

## A Christmas Story of the Chums of Cedar Creek, the Backwoods School

# THE FIRST CHAPTER Interrupted Throes!

"You must come!"

"Can't be done!" said Frank

Richards decidedly.

"Now, look here, old chap——" began Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc together.

"Can't be done, really!"

Cedar Creek School had broken up for Christmas. Frank Richards was in his room at the Lawless Ranch, seated at the table before the ancient and somewhat battered typewriter lent him by Mr. Penrose, of the "Thompson Press."

Frank had been leaning over that typewriter, with a wrinkle in his brow and a faraway look in his eyes, when his two chums came in.

He was, as a matter of fact, in the throes of composition, and the interruption was antimely. But he smiled and nodded cheerfully to Bob and Beauclerc as they came in. The lamp on the table glimmered on the typewriter keys and on a blank sheet of paper in the machine. So far Frank had written one line, "Bullivant's Christmas," which was evidently the title of the story hatching in the youthful author's brain. But the story was still incubating, so to speak, and the sheet of paper remained a beautiful blank so far.

"Shove that machine away!" continued Bob Lawless. "You've simply got to come! Chunky Todgers is waiting downstairs—"

"Bother Chunky Todgers!"

"Oh, I say, Richards——" came a voice at the doorway.

The fat and cheerful Chunky, muffled from head to foot against the weather, blinked in.

Frank Richards groaned inwardly.

Attached as he was to his friends, he wished them anywhere else at the present moment.

"Molly Lawrence will be there," remarked

Beauclerc casually.

Frank Richards did not say "Bother!" this time.

"Can't be helped," he said.

"Molly will expect you," said Bob severely.

"She says you're the only good dancer at Cedar Creek."

Frank laughed.

"No time for dancing now," he said. "Look here, you chaps! You buzz off! There'll be no end of a crowd at the Mission dance, and I shan't be missed. I've simply got to get this done."

"What rot!" said Bob. "Can't you do

it to-morrow?"

"Or the next day?" suggested Beauclerc.

"There's only one dance at the Mission before Christmas," said Bob Lawless reproachfully. "It's awfully kind of old Smiley to get it up, too. Can't give it a miss."

" But--- "

"Better come, Richards," said Chunky Todgers. "Not that it matters about Molly. I'll dance with Molly—"

"You must come, if only to save Molly

from that!" said Bob

Chunky Todgers snorted at that remark.

"You see," said Frank, "this is for the Christmas number. You know Mr. Penrose is getting out a Christmas number of the 'Thompson Press.' I've got to do a Christmas story. And I ought to take it along to-morrow morning at the latest. In fact, it ought to be in Mr. Penrose's office this evening."

"Then why haven't you done it before?" demanded Bob. "Never put off till to-morrow—"

"Why, that's what you're asking me to do!"

"I-I mean, never put off till to-day what you ought to do yesterday," said Bob.

"But I hadn't an idea yesterday-"

"Oh gum!" said Bob. "Do you have to the wait till you get an idea before you write a story?"

"Well, you

"Have you got the idea now?"

"I was just getting it nicely when you fellows burst in," said Frank Richards ruefully.

"Keep it till to-morrow, then, and it will very likely improve with age," suggested Bob. "Like wine, you know!"

" Ass!"

"Perhaps I can help," said Chunky Todgers.

"Eh? How?"

"Well, you

know I can write a better story than you, old chap."

"Fathead!"

"Old Penrose doesn't think so, I know," said Chunky. "Penrose is rather a jay. But the fact remains. Now, if you like, Richards, I'll turn out the Christmas story, and you can go to the dance."

Chunky Todgers had quite a generous air as he made that offer. Frank Richards

laughed.

Generous as the offer was, the schoolboy author did not seem especially grateful for it.

"What do you think of the stunt?" asked Todgers. "I mean it!"

"You're too kind!" said Frank.

"The fact is, old chap, I mean to be kind—this is the season for kindness," said Chunky cheerily. "I can knock off a story in an hour or so; I don't have to stick at the typer for hours to do a story, as you do. I've got the gift, you know—a sort of facility. I should think you'd be pleased—"

"I'm afraid Mr. Penrose wouldn't be---"

"Never mind Penrose; he can't help being an ignorant jay. You needn't mention it to him at all. He can think it's your stuff."

"You don't think he'd notice any difference?" asked Frank, with a touch of gentle sarcasm.

"He might. But if he thought it was better than usual, and sent you some extra dollars, you could keep the money," said Chunky Todgers, still generous. "I'm not after the



"Come on!" Bob exclaimed, as he and Vere Beauclerc yanked the hapless Frank away from his typewriter. (See page 22.)

cash. I want to oblige you. Besides, I'd rather like to have a story in Penrose's Christmas number. Probably there would be a rush, and he'd have to print a second edition. Then we'd tell him I did the story. No end of a joke on him, you know, after he's been ass enough to refuse all the stuff I've sent him. See?"

" Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't see where the cackle comes in!

Now, is it a go?"

Chunky Todgers meant to be generous, but he was very eager. As a matter of fact, the fat Chunky yearned to see his literary efforts in print. So far, Mr. Penrose had been willing to admit his contributions to the "Thompson Press" only if they were paid for at advertisement rates. On those lines Mr. Penrose would have published anybody's literary output, even if he had had to increase the size of his paper for it. But such an offer was no use to Chunky Todgers.

"Fathead!" said Frank Richards. "Now if you fellows will buzz off to the Mission—"

"Not without you!" said Bob. "You've got to come!"

"But Mr. Penrose is expecting his copy-"

"Let him expect!"

" But-"

"You'll feel no end bucked by a dance," said Bob. "To-morrow morning the literary bizney will roll off the typer like—like boiled tallow. Come on!"

" Oh dear!"

Frank Richards had always found it difficult to say "No" to anybody. And certainly he wanted to go to the Mission dance; dances were rare enough in the Thompson Valley of British Columbia. Bob saw the signs of yielding in the hapless author's face, and jerked him from his chair.

"Kim on!" he said.

"If the copy's late for the paper, I----"

"Better than the author being late for the dance! Come on!"

And Frank Richards gave in.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER Chunky's Little Game

"O' The buggy which was to carry the Cedar Creek chums to the Mission had been

brought round. That evening traps and buggies and wagonettes and carts were converging on the Mission from all directions through the falling flakes of snow. The dance given by Mr. and Mrs. Smiley to the inhabitants of the Thompson Valley was well attended. Frank Richards, having made up his mind—or having had it made up for him—prepared to mount into the buggy with his chums, when a strange and lamentable howl came from Chunky Todgers.

Chunky sat down on the pinewood bench in the porch of the ranch-house, and his fat

features were contorted.

"Hallo! What's the matter, boy?" exclaimed Rancher Lawless. The rancher and his wife were going in the buggy.

"A-a sudden pain."

"Too much maple-sugar?" asked Bon.

"Yow-ow!"

"Can I do anything for you, Todgers?"

asked Mrs. Lawless, with concern.

"Ow! No, thanks, ma'am!" gasped Chunky. "I—I don't feel well enough to—to go to the dance, that's all!"

"Dear me!"

"That's bad!" said the rancher, looking at Chunky rather curiously.

The fat youth's pains had come on very

suddenly.

"Oh, buck up, Chunky!" said Bob Lawless. "We can't wait, you know. Bring your pains along with you!"

"Room in the buggy," said Frank, smiling. "My dear boys!" murmured Mrs. Lawless.

"Chunky's such a blessed malingerer," said Bob, with a grunt. "Now, look here, Chunky. What's the game? Have you got any pains?"

"I—I'm suffering fearfully!" said Chunky Todgers. "But don't you fellows worry. I'll sit here by the fire till I feel well enough to

come on on my pony. You get off."

"Well, if you will be all right-" said

Mr. Lawless.

"Quite all right, thanks!" said Chunky eagerly. "I—I wouldn't spoil your pleasure for worlds, you fellows. Buzz off!"

"Oh, all right!" said Bob.

As a matter of absolute fact, the journey in the buggy was likely to be more comfortable



"O-oh!" Chunky Todgers groaned as he dropped heavily on to the pine-wood bench, his fat features contorted. "Oh dear! I've got a—a pain! I don't feel well enough to go to the dance!" he gasped. Frank and the others eyed him curiously; Chunky's pain had come on with suspicious suddenness.

(See page 21.)

without Joseph Todgers' ample proportions being stowed in it. Chunky had ridden over from the Todgers' homestead to get a lift in the ranch buggy, when he might just as well have ridden on to the Mission, only a couple of miles further.

There were plenty of passengers in the buggy already, and certainly it was quite a

good idea for Chunky to follow on his fat pony as soon as he felt well enough.

In a few minutes Mr. and Mrs. Lawless, their son and nephew, and Vere Beauclerc, were in the buggy, driving away through the falling flakes.

Chunky sat by the blazing log fire in the attitude of a suffering invalid till they were gone.

As soon as the cracking of the whip had died away in the distance, however, Chunky ceased to be an invalid.

He rose to his feet and grinned.

"Silly jays!" he murmured, apparently referring to the Lawless family and Frank Richards.

Chunky Todgers mounted the stairs to Frank Richards' room and lighted the lamp.

He seated himself cheerfully at the table

before the typewriter.

Frank Richards was safely disposed of for the evening; certainly the party were not likely to return to the ranch before midnight. Indeed, if the snow continued to fall, the return might be later than that. So Joe Todgers had plenty of time before him.

Having invented an attack of internal pain as an excuse for remaining behind, Chunky had the evening before him at the ranch, with no one to interrupt. There were only two Chinese servants left in the house, and they were not interested in Todgers' proceedings.

Click, click, click!

Chunky's fat fingers were soon busily at

work on the typewriter keys.

He did not need to pause and reflect and cogitate, like Frank Richards.

Far from that.

Chunky worked with the greatest facility. Literary composition fairly flowed from his

fat fingertips.

As a literary producer, the quantity of his productions was limited only by the amount of paper in stock. The quality, perhaps, was another matter.

Chunky was satisfied about the quality,

however.

Doubts on that point never entered his mind. His fat fingers clicked away on the keys almost without a pause.

Frank Richards had been prepared to spend the whole evening on a short story. Not so

Joseph Todgers.

He covered sheet after sheet at a terrific rate.

In an hour his work was done.

He grinned with satisfaction as he drew the last sheet from the roller.

With great care he pinned the sheets together at the corner. Then he sat down to read them over, and make any little corrections that were necessary; not that many corrections were necessary in literary work turned out by Chunky Todgers.

His fat face beamed over the manuscript.

He had thought it good while he was click

He had thought it good while he was clicking it off, but read over it seemed better than ever.

"Splendid!" murmured Chunky. "Ripping! Top-notch! Never been anything like this in the 'Thompson Press' before, you bet your life! It's a shame to let that old ass Penrose have it for nothing."

Chunky paused to reflect.

That was his little scheme—to get his valuable productions into print, as if they belonged to Frank Richards. Mr. Penrose, he considered, would not notice any difference; he would receive the typed copy, and suppose that it was Frank's. If he noticed any difference it would be a difference for the better—Chunky did not doubt that.

Once the story was in print, everything

would go swimmingly.

The encomiums it would receive from Mr. Penrose's readers would open his eyes to Chunky's quality as an author—as soon as Chunky revealed the secret.

Of course, it was rather rotten to have to sneak into print, as it were, under the name of an inferior author. Chunky felt that. But he did not see what else was to be done, Mr. Penrose being so utterly asinine as to decline even to look at Chunky's own manuscripts. He had looked at the first, and that had seemed enough. Evidently he had a foolish prejudice on the subject, which was only to be overcome by a pardonable device like the present one. Chunky had no doubt that it was pardonable.

But now he paused.

It seemed really a sin and a shame to let that splendid story go for nothing, after all.

It occurred to Chunky that it would be wiser to send it to one of the well-known Canadian magazines, and rope in a handsome cheque for it.

But he couldn't help remembering that he had spent a considerable amount of pocket-money on postage to the Canadian magazines,

and that the prejudice against his literary

work seemed very widespread.

No editor had been intelligent enough to charm and dazzle his readers by publishing it.

Possibly the same thing would happen again. Indeed, Chunky had a sort of feeling that it would.

"No; I'll let Penrose have it," decided Chunky, with a shake of the head. "The old ass will shove it right in without noticing, and after it's scored a big success I'll tell him. And

then I'll charge him pesky high for regular contributions. I guess he deserves that."

So Chunky carefully wrapped up the manuscript, and typed the address of the "Thompson Press" on the wrapper.

He descended, and called up one of the Chinese servants. He held out the addressed packet to Hon Han.

"This ought to be taken into Thompson to-night," he said

The Chinaman blinked at it.

Richards ought to have taken it, "but he's gone to the dance," went on Chunky mendaciously.

ride over with it?"

"No thinkee," said the Chinee.

Hon Han had no desire for a long ride through the snow that bitter December night.

"I suppose you can

"I'll stand you a dollar," said Chunky

generously.

Hon Han's almond eyes glistened.

That made a difference. "Me takee!" he said

"Good! Get off at once!"

Chunky sat down in an armchair, and grinned at the fire when the Chinaman rode away, muffled to the ears, and with the valuable packet stowed away under his coat.

"I guess that's O.K.," murmured Chunky.
"I—I wonder if Richards will mind? Can't help it if he does. He's had a long run in the 'Thompson Press' with his rubbish, and it's time they printed something good. I guess I'll stay here over night, and see that he



"You take this into Thompson," said Chunky, "and I'll stand you a dollar!"
Hon Han's almond eyes glistened. "Me takee!" he said. (See this page.)

doesn't send along any rubbish to-morrow—I'll offer to take it along to Thompson for him, and see that it's kept back a few days." Chunky chuckled. "Sorry for poor old Richards—but he can't really write, so it doesn't make any difference. I can't afford to lose a chance like this."

And, still chuckling, Chunky Todgers fell asleep before the fire, and dreamed golden dreams of the days to come, when he was to be famous as Canada's greatest author, and

editors were to fall over one another in crowding round him to beg for contributions, all of which was to date from the appearance of his masterpiece in the columns of the "Thompson Press."

### THE THIRD CHAPTER

Better Late Than Never !

THE mission-hall was crowded.

I Sweet strains of music echoed out into

the snowy night.

In the glare of the swinging lamps, dozens of couples glided merrily over the pinewood floor to the strains of a piano, a fiddle, and a 'cello.

It was a great gathering!

Nearly all the young people of the section were there for Mr. Smiley's Christmas dance,

as well as a crowd of their elders.

Frank Richards & Co. enjoyed themselves. Dances were few and far between in the Thompson Valley. Frank was rather in request, being a good dancer. He danced with pretty Molly Lawrence, and several other of the Cedar Creek girls. But Frank was not thinking wholly of the dancing.

The Christmas number of the "Thompson

Press" haunted his thoughts.

He felt guilty.

Mr. Penrose relied upon him for the copy, and the copy was due at the office. And the idea for his story having come to him, it was rather like a burden on his mind until the story was written and done with.

He was feeling more like scribbling than dancing that evening, and although his face was cheerful and bright, he would have given a great deal to be sitting at the typewriter in

his room at the ranch.

Early in the evening, Frank Richards vanished from the sight of his chums.

There were several inquiries after him; but

he did not reappear.

After the first half-dozen dances Frank felt that he had done his duty, and he had quietly

slipped away.

He spoke a few words to Mr. Smiley, who nodded and smiled, and then made his way into the reverend gentleman's house, which adjoined the pinewood mission-hall.

In Mr. Smiley's study was a typewriter, which Frank had sometimes used, doing typing for the reverend gentleman occasionally.

Frank turned up the lamp and sat down to

the machine.

While his chums were wondering what had become of him, Frank Richards was busy.

The strains of the music came to his ears from the distance, but he did not heed them;

in fact, he hardly heard them.

Neither did he hear nor heed the sounds of the dancers as they "tripped the light, fantastic toe."

Time and space had vanished for him, as he sat at the machine clicking cheerily away on

the keys.

Nothing short of an earthquake would have brought him back just then from the realms of imagination, where his fertile fancy was

wandering.

He was no longer Frank Richards of the Backwoods School; he was living what he wrote; his spirit was in the typewriter, weaving sentence after sentence, page after page—more real to him then than his actual surroundings.

He rose and sighed as he finished the last

page.

He pinned the sheets together, wrote a little note to Mr. Penrose to put inside, and wrapped up the manuscript.

Little did he dream that, at the same moment, Joseph Todgers was similarly engaged in his room at the Lawless Ranch.

With the package in his pocket, Frank

Richards quitted Mr. Smiley's study.

The dance was nearly over when he re-

"Where on earth have you been?" demanded Bob Lawless, coming along with Molly Lawrence on one arm and Kate Dawson on the other. Bob was taking the young ladies in to supper.

"Can't you give me one more dance, Molly?" asked Frank, parrying his Canadian

cousin's question.

Molly found that she could.

After supper, when the guests were departing, Frank Richards stopped beside the



The mission-hall was crowded; in the glow from the swinging lamps dozens of couples glided merrily over the smooth floor—but Frank Richards slipped quietly away from the lights and gaiety, to the old typewriter in Mr. Smiley's study. (See page 26).

Lawrences' wagonette. He had to say goodbye to Molly, and he had also to speak to her brother Tom.

"You drive home through Thompson?"
Frank asked.

"Right through Main Street!" answered Tom Lawrence.

"Will you drop this packet for me at Mr. Penrose's office?"

" Sure!"

"I'll see that he does, Frank!" said Molly, with a bright smile.

And they parted.

"Now for home!" said Bob Lawless, 68

Frank Richards rejoined his friends. "I suppose we shall find Chunky there. He never turned up at the dance, after all!"

"I hope he is not really ill," said Mrs.

Lawless.

"Only an overdose of maple sugar, if he is!" answered Bob. "I expect we shall find him fast asleep!"

Bob's prediction was verified.

When Frank Richards & Co. arrived home, Chunky Todgers was still deep in the arms of Morpheus, and snoring with a resonant snore. Bob Lawless awakened him cheerily with a dig in the ribs.

"Ow!" Chunky woke, and blinked at the returned party. "I can't let you have it under ten thousand dollars!"

"What?" yelled Bob.

"Ten thousand—oh!—ah!—I—I've been dreaming!" gasped Chunky, rubbing his eyes. "I—I thought I was speaking to the editor of the 'Montreal Magazine.'"

" Ha, ha, ha!"

"What wouldn't you let him have under ten thousand dollars?" grinned Bob.

"You wait a bit, Bob, and you'll see. Perhaps the greatest author Canada has ever produced belongs to this section."

"You flatter me," said Frank Richards

demurely.

Chunky snorted.

"I don't mean that, ass! I mean—never mind what I mean!"

Chunky was quite mysterious.

"Never mind," agreed Bob. "Do you know how late it is, Chunky? Why didn't you come to the dance?"

" I—I forgot."

"You must have forgotten what a tiptop supper Mr. Smiley stands, or you'd have come!" said Bob, with a chuckle. "You off, Cherub?"

"Yes; good-night!"

Beauclerc rode away for his home through the falling flakes.

But Chunky Todgers did not follow his

"You chaps don't mind if I stop the night?"
he asked.

"Not at all!" said Mr. Lawless. "But your parents—"

"Oh, they know I'm here!" said Chunky.

"That's all right!"

"Stay by all means, then!"

Chunky Todgers snored that night in the extra bed in the room belonging to Frank and Bob. Hospitality in the Canadian West is unbounded, and Chunky was quite welcome to take up his quarters at the ranch if he liked.

It proved that he did like.

At home there was wood-chopping and snow-sweeping and errand-running, and other occupations beneath the dignity of a fellow of Chunky's literary abilities. But it was not only for the sake of slacking that he stayed on at the ranch.

Hon Han had delivered his precious manuscript at Mr. Penrose's office. That day would see it in type. But evidently something would be suspected if Frank Richards sent in his usual copy as well. That was what Chunky had to prevent, somehow.

youth that he was acting in a decidedly unscrupulous manner. That reflection never crossed his mind at all. Conceit had blinded Joseph Todgers to the moral aspect of his conduct.

In the morning he fully expected Frank Richards to set to work on the typewriter; not having the slightest suspicion that Frank's work had been done at the Mission overnight.

To his relief, Frank let the typewriter quite

alone.

There was work to be done on the snowy range, and Frank and Bob joined the cattlemen. Chunky Todgers did not care for work on the range, and he remained hanging about the fire most of the day. If Frank was letting his literary work slide, that suited Chunky quite well, and saved him trouble. But he remained at the ranch—on the watch, with his little, round eyes very much on the alert.

### THE FOURTH CHAPTER

A Little Surprise !

"Young Richards!"
"Hallo, Billy!"

Frank and Bob were returning to the ranch-

house in the early dusk of the winter evening, when Billy Cook rode up. The ranch foreman looked like a pillar of snow as he loomed up in the dusk—he had ridden up from Thompson Town.

"Something for you," said Billy Cook, fumbling under his fur coat. "I was jest ambling up Main Street when Mr. Penrose called me. He told me to ask you if you was drinking yesterday."

"What?" exclaimed Frank and Bob

in unison.

"That's what he said, and he give me this," said Billy Cook, and, passing a packet to the schoolboy author, he rode on.

Frank took the packet and stared at it.

He knew by the feel of it that it contained typed sheets.

Bob Lawless grinned.

"This is what comes of scribbling when you ought to be dancing, old scout," s a i d B o b. "You've made a muck of it this time, and Penrose

declines it with thanks."

"Rot!" said Frank warmly. "It's one of the best things I ever did."

"Penrose doesn't seem to think so."

"Penrose is an ass!" growled Frank. Bob chuckled.

"That sounds like Chunky!" he remarked.
"Open it, anyhow, and see what the galoot has to say."

He led the way into a cattle-shelter close at hand, and lighted a lantern.

Frank opened the packet with slow fingers, an extraordinary expression on his face.

Frank Richards had taken to "scribbling" at a very early age, almost as naturally as he took to walking or breathing. He had not gone through the painful experience of most young authors—he had never had a rejected manuscript. Was this to be the first of his painful experiences in that line? If so, he could not help feeling that Chunky Todgers was right in describing Mr. Penrose as an ass.

Frank was a healthy and cheery youth, but he had the sensitiveness of the literary nature. His first thought was that if this was a rejected manuscript he would never write another line.

Folded typewritten pages turned out as he opened the packet.

Bob Lawless ceased to grin; the expression on Frank's face showed him that it was not a time for grinning. There was a letter enclosed with the manuscript, and Frank glanced at it.



Frank gave a howl as he stared at the letter accompanying the manuscript. "What on earth does this mean?" he cried. (See this page).

Then he gave a howl.

"What on earth does the man mean? Has he been at the Red Dog—?"

"What does he say?" asked Bob.

"Look!"

Bob Lawless read the letter, and whistled in astonishment.

"Dear Richards,—I received your manuscript Bullivant's Christmas,' which you send by young Lawrence. Many thanks for the same, and thanks for sending it in good time."

"But what the thunder do you mean by sending another story with the same title by the Chinaman last night? And what the thunder do you mean by scribbling such idiotic rot?

"If you're taking to drink at your age, I guess I'd better speak to your uncle about it. If you're not, what the thunder do you

mean?

"I enclose the stuff the Chinaman brought; no use to me. Put it in the fire. Yours,

"H. PENROSE."

"Is he potty?" gasped Bob. "Or are you potty, or what?"

"Blessed if I know," said Frank.

"Look at the stuff-"

Frank unfolded the manuscript.

He blinked at it.

There was the title of "Bullivant's Christmas," which he had written just before Bob and Beauclerc dragged him away to the Mission dance. But the rest of the story—he blinked at it, and stared at it. It began:

"Twas night! Not a sound broke the stillness save the roar of the feerful wind as it raiged throo the treeze, and the crash of falling timber, and the deffening boom of the raiging torrent."

That sample was enough for Frank Richards. He recognised the masterly literary style.

"Chunky Todgers!"

"Ha, ha, ha! That's why he stayed back from the Mission dance," yelled Bob. "He did this on the typer—"

"The fat fraud!"

"And sent the Chinee with it-"

"Why, I'll-I'll-I'll-"

Words failed Frank Richards.

"No wonder Penrose thought you'd been at the fire-water!" skrieked Bob. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"It's not a laughing matter," roared Frank Richards wrathfully. "I'll scalp him—I'll— I'll—I'll lynch him—I'll——"

Bob Lawless shrieked.

"Don't say a word," he gasped.

"I'll say a good many words-I'll-I'll-"

"Not a word!" gasped Bob. "Don't you see, the fat idiot thinks Penrose will take this

for your stuff and print it. He doesn't know you did the story at the Mission last night and sent it by young Lawrence. He thinks this stuff will come out in the Christmas number under your name. Let him go on thinking so. Penrose is jolly late with his Christmas number. We don't get it till Christmas morning here. Let Chunky go on dreaming till it comes; and give him this stuff for a Christmas present—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Wrap it up again and give it to him on Christmas morning as a present," chuckled Bob. "And—and watch his face!"

Frank Richards broke into a chuckle.

"Good egg!"

"Mind, not a word to the fat jay!" said Bob, as they left the cattle-shelter. "Not a pesky syllable! Let him run on!"

And Frank Richards assented.

#### THE FIFTH CHAPTER

### Chunky Todgers' Christmas Present!

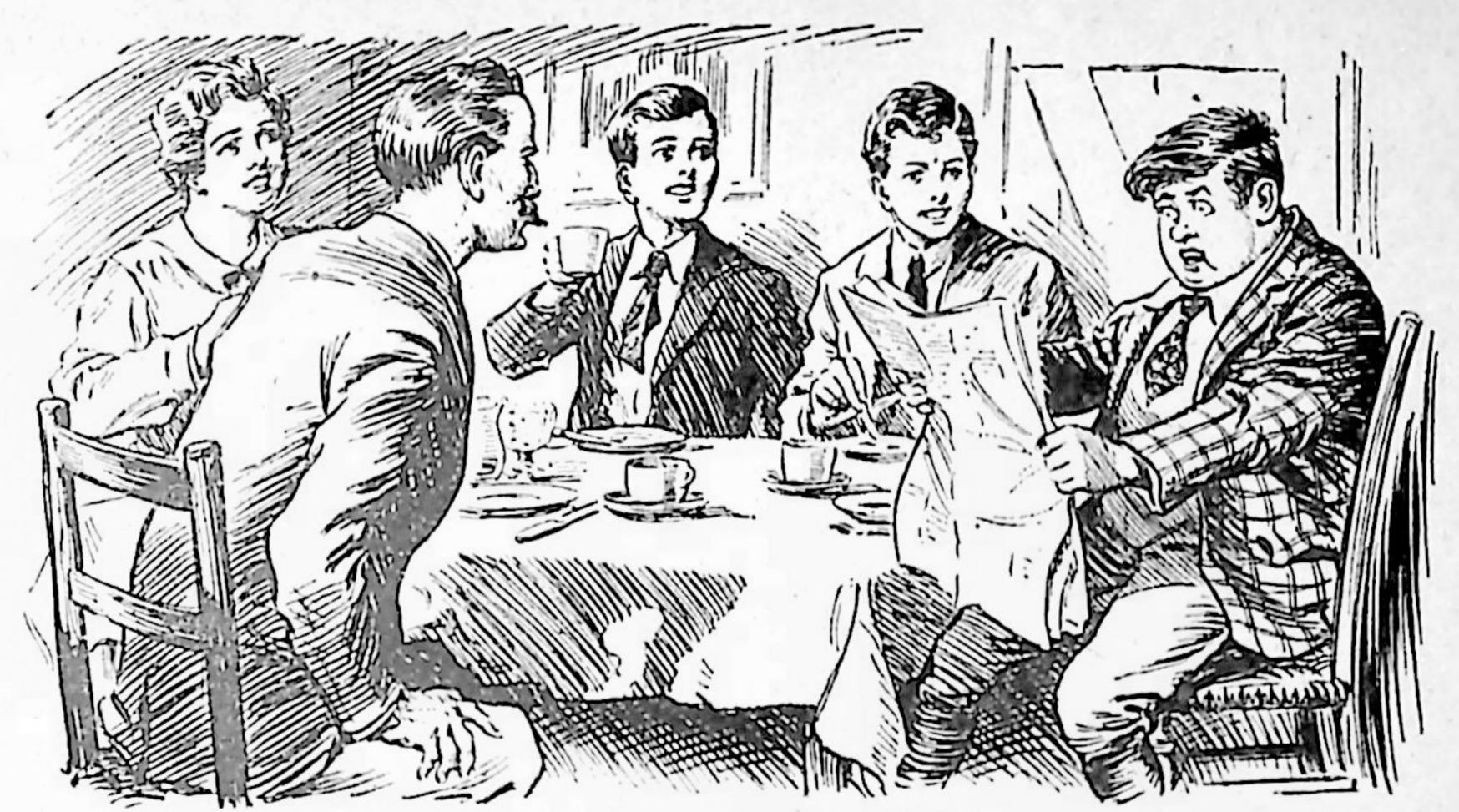
CHUNKY TODGERS wore a fat and cheerful smile on Christmas Eve at the Lawless Ranch.

That evening he felt more than satisfied.

Owing to Mr. Penrose's frequent visits to the Red Dog and the Occidental, he was often late with the "Thompson Press," and the Christmas number was late. But Chunky knew that it must be printed on Christmas Eve at the very latest. And—so far as Chunky knew—Frank had not sent in his copy. Chunky had remained on guard at the ranch to intercept it; but it did not need intercepting. The schoolboy author apparently was neglecting his editor in the most culpable manner.

Chunky came down bright and cheery on Christmas morning. Breakfast was rather later than usual that morning, and on the table lay a copy of the "Thompson Press"—the Christmas number, which Mr. Penrose had produced to dazzle the section. Frank Richards opened it and glanced at the page devoted to the Christmas story. He nodded and smiled over it, much to Chunky's astonishment.

"Is—is—is the story there, Richards?" stammered Chunky at last, unable to control his impatience any longer.



Chunky blinked at the page as though he could scarcely believe his eyes: his fat face took on an expression of amazement and disappointment. "I-I say, this-this isn't m-my story!" he stuttered. (See this page.)

"Oh, yes!"

"Does it-does it read better than usual?"

"I think so."

"Lemme see it."

Chunky was amazed. Surely Frank must have recognised by this time that the Christmas story was not his own work! He grabbed the paper from Frank, and blinked at it. Frank and Bob watched him with grinning glances.

Chunky blinked at the page, and his fat face fell. He could scarcely believe his eyes for

a minute or two.

"I-I say, this-this isn't my story," he stuttered.

"Your story?" said Frank.

"There—there's some mistake— What the thunder—— You—you wrote this?"

"Of course I did!" said Frank in mild

surprise.

"But-you-but-you-you never wrote it! I-I was watching-" babbled Chunky, utterly confounded. "I—I—I—"

"I wrote it at the Mission, on the night of the dance," said Frank cheerily. "Tom Law-

rence took it along to the office for me."

Chunky gasped.

"Then-then-where-where's my story?"

"Your story! What story?"

"Oh—ah—n-n-nothing!" babbled Chunky.

Chunky Todgers finished his breakfast in a dazed state. He was still dazed when, after breakfast, he mounted his fat pony to ride home. Frank and Bob came out to see him off, and Frank Richards pressed a packet into his hand.

"A little Christmas present for you, Chunky," he said. "Don't open it till you get home. Take care of it, though, it's worth thousands of dollars."

"Ten thousand, at least," said Bob Lawless.

Chunky Todgers rode away, still in a dazed state. Before he was a hundred yards away he had opened that valuable packet. His little round eyes almost started from his head at the sight of his own valuable manuscript. He looked round. Two cheery youths were looking after him from the distance, grinning.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted Frank after him. And Bob Lawless bawled:

"And don't forget to read Frank Richards' Christmas story!"

## When the Red Man Roamed the Far West!

