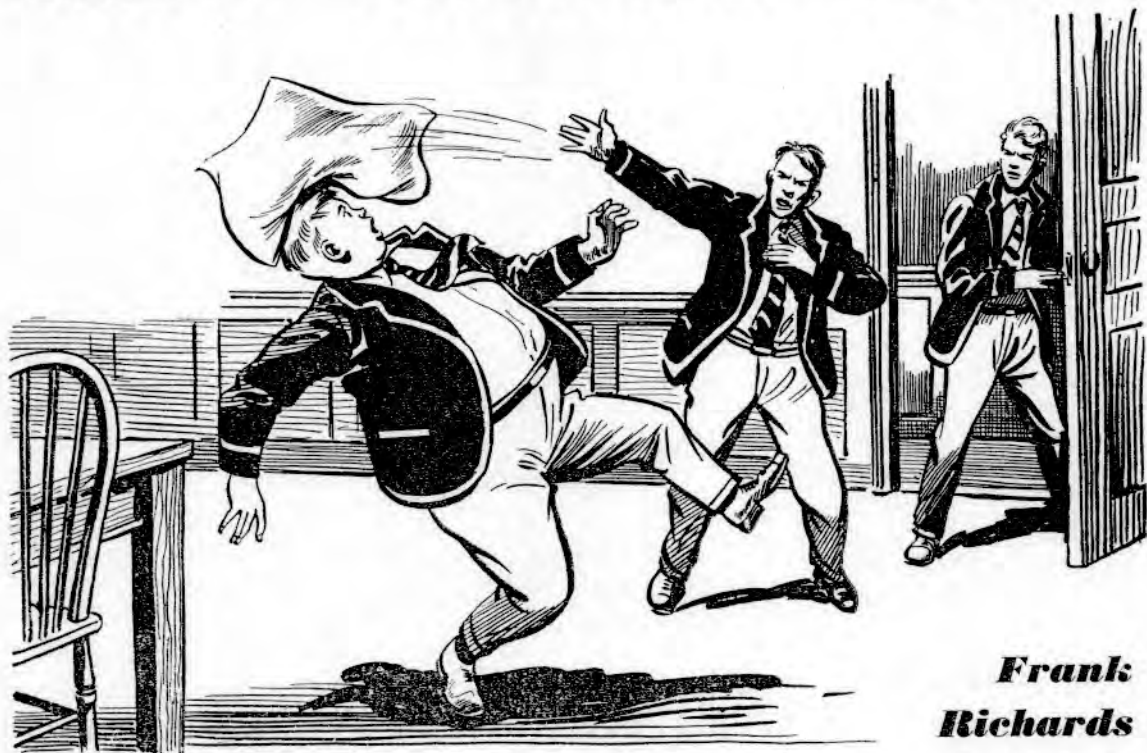


SKIP KNOWS HOW



**Frank
Richards**

WHETHER Selwyn, of the Shell, would have won the swimming race on the Fenny, without the inadvertent assistance of Skip Ruggles, was a moot point in the Lower School at Felgate, and it had to remain moot. There were a dozen fellows competing, but everyone knew that it was between Selwyn of the Shell and Tom King of the Fourth. Study Four, of course, banked on Tom, and they were all the more keen to see him the victor, because Selwyn, though he certainly could swim, was a little given to swank, and seemed to carry on as if he already had the event in his pocket — which he assuredly had not!

When Charne, the master of the Fourth, came down on Tom with a very heavy down, there was dismay in Study

Four. The race was scheduled for Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday, so when Charne rapped out the fateful words, “Extra school on Wednesday, King!” there was in Study Four, as by the yellow Tiber of old, tumult and affright!

It was not really Tom’s fault. It came about in this wise. Selwyn, who never made a secret of his good opinion of himself and his powers, was telling his friends in the Pound to be sure not to miss watching him leave the mob behind on Wednesday. Skip Ruggles, who heard him, could not forbear interjecting the expressive word “Gas!” Whereupon Selwyn hurled a cushion at the fattest head at Felgate. Tom King came into the Pound just in time to see his fat chum spread-eagled on the floor,

kicking up little fat legs, and gurgling for breath. It was quite a natural for Tom to go into action at once, which he did, up-ending Selwyn, and sitting on his head. Such little episodes were not really uncommon in the junior room, but the uproar, on this occasion, was perhaps a little out of the common, and it caused Charne to look in. The sight of a member of his form sitting on a Shell fellow's head, while the Shell fellow roared and struggled, and heaved, seemed enough for Charne. Rhadamanthus himself could not have looked grimmer.

The scene, of course, ended abruptly when a beak looked in. Tom King jumped up hurriedly; Selwyn, out of breath, continued to sprawl and gasp. Charne's grim eye pin-pointed Tom.



Skip wrinkled a fat brow in deep thought. "I say, suppose a fellow pinched his study key—"

The fateful words came. Having uttered them, Charne rustled away.

And that was that!

"Any other day," groaned Tom, in Study Four, "it wouldn't have mattered a boiled bean. But tomorrow—"

"Charne's forgotten the race tomorrow," said Dick Warren. "Perhaps, if you reminded him—". But he paused, and shook his head.

"Not a hope!" said Tom. "Might try it on, but—". He too shook his head.

"You can't cut the swim, and let that swanking ass Selwyn pull it off, Tom," said Skip. "Look here, a fellow can cut Extra, if he's ready to take a whopping afterwards."

"Fathead!" said Warren. "It's Charne himself who's taking Extra tomorrow, and he would be after Tom like a shot."

"Um!" said Skip. "I suppose he would! Not much good Tom going down to the Fenny, if Charne sent a pre. to fetch him back. But look here, we've got to do something about it. Tom's not going to cut it. If we could get Charne out of the way somehow—" Skip wrinkled a fat brow in deep thought. "I say, suppose a fellow pinched his study key—"

"What?"

"And tiptoed along and locked him in his study after tiffin!" said Skip, brightly. "That would keep him out of mischief."

"Fathead!" said Warren.

"Ass!" said King.

"Well, I think it's a jolly good idea and I'm willing to take the risk, to give you a chance, Tom," said Skip, stoutly.

"Think he wouldn't step out of the window, if you did?" hooted Warren. "Oh!" Skip, apparently, hadn't thought of that. "I—I suppose he might.

Ye . . . es, I suppose he would. But——”

“I’ll put it to him, tomorrow,” said Tom. “There’s just a chance that he might let me off, for the swim. I’ll try it on, at any rate. Nothing else we can do about it.”

“We’ve got to do something else,” said Skip. “You’re going to swim tomorrow, Charne or no Charne. We’re not going to have that gas-bag Selwyn swanking over this study. Look here, if Charne was out of the way, another beak would take Extra, and you could cut. You’d be reported to Charne afterwards, but that wouldn’t matter – it’s worth a licking. I’m going to think this out——”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The idea of Skip thinking it out, or indeed doing any thinking at all, seemed to entertain his chums. Serious as the situation was, they chortled. Skip gave them an indignant glare.

“You can cackle,” he said. “But I’m going to work it somehow, to get Charne off the scene, and give you a chance to cut, Tom. Leave it to me to pull Charne’s leg somehow!”

“You fat, fozzling, footling chump!” said Tom King ungratefully. “The only chance is that Charne may let me off, if I tell him about the race, but there won’t be the ghost of a chance if you try playing potty tricks on him. If I catch you playing tricks on Charne, I’ll give you six on the bags with the fives bat.”

“Look here——” bleated Skip, indignantly.

“And I’ll give you another six!” said Warren.

Skip snorted and rolled out of the study, leaving his chums in somewhat dismal discussion. It says much for the loyal friendship of Skip, that in spite of

“Ha, ha, ha!” The idea of Skip thinking it out, or indeed doing any thinking, seemed to entertain his chums.



such ingratitude, he persisted in his determination to see Tom through. He concentrated his fat intellect on the problem, and at length evolved a plan, of which he did not confide a single whisper to his friends. He did not want six, or double-six, on his plump bags! Afterwards, he would let them know, and they would be jolly glad that he had solved the problem, and Skip was content to wait for their enthusiastic gratitude till then.

II

Mr. Charne breathed hard and he breathed deep. His pin-point eyes glittered. He was in what members of his form would have called a “bait”. And no wonder – for surely any beak would have been in a bait, coming into his study and seeing what Charne saw.

Seldom did any Fourth-Form fellow venture to "rag" Charne. Even Reece, who was as full of tricks as a monkey, generally steered clear. But somebody had been ragging now.

It was after tiffin, on Wednesday. Charne came into his study, to read his newspaper till Extra School. Clearly some surreptitious person had been in the study before him, and had apparently brought a brush with him, which he had dipped into Charne's inkpot. For across the newspaper, which lay on the table, a sentence was daubed in capital letters:

"IF YOU WANT YOUR
JUVENAL IT'S UP IN THE
ATTIC"

Charne glanced over the table. In leisure hours, Charne was wont to get busy in translating Juvenal. His volume of that ancient satirist, its margins thick with Charne's notes, was always to be seen on his study table – till now. Now it was missing. Incredible as it seemed to Charne, some wildly reckless ragger had transported that precious volume to the attic, and left that impertinent message for Charne – to give him a climb up almost endless stairs! No wonder Charne's expressive countenance registered wrath.

Who had done this? Capital letters left no clue. That young rascal Reece, perhaps, or – or – really, it might have been anybody. Charne realised that it would not be easy to track out the culprit. But he was chiefly anxious about Juvenal, with his notes on the margins. He was making up his mind to the effort required to mount all those stairs, when there was a tap at his door, and Tom King entered the study.

"If you please, sir——" began Tom, meekly.

Charne's eyes pin-pointed him. A lean forefinger tapped the newspaper.

"Do you know anything of this, King?"

Tom glanced at the newspaper, and started. That monkey Reece, was the thought that come into his mind. But of course he could not say so.

"Oh! No, sir! I've never seen it before. I hope you don't think I would do anything like that – I came here to – to ask you something, sir."

"Indeed." Having thoroughly pin-pointed him, Charne was satisfied that this was not the culprit. "What is it, King?"

"About – about Extra School this afternoon, sir."

"Two-thirty!" said Charne, briefly.

"Oh! Yes, sir! But – but if you please



sir," said Tom, with a meekness that could not have been excelled by the most lamb-like of lambs, "if you please, sir, it's the junior swimming race this afternoon, and I'm entered, sir, and — and — and Langdale's going to start us, and — and if you'd be so kind as to let Extra stand over till Saturday, sir——" Tom's voice trailed away, and he waited to hear his fate.

Charne stood silent, looking at him. Charne's edicts were like unto the laws of the Medes and Persians, as a rule, unchangeable. He was not wont to rescind a sentence, for any reason whatsoever.

But the mingled trepidation and eagerness in the junior's face touched a chord. Charne, after all, had been a schoolboy himself, though it was long,

long ago. And it was true that he had forgotten the swimming event due that day, and he did not want to devastate junior sports. There was a long pause; his answer was long in coming, but it came:

"Very well, King! In the circumstances, you may go into Extra School on Saturday instead of today."

He was rewarded by the brightening of the junior's face. It was like the sun coming out of the clouds. Charne even smiled.

"Oh, thank you, sir!" gasped Tom. "Thank you ever so much, sir." He backed to the door, walking on air. Study Four was going to beat that swanking ass Selwyn after all!


"One moment, King," added Mr. Charne. The junior, whose request he had granted, had come to the study at a very convenient moment, as it happened. "Perhaps you would oblige me by going up to the attic, and fetching the volume of Juvenal which some impertinent boy has taken there."

"Oh, certainly, sir! I'll go at once."

"Thank you, King," said Mr. Charne, quite graciously. "I am going to Common-Room now, but you may leave it on my table here."

"Yes, sir!" said Tom, and he hurried from the study. Mr. Charne left it, to proceed to Common-Room, there to peruse a newspaper that was not inky.

Tom ran up the stairs. Charne, if he had gone up, would have gone slowly, step by step, with not infrequent pauses, but Tom King went up almost like the wind. He was anxious to join Dick Warren and impart to him the glad news. He fairly flew up the stairs, past the study landing, past the dormitory landing, and then up the narrow, winding stair to the long-disused attic.



Who had done this? Capital letters left no clue. That young rascal Reece, perhaps, or — or really it might have been anybody.

"Here, let me out of this! What's this game? Who's there? Open this door at once! Let me out of this!"



The attic door, which opened outwards, stood wide open, almost flat against the wall. It could not possibly occur to Tom King that a fat figure was parked behind it, between the door and the wall. Charne, if he had come up, certainly would not have suspected it, neither did Tom. The open doorway gave him a view of the window opposite and on the window-shelf, a large calf-bound volume. He tramped into the attic, and across it to the window.

Slam!

The door banged shut after him.

A clap of thunder on that fine summer's afternoon could hardly have startled Tom more. Juvenal was in his hand, when the door slammed suddenly from outside. He spun round, staring. Click!

The key, evidently placed in readiness on the outside of the lock, turned and clicked. A scamper of hurried feet followed. Someone was running down the attic stair. The patter of running feet died away.

"What - what - who - what——" stuttered Tom, in his amazement. He tramped across to the door, and wrenched at the handle. The door did not stir. He crashed his knuckles on the panels.

"Here, let me out of this! What's this game? Who's there? Open this door at once! Let me out of this, I tell you."

But answer there was none.

III

"Seen King?"

Skip Ruggles was asking that question, up and down and round about Felgate, more and more puzzled and alarmed as the minutes ticked away.

Looking for Tom, to apprise him that it was all clear, Skip, to his surprise and alarm, failed to find him. He asked everybody he came upon, but the answer was always in the negative. Nobody seemed to have seen King, since he had gone into the House to speak to Charne. Dick Warren had gone along with the crowd to the bathing hut on the Fenny, where, on Long Reach, the race was to take place, under the auspices of no less a person than Langdale, the captain of Felgate. There was plenty of time, before Extra, for Tom to join up, if he had a favourable answer from Charne. But Tom did not join up, and Warren could only conclude that Charne had said him nay, and that he was out of it. All Dick Warren could do was to make up his mind to go all out himself to uphold the prestige of Study Four.

But Skip knew better. Skip knew who had abstracted Juvenal from Charne's study, and left that message for Charne. Skip knew that Charne was safely off the scene, for had he not parked himself behind the open attic door, waiting for Charne to come up, and had he not heard, with his own fat ears, footsteps going into the attic, and had he not slammed the door, locked it, and bolted down the attic stairs?

Certainly, he had not seen the person who had gone into the attic—Skip could not see through an oak door. But it had to be Charne. Nobody ever went up to that disused attic, and only Charne had any reason for going there—after his precious Juvenal!

Satisfied with his masterly strategy, Skip had no doubt that Charne was safe out of the way, and as another master would have to take Extra, Tom could "cut". Any beak but Charne would simply mark him absent, to be reported to his form-master later. Thanks to his brainy chum, Tom was going to swim, and beat that swanking ass Selwyn. All that was needed was for Skip to give Tom the tip.

Only—he couldn't find Tom.

Up and down and round went the anxious and worried Skip, seeking Tom King and finding him not. The half-hour chimed from the clock-tower—a sad sound for the delinquents who had Extra School on a half-holiday. Skip wondered whether Tom had, after all, cut, chancing it with Charne; really that seemed the only solution! If that was so, he would join the crowd at the bathing hut, and Skip, at last, rolled down to the Fenny to see whether Tom was there.

He was not there! Selwyn, Dick Warren, Reece and Bullinger, and other

fellows, had already changed, but among all the boyish figures in swimming trunks, Tom King was not to be seen. Skip could only hope that he would turn up, even at the last minute, to hear the good news that he could join in the swim without danger from Charne. But Tom King did not join up, even at the last minute, and when Langdale gave the signal, Skip had to give up hope.

It was quite a good race, and worth watching, but there was no doubt that Selwyn of the Shell, as he had told the fellows in the Pound, had it in his pocket—in the absence of Tom King. Dick Warren was a good man at the game, and he ran Selwyn close, but all the rest were merely also-rans. Dick came a good second but Selwyn was a fairly easy first, though whether he would have been first, had Tom been there, was a moot point that had to remain moot. Tom was not there, and that was that!

IV

"You fathead!"

"What?"

"You silly ass!"

"Eh?"

"Oh, you ditherer!"

Tom King and Dick Warren, in Study Four, stared at Skip Ruggles, blankly. Skip, pointing an accusing, fat finger at Tom, called him names—why, neither of them could guess.

Neither of the two was feeling either merry or bright. Tom, naturally, had not been cheered by a couple of hours locked up in an attic. How long he might have had to remain there he hardly knew, had not Charne come up after Extra School. Charne, not finding Juvenal in his study, supposed that the

junior had neglected to fetch it down, and came for it himself – to his astonishment finding a member of his form locked in the attic. Tom, released at long last, found Dick Warren in Study Four, and learned that Selwyn of the Shell had pulled off the race – with the additional agreeable item that Selwyn was swanking all over the shop as a result. Warren learned, with amazement, what had happened to keep Tom away, and the two were discussing the mystery, when Skip blew in. They were keen, fearfully keen, to discover who had turned that key on Tom, agreeing that when they found him out, they would boot him all over Felgate, and absolutely yearning to get on with the booting. Skip interrupted.

“So you’re here!” hooted Skip. “You fathead – you ass – walking off like that – where have you been – did you go into Extra after all, or what? I looked for you everywhere to tell you that it was all clear. I couldn’t find you anywhere. After all my trouble, and taking the risk with Charne, you had to fool around somewhere and miss the race. What sort of dithering ass do you call yourself, Tom King? After I’d got Charne out of the way, and made it all safe for you——”

“What?”

“Why, if it comes out that it was I who locked Charne in the attic, I may have to go up to the Head for it!” hooted the indignant Skip. “And then you chuck it all away, not turning up for the race after all——”

“Mad?” gasped Tom. “Charne wasn’t locked in any attic——”

“That’s all you know!” snorted Skip. “I tell you I fixed it all up – pinch-

ing his Juvenal and leaving a note for him that it was up in the attic – and waiting behind the door for him to come up – and then turning the key on him, and——”

“You!” yelled Tom King and Dick Warren, simultaneously.

“Yes, me!” snapped Skip. “Got him safe out of the way, like I said I would, and then when I looked for Tom to tell him, I couldn’t find him anywhere——”

“You potty ditherer,” shrieked Tom. “It wasn’t Charne you locked in the attic——”

“It jolly well was,” said Skip. “He came up for his Juvenal, just as I planned it, and I——”

“He didn’t!” yelled Tom. “He sent me up for it!”

“Eh!”

“Me!” roared Tom. “It was me you locked in, you mad ass – me! That’s why I missed the swim, after Charne had let me off Extra!”

Skip almost fell down!

“You!” he stuttered.

“Yes, me!”

“Oh, crikey!”

Tom King and Dick Warren jumped up. They had been intensely anxious to find out who had turned that key. Now they had found out! They had been yearning to boot him! Now they booted him. They were great chums in Study Four at Felgate, but nobody, looking into the study now, would have supposed so. Really it did not look like it, with Skip Ruggles dodging frantically round the study in vain efforts to elude those lunging feet. He hardly felt that he was still in one piece, when at long last he escaped from Study Four and fled like the wind for his fat life.