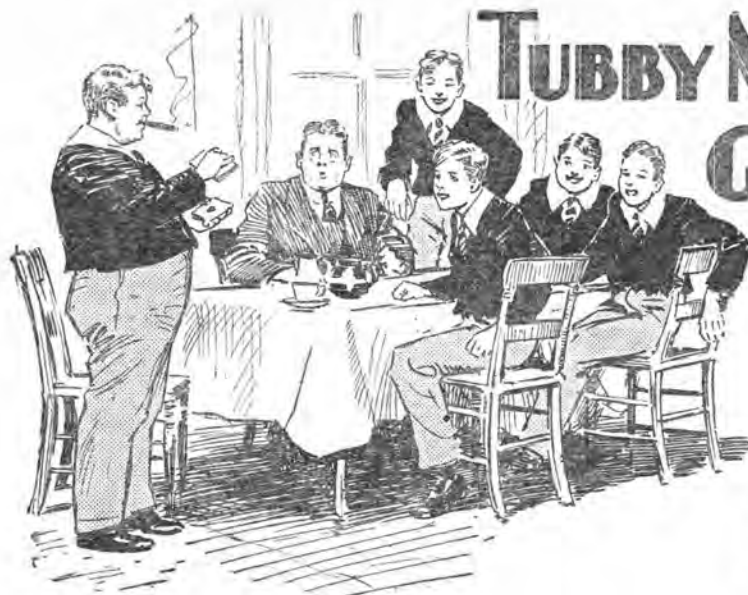




TUBBY MUFFIN GOES GAY!

By
OWEN
CONQUEST

Why did Tubby Muffin become a "gay dog"? Why did he start smoking and gambling like the other "bad lads" of Rookwood? This short complete story is one long laugh!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

TUBBY OR NOT TUBBY?

"**W**HAT the thump—" Jimmy Silver, of the Rookwood Fourth, stopped short. Words seemed to fail him, as he stood in the doorway of No. 2 Study. "Surely it can't be!" gasped Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Impossible!" said Newcome, with a shake of his head.

"Must be a mirage!" grinned Raby.

Tubby Muffin looked round from his armchair by the fireside. There was a grin on his podgy face and a lighted cigarette between his lips. It was that lighted cigarette that had caused consternation amongst the Fistical Four, as they looked into the study.

"I say, you fellows, trot in!" drawled Tubby. "Make yourselves at home, you know. What about a little flutter?"

"A—a whatter?"

"Flutter—a game of cards!" ex-

plained Tubby. "Which do you prefer—nap or banker?"

"N-n-ap?"

"B-b-banker?"

"I say, don't stand there lookin' like a lot of moultin' owls!" urged Tubby. "I know you chaps aren't goers like me, but you needn't look so soft about it. Trot in an' have one of these fags. They're rippin'!"

"You—you fat idiot!" gasped Jimmy Silver. "What's the game?"

"He, he, he! That's just what I'm askin' you!" grinned Tubby, who was omitting his final g's with fearful emphasis. "We'll make it nap, if you like. I'm a dabster at nap!"

"Ye gods!" said Lovell and Newcome together.

"Mad!" declared Raby. "I've always said he had a screw loose somewhere."

Really, it was enough to make the Fistical Four have serious doubts about Tubby's sanity. Tubby had never previously smoked or gambled

or omitted his final g's in the manner approved by the Rookwood "smart set"; and it was difficult to think of a reasonable explanation unless there was a temporary mental indisposition of some kind.

The Fistical Four looked hard and suspiciously at Tubby Muffin.

"Becoming a bit of a gay dog, eh, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"'Becoming'?" You mean I always was!" retorted Tubby Muffin, with a podgy smirk. "I was never a soft Good Little Eric like you chaps. I've been a goer all the time, at heart, though I'm only just beginning to break out."

"Oh, you're just beginning to break out, eh?" remarked Jimmy Silver. "So you'll be smoking a lot of cigarettes and having a lot of little flutters, I suppose?"

"Oh, rather!" grinned Tubby.

"Then, in that case," remarked Jimmy Silver. "it seems to me we'd better cure you before the trouble gets serious! Shall we cure Tubby, you men?"

"What-ho!" grinned Lovell and Newcome and Raby.

Tubby removed his cigarette from his lips and jumped up in sudden alarm.

"I say, you fellows, no larks, you know—ow! Leggo, you beasts! Yarooook!"

Wild yells rang out in Study No. 2 as Tubby's podgy form smote the floor. But the Fistical Four did not let Tubby's yells deter them from performing their duty. They carried on regardless.

"Going to chuck being a bad lad now, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver genially, when half a dozen bumps had been registered.

"Ow! Beast! Grooogh! Yes!"

"Well spoken!" grinned Jimmy

Silver. "Here's your cigarette back, old fat bean—just to impress the lesson on you!"

With that, Jimmy Silver picked up Tubby's discarded cigarette, which was still smouldering, and pretended to stuff it down the fat junior's back. What he actually inserted was an unlighted cigarette from the packet on the table. Tubby's imagination, however, promptly provided it with a burning end, and, under the impression that he was being burnt all the way down his back, he started performing a series of leaps that would have done credit to a Russian ballet dancer!

"Whooooop! Beast! I'm burning!" shrieked Tubby. "Water—quick! Fetch the fire brigade! Yarooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why not run up to the bath-rooms, old scout?" gasped Newcome. "There was a bath filling when we passed just now. You can put yourself out if you jump in!"

The Fistical Four hardly expected Tubby to take that advice seriously. But such was Tubby's panic that he did! Leaping and yelling, he flung himself out of Study No. 2 and made tracks for the bath-rooms. There, the astonished crowd he had swiftly collected en route saw him dive into a bathful of water and deliberately immerse himself up to the shoulders.

There was a roar from the crowd.

"What's the idea, Tubby?"

"Learning to swim, old chap?"

"Ouch! Groogh! That's put it out, thank goodness!" gasped Tubby.

"I say, you fellows——"

A tall figure appearing in the bathroom doorway cut Tubby's speech short. It was Mr. Dalton, the Fourth Form master. Dicky Dalton's eyes almost popped out of their sockets

at the sight of a fully dressed junior in the bath.

"Muffin! What in the name of goodness are you doing, boy?"

"Pip-pip-please, sir, putting myself out!" gasped Tubby. "Silver set me on fire and——"

"Silver set you on fire?" hooted the Form-master.

"Well, sir, he put my cigarette down my back and——"

Dicky Dalton glared.

"You were smoking a cigarette then, Muffin?"

"Oh, no, sir—nothing of the kind! I wouldn't dream of smoking—and anyway I had only one or two puffs at it and——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" snapped Dicky Dalton.

"Is Muffin's allegation true, Silver?"

"Not exactly, sir!" grinned Jimmy Silver. "I did put a cigarette down his back, but it wasn't the lighted one. I threw that into the grate!"

The crowd gasped. Then, despite Mr. Dalton's presence, there was a yell.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—oh, crikey!" finished Tubby, finding no words capable of expressing his emotions.

There was a twinkle in Dicky Dalton's eye. But he still frowned on Tubby.

"You had better dry and change,

Muffin," he said. "After that, report to me. I shall cane you for smoking."

"Oh, lor'!" gasped the fat junior.

And that, so far as the spectators were concerned, ended the matter. And the general opinion was that the disastrous fate of Tubby's strange attempt to become a gay dog and a bold, bad blade would send him back to the straight and narrow path with a rush.

But that, strangely enough, proved to be an entirely mistaken opinion.

In the days that followed the incident of Tubby and the cigarette, the Fourth had their eyes opened. They began to see that Tubby Muffin was bent on acquiring a murky reputation at all costs.

He was seen more than once studying a pink sporting paper.

He was observed in earnest conversation in Coombe Lane with a shady person named Jim Huggins,



Tubby, under the impression that Jimmy Silver had thrust a lighted cigarette down his back, started performing a series of leaps that would have done credit to a Russian ballet dancer. "Whooooop! Beast! I'm burning!" he shrieked. "Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Jimmy Silver and Co.

who was known to be a collector of wagers on horse races in the neighbourhood.

He was even rumoured to have paid a visit to an inn near Bagshot for an afternoon game of billiards with Peele of the Fourth.

"Something has got to be done about it," said Jimmy Silver, after dinner one half-holiday, on being informed by Lovell that Tubby was contemplating another suspicious outing that afternoon. "We can't let Tubby go to the bow-wows like this!"

"If the fat idiot wants to do so, it's his funeral!" snorted Raby.

"True; but I've a funny feeling that he doesn't want to be a bad lad at all, in spite of appearances," said Jimmy Silver, wrinkling up his brow. "He doesn't really like smoking and gambling, you know. He's several sorts of a silly ass—but not that particular kind of a silly ass! I'd like to find out what's behind it."

"Well, let's ask Tubby!" said Newcome.

"Good egg!"

And the Fistical Four, without any more ado, went along to Study No. 2—to find Tubby just emerging in his outdoor clothes.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

MEETING UNCLE GEORGE.

"TELL us all about it, Tubby!"

Jimmy Silver's tone was friendly—but firm. Tubby looked alarmed.

"Look here, if you're talking about Mornington's cake, I don't know anything about it. Besides, it was only a wretched currant cake, hardly worth bothering about."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm not talking about Mornington's cake, Tubby," said Jimmy Silver

firmly. "I'm talking about you. Why have you gone gay? Confide in your Uncle James."

"Look here, Jimmy Silver, I told you the other day I'd always been a goer——"

"Chuck it, Tubby! I know better," said Jimmy Silver sceptically. "What's at the back of it all? Out with it, old fat man!"

Tubby paused and pondered. Then he grinned a podgy grin.

"All right, then. Seeing that you chaps are more or less pals of mine, I'll let you into it. The fact is, I've turned into a goer to please my pater."

"What!" yelled the Fistical Four.

"A week ago he wrote me saying that my Uncle George from Canada would be visiting Rookwood shortly," said Tubby. "He mentioned that Uncle George had made a fortune in Canada, and that he wanted to leave Uncle George with the impression that I was going to turn out the same kind of go-ahead chap myself."

"Well?"

"He also said that Uncle George was himself an old Rookwood boy."

"Didn't you know that much about your uncle before, fathead?" asked Newcome.

Tubby grinned.

"No, I didn't. That's just where my turning into a goer comes in. When I told the Head about Uncle George coming here, you see, I found out that my pater had been keeping the truth about him from me. The Head let it out before he realised I didn't know. The fact is, Uncle George was expelled from Rookwood!"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Expelled for blagging," grinned Tubby. "It seems he was a real bad hat while he was here—gambling and

smoking and all that. Now do you see the point?"

"Not quite."

"Well, you're an ass, Jimmy Silver!" said Tubby disgustedly. "Here's an uncle who was bunked from Rookwood for being a rank outsider—and never looked back from that day. He's coming back to his old school to see me, and I've got to give him the idea I've got the makings of a successful man like he is in me. How am I going to do it?"

"Oh, my hat! You mean——"

"I mean that the only way to impress my uncle is to show him I'm a gay kind of chap like he was himself in his young days. Just that!" grinned Tubby. "Now you know why I've changed a bit lately. I've been trying to get a bad reputation. See?"

"Great pip!"

The Fistical Four looked at each other and then at Tubby Muffin. Then they grinned.

"Now we understand!" grinned Lovell.

"Clear as daylight!" chuckled Jimmy Silver, looking quite relieved.

"You haven't taken the wrong turning really. You've just pretended to take it, so as to impress your uncle! My hat!"

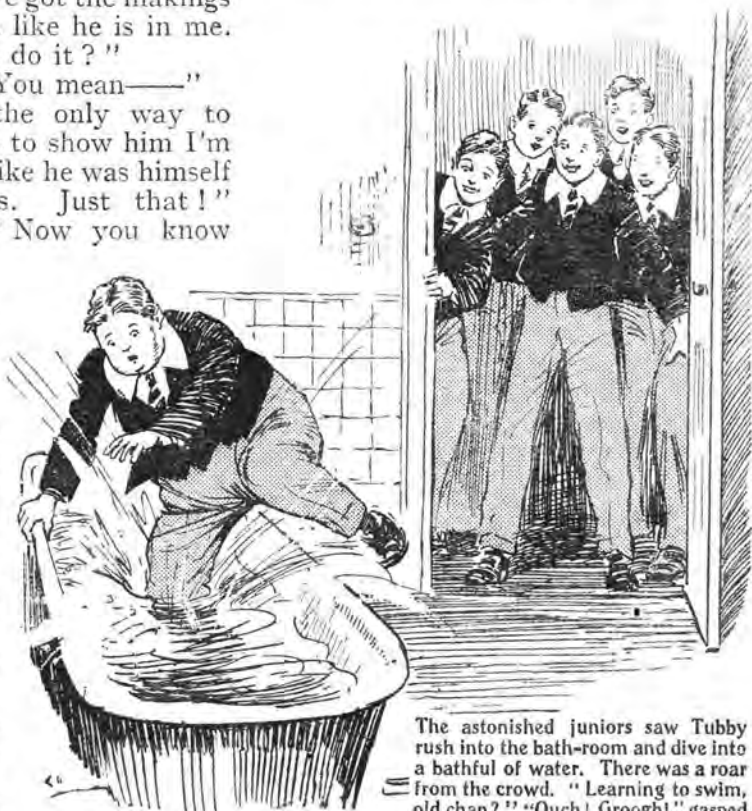
"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, you chaps! It's nothing to laugh at," said Tubby seriously. "My uncle made good after being a real bad egg at Rookwood, and he'll be awfully pleased when he

finds I'm a bad egg, too. I expect he'll make me his heir, you know. Probably I shall be wealthy for life through turning into a rank outsider."

"Ye gods and little fishes! It's like a giddy fairy tale!" said Jimmy Silver. "When does Uncle George arrive, then, Tubby?"

"This afternoon. I'm just off to meet him at the station," said Tubby



The astonished juniors saw Tubby rush into the bath-room and dive into a bathful of water. There was a roar from the crowd. "Learning to swim, old chap?" "Ouch! Groogh!" gasped Tubby."

"Look here, you chaps, what about coming with me? Of course, you'll have to pretend to be smoky blackguards—the sort of chaps Uncle George will approve of, you know."

Jimmy Silver laughed.

"We'll come, Tubby. It strikes me you may need someone to keep

an eye on you this afternoon, and if you do, we're the men for the job, eh, chaps?"

"What-ho!" grinned Lovell and Newcome and Raby.

And so it came about that when Uncle George's train steamed into Coombe Station that afternoon the Fistical Four, as well as Tubby Muffin, were there to meet it.

"By the way, I've no idea what my uncle looks like, but I expect we shall recognise him as soon as we see him," said Tubby. "He'll look a gay old bounder, you know!"

But the passenger who introduced himself to the Rookwood juniors as Tubby's uncle was short and plump—not unlike Tubby, from some angles—and his manner was brusque and not very friendly. Tubby Muffin and the Fistical Four eyed him in undisguised surprise when he announced himself.

"My hat! But I expected——" began Tubby. Then he pulled himself together and said hurriedly: "I mean, how are you, uncle? I'm your nephew!"

"How do you do, Reginald?" remarked Mr. George Muffin, eyeing Tubby with a critical eye, as he grasped Tubby's podgy hand. "Like most of the family, you run to fat, I see!"

"Oh, really, uncle——"

"No need for these muscles to be so slabby, though!" went on Uncle George, giving Tubby's arm a grip that made Tubby squeak. "I'd have thought your games would have kept you in better trim, Reginald!"

"Ow!" gasped Tubby. "I'm fit enough, uncle—but, of course, I'm not one of those athletic freaks who spend all their time developing their muscles! I've got other interests—cards and horse-racing, for instance!"

The Fistical Four, watching for Mr. Muffin's reaction to that cheerful admission, saw him jump.

"You—you—what?" he exclaimed.

"But I was forgetting—these are some friends of mine I brought along, uncle," said Tubby, with a podgy grin. "Silver—Lovell—Newcome—Raby; four absolute dogs, you know, uncle!"

"Wha-a-at!" gasped Uncle George.

"I don't think your nephew really means that, sir," said Jimmy Silver, with a cough. "He's—er—a bit of a leg-puller, sometimes, aren't you, Tubby?"

"He, he, he! I say, Silver, old chap, don't be scared of Uncle George!" grinned Tubby. "You don't mind a chap being a dog, do you, uncle?"

"Well, upon my soul!" ejaculated Uncle George, registering considerable surprise at that cheerful statement.

"Hem! I fancy Tubby—that is, Reginald—was going to suggest getting back to Rookwood right away, sir," said Jimmy Silver, diplomatically. "If that suits you, sir."

"Most certainly. I'm extremely anxious to see the school again," said Tubby's uncle, displaying a little enthusiasm for the first time since his arrival. "Are we all ready?"

"Oh, rather!"

And the entire party made a move out of the station.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

NOT ACCORDING TO PROGRAMME!

THE one thing that impressed itself on the minds of the Fistical Four as a result of those first few minutes with Tubby's uncle was that he was by no means the type Tubby had been anticipating. If his

expression was anything to go by, Mr. George Muffin certainly did not approve of Tubby's being interested in cards and horse-racing. On the contrary, he looked as if he disapproved very strongly, indeed.

The Fistical Four, feeling that it was up to them to convey this information to the slower-witted Tubby, did their best to convey it by signs and grimaces, as they quitted the station. But Tubby failed entirely to follow their meaning, and waxed more and more talkative over his imaginary misdeeds.

The more he talked the more silent Uncle George became; two pink spots developed in his cheeks and a strange gleam came into his eyes. The Fistical Four noticed these signs, and expected the storm to break at any moment.

By the time they reached Rookwood, Tubby had really warmed up to his work.

He stopped Peele and asked him if he knew the winner of the two-thirty race that afternoon—a question that made Peele jump.

He tapped Hansom of the Fifth on the arm near the steps of the Classical House and asked him if he had put his name down in the forthcoming billiards championship. Hansom was left leaning back against the stone balustrade of the steps, as Tubby passed on—apparently rendered speechless by that cheery inquiry!

All round the Classical House, as they continued their tour of inspection, Tubby was tapping fellows on the arm and buttonholing them with inquiries relating to the world of gay dogs and bold, bad blades. It was quite an ordeal for Jimmy Silver and Co., as time went on. As for Mr. Muffin, he was certainly being impressed; but a glance at his thunder-

ous brow and compressed lips was sufficient to tell anyone with eyes to see that he was not being impressed quite as Tubby had intended!

The climax came after tea in No. 2 Study—provided, after a whispered confab., by Jimmy Silver.

It was then that Tubby, so to speak, reached his top note. Grinning triumphantly, he produced a cigar-case and offered it round. And after the mesmerised juniors and Uncle George had declined in turn he calmly lit one of the torpedo-shaped horrors himself and puffed away vigorously. Then he brought to light a pack of cards.

"Now for a little flutter!" grinned Tubby. "Name your game, gentlemen, and we'll see how much we can rook each other for!"

It was the last straw that broke the camel's back! Mr. Muffin jumped to his feet, red with rage.

"You young rascal!" he roared. Tubby jumped.

"Eh, what? Look here, uncle——"

"You young villain!" hooted Uncle George furiously. "Put that idiotic cigar out and come along with me! I am going to take you to your headmaster and request him to give you the flogging of your life!"

Tubby blinked. He was completely taken aback.

"But—but I thought—whooooop!"

"So much for that poisonous thing!" snorted the infuriated Mr. Muffin, snatching the smouldering cigar from Tubby's mouth and hurling it on to the fire. "Now come with me!"

"Mr. Muffin, I think perhaps I can explain——" began Jimmy Silver.

But, for the moment, Mr. Muffin was not in the mood to listen to explanations. He grabbed Tubby by the scruff of the neck and rushed him out of the study.

"Oh, my hat! Better follow!" grinned Lovell; and the Fistical Four followed along the passage and down the stairs and across the Hall right to the door of the Head's study. And there, before their eyes, the last act of the piece was played out.

"Doctor Chisholm, you remember me?" Mr. Muffin was saying, as they arrived. "I am Muffin—the one you expelled years ago. On that occasion, sir, you did me a good turn for which I shall always be grateful to you. You brought me to my senses. Now I want you to do a similar good turn to this wretched nephew of mine by flogging some sense into him before expulsion becomes necessary."

"My dear sir!" exclaimed Doctor Chisholm, quite shocked. "What ever has he been doing?"

"Precisely the same foolish things as I did at Rookwood, Doctor Chisholm—gambling, smoking, breaking bounds."

"Bless my soul! Is this true, Muffin?"

"No, sir—yes, sir! What I mean, sir, is——"

Jimmy Silver took a hand in the game. He felt it was up to somebody to get Tubby out of his tangle.

"Perhaps I can explain it all, sir," he said. "It's not my business, but if Mr. Muffin will allow me to bring in his name——"

"If you can say anything in the young reprobate's defence, by all means bring in my name!" said Mr. Muffin.

And then Jimmy Silver explained just how Tubby had come to take the wrong turning.

The Head and Mr. Muffin listened carefully. When Silver had finished, they looked at one another. Then Mr. Muffin relieved the tension by laughing.

"So that was it!" he said. "Well, well, it's a relief. It's good to know that my nephew is not a rogue—even though it appears that he's several sorts of a young ass!"

"Look here, uncle——" protested Tubby feebly.

"You can all listen to this, boys," went on Uncle George, beckoning to Lovell and Newcome and Raby, who were hovering uncomfortably in the doorway. "I was one of the so-called 'smart set' at Rookwood in my day. My nephew seems to have thought on that account that I should still approve of similar foolishness on the part of Rookwood boys to-day. He was wrong.

"I've seen a lot and learned a lot since I left school, and all I've seen and learned has confirmed the lesson Doctor Chisholm taught me—that the schoolboy who apes grown-up weaknesses in order to look manly is heading for trouble. I learned that lesson in time. But that is not everybody's good fortune. Get the idea?"

Doctor Chisholm smiled.

"Then I can disregard your request to flog Muffin?" he asked.

"Most decidedly! I did him an injustice—as he unwittingly did me."

"Cheers!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

And though, of course, it was impossible to cheer in the Head's study, they made up for it by cheering when Mr. Muffin, having given a tip to Tubby the size of which made that junior's eyes goggle, took his departure.

Uncle George's visit had certainly not gone according to programme. But it had been successful from all points of view—particularly in ensuring that never again would Tubby Muffin want to go gay!

THE END