, the captain of Oakshott, who enlightened the hunters at last.

"I hear you're looking for Tunstall," said the Sixth Former, coming up to the hunting-party with a grinning face.

"Know where he is, Oliphant?" gasped Pie.

"He's with Bullivant in his rooms. He's got keen on games—all of a sudden!" said the Oakshott captain, and walked on laughing.

Pie looked at his friends eloquently. If the tick was with a master, even Pie couldn't think of rooting him out

and punching him. And the games-master of all masters! The fellow loathed games—old Bully had ragged him for slacking at games—threatened to whop him more than once! Perhaps old Bully, unaware of the man-hunt that was going on, was pleased to see that seedy slacker developing an interest of his own accord, in a subject so near to old Bully's heart, and welcomed him like a wandering sheep into the fold. Anyhow, he was letting him stay in his rooms to talk games. It was the very last cover Pie would have thought of drawing.

"That games dodger—talking games—with old Bully!" gasped Pie. "Can you beat it?"

Len chuckled.

"He's beaten you, old man! You can't walk in on old Bully, and yank the fellow out by his ears! After all he'll keep!"

"Keep!" said Pie. "Wait till after lights out, that's all!"

It looked as if there was going to be a little liveliness in the Fifth Form dormitory that night.

CHAPTER 23.

Light at Last!

LEN LEX sat up in bed, and smiled. It was a quarter of an hour since the master of the Fifth had put out the light in his Form's dormitory. Len rather expected Pie to leave it a little later, in order to make sure that there was no interruption. But as he heard a creak of some fellow getting out of bed, he had no doubt that Pie's impatience had been too strong for him, and that he was getting going. Harvey and Banks sat up, too. Nobody in the dormitory, in fact, was asleep yet. A dim figure was seen moving in the glimmer from the high windows.

"That you, Pie?" called out Harvey.

"Chuck it, old man—wait a bit later! Beaks all over the shop now!"

"Eh? I'm not up!" came Pie's voice from Pie's bed.

"Somebody is!"

Len Lex turned on a flashlamp. It shone on a fellow who was standing by his bed, dressing. It was the new man in the Fifth. Pie was not out of bed at all. But as he saw his enemy in the light of the flashlamp, Pie bounded out—and yelled as his painful leg twinged.

Harvey lighted a candle—Banks another. All the Fifth stared at Tunstall. Many of them gave him sneering and scornful looks. The fellow was not, of course, thinking of dodging Pie by going down from the dormitory; that was impossible, with masters and prefects about. They knew what his game was—breaking out after lights-out; his dingy manners and customs were well known in his Form. He was not thinking of Pie at all, but of some appointment with shady acquaintances at the Peal of Bells. He glanced round sullenly at staring, contemptuous faces and went on dressing.

Pie's bound landed him on the floor, as his game leg doubled up. Tunstall gave him no heed, but hurried with his dressing. Len, sitting up in bed, watched the fellow—puzzled, curious, mystified. Pie, impatient as he was, had been going to leave the scrap till it was later, and safer. Tunstall, bent on breaking bounds, was risking it, with his Form-master hardly clear of the dormitory. Any fellow breaking out at night would have left it till later—unless he wanted to be spotted and caught and sacked. And that was what Tunstall wanted!

He was going to leave the House with rather the certainty than the risk of being spotted—and the "sack" to follow. He had tried on that very game, as Len knew only too clearly, half a dozen times already, and one chance or another had cropped up to

knock it on the head. This time he was leaving nothing to chance. This time he was going to be spotted and expelled!

But Tunstall's game was not to be a success that night any more than on earlier occasions. Pie Porrhinge had to be reckoned with.

Pie did not care a hoot whether Tunstall got himself sacked or not. He did care whether the tick got out of reach of his avenging knuckles. He picked himself up, and limped towards the new fellow. Harvey and Banks, and three or four others, were out of bed now. They gathered round Tunstall, who gave them dark looks.

"Keep the cad from botting!" said Pie. "I can't chase him up and down the dorm with this leg! Put up your paws, you swab!"

Tunstall scowled at him blackly.

"Don't be a fool! I'm going out."

"Going out, are you?" said Pie grimly. "Well, if you want to go out, after I'm through, I won't stop you. Just at present I'm going to handle you for what you did on Greenwood Down this afternoon. Will you put up your hands?"

"No!" said Tunstall, through his gritted teeth. "If you want to scrap, you fool, leave it till you're fit!"

"Something in that, Pie, old man," said Harvey.

"I'm fit enough to thrash that swab!" said Pie. "Fit or not, I'm going to do it! Don't let him run away, that's all—I can't get after him with this leg! Now, then, you worm—"

Smack! Pie's fist came home in Tunstall's scowling face. The latter had nearly finished dressing. Pie followed up that punch with another, and another. Tunstall put up his hands—he had no choice about that. Half a dozen of the Fifth, clustered round, cut off his retreat. In sheer

desperation he threw himself into the scrap, and for several hectic minutes there was fierce fighting.

Twice Pie's game leg failed him, and he went down. Each time he scrambled up somehow, and renewed the fight with undiminished vim. Pie was no whale on boxing, but he had a hefty punch—and it landed on Tunstall hard and often. Every anguished twinge in his damaged knee added to Pie's force and fury—and in five minutes the Oakshott Fifth witnessed such a thrashing as they had never witnessed before.

It was not until Tunstall, in a groaning heap on the floor, was obviously unable to carry on, that Pie tottered back to his bed, battered, breathless, but victorious.

Tunstall lay where he was, groaning and gasping, till Harvey gave him a hand. Harvey had to help him get his clothes off—he was too far gone to do it unaided. He collapsed in his bed, and lay there gasping. Breaking out that night was no longer a thing possible for the bad hat of the Fifth. He could hardly have crawled out on his hands and knees!

Cayley blew out the candles. The Fifth Form settled down to sleep—except for Pie; his usual healthy slumber disturbed by his painful knee, Tunstall groaning over his damages—and Len Lex!

Len was not sleeping. He was thinking, and the look on his face was strange. Tunstall, groaning in his bed, was safe for that night—saved, as the fellows supposed, from the risk of detection and the sack; defeated, as the Schoolboy Detective knew, in his amazing scheme for getting himself expelled from Oakshott. Why, was the question that had hammered unanswered in Len's brain—till now! Now, like a gleam of light in the dark, it had come to him—so strange, so startling, that it made him catch his breath.

He could not be surprised that he had not thought of it before—so

strange and startling was it. He had never seen Eric Tunstall before the first day of that term at Oakshott—if he had seen him then! Had he?

Eric Tunstall, due for disinheritance if he was expelled from Oakshott School, could not imaginably want to be sacked.

Tunstall of the Fifth was seeking by every stealthy and surreptitious means to get himself sacked from Oakshott.

Therefore, Tunstall of the Fifth was not Eric Tunstall!

Who was he? And where was the real Eric Tunstall? Much remained to be discovered. But the Schoolboy Detective had his finger on the clue!

CHAPTER 24.

"This is the end!"

"THE Head!" exclaimed Banks of the Fifth.

"Oh, crumbs!" murmured Pie Porringe.

"That," remarked Harvey, "tears it!"

Since Tunstall, the new man in the Oakshott Fifth, had been at the school he had had a series of extremely narrow escapes from the "boot." Now he had, as Harvey expressed it, "torn" it.

The chums of Study No. 8 were walking down to Oakways after class. Near the village they had to pass the Peal of Bells. That establishment was, of course, strictly out of bounds for Oakshott fellows. But it was, as the chums knew, a favourite resort of the new man, Tunstall.

Glancing at the building in passing, they could see into the open window of the billiards-room. They would not have been surprised to see the "bad-hat" of Oakshott in that apartment, for the fellow was absolutely reckless, and did not seem to care whether he

was spotted or not. But three of the four, at least, were quite surprised to see him sitting in the open window, smoking a cigarette, in full view of any passers-by.

They stopped and looked at him. Tunstall returned their look with a sneer on his sallow face, and blew out a little cloud of smoke. And at the same moment a stately and imposing figure came into view from the direction of Oakways. It was Dr. Osborne, the headmaster of Oakshott School.

Study No. 8 caught their breath as they saw him. In about a minute the Head would reach the spot where they stood. Tunstall would be right under his eyes sitting smoking at the window of the billiards-room in the Peal of Bells. The fellow was under suspicion already; he seemed to have gone out of his way to get himself a bad name at Oakshott. Now he was fairly asking for it! If he saw the Head coming in the distance, it had no effect on him. He sat and smoked. Study No. 8 stared at him, astonished at his nerve and impudence.

Pie made a movement. If ever Porryng had loathed a fellow, he loathed Tunstall. But Pie was all good-nature. He simply could not see a fellow "copped" like this! But Harvey grabbed him by the arm.

"Hold on, you ass! The Head can see us!" he breathed.

"I don't care! I'm going to give him the tip!"

"You're not, ass! The Head——"

"I jolly well am!" retorted Pie.

He jerked his arm away from Harvey and ran towards the building, which lay back from the road. Banks made a hasty grab at him, and missed.

"Oh, the goat!" hissed Banks.

Len Lex said nothing. He stood and watched. To his three comrades it seemed that Tunstall, reckless as he was, could not possibly know that the Head was coming up the road. To the

Schoolboy Detective it seemed otherwise. Ever since Tunstall had been at Oakshott, the nephew of Detective-Inspector Nixon, of Scotland Yard, had wondered, perplexed and puzzled, why the fellow so persistently asked for trouble. But he had guessed the reason at last. And he knew—what his comrades did not think of guessing—that no warning would cause the bad hat of Oakshott to get out of sight as the Head came by.

Dr. Osborne had seen the four standing in the road. He saw Porryng detach himself from the other three and cut towards the forbidden building. He frowned, and quickened his stately pace a little.

Unheeding, Pie dashed up to the window.

"You dirty tick!" he gasped. "Haven't you any sense? Back out of sight—the Head's coming!"

Tunstall did not even remove the cigarette from his mouth.

"Rot!" he answered.

"I tell you, the Big Beak will be along in a minute or less!" gasped Pie. "Do you want to be bunked, you frowzy swab?"

"Mind your own business!"

Pie stared at him. There was no time for talk, if the black sheep was not to be spotted—no time to convince him of his danger. Only prompt action could save him.

Instead of speaking again, therefore, Pie clenched his fist and hit the fellow in the window a mighty smite under the ear and sent him toppling over.

There was a yell, and Tunstall disappeared.

Pie looked round breathlessly. Had he been in time?

He had! Dr. Osborne reached the spot where Len, Harvey, and Banks stood, and halted, gazing at Pie. He saw Pie framed against an open but untenanted window. Tunstall, sprawl-

ing and spluttering on the floor within, was invisible.

"Purrige!" came the Head's deep voice.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Pie. He hurried back to the road.

"What are you doing there, Purrige?"

"Oh! Nothing, sir!"

"You should not have approached that building, Purrige," said the Head severely. "Had I not seen you a few moments ago, in the road with your friends, I should have supposed—"

He broke off. Within the building, at the open window, a figure rose into view, staring out.

Tunstall, with a cigarette in one hand, and the other pressed to a damaged ear, stood visible to all eyes. Dr. Osborne gave a violent start. His gaze fixed, as if spellbound, on the Fifth Former, caught frequenting the lowest resort in the vicinity of the school. The expression that came over Dr. Osborne's face was positively terrifying.

"That—that is an Oakshott boy! That is Tunstall! Upon my word!" He made a step towards the building and raised his hand. "Tunstall!"

Study No. 3 exchanged glances. The fat was in the fire now!

"Tunstall!" repeated the Head. "Leave that building this instant! Do you hear me?"

Tunstall stood staring. A beery-looking man joined him at the window, looked out, and whistled. The Oakshott senior stirred at last. He disappeared from the window, and a moment or two later emerged from a side door. With hanging head, he came across the road and stood before his headmaster.

"This," said Dr. Osborne, "is the end, Tunstall! You have been at Oakshott a very short time, but in that short time I have received the worst reports of you from your Form-master

and from the prefects. I have doubted very seriously whether you could be allowed to remain at the school. Now I have myself witnessed your conduct, and there is no further doubt. You will be expelled from Oakshott, Tunstall!"

Tunstall made no reply. He stood shifting nervously, his eye on the ground.

"You will now," continued the Head, "walk back to the school with me. I shall write to your grandfather, Sir Gilbert Tunstall, and explain the matter, and to-morrow morning you will go. Until then, you will be isolated in the punishment-room. Follow me, Tunstall!"

Dr. Osborne walked on. After him, sullen and cringing, went the new fellow in the Fifth. Study No. 3 watched them depart.

"Well," said Harvey, with a deep breath, "that's that! He's tagged at last!"

"The silly fathead!" said Pie. "It would have been all right if he'd kept away from the window. I knocked him out of sight—a fellow couldn't do more."

"Looks as if he wanted the boot!" said Banks. "I suppose a fellow couldn't—but dashed if it didn't look like it!"

"He's got it, anyhow!" said Len Lex.

The four walked on into Oakways. Three of them went into the sports shop there; Len Lex remained outside. But he did not remain long. When Pie, Harvey, and Banks came out, they saw nothing of Len, wondered what had become of him, and then walked back to Oakshott without him.

CHAPTER XX.

News for Mr. Nixon!

DETECTIVE - I N S P E C T O R
WILLIAM NIXON backed his two-seater on a rutty track under the

thick, overhanging branches in Oakways Wood, and sat watching the lane in front of him. It was half an hour before a boyish, athletic figure swung out of the lane into the woodland track, stopped by the car, and grinned cheerily at the man from Scotland Yard.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Bill!" said Len, as he stepped in and sat down beside his uncle. "You've run in a lot of burglars in your time, Bill," he went on, "and you must have picked up some of their ways. Feel like cracking a crib with me?"

Bill Nixon looked at his nephew.

"Talk sense!" he suggested.

"Talking it!" assured Len. "To come down to brass tacks, Bill, we're winding up the case to-day. You may need a jemmy, and you'll certainly need the handcuffs. I hope you've got both!"

"You're winding up the case to-day, are you?" said Mr. Nixon. "This is my first information that there's a case to wind up. What is it?"

"Kidnapping, illegal detention, and fraudulent impersonation, Bill!"

Bill Nixon looked hard and long at his nephew. Len Lex gave him a cheerful wink, and the inspector grunted.

"Let's know what you mean, if you mean anything," he said. "I asked you to keep an eye on Eric Tunstall at your school. Have you done so?"

"No!"

"And why not?" demanded Bill hotly.

"Because I haven't seen him there."

"You haven't seen him!" said Mr. Nixon. "Have you forgotten all I said to you the day before you went back?"

"Sing it over again to me, Bill, and I'll see if I remember."

"You young ass!" Mr. Nixon breathed hard. "I told you that old Sir Gilbert Tunstall asked my advice

about his grandson Eric. The boy was expelled from his school, Higham, in Yorkshire, for bad conduct—card-playing, pub-haunting, all sorts of shady things. He protested his innocence, and stated his belief that his cousin Herbert Varney, also a Higham boy at that time, had somehow fixed the evidence on him. I saw the boy, and liked him, and thought there might be something in it—all the more because if the old man got fed up with him, he was likely to cast him off, and the Tunstall fortune would go to the other grandson."

"I remember," smiled Len, "and I said that if such a game was on, a schoolboy, even a really bad egg, couldn't lay such a scheme on his own and there was an older hand behind it."

"Oh, you remember, do you?" grunted Mr. Nixon. "And you may remember I told you that old Sir Gilbert hoped there might be something in Tunstall's story and decided to give the boy another chance. He used his influence with the governors of Oakshott, to get him into a new school, with no questions asked. As a total stranger there, he had a chance of washing out what had happened and starting fresh. Varney—if Varney really had done him any harm at Higham—had no chance of doing any more, as he was sent abroad with a travelling tutor—a Mr. Stacey. Young Tunstall's future prospects hung on how he turned out at Oakshott. If he was sacked, as he had been from Higham, it was the finish for him. That's why I asked you to keep an eye on him, you young rascal!"

"You're getting shirty, Bill!" murmured Len.

"Well, why haven't you?" demanded Bill. "If there was any truth in young Eric's tale, there was some crook behind Varney at Higham, planning the thing, as you said yourself. Varney's safe abroad with his tutor, but that crook might have tried on some game

at Oakshott—not likely, perhaps, but there was a chance of it, and I told you to keep Tunstall under your eye from the day he came! Now you tell me that you've not even seen him—and you spin me a yarn about a case of kidnapping!"

"Same case, Bill!" replied Len, "A man called Tunstall blew in late first day of term. Mindful of my dear uncle's instructions I glued my eyes on that sportsman: first shot!"

"You said, a minute ago, that you'd never seen Eric Tunstall!"

"I'll say it again, if you like!"

Mr. Nixon looked at his nephew, gave a sudden start, and drew a deep breath.

"Carry on!" he said curtly.

"After seeing that sportsman called Tunstall, Bill, I wondered that you had liked his looks—I didn't! I wondered more and more, after what you'd told me, when he turned out to be not merely a bad hat, but the worst hat ever! Smoking, betting, pub-haunting, breaking bounds—disgraceful blighter in every imaginable way! He not only deserved the sack, Bill, but asked for it—begged and prayed for it! Bill, you know that your nephew Leonard is bright—or don't you?"

Grunt from Mr. Nixon.

"Bright as your nephew is, Bill, that sportsman had him beat! A fellow who was going to be disinherited, and see a fortune handed over to a relative, if he got sacked—asking for the sack all the time! Hunting for it! In the innocence of my heart, Bill, I barged in to keep him clear—thinking him a reckless fool! And only quite lately, Bill, it dawned on me. I put it like this. A fellow who was going to lose everything if he was expelled from school couldn't possibly want to be sacked. This fellow was going all out to get sacked! So—he wasn't the fellow, Bill!"

Mr. Nixon whistled.

"No doubt about the facts?" he asked.

"None! Five or six times already the cad would have been bunked—only other fellows helped him out. And every time his bacon was saved he was as vicious as a badger. But he's brought it off at last, Bill! That's why I was late at this merry meeting. Half an hour ago, I watched the Big Beak spotting him smoking at the window of a pub—sitting there, Bill, to be spotted! The Head's walked him back to Oakshott, to be turned out in the morning.

"He wins the game," added Len, "so far as he knows—and his backer! I fancy he's rather like the real Eric Tunstall to look at—near enough for this game. A relation, I fancy! Absolutely certain that that sportsman Varney is abroad all this time with his jolly old tutor, Bill!"

"Supposed to be—there must be letters!" grunted the inspector.

"Easy enough to wangle. I suspect that Varney is nearer home! I rather think that the tutor will turn out to be the nigger in the woodpile. Anyhow, the chap called Tunstall at Oakshott is no more Eric Tunstall, once of Higham, than I am!"

"That the whole packet?" asked Bill.

"My dear old bean, I'm only beginning," smiled Len. "You've met my pal Porrhinge—old Pie. Well, on the first day of term Pie missed his train, and caught the next. A vulture-nosed man in that second train wanted to keep him out—man who was travelling with one other passenger, a schoolboy. This lad chipped in, and made the man let old Pie in. Pie got talking to him, and the chap said he was a new man for the Fifth Form at Oakshott. Before they got further, the train stopped at a station, and the man pitched old Pie's bag out. Pie had to jump after it, and the man pushed Pie over when he tried to get back. So Pie lost his second train, and trickled in very late!"

"I suppose all this is leading to something!" said Mr. Nixon.

"That remark, Bill, shows how they polish up their intellects at Scotland Yard!" assented Len. "You're right on the mark. Hearing that Tunstall was coming. Pie jumped to it that the fellow he had met in the train was Tunstall, and having taken a liking to him, asked our beak to put him in our study. We bumped him for it when we found that we were landed with that bad hat. Not the same chap at all, you see! But we fancied at that time that the fellow in the train had been stuffing Pie—Pie's born to have his leg pulled. But since then—"

"The real Tunstall?"

"Guessed it in one!" said Len approvingly. "You're getting as bright as your nephew, Bill. That man with the vulture nose didn't want another passenger in the carriage because he had things fixed to snaffle your Eric somewhere along the line. And after Pie was got rid of he snaffled him, Bill—and a bad hat came along to Oakshott in his place."

Mr. Nixon sat in silence.

"Pie noticed that he was rather like the chap in the train, though different," Len remarked casually. "Cousin, I fancy."

"Varney?"

"Or his ghost, Bill! With a crook behind pulling the strings, he got Tunstall sacked from Higham School. That didn't quite work the oracle, hence this new game! From what's happened at Oakshott, deduce what happened at Higham—what young Eric told his grandfather was the truth. See the game, Bill? Eric's snaffled on his way to his new school, and bad hat turns up at Oakshott in his name. Old Sir Gilbert, convinced that there's no doubt of it this time, goes off at the deep end, disinherits Eric and takes the cousin into favour. How's that?"

"Um!" grunted Bill.

"Turfed out of Oakshott, Varney drops his Tunstall name, hikes off

abroad with his tutor, and comes back when wanted, looking as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth—heir to Tunstall Hall."

"And the real Eric?"

"Kept safely parked all the time. Old bean hears that he's sacked from his new school, expects him home in disgrace; thundrbolts of wrath all ready for his devoted head—but he doesn't turn up! What does the old bean think? Afraid to face the music, the kid has cleared off on his own—run away! Who's going to guess that he never arrived at Oakshott at all, when his grandfather receives the Head's official notice that he's been sacked?"

"Nobody!" said Bill. "But they'd have to let him go sooner or later."

"Later rather than sooner, I think," said Len. "I won't undertake to sketch their plans to the last spot, but I think young Eric's booked for a long spell of board-residence in a secluded spot. Possibly till the ancient joins his ancestors. At any rate, till it's safe to let him run. Meanwhile, supposed to be a disgraceful young scoundrel, afraid to show his face at home."

"Um!" repeated Bill.

"Suppose, after a long time, they let him run. He hikes home, and finds the old bean with a fixed belief that he was expelled from Oakshott and ran loose after. Is his tale of kidnapping going to be believed? Not without a lot of proof, Bill. Where's the proof? Suppose he calls on Oakshott people to prove that he was never there? Varney's only a short time there—they're alike to look at—no Oakshott man is going to know, after a long lapse of time, which was there. They won't let him run, in fact, till all possible danger is over in that quarter—if they let him run at all while his grandfather lives, which I doubt."

"Look here, Len if you've got it

right, it means that the tutor, Stacey—the man Varney's supposed to be abroad with—is in the plot. And he would have to keep in touch with the young rascal at Oakshott. That means sticking somewhere in this neighbourhood."

"Quite! They're on visiting terms—official!" grinned Len.

"And he would have to keep the kidnapped boy under his own eye," went on Bill. "That means that young Eric is near Oakshott all the time, if Stacey—"

"I'm pleased with you, Bill!" said Len Lex gravely. "The way you work a thing out, when it's as plain as a pikestaff, does credit to Scotland Yard."

Detective-Inspector William Nixon gave his nephew a glare.

"If you mean that you've spotted the place—" he began.

"I mean," said Len, "that if you'll drive me to Greenwood, I'll take you to the place. I'll tell you the rest, old man, while you're endangering the public safety on the King's highway!"

Mr. Nixon, grunting, started up. The car slid out into Oakways Lane, turned into the Greenwood road, and buzzed off in the direction of Greenwood.

CHAPTER 26.

Bill the Burglar!

KNOCK. Knock! Knock! The sound echoed through the lonely Greenwood Down. It echoed over the weedy, ill-kept garden and through the surrounding trees. But, save for the echo, there came no answer.

Detective-Inspector Nixon grunted, and released the knocker.

"Nobody at home!" he said.

"Which is exactly," remarked Len Lex, "what I expected! The man was away from home at this time yesterday, and I rather think he is often from home. Greenwood is not a wildly exciting place, but it must be

an agreeable change in the evening, from this. Even Robinson Crusoe would tire of permanent quarters in this spot."

Grunt from the inspector. His car stood at the gate. The gate was locked, and Bill Nixon had clambered over it with his nephew. That was not a wholly satisfactory proceeding to a guardian of the law.

"We're trespassing here!" he said.

"Quite!" agreed Len. "But that's nothing compared to what we're going to do, Bill!"

"Are we?" said Bill.

"We are!" said Len. "Look at it, Bill, with the keen eye that has so long been a terror to jolly old evil-doers! The beaky blighter who turned old Pie off his train that day lives here—all on his own! He makes himself extremely disagreeable to visitors—except Tunstall, who comes here on his bike. Tunstall, the biggest funk ever, pitched old Pie off his bike to keep him away from here—and bagged a big hiding in the dorm for the same. Not without a motive, Bill! What's Tunstall's connection with the man—the man who turned Pie off the train, and travelled on alone with the lad who said that he was bound for Oakshott, but never turned up there? Bill, old bean, do you want me to spell it out in words of one syllable?"

Grunt, from Bill.

"This way!" said Len brightly.

Doubtfully, the inspector followed him round the lonely house. Every window was shuttered; every shutter locked on the inside. If the vulture-nosed man had a secret to keep, he guarded it carefully.

Len stopped at the window of a back room. It was the window at which the Oakshott fellows had knocked the day before when they were in search of the elusive Pie, and had tried in vain to get an answer from the silent house. The wooden shutter at that window, like the rest, was closed and fast.

"Now lend me your ears," said Len. "We banged at the shutters as well as the door to make that beaky blighter answer, if he was there. He wasn't! But—somebody was, Bill! A sort of sound, as if a fellow could hardly move—a creak of a chair. A puzzle at the time, Bill, but no puzzle since I've spotted that sportsman's game at Oakshott and tumbled to it that the genuine Eric is parked somewhere round about."

"You see, Bill, this place is jolly lonely—selected for that reason by our friend with the beak—but strangers sometimes happen by. A prisoner couldn't be left free to yell. I think, old man, that every time that hard nut with the nose goes down to Greenwood in his car, he fixes up his boarder so that he can't hand out any back-chat if a chance caller knocks at the door. What?"

"If!" said Mr. Nixon.

"Wash out the ifs, Bill!" said Len. "We're here to burgle, not to talk about ifs. I must remind you that I am a schoolboy as well as a detective. As a detective, I'm here to bring up a Scotland Yard inspector in the way he should go. But as a schoolboy, I have to turn up at Oakshott for roll, or get lines from a beak."

Mr. Nixon breathed hard and deep.

"You're making out," he said, "that the man keeps a prisoner here, and fixes him up, gagged and bound, every time he leaves the house?"

"Could he do anything else?"

"Not if——"

"Ifing again, Bill!" said the schoolboy detective reproachfully. "With your ifing, I begin to doubt whether you'll ever be Chief Commissioner at Scotland Yard, even with my assistance."

"I don't know," said Mr. Nixon thoughtfully, "why I don't take you by the neck, Len, and bang your cheeky head against that shutter."

"You're getting shirty again, Bill! That's a mistake! Now, listen!"

With his knuckles, Len knocked sharply on the wooden shutter. Detective-Inspector Nixon bent his head to listen. There was no sound from within. Rap, rap, rap! went Len's knuckles again. Then Mr. Nixon gave a start as a faint sound from within came to his listening ear—a faint shifting sound, as of someone who moved with difficulty. Len's eyes met his uncle's.

"A dog!" muttered Bill.

"Wouldn't he bark?" asked Len. "Don't be an ass, Bill. Are you going to burgle that shutter, or are you leaving it to the less practised hand of your innocent nephew?"

Mr. Nixon drew a deep breath and answered:

"All this is distinctly against the law. If it's a mare's-nest——"

"Then you can run yourself in for burglary," suggested Len. "You can call me as a witness to your guilt."

"It's perfectly clear to me," said Bill, "that they don't thrash the Fifth Form boys enough at Oakshott. I shall set that right, if we don't find anybody named Tunstall in that building, Len."

"Done!" said Len.

Possibly Detective-Inspector William Nixon had picked up knowledge of the cracksman's art from his dealings with gentlemen of that fraternity. At all events, when he ceased to raise objections, and proceeded to action, it did not take him long to open the locked shutter. It was drawn open, revealing the glass, covered by a blind.

"Skill in the felonious line," remarked Len, "is no longer needed! An elbow will do the rest."

Crash! Shattered glass flew and scattered under Len's jabbing elbow. Bill Nixon said nothing, but his look was expressive. Len reached through, found a catch, and unfastened it. He pushed up the lower sash, dragged aside

the blind, and two heads were put into the room. Len looked with confident eye—Bill with a doubtful scrutiny. Then he gasped at what he saw.

Len was in at the window in a twinkling. The inspector followed him more slowly, but actively, all doubts gone now. By the time he was in, Len was already at work on the cords that bound a boy sitting in a wooden arm-chair. Porryng, had he been there, would have recognised the pleasant-faced boy he had met on the train the first day of term—the boy who had told him that he was coming to Oakshott, and who had never come. But the pleasant face was pale and worn now—two or three weeks of imprisonment in the lonely house had told on the kidnapped schoolboy.

His eyes fixed almost wildly on the rescuers. Len cut the cords and unfastened the gag that was jammed in the prisoner's mouth. The boy in the chair panted.

"The brute fixes you up like that every time he goes out?" asked Len.

"Yes!" the boy panted.

"You hear that, Bill?"

Bill did not heed. His eyes were fixed on the pale face—a face he had last seen at Tunstall Hall, in Yorkshire. And the boy knew him. His pale face broke into a smile.

"You're Inspector Nixon," he said. "You came to see me at my grandfather's. Bless you for finding me here, Mr. Nixon!"

Bill coughed.

"You're Eric Tunstall, I fancy?" remarked Len.

"Yes, yes, that is my name. That brute—that villain—I don't know who he is—brought me here—"

"He got you on the train, first day of term?"

"How did you know?" The boy stared. "You're not the Oakshott chap who was in the carriage. The brute got rid of him, and then—all of a sudden—

it was chloroform, I think——" The boy shuddered. "I don't know how he got me off the train unnoticed—might have made out that I'd fainted or something—I don't know. I never knew anything till I woke up in a car coming here. Mr. Nixon, I don't know how to thank you. I can't imagine how you found me here—but you have—how can I ever thank you enough?"

"Scotland Yard gets there every time, old thing!" said Len Lex gravely. "Bill's never been beaten yet."

Which remark earned the Schoolboy Detective a petrifying glare from William Nixon.

CHAPTER 27.

Time to Cut!

"JUST in time!" said Pie, slipping his arm through Len's, as the Oakshott fellows went into Hall for roll-call. "Where have you been? We missed you in Oakways."

"I met a man I knew, and he gave me a ride in his car!" explained Len, whose chums did not know he was a detective.

The Fifth Form master, calling the roll in Hall, did not call Tunstall's name. That name was already erased from the Form list. When roll was over, most of the Fifth gathered in the senior day-room, discussing Tunstall's expulsion. Everybody agreed that it was exactly what he might have expected, from the way he had carried on.

Len did not join his comrades in the day-room. He loitered in the passages till a favourable moment when no eye was on him, then slipped into the corridor that led to the punishment-room. The door of that dreaded apartment was locked, the key on the outside. That any Oakshott fellow would ever venture there and turn that key had probably never occurred to Dr. Osborne. But Len turned it, opened the door, and stepped in.

He shut the door after him and stood looking at the fellow who had been called Tunstall at Oakshott. The bad hat of the Fifth was sprawling in a chair smoking a cigarette—his supply of smokes, apparently, had not been taken away when he was "run in." He gave Len Lex a stare of astonishment.

"What the dickens do you want?" he asked.

"The pleasure of your society for a few minutes," said Len. "You can throw that smoke away, you worm—the Head isn't here to see it."

The expelled Fifth Former gave him a quick, furtive look.

"Do you think I want him to see it, you fool?" he muttered.

"I know you do! You want to keep him up to the mark, in case he thought of going easy."

"I don't understand you—"

"I think you do!" said Len. "But I'll make it plain. I've come here to speak to you, because there's still time for you to cut without a policeman's hand on your shoulder, and—as an Oakshott man—I don't want that to happen. There's a window in the passage, and the door's unlocked! You've time to cut—if you choose."

"Why should I?"

"I'll tell you! The police are in charge at the house on the down near the Greenwood road."

The black sheep of the Fifth bounded from his chair. The cigarette dropped to the floor. He stared at Len Lex, the colour draining from his face.

"What?" he muttered hoarsely. "What?"

"Eric Tunstall has been found there," said Len quietly, "and that blighter with the beaky nose—whose name turns out to be Stacey—has been arrested in Greenwood on a charge of kidnapping, and is now in a cell in Greenwood Police Station."

The wretched schemer gazed at him with wild eyes.

"Your game here," went on Len, in the same quiet tone, "is known, Herbert Varney—and that game is up! Detective-Inspector Nixon, of Scotland Yard, is driving up to Yorkshire, taking Eric Tunstall home to his grandfather. But he has left certain instructions at Greenwood. If you are here in an hour's time, you will leave in custody of a constable. You're a pretty thorough rotter, but I've no doubt that beaky blighter was the worst of the two, and you were as much a tool as anything else. Rotter and rascal as you are, I'm giving you a chance."

"You—how—why—" The young rascal stammered helplessly.

"Never mind how and why," said Len Lex. "Whether your grandfather can, and will, do anything for you now, I don't know—but your best guess is to head for him, confess the whole thing, and throw yourself on his mercy. Stacey will go to prison, you may get off more cheaply. But if Sir Gilbert Tunstall can, and will, do anything for you, you've no time to lose."

Varney gave a groan.

"Then it's all out? It was all his doing—he put me up to it, at Higham. He planned it all here—"

"I know all that! Never mind! Go while the going's good."

Len Lex walked out of the punishment-room, leaving the door ajar. He did not look back as he went up the passage. But when he turned the corner at the end, he lingered—and a few minutes later heard the sound of an opening window. He walked away to join his friends in the day-room.

At prep that evening in Study No. 8 work was suspended, every now and then, for discussion of the exciting topic of an expulsion in the Fifth. After prep, however, there was a still more exciting topic. Cayley of the Fifth barged the door open, and put an excited face into Study No. 8.

"You fellows heard?" he gasped.

"Which and what?" asked Len, with a grin.

"That man Tunstall—bolted!"

"Bolted!" repeated Harvey, Banks, and Porringer with one voice.

"It's all over the House!" said Cayley. "By gum, you know! What a neck! Some sportsman must have gone along and unlocked the door. Anyhow, it was found open, and a window in the passage, too. And Tunstall's not in the House—he's gone!"

"Couldn't wait to be bunked in the morning!" said Harvey, with a whistle. "Who could have let him out?"

"Nobody seems to know! Somebody did! He's bolted!"

CHAPTER 12.

The Man of Straw!

"**W**ouldn't you have thought it?" Porringer asked in Study No. 3 a few days later.

"Boko answers who!" agreed Banks. And Harvey nodded.

Len Lex, who was reading a letter from his Uncle Bill, did not speak. The Schoolboy Detective was reading that letter with considerable satisfaction. It told him that the vulture-nosed man, Stacey, was booked to take his trial, and that Eric Tunstall, completely cleared in the eyes of his old headmaster by the full confession of Varney, had gone back to Higham. Which was pleasant reading for Len. He would rather have liked to see the chap at Oakshott, but it was very satisfactory to hear that he had been reinstated, in all honour, at his old school. Deep in that agreeable letter, Len did not heed Ple.

"Though, as a matter of fact," went on Ple, "I never trusted the fellow. I can't say I exactly spotted the game he was playing here—but I knew he was fishy! Secretive sort of swab, you know—and I dare say I should have spotted his secret, if—if I'd thought of it. It's all come out now—and if you'd get your nose out of that silly letter, Lex, I'd tell you—"

"Eh!" Len looked up. "Any news?"

"Oh, you never hear anything!" said Ple. "That man Tunstall—you know, that swab the Head copped at the Peel of Bells, and sacked—well, it turns out that his name wasn't Tunstall at all."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated Len.

"I jolly well do!" affirmed Ple. "His name was Barney—I think it was Barney—or Carney—no, Varney—that's it, Varney! Well, this fellow Barney—I mean, Varney—came here calling himself Tunstall, and everybody knows now, except you—you never know anything."

"I'm waiting for you to tell me, old man!" said Len meekly.

"I fancy," said Ple, "that the Head would rather have said nothing about it—but he couldn't let fellows go on thinking that Tunstall was such a swab. But I say, who'd have thought it?"

"Who indeed?" said Len.

"And where do you think young Tunstall was all the time?" demanded Ple. "That chap I met on the train, you know—jolly decent chap, as I told you at the time—where do you think he was?"

A dramatic pause!

"At that house on Greenwood Down!" said Ple. "Parked there—kidnapped! That nosey blighter was the kidnapper! I shouldn't wonder if that was why that swab barged me over on my bike the day I was going there—that swab Tunstall—I mean Barney—that is, Varney! I see now that he didn't want Oakshott men rooting round the place. Might have spotted something, you know. By gum, if I'd known the chap was there, I'd have barged in fast enough. A man named Dixon found him there."

"Dixon?"

"I think it was Dixon—or Hickson—a detective, or something, from Scotland Yard, I believe," said Ple. "These Scotland Yard johnnies are pretty wide, you know. Well, this man Hick-

son—or Dixon, I forget which—rooted him out all right. And I'll tell you fellows what I think!" went on Pie. "I jolly well think that man Tunstall—I mean Barney—no, Varney—that man Varney somehow got wind that they'd found something out, and that was why he bolted out of a window, instead of waiting to be bunked in the morning! Got the wind up, you know, and slid. That's what I think, now—now we've got the whole story, you know."

"You're the man for thinking things out, Pie, old chap!" said Len Lex admiringly.

"But who'd have thought it?" said Pie. "A schoolboy with a secret like that—and if that Scotland Yard Johnny hadn't butted in, it would never have come out! Nobody at Oakshott would have guessed it, what?"

"Nobody!" agreed Harvey and Banks. And Len Lex, deep once more in his Uncle Bill's letter, made no remark!

CHAPTER 29.

"Before I'm spotted!"

"**PIE!**" exclaimed Len Lex, Harvey, and Banks, of the Oakshott Fifth, as Pie Porrynge appeared suddenly in the doorway of the bicycle-house, where the Schoolboy Detective was doctoring a puncture.

Pie was panting for breath. Evidently he had been running. He paused in the doorway to cast a quick glance over his shoulder. Then he stepped in.

"You howling ass!" said Banks. "What are you doing here?"

"Eh? I want my bike, of course!" answered Pie.

"But you're in detention this afternoon!" howled Banks.

"I'm jolly well not!" said Pie.

"Oh!" said Len Lex. "If you're let off, good! You can come along to Trant with us."

"I've let myself off!" explained Pie.

"But I'm jolly well not coming to Trant. I'm going down to Oakways. It's rather important——"

"Important enough to break detention for?" asked Harvey.

"Quite!"

"You goat!" said Banks. "You're not going to break detention. It might mean a flogging."

"I'm chancing that!" said Pie.

"Are you?" said Banks grimly. He stepped between Pie and the doorway—and Harvey stepped between Pie and the bicycle-stand. Len Lex laid down a tube of solution and stood ready to back up either of them that might require his aid.

Breaking detention was a serious matter—much too serious for Pie's loyal chums to let him get away with it, if they could help it. They had been feeling very sorry for poor old Pie, stuck in detention that glorious afternoon, unable to join them in a bike spin over the Sussex downs, with ginger-pop and cake at the Rotunda, in Trant. But they were not letting him ask for trouble to this extent. Pie, as a hunter of trouble, had few equals, but Study No. 8 were always prepared to save him from himself if they could.

"I say, don't you chaps play the goat!" said Porrynge. "I've dodged away all right, but I'm due in detention now, and I may be missed any minute. I've got to get out quick."

"You've got to get in quick!" said Len, shaking his head. "What the thump do you want to go down to Oakways for? You can run down to the village after you're let out, anyhow."

"That would be too late!" explained Pie. "I'm meeting the four o'clock train from Greenwood."

"You're not!" said Banks—and Harvey gave him a shove on the chest as he made a stride towards his bike.

"Look here," roared Pie, "if you want me to knock your silly head off, Harvey, you silly ass——"

"Fathead!" said Harvey.

"I want that bike!" roared Pie.

"Go on wanting!"

Pie came on again. He was in a hurry. A fellow dodging out of detention, in momentary danger of a master's eye, could not afford to waste time. He jumped at Harvey, to grasp him and spin him out of the way. At the same moment, Len and Banks closed in on him from behind and planed his arms.

"Leggo!" yelled Pie. "Lex, you fat-head, leggo! I'll punch your head, Banker! I tell you I'm going to—Whoop!"

They slammed him against the wall of the bicycle-house. Then all three stood in front of him, while Pie leaned on the wall and spluttered.

"Not to-day, old man!" said Len soothingly. "Any other day——"

"You silly ass! Any other day won't do, when Young's coming to-day, you dummy!" panted Pie.

"Young?" repeated Len. "The new games-master?"

"Yes, you fathead! I heard Surtees tell Oliphant that he was coming by the four o'clock train, so I'm going to meet him—see?"

"Blessed if I see!" said Harvey blankly. "You don't know the man, do you?"

"I'm going to!" said Pie. "Old Bully knows him—he recommended him here—but so far as I know, he knows nobody else at Oakshott. I dare say old Bully would go to meet him, only he's with the Sixth at cricket practice. Well, I'm going! Stands to reason that a chap coming into a strange place will feel rather pleased at a fellow taking the trouble to hike along and meet him at the station—what?"

Pie's friends gazed at him.

"What I mean is," said Pie, "it's rather a stroke of luck, old Bully going away for a month."

"What?" ejaculated the three. Mr.

Bullivant, games-master of Oakshott, was easily the most popular master in the school. Everybody at Oakshott was sorry that he was going away—except, apparently, Porrynge.

"I mean to say, I like old Bully, of course, but he's no end of an ass," said Pie. "He's got no judgment. I think I shall have a better chance with the new man. Old Bully really knows no more about a man's form at cricket than you do, Harvey."

"Eh?" Harvey, as captain of the Fifth Form eleven, fancied that he knew something about cricket. He knew too much, at all events, ever to play Pie in the Form eleven!

"The new man may have more sense," went on Pie. "He mightn't notice me specially among a crowd of fellows, but if I meet him at the station when he blows along, and give him a little special attention, and all that—See? He will have his eye on me! He will know me! Sort of getting in on the ground floor, if you know what I mean!"

Pie's friends gazed at him, uncertain whether to laugh or to weep. Pie was not aware that his cricket was enough to make a games-master tired of life, but everybody else in the Oakshott Fifth knew it. And for this great scheme, Pie was going to break detention—and risk a flogging!

"Now stop wasting time," added Pie. "I shall have to wait about a bit, if I start now—but I've got to get clear before I'm spotted." And he made a stride at his bike again.

Three pairs of hands fastened on him like three steel vices. Len and Banks took his arms, Harvey appropriated his collar. They jerked him away from the bicycle-stand to the doorway.

"Will you leggo?" yelled Pie, struggling manfully.

"It's no good talking to you!" said Len. "Don't you worry about Mr. Young noticing your cricket. He'll notice it fast enough. Your game

could never pass unnoticed, old chap—it's the sort of thing that leaps to the eye. Just now you're going into detention. Come on!"

"I'm going out!" roared Pie.

"Wrong preposition—you're going in!"

Red with wrath, gasping for breath, considerably untidy and dishevelled, Porrynge of the Fifth arrived at the door of the Form-room—a little late, but better late than never!

A gentleman in horn-rimmed glasses was standing there. It was Mr. Chalmers, Pie's Form-master, and at the sight of him, Pie's friends released the exasperated, indignant Pie. Under the eyes of his beak, even the Goat of the Fifth could hardly think of bolting.

"You are late, Porrynge!" said the master. "Five minutes late, Porrynge! Go into the Form-room, and lose no more time, Porrynge."

Pie gave his friends a withering, devastating look, and went into the Form-room. His friends walked away, happy to have saved him from bad trouble. Ten minutes later they were in the saddle, spinning away on their jiggers—sorry for poor old Pie, but glad that they had, at all events, done their best for him.

CHAPTER 36.

Two Sudden Reports!

"WALK it?" asked Banks. "It's rather a pull up to Trant!"

"If that old Johnny can do it, we can!" said Harvey. "I'm jolly well not getting down if he doesn't."

Len nodded assent to that. Still in the saddle, therefore, the chums slogged up Trant Hill. The "old Johnny" to whom Harvey alluded was a little ahead of them; and venerable as he looked, he seemed to be taking the hill in his stride. Oakshott men, especially hefty men in the Fifth Form, were not going to push their bikes up that hill

afoot, when an old gentleman whose silver hair glimmered in the sunshine was riding it. Really, they couldn't, and wouldn't!

The three had been round by Greenwood Down, and from Greenwood there was a long, long hill up to Trant, where they were going to stop at the Rotunda for ginger-beer and cake. Fellows often started up that hill with a swing, but ptered out after a time, and decided after all to walk the rest. Len, Lex & Co. were about half-way when Banks proposed getting down and walking—and Harvey refused. They rode on.

Len's eyes dwelt rather curiously on the silver-haired cyclist. Under a shady Homburg hat, thick, almost bushy, silvery hair gleamed. When he had a glimpse of the man's face, he saw white brows and a grizzled moustache and beard. The old fellow looked sixty, if he was a day—a hale and hearty sixty! He might have been expected to take his cycling very easily at that time of life—and certainly to be readier to dismount on a hill than any Oakshott Fifth Former. Instead of which, he pegged on, driving his pedals with ease, and apparently hardly noticing that he was on a hill at all.

Len & Co. noticed it! Banks was puffing and blowing. Harvey, breathing hard, and with a face growing redder and redder, began to wish that he had agreed to Banker's suggestion. Len, who was as hard as nails, was feeling the strain. All three of them wished that the old Johnny would get down and walk—and thus give them an excuse for doing so. But he pedalled on.

He was going at a leisurely pace, but did not dismount. And the Oakshott fellows weren't going to, unless he did!

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Banks, at last.

"That old chap," said Harvey, "must be made of iron! Hardly a man ever rides a push-bike up this dashed hill!"

"Can't be so old as he looks!" gasped Banks.

The pleasant old High Street of Trant had never seemed so pleasant as it did when it dawned, at last, on the eyes of the determined but weary three. In the early afternoon, the street in the little Sussex country town shimmered in sunshine, the place looking half-asleep, as it generally did. Only on market days did Trant wake up and look lively, and it was not market day. Three or four people were seated at the little tables under the spreading oak outside the Rotunda tea-house. At the corner, where the Sussex and Southern Bank stood, a stolid policeman was slowly and solemnly brushing a gnat off his nose. Other signs of life were few.

Ahead of the Oakshott fellows the old Johnny pedalled into the High Street, obviously not in the least fagged by his ride. Fagged to the limit, the Oakshott trio trundled on, till they reached the Rotunda, and there, in immense relief, they got down.

"That old ass is keeping on!" remarked Harvey. "Anyhow, we were going to stop here. The old chump hasn't beaten us."

"No—he's stopping, too!" said Len. "He's gone on to the bank."

The corner where the bank stood was about fifty yards on past the Rotunda. Outside the building the old Johnny stopped and got off his bike. His easy movements showed that he was not fatigued, which was really surprising, in view of his age, when the Oakshott fellows were tired to the bone.

Having alighted, the silver-haired gentleman swung his bike round, before he lodged the pedal on the kerb, evidently to place it ready for returning the way he had come when he had got through his business at the bank. It was a large machine, but he twirled it round as if it had been a feather. Uncommon strength was packed somewhere within that venerable exterior. Leaving it parked on the edge of the pavement, the old Johnny walked across to the bank, mounted the granite steps,

pushed open the swing doors, and disappeared within.

"Well!" said Harvey. "I hope I shall be as hefty as that when I get to a hundred! For goodness' sake let's sit down, before my legs drop off!"

They bunched their machines against the trunk of the oak, and dropped into chairs at one of the little tables. A waiter brought ginger-beer and cake. Never had the foaming ginger-pop been so welcome. Len was raising his glass when from up the street came a sudden sharp report. It was followed immediately by another.

"What the thump——" ejaculated Len. He jammed down his glass and stared round. It sounded like a motor back-firing—but there was no car to be seen in the High Street of Trant.

The next moment he knew what it was, and he bounded to his feet, his eyes ablaze with sudden excitement.

The swing doors of the bank burst open, and the silver-haired old Johnny came running down the steps. At the same moment the stolid looking policeman at the corner—his stolidity suddenly vanished!—came running towards the bank. The old Johnny shouted to him:

"Quick! Help! A hold-up!"

The constable passed him with a rush, and disappeared into the bank. The old Johnny crossed the pavement with equal quickness, threw himself on his bike, and shot away. In a moment, he was passing the three startled Fifth Formers of Oakshott, standing astonished under the oak at the Rotunda.

"A—a hold-up!" stuttered Harvey.

"Bank-raider!" gasped Banks.

Len Lex, swifter on the uptake, made a leap into the road—but, swift as he was, he was not in time. The old Johnny shot past, and pedalled on madly out of Trant. From the bank a bare-headed man came rushing and shouting:

"Stop him! Stop him! Bank raid! Stop him! That man—that man!" The bank clerk, spluttering with excitement, pointed after the old Johnny, vanishing out of the High Street into the country road beyond. "He's shot a man—stop him!"

Len Lex wrenched his bike away from the oak, threw a leg over it as he rushed it into the road, and shot away after the man with the silver hair, leaving his comrades staring and gasping. Utterly unexpectedly, professional business had turned up for the School-boy Detective. He shot away like an arrow, and Harvey and Banks were left to stare and gasp.

CHAPTER 31.

Just Like Pie!

"**B**LOW!" said Pie, as, having opened the Form-room door an inch or two and peered into the passage, he spotted his Form-master at a little distance, in conversation with Mr. Surtees, the master of the Fourth. He closed the door softly.

He went back to his desk, glared at the detention task thereon, and again said "Blow!" But he did not sit down at the desk. He crossed to the window, and looked out into the smoky quad.

Purrings was a stickler. He was, no doubt, every known kind of an ass, but his sticking powers had never been denied. When his mind was made up, it was made up, and that was that. He had told his friends that he was going down to Oakways Station to meet Mr. Egerton Young, the new games-master, and he was going. The only question was, how?

He had allowed an hour to pass. By that time he considered the coast ought to have been clear. Instead of which, two beaks were wagging their chins in the corridor—and even Pie could not walk out of detention under his Form-master's nose. Still, if his beak was in

the corridor, he was not in the quad—and from the Form-room window Pie surveyed the quad with a calculating eye. Dropping from the window was easy, but a fellow had to get clear.

Luckily, not a man of the Sixth was to be seen—and not a master! It was a golden opportunity for a fellow bent on playing the goat!

Pie dropped from the window and, adopting a casual air, strolled away, heading for the bike-shed. There he came to a halt. At the door of the bike-shed, Campion, head boy, stood talking to Oliphant of the Sixth, captain of Oakshott.

"Hallo, aren't you in detention, Purrings?" asked Campion. Pie's face was a sufficient answer. Campion frowned. He was more inclined to laugh, but he had his duty to do. He pointed to the House. "Go back at once, you young ass! If I spot you again, I shall have to report you. Cut!"

Pie trailed away, with inexpressible feelings. He disappeared from Campion's sight, and a few minutes later dropped over a wall and was outside Oakshott School.

He had to walk, but he had plenty of time in which to get to Oakways and arrive at the village station before four o'clock. It was a quarter to four when he walked into the railway station and went on the platform, to wait for the train from Greenwood.

Other fellows in Pie's position might have been wondering whether the outcome of this adventure was going to be a Head's flogging or a stiff imposition. Pie was not! He was wondering what Mr. Young was going to be like, and whether he was a sensible chap, and a better judge of a fellow's form at games than old Bully, or Oliphant, or Harvey.

Pie was not, of course, the fellow to "grease" up to a beak, but he saw no reason why he should not make, if he could, an agreeable impression on Mr. Young, who was going to be in charge

of the games while Mr. Bullivant was away. He knew little of Egerton Young so far—only that he was a young man who took temporary posts at schools when a regular member of the staff was away. He hoped that Mr. Young would have more perception than old Bully.

When the four o'clock train came in from Greenwood, nobody who alighted from it could possibly have been taken for a games master. Mr. Young had not, after all, come by that train.

This was unexpected—and it was irritating. Fuming, Pie waited patiently for the next two trains to arrive, but Mr. Young was on neither of them. It was then half-past five, and Pie decided that the new sports master must have changed his mind and taken a car or something.

It was for this that he had broken out of detention! He might as well have stayed in it—it would have been up at five! Now, of course, he had been missed, and his beak would be looking for him. And it was all for nothing—Young hadn't come.

Fed up and furious, Porrhinge walked back to Oakshott, feeling a strong desire not to make himself agreeable to Mr. Young, but to boot that unoffending young man all over Sussex!

"The ass! The fathead! The chump!" said Pie, over and over again, as he trailed wearily back to the school.

He walked in with a glum brow. Almost the first person he met was Mr. Chalmers, his Form-master. A commanding hand rose, and the horn-rimmed spectacles fixed on him grimly. The Fifth Form master, clearly, was not pleased!

"Porrhinge!"

"Yes, sir!" said Pie dispiritedly. He could have faced this with equanimity if he had carried out his plans. It was hard to have to face it for nothing—very hard!

"I was surprised, Porrhinge—very much astonished—to find that you

had left the Form-room. This will not do, Porrhinge! I make allowances for you, as the stupidest boy in my Form—"

"Eh?"

"If this should occur again, I shall report you to Dr. Osborne. On the present occasion, Porrhinge, you will write out a Georgic from Virgil."

"Oh, crumbs!" said Pie, as he trudged on dispiritedly to the House, the horn-rimmed glasses gleaming severe disapproval after him.

CHAPTER 32.

Under Fire!

LEN LEX rode out of Trant like the wind. Behind him the old High Street was in a buzz deepening to a roar. Exciting events were few and far between in the quiet country town. A bank hold-up was a new thing in its sleepy history—new and wildly strange and thrilling. But if the townsfolk were excited and thrilled, they were not quick on the uptake. The bank-robber whizzed away on his bicycle, and only Len Lex went after him—other pursuit there was, for the moment, none—though no doubt there would be a car on the road before long.

Len had been tired after that drag up Trant Hill. He forgot it now, for the silver-haired man, going back the way he had come, was shooting down the hill, and Len shot after him, the wind lashing his face and stinging his ears as he went like a bullet. Up that hill the Oakshott fellows had come painfully—down it Len went at a pace that blended the roadside trees and hedges into a continuous film.

If he was not gaining on the man who fled, he was not losing—and he was hardly twenty yards behind. His eyes were on him—on the deceptive gleam of the silver hair in the sunshine. He could have grinned at it, if he had had leisure for grinning. He knew now, of

course, that the silver hair, the white moustache, and brows and beard were a cunning disguise. He knew why the old Johnny had negotiated that hill with such ease—it was because, under that venerable exterior, he was a young, strong, active, and particularly muscular and vigorous man!

Only too well Len Lex knew that now. Banks had remarked at the time that perhaps the man was not so old as he looked—and he wasn't, by thirty or forty years! That old Johnny was, quite probably, hardly ten years older than Len—fifteen years, at the most!

They had covered a mile at break-neck speed when the old Johnny glanced over his shoulder. Len saw the glancing eyes grow fixed under the bushy white brows. The man, seeing him, knew that he was followed.

He might have supposed that a schoolboy was riding recklessly down the hill, unconnected with him or what had happened in Trant. But perhaps he had noticed Len before—seen him, perhaps, with his friends, outside the Rotunda, and guessed that he had jumped on his bike to pursue. Anyhow, the sudden fixity of his backward stare told of suspicion and enmity. And Len, remembering that the desperate man had fired two shots in the bank, set his teeth.

From what the bank clerk had shouted, he knew that a man had been shot—perhaps two. In any case, the hold-up man, fiding for liberty, if not for life, was ready to use a deadly weapon for his safety. Spinning down the hill at dizzy speed, there was not much danger in shooting, but Len knew of what the villain was capable, and he set his teeth as he spun on.

He knew that the bank-robber could not intend to keep to the highway. Cars would soon be roaring in pursuit—the telephone was already at work, and the roads would soon be watched and barred to the fugitive. On a push-bike he had no chance whatever of ultimate escape.

His game was to get clear of the town in that desperate rush, dodge into cover, strip off his disguise, and conceal or abandon the bicycle.

The Schoolboy Detective knew that that must be his game. And but for Len, he would have carried on unchecked, unwatched, and in a totally different guise appeared on the road again, met his pursuers face to face unsuspected—perhaps even joined in the hunt for himself! For whatever he looked like when his disguise was removed, it was a certainty that he looked in his natural state nothing whatever like a silver-haired grandfather!

But with Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew close behind, the man's game was not so easy to play. True, Len was merely some schoolboy or other in his eyes—that and nothing more. Even his friends at Oakshott did not know that Len Lex was a detective as well as a schoolboy. But the man knew that this schoolboy was pursuing him—that he would see, that he would tell what he had seen!

Two miles flashed by almost at the speed of an express train. Cars had been passed, but Len was going too fast for a shout to them. At a point where a narrow lane opened into Trant Woods, the old Johnny turned to the left so sharply that his machine rocked and almost tumbled. In a flash he was gone, swallowed by wide-spreading branches.

About a second later Len Lex rocked round the corner into the lane.

If he had noticed the man's game before, he knew it now. He was hunting cover, and he needed only minutes! Len was not going to give him seconds, if he could help it. He glimpsed the Homburg hat, with the deceptive silver hair brushed under it, ahead of him under the shady branches. The woodland lane was narrow and winding; in a moment or two the high road was lost to sight behind—and pursuit, if it came from Trant, would go sweeping

past. The bank-raider had planned well—not reckoning, naturally, on the chance that the nephew of a Scotland Yard inspector might happen to be on the scene!

Again the man looked back. In the shadow of thick branches his eyes, under the white brows, gleamed and glittered like those of a hunted animal. But he did not pause.

From the lane a cart-track wound away into the woods to the right. Len knew that track; it wound away for many miles, and led at long last into the Greenwood Road, near Oakways village, far away past the school. It was narrow, rough, bumpy. The old Johnny rocked and jolted on to it, and behind him, still going strong, Len Lex rocked and jolted in his turn. His legs were feeling the strain now—he had no chance in a race with the man who looked like a grandfather, but was obviously young and strong and tireless.

A woodcutter appeared in sight ahead, staring—amazed, no doubt, to see a silver-haired old Johnny going at such speed.

"Stop thief!" Len yelled.

But the bank-raider was past the man in a flash; Len passed him in another, leaving him blinking. But a few moments later the Schoolboy Detective grinned with glee as he jammed on his brakes. Blocking the narrow track ahead was the woodcutter's cart, the wheels brushing the thickets on either side. The hold-up man braked savagely, but barely escaped crashing into the rear of the cart. He jumped off, panting, and turned, his lips drawn back in a snarl.

Keen, flashing brown eyes, with a desperate glitter in them, fixed fiercely on the Schoolboy Detective. A hand dived into a pocket, and Len, knowing what was coming, threw himself off his machine as the automatic roared and the bullet whizzed past.

Bark, bark, came again, as Len rolled into the brambles beside the cart-track. Whether the man was firing to hit, or merely to scare him, Len could not tell, but clearly the hold-up man cared little what damage he did. But Len Lex was in the thickets beside the track in the twinkling of an eye, and the bullets hummed harmlessly by.

The woodcutter was coming up the track at a run, shouting to some other man somewhere in the wood. But at sight of the blazing eyes and lifted weapon, the woodcutter popped behind a tree with great celerity.

Len put his head out from a bunch of hawthorns and peered up the track. The hold-up man was jamming the pistol back into his pocket and staring at the cart that blocked the way. To push the bicycle past it was impossible—to drag the machine round through the trees and tangled thickets almost impossible.

Len could guess that the hold-up man had intended to ride farther, perhaps nearly as far as Oakways, before abandoning the machine. Now he suddenly made up his mind, and leaving the bicycle lying by the cart, plunged into the wood and vanished.

The next second Len was running up the track, and he reached the cart and the abandoned bicycle. A sound of brushing and rustling was dying away in the distance. He made a few steps into the wood—and stopped—the rustle died into silence. It was futile to follow farther; the chances a thousand to one against sighting the old Johnny again.

Len gritted his teeth. Somewhere deep in the dusky wood, the scoundrel would be stripping off that venerable disguise, to appear later in the public eyes as—what? Certainly as a young man, strong and vigorous; but that, and the fact that his eyes were keen as a hawk's, and dark brown in colour, was all that Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew would be able to report!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you silly asses!" exclaimed Pie indignantly. "Think it's funny?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the three. "Funny isn't the word for it. It's a positive scream! Ho, ho, ho! You'll be the death of us, Pie!"

Pie glared at them in speechless indignation. Then he jumped up, grasped Virgil from the inkstand, and, brandishing that great poet in the air, rushed at his hilarious friends and drove them from the study, still yelling like hyenas.

CHAPTER 31.

Len Interviews Mr. Young!

LEN LEX was sitting in the window of the senior day-room, with a thoughtful wrinkle in his brow. From the window he had a view of old Bully stepping into a taxi with a suitcase in his hand.

Len was sorry he was going, but he was thinking of Mr. Egerton Young, who was to take his place for two or three weeks. So far, he had seen nothing of Mr. Young except a glimpse of the back of his head when old Bully was showing him round the school.

Len was wondering what Young was like, and whether he was, by chance, a good-natured and kind-hearted man like old Bully, when Hobbs of the Fifth interrupted him. Nearly every fellow in the Oakshott Fifth had asked Len about the hold-up man—now it was Hobbs' turn. The Schoolboy Detective suppressed a yawn. He was getting a little tired of the topic of the bank raid at Trant.

"You saw him, I hear," said Hobbs.

"Oh, yes," said Len, "we all three saw him. He was got up in silver hair and beard, and looked about sixty or seventy. I fancy he took them off, and about forty years along with them, when he got away in the wood."

"You don't know what he really looked like, then?"

"Only that he had brown eyes, as keen as a hawk's."

"By gum," said Hobbs. "If he really was in disguise like that, he might be walking about Trant this very minute, and nobody the wiser."

"Quite likely."

"I say, I've heard that he got away with a lot of stuff," said Hobbs. "They say that he fired two shots in the bank, and knocked one man over with a bullet—rather badly hurt—and grabbed whole bundles of currency notes—hundreds of pounds! I wonder whether it'll be in the evening papers? Might get a squint at one of the beaks' papers when they're put in Common-room."

And Hobbs of the Fifth walked off with the intention of getting that "squint."

"Not a bad idea," remarked Harvey. "I'd like to see——"

"Never mind that now," said Len. "Look here, about poor old Pie——"

"Oh, blow Pie!" said Banks. "We shall have to keep out of the study till prep. What did he ask for that Georgic for, the silly goat?"

"I was wondering if Young would put in a word for him?" said Len.

"Eh? Why should he?"

"Well, Pie got the Georgic for going to meet his train. If Young's good-natured, like old Bully, he might think it rather hard on a chap to get a Georgic for paying him a little polite attention. If he put in a word with Chalmers——"

"He might," said Banks dubiously.

"Sporting chance, at least," assented Harvey. "I'd like Pie to get off that Georgic. Life won't be worth living in Study No. 8 till he's done it, and that means a week, at least."

Len Lex rose from the window-seat.

"No harm in putting it to Young, anyhow," he said. "I suppose I shall find him in old Bully's rooms."

Len left the day-room, and went up the stairs to the upper corridor on which Mr. Bullivant's rooms opened. He tapped at the door of the sitting-room.

"Come in!" called a sharp, clear voice, quite unlike old Bully's gruff bark, but much less kindly.

Len opened the door and stepped in. A young man of athletic and powerful frame was standing by the window. His face was rather handsome, if a little hard in outline, his eyes very keen.

"My baggage——" he began; and broke off as he saw that Len was an Oakshott fellow. Apparently, he had been expecting one of the household staff with his bags. There was no baggage of any sort to be seen in the room.

He gave Len a nod and a smile.

"Come in!" he said. "What is it?"

Len came across the room towards the window. Mr. Young gave a slight start as the light fell on his face. It seemed to Len for a moment that the man knew and recognised him.

That, however, was scarcely possible, as Mr. Young had never been at Oakshott School before that day. But it was only for a moment that the sharp eyes were fixed, with keen penetration, on Len's face. Then the young man turned to the window, his profile to Len.

"I hope it isn't a cheek to butt in on you like this, sir," said Len. "I'm Lex of the Fifth——"

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," said Mr. Young; and he shook hands. "I have heard of you already—Bullivant mentioned you as one of his most promising cricketers."

"That was very kind of Mr. Bullivant, sir! I've come here to speak about a pal of mine—Porrings of the Fifth. Old Pie—I mean Porrings—has been looking forward to your coming here, sir. He's fearfully keen on cricket,

and was very anxious to meet you when you came——"

"He may have that pleasure whenever he pleases," said Mr. Young, with a smile. "I have been here some time now—several hours, in fact!"

"He heard that you were coming by the four o'clock train from Greenwood to Oakways Station, sir——"

"That is correct," assented Mr. Young. "I walked from the station, but I was here by half-past four, if your young friend was very anxious to see me."

Len was so astonished to hear this that his breath was nearly taken away.

Pie had waited for three trains at Oakways, and Young had not come. Yet Mr. Young calmly stated that he had walked from the station as if he had come by the four o'clock train!

Pie, it was true, was every known kind of a goat. But was it possible that even Pie could have let the man walk out of the station, under his very nose, without spotting him?

The amazement in Len's face drew another keen glance from Egerton Young. He stared at the Oakshott Fifth Former.

"Well, my hat!" ejaculated Len. "That goat Pie didn't know you by sight, but he told us that nobody looking the least bit like a games-master came by that train."

"I don't understand you." Mr. Young's voice was cold and hard. "What do you mean, Lex? What are you talking about?"

"I was going to tell you, sir—Porrings went to meet your train at Oakways this afternoon——"

The games-master started.

"My train—at Oakways!" he repeated.

"Yes; and from what he's told us, he was at the station long before the train came in, looking out for you," said Len. "You must have walked by

right under his nose and he never noticed you."

Mr. Young stood silent, his face turned to the window.

Len was grinning now. Pie had risked, or, rather, asked for, a Georgic, by breaking detention to go down to Oakways and meet the new games-master, and had allowed him to walk off under his nose! It was the limit, even for the goat of the Fifth!

Mr. Young turned to Len again. His expression was cold and discouraging. Len realised that he was not, by any means, a good-natured man like old Bully. Pie's amazing blundering would have made old Bully chuckle.

"Let me have this clear!" snapped Mr. Young. "You say that this friend of yours, Porrhinge, went to the station to meet my train?"

"Yes, the four o'clock," said Len. "He watched it in and out again, and never saw you—I mean, he never saw anybody that could be taken for a games-master. He was going to ask, of course, if he saw a likely man. Must have been watching with his eyes shut, I suppose. He waited for two more trains, and you never came. Of course you didn't, if you'd already come by the four o'clock, and walked out of the station."

"And why," asked Mr. Young, "have you come here to tell me this, Lex?"

Mr. Young's voice was very quiet, but there was a tone in it that startled Len a little. It was a tone of subdued hostility. He realised that the man was angry, though why it was hard to say. There was nothing in the episode to make any man angry that Len could see. He would rather have expected Mr. Young to be amused.

"It's on Pie's account, sir," Len explained. "As it happens, he was in detention this afternoon——"

"You have just stated that he went to Oakways Station to meet my train," said Mr. Young harshly. "What do you mean? Explain yourself."

"I mean that he cut detention, sir, to meet your train," said Len, more and more surprised. It came into his mind that he was not going to like this Mr. Egerton Young. "That's why I came to speak to you, sir. Our Form-master, Mr. Chalmers, has given him a Georgic for breaking out of detention."

"How does that concern me?"

"Well, it doesn't, of course, sir," said Len, discouraged. "But we thought—that is, I thought—that as he had done it to meet you at the station, sir, being anxious to make your acquaintance, you—you might put in a word for him with Mr. Chalmers."

"Nonsense!"

Len set his lips a little. A man like old Bully would have laughed at Pie's fathheaded proceedings, and very likely done what he could for him. This young man, only too clearly, was nothing at all like old Bully.

"From what you tell me," said Mr. Young coldly, "the boy appears to be a fool. If he broke out of detention to meddle in what did not concern him, I should certainly not think of interfering in the matter in any way."

"Very well, sir!" said Len quietly. "I'm sorry I've bothered you."

Mr. Young, with a shrug of his broad shoulders, turned to the window again. He did not give Len another glance as the Fifth Former went out of the room.

CHAPTER 34.

Pie Sees Red!

THE fellows in the day-room burst into a roar of laughter as Porrhinge of the Fifth appeared in the doorway.

Pie, weary and worn, had come down for a rest from Georgics. It was getting near time for prep, and a fellow really had to have a rest between impots and prep. So down came Pie, for a little pleasant and genial company

in the day-room. He was quite surprised when the fellows there burst into a roar at his appearance.

"What's the joke?" asked Pie, staring.

"You, old man—you!" chortled Cayley. "The richest joke ever! What would Oakshott be without you, you goat?"

"What indeed?" gurgled Banks.

Pie frowned. He was accustomed to being considered a goat, but this was annoying—especially after a fellow had been grinding at Georgics.

"You silly asses!" began Pie. "If you're sniggering over that dummy, Young, not coming by the train he said he was coming by, he's a silly goat, if you like, for losing train after train. It wasn't my fault he didn't come."

"But he did!" shrieked Banks.

"Don't be an ass!" said Pie crossly. "It may be funny, me sticking there waiting for a man who never came, though I don't see it myself. But he never came—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Pie glared.

His friends had considered it rather funny that Pie should put in over an hour and a half waiting at a railway station for a man who hadn't come. But the latest news made them consider it funnier. If the man had actually come, and walked by under Pie's nose, it was a real shriek, in the general opinion of the Fifth.

"Pie, old man," sighed Len, "you'll be the death of us yet! The man was here when we got in from Trant. When you told us he hadn't turned up at the station, we fancied he'd had a car from Greenwood, or something. But it turns out that he did come by the four train."

"He didn't!" shrieked Pie.

He was getting excited. Goat he might or might not be, but he wasn't goat enough to miss the man at the station if he had come. The bare idea was absurd. Pie glared at the hilarious

Fifth Formers. His face grew crimson with wrath.

"He did!" chortled Harvey. "He did, old man—he did!"

"Four train at Oakways!" howled Banks. "And you standing on the platform watching for him! And you never saw him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The day-room almost rocked. Every fellow there yelled. Really, it was too funny, even for Pie!

Pie breathed wrath. This was altogether too thick. If there was one thing he was absolutely sure of, it was that no man even remotely resembling a possible games-master had come to Oakways Station that afternoon.

"I tell you he never came!" he hooted. "If he's here now—I haven't seen him yet—he came some other way unless he came by a later train than the five-thirty."

"You ass!" howled Banks. "He was here when we came in, I tell you! He was here at half-past four."

"Then he had a taxi from Greenwood," said Pie. "What the thump makes you think that he came by train, anyhow?"

"Only that he says so!" chortled Banks.

"Rot!" said Pie.

"But he does!" yelled Len. "I've spoken to him. I was going to ask him to put in a word for you, old man, with Chalmers. That's how it came to be mentioned. He said he came by the four train!"

Pie stood dumb. He knew that Eger-ton Young, the new games-master at Oakshott, had not come by the four o'clock train at Oakways. It was several moments before he found his voice.

"You're not pulling my leg, Lex?" he asked.

"Honest Injun, old fathead!" Len chuckled.

"Then," said Pie grimly, "why is the man telling lies about it?"

"Wha-a-t?"

The laughter died away in the day-room. This was getting serious!

"He never came by train," said Porringe in the same grim tone. "And if he said he did, he's telling lies."

"Oh, chuck it, you ass!" said Cayley. "You'll get into a frightful row if anybody hears you say a beak was telling lies."

"I don't care who hears me say so!" roared Pie. "I tell you I watched that train, and the two after it, and saw everybody that came. Look here, where's the man? I'll take a squint at him. Where is he?"

"I saw him in Hall, talking to Surtees," said Banks. "But—here, hold on, you ass! Pie, you goat!"

Pie, unheeding, turned and tramped away. His friends exchanged glances, and hurried after him. A dozen Fifth Form men followed. This was getting exciting, and they weren't going to miss the fun.

With a whole army following on his trail, as it were, Porringe marched into Hall. A group of three stood there—Surtees, master of the Fourth, Young, and Oliphant, captain of Oakshott.

Pie's eyes fixed at once on Young. As he was a stranger there, Pie knew that he must be the new games-master. He stared hard at Mr. Egerton Young—a man he certainly had never seen before, and who, he knew, had never arrived at Oakways Station by the four o'clock train from Greenwood.

Banks tapped him on the elbow.

"Don't glare at the chap, fathead!" he whispered.

"So that's the man!" breathed Pie. "And he makes out that he came by the four train! He never did! Think I shouldn't have guessed who he was, and asked him? I tell you, I saw everybody who came—watched every face. And if he says he came by that train, he's a—gurrreggh!"

Pie's friends grabbed him in time, closed round him, and walked him out of Hall. Surtees, Young, and Oliphant were glancing round—and Pie's friends felt that the excited Fifth Former was better off the scene.

"I tell you," spluttered Pie angrily, "if—ooogh!" Harvey clapped a prompt hand over Pie's mouth, and they walked him back to the day-room.

"Now, you goat, you can blow off steam, if you like," said Banks, shutting the door. "But you're not going to let Young hear you calling him a liar, you blithering idiot!"

"I don't care if he does hear me!" bawled Pie. "I tell you he never came by that train! I don't know why the man should tell lies about it, but he never came by that train, and I jolly well know it. He's a lying tick, and if he told me that he came by that train, when he jolly well didn't, I'd jolly well tell him so to his face!"

"Isn't he the giddy limit!" sighed Banks.

"Oh, shut up!" roared Pie. He grabbed the door-handle. "Making out that a fellow's a fool, and blind as an owl! He never came, I tell you, and if you can't take my word for it, you can go and eat coke, and be blowed to you!"

And Pie jerked the door open, stamped out of the day-room, and slammed the door after him, with a slam that was heard over most of Oakshott School.

CHAPTER 35.

Rough Luck for Root!

"COMING?" asked Root of the Fourth.

It was after class the following day, and plenty of juniors had gathered in the Lair. Not one of them answered.

"Nobody coming along with me?" asked Root with sarcastic scorn.

"Out of bounds, you know!" said Skye, shaking his head.

"Yah!" rejoined Root inelegantly. And he departed.

Root walked down to the gates, where he found Len Lex, Harvey, and Banks arguing with Porrhinge. Root grinned in passing. He could guess that Porrhinge was up to something of a goatish nature, and that his friends were trying to make him see reason. He passed on his way, and went out, up the road that led to Trant. At the same time, Pie, detaching himself from his argumentative friends, started in the opposite direction towards Oakways.

Root went on his way unheeded—which he was happy to do. A fellow who was deliberately going out of school bounds naturally did not desire to draw attention to himself.

Getting towards Trant Wood, which was out of bounds for Lower boys, he cast a cautious glance backward—and was dismayed to spot an athletic figure in the distance. It was annoying for Mr. Young, the new games-master, to be walking in that direction, when Root was bound on an expedition that might result in "six on the bags" if discovered by his Form-master.

Root broke into a run.

Mr. Young had been only twenty-four hours at Oakshott School, and did not know half the fellows yet. Probably he did not know Root at all. Anyhow, he would never guess where Root was going, if Albert got out of his sight.

Looking back five minutes later, Root was relieved and satisfied to see that he had dropped Mr. Young. All was clear now. He scrambled up the grassy, brambly bank by the roadside, wriggled through a fence where a paling was missing, and found himself in Trant Wood. With his eyes well about him, Root proceeded to wind a way through the wood.

Footpaths and bridle-paths in Trant Wood were free to the public. The thickets and sunny glades were not. Root could not help that. He had no time to go by footpaths. He had to

get to a particular spot, and he took the shortest cut.

On half-holidays, school bounds were extended, and Trant Wood was then within the radius. That was the cause of Root's trouble, really. The previous afternoon, with two or three comrades from the Fourth, he had climbed a tree in the wood. In climbing, he had dropped his pocket-knife—a little accident that might have happened to any fellow, and that did not matter in the least, as it was easy enough to spot it and pick it up again when he descended from the oak. But while Root & Co. had been in the branches, there had been an alarm of keepers—and they had dropped and fled, without stopping to look for the pocket-knife.

Leaving it there till next half-holiday was not to be thought of. So here was Root.

Suddenly he came to a halt as he heard a rustle in the thickets behind him. The thought of keepers flashed into his mind at once. He could see no one yet, but he could hear. With a palpitating heart he hurried on, taking as much care as he could to make no sound. The rustle died away, and he breathed more freely.

A few minutes later he emerged into a cart-track. This was the spot, from what he had heard, where Lex of the Fifth had chased the hold-up man the day before. The man had abandoned his bike and taken to the wood—and it was quite as likely as not that it was his approach that Root & Co. had mistaken for a keeper's, when they were in the oak. That was rather a thrilling idea.

The old oak was only a short distance from the track. Root turned off into the wood again, and reached the tree.

Stooping, he groped in thick grass under the wide-spreading branches, in search of the pocket-knife. At last his searching fingers met a hard object lying in the grass, and in great relief and satisfaction, he clutched up the lost knife.

Breathing rather hard, he rose to his feet—and came face to face with a man coming round the thick trunk of the oak! Root jumped almost clear of the ground in his surprise. He had not heard the man coming—any more than the man had heard him—and right up to that moment, the massive trunk had hidden them from one another's sight.

Root's first feeling was panic. His next was relief, as he saw that the man was not a keeper. Relief was mingled with surprise as he recognised Mr. Young.

Then he started back at the black look that came over Mr. Young's face. For a moment he thought that the games-master was going to grab him; he looked so startled and savagely angry at the sight of him. But if that had been Mr. Young's intention, he restrained it.

"You are an Oakshott boy!" he rapped. "What are you doing here?" He did not wait for an answer. "You are out of bounds here—and not merely out of bounds, but trespassing!"

The dismayed Root wondered how he knew. He had been picking up local information pretty quick for a man who had been only one day at the school.

"Your name and Form?" rapped Mr. Young.

"Root of the Fourth, sir!" faltered the junior dispiritedly.

"Mr. Surtees' Form! I shall report this to him!"

"I—I say, sir," stammered Root, "I—I only came to—"

"Go back to the school at once—and report yourself to Mr. Surtees!" said the games-master sternly. "You will tell Mr. Surtees that I caught you out of bounds, trespassing in Lord Trant's woods. I shall speak to Mr. Surtees when I return. Now go!"

Albert Root, with feelings too deep for words, went.

CHAPTER 24.

Pie's Proof!

"WELL, we've given old Pie a helping hand," said Len, rising from the study table. "Let's go down and see if he's in the office. It's close on 'gates' now!"

Pie's friends had been occupied in a noble work of self-sacrifice. They had done fifty lines each of Pie's Georgic. Mr. Chalmers being—very fortunately!—a short-sighted gentleman, they had no doubt that the lines would pass, jammed in with the rest.

Fifty lines each was a handsome quota; quite as much, at all events, as any of the three felt disposed for. Tired of Virgil's deathless verse and the rural delights described therein, the three left the study.

They reached the study landing, and found a junior hanging on the banisters there, wriggling and moaning. The Fifth Form men chuckled. Root of the Fourth glared round at them.

"Had it bad, kid?" asked Len good-naturedly.

"Surtees gave me six—wow!" said Root. "Every one a swipe! Oh, that cad—that rotter—that sneaking spy—I'd like to punch his head! What bizney was it of his I'd like to know! Trespassing himself, if you come to that! Beaks ain't allowed in old Trant's woods any more than we are! Ow!"

"If you've been trespassing you jolly well deserved six, and Surtees had to hand them over," said Harvey.

"I know that!" groaned Root. "I ain't blaming Surtees. But it was no bizney of that swab Young—ow!"

"Young!" repeated the three.

"That swab—that cad—that worm!" said Root, with eloquence. "What was he doing there himself, I'd like to know? Sneaking about in the wood like a fox and coming on a chap suddenly! He's not a regular beak—only a games-master, and a temporary one at that! No bizney of his to report a chap—wow!"

"Young came on you in Trant Wood?" exclaimed Len. "He's new here. I suppose he doesn't know the public aren't allowed—"

"He jolly well does; he told me I was trespassing!" grunted Root. "So he was himself; but, of course, a chap couldn't tell him so. Sneaking rotter, going about on tiptoe and catching a chap! I can tell you that Young is a rotter!"

Len & Co. passed on to the stairs, leaving Albert Root hanging on the banisters again, wriggling and mumbling.

"Young isn't going to be popular here!" grinned Harvey. "Old Pie makes out that he's a liar, and young Root calls him a spy and a swab! But why the dickens was the man rooting about in Lord Trant's woods?"

"Like his cheek to nail young Root for trespassing when he was up to the same game himself!" remarked Banks. "Can't say I like the man. You don't, Lex?"

"No," answered Len slowly.

They went out of the House and walked down to the gates. It was getting near lock-up now, and fellows were coming in. They watched the road for Pie, who, despite his friends' arguments, had gone down to Oakways with the declared intention of making inquiries at the station there, and jolly well prove, as he expressed it, that that swab Young hadn't come by the four train on Wednesday afternoon.

Harvey and Banks expected him to turn up looking down in the mouth, with proof, of course, that Young had come by that train. Len Lex now was not feeling so sure. He was a keen judge of men, and he did not like Mr. Egerton Young; and a vague distrust of the man had, somehow, been strengthened by what he had just heard from Root of the Fourth.

It seemed impossible that the man could have lied concerning his route to the school the previous day—there was

no imaginable reason why he should, the matter being of absolutely no consequence whatever, so far as a fellow could see. Yet Len did not share the certainty of Harvey and Banks that Pie would return disappointed, forced to own up that he had made one more of his idiotic mistakes.

"Hallo, here he is!" said Banks.

"Any luck, old ass?"

"Lots!" grinned Pie.

"You've found out that everybody at the station knows that Young came by the four train yesterday?" chuckled Harvey.

"Wrong!" said Pie, with superb coolness. "What I've found out is this—that everybody at the station knows he didn't!"

Len Lex drew a deep breath. Now that it had come he knew that, at the back of his mind, he had been expecting it.

"I told you yesterday that Young was a liar if he said he came by train from Greenwood to Oakways!" added Pie. "Now I've proved it! The man who took the tickets remembers every passenger who came by the four train, and there wasn't anybody like Young among them. And that ain't all, either. Young's bags came on by train and were sent on to the school, but Young wasn't with them! Looks as if he meant to come by that train, as his bags were on it. But he never did! So what do you say about it now?"

Harvey and Banks had nothing to say. They could only gasp. It was not only that Pie had turned out to be right, which was surprising enough in itself. But why, in the name of all that was idiotic, should Young have said that he came by the four train to Oakways; when—as was now quite clear—he hadn't?

Harvey and Banks could only wonder, while Pie grinned and chuckled in his triumph. Neither had Len Lex anything to say, but the Schoolboy Detective was thinking, and thinking hard!

CHAPTER 37.

"Just a Slip!"

THERE was a hurried movement on the study landing at Oakshott School. Six or seven fellows were there, and every one of them, as if moved by the same spring, got away from the immediate neighbourhood of Pie Porringe of the Fifth.

A cricket ball, in its proper place, was a harmless article. In the hand of Porringe, at close quarters, it was neither. When Pie lifted his right hand, with the round, red ball in it, the effect was quite startling. It might really have been a bomb.

"For goodness' sake," gasped Harvey, "don't start chucking that ball about indoors, you ass!"

"Chucking it!" repeated Pie, staring at him. "I'm not going to bowl, you fathead! I'm just going to show you——"

"Don't!" implored Banks.

"What I mean is——"

"We know what you mean, Pie, old man," said Len Lex, the Schoolboy Detective. "It's what you don't mean that we're afraid of."

Pie glared. He had a lot of this sort of thing from his pals of Study No. 8. It was very annoying. Porringe knew that he could bowl, if nobody else did. It was altogether too thick for a fellow—a good bowler, too—to be regarded as positively dangerous merely because he was going to show his friends a little trick in bowling. Pie wasn't going to bowl, of course, but merely demonstrate to his friends how it was done. Nevertheless, the Fifth Form fellows on the study landing seemed worried. Three or four of them went hastily up the Fifth Form passage. Lex and Harvey and Banks stayed with Pie—but they remonstrated.

"You silly asses!" said Pie. "Think I'm going to knock your brains out with this ball—if you've got any? Look here! That fool Young——"

"Hush, you ass! He's on the next landing!" hissed Harvey.

"I don't care," said Pie. He glanced over the banisters. On the next landing, half-way down to the hall, Mr. Young, the games-master, was standing, talking to Oliphant of the Sixth.

Pie had hoped great things when the new games-master came in the place of Mr. Bullivant. But he had found Mr. Young as blind to his quality as a cricketer as old Bully had ever been. Still, he lowered his voice a little as he went on. Low as he rated Mr. Young's intelligence, he could not very well tell the man what he thought of him.

"That silly chump, Young," resumed Pie, in a lower key, "thinks I can't bowl. He's as fatheaded as old Bully. He knows no more than you do about a man's form, Harvey."

Harvey winked at his friends. As captain of the Fifth Form eleven, he had had many arguments with Pie. Pie was his pal, but Cedric Harvey would not have put him in a team to play anything but noughts and crosses.

"What about tea?" asked Banks casually.

"Never mind tea," said Pie. "I'm going to show you! That idiot, Young, said I didn't even know how to grip a ball. He's down on me—that's the truth. He doesn't like me because I went to meet his train the day he came here, and so it came out that he never came by train, though he said he did. I don't know why he told lies about it, but he did, and it was through me that it came out. That's why he's down on me. It's pretty thick, though, to slang my cricket because he has a down on me."

Pie's friends chortled. It was true that Mr. Young did not seem to like Pie—and perhaps it was on account of that peculiar incident on the day of his arrival to take old Bully's place. Why the man pretended that he had come by the four o'clock train from Greenwood, when, owing to Pie, it was

known that he hadn't, was quite a puzzle. So far as a fellow could see, it did not matter a boiled bean how he had travelled that day. Still, there it was—and no doubt it had been annoying to Mr. Young.

But that wasn't really the reason why he slanged Pie's cricket. Pie's cricket, on its merits, was enough to make a games-master weep.

"Oh, cackle!" said Pie. "But I can tell you, that's the reason—the man's a liar, and I happened to show him up. Do you know what he called me at games practice this afternoon? A clumsy ass!"

"He hasn't been here long," remarked Banks, "but he knows you already, Pie."

"Oh, shut up, Banker! Look here, do you fellows want me to show you or not?" demanded Pie hotly. "Just watch! This was how I did it when that cheeky swab called me a clumsy ass—me, you know!"

The three kept well out of the way and watched—warily. If Pie let that ball go, goodness only knew what the result might be—a smashed window, at least. That, however, was better than a smashed napper.

Pie's arm came over with a swing. How it happened that the ball left his fingers he never knew. Possibly, there was some foundation for Young's assertion that he didn't know how to grip a ball. Certainly, Pie had not the remotest intention of letting the ball go. He was merely demonstrating the action—and the ball should have remained in his grip. The unfortunate part of the performance was that it didn't—it flew!

"Oh!" gasped Pie, in surprise.

The ball went with a whiz! For an awful second, the Oakshott Fifth Formers wondered where, dreading a crash of one of the tall windows over the staircase.

But it was not the crash of a breaking window that came. It was a fearful yell of agony from below.

Mr. Young had turned as Oliphant left him, glanced up at the Fifth Form fellows on the upper landing, and started to climb the stairs. Then it happened. Something that felt like a bullet hit him on the right knee. It hit him hard! The startled yell from Mr. Young woke most of the echoes of Oakshott School.

He hopped on one leg. With both hands he clasped the knee of the other. He hopped and he roared.

Pie, over the banisters, gazed down at him in horror. Pie could not understand how this had happened. The ball should not have left his fingers. Even if it did it should not have taken a downward flight to the middle landing. It shouldn't have—but it had! And Young had got it!

"Oh, gum!" gasped Pie.

"You goat! You've done it now!" hissed Harvey.

They stared down over the banisters. Five or six fellows came running up the lower stairs in alarm. Mr. Young ceased to hop and set down his damaged leg very gingerly. He winced as he did so. Clearly, he was hurt. He tried to calm himself, but the expression on his rather hard face was fearfully unpleasant.

"Porridge!" His voice came up like a savage bark. "You threw that ball at me!"

"Oh, no, sir!" gasped Pie. "Not at all, sir."

"What? I saw it in your hand!" roared the games-master. "I was about to call up to you when you threw it!"

"I—I never!" stuttered Pie. "I—I was just showing these fellows something, sir, and it slipped from my hand—a pure accident, sir!"

"I shall report this assault to your headmaster, Porridge!" And Mr. Young went down the lower stairs, limping.

"That," said Pie bitterly, "is that swab all over. He's going to get me

into a row with the Head—making out that I chucked that ball at him! I told him it was an accident. He thinks I'm a liar like he is."

"Oh, you goat!" groaned Banks.

"Hold on a minute, you men," said Pie, "I'll go and get that ball, and show you—"

Pie's friends did not speak. They grasped him, and walked him away to Study No. 8. Pie's indoor demonstrations of how it should be done were over. Once was enough—if not too much.

CHAPTER 38.

The Man in the Tree!

"EIGHT hundred pounds!" said Root of the Fourth impressively.

"Phew!" said Skye, of the same Form.

"And all," went on Root, "in pounds and tens, so the swab will get rid of them as easily as anything. People don't take the numbers of currency notes, like they do banknotes."

Len Lex, sauntering under the old Oakshott oaks with his hands in his pockets, glanced at the group of juniors. Albert Root had a day-old newspaper, and was reading up the recent bank-raid at Trant.

Newspaper, bank-raids, and such things seldom interested Oakshott men. But the case at Trant was rather a special one. It was the Sussex and Southern Bank which had been "held up," and Oakshott fellows had got mixed up in the affair. Lex had actually gone after the bank-raider on his bicycle, and had been called upon by the police to make a statement. For these reasons the hold-up at Trant was a great topic at the school.

"And they haven't got him!" said Dodham of the Fourth.

"Oh, they won't," said Root, shak-

ing his head. "They don't know what he's like. A lot of people saw him, but what have they got to go on? An old Johnny with silver hair and white whiskers—see? Well, of course, all that was stuck on. He took 'em off afterwards."

"I don't see how they know that!" said Skye.

"You mayn't, but I do, and so does everybody else," rejoined Root. "The way he beat it on a bike showed that he wasn't what he looked—a giddy old grandfather. He did Trant Hill at about a mile a minute, with Lex scudding after him. The bobbies aren't looking for a jolly old Methuselah, I can tell you—they're looking for a young and hefty blighter; but, of course, they don't know what he's like, except that Lex saw him close, and said that he had brown eyes. That's something."

"Fat lot that is!" said Dodham. "Lots of people have brown eyes. I have, and Campion of the Sixth has, and that chap Young, the new games-master, and—"

"Still, it's something," said Root. "But if I'd had a bit of luck last Wednesday, I'd have been able to tell them more than Lex could. I never saw the man—but I jolly well heard him."

Len Lex stopped his stroll under the oaks, and listened. Root & Co. did not notice him there. And had they done so, would not have guessed that he was interested in their discussion. But he was. The Schoolboy Detective had his reasons. He had been doing some hard thinking of late on the subject of the bank raid.

And Root had talked of the fact that he had—or at least believed he had—almost established contact with the escaping bank-raider on that memorable Wednesday afternoon. Other Fifth Form seniors, if they heard of it, gave no heed to the chatter of a Fourth Form junior. Len Lex did. Nobody at Oakshott School knew that Lex of

the Fifth was a detective as well as a schoolboy—not even his chums in Study No. 8. But he was, and since the bank raid at Trant, the detective in Len had been rather more to the fore than the schoolboy.

"I heard him," repeated Root impressively. "You remember we were up in that big oak in Trant Wood that afternoon, Skye? Member I dropped my pocket-knife, and was going to field it when we got down—and then we heard somebody coming, and bunked——"

"A keeper!" said Skye.

"We thought it was a keeper at the time," chided Root, "but he never showed up, and we never saw him—we beat it quick. But look here, that old oak is quite close to the wood-cutter's cart-track in Trant Wood. If we'd only known it, that hold-up man was scooting along that cart-track, with Lex behind him on his bike. From what we've heard since, he was stopped by a cart blocking the way, chucked his jigger, and bolted into the wood. That was the time we were there. See? Ten to tell the bobbies a lot more than Lex heard, and took for a keeper."

"Um!" said Skye.

"You can say um!" snapped Root. "But I wish I'd known! I'd have spotted him, and seen him taking his whiskers off. Then I'd have been able to tell the bobbies a lot more than Lex did."

"Funny thing is," went on Root, "that he was coming straight towards the oak—just as if he knew the place."

"If it was a keeper, and he had spotted fellows in the tree——" began Skye.

"It wasn't," said Root, a little discountenanced, for really Skye's suggestion seemed very probable. "I dare say he was going to stick behind that oak to take his white whiskers off. I dare say he did, if you come to that, after we were gone. When I went there the next day, to find my pocket-knife, I was jolly well going to look

round, to see if there were any foot-prints or things, you know, only that swab Young came barging in and ordered me off." At the mention of Mr. Young, Root shot off at a tangent on a new subject.

"I tell you I loathe that beast Young. Sending me to Surtees to take six, for trespassing in Lord Trant's woods, What bizney was it of his, I'd like to know? I'm jolly glad Porrhinge has given him a game leg, playing the goat with a cricket ball! I say, have you fellows heard? That idiot Porrhinge of the Fifth——"

Len Lex resumed his stroll, and passed out of hearing of Root & Co. The discussion had lost its interest for him. He sauntered in the direction of the bicycle house, and Harvey and Banks cut in and joined him on his way.

"Going out?" asked Harvey.

The Schoolboy Detective nodded and smiled, without giving the slightest indication that it had been his intention—and desire—to go out on his own. Friendship was a boon and a blessing, but it was rather in the way sometimes of a fellow who happened to be a detective as well as a schoolboy.

"Let's get the jiggers out, then," said Banks. "I want a bit of a change from poor old Pie! I'm tired of hearing him talk about that man Young. He's called him everything he can think of twice over, and he was beginning again at the beginning when we bunked out!"

The three ran their jiggers out, and sailed merrily away up the road towards Trant. For several miles they rode abreast. But at a point where a bridle-path led away through Trant Wood, Len slowed down, jumped off, and bent over his jigger.

Harvey looked round.

"Puncture?" he called out.

"No, it's all right—carry on!" called back Len.

Harvey and Banks carried on, and disappeared round the curve of the road

ahead. Then Len remounted, turned from the road, and pedaled into the bridle-path. Much as he liked his chums, he did not want them on the spot when he was dropping Lex of the Fifth and taking up Lex the detective!

Five minutes later, he reached the spot where he had had to give up the chase of the bank raider. Parking his machine in a thicket of hawthorns, he proceeded on foot, winding among the trees. Off the paths, Trant Wood was private property, and out of bounds; but it was not the first time that Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew had had to disregard bounds. Len was looking for that big oak in which Root and his friends had been ensconced on the afternoon of the bank raid. He had no doubt of it when he reached it—a gigantic, ancient tree, topping the wood, with vast branches spreading far and wide.

Standing under the huge branches, Len looked about him with a searching eye. Somewhere near this spot—not close by it—the silver-haired, disguised bank-robber must have passed. And, and as likely as not, it was his approach that Root & Co. had heard, and mistaken for a keeper's. But had he passed—or had he been, as that observant youth, Root, surmised—making for the oak as a spot he knew? A discarded disguise, a discarded hat and suit of clothes, had to be concealed somewhere—easily done, in those massive branches, heavy with foliage.

Len gave a sudden start. From above him, in the dense tree, came a sound of rustling. His heart beat as he stared up.

Someone was in the tree. He could see nothing of the climber—thick foliage screened him. But Len heard him moving. Leaves rustled, and a branch swayed. Some village lad tree-climbing, or—

Len heard a grunt from the tree above. It was no village lad in the branches. That was a grunt of exertion

from a man who was past his first youth—past the clambering age. Grunt again, and a lower branch swayed. The climber was coming down on the side of the tree where Len stood.

Silently, the Schoolboy Detective circled round the massive old trunk. Hidden from sight by that great trunk, he listened intently. Grunt again—rustle, rustle, rustle—and then a bump! The man had dropped from the tree, and was standing under the branches, breathing hard.

The great trunk was between Len and the climber, and for a moment he was content to keep himself out of sight. Then his heart gave a great jump. The unseen man was coming round the tree. His stertorous breathing heralded him.

Had he, after all, heard anything, cautious as Len had been? Did he know that someone was there? As the heavy breathing came round one side of the great trunk, the Schoolboy Detective backed quietly round the other. The tree was still between them when they had changed places—each still unseen by the other. If the man had not heard him—

But the man had! There could be no doubt of that, for he came on round the big oak, obviously in pursuit. Len, stepping softly, circled the trunk again. He had to take the chance of the man reversing and coming back instead of going on, and so meeting him face to face. And that was precisely what the man did! Face to face, Len stared at a portly figure and a red face—and gave a gasp of astonishment and relief!

"Bill, you old ass!"

CHAPTER 38.

A Tip for Bill!

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR NIXON stared at his nephew, as astonished as Len.

"You!" he exclaimed, pushing back his hat and mopping his brow with a

handkerchief. It was warm weather, and clambering in the oak branches had made him rather damp.

"You keep young, Bill," remarked Len. "What's the game? Bird's-nesting?"

Mr. Nixon gave his nephew a glare. For whatever reason the portly Scotland Yard inspector had clambered into that ancient oak, it certainly was not bird's-nesting.

"What are you doing here, you young ass?" he demanded. "Why aren't you at your lessons, like the other little boys?"

Len chuckled.

"Don't get shirty, Bill! Why didn't you tell me they'd put you on the case? Didn't it occur to you that I might have helped?"

"No!" said Bill. "It didn't! I heard all you could tell me, from the police-inspector at Trant, who took your statement down. And when an officer from Scotland Yard is called in, he doesn't confide it to small boys at school."

"Shirty!" sighed Len. "It's your great fault, Bill, you get shirty! Did you think you'd got your man when you played mulberry-bush with me a few minutes ago. When I heard you in the oak, I fancied you were the bank-raider coming back for his whiskers. Here we are, both done—neither of us a hold-up man only an affectionate nephew and a grumpy uncle. And you're getting proud! Too proud to take a helping hand from your dutiful nephew! I've a jolly good mind to throw up the case."

"Throw it up?" said Bill. "Does that mean that you've been barging into it, instead of attending to your lessons?"

"What else?" asked Len. "What do you expect of a fellow trained by the most sagacious inspector and finest detective at Scotland Yard?"

Mr. Nixon looked at him, his damp,

red face slowly melting into a grin. But he shook his head.

"You're not butting into this, Len! That bank-raider shot a man in Trant. He's not going to shoot my nephew."

"I might have guessed," said Len, "that it was some fatheaded idea of that sort that you had in your soft old brain, Bill. But to come down to brass tacks. You're after the man who held up the bank at Trant. You've read my statement, and you know I liked after him nearly as far as this and you're wise to it that he parked his venerable exterior somewhere when he got away.

"Now you're rooting through the wood after a clue to the jolly old hold-up man, and you've spotted this oak—and it does you credit, Bill. You thought it a likely spot?"

"Isn't it?" grunted Bill.

"Quite!" agreed Len. "Easy for the man to find again, when he wanted it—and as safe as houses for a hiding-place, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"Unless some merry spirits of a junior Form at some school happened to go tree-climbing, and picked this very tree," said Len, "which is a thing that no hold-up man could be expected to foresee or guard against. Fancy his surprise if he'd clambered up and found them there! Lucky for them, in such a case, that they might have heard him coming, taken him for a keeper, and scooted! What?"

Mr. Nixon regarded his nephew in silence.

"But you're too late, Bill!" said Len regretfully. "You've picked a likely spot, but I've an idea that the man came back the next day, found out that the hiding-place wasn't so safe as he had fancied, and cleared out anything he might have parked in that oak."

Grunt from Bill.

"You've found," grinned Len, "signs that this oak has been climbed recently. Are we in this together, Bill?"

"No!" said Mr. Nixon, stubbornly.

"Then I shan't play!" chuckled Len. "Only out of sheer good nature, I'll tip you that there's nothing to be spotted in this wood since Thursday. You can chuck up understudying our remote ancestors, Bill—tree-climbing isn't your long suit," Len glanced at his wristwatch. "It's an hour's walk back to Trant from here, Bill. That gives you easy time to catch the 7.15 up."

"I'm not going back to London, you young ass!"

"No?" asked Len. "Sorry! I thought you might like to take a walk along Regent Street in the morning."

That unexpected and extraordinary remark caused Inspector Nixon to stare very hard at his smiling nephew. He not only stared hard—he breathed hard.

"Carry on!" he grunted. "What do you mean about Regent Street, bother you?"

"In that well-known thoroughfare in the metropolis, Bill, there is an office run by a firm called Hodgson's. Scholastic agency—supplies temporary masters to schools when required; anything from a French master to a mathematics master, or a games-master. It occurred to me, that if you had nothing special on hand in the morning, you might drop in at that show, Bill, and enjoy a little conversation with the principal. You might pick up news of a man named Young—Egerton Young."

"Who's he?"

"So far as I can tell you, Bill, he's a youngish man, pretty good athlete, and quite a good games master—and his business is taking temporary posts at schools and such places, when the regular man is on leave, or sick, or anything of the kind."

"Well?"

"Of course," said Len, "if you prefer climbing trees, Bill, stick to it. It's splendid exercise—slimming, too! But if you felt curious about the chap I've mentioned, you might get a list of the posts he's held during the past few years and compare it with another list

which I dare say you will find parked somewhere at Scotland Yard—list of bank hold-ups, where the man hasn't been caught, and where there's any reason to suppose that he was in disguise when he dropped in to do his business with the bank."

Mr. Nixon breathed very hard.

"You may find," went on Len, "that there are certain coincidences in the two lists—that hold-ups may have happened round about the spots where the chap I've mentioned was filling his temporary posts. Mind, I'm not advising you, Bill—as I'm not in this, of course, it's no business of mine. But if you do as I've suggested, and find any of those coincidences, you'll drop me a line, I'm sure."

Mr. Nixon looked at him in expressive silence.

"Now, if I don't get back to my bike, some Oakshott chaps will come rooting after me," said Len. "Good-bye, Bill! Take your choice between tree-climbing stunts and a walk up Regent Street."

Len waved his hand to Mr. Nixon and cut away. Bill stood staring after him, his brow wrinkling deeper and deeper in thought. Len, grinning, pushed out his bike and remounted it. He spun away at top speed, got back to the road, and whizzed on to Trant.

He overtook his friends as they pedalled into that little country town, and the three had ginger-pop together at the Rotunda. When they rode back to Oakshott, Len glanced once or twice at the dusky shades of Trant Wood. He did not think that Detective-Inspector William Nixon was still there.

He wasn't! Bill Nixon was catching the 7.15 at Trant.

CHAPTER 40.

Pie's Strange Find!

PORRIDGE sat down, got up hastily, and squeaked! His three friends, sitting down to prep in Study

No. 8, smiled. They were, of course, sorry for poor old Pie. A fellow who had been up before the Head and taken six hefty swipes from that gentleman's muscular arm was a proper object of sympathy. Still, sad as it was for poor old Pie, it had an element of the comic.

"Still feel it?" asked Harvey.

"Oh, no!" said Pie, with bitter sarcasm. "Not at all! I'm standing up to prep because I like standing up, like a horse taking its fodder. Ow!"

"Well, you did ask for it, old fellow!" said Banks soothingly. "You can't crock a beak with a cricket ball without something to follow. Young's going about dot-and-carry-one now. You didn't expect him to like it, did you?"

"The rotter!" said Pie, in a deep voice. "I never liked that man from the start. He's an outsider! A real rotter! Look how he told lies about that train the day he came, and look at the way he reported young Root. Cheeky little beast, I know, but he was doing no harm going to Trant Wood to find a pocket-knife he'd lost. He was trespassing, but so was Young himself. He had no more right off the footpaths in Trant Wood than a Fourth Form kid had! I wish a keeper had copped him!"

"And now he lands me with six from the Head, for an accident—a sheer accident!" went on Pie. "He fancies I buzzed that ball at him on purpose! That's because he tells lies' himself—liars can never believe other chaps."

"He was a bit hurt!" murmured Len.

"Serve him right!" said Pie. "I'm glad he got it! I wonder what he was up to that Wednesday afternoon?" added Pie bitterly. "Eh?"

Len Lex looked curiously at Porringer. He also had wondered—not without result. But Porringer's ideas were not likely to run on the same lines as the Schoolboy Detective's.

"You wonder—what?" asked Banks, while Harvey stared.

"Well, just think," said Pie. "He's supposed to get here by the four train from Greenwood. He doesn't! He turns up from nowhere—and makes out that he came by the train he never came by. Why should a man tell thumping lies about a silly thing like that?"

"Beats me!" said Banks.

"And me!" said Harvey.

"What do you think, Lex?" asked Pie.

"I think we'd better get on with prep, old bean."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Pie. "The man's a swab and a rotter—but even a swab and a rotter doesn't tell silly lies for nothing. There must be something fishy about it. Looks to me as if he's keeping something dark or—or something."

"Well, what?" grinned Harvey.

"How should I know, fathead? But he wasn't in the Greenwood train when he said he was, so he must have been somewhere else—and he'd got some reason for keeping that somewhere else dark, or he wouldn't tell lies about it," grunted Pie. "Beastly tick! And look here, you men——"

"Prep, old chap!"

"Oh, rats!"

Prep, however, had to have attention, in spite of Porringer's painful and disgruntled state. Pie stood to it. Every now and then he sat down, but he always got up again. His face, generally beaming, was darkly clouded. It was not only the whopping that worried Pie—though that was bad enough. It was the injustice of it—from Pie's point of view. True, Young had hardly been at Oakshott long enough to learn how dangerous Pie could be with a cricket ball! Still, he ought to have taken a fellow's word.

After prep, when three fellows were ready to go down, Porringer walked about the study with his hands in his pockets and knitted brows.

"Come on, old chap!" said Harvey at the door.

"I've got to think out something," said Pie. "You cut."

"Now, look here, old bean," said Harvey, in a tone of patient remonstrance. "I know what you've got in your silly head, and you're going to chuck it, see? You've had enough trouble with Young, without asking for any more."

"Young's going to have trouble with me!" answered Pie calmly. "The swab's not getting by with this—without a knock back. You fellows cut. I've got to think!"

His friends went down, and Pie was left to pace the study and meditate. When, later, he left Study No. 8, he turned into the passage that led to the masters' quarters, and reached the door of the room that had been old Bully's sitting-room; now, with the adjoining bed-room, the quarters of the new man. He paused, to ascertain that there was no light under the door, or through the keyhole, turned the door-handle softly, stepped in, and closed the door after him with hardly a sound.

Pie, grinning rather breathlessly, looked round the room in the glimmer of light that came from the window. On the table lay a cricket bat.

Pie was there for a "rag." That was the only form in which he could give that swab a knock back. The question was, what form was the rag to take? The sight of the games-master's bat supplied him with the necessary idea.

Taking it up, he stepped towards the empty fireplace and pushed the cricket bat up the chimney—planning to lodge it there, out of sight.

Greatly to his surprise, the end of the bat clumped sharply on something hard, where empty space should have been, dislodged that something, and brought it down with a shower of soot.

Pie jumped. Then he stared at the

object that had dropped into the grate. It was a small leather attache-case, locked with a couple of patent locks.

For a long minute the bewildered Pie stood staring at that mysterious and startling object. He saw that it was locked. What, in the name of wonder, could it contain for its owner to hide it in a chimney? It beat Pie hollow.

But slowly a grin dawned on Pie's astonished face. He saw his rag taking an undreamt-of shape and form. This was going to be rich—richer than he could ever have planned! Young, missing his bat, would probably be guided by the very palpable traces of soot to the chimney. He would find the bat there—but not the attache-case!

The probable expression on his face when he did, made Pie chuckle breathlessly. He would not have to hunt long for the bat. But he would have to hunt for the attache-case! And if he had any reason—as, of course, he must have—for hiding it, missing it from its hiding-place would give him a fearful jolt.

Up went the bat—meeting with no resistance this time. Pie lodged it in the chimney, then picked the attache-case out of the grate, brushed it along the hearthrug to clear off soot, and stepped to the door with it in his hand.

Very cautiously indeed did Pie open the door a few inches and peer out. The coast was clear, and he stepped swiftly to the big window at the end of the passage and opened one of the casements. Below the broad stone sill, the ancient ivy of Oakshott grew thick. The leather case was neither large nor heavy. It was perfectly easy to shove it down in the thick old ivy and push it out of sight there. It lodged safely among the tough old tendrils, completely hidden.

Pie closed the casement, and strolled down to the day-room. His friends were there, and they gazed at him as

he came in. So did every other fellow present.

"What the dickens," exclaimed Banks, "have you been up to? Sweeping a chimney, or what?"

"What d'you mean, you ass?" ejaculated Pie.

"There's a spot of soot on your nose, old chap!" said Len Lex gently.

"Oh!" gasped Pie.

He drew his sleeve across his nose, transforming the spot into a smear.

"That all right?" he asked.

"Right as rain," said Len, "if you want all Oakshott to know that you've been rooting up a chimney! What, in the name of all that's idiotic, have you been up to, you goat?"

Without replying, Pie went to a glass, took out his handkerchief, and rubbed. Every fellow in the room watched him with deep interest.

"Well?" said Study No. 8, with one voice, when Pie had finished his cleansing operations.

"Oh, nothing!" drawled Pie. "That swab Young may be sorry he got me that six from the Head! Don't you fellows ask me any questions, and I won't tell you any whoppers—see?"

Which was all that his friends could draw from the astute Pie. They could only wonder what particular form the goatishness of the Goat of the Fifth had taken this time!

CHAPTER 41.

Friends in Need!

"**Q**UIET!" murmured Len Lex, the Schoolboy Detective.

It was necessary to be rather cautious. Lex, Harvey, and Banks, of the Oakshott Fifth, were where they had no business to be. The fact that their intentions were good would not, probably, have saved them from

trouble had Mr. Young come in and discovered them in his quarters. Certainly he would have wanted to know why they were there—which would have been difficult to explain.

Mr. Young, the new games-master at Oakshott, was neither a patient nor a sweet-tempered man. But had he been both, they could hardly have explained to him that their pal, Pie Porringe, had been japing in his rooms, and that they had come up to see what the dickens the goat of the Fifth had been up to.

They had left Pie downstairs, grinning, in the day-room. That he had been up to something, they knew—but what, Pie declined to confide in them. All he would say was that Young would be sorry for having got him a licking from the Head.

Young, at the moment, was in Common-room, with other beaks. As he had a crooked knee, which was rather painful, it seemed likely that he would not negotiate the stairs till bed-time. The chums hoped so, at least.

In the glimmering starlight from the window, the three looked round the room. Nothing, at the first glance, seemed amiss. They were familiar with that room—Young had Bullivant's old rooms, while the regular games-master was away. Everything seemed to be much as usual. Harvey made a movement towards the doorway into the adjoining bed-room.

"Apple-pie bed, perhaps," he whispered. "Pie's idiot enough."

"Hold on!" murmured Len.

"Look here, the sooner we're out of this, the better, you know!" muttered Banks. "If Young barged in, he might fancy we did it—whatever it was!"

"I know!" Len Lex groped in his pocket for an electric torch. "That goat, Pie, had a smut of soot on his nose when he came down. We must

have been messing about with the chimney. Let's look there."

A tiny beam of light played from Len's hand over the fireplace and the fender. The grate was empty. But that somebody had recently been there was evident. In the middle of the grate was a chunk of soot. In the fender were sprinkles of the same.

"But what in the name of all that's idiotic did that goat root into the chimney for?" breathed Harvey.

Len did not answer. He stooped, and flashed the light up the big old-fashioned chimney. Harvey and Banks were mystified; but it was not much of a problem to the Schoolboy Detective. Stooping, his head under the chimney, his keen glance following the light, Len Lex unravelled the mystery.

He reached up, and drew down the object that had caught his eyes—a cricket bat, jammed in the irregular brickwork. There was a good deal of soot on it. Harvey and Banks gazed at it. It was Mr. Young's bat!

"The unspeakable idiot!" hissed Harvey. "That's what Pie calls a rag—hiding a man's bat up a chimney!"

"Jevver hear of a man asking for it like that?" murmured Banks.

"Hardly ever!" grinned Len. "But it's all clear now. We've got to get this bat cleaned, and clean up the trail Pie's left, then Young will never know that anybody's touched his bat—or his chimney! Cut off to number eight and get some dusters, Banker!"

The chums of Study No. 8 were busy for ten minutes by the light of the electric torch. When they were through, Mr. Young's cricket bat lay on the table with hardly a sign on it to hint that it had been anywhere else. Not a spot of soot was left to meet the eye. There were several spots and smudges on the Fifth Formers, it was true—but that did not matter. Softly and stealthily, the three crept away from Mr. Young's quarters.

CHAPTER 42.

A Surprise for Pie!

ROOT of the Fourth came out of the House the following afternoon with a frown on his face. He stared round him in the quad, sighted a group of Fifth Formers, and cut across to them.

Saturday was a half-holiday at Oakshott, and Study No. 8 were debating what they were going to do with the afternoon. There was no match on, but Harvey, who was cricket captain in the Fifth, was rather keen on fixing up a game. Banks gave him support. So did Porrhinge—whose only chance of cricket was getting into a side in a practice game. Len Lex, however, though generally keen, demurred.

Detective-Inspector William Nixon's nephew desired, for certain reasons of his own, to be disengaged that afternoon. They were discussing the matter, though Pie was not giving his whole attention to the discussion. Pie had an eye on Mr. Young, who was standing at a little distance in conversation with Oliphant and Campion and some other Sixth Form men.

Mr. Young's knee seemed to have recovered from the effects of Pie's bowling stunts; at all events, there seemed nothing the matter with him now. But Pie was not thinking of that. He was thinking of his jape of the previous evening, and wondering whether Young had missed his bat yet. It looked as if he hadn't, for nothing had been said on the subject so far, and Mr. Young seemed quite undisturbed.

Which was rather perplexing to Pie! Certainly the games master had not happened to want the bat yet. Still, it was odd that he had not noticed that it was missing!

Albert Root came up to the group.

"Here, Lex!" he called, or rather hooted, to Len. "Your beak wants you in his study. And you can tell

him to find somebody else to carry his dashed messages, and not to bother a Fourth Form man, see?"

"I think," remarked Len, with a grin, "that I'll leave it to you to mention that, Root."

Root grunted, and turned away. A Fourth Form "man" had plenty to do on a half-holiday, without fetching and carrying for beaks—not his own beak, either! Root was justly annoyed. But his troubles were not at an end, for as he was about to depart, Mr. Young glanced round, and called to him:

"Root!"

Albert breathed hard! He did not like Young, who had got him a whopping for trespassing in Tranf Wood!

"Yes, sir!" murmured Root.

"Please go up to my rooms and bring down my bat!"

Albert breathed harder! Gladly he would have told the swab to fetch his beastly bat himself, or even to go and eat coke! But replies like that could not be made by Fourth Form juniors to beaks! Root, suppressing his feelings, answered "Yes, sir!" and started for the House.

Porrige winked at his friends, and grinned. His friends, guessing what was in Pie's mind, grinned, too. The bat had not been missed yet! But now that Mr. Young had sent a fag to fetch it, it was going to be missed—so so far as Pie knew!

"I say, Lex, don't go!" breathed Pie, as Len turned to go. "Old Chalmers can wait. What the dickens does he want you for on a half-holiday, anyhow? I say, hang on till Root comes back."

"With Young's bat?" asked Len.

"Ha, ha!" chortled Pie. "I fancy he won't find that bat in a hurry! I say, hang on till he comes back, old chap."

"My dear chap, can't keep a beak waiting!" said Len, and he walked into the House—leaving Harvey, Banks, and

Pie all grinning, though for different reasons.

Len tapped at the door of his Form-master's study and entered. The Fifth Form master gave him a blink over his horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Ah, Lex!" he said. "I have had a telephone message from your uncle, Mr. Nixon."

Len's eyes gleamed for a moment. He had wondered when he would get news from Bill.

"Yes, sir!" he said.

"Mr. Nixon desires me to tell you, Lex, that he is sorry that it is impossible for him to pay you a visit at the school this afternoon, as appears to have been arranged."

"Thank you, sir!"

Len left his Form-master's study, smiling as he went down the corridor.

The master of the Fifth did not know that he had delivered a "code" message from Detective-Inspector William Nixon of Scotland Yard to his nephew.

The actual meaning of that message was that Mr. Nixon would be waiting to see his nephew that afternoon at a certain prearranged spot a mile from the school. Len Lex was feeling backed as he walked out into the sunny quad again. He had no doubt that Bill had news for him—and that it was the news he wanted to hear!

He had for the moment forgotten Pie. But he remembered him as he spotted his grinning face in the sunshine. He had only been two or three minutes in the House, and Root had not come back yet.

"Oh, here you are!" said Pie. "You're in time to see the fun, old man."

"What fun?" asked Len innocently.

"You'll see when young Root comes back!" grinned Pie. "Just keep an eye on that swab Young. He's an ill-tempered tick—bet you he goes off at

the deep end when Root tells him he can't find that bat in his room!"

"You think Root won't be able to find it?" asked Harvey.

"Sort of!" smiled Pie. "Bet you Young will slang him, and then he'll go up for the bat himself, and then the fun'll start! Just stand round and watch for a bit!"

Pie's friends were quite prepared to stand round and watch—though they had their own reasons for thinking that it would be Pie's face that would be worth watching.

Root came out of the House and walked towards the games master and the group of Sixth Form men.

"Now," murmured Pie, and broke off suddenly, staring at the approaching Root.

Under Root's arm was a cricket bat. Evidently it was the games master's bat! The ghost of a cricket bat could not have startled Pie more. The changing expressions on his face were quite entertaining to his friends.

Root, not even noticing him, came up to Mr. Young.

"Your bat, sir!" grunted Root.

"Thank you, Root." Mr. Young took the bat, slipped it under his arm, and walked away towards Big Side with Oliphant and the other Sixth Form men.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Pie at last. "My only hat! That—that—that was Young's bat, you men! I—I—I say, he—he—he's got his—his bat!"

"What about it?" asked Banks.

"Wha-a-at about it?" gasped Pie. "I'll tell you what about it! I parked that bat up his chimney last night! It beats me! Root can't have found it there! Young can't have found it there himself, or he'd have kicked up a terrific row! Yet—yet it's been—been found. Can you fellows make it out?"

Pie's friends did not try to make it out! They walked away, laughing, and Pie was left trying to make it out, in quite a dizzy state of astonishment.

CHAPTER 43.

"Leave it to me!"

DETECTIVE-INSPECTOR NIXON rose from his seat on a big gnarled root under a shady tree in Oakways Wood, and grunted. That grunt was his greeting to the schoolboy who came through the wood and gave him a cheery nod and a smile.

"News?" asked Len.

Mr. Nixon nodded. He groped in a pocket and drew therefrom a folded, typed sheet. The Schoolboy Detective's eyes gleamed.

"You've not let the grass grow under your feet, Bill," he remarked approvingly. "They knew what they were about when they sent for you to put salt on the tail of the hold-up man who raided the Sussex and Southern Bank at Trant. You're going to make them a present of him, what?"

Grunt from Mr. Nixon.

"And you were going to leave me out of the game?" said Len reproachfully. "And little me right on the spot, too!"

"I don't want you in this, Len!" said Mr. Nixon. "That hold-up man is dangerous. He shot a man in the bank—it's not schoolboy's work to handle him. But—"

"But," grinned Len, "you want to know why I asked you to look into the record of Mr. Egerton Young, the sportsman who takes temporary posts at schools, for a few weeks at a time."

Bill Nixon nodded.

"I don't know how you got on to this, Len," he said slowly; "but it looks as if you're on the mark. The man's above suspicion, to all appearance. Good college record—satisfaction in the various posts he's held. There's no doubt that he could have secured a good permanent appointment, if he had wanted to—"

"But he may have had reasons for sticking to the temporary line—frequent change of quarters, and all that?" said Len.

"I've got a list of every post the man has held for the last two years,"

grunted Inspector Nixon. "In the last two years Egerton Young has held eight different posts, in eight different places, all over the country. And in each district there has been a hold-up—during Young's time.

"In each of these hold-ups," went on the inspector, "the man got away. In every case there was reason to suspect that the man acted in disguise. In every case he got clear, and vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up."

"Same as that Wednesday at Trant," said Len. "The hold-up man at Trant looked like a silver-haired granddad. But he got away on a bike like a stout lad. And vanished as if the earth had swallowed him up."

Len took the paper from Bill Nixon's hand and scanned the typed lists—one a list of Mr. Egerton Young's posts during the past two years; the other a list of bank hold-ups. The Schoolboy Detective smiled grimly. He had had hardly a doubt—but this was certainty! Was it a coincidence that whenever Mr. Egerton Young occupied a temporary post in a school a bank hold-up took place within a certain radius of the spot, while Mr. Young was in the post? That was stretching coincidence very far.

"That's as good as proof, Bill," said Len, handing the paper back to the Scotland Yard inspector.

"For us—not for a judge and jury!" answered Bill. "There's never been a breath of suspicion on the man. It might be all coincidence. What started you suspecting him?"

"Young came same afternoon as the bank raid," said Len. "He was supposed to come by the four o'clock train from Greenwood, having come from London. Porrhage had a stunt of meeting him at the station. And so, by a chance that no fellow could have foreseen and reckoned on, it came out that Mr. Young hadn't come by train."

"Nothing in that," said Bill, staring. "Might have changed his mind."

"Nothing," said Len softly—"except

that, knowing nothing about Pie having waited for him at the station he said he had come by the four o'clock train from Greenwood, when the subject was mentioned."

"Oh!" said Bill.

"Then," continued Len, "I fancied Pie had made one of his usual fat-headed mistakes and missed him at the station. But we found, from inquiry at the station, that Young really hadn't come by train. His bags had, but he hadn't! A lot of the fellows heard Pie on the subject, of course, and wondered why a man should tell lies about such a trifling thing. No reason, that they could see. But when a man makes out that he was somewhere where he wasn't, at the time of a bank raid by a man who got away and disappeared, it's fishy. A man doesn't work up an alibi for nothing, Bill."

"No," said Mr. Nixon slowly. "But that's not the lot?"

"More to come!" said Len. "Wednesday was a half-holiday, and Root, a junior, with some fag friends, was tree-climbing in Trant Wood. He dropped his pocket-knife. Thinking they heard a keeper coming, they scudded—without picking up the pocket-knife. Next day young Root went back to look for it, under that big oak in Trant Wood. Bill. You know the tree—the one I found you in—"

"Get on!"

"You fancied it might be in that tree that the hold-up man parked his disguise and clobber when he got away. So did I—after what I'd heard from young Root. Listen to this, Bill: While young Root was rooting after his pocket-knife, Young came suddenly on him, and sent him back to the school to be caned for trespassing! But what was Young doing there on his second day at Oakshott? You searched that tree, Bill, and found nothing. I fancy you might have found something if you'd got there before Young."

Bill was silent.

"Look at it," said Len. "The hold-

up man got away in the wood, and vanished as if he had dissolved into air. That means that he stripped off his disguise, removed the clobber he was wearing outside his own, parked them in hiding, and walked off in his own proper person—unknown! Nothing certain known of his looks but sharp brown eyes. At the same time, Mr. Young walks into Oakshott School and tells lies about having come by train—and Mr. Young has sharp brown eyes!"

Bill nodded slowly.

"To put in some guess-work," said Len, "I should say that the hold-up man left disguise, clobber, and loot all hidden in the same spot. Safer for him, till he got quite clear. Next day he goes back for the loot—perhaps for the disguise as well, but more likely intending to leave that till wanted, or perhaps abandon it altogether. But finding a school kid rooting about the spot, he clears off the whole lot. And," added Len, with a chuckle, "a Scotland Yard inspector comes along later and draws blank!"

"You were going to leave me out of this case, Bill," went on Len, "but you've got to leave it to me. Young's at Oakshott, under my eye. He doesn't know there's a detective in the Oakshott Fifth!" Len chuckled. "He may find that out later—when I introduce him to my Uncle Bill—what?"

"You're not to run risks!" growled Bill.

"I'm too fond of your nephew, Bill, to run unnecessary risks," said Len. "Leave it to me, old man—and leave me your telephone number at Trant."

Bill Nixon paused—a long pause. Then, in silence, he wrote down a telephone number.

CHAPTER 64.

Parked in the Ivy!

PIE was wandering in the quad when Len came in. Harvey and Banks were still at cricket. Poringe was disengaged. He joined Len,

"You'd hardly believe it, old man," he said, "but I bagged a duck's egg!"

Len could quite believe it.

"Rough luck, old man!" he said.

"These things happen," said Pie. "But, I say, Lex, old man, I can't make it out. It's weird about Young." There was puzzlement in Pie's face.

"What about Young?" asked Len, with a curious glance at his chum. Pie little guessed how keenly Len Lex was interested in Mr. Egerton Young!

"I expected him to go off the deep end," said Pie. "He's got a rotten temper. And he must know. I told you I'd parked his bat up his chimney —"

"Oh, that!" Len chuckled.

"Well, he must have found it, and never made a fuss about it," said Pie. "But that isn't what beats me hollow. What are you grinning at, Ler?"

"Nothing, old man! Carry on."

"Well, if he found it there, he must have found something else," said Pie. "That's what beats me hollow. He couldn't have hooked that bat out without noticing that there was nothing left in the chimney."

"Lois of soot!" suggested Len.

"I don't mean that, fathead! Something else," Pie said crossly. "Look here, Lex, when I shoved that bat up his chimney, I found he'd got something parked there already—a leather attache-case. I was just flummoxed to find such a thing hidden up a man's chimney. But there it was, and I hooked it out, and left that bat in its place."

Len looked hard at Poringe. This was news to him—startling news!

"Being there to rag the swab, you can guess what I jolly well did, what?" said Pie. "I fancied he might spot the bat in the chimney, because there was some soot sprinkled about when the attache-case came down—and it seems that he did, as the bat turned up! But I thought that he'd get fearfully excited

at missing the attache-case. He couldn't get the bat down without noticing that it was gone! So he must know! See?"

Len nodded. His eyes were gleaming.

"Well, if a man hides a thing in a chimney, it must be because he's fearfully particular about it," said Pie. "Missing it, wouldn't you expect him to, at the very least, inquire after it? And he hasn't said a word! He's carrying on just as if he doesn't know anything's happened in his rooms at all! Isn't that weird?" Pie was hopelessly puzzled.

"You shifted it?" asked Len.

"Yes, I parked it in the ivy just under the passage window," said Pie. "Give him a hunt for it—that was the idea! I was going to give him a hunt for the bat, and when he found that he would miss the attache-case, and have a hunt for that, too! I fancied he would be shouting his loss all over Oakshott! But he isn't!"

Len smiled faintly. The explanation, though unknown to Pie, was simple: Young hadn't missed his bat at all, owing to the intervention of Pie's friends; and had not had his attention drawn to the chimney in any way whatever. If he had parked an attache-case there, he naturally supposed that it was still there, as he had no reason to suppose otherwise!

But why had he parked a leather case in a chimney? It was quite mysterious to Pie—not so mysterious to Detective-Inspector Nixon's nephew. Len's interest in a case belonging to a man he suspected of bank-raiding, and which that man had hidden in a chimney, was deep.

"Can you understand it, old man?" asked Pie. "Blessed if I can! He must know—and he doesn't seem to care a bean! I thought he would be raging all over the school—and there he is, playing cricket with the Sixth! It's got me beat."

"My dear chap, it's as you said—weird," agreed Len. "One of those

insoluble mysteries! Let's go and have a look at the cricket, shall we? You'll be wanted to field soon."

Len left Porrhage on the cricket ground, and, after making sure that Mr. Young was still with the Sixth Form cricketers, walked to the House. He went to Study No. 8, where, from a secret drawer in his box, he drew a bunch of rather peculiar-looking keys. Then strolled across the study landing and up the passage past the masters' rooms.

At the big window at the end of the passage he stopped, opened one of the casements and stood looking out, scanning with keen eyes the thick ivy that grew under the old stone window-sill.

Closer examination revealed traces

THE BEST ON THE BOOKSTALLS —FOR JUNE!

THE SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY

Nos. 373, 374 and 375.

"THE FIGHTING FORM-MASTER!"

By FRANK RICHARDS.

"THE BOY THEY COULDN'T TRUST!"

By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

"THE FIENDS OF FU CHOW!"

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

On sale:

THURSDAY, JUNE 1st.
PLACE YOUR ORDER EARLY!

which guided Len's reaching hand to the spot where Pie had parked the attache-case. He groped, and his hand came in contact with the hidden article. He could feel that it was of thick, strong leather, and that there were two locks on it.

He jerked the leather case out of the ivy and in at the window with a single swift movement; so swift and neat that no one in the quad below could possibly have observed the action. Swiftly he closed the case-ment and ran along the passage to the door of the games-master's sitting-room. Stepping into that apartment, he closed the door and laid the attache-case on the table.

The Schoolboy Detective was breathing hard, but he was cool as ice. The bunch of peculiar keys was whipped from his pocket and in less than a minute the two patent locks on the attache-case yielded.

Cool as he was, the Schoolboy Detective felt his heart thump as he lifted the lid, and he drew a deep breath at what he saw within; a closely folded suit of clothes, identical in appearance with the clothes worn by the bank-raider on the day of the hold-up at Trant; a silvery wig, a set of white whiskers and moustache and eyebrows; a folded soft hat, and a number of bundles of currency notes, fastened with elastic bands—just as the hold-up man had grabbed them at the Sussex and Southern Bank!

It was no wonder that Mr. Egerton Young had parked the attache-case in a secret spot—never dreaming that a japing goat would go to the chimney to hide a cricket bat there. For a brief moment Len Lex gazed at what he had discovered. Then swiftly he closed the leather case, and locked it securely again without a sign of it having been opened.

There was a grim smile on his face as he lifted the attache-case to the fireplace and dropped it into the grate just under the chimney. Taking the

poker, he raked, and a shower of soot fell on the leather case and round it.

A few moments later Len was gone, closing the door quietly after him. For the next hour he was seated on the settee on the study landing reading, but with one eye on the staircase. He was rewarded at last by the sight of Mr. Young coming up.

The games master went to his rooms without a glance at Len.

The first object that would meet his eye would be the leather attache-case lying in the grate in a shower of soot. He could hardly think anything but that it had fallen from the chimney. That it was his—that he was the bank-raider of Trant—Len knew; but the proof would be final if Egerton Young, finding that leather case lying in his grate, concealed it in his rooms.

Len gave him five minutes, then tapped at the games-master's door.

"Come in!" Mr. Young's voice was quite casual.

Len entered. Mr. Young faced him, his hands in the pockets of his flannel trousers. There was a fleck or two of black on the white flannels—and the leather case was no longer in the grate!

"About the games practice on Monday, sir——" Len had to say something, and that was an easy one.

"Another time, Lex, another time," said Mr. Young. "I am a little fatigued now. Shut the door after you, please."

Len was smiling as he walked down to the bicycle shed and wheeled out his machine. He had a telephone call to make—which he certainly could not make from the school.

CHAPTER 45.

The Grip of the Law!

"WHO are you, and what do you want?" Mr. Egerton Young rapped out the

words sharply. He had come hastily up the staircase, arrived at his rooms a little breathless, and flung open the door of the sitting-room and strode in.

It was the hour of prep, and all the Oakshott fellows should have been in their studies. One Fifth Form man was missing from his study, and Porringe, Banks, and Harvey were wondering what had become of Len Lex.

Of that, however, Mr. Young knew nothing—the games master had nothing to do with prep. Striding angrily into his sitting-room, he stared at a man who was standing by the window, his back to the red sunset that glowed outside.

"My name is Nixon——" began the inspector quietly.

"I do not know the name, and I cannot imagine your business with me," rapped Mr. Young. "I was surprised, and very much annoyed, to be told by the House page that he had shown a caller into my rooms. He should have done nothing of the kind. The visitors' room downstairs is——"

"The lad is not to blame!" broke in Nixon. "I may explain that I have spoken to the headmaster, Dr. Osborne, and he gave the page his instructions."

"I fail to understand you, Mr. Nixon." There was a startled gleam in the sharp brown eyes of the new games-master. "I repeat, who are you, and what do you want?"

"I have told you my name, Mr. Young. I may add that I hold the rank of detective-inspector at Scotland Yard."

Mr. Egerton Young stood quite still. For a long moment there was dead silence in the room, then the games-master stepped to the door and closed it. He turned back to Inspector Nixon. His face was calm, but its lines had hardened strangely.

"I am more in the dark than ever," he said. "I can imagine no reason why an officer from Scotland Yard

should call on me. Perhaps you will be kind enough to explain your business."

"That is why I am here, Mr. Young," said Bill stolidly. "It is in connection with the recent bank raid at Trant."

"The bank raid at Trant!" With all his nerve, the games-master could not quite keep a tremor out of his voice. "I do not seem to have heard of it."

"It occurred, I understand, the day you arrived here to take up the position you now hold," said Nixon. "And from information received, Mr. Young, we have reason to believe that you are the man we want."

"Are you jesting, sir?"

"Not at all! It is my duty to warn you that anything you may say——"

"You must be mad, I think."

"—will be taken down, and may be used in evidence against you," continued Bill stolidly. "I must ask you to accompany me to Trant police station, Mr. Young. I have a taxi waiting outside."

"If you are not mad," said Egerton Young, "tell me what you mean! You are making an absurd mistake! But if you fancy you have any grounds——"

"Such as an attache-case hidden in a chimney?" suggested Detective-Inspector Nixon.

The man staggered. His face whitened as the colour drained from it.

He knew now that the game was up—the game he had played so long and so successfully. Utterly unexpectedly, the blow had fallen. He staggered, as if he had received a blow—and rested a hand on the table for support.

Inspector Nixon made a step towards him. There was a clink of metal, and that sound seemed to pull the hold-up man together. All was lost—his name,

his reputation, his plunder—everything but liberty.

He made a swift step back, and his hand shot to his hip pocket. In another second the deadly weapon would have been out—but a grip was laid on Egerton Young from behind, and the automatic, as it whipped from his pocket, was twisted from his hand.

He spun round. He had believed himself alone in the room with Bill Nixon—he had seen no one else. His eyes almost popped from his head at the sight of Lex of the Fifth.

Disarmed, but desperate, he struggled, till in the grip of Bill Nixon and Len Lex he crashed on the carpet, and the handcuffs clicked.

Len picked up the automatic and dropped it on the table.

"You'll want that, Bill!" he remarked. "If I hadn't parked myself behind that screen, Bill, they'd be filling a vacancy at Scotland Yard. Let this be a warning to you—never think of leaving me out again."

"Clear!" said Bill tersely.

"It's more than time," remarked Len, "that I got to prep; and my shy nature makes me loathe the limelight. I don't want the fellows here to tumble to it that I'm a detective. I'm off! Get him away quietly while the fellows are in the studies, Bill—the less excitement, the better. It won't take you long to search. So long."

And Len walked away to Study No. 8, there to resume life as Lex of the Fifth!



Here's Something Really New!

CAPTAIN JUSTICE

versus

THE INSECT ARMY!

And it's as thrilling as it sounds. In a Secret City of the Sahara, Captain Justice has discovered the greatest menace that ever threatened the world — insects, grown to man-eating proportions, being trained to warfare by a

crazy sheik, an army that is to drive the white man from Africa—conquer the world!



CAPTAIN JUSTICE

Captain Justice is in hourly peril of falling victim to the monstrous insects. Can he survive the peril, hit back at the mad sheik and deliver Africa and the world from the terrible threat that hangs over them?

You want to know the answers to all these questions? Then buy **Modern Boy** and read the exciting stories written around the captain's adventures in the secret city. Thrills . . . action . . . amazing situations . . . plot and counter plot!

MODERN BOY

Every Saturday

Price 2d.

JUNGLE THRILLS

IT isn't the big-game hunter who collars all the excitement that's going in the world's most dangerous jungles. For sheer hair-raising thrills he has to take second place to the wild-animal photographer. For one thing, the cameraman, out after a really worth-while snap of some ferocious beast, has to get a good deal nearer his quarry than the hunter does before he can take his "shot," and if by some unlucky chance he happens to betray his presence to his wary "sitter," then his hopes of getting away with a whole skin, let alone his precious photograph, are very small.

Cornered by Elephants.

One famous explorer-photographer, Major Dugmore, who has stalked wild animals with his camera in almost every corner of the globe, stood motionless as a statue for age-long minutes with a suspicious "killer" of the jungle only a few yards away, and secured one of the most amazing close-ups ever taken. His hairbreadth escapes from death or injury read as thrillingly as any fiction; the full story of his stirring adventures would fill book after book.

Probably the most nerve-wracking of all this intrepid photographer's experiences happened while he was taking shots of a herd of wild elephants in Central Africa. He had been busy with his camera for half an hour before one of the females suddenly spotted him and gave the signal to the rest of the herd. Elephants aren't lacking in intelligence by any means, and slowly they began to close in on Major Dugmore in a steady ominous march.

Yard by yard, in a silence that was uncanny, the giant brutes advanced, not a twig cracking under their feet. Cornered, with only a thousand to one chance of escape, the explorer was at his wits' end. Apart from a few trees and some scrubby bushes, the herd's grazing ground was absolutely bare. Climbing one of the trees was hopeless, for a full-grown tusk can uproot a tree in a twinkling; to start running would have meant a swift but ghastly death under one of those giant feet, and his rifle was no earthly use against so many foes.

A Step from Death.

There was just one faint hope, however, and on this the major staked everything. He knew that, although possessing a sense of smell that is keenness itself, elephants are nearsighted; and he managed to crawl under a bush without being observed. The herd came on, trunks waving in the air to catch his scent, until the female who had first given the alarm was standing right beside the bush that hid him.

Stretched out on the sun-baked, dusty ground, not daring to move a muscle, the explorer's life hung by the proverbial thread. Then the elephant took a step—backwards—and Major Dugmore breathed again. No cameraman was ever more glad to see the last of his sitters than the major after that ordeal!

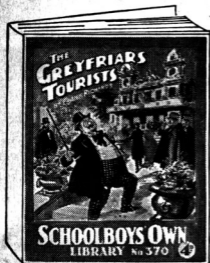
It takes a man with a nerve like iron to remain still in the face of terrible danger, and it is this extraordinary ability that time and again has saved Major Dugmore's life.

Baffling the Bear.

Once, when photographing big game in the Canadian Rockies, he stepped out of his tent to see a grizzly bear and her two cubs devouring the butter that had been hidden, with other supplies, in a frozen brook. Not dreaming of danger, he dashed towards the marauders, waving a pillow-case and yelling at the top of his voice, in the hope that that would drive them off.

It didn't. With a growl the grizzly rose to her hind legs and shuffled menacingly towards him, so swiftly that he had no chance to turn and run, and cutting off his retreat to the tent. The one thing the major could do was to stand still, and somehow, though his knees felt as if they had turned to jelly, he managed it. This puzzled the bear and brought her to a halt—wondering and uncertain. She didn't know what to make of an animal that neither attacked nor retreated. Finally, after a lot of very unladylike growling and snarling, she lumbered back to her cubs and butter. That finished, she broke open a tin of pears with her teeth, tipped her huge head back, and drank the juice.

TWO MORE TIP-TOP SCHOOL TALES TO READ!



THE yellow hand at St. Frank's—sinister, menacing, hovering over Yung Ching, the Chinese new boy, seeking to kidnap him and take him back to China! And it's left to Nelson Lee and Nipper to protect the Chinese junior from his relentless enemies! You cannot fail to be thrilled by this powerful story.

By EDWY SEARLES BROOKS.

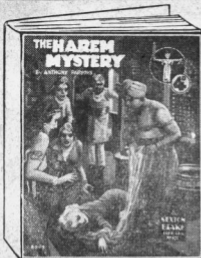
JJOIN up with the cheery chums of Greyfriars on a jolly cruise to the Mediterranean! With Horace James Coker being captured by brigands in Spain, and Billy Bunter trying to break the bank at Nice, you're booked for a thrilling and amusing holiday tour. Go aboard the Sea Nymph to-day by asking your newsagent for this grand yarn.

By FRANK RICHARDS.

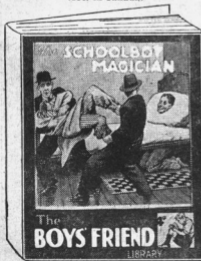


On Sale Now - - - - Price 4d. each

BEST BOOKS OF DETECTIVE THRILLS, MYSTERY AND ADVENTURE!



Now on Sale. Price 4d. per Volume
(10c. in Canada)



Make sure of this month's issues of the SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY

No. 669. THE A.P.P. MYSTERY.

By BARRY FEROWNE.

A grand new novel of vital interest to all featuring the famous private investigator, with Raffles, the gentleman cracksmen, opposing him.

No. 670. THE MAN FROM SINGAPORE.

By JOHN G. BRANDON.

A real story of he-man thrills and adventure, introducing the popular character the Hon. R. S. V. Farvale, fighter and tough guy—the man who is always in the thick of trouble.

No. 671. THE HAREM MYSTERY.

By ANTHONY PARSONS.

A tale of detective adventure and thrills in the East. A grand yarn of mystery and cunning, featuring the popular personality Gunga Dase. Do not miss it—it is something new and gripping.

No. 672. THE RIDDLE OF THE WEST END HAIRDRESSER.

By GILBERT CHESTER.

A fascinating full-length novel of sensational happenings, mystery, and intricate detective work. It gets you guessing from the start as to who is guilty, and the final chapter holds the big surprise.

And don't miss these fine numbers of the BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY

No. 669. THE LAW OF THE FORGOTTEN MEN.

By ALFRED EDGAR.

A young lorry driver is kidnapped on the road by strange men. The compact he makes with these men is even stranger—for he agrees to take the place of another and drive the fastest racing cars in the world. That is Rip's ambition, but the web of mystery in which he finds himself involved makes his effort to keep his amazing bargains an affair of the greatest danger. Thrills all the way!

No. 670. THE SCHOOLBOY MAGICIAN.

Here is the most sensational yarn ever written of schoolboy life in America. Harry Houdin, the most amazing boy that ever went to school, conjurer, magician, escapologist—he is the terror of his masters and the idol of his pals. The book tells of his startling and inexplicable tricks and stunts. Breathless from start to finish.

No. 671. THE FLAMING FRONTIER.

By JOHN BEARLEY.

There is always trouble brewing on the North-West Frontier of India. And now it is known danger to the British Raj of a particularly widespread nature is being fomented by disgruntled native chiefs. The danger is so big that the most famous man in England is sent for to thwart it—Sexton Blake, private detective. How Blake gets to work is vividly told in this exciting story of desperate peril and adventure.

No. 672. THE ROARING TRAIL.

By GORDON SHAW.

This splendid yarn of thrills and adventure in the Wild West contains all the ingredients that are asked for in this type of fiction. Hard riding, fast shooting, the ruthless plotting of cunning crooks, are all to be found in this thrilling book of the great open spaces.

Printed in England and published on the first Thursday in each month by the Proprietors, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Advertisement Offices: The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, E.C.4. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad, 5d. each. Registered for transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Sole Agents for Australia and New Zealand: Messrs. Gordon & Gotch, Limited, and for South Africa, Central News Agency, Limited. S.V.