

FRANK
RICHARDS

NOT A SUCCESS



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

Tom King shook his head.

"No!" he answered, concisely.

Rexie was standing just within the doorway of Study First, staring at Tom King and Dick Warren, his face thick with angry resentment.

Tom, at the study table, had a football in front of him, from which the name of Edgar Rexie had been pencilled out. Warren, standing beside his chair, had an alert eye on Rexie, who looked as if he could hardly keep his hands off the Junior football captain. Skip Ruggles, his fat face extended in the window-seat, was concentrated on a packet of toffies.

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

"You know why," answered Tom

King. "You're all just late. You're no good. If you want a game, keep yourself fit, if you want to play Soccer for Helgins."

"I'm fit enough."

"You looked out in games previous 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-up last night. If Christ 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 game, and smoke cigarettes till you're sick, if you're fit enough. But we don't want a passenger in the team when we play Carroll tomorrow. You'd be no more good than Skip here—"

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

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

"Look here——!" bellowed Skip.

"Nothing doing, Rocco!" said Tom King, stridently. "If you want to play Soccer, you can't play the goal. One or the other — not both! Shut the door after you!"

"I was a bit drowsy-headed 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."

Rocco clucked his hands, hard. His temper, never very reliable, was near boiling-point.

"You've been wanting a chance to check me," he muttered. "Now you've found one — you better!"

"That will do! Get out."



"You've been wanting a chance to check me," Rocco muttered.

At that point, Rocco'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 Rocco remained idle for. The next moment they were punching.

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

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

He added his grasp to Warren's, and Rocco went whirling to the doorway. It was quite a mix-up, for a few moments. Three starting figures emerged into the passage, where there was a final whirl. They two went back, rather feathily, into Study Four, and the third was slung on Edgar Rocco, crawling 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. His prudish 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 crowd. The initials "T.K." in the corner told who the owner was. Rocco, snuffling, kicked it along the passage, as he departed. Liked it great a corner, and left it there.

II

"Oh," gasped Mr. Claxton.

"Oh," gasped Skip, like an idiot. It was Skip, all over.

On Wednesday afternoon, most College footballs were drifting chiefly toward the Carroll match. Tom King and Dick Warren, Hollingshead Perrot and

Curtis, and the rest of the team, naturally thought of nothing else. But almost every fellow in the Lower School was keen to see them and Carroll's boot-torn horse. Skip Figgins, too, was thinking about it: but, at the moment, he was more interested in business. Skip provided with a bunch of that innocent trout, was leaning his fat person on one of the old Fulgata oaks, slowly but evenly travelling through one business after another. It was exactly like Skip Figgins to throw away a business that without being gone 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. Charn, the master of the Fourth, notice it—till he stepped on it! Then he did!

Charn was taking his usual post-prandial walk. Charn'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 feet-master's manner and customs; he was also aware that Charn's favourite ground was the path under the oaks. But he was not thinking about Charn—till it happened. Then he gasped, and gasped with horror at what he saw—a partly feet-master suddenly transformed into a sort of imitation of a certain what?

Unnoticed, unsuspecting, Charn stepped on that business skin. What happened next he hardly knew. It seemed to him that the solid globe had streptly slid away from under his feet. Gone went Charn's necktie and the horrid! Skip had a startling view of partly legs descending to the air, over a following gust.



Charn's round at the perilous step.

Charn sat up.

For the moment he was quite bewildered. He gazed for breath. He stared at the perturbed Skip. He stared round him. Then he saw the business skin: which, of course, tumbled up at once, in his mind, with the business in Skip's fat hand. He rose to his feet, with an expression on his face that Rhododendrons himself would never have equalled.

"Figgins!"

"Oh, yes?"

"You thoughtless, careless stupid—horridly stupid—boy! You threw a business skin down in the path! I have fallen over it. Go to my study. Wait there till I want it!"

Charn did not add what you do

happen when he came in! He left Skip to guess that—which he did—early enough. Charve resumed his walk, still in a gurgling state. Skip, in the lyrics of spirit, started for the House.

In the yard he encountered Tom King and Dick Warren, who stood at his veritable Vaude.

"What's up?" they asked simultaneously.

Skip explained, *deprecatingly*.

"Oh, you are!" said Tom.

"Oh, you are!" said Warren.

"I'm for it!" growled Skip. "I've got to look in Charve's study—for him to come in and give me an 'Oh, ho!'"

"Don't enter the match," said Tom. "Charve will be here soon."

"Oh, how do you do?" mumbled Skip, and he rolled himself on. Just then Skip was too interested in football than in what he was to receive from Charve.

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 Renee gave him a glare.

"You clumsy son!" he squeaked.

"Look here——!" hissed Skip.

But Renee was gone.

Finally, it was not Skip's fault for once. Renee, turning the corner suddenly at a run, had done it. But it was the fat Miss who was left breathless from the collision, and for some minutes he remained where he was, recovering his wits. Then, slowly and dully, he resumed his way to Mr. Charve's study.

III

Skip jumped.

Really, he could hardly believe what he saw in Charve'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. Directly it was pointed



Then he realized an only way being in the study

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

"WHO CARES FOR OLD CHARM?"

"Oh, screens!" 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 Charms's form who would have liked to "tag" Charms. Few, if any, ever ventured to do so. But some fellow, evidently, had ventured now: while Charms was out on his accustomed grid. That impudent inscription was to meet his eyes when he came in. Charms 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 was, that fellow would go up to the Head - that was certain. Skip earnestly hoped that Charms wouldn't that him out, whoever he was.

Then he noticed an oily rag lying in the locker.

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

"The silly ass!" breathed Skip. "What a fellow! Charms might spot him from that hooky."

He picked it up. Handkerchiefs were muffled. It was not a trace of "mug". That oily rag was an infallible clue. It would not fail to lead Charms directly to the reckless young man who had defaced his glass. The fellow might as well have left his signature. That fellow, whoever he was, could not of course have forgotten that Stanley G. Lager

Ruggles would be seen in the study to wait time for Charms. But it was Skip's luck, a bit of luck for him. That spot of evidence was not going to remain for Charms to see.

Then Skip jumped again - or rather, he leaped.

"Tom!" he yelled.

He gazed at that oily rag! There in the corner of it, oily but unmistakable, were the initials "T.K." It was Tom King's. The man who also had defaced that insidious message on the glass for Charms was his own class, Tom King, captain of the Fourth!

"Tom!" shrieked Skip. "Tom! Oh, the fellow - the ass! Ragging Charms, and leaving his hooky behind to tell him who did it! For lot of Sweary he would play this afternoon if Charms came in and found it!"

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

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

Then he looked round for a shower, and wiped the look-up-glasses. He wiped hard and fast, till he was red and breathless, and every speck of ink had disappeared. The entrance left him wigged: but there was nothing for Charms to see: only Skip was peering, with covetous Tom-like covage, till he squeak when Charms, at last, did come in, and a case concerned the plumpier trousers in the Fourth Form of Filbert.

Some smile, a sour smile.

They were in the changing-rooms. Harry Compton and Co. of Carroll's had not yet turned up, but Tom King and his merry men were getting ready. They were looking forward to a keen Soccer match, and a win over the visitors - though that was as yet on the knees of the gods. Carroll was good man at the game: but Tom fancied that Fulgar had just that little bit extra that was needed, and he was, himself, at the very top of his form. His look was very cheery, as Rocco noted with that sour smile of his. He was going to look much less cheery shortly, Rocco opined: when Charm came cying on his track!

Rocco, while other fellows changed for Soccer, had nothing to do but loaf with his hands in his trousers pockets. But he, like the footballers, was in an anticipative mood: though what he anticipated was something quite different.

How way it had been, Rocco reflected, to give the junior captain a knock back for checking him out of the street, and pinning him neck and crop out of Study Four. That dropped head-knack, which he had kicked into a corner from their ill-timber, had occurred to his mind when he was thinking out ways and means: and he had found it where he had left it. Now - and his sour smile widened as he thought of it - that knack, black with ink, was in Charm's folder: a clue to the disappointing bond that had traced insulting words on Charm's looking-glass. Not more than a minute after Charm got back to his study, the Thursday would find

From the window, Rocco had an eye on a pretty figure in the distance. He observed that pretty figure coming to-

wards the House. Charm was going in - and Rocco smiled. He could picture the look on Charm's face when he read that message on the mirror: and he was going to see it now. Any minute his heavy tread might be heard.

But the minute ticked away and no heavy tread was heard. The smile on Rocco's face was replaced by a look of pained irritation. Charm was certain to be as good as a letter - he was certain to spot that ink-knack - he was doubly and trebly certain to get after its owner. Yet he did not come: and no summons came to call Tom King to his study. It was irritating and puzzling to Rocco. Charm was not the man to let such a matter stand over for five minutes. Yet nothing happened. Then, at length, there was an exclamation from Warren, looking from the window, ignoring Rocco:

"Here they come!"

Carroll had arrived.

Rocco pruned his teeth. His calculations had been made carefully, and his scheme to knock Tom King out of the Carroll world seemed to him fault-proof. Certainly, he had never calculated on Slip Rogues and a bonus (his: even the messages of attorney-could-be have counted on that! But something must have gone wrong, though he could not imagine what.

Tom King, in all events, was going to play Soccer after all. For under Rocco's malicious eye he watched Tom with his men, and lined up with them at Dan Carroll's. Bruce followed on, looking over his shoulder to the hope of seeing Charm in the office. But there was no sign of Charm, and Parkinson of the Fifth blew the whistle, and the ball rolled. A crowd of Fulgar juniors watched Bruce among them: and he



Tom King's aim was not the goal's keeper.

might have had his pleasure, if he allowed, of watching a really good game. But it did not register his heart when Tom King put the leather in at the visitors' goal; nor when Dick Warren saved that after that from Harry Compson, 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 hands. Force in his lips. He had only one eye on the game - the other on the watch for Charn.

But he never saw Charn. He saw Skip Duggan arrive, rather late, with a pained expression on his plump face; and he had been informed in Skip's night have word that he wriggled considerably as he stood watching the game. But he was not interested in Skip.

Why didn't Charn show up? He must have gone to his study - he must have seen what was dabbed on his glass - he must have picked up King's hoodie: he must know, or at least believe that he knew, who had done it: and he was not the man to be a football match stand in the way of the out-going of the side of wack. But, whatever the reason, nothing was seen of Charn: not when the first half ended with Fulgate out up. Rowe gave up hope, and slumped away to his study, there to console himself with cigarettes for the failure of his help-out scheme.

So he raised a second half (but was quite drilling, when Compson of Corroch, at last, got through Dick Warren's defence and equations; and then another good Corroch's man, Fute-

Carton, plunged the heater in; and then Ballinger got through, making the score once more equal; and finally Tom King, with a wonderful long shot, tore the visitors' goal by surprise and landed the ball in the net, just as Perkins was going to blow. But somebody missed Boone, scowling over his cigarettes in his study while the Friar's crowd roared and cheered.

V

"You city cat, Tom."

"Hi!"

"Futball?"

"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 home to bed. Tom had kicked the winning goal. So when Skip Ruggles called 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 cat!" said Tom. "You fat fooling cat—"

Skip laughed, derisively.

"Me an cat?" he said. "I like that! What price you? If I hadn't found your lanky in Chase's study, whom would you be? Where would the Carcroft match be? You'd be up to the Head, and the game a piece! Me an cat! Why, of all the asses that ever stood about you're the best, you are! Playing mud balls on Chase, just before a soccer match, and dropping your lanky in his study fat hen is fed—oh, you make me tired!"

This was so much Greek to Skip's theme.

"You burbling blunderer, what do you

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

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

King and Warren looked at it.

"In Chase's locker," said Skip, "and 'Who Care for old Chase' inked on his looking-glass with that very lanky. Lucky Chase sent me to his study." Skip gave a reminiscent wobble. "I was jolly well and you I begged that lanky jolly quick, and wiped off what you'd dashed on his glass—and whom would you be if I hadn't? Me an cat! 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 Chase's study at all. When Skip, at long last, did comprehend that, he was quite agitated. Chase could hardly have believed Tom innocent, in the face of the evidence; but Skip, of course, did, when his fat head finally ground it.

"Some awful rooster, to land you in a row with Chase, that?" gasped Skip.

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

"Only Rose—"

"Rose!" 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, what are you going?"

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