The New Adventures of J. Rufus Wallingford.

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WRITTEN BY
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INTRODUCING
BURR McINTOSH ..... J. Rufus Wallingford
MAX FIGMAN ..... Blackie Daw
LOLITA ROBERTSON ..... Violet

A Trap for Trapp

FOUR round eyes stared wistfully through the wide plate-glass window and two noses touched the glass. The blue eyes were entirely surrounded, from hair to collar, by freckles; the brown eyes were set in an oval face of good features, except for the lobeless ears, which ran down on a tangent to the cheeks. The blue eyes were so filled with enthusiasm that even the surrounding freckles seemed to glow; the brown eyes were calculatingly thoughtful.

"Uncle Blackie might buy it for us," hopefully speculated Toad Jessup, his freckles seeming to dance. He could not have been more eager if the window had been full of pie.

"Nobody would," thoughtfully decided the young nephew of J. Rufus Wallingford. There was a long silence, in which both boys projected their very souls through the unsympathetic plate glass. "Let's go in and look at it," and Jimmy led the way quite deliberately.

"What's the use?" grumbled Toad, but he followed.

A small-eyed man came forward immediately, smiling. He was rather plump, and bald in front, so that his large nose seemed to be a sort of handle to that part of his face which began above the eyebrows.

"Hello, boys!" he greeted them with the cordiality due to the progress of good customers. The wealthy looking Mr. Wallingford had just opened an account.

"How's the new searchlight?"

"Fine and dandy!" replied Toad, with enthusiasm. "We make everybody stop at the side of the road and wait."

"What's the price of that new car in the window?" inquired young Jimmy calmly, thrusting his hands into his pockets and looking up at Louis Trapp with business-like soberness.

The change in Mr. Trapp was instantaneous. His eyes glazed. He screwed up one side of his face until his mouth was all in one corner; then released his countenance with a smack.

"The little six," he observed, now smiling with fatherly kindness. "Twenty-six fifty," and he led the way to the window. Toad Jessup was already over there.

"How fast can she go?" inquired Toad, his stiff, dark-red hair almost quivering.

"Seventy," and Louis Trapp held the back of one stubby hand in the other palm while he studied the two boys speculatively. "That's the smoothest-running engine on the market."

The two boys who had been adopted by Wallingford and Blackie Daw bent on the car an appreciative gaze. It was an extremely low, cartridge-shaped runabout, most obviously built for speed, and the designer had meant it, absolutely, for two boys, one freckled and one rather plump.

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"Louis Trapp seems to be rather a hard customer," speculated J. Rufus Wallingford, and the three other members of the restitution conference, sitting on the veranda of Wallingford's beautiful suburban home, were silently thoughtful. "I opened an account with him in order to get acquainted, but I haven't been able to stimulate his financial imagination."

The two beautiful Warden sisters and Blackie Daw laughed at that; then Blackie rose and leaned against the rail, crossing his spider-like legs and twirling his black mustache.

"He'll have to give up the fifty thousand he stole from the Warden estate just the same," and Blackie gazed down into the sparkling blue eyes of Violet. "Louis is number six on the list of swindlers who robbed you orphans of your father's fortune, and Louis will have to be crossed off. Well, look who's here!"

Wallingford glanced down toward the gate through which came a man, so bald-headed that a near-sighted lamp cleaner had once mistaken him for an arc light. He had his hat off, and was mopping his head.

"The Onion," chuckled Wallingford, who was always amused by W. O. Jones. "Girls, go out and look at the pansies and the pinks, and spare yourselves the onion."

Laughing, the sisters stepped off the side entrance to the porch and wandered round the garden, while Onion Jones was led into the library.

Toad Jessup and young Jimmy came racing home full of enthusiasm for the new car, and all this enthusiasm they poured out on Violet and Fannie. Also, they revealed their settled and hopeless conviction: that nobody in the whole wide world would give them the car.

Violet, watching their wistful faces, suddenly giggled and drew Fannie aside.

"Let's play one of his own tricks on Mr. Wallingford," she urged, and explained it in excited whispers.

Fannie shook her head at first, but finally she smiled, and it was she who led in the careful execution of the plan which followed. She called the boys, and led the way back into the garage, where she promptly drove nails through two of the tires on Wallingford's pet roadster.

Two minutes later Toad Jessup was ushered for the library, where Wallingford and Blackie were laughing hilariously at the Onion's latest scheme for getting himself jailed for life.

"Well, why don't you go through with it?" urged Blackie.

"Excuse me," observed Onion Jones, lightly mopping the flawlessly made bald, which Blackie called an egg. "I don't mind living, for a spell in a bunk hotel, or even a hospital, but I draw the line at the penitentiary. I'll sell you the scheme for five thousand."

J. Rufus leaned back in his library chair, and surveyed Onion with mock disapproval.

"Your streak of yellow's beginning to show through," he charged.

Toad Jessup bobbed in at the door.

"Say, you got a couple of busted tires, Uncle Jim," he shouted. "Mr. Trapp's got a new kind in. I was going to get us some, but Miss Fannie said I'd better get an order from you."

Wallingford smiled and wrote an order for the tires; then he returned to the business proposition of Mr. W. O. Jones.

"I can remember when you'd take a chance," he said, with a sly wink at Blackie.

"That's just it," responded Mr. Jones. "I took 'em all, and there ain't any chances left. Ever since I put in that six-stretch, cracking rocks in a striped suit, twelve years ago, I get nervous when I'm in a small room. That's why I come to you smart guys to put in a few fancy lugs. How about it, Jim? You go at it this way——"

"Not me," interrupted Wallingford; "you!"

"I don't think you understand this scheme," complained Onion, drawing his chair closer and twirling his hissing champagne highball. "You advertise that you'll double their money, Blackie, then you—"

"Not me," interrupted Blackie; "you!"

"Gimme a chance!" growled the Onion. "As fast as the boobs send their money in you use it to pay off the ones that sent it in before, Jim; but you—"

"Not me," interrupted Wallingford; "you!"

"Fine as silk!" said Blackie enthusiastically. "Then the postoffice authorities come around with a bang, and pass you the finish of Five-hundred-and-twenty-per-cent. Miller."

Young Jimmy bounced into the room with a freshly bent and broken auto horn in his hand.

"We need a new horn," he reported, surveying with admiration the recent work of the Warden sisters. "Miss Violet said that we might as well get one when we went for the tires, so please give me an order."

Only a slight trace of annoyance on the round, pink face of Wallingford, as he wrote the order and passed it to Jimmy.

"Miller was a plain crook," went on Onion, now a trifle sulky. "With my scheme the money, as it comes in, is split four ways. You snag out one-fourth for yourself; you—"

"Not me," interrupted Blackie; "you!"

"Wait a minute!" begged Onion.

"You snag out a fourth for yourself; you pay off your first boobs with two-fourths; and with the other fourth—Listen!—you pyramid wheat!"

"Oh joy!" yelled Blackie. "Then you run a lottery with the wheat profits, I guess, and give a pound of coak for the capital prize."

Toad Jessup and young Jimmy came stamping in with their arms full of auto accessories which had been pounded to bits by the gleeful Warden orphans.

"Found a lot of things we need," explained Jimmy eagerly. "We're going to take some of them down to be repaired, but a lot of them we'll have to buy new. The girls said you'd better just give us an order for anything we want."

"That's right, Jim, be a sport," grinned Blackie. "Why weren't you in the first place."

"Who's running this ranch?" inquired Wallingford with a trace of curtness, and, writing the order in a hurry, he gave it to young Jimmy; whereupon the boys dashed out of the door, dropping half their broken accessories as they ran.

Onion Jones finished his highball. He took a cigarette from the box on the table and lit it; then he started in earnest, and spent a solid three-quarters of an hour in explaining the intricacies of his new scheme.

"But here's the best part of it," he finished triumphantly. "I've saved this for the last. All you've got to do is pick a good boob, with fifty thousand dollars, that'll buy you out just before the pinch comes. Of course, then, you got to frame some way that the boob can't pass it back to you. That's where I fall down. I can't frame these flossy angles. That's where you come in, J. Rufus."

J. Rufus lit a fat, black cigar.

"Not me," he calmly, and finally, stated; "you!" whereupon Onion Jones concealing his nakedness with a new felt hat, cursed profoundly, and walked out into the air.

"You missed a circus, girls," explained Blackie, as Violet and Fannie came into the library, with the pink of excitement in their cheeks and the sparkle of mischief in their eyes. "Onion Jones has a great scheme to end his days in Sing Sing, and all he needs is an investor from Matteawan. He——"

A loud shriek interrupted the conversation. It was like the approach of a high-speed locomotive, and it gathered in volume and intensity like the scream of a sky-rocket. Blackie turned to the window and his mouth dropped open.

"For the Lord's sake, pipe this!" he yelled, and the girls knocked over two chairs in getting to him. They had a sudden attack of fright.

Onion Jones was just passing out through the carriage gate with offended dignity. As Wallingford reached the window, Onion, who was inclined to portliness these days, suddenly sprang straight up and described a parabola over into the grass. Simultaneously with this and the loud cries of Fannie and Violet a low gray streak shot in from the road on two wheels, whizzed up the drive, and rounded the curve into the carriage porch, missing the stone post by an inch, then stopped, with a slam and the smell of rubber, directly in the center. For the first instant since their approach, the pneumatic horn stopped shrieking.

"Ain't she a dany?" demanded Toad, jumping out onto the porch, his hair tousled, his eyes shining, his freckles red with joy.

"Made it in fifty-two minutes from Columbus circle!" announced Jimmy, stopping the motor with a touch of his toe.

The boys were met with a strange lack of enthusiasm. Violet had plumped down in a porch swing, with her feet straight before her and both hands at her heart. Fannie was white and stiff, and was squeezing her left hand with her right so hard that the tips of her fingers were crimson. Jim Wallingford, at the library window, was leaning out with a sagging jaw, and his face was the color of a fish. Blackie Daw, having no flesh to worry him, stepped out through the window, one long leg after the other, and for once the jovial Blackie had no grin for his pals.

"You young devils!" he crackled, with a husky voice. "Where did you get that car?"

Toad's freckles lost their redness, but Jimmy looked up at Blackie with a smile. "Uncle Jim gave it to us," he stated, glancing for an instant in the direction of the heavy figure in the window, and his smile deepened. "He ordered Mr. Trapp to let us have anything we wanted, and this is it."

"If I'd only known you boys would drive like that, I'd never have helped you!" cried Violet.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," worried Fannie. "Vi and I are to blame, Mr. Wallingford."

J. Rufus looked from one to the other of the Warden sisters in astonishment, then he chuckled.

"This gives us our chance, Blackie. Now we can get very close to Louis."

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"For two cents I'd have you put into cold storage!" threatened J. Rufus Wallingford, his big, round pink face aflame with indignation, and his broad chest swelling with the same vigorous sentiment. "Here's your car," and, with a wave of his hand, he indicated the keen-looking "little six" outside the curb, where Blackie Daw, who had driven it in, stood gazing down at it with smiling admiration.

RUFUS AND BLACKIE CONFER

Louis Trapp glanced in the direction of the hand wave. His small eyes glazed, and the right side of his face screwed up.

"What's the matter with it?"

"The fact that it's there!" snapped Wallingford. "You should have better sense, if not better morals, than to put a dangerous machine like that into the hands of children. Besides, there's a law against it."

Mr. Trapp turned his eyes on Wallingford, and released his countenance with a smack. He disliked to lose a customer, but it would take Wallingford two years to buy twenty-six hundred and fifty dollars' worth of accessories.

"It's not my responsibility," he stated in easy security. "You sent me your written order for the purchase of this car; and a sale is a sale, Mr. Wallingford."

"You took a crooked advantage of that order!" hotly charged Wallingford. "I suppose if you had been selling poison, it would have been just the same."

Neither Wallingford's scorn nor his indignation, nor his broadly swelling chest, affected Mr. Trapp in the least.

"Won't he take back his car, Jim?" demanded Blackie Daw, who had studied the expected quarrel from without, by the mere poses of the men.

"Do I look like a sucker?" demanded Mr. Trapp in return. "That's a used car now. I wouldn't offer it to anybody for new."

Tall and lean, Blackie Daw bent over Mr. Trapp's desk impressively. Mr. Trapp was only about five feet six, and he felt as if the Metropolitan tower were hovering above him.

"Would you rather have that car or a licking?" asked Blackie, in his deadliest of tones.

Louis Trapp placed the palm of his stubby right hand over the back of his left one, and pressed both against his stomach, as he stepped out of immediate range.

"A licking," he confessed, and found safety for the present in the sudden grin which lifted Blackie's pointed moustache. "I don't let anything stand in the way of my making money." His small eyes squinted, and he smiled with complacent pride.

Blackie turned on the indignant J. Rufus a suddenly serious face.

"Then he deserves the money," he decided.

The indignation suddenly left the eyes of Wallingford. He was smiling. Louis Trapp, gaining confidence, stepped closer.

"You see, business is business," he pleasantly observed.

"Mr. Trapp is entirely right," said Wallingford to Blackie. "We'll keep the car."

Outside as they climbed in the car, Wallingford smiled contentedly.

"Greed," he said. "That's his weak point. He's easy."

"Easy enough for Onion's scheme," grinned Blackie. "Jim he gets it."

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Again the swift "little six" stopped in front of Louis Trapp's place of business, a dingy repair-and-accessory shop, to which a glittering show window had been added, like a clean collar on a soiled shirt. Louis Trapp betrayed no uneasiness when he saw Wallingford and Blackie Daw clambering out of the low gray runabout. People like Wallingford never made more than one kick, and a stop now could mean nothing but profit.

"Mr. Trapp," inquired Wallingford with business-like crispness, "have you any manufacturing facilities?"

Mr. Trapp's eyes glazed. His face screwed up on one side. He pressed one palm over the back of the other. He gazed, unseeing, at the little runabout out by the curb.

"Well, no," he finally admitted; "but I could have."

"I thought of a little automobile accessory last week, and have applied for a patent on it," explained Wallingford, with smiling nonchalance, as if he were amused with himself for having descended to such trifles. "It's a trouble-light, to be used on cars fitted with gas lamps. It's a long tube, provided with a funnel at one end and a condensing lens at the other. It is lined throughout with burnished silver cloth. The funnel is placed over the lens of the gas lamps, and the light is reflected through the entire length of the tube."

He had made some deft sketches on the back of an order-slip, but Mr. Trapp did not need the diagrams.

"I'm hunting," he admitted, with the indifference of one who is not eager for the untried. "It looks pretty good. If I had some, I might sell half a dozen or so on commission."

"I've no doubt," smiled Wallingford, his broad-chested, jovial fellow. Wallingford was, and the soul of careless generosity. "I didn't know but that you might be interested in the manufacture and marketing of it."

"I never gamble with my money," he quickly stated. "What I made, I made without much investment."

Wallingford chuckled, his big shoulders heaving and his eyes half closed.

"No chance for you to lose, is there?" he good-naturedly commented. "I don't care shucks about the investment, Mr. Trapp. All I want is to see this thing made. I'll back it myself, if you'll manufacture and market it and pay me a royalty."

Mr. Trapp's stubby hands fluttered from his trousers pockets, his vest pockets and his vest armholes, where they hung by his thumbs.

"Oh, if that's it, I might be interested," he observed, concealing his eagerness with a glazing of his eyes and a twisting of his mouth.

Thus it was that Mr. Louis Trapp organized the Trapp Marketing Company—that name being urged by Wallingford as a conveniently indefinite title which would permit Mr. Trapp to add any other articles of manufacture he might desire. This argument was potent, since it was backed by the fact that the entire venture had been financed by Mr. Wallingford to the extent of five thousand dollars. Thereupon, Mr. Wallingford and Mr. Trapp entered into most lengthy and elaborate articles of agreement, which permitted Mr. Trapp, on his part, to enter upon any other manufacture under the same name, as long as he furnished the capital himself, without profit to Mr. Wallingford. In offset to this privilege, Mr. Wallingford was entitled to the same right. In other words, while the entire undertaking was to be conducted under Mr. Trapp's name and sponsorship, the trouble-light alone was to be a mutual enterprise.

Wallingford and Blackie set up a desk in Mr. Trapp's office the next day.

Louis Trapp, opening letters of inquiry from auto-supply dealers, opened one from which dropped a ten-dollar bill, and he brought it over to Wallingford's desk with a puzzled brow. His scalp had slipped forward fully half an inch, and his mouth had screwed up close to his eye.

"What is this?" he asked, loosening his countenance with a smack. "Listen:"

"Trapp Marketing Company.

"Dear Sirs: You are probably another fake, but I'll fall for a ten, anyhow, so as not to break my record. Invest it as per dope in your handsome advertisement, and if you're merely going South with the money, mail back a magnolia. Yours as ever,

"JACK HOADLEY."

Blackie and Wallingford exchanged a comfortable grin.

"If you'll notice, Mr. Trapp, this envelope is marked for Department A," directed Wallingford gravely. "Kindly watch for such letters, and put them in this basket," and he lifted to the top of his desk the largest waste paper basket which Louis Trapp had ever seen. Wallingford unlocked the upper drawer on the right-hand side of his desk, and dropped in it the ten dollar bill. He opened the opposite drawer and drew forth a blank card, number one in the right hand row, which he numbered and stamped with the date, after which he wrote on it Jack Hoadley's name and address, and the amount of his contribution.

"What is it?" asked Louis Trapp, blinking at the big waste basket with his small eyes, clasping the back of one hand with the palm of the other, and pressing both against his stomach.

"Oh, a little side line," responded Wallingford carelessly. "Trapp, you have some vacant space in the third floor front. I think I'll put some tables in there for mailing girls."

Mr. Trapp screwed up his face.

"What kind of business is this?" he insisted on knowing.

"Wheat investment," replied Wallingford briefly.

The afternoon post brought three letters for Department A, and Mr. Trapp came over to see them opened. All three contained money! The next two days brought an additional scattering few; Thursday a dozen, Friday a score, Saturday nearly fifty.

"If you don't mind, Trapp, we'll lock the office door," suggested Wallingford, after lunch on Saturday. "We want to pay off our investors," and opening the locked drawer, he began dumping money on the desk.

"Sure," agreed Mr. Trapp, with alacrity, and he immediately locked the door from the inside. He climbed on a high stool as Blackie began to sort the money and peered with all his eyes.

"A thousand and twenty dollars, Jim," reported Blackie, stroking his pointed mustache complacently. "Not so bad for the first week."

"We'll hold over the twenty for a nest egg," decided Wallingaford, and taking the two odd ten-dollar bills, he dropped them back into the drawer, which he closed and locked. He divided the money into four equal piles. "This is ours," he said, handing one of the piles to Blackie, and that careless gentleman dropped the two hundred and fifty dollars into his upturned hat.

"This will pay off the first twenty-five investors," and Wallingford drew two of the piles toward him, snapping a rubber band around the remaining one and shoving it to one side. He chuckled as he stole a sidelong, upward glance at Louis Trapp. That gentleman's eyes had expanded until the color was visible. They were a mottled canary.

"Lend us a hand, Trapp, if you're not busy," requested Wallingford. "Fold two ten-dollar bills in these circular letters so they will fit these envelopes," and reaching into one of the bottom drawers of his desk, he passed Mr. Trapp a sheaf of circular letters, on which he placed one of the piles of bills.

Louis Trapp sat numbly gazing at the money for a few minutes, and then, as a preliminary to intelligent co-operation, he read the circular letter. It was as follows:

"Dear sir: We take pleasure in discharging from our books your investments of (here had been left a blank in which the amount, "$10.00," was stamped) made with us on (here another blank in which a date was stamped). According to the terms of our offer to you, this amount was only to be held by us until its profits should accrue to one hundred per cent. We beg to state that our operations have been successful and with the usual expediency, and we herewith return your original investment of—$10.00—together with the accrued profits of—$10.00—making a sum total of—$20.00—. Soliciting your further patronage, and that of your friends in any amounts from ten up to one thousand dollars, we remain, Yours confidentially,

"Trapp Marketing Company."

Mr. Trapp jumped down from his stool, and deposited his bundle of money on the desk between Wallingford and Blackie.

"This is a skin game!" he exclaimed. "I'll have nothing to do with it!" Wallingford's big pink face was a picture of cheerful joviality, and Blackie Daw laughed in keen enjoyment.

"How hasty!" chided Blackie. "Why, you don't know anything about it, Trapp."

"I know this much," and Mr. Trapp's stubby hands strayed from his trousers pockets to his coat pockets, to his vest pockets, and to the armholes of his vest, where they hung by the thumbs. "You haven't invested a cent; you let the money lay in that drawer all week! You're using one-half of the money to pay off one-fourth of the suckers!"

"Don't blame them," grinned Blackie. "They're not harming anybody. They'll send the money right back to pay off the next fourth, and so it goes merrily on."

"But you are using my name!" excitedly objected Mr. Trapp, his hands now finding no home. "I'm the only one that's known in this company. I don't even get any of the money!"

"You get your share of the tubular light," sternly reproved Wallingford. "Now let me make you ashamed of yourself, Mr. Trapp. You see this money?" and he indicated the two hundred and fifty dollars embraced by the rubber band. "That is the investment fund. You see that we have held it out, fairly and squarely, and I'm going to let you handle it for investment, so that you will know there's nothing underhanded about it. More than that, Trapp—since you're so particular—I'm going to write and sign a document stating that you have nothing to do with this department of the Trapp Marketing Company; that you have no financial or personal interest in it, and that I alone am morally and legally responsible for it."

True to his word, J. Rufus Wallingford, then and there, and with great pomp and ceremony, wrote out the document in question and signed it; after which Horace G. Daw and Louis Trapp attached their signatures as witnesses.

"Now," said Wallingford, severely, "you are safe. I place this document in this small tin box, which, as you see, has two locks. I lock both locks. I give you one key, I retain the other. Here is the box; lock it in your own safe. Now, are you satisfied?"

"I guess so," hesitated Mr. Trapp, holding the little tin box with both hands. "How do you invest the money?"

"In the wheat pit," replied Mr. Wallingford, promptly. "We shan't be here on Monday morning. I'd like you to send for a man from the Tilwit Brokerage Company, as soon as you can get them on the 'phone. Give him this money; tell him to buy wheat on a five-point margin, and pyramid it every point up."

Mr. Trapp's stubby hands dropped at his sides.

"That's no investment," he exclaimed; "that's arson!"

"Cinch," agreed Wallingford, briefly. "But you're bound to catch it some time if you play it every day, aren't you?"

"Sure," admitted Louis Trapp; "but it don't happen often enough. You'd have to win once out of about five times, and it don't happen."

Wallingford rose and loomed above him, big, confident, chuckling.

"Yes, but suppose the amount you invest is bigger every day? When you do catch it, you wipe out the score, don't you?"

"If it's enough bigger," acknowledged Trapp promptly. Figures were an inheritance to him.

"Well, don't you suppose this business will grow fast enough?" and Wallingford laid his hand on the hundred per cent money. "Don't you suppose that every man who gets this twenty dollars will be responsible for firing a hundred back here in the next mail? And don't you suppose that rate of increase will keep up every week? Why Trapp," and he shook a jovially impressive finger at Louis, "before long we'll have to widen your doors to get the money in. Figure it out for yourself."

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"Well, Jim, it's a show-down," said Blackie Daw, regretfully as they came away from lunch. "The money's rolling in so strong that we'll have to run from it."

"Tough luck," grumbled Wallingford. "If we were able to strike a winning on that wheat pyramid, so as to pay off all boobs to date, we could clean a million dollars out of this game. As it is, we've only raked off about eighty thousand." He hesitated for a moment; "I've been studying the market until I get a headache every night, and it seems to me that wheat is due for a sharp rise."

Blackie stopped him, right in the middle of the sidewalk on crowded Broadway, and studied his big, round face with deep concern.

"You fat lollop!" he exclaimed. "Jim, when you turn kick yourself, it's time to get out!"

"I guess you're right," soberly considered Wallingford. "I've been going after that wheat-dope like a bucket shop wreck, watching the crop reports, and the weather, and the foreign shipments. What a cinch I'd be for a gold brick artist!" He paused and contemplated himself in amazement. "I don't suppose we'd better chance it much longer."

"I'd feel happier if we were out now," returned Blackie, with an apprehensive glance around him. "I'm like Onion Jones: I love fresh air. The mail's coming in too heavy to escape a postoffice investigation much longer."

"Just one winning would make us able to show an on-the-level investment with legitimate profit," speculated Wallingford. "I wonder if the goat will buck," worried Blackie.

"That's a horrible thought, Jim! For two weeks past, Trapp has hugged the hook in his gills, and was crazy to buy in; but after I told him, last Saturday, that we might consider letting him have a slice of it he quit. And now every day at 3 o'clock he telephones for the wheat report and says, 'Well, you didn't get your winning yet.'"

The somber look on Wallingford's face was not a reflection from that on Blackie's. It was from within.

"If this little Trapp lets us hold the bag, after we've so carefully propped it up for him to hold, I'll poison him!" he declared vindictively.

At that moment there came slamming down Broadway, at the apex of the legal rate of speed, a low, gray, cartridge-shaped runabout, in which sat a diminutive driver and a diminutive passenger, both with goggles and flying hair.

At the very instant in which Blackie and Wallingford recognized the car and the crew, something happened which gave Broadway one of its few thrills. Two girls started to cross the street in front of the car, and stopped midway to decide in which direction lay the nearer sidewalk. They held hands, giggling, and pulled each way; while Toad Jessup, too near for the brakes, tried to change his mind as often as they did. When they finally separated, one of the girls followed the car across to the wrong side of the street, in order to tumble in front of it; and then in the midst of shrieks of terror, Toad Jessup did the brilliant thing which marked him as a born driver. He turned the arrowline "little six" at right angles, shot between a taxi and a dray, ran over the curb and up on the sidewalk, stopping the nose of the machine one foot from a drug store window.

Wallingford, his face ashen, gasped to recover his breath, and strove to fight his way through the crowd. Blackie, his face equally white, held him back.

"Let him alone," he said. "You'll only rattle them. They're not hurt. Nobody's hurt."

"I'll smash that car!" swore Wallingford, through gritting teeth.

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" declared Blackie. "Toad should have a medal. Come away!"

A big traffic policeman had elbowed his way in to the "little six." He had a blond mustache and a blue eye.

"Good work, kid," he observed, as he cleared the crowd away from the rear of the machine. He viewed Toad and Jimmy with a grin of amusement. "Are you eighteen?" he asked the driver.

Jimmy nudged Toad sharply.

"Yes," snickered Toad.

"Well, I have your word for it," remarked the officer, who loathed an awkward driver of any age. "Can you back out of this, or is your nerve gone?"

Toad nodded as he grabbed his gear lever and threw out his clutch, looking over his shoulder meanwhile. Jimmie Wallingford touched the pneumatic horn one short, shrill blast. The blue-eyed traffic policeman leaned confidently close to Toad's ear.

"Get off the street before you are pinched," he advised. "You look darn young for your age."

The car was just starting when Wallingford and Blackie arrived in time to prevent the spurt.

"Where's that chauffeur I got you?" demanded Wallingford, in more anxiety than anger.

"Say, listen!" Young Jimmy's voice vibrated with excitement. "Jump on the car." Blackie was already in the mechanic's seat. Wallingford stood on the runningboard. Toad Jessup swung on a side street. "We were in a shooting!"

"Right in front of our place, Uncle Jim!" interpolated Toad.

"A murderer or something was getting away from two detectives," went on Jimmy, his eyes like coals. "We were on top of the shed with the big barrel we were putting up for a windmill tank. The burglar shot a detective, and Toad and I dropped the barrel on him! And they took him away in the wagon!"

"It lit top down; the barrel did!" shouted Toad, swinging around a woman with a baby buggy.

"Well, the girls were taking care of the wounded detective, and——"

"The girls!" Both men asked it at once. "What girls?"

"Miss Vi and Miss Fan!" shouted Toad.

"They brought us our dog they promised us," went on Jimmy. "Well, Miss Fannie called me in the library and gave me this note. She said to hustle it!"

"And the chauffeur wasn't there!" shouted Toad, grinning with all his freckles. "We had a dandy ride!"

Wallingford had ripped open the note. He read it and passed it quickly to Blackie.

"Trapp Marketing Company is to be investigated this afternoon. What does it mean! Has Mr. Trapp done something illegal to get you into trouble?

"FANNIE."

"Drive us to Trapp's," directed Wallingford briskly.

(Continued tomorrow.)