

THE  
**BIG PARADE  
FOR BOYS**





## FRANK RICHARDS

**T**OM KING got out of sight when he saw Perkinson of the Fifth, for good reasons. It was 'after gates'.

Tom had been down to Fell, and returned just too late to push in before the school gates changed shut. To ring for admittance, give his name, and then to be reported to his form-master, meant a hundred lines from Charne; for which Tom had no use whatever. A much better idea was to cut along the school wall, clamber in over the little wicket gate used by masters and prefects, and scud to the House in time for toll. That was a simple and easy programme; of which King of the Fourth carried out the first part. He dropped in lightly over the master's gate, and moved along the path under the frosty old oaks, looking about

him cautiously in the thickening winter gloom. But the second part of the programme was rather crabbed by the sight of a figure coming up the path—at the first glimpse of which, Tom backed promptly behind one of the ancient Felgate oaks, and waited for it to pass.

In the dimness he did not, at the moment, recognize Perkinson of the Fifth. All he saw was a tall fellow, coming along towards master's gate, whom he naturally took for a prefect of the Sixth, since only prefects of the Sixth had the privilege, among Felgate men, of using that gate. Behind his oak, he waited, and listened to the footsteps as they came; but the footsteps did not pass. They stopped.

Tom, behind the oak, breathed hard.

He could hardly doubt that he had been spotted, that the fellow on the path was a prefect, and knew he was there. That meant trouble. Climbing in over masters' gate was, to a junior, a harmless and necessary expedient. In the eyes of authority it was a serious infraction of the rules. Instead of more lines he had whops to expect, now.

But he was relieved the next moment. Perkinson - though Tom did not yet know that it was Perkinson - had stopped quite near his oak. But he did not call out, or come round it. Instead of doing either, he backed behind another oak.

Had he glanced round, he must have seen Tom staring. But he did not glance round. In cover, like the junior, behind a tree, he

was peering round it in the dimness in the direction of the wicket gate.

Tom was blankly amazed.

His own reasons for hunting cover behind an oak were good and solid. But why any man, especially a senior, should walk along that shadowy path just on roll-call, and hide behind a tree, was a deep mystery. He doubted whether it was, after all, a Sixth-form prefect. But who was it, and what did it mean?

The big senior was not three yards from him. Peering through the gloom, Tom discerned that he had a small bundle under his arm - some small object wrapped in a newspaper. He unwrapped it, and Tom King's amazed eyes discerned that what he took from it was an orange - a large orange, which, from the gingerly way he handled it, was evidently very soft and juicy - an orange that had seen its best days, and seen the last of them. And it was at the same moment that Tom recognized him, and knew that he was looking at Percival Perkinson of the Fifth Form.

That was all clear, so far as a report to Charne went. Fifth-form men were not prefects. But Tom did not stir. The look he had caught on Perkinson's face startled and alarmed him.

Perkinson of the Fifth, as all Felgate knew, was in an awful temper that day. Often, indeed, was Perk in an awful temper; though at other times he was so good-natured that he was liked all round. But in that mood, Perkinson was as likely to smack a junior's head as to look at him. Only that afternoon, in fact, he had smacked Skip Ruggles's head, simply for grinning. Perkinson was a good fellow, none better really, but he had his faults. He



*He took from it an orange*

was a tower of strength in the Felgate first-eleven, acknowledged to be the best winger Felgate had, and he was confidently expected to score goals in the Lanchester match on Saturday, the biggest fixture on the Felgate list. And they would be needed, too, for owing to one cause or another, Felgate First were at a low ebb when that fixture came round. Five or six of the best men were laid up with 'flu, and their places filled with second or third rate material. Everybody knew that old Langdale, the captain of Felgate, was relying more on Perkinson than on anybody else for upholding Felgate's colours against the visiting team from Lanchester. And Perk was the man to play the game of his life in such circumstances. But stout lad as he was at games, and loyal to the core, Perkinson had his little faults.

He was hot-headed and hasty; one of those fellows who do things in haste and repent them at leisure. That was why there had been trouble that day. Perk had checked his form-master, Kye. Kye was rather an exacting gentleman. He expected a fellow whose head was simply crammed with Soccer, who was hardly able to think of anything but the Lanchester match on Saturday, to turn out a good Latin prose. Perkinson had turned out an uncommonly bad one. Kye had 'jawed' him before all the form, till Perk was in a sweat. And he had been heard to murmur 'Rot!' He hadn't intended Kye to hear him, but Kye had heard him: and Kye had given him the choice of taking six or going up to the head. Perk had taken the six, six on the bags just as if he had been some grubby fag in the Third or Fourth. It was no wonder that, after that, Percival Perkinson had been in the fear-fullest temper ever: almost dangerous to ap-

proach. No wonder he had smacked Skip's fat head, for grinning. He had been in a mood to smack every head at Felgate School.

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'CHEEKY smug!'

Tom heard those muttered words from Perkinson. They were not addressed to him, Perkinson had not the remotest idea that he was there. The disgruntled Fifth form man was muttering to himself.

'I'll show him, by gum!'

Tom could only wonder. Somebody was a cheeky smug, and Perkinson was going to show him! Then it suddenly dawned on the junior. That was why Perkinson of the Fifth was there, blotted behind a tree in the gloom, an antiquated fruit in his hand, watching the path. He expected somebody to pass along that path, and he was lying in wait for him.

It was the only possible explanation. That was Perkinson's game - but who was the intended victim? Only beaks and pre's came along that path. Tom almost gasped aloud, as he realised what was - what must be - in Perkinson's mind. Was even Perkinson mad enough to buzz a rotten orange at a beak?

There was a click of a key in a gate.

Had Kye gone out? Was he coming in, and did Perkinson know? Was he - could he be - insane enough to buzz that orange at Kye, in return for the six in the form-room that morning? Why, he would be asking for it - hoofed out of Felgate so quick that it would make his head swim. A junior might be whopped for such a mad trick - but a senior had only one sentence to expect: the sack, short and sharp. Could even that hot-headed ass Perkinson be mad enough - ?

A stout figure in hat and overcoat came



*Mr. Kye caught a glimpse of the running junior*

along the path from the gate. Tom, as he glimpsed it, knew that it was Mr. Kye. A wild idea of running across to Perkinson, and grabbing him in time, flashed into his mind. But there was, in fact, no time.

Perkinson's arm had gone up. There was no doubt about his intention now, for the missile flew.

Whiz!

Squash!

Full in a round ruddy face, right on a somewhat beaky nose, landed that ancient and squashy orange, bursting there.

'Oooooooh!'

That spluttering gasp came from Mr. Kye. Utterly taken by surprise, hardly knowing what was happening, the Fifth-form master

staggered, spluttering, his face adorned with trickling juice and fragments of clinging orange. Perkinson did not stay to listen to his spluttering. He vanished through the oaks like a ghost at cock-crow, and was gone. Mad as he was, Percival Perkinson knew what the consequences would be, if Kye discovered who had pelted him with a rotten orange. Probably, the moment it was done, he was sorry that he had done it. He disappeared into wintry shadows.

Tom King stood, for a moment or two, paralysed. He gazed in horror at the stout figure staggering and spluttering on the path. Then he realized that the sooner he was gone, the better. If Kye saw him there, he might think that he had done it: anyhow, he would

question him, and he could not give that mad as Perkinson away. Tom cut off through the gloom. But a voice shouted behind him.

'Stop!'

Perkinson had vanished too promptly to be spotted. But evidently Mr. Kye caught a glimpse of the running junior.

Tom King was not likely to stop. Kye might have glimpsed him in the gloom, but certainly could not have recognized him. Tom flew on, and if Kye called again, he was out of hearing.

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CHARNE frowned.

Charne was the soul of punctuality. In his form-room, a fellow who was a minute late might as well have been an hour late. And when Charne was taking roll, as now, he disapproved strongly of a fellow squeezing into hall at the last moment before the door was closed. All Felgate, from the Sixth to the Second Form, were in place, with one exception: that of Tom King, captain of the Fourth. Perkinson, of the Fifth Form, had been last in: still, he was in time, and Charne had not heeded him. But he heeded Tom King, who squeezed in just as Langdale of the Sixth was closing the big oak door. In Charne's opinion a junior should have been in his place, quiet and sedate, in ample time for roll. Instead of which, Tom King, arriving breathless, was barely in time to squeeze in - Langdale very nearly shut him out. But old Langdale was always easy-going: he eased up on the door for Tom to slip in, and then closed it. And Charne's frowning glance followed Tom as he went to his place in the Fourth.

Still, narrow squeak as it was, Tom was, actually, in time for roll, so Charne could say



*His face was almost purple with rage*

nothing. He had to content himself with a disapproving frown. Then he began calling roll.

Tom was panting a little. His chums, Dick Warren and Skip Ruggles, were glad to see him get in, even breathlessly at the last moment. They knew that he had been down to Fell, and guessed that he was late back, when he did not turn up in hall at the bell. But here he was: in time, though bare time, to avert the vials of wrath.

'Close shave, old man,' whispered Dick Warren.

Tom nodded. He was thinking of Kye, spluttering out there in the dark with an orangejuicy face, and wondering what was going to happen. That there would be a row,



*'You are sure it was a junior you saw?'*

and a most terrific row, was certain. That mad ass Perkinson was for it, if he was spotted. And could he fail to be spotted? Could Kye fail to connect the incident under the oaks with the 'six' in the Fifth-form room that morning?

It was an awful prospect for Perkinson, for it meant going up to the Head to be sacked. But that was not all that it meant. It meant that Felgate, hoping against hope to keep their end up against Lanchester on Saturday with a depleted team, would not have a dog's chance of pulling it off. Denver, Loring, Chard, Cadby, were all in sanny with 'flu, four of the best, and two or three others of lesser worth were also out of the team for the same reason. Old Langdale had had to scratch up a team somehow or anyhow, and,

apart from Langdale himself, Perkinson was the best man remaining – the only first-class winger, in fact, that Felgate had to put in the field. He was at the top of his form, worth his weight in gold to the team. And if he was sacked, as undoubtedly he would be if Dr. Leicester had to judge him for what he had done, he would not be there to play on Saturday, and Felgate would be irrevocably booked for defeat in the biggest fixture of the season. Tom was thinking of that, though Perk, apparently, had not thought of it. Only too evidently, thinking was not Perk's long suit.

'Is Perkinson in?' Tom whispered to Warren. He did not want to look round at the Fifth, to run the remotest risk of drawing attention to Perk. If, by some miracle, the mad ass of the Fifth escaped detection, Felgate would keep their end up on Saturday, and Tom hoped from the bottom of his heart that Kye would not spot Perkinson.

'Eh? Yes – he came in a minute or two before you did, I think,' said Warren. 'What about Perkinson?'

'Oh! Nothing.'

'Silence there!' called out Langdale. The whispering ceased.

Mr. Charne finished the roll. It was the rule at Felgate that all stayed in their places till the end. So everyone was still in the hall when the big oak door was flung open: and all eyes turned on Mr. Kye as he came in.

The Fifth-form master had spent some time in dabbing his face with his handkerchief. But it was still juicy, and there were fragments of orange here and there, as he rolled into hall. And his face was almost purple with wrath. That something had happened was obvious, and a staring school wondered what it was. Two knew!

Charne blinked at Mr. Kye, as he came rolling up hall, juicy and purple. The Fifth-form master spluttered at him.

'Mr. Charne —'

'Has anything happened, Mr. Kye?' asked Charne, in his calm cold voice. Charne disapproved of excitement.

'What? What? I have been attacked — assaulted — something — an orange — an orange in an advanced state of decay — was flung in my face!' spluttered Mr. Kye. 'Mr. Charne, are all the boys present?'

'Certainly. All have answered to their names.'

'No junior is missing?'

'None.'

'It was a junior — I saw him running. I called to him, but he did not stop. An orange was flung in my face by some junior.'

Tom King caught his breath. Warren and Skip gave him startled looks. Reece and Preece, Bullinger and Carton, looked round at him. If a junior had buzzed an orange at a beak in the dark quad they did not need telling who it was — it was, and could only have been, the junior who had squeezed into hall at the very last moment.

'Oh, you ass!' breathed Skip, 'You —'

'Quiet, fathead!' hissed Warren.

Tom felt his heart beating. He saw Charne's eye turn on him from upper hall. Kye's mistake was a natural one. He had seen nothing of the long-legged Perkinson: Perk's long legs had saved him in ample time. He had glimpsed Tom King running — it was impossible to recognize him, but from his height, Kye had seen that he was a junior. He was not thinking of seniors — he was not connecting the orange episode with the whopping in the Fifth-form room. He had seen

a junior running in the dark, and that was that.

One piercing glance Charne gave the captain of his form. Then he looked at Kye again.

'You are sure that it was a junior you saw, Mr. Kye?' Charne, perhaps, was thinking for a moment of Perkinson's whopping.

'What? What? Of course I am sure — I could not see his face, but I saw him running — a junior boy,' spluttered Mr. Kye. 'He must have been late in hall. The bell stopped ringing as I came in at the gate. If any boy was late — any junior boy —'

'All have answered to their names,' said Mr. Charne, slowly. Again his eye pin-pointed Tom King. Probably he would have called him up for judgment, then and there, but for one consideration. Tom really was the last fellow at Felgate to have played such a trick. Skip might have — he was ass enough for anything. But Tom, a steady-going, sensible fellow, captain of his form — it looked like it, yet it seemed unlikely to Charne. There was a pause.

'I shall report this outrage to Dr. Leicester,' said Mr. Kye. 'I came here at once to ascertain whether any junior boy was absent from roll-call.' And Kye rolled out of hall, still purple.

'Dismiss!' rapped Mr. Charne.

Warren and Ruggles followed Tom up to Study Four in the Fourth. Warren shut the door.

'You potty ass,' he breathed, 'why did you do it? What's old Kye ever done to you?'

'You awful fathead,' said Skip. 'Getting a beak on the beezzer with an orange. What's old Kye done?'

Tom did not answer. His two chums took





*'Mr. Charné wants you in his study, sir'*

it for granted that he had done it, he had been the only junior out of the House, and Kye had seen a junior running after getting the orange. They were not alone in their belief - everyone would think so - Charné, and the Head, and everybody. Certainly, he was in no danger. Percival Perkinson of the Fifth might be a mad ass, and undoubtedly was, but he was not the man to keep mum and let a younger fellow take his gruel. As soon as Tom was up before the Head, Perkinson would own up as a matter of course. And old Langdale would lose his only really reliable man in the Lan-ches-ter match.

'It's a Head's flogging!' muttered Warren. 'They'd sack a senior - you'll get a flogging.'

'Oh, you ass!' sighed Skip.

There was a tap at the door. Gudge, the house-porter, looked in.

'Master King here?' he asked. 'Mr. Charné wants you in his study, sir.'

'Right!' said Tom.

And leaving his chums with dismal faces, he left Study Four. But he did not head immediately for his form-master's study. In the passage he stopped, for a couple of minutes, to think. Then, quietly, he headed for Perkinson's study in the Fifth.

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PERCIVAL PERKINSON, in his study, was grinning. His pal, Purring, was not. Purring was looking worried. But Perk was quite elated.

'Safe as houses, old man,' said Perkinson. 'That old ass, Kye, thinks that he saw a junior! Ha, ha! That lets me out all right. I say, he might have thought of me first shot - I didn't think of it at the time, but since - well he might have - but now he fancies that it was a junior, I'm all right! What?'

'You born ass,' said Purring. 'They'll go over Felgate with a small comb to get the man. If I'd known what you were up to -'

'They won't get me, now old Kye thinks it was a junior!' grinned Perkinson. 'And they can't get a junior, as it wasn't one! Don't you worry. Hallo, come in,' he added, at a tap.

Tom King came in, and shut the door after him. The two seniors stared at him.

'Well, what do you want?' asked Perkinson.

Tom came straight to the point.

'I was late in,' he said. 'I got in over masters' gate. I saw you buzz that orange at Kye.'

Percival Perkinson nearly fell down! Purring whistled.

'That's why I've come here,' said Tom, quietly. 'It was a mad trick, Perkinson, but you always were a mad ass, at everything except Soccer —'

'That will do,' said Perkinson, recovering himself a little. 'Do you mean that Kye really saw a junior running, and that it was you?'

'Yes! I'm not going to give you away, of course. I don't want you to let old Langdale down on Saturday. I want you to promise me something.'

'That's cheek,' said Perkinson, frowning.

'Don't be a fool, old man,' urged Purring.

'Do you want to go up to the Head and be sacked the day before the Lanchester match? Let the kid speak.'

'Give it a name, you little smug.'

'You'll promise me not to own up, whatever happens. If you're sacked, old Langdale won't have an earthly on Saturday.'

Perkinson stared at him blankly. Then he laughed.

'You utter little idiot!' he said. 'Do you dream that I was thinking of owning up? Why should I, when nobody knows a thing?'

'Well, that's what I want,' said Tom. 'You promise?'

Perkinson chuckled.

'I promise,' he answered. 'If that's what you want, O. K. It's a promise.'

'Honour bright?'

'Honour bright!' said Perkinson, 'and now get out.'

Tom King got out. He left Perkinson laughing, and Purring looking puzzled. And Tom, breathing rather hard, went to his form-master's study, to face his question — to which, it appeared, he had nothing to say in reply.

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'Honour bright!' said Perkinson

STUDY Four, in the Fourth, was a somewhat dismal abode that evening. Prep was a mere pretence. Tom King, with a Head's flogging looming over him, did not feel like prep. Warren and Skip, deeply concerned for their chum, gave it even less attention.

'You ass!' said Dick, for the umpteenth time. 'Why did you do it?'

'Why?' bleated Skip.

To which Tom made no answer. He was keeping his own counsel, even with his nearest and dearest pals.

All Felgate knew now. King of the Fourth, questioned by Charne, had admitted that he had been late, that he had climbed in over masters' gate, that he had been on the spot, and that it was he whom Kye had seen run-



... kicked the winning goal ...

ning. That was all he admitted, but it was more than enough. He had nothing to say when Charne took him to the Head, and he received his sentence of a flogging after third school on Saturday. And he had nothing to say now.

But, as it happened, somebody else had.

The door of Study Four was suddenly hurled open, and a long-legged senior rushed in, with a red and excited face. Tom King hastily threw the door shut. He could guess why Perkinson of the Fifth had come.

'I've just heard!' gasped Perkinson, 'You potty young ass, have you let them think it was you?'

'They can think what they like,' said Tom. 'Is it a flogging?'

'Yes.'

'Well, you needn't worry, you little idiot! Decent of you not to give a man away, up before the Head, but of course you know that I can't leave you to it.'

'You can.'

'What? I'm going to the Head to own up, of course,' snorted Perkinson.

'You're not,' said Tom, quietly. 'You're not going to be sacked, Perkinson - you're going to play for Felgate. You don't matter a lot, but Felgate does. You've promised me -'

'I - I - I -' Perkinson seemed to stutter, 'I - I - that's rot! I can't leave it on you - you know that!'

'Honour bright!' said Tom. 'It's a promise, honour bright!'

Perkinson stared at him. He goggled at him. Warren and Skip listened in dumb-founded astonishment.

'You young ass!' gasped Perkinson, at last. 'I never knew you'd be up for it, when I made that promise —'

'I know that,' said Tom, smiling faintly.

'I - I - I - are you crackers, or what? You're up for a Head's flogging —'

'And you're up to play for Felgate!' said Tom.

They wrangled for a good five minutes. A promise was a promise: there was no getting out of that. Perk had to keep his word, if the junior held him to it, and the junior did. He argued: he called Tom various fancy names, he threatened to smack his head. Finally, he left the study, still bound by that promise. Then Warren and Skip weighed in.

'Tom, you ass —'

'You can't do it!'

'Oh, don't jaw,' said Tom. 'And mind, not a word outside this study.'

'Perk would own up like a shot if you let him —'

'That's why I made him promise.'

'You get a flogging —'

'And Perkinson gets goals! Now shut up, for goodness' sake.'

ON SATURDAY there were two events at Felgate School, one painful, the other glorious. The first was a flogging in hall, which left Tom King hardly able to feel interested even in the Lanchester match. The second was the Lanchester match itself, where Tom King, still wriggling rather painfully, stood with a crowd of other juniors to watch the First Eleven play a great game against odds. Even old Langdale himself did not excel Percival Perkinson of the Fifth. And when, after a ding-dong game, and a level score of one-all right up to the finish, Perkinson of the Fifth kicked the winning goal for Felgate, Tom forgot all about his twinges, and waved his hat and cheered as loudly as any Felgate man.