



# HOW TO EAT FRIED WORMS

BY THOMAS ROCKWELL  
ILLUSTRATED BY EMILY MCCULLY

SCHOLASTIC INC



If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

Text copyright © 1973 by Thomas Rockwell  
Illustrations copyright © 1973 by Emily McCully

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBN 978-1-338-56589-8

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 19 20 21 22 23

Printed in the U.S.A. 40  
This edition first printing, May 2019

Book design by Baily Crawford

# 1



## THE BET

“Hey, *Tom!* Where were you last night?”

“Yeah, you missed it.”

Alan and Billy came up the front walk. Tom was sitting on his porch steps, bouncing a tennis ball.

“Old Man Tator caught Joe as we were climbing through the fence, so we all had to go back, and he made us pile the peaches on his kitchen table, and then he called our mothers.”

“Joe’s mother hasn’t let him out yet.”

“Where were you?”

Tom stopped bouncing the tennis ball. He was a tall, skinny boy who took his troubles very seriously.

“My mother kept me in.”

“What for?”

"I wouldn't eat my dinner."

Alan sat down on the step below Tom and began to chew his thumbnail.

"What was it?"

"Salmon casserole."

Billy flopped down on the grass, chunky, snub-nosed, freckled.

"Salmon casserole's not so bad."

"Wouldn't she let you just eat two bites?" asked Alan. "Sometimes my mother says, well, all right, if I'll just eat two bites."

"I wouldn't eat even one."

"That's stupid," said Billy. "One bite can't hurt you. I'd eat one bite of anything before I'd let them send me up to my room right after supper."

Tom shrugged.

"How about mud?" Alan asked Billy. "You wouldn't eat a bite of mud."

Alan argued a lot, small, knobby-kneed, nervous, gnawing at his thumbnail, his face smudged, his red hair mussed, shirttail hanging out, shoelaces untied.

"Sure, I would," Billy said. "Mud. What's mud? Just dirt with a little water in it. My father says everyone eats a pound of dirt every year anyway."

"How about poison?"

"That's different." Billy rolled over on his back.

"Is your mother going to make you eat the leftovers today at lunch?" he asked Tom.

"She never has before."

"How about worms?" Alan asked Billy.

Tom's sister's cat squirmed out from under the porch and rubbed against Billy's knee.

"Sure," said Billy. "Why not? Worms are just dirt."

"Yeah, but they bleed."

"So you'd have to cook them. Cows bleed."

"I bet a hundred dollars you wouldn't really eat a worm. You talk big now, but you wouldn't if you were sitting at the dinner table with a worm on your plate."

"I bet I would. I'd eat *fifteen* worms if somebody'd bet me a hundred dollars."

"You really want to bet? *I'll* bet you fifty dollars you can't eat fifteen worms. I really will."

"Where're you going to get fifty dollars?"

"In my savings account. I've got one hundred and thirty dollars and seventy-nine cents in my savings account. I know, because last week I put in the five dollars my grandmother gave me for my birthday."

"Your mother wouldn't let you take it out."

"She would if I lost the bet. She'd have to. I'd tell her I was going to sell my stamp collection otherwise. And I bought that with all my own money that I earned mowing lawns, so I can do whatever I want with it. I'll bet you fifty dollars you can't eat fifteen worms. Come on. You're chicken. You know you can't do it."

"I wouldn't do it," said Tom. "If salmon casserole makes me sick, think what fifteen worms would do."

Joe came scuffling up the walk and flopped down beside Billy. He was a small boy, with dark hair and a long nose and big brown eyes.

“What’s going on?”

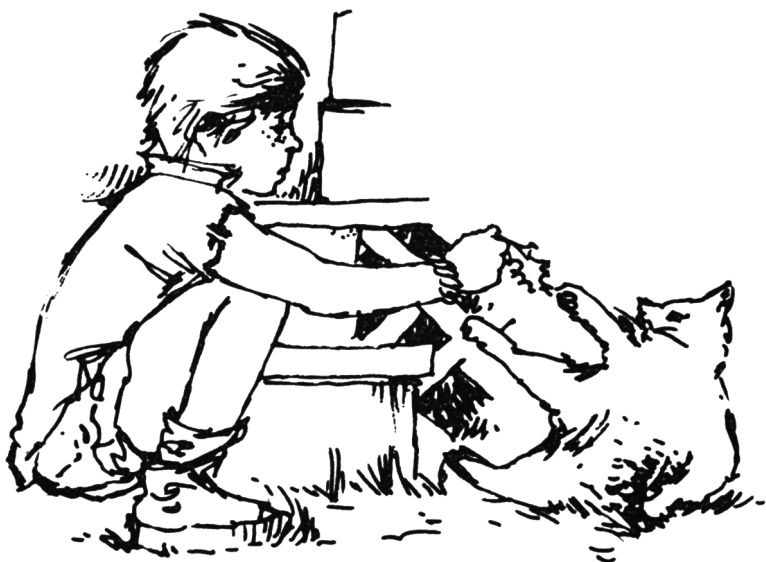
“Come on,” said Alan to Billy. “Tom can be your second and Joe’ll be mine, just like in a duel. You think it’s so easy—here’s your chance to make fifty bucks.”

Billy dangled a leaf in front of the cat, but the cat just rubbed against his knee, purring.

“What kind of worms?”

“Regular worms.”

“Not those big green ones that get on the tomatoes. I won’t eat those. And I won’t eat them all at once. It might make me sick. One worm a day for fifteen days.”



“And he can eat them any way he wants,” said Tom. “Boiled, stewed, fried, fricasseed.”

“Yeah, but we provide the worms,” said Joe. “And there have to be witnesses present when he eats them; either me or Alan or somebody we can trust. Not just you and Billy.”

“Okay?” Alan said to Billy.

Billy scratched the cat’s ears. Fifty dollars. That was a lot of money. How bad could a worm taste? He’d eaten fried liver, salmon loaf, mushrooms, tongue, pig’s feet. Other kids’ parents were always nagging them to eat, eat; his had begun to worry about *how much* he ate. Not that he was *fat*. He just hadn’t worked off all his winter blubber yet.

He slid his hand into his shirt and furtively squeezed the side of his stomach. Worms were just dirt; dirt wasn’t fattening.

If he won fifty dollars, he could buy that minibike George Cunningham’s brother had promised to sell him in September before he went away to college. Heck, he could gag *anything* down for fifty dollars, couldn’t he?

He looked up. “I can use ketchup or mustard or anything like that? As much as I want?”

Alan nodded. “Okay?”

Billy stood up.

“Okay.”