



The Manœuvres of Muffin!

*An Amusing Story of Rookwood School
Narrated by Teddy Grace.*

Illustrated
by
G. W. WAKEFIELD.

SEVEN o'clock in the morning is a ridiculously early hour to get up. So thought Tubby Muffin, the fat junior of the Classical Fourth.

"On these dark, chilly winter mornings," said Tubby, "it fairly breaks a fellow's heart to have to turn out at seven."

"Lazy slacker!" grunted Jimmy Silver. Jimmy had no patience with sluggards.

"Oh, really, Silver! It's all very well for a sturdy fellow like you, strong and in the pink of condition. But a frail and delicate fellow like me finds it simply awful to have to get up at seven. I'm certain I shall get pneumonia one of these times."

Jimmy Silver glanced at Tubby Muffin's ample form.

"Frail and delicate!" he echoed. "Oh, my giddy aunt! Why, you're as fat as Falstaff!"

"What time would you like the rising-bell to be rung, Tubby?" asked Raby

"Eight o'clock, at the very earliest. And we ought to have brekker brought up to us in bed."

"My dear old porpoise," said Lovell, "this is a public school, not a private hotel for prosperous people, who can lie in bed all the morning and be waited on hand and foot by a retinue of servants."

"We can't expect to be mollycoddled, you know," said Newcome.

Tubby Muffin gave a grunt. "I don't see why we should have to get up in the middle of the night," he growled. "It's a beastly state of affairs. And I'm going to make an alteration."

"Going to send a petition to the Head?" asked Jimmy Silver, with a yawn.

"No."

"How are you going to alter things, then?"

"Wait and see."



Tubby very quickly had the window open.

Tubby Muffin rolled away with a determined expression on his fat face.

Tubby felt very strongly upon this subject of early rising. He didn't believe in it.

He had nothing but contempt for the old proverb :

“Early to bed, and early to rise,
Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

He much preferred the words of the modern song :

“Oh, it's nice to get up in the morning,
But it's nicer to stay in bed !”

Tubby rolled out into the quad. Dusk had fallen over Rookwood School. Lights gleamed in the windows of cosy studies ; but outside all was dark and drear.

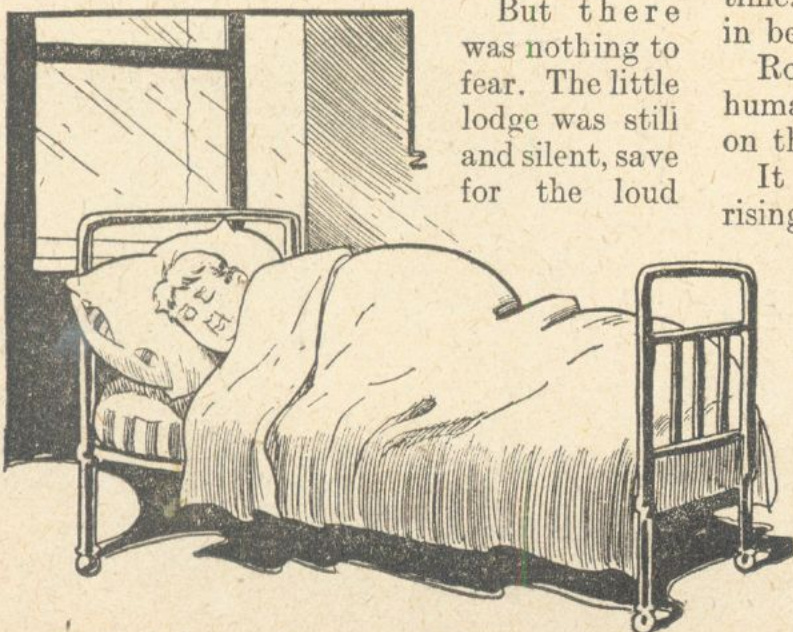
It was nearly bedtime. Some people had, in fact, already retired for the night.

No light gleamed in the window of the porter's lodge. Mack, the porter, had to be up betimes in the morning for the purpose of ringing the rising-bell, and he had gone early to bed.

“If I can only get into his parlour—— !” muttered Tubby Muffin.

This proved to be a very simple task. Mack had indiscreetly left his parlour window open, and Tubby Muffin, plump and ungainly though he was, clambered through the aperture without difficulty.

Once inside the room he paused, his heart thumping quickly against his ribs.



Tubby had secured an extra half-hour's sleep.

tick-tock of the grandfather clock in the parlour. Tubby Muffin struck a match, and tiptoed towards the clock. He opened the glass cover of the face, and put the hands back one hour. Then he closed the cover, and beat a retreat as stealthily as possible.

In less than a minute Tubby Muffin was making his way across the wind-swept quad, chuckling softly to himself as he went.

“I've worked the oracle all right,” he muttered. “When it's seven o'clock to-morrow morning Mack will think it's only six. And rising-bell won't go till eight.”

When he re-entered the school building, Tubby found the fellows trooping up to bed. He joined the procession, and he was in good spirits as he undressed and turned in.

Rookwood retired as usual, and many of the fellows awoke as usual. They opened their eyes at seven o'clock, and sat up in bed.

But there was something missing. The harsh, discordant clanging of the rising-bell was not audible.

“Mack's late,” remarked Jimmy Silver drowsily.

“Most unusual for Mack,” said Lovell. “He usually rings that blessed bell prompt to the tick.”

“P'r'aps he's ill this morning,” suggested Raby.

Whatever the cause, Mack did not carry out the duties of bell-ringer at the appointed time. And many of the fellows turned over in bed to have another forty winks.

Rookwood School usually resembled a human bee-hive at seven in the morning. But on this particular morning nobody was astir.

It was not until eight o'clock that the rising-bell sounded.

The school rose an hour late, and the routine of the day was thrown entirely out of gear. The Head sent for Mack, the porter, and demanded an explanation.

“Which my clock was an hour slow, sir,” said Mack.

“Did you wind it overnight ?”

“Yessir. I can't for the life of me hunderstand 'ow it 'appened. I've' ad that there clock, sir, for five-an'-twenty year, an' it ain't never given me no trouble until now.”

"It has probably started to go wrong, Mack," said the Head. "You must get a man in during the day to overhaul it. I cannot have a recurrence of this episode."

"Werry well, sir," said Mack. And he shuffled away.

Tubby Muffin, however, had not yet finished his merry manœuvres. He had secured an extra hour's sleep that morning, but he was far from satisfied. Having achieved success once, he resolved to achieve it again.

"I won't put the clock back to-night, though," he muttered. "Too risky to do that sort of thing two nights running. I shall have to try a fresh dodge."

Shortly before bedtime that evening, Tubby put his new scheme into practice. He borrowed a ladder from the woodshed, reared it against the wall, and climbed up to the bell. Then he deftly tied up the iron clapper, so that when Mack tried to ring the bell next morning, no sound would proceed from it.

Mack had carried out the Head's instructions, and had his clock overhauled. The man who did the job pronounced that there was nothing wrong with the clock, and that it was quite sound in wind and limb, so to speak.

But Mack was so nervous of being late again that he had hardly a wink of sleep that night. He was up and dressed at six o'clock, heavy-eyed and shivering in the raw cold of the new winter day.

At a few minutes before seven, Mack shuffled across the quad. And sharp to the minute he gave a vicious tug at the bell-rope.

No sound came.

Mack continued to tug, muttering to himself the while.

"Wot I says is this 'ere—this blessed bell's bewitched, that's wot's the matter with it! 'Ere am I a-tuggin' and a-strainin', an' it don't make so much as a murmur."

At ten minutes past seven, Bulkeley of the Sixth came striding on the scene.

"What's the matter, Mack?" he demanded.

"Which I can't get this 'ere bell to go, Master Bulkeley."

Bulkeley gazed upwards.

"And no wonder," he said. "Some practical joker has tied up the clapper."

"My heye!"



Tubby was climbing the ladder with an open penknife in his hand, when Bulkeley hailed him. "Muffin, you young rascal! Come down at once!" Tubby nearly fell down!

"Go and fetch a ladder, and I'll shin up and untie it."

These operations took some time, and it was half-past seven before Rookwood was roused by the rising-bell. Tubby Muffin had scored again—to the extent of half an hour this time.

Had Tubby been a wise youth he would have been content with the mischief he had already wrought. But he was a greedy fellow in more senses than one, and he determined to outwit Mack for the third time.

That third time prove fatal.

Tubby conceived the brilliant idea of cutting the bell-rope completely away, and then hiding the ladder, so that the bell would be inaccessible.

It so happened, however, that Bulkeley of the Sixth did a little detective work that evening.

Tubby had reared the ladder against the wall and was climbing it with an open penknife clutched in his hand, when he was suddenly hailed from the shadows down below.

"Muffin, you young rascal! Come down at once!"

"Oh, crumbs!"

Tubby nearly fell down the ladder in his agitation. When he reached terra firma, Bulkeley's strong grasp closed on his collar.

"It is quite clear to me, Muffin," said the captain of Rookwood, "that you have been responsible for these outrages. I have caught you red-handed! You were about to cut the bell-rope."

"Oh, really, Bulkeley——"

"You will accompany me to the Head's study!" said Bulkeley grimly.

Tubby Muffin pleaded and entreated and cajoled, but all to no purpose. He had been fairly bowled out, and now he had to face the music.

The Head naturally took a serious view of Tubby's conduct, and he was called upon to endure the ordeal of a public flogging in Big Hall.

Tubby will not soon forget that flogging. It was one of the severest he had ever received. And the fat junior's campaign against early rising ceased from that moment.

THE END

Great Days at Greyfriars

By Dick Penfold

Guy Fawkes' Day



A day of flame and fury this,
When bonfires blaze right merrily;
A day of happiness and bliss
For all concerned; yea, verily.
When lads and lassies all unite
In Guy Fawkes' celebrations;
They set their effigies alight
And cheer the conflagrations.

Long years have passed away since Guy,
A scoundrel sleek and sinister,
Plotted a plot to blow sky-high
The King and every Minister.
But year by year we celebrate
That great event of history;
And then retire to bed quite late
With fingers scorched and blisterly!

Rockets are screaming overhead
And crackers dancing under us;
The din's enough to wake the dead,
So loud it is and thunderous.
O never were such lively scenes
Of rapture and of revelry!
Big fires on all the village greens
Commemorate Guy's devilry.

The Greyfriars fellows all enjoy
This gay and gladsome holiday;
I've never heard a British boy
Call it a melancholy day.
When it comes round again, what larks!
We'll celebrate it mirthfully;
It is (as Hurree Singh remarks)
The happiest day on earthfully!