

# OUT OF BOUNDS!

*Frank Richards*



**M**ORNEY was the cause of the trouble. Mr. Morney, the master of the Shell at Felgate, had a tart temper. Fellows in his form sometimes had the raw edge of it. Tom King and Co., being in the Fourth, had nothing to do with Morney, and couldn't have cared less whether he had a tart temper or not. But on this occasion they had to care.

It came about in this wise.

There had been a fall of snow. It was not a heavy fall: certainly no reason for abandoning the cross-country run planned for the afternoon. Fellows like Froeze might prefer to loaf by the fire in the Pound: but most of the Felgate Fourth were hardy fellows, indifferent to weather. Tom King, Dick Warren, even Skip Ruggles, looked forward to that run under a wintry sky, and did

not care if it snowed cats and dogs and crocodiles. In the meantime, though the snow had stopped, and there was not really a lot about, there was enough for snowballs. What was more natural than that the Felgate Fourth, when they came out after dinner, should improve the shining hour by snowballing one another? They did not even see Mr. Morney when he came into the offing. Nobody meant to snowball a member of Dr. Leicester's staff. Unfortunately they did it without meaning to. Snowballs whizzing in all directions were no respecters of persons. Morney captured three or four. He spluttered as he captured them. Then the juniors became aware of his proximity.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom King.  
"Morney——!"

"Sorry, sir!" gasped Dick Warren.

"Didn't see you, sir——!" stammered Bullinger.

That was of no use to Mr. Morney. He wiped snow from his face, shook it from his coat, and glared at the snow-balls. Had they been members of his own form, no doubt he would have given them a detention for the half-holiday, on the spot, or marched them into the House for "whops". But the master of the Shell couldn't hand out either detentions or whops to the Fourth.

"You - you - you——!" he stammered with wrath. "You will be punished for this - severely punished!"

He whisked away, leaving dismay behind him. His first thought was to whisk to Charne's study, to report these

reckless young rascals to their form-master. But remembering that Charne was away for the day, he whisked off to the Head's study instead. The result was calamitous, so far as hare-and-hounds planned for the afternoon was concerned. The Head's verdict was "gates". Probably Morney, with his temper at its tarterest, would have preferred "whops". But the Head took a milder view: and it was "gates". Which meant that hare-and-hounds was washed out, and that bags of scent all ready in Study Four had to be left unused. And the Felgate Fourth told one another, with deep feeling, what they thought of Morney, and how they would have rejoiced to smother him with snow-balls, or to tip him into one of the old chalk-pits on Hodden Heath, or even to boil him in oil! But an edict of the Head was an edict of the Head - and nobody thought of disregarding it - till Reece did.

## II

"Going?"

Reece asked that question in the doorway of Study Four. Three fellows stared round at him as he asked it. It was a disgruntled study, at the moment. Tom King, Dick Warren, and Skip Ruggles were staring from the window down into the quad, with glum faces. The snow had long stopped: there was little more than a powdering of it. The sky was a steely blue: there was even a glimmer of sunshine. The air was fresh and keen. It was, in fact, an ideal day for a run: and never had the open spaces called more enticingly. But the open spaces called in vain. What the Head had said, he had said: and that was that. Study Four stared at Reece, as he looked in with that sneering smile



"You - you - you——!" he stammered.

of his, which often made fellows feel like smacking it off his face.

"Going?" repeated Tom King. "Where?"

"Didn't we map out the run?" drawled Reece. "If you've forgotten, it's by Fell Wood, the meadows, round High Fell, and home by Hodden Heath. Couldn't ask for a better afternoon."

"What the dickens do you mean?" snapped Warren. "You know that the Head's washed it out. We're all gated, over that acid drop Morney."

"I know all that," assented Reece, shrugging his shoulders. "My idea is to go all the same."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Skip.

"Rot!" said Tom.

"Forget it," said Warren.

"Funk it?" asked Reece, in his most unpleasant tone.

They looked at him, very expressively. Study Four at Felgate did not "funk" anything. But to carry on regardless, in the teeth as it were of their headmaster, did not appeal to them. Respect for their headmaster's authority counted more with them than with Reece, who was a rebel by nature, and delighted in flouting authority whenever he fancied he could get away with it. What counted still more was the penalty involved. Dr. Leicester's commands were not to be disregarded with impunity. Nobody wanted to bend over in the Head's study.

"Oh, get out!" snapped Tom. "The Head's the Head, and we've got to toe the line."

"Good little boy!" said Reece, with sarcastic approval. "Nice little fellow, always obedient to his kind teachers!"

Tom crimsoned.

"You're asking to be kicked along the passage, Reece," he said.



*"Good little boy!" said Reece, with sarcastic approval, "nice little fellow, always obedient to his kind teachers."*

"Not at all," drawled Reece. "I'm asking whether you're going on that run, as we've arranged. I don't see letting old Morney muck it up."

"It's not old Morney—it's the Head!" snapped Warren, with a glare. "You don't care if you're in a row—you're always in rows—and you'd like to land us in one. Get out of this study."

"Okay," said Reece. "If you funk it, you funk it, and that's that. You two were going to be the hares, but if you won't come——"

"We won't!" said Tom.

"Just as you like. We'll go without you, and you can stick safe in your study and think what good little boys you are——" He laughed, as they glared at him. "It's not so jolly risky as

you seem to think. The Head's got visitors in the house this afternoon, and he won't be thinking about us or remembering that there's a Fourth Form at Felgate at all. And old Morney's gone over to Hodden, if you fancy that he might be keeping an eye open. We could slip out quietly by the football ground, and who'd be the wiser?"

Reece's proposition, it seemed, was not so reckless as it had seemed at first hearing. He seemed to have acquired useful information before he came up to Study Four.

But Tom shook his head.

"Wash it out," he said. "The Head's the Head."

"You're repeating yourself, dear man," said Reece. "And it's not going to be washed out. I'm going, and I fancy most of the fellows will join up. Stick in and let other fellows chance it."

With that, Edgar Reece turned and walked away. Three fellows looked at one another. Skip's fat face was pink with wrath.

"The cheeky swob!" said Skip. "He's not going to make out that this study funks going, if he's going."

"That's what Reece would like!" said Warren. "It's not good enough, Tom. We can't stick in if the other fellows go."

"We're not going to let that rat Reece diddle us into checking the Head," said Tom, savagely.

"I'm going," said Skip.

"Look here, you fat ass——"

"Same here," said Warren. "Please yourself, Tom."

Tom King did not please himself! Pleased or not, he couldn't hang back, in the circumstances: and he followed his chums from the study.

Actually, it turned out quite easy. Probably it could never have occurred to Dr. Leicester's majestic mind that when he had ordained "gates", any Felgate so gated would even dream of stepping one inch outside the limits. Morney might have been more dubious: but Morney was over at Hodden, as Reece had learned: so that was all right. In the corner of the football ground was a gate on Fell Lane, out of sight of the school buildings, which was not locked till lock-ups. Fifteen fellows, in ones or twos, slipped surreptitiously out at that gate, and gathered at a safe distance to start the run. Some of them, perhaps, felt some misgivings: for there could be no doubt that the Head's wrath would be quite terrific, if he found that his command had been disregarded. But so long as they were back in time for roll, it looked fairly safe. Anyhow, most of the Fourth were ready to chance it, rather than allow Reece to strut as the only fellow who dared. Even Study Four couldn't tolerate that: so there they were with the rest.

They were keen enough, if it came to that. Tom King and Dick Warren, the hares, got off with their bags of scent, and soon the pack were in full cry, through the Fell meadows. King and Warren, at first had been more inclined to kick Reece than to start the run; but they soon forgot that. Powdery snow crunched under their feet: the keen frosty air was like wine: they covered the ground at a good rate, and enjoyed every foot of it that they covered. They were well ahead at High Fell. By that time, some of the pack had tailed off—Skip first of all, with plump bellows to mend. But eight or

nine were still coming on, with Reece in the lead.

They trotted round the slopes of High Fell, scattering scent as they trotted. When they came out on Hodden Heath, and looked back, not a hound was in sight. Reece would have given a great deal to make a capture, as a score over Study Four. But he did not look like doing so. The hares slackened a little, and trotted on comfortably, across the wide, snow-powdered expanse of Hodden Heath. Here they were careful to keep to the beaten track: wary of the old chalk-pits that dotted the heath, almost hidden by straggling thickets and drifted snow.

"Okay," said Dick Warren, with another glance back. "They haven't an earthly. We shall be in before they're across the heath."

"Looks like it," agreed Tom. He laughed. "Not a bad idea of Reece's, after all—jolly good run, and ten to one nobody will know a thing—and it's a score over old Morney, too, after getting us gated." Then he frowned. "I hate checking the Head—but he won't know—"

"Six of the best all round if he did," said Warren. "But—OH!"

"What——?"

Warren gasped.

"Look!"

He gestured towards a lean figure in a long lean coat, on a cross-track at a little distance. Tom looked. Then he too gasped.

"Morney!"

"Copped!" groaned Warren.

"Oh, what rotten luck!"

And they halted, in dismay. It had

*"Look!" Warren gasped. "Morney!" "What rotten luck," groaned King.*



not been quite so safe as houses, after all. By sheer ill-luck, Mr. Morney was walking home from Hodden across the heath, just when the hares were on the lap lap. It had been a most enjoyable run - till then. Now it was most un-enjoyable - scheduled to end in the Head's study at Felgate!

#### IV

Mr. Morney could hardly believe his eyes. He halted in his walk, and stared. He stared at two well-known figures, at a little distance on the heath. He knew King and Warren, of the Fourth, at a glance: he noted their running kit and the bags slung on their shoulders. Gated by the Head - and running, evidently, in a paper-chase, and it was therefore easy to guess that a crowd more were behind, though not in sight. A wholesale defiance of authority: a disregard, indeed a contempt, of their headmaster, and incidentally of Morney himself! For a long moment Mr. Morney stared at those two figures: then, with knitted brows, and glinting eyes, almost on the boil with indignant wrath, he started towards them. They were not going to carry on with that impertinent, that insolent, defiance of authority - not if Mr. Morney knew it! He was going to march these two young rascals back to the school, under his own eye: and the rest would be caught as they came in later. And every one was going to be taken to the Head for judgment, when stern justice would be meted out.

"Cut?" muttered Warren, as Mr. Morney came striding towards them.

Tom shook his head.

"No use - he knows us. We're for it."

"I'll kick Reece for this."

"Same here!"

"Bother old Morney! He had to turn up, like a bad penny."

"Well, he's got us."

But had he?

"Oh! Look!" yelled Warren.

Mr. Morney, in his high indignant wrath, had forgotten, for the moment, that it was not always safe to leave the beaten tracks on Hodden Heath. He came towards the two dismayed juniors at a swift indignant stride, the frozen grass crackling under his feet, snow scattering as he strode. And then, suddenly, just as if he was performing a vanishing trick like a conjurer, he disappeared from sight.

King and Warren stared blankly.

A moment ago Morney had been in full view, striding at them. Now the bleak expanse of Hodden Heath was bare save for themselves. For a moment they were amazed. Then they understood. One of those hidden old chalk-pits, lying between the path Morney had left, and the one he was striding towards, had engulfed him.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Tom King.

Warren chuckled.

"One for his nob!" he said. "He can't collar us now, Tom. Cut on."

"Hold on," said Tom. "That pit may be deep——"

"All the better - it will keep him out of mischief," chuckled Warren.

"Fatehead! He mayn't be able to get out."

"Oh!" said Warren. And he ceased to chuckle.

They looked at one another. Morney had caused all the trouble, with his tart temper, and his resentment of a few accidental snowballs. Morney was going to land them in an awful row with the Head! But——!



*"King! Warren! Help!" Mr. Morney gasped.*

"Come on," said Tom.

They left the track, treading warily. They dragged aside straggling frozen brambles, and looked down. That old pit was narrow, but it was deep. And it was thick with drifted snow. Below them, as they looked, Morney, who had straggled to his feet, was standing chest-deep in snow, and staring up quite wildly. The faces that looked down were a good six feet above the face that looked up. The slippery sides of the pit gave no hold whatever. Morney had no more chance of climbing out of that pit than of flying round the moon. Unless somebody came to the rescue, the master of the Felgate Shell was undoubtedly booked for an extremely uncomfortable time.

Luckily for him, help was at hand. His face lighted, as he saw the two juniors looking down.

"King! Warren! Help!" he gasped.

Considering that Morney had them taped for dire penalties, it was very sporting of King and Warren to dismiss all else, and devote themselves to rescue work. However, that was what they did. It was not easy. It was hard. It was difficult, laborious, troublesome, and very cold work. At first they hardly knew what to do. They could not reach Morney, and he could not reach them. Finally they contrived, with tremendous efforts, to break a long branch from a leafless tree, and it was lowered into the pit. By its aid, and with helping hands from above, the

master of the Shell was able, at long last, to clamber out: breathless, gasping, and half-frozen.

Once on safe ground, he mumbled something through chattering teeth, and started off at a rapid pace, no doubt to restore the circulation. Probably he was feeling too frozen to bother further about the young rascals who were out of gates. Anyhow, he tramped away rapidly: and two breathless juniors were glad to see his back.

A note from a bugle rang out in the frosty air. The pack were in sight—some of them, at least—Reece in the lead. Tom gave them a stare.

"Come on, Dick!" he breathed. "We'll beat them yet."

"Put it on," said Warren.

They put it on.

## V

The hares were home, and had changed, by the time Reece, first of the pack, reached the gate in the corner. But they were waiting for him there: and they kicked him, hard and often, before he

escaped, yelling. That was a solace to go on with, while they waited for the wraith to come. The rest of the pack straggled in, one by one: the last of them in ample time for roll: if that had been of any use: but that, of course, was of no use now—now that Morney was going to report the whole crowd to the Head. They could only wait for the dread summons to the Head's study. They gathered in the Pound to wait for it: and when Mr. Morney looked in, they knew that the moment had come.

But had it?

"King! Warren." Morney's tone was unusually mild. "I am much obliged to you. Very much indeed. Thank you, King and Warren."

That was all! Morney rustled away, leaving a happy crowd in the Pound. Clearly, there was going to be no report to the Head. In their relief, Tom King and Dick Warren almost wished that they hadn't kicked Reece. But it was rather too late to wish that: and anyhow they agreed that Reece could do with a good deal of kicking.

