



SKIMPOLE WORKS HIS WILL!

By MARTIN CLIFFORD

"By the exercise of my Will Power," says Skimpole, the worst cricketer at St. Jim's, "I can play as well as anybody!" And he proves it by winning the match for the school!

"Pardon me, my good youth, but—"

"Skimmy's not to blame," broke in Talbot, with a rueful grin. "He's gated, too, anyway. It was my fault for not stopping him."

"Precisely!" exclaimed Skimpole, with an approving nod. "Every individual is responsible for his own destiny. As Professor Balmycrumpet says—"

"Blow Professor Balmycrumpet!" yelled the irate crowd of cricketers that had gathered in Tom Merry's study.

"Really, my good youths! Anyway, I, too, as Talbot mentioned, am to suffer similar punishment," said Skimpole, solemnly. "What is more, in my case it means the loss of something much more serious than a mere juvenile game. As it happens, I was going to Abbotsford myself on Wednesday—not for a game of cricket, but for a lecture on Will Power!"

"Bother your blessed lecture!" snapped Tom Merry. "It's our cricket match that matters at Abbotsford on Wednesday—not your potty lecture! Abbotsford are fielding their strongest side and if we don't have Talbot—"

THE FIRST CHAPTER THE WHEEZE THAT WENT WRONG!

FATHEAD!"

"Really, my dear Merry—"

"Footling, frabjous, freakish fathead!" snorted Tom Merry of the St. Jim's Shell. "Why couldn't you have buttonholed Talbot at some other time?"

Herbert Skimpole, the genius of St. Jim's, blinked through his spectacles in mild protest.

"My good youth—" he began.

"If you hadn't kept on gassing to him in that teashop at Wayland about your blessed Will Power, he wouldn't have missed his train," said Tom Merry, unheeding. "And if he hadn't missed his train, he wouldn't have been late for calling over and Railton wouldn't have gated him for next Wednesday—the very day when we were relying on him to play cricket for us at Abbotsford!"

"Half-a-mo! I've got an idea!"

All eyes were turned to Monty Lowther. An idea from the humorist of the Shell was usually worthy of attention.

"Spill it, Monty!" said Tom Merry encouragingly. "If it's an idea for getting Talbot to Abbotsford next Wednesday, you'll earn our undying gratitude!"

"It is!" grinned Monty Lowther. "Of course, the best solution really would be to put me in the team in Talbot's place. But as you're all so keen on keeping him and the problem is simply to get him to Abbotsford, why not disguise him?"

The juniors stared at Monty Lowther rather blankly. Tom Merry frowned.

"N.G., Monty, I'm afraid. Knowing how things stand, Railton's bound to tell a prefect to keep an eye on our motor-coach—and a fishy-looking stranger aboard will catch his eye right away."

"Quite likely," nodded Lowther. "But there'd be nothing fishy-looking about a conductor, would there?"

"Oh!"

The juniors looked at Lowther, then looked at each other; and then they grinned.

"My hat! I believe you've picked a winner, Monty!" chuckled Tom Merry. "Motor-coaches often do have conductors, and there'd be nothing odd about one turning up with ours. If we can find a white smock and a peaked cap amongst the Dramatic Society's props—"

"There are two of each," said Kangaroo. "One set's bound to fit Talbot."

"Then it's just a question of Talbot slipping in as though he'd arrived with the coach—and the deed's done! What do you say, Talbot?"

"I'm on," smiled Talbot. "Of course, it will mean staying disguised till we get there, to avoid any danger of being spotted en route. But once we're there, there'll be no need to worry. Thanks for the wheeze, Lowther."

And that, so to speak, was that. The meeting broke up on a note of most cheery optimism.

Nothing happened up to the Wednesday to disturb the renewed optimism of the St. Jim's cricketers. One of the Dramatic Society's peaked caps fitted Talbot to perfection, and Mr. Railton made it known that no restrictions were to be placed on the movements of Talbot and Skimpole apart from their not being allowed out of gates. Both these happenings favoured Lowther's scheme.

When the fateful Wednesday afternoon arrived, everything seemed to go swimmingly. As the cricketers' motor-coach drove through the gates, Tom Merry & Co., walking over from the pavilion with their bags, saw emerging from the School House a bewhiskered and bespectacled conductor whom nobody could possibly have associated with Talbot of the Shell.

They hurried to join the coach and go while the going was good.

All went well. The bogus conductor sat with the driver, and Kildare of the Sixth saw the coach off without registering the slightest suspicion.

It was not till they reached Abbotsford that the juniors realised that something was wrong. But then they realised it with a vengeance. The disguised St. Jim's junior stepped down from the coach and removed his false whiskers—and, with a gasp of horror, the cricketers recognised the last man they had anticipated seeing at Abbotsford that afternoon.

"SKIMPOLE!"



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THE SECOND CHAPTER BY POWER OF WILL!

"SKIMPOLE!" gasped Tom Merry, faintly. "What the thump——"

Skimpole blinked solemnly at the half-paralysed cricketers.

"I regret deeply having had to deceive you, my good youths," he said. "But necessity knows no law. It was vitally important for me at the present stage of my studies to get to the lecture that is being given at Abbotsford this afternoon on Will Power!"

"You—you dummy!"

"How did you do it?" yelled Tom Merry. "Where's Talbot?"

"Locked up in his study, my dear Merry. I locked him in myself, while

he was changing into the conductor's outfit!"

"Oh, ye gods!"

"I thought it would be an excellent idea if I myself resorted to the ingenious subterfuge Lowther suggested," explained Skimpole. "I am sure the knowledge that you are assisting me in my study of Will Power will compensate you for Talbot's absence."

"You—you——"

"I must go now, or I shall be late for the lecture," went on the genius of the Shell, glancing at his watch. "I'll see you later, my dear fellows!"

And Skimpole went, leaving the cricketers staring after him as though mesmerised!

And so it came about that St. Jim's played only ten men against Abbotsford that afternoon. There was no help for it. Manners, the scorer, was the only spare man with the team and he had an injured ankle.

Tom Merry and his men settled down to the game with feelings that were too deep for words !

But time healed their outraged feelings, and as the afternoon wore on they cheered up and forgot their troubles in the enjoyment of a great game. With one man short and Abbotsford at the top of their form, they were fighting with their backs to the wall. But that fact inspired them to greater efforts than they might have made with Talbot in the team, and the Abbotsford men were soon shown that it was going to be no walk-over for them.

Abbotsford scored 98 in their first innings ; St. Jim's only two runs less. Then Abbotsford went in again and, on a deteriorating wicket, knocked up 81, which left St. Jim's with 83 to score for a tie or 84 for a win. Not a very formidable task on paper, but the wicket was tricky and becoming trickier. Tom Merry realised that they were up against it. They could, of course, play for a draw, but that wouldn't have been in the St. Jim's tradition. He gave his men orders to go all out for a win.

As time went on, it became clear that it was going to be a desperately close finish. But nobody anticipated quite such a close finish as it proved to be. The score crept up and batsmen came and went—until, with the score at 82, Jack Blake was caught out and Fatty Wynn, last man in of the team of ten, joined Kangaroo at the wicket. Disaster came swiftly. Raikes, the Abbotsford skipper, sent down a

fast ball that gave Fatty Wynn no chance.

There was a cheer from the home supporters.

" Abbotsford wins ! "

And then—

Suddenly, Tom Merry, standing at the bottom of the pavilion steps, was aware of a weedy bespectacled figure wandering towards him.

" Skimpole ! " he ejaculated. " My hat ! I wonder—"

To think was to act. Tom dashed on to the pitch, where the players were just turning towards the pavilion.

" Raikes, old chap, there's a man of ours just turned up. It's a bit unusual, but do you think we might—"

" Play him ? By all means," said Raikes readily. " You've been a man short all the afternoon, Merry, and I'd be a poor sport if I didn't agree to your having a full team for the finish. Send him in ! "

" Thanks ! "

" Don't mensh ! It will give me a chance to complete my hat-trick ! " grinned Raikes. " Stay on, you men ! We haven't finished yet ! "

Tom ran back to Skimpole.

" Skimmy, old bean, it's up to you ! " he gasped. " You're last man in and we want two runs to win ! Lend him your boots, Figgy ! Here's a pair of pads ! "

" Ow ! Really, my good youths," exclaimed Skimpole breathlessly, as he felt himself grabbed by willing helpers and sat down forcibly on the pavilion steps as a preliminary to being fixed up for cricket.

" No jaw ! " said Tom Merry. " This is the time for deeds, not words. All you've got to do, Skimmy, is to stand at your wicket and stone-wall till they change over. Then if

only Kangaroo can score another two, we've won the day. Savvy?"

Skimpole blinked.

"But, my good Merry, inasmuch as the runs are of equal value to the side whichever individual scores them, it would surely be an economy of time if I scored them myself!"

"It would if you could bat, old son," grinned Tom. "But as you can't—"

Skimpole frowned.

"Pardon me, my good youth, but there are no limits to what can be accomplished by the exercise of Will Power. The lecturer to whose discourse I have been listening this afternoon distinctly said—"

"Chuck it, old bean!" begged Tom Merry, as Skimpole's helpers stood him on his feet again and pushed a bat into his hand. "Be a good scout and do as I tell you. Just keep your wicket intact if you can and—"

Skimpole shook his head.

"I am sorry, Merry, but I cannot agree to take merely a passive part in the game. I admit that I have never aimed at pre-eminence at cricket, but I maintain that by the exercise of my Will Power I can play cricket as well as anybody! Stand aside!"

"Oh, crikey!"

The St. Jim's juniors stood aside. They were too surprised at the unexpected effect of the afternoon's lecture on Skimpole to do anything else!

Skimpole trotted solemnly down to his wicket and faced the bowler. The St. Jim's men left behind at the pavilion groaned.

"Well, this finishes it," Tom Merry remarked lugubriously. "Had that chump gone in with the intention of just stopping the ball, there'd have

been a chance. But now he's decided to hit out and try Will Power on it, we're done!"

"Play!"

The spectators watched breathlessly. Raikes sent down one of his swiftest and deadliest and Tom Merry & Co. closed their eyes in almost agonised suspense as they saw Skimpole step out to it.

Clack!

"Hallo! What the thump—"

The St. Jim's men opened their eyes again and stared.

Skimpole's wicket was not spread-eagled, as they had thought for a moment. The "clack" they had heard, incredible as it seemed, was the sound of Skimpole's bat smiting the ball!

"He's hit it!" yelled Figgins. "Oh, what a fluke! He's hit it! Good old Skimmy!"

"It's a boundary, too!" gasped Tom Merry. "Skimmy's won the game! Hooray!"

The miracle had happened! Skimpole had won the game for St. Jim's!

The visitors yelled themselves hoarse.

"Well, you did it, Skimmy!" grinned Tom Merry, as Skimpole returned. "Of course, as it was your fault Talbot didn't turn up, it was the least you could have done, anyway—still, I didn't expect it of you!"

Skimpole blinked solemnly through his spectacles.

"No other result was possible, my good youth," he said. "It was simply and solely the result of my exercising my Will Power!"

And, although Tom Merry & Co. had their own ideas about that, they allowed the genius of the Shell to have it his own way!

THE END