

# All's well that ends well

By Frank Richards

**T**OM KING was feeling on top of the world that morning. As why should he not, when it was a glorious Summer's day, bright and sunny, with fleecy clouds sailing across a deep blue sky, and he was as fit as a fiddle, and looking forward to knocking up unnumbered runs against Didcot? He walked in the Felgate quad, after third school, as if he were walking on air, his face as bright as the sunshine.

In third school he had had rather a bad moment. Possibly he had been thinking a little more of cricket, and a little less of Virgil, than should have been the case in the form-room. Un-

doubtedly he had "skewed" his con: quite a bad skew. His form-master, Charne, had looked, for some moments, like "Extra School": and Extra that afternoon would have been an unmitigated disaster. However, Charne had contented himself with imposing a hundred lines: and what did Tom care for lines, on such a day? Lines could be knocked off any old time. He would hardly have cared had Charne made it five hundred, or even a thousand, so long as he was free to play cricket that afternoon.

It was rather a special occasion, too. The Felgate junior team had regular



fixtures with Didcot and, on their own ground, Didcot had beaten them by a hatful of runs. Felgate simply had to win the return match, and Tom was confident that they were going to do it. Tom would never have stated that he was the best junior batsman at Felgate: but it was a fact, and he couldn't help being aware of it. And his chum Dick Warren was the best junior bowler at Felgate or anywhere else. And Bullinger, and Carton, and Valence, and the rest, were all good men, even Parrott, who was rather a swot, but a good man at games all the same. Parrott, who was swotting for an exam, would have preferred to give cricket a miss that afternoon: but he was wanted, and he agreed to give swotting a miss instead. Tom had been a little uncertain about Reece, who was a first-class cricketer when he chose to be: but Reece was too unreliable, and after a due weighing of the pro's and the cons, he had been left out for Parrott. A cricket captain couldn't take chances. If Reece chose to smoke in his study, it was no business of Tom's: but it was very much his business if a man's wind conked out when he needed every ounce of it. It wasn't going to be easy to beat Didcot: and there was no room in the Felgate team for lame ducks.

Tom, as already stated, was feeling on top of the world: as merry and bright as a schoolboy could be, even at Felgate. But his cheery look clouded a little, as his eyes fell on a scowling face – that of Edgar Reece, of his form. Reece gave him the blackest of black looks. Tom would have changed course and avoided him, but Reece came up and barred his way. Obviously, he was ripe for a row. His eyes glinted under knitted brows.

“Do you know what I've a jolly good mind to do, King?” he asked.

“Haven't the foggiest,” answered Tom, “But if it's chucking up cigarettes

in the study, it's a jolly good idea.”

Reece's scowl deepened.

“What I've a jolly good mind to do, is to knock you into the middle of next week,” he said.

Tom laughed.

“It might be you who took that trip along the calendar!” he suggested. Then he went on, more seriously, “Look here, Reece, don't be an ass. If every fellow who wasn't picked to play cut up rusty about it, and rowed with his skipper, we should be in for a high old time.”

“You had to jaw that swot Parrott into it: he'd rather swot at his rotten Greek: and you know he's nowhere near my form.”

“I know he won't muff catches in the field because he's got bellows to mend,” retorted Tom, “You did, over at Didcot.”

“I'm as fit as you are.”

“Perhaps! But we're not taking chances today – Parrott's playing, and you're not. That's that. So drop it.”

Tom made a move to walk round Reece, as he barred the way. But Reece shifted too, and again barred further progress. His hands were clenched.

“Let me pass,” snapped Tom, impatiently.

“Not till I've told you what I think of you,” said Reece, with tight lips. “We've never been friends: and you're junior captain, and you've got the cricket in your trousers pocket, and you're taking advantage of it. You keep me out because we have had rows. You'd rather play a dud like Skip Ruggles than me. You'd lose the match rather than play a fellow you disliked.”

Tom King looked at him, curiously. Reece, evidently, believed what he said. It was like him to believe it. He could only judge other fellows by himself. He could never have understood that Tom put the game first and foremost, and



would have stood down himself to make room for a better man. It was not only because Reece was keen to play for Felgate that he was so bitterly resentful: he fancied that he was resenting injustice. It was not of much use arguing with a fellow who was not only angry, but like the prophet of old, felt that he did well to be angry!

"If that's what you think, Reece," said Tom, quietly, "You're welcome to think what you like. Now get out of my way."

"Put me out of it!" sneered Reece.

"Okay, if that's what you want."

Edgar Reece was contemplating knocking the captain of the Fourth into the middle of the following week! But as Tom King grasped him by the shoulders, and spun him out of the way, he had to realise that he would have had no luck whatever in such an enterprise. Reece was no weed: but Tom was very much the better man of the two. With a swing of athletic arms, he sent Reece spinning to one side, and Reece tottered helplessly two or three yards before he tumbled over. Then he went down with a bump.

Tom King walked on.

Reece scrambled up. His impulse was to rush after Tom King, hitting out right and left. But he restrained that impulse, with the uncomfortable misgiving that if he did, his last state would be worse than his first. And perhaps there were other ways!

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## II

"KING!"

Charne fairly barked.

Tom King gave quite a jump. He was chatting – cricket, of course – with his chums, Warren and Ruggles, after tiffin. It was a half-holiday, and he was

done with Charne for the day, and did not expect to hear from him. Now he heard from him, in Charne's sharpest tones.

"Yes, sir!" stammered Tom. Something, it seemed, was up, though he could not imagine what. Charne was looking his grimmest.

"Follow me to my study."

Charne stalked away with that.

"What's up, Tom?" asked Dick Warren.

"Goodness knows – I don't!" answered Tom.

"Charne looked jolly shirty," said Skip, "What have you been up to?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"Charne doesn't jump on a fellow for nothing," said Skip, sapiently, "If you've been up to something, just before a match – ."

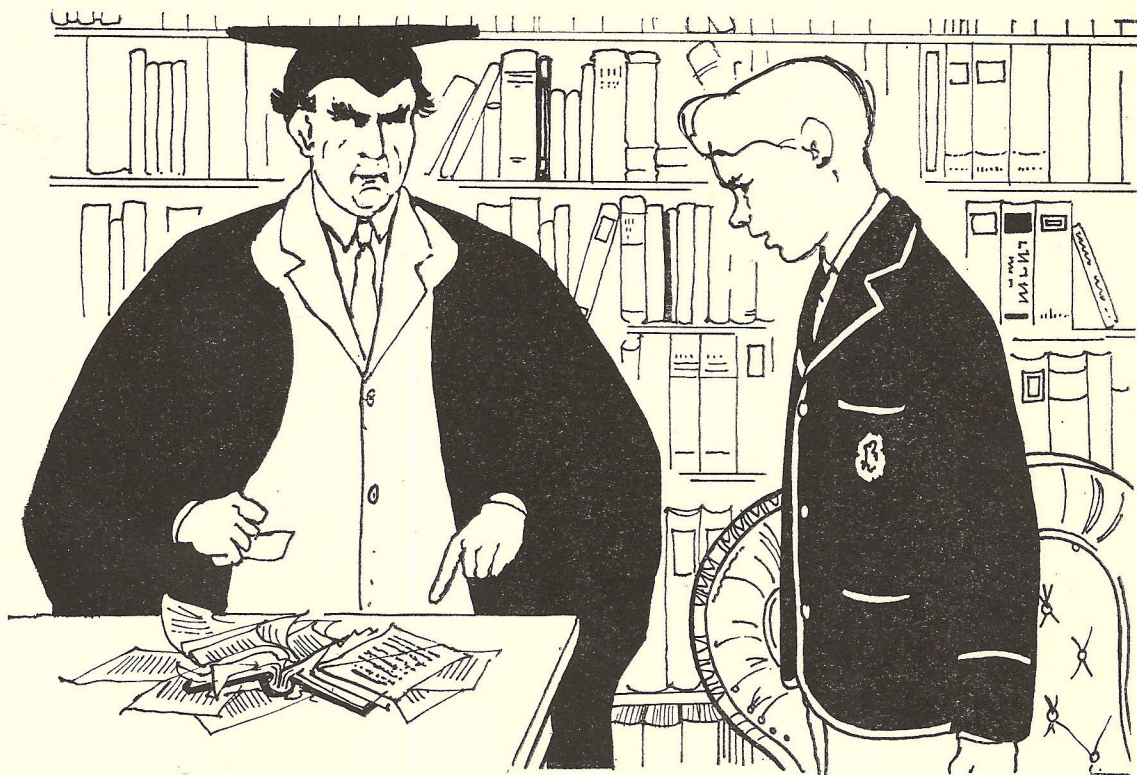
"Fathead!" was Tom's polite reply to that. And he followed Charne, wondering uneasily what the matter was. So far as he knew, he had done nothing to bring that portentous frown to his form-master's brow. Only that unlucky "skew" in third school, and Charne had already "lined" him for that.

Charne stalked into his study, and Tom followed him in. Glinting eyes fixed on him, as Charne pointed, with a forefinger, at a volume that lay on the table. Tom's eyes followed the direction of the pointing finger, and he gave a start. The book was the Virgil that Charne used in class. It was quite familiar to Tom. But its present aspect was quite unfamiliar. It lay wide open, and its pages were almost in tatters, evidently having been cut and slashed by a knife. That Virgil was never likely to be used again in the Fourth Form room. Charne's voice came, in deep tones.

"That is your handiwork, King."

"Mine!" gasped Tom, as he stared blankly. Some surreptitious hand had





slashed that book into tatters. Why Charne fancied that his had been the hand, he could not guess. "No, sir! Certainly not. I have not been in your study at all, sir."

Charne's lip curled contemptuously.

"This morning," he said, "I gave you lines, King, for an inexcusable blunder in your construe. I did not expect you to be guilty of an act of petty and impertinent revenge. I am surprised – I am shocked. I had a much better opinion of you, King. This is your act."

"But it isn't, sir!" gasped Tom, in bewilderment, "I wouldn't do such a thing – wouldn't have dreamed of it. I don't know why you should think so, sir."

"Then how do you account for this? Is this your penknife, or is it not?"

Charne held up a penknife. Tom

stared at it. It was rather an uncommon article for a junior boy – a silver penknife, with a monogram engraved on the metal. It was in fact, a present Tom had received long ago from an affectionate relative, and there was no other like it in the Felgate Fourth. Charne, probably, had seen it in his possession: anyway, the initials engraved on it were "T. K." There could be no doubt about the ownership of that penknife. It was Tom King's. How it came to be in Charne's study, Tom could not begin to guess. He could only stare at it.

"Do you deny that this is yours, King?"

"No, sir! It's mine. I – I don't know how it came here – I think I left it in my study, after pointing a pencil – ."

"Indeed!" Charne's tone became grimly sarcastic. "Then perhaps you



can explain how it happened that I picked it up under my open window here.”

“Did – did – did you?” stammered Tom.

The study window was wide open letting in the balmy Summer breeze. It dawned upon Tom what must have happened. Some mischievous young sweep had clambered in at that window, and slashed Charne’s book, and inadvertently dropped the penknife as he made a hurried exit by the window again. He – whoever he was – must have borrowed Tom’s penknife from Study Four. That, to Tom, was the only way of accounting for it. Unluckily, it was not the way Charne accounted for it.

“You need say no more, King!” said Mr Charne, in cutting tones, “I am surprised – I am shocked – by such an action on your part. It has very considerably altered the good opinion I had of you. Such a malicious act – .”

“But I never – !” gasped Tom.

“I will listen to no prevarications,” thundered Mr Charne, “This is your penknife, dropped as you escaped by the window after slashing that book. The facts speak for themselves. I shall deal with you severely for this, King. You will go into Extra School every remaining half-holiday this term, beginning with today. You may take your penknife, and leave my study.”

Tom King took the penknife: but he did not immediately leave Charne’s study. He seemed too overwhelmed to stir, standing staring at his form-master in utter dismay.

“But, sir – !” he stammered.

“You may go!”

“But I never – I – I – I didn’t – .”

“I have told you to go, King.”

“But – but – but – the cricket – !” gasped Tom, “I – I – .”

“If you do not leave my study this instant King, I shall cane you.” Charne’s

hand strayed to a cane. “Go!”

The door closed on Tom King.

His chums were waiting for him: and when he rejoined them, what he had to tell them caused their faces to lengthen, almost as long as his own. Charne’s word was law: there was no appeal against the verdict. Tom King was out of the cricket, and a place had to be filled in the eleven, while he sat in Extra with other delinquents. That morning, Tom had been feeling on top of the world: now, like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, he had fallen from that high estate, and great was the fall thereof. But he was thinking less of his own disappointment, than of the Didcot match and what was to be done. And the result was that he went to look for Edgar Reece.

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### III

REECE smiled.

It was not a pleasant smile.

Reece was lounging in the quad when the captain of the Fourth came up. From the expression on Tom’s face he knew all that he wanted to know. The skipper who had – from motives of personal dislike as he believed – left him out of the cricket, was down on his luck himself. Something had happened to dash his cheery spirits. Reece did not need telling what it was.

“Here, Reece,” called out Tom, as he came up.

“Here I am! Changed your mind about playing me?” asked Reece, sarcastically.

“Yes.”

“Wha-a-at?” Reece stuttered in his surprise. “What do you mean, King?”

“Only what I say,” answered Tom, brusquely, “I’m out of the cricket – a row with Charne. A man’s wanted in



my place, and you're the best I can think of. I suppose you're keen?"

Reece stared at him dumbly. Never had a fellow been so taken aback. He could hardly believe his ears. Tom gave him an impatient look, not understanding his silence.

"Aren't you keen?" he snapped, "You seemed keen enough this morning when you wanted to kick up a shindy about it."

"Oh! Yes! Of - of course," stammered Reece. "But - but - I - I - I don't get it. What's happened?"

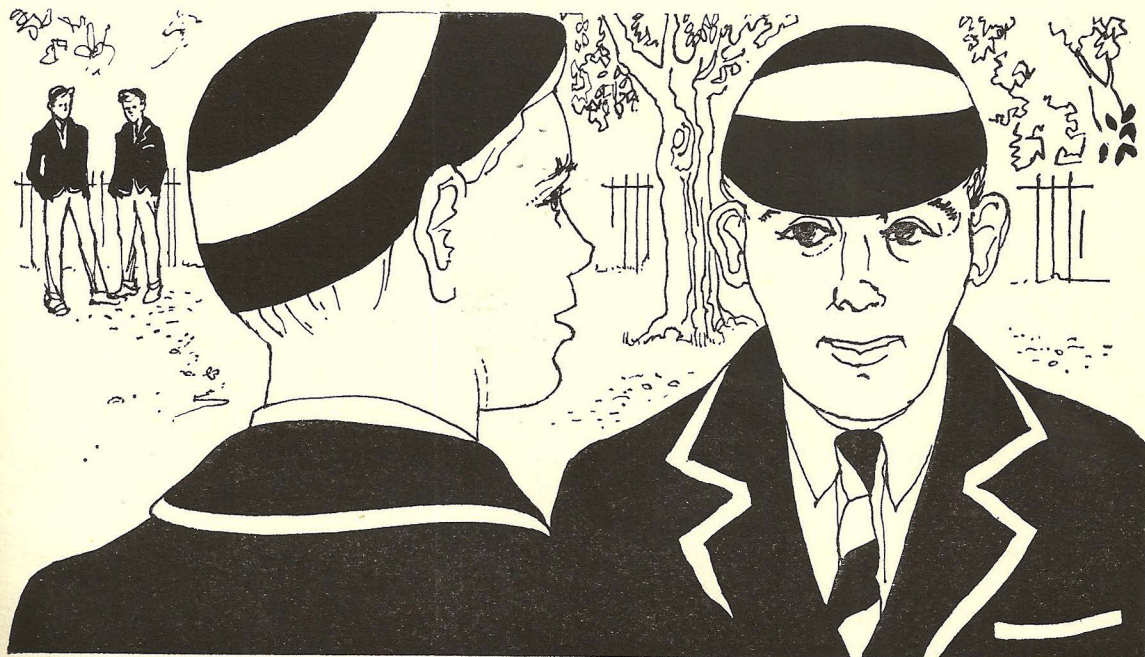
"I'm booked for Extra. Some silly ass slashed Charne's Virgil, and must have pinched my penknife to do it, as Charne found it under his window. Charne thinks it was me - I suppose he would! Looks like it, of course. Anyhow I'm out of the cricket. Warren will captain the side, and you're the best man I can think of to take my place."

Reece gazed at him, the colour creeping into his cheeks. Not for a moment,

he could clearly see, did Tom suspect foul play. Somebody had borrowed his penknife, and accidentally dropped it, getting out of the window after the slashing. That a cunning, malicious, envious fellow had planned the whole thing, did not occur to Tom's honest unsuspecting mind. And, out of the cricket himself, he had come to offer Reece the place, as the next best man. Reece felt his cheeks burn. What became now of his sullen, sulky suspicions? Reece was a hard case; he had few scruples, and he never hesitated to attribute the worst motives to anyone. Seldom, if ever, did Edgar Reece experience a feeling of shame. It was probably the first time in his life that he had felt thoroughly and utterly ashamed of himself. But that feeling almost overwhelmed him now.

"Look here, you - you're not pulling my leg!" he stammered.

"Oh, don't be an ass. I tell you a man's wanted - ."





"There's a dozen you could pick."

"Not your form. Are you playing or not?"

"Yes, yes. But - but - I - I - I never dreamed you'd play me. I - I thought - I - I thought - you know what I thought - ." Reece was almost incoherent.

"I know! Never mind that. Look here, make up your mind - Didcot will be along soon - stumps are pitched already - no time to waste - ."

"I - I'm sorry - ."

"Eh! What are you sorry about?"

"What I said this morning. I take it all back - ."

"I said never mind that. You're playing - ."

Reece drew a deep breath.

"No!" he said. It cost him an effort, Reece being the fellow he was. But he made the effort. "You're playing, King."

"I tell you I'm out of it - ."

"And I tell you you're in," said Reece, "You're in, because I'm going straight to Charne to tell him who borrowed your penknife from your study and slashed his book. That will put you in the clear."

"How do you know?"

Reece laughed.

"Only because it was me," he answered.

"You!" ejaculated Tom, staring at him.

"And I didn't drop the penknife by accident - I did it to dish you, because I believed that you were all out to dish me."

"Why you awful rotter - !" gasped Tom.

"Rotter or not, I'm going to Charne: and you can go and get into your flannels," said Reece. And with that, he walked away to the House, leaving Tom King staring after him blankly.

"PARROTT, old man."

"Here I am," said Parrott, "Just going to change. Think I'd let you down?"

Tom King smiled.

"No," he said, "But you'd rather swot at Greek - ."

"Well, you see, there's that exam," said Parrott, "But it's all right - I'm giving it a miss - ."

"No need!" said Tom, "I'm letting you off. Cut off to your study and bury yourself in Thucydides; Reece is going to play after all."

"Oh, all right, then," said Parrott. And he cut off; the only fellow at Felgate who would willingly have handled Thucydides instead of a cricket bat that afternoon.

"Reece playing after all?" asked Dick Warren.

"I shouldn't be, but for him!" said Tom, "One good turn deserves another. Reece isn't such a rotter as he fancies he is. I don't think he'll conk out this time as he did last. Charne's let him off with lines - I expect he was glad to hear that he'd made a bloomer, in time to wash out Extra for me. Where's Reece? Oh, here you are - jump into your flannels, old boy."

It was a great game. Tom King, once more on top of the world, was also at the top of his form: Dick Warren contributed a couple of hat tricks: and Reece's score was second only to Tom's. And Didcot, who came over expecting to repeat their recent performance, found Felgate altogether too hard a nut to crack, and took their homeward way sadder and wiser. So it was all well that ended well.

THE END