

**FRANK
RICHARDS**

NOT A SUCCESS



"SO I don't play tomorrow?" asked Reece.

Tom King shook his head.

"No!" he answered, concisely.

Reece was standing just within the doorway of Study Four, staring at Tom King and Dick Warren, his face dark with angry resentment.

Tom, at the study table, had a football list before him, from which the name of Edgar Reece had been pencilled out. Warren, standing beside his chum, had an alert eye on Reece, who looked as if he could hardly keep his hands off the junior football captain. Skip Ruggles, his fat form extended in the window-seat, was concentrated on a packet of toffee.

"And why?" asked Reece, breathing hard, but keeping his temper in check.

"You know why," answered Tom

King. "You're off your form. You're no good, if you want it plain. Keep yourself fit, if you want to play Soccer for Felgata."

"I'm fit enough."

"You conked out in games practice this afternoon. You hadn't an ounce of wind. And think I don't know why?" added Tom, scornfully. "You were out of bounds after lock-ups last night. If Charne knew, you'd go up to the Head——"

"No business of yours."

"Not at all, if you're not in the eleven. You can play the giddy goat, and smoke cigarettes till you're sick, if you're fool enough. But we don't want a passenger in the team when we play Carcroft tomorrow. You'd be no more good than Skip here——"

"Oh! I say!" came a bleat from Skip.

"Less!" said Dick Warren. "Skip at least keeps himself as fit as a porpoise can be expected to keep——"

"Look here——!" hooted Skip.

"Nothing doing, Reece!" said Tom King, tersely. "If you want to play Soccer, you can't play the goat. One or the other - not both! Shut the door after you."

"I was a bit short-winded today. I shall be all right tomorrow."

"Perhaps!" said Tom. "But we're not taking chances in a School match. Nuff said - you're out."

Reece clenched his hands, hard. His temper, never very reliable, was near boiling-point.

"You've been wanting a chance to chuck me," he muttered. "Now you've found one - you rotter!"

"That will do! Get out."



"You've been wanting a chance to chuck me,"
Reece muttered

At that point, Reece's temper boiled over. He made a rush across the study at Tom King, who had dropped his eyes to the football list. But Warren was alert and ready. He stepped between, and Reece cannoned into him. The next moment they were punching.

"Oh, crickey!" ejaculated Skip. He sat up and stared, for the moment forgetful even of toffee.

Tom King jumped up, his eyes ablaze. "Outside!" he snapped.

He added his grasp to Warren's, and Reece went whirling to the doorway. It was quite a mix-up, for a few minutes. Three whirling figures emerged into the passage, where there was a final whirl. Then two went back, rather breathlessly, into Study Four, and the door was slammed on Edgar Reece, sprawling on his back on old oak planks, gasping for breath.

He picked himself up at last, panting. He made one step towards the closed door. But prudence prevailed, and he turned away. Then his eyes fell on an object lying in the passage. It was a handkerchief, which had evidently fallen from a pocket in the struggle, unnoticed by the owner. The initials "T.K." in the corner told who the owner was. Reece, scowling, kicked it along the passage, as he departed; kicked it round a corner, and left it there.

II

"Oh!" gasped Mr. Charne.

"Oh!" gasped Skip, like an echo.

It was Skip, all over.

On Wednesday afternoon, most Felgate juniors were thinking chiefly about the Cartcroft match. Tom King and Dick Warren, Bullinger and Parrott and

Carton, and the rest of the team, naturally thought of nothing else. But almost every fellow in the Lower School was keen to see them send Carcroft bootless home. Skip Ruggles, too, was thinking about it: but, at the moment, he was more interested in bananas. Skip, provided with a bunch of that succulent fruit, was leaning his fat person on one of the old Felgate oaks, slowly but surely travelling through one banana after another. It was exactly like Skip Ruggles to throw away a banana skin without taking note where it fell.

He did not notice that one of those extremely slippery skins lay in the middle of the path under the oaks. Neither did Mr. Charne, the master of the Fourth, notice it - till he stepped on it! Then he did!

Charne was taking his usual post-prandial walk. Charne's habits were regular as clockwork. Fellows could have set their watches by him. After lunch in Common Room he walked for precisely half an hour. Then he retired to his study. Skip was aware of his form-master's manners and customs: he was also aware that Charne's favourite grind was the path under the oaks. But he was not thinking about Charne - till it happened. Then he gasped, and gazed with horror at what he saw - a portly form-master suddenly transformed into a sort of imitation of a catherine-wheel!

Unnoticing, unsuspecting, Charne stepped on that banana skin. What happened next he hardly knew. It seemed to him that the solid globe had abruptly slid away from under his feet. Over went Charne, backwards, and the horrified Skip had a startling view of portly legs flourishing in the air, over a billowing gown.



Charne stared at the petrified Skip

Charne sat up.

For the moment he was quite bewildered. He gasped for breath. He stared at the petrified Skip. He stared round him. Then he saw the banana skin: which, of course, connected up at once, in his mind, with the bananas in Skip's fat hand. He rose to his feet, with an expression on his face that Rhadamanthus himself could never have equalled.

"Ruggles!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"You thoughtless, careless, stupid - incredibly stupid - boy! You threw a banana skin down in the path! I have fallen over it. Go to my study. Wait there till I come in!"

Charne did not add what was to

happen when he came in! He left Skip to guess that—which he did easily enough. Charne resumed his walk, still in a gasping state. Skip, in the lowest of spirits, started for the House.

In the quad he encountered Tom King and Dick Warren, who stared at his woebegone visage.

"What's up?" they asked simultaneously.

Skip explained, dolorously.

"Oh, you ass!" said Tom.

"Oh, you clown!" said Warren.

"I'm for it!" groaned Skip. "I've got to wait in Charne's study—for him to come in and give me six! Oh, lor'!"

"Don't miss the match," said Tom.

"Carcroft will be here soon."

"Oh, blow the match!" mumbled Skip, and he rolled dismally on. Just then Skip was less interested in football than in what he was to receive from Charne.

As he turned the corner into the

study passage, a junior came out of that passage at a run. There was a bump as they met at the corner. Skip staggered, and Reece gave him a glare.

"You clumsy ass!" he ejaculated.

"Look here——!" bleated Skip.

But Reece was gone.

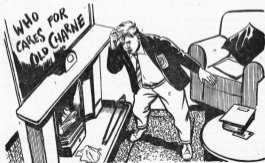
Really, it was not Skip's fault for once. Reece, turning the corner suddenly at a run, had done it. But it was the fat Skip who was left breathless from the collision, and for some minutes he remained where he was, recovering his wind. Then, slowly and sadly, he resumed his way to Mr. Charne's study.

III

Skip jumped.

Really, he could hardly believe what he saw in Charne's study. But he had to believe it: for there it was, staring him in the face.

There was a looking-glass over the mantelpiece. Usually it was polished



Then he noticed an oily rag lying in the fender

clean. Now it was not as usual. Across that glass, daubed in ink in large capital letters, was a startling inscription:

"WHO CARES FOR OLD CHARNE?"

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Skip.

He stared at it. He blinked at it. Who could have had the nerve to do this, he could not imagine. Probably there were fellows in Charne's form who would have liked to "rag" Charne. Few, if any, ever ventured to do so. But some fellow, evidently, had ventured now: while Charne was out on his accustomed grind. That impudent inscription was to meet his eyes when he came in. Charne would go right off at the deep end when he saw it. He would be after the author of it like a tiger. If he found the fellow out, that fellow would go up to the Head—that was certain. Skip charitably hoped that Charne wouldn't find him out, whoever he was.

Then he noticed an inky rag lying in the fender.

It was a crumpled handkerchief, soaked. Obviously it had been dipped in Charne's inkpot to trace those letters on the glass. Apparently the unknown ragger had dropped it, and cut out of the study without noticing that he had left it behind.

"The silly ass!" breathed Skip. "What a fathead! Charne might spot him from that hanky."

He picked it up. Hankies were marked. It was not a case of "might". That inky rag was an infallible clue. It could not fail to lead Charne directly to the reckless young rascal who had daubed his glass. The fellow might as well have left his signature. That fellow, whoever he was, could not of course have foreseen that Stanley St. Leger

Ruggles would be sent to the study to wait there for Charne. But it was, Skip reflected, a bit of luck for him. That spot of evidence was not going to remain for Charne to see.

Then Skip jumped again—or rather, he bounded.

"Tom!" he gasped.

He gazed at that inky rag! There in the corner of it, inky but unmistakable, were the initials "T.K." It was Tom King's. The mad ass who had daubed that insulting message on the glass for Charne was his own chum, Tom King, captain of the Fourth!

"Tom!" stuttered Skip. "Tom! Oh, the fathead—the ass! Ragging Charne, and leaving his hanky behind to tell him who did it! Fat lot of Soccer he would play this afternoon if Charne came in and found it!"

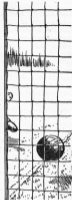
It was appalling to think of! Tom King, instead of leading the Felgate junior team into the field, would be up before the Head for this mad prank on his form master.

Skip Ruggles had come slowly and sadly to Charne's study. But he was glad now that he had come. Even "six" from Charne was better than old Tom going up to the Head, and the Carcroft match as good as chucked away. Skip jammed that inky handkerchief deep into his pocket.

Then he looked round for a duster, and wiped the looking-glass. He wiped hard and fast, till he was red and breathless, and every speck of ink had disappeared. The exertion left him winded: but there was nothing for Charne to see: only Skip was gasping, with scarcely breath enough left to squeak when Charne, at last, did come in, and a cane contacted the plumpest trousers in the Fourth Form at Felgate.



Tom King's shot took the goalie by surprise.



might have had the pleasure, if so disposed, of watching a really good game. But it did not rejoice his heart when Tom King put the leather in at the visitors' goal: nor when Dick Warren saved shot after shot from Harry Compton, who had come over in his shooting-boots, but found the home custodian just a little too alert for him. Other fellows yelled, and waved their hats: Reece bit his lips. He had only one eye on the game - the other on the watch for Charne.

But he never saw Charne. He saw Skip Ruggles arrive, rather late, with a pained expression on his plump face: and, had he been interested in Skip, might have noted that he wriggled considerably as he stood watching the game. But he was not interested in Skip.

Why didn't Charne show up? He must have gone to his study - he must have seen what was daubed on his glass - he must have picked up King's hanky: he must know, or at least believe that he knew, who had done it: and he was not the man to let a football match stand in the way of the out-pouring of the vials of wrath. But, whatever the reason, nothing was seen of Charne: and when the first half ended with Felgate one up, Reece gave up hope, and slouched away to his study, there to console himself with cigarettes for the failure of his foolproof scheme.

So he missed a second half that was quite thrilling, when Compton of Carcroft, at last, got through Dick Warren's defence and equalised; and then another good Carcroft man, Vane-

Carter, plumped the leather in; and then Bullinger got through, making the score once more equal; and finally Tom King, with a wonderful long shot, took the visitors' goalie by surprise and landed the ball in the net, just as Perkinson was going to blow. But nobody missed Reece, scowling over his cigarettes in his study while the Felgate crowd roared and cheered.

V

"You silly ass, Tom."

"Eh?"

"Fathead!"

"What?"

Tom King and Dick Warren, in Study Four, stared at their plump chum. They were in great spirits after that great game. Carcroft had, as they had hoped, gone bootless home. Tom had kicked the winning goal. So when Skip Ruggles rolled into the study and immediately proceeded to address extremely derogatory remarks to the captain of the Fourth, they really did not know what to make of it.

"You fat ass!" said Tom. "You fat, footling ass——"

Skip laughed, derisively.

"Me an ass!" he said. "I like that! What price you? If I hadn't found your hanky in Charne's study, where would you be? Where would the Carcroft match be? You'd be up to the Head, and the game a goner! Me an ass! Why, of all the asses that ever assed about, you're the limit, you are! Playing mad tricks on Charne, just before a Soccer match, and dropping your hanky in his study for him to find—oh, you make me tired."

This was so much Greek to Skip's chums.

"You burbling blitherer, what do you

mean, if you mean anything?" asked Tom. "I lost a hanky yesterday, and never found it, but I never dropped it in Charne's study——"

"Look at it, then!" said Skip. And from his pocket he jerked out a hanky black with dried ink.

King and Warren looked at it.

"In Charne's fender," said Skip, "and 'Who Cares for old Charne' inked on his looking-glass with that very hanky. Lucky Charne sent me to his study." Skip gave a reminiscent wriggle! "I can jolly well tell you I bagged that hanky jolly quick, and wiped off what you'd daubed on his glass—and where would you be if I hadn't? Me an ass! Ha, ha!"

It was some minutes before King and Warren were able to extract from Skip what he meant. It was much longer before Tom was able to make Skip comprehend that he, Tom, hadn't been in Charne's study at all. When Skip, at long last, did comprehend that, he was quite aghast. Charne could hardly have believed Tom innocent, in the face of the evidence: but Skip, of course, did, when his fat brain finally grasped it.

"Some awful rotter, to land you in a row with Charne, then!" gasped Skip.

"Did you see anybody around Charne's study?"

"Only Reece——"

"Reece!" yelled King and Warren together.

"He bumped into me at the corner of the passage when I was going there. He was running—I don't know why—I say, where are you going?"

King and Warren did not stop to explain where they were going. But when, a minute later, sounds of deep anguish were heard from a study farther up the passage, Skip was able to guess that they had gone to call on Reece.