

BILLY BUNTER'S BURGLAR!



By
FRANK RICHARDS

Billy Bunter's reluctance to have an aching tooth removed leads to not a little excitement—for Bunter and a Burglar!

THE FIRST CHAPTER

EXIT BUNTER!

"ALL over in a couple of minutes!"
"Ow!"

"Just one tug of the dentist's forceps——"

"Wow! Beast!"

"And it'll all be over," said Peter Todd soothingly. "No more pain then, old fat bean; so the best thing you can do now is to trot along to the sanny and get it over quick!"

Toddy's advice was well meant; but it was not well received. Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove looked the reverse of grateful for it, as he glared up at his study-mate through his big spectacles from the armchair in which he was tenderly nursing a fat and swollen face.

"Beast!" he hooted. "Chortling over a chap because a chap's got toothache! Yah!"

"Try not to be a fathead, my dear old bean," said Peter patiently. "It may hurt——"

"Yow!"

"Just a little of course, for a few ticks. But then it'll be all over; and think of the joy of being without that rotten toothache again," said Peter consolingly. "Better hurry, old fat man. The dentist's waiting."

There was a tap on the study door. Trotter the page poked his head through the doorway. There was a somewhat ghoulisn grin on his face.

"Which Mr. Quelch says Master Bunter's wanted in the sanatorium," he announced genially.

"Yooop! Tell him I'm not coming! Tell him the pain's gone! Tell him——"

"Which 'e says you're to come at once, sir. 'Tell Master Bunter, 'e says, 'as Doctor Pillbury an' the

dentist is both 'ere an' 'e's to come right away,' 'e says."

"Better put a jerk in it," advised Peter Todd. "No need to add to your troubles by getting Quelch's rag out. Buck up, old fat man."

"Beast! Look here, I'm not going to have my jaw pulled to bits by the dashed dentist!" roared Bunter. "My toothache's gone now——"

"Always happens when you get near the dentist's chair," remarked Toddy philosophically. "Have it yanked out all the same, old bean!"

"Shan't! You're an unfeeling rotter, and I despise you! Yah!"

Peter Todd rose from his chair with a frown.

"Look here, you fat, funky frog, this has gone far enough! There's nothing to be scared about, anyway—having a tooth out is no more painful than having your hair cut nowadays—but even if there were, you've got to go through with it. Roll along to the dentist like a good porpoise and make it snappy!"

"I'm not going, I tell you! Look here, Trotter, you grinning beast, tell Quelch I've been taken ill. Tell him I've gone out——"

"Tell him Bunter's coming along right now, you mean!" grunted Peter Todd, taking a step forward. "If you won't go of your own accord, Bunter, I'll roll you along myself! This way!"

"Ow! Beast! Leggo! I'm not going!"

But there Bunter was mistaken. He got going at quite a spanking pace, propelled from the rear by Peter Todd's lean but sinewy arm.

Peter marched him out of Study No. 7 and down the Remove passage, to an accompaniment of yells of protest from Billy Bunter. Trotter ambled amiably beside them and quite a number of Removites, attracted

by the din, came out of their studies to join them. They grinned heartlessly when they learned the cause of the commotion.

"Chuck it, Bunt, old man!" counselled Bob Cherry. "I had a tooth out myself once. There's nothing in it."

"Absolutely nothing!" chortled Skinner, who was particularly insensitive to the aches and pains of anybody but Harold Skinner. "The first ten minutes he's tugging will be the worst; after that, you'll get used to it!"

"Beast!"

"Besides, it's good for your health to have a lot of pain," added Skinner. "Makes you tough! I believe in pain myself—yaroooh! My foot! What idiot jumped on it?"

"Only little me!" said Bob Cherry demurely. "Quite a pleasure to do anything that's good for your health, old bean! Don't thank me!"

The Removites chuckled and Skinner hopped aside, hugging his injured extremity and looking as if he was not at all likely to render thanks for the cheery Bob's contribution to his bodily health.

Leaving the injured Skinner behind, the interested crowd marched cheerfully down the stairs behind the Porpoise and his stern captor.

At the foot of the stairs, Bunter made quite a pathetic appeal to be released. Bunter was not of the stuff that heroes are made of; and, absurd as it seemed, he was scared out of his fat wits at the prospect of facing the dentist.

"Look here, Peter, old chap, lemme go, you beast! I've never done you any harm, you rotter—I mean, dear old fellow—and my toothache's gone now, anyway. You lemme go—and I'll go to the sanny myself!"

"I'm going to see you go, old sport!" said Peter grimly. "This way—yaroooh!"

Peter Todd's remarks finished up in a fiendish howl. In sheer desperation, Bunter had kicked backwards—and that kick landed fairly and squarely on the tenderest part of Toddy's shin! Toddy jumped back with a howl, releasing his fat captive in the process. An instant later, Billy Bunter made a dash for the wide, open spaces, to the tune of an encouraging cheer from the crowd. Any member of the crowd could have overtaken the fat porpoise had he been so minded; but it was none of their business, and they were quite content to let Bunter get away with it if he could.

Bunter could—and he did! While Peter Todd sat down, yelling, Bunter was going all out. His fat legs working like clockwork, he dashed to the front door. He took the School House steps three at a time, paused for a mere instant at the bottom to regain his balance, then resumed his headlong flight.

"Trust Bunter!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "He's heading for the tuckshop!"

"Must be instinct!" grinned Tom Brown. "Hallo, hallo! 'Ware Quelchy, you fellows!"

Mr. Quelch came striding up to the School House steps from the direction of the school sanatorium. There was a portentous frown on his brow.

"Boys! I am looking for Bunter—ah, Trotter, so you are here, too! Where is Bunter?"

"Which 'e's gorn, sir!" answered Trotter. "Master Bunter says as 'e ain't 'avin' no tooth pulled out by no dentist, sir, so 'e's gorn!"

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch's brow became positively thunderous. "Gone? Gone where?"

"Please, sir, 'e went off in the direction of the shop!"

Mr. Quelch's lips set grimly.

"Indeed. In that case, Trotter, you may return to your duties. I will find Bunter myself."

"Yessir. Thank'ee, sir!"

Trotter retreated. The Remove master stalked off towards the tuckshop, with an expression on his face that boded ill for Bunter.

Later, however, Mr. Quelch had to return empty-handed. Bunter was not, it seemed, in the tuckshop. Nor was he to be found anywhere near the tuckshop. Nor indeed, reported fellows who afterwards scouted round for him, was he to be found anywhere at all.

For all the evidence there was to the contrary, Bunter's podgy person might have evaporated; and eventually, Dr. Pillbury and the dentist were compelled to depart without removing the fat Owl's offending molar!

THE SECOND CHAPTER

BUNTER MEETS A PROFESSOR

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter said that word. Or, more accurately, he gasped it. The fat Owl of the Remove had bellows to mend.

He had run all the way from the School House to the elm walk in the far corner of the school grounds, and he was almost at bursting point by the time he reached the shelter of the long grass and the trees. He shook a fat fist indiscriminately at the distant school buildings as he sat down below one of the tall elms. A moment later he unclenched the same fist and started caressing his swollen face again. A twinge in the gums was giving him a stern reminder that the toothache which he had forgotten in

the excitement was still very much a reality.

"Beasts!" repeated Billy Bunter sulphurously.

Really, it was a little illogical for Bunter to be annoyed with the Removites. But logic was never Bunter's long suit, and he mumbled "Beasts!" with every twinge just as though the fellows were entirely responsible for his aching tooth.

A rustling sound in the long grass nearby brought his dolorous groaning to a stop. Bunter ducked—hurriedly. If Peter Todd or one of the other beasts was still on his track, bent on hauling him back to the dentist, Bunter intended to make himself as inconspicuous as possible. Bunter rolled over on to his fat hands and knees and began crawling cautiously towards the shelter of a neighbouring bush, like a fat young Redskin on the warpath.

He reached the bush without trouble and crawled round it to get to the far side from the walk. Then he had a shock.

Crawling round the bush towards him, also on hands and knees, was a man!

He was a total stranger to Bunter, and he seemed almost as startled to see Bunter as Bunter was to see him. The pair of them stared at each other blankly. Then the horrid thought came to Bunter that it was the dentist and he emitted a yelp.

"Leggo! Don't touch me! I ain't going to have that tooth out—the pain's gone now!"

The stranger—a neatly dressed, youngish man—looked surprised for a moment. Surprise, however, quickly gave way to relief; he grinned.

"Don't worry, young 'un. You've made a mistake. I'm not the dentist."

Bunter blinked suspiciously at him.

"Look here, no larks, now. If you really are the beastly dentist——"

"I really am not, I assure you. I—well, as a matter of fact, I am an archaeologist."

"A whatter?"

"An archaeologist—a student of antiquities, you know. Have you never heard of Professor Cheetham?"

"Can't say I have—ow!" concluded Bunter, as he experienced yet another spasm of pain from his aching tooth.

"Your education has been sadly neglected, young man. Better not tell your masters that I said so, though, or they'll be taking steps to withdraw my permit. I have a permit, you see, to explore the grounds at any time I like. You have some most interesting relics at this school."

"You're welcome to 'em," sniffed Bunter. "If I couldn't find something better to do with my time than crawl round the school grounds looking for relics I'd eat my hat! Yow!"

"Naturally, I should hardly expect a schoolboy to share the enthusiasm that animates a professor," remarked Professor Cheetham, regarding Bunter with a somewhat peculiar expression in his keen face. "You, I suppose, walk about these venerable old buildings with scarcely a thought to their hundreds of years of history."

"Blow history!" snorted the Owl of the Remove disrespectfully. "Catch me rooting about the blessed School House thinking about history! I've got more important things to think about, I hope. You can do it—but not me!"

"Unfortunately, I am not able to do it with the same freedom as you, since my permit does not extend to the school buildings themselves during term time," sighed the professor, standing up and gazing quite sadly at

the grey old pile that could be glimpsed through the trees. "I must really approach your headmaster for permission, one of these days. By the way, can one see the windows of his study from this point?"

"Ow! Yes; they're over there, near the main door," grunted Bunter, still ruefully nursing his face with one hand while he pointed through the trees with the other.

Professor Cheetham nodded.

"It is there, of course, that he transacts all business relating to the school—the donations, for instance, to the building restoration fund, to which I want myself to contribute?"

"S'pose so," growled Bunter, who had not the faintest interest in the building restoration fund, nor indeed at the moment in anything save that ache in his jaw. "They say he's been

holding up visitors to ransom there lately for the blessed fund—and that's where he keeps his safe, of course."

"Of course," nodded the professor. "But I must go. Please do not let it be known that I have been talking to you or my permit might be withdrawn."

"Think I'm likely to waste my time talking about archie—thin-gummy?" said Bunter, contemptuously. "Not likely! But, look here, while I remember it, I happen to be expecting a postal-order——"

Bunter blinked up hopefully at Professor Cheetham. But the subject of Bunter's celebrated postal-order, which had been expected at Greyfriars so long that it was reputed to have grown whiskers in transit, did not seem to interest the Professor. He stalked off among the elms with a



As Billy Bunter crawled towards the bush he had a shock. Crawling round the bush towards him, also on hands and knees, was a man!

mere wave to the Owl of the Remove. And Bunter was left to nurse his jaw disconsolately and vent his feelings in one final and expressive :

"Beast !"

THE THIRD CHAPTER

AFTER LIGHTS OUT !

BOOM !

The last stroke of midnight boomed out from the old clock tower at Greyfriars and died away into silence.

Billy Bunter shivered.

In the usual way, he would have been in the Remove dormitory at this hour. His loud snore would have been forming an unmusical accompaniment to the deep chiming of the school clock. On this occasion, for the first time he could remember, Bunter found himself listening to the reverberating strokes of twelve o'clock midnight from the flagstones of the Close.

There was a bright moon shining overhead and the air of the summer night was soft and pleasant enough. From the point of view of the weather, it was an ideal night for any man to be out on the tiles. But Bunter shivered all the same, and thought longingly of his empty bed in the dorm. He had no wish whatever to remain out on the tiles while that vacant bed in the dorm. called him.

It was, of course, Bunter's own fault. At any time of the day after his flight from the School House he could have reported to Mr. Quelch had he felt like doing so. But there were drawbacks about that course, chiefly in the shape of a cane that usually reposed in a corner of Mr. Quelch's study ; and Bunter had allowed the hours to slip by without being able to bring himself to do it.

Now it was midnight ; and ob-

viously, unless the hapless fat Owl chose to sleep on the flagstones or somewhere else equally inconvenient, something had to be done.

Bunter groaned aloud as he rolled miserably across the Close. He was tired and his tooth was still aching. Worse than either of these, perhaps, he was hungry.

It was true that during the evening he had managed to sneak into the school kitchen unobserved and secure food. But he had not been able to take more than would have satisfied half a dozen normal fellows ; so naturally he was still hungry.

It would have given him some small comfort had he thought the school authorities were so worried over his absence as to be likely to overlook his behaviour. But he was under no illusions on that point. Late in the evening, from a sheltered nook in the elm walk, he had overheard Quelch discussing the matter with Prout. He had heard that his tuck-pilfering exploit in the kitchen was known to the Head, who proposed to stop searching and merely to wait for Bunter to ring the door-bell. So he knew for certain that there was going to be no killing the fatted calf for W. G. B.

Bunter rolled round the Close in a state of great despondency—looking for an open window. In Bunter's fatuous estimation, it was better to get into the House secretly than to ring the bell. What would happen in the morning, he did not know ; but he did know that he had no wish to fetch Mr. Quelch out of bed to let him in.

At first, he could see no opening. Eventually, however, on rolling round to the front of the House, he found what he sought in a most surprising place.

A window in the Head's study on the ground floor was wide open.

Bunter blinked at that open window in great surprise. The Head's study was the last place where he would have expected to find an open window. It occurred to him either that Dr. Locke must be getting very careless in his old age or else that the domestic staff were at fault. Still, an open window was an open window to Bunter in his present plight—Head's study or not. After a moment's hesitation at the thought of entering the House by that holy of holies, Bunter conquered his fears and hauled himself up on to the sill.

Grunting and puffing from his efforts, he insinuated his podgy person into the moonlit room and dropped on to the floor.

An instant later, he gave a startled jump.

He had caught sight of the Head's safe, which stood against the wall near the window, in a spot where the moonlight was shining. The door of the safe was wide open and books and papers, obviously taken from it, were scattered in disorder over the floor.

For a moment, as he gazed through his big spectacles at that startling sight, Billy Bunter felt his heart stop beating. His fat knees knocked together.

"Oh, lor'!" he gasped.

It was a burglary! Even Bunter's obtuse brain could not fail to understand that!

He stared round him in dismay and alarm. Unless he had already departed with the loot, there must be a burglar somewhere near him—possibly in the Head's study itself, watching Bunter from one of the dark corners! At that unpleasant thought, Bunter gave a squeak of alarm and turned towards the door.

At the same moment, there was a movement behind him.

Bunter opened his lips to yell. But the intended yell did not materialise. Instead, a big hand was suddenly clapped over his mouth and a grip of iron fastened round his neck.

"Quiet, you!" hissed a threatening voice in the terrified fat Owl's ear. "Otherwise, I'll soon quieten you!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

OPERATION ENTIRELY SUCCESSFUL!

IN the darkness, gripped by an unseen hand, Billy Bunter almost collapsed from sheer funk.

Fear, however, was not the only emotion he felt. At the sound of the burglar's voice, he also experienced a spasm of surprise. For the voice, easily recognised, was that of Professor Cheetham, his chance acquaintance in the elm walk!

Bunter was not quick on the uptake; but the sound of the professor's voice explained everything in a flash. "Professor Cheetham" was no more a professor than was Bunter himself. He was just a common or garden cracksman who had assumed his title to pull the wool over Bunter's eyes and extract from him all the useful information he could!

It was an aggravating thought, and one that caused Bunter to feel distinctly peeved with himself. But he had little time to give to this aspect of the matter. He was much more concerned with the cracksman's intentions regarding himself.

It was an immense relief to Bunter when that big hand was lifted from his mouth and the iron grip relaxed.

"Quiet, remember!" hissed the burglar.

"Sus-sus-certainly! I—I won't say a word——"

"Quiet, I said!"

"Ow! All right!" gasped Bunter.

"Just stand where you are without moving or talking till I tell you you can! See?"

"I sus-sus-see!"

"You'd better!"

"Professor Cheetham" released his fat captive. Bunter heard him turn away—doubtless to resume the task which Bunter's arrival had interrupted.

The fat Removite stood facing the door in palpitating expectancy, while the "professor" busied himself at the safe.

What made Bunter do what he did next, he never knew.

Possibly in the inmost recesses of his fat mind he was anxious to undo the harm he had done and raise the alarm, in the hope of nipping the "professor's" burglarious aims in the bud. More probably, he felt so scared in his present position that he was emboldened to make a bid for liberty rather than put up with it any longer.

Whatever the reason, the fat Owl made a sudden leap for the door. At the same moment, he let out a ringing call for help.

"Help! Rescue! Burglars! Police!" yelled Bunter, as he raced out of the Head's study.

He heard a startled gasp behind him, then pattering footsteps. He spurted desperately down the passage outside the Head's study, with the "professor" close at his heels.

Unfortunately, Bunter was no sprinter. Before he had reached the end of the passage, the "professor" had drawn level with him. He felt that clutching hands were being extended for him.

Sheer desperation drove Bunter to it. Nothing else could have done it.

With a suddenness that took his

pursuer completely by surprise, Bunter turned and put out his foot!

That surprise move of Bunter's proved to be sheer disaster for "Professor Cheetham." It was also disastrous in a minor degree for Bunter himself. The "professor" crashed. Bunter received a big, whirling fist in his face as he did so. Both rolled on to the floor of the passage, yelling.

"Whooooop!"

"Yaroooh! Help! Murder!"

Two thunderous crashes and a whole series of yells rang out through the nocturnal silence of the School House. The effect was instantaneous. Doors began to open upstairs and startled voices could be heard calling. A light gleamed in the distance.

"Professor Cheetham," with a muttered oath, scrambled to his feet and beat a hasty retreat. But he was too late. Before he had run half way down the passage, the light was switched on and two burly seniors appeared. Bunter sat up and pointed wildly after the retiring crook.

"There he is, Wingate! Nab him, North! It's the burglar!"

Wingate and North fairly flew after their quarry, and cornered him just before he reached the Head's study. He turned and hit out desperately; but Wingate and North, tough customers both, closed with him unhesitatingly, and in a matter of a few seconds, he was their prisoner.

There was a surprise for the Remove fellows when they arrived on the scene a few seconds later. Wharton, the first arrival, stared at Bunter in blank amazement.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated. "What the merry dickens are you doing here?"

"Oh, really, Wharton! I've been catching a burglar!"

"Wha-a-at!"



A big hand was suddenly clapped over Bunter's mouth and a grip of iron fastened round his neck.
 "Quiet, you!" hissed a threatening voice in the terrified Owl's ear.

"Blessed if I see anything to stare about!" sniffed Bunter, whose courage was rapidly returning now that the "professor" was in safe hands. "I'm not scared, I hope, like some of you chaps. I tackled him single-handed—regardless of danger, you know. He had a cudgel in one hand and a pistol in the other and a dagger in the other——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I didn't care two hoots. Brave as a lion, I flung myself into the fray—— Oh! G-g-good evening, sir!" finished Bunter, changing his tune considerably as Mr. Quelch, a terrifying spectacle to Bunter even in pyjamas and dressing-gown, stalked forward.

"Bunter! What is the meaning of this?" Then Mr. Quelch stopped and blinked incredulously, as he spotted the two Sixth-Formers with their captive. "Wingate! North! Who is this person?"

"Apparently a burglar, sir," answered Wingate. "When I came downstairs, he was fighting with Bunter."

"Bless my soul!" Mr. Quelch looked completely taken aback by that surprising statement. "Bunter! Is this true? Kindly explain the matter at once."

Bunter was only too willing to do that. He plunged into a vivid and exciting story in which the hero, William George Bunter, performed

feats of courage and endurance which would have put any film hero to shame. Mr. Quelch listened in grim silence, apparently sorting out the modicum of truth from the abundance of exaggeration as the tale progressed. When Bunter finished at last, he nodded.

"Very well, Bunter. That will be sufficient. You should learn to be more truthful."

"Oh, really, sir——"

"You have, however, done well in all the circumstances," acknowledged the Remove master. "You are entitled to the credit for that, Bunter. Now you may leave me to summon the police and complete the matter. You will go up to your dormitory to bed; and in regard to your extraordinary behaviour in going into hiding earlier in the day, you will report to me immediately after prayers to-morrow morning."

Bunter's fat jaw dropped. In the excitement, he had forgotten all his other worries. Now they came back with a rush, with the prospect of a licking in addition.

"I—I say, sir, you—you ain't going to whop me, after all I've done—saving the Head thousands of pounds——"

The crowd chuckled. Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Ahem! Your behaviour in calling attention to the burglar, Bunter, is perhaps an extenuating fact. Having regard to that, I shall on this occasion let you off——"

"Oh, good—— I mean, thank you, sir!"

"But it must be clearly understood," concluded Mr. Quelch, "that

you are to have your tooth extracted to-morrow!"

"Oh, crikey!"

Billy Bunter groaned. Instinctively his fat paw went up reminiscently to that troublesome molar.

Then he jumped. An expression of amazement dawned on his fat countenance. He opened his mouth and dabbed a handkerchief on the gum. He withdrew it and the crowd saw reposing on it a tooth!

"M-m-my hat!" Billy Bunter stared at his hanky. Finally, he grinned. "I—I say, sir, there won't be any need for the dentist, after all!"

"What!"

"It was the burglar, sir!" chortled Bunter. "He biffed me on the mouth! It must have loosened the tooth, and now it's come out altogether! He, he, he!"

"Goodness gracious!" Mr. Quelch stared at Bunter's molar as though mesmerised. "You are sure, Bunter, that it is the right tooth?"

"Positive, sir!"

"Very well, then. Very well indeed." The master of the Remove permitted the ghost of a smile to flit across his stern visage. "I congratulate you, Bunter, on your good fortune."

Mr. Quelch then turned his attention to the captive professor; and Bunter was escorted up to the Remove dormitory like a conquering hero.

And in less than five minutes an unmusical snore, ringing out across the dorm., told the Remove quite plainly that a fat and fatuous Owl was enjoying peaceful and untroubled repose!

