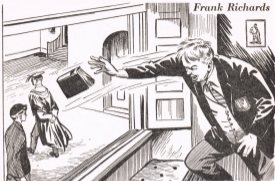


LANGDALE'S LUCK!

Frank Richards



SKIP just couldn't resist it. He disliked that fellow Croom, of the Fifth. Moreover, Croom had been heard to say nasty things about old Langdale, captain of Felgate, for leaving him out of the cricket: and Skip, like most fellows at Felgate, quite worshipped old Langdale. Knocking Croom's hat off, in circumstances that made it a perfectly safe proposition, seemed quite a bright idea to Skip Ruggles.

Had either of his chums, Tom King and Dick Warren, been at hand, it wouldn't have happened. They would certainly have put the stopper on. Shying hooks at a fellow's head from a study window was not a form of activity that Skip's chums would have encouraged.

But Skip was alone in Langdale's

study. King and Warren, like most other fellows that day, were chiefly interested in the first-eleven game due to begin early, and had perhaps forgotten their fat chum's existence. It was one of those rare occasions, a whole holiday: and they didn't even know that Skip, less interested in the summer game than themselves, planned to go home for the day, and wouldn't have cared anyway.

Whole as the holiday was, it was necessary to obtain an exeat for a trip so far out of bounds. Skip's form-master, Charne, had gone off to golf, so Skip couldn't ask him for the necessary leave. Langdale, as Head Prefect, was empowered to grant an exeat: and he was too good-natured a fellow to say no to any reasonable request. Charne

might have said no: Langdale was more likely to say yes: so it was a hopeful Skip who came to ask Langdale.

But Langdale was not in his study. Skip waited for him to come in. The window was open, and Skip stood looking out of it, while he waited for Langdale. It was unlucky that Croom of the Fifth passed at a little distance from that open window. A book lay in the window-seat, where Langdale had left it. To buzz that book at Croom's head, knock his hat off, and pop out of sight before he could be spotted at the window, struck Skip as a bright, indeed brilliant, and quite hilarious idea. He couldn't resist it.

In fact, it was no sooner thought of than done.

A fat hand clutched up the book, and it whizzed from the window, aimed at Croom's hat. Skip put all the force of a fat arm into that hurl.

But Stanley St. Leger Ruggles, as any fellow in the Felgate Fourth could have told him, was cack-handed. If Skip bowled a cricket ball, nothing within range was safe excepting the wicket. That whizzing book being aimed at Croom's hat, it was scheduled to hit anything except that hat. Actually, it described an arc a good yard over Croom, and flew on into space.

And then—!

Skip had not even noticed a stately figure in the quad, some distance beyond Croom. Even if he had noticed it, he wouldn't have worried: for Dr. Leicester was not in the line of fire—at any rate in what Skip intended to be the line of fire. Why that whizzing book passed high over Croom's head, and in the wrong direction, Skip did not know. But it did! And then a startled exclamation, almost a howl, was heard,



Skip was putting the greatest possible distance between his fat person and Langdale's study

as a stately figure tottered under an unexpected crash—tottered, and sat suddenly down!

"Oh!" gasped Skip.

For an instant, he gazed in utter horror, paralysed by what he had done. It was like an awful dream, like the very worst of nightmares, to see Dr. Leicester, head-master of Felgate School, sit down in the quad under the sudden bang of that whizzing book.

But only for an instant was Skip paralysed. The awfulness of it quickened his fat faculties. It would have been necessary to escape discovery had Croom received that missile. But with Dr. Leicester at the receiving end, it was a matter almost of life and death. Skip jumped back from the window. He raced for the door. He was not going to wait there for Langdale and an

exact now. He was going to put the greatest possible distance, in the shortest possible time, between his fat person and Langdale's study. Skip's motions were seldom rapid: but on this occasion, an arrow in its flight had simply nothing on him.

Skip vanished into space: and only in time, for hardly more than a minute later, Langdale of the Sixth came into the study: happily unconscious that anything out of the common had happened there. By that time, brief as it was, Skip Ruggles was out of gates, trotting breathlessly for the railway station, reckless of bounds and crests: only anxious to be far, far away when Dr. Leicester started inquiring for the book-hurler - and not breathing freely till he was sitting in the train for home.

II

"Blow!" said Langdale, crossly. "Where's that dashed Thucydides?"

For once, the good-tempered captain of Felgate did not seem in his usual genial temper. The brightness of the summer sunshine streaming in at the open window of his study was not reflected in his face. He was frowning slightly when he came into his study: and his frown deepened when he looked for a book he wanted and couldn't find it. He had, in fact, no time to waste. He had torn himself away from a crowd of cricketers in the Prefects' Room, all discussing the Carcroft match due that day, to deal with a translation which, very unfortunately he had on hand that morning. Actually, he had had some words with his headmaster about that translation.

Langdale, if not exactly keen on Greek, was at any rate a good man in class. But just lately, with the Carcroft match coming on, and the Felgate first-

eleven not quite up to its usual form, it had to be admitted that he had given more attention to cricket, and less to other matters: the result being that there were several distinct "howlers" in the paper he had handed to Dr. Leicester the day before. That, he soon learned, was not good enough. Generally, as captain of the school and Head Prefect, he was on the best of terms with his Chief. But "howlers" from a Sixth-Form man in a Thucydidean translation tested Dr. Leicester's patience too far. Quite sharply, indeed very sharply, he had told Langdale to do that paper over again in the morning: regardless of the fact that that Wednesday was a whole holiday, and perhaps forgetting that it was the date of one of the biggest fixtures of the summer season. A protesting murmur from Langdale had been cut short still more sharply. So that was that: and the wretched paper had to be done.

There was plenty of time for it, certainly, before Carcroft came. But Langdale, full of cricket, had not tackled his task immediately. However, he had now wrenched himself away from cricket, as annoyed with the Head as the Head was with him: and he was ready to handle that putrid passage in Thucydides about the Spartans in the isle of Sphacteria. He did not, at the moment, care two straws, or one, about the Spartans, the island of Sphacteria, or Nicias, or Cleon, or Thucydides or anything that was his. But he was going to grind through it, and get rid of the wretched thing, before Carcroft were due to arrive.

So it was an added irritation when he couldn't find Thucydides.

He ejaculated 'Blow!' very emphatically, and stared about the study for it.

He knew that he had left it there - in the window-seat, he thought he remembered - anyhow it was, and had to be, in his study. But he stared about him in vain. No sign of a Greek historian was to be seen.

Langdale breathed hard, and he breathed deep. If some silly chump had borrowed his Thucydides, it was at a most awkward moment. Where was the dashed thing? He was sorting over books when the study door opened.

"Oh, don't bother now!" snapped Langdale, over his shoulder, supposing that it was Denver, or Loring, or some other fellow, coming in to talk cricket. Then he jumped, as he saw who it was. "Oh! I - I didn't know it was you, sir!" he gasped.

Dr. Leicester rustled into the study.

Langdale looked at him, surprised by the hard, stern, stony expression on his face. Dr. Leicester could look stern, very stern, at times: but Langdale had never seen that look on his face before. He could not keep a trace of resentment out of his own look. What the dickens was the matter with the man? He couldn't expect that putrid translation yet.

"This is yours, I think, Langdale." The Head's icy voice seemed to come from the deepest depths of a refrigerator. He held up a book as he spoke.

Langdale, in amazement, recognised it as the missing Thucydides.

"Yes, sir!" he stammered. "I - I don't understand——"

"Your name is in it."

"It's my Thucydides, sir."

"It was thrown from that window——"

"Eh?"

"It struck me, and caused me to fall——"

"Wha-a-ah——!"

Dr. Leicester placed the volume on the table.

"You need not trouble about that translation, Langdale. There is no need, as you leave Felgate today."

Langdale almost fell down. He doubted his ears.

"What - what - what did you say, sir?" he stuttered.

"I think you heard me," said Dr. Leicester, icily. "You will hardly expect to be allowed to remain at Felgate after this——"

"After what, sir?" gasped Langdale.

Dr. Leicester raised his eyebrows.

"You will not deny, I presume, that you flung that book at me - at your headmaster - only a few minutes ago——"

"I - I - I did?" stuttered Langdale.

"I did not - I - I - I—— what has happened?"

"I need not say how shocked, how pained, I am, by this occurrence, Langdale." For the moment the Head, like the elder Hamlet, spoke more in sorrow than in anger. "I am surprised, shocked, pained, that so petty a cause as a few sharp words for a careless translation, should have impelled you to such an action. Do not add prevarication to the rest, Langdale - the book is yours, a Fifth-Form boy saw it coming from this window, and you are here alone. You have allowed a childish resentment to urge you on to an act of the grossest disrespect to your headmaster - an act that cannot be condoned. You leave Felgate today. I shall give you a letter for your father, explaining the circumstances——"

"But I - I - I——" Langdale stammered, hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels.



"You leave Felgate today. That is all."

"You need say no more, Langdale! I shall not expel you publicly - I spare you that, in consideration of your hitherto excellent record. But you leave Felgate today. That is all."

"But - but——"

Langdale's voice trailed away, as the headmaster swept out of the study. Dr. Leicester was gone: leaving the captain of Felgate almost stunned.

III

"Sacked!"

"Old Langdale——"

"Rot!"

"It's official——" said Reece.

"It's impossible!" said Tom King.

"Old Langdale sacked!" said Dick Warren. "Bosh! And tosh!"

It was all over Felgate. It was the biggest sensation the old school had

ever had. Langdale - captain of Felgate - sacked! And for a silly fag trick like chucking a book at a beak's head! It was unheard-of - impossible - unthinkable.

But it was so!

Amazing as it was, impossible as it was, it was so. The Sixth knew it first: but it spread over the school like wild-fire. Fellows couldn't believe it: but they had to believe it. At Felgate, as by the yellow Tiber of old, there was tumult and affright! It almost seemed like the end of all things. Old Langdale - sacked! And Carcroft due for the biggest cricket fixture of the season, too!

"Must have been off his rocker!" said Dick Warren, when he finally got it down that it was so. "Buzzing books at the Head - phew!"

"But did he?" said Tom King. "Might be some mistake - old Langdale isn't that sort of ass - a fathead like Perkinson might, but not old Langdale——"

"I hear that the Head picked up his book, after it had knocked him over. Croom saw it coming out of Langdale's window."

"Did he see Langdale chuck it?"

"Not from what he's said. He just noticed it fly from the window, and the next tick it was knocking the Old Boy over. Anyhow, whose window would it come from - Langdale's book?" Warren shook his head. "The Old Boy must have riled him! But - fancy old Langdale——"

"I can't fancy it!" said Tom. "Look here, suppose there was somebody else in Langdale's study——"

"They say that the Old Boy cut in, and found Langdale alone there." Warren shook his head again. "Must have been crackers! His own book - chucked from his own study window! Asking for it!"

"It's hard to believe," said Tom.

Hard as it was to believe, it had to be believed. And, heavy as the blow was to all Felgate, it had to be admitted that Langdale had to go. A fellow who buzzed books at his headmaster obviously had no place at Felgate. He had to go - that day! He was not gone yet: but he was going.

But if there was amazement and dismay among all the rest, there was absolute consternation among the senior cricketers. Carcroft were due to play Felgate, and the home team was not at its best. Langdale, a mighty man with the willow, was a tower of strength to his side: with him in the ranks, it was perhaps anybody's game: without him,

it was as good as a goner. True, he could defer his departure, if he liked, till late in the day. He could play cricket before he went, if he felt like it. But nobody thought that likely. What sort of a game could any fellow play, with such a crushing weight on his mind?

Tom King and Dick Warren, like most Felgate fellows, had been going to watch the big match from start to finish. But Langdale's disaster had dashed their keenness. They were hardly interested when Carcroft arrived: they could not help thinking of old Langdale, booked for the train home.

"It's rotten all round," said Warren. "Walkover for Carcroft, most likely, with old Langdale out. Must have been mad to do what he did."

"If he did!" said Tom, with a lingering doubt. "He's told his friends that he didn't——"

"Um!" said Warren. "You see, the Head knows he did. He wouldn't sack a man like Langdale if he could help it."

"I suppose not. But——"

"Anyhow, Langdale's out. Let's cut it, and get out for the day, what? Seen Skip about?"

"Let's!" agreed Tom. "May as well see the start before we go, though."

"Oh, all right."

They were in no hurry to get down to Big Side. They looked round for Skip as they went, but saw nothing of that plump youth. A crowd was gathering round the field: a first-eleven match was always an attraction, though prospects on this occasion seemed dim.

"Here they come!" said Tom.

Carcroft, it seemed, were taking the first knock. The home team came into the field. And as they came, there was a murmur which swelled into a shout.



"How's that?"

"Langdale!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Warren.
"Langdale! He's playing."

Tom King almost rubbed his eyes. Langdale, under sentence of the "sack": Langdale, due that day to pack for home: Langdale, behind whom the gates of Felgate were soon to close for the last time - there he was, in flannels, captaining the team as if nothing out of the usual had occurred. His face was graver than usual, that was all. But there he was!

"Langdale!" gasped Tom.

"Him or his ghost!" grinned Warren.
"By gum, what a sportsman! He wouldn't let the side down, Tom - not old Langdale! But what a nerve - what a thumping nerve! Sacked - and playing up for Felgate all the same! Good old Langdale!"

Tom watched - in wonder. Langdale, evidently, was playing up - his last game for Felgate. What was he feeling like? Under sentence of the "sack": thinking of the train home, of the disaster that had overwhelmed him - what sort of a game was even old Langdale likely to put up, in such circumstances? Could he, could any fellow, brace up under such a weight, and play a game that was worth while? It did not seem likely. On the cricket-field, he was wont to dismiss all else, and live and breathe cricket. Could he - now?

It seemed that he could. For in the very first over, bowled by Denver, a ball smacked into a palm, and that palm was Langdale's.

"How's that?"

"Out!"

"Hurrah!"

Dick Warren almost hugged his chum.

"And we were going to miss this!" he gasped. "Old Langdale - he's at the top of his form - this is going to be worth watching. Tom, what?"

"You're telling me!" agreed Tom.

IV

Skip Ruggles was tired when he got back to Felgate, after his long trip that day. He was also a little apprehensive. He was not worried about that book-hurling episode: nobody could nail him for that: and it never occurred to Skip's fat brain that anyone else could have been nailed for it. But he had been absent for the day without an excuse, and that meant lines from Charne, and possibly "whops". The House seemed deserted when Skip came in: but he heard the echo of tremendous shouting from the cricket-field, and guessed that the Carcroft match was still going on:

so he rolled off in that direction to look for his chums. Under the westering sun, Big Side was swarming with almost all Felgate. The great game was almost at its end—but not quite! Langdale was batting, and the man at the other end was the last man in. Skip clutched Tom King's arm.

"I say, Tom——"

"Shut up, ass!" Tom did not look round. He had forgotten his fat chum's existence, and had no time to be reminded of it now. Felgate wanted three to tie, four to win; and everyone knew that this was the last over: Langdale's partner was booked to go down like a rabbit if he had the bowling. And the last ball of the over was about to come.

"But I say, Tom — oooooogh!" An elbow jabbing on Skip's fat circumference silenced him.

It was only moments, but it seemed an age before the ball came down. If Langdale ran a single, Felgate would pull out yet. There was a smack of willow on leather. But Langdale did not run at all. There was no need to run. For it was a boundary hit, and Felgate had the four they wanted. And then there was a roar that might have been heard as far off as Hodden.

Skip rubbed the spot where Tom' elbow had jabbed, and joined a fat squeak to the roar of cheering, as the crowd swarmed on the field, and Langdale was carried off shoulder-high.

"Poor old Langdale!" sighed Tom. He had almost forgotten that Langdale was sacked, in the excitement of that close finish. But he remembered now.

"Eh! What's the matter with Langdale?" asked Skip. "Looks to me as if he won this match for Felgate."

"So he did, ass! But he's sacked all the same." said Dick Warren.

Skip jumped.

"Sacked! Langdale sacked! What's he done?"

"Buzzed a book at the Head from his study window this morning."

"Langdale did!" he stuttered.

"Yes, and——"

"But he didn't!" yelled Skip.

"Fathead! How do you know whether he did or not?"

"Because I did!"

"You!" howled Warren.

"You!" shrieked Tom King.

"Yes! You see, I went to Langdale's study to ask for an exam, and he wasn't there, and I buzzed a book at Croom, and it missed him and knocked the Head over, and I jolly well bolted, and — and — what on earth made them think it was old Langdale?" gasped Skip.

Skip's chums gazed at him, dumb-founded. Then they seized him by either fat arm, and rushed him away head-long: the three arrived breathless at Dr. Leicester's study.

The head, no doubt, was glad to learn the real facts: and he expressed the deepest and sincerest regret to Langdale for that most unfortunate misunderstanding. Skip had been willing, indeed eager, to state those facts, not even thinking of the consequences to himself so long as he saw old Langdale through. Happily, there were no consequences: it had been, after all, an accident, and Skip's prompt confession saved his fat skin. Croom of the Fifth, when he heard, made it a point to look for Skip and kick him: but that was all. Langdale also looked for Skip, smacked him on a fat shoulder, and told him he was a brick: which translated Skip to the seventh heaven. Croom was the only fellow at Felgate who did not rejoice in Langdale's luck.