



The Rookwood Rat-Hunt!

By OWEN CONQUEST

Tubby Muffin's Latest Stunt creates
a vast amount of excitement at
Rookwood!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Tubby Plans Revenge!

"TURNED out of my own study!"
Reginald Muffin—christened "Tubby" on account of his barrel-like circumference—limped painfully along the Fourth-form passage at Rookwood.

The fat junior looked, and felt, as if he had just been put through a mangle. His collar was loose; his Eton jacket was torn; and he was dusty and dishevelled. Fellows who saw him limping along the passage grinned at him, and they surmised that their plump schoolfellow had been in the wars.

Tubby Muffin had just been "scragged" in his own study, by his own study-mates, and then ejected into the passage. And he had been warned that he could expect another dose if he returned to the study.

The "crime" for which Tubby had been ejected was simply this. He had partaken of an early tea, whilst his study-mates were on

the football ground; and, his appetite being keener than usual, Tubby had scoffed the whole of the supplies. He had eaten his study-mates out of house and home, so to speak, and they had come on the scene just as the last slice of plum-cake was disappearing into Tubby's capacious interior.

Tubby Muffin had argued that a fellow can do what he likes in his own study. If he likes to help himself from the cupboard, he is at perfect liberty to do so. True, his study-mates were entitled to a share of the supplies; but if they chose to footle away their time on the football field, instead of coming in to tea at a respectable hour, it was their funeral. "First come, first served," was Tubby's motto.

Tubby's study-mates did not see eye to eye with him in the matter. They had come in to tea with keen appetites, only to find that there was no tea to be had. Whereupon, they had waxed exceeding wroth, and had ejected their fat study-mate with great violence.

"Beasts!" growled Tubby, as he limped along. "I wish I could change out of that study. I've wanted to, for a long time. But I can't get anybody to swop with me. If only I had a study of my own!"

But it was like crying for the moon, for a mere Fourth-former to expect a study all to himself. Such a thing was unheard-of at Rookwood. The majority of the junior studies had three occupants. Some had four. The fact was, there were not enough studies to

go round. The demand far exceeded the supply.

But Tubby Muffin, as he limped out into the quadrangle, looked very thoughtful. He was trying to devise ways and means of procuring a study to himself. And as he rolled to and fro under the old beeches, Tubby's brain was very busy.

"Peele's study would suit me best," he murmured. "It's a topping little den, and it's awfully nicely furnished. But the puzzle is, how can I get Peele and Lattrey and Gower out of it?"

That was, indeed, a puzzle which might well have baffled the Sphinx of old.

It would be no use approaching Cyril Peele, the "nut" of the Fourth, and asking him to vacate his study for Tubby Muffin's benefit. Such an impudent request would result in yet another painful ejection for Tubby.

But there are more ways than one of killing a cat, or procuring a study. Presently Tubby Muffin's face brightened up, and he gave vent to an unmusical chuckle.

"I've hit it!" he exclaimed. "I reckon that if there was a plague of rats in Peele's study, he'd jolly soon be scared out of it. And so would Lattrey and Gower. They simply hate rats; I heard 'em saying so the other day. And I know a fellow down in the village who will let me have as many rats as I want. I'll get about two dozen of them, and smuggle the beastly pests into Peele's study! He, he, he!"

Shakespeare once said that conspiracies should no sooner be

formed than executed; and Tubby Muffin did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. He coolly borrowed Jimmy Silver's bicycle from the shed, and pedalled down to Coombe in the gathering dusk.

On the outskirts of the village lived a man with a queer taste in hobbies. His particular hobby was rat-catching. For this purpose, he kept a large wire trap, into which the rats were enticed. They were captured alive, and after a brief spell of captivity they were liberated, only to be chased and killed by dogs.

Tubby Muffin's luck was in. There were two dozen live rats available, and they were placed in a special hamper, securely fastened, and handed over to Tubby for a small consideration.

Tubby persuaded the rat-catcher to carry the hamper up to the school, and the fat junior pedalled slowly beside him.

"Stay here with the hamper for a few minutes," said Tubby, when they reached the school gates. "I'm just going to see if the coast is clear."



Peele had only a brief glimpse of the interior of the study—but he saw all he wanted to see! The place was alive with rats! (See Chapter 2.)

An Unwelcome Intruder !



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Drawn by E. E. Briscoe

A Knight of the Road, hard pressed, takes refuge in Rookwood School.

A HIGHWAYMAN AT ROOKWOOD

IN the year 1750 the roads of England were infested with highwaymen, and no traveller was safe from their unwelcome attentions. In the county of Hampshire the acknowledged king of the "high-tobymen" was one Jerry Swiveller, a most audacious fellow. In the month of September a determined effort was made to capture Swiveller. He was located in the Half Moon tavern upon the Winchester road, and the place was surrounded by the Bow Street runners—the policemen of those days. The highwayman, however, made a sudden dash from the house, seized a horse and spurred off across country, with the runners in hot pursuit.

Making straight for Rockwood School, Swiveller sprang from his horse, climbed over the wall and raced across the Quadrangle. The next minute he was swarming up the thick ivy towards the window of the Prefects' Room, which he entered, pistol in hand.

There were three fellows in the Prefects' Room, and their consternation at the sudden entry of this armed and desperate highwayman can be imagined.

"Not a sound, my pretty fellows," said Swiveller. "Do as I bid ye, or my barkers shall let daylight into ye!"

Caught thus at a disadvantage the three Rookwooders, whose names were Lacy, Grubb and Oldfield, hastened to do the highwayman's bidding.

Locking the door, they managed to keep all inquirers at bay for an hour or more, under the pretext that they were studying and refused to be disturbed.

The highwayman eventually took his departure by the way he had come, making the boys swear to say nothing of his visit until the morning—which promise they obeyed.

The result was that the highwayman made good his escape.

Two years later, after making himself the terror of Hampshire, Jerry Swiveller fell into the hands of the authorities and was hanged at Winchester.

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And he hurried into the building, and made his way to Peele's study.

The apartment was empty. Cyril Peele was taking part in a chess tournament in the junior common-room, and Lattrey and Gower, as well as practically the whole of the Fourth, had gone to see the game. The Fourth-form passage was deserted.

"Good!" ejaculated Tubby Muffin. "I couldn't have chosen a better time."

He sped back to the gates, and relieved the rat-catcher of the hamper. It was a weighty hamper, and there was quite a commotion going on inside it. Tubby shuddered a little as he carted the hamper through the dark quadrangle. He had no more love for rats than Peele & Co. had.

He reached Peele's study without being challenged; and he dumped the hamper on the floor, and switched on the light. Then he paused, panting from his exertions.

Now came the most ticklish part of the business. The hamper had to be emptied of the rodents. Tubby wished he had asked the rat-catcher to perform this gruesome task. But it was too late now. The rat-catching gentleman was on his way back to Coombe.

"It's got to be done!" muttered the fat junior. "But supposing the beastly things set on me? They might be hungry; and I've heard that a hungry rat will attack anything or anybody. Groo!"

Certainly it was an awkward business; but it had to be done. Every moment that Tubby Muffin lingered in Peele's study added to his danger.

The fat junior rolled over to the cupboard, and opened it wide. Then he saw that the window was securely fastened. And then, screwing his courage to the sticking-point, Tubby turned the hamper on its side, and wrenched off the lid. Before any of the rats could escape, he turned the hamper upside-down. For a brief moment he stood there, pressing it down over the struggling rats. Tubby was shaking from head to foot, and the perspiration was beaded on his brow.

The crucial moment had come! Tubby Muffin shut his eyes, and jerked the hamper away in a flash. Then he fairly hurled

himself through the open doorway, slamming the door behind him.

Quick as he was, however, a couple of the rats managed to escape from the study, and they scuttled away down the passage.

The remainder of the rats were prisoners in Peele's study. There would be ample supplies of food for them, for Peele intended to hold a little supper-party that evening, when the chess tournament was over, and lots of provisions had been laid in for the occasion. Tubby Muffin had thoughtfully left the cupboard door wide open, so that the rats could help themselves.

His task accomplished, the fat junior hurried away with the empty hamper, which he stowed in one of the box-rooms. Then he rolled away to the junior common-room.

"I've worked the oracle," murmured Tubby. "When Peele & Co. go to the study later on they'll find it over-run with rats, and they'll scoot away in a panic. They won't dream that the rats have been specially smuggled into the school. They'll think that a plague of rats has suddenly broken out in their study. The chances are that they'll refuse to stay there any longer. The study will be going begging, and I shall bag it. But I'll get that rat-catcher fellow to clear all the rats away first."

Tubby Muffin was serenely confident that his little scheme would succeed up to the hilt. And he rubbed his hands gleefully in anticipation of becoming the sole tenant of Peele's study. In that luxurious apartment, he would be able to spread himself, and do exactly as he pleased. So he thought, anyway. But the best laid schemes of mice and men—and rat importers—often go astray!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Rats !

"Bow-wow-wow ! Woof !"

The loud and incessant barking of a dog echoed through the Fourth-form passage at Rookwood. The barking was punctuated, at intervals, by a violent scratching noise.

Cyril Peele & Co., the "nuts" of the Fourth, were coming along the passage ; an

Greyfriars Champions



DICKY NUGENT

(Champion Author)

You've heard of Dickens and of Scott,
Those mighty men of letters ;
But Dicky Nugent says they're not,
Nor ever were his betters !
Among the scribes who wield the pen
A leading light he's reckoned ;
We boast no literary men
Like Nugent of the Second !

He writes of heroes like Bill Hart,
And Deadshot Dick, the bandit ;
Each plot is such a work of art
You marvel how he planned it !
Of pirates on the Spanish Main
He tells you tales in plenty ;
You'll never wish to read again
Such lesser lights as Henty !

His spelling is a trifle queer,
He's shaky in his syntax ;
And yet you grin from ear to ear
At Heads who sit on tintacks :
At masters who exclaim, " My hat ! "
Or, " By my Sunday breeches ! "
But Dicky's yarns would fall quite flat
Without such spicy speeches !

When Dicky comes to man's estate
He'll be sedate and solemn,
And scribble stories at the rate
Of twenty pounds per column.
But if his writing fails to show
Its present style and freedom,
I'm sure his yarns will never " go."
And few will care to read 'em !



Panic-stricken rats fairly poured into the passage, with Gyp snarling and yapping behind them. The terrier came bounding out of the study in hot pursuit. "Fetch your cricket stumps!" roared Jimmy Silver, "Old Gyp will want some help!" (See Chapter 2.)

they halted in astonishment on hearing that loud canine commotion.

"My only aunt!" exclaimed Peele. "What a rumpus! That sounds like Mack, the porter's, dog Gyp."

Gower nodded.

"There he is!" he exclaimed. "Seems to be trying to get into our study!"

The dog Gyp—an unusually large-sized terrier, which Mack the porter had recently bought for purposes of protection against "burglars"—was scraping and scratching furiously at the closed door of Peele's study. And he was barking and snarling in a truly ferocious manner.

The Fourth-form passage was strictly out of bounds to Gyp, and as a rule he observed the restriction. But wild horses would not have kept him from entering the Fourth-form passage on this occasion; for he was hot on

the trail of his deadly enemies—rats. Only a few minutes before, Gyp had spotted a couple of rats in the quadrangle, and he had made short work of them. He had then picked up their scent, which led to Peele's study. He could both smell and hear the friends and relatives of the rats he had already slain; and he clamoured loudly for admittance to the study. Gyp's blood was up. He was in a war-like mood, and he would cheerfully have faced a whole army of rats at that moment.

"Wow-wow-wow! Woof! Woof!"

Scratch, scratch, scratch!

Peele & Co., having recovered in some measure from their astonishment, walked on to their study. The dog, on seeing them, became more noisy than ever. If his doggy language could have been interpreted, he would have been heard to say:

"Open this door, you goggling fools!"

Can't you see that I'm simply dying to get at those rats?"

Gower grasped the dog rather gingerly by the collar, and held him.

"Take a peep into the study, Peele," he said. "There's somethin' wrong, I'm thinkin'."

Gyp struggled furiously in Gower's grasp, as Peele cautiously opened the door of the study.

The next moment there was a startled yell from the leader of the "nuts." He jumped back into the passage as if something had hit him.

Peele had only had a brief glance at the interior of the study; but he had seen all he wanted to see.

The room was infested with rats. There were rats on the table, and on the chairs, and in the fireplace; and Peele had caught a fleeting glimpse of a big fat rat perched on one of the shelves of the cupboard, delicately toying with a cold sausage.

"What's up?" asked Lattrey, in alarm.

"Rats!" Peele managed to gasp. "There's a whole blessed swarm of 'em in the study. Reminds me of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Goodness knows where they all sprung from!"

At the mere mention of rats Lattrey turned quite pale.

"Shut the door—quick!" he panted.

"No jolly fear! I'm goin' to let old Gyp loose amongst them. Let him go, Gower."

Gower released his grasp of Gyp's collar, and with one tremendous bound the terrier was inside the study.

A perfect pandemonium ensued. Sounds of snarling and snapping were intermingled with loud squeals of terror. The commotion brought a dozen fellows hurrying to the spot.

"What the thump——" ejaculated Jimmy Silver, in amazement.

"Do you fellows care about a rat-hunt?" inquired Peele, with a grin. "If so, now's your chance."

Even as Peele spoke a number of panic-stricken rats fairly poured out into the passage. Some of the juniors sprang away in alarm; others stood their ground.

"After 'em, Gyp!" roared Gower.

The dog needed no second bidding. With bared teeth, he came bounding out of the study, and dashed off in hot pursuit of the rats.

"Fetch your cricket-stumps, you fellows," exclaimed Jimmy Silver. "Old Gyp will want some help."

The juniors rushed into their studies, emerging a moment later with stumps. Then they sped down the dark quadrangle, whither the rats had fled.

Rookwood had not enjoyed a rat-hunt for many a long day, and it came as a welcome diversion.

The old quadrangle, usually still and peaceful at this hour of the evening, was now alive with running figures. The place was in an uproar; and Gyp's loud barking fairly awakened the echoes.

"Pile in!" roared Lovell. "We'll teach these blessed rats that they can't make Rookwood their headquarters!"

"Yes, rather!"

"Sock it into them!"

Suddenly the light of an electric torch was flashed upon the scene, and the stern voice of Mr. Dalton, the master of the Fourth, became audible.

"Boys! What is the meaning of this wild horseplay?" he demanded.

"We're rat-hunting, sir," explained Jimmy Silver cheerily. "There were about two dozen rats in Peele's study, and Mack's dog chased them out into the quad. I think we've killed most of them."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated Mr. Dalton, in astonishment. "I had no idea that there were any rats in the school. You say there were two dozen of the rodents in Peele's study, Silver?"

"That's so, sir," chimed in Peele.

Mr. Dalton looked grim.

"Then it is my belief that some wretched boy deliberately smuggled the rats into the school, for a practical joke!" he said. "I will probe this matter to the bottom."

Tubby Muffin overheard this remark, and he fairly quaked at the knees. He remembered, with a shock of alarm, that he had left the lid of the hamper in Peele's study. And, with the intention of removing that incriminating piece of evidence, Tubby suddenly darted away towards the building.

Mr. Dalton's voice fairly boomed through the darkness:

"Stop! Come back at once, Muffin!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Every boy will remain where he is," continued Mr. Dalton, "until I have made an investigation of Peele's study. It is possible that I may find some evidence which may lead to the identification of the culprit."

Mr. Dalton rustled away into the building. He found the evidence all right. The hamper lid bore the address of the rat-catcher in Coombe; and, that gentleman being on the telephone, the Form-master lost no time in ringing him up, and asking him to whom the hamper was supplied.

"I dunno the name of the young gent, sir," said the rat-catcher. "But he was a very fat young feller. I could pick him out in a crowd."

"There will be no need," said Mr. Dalton grimly. "I know the boy to whom you refer. Why did you allow him to have the rats?"

"He told me he wanted them for a harmless joke, sir, an' I took his word for——"

"Enough!" said Mr. Dalton. "I am satisfied that you did not act in complicity with the

young rascal. I am obliged to you for the information."

Mr. Dalton rang off, and sent for Tubby.

It was with a sinking heart that Tubby rolled along to the Form-master's study.

Those who happened to be standing below the lighted window of Mr. Dalton's study, could hear sounds of steady swishing. There were other sounds, too, resembling those of a wild beast in pain.

THE END



Rookwood had not enjoyed a rat-hunt for many a long day. The old quadrangle, usually still and peaceful in the evening, became alive with running figures. The place was in an uproar, while Gyp's barking woke the echoes. "Pile in!" yelled Lovell. "We'll teach these blessed rats that they can't make Rookwood their headquarters!"

(See previous page.)

THE NIGHT RAIDERS

By JIMMY SILVER
(of Rookwood)

HALF a stride,
Half a stride,
Half a stride,
Onward!
Into the rival dorm.
Marched the half hundred.
"Forward, the Night Brigade
In sleeping suits arrayed.
Keep near the balustrade!"
Into the rival dorm.
Marched the half hundred.
Forward, the Night Brigade!
Was there a boy dismayed?
Though the invaders knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to reason whether
They should display the "White Feather."
Theirs but to stand together!
Into the rival dorm.
Marched the half hundred.
Pillows to right of them,
Pillows to left of them,
Pillows behind them
Volleyed and thundered.
Loud rose the battle-cries:
"Classical chums, arise!"
Down with the Modern guys!"
Into that whirling fray
Rushed the half hundred!
Fiercer the foray grew,
Routed, the foe withdrew.
Swiftly the tidings flew—
All the school wondered.
Moderns in wild retreat,
Writhing at their defeat:
Classicals' joy complete—
Noble half hundred!
When shall their glory fade?
O the brave show they made!
Foes on the floor were laid,
Scattered and sundered.
Honour the fight they made,
Honour the Night Brigade!
Toast them with lemonade—
Gallant half hundred!

