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HAPPY STORY BOOK



THIS BOOK
BELONGS TO

*George Harding
Lawington
Arms 1956*

From Auntie Bessie

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Jolly Good Sport! ^{By} FRANK RICHARDS

Creator of
BILLY BUNTER &
GREYFRIARS



‘WE’VE GOT to play Oakshott,’ said Tom King.

‘We’ve got to!’ agreed Dick Warren.

‘But—’

Tom King paused at that.

There was a ‘but’: and it was a large size in ‘buts’.

The cause of the trouble was a rag in the French class. Monsieur Pin, who had the thankless task of driving his beautiful language into reluctant heads at Felgate, was born to be ragged. He was a dutiful and kindhearted little gentleman, and the Felgate fellows really rather liked him. But schoolboys are thoughtless sometimes.

The Felgate Fourth would no more have

thought of ragging Charne, their form-master, than of pulling a tiger’s tail. Charne was the man to make a ragger tired of life, even life at Felgate. But Mossoo was conciliatory, placatory, eager for peace at any price. He was ragged, not because he deserved it, but because the raggers could get away with it.

But on this especial occasion the rag had assumed unwonted proportions. Slamming desk-lids, dropped books, affected ignorance and idiotic questions, were quite usual in Mossoo’s class-room. But what happened on this occasion was not usual.

Third school, that morning, for the Fourth, was French with Mossoo. It was a glorious summer’s morning. Sunshine streamed in,

with a balmy breeze, at the open windows. The juniors were restless. With Charne they would have controlled that restlessness. With Monsieur Pin they saw no necessity for doing so. Many of them were thinking of the Oakshott match booked for the afternoon. The mere thought of cricket made the dusky old class-room seem more dusky and dusty than ever. Never had French irregular verbs seemed so weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable. A rag was much more lively and interesting. It was Reece, who never seemed to know that there was a limit, who whizzed a *Henriade* across the room, dropping it at Mossoo's feet and making him give a convulsive jump and drop his own book. It was Preece who rushed out officiously to pick up that book for Mossoo, and contrived somehow to collide with the blackboard and send it whirling with its easel. The crash of the blackboard was the signal for general uproar. A dozen fellows crowded round to set it up again, shoving and pushing and making confusion worse confounded. In vain Mossoo shrieked for order, gesticulating with both hands, almost with his feet, dancing on the edge of the *mêlée*. Nobody heeded him. Up went the easel, and down again with another crash—up again, and down again—crash on crash. The French class were fairly letting themselves go, and enjoying this ever so much more than French verbs.

The door opened in the midst of it, and Mr. Charne looked in.

No doubt the uproar had reached his ears. And the tremendous din in Mossoo's class-room ceased as if by magic. Sudden silence fell. With Charne on the scene, the matter had ceased to be a joke. It had become awfully serious.

'What is all this?' Mr. Charne asked, quietly

'Hem! We—we—we're setting up the blackboard for Monsieur Pin, sir,' ventured Dick Warren.

'It—it went over, sir,' said Skip Ruggles.

'Ciel! Zat you take ze place!' gasped Monsieur Pin. 'Je vous dis, take ze place. Assez, assez, je vous dis, assez.'

'I quite understand,' said Mr. Charne, still very quietly. 'Quite! The Form will go into Extra School this afternoon, from three to five.'

Charne, having said that, walked away. He did not need to say more. From that moment Monsieur Pin had no more trouble with his class during third school. It was a great relief to Mossoo. He was almost happy. But in the ranks of the Fourth, as by the yellow Tiber of old, there was tumult and affright. For Extra School that afternoon clashed fatally with the Oakshott match: and the fact that they had asked for it, indeed sat up and begged for it, was no comfort at all to the cricketers.

Afterwards, in Study Four, they discussed it in deep dismay.

'We've got to play Oakshott,' Tom King declared, for the umpteenth time.

'We've got to,' Dick Warren agreed, also for the umpteenth time.

'But — . ' They both groaned together.

Reece and Preece, Parrott and Bullinger, were there, but they had nothing to suggest. Tom King told Reece that he was a born fool to have started that rag on a match day, adding that Preece was a blithering idiot to have carried on with it: true statements, but no present help in time of need. It was Skip Ruggles who had a suggestion to make. Skip

had been thinking it out, which was really sporting of Skip, as he had no place in the team, and was going to be nothing but a 'looker-on in Vienna' if the match was played. Skip had set his wits—such as they were—to work.

'Why not cut?' said Skip.

His suggestion was received ungratefully.

'Ass!' said Tom King.

'Fathead!' said Dick Warren.

'Ditherer!' said Reece.

'Blitherer!' said Preece.

'For goodness' sake, shut up,' said Bul-linger.

'Sit on his head, somebody,' said Parrott.

'But look here—' said Skip.

'Shut up, ass!' roared the whole meeting, and Skip shut up.

Nobody else had any suggestion to make. A dismal meeting broke up dismally when the dinner-bell rang.



'Why not cut?' said Skip

CHAPTER II

SKIP'S suggestion had been received with ingratitude, derision, and contumely. It was, in the general opinion, the sort of idiotic thing Skip would suggest. Yet, strange to relate, it was Skip's suggestion which, at long last, was adopted.

The circumstances favoured that desperate expedient.

Desperate, indeed, it was: for a fellow who cut Extra was booked inevitably for six of the very best. Neither, in ordinary circumstances, was it possible to get away with such an expedient. A Home match could not have been played under the eyes of all Felgate by fellows booked for Extra. But it

was an away match, so that, so far, was all right. Once at Oakshott, out of sight and sound of Felgate, they could carry on. For six, or sixteen, on the bags, no cricketer cared a hoot, so long as the match was played. But—there was still a large size in butts. What about Charne?

Mossoo was negligible. He would go to his class-room, at three, and find that not a man had turned up for Extra. He would duly make his report: and later on, the truants would get toco. That did not matter. But Charne? Charne, of course, knew all about Oakshott, he would know at once where the absentees had gone, and he was the man to follow on, and order them—indeed, yank them off the field by their back hair, if needs



They proceeded to pile up eighty runs

were. That made it hopeless, and Skip's suggestion merely his accustomed dithering, till Reece brought the glorious news that Charne was going to London with the Head in his car.

That clarified everything.

With Charne, in the majestic company of Dr. Leicester, eating up the miles on the Hertfordshire roads, there was nothing to fear.

Twenty fellows watched the Head's car roll away from the gates of Felgate, and they felt like cheering him as he went: Charne being with him, not to return till a late hour.

Faces were bright when the car had dis-

appeared. Charne was gone, and all was clear. Mossoo did not matter. Nobody gave Mossoo a thought. They were accustomed to regarding Mossoo as a trifle light as air. Mossoo was nobody and nothing. Once Charne had disappeared into space, Tom King and Co. were only thinking of packing cricket bags and getting off to Oakshott.

'So you're going to cut after all?' asked Skip.

'Sort of,' agreed Tom King.

'It was my idea.'

'Was it? Oh! Yes! Hand me that bat.'

'And I jolly well think you ought to give me a show in the game,' said Skip, warmly. Tom King laughed. He could laugh—now that all was clear!

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm not joking!' roared Skip.

'You are!' assured the captain of the Fourth. 'One of your best! You'd better turn up for Extra, old fat man—no need to get six for nothing.'

'I'll watch it,' grunted Skip.

Skip went with the cricketers. So did all the Fourth; the lawless example of the cricketers being catching, as it were. Stumps were to be pitched early at Oakshott, and they lost no time: very soon after the Head's car had disappeared, the Fourth Form at Felgate had disappeared also.

They walked to the bus stop, crammed on the motor-bus, and rolled away merrily for Oakshott. It was rather exciting, to be cutting Extra, and playing cricket when, according to law, they should have been sitting in the French class-room, absorbing knowledge of French. They grinned as they pictured Monsieur Pin's little sallow face, with its little pointed beard, staring into an

empty class-room at three. No doubt he would be furious: and there was no doubt at all that when they came back, and Charne came back, there would be the dickens to pay. But they were not going to worry about what could not be helped: they were going to play cricket, and beat Oakshott if they could: and afterwards, take what was coming to them. King Cricket, at the moment, was the monarch whose rule they acknowledged. And they arrived at Oakshott in great spirits: and Tom King having won the toss, and elected to take first knock, they proceeded to pile up eighty runs in the first innings: and then went into the field as fresh as paint and cheery as crickets, not even dreaming of what was just about to happen!

CHAPTER III

‘NOM d’un nom!’ breathed Monsieur Pin.

If he was not exactly furious, there was no doubt that Monsieur Pin was very angry. Otherwise, certainly he never would have called upon the name of a name. He stood looking into the class-room, inhabited solely by empty desks, and his little black eyes flashed, and his little black beard bristled.

Patient and long-enduring as was Mossoo, this was the limit. Fellows had been known to cut Extra before. But never a whole class. Sometimes the good-natured Mossoo would not even report such delinquents. Nevertheless, there was a limit to his patience. Even Froggy could reach explosion-point. He reached it now. Gazing into that empty class-room, Mossoo boiled over.

‘Nom d’un nom d’un chien!’ he breathed. Which showed that he was on the boil. Never before, since he had been French master

at Felgate, though he had had many trials, had Mossoo invoked the name of a name of dog! Now he did!

Prompt at three Mossoo had arrived to take his detention-class. Nobody was waiting for him at the door: and when he looked into the room, nobody was there. His first impression was that the fellows were late. But when he had waited five minutes, ten minutes, he knew. It was then that he invoked the name of a name, and still more emphatically, the name of a name of a dog! With utter disregard of him, disregard amounting to contempt, the Felgate Fourth had walked out on him, as it were. And Monsieur Pin was not standing this. It was



‘It is too mooch! I do not stand him!’

the limit, and then some, and a lot over. He breathed wrath.

Breathing wrath, he whisked away to Charne's study—finding it as vacant as the class-room. Then he whisked away to Common-Room, where he found Kye and Morney and other beaks, and learned from them that the Fourth-form master was gone up to town with the Head. The beaks, on learning that his detention-class was missing, smiled compassionately, adding fuel to the fire of Mossoo's wrath. He spluttered with indignation.

'C'en est trop!' he declared. 'It is too mooch! I do not stand him! Non! non! Jamais! I stand him not!'

That Mossoo was a good little ass all Felgate knew. That he could be a fierce little ass they did not yet know.

Mossoo knew, of course, what Charne would have done. Charne would have rounded up those truants and marched them back to Extra, if he had had to follow them half, or quite, round the globe. Charne would not have tolerated this for a split second. And why should Mossoo? Was he to be defied, disregarded, smiled at by pitying beaks in Common-Room, set at naught, treated as a negligible nobody? Jamais de la vie! Never in life! Mossoo, for once, was not standing it.

He debated in his mind as to where the truants could be. Not a man of them was to be seen about the school. Then he remembered that he had heard of the Oakshott match. That was it! That was where the young rascals were—playing cricket at Oakshott. Charne, he knew, would have shot across to Oakshott to herd them back—had Charne been there. But, of course, it was because

Charne was safe off the scene that they had ventured. He, Monsieur Pin, did not matter—they did not care about him! Did they not? They should!

Some minutes later, an excited little gentleman with a pointed beard, in a tightly-buttoned coat and a top hat, was walking briskly to the bus stop. Grim as Charne's own was Monsieur Pin's face as the motor-bus rolled him over to Oakshott. They were going to see whether he, Adolphe Pin, could be disregarded and derided in this flagrant manner. He was going to make sure that they were playing at Oakshott, by the evidence of his own Gallic eyes. Then he was going to order them back to Felgate, game or no game. And if they ventured to disregard that order, an appeal to the headmaster of Oakshott would settle the matter. They were not going to get away with this. They were going to learn that Adolphe Pin was a man to be respected. He was coming down on those truants like a ton of bricks: as fierce as Charne: indeed, out-Charning Charne. If they were, indeed, playing 'le cricket' at Oakshott—

They were: for when he arrived, he needed no guidance but a roar that fell on his ears from the cricket-ground.

'Well bowled, Warren! Oh, well bowled!'

'C'est ca!' breathed Monsieur Pin.

'Good man, Warren!'

'I give zem good man, Varren!' murmured Monsieur Pin.

There was a good crowd round the cricket-ground at Oakshott. Plenty of Oakshott men had turned up to watch the game, and among them were spotted the blue-and-white caps of Felgate. All the Felgate Fourth who were not playing cricket were watching

Tom King and Co. do it. And at the moment they were making the welkin ring with cheers for Dick Warren, who had captured three Oakshott wickets one after another. It was worth while to cut Extra, with all its risks and penalties, to see Warren put up the hat-trick!

'Tophole, old man,' chuckled Tom King. 'Give us another!'

And Dick Warren, favoured by fortune, did give them another, as a little gentleman in a tightly-buttoned coat and a glimmering hat arrived on the ground. It was the last ball of the over, and Oakshott were eight down for forty, which looked good for Felgate. Felgate men cheered and waved caps: and the Felgate field looked, and felt, very pleased with themselves as they crossed over: till a sudden startled yell from Skip Ruggles at the pavilion made them jump.

'Oh, scissors! Froggy!' yelled Skip. 'I say, here comes Mossoo!'

Tom King looked round. He almost fell down, at what he saw.

'Great pip! Froggy!'

'Mossoo!' gasped Dick Warren.

'Mossoo!' articulated Reece.

'Mossoo,' moaned Bullinger.

The Oakshott men wondered what was up. The Felgate men stood rooted to the ground, staring at the sallow face and the pointed beard under the top-hat. They gazed at Monsieur Pin with startled, dismayed, almost unbelieving eyes. They did not need telling why he was there. They had never dreamed that Mossoo, little mild Mossoo, was capable of such things. Charne, yes—but not Mossoo—that little ass Mossoo! But as soon as they saw him, they knew. The little beast was taking a leaf out of Charne's



'I say, here comes Mossoo!'

book: and he had come there to stop the cricket, and order them back to Felgate. They gazed at Mossoo, petrified; as Priam may have gazed at the dread figure that drew his curtains at dead of night.

CHAPTER IV

'SOLD!' muttered Tom King.

'And what a sell!' moaned Dick.

'Look here,' muttered Bullinger, 'that little ass isn't going to play Charne at us! Chuck him out if he butts in.'

'Oh, don't be an ass! He's only got to say a word to the beaks here, or the pre's. The game's up!'

Fellows who cut Extra often had cause for repentance. But never had truants repented so deeply as Tom King and Co. did just then.

Mossoo, it was true, was not Charne: he was only Mossoo. Nevertheless, he was the embodiment of Fate to the hapless cricketers. More than one fellow in the eleven would willingly, had it been practicable, have colared the little gentleman, and run him off the cricket-ground, and pitched him, top-hat and all, anywhere out of the way. But that was a futile idea, only likely to occur to a bullhead like Bullinger. No game, obviously, could go on, with a Felgate master on the spot demanding the return of truants. One word from Mossoo was as effective as Jove's nod on Olympus. The game was up.

From the bottom of their hearts, the Felgate cricketers wished themselves in the French class-room at Felgate. For not only was the game a goner: but leaving it in the middle was worse than never having started it: and they were going to look priceless fools to the Oakshott men, marched off the field under a beak's eye! Grinding French verbs at Felgate would have been a genuine pleasure, compared with this! This was awful! They had asked for it. Perhaps they even deserved it. But it was awful—horrid!

They gazed at Monsieur Pin. He gazed at them. Oakshott men exchanged wondering glances. The batsmen were waiting. But the bowler and the fielders were petrified. The pause was brief but terrible.

And then — !

Monsieur Pin turned and walked off.

That was the very last thing the Felgate cricketers expected him to do. They gazed at his departing back.

'What the thump — ?' breathed Tom King.

'Is he going?' murmured Dick Warren, Warren, in utter wonder.

'Ain't he going to butt in?'

'Is he crackers?'

'He's gone!'

Had he gone to speak to Oakshott masters? That did not seem to be it, for he had not gone towards the House. Had he merely dropped in at Oakshott to ascertain that the truants were there, without intending to intervene? It hardly seemed possible. They could hardly believe it. But he was going—going—gone!

'He's gone!' said Tom King.

'What are we going to do?' asked Warren.

'Carry on,' said Tom.

'But he can't mean to let us —'

'Carry on, and see.'

It was a bewildering situation. Why Mossoo was there, unless to round up the truants, what he was going to do, if he was going to do anything, no fellow could guess. There was nothing to do but to carry on, and see! So they carried on—and saw!

They piled into the game. Oakshott were dismissed for fifty. Nothing was seen of Mossoo when Felgate started batting again, securing seventy. Then there was a pause for tea, and still nothing was seen of Mossoo. The cricketers went back to the field wondering. But by that time they were feeling fairly confident. If Mossoo had been going to butt in, he would have butted in before this, surely. He couldn't be playing with them like a cat with a mouse. And in cheery mood once more, the Felgate cricketers proceeded to mop up Oakshott, beating them by a hatful of runs.

TOM KING solved the mystery, as the Felgate cricketers, pleased but puzzled, rolled home in the motor-bus in the summer sunset.

'Froggy's a sport,' he said.

'How, which, and why?' asked Dick Warren.

'He came over boiling. You could see that in his mug. He was going to round us up and march us off. But—he's a good sport. He wouldn't spoil our game.'

'Fat lot Froggy knows, or cares, about games!' said Bullinger.

'Not a lot,' agreed Tom. 'But he knows we do! He came over to handle the chopper but when he saw us looking so jolly sick, he decided not. That's it! I tell you, Mossoo's a sport. He let us finish the game because he's a jolly good sport. And I tell you fellows this, that if there's any more ragging in Mossoo's class this term, the ragger's going to be booted all over Felgate. We shall get a report to Charne, and a whopping all round—that's what we expected. Froggy was a good sport to let us play out the game, and nobody's going to rag him.'

There was, of course, a report to Charne, and a whopping all round. It was worth it, to play Oakshott; though it was decidedly painful until it wore off. And the next time the Fourth were up to Monsieur Pin for



They piled into the game

French, and Bullinger as usual banged his desk-lid, Tom King gave him a warning look: and made the warning more effective, in the corridor later, by banging Bullinger's head on the old oak wall. For that term, at least, Mossoo found life at Felgate School ever so much more peaceful: the just reward for having shown himself a jolly good sport!



By FRANK RICHARDS

NOBODY at Felgate School had ever seen Skip Ruggles' cousin, Eric Ruggles. If they had ever heard of him, they weren't interested, and if Skip had ever mentioned that Eric was a tremendous cricketer, an almost magic bowler, indeed a demon with the ball, probably nobody had believed a word of it; for Skip himself was not merely a rabbit at the game, but the extreme limit and outside edge in rabbits, and what he did not know about cricket would have filled large volumes. And if Skip had ever referred to the fact that Eric was remarkably like him in appearance, naturally that would have made fellows feel sorry for Eric, without leaving any other particular impression on their minds.

So when Skip, plump and rosy, went off to Hodden, on the day before the junior match with Carcroft, to meet his cousin Eric at the station there, and bring him back to the school to tea in Study Four, not a man at Felgate dreamed what was to come of it. Even Skip didn't, at the time. The great idea came later; Tom King and Dick Warren, Skip's chums in Study Four, were prepared to be civil to Skip's cousin, and stand him a good tea, but their interest in him went no further than that.

They were rather relieved when Skip walked off to Hodden to meet that cousin of his. It gave them a rest from Skip on the subject of cricket. Poor old Skip fancied that he could play that game, a fancy that he had wholly

to himself. Tom King hated saying 'No!' to Skip: but as junior captain, what else could he say?

When Skip suggested that his name should grace the list of players in the Carcroft match, Tom really hardly knew whether to laugh or to weep. Anyhow he couldn't adopt the suggestion. Skip's fat face was sad and reproachful, but it couldn't be helped.

It was at Hodden, that the great idea germinated in Skip's plump brain. There he met Eric, as the latter stepped off the train. They were to come back to Felgate for tea, but Skip always had a space to fill in his extensive inside, and after his walk to Hodden that space was an aching void. Eric, though as plump as Skip, did not share his taste for meals between meals, but he was ready for something after his train journey, and they adjourned to the station buffet, before starting to walk to Felgate. As they sat negotiating doughnut and ginger-beer, two plump and rosy faces were reflected in the looking-glass on the wall, as like one another as two peas. Skip, looking at those reflections, had his brain-wave.

Never was there so remarkable a likeness. They were the same age, the same plump build, they had the same features, the same rosy cheeks, the same untidy hair. Dressed in the same clothes—cricket flannels, for example—a microscope could hardly have picked out any difference between them.

Skip Ruggles was supposed, at Felgate, to be an unlimited fathead. But even an unlimited fathead may have a vein of artfulness in him. Skip had! When the great scheme hatched in his fat brain, he pondered over it for a few minutes, and then propounded it to Cousin Eric. Cousin Eric stared.

'What rot!' he said.

'You'd be doing me a good turn,' said Skip. 'You're a better cricketer than I am, Eric—at least in bowling—.'

'Oh, my hat! I hope so!' murmured Eric.

'As good a man as any in the Felgate eleven with the willow, and a better bowler than the best of them!' said Skip. 'They've never seen you, and they'd never know a thing. They'd think it was me—and if I once put up a good show, in a match, they'd believe that a chap's a cricketer—I'd come in on our next fixture, with Greyfriars. See?'

'Um!' said Eric. Eric Ruggles really was a bit of a prodigy with the round red ball. At his own school he was considered worth his weight in gold in the summer game. Certainly cricket from Eric would have made Felgate men believe that there was cricketing quality in Ruggles.

'It's a half-holiday tomorrow with you, same as with us,' went on Skip. 'You could work it all right—meet me here again early in the afternoon, see? It would give me no end of a leg-up! That's all I need really: things would go all right afterwards.'

Skip felt confident about that! 'You'll do it for me, old chap?'

There was a pause. Then Eric Ruggles, grinning, nodded.

'Well, it would be rather a lark,' he said, 'I'll do it, if you like, Skip. But I say, I don't know any of the Felgate chaps—.'

'You'd know them all right, from the photograph of the junior eleven I sent you, with their names on it,' said Skip.

'So I would! I'll nose it over! O. K. Skip! It's a go!'

When Skip Ruggles returned to Felgate that afternoon, he returned alone. Tom King

and Dick Warren were prepared to entertain the guest in Study Four. But no guest materialised.

'Isn't your cousin coming, after all?' asked Tom.

'Well, no!' answered Skip. 'You'll see him another time.'

'After we've got this spread ready!' said Warren.

'I'm ready for tea,' said Skip.

Doughnuts at Hodden made no difference to that. Skip sat down cheerfully to tea in Study Four, and easily disposed of the extra good things. He seemed very cheery, and did not even mention cricket, which was a relief to his friends. They were glad to see old Skip looking so bright, and never thought, or guessed, or dreamed of the deep dark scheme that was working in the fat brain of Stanley St. Leger Ruggles.

Skip disappeared immediately after dinner the next day. Sad to relate, nobody noted that circumstance. Tom King and his merry men were thinking wholly of cricket; and much as they liked old Skip, they had no use for him with cricket in the offing. Nobody knew or cared whether Skip Ruggles was within the walls of Felgate School or without. Which, as it happened, suited Skip, with the extraordinary scheme he had in mind, which was to be carried out that day with the assistance of that champion cricketer, his cousin Eric. Nobody remembered Skip till a fat figure in flannels was seen in the quad. Then, of course, fellows took notice, wondering why on earth Skip Ruggles was in flannels. Dick Warren bestowed a grimace on Tom King. Did this mean that Ruggles hoped, at the last moment, to be picked to play?

The fat figure strolled up to them, with hands in the pockets of the flannel bags. They could not help noticing that Skip seemed to have more lithe and easy motions than usual, and a certain assurance that they had never observed in him before. Otherwise, he was just Skip. Certainly no Felgate man, even his nearest chums, would have dreamed that this was not the old familiar Skip.

He gave his friends a cheery nod.

'Carcroft not here yet?' he remarked. His voice seemed a little less high-pitched than was familiar. But it was not really noticeable.

'Not for a while yet, Skip,' answered Tom King, unsuspiciously. 'What have you changed into flannels for?'

'Cricket, if you'd like to play me.'

'For the love of Mike, don't begin that again, old chap!' implored the junior captain of Felgate.

'For Pete's sake—!' beseeched Warren. Ruggles laughed.

'Oh, all right,' he said. 'But I'll tell you what. Come down to the nets, and if I take your wicket first ball, will you play me?'

'Ha, ha, ha!' roared King and Warren. They could not help it. The idea of Skip taking anybody's wicket, especially Tom King's, was too funny. The Greeks did not find it so difficult to take Troy, as Skip would have found it to take a wicket, even in a game with the Second Form.

Ruggles waited sedately till they had finished laughing. Then he said:

'Well, are you on?'

'Fathead!' said Tom.

'Funk taking it on?' asked Ruggles.

'You silly ass, Skip,' said Tom King. 'What are you fooling for? You know jolly well you

can't bowl for toffee. I'd be glad to play you if you could.'

'I know I could knock your sticks over. Try it on.'

'Oh, all right!' said Tom, resignedly. 'Come on, Dick—come and see Skip bag my wicket. Mind he doesn't brain you with the ball.'

If old Skip wanted to waste a few minutes showing what a hopeless dud he was with a cricket ball, his friends were willing to oblige him. Other fellows followed to see the fun. It was only necessary to be alert, for really nobody quite knew what direction the ball might take when it left Skip's hand; Skip, probably, least of all. Tom King was smiling as he took his stand. He did not expect to see anything of the ball. But it was the unexpected that happened.

Ruggles took a little run, turned himself into a sort of plump catherine-wheel, and the ball came down like a bullet from a rifle. The next moment Tom was staring at a wicket from which the middle stump was missing.

'Oh, great pip!' he ejaculated.

Warren fielded the ball, looking like a fellow in a dream.

'Skip did that!' he said, 'Skip!'

'Try that again, Skip!' called out Tom King. He had been, perhaps, a little careless, but it was astonishing, all the same, 'Give him a catch, Dick.'

Warren returned the ball to Ruggles, naturally expecting him to miss it by a yard. Instead of which, a plump hand flashed up, and the ball rested in the plump palm. It was not an easy catch, but it seemed to come easy to Ruggles. Warren almost rubbed his eyes, in wonder.

Tom King was very careful as he prepared

to take the next ball. How Skip had got away with his first shot, he hardly knew; but Skip was not going to get away with a second. It was simply too absurd. And how that ball curled under his bat. Tom was never able to surmise. All he knew for certain was that his leg stump slanted and the bails came down.

There was a buzz of amazement from fellows looking on. This was not merely astonishing. It was amazing—astounding! Ruggles, the rabbit, Ruggles, the dud, Ruggles the fellow whose cricket made even the fags smile, had twice knocked over the wicket of the best junior bat at Felgate. And he had apparently done it with ease.

Ruggles, it appeared, was a dark horse. Some remarkable, amazing, extraordinary improvement had taken place in Skip Ruggles, all of a sudden. Fellows could not doubt the evidence of their eyes. Dick Warren was the champion junior bowler at Felgate, but he could not have done this! It was hard to believe, but Ruggles was a prize-packet, a rod in pickle for Carcroft when they came.

Tom King had said that he would play Ruggles if he could bowl! Tom was a man of his word, and he was eager to keep it, too. How it had come about and what it meant he did not know, but he was eager to secure such a bowler to take Carcroft wickets. Reece, left out to make room for Ruggles, grumbled, but everyone else was satisfied. Ruggles, having developed this unexpected and amazing form as a bowler, was not to be spared from the team. Tom King and Dick Warren almost hugged him. It had always been a spot of bother to them that their chum couldn't put up a show in games. Now he had proved himself a foeman worthy of anybody's steel, and they rejoiced. Those lightning balls were



'Skip!' 'Bravo, Ruggles!' 'Good old Fatty!' 'Well bowled,—oh, well bowled.'

going to help beat Carcroft—and later on, Greyfriars, and St. Jim's, and Rookwood—it was quite an enticing vista.

'Skip!'

'Bravo, Ruggles!'

'Good old Fatty!'

'Well bowled—oh, well bowled.'

Skip Ruggles had often dreamed of hearing such shouts on the cricket ground at Felgate. Often he had heard them—with his mind's ear, as it were, never destined to hear them with any other ear. But they were ringing out now, whether it was Skip who heard them or not. How the rabbit of Felgate had come out like this, was beyond guessing. But he had! There was no doubt that he had. His bowling

was superb. With the willow he was as good as any other man in the eleven. But with the leather he was far and away ahead of the best of them. There were good bats in the Carcroft team—especially Compton and Vane-Carter. But both Compton and Vane-Carter were sent bootless home by that new and amazing Ruggles.

Ruggles seemed tireless. Skip, when he cavorted in the field, had been wont to puff and blow, shortness of wind being his long suit. But there was no sign of it now. He was fit as a fiddle all through. Tom King gave him almost as many overs as the rules of the game allowed, but even at the end of the long summer's afternoon he seemed fresh as paint. And when he wound up the final innings—

Carcroft's—with a hat-trick, leaving Felgate winners by a bagful of runs, the Felgate crowd yelled, and roared, and cheered, to such an extent that Ruggles, like Horace of old, might have touched the stars with his exalted head!

There was a celebration of that glorious victory, after the Carcroft men were gone, and for once, if for once only, in the history of Felgate cricket, Skip Ruggles was the hero of the hour. Strange to relate, the hero disappeared quietly, indeed almost surreptitiously, and could not be found.

Tom King and Dick Warren, and a dozen other fellows, looked for him everywhere, but found him not. It seemed that Ruggles had gone out of gates: why, nobody could guess, unless it was the modesty of a hero. Anyhow he did not appear till close on lock-ups, when, at long last, a fat figure rolled into Study Four.

'Oh, here you are!' exclaimed Tom King.

'Here I am,' assented Skip.

'Where have you been, you ass?' asked Dick Warren.

'Oh, just ambling around,' answered Skip, vaguely. 'I... I... I say, it was a... a pretty good game, what? Eric told me—.'

'Eric!' repeated Tom. 'Have you been seeing that cousin of yours again?'

Skip's fat face coloured.

'Oh! Yes! I mean... I didn't mean... I... I...' Skip stammered. 'I mean, it was a jolly good game—.'

'Topping!' said Tom, 'though I half-believe that we must have dreamed it. How did you ever pick up bowling like that, Skip?'

'Oh! I... I... I always told you I could play cricket—.'

'But you never could!' said Warren.

'Never!' said Tom. 'Must have had it in

you, though, I suppose, to come out like that! Good old Skip!'

Skip eyed his study-mates almost stealthily. There was no suspicion in Study Four. Neither King nor Warren dreamed that this Ruggles was not the Ruggles who had played cricket that day. It had been a masterly scheme, and it had worked like a charm—it had got him a place in Felgate cricket—for of course, after that amazing display of quality, there could be no question of leaving Skip out of the eleven. He was safe to be selected for the next fixture—with Greyfriars School, that went without saying. It was quite a thrilling prospect. Skip did not expect to play a game like his cousin Eric, but he had no doubt that, given a chance, he would come well to the fore. He was going to have his chance now: which poor Skip really believed was all that he needed. But he felt a slight pang in his fat conscience. He did not like pulling his friends' legs like this, if it could be helped. Still, he reflected that it was for their good!

'Good old Skip!' repeated Tom. 'By gum, who'd have dreamed that old Skip would turn out like this?'

'You're going to play me in the Greyfriars match!' gasped Skip. He fully expected it, after the success of his deep-laid scheme. Still it was rather dazzling.

'Of course!' said Tom. 'You'll be wanted next Wednesday.'

'You bet!' said Dick Warren.

And Skip grinned happily.

It was a sheer mercy, so far as Felgate cricket was concerned, that on the Saturday preceding the Wednesday, Skip Ruggles played in a Form match. The Fourth played the

(continued on page 48)

which boasts a lifeboat, make a point of visiting the station and learning all you can about the service and those who are part of it. And don't forget the little box as you leave, for your pennies or sixpences are greatly needed – and appreciated – by the RNLI which depends on YOU for its existence.



SKIP'S SCHEME *(continued from page 29)*

Shell, and Skip was put on to mow down the Shell wickets. Skip went into the game full of confidence, which, before it started, was shared by his friends. They had no doubt that they were going to see Ruggles do his wonders again, demonstrating beyond all doubt what a rod in pickle he was for Greyfriars the next week. But this time—alas for Skip!—it was not Eric or anything like Eric. Even Skip, perhaps, began to doubt whether he was, after all, the cricketer he fancied he was. His friends were left in no doubt. Skip's efforts with the willow were rewarded by a pair of

spectacles. His bowling was so wildly erratic that, after a few overs, Tom King was more inclined to brain him with the ball than to let him have it to bowl.

How and why nobody knew, but it was obvious that Ruggles' remarkable form on Carcroft day had wholly disappeared. And Skip did not play in the Greyfriars match. He did not play in any match. He fell back sadly into his old status of disregarded rabbit, and—as really might have been expected by the fathead of the Fourth!—absolutely nothing whatever resulted from Skip's Scheme.



CHANCING IT WITH CHARNE

by *FRANK RICHARDS*
Creator of BILLY BUNTER & GREYFRIARS



'HE BAGGED my dough-nut-.'

'Oh, dry up!'

'Give us a rest!'

'That swob Sleake, you know-!' went on Skip Ruggles, unheeding, 'it was a topping dough-nut, and he-.'

'Will you dry up, Skip?' roared Tom King and Dick Warren together, in great exasperation.

It was no time, in the opinion of two members of Study Four at Felgate, to worry about a dough-nut.

Tom King and Dick Warren, generally as bright and cheery as any fellows in the Lower School, looked as if all the troubles in the universe, and a few over, had descended in a solid chunk on their young shoulders.

They were under detention that afternoon. Charne, master of the Fourth, had said it; and what Charne had said, he had said! The laws of the Medes and Persians were not more irrevocable than Mr. Charne's edicts.

But it was not merely detention, unpleasant as it was, that made Tom King and Dick Warren look as if they had collected all the troubles known to mankind. The Carfield match was due that afternoon. And what

sort of a game the Felgate junior team were going to put up, without Tom King at centre-forward and Dick Warren in goal, was a pessimistic problem.

King and Warren wished that they hadn't slid down the banisters, which was strictly and awfully against the rules. They wished still more that Charne hadn't caught them in the very act. They wished that he had whopped them, ever so hard, instead of handing out detention. They wished anything and everything, except to be left out of the footer that afternoon. But that was their disastrous fate!

Kick-off was at three. And King and Warren had to walk with their books into the form-room, and sit there absorbing utterly unwanted and unappreciated Latin, while a depleted team did what it could to keep down the margin of Carfield goals.

In such circumstances, they were not likely to waste much thought of sympathy on Skip for the loss of his doughnut. Sleake of the Fourth might have bagged all the doughnuts at Felgate, and they couldn't have cared less.

Skip, on the other hand, cared a good deal; and he was indignant. As Skip had no more chance of playing in a football match



A plump form went spinning into the Fourth-form passage

than the man in the moon, he was perhaps less perturbed by the Carfield problem than his chums. Dough-nuts, however, were dough-nuts; Skip was fond of anything in the edible line, and particularly of dough-nuts. And that swob, that tick, that smoky sweep, Sleake, had bagged his dough-nut—the only one he had! Skip expected his friends to sympathise; to share his burning indignation. And they didn't, in the very least—they only told him to dry up!

'Well,' said Skip, with a deep breath, 'I like that! Call yourselves pals!'

'The question is, what are we going to do?' said Tom King, dismally, thinking of the Carfield match.

'No need for you to do anything,' said Skip,—thinking of Sleake and the dough-nut 'I've got it all cut and dried. You know how that smoky swob Sleake sneaks up to the top box-room on a half-holiday to smoke his silly cigarettes? Well, I've bagged the key of that box-room.' Skip, in triumph, held up a rusty key. 'I'm going to keep an eye on Sleake this afternoon, and as soon as I know he's in the box-room, I'm going to tiptoe up and lock him in! When he's finished his filthy cigarettes, he won't be able to get out! How's that?'

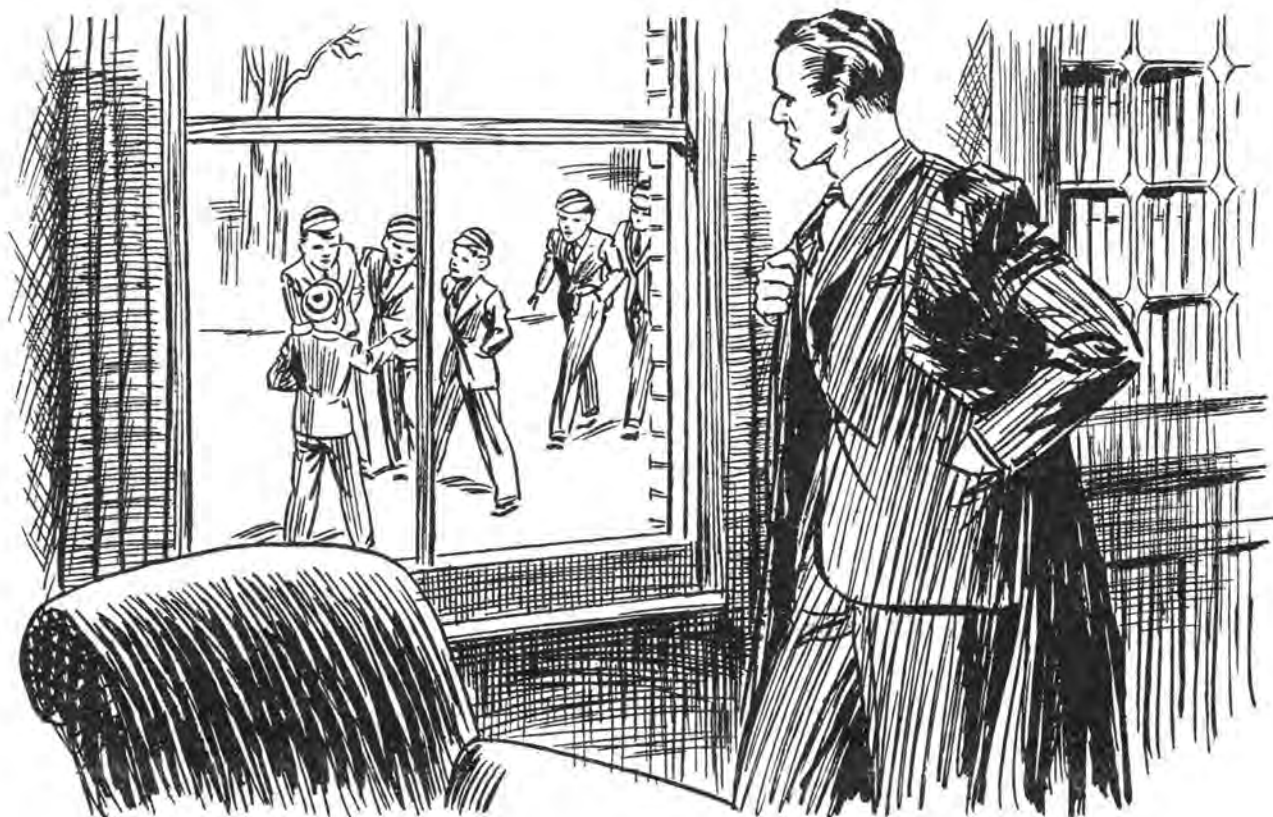
Skip chuckled. His fat face was wreathed in smiles. His plump form shook with merriment. Evidently Skip was greatly pleased by his masterly scheme of retaliation on that swob Sleake.

His friends did not chuckle. They did not smile. Skip and his schemes were nothing, less than nothing, to fellows faced with the disastrous prospect of standing out of a Soccer match in which they were badly wanted.

King and Warren resumed their dismal discussion of what couldn't be helped, in the faint, faint hope of finding some way round it. They even mooted cutting detention, and chancing it with Charne. But they shook their heads at that idea. Charne's eye was keen and ubiquitous—nothing escaped it! That was a chicken that would not fight. But what else was to be done? Nothing in maths quite came up to that dismal problem—it was a question without an answer.

CHAPTER II

MR. CHARNE, master of the Felgate Fourth, stood at his study window, looking out into



Charne was not pleased

the quadrangle, bright with wintry sunshine. There was a frown upon his brow.

Charne was not pleased. His eyes rested on a group of fellows who seemed to be discussing some sad and sorrowful topic, to judge by their looks. King and Warren had joined that group: and these two juniors of Charne's form were talking to Carton, Valence, Reece, Preece, and several others. Charne did not need telling what was the topic—he could guess that one. And he frowned. Charne was not a hard man, by any means; discipline came first with Charne—Fourth-form men who did not toe the line had to take the consequences of leaving it un-toed, as it were. Fellows *would* whizz down those massive old polished oak banisters at the risk of their limbs. Two hours'

detention was really a light punishment for an infraction of a necessary rule. If it happened to knock out a football match, that was unfortunate; but doubtless would cause the delinquents to remember that rules were not made to be broken.

Charne watched that discontented group with a grim eye, till it dispersed. Then the frown on his face melted into something like a smile, as a fat figure rolled into his view. It was that of Stanley St. Leger Ruggles—oftener called Skip. Skip was rather a trial to Mr. Charne in the form-room: but he liked the fat good-natured junior, as nearly everybody did. Skip was rolling off in the direction of the school shop—almost the only fellow in the Fourth who was not all hot and bothered about the Carfield game that after-



Skip's fat face suddenly darkened

noon. There was consolation, for Skip at least, in the tuckshop.

Skip's fat face suddenly darkened, as he passed another fellow in the quad. That fellow was Sleake of the Fourth—loafing with his hands in his pockets as he usually did in leisure time. Skip gave Sleake's pasty face an inimical glare, and rolled on. He was going to keep an eye on Sleake that afternoon, and, if he could catch him at his old game of smoking cigarettes in the top box-room, lock him in, as he had told his friends, in Study Four. But at the moment, Skip had a 'bob' in his pocket, and schemes of vengeance had to stand over until that sum had been expended in light refreshment.

Mr. Charne's frown revived, and intensified, as he looked at Sleake. He had more than a suspicion of that weedy, pasty youth's manners and customs. He was not in the football: he was a dodger of game-practice: he wouldn't be watching the match—more likely smoking in some obscure corner: and Mr. Charne had a suspicion, too, of Sleake's favourite corner. More than once he looked into that remote box-room and detected a lingering scent of tobacco there—but Sleake was wary, and he had never yet caught him. And as Sleake loafed away and disappeared into the House, Charne's grim brow grew grimmer.

He had his duty to do to all his boys: even an unpleasant specimen like Sleake. Grim duty had compelled him to wash out football for two of his best boys that day. With much more satisfaction would he have done his duty by Sleake—if only he could make a catch! And after thinking the matter over for a little while. Mr. Charne left his study, and went upstairs. If Sleake were smoking in the top box-room again, he would not escape this time!

It was one of the black sheep's narrowest escapes. For Sleake, in his study, was searching for a stray cigarette, without finding one. Had Sleake had any smokes that afternoon, he would certainly have gone up to his favourite haunt to smoke them. Fortunately for Sleake, he hadn't.

Skip Ruggles, in the tuck-shop, expended his shilling, and emerged in a rather sticky state. He looked for Sleake again, and did not see him in the quad. Whereupon Skip's fat face expanded into a grin: and he felt in his pocket, to make sure that the box-room key was safe there. He rolled up to King and

Warren, who were waiting dismally for a quarter to three to chime the time for detention.

'I say, that smoky swob's gone up, I believe,' said Skip. 'I say, he bagged my dough-nut, and—'

'Kick him!' said Warren.

Skip dodged hastily and departed into the house. On the box-room stair, Skip was very cautious. He did not want Sleake, if Sleake was there, to hear him coming. On tiptoe, Skip ascended that stair, to the little landing outside the box-room door. The door was ajar: looking as if somebody had gone in. And Skip, listening, heard a sound of a movement in the room.

That was enough for Skip! The bird was in the net, so to speak. With one fat hand, Skip grasped the door-handle and snapped the door shut—with the other, he jammed the key into the lock, and turned it. The next moment, Skip was scuttling down the stair, chortling. He did not even hear the startled exclamation from the interior of the box-room: and though he heard, he did not heed, an angry thumping on the door. Skip departed in gleeful satisfaction. That smoky swob could stick there till calling-over—and serve him right! It might make him think twice before he bagged another dough-nut from Skip Ruggles! It was a triumphant Skip that rolled out of the House, prepared to watch the Carfield match, while his victim kicked his heels unheard and unheeded in a remote box-room.

CHAPTER III

'CHARNE'S out.'

'What?'

'Gone out,' said Reece.



Jammed the key into the lock and turned it

He grinned into Study Four.

King and Warren had gone there dismally, to collect their books for detention. Yet again they had discussed the desperate expedient of 'cutting', and chancing it. But what was the use? Charne could see the football ground from his study window if he looked out, and ten to one he would. There was nothing doing—and the Chums of the Fourth had made up their minds to it—when Reece burst into the study with his startling news.

'Fact!' said Reece, as they stared at him, 'I had lines for Charne, and when I took them to his study, he wasn't there. Well, as I came away, Gudgers asked me if I knew where my form-master was, as he had a mes-

sage from the Head, and couldn't find him anywhere. What price that?'

'By gum!' said Tom King.

Dick Warren drew a deep breath.

'If he's gone out, we'll chance it,' he said.

Tom King nodded.

'But we'll jolly well make sure first,' he said, 'We should look priceless asses if Charne came down and walked us off the ground. But—if he's really gone out of gates, what a spot of luck!'

They did not linger in the study. If Gudge, the house-porter, was looking everywhere for Mr. Charne, without finding him, it certainly looked as if the master of the Fourth must have gone out of gates. In which case, King and Warren, instead of walking their books into the form-room, were certainly going to walk their shorts and blue shirts on to the junior football ground. Charne, probably, would never know—but even if it came out, what did a whipping matter—after the match? Six on the bags would be a light price to pay for beating Carfield. But they had to make sure. And for the next ten minutes, King and Warren, Reece and Preece, and a dozen other fellows, were going to and fro, and up and down and round about, making assurance doubly sure that Charne was out.

It was quite unlike Charne. It was, in fact, inexplicable. Charne was the strictest of disciplinarians, and he was as regular as clockwork. Never had he been known to forget a detention, or anything else. Detention was scheduled for 2.45 precisely; and at 2.45 to the minute, indeed to the second, Charne should have been prepared with a detention paper for the hapless

victims, to which they should have sat down under his eagle eye. And if they had not turned up, Charne certainly would have looked for them or despatched a prefect so to do: 'chancing it' was really a hopeless proposition, while Charne was around. But if Charne, unexpectedly, and inexplicably, was not around—!

It seemed too good to be true. But it was true. Charne was not around.

Two-forty-five had come, and two-forty-five had gone. And there was no Charne.

'Must have been called away suddenly,' said Tom King, 'somebody got him on the phone, perhaps—'

'He's gone, at any rate,' said Dick.

'Yes; he's gone. That lets us out.'

'It jolly well does!'

'You're all right,' said Reece. Reece was a bit of a lawyer. 'If a man turns up for detention, and his beak ain't there, he's not bound to stay in.'

'Um!' said Tom King. He hoped that Reece had that right! Anyhow he was going to chance it, and so was Warren. 'It's queer Charne forgetting—still, if he was called away suddenly—and he must have been—.'

'We're chancing it,' said Warren.

'We jolly well are!'

There was no hesitation about that. Chancing it with Charne was usually a rather perilous game; but Soccer was Soccer. If Charne, having cleared off, expected two keen footballers to hang about while other fellows played football, Charne had another guess coming.

'Come on,' said Tom King, 'Carfield may be here any minute. We're playing and that's jolly well that!'

King and Warren, who had looked, earlier that afternoon, as if they had made a complete collection of all human troubles and tribulations, looked merry and bright as they ambled cheerily into the changing-room. Nine other fellows looked sunny. Playing Carfield, with second-rate men in the place of their trusty captain and tried goalkeeper, was a very dubious proposition: but with King at centre-forward, and Warren between the posts, they were going to make hay of Carfield—at any rate, they were going to put up a game worthy of Felgate.

The Carfield men arrived to find the home team in great spirits. Perkinson of the Fifth, who was refereeing the match, had never seen a junior team looking so full of beans.

‘I say,’ Skip Ruggles grabbed Tom King’s arm, as the players came out of the changing-room, ‘I say, I got him all right.’

‘Eh! What?’ asked Tom.

‘That swob Sleake, you know, who bagged my dough-nut—’

‘You fat ass,’ said Tom laughing. He could laugh now—and was not in the least disposed to boot Skip.

‘Well, I got him all right,’ said Skip, with a blissful grin, ‘I’ve jolly well locked him in the top box-room, see? I left him thumping on the door—he can thump all he jolly well likes, but nobody will hear him, up there. Think he’ll be sorry, by calling-over, that he bagged my dough-nut? What? Ha, ha.’

Everybody on the junior ground, but Skip, was thinking wholly of Soccer—and soon even Skip forgot Sleake and the dough-nut and the locked box-room, and was shouting and cheering with the rest. For it was a great game, and Felgate juniors were at

their best; as if the rebound from dismal pessimism had inspired them with a double dose of vigour. They looked a winning team from the start. Carfield were good men at Soccer, and they played a good game: but Tom King and Co. had the upper hand from the whistle.

The blue shirts were all round the visitors’ goal, and in the first five minutes the ball went in from King’s foot, and ten minutes later Reece put it in again. After that, Carfield made great efforts, and their pink shirts were seen over the half-way line: but Warren, in goal, had nothing to do but to stamp his feet to keep them warm, and the backs lounged with their hands in the pockets of their shorts, while the blue shirts surged forward again, and the pink shirts had to pack the Carfield goal once more. And just on half-time a third shot went unerringly home.

In the second half, Carfield put all their beef into it, and at length the pink shirts predominated in the home half. But Dick Warren, in goal, was a tower of strength; and with coolness and precision he saved shot after shot: till at last, with a kick like a mule, he cleared to midfield, and the game swayed away again over the line. Twice and thrice again Carfield came through but every time they found the Felgate goalkeeper equal to the test: it seemed easier for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye than for the leather to get past Richard Warren. Never once did the ball find the net: and at length Carfield were driven home, and stayed there—packing their goal to keep down the margin. And they did not quite keep it down: for a final burst from Felgate broke up the defence, and once more the ball went in—followed by the whistle. Four to nil was a



The ball went in from King's foot

tremendous victory, and the Felgate crowd shouted and roared and stamped, and Skip, utterly forgetful even of dough-nuts, hurled his cap into the air, careless where it came down, or whether it ever came down at all.

CHAPTER IV

'CHARNE!'

Tom King almost fell down.

He gazed at Charne, as if the red and angry man in the top box-room was the ghost of a form-master. Really, he could hardly believe his eyes.

The great game was over. Carfield had gone bootless home. The Felgate footballers were on top of the world. And Skip Ruggles had sagely asked Tom to go up and let out

the prisoner of the box-room. Sleake, he pointed out, would be fearfully enraged, and Tom King could handle him as easily as anything, while the plump Skip was not quite so sure that he could. And so it came about that it was Tom King who made his way up the stair to the remote box-room—grinning as he heard an angry thumping on the door above. The key was in the outside of the lock—Tom had only to turn it back. He threw open the door, expecting to see an exasperated Sleake—and doubted the evidence of his eyes as he beheld an infuriated form-master!

Sleake was not in the box-room. Charne was!

Charne had not caught Sleake there. Charne had been caught himself, locked in

by the strategic Skip in the happy belief that he was locking Sleake in! Charne's mysterious disappearance that afternoon was now explained. Charne had not gone out on some sudden call, as the Fourth-form men had naturally supposed. Charne had been locked in that box-room all the afternoon! And, judging by his look, the effect on his temper was deplorable.

'Cha-cha-Charne!' stuttered Tom King. His eyes popped. That idiot, Skip!

Charne fixed him with a glare.

'Did you lock that door on me, King?' he thundered.

'Oh! No, sir!' gasped Tom, 'I've only just come up-I-I found the key on the outside of the door, sir-I-I didn't know you were here, sir-I-I hadn't the faintest idea-.'

Mr. Charne did not wait for more. He swept past Tom with billowing gown like a thunderstorm. No doubt he had had enough of the box-room. And Charne's chief desire, at that moment, was to find Sleake. He could hardly doubt that it was Sleake who had locked him in-who else?

Tom King almost tottered back to Study Four. Dick Warren stared at him. Skip grinned.

'Was he waxy?' chuckled Skip.

'You benighted born idiot,' said Tom, 'You unmitigated, footling foozling fathead! It wasn't Sleake in the box-room.'

'Eh! Who was it, then?'

'Charne.'

'Charne.'

'Charne!' said Skip, faintly. 'Oh, scissors!'

He said no more. Words failed him. For the next hour or two, Skip Ruggles' life was one of awful suspense and anxiety, in dread of being called to Charne's study. But no such call came. Charne never thought, or even dreamed, of Skip. His suspicions were on Sleake: but there was no jot or tittle of evidence, so he had reluctantly give it up.

It was a mystery to Mr. Charne. He might have been enlightened, had he looked into Study Four that evening, just before prep., where Tom King and Dick Warren, with laughing faces, were presenting a bag of dough-nuts to Skip Ruggles, as a reward for having performed the most fatheaded mistake of his fatheaded career, and so, unexpectedly and inadvertently, helped them to beat Carfield at Soccer.

MAN WANTED

By FRANK RICHARDS



BEFORE, during, and after the Cufton match, many Felgate fellows felt like kicking Perkinson of the Fifth. Kicking, indeed, would have been a mild penalty for a fellow who changed into the wrong train on the day of a big Soccer fixture, and dragged another fellow into it with him. Boiling in oil would really have been more suitable.

Tom King, on the other hand, felt more like patting Perkinson on the back—if a Fourth-form junior could ever have dreamed of patting the back of so tremendous a Blood and gamesman as Perkinson of the Fifth. Tom would have been glad to see Perk change into an unlimited series of wrong trains, all

through the Soccer season, if the same result could have accrued. Though really that glorious day at Cufton was as much due to Skip Ruggles as to Perk. It was just that Skip played the goat, simultaneously with Perkinson understudying that animal.

It was a bitter winter's day. Snow glistened on the old red roofs of Felgate School, and ridged the branches of the ancient oaks. There was snow in the quad, and snow and ice on the roads. Grim winter weather was not likely to deter Felgate footballers. So long as the ground at Cufton could be played on, that was all they wanted. A crowd watched Langdale, the Felgate captain, and his merry men, depart for their train at

Hodden—a round dozen of them. Only Purringe of the Fifth was going with the team: he was Perkinson's special chum. In milder weather, a good many fellows would have pushed out their bikes for the ten miles to Cufton: but icy roads did not tempt them. Even Tom King and Dick Warren, keen as they would have been to watch the first-eleven play Cufton, and hardy cyclists as they were, did not think of it. It was Skip who thought of it.

Which was just like Skip.

If ever there was anything absolutely idiotic to be thought of, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles was the man to think of it.

Having thought of it, Skip looked for King and Warren. He found them in Study Four. He looked in with a disapproving fat face.

'Slackers!' said Skip. 'Look here, what about pushing out the jiggers, and cutting across to Cufton to see the match?'

'Fathead!' said Tom King, briefly.

'Ass!' said Warren, with equal brevity.

'Only ten miles,' said Skip, encouragingly. 'Might get there before the team. It's a long way round by rail, changing at Lanshot, and all that. What's ten miles on a jigger?'

'Exactly nine miles and seven furlongs more than you're good for.'

Sniff from Skip.

'Well, I'm going,' he said. 'If you fellows choose to slack about —.'

Tom King rose from the window-seat. He was so obviously going to kick Skip, that the fat junior departed with his sentence unfinished. He squeaked back as he went, 'Slackers!' and disappeared.

Tom King and Dick Warren exchanged a look. To hang back where Skip led was a moral impossibility. Besides, somebody

would be needed to pick Skip up when he skidded and crashed.

'What about it, Dick?' Tom asked.

'Rotten!' answered Warren. 'But let's.'

They followed Skip down. They found him at the bike-shed, wheeling out his machine. He gave them a cheery fat grin.

'Coming?' he asked. 'Good! I won't ride you off your legs, old chaps.'

King and Warren were accustomed to being patient with their fat chum, so they did not fall upon him and slay him for that remark. Skip fancied himself on a bike, just as he fancied himself on a football field. He was about as good on the one as on the other. But Skip always had a cheerful and unbounded confidence in himself. He put a fat leg over his machine and started: and King and Warren mounted their bikes and followed on. Ten yards from the gate, Skip discovered that ice on the roads was not a negligible proposition. He skidded, and landed in a frosty hedge.

'Good-bye, Skip!' called out King and Warren together, and they pedalled on, leaving Skip floundering. But it was not good-bye yet. Skip floundered out of the hedge, remounted his machine, and came on. Marvellous to relate, he did a whole mile without further mischance. Then another skid landed Skip in a frozen puddle. His weight, of course, cracked the ice, and Skip sat deep in freezing water, spluttering.

This time, King and Warren dismounted, to drag him out. Skip really needed their help, but he did not seem grateful for it: perhaps because King gripped him by one fat ear, and Warren by the other, to pull him out of that puddle. Skip yelled frantically as he was rescued.

'Had enough?' asked Warren.

'Yah!' was Skip's only reply to that.

Skip was a sticker, and he stuck. Once more he mounted his faithful steed, and pushed on. As he had promised, he did not ride King and Warren off their legs. So far from that, he zigzagged onward at an extremely moderate pace; and they had to slow down continually, telling him occasionally what they thought of him. It was not an enjoyable ride. It was wet, and muddy, and snowy, and icy, and slippery and skiddy: not at all an attractive occupation on a half-holiday. Had Skip conked out in the first mile or two, King and Warren would probably have chucked it, and turned back with him. But Skip did not conk out till they had done half the distance to Cufton.

By that time Skip was winded to the wide and, cold as the afternoon was, bedewed with perspiration, and he had contacted a frozen road six or seven times. Even so, Skip would not have given in if he could have helped it. He had set out to bike over to Cufton: and he was going to bike over to Cufton, if he could. But his last purler had damaged his bike, as well as its rider. Skip collected half a dozen bruises, in spite of which, he hauled his jigger upright again, and essayed to remount. But that jigger, which had had a series of miraculous escapes up till then, had taken the knock at last.

'Oh, crikey!' ejaculated Skip, in dismay, as he discovered that his front wheel was twisted, his mudguards buckled, and one of his pedals looking a little like a corkscrew.

'Coming on?' called back Tom King over his shoulder.

'My jigger's crocked,' wailed Skip.

They came back and rejoined him. They



Skip sat deep in freezing water, spluttering

examined the bike. Obviously, it was no longer a going concern. Skip had to wheel that bike back to Felgate. Like a recalcitrant horse, it could be led but not driven.

Skip looked dolorous.

'This means chucking it!' he said. 'We shan't see the first eleven play, after all. Well, you chaps weren't keen, so you won't mind. We'll take it in turns to wheel the bike, walking back, what?'

His chums looked at him. It was true that they had not been keen on that slippery trip. Skip had dragged them into it. But they had now done over half the distance, and so were not disposed to turn back. Still less were they disposed to walk back, taking turns, at wheeling a clinking, clanking jigger. Skip had asked for this, and he was more than welcome to that for which he had asked. Having looked at him, expressively, King and Warren remounted their machines, and pedalled onward. Skip stared after them.

'I say,' he bawled. 'I've got to wheel this



'The ass!' said Langdale

jigger home! Don't you understand? No good going on now. You're going to lend me a hand with this jigger. I say!'

Skip bawled: but he bawled to deaf ears. They did not even glance back. They had to give careful attention to an icy road, and had none to bestow on Skip. That plump youth watched them till they disappeared in the frosty distance: and then slowly and sadly started to wheel home a dilapidated jigger, which produced many and various musical effects as he wheeled it.

It was necessary to be careful on icy, slippery roads: but King and Warren were able to put on a good deal more speed, minus Skip. They agreed that it was an absolutely rotten ride: but they were not going to 'chuck' it at that stage. They sighted Cufton long before Skip, wheeling his jigger, sighted Felgate. As a matter of fact, they arrived at Cufton ahead of the football team coming by train, and they had put up their bikes, and were strolling about, and chatting with Cufton fellows they knew, when Langdale and the other mighty men of the Felgate First arrived. And then, with surprise and concern, they observed the curious circumstances that, of the dozen men who had left Felgate to take the train at Hodden, only ten turned up at Cufton.

CHAPTER II

Langdale fumed.

Old Langdale, captain of Felgate, was the best-tempered fellow in the Sixth Form. But anyone who saw him in the changing-room at Cufton might have supposed him to be the worst-tempered fellow in the wide world. Really he looked a twin to that Alpine climber, whose brow was set and whose eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath.

'The ass!' said Langdale. 'The fathead! The goat! I always knew he was the biggest idiot at Felgate, except in Soccer. But this —!' Words seemed to fail Arthur Langdale.

Other members of the team were equally incensed. Chard, and Denver, and Loring, and Cadby, and the rest, all stated what they thought of Perkinson of the Fifth: and everything they thought of him was fright-

fully uncomplimentary. At Lanshot Junction they had all—from the right train—seen Perkinson rushing for the wrong train, dragging Purring with him. It was too late to stop him: Perkinson and Purring were in that train, and gone, before anything could be done. Langdale, instead of arriving at Cufton with a man to spare, arrived there a man short. Ten Felgate men were yearning to kick Perkinson, giving him the whole benefit of the weight of their football boots. But Perk was far away—where, nobody knew, or cared much, since he was not at Cufton.

‘We shall have to borrow a man here!’ said Denver, gloomily.

‘Nothing else for it!’ growled Chard. ‘That ass Perk—!’

Langdale growled angrily. He did not want to borrow a Cufton man to play Cufton. He stared savagely from the window: perhaps in a faint hope that Perkinson might, somehow or anyhow, have come after all. He was not likely to see anything of Perk, who was, in those very moments, speeding in a nonstop express in the direction of Brighton. But, to his surprise, he saw two Felgate fellows chatting with a group of Cufton juniors.

He stared at Tom King and Dick Warren. He had not expected followers from Felgate on such a day. But those two, evidently, had come over to watch the game. Langdale stared at them: and the angry frown faded from his face, and was replaced by a very thoughtful look.

‘I wonder—!’ he said slowly.

He did not wonder long. He threw open the window, and called:

‘King! Come here.’

Tom King and Dick Warren glanced round. Tom cut across to the window. He

wondered what the Felgate captain wanted. Certainly he did not dream of guessing.

Langdale eyed him keenly. Tom King was a junior: but he was, undoubtedly, the best man at Soccer in the Lower School at Felgate. He looked—as he was—as fit as a fiddle. He was sturdy: though nowhere near the size and weight of First-eleven men. But it was a case of any port in a storm. Langdale made up his mind.

‘You’re wanted. King,’ he said crisply. ‘We’re a man short, and I don’t want to borrow a Cufton man. You’re wanted to play. Man wanted, see?’

Tom jumped almost clear of Cufton.

‘I—play for the First!’ he gasped.

‘Yes, you! Get in here—we’ve got Perkinson’s things, and you’ll have to manage in them somehow. Don’t waste time staring, you young ass. Get a move on.’

Tom King gasped for breath. But his eyes danced. Play for the First-eleven! It was a dream beyond all dreams. He did not waste time staring. He cut into the changing-room, throwing a word to Warren over his shoulder.

‘Langdale wants me to play! Ain’t it gorgeous?’

‘Oh, suffering cats!’ ejaculated Dick Warren. He cut in after his chum, to help him change.

First-eleven men stared, and shook their heads. But old Langdale’s word was law. Perkinson’s things hung rather loose on Tom: perhaps more than rather. He did not care a bean for that. He was going to play Soccer for Felgate First: he was going to take Perkinson’s place at outside right: and he was going to play the game of his life: he wasn’t going to let old Langdale down, who had picked a junior to play in the place of a

missing senior man. He couldn't perhaps, hope for goals against Cufton: that was beyond the limits even of a dream: but he was going to keep his end up: he was going to show these senior men that they knew something about Soccer in the Fourth Form. Dick Warren, as delighted as his chum, helped him into Perk's roomy outfit, and scrounged boots from a junior Cuftonian. When the Felgate men sallied forth for the game, nine members of the team felt dubious about the new recruit, and Langdale perhaps a little dubious too: but Tom King was walking on air!

CHAPTER III

Tom King lined up with the Felgaters, feeling on top of the world. He noted, without minding in the least, that some of the Cufton crowd smiled. He was aware that he must have looked a little like a minnow among the whales—all the more so because Loring, at inside right, was a very tall fellow—he was called Lanky Loring at Felgate. He towered over Tom, and the contrast was perhaps a little striking. But Tom did not care. If his legs were not so long as Loring's, at least he was very quick and active on them: and he had a sure foot and an unerring eye. And in spite of the fact that the Felgaters felt that they had a weak spot on the right wing, it was Felgate that scored first.

'Goal!' yelled Dick Warren, most eager of onlookers. 'Good old Tom!'

It was Langdale who put it in. Langdale, at centre-forward, was a man of men on the Soccer field. But Tom had a hand—or rather a foot—in it. Almost on the touch-line, and

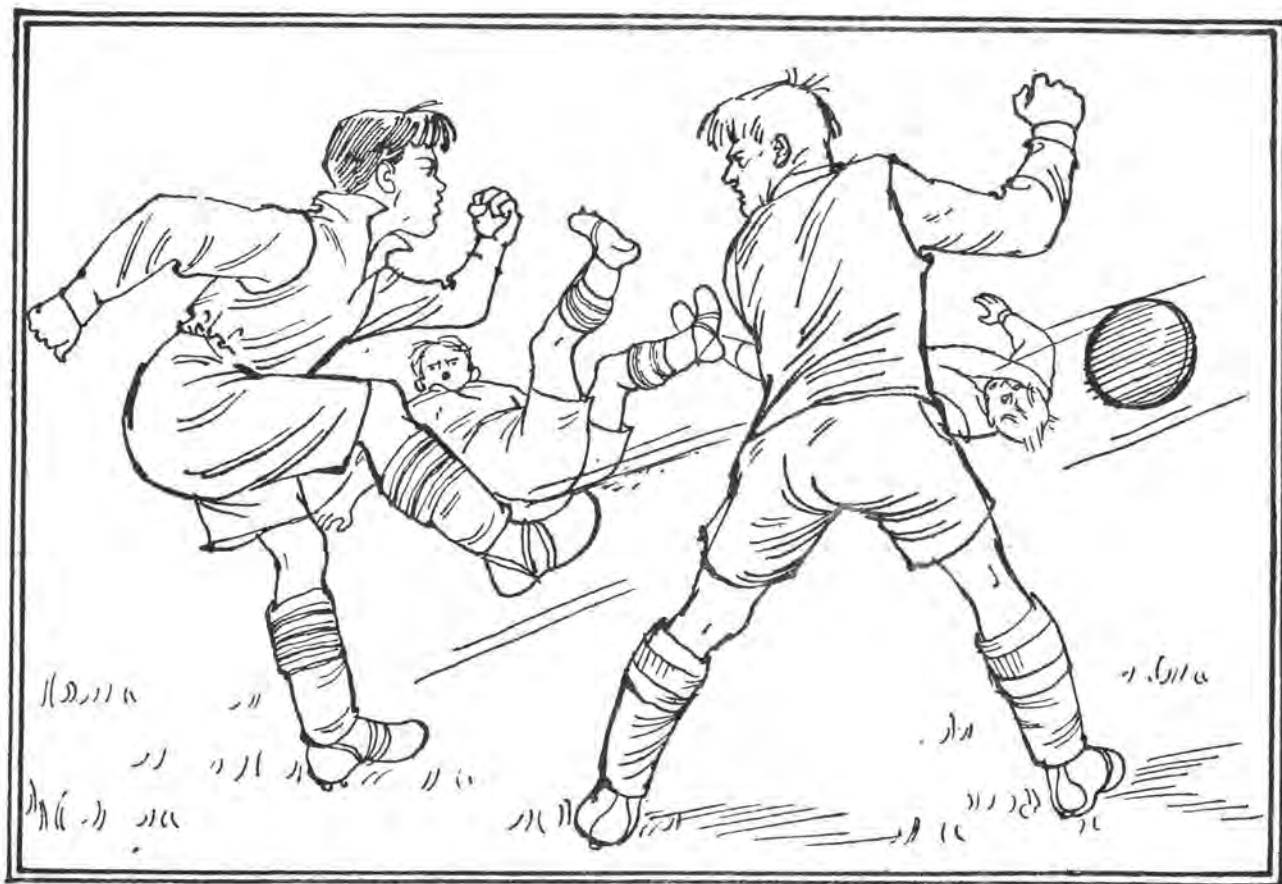
with a heavy Cufton half rushing him down, Tom King cut the ball in to inside right. The next moment he was flying. But as he went down, he knew that Loring had the pass, and was despatching it to centre a second before a hefty Cufton shoulder sent him tottering. Lanky Loring's long legs stretched out on the earth: but Langdale had the leather, and the Cufton goalkeeper hardly saw it coming before it was there.

It was first blood to Felgate, and very encouraging to begin with. But after that, the game was hard and fast, with nothing to come for a long time. Perkinson of the Fifth, had he been in his place, would no doubt have provided that extra spot of quality which would have weighed the scales in Felgate's favour. It was a fact that King of the Fourth was rather lost among the big men at close quarters, and that weight would tell. But he was full of pluck, and full of beans: and if a heavy Cufton shoulder laid him low, he was up again like a jack-in-the-box, as if like Antaeus of old he derived new strength from contact with his mother earth. And it was another fact, that his wind was as sound as a bell: and at the end of a gruelling half, he still looked as fresh as paint. But that half ended with a goal for Cufton: and when the whistle went the score was equal.

Langdale gave him a pat on the shoulder, in the interval.

'Keep it up!' he said: just as if Tom had done some wonders already. Which was all Tom needed, if he needed anything, to screw him up to top pitch. After that he would have died a dozen times for old Langdale.

In the second half, Cufton came down like wolves on the fold. Again and again



Tom had a second, and he made the most of it

Felgate had to pack their goal and content themselves with defence: and Denver, between the posts, was given all the exercise he wanted, and perhaps a little more. But Denver was a great man in goal: and with cheerful equanimity he put paid to shot after shot: while the Cufton custodian at the other end stamped about to keep his feet warm. The Cufton man was given some exercise later, but he too appeared to be equal to all demands. And as the half wore to its end, it looked like a draw to come: and gallantly as Tom King was playing up in Perkinson's place, Felgate men yearned to kick Perk for getting into that wrong train. Never had Perkinson been so badly wanted:

and his comrades would gladly and joyfully have booted him all round Cufton, all round Felgate, and then back again. They did not know what was coming—till it came!

It came almost on the tick of time. Langdale and Co. determined that it should not be a draw if they could help it, were attacking with all their might. But if the attack was hot, the defence was sound: the ball went in from Langdale, only to be headed out: it went in again, only to meet a ready fist: and yet again, only to spin away like a bullet from the vigorous foot. And it came to Tom right out on the wing.

After it came a Cufton rush, Tom had a second, and he made the most of it. He did



Skip was attending to the numberless bumps and bruises he had collected on that bike ride

not stop to think – it was no time for thinking. He knew, rather than saw, that Langdale, colliding with a Cufton forward, was over on his back: that Loring, contacting a Cufton shoulder, was down and waving his long legs in the air, and that the left winger had no earthly chance of taking a pass. And, in the second that was granted him, he put all his beef into a long shot for goal. The next moment earth and sky were pinning round him: but the leather was whizzing on its way, swift and true as a rifle-shot: and the Cufton custodian jumped at it a split second too late!

‘Goal!’ shrieked Dick Warren. He waved his cap, frantically, catching a Cuftonian, on his right, in the eye, and another Cuftonian, on his left, in the ear. But what did he care for Cuftonian eyes and ears? ‘Goal! Goal! Goal! Hurray!’

The whistle went.

Tom King tottered to his feet. He realised that it was a goal, that the game was over, and that Felgate had won. Langdale careered up, to give him a smack on the shoulder that almost floored him again. Loring gave him a joyful dig in the ribs. Chard smacked his other shoulder. He was a little dizzy, but more on top of the world than ever, as he went to the changing room: Dick Warren almost hugging him as he went.

They found Skip in Study Four when they came back to Felgate, and were greeted by a strong scent of embrocation. Skip was attending to the numberless bumps and bruises he had collected on that bike ride. He was not looking joyful. But his fat face brightened when he was told what had happened at Cufton. It was great glory for Study Four: of which Skip, as a member of the study, had a reflected share.

‘And it couldn’t have happened, if that ass Perkinson hadn’t buzzed into the wrong train at Lanshot!’ said Warren.

‘You mean, it couldn’t have happened if I hadn’t fairly dragged you fellows out to bike over to Cufton!’ hooted Skip.

Tom King laughed.

‘Quite!’ he agreed. ‘It couldn’t have happened, if both the biggest asses at Felgate hadn’t played the goat at the same time.’

When Perkinson and Purring came in, rather late, many Felgate fellows had something to say to Perk: and nothing that they said could have been very pleasing to Perk’s ears. But Tom King, at all events, was not disposed to join in the slanging chorus: he was, indeed, feeling quite affectionate towards Perkinson: for was it not owing to Perk that at Cufton there had been a Man Wanted!