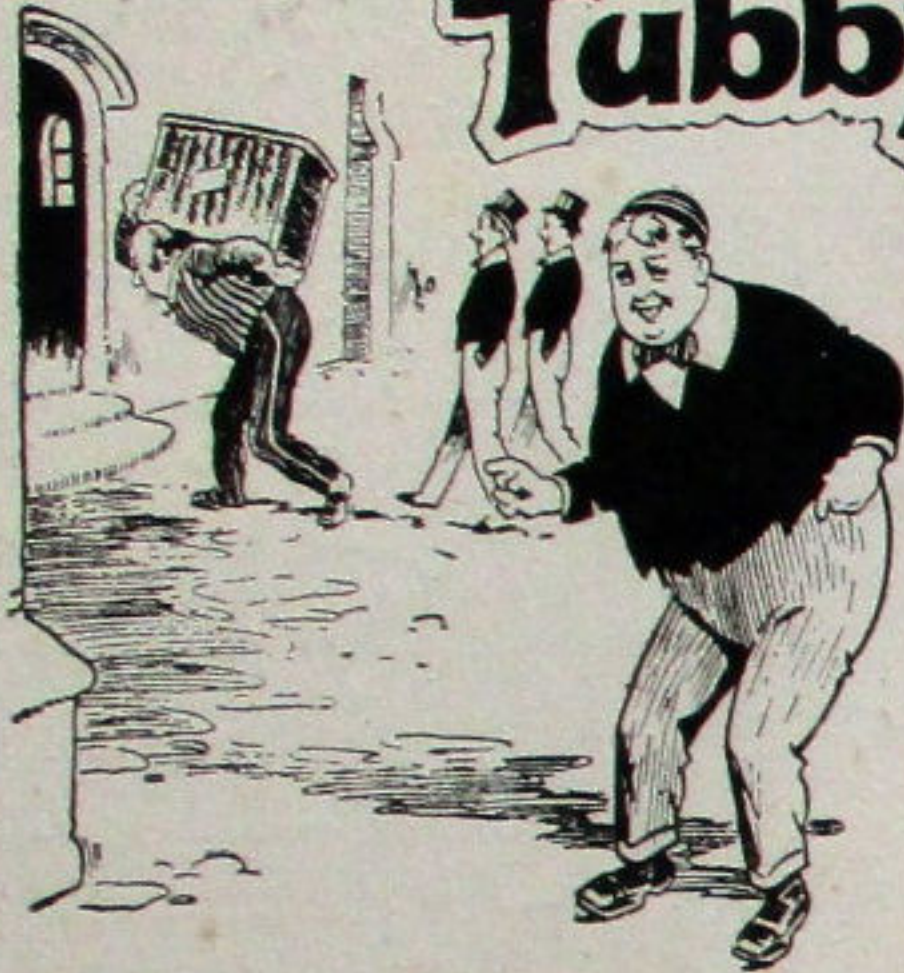


Tubby and the Tuck Hamper!



A Story of Rookwood School.

Narrated by Teddy Grace.

REGINALD MUFFIN—commonly called Tubby, on account of his rotundity—was in despair.

There was a famine in the land.

Tubby was in the state known as “stony.” It was a condition with which he was painfully familiar.

Generally, however, there were other fellows in the Fourth Form, on the Classical Side, who had ample supplies of either money or tuck—or both. And Tubby Muffin was in the habit of feeding on the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table, so to speak.

But on this occasion everybody was in the same boat.

The term was drawing to a close, and the end of term is always a lean time.

Jimmy Silver & Co., the dashing leaders of the Classical Fourth, were “broke.” Mornington, whose pockets were usually well-lined, had squandered all his substance. Erroll and Conroy and Van Ryn were penniless. So were the black sheep of the Form—Peele and Lattrey and Gower.

On the Modern Side, things were just as bad. Tommy Dodd was heard to remark that he proposed paying a visit to the Official Receiver in Bankruptcy. Tommy Doyle inquired—

jestingly, of course—if there happened to be a moneylender in Latcham.

You can therefore guess what sort of a plight Tubby Muffin found himself in. Despair gnawed at his vitals. He had to content himself with the meals in Hall; and the school fare, though excellent in regard to quality, was somewhat lacking in quantity.

The tuckshop was inaccessible to Tubby. And there was nothing in the study cupboard beyond a tin of very stale and ancient sardines.

“I say, you fellows,” said Tubby, rolling up to Jimmy Silver & Co. in the quadrangle, “I believe I shall go under, you know.”

“No such luck!” grunted Lovell.

“Oh, really, Lovell! I say, Silver, you haven’t a piece of cold pudding in your pocket, by any chance?”

Jimmy Silver laughed.

“I’m not in the habit of carrying cold pudding on my person,” he said.

“A bar of chocolate, then?” pleaded Tubby.

“Sorry, porpoise, but I’ve nothing at all in the eating line.”

“I’ve got a pair of bootlaces,” said Newcome. “You can start on those, if you like.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Tubby Muffin showed no desire to masticate the bootlaces.

“I’m famished!” he groaned. “I can feel starvation creeping on! I’ve got a sort of sinking feeling—”

“Like you had when you capsized your boat

on the river the other day?" asked Raby.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Everybody seems to be broke," lamented Tubby, "and they don't give you enough in Hall to keep body and soul together. It's awful! Hallo! Here comes the postman!"

The postman's arrival kindled great expectations in the breasts of the juniors. But only in one case were the expectations realised.

There was a letter for Tubby Muffin.

Tubby fairly snatched the letter from the postman's grasp. He opened it eagerly, his little round eyes gleaming with anticipation.

Jimmy Silver & Co. stood together in a group, looking mildly amused. It was a treat to watch the expression on Tubby Muffin's face.

"Good news, Tubby?" inquired Lovell.

"Yes, rather! This is from my Uncle Joseph, you know!"

"Has Uncle Joe enclosed a fat remittance?" asked Newcome.

"No."

"Then why are you beaming like a full moon?"

Tubby, having perused the letter, handed it over for his schoolfellows' inspection.

The message ran as follows:

"My dear Reginald,—I find that I omitted to send you something for your birthday. I was out of England at the time, on business, and was unable to attend to any personal matters.

"I am now making good the omission by putting on rail a hamper of foodstuffs. It is addressed to you at Coombe Station, to be

called for. I trust that when you have collected the hamper, you will thoroughly enjoy the contents. Best wishes, dear boy,

"Your affectionate

"UNCLE JOE."

Jimmy Silver & Co. were grinning.

Tubby Muffin completely misunderstood their grins.

A suspicion suddenly dawned upon the fat junior's mind—a suspicion which ripened into certainty. This letter, signed by Uncle Joe,

was not genuine. It was a jape on the part of Jimmy Silver & Co.

The jape was not a novel one.

On a previous occasion, Tubby Muffin had received a letter, purporting to come from one of his relatives, and advising him that a tuck hamper was waiting for him at the station. On going down to the station to collect it, he had discovered that the hamper was abnormally heavy. By dint of much energy and exertion, he had dragged it up to the school, only to

find that the hamper was full of bricks!

Having been caught napping before, Tubby was on his guard this time.

"What are you fellows grinning at?" he demanded.

"We're smiling at your good fortune," said Jimmy Silver.

The explanation failed to satisfy Tubby. He was thoroughly convinced by this time that the letter was a fake, and that the whole affair was a practical joke.

"Hope you enjoy the hamper, Tubby," said Lovell.



"I say, you fellows," said Tubby rolling up to Jimmy Silver and Co. in the quadrangle, "I believe I shall go under, you know." "No such luck!" grunted Lovell. (See opposite page)

"Spare your old pals a slice of cake a-piece!" pleaded Raby.

Tubby Muffin rolled away without replying. He was looking very thoughtful.

Presently he broke into a cackle.

"I know!" he exclaimed gleefully. "This is a ripping chance to pay off a very old score!"

There were two fellows in the Fourth who had annoyed Tubby Muffin considerably. They had caught him raiding their study, and had bullied him unmercifully, taking it in turn to chastise him with a cricket stump.

Those two fellows were Peele and Gower.

Tubby now scented an excellent opportunity of getting even with the cads of the Fourth.

He waited until afternoon lessons were over. Then he rolled up to Peele and Gower in the quadrangle.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Hallo!" said Peele, stopping short. "What does our corpulent friend want?"

"There's a hamper of tuck waiting for me at the station," said Tubby. "My Uncle Joe sent it."

"Lucky beggar!" said Gower.

"The fact is," Tubby went on, "I don't feel like having a blessed orgy. I've got horrible pains in the chest; I think it's indigestion. I shall never be able to shift the contents of that hamper."

"Then we'll jolly soon shift them for you!" said Peele, with a chuckle.

"Yes, rather!" said Gower. "We're always willing to do a chap a good turn."

Tubby Muffin waved his hand in the direction in which the station lay.

"You're quite welcome to go and collect the hamper," he said, "and consider it your own."

Peele and Gower were frankly astonished.

Tubby Muffin's name was not usually associated with philanthropy. He had never been known to give away a tuck hamper, or any portion thereof. His generosity, unexpected as it was, was truly amazing.

Peele rubbed his eyes. Gower pinched himself, to make sure he was not dreaming.

Tubby Muffin must be in a very bad way, they reflected, if he was unable to eat the contents of a tuck hamper.

Peele was the first to find his voice.

"You — you mean that, Tubby?" he gasped.

"Of course!"

"We can collect the hamper, and scoff all the contents?" said Gower.

Tubby nodded.

"But why do you go out of your way to shower this kindness on us?" asked Peele suspiciously. "There's no catch in it, I hope?"

"Not at all!"

The fact is," said Tubby Muffin, in a burst of confidence, "I'm very much attached to you two fellows. I'd do anything for you—go anywhere with you—follow you to the ends of the earth. I—I'm your stout pal, you know."

"Very stout indeed!" murmured Gower, glancing at Tubby's ample form.

The cads of the Fourth were amazed beyond measure.

Between themselves and Tubby Muffin there had been no bond of friendship such as existed between David and Jonathan, and Damon and Pythias.

As a matter of fact, Peele and Gower had



"You're welcome to go and collect my hamper," said Tubby, "and consider it your own!" (See this page)

been at daggers drawn with their plump schoolfellow. This sudden burst of generosity on Tubby Muffin's part knocked them all of a heap.

They decided to go and collect the hamper before Tubby had time to change his mind.

Thanking him rather breathlessly, they sprinted down to the school gates.

Tubby Muffin remained where he stood, doubled up with merriment.

"He, he, he! What a lark!" he gurgled. "Those bounders will have a terrible job, carting that hamper up to the school. And when at last they manage to get it here, they'll find it full of



There was a strangled cry from the doorway, as Tubby rushed towards his hamper. "My hamper! Gimme my hamper!" (See page 138)

bricks! Oh, what a giddy sell! He, he, he!"

Peele and Gower, however, had no intention of turning themselves into a sort of fatigue party.

They brought the hamper up to the school

with the minimum of trouble. It was placed on the station hack, and it was the ancient horse which had to bear the burden—plus the weight of Peele and Gower.

Mack the porter was requested to convey the hamper, on arrival, to Peele's study. Mack struggled along valiantly, with the hamper on his broad back, and Peele and Gower followed. Tubby Muffin formed the tail-end of the procession.

He meant to be in at the death, so to speak. It would be worth a guinea a box, he reflected, to see the expressions on the faces of Peele and Gower when the hamper was opened.

Advancing through the study doorway in a crouching position, Mack allowed the hamper to slide down his back on to the floor. Then he raised himself erect, and mopped his perspiring brow.

"'Ot work, young gentlemen!" he observed.

Peele was already prising open the lid of the hamper. He raised it at length, and a layer of packing was visible.

Tubby Muffin, looking on from the doorway, chuckled. He could guess what was underneath the packing!

The next moment Tubby had the shock of his life.

When the straw and shavings had been cleared away, a choice assortment of wholesome tuck lay revealed!

"Ripping!" said Peele, drawing a deep breath.

"Absolutely top-hole!" exclaimed Gower.

There was a strangled cry from the doorway.

"My hamper! Gimme my hamper!"

Peele and Gower stared in surprise at the speaker.

"But you've already made it over to us, with your blessin'!" said Peele.

"Oh, crumbs! I—I thought——" stammered Tubby Muffin.

"The hamper's ours," said Gower, "and we're going shares. I must say your Uncle Joe knows how to make up a hamper, Tubby!"

"Young gents!" chimed in Mack the porter. "Which the weight of this 'ere hamper was suthin' crool!"

Peele tossed a shilling to Mack, who shuffled contentedly out of the study.

As for Tubby Muffin, he was in a state bordering on frenzy. He had jumped to an entirely false conclusion.

The letter from Uncle Joe, and the hamper which followed it, had both been genuine!

Peele and Gower were deaf to Tubby's protestations. They proceeded to "whack out" the contents of the hamper between them.

"It's mine! It's mine, I tell you!" screamed Tubby.

"You said you had horrible pains in the chest, and didn't feel like having an orgy," said Peele, solemnly.

"And you told us we were quite welcome to consider the hamper our own," added Gower, "and we're going to."

"But I didn't know! I—I——"

Tubby Muffin attempted to gain possession of the hamper by force. He was repulsed with heavy casualties, as a war correspondent might say.

Peele and Gower had the contents of the hamper to themselves.

With the object of pacifying their plump school-fellow, they made him a present of a single slice of plum cake.

Tubby accepted it with a growl.

And that was the only "crumb" of consolation that the unfortunate Tubby Muffin received!



They made Tubby a present of a single slice of plum cake. (See this page)

THE END