

# FIGHT TO A FINISH

"TOM could do it!" said Skip.  
"He couldn't!" contradicted  
Reece.

"I tell you he could——"

"And I tell you he couldn't, and he wouldn't dare take it on."

"He jolly well could, and he jolly well would, and I'll jolly well put it up to him, and you'll see. And I'd jolly well back him ten to one!" said Skip, hotly.

"Done!" said Reece, almost before the words were out of the extensive mouth of Stanley St. Leger Ruggles.

There was a laugh in the Pound.

"In half-crowns," added Reece.

And there was a laugh again, at the expression on Skip Ruggles's fat face.

Skip hadn't expected to be taken up like that: he had spoken without thinking. It was not uncommon for Skip Ruggles to speak without thinking. In fact it was rather doubtful whether Skip ever did any thinking at all.

And it was like Reece to catch a fellow out, pinning him down on a thoughtless word.

They did not bet in the Felgate Fourth. Not only because it was against strict rules: but because it was not the thing. Reece was an exception. Reece would bet on anything, from a first-eleven match to a fag game, if he could find takers. And Reece, who was very keen and a little unscrupulous, liked to back "certs". This looked like a "cert" to Reece, who did not fancy for one moment that Tom King, of the Fourth, could box Selwyn, of the Shell. Skip's unlimited loyal faith in his chum gave Reece a chance, at which he jumped with both feet, as it were.

"I—I say," Skip stammered, "I didn't mean——"

"Backing out?" jeered Reece.

"Gas!" said Bullinger.

Skip crimsoned. He was not the fellow to back out, even if he had spoken unthinkingly, not expecting to be pounced on. He was not going to have his hot words labelled "gas".

"Done, if you like!" he said, defiantly.

"Okay!" said Reece. He took a little

book from his pocket, and made a note in it. "King meets Selwyn, with the gloves. You back him ten to one, in half-crowns. You'll owe me twenty-five bob when Selwyn knocks your pal into the middle of next week."

Skip Ruggles felt a slight sinking in his plump inside. Skip's pocket-money was five shillings a week. It never lasted a week: the claims of the tuck shop were too strong. If Reece won that bet, as he confidently expected to do, Skip's chums, King and Warren, would have to help him out: and there would be a period of dearth in Study Four as a result. Skip could have kicked himself. Still more gladly he could have kicked Reece. But he was for it, now. What he had said, he had said! And he retorted:

"You'll owe me half a crown, when Tom knocks Selwyn into a cocked hat."

"When!" grinned Reece.

"Yah!" snorted Skip. It was not an elegant rejoinder: but it was all that Skip could think of, at the moment. He rolled out of the Pound, leaving Reece and Bullinger and the other fellows laughing.

## II

"Strutting ass!" remarked Dick Warren.

Tom King smiled.

The chums of the Fourth were looking down from the window of Study Four, into the sunny quad. Plenty of Felgate fellows were to be seen there: but Dick Warren's eyes had fixed on one, with a glance of disfavour. That one was Selwyn, of the Shell. Selwyn was a rather big and burly fellow for a junior form. He was not exactly "strutting", as Warren described it: but as he walked with his hands in the pockets of his flannel bags, and an expression on his face of complete and absolute self-

satisfaction, it was easy to discern that whatever he may have lacked he did not lack a good opinion of himself. Still, a Shell man who had administered the K.O. to a Fifth-Form senior, with the gloves on in the gym, was entitled to a good opinion of himself: and Selwyn had recently performed that feat. Purring of the Fifth might be feeling a little disconcerted about it: but Eric Selwyn was feeling rather like Quintus Horatius Flaccus on the occasion when Q.H.F. was like to strike the stars with his exalted head!

"He can box!" said Tom, tolerantly. "Everybody thought it was cheek, when he took on Purring: but he gave him all he wanted, and a spot over."

"Who's Purring?" grunted Warren. "If it had been Perkinson, Selwyn would have perished in the first round. I shouldn't wonder if you could box his head off, Tom."

Tom King laughed.

"I'm not going to try," he answered. "Too big for me, and too long in the reach. No good asking for more than a fellow can digest."

"Oh! I - I say, Tom," came a squeak from the doorway. They looked round from the window, as Skip Ruggles rolled into Study Four. Skip's face was red, and his manner hesitating. Some trouble seemed to be on Skip's fat mind. He blinked almost stealthily at Tom.

"What's up, Skip?" asked King and Warren together.

"Oh, nothing!" stammered Skip, "I - I heard what you said, Tom, as I came in. I say, old chap, that's all rot, you know. You could box Selwyn all over the shop, and give him more than he gave Purring of the Fifth."

"Thanks," said Tom, laughing.

"You could, you know," urged Skip.



*"I-I said I'd back you ten to one and - it's in half-crowns"*

"Ain't you the best boxer in the Fourth? Bullinger can't stand up to you, and he's nearly as big as Selwyn. You have the gloves on with Selwyn, and you'll be all right."

"I'll watch it," said Tom.

"Look here, you can't let me down——"

"What does that mean, you fat ass, if it means anything?" inquired the captain of the Fourth, staring at his fat chum.

"Well, you see, - the - the fellows were talking in the Pound," stammered Skip; "Reece said nobody in the Fourth could stand up to that Shell chap, and I said you jolly well could, and - and - and I said I'd put it up to you, and - and if you don't take it on, it lets me down, and lets this study down——"

"Well, you priceless ass!" said Warren.

"You chattering chump!" said Tom King.

"Well, I like that!" said Skip, indignantly. "A fellow stands up for a pal, and all you can do is to call a fellow names. But - but that isn't all——"

"What's the rest, fathead?"

"I - I said I'd back you ten to one, and Reece pinned me down on it, and - and it's in half-crowns," stammered Skip. "You've got to take it on, Tom, after what I said - and you've jolly well got to beat Selwyn, too, or where's the twenty-five bob to come from?"

King and Warren gazed at Stanley St. Leger Ruggles. They gazed at him in silence for some moments. Skip, of course, could always be relied upon to do anything idiotic, if there was anything idiotic to be done. That was Skip's line of country. But this time he had touched the limit. Not only had he

landed Tom King with a task which, in all probability, he could not perform: but he had staked on it a sum beyond the financial resources of the whole study.

"Well!" said Tom, at last, with a deep breath.

"Well!" said Dick Warren.

"I – I say, don't you get shirty, you know," pleaded Skip. "I wasn't going to have Reece making out that this study couldn't beat any man in the Shell——"

"This study doesn't bet," snapped Tom. "You've let that tick Reece wangle you into laying money on a boxing match. You ought to be jolly well kicked——"

"Kick him!" suggested Warren.

"Good!" said Tom. "Let's!"

Stanley St. Leger Ruggles revolved on his axis, with all the speed of which his plump person was capable, and headed for the doorway. He travelled through that doorway at almost supersonic speed, assisted by two feet that landed on him at the same moment. There was a heavy bump in the passage, and a loud yell. Then the door banged after him.

Tom King and Dick Warren looked at one another.

"What are you going to do, Tom?" asked Warren.

Tom King uttered a sound resembling a snort.

"Do?" he repeated, "I shall have to take it on, after that silly ass blowing off his mouth in the Pound. Can't have that cad Reece crowing over this study. But——"

"You'll win!" said Warren, hopefully.

"I'll try!" said Tom.

And that was that!

Selwyn laughed.

That was how he accepted the challenge from the Fourth.

Of course, he accepted it. Having touched the stars with his exalted head by K.O.-ing a Fifth-Form man, Selwyn had no objection to adding to his laurels by giving the champion fighting-man of the Fourth the mixture as before, so to speak. He was perhaps a little puffed up by his success in the boxing line, and a little disposed to regard himself as monarch of all he surveyed within the walls of the gym. His manner was ironically amused when he fixed up the details with Dick Warren: and Warren could only hope that pride would go before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall!

The Felgate Fourth buzzed with it. It was the one topic in the Pound, in the passages, and in the quad.

"Tom King——"

"And Selwyn——"

"Selwyn'll slaughter him!"

"I don't know – Tom's tough——"

"Not tough enough for that lout."

"We'll all be there——"

"To carry him home!" said Reece.

"Oh, shut up, Reece."

Every man in the Fourth, excepting Reece, hoped that Tom King would pull it off. Even Preece and Bullinger, who were generally pally with Reece, parted with him on this point. But they were all very dubious. It was in fact all hope and little expectation. It would be a glorious victory for the Fourth if it came off. But – it wouldn't! Only Skip was absolutely certain about it. Tom having consented to take it on, Skip regarded the matter as settled, and Reece's half-crown as good as in his pocket. Perhaps his fat chum's un-



*The Felgate Fourth buzzed with it. "Selwyn - Tom King - Selwyn'll slaughter him!"*

doubting faith encouraged Tom. Skip was prepared to say "I told you so" as soon as the contest was over. But as Skip knew exactly as much about boxing as he knew about cricket and football, which was precisely nil, his opinion did not carry much weight.

Tom himself was taking it very seriously. The boxing match was fixed for Wednesday afternoon, which was a half-holiday at Felgate. It was to take place in the gym, and the gym was sure to be crowded for the occasion - with all the Fourth, all the Shell, a good sprinkling of seniors, and probably a horde of fags. Perkinson of the Fifth, a great games-man, had consented to act as referee. Tom had a couple of days to prepare, as it was on Monday that Skip's big mouth had landed him in it.

He made the best use of his time - he punched the ball, he boxed with Warren, with Bullinger, and others in turn: only careful not to over-do it and get stale. Tom King was always fit: and on Wednesday he was in the pink.

But he was not over-confident. Selwyn of the Shell was more than a year older: bigger and heavier: and had not Selwyn knocked out Purring of the Fifth? Tom could only make up his mind that he was going to do his best: that he would stand up to it so long as he could stand at all, and fight it out to a finish whatever the finish might be.

"You'll win, Tom!" said Skip, when, the great occasion having come, he went into the gym with his chums. "If I know anything about boxing, you'll win."

"Fathead!" was Tom's ungrateful reply. All that Skip knew about boxing would have gone into a nutshell, leaving ample room for the nut: a circumstance of which Tom was aware, if Skip was not.

"Look here!" bleated Skip.

"Oh, dry up!"

Skip dried up indignantly.

But his fat face wore a cheery grin as he joined the mob round the ring. Tom King "peeled" well: he looked a sturdy figure, sturdy and fit, cool and serious. But Selwyn seemed to tower, with his extra inches: there was a smile on his face, and he winked at his friends as he stepped into the ring. He was going to polish off this cheeky Fourth-Former, probably in one round, at any rate in two, three at the most: and perhaps he forgot that "swank" was not an asset.

The boxers touched gloves, and Perkinson called time. And then the hopes of the Fourth went down to zero, and even Skip's fat face grew as long as it was broad, as Selwyn came in with right and left, and Tom King stumbled under a slogging attack, and went down, and stayed down, and Perkinson of the Fifth began to count.

"One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven! Eight!—"

#### IV

"Nine!"

But Tom was on his feet again.

He hardly knew how he got on them. But he did. And he stalled off Selwyn till the welcome call of time gave him sorely-needed relief.

Dick Warren made a knee for him in his corner. Warren tried not to look anxious. He gently sponged Tom's heated face. Selwyn lounged, and smiled

at his grinning friends round the ring. This was easy work — hardly worth a fellow's while! Selwyn made the fatal mistake of counting his chickens before they were quite hatched.

In the second round, he repeated his tactics: rushing, slogging, overwhelming with size and weight. But this time it did not pay off. A nimble junior side-stepped the rush, almost danced round the big Shell fellow, and landed a right like a hammer under Selwyn's ear, followed up by a left to the jaw. Selwyn tottered, sawing the air with his gloves, and Tom King came at him with left and right, hitting hard and hitting often. There was a murmur, growing to a roar, in the Felgate gym, as the Shell fellow was driven round the ring, hardly able to stop one of the vigorous jolts that landed hard and fast. This time it was Selwyn who was glad to hear the call of time.

Skip chuckled.

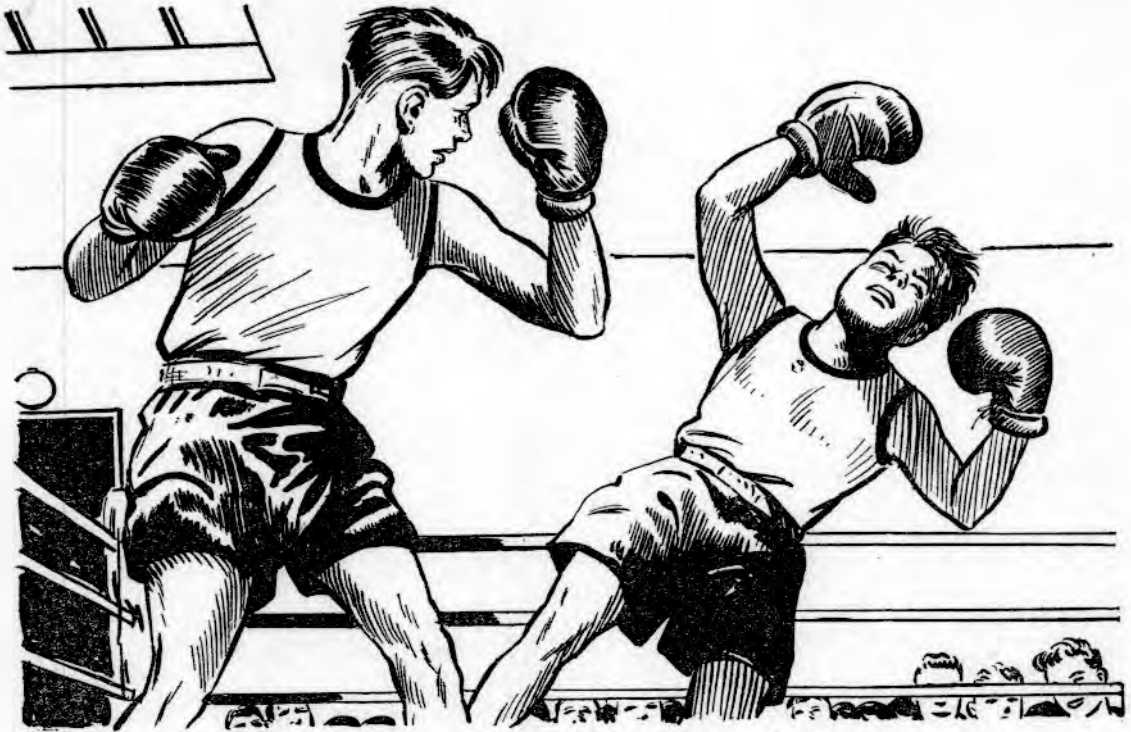
"Good old Tom! What did I tell you fellows?"

"Ass!" said Reece, in his fat ear. "They haven't started yet."

"Fat lot you know about it!" retorted Skip.

But Reece certainly knew more about it than Skip did. That hard-hitting round had told on Selwyn, and he showed signs of wear and tear when he came up for the third. But he came up with determination, and much more cautiously than before: he gave Tom no more such chances. It was borne in upon his mind that this was not a walk-over, and that he had to go all out if Tom King of the Fourth was to go the way of Purring of the Fifth.

There was cautious sparring on both sides in that round, and in the next. Then the fireworks recommenced.



*Selwyn tottered, sawing the air with his gloves*

Twice, thrice, Tom's gloved fist rapped, and then Selwyn came through with a right to the chin, with all his weight behind it, that almost lifted the Fourth-Former off his feet. Tom King landed on his back, with the gym and a sea of faces swimming round him.

"Oh!" gasped Skip. Reece grinned.

Tom did not even know, for a moment or two, that Perkinson was counting. But the word "seven" came to his dizzy ears. "Eight" followed it. But this time there was no "nine": for Tom, with an effort of which he hardly believed himself capable, leaped to his feet. That sudden recovery took the whole crowd by surprise—including Selwyn. Selwyn was in fact smiling down at a defeated adversary, when that defeated adversary came to sudden and vigorous life and delivered a jolt to the jaw almost before Selwyn knew

that he was perpendicular. The Shell fellow went over as if a cannon-ball had hit him.

"Oh!" gasped Skip, again. "What did I tell——"

"Shut up!" hissed Reece. Reece was not feeling quite so assured now.

Only the call of time saved Selwyn. In the sixth, he was looking distinctly groggy. Tom was feeling rather as if he had been under a lorry, or through a mangle. But he was game: steady on his feet, clear in his eye, his wind sound as a bell. They circled and circled, looking for openings, till Perkinson called time: both of them glad of the brief rest. But in the seventh round, Tom was fresh and springy, and Selwyn had evidently slowed down. His friends round the ring were no longer grinning. That jolt on the jaw had unsteadied him: his punches were wild, and he was none too

certain on his pins. And when Tom King, putting in his last ounce, came in with close and heavy hitting, Selwyn's defence seemed nowhere, and he rocked and rocked, and finally went down like a sack. And stayed down. Perkinson counted ten; but he could have counted twenty.

## V

Afterwards, in Study Four, Tom King sat in the study armchair, and rested—he needed a rest. How many aches and pains he had he could not have computed without going into high figures. He felt as if there was hardly a spot of him where Selwyn's jolts hadn't landed. Still, he had beaten Selwyn. That superior youth was no longer touching the stars with his exalted head; and it was a great victory for the Fourth.

"How are you feeling, old chap?" asked Dick Warren.

"Like a washed-out dish clout!" answered Tom.

Warren grinned.

"That ass Skip!" added Tom.

That ass Skip came dancing into the study. Skip's fat face was jubilant. Skip had been right when everyone else had been wrong. The only fellow at Felgate who did not know a single thing about boxing had predicted, accurately, the result of that boxing match. And he had won his bet with Reece, who was reputed never to lose a bet. Skip was feeling quite on top of the world.

"Look!" chirruped Skip.

He held up a half-crown in fat fingers.

"Did Reece want to pay up?" grinned Skip. "Did he look shirty? Did he scowl? Did he bank on collecting twenty-five bob from this study? Ha, ha! I knew it was all right! I told you so! And here's his half-crown, and we'll jolly well have something special for tea, and——"

Tom King and Dick Warren exchanged a glance. That matter was already decided. They did not bet in Study Four. Tom was disinclined to leave the armchair, at the moment; but Dick Warren grasped a fat arm.

"Come on, Skip," he said.

"Eh! What—where——?"

Warren, without wasting time in words, led him out of the study, down the passage, and down the stairs. Skip went protesting; but he went: there was no arguing with a grip of iron on a fat arm. They stopped at the School Hospital Box.

"Drop it in," said Warren.

"Look here——"

"Unless you want me to twist your fat fin—like that——!"

"Yaroooh!"

The half-crown clinked into the box.



*"Drop it in," said Warren*