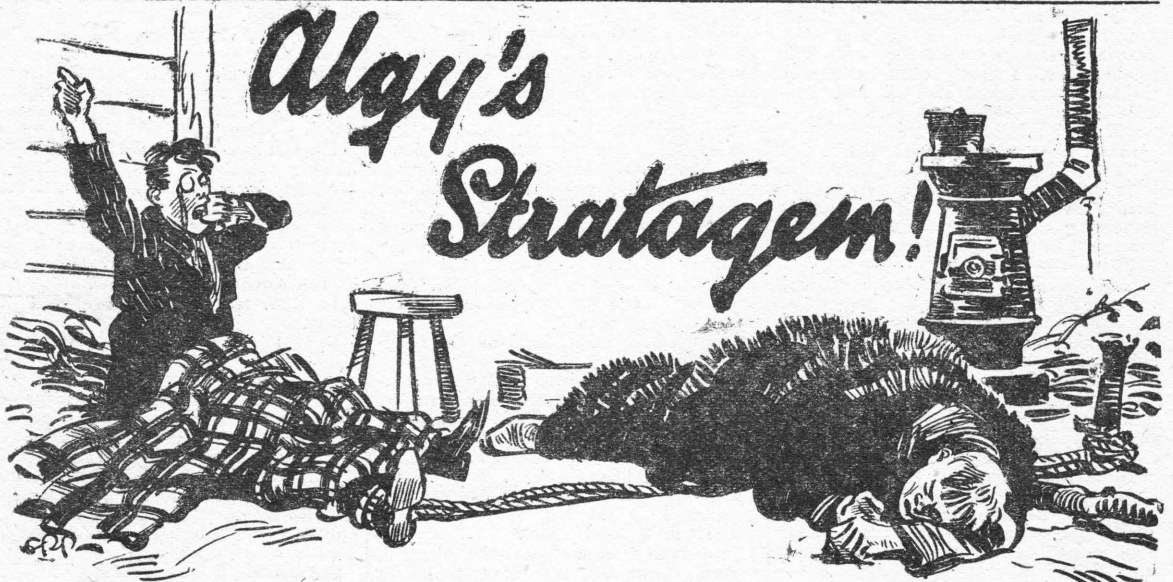


TRICKING THE KIDNAPPERS!

Algernon Beauclerc can be as energetic as he is elegant when occasion calls. Before he is long in captivity his kidnappers discover, to their sorrow, he is more than a handful. You will enjoy reading this thrilling story of the Backwoods School!



Another Roaring Tale of FRANK RICHARDS & CO., The Chums of the School in the Backwoods.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
News of Algy!

"ANY news?" Frank Richards and Bob Lawless rode up to the Beauclercs' cabin on the creek. They called out the question together as Vere Beauclerc appeared in the doorway.

"Yes," was Beauclerc's answer. "News of Algy?" exclaimed Frank Richards, as he jumped from his horse. "Yes; come in!"

Frank and Bob followed their chum eagerly into the cabin.

It was two days since Algernon Beauclerc had been missed from his place at Cedar Creek School; and during those two days the search for him had been incessant—but fruitless.

Nothing had been heard of him since the letter had arrived from the kidnappers, demanding a ransom for his release. "Old Man Beauclerc" had taken that letter to the sheriff of Thompson; and the sheriff's men had been searching, as well as the ranchmen from Lawless Ranch and the chums of Cedar Creek. But the kidnapped schoolboy remained hidden from search in the sombre, frosty depths of the forest.

What would happen to Algy if the kidnappers' demands were not met was a question that troubled his friends deeply.

Further demands, coupled with threats, were what they expected.

In the cabin, Mr. Beauclerc stood with a letter in his hand, and a deep frown upon his face.

"Another letter?" asked Frank.

The remittance-man nodded.

"From the kidnappers?"

"From Algy!" said Vere Beauclerc.

"Oh, is that all the news?" asked Frank, disappointed.

"That's all."

"I suppose they've made him write," remarked Bob Lawless.

"That's it!" said Mr. Beauclerc.

"Read the letter!"

Frank and Bob looked at the letter together. It was written in pencil upon a rough sheet of paper; but Algy's delicate caligraphy was easily recognised.

But the letter was written rather oddly, for Algy. Usually, Algy wrote in the neatest possible way; but in this letter the lines were very irregular, and in some places the words were sprawled out, as if to fill up space, and in other places they were compressed, as if to get more into the line.

Why Algy should have written thus carelessly was perplexing to anyone who knew his orderly manners and customs. But for the moment the chums of Cedar Creek hardly observed it, being chiefly interested in the contents of the letter. It ran:

"Dear Uncle,—
Will you pay the money and let me get out of this? I am awfully cold here and not at all happy in this place. Be assured that all money paid on my account now will be repaid to you, every cent, by my father. I am really anxious to get home, so don't lose any time.
"ALGERNON."

"Rotten!" muttered Bob Lawless.

Frank Richards frowned a little.

The chums of Cedar Creek had expected demands from the kidnappers, and threats of what would happen to the prisoner if the ransom was not paid. But they had certainly not expected that Algernon himself would write and ask for the ransom to be handed over. Algernon was a dandy of the first water, but he had proved more than once that he had plenty of pluck; and it was a surprise to his friends that he should play into the hands of the kidnappers in this way.

Beauclerc flushed a little as he read the thoughts of his chums in their faces.

"They've been threatening the poor kid, of course," he said.

"I—I guess so," assented Bob.

"They may even have been ill-using him," said Mr. Beauclerc quietly.

"Algernon is not the kind of lad to do anything weak or cowardly. He must have had a strong reason for writing in this strain."

"I suppose so," Frank Richards said slowly. "It's rather a queer letter for Algy, too."

"It's genuine enough—I know his hand."

"Yes; but it seems queer somehow. And—Algy must know—"

Frank Richards paused.

"He must know that the rascals are demanding five thousand dollars, and that I could not possibly raise such a sum of money," said Mr. Beauclerc quietly. "He certainly must know that. It could be obtained from his father in England, if there were no other resource; but that would take a great deal of time. It is possible, however, that Algernon has written this letter under threats, simply to save himself from brutality, knowing that it cannot be acted upon."

"Yes, I guess that's possible," said Bob Lawless. "How did the letter get here, sir?"

"It was thrown into the window last night by someone who disappeared too quickly to be seen."

"And what's going to be done?" asked Frank.

Mr. Beauclerc knitted his brows.

"The money cannot be paid. The sheriff would not allow that, now that the matter has been placed in his hands. I must take this letter to him, and the search must go on."

"Let me see it again," said Frank.

He took the letter and scanned it.

Then he shook his head.

"There's nothing in it to give a clue," he said. "I hoped—but there's nothing. Of course, they'd read the letter, and see that he didn't give away his hiding-place in any way."

"Of course!"

"I wonder—" muttered Frank.

"Well, what do you wonder?" asked Bob Lawless, looking at his English cousin curiously.

"It's jolly queer that Algy should write such a letter as that," said Frank. "I can't catch on. They have threatened him, of course; but—but Algy's as brave as a lion, though he's rather an ass in some things. I simply can't understand his knuckling under like that. I can't help thinking—"

"What?" asked Beauclerc.

Frank glanced at the letter again.

"I can't help thinking that Algy must have had some reason for writing this letter," he said quietly. "There may be something in it—if we could only see it some sort of a dodge for communicating with us and—"

Mr. Beauclerc gave a start, and took the letter from Frank.

"That deserves thinking out," he said.

"Good old Franky!" said Bob Lawless admiringly. "I don't quite reckon Algy would have brains enough for a dodge like that—but it's barely possible. But how could anything be wrapped up in that letter that we can't see at a glance, and that the kidnapers couldn't see?"

Frank shook his head.

"I don't know—but it just occurred to me. It's not the kind of letter Algy would write—not like him. The kidnapers wouldn't know that—but we know it. And it's possible—"

Mr. Beauclerc sat down at the table, the letter before him.

"We will go into this," he said quietly.

"It is quite possible that Frank has hit on the truth. Let us examine it thoroughly, at all events."

And four heads were bent thoughtfully over the letter from the kidnapped schoolboy.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Prisoner!

"OH, gad!"

Algernon Beauclerc yawned as he sat up.

Dawn was struggling faintly through the frosty, leafless treetops in the heart of the forest.

Algy of Cedar Creek sat up shivering, in a blanket on the earthen floor of the hut in the forest, where he had been a prisoner for what seemed to him years, at least, though the time could have been counted by hours.

For the first day he had been in company with Dry Billy Bowers, while Dry Billy's confederates were gone to Thompson town for supplies.

Now, Mr. William Bowers was gone, and the ruffian Four Kings was taking his turn at watching the prisoner.

The ruined hut in the forest was a very imperfect shelter from the keen Canadian winter. In one corner was a pile of snow that had dropped through an opening of the dilapidated roof. Bitter winds came through the interstices in the bark walls.

A rusty iron stove burned smokily, and tainted the air with the smell of oil and soot.

Algernon glanced at his companion in the hut.

Four Kings, still sleeping, was rolled in a thick bearskin, and his deep snores sounded through the silence.

"The rotter!" muttered Algernon. "If a chap could get loose—"

He looked at the rope that held him.

It was a thick trail-rope, and the middle of it was knotted round his ankle. Both ends were tied to a stake driven into the earth.

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And across the rope Four Kings lay sleeping.

It was impossible for Algy to get at the tied ends of the rope without disturbing the slumbering ruffian.

To loosen the knots about his ankle was a long and difficult task, and every movement was likely to disturb Four Kings. Algy had tried it once, and the ruffian had started up and stretched him on his blanket with a furious blow. Algy's head was still singing from that blow.

"No go!" he murmured disconsolately.

Outside in the forest, the snow was falling lightly. And the kidnapped schoolboy was aware that the new snowfall covered up any possible traces the kidnapers had left behind them.

Algy's second day had been worse than the first. Dry Billy Bowers was a rascal, but he was a genial rascal, and Algy had been sorry to change his company for that of the surly, savage ruffian now guarding him.

His eyes remained fixed on the sleeping ruffian.

The man was asleep, but any movement of the rope would awaken him. But Algy shivered a little at another thought.

A heavy wooden stool was within reach of his hand.

Half-unconsciously he reached out and grasped it by the leg.

Then he paused again.

One heavy blow upon the sleeping ruffian's head—one sure blow, and then he—

If Four Kings was stunned at the first blow, all was easy. He had simply to take the ruffian's knife and cut himself loose and run for it.

But—

He could not do it.

It would be justified—his freedom was at stake—perhaps even his life in the end, if the kidnapers were disappointed of their plunder; but he could not strike the sleeping man.

His grasp upon the stool relaxed.

But the thought remained in his mind, haunting him; and he was almost glad when the ruffian's eyes opened at last.

Four Kings grunted, shook off the bearskin, and rose to his feet.

He greeted Algy's glance with a scowl.

"Good-mornin'!" said Algy politely.

"Shet up!" was his guardian's response.

"Cold this mornin', old top!"

"You'll be a deal colder soon, if them dollars don't come along," said Four Kings significantly. "I guess I ain't keeping up this hyer stunt much longer. This hyer ain't good enough."

"I'm ready to go if you are!" smiled Algy.

"Oh, shet up your yaup-trap!" growled Four Kings.

"Certainly, old top, if my conversation bores you," answered Algernon, who had evidently not lost his polish during his sojourn in the forest.

The ruffian grunted, and moved to the stove.

He crammed it with pine-chips, and there was soon a ruddy fire roaring, filling the dilapidated hut with grateful warmth.

"That's better!" growled Four Kings.

"Much!" assented Algy. "Any brekker goin'?"

"I guess you're goin' to get breakfast," said the ruffian. "You'll find the stuff in that there bag. There's a pan hyer, and all you want. If you ain't got a good breakfast in ten minutes, look out for the trail-rope!"

And Four Kings moved towards the doorway.

Algernon looked at him.

To cook for his kidnapper was rather

a humiliating task; and Algy's pride rose against the idea.

But the trail-rope was an unanswerable argument.

The ruffian was quite capable of carrying out his threat, and worse; and the dandy of Cedar Creek decided to do as he was told.

"Anythin' to oblige, old scout!" he said.

"Shet up, and get to work," answered Four Kings, who seemed somehow far from appreciating Algy's politeness at its true value.

He tramped out of the hut and stood looking through the leafless trees, evidently in expectation of an arrival.

Algy set to work.

He was hungry himself, and the fact that he was to share the meal he prepared was an incentive to work, as well as the threatened trail-rope.

In ten minutes the breakfast was ready.

Four Kings gave a grunt of satisfaction as he came in and found an ample meal prepared.

He ate it in silence, Algy venturing a few remarks while he ate, his remarks being received with surly grunts.

Evidently Four Kings liked his imprisonment in the forest but no more than Algernon did. And one at least of the kidnapers was bound to be almost as much of a prisoner as the kidnapped schoolboy himself.

After breakfast, Four Kings filled his black pipe, and smoked.

There was a step at last in the snow outside.

Euchre Dick, the third member of the gang, stepped in. Four Kings rose surlily to his feet.

"So you're arrove!" he growled.

"I guess I'm here!" said Euchre Dick.

"You gave in the letter?"

"Dry Billy did—threwed it in at the winder of the Beauclercs' shebang," answered Euchre Dick.

"They ain't paid up?"

"Nary a pay-up," answered Euchre Dick, rather dismally. "I looked at the place where the dust was to be put, 'cording to our first letter, and there was nix. I guess they ain't payin' yet. I guess Old Man Beauclerc ain't got the rocks!"

Four Kings uttered an oath.

"The kid's asked him to pay up," he said. "He can get the money back from the kid's popper in the Old Country. Ain't that so?" demanded Four Kings, with a glare at Algernon.

Algy smiled.

"If the money was paid, my father would see that my uncle didn't lose by it, certainly!" he said.

"And you've asked your pesky uncle to pay?"

"You read the letter I wrote," said Algy, still smiling.

"Correct!"

"If they've got as much sense as I hope they have, I sha'n't stay here long after they get my letter," said Algernon. "I've done all I can."

"Waal, that's so," said Four Kings grudgingly. "You couldn't do more'n ask 'em to square up, I allow. All the same, if you ain't paid for soon, you won't never get out of this hyer timber alive!"

Euchre Dick nodded.

"That's so," he said. "If the money's paid, we shall have to quit this section; but if it ain't paid, we're not quitting for nothing. You'd better hope that your uncle will have some hoss-sense, Mister Dude!"

"I do hope so," said Algy meekly.

"Waal, I'm going!" grunted Four Kings. "Your turn to watch to-day,

(Continued on page 16.)

"ALGY'S STRATAGEM!"

(Continued from page 12.)

Euchre Dick. To-morrow Dry Billy takes it on agin, if it lasts over to-morrow. But I tell you, if they don't pay up soon, I guess I shall send them one of his ears in the next note, as a reminder."

"Not if we can help it, pard," said Euchre Dick.

"I guess this hyer game ain't going on much longer, anyhow!" growled Four Kings; and he tramped out of the hut. And Algy was left to face another day, this time with Euchre Dick as his watchman.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Algy's Message!

EUREKA!" Frank Richards uttered that exclamation suddenly.

His handsome face was blazing with excitement as he started up from the table in the remittance-man's cabin.

"Hallo! What's biting you now, Franky?" asked Bob Lawless, in astonishment.

"I've got it!"

"What have you got—the jimjams?"

"Got it!" repeated Vere Beauclerc. The remittance-man looked at Frank questioningly.

For a good half-hour the four of them had been conning over the letter written by the kidnapped schoolboy.

Three of them, at least, had come to the conclusion that Frank's surmise regarding it was unfounded; that the wish was father to the thought, so to speak.

It seemed impossible that that letter written under the eyes of the kidnappers, read by them before it was delivered, could contain any secret message to the kidnapped boy's friends.

But the belief grew in Frank's mind as he puzzled over it.

Algy was not the sort of fellow to play into the hands of the kidnappers; and he had rather too much reckless courage than too little. The letter was quite unlike what might have been expected from Algy, though undoubtedly to his kidnappers it seemed natural enough.

And Frank's attention was concentrated, at last, upon the peculiarities of the letter—upon the odd circumstance that the lines contained different numbers of words—here extended, there compressed, for no apparent reason.

And so the thought came into his mind that Algy had had some motive for writing the letter thus; and that upon this oddity there hung the explanation.

Then came illumination like a flash.

"I've got it!" repeated Frank jubilantly. "Bowers—Billy Bowers! That's the man!"

"Bowers!" repeated Bob Lawless.

"Dry Billy, the loafer of Thompson, do you mean?" asked Mr. Beauclerc.

"Yes, yes!"

"But what—how—"

"You remember?" exclaimed Frank excitedly. "Billy Bowers tried to rob Algy the day he came up the valley. We met him in the timber the other day, and gave him a licking for it."

"We remember all that well enough," said Bob. "Bowers is likely enough to have had a hand in the kidnapping. So are a dozen other bulldozers in the town. But there's no mention of Bowers in this letter."

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"There is!" grinned Frank.

"What?"

"Watch Bowers.' That's Algy's message."

"What?" yelled Bob.

"Under our eyes all the time!" gasped Frank Richards.

His chums stared at him. For a moment they wondered whether Frank Richards had become a little light headed through probing over the perplexing problem so long.

Mr. Beauclerc looked at the letter again.

"Where do you find that message, Frank?" he asked quietly.

"It's an acrostic," said Frank.

"An acrostic!" repeated Bob Lawless blankly.

"Yes, yes! That's why the lines are of different lengths. He had to word it so as to get a certain number of letters in succession downwards—the first letter of every line."

"Wha-at?"

"Read the first letter of every line downwards, and see what it makes," said Frank.

Three pairs of eyes ran eagerly over the missive.

"Dear Uncle,—

Will you pay the money

and let me get out of

this? I am awfully

cold here and not at all

happy in this place.

Be assured that all money paid

on my account now

will be repaid to you.

every cent, by my father. I am

really anxious to get home,

so don't lose any time.

"ALGERNON."

"The first letters downwards!" said Bob.

"W-a-t-c-h B-o-w-e-r-s. Great jumping gophers! Watch Bowers! Watch Bowers! Hurrah!"

Bob Lawless jumped up, and executed a war-dance round the remittance-man's cabin.

"Hurrah! Bravo, Algy!"

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Beauclerc.

The remittance-man did not speak for a moment. He scanned the letter carefully, and then nodded.

"You are right, Frank," he said, in his grave way. "That is it, undoubtedly.

It is an acrostic. That is why Algy has sprawled some words out to fill a line, and squeezed in a larger number in other lines. It was not easy to word a letter so that the initials would form an acrostic. And Bowers is the man who tried to rob him! That settles it."

"I guess I'd thought of Bowers already," remarked Bob Lawless, calming down. "But without any evidence—"

"Evidence enough now," said Vere Beauclerc brightly. "Dry Billy Bowers is one of the kidnappers."

"I guess so."

"And if he's watched, we shall find out where Algy is kept prisoner," said Frank Richards. "That's what Algy means."

"Sure!"

"The clever lad!" exclaimed Mr. Beauclerc, rising to his feet and taking up the letter. "Thank goodness we have found the message—or, rather, that Frank has found it."

"Good old Franky!" chirruped Bob. "Now I could follow a trail with anybody, but I own up I should never have found that out."

"I'm afraid I should have missed it," said Mr. Beauclerc. "I was not thinking of anything of the kind, till Frank mentioned it."

Vere Beauclerc slapped Frank Richards on the shoulder.

"Lucky you came along this morning, Frank," he said.

Frank coloured a little.

"It was jolly clever of Algy," he said. "Of course, he reckoned that even if we didn't spot the message, the letter would do no harm. And if we did spot it, it gives us the clue we want."

"Good old Algy! I guess I'll never call him a tenderfoot again," said Bob Lawless.

"I saw Bowers in the town yesterday, lounging about the Red Dog as usual," remarked Mr. Beauclerc. "He has associates in this rascality, for Algy must be kept under watch all the time. I will take this to the sheriff at once, and the rest should be easy."

"He will be watched—"

"Better still—arrested," said Mr. Beauclerc. "He can be made to show us where Algy is kept prisoner."

"Oh, good! We'll all come, then, if you don't mind."

"Come, by all means!"

Five minutes later the chums of Cedar Creek were riding with the remittance-man to Thompson.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Mr. Bowers Obliged!

DRY Billy Bowers sipped his third glass of whisky, lighted his second cigar, and proceeded to deal from a greasy pack of cards.

It was morning in the Red Dog Saloon at Thompson.

Dry Billy was not accustomed to be treated with much respect at the Red Dog. He generally haunted that salubrious establishment on the look-out for stray drinks. More than once the heavy boot of Boss-Eye, the saloon-keeper, had helped Mr. Bowers to a hurried departure.

But Dry Billy was a person of some distinction now.

The notes taken from Algernon Beauclerc had not been quite expended; and when Dry Billy was in funds he was accustomed to making the fur fly. And over his whisky Dry Billy had been talking vaguely, but largely of a "bonanza" he was expecting; though even in his tightest moments he was careful not to mention that the "bonanza" was to take the form of a ransom for a kidnapped schoolboy.

Dry Billy was playing poker now with Boss-Eye himself, and was in a satisfied and hilarious mood.

Four Kings had come in, and was comforting himself with whisky at the bar. In the lonely hut in the forest, Euchre Dick was taking his turn at guarding the prisoner.

There was a trampling of feet in the doorway of the saloon, and a little crowd entered.

Dry Billy glanced round carelessly, and then he started, and the satisfied grin died off his ruddy face.

The burly figure of Mr. Henderson, the sheriff of Thompson, was the first to enter.

After him came Mr. Beauclerc, the one-time remittance man. Then two of the sheriff's men. And then Frank Richards, Bob Lawless, and Vere Beauclerc, of Cedar Creek School.

"Oh, Jerusalem!" murmured Mr. Bowers.

He scented trouble.

And his scent was right; for the sheriff and his party came directly towards the little table where Billy Bowers was sitting with Boss-Eye.

The saloon-keeper rose to his feet easily.

"Nothing wrong, sheriff?" he asked.

"Not for you," answered Mr. Henderson briefly.

And Boss-Eye, much relieved, went back to his bar.

"Mornin', sheriff!" murmured Dry Billy effusively.

"Get up!"

"Cert'nly, old sport!" said Mr. Bowers.

"What'll you take?"

"I guess I'm going to take you."
 "Don't be hard on a galoot, sheriff!" murmured Mr. Bowers. "If I did make a bit of a shindy last night, where's the harm? Nobody hurt. Jest a case of a leetle too much tanglefoot. Don't say it's the calaboose for that, sheriff."

"I guess I'm arresting you, Billy Bowers, for something a bit more serious than a shindy in the street. Where is Algernon Beauclerc?"

Dry Billy jumped.
 "Eh?" he ejaculated.

Four Kings, with a startled face, detached himself from the bar, and made for the door. The sheriff's men blocked the way.

"Nobody to go out till the sheriff gives the word!"

"I guess I'm going out—"

"Stand back!"
 Four Kings dropped his hand to his belt, and the sheriff's men pushed the muzzles of their rifles forward. The ruffian decided not to draw a weapon.

He stood sullen and scowling.

Mr. Henderson glanced round.
 "So you're in it, too, Four Kings?" he said drily.

"I guess I don't know what you're talking about, sheriff," answered the ruffian uneasily.

"We shall see. Bowers, you're wanted. You're going to take us straight to where the boy is kept a prisoner."

Mr. Bowers' eyes rolled helplessly.

"I guess I don't know nothing about any boy," he answered. "Never even heard the name afore, sheriff."

"That's a lie!" said Bob Lawless.

"You tried to rob Algy once, Mr. Bowers, and the other day we hid you for it."

Mr. Bowers blinked at him.

"It was all a mistake; young Lawless—"

"Disarm that man, and put him in the calaboose!" said the sheriff, jerking his thumb towards Four Kings. "We'll see about him later. You come with me, Bowers!"

"I—I guess, sheriff—"

"Lively, now!"

Mr. Henderson's muscular hand gripped Dry Billy's shoulder, and the loafer, with a groan, submitted to his fate.

While Four Kings was marched off to the calaboose, to be detained there on suspicion, Dry Billy was walked into the street, with the sheriff's grip on his shoulder, and Mr. Beauclerc and the chums of Cedar Creek following.

Dry Billy seemed like a man in a dream.

All his air-castles had suddenly tumbled to pieces at his feet.

In his mind's eye, he had seen himself rolling in dollars and basking in unlimited prosperity, whisky, rum, and poker.

It was evident that that enticing vision was at an end.

How his secret had become known he could not even guess; but it was clear enough that he was known as the kidnapper.

"Which way?" asked the sheriff curtly.

"Sheriff, I guess I don't know nothing—"

"Listen to me, Bowers," said Mr. Henderson grimly. "You've got that schoolboy hid somewhere in the forest.

He's not going to stay there while you're charged and tried. You're going to take us to the place."

"That there ain't law!" protested Mr. Bowers feebly.

"It's Thompson Valley law," said the sheriff. "We don't stand on ceremony with your sort in Canada. Are you going to lead the way?"

"S'pose I don't?" said Mr. Bowers, with a flush of defiance.

"Then I begin on you with a trail-rope."

"Wha-at?"

"You've brought that trail-rope, young Lawless?"

"Here you are, sheriff?" grinned Bob. "Give him a dozen to begin with!"

"You bet!"

"Hold on!" roared Mr. Bowers, in great alarm. "I ain't asking for that, sheriff. Ain't I standing hyer waiting to guide you as soon as you care to get a move on? Give a galoot a chance!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"Come, then!" said the sheriff, still grasping Mr. Bowers. "If he lags, give a touch up, Lawless!"

"Sure!"

But Mr. Bowers did not lag. He had resigned himself to his fate.

With the hapless Mr. Bowers in the lead, the party turned out of Thompson into a trail that led into the timber.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Rescued at Last!

"I GUESS we're on it now!" said Bob Lawless jubilantly.

"What-ho!" said Frank.

"And all your doing, Frank," said Vere Beauclerc.

"Oh, rot! Just luck!" said Frank Richards. "Hallo! Where are we going now?"

The sheriff and his prisoner turned off the trail to the rough timber.

The rest of the party followed, Mr. Beauclerc giving a glance to the rifle he carried under his arm.

Dry Billy paused at last in the forest.

"Better look out!" he mumbled. "Euchre Dick may cut up rusty, and he's handy with his gun."

"Euchre Dick!" repeated the sheriff. "Is he alone with the boy?"

"Sure!"

"He had better not cut up rusty, if he knows what is good for his health," said Mr. Henderson, taking out a revolver with his free hand. "Keep on! Are we near the show now?"

"Yep!"

"Better call out to Euchre Dick when you get near enough. It may save him from a bullet through the head."

"Yep!" groaned Mr. Bowers.

The rescuers plunged through a thicket of frost-blackened larches, and a blur of smoke against the snow on the trees met their eyes.

They were close on the ruined hut now.

"Call out!" said the sheriff, as the hut came in sight, after a struggle through the thickets.

Dry Billy lifted a dolorous voice.

"Euchre Dick!"

"Hallo!" came an answering call from within the hut. "That you, Billy?"

"I guess so."

"What are you—?" Euchre Dick appeared in the doorway of the hut.

"Oh, thunder! What—?"

"Pass, pardner!" said Mr. Bowers

(Continued on page 22.)



SURPRISING THE KIDNAPPER! Euchre Dick appeared in the doorway in answer to Billy Bowers' call. "Hands up!" rapped out the sheriff. Euchre Dick's hand flew to his belt, but Mr. Henderson's revolver was covering him. "Waal, carry me home to die!" muttered the ruffian. And his hands went slowly above his head. (See Chapter 5.)

the House downstairs, so Figgins went up to the study.

There he found the pleasant youth. Master Bartholomew was sprawled in the armchair, with his feet on another chair, and a cigarette between his lips. Smoke was curling up from the cigarette. Master Bartholomew appeared to be enjoying himself in his own way.

Figgins stood in the doorway staring at him blankly.

"My hat!" he murmured.

Ratcliff glanced at him through the curling smoke.

"Hallo! What are you doing out of class?" he inquired.

"Mr. Latham sent me to look for you!" growled Figgins.

"Who's Mr. Latham?" yawned Bartholomew.

"Our Form master."

"Oh, yes! I remember. I'm late, I suppose?"

"You're a quarter of an hour late already."

"You don't say so? Well, you can cut off! I'll come when I've finished my smoke."

Figgins blinked at him.

"You're to come at once," he said.

Bartholomew went on smoking, and did not heed.

"Well, I've told you," said Figgins. "Am I to tell Mr. Latham you won't come?"

"Tell him I'm coming."

"Oh, all right!"

Figgins returned to the Form-room. Mr. Latham seemed surprised to see him come in alone.

"Have you not found Ratcliff, Figgins?" he asked.

"Yes, sir; he says he's coming."

"But why has he not come?" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

Figgins could not very well answer that question.

"This is very extraordinary!" said Mr. Latham, blinking at the confused junior over his glasses.

Lessons were resumed, with some suppressed excitement in the Form-room. The juniors wondered what would happen when Bartholomew put in an appearance at last.

It was pretty clear by this time that Bartholomew considered himself a privileged person who could do as he liked.

Mr. Latham's expression indicated that Bartholomew, sharp as he was, had made a mistake upon that point.

The first lesson was finished before a step was heard in the corridor, and Ratty junior came into the Form-room.

Mr. Latham fixed a very stern look upon him.

"Ratcliff, come here!"

Bartholomew came up to his desk.

"You are more than half an hour late, Ratcliff!" exclaimed Mr. Latham. "You have missed the whole of first lesson!"

"Have I really, sir?" asked Bartholomew.

"You have! What is your explanation of this conduct?" exclaimed the Form master.

Bartholomew looked at him with his sharp eyes. He was evidently taking Mr. Latham's measure, to ascertain exactly how impertinent he might dare to be. The Fourth Form watched him in silence.

"I—I forgot, sir," he said at last.

And he turned to go to the form.

"Stop!" rapped out Mr. Latham.

Bartholomew turned back.

"I do not desire to be unduly strict with a new boy," said Mr. Latham mildly; "but you were told the time for classes, Ratcliff. And I sent Figgins to fetch you. Even if you forgot the time for classes, why did you not come back with Figgins?"

Bartholomew looked dogged. It was clear that if he was going to have his privileged position acknowledged at all, now was the time.

"I wasn't ready, sir," he answered.

"What?"

"I had several things to do."

"You—had—several—things—to—do!" repeated Mr. Latham, in jerks, as if he could hardly believe his ears.

"That's it!" said Bartholomew.

There was a moment or two of silence. Mr. Latham looked at Bartholomew, and Bartholomew looked at Mr. Latham, and the Fourth Form stared fixedly at both of them.

Then the Form master picked up his cane.

"This is sheer impertinence, Ratcliff!" said Mr. Latham.

"Not at all, sir," answered Bartholomew cheerfully. "I was rather occupied this

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morning, that's all. I hope, as a rule, to be in time for classes."

"As—as—a rule!" stuttered Mr. Latham.

"Oh, certainly, sir!"

"Do you not understand, Ratcliff, that you must be in the Form-room at the proper time every day, without fail?"

Bartholomew looked more dogged. Mr. Latham's mild patience had made a false impression upon him, sharp as he was.

Indeed, Bartholomew was like many very sharp people—quite liable to make the most egregious mistakes. He was quite mistaken in Mr. Latham.

That unusually mild and benevolent little gentleman had a temper, when it was provoked; and Bartholomew had succeeded in provoking it now.

"I fail to comprehend this conduct, Ratcliff," said Mr. Latham. "Why you should suppose yourself entitled to neglect classes, and to be guilty of impertinence towards your Form master, passes my understanding. I feel compelled, Ratcliff, to administer a severe warning. Hold out your hand!"

Ratcliff breathed quickly and hard—and did not obey.

"Do you hear me, Ratcliff?" exclaimed Mr. Latham.

"My uncle would not like me to be caned, sir," said Bartholomew sullenly.

It was out at last!

Mr. Latham understood now—what the Fourth Form had understood from the beginning.

The Housemaster's nephew was expecting to be treated in a privileged way—not at all like a "common or garden" Fourth-Former. His relationship to a St. Jim's master was to stand between him and anything he did not like, and to protect him from punishment!

This dawned rather slowly upon Mr. Latham's astonished mind. When he fully comprehended his expression became simply terrific.

"Your uncle?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes, sir. Mr. Ratcliff."

"Mr. Ratcliff is master of the Fifth Form," said Mr. Latham. "You must be aware that his authority does not extend to this Form-room."

"He would not like me to be caned."

"I have no reason whatever to suppose, Ratcliff, that your relative would wish you to be punished for astounding impertinence. But, be that as it may, it makes no difference whatever in this Form-room, I shall punish you most severely, Ratcliff!"

Bartholomew bit his thin lip hard. He had tried his luck—and failed. There was no doubt that he had failed. Mr. Latham came round from behind his desk, cane in hand, his plump cheeks pink with wrath.

"Hold out your hand, Ratcliff!"

Ratty junior cast a glance towards the door. Apparently the thought of seeking Ratty senior's protection crossed his mind. But the folly of such a step was clear enough, and Ratty junior decided to obey. His hand came out at last.

Swish!

"Yow!" roared Ratty junior as the cane came down.

"The other hand, Ratcliff."

Ratty junior gritted his teeth, and obeyed.

Swish!

"Wow-wow-wow!"

"Now go to your place, Ratcliff," said Mr. Latham, breathing hard.

"Yow-ow! I'll tell my uncle of this!" wailed Bartholomew.

"What!" shrieked Mr. Latham, petrified.

"Ow! I'll tell—Yarooooh!"

Mr. Latham's patience—which was really great—was exhausted. He took Ratty junior by the collar, and laid the cane across his shoulders.

Whack, whack, whack!

The whacking of the cane was accompanied by loud yells from Bartholomew. The Fourth looked on breathlessly. Never had they felt in such loyal accord with their Form master.

"Now go to your place, Ratcliff," said Mr. Latham, breathing hard. "Go! Not another word! Another word, sir, and I will take you to Dr. Holmes, and request him to administer a flogging!"

And Bartholomew went to his place without another word. Grunting and gasping, he sat down amid a smiling Form!

THE END.

(You must not miss reading next week's grand long tale of Tom Merry & Co., entitled: "BARTHOLOMEW THE CRICKETER!" by Martin Clifford—crammed full of humour and thrilling episodes.)

"ALGY'S STRATAGEM!"

(Continued from page 17.)

dispiritedly. "The game's up! They've got the guns!"

Euchre Dick's hand was at his belt.

But the sheriff had raised his revolver, and behind him the rifle of the remittance-man rose to a level.

"Hands up!" rapped out Mr. Henderson sharply.

"Waal, carry me home to die!" muttered Euchre Dick. And his hands went slowly up.

Then they ran into the hut.

"Algy!"

"Good-mornin'!" drawled a cool voice.

In the dim light of the hut, Algernon of Cedar Creek smiled cheerily at his schoolfellows.

"Here you are!" exclaimed Frank Richards, shaking his hand. "Jolly glad to see you again, you ass!"

"Same to you, old top, and many of them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Safe again, Algy!" said Mr. Beauchere, looking into the hut with a smile, while Frank Richards & Co. were hacking at the rope which confined Algy's ankle to the stake.

"Safe as houses, sir, but sadly in need of washin'!" said Algernon. "Jolly glad to see you, uncle! Did you understand my letter? I suppose you did, from your bein' here!"

"We understood, Algernon; Frank found out the message in it."

"Good!" said Algernon. "I wondered whether anybody would tumble—but it seemed worth tryin' on!"

"And now the sooner we get out of this the better," said Bob Lawless, as he cut through the rope. "Come on, Algy!"

"Like a bird, old top!"

The dandy of Cedar Creek left the hut with his chums.

Euchre Dick and Mr. Bowers, with their wrists tied together, were ready to be marched back to Thompson by the sheriff, to take their trial with Four Kings for the kidnapping. Euchre Dick was sullen and silent, but Dry Billy gave the chums of Cedar Creek a mournful glance.

"This hyer is hard lines, gents," said Mr. Bowers. "I guess you'll put in a word for me, Mister Algy. I treated you well, now, didn't I?"

"Right-ho!" said Algy. "If they sentence you to chokey, I'll put in a word, if I'm allowed—"

"Thank you, young gentleman!" said Mr. Bowers humbly.

"And ask them to hang you instead," concluded Algy.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of Cedar Creek walked cheerily on, leaving Mr. Williams Bowers with an extraordinary expression on his face.

Three hapless kidnappers were taking their trial shortly afterwards in the sheriff's court at Thompson; and their punishment was sufficient to make them repent sincerely of their attempt to "get rich quick."

Algy was quite a hero at Cedar Creek for some days afterwards, and he did not seem any the worse for his enforced sojourn in the wintry forest.

THE END.

(There will be another long complete story dealing with the adventures of Frank Richards & Co., the chums of the Canadian lumber school, entitled: "THE BACKWOODS ARISTOCRAT!" in next week's bumper issue.)