

YES, WE HAVE NO BANANAS — BUT WE HAVE FINE STORIES INSIDE!

Week Ending  
September 29th,  
1923.  
New  
Series.  
No. 245.

# The POPULAR 2<sup>D</sup>

Twenty-eight  
Pages.

The Story Book  
for Boys.

EVERY  
TUESDAY.



**BILLY BUNTER, THE MODERN KNAVE OF HEARTS!**  
*Meet the world-famous schoolboy inside again this week!*

**THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF TUBBY!**

*It was all through a banquet! If Tubby Muffin had not been to that big banquet, had not snatched forty winks by the roadside on the return journey, it would never have happened. As it was it did, and Tubby passed through the most amazing series of adventures ever recorded!*

**THE ROOKWOOD CHUMS AGAIN!**

# Tubby in the Toils!



A gripping, new, long complete story, dealing with the adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co., of Rookwood.

By **OWEN CONQUEST.**

(Author of the Tales of Rookwood appearing in the "Boys' Friend.")

**THE FIRST CHAPTER. A Rude Awakening!**

**W**HITHER bound, Tubby?" The Fistical Four—Jimmy Silver & Co., of the Classical side—hailed Tubby Muffin from their study window.

The Falstaff of the Fourth was wheeling his new bicycle down to the school gates.

For once in a way, Tubby Muffin was well-dressed and well-groomed. It was evidently a very special occasion.

Tubby turned a beaming face towards his schoolfellows.

"I'm going to a banquet!" he said gaily.

"Aren't you jealous, you chaps?"

"Not a scrap," said Jimmy Silver.

"Where's the merry banquet?"

"Over at Burchester. It's a special feed, organised by Bunter of Greyfriars the editor of 'Billy Bunter's Weekly,' you know. All the sub-editors have been invited—Sammy Bunter from Greyfriars, Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble, from St. Jim's, and little me from Rookwood. We fixed on Burchester because it's situated midway between the three schools."

"It's a jolly long bike-ride," said Lovell.

"You'll never get there."

"The bike won't bear up for five miles under that mountain of flesh!" grinned Newcome.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin gave a snort.

"I'll wager I'm the first fellow to turn up at the Popular Cafe, in Burchester!" he said. "I can always keep up a steady dozen miles an hour when there's a feed at the other end."

"Don't go riding recklessly, you fat chump!" said Jimmy Silver. "There's a lot of traffic on the roads, these days, and we shouldn't like you to get mixed up with a steam-lorry."

"Or pitch over the handlebars, and do a somersault into a duckpond!" said Raby.

"If you're not back at a reasonable hour, we'll send the ambulance along the Burchester road, with a spade and pail to gather up any stray pieces of Muffin that happen to be lying about."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin turned his back on the laughing juniors. He mounted his machine in the

THE POPULAR.—No. 245.

school gateway and disappeared down the dusty road.

Tubby was feeling tremendously bucked with life. Banquets did not come his way every day. It was not often that the staff of 'Billy Bunter's Weekly' was gathered together with one accord in one place. Such occasions were red-letter days.

A long bicycle ride, on a sultry September afternoon, didn't appeal to Tubby Muffin very much. But he lacked the wherewithal to go by train, and cycling was his sole means of transport.

It was a matter of twenty miles to Burchester, and an athletic fellow would have made the journey comfortably in a couple of hours. But Tubby Muffin, despite his airy talk of keeping up a steady dozen miles per hour, progressed along the road like a tortoise with a pair of wheels attached.

At the end of five miles he was hot and uncomfortable. At the end of ten miles he was showing acute signs of distress. But the thought of the big banquet at Burchester spurred him on.

Tubby was conscious of an aching void in his interior. How ripping it would be to fill that aching void with sugary doughnuts and the creamiest of cream buns!

When, at long last, Tubby Muffin cycled onto the cobbled, old-fashioned High Street of Burchester, he felt like a grease-spot.

He scanned the shops on either side of the street as he crawled along. And presently, with a thrill, he caught sight of a well-appointed building, with the magic sign overhead:

**"THE POPULAR CAFE."**

"I'm the first to arrive!" he panted, as he rolled off his machine.

But Tubby was soon disillusioned.

Inside the cafe four juniors were already going strong. The brothers Bunter were there, and so were Fatty Wynn and Baggy Trimble. They had evidently started out earlier than Tubby Muffin.

Tubby glared at them as he rolled up to the table.

"Beasts!" he growled. "You might have waited for a chap!"

"We waited half an hour," said Billy Bunter, "and as there was no sign of you we thought you weren't coming."

"We'd quite given you up," chimed in Sammy Bunter, with his mouth full.

Tubby Muffin sank into a seat.

"Order what you like, old scout," said Fatty Wynn. "This feed is being provided out of the funds of the 'Weekly.' Don't stint yourself."

The advice was unnecessary. Having cycled twenty miles, with visions of a feed at every turn of the pedals, Tubby Muffin wasn't likely to stint himself when the great moment arrived.

A waitress was hovering near. Tubby beckoned to her. And the magnitude of his order quite startled the young lady. She began to wonder whether the latest arrival at the cafe was a human being or a bo-constrictor.

The affair was more like an orgy than a banquet.

Billy Bunter sat at the head of the table, and showed his sub-editors how to dispose of the maximum amount of food in the minimum amount of time. Not that they wanted showing!

The meal consisted of several courses, and if the feasters fancied a particular course they had it twice over.

Tubby Muffin was the last to start and the last to finish. He felt uncomfortably top-heavy when it was all over, and so did the others. But they had enjoyed the banquet up to the hilt.

Over a final glass of ginger-pop Billy Bunter gave his sub-editors a lecture on how he wished his 'Weekly' to be run in future. He told them what sort of articles he required, and so forth. In fact, he "talked shop." But the others were too drowsy to pay much heed to the words of wisdom which fell from the lips of Billy Bunter.

The party dispersed at length, and went their several ways—the Bunters to Greyfriars, Wynn and Trimble to St. Jim's, and Tubby Muffin on his solitary journey to Rookwood.

Tubby didn't feel like cycling twenty miles. It was an effort to cycle at all, for the fat junior was feeling the worse for food, so to speak.

He crawled slowly out of Burchester, and then an overwhelming desire to take "forty winks" came over him. He found himself yawning, and his head nodded over the handlebars.

"I simply can't go on!" he muttered. "It's those apple fritters—I'm certain of it! They weren't properly done, and they've made me feel heavy and sleepy."

**Look Out for "The Rookwood Giants!"—Next Tuesday!**

Tubby Muffin rolled off his machine and wheeled it through a gateway which gave entrance to a hayfield. And there, overcome by the heat of the afternoon and the tremendous feed he had consumed, he threw himself down under the shadow of the hedge.

Curling himself up like a fat dormouse, Tubby was soon in the arms of Morpheus.

His slumbers were disturbed by dreams—dreadful dreams, which flashed through his brain in a bewildering jumble. First, he was cycling over the edge of a precipice, and he seemed to be falling through an infinity of space. He was waiting for the inevitable "bump" at the bottom, when the scene suddenly changed, and he was being publicly flogged in Big Hall, for raiding the school kitchen.

Another quick-change effect, and the dreamer was whizzing through space in an aeroplane. He had no idea how to control the machine. He tugged frantically at the various levers, hoping to descend to earth; but every time he touched a lever he was shot up to a higher altitude, until he had dreadful expectations of bumping into a comet.

But the collision never came. The scene changed once more with startling suddenness, and Tubby Muffin was being marched away to the police-station by two stern-faced men. As in the case of Eugene Aram, there were gyves upon his wrists.

"Yaroooh!"

With a wild yell of terror Tubby awoke. Then he rubbed his eyes and wondered if he was still dreaming. For the two stern-faced men were actually there, standing over him. They were no dream-characters—they were there in grim reality.

"That's him, right enough!" said one of the men.

The other nodded.

"To think that we've been searching high and low for him for a week, thinking he was miles away from here! And then, when we come back to Burchester, we find him asleep in a hayfield, as casual as you like!"

The man who had first spoken glared at the prostrate Tubby. Like the Ancient Mariner, he held him with his glittering eye.

"Come along, young shaver!" he said.

"Eh?" gasped Tubby, in alarm. "Come along where?"

"You know where!" was the reply. "You've led us a rare dance, young Jorkins, and you'll catch it good and proper when you get back!"

Tubby Muffin sat bolt upright.

"I—I fancy you've made a mistake," he faltered. "My name's not Jorkins, it's Muffin."

The men—big, broad-shouldered fellows, who appeared to be detectives—laughed heartily.

"Ho, ho, ho!"

"Fancy calling himself Muffin!"

"Must have been a bit balmy in the 'crumplet,' to fix on a name like that!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Tubby Muffin tottered to his feet. He was confused and bewildered. It seemed as if the world had come tumbling about his ears.

What did it all mean? He had gone into a hayfield to take forty winks, and he had been awakened by two men, apparently detectives, who called him Jorkins, and went into peals of merriment when he told them that his name was Muffin.

Gradually it dawned upon Tubby's slow brain that it was a case of mistaken identity.

Evidently Tubby had a "double"—a youth named Jorkins, who had broken the law in some way and was wanted by the police.

Tubby Muffin was seriously alarmed. But he had no doubt that he would soon be able to convince the detectives that they had got the wrong pig by the ear, so to speak.

"I tell you my name's Muffin!" he repeated indignantly. "I belong to Rookwood School, and if you dare to lay hands on me, you rotters, I'll make a fearful row about it! Yow! Keep off, you beast! My name's not Jorkins, I tell you—it's Muffin!"

Tubby Muffin's wild outburst ended in a wail of alarm, as the strong hand of one of the detectives fell upon his shoulder.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### A Terrible Ordeal!

**O**NE minute, Smithers! Before we take him off we'll just make sure that he answers to the description."

So saying, one of the detectives took a card from his pocket.

A small photograph was pasted to the card—a photograph of a boy's face. It tallied in every particular with the plump and puffy countenance of Tubby Muffin.

At the foot of the photograph were some pencilled notes, which the detective proceeded to read aloud.

"Percy Jorkins, age fifteen. Escaped from Burchester Reformatory on the twentieth instant. Very plump in appearance, blue eyes, brown hair. Was wearing the usual reformatory garb, but has probably changed his attire since his escape."

The detective glanced keenly at the photo on the card, then he scrutinised the face of Tubby Muffin and nodded grimly.

"This is the young rascal, right enough," he said. "He's managed to get hold of a suit of Etons and a school cap from somewhere, but it takes more than a change of clothing to deceive us—eh, Smithers?"

"Rather!" said the detective who held Tubby Muffin in a grip of iron.

The fat junior struggled and spluttered.

"You've got hold of the wrong fellow!" he protested. "I'll jolly soon prove to you that I'm Muffin, and not Jorkins! Let me go through my pockets; there's bound to be some letters—"

"Produce them, then!" said Detective Smithers.

Tubby groped feverishly in his pockets. Then he gave a gasp of dismay. He had nothing on him to prove his identity. There was a penknife, but that didn't help. There was a slab of toffee, but that was equally useless. There was no letter of any sort, neither was there any article engraved with Tubby Muffin's name or initials.

Even Tubby's bicycle, which reposed in the hedge, had no card at the back of the saddle-bag bearing Tubby's name.

The fat junior gave a groan.

"There's nothing on me to prove who I am," he admitted. "But you've only to ring up Rookwood School, and the Head will tell you that I'm a pupil there."

"A pretty fairy-tale," said Detective Smithers; "but it cuts no ice with us! Come along! You've kept us hanging about long enough!"

Despite his protestations and entreaties, Tubby Muffin was marched away by his captors. Which proved that dreams sometimes have a habit of coming true.

The bicycle was left behind in the hedge. Apparently the detectives, in their eagerness to get their prisoner back to the reformatory, had overlooked it.

Tubby Muffin's heart sank within him as he was marched along.

There was no possible loophole of escape. Neither was there any possible chance of encountering any of the Rookwood fellows, for Burchester was twenty miles from the school.

If only the detectives had telephoned to Rookwood they would have soon discovered that they had indeed got the wrong pig by the ear. But they were quite satisfied that they had made no mistake. Save for his clothes, their prisoner tallied in every detail with the description.

On the outskirts of the town stood a grim, stone building, enclosed by a high wall, which was surmounted by pieces of broken glass.

Tubby Muffin shuddered as he gazed at the building. He did not need telling that it was the reformatory.

What was to happen to him now? Surely the authorities inside that grim building would realise that he was not the same boy who had made good his escape a week before?

The detectives halted outside the heavy iron gates. One of them rang the bell.

After a brief delay a gloomy-faced porter answered the summons. He gave a start when he caught sight of Tubby Muffin.

"So you've found the young rascal?" he exclaimed.

The detectives nodded.

"Where did you nab 'im—in Lunnon?" asked the porter.

"Never mind about that!" said Detective Smithers, who did not wish the porter to think that the discovery had been a tame one. "Take us to the superintendent."

The gloomy-faced porter nodded, and shuffled away on his gouty pins. The others followed.

Now that he was inside the reformatory gates, Tubby Muffin seemed to sense something terrible in the atmosphere. This place was as different from Rookwood as a

dungeon from a mansion. Everything struck a note of grimness and gloom.

A party of boys, clad in rough, coarse clothes, were being drilled in the yard—it could hardly be called a quadrangle. They had heavy dumb-bells in their hands, and a grim-faced sergeant was putting them through their paces. The sergeant carried a cane, and at the least sign of slackness on the part of any member of his squad, he darted towards the slacker, and dealt him a stinging cut.

For the first time Tubby Muffin began to realise what reformatories were like. They were anything but homes of rest for small boys who had gone astray.

This particular reformatory, though situated on the outskirts of a big town, was shut off from the outer world by its high walls. And the average, care-free passer-by little dreamed what went on within those walls.

The wretched inmates—unhappy victims of a system which ruled by tyranny rather than by kindness—could have unfolded many a tale of suffering and ill-treatment. But their lips were sealed, and all letters were strictly censored before they left the place. Occasionally a few details of what went on filtered through to the public, and there would be an outcry in the newspapers against a system which crushed the spirits of juvenile offenders, and drove them still deeper into crime, instead of educating them up to higher things. But the outcry would soon die down, and the conditions in the reformatory remained exactly the same.

Tubby Muffin was marched into the building, and escorted through some winding, gloomy passages.

The porter halted at a door marked "Superintendent." He applied his knuckles to it, and a deep voice bade him enter.

The little procession trooped into the superintendent's room.

A shiver ran through Tubby Muffin's frame when he came face to face with the superintendent. A more grim-looking man he had never seen. Even the most terrifying expression of the headmaster of Rookwood, when he was about to punish some delinquent, was kind and amiable by contrast with the expression of the man who now frowned at Tubby Muffin.

"So, Jorkins, you have returned—in custody?" said the superintendent, in steely tones.

Tubby Muffin flung out his arms appealingly.

"It—it's all a mistake!" he cried wildly. "I'm not Jorkins! You've all got hold of the wrong end of the stick! I'm Muffin, of Rookwood!"

The superintendent's frown deepened.

"Do you imagine for one moment, Jorkins, that I am to be deceived by a change of clothing? And an unnaturally high-pitched voice?" he said. "And do you suppose that members of the detective force could also be deceived?"

"We had his photograph, sir," said Detective Smithers, "and it corresponds with him in every detail."

"Quite so—quite so! There is not the slightest suggestion of a mistake having been made. There must be very few, if any, lads in the country of Jorkins' type—so disgustingly plump, and with such flabby features. How did you come by those clothes, you young rascal? And that cap? You broke into some school, and stole them, I presume?"

"Nothing of the sort!" cried Tubby Muffin. "These togs are my own—the togs I've been wearing at Rookwood. That's where I belong—Rookwood School, about twenty miles from here. Dr. Chisholm's the headmaster. Ring him up on the phone, or send him a telegram, and he'll bear out what I say."

"Enough!" said the superintendent sternly. "If there was the slightest doubt in my mind as to your identity, I should investigate. But there is none. I am quite satisfied that you are Percy Jorkins, the boy who escaped from this institution a week ago. Your hair has grown during that interval, and there is more colour in your cheeks. You have also managed to procure a change of clothes; but these trivial details do not hide your true identity."

Tubby Muffin pleaded and protested. He actually slipped down on to his knees, and beseeched the superintendent to get into communication with the authorities at Rookwood. He declared that Percy Jorkins must be his "double"—a fellow who resembled

him in every particular. But all his pleadings and protestations were in vain.

The superintendent thanked the detectives for their services, and they departed. With their departure, the last vestige of hope departed from Tubby Muffin's breast.

He was a prisoner in a reformatory! There would be no possible chance of escape. Believing him to be the truant Jorkins, the reformatory authorities would keep a strict watch on his movements.

There was no spark of consolation for the fat junior in his helpless plight. He could not hearten himself with the reflection that stone walls did not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage. The stone walls of this reformatory made a very effective prison, and the iron bars fixed outside the windows made an equally effective cage. Indeed, Tubby Muffin found himself wondering how on earth the real Jorkins had managed to effect his escape.

Suddenly he became aware that the superintendent was addressing him:

"You have committed a very serious offence, Jorkins, for which you will be punished with the utmost severity! I propose to hand you over to the sergeant, with instructions that your hair is to be cropped and your clothing changed. You will be placed on a bread-and-water diet for forty-eight hours, and to-morrow morning you will be publicly flogged!"

The superintendent seemed to find a peculiar pleasure in pronouncing this sentence. A tyrant by nature, he revelled in flogging the unhappy creatures committed to his charge.

At Rookwood, public floggings were the exception rather than the rule, and the Head found no pleasure in wielding the birch-rod. He always referred to it as "a painful duty." But the reformatory superintendent would not regard it as a painful duty. The proceedings would be painful for one person only—Tubby Muffin!

The superintendent pressed a button-bell, and after a brief delay there was a martial tread in the passage. The sergeant came into the room, and Tubby Muffin was handed over to his tender mercies.

The superintendent issued his instructions, and the sergeant nodded. Then he turned to Tubby Muffin.

"Kim on!" he growled.

The unfortunate Tubby had no alternative. With the strong grasp of the martinet on his shoulder he was whirled out of the room.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### Missing!

JIMMY SILVER'S face wore a worried look.

The shadows were deepening in the old quadrangle at Rookwood. Twilight was merging rapidly into darkness.

Mack, the porter, had locked the gates, but there was one fellow still on the wrong side of them.

Tubby Muffin had not returned.

Jimmy Silver and his chums were down at the gates, listening for the tinkle of Tubby Muffin's bicycle-bell.

Occasionally a cyclist flashed past in the gloom, but not one of them alighted at the gates of Rookwood.

There were all sorts of conjectures as to what had happened to Tubby Muffin.

"I reckon he's come to grief on the road," said Jimmy Silver. "He's such a reckless chump, and he's got no control over a bike."

"But if there had been an accident we should have heard about it by now," said Lovell. "I'm inclined to think that the staff of 'Billy Bunter's Weekly' are making a night of it over at Burchester."

"But the other fellows would have had to get back to their schools—"

"Well, Tubby isn't back, so the assumption is that they haven't gone back, either. They've all gone on the spree, I expect."

Newcome shook his head.

"I know a much simpler explanation than that," he said. "Tubby must have picked up a puncture, soon after he started to ride back from Burchester. He's had to walk back. He'll roll up by bedtime, I dare say."

But bedtime came, and the rolling-up process on the part of Tubby Muffin was not accomplished.

Jimmy Silver was thoroughly alarmed by this time. And so were other people at Rookwood.

Tubby Muffin had not answered his name

THE POPULAR.—No. 245.



**A BLUNDER SOMEWHERE! Tubby Muffin flung out his arms appealingly. "It—it's all a mistake!" he cried wildly. "I'm not Jorkins! You've all got hold of the wrong end of the stick! I'm Muffin of Rookwood!"** (See Chapter 2.)

at calling-over, and Bulkeley of the Sixth was making inquiries for him.

When Jimmy Silver & Co. came in, after their vigil at the school gates, Bulkeley spoke to them.

"Have you kids seen anything of Muffin?" he asked.

"We've been waiting for him to show up, Bulkeley," said Raby, "but there's no sign of him. He went over to Burchester this afternoon, to a banquet. Goodness knows what's happened to him!"

Bulkeley looked gray.

"Did Muffin go on his bike?" he queried.

"Yes, Bulkeley."

"Then he may have had a smash-up. The Burchester road is congested with charabancs and things, and you need to be a sort of trick-cyclist to ride in safety. You have to have eyes at the back of your head, and you also have to know how to pull up sharp at a second's notice. If there's anything wrong with your brakes—well, anything might happen."

"I wish we could go and search for the fat chump," said Jimmy Silver.

"I'll ask Mr. Dalton if you may," said Bulkeley.

"Thanks awfully!"

At that moment the master of the Fourth came on the scene. He was looking decidedly agitated.

"Has not Muffin come in yet, Bulkeley?" he asked.

"No, sir. I was about to suggest that these juniors should be allowed to go and hunt for him."

"Do they know which direction to take?"

Bulkeley nodded.

"Very well, my boys," said Mr. Dalton, turning to Jimmy Silver & Co. "You may undertake this quest. But do not be absent longer than you can help."

Jimmy Silver and his chums hurried round to the cycle-shed. They were not at all averse to the adventure. It would be rather ripping, skimming along the dark road when their schoolfellows were in bed.

There was some delay in starting off. Jimmy Silver had a puncture to mend, and Newcome had trouble with his chain. But the juniors were ready at last, and they lighted their lamps and pedalled down to the school gates.

Mack came shuffling out of his lodge to unlock the gates, saying that he considered it "disgustful" for young rips to be gallivanting around at that hour of the night.

But the juniors had Mr. Dalton's permission to "gallivant," and Mack had no alternative but to let them out.

They were soon speeding down the road, four abreast. There was very little traffic about at that hour.

Swiftly though they pedalled, the juniors on the extreme right and left kept a sharp look-out for "Tubby Muffin." They half-expected to find the Falstaff of the Fourth lying unconscious by the roadside.

Hedges and ditches were illuminated by the glare of the bicycle-lamps. But there was no sign of Tubby Muffin.

Through village after village the Fistical Four wended their way.

Whenever they encountered a constable—and they did so in every village—they got off and asked him if he had seen anybody answering to the description of Tubby Muffin. In every case the answer was in the negative.

A run of two hours brought them to Burchester.

It was getting on for midnight now, and very few people were astir in the town.

Jimmy Silver & Co. made exhaustive inquiries, but they could get no information—not a single clue.

One constable said he had seen five fat boys—the fattest he had ever seen in his life—come out of the Popular Cafe at about five o'clock in the afternoon. Then they had separated, and gone off in different directions. But this information was of little value to the searchers.

"No go," said Jimmy Silver at length. "We shall have to be getting back to Rookwood."

"Well, this is a giddy mystery, and no error!" said Lovell. "What's happened to our prize porpoise?"

"Lost, stolen, or strayed?" said Newcome. "He can't have met with an accident, or the police would have heard about it."

"If he left Burchester at five o'clock, he ought to be back at Rookwood by now, even if he had to walk all the way," said Raby. "It almost looks as if Tubby had been kidnapped."

"What rot!" said Jimmy Silver. "We're living in the twentieth century, man, not in the days of the press-gang!"

The juniors cycled slowly out of Burchester.

Lovell, who had been pondering deeply, suddenly came out with a suggestion.

"I say, you chaps! It's quite on the cards that Tubby, feeling drowsy after his feed, pushed his bike into a field, and laid down and went off to sleep."

"My hat!" said Jimmy Silver. "There's something in that. But surely he would have woken up by now?"

"Oh, I don't know. He might have made himself comfy, in some hay, and gone into a sound sleep."

"Well, we're not going to explore every blessed hayfield we come across!" growled Newcome. "Personally, I'm beginning to feel fagged, and I sha'n't be sorry to get between the sheets."

"Same here," said Jimmy Silver. "But we'll take a peep inside one or two fields."

"Here's one!" exclaimed Lovell.

The juniors jumped off their machines, and wheeled them through a gateway into a hay-field.

George Raby turned his bicycle towards the hedge, and the rays of the lamp fell upon a familiar object.

"Tubby's bike!" exclaimed Raby. "I should know his jigger anywhere. It's a green one, and nearly new."

"By Jove!" said Lovell. "My theory seems to have been quite right. If Tubby's bike is here, the owner can't be far away."

The juniors started to look round for Tubby Muffin. They explored the hedge right along, and then they moved across the field, searching in every direction.

Of Tubby Muffin there was no sign. Jimmy Silver & Co. were baffled and perplexed.

It was very tantalising to have discovered Tubby Muffin's bike, without seeing so much as the shadow of Tubby himself.

"The plot thickens!" said Raby. "Now, where in the world can the fat duffer have got to?"

"Let's give a shout," said Jimmy Silver.

The juniors made megaphones of their hands, and bawled Tubby Muffin's name at the top of their lungs.

Had Tubby Muffin been in the vicinity he could not have failed to hear those

**The Giants of Rookwood Make the Fur Fly! You'll Rave Over Them!**

stentorian shouts. Awake or asleep, he would have heard them. Indeed, that volume sound would have awakened the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus.

It was a very perplexed party of juniors that rode back through the night to Rookwood.

Jimmy Silver took Tubby Muffin's bicycle in tow, and progress was rather slow in consequence.

The school clock was striking two when the juniors, utterly exhausted, almost fell off their machines at the gates.

They had to tug at the bell several times before Mack came out to give them admittance.

There was a light still burning in Mr. Dalton's study. Having taken their machines round to the shed, Jimmy Silver & Co. went to report to their Form master.

"This is extraordinary!" said Mr. Dalton, when he had heard their story. "It is most singular that you should have found Muffin's bicycle and seen no sign of Muffin himself. It is extremely difficult to conjecture what has happened. The situation is serious, and a thorough search must be instituted in the morning. You are looking very tired, my boys. You may remain in bed for two hours after rising-bell. I will arrange for your breakfasts to be sent up to you."

"Thank you, sir!"

Jimmy Silver & Co. wended their weary way to the Fourth Form dormitory, and the mystery of Tubby Muffin's disappearance remained still unsolved.

**THE FOURTH CHAPTER.**  
**A Happy Release!**

**T**UBBY MUFFIN was in the toils. The fat junior was handled none too gently by the sergeant at the reformatory. He was first of all made to discard his Etons, and done attire similar to a convict's, save that there were no broad arrows.

The sergeant stood over Tubby while the latter changed his clothes.

"Now, Jorkins, my lad," he said, when the operation was over, "jest you come along o' me, an' ave that 'air off!"

Tubby Muffin uttered a shrill squeak of protest. He had strong objections to being cropped in convict fashion. Tubby was rather vain, and he shuddered as he pictured himself in a state of semi-baldness. What would the Rookwood fellows say when he was released—for his release could only be a matter of time. Sooner or later the reformatory authorities would find that they had made a big blunder, and Tubby would be liberated. How could he go back to Rookwood with only a short stubble on his head? The prospect was appalling.

The sergeant paid no heed to Tubby's protests. And the fat junior was led away like a sheep to the shearing.

Fortunately, the sequel wasn't quite so bad as Tubby had anticipated. The sergeant slashed off some of his curls, but it wasn't a close crop. And Tubby, who had had visions of being bald, breathed a thanksgiving.

"Now you can 'op it!" said the sergeant. "But I shall keep my eye on you, young Jorkins. If you tries to escape again, I shall be down on you like a thousand o' bricks!" Sergeant Smythe don't stand no nonsense; bear that in mind."

Tubby Muffin wandered away down the gloomy passages—a stranger in a strange land. He knew nobody at this place, though they all thought they knew him.

Presently he came to a large, ill-lighted room, where the inmates of the reformatory were gathered together. It was one of their rare hours of recreation, before bed-time.

Tubby gazed at the drab figures, and shuddered. In every face he read a story of suffering and despair. Here, huddled together in this room, were fellows who, through no fault of their own, but through faulty upbringing and wrong environment, had not had a fair chance in life. In many cases they had been faced with the dread alternative of having to steal or starve. They had stolen; they had been founnd out, and they had been sent into durance vile for terms ranging from one year to seven years.

When Tubby Muffin entered the room there was a buzz of excitement.

"Here's Jorkins!"  
"He's come back!"  
"Rough luck, old chap!"  
"How did they find you?"

Tubby Muffin seated himself on one of the crude forms at the end of the room.

"I shall go poity soon if people keep on calling me Jorkins," he said. "I'm not Jorkins at all; I'm his double. I've never been to this place before. This is the first time I've set eyes on you fellows."

"Stow it, Jorkins!"

"Draw it mild!"

"I'm not Jorkins, I tell you! The 'tees got hold of the wrong end of the stick, and so did the superintendent of this awful place. My name's Muffin, and I belong to Rookwood."

There was a derisive laugh from the reformatory inmates. It was quite obvious that they didn't believe Tubby's story—nobody believed it. The detectives, the superintendent, the sergeant, and the fellows themselves all thought that the runaway had been recaptured. They scouted the idea that Jorkins had a "double." They did not, in fact, give it a moment's serious thought. Tubby soon grew tired of protesting his identity. What was the use, when he could get nobody to believe him?

He did not know the names of these fellows, but he began to pick them up after a bit. He gathered that Jorkins had been fairly popular in the place, for the fellows treated him quite decently, in their rough way. By this time Tubby Muffin was very hungry—ravenous, in fact. Many hours had elapsed since the orgy in Burchester, with the staff of "Billy Bunter's Weekly."

"I say, you chaps, when are they going to serve supper?" asked Tubby.

A loud laugh followed this innocent question.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You're a dashed funny beggar, Jorkins!" said the biggest boy there—a black-haired fellow who was doing five years for "breaking and entering."

"Funny?" said Tubby, in surprise. "I'm perfectly serious. I'm as hungry as a hunter, and if they don't serve supper soon I shall jolly well faint."

"Don't be an ass, Jorkins! You've been here long enough to know that we never get

supper. The last meal of the day is bread-and-scrape, at six o'clock."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"You won't get anything worth eating for the next forty-eight hours, at any rate. When a fellow bolts, and gets brought back, old Grimmer always put him on a bread-and-water diet."

Tubby Muffin suddenly recalled his interview with the superintendent, and he groaned. How could he possibly subsist for all that time on a meagre diet of bread-and-water?

Presently the sergeant, who seemed to be a general factotum at the reformatory, stamped into the room. And the former expression of terror and despair returned to the faces of the fellows.

The sergeant carried a cane—he was never without it—and his method of shepherding the boys to bed was Hunnish in the extreme.

At Rookwood Bulkeley of the Sixth would look into the junior common-room with a cheery "Bed-time, you kids!" The sergeant's method was to bawl "Bed-time, you brats!" and to stand in the doorway and tickle up the victims with his cane as they passed through.

Tubby Muffin followed the crowd, and he found himself in a big, bare room, which gave forth a musty smell associated with prisons and dungeons.

A number of beds stood in a row, and Tubby did not know which one to take. His companions thought he was still trying to be funny, and they chuckled.

Nobody went to the bed nearest the door, so Tubby concluded that it must be his.

The fat junior turned in, feeling tired and hungry and miserable. No ray of hope came to lighten his darkness. He had been the sport of a strange Fate, which had brought him to this terrible place—a place such as Dickens had described in "Nicholas Nickleby"—another Dotheboys Hall!

When the morning came he was to be flogged. It was a prospect which would have struck a chill into the hearts of braver fellows than Tubby Muffin.

The fat junior did not know what reformatory flogging was like, but he could guess.



**NOTHING LIKE ROOKWOOD!** When Tubby Muffin entered the room there was a buzz of excitement from the group of strange-looking boys. "Hullo, here's Jorkins!" Tubby started round amazed. "I'm not—I'm not!" he stutered. (See Chapter 4.)

There was no sleep for Tubby, tired though he was.

The long night dragged out its slow course, and the unhappy junior lay turning and twisting in his bed.

At last came the dawn—a hopeless dawn, with overcast skies and drizzling rain.

Tubby Muffin went down to breakfast with the others. A hunk of bread—known in reformatory parlance as a “toke”—was on his plate, and beside it was a cup of cold water.

The other fellows fared little better. Their bread was scantily covered with a thin layer of margarine, almost invisible to the naked eye. And they had the doubtful luxury of a mug of cocoa, which had the appearance of thick soup.

Tubby Muffin was on the verge of dissolving into tears. But he was very hungry, and even dry bread was better than nothing. So he made a start.

The meal, which was presided over by the sergeant, was about half-way through when Tubby Muffin received a summons from the superintendent.

In fear and trembling Tubby made his way to Mr. Grimmer's room. He tapped nervously on the door, and the superintendent's voice, less stern than usual, bade him enter.

There were four persons in the room.

Mr. Grimmer was seated at the table, and before him stood a plump youth who was the absolute counterpart of Tubby Muffin. On each side of this plump youth stood a stalwart policeman.

“Ah, come in, my boy!” said the superintendent. “I fear that a grave blunder has been made—a blunder for which the detectives who brought you here are solely responsible. Last night, when you repeatedly assured me that you were not Jorkins, I did not credit your story; but I now know it to be true. Here is Jorkins, who, as you will see, bears a most remarkable resemblance to you. You might be twins, you are so much alike!”

Tubby Muffin drew a quick, sobbing breath of relief.

Now that the real Jorkins had been brought back to the reformatory, Tubby's troubles were over.

“Jorkins was arrested yesterday on a charge of housebreaking,” explained the superintendent. “He was taken before the magistrates, who ordered his immediate re-

turn to this institution. He has just arrived, in the custody of the police, and I can clearly see now that a mistake has been made, and that you have been detained here in error, Muffin.”

Tubby, who had now recovered his spirits, glared at Mr. Grimmer.

“It was a jolly shame,” he said. “You had no right to keep me here. I told you who I was, and where I came from, and you ought to have believed me. I shall make a fearful row about this!”

The superintendent looked alarmed.

“Pray calm yourself, Muffin,” he said. “I was going to ask you not to mention the matter to anybody. If you have suffered inconvenience here, I am sorry. I detained you in all good faith, thinking you to be Jorkins. If you make a fuss about this affair it is quite possible there will be an outcry in the Press!”

“I jolly well hope there is!” cried Tubby Muffin. “I'm not going to keep my mouth shut—why should I? The Head of Rookwood will want to know where I've been, and I shall have to tell him. I've been rottenly treated, and I shall have a shot at getting compensation!”

Mr. Grimmer gave a sigh.

“Very well,” he said. “But I shall disclaim all responsibility in the matter. The detectives were really to blame; they should have made sure of your identity before bringing you here.”

“Whoever's to blame, I'm going to make somebody sit up over this!” said Tubby Muffin, who was now in the happy position of being able to speak to the superintendent how he liked. “I've been starved; I've had no sleep, and I've been threatened with floggings, and goodness knows what. I never knew what went on in a reformatory until I came here; but I know now, and I sha'n't be afraid to show you up, you beastly old tyrant!”

The two constables fairly gasped at this fierce outburst on Tubby Muffin's part. As for the superintendent, he seemed to be on the verge of an apopleptic fit. But he no longer had any hold over Tubby, and he could do nothing.

Tubby flourished a fat fist at Mr. Grimmer, and stamped out of the room.

He was free now, and he was anxious to get away from that gloomy place with all speed.

He changed into his Etons, and the crochety old porter let him out at the gates.

Outside the reformatory walls the air seemed to be fresher and purer. And Tubby Muffin drank in great gulps of it, as if it were some health-giving anodyne.

“Now the question is how am I going to get back to Rookwood?” he muttered. “I haven't enough tin to go by train, and I expect my bike, which I left in the hedge, has vanished by now. Anyway, I'll go and see.”

It was only a short distance to the spot where Tubby had left his machine. But the latter was no longer there, and the fat junior became depressed again at the prospect of a twenty-mile tramp.

Fortune favoured him, however. A passing motorist, seeing Tubby trudging along, drew up and asked if he might give him a lift. It transpired that the motorist was going to Latham, and would have to pass Rookwood School.

Tubby jumped into the car with alacrity, and thanked his benefactor. And the next moment the car was speeding along the highway.

Morning lessons were in progress when Tubby Muffin reached Rookwood. He went first of all to the Head, and told him the startling story of his adventures.

The Head was very relieved to find that the junior was safe and sound. And he wrote a strong letter to the superintendent of the reformatory, telling him that he ought to have got into communication with Rookwood before detaining Tubby Muffin.

Tubby was sent to the school kitchen for a good square meal, and he was excused lessons that day. After his grim experiences, the Head felt that he deserved a holiday.

When Jimmy Silver & Co. trooped out of the form-room at twelve o'clock they encountered the familiar fat figure of Tubby Muffin. And Tubby at once proceeded to entertain them with the story—a rather exaggerated story—of the thrilling adventures he had met with since setting out from Rookwood on the previous afternoon.

The lost sheep had now returned to the fold, and Tubby Muffin suggested that a bumper banquet should be organised to celebrate his return—a suggestion which fell upon deaf ears so far as Jimmy Silver & Co. were concerned!

THE END.

(Another grand new story of Jimmy Silver & Co. of Rookwood in next Tuesday's bumper issue.)

## THE MOONLIGHT FOOTBALLERS!

(Continued from page 9.)

parties, began to race along the road and the fields to the left and right of it. Then, suddenly, Blake, who was with Tom Merry & Co., gave an exclamation.

“There he is, chaps!” he said, indicating a dark figure a few hundred feet ahead. “And running like the wind!”

“After him!” roared Tom Merry.

The juniors needed no second bidding. The glamour and excitement of the chase had caught hold of them. They felt, too, that they were on the verge of a discovery.

Gradually the distance between the fleeing figure in front and the racing juniors behind became diminished. Then Tom Merry gave a shout.

“Hi! You've dropped something! Stop!”

But Tom Merry's voice seemed only to spur the man on faster. In his fight the man in front took the hedge to his left with a bound, and failed to see D'Arcy and Gordon Gay & Co. a few yards behind him.

“Nab him!” roared Gay excitedly, sprinting like a hare.

“Stop, all of you, or I'll fire!”

The man in front suddenly halted and swung round. In his hand glinted a revolver, and the light from the moon lit up a face that was at once familiar and forbidding.

The juniors stopped dead in their tracks. “Hatchet!” came the amazed exclamation. And Mr. Septimus Hatchet it was.

Far from looking the typical schoolmaster, Mr. Hatchet was revealed as a sinister person in rough clothes, the pockets bulging, and with a fully-loaded revolver in hand. He answered in every way the description

THE POPULAR.—No. 245.

of the “wanted” burglar, with the exception that he wore no beard, and that article Monty Lowther had secured in his pocket.

“Oh, my hat!” said Herries faintly.

“Fancy meeting old Hatchetface!”

The comedy in the remark relieved the tenseness of the situation, and the man involuntarily lowered his revolver.

“Collar him!” yelled Tom Merry suddenly.

Regardless of the revolver, the St. Jim's juniors swept forward with a yell. In a moment Mr. Hatchet, schoolmaster and crook, was struggling in the grasp of a dozen pairs of hands. At the same time a burly, unformed figure appeared from behind Mr. Hatchet and wrenched his pistol arm heavenwards.

The revolver spat fire, and the bullet hummed through space. That was all the damage Mr. Hatchet had time for. Next moment the juniors pounced on him like a pack of wolves, and he was quickly reduced to a state of harmlessness. Then the handcuffs appeared, and Inspector Skeat of Wayland, the new arrival, had snared his prisoner.

“Thank you, young gents!” he said, with a gratified smile. “You have helped to lay one of the biggest crooks in Christendom by the heels. I won't ask what you are doing out of school bounds at this hour of the night, for I can see for myself, but I should advise you to hop right back to your beds. Leave this rogue to me. See, his pockets are bulging even now with the spoil he has looted from General Dementer's house at Wayland.”

“You'll be all right with him?” asked Tom Merry anxiously.

“Right as rain, young gents!” said the inspector. “Get back to your beds, and I'll make it all right with your headmaster in the morning. Good-night!”

And the inspector turned on his heel, taking in tow the cringing figure of the man who had posed as a respectable Form-master at St. Jim's, leaving a marvellous crowd of schoolboys gazing after them.

“Well, my giddy aunt!” muttered Tom Merry.

And that expression of amazement was uttered on more than one occasion on the way back to St. Jim's, for, as a matter of mutual arrangement, the footer match was, in view of the startling incidents of the night, declared a drawn game.

To say that the capture of Mr. Septimus Hatchet caused a sensation throughout the country would be a feeble description of the case when the true facts became known. It transpired that Mr. Hatchet had come of a good family, had taken his degrees at a University, and had then resorted to crooked ways of earning a living. By bogus references he had insinuated himself into St. Jim's, feeling secure in his role of temporary Form-master to carry on his nefarious trade.

And but for the night adventure of Tom Merry & Co., Mr. Septimus Hatchet would have continued in all probability in the dual role of the unpopular Form-master and the mysterious burglar of Wayland, until Mr. Linton returned to the school to resume his duties.

As it was, Mr. Hatchet owed his downfall, and, incidentally, several years' hard labour, to the Midnight Footballers.

THE END.

(Don't miss next week's top-hole story of Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's.)

Further Adventures of Jimmy Silver & Co. in the “Boys' Friend”!