



By
MARTIN
CLIFFORD

*A Thrilling Christmas Yarn of the
Schooldays of Frank Richards in
the Backwoods of Canada.*

THE FIRST CHAPTER CHRISTMAS EVE!

JINGLE, jingle!
The sleigh-bells rang merrily
through the frosty air.

The early dusk of the Canadian winter had closed in, and the stars, as they came out one by one, glittered like points of fire in a sky of steel.

Round the Lawless Ranch the plains lay white under a winding sheet of snow. There had been a heavy fall for several days, and light flakes were still fluttering down in the starlight of Christmas Eve.

Frank Richards looked out of the doorway of the ranch-house and drew

his fur collar closer about his neck. "Here's the sleigh!" he said cheerily.

Bob Lawless followed him out. The big sleigh, with its three steaming horses, was ready. Rancher Lawless stood in the doorway and glanced rather uneasily at the sky.

"I guess there's more coming down," he said. "You'll have to be careful, Bob. I hardly think you ought to go."

"But we've promised to call for the Lawrences, popper," said Bob Lawless. "And Molly will be waiting."

"And we've got to call for Beauclerc, coming back," said Frank

Richards. "We can't leave them in the lurch, uncle."

Mr. Lawless nodded.

"I know you're a careful driver, Bob," he said. "Look out for the drifts, and don't take risks."

"Nary a risk!" said Bob cheerily. "Safe as houses, popper. Haven't I driven a sleigh from here to Fraser in mid-winter?"

"Well, off you go!" said the rancher, still rather dubiously. "If it wasn't for the dance at the mission——"

"But it is!" said Bob brightly. "The big dance of the year, popper."

The rancher laughed.

"Well, take care—that's all!" he said. "Off with you!"

The chums of Cedar Creek climbed into the sleigh, and Bob Lawless took the "ribbons."

Thick rugs were wrapped round them in addition to fur coats.

Billy Cook was holding the horses. He let go at a signal from Bob; the whip cracked, the bells jingled, and the sleigh was off.

Out on the smooth snow the sleigh glided, gathering speed as it went.

The rich grassland was deep under snow, which stretched for miles on all sides; in the distance, leafless frosty trees loomed shadowy.

Clatter, clatter! Jingle!

"Ripping, isn't it, Franky?" remarked Bob Lawless, when the ranch-house had vanished behind and the sleigh was skirting the timber on its way to the upper valley.

"Topping!" answered Frank.

"The popper's a bit of a weather-prophet, but I guess he's off the mark this time," said Bob. "The snow's slacking off. A few flakes like this won't hurt even Molly."

"No fear!"

"There's the Cherub's shebang,"

said Bob, pointing with his whip as a light gleamed out across the snow.

The sleigh ran within a hundred yards of the Beauclerc cabin. Frank and Bob were to call for their chum, Vere Beauclerc, and his cousin Algy on their way back from the Lawrence's homestead. It was a great occasion at the mission—the dance on Christmas Eve, when Mr. and Mrs. Smiley entertained all the young folk of the section, and the boys and girls of Cedar Creek School turned up in great force.

"Hallo!" exclaimed Frank suddenly. "There's Beau!"

A fur-clad figure was running towards the sleigh through the snow from the direction of the remittance-man's cabin.

Bob Lawless pulled in his horses.

Vere Beauclerc came up, panting.

"Coming along?" asked Frank.

"You're going over to the Lawrences?" asked Beauclerc.

"Yes—to call for Molly and Tom."

"Father says the weather's likely to be thick to-night," said Beauclerc. "He doesn't seem to think it quite safe——"

"Just what popper seemed to think," said Bob cheerily. "But he's let us come, all the same. You come along with us, Cherub."

"If you're going, I certainly will."

"Jump in, then!"

With the Cherub on board, Bob cracked his whip again, and the sleigh rolled on.

"Jolly glad you're with us, Beau!" said Frank Richards. "Where's Algy?"

Beauclerc laughed.

"Sorting out some beautiful evening clothes that he brought from England," he answered. "He's going to turn up at the dance in style."

"Ha, ha, ha!"



"Give us a lift, Bob!" roared Chunky Todgers. The sleigh halted. "Roll in, Chunky!" exclaimed Bob. "The more the merrier!"

"Good old Algy!" chuckled Bob. "His evening clobber will make a sensation at the Mission dance. All the girls will want to dance with Algy. I guess we shall be left out in the cold."

And Bob drove on merrily.

The Thompson River, frozen fast and hard as iron, was left on the right, and the sleigh-bells jingled cheerily through the main street of Thompson, past the "Press" office and the Occidental Hotel and Gunten's store and the Red Dog.

Then out on the north side of the town by an invisible track that Bob Lawless followed without a fault.

Lights gleamed ahead at last—the lights of the Lawrence farmstead.

With a jingle of bells and a fusillade

of whip-cracks, Bob Lawless drove up to the farmhouse and stopped his steaming team.

There was no need to knock; the farmhouse door flew open at the sound of the sleigh-bells, and ruddy firelight gleamed out into the snow.

Molly and Tom Lawrence were ready.

Molly's pretty face showed prettier than ever among her furs as she came out to the sleigh. Kate Dawson came with her, and brother Tom followed. The sleigh was large, but it was well filled. But there was still a corner for Algy if that elegant youth was ready when the sleigh passed the Beauclercs' cabin en route to the Mission Hall.

"Hustle along!" called out Bob.

"Can't keep the horses standing! Now, then, all aboard?"

"Buck up, Molly!" said Tom Lawrence. "Give Frank a shove!"

"Lots of room!" called out Frank Richards, laughing. "Here's your cloak, Molly. Here's your rug, Kate. Now then, Tom, squeeze in."

Tom Lawrence squeezed in next to Kate Dawson.

Then Bob's whip cracked again, and the sleigh whirled away through the flakes.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

HELD UP!

"**M**ORE snow!" remarked Vere Beauclerc.

The light, fluttering flakes had thickened, and snow was coming down more heavily, as the sleigh glided back through the main street of Thompson town. A fat figure appeared and waved a fur-gloved hand at the sleigh and yelled:

"Stop for me!"

"Chunky Todgers!"

"Give us a lift, Bob!" roared Chunky Todgers.

Again the sleigh halted.

"Roll in, Chunky! You'll have to let Algy sit on your head when he gets in. The more the merrier!"

"I say, it's jolly cold, isn't it?" gasped Chunky Todgers. "Give a chap room! I've got a bag here. Mind you don't drop it, Franky."

"What on earth are you taking a bag for?" demanded Tom Lawrence.

Chunky gave a fat wink.

"Grub!" he answered.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's refreshments at the Mission dance, you fat clam," said Bob Lawless. "Old Smiley always does us well."

"I guess there aren't refreshments

going and coming back, though," answered Chunky Todgers sagely.

"I haven't got much——"

"It only weighs about a ton!" remarked Frank Richards.

"Well, there's a ham, and some corncakes, and a pudding, and some sausages and things," said Chunky. "It's nearly an hour since I ate anything."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I was hungry last time I went, I know that," said Chunky Todgers warmly. "You give me my bag."

And the bag reposed on Chunky's fat knees as the sleigh jingled on again.

The snow thickened as the party turned out of Thompson and glided along by the frozen river. Thick clouds were blotting out the stars now, and Bob Lawless glanced once or twice anxiously at the sky. It was pretty clear that Mr. Lawless' foreboding had been well founded, and that there was a heavy fall coming on. But the rancher's son had driven through a heavy snowfall before.

"Hallo! What's that?" exclaimed Tom Lawrence, as the sleigh turned from the river and struck across the plains for the three-mile run to the Mission Hall.

"What's which?" asked Frank.

"We're being followed!"

"My hat!"

Frank Richards looked back.

The snow-clouds were blotting out the stars, and a dim twilight reigned on the plains. Through the dimness a form was seen—the figure of a horseman, looming up eerily.

"Silly jay, to be riding in this!" said Chunky Todgers. "What the thunder is he following us for?"

"Lost the track, and using the sleigh as a guide, perhaps," said Frank Richards.



ERNEST
IBBETSON

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Colour Plate by Ernest Ibbetson

THE GUNMAN'S CHALLENGE!

11A

Keno Kit, his hard face flushed with rage, drew alongside the sleigh. "Halt!" he shouted, levelling his revolver.

"I guess that's it."

As the sleigh ran on, the little party looked back several times at the lonely rider in the mist and snow.

"He's overtaking us," said Beauclerc presently.

With a thudding in the snow the horseman came alongside the dashing sleigh, and a hoarse voice shouted:

"Stop!"

Bob Lawless did not stop, but he glanced round.

"What's the trouble?" he called back.

"Stop!"

"Stop be blowed!" answered Bob, with more force than elegance. "Go and chop chips, whoever you are!"

"Stop!" shouted the horseman again. "Do you want me to drop your leader?"

There was a glitter of steel in the horseman's hand.

Molly Lawrence gave a cry.

"My hat! It's a thief!" exclaimed Frank Richards. "He's trying to hold us up! My only hat!"

"It's Keno Kit, of the Red Dog," said Vere Beauclerc quietly. "Are you going to stop, Bob?"

Bob Lawless set his teeth.

The whip cracked and the reins shook, and the team galloped on. For the moment the horseman was left behind. But the schoolboys and schoolgirls, peering anxiously back, saw the dim figure riding on furiously through the falling flakes.

Crack!

Through the frosty air and the jingling of the sleigh-bells came the sudden report of a revolver.

The bullet sped through the air high over the sleigh. It was a threat—so far.

Bob Lawless drove on savagely.

It was a race now.

Keno Kit, as the man was called,

was one of the loafers of the Red Dog Saloon in Thompson; and no doubt he had expended his last cent in tanglefoot, or in the game of euchre, at the Red Dog, and was "out" to make a "raise" by any means that came to hand.

The desperate ruffian was reckless of consequences.

Probably he was celebrating Christmas in his own way by a "bender" at the Red Dog, and his dollars had run out and he was desperate.

His object was to go "through" the Christmas party in the sleigh—perhaps to steal the horses and sleigh, which were worth a very large sum.

It was evident that he meant business, at all events. He drove on his horse savagely with whip and spur, and drew alongside the sleigh again at last.

His hard face was flushed with rage. He rode beside the trampling team and flourished his revolver at the schoolboy driver.

"Halt!" he shouted.

Bob Lawless did not reply.

He made a sudden lash with the whip and caught the ruffian full across the face.

There was a wild yell from Keno Kit as he reeled backwards in the saddle. His horse stumbled in the snow and went over, and the ruffian landed on his back.

"Bravo!" shouted Frank Richards.

Bob Lawless drove on furiously.

It was less than a mile to the Beauclercs' cabin, whither the highwayman would scarcely dare to follow. Keno Kit scrambled out of the snow, pouring out a string of savage oaths.

Crack, crack, crack!

He was firing recklessly after the sleigh.

There was a sudden whinny of pain from the leader, and he went plunging

into a drift, dragging the other horses down with him.

The next instant the sleigh was on its side, and the occupants were rolling in the snow.

THE THIRD CHAPTER IN DEADLY PERIL!

BOB LAWLESS scrambled up and rushed to the kicking, plunging horses. His first thought was for them. Frank Richards and Beauclerc helped the two girls to their feet.

"He's coming!" yelled Chunky Todgers.

Through the snow, now falling in thick masses, came the horseman, riding furiously, his horse knee-deep in snow, churning it up as he rushed.

"Look out!"

Chunky Todgers' bag had burst open by the overturned sleigh, and packets of "grub" and a stone bottle had rolled into the snow. Frank Richards spotted the stone bottle and caught it up.

"Look out!" yelled Chunky, "that's my peppermint!"

But Frank Richards did not heed. Chunky Todgers' supply of peppermint was not an important matter at that moment.

As Keno Kit came plunging up through the snow, Frank Richards hurled the stone bottle with a deadly aim.

The ruffian received the missile full in his brutal, stubbly face, and it struck him like a bullet.

He gave a gasping howl, and pitched off his horse.

"On him!" panted Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless was too busy with the horses to help, but the other fellows rushed at the fallen ruffian. They knew that their only chance was to tackle him before he rose.

Vere Beauclerc was the first to reach him, and he hurled himself upon the dazed ruffian.

Keno Kit, who was making a dizzy effort to rise, was flung back, with Beauclerc's knee on his chest.

The next moment the other fellows were upon him.

The ruffian sank into the snow under a shower of blows. Tom Lawrence grabbed away his revolver, and the butt of the weapon crashed on Keno Kit's head.

The horse, frightened by the fracas, was dashing away through the snow, with trailing reins and dangling stirrups. Keno Kit squirmed in the snow, struggling feebly and howling for mercy.

"Give me the shooter, Lawrence!" Vere Beauclerc grasped the revolver. "Now, you scoundrel, hoof it!"

He jammed the muzzle to Keno Kit's ear.

"Let up!" gasped the ruffian. "I guess I give in! Let up!"

"Get out, you rascal!" said Frank. Keno Kit staggered up.

There was no fight left in him, and Beauclerc's finger was on the trigger of the revolver, and his look showed that he was quite ready to shoot.

Keno Kit staggered away dazedly on the track of his runaway horse, and the snow and the twilight swallowed him up in a few moments.

"I guess we're clear of him!" panted Lawrence. "Cheer up, Molly, it's all right!"

"We'll be going again in a few minutes," said Frank.

"I say, where's that bottle?" howled Chunky Todgers. "Look here, Richards, my peppermint's lost."

"Br-r-r!"

"Why couldn't you chuck something else at him?" demanded Todgers indignantly. "Look here, you

help me look for that bottle—it's trampled in the snow somewhere — Yaroooooh!"

Frank Richards took the fat and wrathful Chunky by the collar and sat him down in the snow. Then he ran to help Bob Lawless.

During the tussle with Keno Kit Bob had succeeded in cutting free the injured horse and getting the other two upon their feet.

The schoolboys gathered round the sleigh to set it right.

Bob Lawless' face was very grave as he examined it.

"Anything up?" asked Lawrence.

"One of the runners is smashed," answered Bob quietly.

"Phew!"

"I guess it can't be moved."

"Oh!"

"We're only a mile or so from my home," said Beauclerc. "We can get help there."

Bob Lawless looked at the falling snow.

The whole sky was blotted out now. Snow was coming down in great masses, and piling up round the sleigh and the horses. The injured horse, already at the point of death, was covered with it. The chums of Cedar Creek looked at one another with serious faces.

The sleigh was hopelessly wrecked, and only two horses remained, and the snowstorm was fairly coming on now.

"Hang the man!" muttered Bob, between his teeth. "We should have been close to the cabin by this time, and I guess it would have been too thick for us to get on to the Mission. But now——"

He broke off.

"Can't we walk to the cabin?" asked Molly Lawrence in a low voice.

Bob did not answer. Well he knew

that it was impossible to cross the plain on foot and live.

"There are the horses," muttered Frank.

"Keno Kit's done for if he doesn't find his horse," said Lawrence.

"Serve him right!" muttered Bob. "He's the cause of all this! But we——"

"We can't stay here!" whispered Kate Dawson.

Chunky Todgers came up with a stone bottle in his hand and a cheery smile on his fat visage.

"I've found it," he announced.

"Found what?" snapped Bob.

"My peppermint."

"You silly chump!"

"Oh, I say! I was afraid Frank had broken the bottle, biffing it at the bulldozer!" said Chunky. "But it's all right. I say, what are you all looking so jolly serious about? Is my grub lost?"

"Oh, dry up, for goodness' sake!" said Bob crossly. "You fellows, you can see the snow—nobody could get through that on foot. Look how it's coming down. There's the two horses, but——"

He stared into the shadows.

"Two of us could go for help on the horses," said Beauclerc.

Bob Lawless nodded.

"After this blow is over," he said. "Get into the sleigh now—it's all the shelter we've got."

It was almost a blizzard that was raging on the plains now. An icy wind from the frozen slopes of the Rockies came across the flats like a knife-edge, and heavy flakes whirled in it.

The dead horse was hidden from sight now; the two remaining animals shivered and whimpered. On horse or on foot it was impossible to get through the snowstorm.

Molly and Kate were wrapped in rugs in the sleigh, their faces very pale now. But Lawless and Frank covered up the horses with cloths as well as they could, and followed their companions into the slanting sleigh. Thicker and thicker the snow came down, and its level rose higher and higher round the wrecked sleigh.

There was a grunt from Chunky Todgers as he drove his teeth into a corn-cake. Whatever might betide, Chunky Todgers was not likely to lose his appetite.

Bob Lawless uttered a sudden exclamation.

"Stop that!"

"Eh! Stop what?" ejaculated Chunky.

"Stop gorging, you fat clam! We may want every ounce of that!"

"Oh, I say!"

Bob Lawless took the bag away from the fat Chunky, who blinked at him speechlessly. A chill fell upon the party in the sleigh. Up to that moment they had not looked at the situation as it was—it was too terrible to realise. But they realised it now. They were snowbound on the open plain, and if help was long delayed it was the shadow of death that hung over them!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

SNOWBOUND!

THICKER and thicker the snow came down. Black darkness, broken only by the glimmer of the snow, enwrapped the sleigh.

There was a deep silence.

Frank Richards & Co. thought of the Mission Hall—of the rafters hung with lanterns and holly, of the light feet pattering to the strains of the wheezy Mission piano and the fiddler from Kamloops. The dance at the Mission was in progress by that time,

though the rough weather would have made the attendance unusually thin. And within a few miles of the merry scene, here they lay—snowbound and in grim peril.

The night grew older.

Still the snow was coming down, thickly, heavily. It was round the sleigh like a sea of white, several feet deep. The horses were almost buried in it as they shivered under their coverings. There was nothing to do but to wait—and waiting was dreary.

Sleep came to their help at last.

Molly Lawrence, with her head resting on Frank's shoulder, slept peacefully, and gradually the others dozed.

Chunky Todgers, after in vain endeavouring to reclaim his provisions, resigned himself to slumber—the next best thing, in Chunky's opinion.

Frank Richards was the last to sleep.

It was warm enough in the closely packed sleigh, under the thick fur cloaks and rugs. It was not till the dim morning sun was glimmering through the snowflakes that the Cedar Creek party awoke.

Bob Lawless rubbed his eyes and looked round him.

The wind had fallen, and the snow was coming down lightly; the blizzard had passed off in the night.

The two horses were no longer to be seen.

The bitter cold had been too much for them, and they had sunk in the snow, and now lay frozen like iron under the spotless covering.

Round the sleigh was a sea of snow and mist, which blotted the sight at a distance of a few yards.

Bob Lawless rose to his feet and stepped from the sleigh on to the frozen body of a horse with a foot of snow over it.

Molly opened her eyes.

"I say!" Chunky Todgers was awake now. "I say, isn't it lucky I brought some grub with me? I'm awfully hungry. You give me my grub, Bob Lawless. I'll whack it out with you fellows, of course!"

"Shurrup!" grunted Bob.

"But I say—I'm hungry!"

"Dry up!"

Chunky Todgers gave a snort of indignation. As a matter of fact, Chunky was not the only member of the party who was hungry.

"Christmas morning!" said Beauclerc, with a shiver.

"What will our people be thinking?" muttered Lawrence.

"It is useless to think of that."

"They'll be searching for us, anyhow," said Lawrence. "What the

thunder are we going to do, Bob? Where are the horses?"

Bob pointed to the snow.

"Oh! We—we can't get away, then?"

"I guess a horse couldn't get through these drifts, anyhow."

"We're landed," remarked Frank Richards as cheerfully as he could.

"We've got to make the best of it!"

"I'm not afraid!" murmured Molly.

"Nothing to be afraid of," said Bob sturdily. "We—we've only got to get help!"

"That's all," murmured Frank.

"I've been snowbound before," said Kate. "But that was in a cabin, with fire, and food, and shelter. But here——" She shivered.

"We've got food," said Bob cheerfully. "Thanks to Chunky for that! I guess it's lucky he's such a greedy clam."

"Look here!" began Chunky hotly.



Frank Richards hurled the bottle with deadly aim as Keno Kit came riding through the snow, and the ruffian received the missile full in his brutal face.

"There's enough in Chunky's bag to last us a couple of days, on strict rations," said Bob. "We may as well begin now."

"Strict rations!" murmured Chunky. "Oh, dear!"

"Lucky we gave you a lift, Chunky!" grinned Bob.

"Ye-e-es, isn't it?" said Todgers, rather doubtfully, however.

Bob Lawless examined the supplies, and handed out the rations. It was a frugal breakfast, but it made the snowbound party feel better.

Chunky Todgers sighed deeply when Bob wrapped the remainder of the provisions in the bag. His eyes followed them mournfully. Chunky was a good fellow, and was quite willing to "whack" out his supply. But he really considered it would have been wiser to whack it out more liberally, and trust to luck for the morrow. Bob Lawless was leader, however, and Bob was not in the habit of trusting to luck for the morrow.

"I say, Bob," murmured Chunky, "I've got an idea——"

"Well?"

"Suppose we finish up the grub now," suggested Chunky. "It—it will give us strength, you know, to—to——"

"Let me catch you trying to finish up the grub!" growled Bob. "Dry up, Chunky, and go to sleep!"

"Well, I may as well, I guess," said Chunky. "I can bear hunger better when I'm asleep."

And Chunky's melodious snore was soon heard again.

While Chunky was snoring, Frank Richards & Co. held a consultation outside the sleigh.

"We've got to get help!" said Bob quietly. "They're searching for us, of course, already; but they don't

know where to look. Two of us had better try to get through this!"

Frank Richards gave an almost hopeless look at the sea of snow.

"I know what you're thinking—it's as good as going to a funeral!" said Bob. "It can't be helped. The girls have got to be saved somehow. It's about a mile to Beauclerc's shebang, and if we can struggle through we're all O.K. I'm going!"

"I'm coming with you, then!" said Frank.

"And I!" said Beauclerc quietly.

"Count me in!" said Tom Lawrence.

Bob smiled faintly.

"No good all going," he said. "Besides, somebody's got to take care of the girls while we're gone. You'd better stay, Lawrence, as you're Molly's brother. Chunky stays anyway. We three'll try it!"

Frank Richards turned back to the sleigh, and Molly's eyes met his anxiously.

"We're going for help, Molly," said Frank quietly. "Most likely we shall be back before long. Don't worry!"

"You cannot get through!" whispered Molly.

"We're going to try. Keep in the sleigh and keep warm. Tom and Chunky will clear away some of the snow here so that you'll have room to move. Keep your pecker up."

"Oh, Frank!"

"Good-bye, Molly! You'll see us again soon!"

And the three chums of Cedar Creek prepared for the desperate venture.

Bob Lawless led the way through the clinging mist that hung over the plain, and his comrades followed him unquestioningly. The snow was like a soft barrier that had to be trampled,



"This way!" shouted Bob. Through the mist the horses loomed up, plunging through the snow. "By gad! Here they are!" It was the voice of Algernon Beauclerc, the dandy of Cedar Creek.

and pushed aside to allow progress to be made, and it was heavy work.

As the three schoolboys proceeded, they left a deep gully in the snow-carpet behind them.

"You're sure of the way, Bob?" Frank Richards asked at last.

His Canadian cousin gave him rather a grim look.

"Almost!" he answered briefly.

They tramped on.

Taking it in turns to lead and force a way through the snow, the three chums pressed on.

They could not see the sun, but a wintry light glimmered faintly through the thick, hanging mists.

Fatigue grew upon them as they fought their way onward, but with fierce determination they stuck to their task.

For two hours or more they struggled on; and still the snow was thick about them, and the mist closed

suffocatingly in upon them. Frank Richards stopped at last.

"I—I can't keep on, Bob," he gasped. "I—I'm done!"

Bob Lawless breathed hard.

"I guess it's the same with me," he muttered. "We haven't done a quarter of a mile yet. We—we can't win through!"

The three schoolboys sat in the snow, too exhausted almost to speak.

Hope was dying in their breasts.

But they did not think of returning. To crawl back through the gully they had made in the snow, and to let the girls know, by their return, that they had failed and that there was no hope was impossible. Somehow, they would contrive to keep on—when they had rested. But in their hearts they knew that there was no keeping on for them.

And it was Christmas Day!

Frank Richards struggled to his feet at last.

"We've got to try again!" he muttered.

Crack!

Suddenly, through the silence of the mists, came an echoing report—the report of a rifle!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

ALGY TO THE RESCUE!

FRANK RICHARDS & Co. started, and stared through the mists. The report died away in a thousand echoes round them. They looked at one another blankly.

"A rifle!" breathed Bob Lawless.

"It's somebody——"

"A signal, perhaps," muttered Beauclerc. "If they are searching for us, it may be a signal——"

"Shout!" said Frank.

The mist was full of echoes, and they could hardly define the direction from which the sound of the shot rang out.

"Help!"

The three schoolboys shouted together with all the strength they could muster.

Crack!

As if in answer, came a second report.

Beauclerc uttered an exclamation.

"The revolver!"

He felt in his pocket hastily. He still had the revolver that had been taken from Keno Kit.

"Good!" exclaimed Bob joyfully.

"They'll hear that——"

"There are two cartridges in it," said Beauclerc.

"Let them go!"

Vere Beauclerc pointed the revolver into the air and pulled the trigger twice in rapid succession.

Crack! Crack!

The reports rang loudly across the snow.

Then the chums listened.

Had the signal been heard? Had it been understood?

Bob Lawless grasped Frank's arm suddenly, squeezing it in his excitement.

"Listen!" he breathed.

"Bells!" shouted Frank. "Sleigh-bells!"

Jingle, jingle!

Never had the merry sound of sleigh-bells sounded so musically in the ears of the chums of Cedar Creek.

"This way!" shouted Bob.

"Help, help!"

Through the mist the heads of two steaming horses loomed up, plunging through the snow.

"Look out!"

"By gad! Here they are!"

It was the voice of Algernon Beauclerc—the dandy of Cedar Creek. The horses plunged to a halt and the bells ceased to jingle. The three chums crushed through the snow towards the sleigh.

"Algy!" shouted Beauclerc.

An eyeglass glittered from the sleigh. Algy was alone in it, handling the reins. A rifle lay beside him.

"Hallo, you fellows!" said Cousin Algy cheerily. "Glad to see you! Where have you been, hey?"

"Snowbound."

"Yaas, I thought so. No end of a row goin' on at the ranch!" yawned Algernon. "Your pater's out in a sleigh, Bob, and the cattlemen are searchin', and my Uncle Beauclerc is with them, and Old Man Lawrence—no end of a big fuss. I offered my services, and what do you think they said? Better stay at home and keep my feet warm!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I didn't!" grinned Algy. "I trotted down to Thompson and hired a sleigh and a gun, and here I am. My idea to pop off the rifle every now and then as a signal, you know. You heard it—what?"

"Yes, and we were jolly glad to hear it!" gasped Frank.

"Yaas, I suppose so! But where are the others?"

"Left with the sleigh—we were going for help!" said Bob.

"You've found help, old top! Let's go and round up the rest of the giddy party," said Algernon. "You can drive if you like. These gees are a bit skittish, and they've made my arms ache. Hungry? I've no end of stuff in the sleigh!"

"Well, my hat!" said Frank.

The three schoolboys clambered in, and Bob took the reins. With light hearts they drove back to the wrecked sleigh, and the jingle of the bells told Molly and her companions that help was coming. Progress was slow through the heavy snow, but the snowbound camp was in sight at last.

"Hurrah!" shouted Tom Lawrence as Algy's sleigh came plunging up.

"Bravo!" yelled Chunky Todgers. "Have you got any grub?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Algy touched his fur cap to Molly and Kate, whose faces were very bright now.

"Merry Christmas!" he said politely. "Can I help you to change carriages? Then we'll move on."

Chunky Todgers' mouth was full, and his jaws were busy when the whole party were crammed into Algy's sleigh. The whip cracked, and they rolled away to a merry jingle of bells.

Christmas Day was cheery enough, after all, at the Lawless Ranch. The dance at the Mission had been missed by Frank Richards & Co., but there were dances enough to follow at the ranch during the Christmas festivities, and Molly and Kate and the chums of Cedar Creek enjoyed themselves immensely.

THE END

THE DETERMINIST'S DIARY

By Herbert Skimpole

(the St. Jim's Determinist)

ON Monday morn I felt forlorn,
They wanted me to play
A cricket game, but 'twas a shame
To pass my time away
In juvenile amusement while
My work was being missed;
I went on strike against it, like
A true Determinist.

"Such wanton waste is not my taste.
There's work," I said, "to do!
To spread the truth to every youth,
Beginning here with you!
Oh, pay no thought to idle sport,
But gather round and list!
You'll find the time well spent, for I'm
A true Determinist!"

They gathered round, but not, I found,
To listen to my talk;
They took my frame and bumped the same
Upon the gravel walk!
Such brutal force left me, of course,
Unable to resist;
It was a sore experience for
A true Determinist.

They little know such antics show
A savage state of mind;
In point of fact, an ape would act
More justly to its kind!
I pity—nay, despise—the way
They raise the cruel fist!
But come what will, you'll find me still
A true Determinist!