



LEG UP FOR

LANGDALE

By FRANK RICHARDS

OLD Langdale had been looking down in the mouth for days. Perhaps he was not aware that anyone at Felgate had noticed it; but as a matter of fact, everyone at Felgate had noticed it, and wondered why. Langdale of the Sixth, captain of the school, the finest Soccer player Felgate had ever turned out, loomed large in the public eye. He was the most popular fellow in his own form—among the juniors an object of unlimited admiration—fags competed for the honour and distinction of fagging for him. Withal he was as modest a fellow as ever stepped, and never seemed to realise what a Great Panjandrum he was. He was in truth the observed of all observers, at Felgate, and could hardly have scratched his nose without that circumstance being noted.

Certainly, he was not a fellow to display his feelings, whatever they might be. You didn't, at Felgate. If you had some private spot of bother, you kept a stiff

upper lip, and just carried on. Nevertheless, old Langdale, in unguarded moments, was seen to be looking down in the mouth. His friends in the Sixth noticed it, in the Lower School they noticed it—even Skip of the Fourth, the fat and fatheaded Skip, who never noticed anything, noticed it. Nobody said a word to Langdale about it, of course. But everyone was aware of it.

And they wondered. With the St. Jude's match just coming along, old Langdale might have been expected to be living and breathing Soccer. So he would have been, if things had been normal. But things, it seemed, were not quite normal. It really seemed that he had something on his mind, which drew it away from even Soccer. He had even been seen to fumble a kick, which was a matter not only for concern, but for consternation. For if old Langdale was off his form when St. Jude's came over, what was going to happen? St. Jude's had beaten Felgate last time,

and nobody wanted that to be repeated on the home ground.

No doubt it was because old Langdale had something on his mind, and was walking with his eyes on the earth, unalert, that he caught Skip's football with his face. Tom King and Dick Warren and Skip Ruggles, the chums of Study Four in the Fourth, were punting a footer in break that morning, the day before the St. Jude's fixture. Skip did not, of course, intend to land that ball on the features of the captain of the school. He would have shuddered at the thought. But when Skip Ruggles kicked a footer, it was liable to fly off in any old direction; generally one not at all intended by Skip. If Skip had deliberately kicked that ball at Langdale, the captain of Felgate would have been absolutely safe. It was because he didn't, that a wet and muddy Soccer ball suddenly banged in the middle of Langdale's handsome features, smothering his face with mud, and causing him to sit down abruptly on the county of Herts.

"Oh!" gasped Tom King.

"Oh!" stuttered Dick Warren.

Skip neither gasped nor stuttered. He stood dumb, gazing in horror at what he had done.

Langdale picked himself up. He was the best-tempered man at Felgate; but the expression discernible through clinging mud on his face indicated that that good temper had failed him. He dabbed at mud, and glared at Skip.

"Ruggles!" he gurgled.

"Oh, lor'!" Skip found his voice.

"Sorry, Langdale—I—I—I——."

"Go to my study, and wait for me there."



Skip neither gasped nor stuttered. He stood dumb, gazing in horror at what he had done.

Langdale strode away to the House. He needed a wash before he attended to Skip. Skip Ruggles gazed at his comrades in dismal dismay.

"That means six!" he moaned.

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Tom King.

"Six of the best, I hope!" said Dick Warren.

That was all the sympathy Skip received from his chums! With a dolorous fat face, Skip limped away to Langdale's study, to wait for him there. All his fat quivered as he gazed at Langdale's official ash, lying on the

table. That ash was going to establish contact, in a vigorous hand, with the plumpest trousers at Felgate School. "Six" was the very least Skip could expect for his exploit. And it was awful, waiting for it. Langdale seemed quite a long time cleaning off the mud in the lobby; and every minute seemed an hour, if not a century, to poor Skip, waiting for the whopping of his fat life.

But as it turned out, it was lucky for Skip that the cleansing process took Langdale so long. In that lapse of time his accustomed good-temper recovered. When he came to the study he gave Skip Ruggles a grim look, but he did not pick up the ash from the table.

"You young ass!" he said.

"I—I—I'm awfully sorry, Langdale," stammered Skip. "I—I—I——."

"You can cut."

"Eh?" Skip could not believe his fat ears. He had floored the captain of Felgate with a footer. He had smothered his face in mud. He had expected six of the very, very best. He had expected to stand up, like a horse, at his next meal. And he was told to cut! "Did—did—did you say kik-kik-cut, Langdale?"

"Yes—unless you want me to boot you."

Skip did not want Langdale to boot him. He cut. In fact, he flew, lest old Langdale should change his mind. He came out into the quad with a beaming fat face, and King and Warren stared at him.

"Didn't old Langdale slay you?" asked Tom, in wonder.

"No, he didn't! He told me to cut! I—I—I say, old Langdale's a splendid chap!" said Skip. "Any other pre.



Skip never meant to listen. Skip often did things that he never really meant to do.

would have skinned a fellow. I—I say, I—I wish I knew what's worrying old Langdale, and—and that a fellow could help. If a chap could give old Langdale a leg-up——!"

Skip sighed. If he had liked and admired old Langdale before, he almost adored him now. And he knew, as everyone did, that something was amiss with old Langdale. If only a fellow could have helped—but, of course, a fellow couldn't.

Skip never meant to listen. Skip often did things that he never really meant to do, realising only when it was too late that he shouldn't have. He was

leaning against the buttress just by Langdale's open study window; that was how it happened. He was leaning on that buttress simply because, with so much weight to carry, the fat Skip always leaned upon something, if there was something upon which to lean. It was Wednesday morning, after class; St. Jude's were due in the afternoon. Skip, however, was not thinking of Soccer, he was thinking chiefly of dinner, and wondering whether the bell would ever ring. Voices in the study naturally came to his fat ears via the open window, Langdale and Denver never dreaming that anyone was there so close at hand. It did not even occur to Skip to shift. His plump brain moved slowly, when it moved at all.

"Well, what's up, old fellow?" It was Denver of the Sixth, the Felgate goalkeeper, speaking. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Well, yes and no!" came Langdale's reply.

"Lucid, at any rate!" said Denver, and then, his tone becoming more serious, he went on. "Look here, Langdale, old man, we all know there's something out of gear. Don't you feel up to the mark for the game this afternoon?"

"Yes and no again!" answered Langdale. "I—I think I'd better stand out. It's rather a blow, but I think I'd better."

"But you're fit as a fiddle."

"I know! But——."

"Something's worrying you?"

"I didn't know anyone had noticed it, but—well, yes. I'm fit enough—I'm all right, only—only—well, I think I'd better stand out this afternoon."

"Spot of bother at home, perhaps!" hazarded Denver.

"Well—yes."

"Nothing to do with Soccer!" the Felgate goalkeeper pointed out.

"I know! But—It's on my mind," said Langdale. "I just can't get it out. I could play the game of my life today—but—but—I just couldn't keep my mind on it, Denver—that's how it is——. I know I shall be missed from the side——."

"Oh! You know that, do you?" grunted Denver. "You know jolly well that without you, St. Jude's will walk over us again, and worse than before. Well, there's a telephone in the Prefects' Room——."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that I may as well ring up St. Jude's, and say 'You win', and save them the trouble of coming over."

There was a long minute of silence in Langdale's study. Then the captain of Felgate spoke again, very quietly.

"I don't want it to get all over the shop, Denver, but I'll tell you. My governor's posted missing in Korea."

"Oh!" Denver whistled.

"I know that Captain Langdale wouldn't want me to worry. I know he would expect me to face up to it like a soldier's son. But—I just can't! If there was any definite news it might be different. But—but—it weighs on a fellow's mind, not knowing——."

"I understand," said Denver, quite softly.

"My brother George is going to ring me up the minute there's news—if there's any. I've been waiting for that call for days. But—it hasn't come! There's no news."

"No news is said to be good news," said Denver.

"That's not much comfort."

"Might get that ring from George before the St. Jude's men get here," said Denver.

"Might!" said Langdale. "But as it's days and days, it doesn't seem likely. And—and with that on my mind, Denver, I'm no good for Soccer. I should be right off my game. A man not half my form as a rule will be more useful. The poor old governor——" Langdale's voice trembled for a moment. But he pulled himself up at once. His voice was almost casual as he went on. "What I've told you is between ourselves, Denver—you won't talk about it. I'm asking your advice as a pal—hadn't I better stand out, with things are they are——?"

"If they feel like that—yes!" said Denver.

It was then, though not till then, that it occurred to Skip Ruggles' fat brain that he was listening-in to a private conversation. Skip was the man to do the right thing when he knew what it was. Realising that he was, though unintentionally, playing the nefarious part of an eavesdropper, Skip moved away, and heard no more of what was said in Langdale's study.

But he had heard enough!

He knew, now!

Everyone at Felgate had seen, or guessed, that there was something amiss with old Langdale lately. Now Skip knew what it was. Skip's fat and kindly heart was full of sympathy. Old Langdale, who had let him off so kindheartedly the day before, was in a sore spot: and Skip would have given

worlds, or whole universes had he possessed them, to help him out. He would have jumped off the top of High Fell for old Langdale's sake.

But a fellow could do nothing. Nothing could help Langdale out but that hoped-for telephone-call from his brother George at home, to give him news of the missing "governor". That was not likely to come at the last minute, if it came at all. Old Langdale was right in standing out of the St. Jude's match, with such a weight on his mind to cramp his style—but old Langdale standing out meant, as a practical certainty, another Soccer defeat for Felgate, a heavy blow to Langdale as well as to the rest of Felgate School.

A fellow could do nothing to help.

But could he not?

Skip Ruggles gave quite a jump, as a sudden, startling thought flashed into his fat mind. At the same moment, the dinner-bell rang. For the first time since he had been at Felgate, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles passed call to a meal unheeded. Tom King and Dick Warren rushed up to him.

"Come on, fathead—tiffin!" said Tom.

"I say," said Skip. "Wait a minute—I say, suppose——." He paused. He would have liked to consult his chums. But he could not tell them what he had heard under Langdale's window. Old Langdale did not want it talked about, and Skip was loyal to the core. Skip was not going to say a word.

"Suppose what?" asked Tom King, staring at him.

"Suppose—suppose——." Skip groped for words. "Suppose a man was

up against it because he hadn't got some good news, and a chap handed out some good news, and it was gammon, but it would see him through, say for a football match, it wouldn't be any harm, would it? It would help him out, and wouldn't make matters worse, see?"

King and Warren gazed at him.

"That," said Tom King, thoughtfully, "may possibly mean something, though I wouldn't bank on it. You're wandering in your mind, old fat tulip. Come in to tiffin and don't talk rot."

They walked Skip in to tiffin. Immediately after tiffin, Skip Ruggles rolled out of gates, rolled down to the village of Fell, and rolled into the post-office there.

Langdale was in the Prefects' Room when the telephone bell rang. He was looking troubled, and a dozen senior men in the room looked troubled, and perturbed, and some of them annoyed. Why old Langdale, obviously as fit as a fiddle, was going to stand out of the game that day, only Denver knew; but they all knew what it meant to the side. Chard said they might just as well present the game to St. Jude's on a plate. Cadby, Loring, Paynter, all had something to say. But the buzz of the telephone interrupted, and Langdale almost ran to take the call. Might it not be that long-hoped-for call at last?

It seemed that it was!

"Langdale speaking! What—who—?" breathed the Felgate captain.

"George speaking from home." The voice that came through was rather husky, but Langdale was not likely to guess, or dream, that that was a disguise—if he thought anything about it, he thought that George had a bit of a

cold. "Don't worry about the governor any more—it's all right."

"Oh!" gasped Langdale.

"I—I just rang you up to tell you! More later! Must cut off now."

Langdale turned from the telephone. Every fellow in the Prefects' Room stared at him. His face looked as if the sun had suddenly come out.

"Well, about the game, if you're finished there on the 'phone," grunted Chard. "If you're standing out, Langdale—"

Langdale laughed.

"But I'm not," he said. "I'm playing Soccer this afternoon, my pippin, and we're going to wipe St. Jude's off the face of the earth. About time we got along to the changing-room, I think."

And, in great spirits, they got along to the changing-room.

St. Jude's, if they were not exactly wiped off the face of the earth, were at least sent bootless home. What would have happened had Langdale stood out, every Felgate man could surmise. What would have happened had he played, with a heavy weight on his mind, Langdale at least knew. But what actually did happen was happy and glorious. Langdale, at the top of his form, was a tremendous man at Soccer; and in his relief and gladness, he seemed to have acquired twice his usual form. It was Felgate's game from the start.

The first half was almost over, when a fat figure rolled on the ground, and joined Tom King and Dick Warren in the buzzing crowd.

"How's it going?" asked Skip, panting. Skip was rather breathless after a long walk to Fell and back.

"How?" repeated Tom King. "You fat ass, you've been missing the fireworks. We're two up already."

"Langdale playing?" asked Skip.

"Of course, ass! Think he wouldn't be?" said Dick Warren, with a stare. "There he is, fathead—look!"

Skip looked, and grinned. There was

the School. But he didn't! He contented himself with a gleeful grin and a fat chuckle.

It was a great game. St. Jude's pulled up in the second half, and twice found the net. But it booted not. Langdale added one more before the final whistle went, and Felgate came off victors by four to two. The cheering for old Langdale woke all the echoes of Felgate, and Skip wondered what fellows would have said, could they have known to whom that glorious victory really was due. But, of course, they couldn't.



There was old Langdale, moving like lightning with the ball at his feet.

old Langdale, moving like lightning with the ball at his feet. Skip was in time to see him bag a third goal for Felgate before the whistle went for the interval. Skip would have enjoyed telling his friends that it was due to him, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles, that old Langdale was there, bagging goals for

It was quite a mystery.

For the very next day, there came a telephone-call from George Langdale, to inform Langdale of the Sixth that the "governor" was safe and sound, having regained the British lines after being "missing" for a week. Langdale almost fell down, in sheer astonishment. George knew nothing of the previous day's telephone-call, and Langdale could not even surmise how or why it had happened. Some person unknown must have put through that call, for what reason he could not begin to guess. It had happened very happily, it was true; but Langdale would have given a great deal to know who it was that had fooled him, in so very serious a matter—and had he been aware that the person unknown was the fattest and fatheadedest fellow in the Fourth Form, Skip Ruggles would have been up for the toughest "six" that had ever been administered at Felgate School. Fortunately for Skip, Langdale never knew who had given him that inexplicable leg-up.