

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF J. RUFUS WALLINGFORD

(Continued from Page 6)

"Certainly not," agreed the inquiring director happily. "What I want to know is this: Do all those notes show on the books as paid before we step out?"

"They show it now, in cash!" And the president, with much satisfaction, handed him a copy of the trial balance. The bills receivable had been reduced by \$300,000, and the cash account had been augmented by that amount.

The fierce whiskered director resumed his regular seat. "I'm ready for the meeting to open," he stated.

The proceedings which followed were brief and crisp. President Prine resigned from his office and from the directorate. The remaining directors immediately named J. Rufus Wallingford as director to fill the unexpired vacancy, in spite of the fact that he only held one share of stock. Immediately thereafter they elected J. Rufus Wallingford president and at once indicated that genial and smiling financier into office.

"Mr. President," remarked W. O. or Olson Jones, as soon as the door had closed behind the last of the retiring directors, "I move that we all go in the vault and split the cash."

"Meeting's adjourned," chuckled President Wallingford. "And let me warn you loose jawed bankers to buy some sticky taffy and keep tight on chewing it until you get on that two-forty train. Sign these resignations, and don't fill in the dates." Producing a big red pocket-book, he handed them each a thousand dollar bill and a ticket to New York.

A tall, thin gentleman, with a black mustache, walked up to the window of the paying teller in the People's bank and laid down a check for \$150,000.

"Currency, please," he observed.

The paying teller, who was an elderly man with severe spectacles, examined the check on both sides and Blackie Daw from as many angles as possible.

"H. G. Daw," he voicelessly formed with his lips, and a knot of concentration sprang between his eyes, lifting his spectacles. That name was a new one to him, and he consulted his references. The account was there, brand new, and for the exact amount mentioned on the check. "Have you any means of identification, Mr. Daw?"

"The man who took my money should be able to identify me," stated Mr. Daw, blowing a thin blue thread of smoke into the gilt dome. The teller murmured something about "picking him out."

"I can't pick him out," returned Mr. Daw, his neck refusing most insolently to turn. "It's his business to pick me out. I want my money!" he shouted.

"There's no necessity for shouting," protested the paying teller, glaring at



"Listen to that mob," Blackie. "You'll have your money as soon as you're properly identified. There's something irregular here. I don't find your signature on file."

The excitable Mr. Daw suddenly grew furious.

"I want my money!" he yelled. "You're trying to delay me! There's a rumor all over town that the old officers looted the bank and resigned. If I don't get my money right away I'll call an officer."

The hay and feed merchant tore up his deposit slip and hurried over to a side desk. The butter and egg merchant had already drawn a check for his balance. There were eight depositors in the bank by now. The butter and egg merchant, waiting his turn at the window, was talking excitedly to three of them and displaying his check.

"Would you mind waiting a few minutes, Mrs. Grandin?" asked the paying teller anxiously as he counted out the lady's money. "I'd like to talk with you."

"I'll be back," promised Mrs. Grandin sweetly as she stuffed the money hastily into her hand bag. "I want to telephone some friends of mine," and as she darted away the paying teller realized, with a sickening sense of dis-

aster, that the minutes were, without emerged from the door irreparable damage would be done.

The butter and egg man lunged his bulk into the space vacated by the lady and slammed down a check. His eyes were bulging and his cheeks were working. Blackie Daw lunged into the butter and egg man's side with a sharp elbow and bumped him away; then Blackie wound his long fingers into the grill to hold his place in front of the wicket.

"My money," he howled. "You're holding me back because \$150,000 cash will clean out your bank! You're going to have a run today, and you know it!"

"Call an officer!" ordered the paying teller, about whose aged mouth there was a snap which Blackie rather admired.

President Wallingford stepped forward.

"I know the man," he said, entering the paying teller's cage. "The account is correct; give him the money." He picked up the check and put his O. K. on it. "What do you mean by this?" he demanded of H. G. Daw. "Are you trying to ruin the People's bank?"

"They wouldn't give me my money," loudly explained Mr. Daw. "I don't want to put the old officers in bad, but the truth about Prine and the rest of them had to come out before the day's over, anyhow, and I wanted my money."

"Shut up, you fool!" ordered Wallingford, quite visibly angry. "Come inside and wait until your money can be counted."

"Give me room, will you—will you!" Blackie excitedly requested of the depositors who were crowding him. There were nine of them now in line, and there was no depositor in front of the receiving teller's window. Blackie Daw picked up a big yellow suit case, and "Remember," he cautioned the paying teller as he moved away, "no one gets paid until I get mine!"

The paying teller looked across at the receiving teller, and the receiving teller looked across at the paying teller. Both were lost in profound wonder as to how that account of H. G. Daw had come on the books, but they did not speak. No employee desired to know anything which would be embarrassing to a witness stand, with the sole exception of the mandolin player, and he was handicapped.

"Shall I leave you the little toilet bag, Jim?" asked Blackie Daw in the office of President Wallingford, and he affectionately parted the yellow suit case, now stuffed with money.

"No," directed Wallingford, with a strained look on his face. He sat down, with frowning anxiety. "I don't want the money on me."

"I wish I could stay," reflected Blackie, his eyes kindling. "You're liable to have a scrimmage before you get out of this."

"I think not," calculated Wallingford, though the look of anxiety was still on his brow. "I'll have the town back of me if Prine tries to start anything. There's no vengeance in a man who's trying to save his own neck."

Twenty minutes later Blackie Daw walked out of the back way with \$150,000 in the yellow suit case, and Wallingford sent for the bookkeeper.

"Well, Qualey, we're caught," he cheerfully told the shiverer who stood before him. "We'll probably all be jailed inside of twenty-four hours."

Mr. Qualey crumpled in a chair and shrank three sizes.

"We're lost!" exclaimed Wallingford. "Listen to that mob."

"There's one way out of this by which no one need be arrested. Prine and Morris and the other former directors must cover that deficit on the jump, and in currency!"

"That's right!" agreed the bookkeeper, with unexpected determination. "They're the ones who took the money, and they're the ones who have to save us."

"Gee! It took you a long time to find your sand!" chuckled Wallingford, wiping his brow in relief. "You hustle right around to Prine and tell him what they have to do."

"You bet I will!" declared Qualey, shaking his fist. "They can raise the money among them, if they have to shut up the Pit bucketshop and all go broke."

In a few minutes Prine slipped in the back way and confronted Wallingford. "A fine mess you got us into!" he hotly charged.

"Rotten!" agreed Wallingford. "Just hear them out there."

"It's none of my affair," declared Prine. "I was astonished that you sent crazy Qualey to me. When we stepped out of this bank we left it in a perfectly solvent condition. I can prove it by the books."

"You'll never have a chance," Wallingford told him, with a grin. "If this were only a matter of legal consequences you might bluff, but if this bank closes its doors with a deficit of nearly half its capital the people of this town will take you apart for souvenirs. If you don't believe it open the front door and show yourself to the crowd outside."

Prine walked to the door and put his hand on the knob. He paused as he heard his own name shouted. An angry depositor was demanding to know where he was.

"I'm sorry you blame me," grinned Wallingford. "You see, I haven't had a chance to pull the scheme that was to square you. I don't suppose anybody figured on the possibility of a run."

There was a knock at the door. The mandolin player came in, his expression entirely unchanged.

"Several of the depositors have asked to see Mr. Prine, if he is in," he politely reported, thumping on the edge of the door with his finger tips. The tune was, "Oh, Myrtle, My Sweetheart."

"Not here!" snapped Prine.

"Very well, sir," accepted the mandolin player, no hair of his curly fore-

lock away.

"Good work," commented Wallingford. "Prine, we have cash enough to last about one hour, by slow counting. Before that's gone, you'd better be pouring the currency in here."

To add effect to his threat he set the door about an inch ajar. The lobby of the bank was packed solidly, and a roar came from the crowd, like a zoo just before feeding time. Even Wallingford paled as he caught their temper from their tone.

Wallingford touched a bell, and Qualey came in, stiffening at the sight of Prine.

"Qualey, tell President Prine where the deficit went."

"The PR Brokerage company," shrieked the desperate Qualey.

"You'll swear that on the witness stand?"

"You bet I will!"

Prine merely glanced at his bookkeeper and sat down—at the phone. He called up his fellow directors in succession and told them what they had to do and how rapidly they had to do it. Then he walked out into the brass grided bank cage and made a speech, a nice speech, a frank, straightforward, manly speech, the speech of an honest banker. At first they howled him down, but he finally got their ears and told them how the absurd rumor had arisen, merely because the bank had employed a manager who was a stranger. Honest and capable as he was, that manager had been dismissed. Above all things, he told them that their money was there! He wanted them to draw it and be ashamed of themselves and bring it back next day. It was a fine speech, and they believed him, but they went on drawing their money just the same.

The paying teller spoke to him as he started back to the office.

"The currency is running rather low, sir," he rasped.

"It will begin coming in at the back door in half an hour," promised Prine, looking at his watch. "It will come in all day faster than you can pay it out, and I'll stay right here to show myself."

Four very cheerful parties sat in the parlor of the hotel, and three of them peered over Wallingford's shoulder while he scratched from a little book the fourth name in the list of those who had assisted in robbing the Warden orphans of their father's fortune. The fourth name was that of President Prine.

"Just even, ladies," chuckled J. Rufus, mighty proud of himself; "\$150,000 to the penny."

"Oh, we forgot!" suddenly exclaimed Violet. "We didn't collect anything for the expense fund. We always—"

"Great Jebozophat!" Blackie Daw had jumped from his chair as the door opened, and, with a pale, drawn face, had thrown up a window. "Get out of here!" he yelled, while Wallingford and the girls rushed to the other window and poked out their heads.

"Where'll I go?" asked Tond Jessup calmly, closing the door and leaning against it. "They put me off the street car, and I had to walk clear back from the country. There's a man out there has a skunk farm."

"Get upstairs into the bathroom," ordered Wallingford, gasping for breath. "Put your clothes in a suit case and have it sunk in the canal. Blackie, get a machine. We'll all go for a ride."

The girls were still giggling when, as they drove swiftly through the cool evening air, J. Rufus began to chuckle.

"That expense fund," he explained. "We'll drive straight back to town. I want to find that real estate fellow."

The town awoke unusually early next morning, gasping for breath. There was in the air a pungent something which spurred into instant activity every revulsion possible to the human system. The town moaned and uttered one agonized word—

"Skunk!"

Never in all the history of civilization had there been such an overwhelming, persistent, devastating odor as that which permeated and saturated the sweet breeze of the morning. There was no escape from it. There was no hiding. There was no relief. The town might as well have been one armed that morning, for every citizen, irrespective of age, sex or color, was compelled to use one hand to close his or her olfactory organ. For a time the disaster was so bewildering that its source could only be conjectured, but at 9:15 Wallingford's telephone bell rang.

"Hello!" responded the faint nasal voice of J. Rufus.

"Is that you, Wallingford?" was the nasal reply. "Well, this is Prine. What do you mean by filling that shanty next to my store with those skunks?"

"They're necessary to my business," twanged Wallingford. "I'm collecting them as fast as I can. The Keebo Chemical company is to manufacture the strongest disinfectant in the world, and skunks!"

"What!" The tone was as explosive as possible to a man who was holding his nose tightly shut. "Well, you can't do that."

"Why can't I? It's my lot. Bought a hundred dollar option on it last night, and I'm going to start building my factory tomorrow."

A choking, gasping silence. Then:

"You infernal grafter!" Another silence. "Well, how much for your option?"

"Ten thousand dollars, and send it over in currency."

Half an hour later the five strangers hurried out to the bus, their expense money added to the restriction fund. The hotel attendants were holding their noses; the passersby on the street were holding their noses; the motormen on the street cars were holding their noses; old men and young men, little children and women were at the same involuntary obedience to nature's desi-



"Skunk."

law. It was a city of left elbows held at right angles to the face.

The president of the reformed People's bank rushed out of Prine's emporium as the bus started.

"Wait a minute!" he choked, changing hands to get at his handkerchief. He saw the Warden orphans in the bus with Blackie and Wallingford and Tond Jessup, and his eyes fell white a bewildered expression immediately came into his face.

Were these girls at the bottom of his misfortunes? Just then the wind shifted, and he shook his unengaged fist.

"What are you going to do with these skunks?"

J. Rufus leaned out of the bus window and, holding his nose firmly with his right hand, beamed gently on the sufferer.

"Oh, those Keebo skunks!" he considered. "They go with the property, Mr. Prine."

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