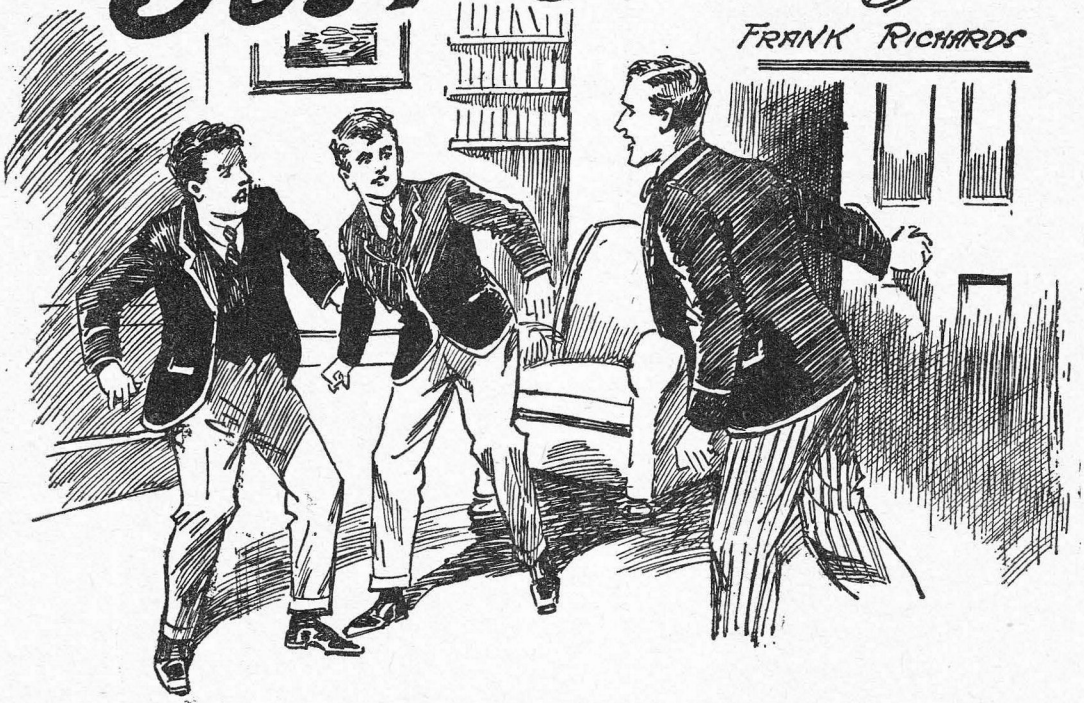


# Just Skip

By  
FRANK RICHARDS



*"Where's Ruggles?" he snapped*

## CHAPTER I

IT was Skip's idea.

Skip's ideas, as a rule, were at a discount in Study Four at Felgate. Neither Tom King nor Dick Warren regarded Skip as anything but a born bungler, an unmitigated ass, and the last word in fatheads. Indeed they often told him so.

But for once, they heeded Skip. For once, if for once only, Stanley St. Leger Ruggles had the ear of the study.

The fact was, that something had to be done about Pook. King and Warren, resourceful youths as they were, couldn't think of that "something". It seemed that Skip Ruggles could.

Pook of the Sixth was the most unpopular prefect at Felgate. He had stealthy ways. As a Sixth-form prefect, he had "whopping privs": and he

exercised the same to the fullest extent. His ashplant contacted junior trousers oftener—much oftener—than any other prefect's ash. Recently Study Four had been through it, at Pook's hands.

Pook, who had an obnoxiously silent tread, had come on the three, telling one another what they thought of him. He had listened-in, unnoticed. He had heard Tom King refer to him as a greasy golliwog, Warren describe him as a footer funk, and Skip as a nasty piece of work. No prefect could have been pleased by hearing himself so described: but no prefect at Felgate except Pook would have listened-in to talk not intended for his ears. Having heard the opinions of Study Four, Pook showed up, and called them to account. Whops followed. And when Pook whopped, he whopped hard. Three Fourth-formers almost crawled up to their study afterwards.

In Study Four, there were wriggings, and mumblings, and fierce yearnings for reprisals on Pook. Something had to be done about Pook: they all agreed on that. But what was to be done? You simply couldn't get back on a pre. Gladly they would have punched him. Gladly they would have up-ended him in the quad, and ducked his head in the fountain. But a Sixth-Form prefect was untouchable. It was the sack, short and sharp for any fellow so wildly reckless as to handle a prefect. Such exploits could be dreamed of, but never performed. Even great games-men, like Perkinson of the Fifth, would never have ventured to punch Pook. It was a hopeless proposition for juniors.

But Skip had an idea!

"He's got it coming!" said Skip, darkly, "And I know how."

And for once, instead of telling Skip to pack it up, or put a sock in it, King and Warren said simultaneously:

"How?"

Skip told them how.

## CHAPTER II

**P**OOK for some moments, simply didn't know what had happened, or what was happening. There had been a Prefects' Meeting in the Prefects' Room, which Pook, as a pre. of course attended. That meeting had lasted an hour, during which all the Felgate prefects were collected in one spot, and were not, naturally, in their studies. After the meeting was over, Pook went to his study: and then it happened.

Several other Sixth-Form men came up the passage with Pook,—Denver, Cadby, Paynter and Loring. So they were witnesses of what happened to



*Skip had an idea*

Pook—luckily for them not near enough to get a share in it. Pook pushed open his study door—and then—!

Pook was a wary, watchful, suspicious pre. But he did not suspect that there was anything unusual awaiting him in his study. True, any fellow could have visited that study unnoticed and unknown, while Pook was in the Prefects' Room. But it did not occur to Pook that any fellow had. He was taken completely by surprise.

He did not have to unlatch the door. He found it ajar. Still, there was nothing very unusual in that: doors were often left ajar. As the door was not latched, all Pook had to do was to give it a push, and walk in. He gave it a push and walked in.

But he did not walk very far in. He stopped in the doorway. He stopped because a large paper bag, perched on top of the door fell on his head. The bag burst open as it landed, and scattered its contents. Its contents were most unpleasant, consisting of soot. As Pook discovered later, from various very



visible signs all over his study, that soot had been scraped down from his own study chimney. There was plenty of it. It smothered Pook from head to foot. It clothed him like a garment. It transformed him, suddenly, into a very good imitation of a native of Central Africa. It filled his hair, and his collar, and his ears: it got into his nose and his mouth. The chimney-sweep at Fell, after a day's work, had nothing on Pook of the Sixth. He was black if not comely. Like the sable arms of the rugged Pyrrhus, he did the night resemble! He tottered in soot—he breathed soot—he sneezed soot—he coughed soot—he reeked with soot.

“Urrrggh! Atchooh! Aytishoo! Wurrrggh!” Incoherent sounds came from Pook, amid clouds of soot.

He tottered back into the passage, scattering soot. The other Sixth-Form men stared at him. They were surprised, though not so surprised as Pook.

“What the dooce—!” exclaimed Denver.

“It's soot!” gasped Loring.

“Soot!” repeated Cadby.

“Urrrggh! Wurrrggh! Groooogh! Oooch!” contributed Pook. “I'm smothered! Ooooh! Ooooooooch!”

“It's a booby-trap!” said Loring, “Oh, gad! A booby-trap in a pre's study! Phew!”

Obviously, it was a booby-trap. Some surreptitious hand had set that trap for Pook, and he had walked right into it. He sneezed and coughed and spluttered and clawed at soot. Sad to relate, the other seniors grinned. Pook did not seem funny to himself—he felt far from funny,—but his aspect seemed to strike the other fellows as funny. Moreover, Pook was not popular with his fellow-pre's. Certainly it was most outrageous, almost unthinkable, for such a trick to be played on the high and mighty Sixth. The perpetrator, if found, would be marched off to the Head, and dealt with most faithfully. But the Sixth-Form men in the passage grinned all the same.

“Urrrggh! Gurrgrh! Grooh! Attishoo! Who did this?” gasped Pook, “What are you grinning at, you silly dummies? Ooooooogh!”

“By gum, you want a wash, old man!” said Loring.

“Urrrggh! Who did this?—hissed Pook. “Some cheeky junior—oooogh! I'll take him to the Head,—grooogh!—this means a flogging for him! Wurrrggh! But who was it—gerrrrrooogh!”

Pook had to postpone that problem till he had had a much-needed cleaning-up. He was busy in a bath-room for quite a long while. He had to change from head to foot. Even after a bath and a change, a lingering aroma of soot seemed to cling to him. And he was quite a volcano of wrath. With set lips and gleaming eyes, he searched his study for a clue to the culprit. Plenty of





*"It's a booby trap," said Loring*

soot had been left about—there was soot on his carpet, and on his books—lots and lots of soot. But there was no clue.

Somebody—obviously somebody in the Lower School—had done it. But Pook had all the Lower School to pick from. There was hardly a Lower boy at Felgate who did not loathe Pook. It might have been anybody in the Third, the Fourth or the Shell. Who had done it? Pook simply didn't know and couldn't guess. But—! Thinking it out, a possible clue occurred to him. Fellows who handled soot might very likely have some sooty traces about them—and a single spot of soot would be evidence. Pook was prepared to take any amount of trouble to discover who had sooted him. With a set, savage face, Pook started on a round of the junior studies: with a hope of spotting a spot of soot on some junior: who would then be marched off forthwith to Dr. Leicester for the flogging he so richly merited.



*Study Four were in high spirits*

### CHAPTER III

“HEARD?”

Reece of the Fourth asked that question, looking into Study Four in the Fourth. Three juniors were in that study—all of them in smiling good-humour. Tom King’s face was bright and cheery—Dick Warren looked like a fellow really enjoying life: Skip, sitting in the window-seat, grinned from one fat ear to the other, and chuckled a fat chuckle. Study Four, it was clear, were in high spirits.

“Heard what, Reece?” asked Dick Warren, with a wink at King.

“Anything happened?” asked Tom, casually.

Reece chuckled.

“Sort of!” he answered, “Pook of the Sixth—ha, ha—”.

“What about Pook?”

“Somebody rigged up a booby-trap in his study, while he was at the Pre’s meeting, and he was smothered with soot—.”

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from Skip.

"I wonder who it was," went on Reece.

"Well, Pook's pretty unpopular," remarked Tom King. "He whops too much you know. Somebody seems to have got back on him."

"You fellows wouldn't know, of course!" grinned Reece. "But I hear that Pook is going round the studies looking for his man. If he spots that spot of soot on Ruggles, he might suspect this study, what?"

Reece walked away, laughing. Tom King and Dick Warren fixed an almost deadly glare on Skip Ruggles. Both of them had been extremely careful in Pook's study, and not the vestige of a spot of soot could have been discovered on either of them with a microscope. Both had warned Skip to be equally careful. But Skip was always Skip!

"You fat ass—!" said Tom, in concentrated tones.

"You podgy piffler!" hissed Dick Warren.

"Oh, draw it mild," protested Skip, "I haven't got any soot on me. Think I'd be such an ass as that? Look at me—! Oh!" added Skip, as he looked at himself. "There's just a spot—."

"You ass—!"

"Reece says that Pook is going round the studies—."

"If he saw that—!"

"It's only just a spot on my wrist—oh, and just a little one on my other hand—and—."

"Reece noticed it, if we didn't!" hissed Warren. "Go and wash it off, this minute—quick!"

"Oh, all right!"

The fat Skip heaved his weight up from the window-seat. He rolled out of the study, to the sink at the end of the Fourth-form passage, where he washed off, with the greatest care, every trace of lingering soot.

#### CHAPTER IV

"**H**ERE comes Pook!" murmured Dick Warren.

"Let him come."

Tom King and Dick Warren were quite unperturbed, as Pook of the Sixth looked in at their doorway, and then walked into the study. Pook's rather narrow eyes scanned them suspiciously. Pook had had a long round already, but so far he had discovered just nothing. Probably he was more suspicious of Study Four than of any other, remembering the recent licking he had bestowed on the inhabitants thereof. But really, there was nothing to go upon,





*Skip burst into the study*

unless he spotted the hoped-for trace of soot on some member of that study. And no such trace met his searching eyes.

"Want anything, Pook?" asked Tom King, politely.

"I'm looking for the young rascal who fixed up a booby-trap in my study!" snapped Pook. "It's a Head's flogging for him when I find him."

He scanned the two juniors. The keenest of eyes could not have discovered the slightest trace of soot on either of them. It looked as if Study Four was to be drawn blank like all the other studies that Pook had visited. But after scanning Tom King and Dick Warren, Pook walked round the study, scanning everything else. Warren winked at King. If the slightest spot of soot had been dropped about, Pook would have spotted it. But there was nothing of the kind to meet Pook's searching eyes. Having scanned the study, Pook scanned King and Warren again. He remembered that there were three to that study.

"Where's Ruggles?" he snapped.

"Gone up the passage," answered Tom King, blandly. He was not likely to add that Ruggles had gone up the passage to wash off spots of soot! "I daresay he'll be back in a minute or two, Pook."

"I'll wait!" grunted Pook.

He waited! Evidently, he was going to give the third member of that study the once-over, before he went on his way. He had not long to wait. Two or three minutes later, a newly-washed Skip burst grinning into Study Four. "ALL serene now, you chaps! I say, jolly lucky Reece spotted that soot on me, and gave us the tip, what? I'll bet that cad Pook would have spotted it, if he'd come to this study—you know he's got eyes like a rat. But it's all right now—I've washed off every speck. But I say, are you fellows sure you haven't any soot about you? You handled it in Pook's study more than I did. You'd better make sure—."

Skip had got thus far, before he noticed that Pook was in Study Four.

But at that point he noticed Pook's presence.

He ceased suddenly to burble. He stared at Pook—he blinked at him—he goggled at him. Pook, of course, had heard every word.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Skip. "Is—is—is that Pook? Oh, crikey!"

Pook smiled—a sour smile! He had them, now. Tom King and Dick Warren exchanged a hopeless look. With considerable self-restraint, they did not fall on Skip and slay him on the spot. The cat was out of the bag, and slaying Skip would not have recaptured it.

"So it was you three!" said Pook, "I might have guessed it! All three of you will follow me to the Head's study!"

They followed him in sad silence.

## THE END

NOTE. The Felgate series, by Frank Richards, appears in Raymond Glendenning's Book of Sport annual.