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# THE SILVER JACKET

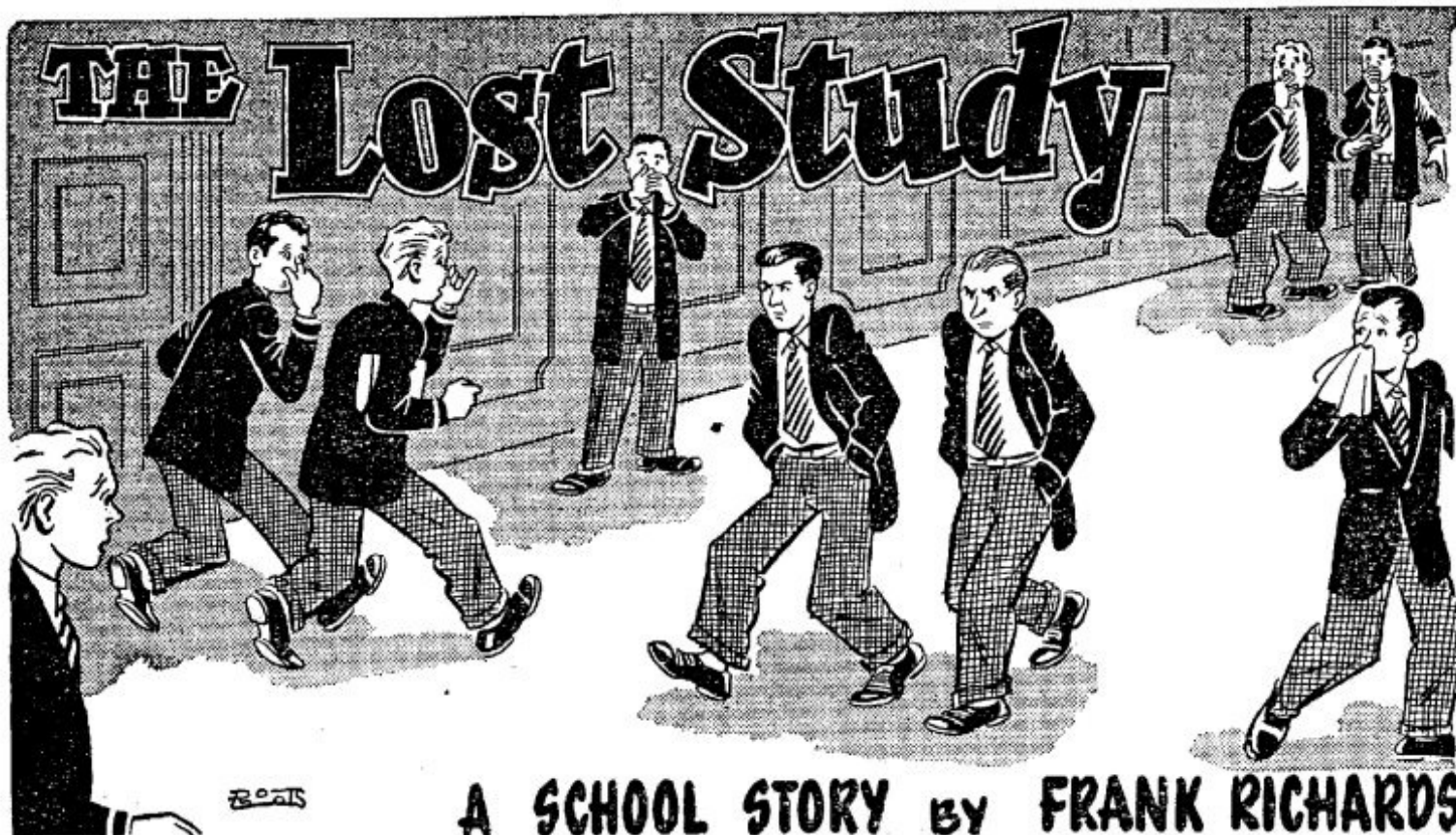
THE MAGAZINE FOR BOYS

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THIS IS AUSTRALIA'S FAMOUS MAGAZINE FOR BOYS!



## A SCHOOL STORY BY FRANK RICHARDS

"WHAT——!"

Three voices ejaculated in unison. Three fellows stared into the corner study, in the Carcroft Fourth, in astonishment and wrath. What Levett and Leath fancied they were up to, in that study, was quite a surprising mystery to Harry Compton and Co.

It was the first day of term. All day long the House had been buzzing with voices, echoing with footsteps and the banging of bags and boxes. But in the dusky autumn evenings things had quietened down: almost the last fellow had reported himself: almost the last medical certificate had been glanced at, if not read: almost all the rush and bother of the day was over for the wearied members of the Staff: when Harry Compton and Co. of the Fourth Form, arrived—late!

Compton, Drake, and Lee were very late! It was Bob Drake's fault, if fault there was. They had had to change trains, as usual, at Ridgate Junction. That day Ridgate Ramblers were playing their first match of the season. The Ramblers were always worth watching. Why not, Bob had suggested, watch them, and catch a later train on to the school? Compton and Lee saw no especial reason why not. So they did. After all, a fellow was not bound to turn up at any special time. There was no prep the first night. If a man turned up in time for supper it was O.K.—more or less O.K., at any rate. So the three watched the football match to the finish, joined in the cheering when the Ramblers

beat the enemy by three goals to two, walked back to the station, and found that they had another hour to wait for a train to Combe. At Combe, of course, there was no school 'bus for such late-comers, and they had to walk on to Carcroft—ringing the porter to get in: and root out their form-master, Mr. Roger Ducas, in Common Room—he was no longer in his study.

Roger, to their relief, said little or nothing: though he looked rather grim, and they detected a glint in his eagle eye. He accepted their excuses and dismissed them briefly: and, there still being time before supper, they went up to the Fourth to take possession of their study. They noticed that Turkey Tuck gave them a fat grin on the staircase: that Vane-Carter's eyes glimmered with amusement when they passed him on the study landing: that Lord Talboys smiled in the Fourth-form passage: that Barrack Major looked out at his door and chuckled. They were not unduly perturbed by these phenomena. But they were quite taken aback when, arriving at their own study—their old study—the corner study—which they naturally expected to find vacant, they found it occupied.

Levett and Leath who really belonged—or had belonged—to Number Seven, were there. They looked as if they had come to stay. Several articles of furniture that belonged to the Co. were standing in the passage. In their place in the study were Levett's armchair, and Leath's desk, and other such things. Levett

was sitting in the armchair. Leath was sitting on the desk. They exchanged a wink as Harry Compton and Co. stared in at the doorway, and then smiled blandly at the newcomers.

"You chaps have got in a bit late, haven't you?" remarked Levett.

"Yes! What are you doing in our study?" asked Harry Compton.

"Our study!" corrected Levett.

"What!" ejaculated the three.

"We're having this study this term," explained Levett, airily. "It's rather better than Number Seven. First come, first served, you know."

"You can have Number Seven, if you like," said Leath. "It's a bit small, after this, but you'll get used to it."

Harry Compton and Co. just gazed at them!

It was true—quite true—that a study was no fellow's particular property. First come, first served, was sometimes the rule. On the first day of term, fellows of aggressive disposition might be inclined to follow 'the good old law, the simple plan, that they should take who have the power, and they should keep who can!'

So, while Harry Compton and Co. were watching the football match at Ridgate, waiting for trains, and walking from Combe, Levett and Leath had calmly installed themselves in the corner study—and there they were!

"We've asked Roger!" added Levett, rather hastily. He did not quite like the look on the three faces in the doorway.

"So you've bagged our study!" said Harry Compton, with a deep breath. "And you've asked Roger—the sort of smudgy thing you would do, Levett. Now we'll ask you—to walk out."

"We're all right here, thanks," yawned Levett.

"You won't walk out?" asked Dick Lee.

"No!"

"That's all right," said Bob Drake. "If you won't go out on your feet, you can go out on your necks. Pile in, my infants."

"I tell you we asked Roger——!" yelled Levett.

"Roger says——!" howled Leath.

But they had no time to finish. There were sixty wild and whirling seconds in the corner study. Just one minute sufficed. Then Levett and Leath were strewn in the passage, articles of furniture were trundled after them, school books and other portable possessions rained on them like leaves in Val-lombrosa: and Harry Compton and Co. proceeded to get their study to rights, finishing in nice time for supper.

"And that's that!" Bob Drake remarked, when they went down to hall.

BUT that was not quite that! For a portly gentleman, with a grim face and an eagle eye, came along behind three cheery youths seated at the supper table, and Harry Compton, turning at a tap on his shoulder, looked at Roger Ducas, master of the Fourth.

"I understand," said Mr. Ducas, "that there is some dispute about a study—Number Five—Levett's study——"

"Our study last term, and the term before, sir."

"Oh! Quite!" said Roger. "It is rather unfortunate that you were so late in arriving that the study was already taken. Let there be no further dispute, please."

"We—we couldn't help coming in rather late, sir——" stammered Bob.

"That makes it all the more unfortunate," said Roger Ducas. "But the matter being settled, cannot be re-opened. No further dispute, please."

He turned away. But he turned back to make one more remark.

"I hope," said Roger, considerably, "that you enjoyed the football match at Ridgate. The Ramblers play a very good game, I believe."

Then he rustled away.

"FOR goodness' sake, Bob, chuck that rotten thing out of the window!" exclaimed Harry Compton.

"And either go and get a hot bath, or chuck yourself after it!" added Dick Lee.

To which Bob Drake replied only with a snort.

Bob was cleaning his bike lamp in Number Seven Study. It was an acetylene lamp of somewhat ancient design: not merely pre-war, but pre-pre-war. It was not cleaned so often as it really needed. And the smell of disused calcium carbide, as Bob stirred and raked it, bore no resemblance whatever to that of attar-of-roses. Compton and Lee, coming up to the study, had an impression, as they opened the door, that Number Seven had unaccountably become occupied by innumerable dead cats, in an advanced stage of decomposition. But it was only Bob cleaning his carbide lamp.

The new term was a week old. The Carcroft Co., once the happy possessors of the corner study, the best in the passage, had fallen from their high estate, and great was the fall thereof. Roger's word was law: and there had been no further dispute about the corner study. Levett and Leath were in possession: and they enjoyed their triumph over the Co. much more than they enjoyed their new quarters. Though they had, undoubtedly, made a change for the better: for Number Seven, where the Co. were now located, was the smallest study in the passage, with a poky little window, a pokier little fireplace: all very well for smears and smudges like Levett and Leath, but inexpressibly rotten for their betters.

There was really hardly room for three fellows to move, and the Co. just hated it. Most of the Fourth seemed rather amused by this fall of the mighty. Vane-Carter, indeed, advised them to boot Levett every day till he agreed to change back. But Roger had to be considered: and they did not adopt such drastic measures. But if Number Seven, at its best, was barely habitable, with Bob cleaning his old carbide lamp in it it was wholly and inexpressibly uninhabitable. And Bob's friends were loud in their protests.

"Is it very thick?" asked Bob. He had got rather used to it himself.

"You could cut it with a knife!" snorted Lee.

"Why the thump," asked Compton, "don't you clean that beastly stinker in the bike-shed—or in the middle of the School Field would be better. Anybody putting his head into this study would think that the drains were out of order just underneath."

"Or else that all the rats that ever died at Carcroft had picked out this study to die under!" grunted Lee.

Compton threw open the window, wide. Lee waved a paper about. Bob gave a fresh dig at mouldy carbide, and there was a whiff in the study more than ever unlike attar-of-roses, which made his comrades turn quite pale.

"Get out of this, for goodness' sake!" gasped Compton. "Better tea in hall today."

"By gum!" said Bob. "Is it really so bad as that?" Bob's eyes were gleaming, as if a bright, indeed brilliant, thought, had just flashed into his mind. "I say, don't go—does it really make the room whiff like bad drains?"

"Worse!"

"As bad as dead rats under the floor?"

"Much worse."

"Oh! Good!" said Bob. "Fine! I say, don't go! I've got an idea."

"Take it away and bury it, and that lamp along with it. Come on, Lee."

"Keep that door shut, fathead! I tell you it's the Big Idea!" exclaimed Bob eagerly. "Where are Levett and Leath?"

"They passed us, going down to tea in the hall. What about those smudges?"

"Then they're not in the corner study now," said Bob. He jumped up. "Member that loose board under the carpet, that I screwed down last term? Get the screw-driver out of my tool-chest. No time to lose now."

"What do you mean, if you happen to mean anything?" asked Compton.

Bob Drake, chuckling, explained what he meant—and Compton and Lee, after a moment's blank stare, chuckled too.

A quarter of an hour later, they went down to tea in hall. Levett and Leath grinned at them across the table—still enjoying their triumph. It was pie to Levett to score over fellows who regarded him, justly, as a mere smudge. Smudge or not, Levett had bagged the best study in the Fourth, and was going to keep it all the term. Or was he?

LEVETT sniffed.

Leath sniffed.

They had come up to their study—the roomy and comfortable corner study—for prep. From the doorway they smiled at Harry Compton and Co. passing on to their cramped quarters in Number Seven. Then they went smiling in: and then—simultaneously—they sniffed.

"What the thump have you been leaving about the study?" growled Levett.

"Nothing, that I know of," answered Leath. He sniffed again.

puzzled. "There's a jolly queer smell here."

"Like a dozen dead cats rolled into one!" growled Levett. "Might be a dead rat or something. Just look round."

They looked round, under the table, under the armchair, into the study cupboard. But nothing unusual was to be discovered. Yet the scent in the study was unmistakable, and most unpleasant. Levett thought it was like dead cats or rats. Leath thought it was more like rotten cabbages. Both agreed that it was distinctly unpleasant, and finally decided that it must be drains. Levett stepped out, and looked into the next study, where Scott and Drummond were sitting down to prep.

"You fellows notice any queer smell about?" asked Levett. "It's jolly strong in our study."

"All right here," answered Drummond. "I expect it's because you fellows don't wash. Shut the door after you."

Levett went back into Number Five. He was quite puzzled, for there was no scent in the passage: so it could scarcely be drains. But in the corner study it hung about in the most unpleasant way.

However, prep had to be done, and Levett and Leath sat down to prep—leaving the study door wide open to freshen the atmosphere as much as possible. After prep, Dudley Vane-Carter looked in at the open door.

"What on earth have you fellows got in this study?" he exclaimed.

"Nothing!" answered Levett. "Do you notice a smell—?"

"Do I notice it?" snorted Vane-Carter. "You could cut it with a knife. Have you got the cupboard full of mouldy eggs, or what?"

"I tell you there's nothing," howled Levett. "I can't make it out."

"Well, if there's nothing, it's you fellows yourselves," retorted Vane-Carter, "you'd better cut off to a bathroom: and bag a pound of soda to put in the bath." And having given that advice, V. C. walked away, in haste.

Levett and Leath lost no time in leaving the corner study. They were quite tired of its atmosphere: and, for the first time since they had ousted Harry Compton and Co. were fed up with their quarters. But the news of the strange atmosphere in the study spread up the passage. Fellows came to look in, and sniff, and pass remarks on Levett and Leath and their manners and customs.

In the Burrow, that evening, Levett and Leath had quite an uncomfortable time. Some fellows re-

fused to go near them, and backed away at their approach. Bob Drake enveloped his nose in a handkerchief when Levett passed him, which example was promptly followed by Compton and Lee. Even Turkey Tuck was disgusted. Turkey was no whale on washing: but this, in Turkey's opinion, was the limit.

"Look here, you fellows, get out," said Turkey indignantly. "You've stunk yourselves out of your own study: but you can't expect to stink us out of the day-room. Get out, and don't come back till you've washed all over."

"Soap and hot water's the thing!" said Bob Drake. "Look here, Levett, the Dame will let you have some extra soap if you tell her how it is."

"I tell you it's something wrong with the study!" shrieked Levett.

"There was nothing wrong with the study when we had it!" said Harry Compton. "And we had it for two terms."

Which was certainly true.

"They don't wash," said Turkey. "They ain't washed this term, and I don't believe they washed in the hols., either."

"It must be a dead rat or something under the floor," hissed Levett, "and I'm going to Roger about it."

And Levett, desperate, went to Roger about it. While he was gone, Bob Drake paid a hurried visit to the corner study, prised up a short length of board under the carpet, and removed a tin of damp and mouldy carbide.

Roger promised to look into the matter in the morning: and did so. But in the morning, there was no unusual scent in the corner study. That quite settled the matter in the minds of the Fourth-form fellows. That study was highly scented when Levett and Leath were in it—not when they weren't! What could be plainer?

Levett and Leath hoped that the strange and mysterious visitation was over for good. But when evening came, and prep, that appalling scent was there again—stronger than ever: and the unfortunate pair could hardly endure it till prep was over.

Fellows who passed the study, carefully passed it as far as possible on the other side of the passage. They held their noses as they passed. In the passages, on the stairs, and in the Burrow, every man in the Fourth got as far away from Levett and Leath as he could. Somebody would ejaculate, "Here come the stinkers!"—and Levett and Leath would be left a wide space.

It was useless for Levett and Leath to protest, almost with tears in their eyes, that it wasn't them-

selves—it was that beastly study. They were simply told, in reply, to keep their distance, and, above all, to wash—with plenty of hot water, plenty of soap, and a dash or more of disinfectant. They began to wish fervently that they never had bagged that rotten study at all.

"COMPTON! Lee! Drake! Come in!" said Roger genially.

The three came into their form-master's study. They wondered, perhaps a little uneasily, why Roger had sent for them. But Roger was quite genial.

"Levett has asked to be allowed to change back into his old study," said Roger.

"Oh! Has he, sir?" murmured Bob.

"I have told him he may do so, subject to your consent, as you have of course a right to keep your present study if you wish."

"Oh! We—we don't mind, sir," said Harry. "We'll change back if—if Levett likes."

"We don't mind at all, sir," said Lee.

Roger nodded. They wondered, as fellows often wondered, what thoughts were passing behind Roger's dome-like forehead. But a fellow never could tell.

"Very well," said Roger. "You may move back into Number Five, and Levett and Leath will take Number Seven as before. That is all."

The Carcroft Co. departed joyfully. That evening they did their prep in the corner study as of old. There was no unpleasant scent in the atmosphere. It had departed with Levett and Leath.

They were at prep when there came a tap at the door, and Roger Ducas looked in. The three jumped to attention at once. Roger glanced round the study, and gave a slight sniff.

"Levett and Leath complained of a bad smell in this study," he said. "You do not notice anything of the kind?"

"No, sir."

"No doubt it has cleared off," said Roger.

"Yes, sir."

"By the way, I think you use an acetylene lamp on your bicycle, Drake," remarked Roger, casually.

Bob jumped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" he stammered.

"I thought so," assented Roger. "You must be careful, Drake, never to bring calcium carbide into the House. It is dangerous stuff, and—smells unpleasantly."

With that and a genial nod, Roger departed—leaving the three juniors in the corner study gazing at one another in deep silence.