1. The other day our Billy was moping along thinking of all the grub he'd eat if it weren't for all the money he hadn't got, when he tripped. Someone had left a large parcel lying around, and having tripped over it, Bunter felt himself quite entitled to open it and have a look inside. The fact that it wasn't his parcel didn't occur to Billy—he just went right ahead and opened it. And inside, what should he find but a costume for a fancy dress ball, and a ticket for the do which Colonel Bracebutton was giving that evening.

2. Needless to say, our Billy donned the costume pronto, and disguised as Dick Turpin, the Highwayman, he made his way to the Ball. It was just as well that Bonny Black Bess, Dick Turpin's horse, wasn't part of the rig-out, or he'd have been run in for cruelty to gee-gees. Once inside the colonel's house, Billy made a bee line for the grub, and began to scheme out how he could get his share, and that of about ninety-nine other folk as well, without being noticed!

3. Well, as it happened, that costume had been planted by a gang of crooks, for one of their pals. And seeing Bunter they thought that he was one of them. So they told him the crafty scheme. He was to turn out the lights, while they did the rest. They didn't say that the rest was the swiping of the Duchess of Dillwater's diamonds, and the only thought in Billy's fat head was that once the lights were out he could do a crafty spot of grub gathering. So Billy sallied off to switch off the lights.

4. Having done so, Billy made a quick dash in the darkness, and swiped a tray of sandwiches. Then he nipped smartly back to collar a big dish which contained about a shovelful of trifle. Now, what he didn't know was that the two crooks had hidden the Duchess's diamonds in that particular dish, so that they would be safe when the police came along to search the guests, which they were sure to do as soon as the theft was discovered. So Billy's dish of trifle was worth about half a million pounds or so!

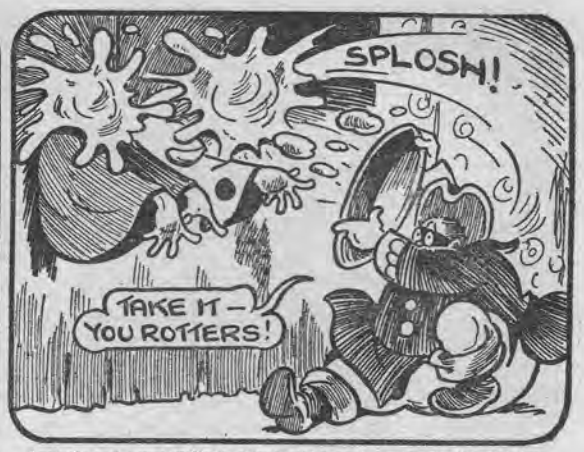
5. The lights went up, and the Duchess was kicking up a proper fuss. Soon everything was in a state of hullabaloo, howdyedo, commotion, and tiz-woz. But Bunter didn't bother his fat head about the diamonds. He just sloped off to the spot where his grub was hidden to do a spot of stuffing. Just then the two crooks noticed that the dish of trifle had flitted, and the first person they suspected was our fat pal. They thought he was trying to collar the diamonds all for himself.

6. They soon found Billy—they couldn't very well miss him—and demanded the trifle. Our William naturally thought that they were just a greedy pair of grub-guzzlers, who were after his hard-won eats, and he scarpered pronto. You'd be amazed how fast that fat lad can shift when there's grub at stake. He just shot away like a jet-propelled football, only more so, and the two crooks came pounding along behind him.

7. Billy zoomed down the passage, around the corner, into the hall, and up the stairs—all the while leading them away from his precious grub. When he reached the top of the stairs an idea came into his brain-box. There was a carpet on the stairs, and it wasn't nailed down—it had been put there specially for the ball, to make the stairs look extra posh. Billy stopped dead, bent down, and yanked the stair-carpet for all he was worth!

8. You can see what happened then. Instead of shooting up the stairs, the two crooks found themselves rolling down. Oo—they were annoyed. You try going downstairs on your left ear, and see how it makes you feel. By the time they'd landed all of a heap at the bottom, our Billy was nowhere to be seen. Needless to say he hadn't hung around. He'd scooted while the going was good.

9. And you can guess where he went to. He'd made a beeline—only straighter—for the spot where he'd hidden his food, at the back of a big sofa, and started to tuck in. The two crooks, who didn't like losing the diamonds any more than the Duchess had done, started out to search for him. They were determined to find him. Suddenly they heard a sound like someone tap-dancing in wet goloshes. It was Billy Bunter smacking his lips. They found him just as he was going to start his trifle!



10. Billy was cornered! And there were two of them to one of him. And after the way Billy had helped those two crooks downstairs, they weren't looking at him at all kindly. In fact they were out for his blood. Even fat headed Billy could see that the time had come for really desperate measures—for doing the kind of deeds men do when Kingdoms are tottering, and all is almost lost, and all that sort of thing. So Billy threw the trifle at them.

11. What a mess! It was really awful! But there, gleaming brightly amid the wreckage of that gorgeous trifle was the Duchess of Dillwater's diamond necklace. And at that moment up sailed her grace in person. For a moment you could have heard a pin drop, if it hadn't been for the Duchess shrieking, and the two crooks gnashing their teeth. And then the fight started. Some of the guests grabbed the crooks, and all the lot fell on top of Billy!

12. But at the end of it all a policeman arrived, and took the two bad lads in charge. Thanks to Billy, and quite by accident, their wicked schemes had come to naught. So the Duchess got her jewels back, and she and Colonel Bracebutton gave Billy a real slap up feed for his trouble, and everybody was happy, especially the fat lad If the house had fallen down, he wouldn't have cared. And by the time he'd done eating, every one of his waistcoat buttons had popped off! And that, to Billy, meant the height of happiness!