THE NEW ADVENTURES OF J. RUFUS WALLINGFORD

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INTRODUCING

BURR McINTOSH - - - - - - - J. Rufus Wallingford
MAX FIGMAN - - - - - - - - - - Blackie Daw
LOLITA ROBERTSON - - - - - - - - - - Violet

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A TRANSACTION IN SUMMER BOARDERS

"STUNG, ladies!" observed J. Rufus Wallingford, as he looked at the dilapidated stage which was to carry them from the forlorn and lonesome little station at Birchwood to the Pine Lake Health Resort. "It takes a couple of wise lollops like you and me, Blackie, to get the prong good when we do get it"; and he glanced at the discouraged looking Violet and Fannie Warden. Aunt Patty Warden was smiling cheerfully.

"Don't ring me in on this, J. Rufus," protested Blackie Daw, twirling his black mustache with complacency. "I didn't want any health, remember. I've got too much now, in spite of all I can do to ruin it." "Perhaps this isn't out stage," said Fanny Warden hopefully. What faint hopes Fannie had entertained, however, were dashed by the driver himself, as he stopped his horses at the platform. "Are you Mr. Wallingford and party?" he inquired in a voice which was a startling reproduction of the tone of the rear off wheel, and he surveyed them with the mournfulness of the grave.

Wallingford looked at Blackie with stern accusation, and then his jovial pink face broke into a smile, which, while infectious to behold, was not all mirth. "I never had a stronger hunch than right now to slip anybody the wrong name," he confessed; "but the train's gone and we might as well be game. If our party can stand this, though, he's a piker. I suppose you're from Pine Lake?"

"Yes, I'm from Rugg's place," admitted the driver. "I reckon you'd better set as near in the middle of the middle seat as you kin," he continued, eying the huge Wallingford with more or less of dismay, and he winced quite painfully when Wallingford, having seated all the others, gravely trimmed ship and forced all the springs down tightly and firmly upon the running-gear, where they only served to accentuate the ensuing jolts.

"It'll seem real nice to have such healthlookin' folks as you around," volunteered the driver when they were well on their agonizing way. "They don't none o' you seem noways peaked lookin'!"

"I feel myself peaking rapidly, however," returned pretty Violet Warden, her blue eyes sparkling at Blackie Daw.

Blackie burst into a chuckle, in which the others presently joined, but the physical discomfort of the trip was such as to check levity, and it was a tired group which finally alighted in appalling stiffness at the Pine Lake Health Resort.

"It's right about the name," considered Blackie moodily. There's the lake and there's the pine," and he pointed out the one single pine-tree which stood by the pond. "Go in and see if Charles Algernon Swivel is here; if not we hike; if so, he hikes. For we won't work here."

"I ought to sue Charles for damges," declared Wallingford with profound dejection, but when he saw the emaciated Ruggs he changed his mind and figured upon buying him a "Gates Ajar" floral piece. "Why don't you get a fat clerk, to encourage incoming guests?" he asked.

"I can't afford it," wheezed Ruggs. "I wish I could sell this joint. I'd hike for Texas. This is no place for a lunger."

"What do you want for the outfit?" Wallingford asked him idly, not because he had the remotest idea of purchase, but merely from commercial habit.

"Five thousand," returned Ruggs, though without hope. "Forty rooms, sixty acres, fine supply of pure spring water, splendid air. Want to buy?"

"No," returned Wallingford with the peculiar chuckle in which his big shoulders always assisted; "I did once think of having my own private cemetery, but I've given it up. Is Charles Algernon Swivel here?"

"Never heard of him," declared Ruggs wheezily, and the party groaned. Charles Algernon Swivel was somewhere in this county of health resorts, and they had to find him.

Breezy Point was a regular place; fussily dressed old women crocheting on the wide verandas, and keeping a sharp eye about for possible scandal; young couples in tennis flannels sauntering about on well-kept lawns between prim flower-beds and delivering themselves of conversation which would bore them to tears if they could hear it in a phonograph ten years later; strikingly dressed married women taking the first steps toward divorce while waiting for their husband's week-end visits; boats with couples of contentment drifting lazily on the quiet bay; smart riding-parties on handsome horses, glancing in cold disdain at mere pedestrians and automobilists; women changing gowns three times a day, and men dressing at least twice; prices beyond the reach of honest folks, and all the rest of it that goes to make a really exclusive fashionable resort for the middle classes.

In this place the Wallingford party fitted like a glove, and J. Rufus was the life of the party. Wherever he went light followed him. He was so big, so impressive, and withal so genial that the women had all noted him with eager questioning, and half the men were his friends and admirers before he had been there a day. Especially Charles Algernon Swivel. That youth, found on the first evening and promptly annexed, trailed Wallingford about, laughed at his stories, drank in his good-natured philosophy, and emulated him in every respect. Charles Algernon was a most immature young man of not overly good breeding, nor overly good looks, nor apparently overly good sense, though in his rather watery little eyes was a trace of inherited shrewdness. Moreover, he was very wearing upon the nerves, and his ethics were crude. His father had made his money in oil. Also his father has stolen twenty-five thousand dollars from the Warden orphans, on the death of their father, and this was why Charles Algernon had been hunted and found and studied.

"This is the greatest place I ever saw," he confessed to Wallingford as his prematurely wrinkled eyes followed a pair of strikingly dressed women across the lawn. "Such women and such flirting"

"Oh, yes," said Wallingford dryly. "Do you suppose they all flirt?"

"Outrageously!" declared Charles Algernon with unction and moist lips and emphatic belief.

"I hadn't noticed it myself," returned Wallingford. "I had a sort of idea that the majority of women were decent, anywhere. But I suppose I'm growing old. A handsome and wealthy young fellow like you, now, must have them flocking around him like flies around a syrup-jar."

"Well, no," confessed Charles Algernon, with certain uncomfortable reminiscences of decided set-baks. "This is my first trip to such a place as this, you know. Father was always pretty close with his money before he died. But I've had some luck with women at that," and he grinned with a leer which might have made a more austere gentleman and a more impulsive one than Wallingford slap his silly face.

"I see," said he. "I guess you'll make father's money circulate in its old age," and he winked at Blackie Daw, who had just come up.

"Well, I'd like to make it more active, anyhow," declared young Swivel. "That is, just as soon as I get it. You see, I've only been on allowance until now, but on the fifth of next month I come of age, and I get the rest of it—a hundred and fifty thousand dollars! Of course I'll only spend the income. I want to invest it in good paying business that will make a good profit and give me plenty of time to spend it in. I've been thinking that for a business which only takes up half the year; the summer-resort line ought to be attractive," and his watery eyes once more followed the progress of a couple of short-skirted tennis-girls, their flannels draping themselves prettily in the breeze against lithe young limbs.

Wallingford saw and understood, and again found himself loathing Swivel quite out of proportion to his deserts. "Finest business in the world," he agreed; "pays big, requires small capital and no experience."

Blackie Daw's head suddenly went back with a laugh. He had been blessed with a happy idea.

"Mr. Wallingford knows what he is talking about," he observed, twirling his moustache and winking gravely while Swivel watched speculatively the ankles of a girl stepping out of a boat. "He made his fortune in the summer-resort business. But, of course, you've heard of him—J. Rufus Wallingford, the big summer-resort owner; owns a string of places from Maine to California. He knows what a fat business it is, I tell you."

"Indeed," fluttered Charles Algernon, to whom the name of Wallingford had been unknown up to two days before. "It's an honor to meet you I'm sure, Mr. Wallingford," and he shook hands anew over this fresh introduction. "It may be worth a lot of money to meet you."

"Yes, it might be worth quite a bit of money," replied Wallingford with a double meaning in which there was almost a snarl; whereat Blackie, knowing Wallingford's most inward mind, almost snorted.

"I say, Jim," suggested Blackie with slow emphasis, "you might let Swivel have your Pine Lake Health Resort."

This would have been too much for even Wallingford's gravity if he had not at that moment caught Charles Algernon's speculative eye fixed upon Fannie Warden, who was passing them with Aunt Patty and Violet. She smiled pleasantly at J. Rufus and at Blackie, and was about to move on, when Mr. Swivel, his expression changing to one smirking courtesy, exclaimed: "And is that beautiful young lady a friend of yours? You must present me!"

Wallingford surveyed him with amusement, and then, with sudden determination, called after the ladies and gravely introduced them.

"Indeed I am glad to meet Miss Warden," asserted Mr. Swivel gallantly. "I've been noticing you for the past two days, with your charming sister."

"You're very flattering," observed Fannie demurely, while Violet suppressed a giggle, "Coming, Aunt Patty."

"You shouldn't have spoken of Pine Lake, Mr. Daw," said Wallingford with pleasant reproof. "I'm not sure that I want to sell such a money-making plant just yet, even though it is somewhat out of my wheel of resorts.

"Pine Lake?" mused Mr. Swivel. "It's an attractive name. Is it a gay place?"

"Gay?" repeated Blackie with enthusiasm. "Gay is no name for it!"

"Fashionable, I suppose?" suggested Mr. Swivel interestedly.

"Fashionable," Mr. Daw assured him, "is no name for it. And women! You'll see no women here like those at Pine Lake; I'll give you my word of honor on that."

"You're absolutely correct about that, Mr. Daw," asserted Wallingford. There are no women here who can be in any way compared to those at Pine Lake. And, of course, the proprietor of such a place becomes very well acquainted, indeed, with the very best of his guests."

"About what would you want for Pine Lake, in case you should make up your mind to part with it?" he hesitatingly asked.

"I shouldn't care to set a price upon it now," Mr. Wallingford declared, after some deliberation. "I might say, however, that the price would be within your means."

"I say," pleaded Mr. Swivel, "if you do make up your mind to sell it, see me about it before you make any bargain, won't you?"

"Well," hesitated Wallingford, "I don't mind promising you that."

Later Swivel attempted to display his wit before the beautiful Warden girls, who soon became bored and excused themselves to dress for dinner.

"Here's where this Swivel person certainly does get the hook!" declared Wallingford savagely. "Heretofore we only meant to take his money, but now we'll take it rough. When I run across a damn fool like that with money it makes me mad. What right has he to have money, anyhow? He don't even know how to spend it! Why, yesterday at breakfast I saw him swallow a whole glassful of the most priceless sauterne in America—only a few cases of it left—without ever stopping to taste it, right between bites of country sausage!"

"I've decided, after all, to let you have the first look-in on that Pine Lake proposition," said Wallingford to Charles Algernon that night, as they sat over a bottle of champagne in a retired little alcove. The first of the month I'll be back this way and we'll go down and see it; and when we get there you'll lay eyes on some beauties that—well, just you wait and see!" and he winked most meaningly.

"I'll be delighted, I'm sure," returned Charles Algernon, squirming with pleasure in the anticipated treat. "Not until the first, you say?"

"Well, along about then," replied Wallingford,

"Thank you, thank you!" exclaimed Charles Algernon fervently, almost grasping Wallingford's hand in his enthusiasm.

"There is one thing, though," continued Wallingford. "If I hold off all offers on this for you, I've got to have your promise not to consider any other propositions until you see this."

"Why, certainly," readily promised Swivel. "That's only fair. Regular stunners, you say."

J. Rufus Wallingford's second visit to Pine Lake was at the head of a much larger party than the first one, for at the nearest big town he had stopped to hire a small army of carpenters, painters, paper-hangers, and gardeners.

"I got your telegram, and I've got my things packed," wheezed Mr. Ruggs; but I reckon now I'll have to stay and tend to all these people. You say there's three or four more stage loads coming? Gosh!"

"Don't worry about them," said Wallingford cheerily. "You can get right off the lot as soon as you please. Here's five hundred in cash and the balance in a New York draft."

"Gosh!" said Rugga. "This is life, Mr. Wallingford. Several years of it, maybe.

"Let's get that deed fixed up," replied Wallingford. "I suppose we need a lawyer."

"I've got one right on the place," Mr. Ruggs explained, with some pride. "He's one of my boarders."

The lawyer, who proved to be a living shadow, lost no time in preparing the necessary papers, and then Bill Ruggs went down to the station with his decrepit driver. The boarders were the next trouble. They wouldn't go. Very well; arrives Onion Jones the next day, and after a session with Blackie behind closed doors and a little clever manipulation with a paint brush, Onion appeared on the porch with spots all over his face and his bald head and fainted. Smallpox! The boarders left, in a hurry.

Immediately things began to happen. Wallingford called the head carpenter to him. "Patch up that roof," he ordered. "Prop up that old barn so it will stand for one month and make it look like new. Splice that picket fence and build a million miles of wide porches around the house. Then I'll tell you what next to do." To the head painter he said, "Just start in and and paint, that's all." To the head gardener, "Here's the place, fill up the lake and get busy."

"Now comes the hardest part of it," said Wallingford at this point. "You stay here, Blackie, and doll the place all up like an old man's bride, while I run in to Chicago and pick out a herd of Class A summer-resorters for our friend Charles Algernon. I'm sure going to give that pin-head a run for his money."

The job of "picking" summer boarders by offering free vacations to manicurists and the like was not so easy as Wallingford had anticipated, and at the end of the third day he was almost discouraged. He was standing at the bar of his hotel, musing in more or less dejection over his poor luck, when a familiar but long-unheard voice hailed him, and he turned to find a good comedian of his Broadway acquaintance at his elbow.

"Hello, Guyer!" said Wallingford heartily. "You're just in time to save me from going the toboggan route; only a drunkard drinks alone, you know. What will you have, Danny?"

"A sandwich and a glass of milk, with a piece of pie and a demi-tasse to follow," said Mr. Guyer in sepulchurral tones.

"The company accepts the engagement with tears of gratitude, Wallingford. It's the heart interest that gets us. When do we start?"

"In the morning. I'll give you about three days to rehearse, and then I'll bring on the hick."

"Rehearse? Oh, of course."

"I thought you'd see the pretty white light. The thing must be properly cast, you know; old Ticker Tape, of La Salle Street, worth a million million dollars; old Persimmon Pucker, of Wall Street, worth a billion billion, then some just common, every-day rich people, marriageable sons, marriageable daughters, flirty wives with rich husbands in the city, flirty daughters with blind aunts, and all the rest of it."

"Say no more," said Mr. Guyer, smiling fondly as he caught the spirit of the thing. We'll write the piece in rehearsal, and I'll guarantee it to be a scream."

When Mr. Wallingford brought Mr. Swivel to Pine Lake, by way of Chicago, two beautiful women boarded the train at the city by the stock-yards, and were no sooner ensconced in their seats than Wallingford hailed them with great joy.

"My dear Mrs. Torrence!" he exclaimed to the slightly older of the two. "What a delightful surprise to find you here, for it's two weeks too early to hope that you are bound for Pine Lake. Howdy, Miss Torrence; married yet?"

"Not yet," laughed Miss Torrence.

"Maybe we can still get rid of her, if you have the usual assortment of nice young men at Pine Lake. You may suppose that we're going to your delightful place just for that purpose, if you like," laughed her mother, stealing an instantly suppressed inquiring glance at Mr. Swivel. Immediately Wallingford presented that flattered young man to the ladies.

Never in all his experience had Mr. Charles Algernon met with so warm and cordial a reception from ladies of such evident breeding, taste and wealth. At last, through Wallingford, that jovial prince of good fellows, he was coming into his own, and all the way to Pine Lake he monopolised the attention of the wife and daughter of a supposititious Rodley Torrence, supposititious traction magnate. Finally they reached Pine Lake, and the ladies hurried away to dress for the next act.

They were scarcely missed. Across the lawn, down flower-bordered walks and beneath bending boughs, sauntered bright-eyed girls in ravishing garments, who cast shy but languishing glances at the handsome stranger. Upon the rails of the wide porch hung draperies of rich, warm coloring, and in the hammocks lolled yet other startling beauties, who, though remarkably careless as to ankles, made a succession of living-beauty tableaux which were wonderfully appealing to Mr. Swivel.

All this was in the very first afternoon. In the evening there were ravishing gowns and ivory shoulders and languorous music, and, about an hour after dinner, Charles Algernon found himself blissfully settled down in a dark corner of the porch for a

"Gentlemen, my wife." For once the usually self-possessed Mr. Wallingford was flustered.

"Sure," said Wallingford. "Won't you add a pickle?"

"Couldn't do it in justice to the balance of the company," returned Guyer.

"What's the matter with the rest of the company?" asked Wallingford. "You haven't had a flivver, or you wouldn't be looking so prosperous."

"A mere tick of the trade, my boy," said the other. "We have clothes, and to spare, both the men and the women of us; but food: Ah, food!"

The divine fire of inspiration hit Wallingford at about that moment. "Forty of you, did you say?" he demanded. "What were the costumes you attached?"

"Modern. Swell afternoon gowns for the women; street and evening clothes for the men, including flannels and outfits for a country-club scene.

"Great!" said Wallingford, with eager enthusiasm. "Tonight, Guyer, we have food without fear. In the morning we lift the mortgage at your hotel, and all go on a picnic. How would the members of your company like to take a week's rest at a nice country resort, at my expense, wear those swell costumes all over the lot, and then hike back to Broadway, still at my—"

"Don't say any more just yet," pleaded Mr. Guyer, holding forth his hand, palm outward. "I couldn't stand it. Where is the family you want murdered. Let's get to work."

"The family consists of one stage-door Johnnie—one of the kind who thinks that if he can't get any of the women of the company to notice him, it's because each one is afraid she'll be found out by the other man in the case."

"Oh! One of those!" said Mr. Guyer, with infinite contempt. "Consider him already assassinated. How do you want it done—knife or gun?"

"Slow poison and horrible agony—by taking his money. I want to sell him a summer-resort. The resort is all ready, primped up clear to the last dab of rouge, but I want to decorate it with a lot of classy guests; and then—"

Suddenly an ominous sound smote upon Wallingford's ears. Back in the parlor they were singing, in full chorus, "Give My Regards to Broadway," and there was a sob in the voices! "Great Scott!" said Wallingford. "If that bunch of actors and actresses are getting mushy about Broadway, it's all over." He hurried back to the house and had the music switched, but the incident had made him thoughtful, and he called Mr. Swivel one side.

"Well, old top; how goes it?" he asked.

"Great!" said Mr. Swivel. "Great! Never had such a night in my life."

"How would you like to own the place?"

The eyes of Mr. Swivel narrowed a trifle. "Well," he said, "I might dicker with you."

"What do you say about going to Chicago in the morning, then?" suggested Wallingford.

Again Swivel hesitated a moment. "Give me just an hour to think it over," he said.

Wallingford, of course, gave him the hour, but he looked in anxiety after Mr. Swivel as that young man walked back to the hammock where he had left Miss Van Vohlen. It was after the concert was over that Mr. Swivel came to Wallingford, all smiles, and full even of eagerness.

"Sure thing," said he. "We'll take that Chicago trip.

Before Wallingford started in the morning, he paid a visit to the sleeping apartment of Mr. Danny Guyer.

"Well, old boy," said he; "how does this look to you?" and before the half-opened eyes of the eminent comedian he held a large roll of real money.

"Count it over," invited Wallingford. "It will do you good. It represents extra fare train transportation, berths, meals, and a liberal allowance for incidentals from here to the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street, for the entire cast of "Stinging a Live One, or Staging the Lone Pine Tree!"

"Three cheers!" said Mr. Guyer, throwing off the covers. "I suppose we are to get an early train."

"It's us," replied Wallingford, with a chuckle and a grandiloquent wave of the hand. "The hick and Blackie Daw and yours truly are on our way, for the gold-extracting process from the raw ore begins today in Chicago. So, good-bye, old boy. Bid good-bye to the rest of the company for us, and thank them; and good luck to everyone of them."

When Wallingford hurried out to the stage, he found unexpected addition to the party, in the person of smiling and confident Miss Tottie Van Vorhies.

"I have to meet papa in Chicago," she sweetly observed to Wallingford, "and I am certainly the lucky one to find that I am going to have such good company. I know you boys will all be nice to me."

Wallingford and Daw exchanged glances of wonder, and then, as by common impulse, they cast black looks at the back of the neck of Charles Algernon Swivel.

"Why, say, Blackie," declared Wallingford, when they had a moment together in the smoking compartment; "if this unbaked lob tries to put over any trick or hold back any of his own coin, I'll have him pinched. They have strenuous laws in Chicago against rubes having money."

"I told you about it," growled Blackie. "The only way to handle a mut like this is to show him the bait, then take it right away from him until he puts up for it. Even a born idiot like Swivel, if you leave him alone with a gold brick, is going to finally tumble that it would be a cute idea to spill acid on it. Well, that's what happened. You allowed Charles Algernon to stay over two days, and he tested the brick."

"You're the original I-told-you-so-kid, all right," declared Wallingford; "but like all the rest of them, you tell what's the matter and don't tell what to do. Go away, and let me think."

Before the trip was over, however, he concluded that he had been doing Mr. Swivel an injustice, for Mr. Swivel paid no more attention to Miss Tottie than did either of the others. He was cheerful and chatty all the way, and corroborated his intention to purchase Pine Lake, by mentioning certain trifling improvements he meant to make in that pleasant health-resort. When they arrived in Chicago he bade Miss Tottie a pleasant good-bye, and went with the other men to their hotel. He even permitted them to go to his bank with him after lunch, and see the transfer of his account. As they came out of the bank, however, Charles Algernon stopped on the steps and bade them good-bye.

"You'll have to excuse me for about an hour," he said.

"I have a little private business to look after."

"But we were to have our talk immediately after you had been to the bank," protested Wallingford.

"I shall be compelled to excuse myself for one hour," insisted Mr. Swivel.

"But I want to get out of town this afternoon," declared Wallingford.

"I shall meet you at the hotel at two o'clock," stated Mr. Swivel, with surprising coolness, and, walking down the steps, he hailed a taxi and drove away.

"Follow him, Jimmy!" exclaimed Blackie, clutching Wallingford's arm. "Follow him!" There goes fifty thousand dollars!"

"There goes the money, all right; or part of it," agreed Wallingford; "but there's no use to follow him, for he is coming back."

"I'll bet you a quart of the special."

"We'll go right back to the hotel and order it, then; because you lose."

At precisely two o'clock there was a ring at the bell of Wallingford's apartments. Mr. Swivel was below to see Mr. Wallingford.

"Send him right up," said Wallingford, and he passed Blackie the wine check to sign.

When Wallingford opened the door in response to a present knock, however, Mr. Swivel was not alone. With him was Miss Tottie Van Vorhies!

"Permit me, gentlemen, to introduce Mrs. Swivel," said Charles Algernon, beaming with joy.

"Swivel, Swivel!" chided Wallingford, shaking a reproving finger at the happy bridegroom. "I never thought you'd turn out to be a mere fortune hunter!" and he cast a malignant glance at Miss Tottie.

For once the usually self-possessed Mr. Wallingford was flustered.

"You needn't spring any of that guff," said Mrs. Swivel sweetly, taking possession of the best chair in the room, and spreading her skirts picturesquely. "Charlie knows all about it. He knows that I'm a show girl, and he married me under my own name, which was Molly Smith. Also Charles knows all about the plant you put up there at Pine Lake for his special benefit."

"Exactly," agreed Charles Algernon, speaking in a surprisingly brisk tone. Now, let's get down to business. We're here to take Pine Lake off your hands. Now, how much do you want?"

Wallingford bent smooth brows upon Mr. and Mrs. Charles Algernon. "Fifty thousand dollars," said he.

Miss Tottie laughed with keen enjoyment. "You got to cancel on that," she said. "I know you figured on a large chunk of Charlie's pile, but he's taken some brains into the company since then."

Charlie smiled delightedly, as if his wife had paid him a compliment, and he patted her upon a plump shoulder.

"So I see," said Wallingford slowly. "Well, how much does the brains of the company propose to pay for Pine Lake?" and he looked pleasantly at the bride.

"Just cost," Charles Algernon told him, the wrinkles around his eyes becoming hard and sharp. "You paid five thousand for the place, and you put in about five thousand on improvements.

"So you are actually willing to pay me ten thousand dollars for it?" returned Wallingford, fingering his big chin thoughtfully.

"Ten thousand dollars. Not a cent more," chirruped Mrs. Charles Algernon.

"All right then," said Wallingford, with sudden determination; I don't care to sell. I'm no piker, and I can pocket my losses like a good loser."

Watching carefully, he caught the slightest trace of a startled look passing between Mr. and Mrs. Swivel, and saw that he could sit tight.

"We—we—might increase that offer a little bit," suggested Charles Algernon after a painful wait.

"All right," said Mrs. Swivel. "We'll make it fifteen thousand, and that is the top figure."

Wallingford looked down upon her smiling confidence. Now he was sure of his ground. "Will you please tell me," he demanded, "Why you are willing to pay fifteen thousand dollars for sixty acres of land that won't grow pumpkins, and a house that isn't worth burning up? You know it's no summer resort."

"Well, you see, I think you're wrong about it being no good as a summer resort," explained Mr. Swivel, with a glibness which did not deceive Wallingford. I've always wanted to go into the summer-resort business, and I think we can advertise this place in a way that will get us good trade."

Both of them smiled at Wallingford brightly and ingeniously.

"You'll pay me forty thousand dollars for Pine Lake," observed that gentleman, smiling in return.

Mrs. Swivel laughed uproariously.

"You'll pay me forty thousand dollars cash for the place," repeated Wallingford. "You won't? Fifteen thousand is the limit? All right, Swivel, I'll make you a proposition. I'll run down to Pine Lake and look it over. If I decide after that not to keep the place, I'll meet you here at this hour day after to-morrow and take your offer of fifteen thousand."

He went to the telephone; he inquired for the next train to Pine Lake; he ordered two tickets purchased for that place; he ordered his bill sent up, a valet to pack his luggage, and a porter to remove it. It was not until the porter came for the luggage that the Swivels gave in.

"Can you give us a clear deed?" asked Charles Algernon.

"There'll be no trouble about that," Wallingford politely assured him, "for I have a lawyer right downstairs."

"So have we," promptly returned Charles Algernon.

When everything had been arranged in ship shape, when Wallingford had put the check in his pocket and Mr. Swivel had put the deed in his, the triumphant moment arrived for which the bridal couple had been waiting.

"Now, you big grafter, I'll tell you the truth," said Swivel, every little wrinkle in his oily face twisting itself into knots. "You've just sold a peach at a lemon price. That peculiar smell at Pine Lake is oil. That land down there is just dripping with it. My father was an oil prospector, and I was raised in the business. When I was a kid I was dragged from one oil-field to the other, and can smell crude oil further off than a buzzard can see a dead horse. I was scared stiff you'd get on to it before we got away from there."

"Go to it, Swivel," replied Wallingford urbanely. "Hope you make a fortune. I had my education in the mining business, from oil to diamonds, years ago, and I want to say to you, right now, that there isn't a smell in the universe that I wouldn't sell for thirty thousand dollars' profit.

Later, when the smoke of battle had cleared away, Blackie Daw was thoughtful and silent. "I don't know about that Pine Lake deal, J. Rufus," he said. "It's at least an even break that we got the wrong end of it."

"We got all that Mr. Swivel stole from us," immediately spake up Fannie Warden, always ready to defend Wallingford. The Wardens were on the spot within twenty minutes after the Swivels had gone.

"There's not much over for the expense fund," considered Violet.

"That isn't the point," returned Blackie, unconsciously patting Violet's hand. We wanted to sting Charles for reasons of our own."

Wallingford, resting back in a big easy chair, paused in the operation of lighting a long, black cigar, to close his eyes and chuckle. "Suppose you had to take the entire Beaumont oilfield, and Molly Smith with it for life?" he suggested. "No, Blackie; whatever turns up, we stung him!"

"But suppose they do find an oil-gusher?" protested Blackie, much worried about it.

"It can't gush much," asserted Wallingford, crossing his legs in perfect satisfaction. "Why, you raw apprentice, don't you know I invented that smell? Up in that soggy, wet field, back of the woods, I poured two barrels of crude petroleum."

(Another Adventure Next Week.)