



I

GOOD OLD SKIP!

“THAT goat Perkinson!” said Tom King.

“That footling fathead!” said Dick Warren. “I thought that Skip was the biggest idiot at Felgate. But Perk goes one better.”

Tom King and Dick Warren, of the Felgate Fourth, were sauntering under the old Felgate oaks, when they beheld Perkinson of the Fifth.

They did not behold all of him. What they beheld was chiefly a pair of very long legs. In that quiet corner, hidden by trees from general view, Percival Perkinson was climbing the school wall. But they knew that it was Perkinson, though his back was to them: chiefly by the legs. They were the longest legs at Felgate.

They stopped, and stared at those legs, and the crumpled jacket further up. They heard Perkinson pant, as he dragged himself up the wall. His head and shoulders were over the top, but the rest of him followed slowly.

“The goat!” repeated Tom.

“The fathead!” repeated Warren.

On a half-holiday at Felgate School, there was no reason why any Felgate

man shouldn't walk out at gates: with the single exception of Perkinson of the Fifth. Perk was "gated".

He was gated, as a penalty for having "cheeked" his form-master, Mr. Kye. Everybody sympathized with Perkinson. When a fellow had his head crammed with Soccer, could he be expected to concentrate on Livy in the form-room?—especially a chap like Perk, who was first-class at football, and about fiftieth-class at Latin?

Perkinson, looking forward to the Dolcot match, simply living and breathing Soccer, just couldn't take the slightest interest in that ancient War, "quod Hannibale cum populo Romano gessere".

Kye, on the other hand, had that idea, so common to schoolmasters, that fellows came to school to learn things. So not infrequently there was friction.

Perkinson, certainly, shouldn't have murmured "Old ass!" when Kye ragged him for mistaking the perfect indicative for the infinitive. He did not mean Kye to hear. But Kye heard. Hence the gating.

Perkinson was a hot-headed fellow. His hot head was not over-supplied with brains. He was often in trouble: and now, evidently, he was looking for some more. King and Warren were quite dismayed to see him at it. They liked old Perk—everybody did. And what a winger he was! Now, regardless of "gates", he was going out—surreptitiously over the school wall in that secluded corner. It was an awful risk. No doubt he intended to return in the same surreptitious manner, and show up at calling-over, just as if he hadn't been out at all. Still it was fearfully risky. Kye might have an eye open for him—might miss him—and Kye was a fierce man. If Kye found out that Perkinson had disobeyed his order, it would be the last drop, as it were, in a full cup. Perk would have to go up to the Head. It would mean a flogging. It might mean the sack! Perk was risking all that, just because he jolly well wouldn't stay in gates at Kye's order. Probably he did not even know that what he was doing would be regarded, by Kye, as rank mutiny and defiance of all authority. He was jolly well going out if he jolly well liked, and that was that!

"The blithering ass!" sighed Dick Warren, watching the long legs on the wall. "If Kye finds this out, Perk mayn't be here to play in the Dolcot match at all! What a chump!"

"What about stopping him?" suggested Tom King.

"Um!" said Warren.

"Catch his legs and pull him back," said Tom.

"Oh, my hat!"

Warren looked very dubious. Gladly he would have stopped Perkinson from rushing on his fate. But Perkinson was a Fifth-Form senior, a great gamesman, a tremendous Blood. For juniors of the Fourth Form to interfere with his proceedings, however idiotic, was quite an unheard-of thing. Was he likely to listen to sweet reasonableness from Fourth-Form fellows? He was much more likely to smack their heads.

"Um!" said Warren, again.

"Chance it!" said Tom. "Dash it all, he might be sacked for cheeking old Kye to this extent. Old Langdale would miss him badly, if he couldn't play at Dolcot. Come on."

"Oh, all right!"

Perkinson was pulling himself up the high wall, slowly but surely. There was still time to catch the long legs. The two juniors ran forward, and captured a leg each.

There was a startled gasp from Perkinson of the Fifth. He was taken quite by surprise. The gasp was followed by a howl, as he came slithering down the wall, to land on the earth in a sitting posture.

He sat there, and spluttered, and stared at the two juniors. The fury that gathered in his face, as he realized that it was a couple of Fourth-Form kids who had pulled him down, was quite terrific.

"Why, you—you—you—!" he gurgled.

"Look here, Perkinson, you can't do it!" expostulated Tom King. "Old Kye will be as mad as a hatter if he finds out—"

"You'd have to go up to the Head!" said Warren.

"Might be the sack!" said Tom.

"For goodness sake—!" said Warren.

They had got so far, when Perkinson bounded to his feet. He did not answer them in words. He made a sudden grasp, catching a junior by the collar in either hand.

Crack!

Two yells were blended into one, as two heads came together with a sharp and painful concussion.

Then Perkinson lifted his foot.

Tom King and Dick Warren did not wait for it. They backed away hurriedly, rubbing painful heads as they backed. Perkinson of the Fifth gave them a glare, and turned to the wall again. Only too obviously, sweet reasonableness was wasted on him.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Tom, rubbing his head.

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Warren.

The long legs whisked up the wall again. Tom and Warren, from a safe distance, watched them whisk, without the slightest idea of lugging Perk back a second time. Indeed at the moment they were rather inclined to hope that, if Perk was sacked for this exploit, he would be jolly well whopped before he went!

The long legs disappeared over the wall. Perk was gone. Tom King and Dick Warren, rubbing their heads, looked at one another.

"You ass, Tom!" said Warren. "Fat lot of use talking sense to the biggest idiot at Felgate! Blow him!"

"Blow him!" agreed Tom.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Warren. "Here's Kye."

A stout form appeared on the path by the school wall. It was Kye, master of the Fifth, coming along. Perkinson had been gone about a minute! Only sixty seconds earlier, Kye would have had a view of long legs whisking! As it was, he saw nothing but two juniors rubbing their heads, and rolled on regardless.

"Keeping an eye open for Perk!" whispered Dick Warren, when the Fifth-Form master had rolled on.

Tom King nodded.

Kye was suspicious, that was clear. And Perk was out of gates! By the time the ache had faded out of their heads, King and Warren hoped that Perk would succeed in getting back undiscovered in time for roll. But they doubted it.

II

"YOU young ass!" roared Perkinson.
Skip Ruggles did not even hear him.

Skip, at the moment, was in unhappy expectation of sudden death.

The fattest member of the Felgate Fourth was on a bike, in Fell Lane. Holding a handle-bar with one fat hand, with the other he had extracted bullseyes from a sticky pocket. It was just like Skip to do that at a point where a wind in the lane hid the road ahead. So when a car came round the bend at about 50 m.p.h. it took Skip by surprise. He wobbled in the middle of the road, his round eyes popping at the destruction that was hurtling down on him, in an utterly bemused, bewildered, and helpless state.

What might have happened to Skip Ruggles, if Perkinson of the Fifth hadn't been strolling up Fell Lane, might have made a very sad chapter in the history of Felgate School.

Luckily, Perkinson was there. Perkinson was strolling up the lane, with a cheery smile on his face, thinking how happily and successfully he had done old Kye. But, ass as Perk was in most things, he had learned quick decision and quick action on the football field. Even while he roared at the hapless Skip, he was leaping to his aid.

How Perkinson gathered up the fat cyclist and the bicycle too, and whirled them out of the way of the rushing car, seemed quite a miracle. He just did it. Only just!

Skip, too bewildered to know how he got there, found himself sprawling on the grass verge by the lane, gurgling for breath, his bicycle reposing in the grass by his side.

Perkinson, panting from the sudden exertion, stared down at him—or rather, glared. About a split second would have been enough for Perk and Skip and the bike to get mixed up under the car. It roared on towards Hodden without having done any damage. But it had been a near thing for all concerned.

"You fat chump!" howled Perkinson.

"Oooooooooogh!" gasped Skip.

"Did you want to be killed, you young idiot?"

"Grooooooooooogh."

"If you can't ride a bike, why don't you get a scooter?"

"Urrrrrrggh!"

"You footling little fathead, I've a jolly good mind to boot you all over the shop!" hooted Perkinson.

"Ooogh! Oh, crumbs!" gasped Skip. He sat up dizzily, and blinked up at the long-legged Fifth-Form man. "I—I—I say, I—I should have been run over!"

Snort, from Perkinson.

"Has that just got into your fat head?" he asked.

"I—I—I say thanks for lugging me off the road!" gurgled Skip. "I—I—I say—oh, crumbs! Ooogh."



Skip . . . found himself sprawling.

"I've a jolly good mind to boot you," snapped Perkinson.

"Oh, I say!" gasped Skip.

"And I jolly well will, too!" added Perkinson: apparently thinking it a good idea. And he did.

"Yaroooh!" roared Skip.

Skip was prepared to feel deeply grateful to Perkinson, for having lugged him out of harm's way especially as it was clear that it had been touch and go, and that Perk himself would have had his share of a very bad accident, if it had happened. But gratitude faded out somewhat, as the Fifth-Form man proceeded to boot him. Skip might feel grateful, but Perk was feeling exasperated, and he signified the same by landing several good ones on the fat figure sprawling in the grass.

Then he walked on, leaving Skip roaring.

When he was gone, Skip crawled to his feet. He rubbed several places where boot-leather had landed. But gratitude revived. After all, what was a booting, compared with what old Perk had done for him?

Skip remounted his bike, and, wisely resisting the lure of bullseyes, put both fat hands to his handle-bars as he pedalled home to Felgate. By the time he got in for tea in Study Four, he had quite forgotten the booting, and boundless gratitude supervened.

III

"DENVER!"

"Sir!"

"Have you seen Perkinson, of my form?"

"Not lately, sir."

Skip Ruggles felt a tremor.

Had Mr. Kye asked him, instead of Denver of the Sixth, whether he had seen Perkinson, what could Skip have replied? Skip had seen him, out of gates: walking down to Fell, as coolly as if he wasn't gated at all. Indeed, if Perk hadn't walked down to Fell that afternoon, it was probable that Skip wouldn't have been at tea in Study Four in the Fourth. But the fact remained that Skip had seen him—out of gates.

However, Kye was not likely to ask Skip. For one reason, he had no reason to suppose that Ruggles knew anything whatever about the proceedings of a Fifth-Form senior. For another, as Kye did not look up, he did not see Ruggles at the open window of Study Four, and was quite unconscious and regardless of Ruggles.

There was tea in No. 4: or rather, there had been tea. Tom King and Dick Warren had finished. Skip hadn't finished: but he had left off.

Skip never had finished a meal, so long as anything edible remained in

Study Four. As it happened, there was a large cake to wind up tea—a very extensive cake that had arrived for Ruggles in a parcel. Generously Skip whacked it out with his friends. No doubt in acknowledgement of his generosity, King and Warren stopped him, after he had consumed about a couple of pounds of plum cake, and told him that the remainder had to stay over till supper. They stated that they did not want to see their fat friend burst all over the study.

In vain Skip protested.

It was his cake. He was still hungry. He was going to finish that cake. They could share the bulky remainder with him, if they liked: but it was going to be finished.

In reply to which, Tom King lifted the cake into the study cupboard, and shut the door on it. Dick Warren picked up a fives bat as Skip made a step towards the cupboard. Whether Skip knew it or not, he had had enough, and a little over, and his chums rightly considered it time to put the stopper on. Skip had to yield the point.

Now he sat at the open study window, looking out gloomily into the quad, while King and Warren cleared the table.

That was how he heard the voices floating up from the path under the study windows. And, remembering his deep debt to old Perkinson, Skip forgot even the cake, for the moment at least, and looked down at Kye's mortar-board and the top of Denver's head.

Kye, only too plainly, was suspicious of that recalcitrant member of his form, Percival Perkinson. He was looking round to ascertain whether Perkinson was within gates, according to order, or not. Not seeing him anywhere, he was asking questions.

Denver of the Sixth answered reluctantly. Denver was a prefect: and as a prefect, of course he had to be down on any fellow who kicked over the traces. Still, he didn't want to land old Perkinson in a row with Kye, if he could help it. To Kye, Perk was a mutinous boy in the Fifth. To Denver, he was the champion winger in the Felgate first-eleven, and such an ass that a fellow wouldn't help liking him. It was a difference in the point of view.

Looking down, Skip could see the discomfort in Denver's face. Then Kye's voice came again, sharp and acid.

"Was Perkinson at games-practice, Denver?"

"I—I think not, sir."

"And you have not seen him?"

"I saw somebody when I passed the library, sir! It might have been Perkinson," said Denver.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Kye, very drily. Percival Perkinson was about the last fellow at Felgate to be found within the walls of a library, or anywhere else where there were books. However, Kye walked off in the direction of the library, asking no more questions.

Skip grinned, a fat grin. Denver hadn't fibbed: it might have been Perk in the library when he passed the window. But it was much more likely that it might not. Books and Perk were wide as the poles asunder.

Langdale, the captain of Felgate, came along the path under the studies, and stopped to speak to Denver.

"Kye's rooting about," he said. "Know where that ass Perk is?"

"Goodness knows!" said Denver. "Kye's gone to look for him in the library."

"Oh, holy smoke! Likely spot," said Langdale. "I say, it will be serious if that fathead has cut. Kye's furious with him already. I've not seen him about."

"Neither have I."

"Chap needn't be on view, if he doesn't choose," said Langdale. "If he shows up for roll, all right. But if he doesn't—!"

"Even Perk will have sense enough to get back in time for roll."

"And hike in over the wall, and drop into Kye's arms, as likely as not!" said Langdale. "Kye's as watchful as a cat this afternoon. He's got it in for Perk, if he catches him. Might be sacked—and we'd lose him in the Dolcot match. We've got no other winger like Perk. The ass!"

The two Sixth-Form men walked on.

Skip, looking across the quad, saw Mr. Kye coming away from the library. Evidently, he had not found Perkinson there! Skip saw him stop and speak to Loring of the Sixth—another prefect! Only too plainly, Kye had got his teeth into this!

Ruggles hoped from the bottom of his fat heart that Perkinson would come through without being nailed by Kye. However, there was nothing that Skip could do in the matter, and he remembered the cake.

He looked round at his study-mates.

"Look here, you chaps," he said. "I'm hungry."

"You must be!" agreed Dick Warren, sympathetically. "You've only had two eggs, a chunk of ham, half a loaf, three or four dough nuts, and a couple of pounds of cake. Famished, I expect! Feeling like a ship-wrecked chap in an open boat at sea, what?"

"Well, it's my cake, ain't it?" hooted Skip. "Can't a fellow scoff his own cake if he jolly well likes?"

Tom King shook his head.

"Not if it's going to make him a hospital case," he answered, "and not if it's going to make him burst all over the study, like a balloon. Leave it over till supper, old fat man."

Skip glared at his faithful friends. They were great chums in Study Four: but at the moment, Skip's glare was fearfully unchummy. The fact that he had packed in foodstuffs to the very brim did not quench Skip's longing for cake.

"Come out for a trot, and get an appetite for supper," suggested Warren.

"I've got an appetite now!" hooted Skip. "I—I say, you fellows go out for a trot! Don't stick in the study in this lovely weather."

At which King and Warren chuckled. They could guess what would happen immediately if they left Skip and the cake in the study.

"Okay," said Warren. "You come too."

"I want a bit of a rest, after a bike ride," said Skip. "I'll stick here in the window-seat while you fellows take a trot. Besides, I'm a bit knocked out by what happened in Fell Lane, you know—old Perkinson lugging me away from that care—"

"Keep that dark," said Tom. "Kye would scalp Perk if he heard. Now come out for a trot."

"Shan't!" hooted Skip. "Look here, leggo my arm, Tom King—leggo my ear, Warren, you smug! I ain't coming."

But Skip came, all the same. His chums were really alarmed about what might happen to Skip, if he followed up two eggs, a chunk of ham, three or four dough-nuts, and a couple of pounds of cake, with three or four more pounds of cake. Skip needed his pals to look after him, and they did. They grasped Skip and walked him out of the study and down the stairs. Skip went reluctantly, but he went. And the cake remained in the study cupboard—lost to sight but to memory dear!

IV

Skip grinned breathlessly.

He almost tiptoed into Study Four.

It was more than an hour later. Tom King and Dick Warren were in the Pound, with a crowd of other juniors. They had entered into an argument with Bullinger, as to the respective merits of Perkinson and Cadby on the right wing in the Felgate First, and momentarily forgotten Skip.

Never was a fellow so glad to be forgotten.

Skip had backed out of the Pound, and cut up to Study Four in the Fourth. The lapse of time had made Skip keener than ever on that cake.

Now he crept into Study Four, grinning. To grab the bulky remnant of the cake from the study cupboard was the work of a moment.

But he dared not linger in the study to devour it. King and Warren might be up after him any minute. Staying only for one gargantuan bite, to go on with, Skip rolled the cake in a newspaper, and hurried out of Study Four with it.

It was dusk, and close on lock-ups. Heedless of that, Skip cut out of the House. If Warren and King looked for him in Study Four, they were not likely to find him now.

Neither were they likely to find him, if they looked out of the House. For the artful Skip hunted cover at once. He did not pause till he was in a secluded corner between the old oaks and the school wall: the very spot, in fact, where Tom King and Dick Warren had lugged at the long legs of Percival Perkinson earlier in the afternoon, with such painful results to themselves.

The dusk was thicker under extending branches. Skip felt quite safe in that

hidden corner. Leaning back against the wall, he opened the newspaper, and proceeded to deal faithfully with the cake.

Munch! munch! munch! Guzzle! guzzle! guzzle! Stanley St. Leger Ruggles munched and guzzled, and was happy.

He finished the cake. He did not, as his chums had feared, burst. Perhaps the lapse of an hour averted that catastrophe.

But he undoubtedly did feel loaded a little beyond the Plimsoll line, and disinclined to move. He leaned back on the old wall and rested after his exertions. There was no hurry to move, till he should hear the bell for roll-call. Leaning heavily on the wall, he breathed a little stertorously, his mind still dwelling happily on the cake.

He started a little, as footsteps came along the path. But he was not alarmed. If his friends had rooted him out in that remote corner, it was too late: the last crumb and the last plum had gone on the downward path.

He blinked through the dusk.

It was not King or Warren. It was a stout figure that rolled along the path: that of Mr. Kye.

Skip whistled softly.

Kye, evidently, was still on the prowl. Having failed to spot Perkinson anywhere within the walls of Felgate, he could have little doubt that that disobedient youth had gone out of gates regardless of authority. True, Perk might be somewhere in the school where Kye hadn't looked—even Kye, in his most suspicious mood, couldn't root through all the studies. If that was so, he would turn up for calling-over—well and good. But if he was out of bounds, he was not going to trickle in surreptitiously, if Kye could help it. And that old wall behind the oaks was just the place for a surreptitious trickle-in.

Kye gave Ruggles a careless glance, and rolled on. Even Kye, sharp and acid as he was, couldn't tell a Fourth-Form fellow not to loaf about: he had nothing to do with the Fourth. He rolled on up the path, and disappeared. Skip had no doubt that he would turn back at the end of the path: for obviously he suspected that Perkinson was out, and might, and probably would, return by way of that secluded wall. It looked as if Kye was going to do sentry-go on that dusky path, till the bell rang for roll.

Skip was reflecting on this, when he gave a sudden jump and gasp, as something banged on his head.

"Oooooogh!" gasped the astonished Skip.

It was surprising to be banged on the head, when a fellow was leaning peaceably against a wall, digesting cake. It was still more surprising to discover, the next moment, that it was a large size in shoes that had banged.

But the next moment Skip understood.

The shoe, naturally, was on a foot. The foot, equally naturally, was attached to a leg—a long leg. Another long leg whisked in the dusk.

"Perk!" breathed Skip.

Perkinson of the Fifth was swinging over the wall. He dropped almost on Skip. Luckily, he just missed him.

Further up the path, footsteps were audible: approaching. Kye had turned back at the end.

Perkinson gave a startled gasp.

"Who—what—?" He stared at Skip angrily. "You again, you fat ass! Getting in a fellow's way! I—"

Skip clutched his arm. He was wildly excited. In a matter of seconds Kye would be on the spot, and, finding Perkinson there, would know everything.

"Quick—!" breathed Skip.

"Let go my arm, you little fat idiot."

"Kye—!" gasped Skip.

"Eh? What about Kye?"

"He's coming—he'll see you in a tick! Get behind that tree—quick!" breathed Skip, in an anguish of anxiety.

Perkinson stared blankly for a moment. Then the approaching footsteps struck his ear, and he understood. It was useless to cut—Kye would have both seen and heard. Promptly, Perkinson backed behind a massive oak. He was barely in time. A stout figure came rolling down the path.

Mr. Kye's eyes were watchful and suspicious. He had heard something. He was looking round him sharply as he came.

Skip could have groaned.

Perkinson was out of view for the moment. But when Kye came close—he knew that the game was up. Old Perkinson had lugged him out of the way of that car, at the risk of going under it himself: and now he was going to be marched off to the Head, very likely to be sacked.

Not if Skip could help it!

Skip did not stop to think. Thinking was not much in his line, anyway. He acted without thinking. He shot along the path at top speed, and before Kye knew what was happening, the fattest junior at Felgate crashed headlong into the stoutest form-master in the school.

It was a terrific crash.

Kye went over backwards, and sat down with a concussion that might almost have shaken the county of Herts. Skip reeled from the shock, and staggered against an oak, dizzy.

Perkinson peered round his tree. He glimpsed a stout form-master sitting for a second, and then rolling over on his back. That was enough for Percival Perkinson. Kye, for the moment, was in no state to observe his surroundings, and Perkinson shot away, the longest legs at Felgate covering the ground at a speed they had never equalled before, even on the football field.

Perkinson of the Fifth vanished into space.

Ruggles of the Fourth would have been glad to do likewise. But there was no such chance for Ruggles of the Fourth. The shock had winded Skip, and he

could only lean on the oak and gurgle for wind. Besides, flight would have been futile, for Kye had, of course, seen him, and had a baleful eye on him now. Skip leaned breathlessly on the oak, while Mr. Kye, gradually recovering, heaved up to his feet.

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Kye.

"Ooogh! Yes, sir!" gasped Skip.

"How dare you rush along the path in so utterly senseless a manner! How dare you crash into me?"

"I—I—I—"

"You utterly stupid boy—"

"I—I—I—"

"You will be punished for this! I shall take you to your form-master, and demand the severest punishment."

That was no news to Skip: he did not expect to barge over a beak without something happening afterwards. Anyhow, Kye knew nothing about Perkinson: and that was a solace. Old Perk was safe in the House by this time, ready to answer to his name in Hall, and Kye couldn't do a thing.

From a distance, a bell clanged.

It was the bell for calling-over! Mr. Kye grasped Skip by a fat shoulder, and walked him away to the House.

V

"Ow! wow! ow! wow! Wow!"

Those sounds of woe greeted Tom King and Dick Warren, as they came into Study Four after calling-over.

They had missed Skip after roll. He had been called to the study of Mr. Charne, his form-master. They had wondered why. Now they knew.

Skip was leaning on the table in Study Four, wriggling. And he wowed and wowed and wowed.

"Whopped?" asked Tom: a rather unnecessary question. It was painfully clear that Stanley St. Leger Ruggles had been whopped.

"Wow! Yes! wow!" moaned Skip.

"Charne?" asked Warren

"Wow! Yes! Six of the best! Wow!"

"What for?" asked both together.

"Wow! Barging over old Kye!" moaned Skip. "Wow!"

"You fat clown, what on earth did you barge over old Kye for?" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment.

"Wow! Perk got in over the wall, and Kye would have spotted him if I hadn't! Wow! ow! wow!"

They gazed at him.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom. "Good old Skip! Perk got clear?"

"Wow! Yes! Wow!"

"And you got six?"

"Wow! Yes! wow!"

"Good old Skip!" said Warren. "After all, he did lug you away from that car, you know."

"That's why!" moaned Skip. "Wow!"

"It will wear off," said Tom, comfortingly, "and look here, old man, you can jolly well finish that cake now, and chance it."

But that, in the circumstances, was not much comfort to Skip!

BUT the next day Skip Ruggles was merry and bright again. Indeed, his fat face beamed like unto the sun at noonday. He was the happy, indeed ecstatic, possessor of the biggest cake that could be had for love or money at the Felgate tuckshop. Perkinson was not ungrateful: and his gratitude took a form that Skip really could appreciate!

THE END

Note: The Felgate stories, by Frank Richards, appear in Raymond Glendenning's *Book of Sport*, published by Sportsguide Ltd.