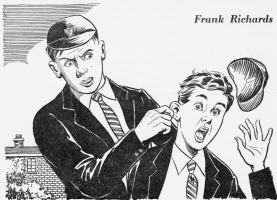


JUST LIKE PERKINSON!

Frank Richards



"I'M going to fight him!" said Dick Warren.

That, judging by Warren's expression as he said it, was that!

His chums, in Study Four, regarded him with dismay.

"You mustn't!" said Tom King.

"You can't!" said Skip Ruggles.

"I'm going to!"

"But——!" said Tom and Skip together.

"Think I'm going to have my ear pulled by a Fifth-form lout?" Warren breathed red-hot wrath.

His ear was almost as red-hot as his wrath. It was quite a startling crimson. A freshly-boiled beetroot had simply nothing on that ear! It glowed. It almost blazed. Obviously, that ear had been handled with uncommon vigour.

"Old Perkinson isn't a lout!" said Tom, mildly. "He's a good chap in his own way. I expect he was in one of his tempers——"

"Shouldn't wonder if his beak had been ragging him in form," said Skip. "He's always in a row with old Kye."

"His tempers don't matter to me, or

his rows with Kye either. He's not going to lug at a fellow's ear without p up his hands."

"You did barge into him——!" said Skip.

"Is Perkinson a Great Big Panjandrum who mustn't be barged if he gets into a fellow's way?" hooted Warren.

"Well, no!" said Tom. "But——"

"Perhaps he'll learn to keep his temper, if he has a fight on his hands when he lets it rip. Are you going along to his study to fix it up, Tom, or aren't you?"

Tom King did not immediately reply.

He sympathized with his chum. He shared his indignation. Ears were not pulled at Felgate: especially ears belonging to Study Four. And, from its look, Warren's appeared to have had not a common-or-garden pull, so to speak, but a really tremendous tug. It was the limit, and a little over. Perkinson of the Fifth was quite a good fellow in the main: indeed it was said in his form that he was such an ass that you couldn't help liking him. His incessant spots of trouble with his form-master, Mr. Kye, were a standing joke at Felgate. He was greatly admired for his prowess on the football field: and his boxing was as good as his Soccer. But he had a hot, quick, and extremely uncertain temper. He was far, very far, from being so good in class as he was on the football field or in the gym. After Kye's sarcastic tongue had lashed him for a "howler" in form, Perk was hardly safe to approach till he had had time to simmer down. Tom had no doubt that Perkinson had come away from Kye in a boiling temper, when Dick Warren had crashed into him, running out of the changing-room.

That, of course, was no reason for

pulling Dick's unfortunate ear – especially such a pull! Perk, already boiling, had just let his temper rip, as he too often did.

Had the offender been in the Fourth, or in the Shell, Tom would have backed up his chum heartily in calling him to account. But a Fifth-form senior was a very different proposition. The bare idea of a Fourth-form junior facing up to the well-known "Perkinson punch" was ludicrous. One mighty swipe from Perk, and the junior would be nowhere. Dick Warren was sturdy and strong, and he was a good man with his hands: but he just hadn't an earthly.

"Well?" rapped Warren, as Tom did not speak.

"My dear chap——!" began Tom. Warren interrupted him.

"If that means that you don't want to be my second, I'll ask Bullinger. Yes or no?"

"Oh, don't be an ass, old fellow," said Tom. "Look here, you couldn't stand up to Perkinson for half a round, and what's the use of biting off more than you can chew? You're wild now – but when you're cool——"

"I'm going to whether I can or not. I'll get in a few before he KO's me, at any rate. Will you fix it up or not?"

"But – you see——" hesitated Tom.

"That's enough."

Warren turned to walk out of the study. Undoubtedly he was, as Tom had said, "wild", just then. His ear was burning. It had a pain in it. But the indignity was worse than the pain. Perkinson of the Fifth, great man as he fancied himself, was going to learn that that particular ear couldn't be lugged at with impunity. Dick Warren hardly cared whether he was licked or not, so long as he got in a few good ones. He



"You're an ass, old chap," said Skip. Perkinson could whip you blindfolded."

was going to give Percival Perkinson all he could, whatever the outcome.

"Hold on," exclaimed Tom, hastily. "If you're set on it——"

"Are you going to Perkinson or not?" snapped Warren. "After tea, in the gym: with or without gloves - I don't care which. Are you going?"

"Yes," sighed Tom. "I'll go."

"Get a move on, then, and not so much palaver."

Slowly, but inevitably, the captain of the Fourth got a move on. Skip shook a fat head, as Tom left the study. Warren rubbed his ear.

"You're an ass, old chap," said Skip. "Perkinson could whip you blindfolded, and with one hand tied. He could whip two of you. Or three——"

"Do you want the inkpot chucked at your head, Ruggles?"

"Eh? No? Wharrer you mean?"

"Shut up, or you'll get it."

Skip blinked indignantly. However, he decided to shut up. There was silence in Study Four as Dick Warren continued to caress that burning ear.

II

Voices were audible in Perkinson's study, in the Fifth, as Tom King approached the door of that apartment. One had a murmuring soothing note: that would be Purrings's. The other was loud and angry: that was Perkinson's. Perk, apparently, was still in a temper.

"The old ass! A Georgic! Do you hear, Purrings? A Georgic! But I'll make him sit up somehow! That old ass Kye——"

Every word came to Tom in the passage. It was just like Perk. Anyone might have passed his study and heard him - a prefect, even a beak! Perk, when his nasty temper was up, did not care. Probably he would have been caused to care very considerably, if Mr. Kye had been in the offing! Luckily, his angry voice fell only on a junior's ears in the passage.

"Kye's down on me!" went on that loud and angry voice. "Isn't he always down on me? But giving a fellow a Georgic! Why, there's hundreds and hundreds of lines in a Georgic! The old ass! The old goat! Well, I've got to do a Georgic for him, but I'll make him sorry by the time he gets it——"

"Put a sock in it, old chap——"

"I jolly well know how, too!" Perkinson, so far from putting a sock in it, barked on more loudly than ever. "You know that notebook of his? Remember he nearly had a fit when it was missing once? Suppose he couldn't find it?"

Suppose a fellow shoved it where he couldn't think of looking for it? What?"

"Look here, Perk——"

"He can jolly well hunt for it while I'm writing that Georgic for him, and we'll both be busy! What? Ha, ha!" Perkinson laughed: one of those sardonic laughs. Evidently he was very much incensed with Mr. Kye.

Knock!

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Purrings. "If anybody's heard you——"

"Only a fag!" snapped Perkinson, as the door opened, and revealed Tom King of the Fourth. He gave Tom a glare. "What do you want? What the dickens do you mean by butting into my study? Get out."

"It's about Warren——!" said Tom.

"Eh? Who's Warren?"

"You pulled his ear, outside the changing-room——"

"Did I? Oh! Yes - I remember the young ass barging into me, and I pulled his ear! What about it?"

Evidently, to Perkinson of the Fifth, what was almost a tragedy to Study Four, was a trifle light as air. Actually he had forgotten that angry ear-pull, and in fact Dick Warren's existence altogether!

Tom King knitted his brows. Study Four was not, in fact, wholly negligible, whatever a Fifth-form man might think on the subject.

"Well, this about it," snapped Tom. "You've got to put up your hands for it, big gun as you fancy you are. I've brought you a challenge from Warren."

Perkinson stared at him. Purrings laughed.

"Seven o'clock in the gym, with the gloves on, Perkinson!" said Tom. "Will that suit you?"

"You young ass!" roared Perkinson.

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you understand plain English in the Fifth?" asked Tom. "If you don't want to put up your hands, you'd better leave fellows' ears alone. Will you meet Warren or not?"

Perkinson laughed: another of those sardonic laughs!

"Okay!" he said, "I'm feeling like taking it out of somebody, after Kye. Tell Warren I'll be there, and I'll give him such a hiding for his cheek, that he won't be able to crawl into form with Charne tomorrow. Now get out, unless you want your ear pulled like Warren's."

Tom King got out.



"You've got to put up your hands, Big Gun. I've brought you a challenge from Warren."

"Young ass!" said Purringe.

"Oh, bother him," said Perkinson. "But about Kye—" He dismissed Study Four wholly from mind, and concentrated on Kye.

III

"That's that!"

Percival Perkinson chuckled.

It was very dusky in Mr. Kye's study. The early winter evening was closing in: the shades of night, as the poet has expressed it, were falling fast. But there was still a glimmer from the high window: and light enough for the fathead of the Felgate Fifth to do what he had to do. It was risky, of course: for if Kye caught that troublesome member of his form in his study playing tricks, it was ten to one that he would march him off straight to the Head. But it was quite easy, really. That bulky notebook of Kye's, about which he was so particular, lay on the table. It was almost the first object that met Perk's eye, in the dusk, when he tiptoed into Kye's study. And Kye was in the Common-Room. Only a few minutes were required. All was safe as houses — unless Kye came back unexpectedly in those few minutes.

Perk was not going to damage it, of course. He was angry: he was resentful: that Georgic rankled. But he was not the fellow to do any real damage to that precious notebook. He was simply going to shove it where Kye wouldn't find it in a hurry — if he found it at all. Kye could hunt for it while Perk was doing his Georgic — it was tit for tat, a Roland for an Oliver. Perkinson picked up that notebook, and looked round the study for a suitable hide-out. He decided on the book-case, and wedged it in behind a row of books on an upper shelf. It

was likely, he considered, to take Kye quite a long time to think that one out!

It was done! Perkinson chuckled, and murmured that that was that! He was highly satisfied. All he had to do now was to quit Kye's study as secretly as he had entered it. Kye could hunt for that notebook, and Perk, grinning, wished him good hunting! He stepped to the door.

It was then that, to quote a poet again, a change came o'er the spirit of his dream. His hand was almost on the door-handle, when there was a heavy tread in the corridor without. He started back. He knew that tread!

"Oh, crumbs! Kye!"

For a moment, Perkinson stood paralysed. He was caught — fairly caught — Kye was coming: escape was cut off: and that rotten notebook was jammed behind the books on a top shelf — the game was up.

In sheer desperation, Perk stared round the dusky study, with a wild idea of hiding, somewhere or somehow. But while it was quite easy to find a hide-out for a notebook, there was nothing of the kind for a big burly Fifth-form man. Then he thought of the window, and ran across to it. Kye's study was on an upper floor: and a drop from the window scarcely practicable. But it was a case of any port in a storm. Perk simply had to escape discovery in Kye's study, if he could. He couldn't drop from that window, without somewhat severe bumping and bruising. But a fellow could hang on to the sill, out of sight, for a time at least. Perkinson did not stop to think — he had no time for thinking, which after all was not much in his line, anyway. He fairly whirled through that window, and over the sill, holding on by his hands, with just time

to shut the sash down before the study door opened.

Light flashed on in the study.

Kye came in: but Perk had escaped in time: though barely. Kye was not likely to look out of the window; and even if he did, would he notice a pair of hands clinging to the sill in the deep dusk? He had come – and Perk hoped that he would go: and give a fellow a chance to climb in again and dodge away.

But Kye did not go. He seemed to be moving about the study, as if looking for something. Several times his shadow

passed the window, and Perk glimpsed it. What the dickens was he up to, Perk wondered savagely, mooching about the room like a tiger in a cage.

Then it suddenly dawned on him. Kye was looking for that notebook! That was what he had come to the study for!

Perkinson could have groaned.

That notebook had been well and truly hidden! Kye was not likely to find it in a hurry! The longer he hunted for it, the better Perk would have been pleased – had he been sitting in his study doing his Georgie! But not while



Then it suddenly dawned on him, Kye was looking for that notebook.

he was hanging on to Kye's window-sill, with dusky space below him, and a deep ache already creeping along his arms. Perk was a good weight. That weight told, in a charge on the soccer field, or a boxing-bout in the gym. It told now! He began to wonder how long he could hang on there, with the Law of Gravitation, as it were, tugging at his heels!

But he had to hang on. It must have dawned on Kye, by this time, that his notebook had been deliberately put out of sight by some surreptitious hand. Whose hand that was, he would know, the moment he saw Perk. And there could be little doubt that his temper, never very placable, was rising and rising, as he hunted for that notebook! Perk simply dared not be found anywhere near Kye's study. He just had to hang on.

Only - he couldn't! His arms ached and ached, and pins and needles assailed his clinging fingers. His arms were going to be stiff, after this - if the strain did no greater damage. Either he had to give himself up, and let Kye do his worst, or chance a drop from the window-sill. Of the two alternatives, a drop seemed the better, but it was not attractive. He might get a knock that would put him off football - an awful thought! But as the aches intensified, and it seemed to him that his almost paralysed arms were holding up a weight of several tons, he made up his mind. It had to be!

He dropped.

Bump!

It was a long drop. Perk almost bounced as he landed. With an ache or a pain in almost every section of his burly person, he lay and panted. Then he scrambled up - and squeaked! There

was a sharp pang in his knee.

"Oh, gosh! The Soccer!" gasped Perk.

He was going to be crooked for soccer! That was the awful thought that rushed into his mind. Sadly and sorrowfully he limped away. Kye, in the study above, was still hunting; but Perk did not give him a thought now: did not care whether Kye found his notebook or not: he did not care for anything but the awful prospect of being left out of the Soccer. He forgot Kye, and the notebook, and the Georgic, and everything else, as he limped away to his study, to surround himself with almost a sea of Elliman's. He was still busy with Elliman's, when Pur-ringe looked in to remind him that he was due in the gym.

IV

"Poor old chap!" sighed Skip.

"Shut up!" hissed Dick Warren.

"Well, I mean to say, you're going to be knocked into the middle of next week - yaroooh!" roared Skip, suddenly.

Whether Dick Warren, booked for a David-versus-Goliath combat, was going to be knocked into the middle of next week or not, Skip Ruggles felt as if he had been kicked almost as far along the calendar, as Warren's foot landed. Warren was not, apparently, in his usual sunny temper that day. There was quite a crowd in the gym, and most of them were grinning. Tom King looked serious - very serious indeed. He did not want to see his best chum slaughtered: and he nourished a hope that Perkinson, who after all was a good-natured fellow, might let Warren off lightly. On the other hand he might let him have it hot and strong, for his

cheek in challenging a Fifth-form man. It was a worry.

But if Tom was worried, most of the fellows took it as a joke. Warren was going to be whopped to the wide: squashed like a mosquito: flattened out like a pancake: left for dead on the floor of the gym, if the Perkinson punch did not lift him bodily out of a window! Warren could call it a fight, if he liked: to everyone else it was a comic entertainment. But Dick was grim and determined. He could hardly hope to whop Perkinson: but he was going all out, with every ounce he had, and even the mighty Perk was going to find him a handful. He had no use for Skip's sympathetic sighs: and he signified the same by landing his foot on the fattest trousers at Felgate. Skip roared and retreated.

"Here comes Perkinson!" said Tom

Perkinson came in with Purrings. He seemed to be limping slightly: nobody knew why. Also it could be seen that his temper had not improved. His brow was knitted: his eyes glistened. Tom King noted it with a sinking of the heart. Perk did not look like letting a cheeky junior off lightly! In fact, he looked like a fellow who would be simply delighted to punch somebody, and the harder the better.

With the gloves on, he towered over Warren.

Perhaps Dick, at that moment, realised to the full his temerity. But he did not dream of faltering. Perkinson had pulled his ear: and he was going to punch Perk, as hard and as often as he could, even if he had to be carried away afterwards. He set his lips and faced up



to it. They touched gloves, and Selwyn of the Shell called time.

And then——!

It is often said that it is the unexpected that happens. But nothing could have been quite so unexpected as what happened next. Fellows, in fact, could hardly believe their eyes: Warren could hardly believe his own. What was the matter with Percival Perkinson nobody knew or could begin to guess: they could only gaze, or rather gape, as Perk, hardly guarding at all, let a right and a left come through, spun over, and went down on his back.

Tom King gasped.

"Man down!"

Warren stared at the sprawling Perk almost unbelievably. Selwyn, hardly able to articulate in his amazement, began to count.

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven——"

Perkinson struggled up. His face was burning. His temper was worse than ever. Fellows were not grinning now: they were staring blankly. Perkinson made a rush, hitting out. Dick Warren captured three or four. But there was no force in them. They were merely taps. Where was the Perkinson punch? Nowhere, it seemed. But Dick Warren was packing punches, and he handed them out hard, and fast, in response to those feeble taps. In breathless amazement the Felgate fellows watched Perkinson—the mighty Perk!—driven round the ring, fairly tottering under a rain of punches. Only the call of time saved him from going down again.

Tom King almost hugged his chum.

"Oh, boy!" gasped Tom. "You're licking him! Licking Perk!"

"Can't make it out!" confessed Warren.

"Neither can I!—but you're licking him!"

Amazing as it was, there was no doubt about that. Nobody, of course, knew that Perk had fearful pangs in his knee, which almost bent under him: that his arms were almost as stiff as pokers: and had no punch in them. Perk was always as fit as a fiddle: and who was to guess that he had crooked himself, thoroughly and utterly, carrying on his idiotic feud with Kye?

"Time!" gasped Selwyn.

Dick Warren stepped up as fresh as a daisy. Perk tottered in the ring. The second round was also the last. Dick Warren, heedless of taps, went in with right and left: and a jolt on the chin laid the Fifth-form man low. Selwyn counted again, and there was a breathless hush as he reached nine. And then——!

"OUT!"

Then there was a roar. Unexpectedly, amazingly, incredibly, the Fourth-form man had KO'd Perkinson of the Fifth, and that lugged ear was fully avenged. Dick Warren had not been whopped to the wide, squashed like a mosquito, flattened like a pancake, left for dead on the floor, or lifted out of a window by the Perkinson punch! Dick Warren was as fresh as paint, hardly a bit the worse for wear: and congratulating friends crowded round him—what time a sympathetic Purring helped a hapless Perk away.

V

Later it came out, and it was known just how and why that fight in the Felgate gym had had so unexpected an outcome. Every fellow laughed when he heard, and agreed that it was just like Perkinson.