

Unexpected



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CHAPTER I

WHEN Tom King, the captain of the Fourth Form at Felgate, pulled Langdale of the Sixth, captain of the school, out of the deep waters of the Fenny, Langdale was naturally grateful.

Any man would have been.

It had been touch and go. Langdale's skiff had capsized, and his head had banged on a rowlock, dazing him. Good swimmer as he was in a normal state, the Felgate captain was simply nowhere in the circumstances—a dizzy head, a deep stream, and a tearing current. Whether Langdale could have struggled ashore somehow was a moot point, never

decided—for, as it happened, there was no need. King of the Fourth saw the disaster from Fell Bridge, and without even stopping to think, dived in to his assistance. It was a dive at which most Felgate seniors would have jibbed, and which no Felgate junior had ever dreamed of: so perhaps it was as well that Tom did not stop to think.

Langdale was drifting under, when Tom's helping hand reached him. Somehow the junior supported him and steered him shoreward. He never quite knew how he did it—but he did. Both of them, as Skip Ruggles said, might have been washed away and jolly well drowned! But they weren't: and the next day neither was a penny the worse for the ducking.

But Langdale, as afore said, was grateful.

His gratitude, indeed, knew no bounds. If Tom King had asked for a place in the Felgate First eleven, Langdale could hardly have refused, in the first flush of gratitude. For actually he told Tom King that, if the junior ever wanted anything that he could give he had only to ask, and it was as good as done. And the next day, when he came on him in the quad, and honoured him by remembering his existence, Langdale repeated that assurance, and there was no doubt that he was quite in earnest about it.

It was some days later that the Felgate captain's gratitude became rather a worry to him: sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, as it were. Almost he wished that Tom King of the Fourth had stayed on Fell Bridge, and left him to take his chance in the Fenny. Not quite, for really life at Felgate School was too good a thing to lose.

For Tom King after consultation with his chums Dick Warren and Skip Ruggles in Study Four in the Fourth, did ask something. And it was something that made even the deep waters of the Fenny seem—almost—attractive.

They were great cricketers in the Fourth Form at Felgate. A batsman like Tom King, or a bowler like Dick Warren, was seldom found in a junior eleven. And Reece and Preece, and Valence and Carton, and Parrott and Bullinger, were all good men of their hands at the great summer game. They had beaten the Shell, an older form. They played outside matches and they won them. They believed that they could have beaten the Fifth, if the Fifth would have deigned to fix up a Form match with the lower school. Of course the Fifth wouldn't: Perkinson and Purring and the rest laughed at the idea.

Perhaps that was why it came into Tom King's head to fly at bigger game.

They talked it over in Study Four. They decided on it. All the Fourth Form cricketers enthused. Even Skip, who had no more chance of playing for the Fourth than for England, was enthusiastic. And the matter having been decided *nem. con.*, the captain of the Fourth betook himself to the study of the captain of the school, and there proffered his request.

Langdale greeted him with a kindly smile and a nod. It was several days since Tom had dived in for him from Fell Bridge: but his gratitude was genuine and still going strong. He sincerely hoped that there was something he could do for that plucky junior. But when he learned what that something was, he had the shock of his life.

'Play the Sixth!' he repeated, after Tom King had explained his errand. He stared blankly at the junior captain. 'Did—did—did you say play the Sixth, King?'

'That's what I said; Langdale.'

'Joking, I suppose?' said Langdale.

'Not so's you'd notice it,' said Tom.

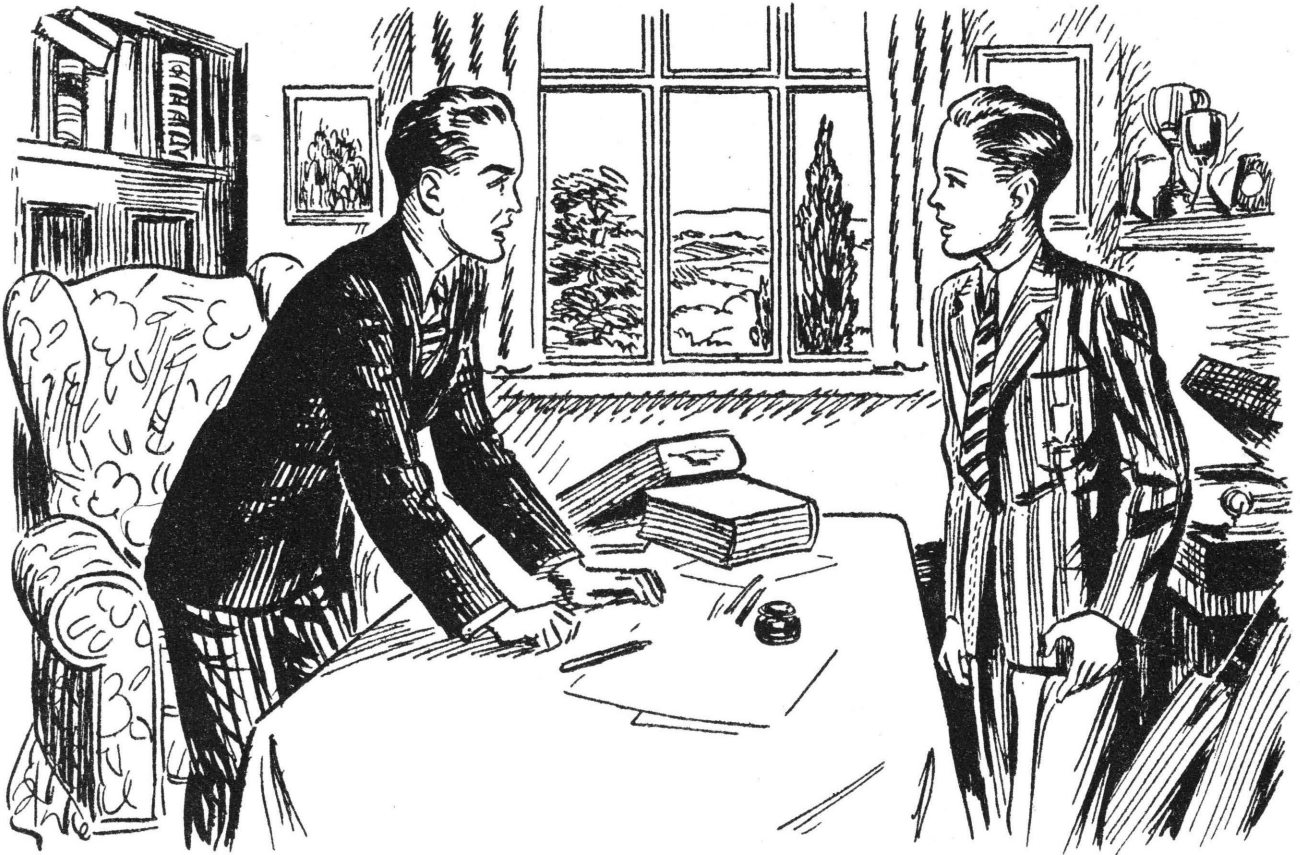
'But my dear kid—' Langdale was kind and patient. The Fourth had done remarkably well at cricket, and had reason to be proud of their exploits. If they were getting a little above themselves, Langdale could be tolerant. 'My dear kid, the idea's absurd.'

'I don't know.'

'We play form matches with the Fifth—there are First-Eleven men in both forms. But a match with the lower school!' Langdale laughed. 'I'm afraid they'd scalp me in the Prefects' Room if I suggested it.'

'You're skipper.'

'Oh! Yes! But—I'd do anything I could,



'Did - did you say play the sixth, King?'

kid. But I couldn't make the Sixth look ridiculous.'

Tom King coloured. It was an ambitious project: he admitted that. Good men as they were at the game, the Fourth could hardly hope to beat the Sixth Form, with seven or eight First-Eleven men in its ranks. That prospect exceeded the wildest hopes in Study Four. But they would give them a good game. They would go down, but they would not go down ingloriously. They would give the Sixth something to think about. They would make runs, and they would take wickets, whatever the lofty seniors thought about it. If there was anything 'ridiculous' in such a match, from Langdale's point of view, there was nothing of the kind from Tom King's

point of view. Hadn't they beaten the Shell? Couldn't they beat the Fifth, if the Fifth would take it on? They were jolly well going to have a shot at the Sixth, and chance it.

'Anything else?' said Langdale.

'Nothing else on the agenda,' said Tom. 'We'll play you and give you a good game. And why not?'

'Lots of reasons why not,' said Langdale. 'About a million or so. Look here, King, don't be a young ass!'

'Does that mean that you won't?'

'Right on the wicket.'

Tom drew a deep breath.

'O. K.,' he said, and walked to the study door.

Langdale called him back, as Tom had no



They could not believe that Langdale was serious

doubt that he would. Arthur Langdale was a man of his word. His word was his bond: and that bond had to be honoured, though the skies fell.

‘Hold on, King.’

Tom turned back.

‘It’s awful rot,’ said Langdale. ‘You’ll make us look fools, and you’ll look fools yourselves. Can’t you see that?’

‘No!’ said Tom.

‘You’re set on it —’

‘Like glue.’

The Felgate captain sighed.

‘Then the answer is yes,’ he said. ‘We’ll play you — if the Sixth don’t lynch me as soon as they hear of it.’

Tom King departed with the good news, and there was great rejoicing in the ranks of the Fourth.

In the Sixth feelings were quite different. In the Prefects’ Room, they could not believe that Langdale was serious, when he told them that a match was fixed up with the Fourth Form. And when they found that he was serious they were surprised, indignant, and wrathful. Denver, Loring, Cadby, Chard, mighty men of the First Eleven, fairly snorted at the idea of playing a team described by them, as a mob of grubby fags. Paynter said plainly that Langdale had let the Form down in agreeing to any such proposition. He should have smacked that cheeky junior’s head and kicked him out of his study. That day, and the next, Langdale found the atmosphere of the Prefects’ Room uncongenial and uncomfortable. He was the most popular man at Felgate: but his popularity trembled in the balance. Even his authority, hitherto unquestioned, trembled!

Tom King and Co., in the Fourth, went on their way rejoicing. Even a defeat at the hands of the Sixth was an honour and distinction for the juniors. So they were all right in any case. But there was no glory for the seniors in a victory over a mob of grubby fags! Victory was almost as absurd as defeat in such a game. To let all Felgate School see them in the field with the inky little scoundrels of the Fourth — every man in the Sixth agreed that it was intolerable: and Langdale had to admit that it was: and almost, though not quite, wished that Tom King had left him to it in the waters of the Fenny. Sixth Form men frowned darkly at Tom King and Co. when they encountered them: and on several occasions, there were prefects’ whippings, for

which no really adequate cause could be adduced. But the fixture was fixed, and the date was coming round, all the same.

And then, suddenly, there was a change.

It was Denver, well known to be astute, and to possess a sense of humour, who made the suggestion that poured oil on the troubled waters. It was as if the disgruntled Sixth had suddenly discovered that there was, after all, balm in Gilead. Denver, when he propounded his idea for meeting the peculiar situation, was greeted, first with an astonished stare, then with a roar of laughter. Langdale, greatly relieved, laughed as loudly as anybody. After which, the Sixth Form men ceased to be disgruntled: and, to the surprise of the rest of Felgate, looked forward to that unusual match, Sixth v. Fourth, with good humour and smiling faces.

CHAPTER II

‘HOT!’ remarked Dick Warren.

Tom King nodded.

It was a hot afternoon: there was no doubt about that. It had been a warm summer, and this was the warmest day so far. Not that any man in the Fourth Form eleven cared two hoots, or one, whether it was hot or cold on that great day: or what it was like so long as the weather allowed cricket to be played. Only Skip Ruggles was rather glad, for once, that he wasn't in the eleven. Skip was plump, very plump, with a lot of weight to carry from one wicket to another: and on that blazing day, a shady seat and a bag of cherries appealed to Skip with a strong appeal.

Stumps were pitched at two. Tom King and Co. were ready, and keen, and eager. Every man in the eleven looked fit and fine

in his flannels, and every inch a cricketer. No doubt they were rather on the small side, compared with the towering men of the Sixth. But there was quality, if not quantity—in the opinion of the Felgate Fourth, at least.

Dick Warren sent the ball up into the air, straight as a die, and caught it with his left as it came down. Warren could do anything with the ball. He had a secret conviction that he was going to take Sixth Form wickets. Tom King, certainly, was going to score runs, even against bowlers like Denver and Loring. And they were all good men in the field—Tom always kept his men well up to the mark in that often neglected branch of the game. There were going to be some catches in the



Skip Ruggles was rather glad he wasn't in the eleven

field that would surprise the Sixth—at least the heroes of the Fourth hoped so. And even if they were licked to the wide—or rather, when they were licked to the wide—they would still have played the Sixth in a Form match, which would be an unforgotten fact in Felgate history.

Men of all forms gathered round the field. Nobody expected the game to last long, and the Sixth, of course, wouldn't bat twice. But while Tom King and Co., in spotless flannels, were ready, the senior team had not yet appeared at the pavilion. Two o'clock had chimed from the clock tower, and the game was due to start. Tom King was ready to toss the coin with Langdale of the Sixth. But there was as yet no sign of Langdale and his merry men.

Tom looked a little worried.

'They're late, Dick,' he muttered.

'Only a few minutes, so far,' said Warren. 'Screwing up their courage to the sticking-point perhaps.'

Tom laughed. Then he looked worried again, and cast a glimpse towards the House.

'Are they pulling our leg?' asked Reece.

'Look here, they're coming ain't they?'

That was the doubt that had smitten the captain of the Fourth. Only too well he knew how disgruntled the Sixth had been on the subject: how they just hated the idea of a match with the fags. Nobody but old Langdale could have made them toe the line. Had they talked old Langdale round, and were they simply going to stay away—leaving the Fourth Form cricketers in the air, so to speak?

Tom's cheeks burned at the thought. Perhaps it had been rather a cheek to challenge the Sixth to a cricket match. Certainly the Fourth would look awful asses, if the other

side did not turn up, and left them to go bootless home. But he shook his head.

'Langdale wouldn't let us down,' he said.

'They're coming all right. Bank on that.'

All eyes were turned on the distant House. And suddenly, there was a shout from the fellows round the field, and a roar of laughter.

'Here they come!'

'Ha! ha! ha!'

'Oh!' gasped Tom King.

He stared. All the Fourth Form cricketers stared. For a moment or two they could hardly believe their eyes.

The Sixth Form men were coming at last. As they were to play cricket, they had naturally been expected to appear in flannels. But they were not in flannels. They were in tail-coats and top-hats!

Tom King and Co. stared petrified.

The crowd round the field, and another crowd that followed the Sixth Form men as they came, howled with laughter.

'What—what—what—?' stuttered Tom.

'Guying us!' said Dick Warren, 'By gum! Guying us!'

'Oh, crumbs!'

The Sixth Form men looked quite serious, as they marched down to the cricket field: though there were some lurking smiles. All Felgate crowded round to stare, and shriek with laughter. Every man in the Sixth Form team was dressed as if for a party—well-creased trousers, polished shoes, white linen, tail-coat, top-hat. For Sunday parade it was perfect: for cricket extraordinary. It made it clear to all Felgate, and the universe generally, what the Sixth thought of Fourth Form cricket. They disdained to beat them in flannels. They were going to beat them in tails and toppers!

‘Sorry we’re a few minutes late,’ Langdale, with a cheery smile, addressed the waiting captain politely. ‘All ready now.’

Tom gasped. Round him his men were gasping. They were indignant and angry. This was treating them, not like cricketers, but like silly kids. It was making game of them. Cricket couldn’t be played in topper and tails. It made the Form match a farce. It made the Fourth look fools! It made the whole thing idiotic! Which, indeed, was the object of the seniors. Denver, the astute, had made that happy suggestion for making the ambitious Fourth Form men look the young asses they really were, and the Sixth had lapped it up. And here they were—in tails and toppers!

‘I—I say—!’ gasped Tom.

‘Yes?’ said Langdale.

‘I—I say, you—you’re going to change for the game?’

Langdale raised his eyebrows.

‘We have changed for the game,’ he answered.

‘But—but look here—’ exclaimed Dick Warren. ‘We’re not funning—we’re here to play cricket.’

‘Aren’t the terms synonymous in the Fourth?’ inquired Denver, affably.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Tom King drew a deep, deep breath. He was tempted to wash out that match there and then, rather than be guyed in this manner. But he had a strong suspicion that that was just what the Sixth Form men would like. Langdale had kept his word: the Sixth were there to play the Fourth. But certainly they didn’t want to: and, if they did, they weren’t going to pretend to take the game with any seriousness. They were going to

walk all over the cheeky fags in tails and toppers, amid laughter from all Felgate. But no doubt they would have preferred to wash the game out. Tom was not going to gratify them in that, at all events.

‘O. K.,’ he said, at last. ‘Just as you like, of course.’

‘Exactly!’ agreed Langdale.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Tom King won the toss and chose first knock. He opened the Fourth Form innings with Reece at the other end. Loring, the demon bowler of the Upper School, went on to bowl. The general expectation was that Loring would put up a double hat trick, and that



All Felgate yelled with merriment

six of the fag mob would be laid low in the first over. No runs were expected.

But it did not work out like that. Loring found his style somewhat cramped by garments more suitable to Sunday parade than to the cricket field. It was no end of a joke on the cheeky fags, Tom King not only lived through the over, but scored four off Loring's bowling—which made some of the seniors frown. They had not intended the juniors to take a single run.

In the next over, Denver bowled to Reece. Reece hit out valiantly. Langdale, in the field caught the ball with his left, and with his right, raised his topper to Reece, as if expressing thanks for the gift. And all Felgate, packed round the field, yelled with merriment.

But when Tom King was batting again it was not so hilarious. No fieldsman raised his hat to Tom for the gift of the ball. Tom was the best junior bat at Felgate, and quite able to put up a good game, even against senior men—especially when the senior men were incommoded by tails and toppers. He gave the seniors some leather-hunting, which in the circumstances, they found rather wearing, under a hot sun. Sixth Form faces were red, and perspiration trickled down them. Guying the Fourth had its drawbacks.

Langdale and Co. had it fairly clearly mapped out in their minds. A quarter of an hour, at the most, for the junior innings—no runs, or hardly any. Then ten minutes or so for a couple of Sixth Form batsmen to knock up enough runs for a win, and declare. Then ten minutes to mop up the junior second innings. The whole thing over in half-an-hour or so: the cheeky fags very properly put in their place, and grinned at by all Felgate.

That was how the seniors planned it. But like so many plans in these days of planning, it did not work out according to plan. For it was three o'clock when the last Fourth Form wicket fell, for a total of twenty-four runs: and by that time, the Sixth Form men in their tails and toppers were feeling so thoroughly cooked, that they were more disposed to kick Denver on his coat-tails than to thank him for the brilliant idea he had propounded in the Prefects' Room.

CHAPTER III

THAT was an unexpected match in every way. It was unexpected that the Fourth ever would or could play a Form match with the Sixth. It was unexpected that, if they did, they could survive for more than a matter of minutes. But the ultimate outcome was the most unexpected of all; quite unexpected by even Study Four. In their wildest dreams they had never dreamed of such unexpectedness.

Langdale and Denver batted for the Sixth. Even Dick Warren's bowling failed to relieve them of their wickets. Still they did not stay long. The combination of tails and toppers and a hot sun did not make batting a pleasure. They knocked up fifty between them, and declared. Afterwards, Langdale wished he hadn't. But then it was too late.

The Fourth Form second innings was not washed out in ten minutes as planned. It lasted longer than their first. And the runs came. The juniors were not expected to make the necessary twenty-six runs to tie. The Sixth had not dreamed of batting a second time. But Langdale, having declared in haste, repented at leisure. The score passed twenty-six with half a dozen wickets in hand. And they

were still batting strong and the seniors, cooked to a turn in their tail-coats, with perspiration streaming under their top-hats, with perspiration streaming under their top-hats fagged at leather hunting till they almost melted away like butter in the sunshine. Their fielding was hardly worthy of the Third: and their bowlers seemed only able to give the batsman runs. If that game had finished under the half-hour, as planned, all would have been well. When it lasted more than two hours, under a summer sun that was rather like a furnace, it was quite another story. The Fourth were out at last for eighty, and the Sixth had to bat again. And then —!

Felgate could hardly believe its eyes when Langdale — Langdale who had captained the First Eleven against the M.C.C. — went down to Dick Warren's bowling. Denver fancied for a moment that he was seeing visions, when Tom King caught him out first shot. Loring stared at the wicket from where the middle stump was missing, with unbelieving eyes. Such surprise occurred, and recurred, as the men in tail-coats and toppers sweated under the blazing sun, and the juniors, fresh as paint, gave them the time of their lives. It was hard for the Fourth to believe it when the Sixth were all down for forty-eight. But they were — and the Fourth, unexpectedly and almost miraculously, had won that match by six runs. Langdale and several other men kicked Denver afterwards. Denver took it



Denver fancied he was seeing visions

meekly: he felt that he had deserved it. But kicking could not alter facts.

And the fact was, as the Fourth Form cricketers never seemed to tire of telling the world, that the Fourth had played the Sixth in a Form match and beaten them — even if that glorious result was somewhat unexpected!