

Spot of Luck!



By
**Frank
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CHAPTER I

YOU ass!' said Dick Warren.
Tom King, captain of the Felgate Fourth, did not reply.

He had, in fact, nothing to say.

He was an ass, and he knew it! He had, at least, acted like an ass, on this occasion. Apuleius of old was not so thoroughly an ass as Tom King felt himself to be.

'You fathead!' went on Warren.

Again there was no reply. Silence gave consent, as it were. The captain of the Fourth admitted himself to be a fathead as well as an ass!

Skip Ruggles, whose plump form sprawled in the window-seat of Study Four, looked indignant. In his opinion Tom King was

neither an ass nor a fathead; but had, at long last, done the right thing. Skip's fat face had been quite merry and bright, till Dick Warren came tramping into the study looking red and wrathful and belligerent. The summer sunshine that streamed in at the study window was not brighter than Skip's face, till Warren came in.

'Look here, Warren—!' began Skip.

Dick Warren glanced round at him, almost ferociously.

They were great chums, in Study Four at Felgate. But nobody would have guessed it, from the look that Dick Warren bestowed on Stanley St. Leger Ruggles. Indeed he looked almost as if he could have eaten the fat Skip.

'You shut up, Skip!' he hooted.

'But look here —!' protested Skip.

'I said shut up!' roared Dick Warren. 'You've jawed Tom into this, with your bleating and blethering. Tom, you ass - Tom, you fathead - it won't do! I just couldn't believe my eyes when I saw Skip's name in the cricket list! The men won't stand it, see? You've got to scratch it out again.'

'Look here—!' came for the third time from Skip.

'If you go on bleating, I'll take my bat to you,' said Dick Warren. 'Can you play cricket? Do you know one end of a cricket bat from the other? Have you ever hit anything except a wicket? Could you catch a ball if it was handed to you on a plate? Shut up! Look here, Tom—'

'It's done now,' said Tom King, breaking silence at last.



'I'll take my bat to you!'

'The sooner it's undone the better. You've put in Skip to play Ringwood to-morrow. Can he bat?'

'No!'

'Can he bowl?'

'No.'

'Can he catch anything but the flu?'

'No.'

'Well, then...?'

'He's a pal,' said Tom, feebly.

'What's that got to do with cricket?'

No answer. There was no answer to be made. It had nothing to do with cricket. Indeed, now that it was brought home to him, Tom King couldn't quite understand how he had, in a moment of weakness, yielded to Skip's endless importunities, and told him that he could play. But he had! It was asinine - it was fatheaded - it was a failure in his duty as cricket captain, which was to win matches for Felgate, and how was a match to be won, with a passenger in the team, and so hopeless a passenger as Skip?

Skip, at games, was enough to make a cat laugh; enough, indeed, to send the animal into hysterics. But he was unaware of it. He fancied that he could play. All through the summer he bored and bothered his chum with requests to be given a chance. All Skip wanted was a chance in a match. Then, he had no doubt, fellows would see what a cricketer he was. All would be calm and bright! That was Skip's opinion - which he had entirely to himself. Somehow or other, Tom King had given in at last, he hardly knew how. It was indeed tough on poor old Skip to be shut out of games when he was so keen. That was not an adequate reason for playing the veriest rabbit at Felgate School. Tom knew that. But - he had done it! He could have

kicked himself for it. Still more willingly he could have kicked Skip. But to scratch him now was really impossible. What he had done he had done. And after all, cricket was a most uncertain game. They might beat Ringwood even with Skip in the team. Hope springs eternal in the human breast.

Dick Warren paused, like Brutus, for a reply. Like Brutus, he received none. So he repeated his question, crescendo.

‘I asked you what that’s got to do with cricket!’

‘Nothing,’ admitted Tom.

‘Then why have you done this?’ hooted Warren.

‘You’ve told me,’ answered Tom. ‘Because I’m an ass! Because I’m a fathead! Leave it at that.’

‘The men won’t stand it!’

‘They can turn me out if they like.’

‘Oh, don’t be a goat,’ snapped Warren. ‘Nobody wants to turn you out. But you can’t play that rabbit – that noodle – that barrel of stickers – that mountain of doughnuts – that barrage balloon—’

‘Look here—!’ roared Skip.

‘Take his name out of the list, Tom, before the fellows lynch you.’

‘I can’t.’

‘Do you mean that you won’t?’

‘Yes, I do mean that I won’t,’ said Tom, goaded. ‘I’m ready to resign, if the fellows want me to. But if I’m skipper, I play Skip, and that’s that. Go back to the other fellows and tell them they can have a new skipper as soon as they like. And now, give a chap a rest.’

Dick Warren gave him a look – the most unchummy look he had ever given his best chum. Then he stamped out of the study, and

closed the door after him with a bang that woke most of the echoes of Felgate.

Tom King was left with a clouded brow.

He was deeply worried. He had done that which he ought not to have done, and he was painfully aware of it. How he ever could have been such a soft ass as to tell Skip that he could play in the Ringwood match, was really a mystery to him. But – he had! He was not surprised that Warren was angry and excited about it. Every cricketing fellow in the Lower School would feel the same. Indeed Tom felt the same himself! But there it was! He almost hoped that the men would carry their indignation so far as to turn him out of the captaincy. He deserved it: and it was the only way out. He had to keep his word to Skip – if they let him!

Skip, from the window-seat, gave him sympathetic looks. He essayed to comfort him.

‘Tom, old chap—’

‘Oh, don’t jaw,’ said Tom, crossly.

‘It will be all right to-morrow, old fellow,’ said Skip, brightly, ‘wait till we’re playing Ringwood. Then it will be O. K.’

Tom stared at his fat chum.

‘Wait till I’m knocking them up!’ said Skip, confidently. ‘Wait till I’m giving the Ringwood men the leather-hunting of their lives! Put me in to open the innings—’

‘What?’

‘And then you’ll see!’ said Skip. ‘They’ll all jolly well see whether I can play cricket or not! What?’

Tom King did not answer. He seemed past words. He rose to his feet, stepped across to the window-seat, and grabbed Skip by the back of a fat neck. Skip gave a startled yell.

‘I say! What – oh!’



The fattest head at Felgate contacted hard oak

Bang!

The fattest head at Felgate established contact with hard oak. Skip yelled frantically.

Bang!

‘Ow! Leggo! Gone mad? Wow!’

Bang!

‘Yurrrrrroooooop!’

Then Tom King walked out of Study Four, and, like Warren, closed the door after him with unnecessary vigour. Skip sat up, dizzily, rubbing his fat head, and wondering what on earth had made his chum break out like that.

CHAPTER II

MR. CHARNE, master of the Felgate Fourth, stared.

He was surprised – indeed astonished – and he frowned, as he stared at the crowd round the fountain in the corner of the old Felgate quad.

Fourth-form fellows at Felgate were sometimes a little unruly, when the master’s eye was not upon them. Raggings were not uncommon phenomena. But this was the limit; this was far beyond the limit. Charne, taking a walk after class under the shady old oaks by the school wall, came suddenly on the scene, and stared. The juniors crowded round the old stone fountain were too excited and busily engaged to notice his approach. But Charne noticed them – with a glinting eye.

Had the victim of that ragging been a sneaking fellow like Sleake, or a bullying fellow like Bullinger, Charne would have disapproved, but he would not have been so surprised. But the victim was the fat and genial Ruggles – a fellow generally liked in his form; regarded unanimously as the biggest ass at Felgate or anywhere else, but liked just the same. Charne himself liked Ruggles, though Skip often made him feel that a schoolmaster’s life was scarce worth living. Everybody liked old Skip. So Charne really could hardly believe his eyes when he saw what was going on: Skip Ruggles, in the grasp of three or four of his form-fellows, having his fat head ducked in the fountain, six or seven other fellows looking on with evident approval.

Splash!

Skip’s head went in again, as Charne stared. Bubbles floated on the water as he gurgled and spluttered. He struggled and kicked. But he struggled and kicked in vain. Dick Warren had an iron grip on one fat arm. Parrott was gripping the other. Reece

had a grasp on a fat neck. Preece was holding on to Skip's jacket. In so many hands, Ruggles was powerless, and he had to take what was coming to him. Every fellow who was looking on was evidently prepared to take a hand in the proceedings if needed. Skip's popularity in his form seemed down to zero.

The fat face came out of the water, red as a beetroot, Skip with his mouth wide open, blowing like a whale.

'Woooooogh! Oooooogh! Ooooh!'

'Now, then—!' said Dick Warren.

'Oooogh! Leggo! Wooogh!' gurgled the unhappy Skip. 'Call yourself a pal! Goooooogh!'

Certainly Warren's actions, just then, could not have been described as 'pally'. But he was not, just then, feeling very pally.

'Will you chuck it?' he demanded.

'Urrrrgh! No!'

'You've pulled Tom's leg and made him make a fool of himself! You know that, you slug, don't you?'

'Urrrrgh! No.'

'Think you can play cricket?' hooted Reece.

'Wurrgh! Yes.'

'Oh, it's no good talking to him,' exclaimed Warren. 'Tom won't scratch him, and he's got to stand out. Will you stand out, Skip?'

'Gurrgh! Never.'

'Duck him again!'

'I say—Wooooooch!'

Splash!

The fat head went in again. Skip struggled and splashed. He was in the hands of the Amalekites, and there was no help for him. He was down to play Ringwood, which was too glorious a chance for Skip to part with it.

Tom King couldn't and wouldn't scratch him, he had to play unless he chose to stand out. The cricketing fellows were helping him to choose! They were using rather drastic methods, but so far without success. Skip might be a rabbit at games, but he had heaps of pluck, and he was obstinate as a mule. He wouldn't give in if they drowned him!

'Urrrrrghh!' Skip's head came up again, with a wild splutter. 'Wurrgh!'

'Now, then, you ass—'

'Now, then, you clown—'

'Will you chuck it?'

'Urrghh! Wurrghh! No!' gurgled Skip.

'In he goes again!' said Dick Warren.

'Sorry, old man, but we can't chuck away cricket matches just to see you play the goat with a bat. We'll keep this up as long as you like.'

'Burrrrrghh! I say—'

'Shove him in!'

'Boys!' The astonished Charne was striding to the spot. His voice was not loud, but it was deep. It startled the crowd round the fountain. They were there to duck Skip till he agreed to stand out of the junior eleven. In the deep interest and excitement of that important business, they had forgotten all about beaks. Charne's voice reminded them.

'Oh!' ejaculated Dick Warren.

'Ware beaks!' murmured Reece.

'Urrrrrghh!' spluttered Skip.

'BOYS!'

They dropped Skip, as if he had become suddenly red-hot. Stanley St. Leger Ruggles sprawled over the granite rim of the fountain, his upper half wallowing in water, his other half kicking the air. Warren and the rest faced round at Mr. Charne, their faces registering alarm and despondency. What they were



'Boys!' The astonished Charne was striding to the spot

doing was, in their own opinion, necessary; it was right in their own eyes. But they could hardly expect it to seem right in Charne's.

Charne's pin-point eyes glinted at them.

'Upon my word!' exclaimed the Fourth-form master. 'What does this mean? What are you doing, Warren?'

'Only - only - only ducking Ruggles, sir,' stammered Dick.

'Urrrggh!' Skip slithered down off the fountain's rim, and stood in a pool of water, drenched and dripping, his hair a wet mop, water running down his neck. He gasped for breath and blinked at Charne. 'It's all right, sir!'

'What?'

'Only a lark, sir!' gasped Skip. 'I - I don't mind, really.'

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Charne.

That was Skip all over. He wasn't going to get the fellows into a row with a beak, if he could help it.

Charne frowned portentously.

'Ruggles! Go into the house at once and change. Lose no time, or you may catch a cold.'

'Yes, sir! But it's all right—'

'Go!' thundered Mr. Charne, and Skip went. He cut off to the house, leaving a watery trail behind him. Charne frowned at a dozen dismayed juniors.

'Each of you will take a hundred lines of

Virgil,' he said. 'You will bring the lines to my study before lock-up. And if there should be any repetition of this horse-play, you will be detained in Extra School to-morrow.'

With that, Charne swept away.

He left the Fourth-form fellows gazing at one another. There was not likely to be any 'repetition'. A hundred lines of Virgil sufficed to keep them busy for a good while, and the menace of Extra School on the morrow was just terrifying. Extra on Wednesday meant standing out of the Ringwood match. Under that awful menace, not a finger was likely to be laid on Skip again.

'That tears it!' muttered Dick Warren.

'There's just a chance!' said Reece, hopefully. 'Ruggles may catch cold. Charne said so. If he does—'

'No such luck!' said Preece.

'If he's laid up in sanny—!' said Reece, who evidently had a hopeful and optimistic outlook.

Dick Warren shook his head sadly. Skip was the fellow to catch anything that was going, except a cricket ball, but this was too much to hope for. They drifted away disconsolately to the House to write their lines.

But that evening, many eyes were on Skip. If he had sneezed, just once, it would have been like tidings of great joy. But he did not gratify the cricketers by so much as a sniff.

CHAPTER III

'ME to bowl?'

Skip asked that question.

Tom King looked at him. How even Skip Ruggles could be such an ass was somewhat of a mystery. But in that line Skip had no limits.



'Ruggles! Go in at once and change'

It was a glorious summer's day – an ideal day for cricket. Skip's fat face was as bright as the sunshine. This was, he was convinced, his day. The looks of other fellows had no more effect on Skip than water on a duck. The cloud on his skipper's brow would, he was sure, soon be chased away. They had only to wait till Skip got going!

Ringwood had won the toss, and elected to take first knock. Whether Skip bowled worse than he batted, or batted worse than he bowled, was a moot question. He was, in everyone's opinion but his own, a born idiot at both. Tom King was less likely to trust the ball in Skip's fat hands, than in the grubby paw of the smallest fag in the Second Form. Tom did not answer Skip's question. He only looked at him.

‘ Brace the fellows up, you know, to see a wicket go down in the first over,’ said Skip.

Tom found his voice.

‘ You pernicious ass!’ he said.

‘ Eh?’

‘ You burbling bloater—’

‘ Look here—’

‘ You look here, Skip,’ said Tom. ‘ You’ve bamboozled me into playing you. I ought to be kicked. You ought to be kicked. We’re as good as licked before we start. If they walk all over us—’

‘ If!’ snorted Dick Warren, at his elbow. ‘ Precious little “ if ” about it.’

‘ If they walk all over us, Skip, I shall have to get out,’ said Tom. ‘ I couldn’t carry on, after letting the side down like that. Now look here, old chap, be a sport! I had a ten-bob note from my uncle this morning. Take it to the tuck-shop – and stay there!’

‘ Do, old chap!’ breathed Dick Warren.

At any other time, on any other occasion, the loan of a ten-shilling note, with all that it implied in the way of sticky things, would have persuaded Skip Ruggles to agree to anything short of homicide. But not on the day Skip was going to play for School! Now it passed him by like the idle wind which he regarded not.

‘ I asked you a question, Tom!’ said Skip, stiffly. ‘ Do I bowl the first over?’

Tom King breathed hard and deep.

‘ No!’ he said. ‘ You don’t bowl, Skip! You shut up, if you know what’s good for you. Come on, you men.’

Skip grunted.

‘ Well, where do I go in the field?’ he demanded.

‘ Anywhere you like.’

‘ What?’

‘ So long as you keep out of the way.’

Skip suppressed his feelings with difficulty. He rolled into the long field, where he proceeded to adorn the landscape rather like a barrage balloon. If, during the Ringwood innings, the ball came Skip’s way, he remained unaware of it till minutes too late. Nobody expected Skip to make a catch. Nobody expected him to return a ball in the required direction. The utmost anyone expected of Skip was that he might have sense enough to leave it alone. Felgate were, in fact, playing ten men against eleven; and all that Skip could do for his side was, as Tom had said, to keep out of the way.

Ringwood made sixty. When the Felgate men prepared to take their knock, Skip poked Tom King in the ribs.

‘ Where do I come in?’ he asked.

‘ Last man, fathead.’

‘ If you’d open the innings with me, it would give a fellow a chance,’ urged Skip. ‘ Be a sport, old fellow! Give a fellow a – wow! Keep that bat away, will you? Ow!’

Tom King went out with Dick Warren to open the innings, leaving Skip rubbing fat ribs where a bat had lunged. That had seemed, to Tom, the only adequate answer to Skip’s request.

By a coincidence, Felgate also had made sixty, by the time last man was called. Nobody expected Skip to make it sixty-one! Reece, at the other end, might have added runs; but Skip had the bowling, for the last ball of an over. With Skip at the batting end, last ball was going to be last over too, in the opinion of all but Skip. Skip’s happy idea was that he was going to knock that ball for three at least. Three would give him the bowling for the next over; after which, he could only

hope that Reece would be able to keep his sticks up while he, Skip, swiped threes and fours. As it happened, however, it was not necessary for Reece to keep his sticks up while Skip swiped threes and fours; for the last ball of that over ripped out Skip's middle stump, leaving his wicket with a toothless look. Skip stared at that wicket in surprise. This was not what he had expected. But it was what had happened, and Skip drifted sadly back to the pavilion with a big round nought to his credit.

'Cack-handed ass!' was Dick Warren's chummy greeting.

'You wait for the second knock!' said Skip.

'Fathead!'

Ringwood made fifty-five in their second innings. Skip distinguished himself by barging into Tom King, whose hand was up for an almost certain catch off Warren's bowling. The ball dropped dead. Tom picked it up, and with wonderful self-control refrained from braining Skip with it. But for Skip, Ringwood would have been all out for forty-five; as it was, they added ten more before finis. Felgate were left with fifty-six to get to win after tea.

They played hard in that innings. The batting was good. But so was the bowling; and the fielding was keen. Ringwood, in fact, were as good as Felgate, and they had no passenger to carry. Felgate had had luck, so far, in keeping level. They hoped that it would last, and for a time it looked like it. Wickets went down, but the runs went up; the score stood at fifty for the second innings with three wickets in hand. But one of the three was Skip, so they counted as two. Reece went out to join Preece.

'Last man in!' sighed Dick Warren. That was really what it amounted to.

'Look here—!' hissed Skip.

'Oh, shut up!'

'Only six wanted,' said Tom King. 'Reece is good, and Preece isn't bad. By gum, there it goes!'

They were running, and it was two. Three wanted to tie, four to win. Every man staring from the pavilion hoped that they would make it. Reece had the bowling, and he was a good man with his hands. Hopeful faces watched; only Skip's was clouded. If they made it, where was Skip's chance of redeeming, in his second knock, the unaccountable misfortune in his first? Skip was a loyal Felgater; but could he quite hope that Reece would make it?

Faces fell – all but Skip's – when the next ball came down. Reece's leg stump went west. Last man in was called.

Skip smiled.

Tom King caught him by the arm.

'For the love of Mike, old man, don't play the goat,' he implored, 'keep your sticks up, and give Preece a chance. Stonewall for all you're worth, and keep the game alive for Preece, see?'

'Who's Preece?' yapped Skip.

'Look here, you ass—'

'If I couldn't play his head off, I'd eat my bat.'

'You burbling cuckoo—!'

'Just you watch!' said Skip.

With a bright face he marched out, and grinned at Reece as he passed him coming in. He took his stand with cheery confidence. At last – at long last – Skip would show them.

Dick Warren shrugged his shoulders. Tom King suppressed a groan. He had done this –



Ripped out Skip's middle stump

he had played Skip; and by the luck of the game it was now Skip on whom all depended. Three to tie – four to win – and Skip was going to contribute a duck's egg, and the game was up. Not only the game, but Tom King's captaincy; for his mind was made up on that point; he was going to resign, if the game was lost by his fault, as it was going to be. There were a score of men in the Lower School who, in Skip's place, might very well have pulled the game out of the fire. But Skip Ruggles was not one of them. Skip's second knock was going to be like his first, and it was all over bar shouting. Tom King looked at him, standing at his wicket like a sack of coke, and gave up hope.

The ball came down, and Skip swiped. Skip was the man for swiping. The drawback

to Skip's style was that his bat was likely to cleave the empty air, a foot or two from the ball. If, by a happy chance, he hit the ball, it could only be to land it, a perfect sitter, in a fieldsman's ready hand. But even that was not likely.

Clack!

They all heard it. It could only have been a fluke, but there it was!

Tom King jumped.

'Oh!' he gasped. 'Look!'

There was plenty of force in Skip's swipe. He had a lot of weight to put behind it. The ball whizzed, high and fast. Skip blinked round. He knew that he had hit that ball, but he did not know where it was going. But it went! It went like a bullet, and no Ringwood fieldsman had an earthly. The men at

the pavilion stared. They blinked. Could they believe their eyes?

'Oh!' gasped Dick Warren.

'Oh!' stuttered Tom King.

They could not believe it. It was the wildest, maddest fluke, and they couldn't believe that it had happened.

But it had!

'It's a boundary!' gasped Tom King, dazedly. 'Of course, we're dreaming this - pinch me, somebody.'

'A-bib-bub-bob-boundary!' stuttered Dick Warren. 'Skip - a boundary! Oh, ye gods and little fishes!'

The next ball, of course, would have knocked Skip out. Everybody but Skip knew that. But there was going to be no next ball. For Skip Ruggles had scored the needed four, and the Ringwood match was won.

Skip beamed in Study Four that evening. Fellows who had sworn to massacre him after the match smacked him on the back instead. King and Warren were as chummy as chums could be.

'And after this,' said Skip, 'you'll play me in the Greyfriars match, what?'

'Ha, ha!' roared King and Warren.

Skip had made the winning hit. There was



There was plenty of force in Skip's swipe

no doubt about that. But, sad to relate, it was not only the first time that Skip Ruggles played for School. It was also the last! Nobody but Skip would ever have dreamed of a repeat of that amazing spot of luck.