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opening extract from

Master Crook's Crime Academy: Robbery For Rascals

written by

Terry Deary

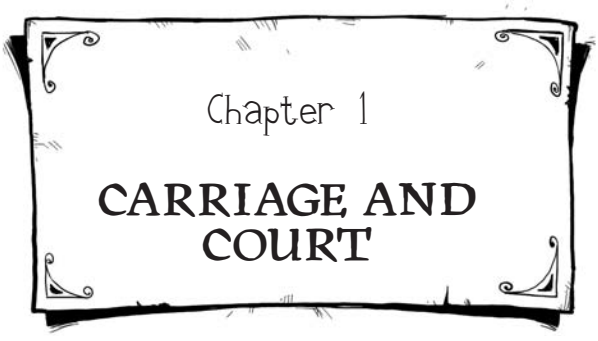
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Chapter 1

CARRIAGE AND COURT

Wildpool Moor – 16th February 1797

The wind blew wildly across the moor and a young man shivered as he huddled in the bare bushes. His coat was thin and his boots more holey than a priest.

He wore a cloak and thought it made him look like the famous Dick Turpin. In fact the cloak was a grey blanket that he'd tied with a ribbon – it made him look like a scarecrow.

Cold mud seeped through the sole of his right boot. "I'm going to buy some new boots when I've done this robbery," he promised himself. It cheered him up. His pinched face suddenly glowed with joy. "And *socks*!" he moaned. "I've *always* wanted a pair

of socks. Oooooh! And stockings for my mum too. And a wig. . .



A wig for him, not his mum, he should have said. His mother had enough hair. It flowed all the way down her back. None on her head, but plenty on her back.

. . . all the best highwaymen have a wig with a black hat with three corners. My name will bring terror to the roads round Wildpool, just as Dick Turpin's did in the south."

But his name would bring only laughter to the people of Wildpool. For his name wasn't Dick Turpin. It was Rick Turnip. He was almost the last of a long line of Turnips. Their roots went back into the mists of time.

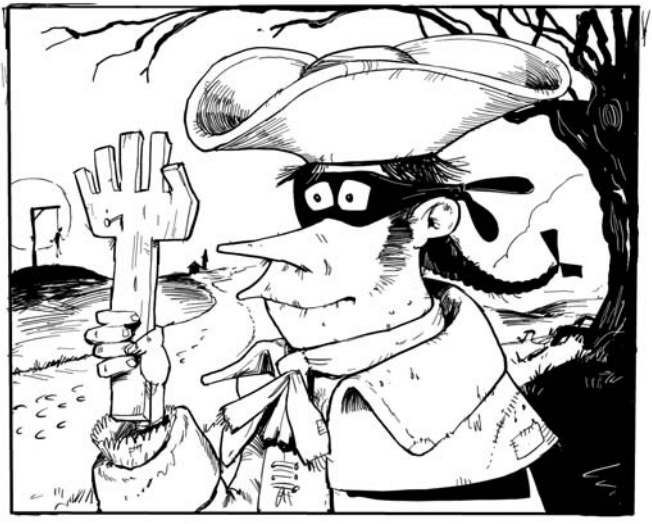
That's a joke by the way . . . roots . . . turnip . . . see? I didn't say it was a good joke so don't groan like that.



Fifty years before, Tom Turnip had been a terror. The Turnip families still had his picture on the walls of their cottages. They were proud of him.

WANTED

DEAD OR ALIVE
(OR SOMETHING IN BETWEEN)



TOM TURNIP – THE ONE ARMED BANDIT

WANTED FOR

RUNNING UP BEHIND LADIES IN THE STREET
PINCHING THEIR PURSES (OR PINCHING THEIR
BOTTOMS IF THEY DON'T HAND OVER THEIR PURSE)
THIS MAN IS ARMED. IN FACT HE HAS ONE ARM.
THE OTHER ARM IS A WOODEN ONE.
(HE STOLE IT FROM A SECOND-HAND SHOP.)

REWARD OF HALF A CROWN
FOR HIS CAPTURE

He was a legend in the Turnip family. "Tom Turnip. The man they couldn't capture!"

That wasn't *quite* true. He *was* captured when he tried to escape from a tavern with a cheese sandwich. A cheese sandwich that he hadn't paid for.

The law officer found our sandwich-stealing Tom hiding in a ditch; he put irons around his wrist and chained him to the village pump while he went to fetch the magistrate.

When the officer returned Tom Turnip's arm was still fastened to the pump . . . but Tom wasn't fastened to the arm. It was his *false* arm and he simply unfastened it and ran off.

Tom met his doom when he tried to cross the river on some slippery stepping stones and fell in. It's hard to swim with just one arm. . .



Well, to be honest Tom had never learned to swim when he had two arms so he hand NO chance.

. . .his body was washed out to sea and never seen again.

The Turnip family believed their Tom had escaped to America where he made a living robbing

stagecoaches. That thought made them very happy.

The law officer handed the wooden arm back to the owner of the second-hand shop, so the shop-owner was happy too.

The Turnips said, "Tom was a dangerous outlaw."

The law officer said, "No, he was 'armless."

THIS was the man that Rick Turnip has grown up hearing stories about. And stories are dangerous things. Rick wanted to BE Tom Turnip – highwayman.

You will be delighted to hear he had no plans to copy Tom's bad habit of pinching ladies' bottoms. Just as well. He wasn't nippy enough! Hah! Pinch . . . nip . . . nippy? Geddit? Oh, never mind.



One night, in the Black Sheep Inn, he overheard the Twitch Family gang plotting an evil plot. "Tomorrow," they plotted, "Lord Fumble leaves Fumble Hall for his country house . . . Wishington Country Manor."

"So?"

"So whenever he goes from house to house he takes the Fumble Family Fortune with him on his coach."

"So?"

"So, we stop the coach, make him hand over the gold and make ourselves very rich!"

"How rich?"

"I just told you . . . *very*!"

Rick Turnip smiled a secret smile. He decided he would beat the Twitch Family at their own game and rob the coach *before* they had the chance. He knew the rutted road Lord Fumble would take so all he had to do was hide in the bushes . . .



Which is where we had left him before you got me talking about old Tom Turnip!

Rick had no idea what time the coach would arrive. He was up at dawn and had waited all day without even a cheese sandwich to eat. He made his mouth go very watery, just thinking, "I wonder what happened to Tom Turnip's cheese sandwich that he nicked? I bet the law officer ate it!"

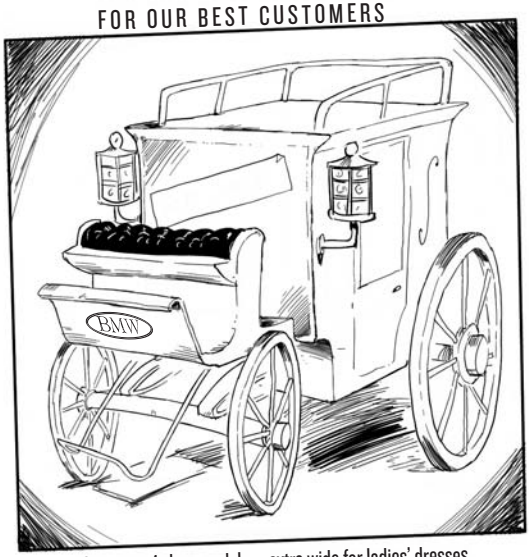
But as morning turned to afternoon he heard the clip-clop, clip-clop, clop-clop, flip-flop, clop-clip, flip-clip, flop-clop of carriage horses. (It was a very rutted road and that made it hard for the horses to clip and clop correctly.)

The carriage was the very latest 1798 model . . . even though the year was 1797, the carriage makers liked to boast it was *next* year's "model". That's how they sold it to their rich customers . . .

Buy your Britain's Most Wonderful (BMW)

THE CLASSIC CARRIAGE

NEW **1798** MODEL OUT NOW
FOR OUR BEST CUSTOMERS



2-door or 4-door models – extra wide for ladies' dresses
2, 3 or 4 horse-power
Roof racks with built-in picnic hampers
Opening windows, 8-spoke wheels standard, 3 year or 300 miles warranty,
Steel tyres,
Springs to soften the bumpiest roads. PLUS free maps and driver's whip

The young man blew his nose on his handkerchief then fastened it round the lower half of his face.

He stepped out into the road and placed his finger under his grey cloak to make it look as if he had a gun.

Most highwaymen carried a pistol. Dick Turpin did. Rick Turnip didn't. Guns cost money. Once he'd robbed Lord Fumble he thought he'd go out and buy a pistol . . . after he'd bought socks, of course.



He raised his finger under the cloak. "Stand and deliver! Your money or your life!"

A shiver ran up through Rick Turnip's spine then back down again to where it started. "Ooooh!" he breathed. "I've always wanted to say that."

The coach stopped. The window slid down and the handsome young Lord Fumble stuck his handsome head out that was topped with a handsome hat. "What have we stopped for *now*, James?"

"Another highwayman, your grace," the driver said.

"Highwayman? Highwayman? Where's his horse?" the lord roared.



The driver turned to Rick. "His lordship wants to know where your horse is."

"I haven't got a horse!" Rick laughed in scorn. "I'm not made of money."

"He says he's not made of money . . ." the driver began to say.

"I heard! I heard, you ninny." The lord opened the door and stood on the step of the carriage. His suit was of finest blue satin with silver stitching and his socks were as white as snowdrops. "You can't be a highwayman without a horse, you rascal. You're a footpad. Nothing but a common *footpad*. What are you? Well? What are you?"

"Erm . . . a footpad, my lord," Rick muttered miserably.

"Who do you think you are, calling yourself a highwayman? Who do you *think* you *are*? Eh? Dick Turpin?"

"No. Rick Turnip."

"Ah! Make a note of his name, driver. Rick Turnip, he says. We know your name. You may as well tell us where you live."

"I'm not telling you that! Do I *look* stupid?" Rick cried.

"How do I know if you look stupid if I can't see your face. You may have the most stupid face in the north for all I know."

"Well I haven't!" Rick cried and tore off the handkerchief.

"Jolly good, now we know what you look like. You'll be arrested. And I don't like footpads on my estate. I have them arrested and hanged, do you hear? Hanged! Drive on, driver!"

"Stop, put up your hands or I'll shoot!" Rick called.

The driver dropped the reins and raised his hands.

The young and handsome lord pulled a blunderbuss from the coach. "That's what that bunch of ruffians down the road said," he explained. "But I shot first. And my gun was packed with all sorts of scrap metal. You should have seen them run, pulling bits of old candlesticks out of their backsides! Hah!"

Rick smiled slowly. "Ah! So it's not loaded *now* then, *is* it?"

Young Lord Fumble's handsome young face turned pale. "Ah . . . no . . . well. . ."

"So hand over the gold, please, or I shoot!" the footpad said politely.



To be honest it's easy to be polite when you are pointing a gun at somebody. It is harder to be polite when (say) a stranger's dog bites your leg in the street. I mean, it is hard to say, "Excuse me, sir, but could I trouble you to remove your little pet's teeth from my leg? It is rather uncomfortable." It is much easier to say something impolite like "!***%!*%!%!*"*

Lord Fumble threw the gun into the ditch and sighed. "Get the gold off the roof, driver, and hand it over. A bullet could do a lot of damage to my handsome face, you know."

Rick Turnip's heart was fluttering like a wasp's wing. He was so near to being a hero like the family's famous Tom. So close to owning his first pair of socks. So close . . . and yet so far.

The Turnips have never been very lucky. So, at that moment, a gust of wind whipped at Rick's blanket-cloak and whisked it away from his pointing finger.

"Aha!" Lord Fumble said with a laugh like a donkey. "You haven't got a gun at all. You just have a finger. Driver . . . don't give this foul footpad a penny."

"But he'll shoot me!" the coach driver whined.

"With his finger?"

"You never know, my lord, the finger might be loaded," the man objected. "It's me that gets it if he's foot-padding around with a loaded finger!"

Lord Fumble frowned at Rick Turnip. "Is that a loaded finger you are pointing at my driver?"

"Well, to be honest, my lord, I couldn't afford a gun OR the powder or the bullets."

"See, driver?" Fumble sneered. "You've been frightened by a finger. Now, arrest that man and we'll take him to Wildpool court, give him a fair trial, find him guilty and hang him."

Rick Turnip saw his plot going horribly wrong and decided it would be a good time to leave. He turned and began to creep towards the bushes. "Stop that man!" Lord Fumble cried.

A moment later the coach driver's whip flicked out and the thin leather wrapped itself around Rick's skinny neck. The driver hauled him back towards the coach, used some of the baggage rope to tie his hands then fastened it to the back of the coach.

Rick was forced to walk behind the coach to Wildpool and his fate. He stumbled over the February mud till at last they reached the courthouse. He was

led to a cell and given some hot soup and fresh bread. It was the best meal he'd eaten. Ever.

After an hour Rick was led up to the court and chained to a screen that ran around a platform. This was called the "dock".

The clerk of the court was a fussy little man with spectacles and a bald head. "Court will rise for the judge!"

The few people who were in court stood up and a door behind the judge's bench opened. In walked the judge.

"Here!" Rick cried. "I've seen you before!"

"Silence in court," Judge Fumble growled. "What are the charges?"

"Armed highway robbery, your honour," the clerk said.

"Do you plead guilty?" Lord Fumble asked as he pushed the long horse-hair wig in place.

"Not really. I mean, I wasn't *armed* and I didn't rob nothing, did I?" the accused man shrugged.

"You tried to get money through menaces. That's a crime. You admitted it so you are guilty," Lord Fumble said.

Oh, that sounds too, too harsh, doesn't it? But I have to tell you it is close to the truth. In 1833 a court report showed that most trials lasted just seven or eight minutes. The guilty were hanged within a couple of days. Some people now, in 1901, still call the 1830s "the good old days". Good for rope-makers maybe.



He reached under his desk and pulled out a black square of cloth. He placed it on his head and read from a card with a black edge. "The court orders you to be taken from here to the place from where you came, and then to the place of execution, and that you be hanged by the neck until you are dead, and that your body be afterward be buried within the grounds of the prison in which you shall be held. And may the Lord have mercy on your soul."

Lord Fumble read it in a bored voice and stood up.

"Sorry, my lord," the clerk said quickly, "but you cannot hang a man for trying to get money with menaces."

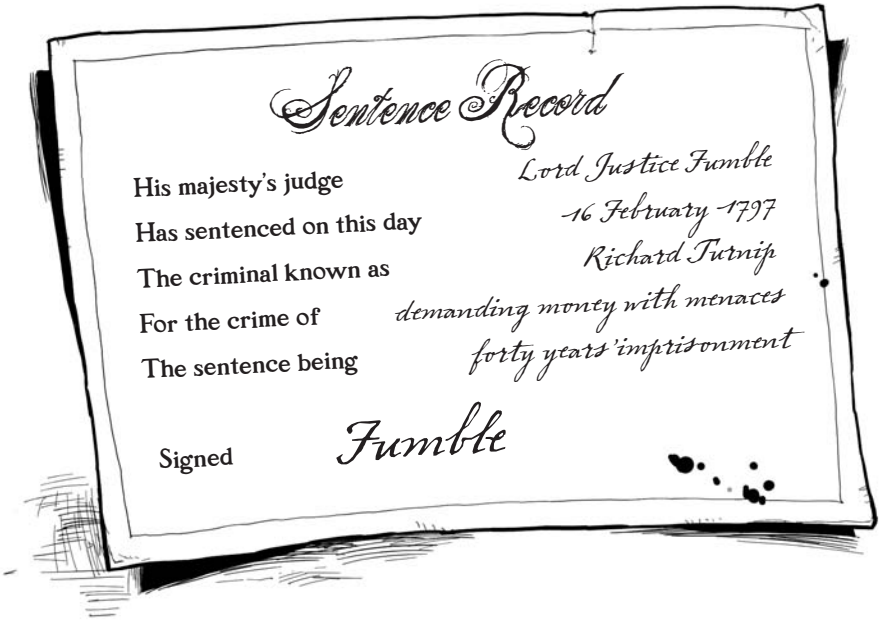
"I can when it's me he was menacing," the judge said, in a menacing voice.

"The law won't allow it!"

Fumble sat down heavily. "What CAN I do to him then?"

"Forty days in prison, my lord."

He passed a sheet of paper to the judge who pulled a quill pen from an ink pot and scratched on the paper.



"Take him down," the judge ordered and passed the record card to the law officer who stood by the door.

"The court will rise!" the bald clerk cried quickly but Lord Fumble was out of the door before anyone could move.

And that is how Rick Turnip ended up in the great grey fortress that was Darlham Gaol, twenty miles south of Wildpool.

The governor of the prison sat at his desk and read the "Sentence Record" when Rick Turnip had been delivered in the prison wagon. The governor blinked. He read it again. "Seems a bit harsh," he muttered. "Oh, well, the law is the law." He looked up at Turnip. "It seems you are going to be with us for forty years, my lad!"

Did Lord Fumble make a mistake and write "years" instead of "days"? Maybe. Maybe not. I think this may just have been his cruel revenge. But what do I know? I wasn't there when Turnip went to prison. Of course I WAS there when he came out. And that's where he joins the story. . .

