Chester George Randolph

Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford

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Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford / A Cheerful Account of the Rise and Fall of an American Business Buccaneer:

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Chester George Randolph Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford / A Cheerful Account of the Rise and Fall of an American Business Buccaneer

CHAPTER I
IN WHICH J. RUFUS WALLINGFORD CONCEIVES A BRILLIANT INVENTION

The mud was black and oily where it spread thinly at the edges of the asphalt, and wherever it touched it left a stain; it was upon the leather of every pedestrian, even the most fastidious, and it bordered with almost laughable conspicuousness the higher marking of yellow clay upon the heavy shoes of David Jasper, where he stood at the curb in front of the big hotel with his young friend, Edward Lamb. Absorbed in "lodge," talk, neither of the oddly assorted cronies cared much for drizzle overhead or mire underfoot; but a splash of black mud in the face must necessarily

command some attention. This surprise came suddenly to both from the circumstance of a cab having dashed up just beside them. Their resentment, bubbling hot for a moment, was quickly chilled, however, as the cab door opened and out of it stepped one of those impressive beings for whom the best things of this world have been especially made and provided. He was a large gentleman, a suave gentleman, a gentleman whose clothes not merely fit him but distinguished him, a gentleman of rare good living, even though one of the sort whose faces turn red when they eat; and the dignity of his worldly prosperousness surrounded him like a blessed aura. Without a glance at the two plain citizens who stood mopping the mud from their faces, he strode majestically into the hotel, leaving Mr. David Jasper and Mr. Edward Lamb out in the rain.

The clerk kowtowed to the signature, though he had never seen nor heard of it before – "J. Rufus Wallingford, Boston." His eyes, however, had noted a few things: traveling suit, scarf pin, watch guard, ring, hatbox, suit case, bag, all expensive and of the finest grade.

"Sitting room and bedroom; outside!" directed Mr. Wallingford. "And the bathroom must have a large tub."

The clerk ventured a comprehending smile as he noted the bulk before him.

"Certainly, Mr. Wallingford. Boy, key for 44-A. Anything else, Mr. Wallingford?"

"Send up a waiter and a valet."

Once more the clerk permitted himself a slight smile, but this time it was as his large guest turned away. He had not the slightest doubt that Mr. Wallingford's bill would be princely, he was positive that it would be paid; but a vague wonder had crossed his mind as to who would regrettingly pay it. His penetration was excellent, for at this very moment the new arrival's entire capitalized worth was represented by the less than one hundred dollars he carried in his pocket, nor had Mr. Wallingford the slightest idea of where he was to get more. This latter circumstance did not distress him, however; he knew that there was still plenty of money in the world and that none of it was soldered on, and a reflection of this comfortable philosophy was in his whole bearing. As he strode in pomp across the lobby, a score of bellboys, with a carefully trained scent for tips, envied the cheerfully grinning servitor who followed him to the elevator with his luggage.

Just as the bellboy was inserting the key in the lock of 44-A, a tall, slightly built man in a glove-fitting black frock suit, a quite ministerial-looking man, indeed, had it not been for the startling effect of his extravagantly curled black mustache and his piercing black eyes, came down the hallway, so abstracted that he had almost passed Mr. Wallingford. The latter, however, had eyes for everything.

"What's the hurry, Blackie?" he inquired affably.

The other wheeled instantly, with the snappy alertness of a man who has grown of habit to hold himself in readiness against

sudden surprises from any quarter.

"Hello, J. Rufus!" he exclaimed, and shook hands. "Boston squeezed dry?"

Mr. Wallingford chuckled with a cumbrous heaving of his shoulders.

"Just threw the rind away," he confessed. "Come in."

Mr. Daw, known as "Blackie" to a small but select circle of gentlemen who make it their business to rescue and put carefully hoarded money back into rapid circulation, dropped moodily into a chair and sat considering his well-manicured finger-nails in glum silence, while his masterful host disposed of the bellboy and the valet.

"Had your dinner?" inquired Mr. Wallingford as he donned the last few garments of a fresh suit.

"Not yet," growled the other. "I've got such a grouch against myself I won't even feed right, for fear I'd enjoy it. On the cheaps for the last day, too."

Mr. Wallingford laughed and shook his head.

"I'm clean myself," he hastened to inform his friend. "If I have a hundred I'm a millionaire, but I'm coming and you're going, and we don't look at that settle-up ceremony the same way. What's the matter?"

"I'm the goat!" responded Blackie moodily. "The original goat! Came clear out here to trim a sucker that looked good by mail, and have swallowed so much of that citric fruit that if I scrape myself my skin spurts lemon juice. Say, do I look like a

come-on?"

"If you only had the shaving-brush goatee, Blackie, I'd try to make you bet on the location of the little pea," gravely responded his friend.

"That's right; rub it in!" exclaimed the disgruntled one. "Massage me with it! Jimmy, if I could take off my legs, I'd kick myself with them from here to Boston and never lose a stroke. And me wise!"

"But where's the fire?" asked J. Rufus, bringing the end of his collar to place with a dexterous jerk.

"This lamb I came out to shear – rot him and burn him and scatter his ashes! Before I went dippy over two letter-heads and a nice round signature, I ordered an extra safety-deposit vault back home and came on to take his bank roll and house and lot, and make him a present of his clothes if he behaved. But not so! *Not*– so! Jimmy, this whole town blew right over from out of the middle of Missouri in the last cyclone. You've got to show everybody, and then turn it over and let 'em see the other side, and I haven't met the man yet that you could separate from a dollar without chloroform and an ax. Let me tell you what to do with that hundred, J. Rufe. Just get on the train and give it to the conductor, and tell him to take you as far ay-way from here as the money will reach!"

Mr. Wallingford settled his cravat tastefully and smiled at himself in the glass.

"I like the place," he observed. "They have tall buildings here,

and I smell soft money. This town will listen to a legitimate business proposition. What?"

"Like the milk-stopper industry?" inquired Mr. Daw, grinning appreciatively. "How is your Boston corporation coming on, anyhow?"

"It has even quit holding the bag," responded the other, "because there isn't anything left of the bag. The last I saw of them, the thin and feeble stockholders were chasing themselves around in circles, so I faded away."

"You're a wonder," complimented the black-haired man with genuine admiration. "You never take a chance, yet get away with everything in sight, and you never leave 'em an opening to put the funny clothes on you."

"I deal in nothing but straight commercial propositions that are strictly within the pale of the law," said J. Rufus without a wink; "and even at that they can't say I took anything away from Boston."

"Don't blame Boston. You never cleaned up a cent less than five thousand a month while you were there, and if you spent it, that was your lookout."

"I had to live."

"So do the suckers," sagely observed Mr. Daw, "but they manage it on four cents' worth of prunes a day, and save up their money for good people. How is Mrs. Wallingford?"

"All others are base imitations," boasted the large man, pausing to critically consider the flavor of his champagne. "Just

now, Fanny's in New York, eating up her diamonds. She was swallowing the last of the brooch when I left her, and this morning she was to begin on the necklace. That ought to last her quite some days, and by that time J. Rufus expects to be on earth again."

A waiter came to the door with a menu card, and Mr. Wallingford ordered, to be ready to serve in three quarters of an hour, at a choice table near the music, a dinner for two that would gladden the heart of any tip-hunter.

"How soon are you going back to Boston, Blackie?"

"To-night!" snapped the other. "I was going to take a train that makes it in nineteen hours, but I found there is one that makes it in eighteen and a half, so I'm going to take that; and when I get back where the police are satisfied with half, I'm not going out after the emerald paper any more. I'm going to make them bring it to me. It's always the best way. I never went after money yet that they didn't ask me why I wanted it."

The large man laughed with his eyes closed.

"Honestly, Blackie, you ought to go into legitimate business enterprises. That's the only game. You can get anybody to buy stock when you make them print it themselves, if you'll only bait up with some little staple article that people use and throw away every day, like ice-cream pails, or corks, or cigar bands, or – or – or carpet tacks." Having sought about the room for this last illustration, Mr. Wallingford became suddenly inspired, and, arising, went over to the edge of the carpet, where he gazed down

meditatively for a moment. "Now, look at this, for instance!" he said with final enthusiasm. "See this swell red carpet fastened down with rusty tacks? There's the chance. Suppose those tacks were covered with red cloth to match the carpet. Blackie, that's my next invention."

"Maybe there are covered carpet tacks," observed his friend, with but languid interest.

"What do I care?" rejoined Mr. Wallingford. "A man can always get a patent, and that's all I need, even if it's one you can throw a cat through. The company can fight the patent after I'm out of it. You wouldn't expect me to fasten myself down to the grease-covered details of an actual manufacturing business, would you?"

"Not any!" rejoined the dark one emphatically. "You're all right, J. Rufus. I'd go into your business myself if I wasn't honest. But, on the level, what do you expect to do here?"

"Organize the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company. I'll begin to-morrow morning. Give me the list you couldn't use."

"Don't get in bad from the start," warned Mr. Daw. "Tackle fresh ones. The particular piece of Roquefort, though, that fooled me into a Pullman compartment and kept me grinning like a drunken hyena all the way here, was a pinhead by the name of Edward Lamb. When Eddy fell for an inquiry about Billion Strike gold stock, he wrote on the firm's stationery, all printed in seventeen colors and embossed so it made holes in the envelopes when the cancellation stamp came down. From the tone of

Eddy's letter I thought he was about ready to mortgage father's business to buy Billion Strike, and I came on to help him do it. Honest, J. Rufus, wouldn't it strike you that Lamb was a good name? Couldn't you hear it bleat?"

Mr. Wallingford shook silently, the more so that there was no answering gleam of mirth in Mr. Daw's savage visage.

"Say, do you know what I found when I got here?" went on Blackie still more ferociously. "I found he was a piker bookkeeper, but with five thousand dollars that he'd wrenched out of his own pay envelope, a pinch at a clip; and every time he takes a dollar out of his pocket his fingers creak. His whole push is like him, too, but I never got any further than Eddy. He's not merely Johnny Wise – he's the whole Wise family, and it's only due to my Christian bringing up that I didn't swat him with a brick during our last little chatter when I saw it all fade away. Do you know what he wanted me to do? He wanted me to prove to him that there actually was a Billion Strike mine, and that gold had been found in it!"

Mr. Wallingford had ceased to laugh. He was soberly contemplating.

"Your Lamb is my mutton," he finally concluded, pressing his finger tips together. "He'll listen to a legitimate business proposition."

"Don't make me fuss with you, J. Rufus," admonished Mr. Daw. "Remember, I'm going away to-night," and he arose.

Mr. Wallingford arose with him. "By the way, of course I'll

want to refer to you; how many addresses have you besides the Billion Strike? A mention of that would probably get me arrested."

"Four: the Mexican and Rio Grande Rubber Company, Tremont Building; the St. John's Blood Orange Plantation Company, 643 Third Street; the Los Pocos Lead Development Company, 868 Schuttle Avenue, and the Sierra Cinnabar Grant, Schuttle Square, all of which addresses will reach me at my little old desk-room corner in 1126 Tremont Building, Third and Schuttle Avenues; and I'll answer letters of inquiry on four different letter-heads. If you need more I'll post Billy Riggs over in the Cloud Block and fix it for another four or five."

"I'll write Billy a letter myself," observed J. Rufus. "I'll need all the references I can get when I come to organize the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company."

"Quit kidding," retorted Mr. Daw.

"It's on the level," insisted J. Rufus seriously. "Let's go down to dinner."

CHAPTER II
WHEREIN EDWARD LAMB BEHOLDS THE AMAZING PROFITS OF THE CARPET-TACK INDUSTRY

There were twenty-four applicants for the position before Edward Lamb appeared, the second day after the initial insertion of the advertisement which had been designed to meet his eye alone. David Jasper, who read his paper advertisements and all, in order to get the full worth of his money out of it, telephoned to his friend Edward about the glittering chance.

Yes, Mr. Wallingford was in his suite. Would the gentleman give his name? Mr. Lamb produced a card, printed in careful imitation of engraving, and it gained him admission to the august presence, where he created some surprise by a sudden burst of laughter.

"Ex-cuse me!" he exclaimed. "But you're the man that splashed mud on me the other night!"

When the circumstance was related, Mr. Wallingford laughed with great gusto and shook hands for the second time with his visitor. The incident helped them to get upon a most cordial footing at once. It did not occur to either of them, at the time,

how appropriate it was that Mr. Wallingford should splash mud upon Mr. Lamb at their very first meeting.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Lamb?" inquired the large man.

"You advertised – " began the caller.

"Oh, you came about that position," deprecated Mr. Wallingford, with a nicely shaded tone of courteous disappointment in his voice. "I am afraid that I am already fairly well suited, although I have made no final choice as yet. What are your qualifications?"

"There will be no trouble about that," returned Mr. Lamb, straightening visibly. "I can satisfy anybody." And Mr. Wallingford had the keynote for which he was seeking.

He knew at once that Mr. Lamb prided himself upon his independence, upon his local standing, upon his efficiency, upon his business astuteness. The observer had also the experience of Mr. Daw to guide him, and, moreover, better than all, here was Mr. Lamb himself. He was a broad-shouldered young man, who stood well upon his two feet; he dressed with a proper and decent pride in his prosperity, and wore looped upon his vest a watch chain that by its very weight bespoke the wearer's solid worth. The young man was an open book, whereof the pages were embossed in large type.

"Now you're talking like the right man," said the prospective employer. "Sit down. You'll understand, Mr. Lamb, that my question was only a natural one, for I am quite particular about this position, which is the most important one I have to fill. Our

business is to be a large one. We are to conduct an immense plant in this city, and I want the office work organized with a thorough system from the beginning. The duties, consequently, would begin at once. The man who would become secretary of the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company, would need to know all about the concern from its very inception, and until I have secured that exact man I shall take no steps toward organization."

Word by word, Mr. Wallingford watched the face of Edward Lamb and could see that he was succumbing to the mental chloroform. However, a man who at thirty has accumulated five thousand is not apt to be numbed without struggling.

"Before we go any further," interposed the patient, with deep, deep shrewdness, "it must be understood that I have no money to invest."

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Wallingford. "I stated that in my advertisement. To become secretary it will be necessary to hold one share of stock, but that share I shall give to the right applicant. I do not care for him to have any investment in the company. What I want is the services of the best man in the city, and to that end I advertised for one who had been an expert bookkeeper and who knew all the office routine of conducting a large business, agreeing to start such a man with a salary of two hundred dollars a month. That advertisement stated in full all that I expect from the one who secures this position – his expert services. I may say that you are only the second candidate who has had the outward appearance of being able to fulfill

the requirements. Actual efficiency would naturally have to be shown."

Mr. Wallingford was now quite coldly insistent. The proper sleep had been induced.

"For fifteen years," Mr. Lamb now hastened to advise him, "I have been employed by the A. J. Dorman Manufacturing Company, and can refer you to them for everything you wish to know. I can give you other references as to reliability if you like."

Mr. Wallingford was instant warmth.

"The A. J. Dorman Company, indeed!" he exclaimed, though he had never heard of that concern. "The name itself is guarantee enough, at least to defer such matters for a bit while I show you the industry that is to be built in your city." From his dresser Mr. Wallingford produced a handful of tacks, the head of each one covered with a bit of different-colored bright cloth. "You have only to look at these," he continued, holding them forth, and with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand turning one red-topped tack about in front of Mr. Lamb's eyes, "to appreciate to the full what a wonderful business certainty I am preparing to launch. Just hold these tacks a moment," and he turned the handful into Mr. Lamb's outstretched palm. "Now come over to the edge of this carpet. I have selected here a tack which matches this floor covering. You see those rusty heads? Imagine the difference if they were replaced by this!"

Mr. Lamb looked and saw, but it was necessary to display his business acumen.

"Looks like a good thing," he commented; "but the cost?"

"The cost is comparatively nothing over the old steel tack, although we can easily get ten cents a paper as against five for the common ones, leaving us a much wider margin of profit than the manufacturers of the straight tack obtain. There is no family so poor that will use the old, rusty tinned or bronze tack when these are made known to the trade, and you can easily compute for yourself how many millions of packages are used every year. Why, the Eureka Tack Company, which practically has a monopoly of the carpet-tack business, operates a manufacturing plant covering twenty solid acres, and a loaded freight car leaves its warehouse doors on an average of every seven minutes! You cannot buy a share of stock in the Eureka Carpet Tack Company at any price. It yields sixteen per cent. a year dividends, with over eighteen million dollars of undivided surplus – and that business was built on carpet tacks alone! Why, sir, if we wished to do so, within two months after we had started our factory wheels rolling we could sell out to the Eureka Company for two million dollars; or a profit of more than one thousand per cent. on the investment that we are to make."

For once Mr. Lamb was overwhelmed. Only three days before he had been beset by Mr. Daw, but that gentleman had grown hoarsely eloquent over vast possessions that were beyond thousands of miles of circumambient space, across vast barren reaches where desert sands sent up constant streams of superheated atmosphere, with the "hot air" distinctly to be traced

throughout the conversation; but here was something to be seen and felt. The points of the very tacks that he held pricked his palm, and his eyes were still glued upon the red-topped one which Mr. Wallingford held hypnotically before him.

"Who composes your company?" he managed to ask.

"So far, I do," replied Mr. Wallingford with quiet pride. "I have not organized the company. That is a minor detail. When I go searching for capital I shall know where to secure it. I have chosen this city on account of its manufacturing facilities, and for its splendid geographical position as a distributing center."

"The stock is not yet placed, then," mused aloud Mr. Lamb, upon whose vision there already glowed a pleasing picture of immense profits.

Why, the thing was startling in the magnificence of its opportunity! Simple little trick, millions and millions used, better than anything of its kind ever put upon the market, cheaply manufactured, it was marked for success from the first!

"Stock placed? Not at all," stated Mr. Wallingford. "My plans only contemplate incorporating for a quarter of a million, and I mean to avoid small stockholders. I shall try to divide the stock into, say, about ten holdings of twenty-five thousand each."

Mr. Lamb was visibly disappointed.

"It looks like a fine thing," he declared with a note of regret.

"Fine? My boy, I'm not much older than you are, but I have been connected with several large enterprises in Boston and elsewhere – if any one were to care to inquire about me

they might drop a line to the Mexican and Rio Grande Rubber Company, the St. John's Blood Orange Plantation Company, the Los Pocos Lead Development Company, the Sierra Cinnabar Grant, and a number of others, the addresses of which I could supply – and I never have seen anything so good as this. I am staking my entire business judgment upon it, and, of course, I shall retain the majority of stock myself, inasmuch as the article is my invention."

This being the psychological moment, Mr. Wallingford put forth his hand and had Mr. Lamb dump the tacks back into the large palm that had at first held them. He left them open to view, however, and presently Mr. Lamb picked out one of them for examination. This particular tack was of an exquisite apple-green color, the covering for which had been clipped from one of Mr. Wallingford's own expensive ties, glued to its place and carefully trimmed by Mr. Wallingford's own hands. Mr. Lamb took it to the window for closer admiration, and the promoter, left to himself for a moment, stood before the glass to mop his face and head and neck. He had been working until he had perspired; but, looking into the glass at Mr. Lamb's rigid back, he perceived that the work was well done. Mr. Lamb was profoundly convinced that the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company was an entity to be respected; nay, to be revered! Mr. Lamb could already see the smoke belching from the tall chimneys of its factory, the bright lights gleaming out from its myriad windows where it was working overtime, the thousands of workmen streaming in at its

broad gates, the loaded freight cars leaving every seven minutes!

"You're not going home to dinner, are you, Mr. Lamb?" asked Mr. Wallingford suddenly. "I owe you one for the splash, you know."

"Why – I'm expected home."

"Telephone them you're not coming."

"We – we haven't a telephone in the house."

"Telephone to the nearest drug store and send a messenger over."

Mr. Lamb looked down at himself. He was always neatly dressed, but he did not feel equal to the glitter of the big dining room downstairs.

"I am not – cleaned up," he objected.

"Nonsense! However, as far as that goes, we'll have 'em bring a table right here." And, taking the matter into his own hands, Mr. Wallingford telephoned for a waiter.

From that moment Mr. Lamb strove not to show his wonder at the heights to which human comfort and luxury can attain, but it was a vain attempt; for from the time the two uniformed attendants brought in the table with its snowy cloth and began to place upon it the shining silver and cut-glass service, with the centerpiece of red carnations, he began to grasp at a new world – and it was about this time that he wished he had on his best black suit. In the bathroom Mr. Wallingford came upon him as he held his collar ruefully in his hand, and needed no explanation.

"I say, old man, we can't keep 'em clean, can we? We'll fix

that."

The bellboys were anxious to answer summons from 44-A by this time. Mr. Wallingford never used money in a hotel except for tips. It was scarcely a minute until a boy had that collar, with instructions to get another just like it.

"How are the cuffs? Attached, old man? All right. What size shirt do you wear?"

Mr. Lamb gave up. He was now past the point of protest. He told Mr. Wallingford the number of his shirt. In five minutes more he was completely outfitted with clean linen, and when, washed and refreshed and spotless as to high lights, he stepped forth into what was now a perfectly appointed private dining room, he felt himself gradually rising to Mr. Wallingford's own height and able to be supercilious to the waiters, under whose gaze, while his collar was soiled, he had quailed.

It was said by those who made a business of dining that Mr. Wallingford could order a dinner worth while, except for the one trifling fault of over-plenty; but then, Mr. Wallingford himself was a large man, and it took much food and drink to sustain that largeness. Whatever other critics might have said, Mr. Lamb could have but one opinion as they sipped their champagne, toward the end of the meal, and this opinion was that Mr. Wallingford was a genius, a prince of entertainers, a master of finance, a gentleman to be imitated in every particular, and that a man should especially blush to question his financial standing or integrity.

They went to the theater after dinner – box seats – and after the theater they had a little cold snack, amounting to about eleven dollars, including wine and cigars. Moreover, Mr. Lamb had gratefully accepted the secretaryship of the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company.

CHAPTER III
MR. WALLINGFORD'S LAMB IS CAREFULLY INSPIRED WITH A FLASH OF CREATIVE GENIUS

The next morning, in spite of protests and warnings from his employer, Mr. Lamb resigned his position with the A. J. Dorman Company, and, jumping on a car, rode out to the far North Side, where he called at David Jasper's tumble-down frame house. On either side of this were three neat houses that David had built, one at a time, on land he had bought for a song in his younger days; but these were for renting purposes. David lived in the old one for exactly the same reason that he wore the frayed overcoat and slouch hat that had done him duty for many years – they made him as comfortable as new ones, and appearances fed no one nor kept anybody warm.

Wholesome Ella Jasper met the caller at the door with an inward cordiality entirely out of proportion to even a close friend of the family, but her greeting was commonplaceness itself.

"Father's just over to Kriegler's, getting his glass of beer and his lunch," she observed as he shook hands warmly with her. Sometimes she wished that he were not quite so meaninglessly cordial; that he could be either a bit more shy or a bit more bold

in his greeting of her.

"I might have known that," he laughed, looking at his watch. "Half-past ten. I'll hurry right over there," and he was gone.

Ella stood in the doorway and looked after him until he had turned the corner of the house; then she sighed and went back to her baking. A moment later she was singing cheerfully.

It was a sort of morning lunch club of elderly men, all of the one lodge, the one building association, the one manner of life, which met over at Kriegler's, and "Eddy" was compelled to sit with them for nearly an hour of slow beer, while politics, municipal, state and national, was thoroughly thrashed out, before he could get his friend David to himself.

"Well, what brings you out so early, Eddy?" asked the old harness maker on the walk home. "Got a new gold-mining scheme again to put us all in the poorhouse?"

Eddy laughed.

"You don't remember of the kid-glove miner taking anybody's money away, do you?" he demanded. "I guess your old chum Eddy saw through the grindstone that time, eh?"

Mr. Jasper laughed and pounded him a sledge-hammer blow upon the shoulder. It was intended as a mere pat of approval.

"You're all right, Eddy. The only trouble with you is that you don't get married. You'll be an old bachelor before you know it."

"So you've said before," laughed Eddy, "but I can't find the girl that will have me."

"I'll speak to Ella for you."

The younger man laughed lightly again.

"She's my sister," he said gayly. "I wouldn't lose my sister for anything."

David frowned a little and shook his head to himself, but he said nothing more, though the wish was close to his heart. He thought he was tactful.

"No, I've got that new job," went on young Lamb. "Another man from Boston, too. I'm in charge of the complete office organization of a brand-new manufacturing business that's to start up here. Two hundred dollars a month to begin. How's that?"

"Fine," said David. "Enough to marry on. But it sounds too good. Is he a sharper, too?"

"He don't need to be. He seems to have plenty of money, and the article he's going to start manufacturing is so good that it will pay him better to be honest than to be crooked. I don't see where the man could go wrong. Why, look here!" and from his vest pocket he pulled an orange-headed tack. "Carpet tack – covered with any color you want – same color as your carpet so the tacks don't show – only cost a little bit more than the cheap ones. Don't you think it's a good thing?"

David stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and put on his spectacles to examine the trifle critically.

"Is that all he's going to make – just tacks?"

"Just tacks!" exclaimed the younger man. "Why, Dave, the Eureka Tack Company, that has a practical monopoly now of the

tack business in this country, occupies a plant covering twenty acres. It employs thousands of men. It makes sixteen per cent. a year dividends, and has millions of dollars surplus in its treasury – undivided profits! Long freight trains leave its warehouses every day, loaded down with nothing but tacks; and that's all they make – just tacks! Why, think, Dave, of how many millions of tacks are pulled out of carpets and thrown away every spring!"

Mr. Jasper was still examining the tack from head to point with deep interest. Now he drew a long breath and handed it back.

"It's a big thing, even if it is little," he admitted. "Watch out for the man, though. Does he want any money?"

"Not a cent. Why, any money I've got he'd laugh at. I couldn't give him any. He's a rich man, and able to start his own factory. He's going to organize a quarter of a million stock company and keep the majority of the stock himself."

"It might be pretty good stock to buy, if you could get some of it," decided Dave after some slow pondering.

"I wish I could, but there is no chance. What stock he issues is only to be put out in twenty-five-thousand-dollar lots."

Again David Jasper sighed. Sixteen per cent. a year! He was thinking now of what a small margin of profit his houses left him after repairs and taxes were paid.

"It looks to me like you'd struck it rich, my boy. Well, you deserve it. You have worked hard and saved your money. You know, when I got married I had nothing but a set of harness tools

and the girl, and we got along."

"Look here, Dave," laughed his younger friend, whose thirty years were unbelievable in that he still looked so much like a boy, "some of these days I will hunt up a girl and get married, just to make you keep still about it, and if I have any trouble I'll throw it up to you as long as you live. But what do you think of this chance of mine? That's what I came out for – to get your opinion on it."

"Well," drawled Dave, cautious now that the final judgment was to be pronounced, "you want to remember that you're giving up a good job that has got better and better every year and that will most likely get still better every year; but, if you can start at two hundred a month, and are sure you're going to get it, and the man don't want any money, and he isn't a sharper, why, it looks like it was too good to miss."

"That's what I think," rejoined Mr. Lamb enthusiastically. "Well, I must go now. I want to see Mr. Lewis and John Nolting and one or two of the others, and get their advice," and he swung jubilantly on a car.

It was a pleasant figment this, Eddy Lamb's plan of consulting his older friends. He always went to them most scrupulously to get their advice, and afterward did as he pleased. He was too near the soil, however – only one generation away – to make many mistakes in the matter of caution, and so far he had swung his little financial ventures with such great success that he had begun to be conceited.

He found Mr. Wallingford at the hotel, but not waiting

for him by any means. Mr. Wallingford was very busy with correspondence which, since part of it was to his wife and to "Blackie" Daw, was entirely too personal to be trusted to a public stenographer, and he frowningly placed his caller near the window with some new samples of tacks he had made that morning; then, for fifteen minutes, he silently wrote straight on, a course which allowed Mr. Lamb the opportunity to reflect that he was, after all, not entitled to have worn that air of affable familiarity with which he had come into the room. In closing his letter to Mr. Daw the writer added a postscript: "The Lamb is here, and I am now sharpening the shears."

His letters finished and a swift boy called to despatch them, Mr. Wallingford drew a chair soberly to the opposite side of the little table at which he had seated Mr. Lamb. Like every great captain of finance, he turned his back to the window so that his features were in shadow, while the wide-set, open eyes of Mr. Lamb, under their good, broad brow, blinked into the full light of day, which revealed for minute study every wrinkle of expression in his features.

"I forgot to warn you of one thing last night, and I hope you have not talked too much," Mr. Wallingford began with great seriousness. "I reposed such confidence in you that I did not think of caution, a confidence that was justified, for from such inquiries as I have made this morning I am perfectly satisfied with your record – and, by the way, Mr. Lamb, while we are upon this subject, here is a list of references to some of whom I must

insist that you write, for my own satisfaction if not for yours. But now to the main point. The thing I omitted to warn you about is this," and here he sank his voice to a quite confidential tone: "I have not yet applied for letters patent upon this device."

"You have not?" exclaimed Mr. Lamb in surprise. The revelation rather altered his estimate of Mr. Wallingford's great business ability.

"No," confessed the latter. "You can see how much I trust you, to tell you this, because, if you did not know, you would naturally suppose that the patent was at least under way, and I would be in no danger whatever; but I am not yet satisfied on one point, and I want the device perfect before I make application. It has worried me quite a bit. You see, the heads of these tacks are too smooth to retain the cloth. It is very difficult to glue cloth to a smooth metal surface, and if we send out our tacks in such condition that a hammer will pound the cloth tops off, it will ruin our business the first season. I have experimented with every sort of glue I can get, and have pounded thousands of tacks into boards, but the cloth covering still comes off in such large percentage that I am afraid to go ahead. Of course, the thing can be solved – it is merely a question of time – but there is no time now to be lost."

From out the drawer of the table he drew a board into which had been driven some dozens of tacks. From at least twenty-five per cent. of them the cloth covering had been knocked off.

"I see," observed the Lamb, and he examined the board thoughtfully; then he looked out of the window at the passing

traffic in the street.

Mr. Wallingford tilted back his chair and lit a fat, black cigar, the barest twinkle of a smile playing about his eyes. He laid a mate to the cigar in front of the bookkeeper, but the latter paid no attention whatever to it. He was perfectly absorbed, and the twinkles around the large man's eyes deepened.

"I say!" suddenly exclaimed Mr. Lamb, turning from the window to the capitalist and throwing open his coat impatiently, as if to get away from anything that encumbered his free expression, "why wouldn't it do to roughen the heads of the tacks?"

His eyes fairly gleamed with the enthusiasm of creation. He had found the answer to one of those difficult problems like: "What bright genius can supply the missing letters to make up the name of this great American martyr, who was also a President and freed the slaves? L-NC-LN. $100.00 in GOLD to be divided among the four million successful solvers! *Send no money* until afterwards!"

Mr. Wallingford brought down the legs of his chair with a thump.

"By George!" he ejaculated. "I'm glad I found you. You're a man of remarkable resource, and I must be a dumbhead. Here I have been puzzling and puzzling with this problem, and it never occurred to me to roughen those tacks!"

It was now Mr. Lamb's turn to find the fat, black cigar, to light it, to lean back comfortably and to contemplate Mr. Wallingford

with triumphantly smiling eyes. The latter gentleman, however, was in no contemplative mood. He was a man all of energy. He had two bellboys at the door in another minute. One he sent for a quart of wine and the other to the hardware store with a list of necessities, which were breathlessly bought and delivered: a small table-vise, a heavy hammer, two or three patterns of flat files and several papers of tacks. Already in one corner of Mr. Wallingford's room stood a rough serving table which he had been using as a work bench, and Mr. Lamb could not but reflect how everything needed came quickly to this man's bidding, as if he had possessed the magic lamp of Aladdin. He was forced to admire, too, the dexterity with which this genius screwed the small vise to the table, placed in its jaws a row of tacks, and, pressing upon them the flat side of one of the files, pounded this vigorously until, upon lifting it up, the fine, indented pattern was found repeated in the hard heads of the tacks. The master magician went through this operation until he had a whole paper of them with roughened heads; then, glowing with fervid enthusiasm which was quickly communicated to his helper, he set Mr. Lamb to gluing bits of cloth upon these heads, to be trimmed later with delicate scissors, an extra pair of which Mr. Wallingford sent out to get. When the tacks were all set aside to dry the coworkers addressed themselves to the contents of the ice pail; but, as the host was pulling the cork from the bottle, and while both of them were perspiring and glowing with anticipated triumph in the experiment, Mr. Wallingford's face grew suddenly

troubled.

"By George, Eddy" – and Mr. Lamb beamed over this early adoption of his familiar first name – "if this experiment succeeds it makes you part inventor with me!"

Eddy sat down to gasp.

CHAPTER IV
J. RUFUS ACCEPTS A TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION AND BUYS AN AUTOMOBILE

The experiment was a success. Immediately after lunch they secured a fresh pine board and pounded all the tacks into it. Not one top came off. The fact, however, that Mr. Lamb was part inventor, made a vast difference in the proposition.

"Now, we'll talk cold business on this," said Mr. Wallingford. "Of course, the main idea is mine, but the patent must be applied for by both as joint inventors. Under the circumstances, I should say that about one fourth of the value of the patent, which we shall sell to the company for at least sixty thousand dollars, would be pretty good for your few minutes of thought, eh?"

Mr. Lamb, his head swimming, agreed with him thoroughly.

"Very well, then, we'll go right out to a lawyer and have a contract drawn up; then we'll go to a patent attorney and get the thing under way at once. Do you know of a good lawyer?"

Mr. Lamb did. There was a young one, thoroughly good, who belonged to Mr. Lamb's lodge, and they went over to see him. There is no expressing the angle at which Mr. Lamb held his head as he passed out through the lobby of the best hotel in his city.

If his well-to-do townsmen having business there wished to take notice of him, well and good; if they did not, well and good also. He needed nothing of them.

It was with the same shoulder-squared self-gratification that he ushered his affluent friend into Carwin's office. Carwin was in. Unfortunately, he was always in. Practice had not yet begun for him, but Lamb was bringing fortune in his hand and was correspondingly elated. He intended to make Carwin the lawyer for the corporation. Mr. Carwin drew up for them articles of agreement, in which it was set forth, with many a whereas and wherein, that the said party of the first part and the said party of the second part were joint inventors of a herein described new and improved carpet tack, the full and total benefits of which were to accrue to the said parties of the first part and the second part, and to their heirs and assigns forever and ever, in the proportion of one fourth to the said party of the first part and three fourths to the said party of the second part.

Mr. Carwin, as he saw them walk out with the precious agreement, duly signed, attested and sealed, was too timid to hint about his fee, and Mr. Lamb could scarcely be so indelicate as to call attention to the trifle, even though he knew that Mr. Carwin was gasping for it at that present moment. The latter had hidden his shoes carefully under his desk throughout the consultation, and had kept tucking his cuffs back out of sight during the entire time. There were reasons, however, why Mr. Wallingford did not pay the fee. In spite of the fact that everything was charged at his

hotel, it did take some cash for the bare necessities of existence, and, in the past three days, he had spent over fifty dollars in mere incidentals, aside from his living expenses.

Mr. Lamb did not know a patent lawyer, but he had seen the sign of one, and he knew where to go right to him. The patent lawyer demanded a preliminary fee of twenty-five dollars. Mr. Lamb was sorry that Mr. Christopher had made such an unfortunate "break," for he felt that the man would get no more of Mr. Wallingford's business. The latter drew out a roll of bills, however, paid the man on the spot and took his receipt.

"Will a ten-dollar bill help hurry matters any?" he asked.

"It might," admitted the patent lawyer with a cheerful smile.

His office was in a ramshackle old building that had no elevator, and they had been compelled to climb two flights of stairs to reach it. Mr. Wallingford handed him the ten dollars.

"Have the drawings and the application ready by to-morrow. If the thing can be expedited we shall want you to go on to Washington with the papers."

Mr. Christopher glowed within him. Wherever this man Wallingford went he left behind him a trail of high hopes, a glimpse of a better day to dawn. He was a public benefactor, a boon to humanity. His very presence radiated good cheer and golden prospects.

As they entered the hotel, said Mr. Wallingford:

"Just get the key and go right on up to the room, Eddy. You know where it is. Make yourself at home. Take your knife and

try the covering on those last tacks we put in. I'll be up in five or ten minutes."

When Mr. Wallingford came in Mr. Lamb was testing the tack covers with great gratification. They were all solid, and they could scarcely be dug off with a knife. He looked up to communicate this fact with glee, and saw a frowning countenance upon his senior partner. Mr. J. Rufus Wallingford was distinctly vexed.

"Nice thing!" he growled. "Just got a notice that there is an overdraft in my bank. Now, I'll have to order some bonds sold at a loss, with the market down all around; but that will take a couple of days and here I am without cash – without cash! Look at that! Less than five dollars!"

He threw off his coat and hat in disgust and loosened his vest. He mopped his face and brow and neck. Mr. Wallingford was extremely vexed. He ordered a quart of champagne in a tone which must have made the telephone clerk feel that the princely guest was dissatisfied with the house. "Frappé, too!" he demanded. "The last I had was as warm as tea!"

Mr. Lamb, within the past day, had himself begun the rise to dizzy heights; he had breathed the atmosphere of small birds and cold bottles into his nostrils until that vapor seemed the normal air of heaven; the ordinary dollar had gradually shrunk from its normal dimensions of a peck measure to the size of a mere dot, and, moreover, he considered how necessary pocket money was to a man of J. Rufus Wallingford's rich relationship with the

world.

"I have a little ready cash I could help you out with, if you will let me offer it," he ventured, embarrassed to find slight alternate waves of heat flushing his face. The borrowing and the lending of money were not unknown by any means in Mr. Lamb's set. They asked each other for fifty dollars with perfect nonchalance, got it and paid it back with equal unconcern, and no man among them had been known to forget. Mr. Wallingford accepted quite gracefully.

"Really, if you don't mind," said he, "five hundred or so would be quite an accommodation for a couple of days."

Mr. Lamb gulped, but it was only a sort of growing pain that he had. It was difficult for him to keep up with his own financial expansion.

"Certainly," he stammered. "I'll go right down and get it for you. The bank closes at three. I have only a half hour to make it."

"I'll go right with you," said Mr. Wallingford, asking no questions, but rightly divining that his Lamb kept no open account. "Wait a minute. I'll make you out a note – just so there'll be something to show for it, you know."

He hurriedly drew a blank from his pocket, filled it in and arose from the table.

"I made it out for thirty days, merely as a matter of business form," stated Mr. Wallingford as they walked to the elevator, "but, as soon as I put those bonds on the market, I'll take up the note, of course. I left the interest in at six per cent."

"Oh, that was not necessary at all," protested Mr. Lamb.

The sum had been at first rather a staggering one, but it only took him a moment or two to get his new bearings, and, if possible, he held his head a trifle higher than ever as he walked out through the lobby. On the way to the bank the capitalist passed the note over to his friend.

"I believe that's the right date; the twenty-fifth, isn't it?"

"The twenty-fifth is right," Mr. Lamb replied, and perfunctorily opened the note. Then he stopped walking. "Hello!" he said. "You've made a mistake. This is for a thousand."

"Is that so? I declare! I so seldom draw less than that. Well, suppose we let it go at a thousand."

Time for gulping was passed.

"All right," said the younger man, but he could not make the assent as sprightly as he could have wished. In spite of himself the words drawled.

Nevertheless, at his bank he handed in his savings-book and the check, and, thoroughly permeated by the atmosphere in which he was now moving, he had made out the order for eleven hundred dollars.

"I needed a little loose change myself," he explained, as he put a hundred into his own pocket and passed the thousand over to Mr. Wallingford.

Events moved rapidly now. Mr. Wallingford that night sent off one hundred and fifty dollars to his wife.

"Cheer up, little girl," he wrote her. "Blackie came here and reported that this was a grouch town. I've been here three days and dug up a thousand, and there's more in sight. I've been inquiring around this morning. There is a swell little ten-thousand-dollar house out in the rich end of the burg that I'm going to buy to put up a front, and you know how I'll buy it. Also I'm going over to-morrow and pick out an automobile. I need it in my business. You ought to see what long, silky wool the sheep grow here."

The next morning was devoted entirely to pleasure. They visited three automobile firms and took spins in four machines, and at last Mr. Wallingford picked out a five-thousand-dollar car that about suited him.

"I shall try this for two weeks," he told the proprietor of the establishment. "Keep it here in your garage at my call, and, by that time, if I decide to buy it, I shall have my own garage under way. I have my eye on a very nice little place out in Gildendale, and if they don't want too much for it I'll bring on Mrs. Wallingford from Boston."

"With pleasure, Mr. Wallingford," said the proprietor.

Mr. Lamb walked away with a new valuation of things. Not a penny of deposit had been asked, for the mere appearance of Mr. Wallingford and his air of owning the entire garage were sufficient. In the room at the hotel that afternoon they made some further experiments on tacks, and Mr. Wallingford gave his young partner some further statistics concerning the

Eureka Company: its output, the number of men it employed, the number of machines it had in operation, the small start it had, the immense profits it made.

"We've got them all beat," Mr. Lamb enthusiastically summed up for him. "We're starting much better than they did, and with, I believe, the best manufacturing proposition that was ever put before the public."

It was not necessary to supply him with any further enthusiasm. He had been inoculated with the yeast of it, and from that point onward would be self-raising.

"The only thing I am afraid of," worried Mr. Wallingford, "is that the Eureka Company will want to buy us out before we get fairly started, and, if they offer us a good price, the stockholders will want to stampede. Now, you and I must vote down any proposition the Eureka Company make us, no matter what the other stockholders want, because, if they buy us out before we have actually begun to encroach upon their business, they will not give us one fifth of the price we could get after giving them a good scare. Between us, Eddy, we'll hold six tenths of the stock and we must stand firm."

Eddy stuck his thumbs in his vest pocket and with great complacency tapped himself alternately upon his recent luncheon with the finger tips of his two hands.

"Certainly we will," he admitted. "But say; I have some friends that I'd like to bring into this thing. They're not able to buy blocks of stock as large as you suggested, but, maybe, we could split up

one lot so as to let them in."

"I don't like the idea of small stockholders," Mr. Wallingford objected, frowning. "They are too hard to handle. Your larger investors are business men who understand all the details and are not raising eternal questions about the little things that turn up; but since we have this tack so perfect I've changed my plan of incorporation, and consequently there is a way in which your friends can get in. We don't want to attract any attention to ourselves from the Eureka people just now, so we will only incorporate at first for one thousand dollars, in ten shares of one hundred dollars each – sort of a dummy corporation in which my name will not appear at all. If you can find four friends who will buy one share of stock each you will then subscribe for the other six shares, for which I will pay you, giving you one share, as I promised. These four friends of yours then, if they wish, may take up one block of twenty-five thousand when we make the final corporation, which we will do by increasing our capital stock as soon as we get our corporation papers. These friends of yours would, necessarily, be on our first board of directors, too, which will hold for one year, and it will be an exceptional opportunity for them."

"I don't quite understand," said Mr. Lamb.

"We incorporate for one thousand only," explained Mr. Wallingford, slowly and patiently, "ten shares of one hundred dollars each, all fully paid in. The Eureka Company will pay no attention to a one-thousand-dollar company. As soon as we

get our corporation papers, we original incorporators will, of course, form the officers and board of directors, and we will immediately vote to increase our capitalization to one hundred thousand dollars, in one thousand shares of one hundred dollars each. We will vote to pay you and I as inventors sixty thousand dollars or six hundred shares of stock for our patents – applied for and to be applied for during a period of five years to come – in carpet-tack improvements and machinery for making the same. We will offer the balance of the forty thousand dollars stock for sale, to carry us through the experimental stage – that is, until we get our machinery all in working order. Then we will need one hundred thousand dollars to start our factory. To get that, we will reincorporate for a three-hundred-thousand capital, taking up all the outstanding stock and giving to each stockholder two shares at par for each share he then holds. That will take up two hundred thousand dollars of the stock and leave one hundred thousand for sale at par. You, in place of fifteen thousand dollars' worth of stock as your share for the patent rights, will have thirty thousand dollars' worth, or three hundred shares, and if, after we have started operating, the Eureka Company should buy us out at only a million, you would have a hundred thousand dollars net profit."

A long, long sigh was the answer. Mr Lamb saw. Here was real financiering.

"Let's get outside," he said, needing fresh air in his lungs after this. "Let's go up and see my friend, Mr. Jasper."

In ten minutes the automobile had reported. Each man, before he left the room, slipped a handful of covered carpet tacks into his coat pocket.

CHAPTER V
THE UNIVERSAL COVERED CARPET TACK COMPANY FORMS AMID GREAT ENTHUSIASM

The intense democracy of J. Rufus Wallingford could not but charm David Jasper, even though he disapproved of diamond stick-pins and red-leather-padded automobiles as a matter of principle. The manner in which the gentleman from Boston acknowledged the introduction, the fine mixture of deference due Mr. Jasper's age and of cordiality due his easily discernible qualities of good fellowship, would have charmed the heart out of a cabbage.

"Get in, Dave; we want to take you a ride," demanded Mr. Lamb.

David shook his head at the big machine, and laughed.

"I don't carry enough insurance," he objected.

Mr. Wallingford had caught sight of a little bronze button in the lapel of Mr. Jasper's faded and threadbare coat.

"A man who went through the battle of Bull Run ought to face anything," he laughed back.

The shot went home. Mr. Jasper *had* acquitted himself with honor in the battle of Bull Run, and without further ado he got

into the invitingly open door of the tonneau, to sink back among the padded cushions with his friend Lamb. As the door slammed shut, Ella Jasper waved them adieu, and it was fully three minutes after the machine drove away before she began humming about her work. Somehow or other, she did not like to see her father's friend so intimately associated with rich people.

They had gone but a couple of blocks, and Mr. Lamb was in the early stages of the enthusiasm attendant upon describing the wonderful events of the past two days – especially his own share in the invention, and the hundred thousand dollars that it was to make him within the year – when Mr. Wallingford suddenly halted the machine.

"You're not going to get home to dinner, you know, Mr. Jasper," he declared.

"Oh, we have to! This is lodge night, and I am a patriarch. I haven't missed a night for twenty years, and Eddy, here, has an office, too – his first one. We've got ten candidates to-night." "I see," said Mr. Wallingford gravely. "It is more or less in the line of a sacred duty. Nevertheless, we will not go home to dinner. I'll get you at the lodge door at half past eight. Will that be early enough?"

Mr. Jasper put his hands upon his knees and turned to his friend.

"I guess we can work our way in, can't we, Eddy?" he chuckled, and Eddy, with equally simple pleasure, replied that they could.

"Very well. Back to the house, chauffeur." And, in a moment more, they were sailing back to the decrepit little cottage, where Lamb jumped out to carry the news to Ella. She was just coming out of the kitchen door in her sunbonnet to run over to the grocery store as Edward came up the steps. He grabbed her by both shoulders and dragged her out.

"Come on; we're going to take you along!" he threatened, and she did not know why, but, at the touch of his hands, she paled slightly. Her eyes never faltered, however, as she laughed and jerked herself away.

"Not much, you don't! I'm worried enough as it is with father in there – and you, of course."

He told her that they would not be home to supper, and, for a second time, she wistfully saw them driving away in the big red machine.

Mr. Wallingford talked with the chauffeur for a few moments, and then the machine leaped forward with definiteness. Once or twice Mr. Wallingford looked back. The two in the tonneau were examining the cloth-topped tacks, and both were talking volubly. Mile after mile they were still at it, and the rich man felt relieved of all responsibility. The less he said in the matter the better; he had learned the invaluable lesson of when not to talk. So far as he was concerned, the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company was launched, and he was able to turn his attention to the science of running the car, a matter which, by the time they had reached their stopping point, he had picked up to the great admiration

of the expert driver. For the last five miles the big man ran the machine himself, with the help of a guiding word or two, and when they finally stopped in front of the one pretentious hotel in the small town they had reached, he was so completely absorbed in the new toy that he was actually as nonchalant about the new company as he would have wished to appear. His passengers were surprised when they found that they had come twenty miles, and Mr. Wallingford showed them what a man who knows how to dine can do in a minor hotel. He had everybody busy, from the proprietor down. The snap of his fingers was as potent here as the clarion call of the trumpet in battle, and David Jasper, though he strove to disapprove, after sixty years of somnolence woke up and actually enjoyed pretentious luxury.

There were but five minutes of real business conversation following the meal, but five minutes were enough. David Jasper had called his friend Eddy aside for one brief moment.

"Did he give you any references?" he asked, the habit of caution asserting itself.

"Sure; more than half a dozen of them."

"Have you written to them?"

"I wrote this morning."

"I guess he wouldn't give them to you if he wasn't all right."

"We don't need the references," urged Lamb. "The man himself is reference enough. You see that automobile? He bought it this morning and didn't pay a cent on it. They didn't ask him to."

It was a greater recommendation than if the man had paid cash down for the machine; for credit is mightier than cash, everywhere.

"I think we'll go in," said Dave. Think he would go in! It was only his conservative way of expressing himself, for he was already in with his whole heart and soul. In the five minutes of conversation between the three that ensued, David Jasper agreed to be one of the original incorporators, to go on the first board of directors, and to provide three other solid men to serve in a like capacity, the preliminary meeting being arranged for the next morning. Mr. Wallingford passed around his black cigars and lit one in huge content as he climbed into the front seat with the chauffeur, to begin his task of urging driver and machine back through the night in the time that he had promised.

That was a wonderful ride to the novices. Nothing but darkness ahead, with a single stream of white light spreading out upon the roadway, which, like a fast descending curtain, lowered always before them; a rut here, a rock there, angle and curve and dip and rise all springing out of the night with startling swiftness, to disappear behind them before they had given even a gasp of comprehension for the possible danger they had confronted but that was now past. Unconsciously they found themselves gripping tightly the sides of the car, and yet, even to the old man, there was a strange sense of exhilaration, aided perhaps by wine, that made them, after the first breathless five miles, begin to jest in voices loud enough to carry against the wind, to laugh boisterously,

and even to sing, by-and-by, a nonsensical song started by Lamb and caught up by Wallingford and joined by the still firm voice of David Jasper. The chauffeur, the while bent grimly over his wheel, peered with iron-nerved intensity out into that mysterious way where the fatal snag might rise up at any second and smite them into lifeless clay, for they were going at a terrific pace. The hoarse horn kept constantly hooting, and every now and then they flashed by trembling horses drawn up at the side of the road and attached to "rigs," the occupants of which appeared only as one or two or three fish-white faces in the one instant that the glow of the headlight gleamed upon them. Once there was a quick swerve out of the road and back into it again, where the rear wheel hovered for a fraction of a second over a steep gully, and not until they had passed on did the realization come to them that there had been one horse that had refused, either through stubbornness or fright, to get out of the road fast enough. But what is a danger past when a myriad lie before, and what are dangers ahead when a myriad have been passed safely by? The exhilaration became almost an intoxication, for, in spite of those few moments when mirth and gayety were checked by that sudden throb of what might have been, the songs burst forth again as soon as a level track stretched ahead once more.

"Five minutes before the time I promised you!" exclaimed Mr. Wallingford in jovial triumph, jumping from his seat and opening the door of the tonneau for his passengers just in front of the stairway that led to their lodge-rooms.

They climbed out, stiff and breathless and still tingling with the inexplicable thrill of it all.

"Eleven o'clock in the morning, remember, at Carwin's," he reminded them as they left him, and afterward they wondered why such a simple exertion as the climbing of one flight of stairs should make their hearts beat so high and their breath come so deep and harsh. It would have been curious, later that night, to see Edward Lamb buying a quart of champagne for his friends, and protesting that it was not cold enough!

Mr. Wallingford stepped back to the chauffeur. "What's your first name?" he inquired.

"Frank, sir."

"Well, Frank, when you go back to the shop you tell them that you're to drive my machine hereafter when I call for it, and when I get settled down here I want you to work for me. Drive to the hotel now and wait."

Before climbing into the luxury of the tonneau he handed the chauffeur a five-dollar bill.

"All right, sir," said Frank.

At the hotel, the man of means walked up to the clerk and opened his pocketbook.

"I have a little more cash than I care to carry around. Just put this to my credit, will you?" and he counted out six one-hundred-dollar bills.

As he turned away the clerk permitted himself that faint trace of a smile once more. His confidence was justified. He had

known that somebody would pay Mr. Wallingford's acrobatic bill. His interesting guest strode out to the big red automobile. The chauffeur was out in a second and had the tonneau open before the stately but earnestly willing doorman of the hotel could perform the duty.

"Now, show us the town," said Wallingford as the door closed upon him, and when he came in late that night his eyes were red and his speech was thick; but there were plenty of eager hands to see safely to bed the prince who had landed in their midst with less than a hundred dollars in his possession.

He was up bright and vigorous the next morning, however. A cold bath, a hearty breakfast in his room, a half hour with the barber and a spin in the automobile made him elastic and bounding again, so that at eleven o'clock he was easily the freshest man among the six who gathered in Mr. Carwin's office. The incorporators noted with admiration, which with wiser men might have turned to suspicion, that Mr. Wallingford was better posted on corporation law than Mr. Carwin himself, and that he engineered the preliminary proceedings through in a jiffy. With the exception of Lamb, they were all men past forty, and not one of them had known experience of this nature. They had been engaged in minor occupations or in minor business throughout their lives, and had gathered their few thousands together dollar by dollar. To them this new realm that was opened up was a fairyland, and the simple trick of watering stock that had been carefully explained to them, one by one, pleased them as no toy

ever pleased a child. They had heard of such things as being vague and mysterious operations in the realms of finance and had condemned them, taking their tone from the columns of editorials they had read upon such practices; but, now that they were themselves to reap the fruits of it, they looked through different spectacles. It was a just proceeding which this genius of commerce proposed; for they who stood the first brunt of launching the ship were entitled to greater rewards than they who came in upon an assured certainty of profits, having waited only for the golden cargo to be in the harbor.

As a sort of sealing of their compact and to show that this was to be a corporation upon a friendly basis, rather than a cold, grasping business proposition, Mr. Wallingford took them all over to a simple lunch in a private dining room at his hotel. He was careful not to make it too elaborate, but careful, too, that the luncheon should be notable, and they all went away talking about him: what a wonderful man he was, what a wonderful business proposition he had permitted them to enter upon, what wonderful resources he must have at his command, what wonderful genius was his in manipulation, in invention, in every way.

There was a week now in which to act, and Mr. Wallingford wasted no time. He picked out his house in the exclusive part of Gildendale, and when it came to paying the thousand dollars down, Mr. Wallingford quietly made out a sixty-day note for the amount.

"I beg your pardon," hesitated the agent, "the first payment is

supposed to be in cash."

"Oh, I know that it is supposed to be," laughed Mr. Wallingford, "but we understand how these things are. I guess the house itself will secure the note for that length of time. I am going to be under pretty heavy expense in fitting up the place, and a man with any regard for the earning power of money does not keep much cash lying loose. Do you want this note or not?" and his final tone was peremptory.

"Oh, why, certainly; that's all right," said the agent, and took it.

Upon the court records appeared the sale, but even before it was so entered a firm of decorators and furnishers had been given *carte blanche*, following, however, certain artistic requirements of Mr. Wallingford himself. The result that they produced within the three days that he gave them was marvelous; somewhat too garish, perhaps, for people of good taste, but impressive in every detail; and for all this he paid not one penny in cash. He was accredited with being the owner of a house in the exclusive suburb, Gildendale. On that accrediting the furnishing was done, on that accrediting he stocked his pantry shelves, his refrigerator, his wine cellar, his coal bins, his humidors, and had started a tailor to work upon half a dozen suits, among them an automobile costume. He had a modest establishment of two servants and a chauffeur by the time his wife arrived, and on the day the final organization of the one-thousand-dollar company was effected, he gave a housewarming for his associates of the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company. Where Mr. Wallingford had

charmed, Mrs. Wallingford fascinated, and the five men went home that night richer than they had ever dreamed of being; than they would ever be again.

CHAPTER VI
IN WHICH AN ASTOUNDING REVELATION IS MADE CONCERNING J. RUFUS

The first stockholders' meeting of the Tack Company was a cheerful affair, held around a table that was within an hour or so to have a cloth; for whenever J. Rufus Wallingford did business, he must, perforce, eat and drink, and all who did business with him must do the same. The stockholders, being all present, elected their officers and their board of directors: Mr. Wallingford, president; Mr. Lamb, secretary; Mr. Jasper, treasurer; and Mr. Lewis, David Jasper's nearest friend, vice president, these four and Mr. Nolting also constituting the board of directors. Immediately after, they adopted a stock, printed form of constitution, voted an increase of capitalization to one hundred thousand dollars, and then adjourned.

The president, during the luncheon, made them a little speech in which he held before them constantly a tack with a crimson top glued upon a roughened surface, and alluded to the invaluable services their young friend, Edward Lamb, had rendered to the completion of the company's now perfect and flawless article of manufacture. He explained to them in detail the bigness of the

Eureka Tack Manufacturing Company, its enormous undivided profits, its tremendous yearly dividends, the fabulous price at which its stock was quoted, with none for sale; and all this gigantic business built upon a simple tack! – Gentlemen, not nearly, not *nearly* so attractive and so profitable an article of commerce as this perfect little convenience held before them. The gentlemen were to be congratulated upon a bigger and brighter and better fortune than had ever come to them; they were all to be congratulated upon having met each other, and since they had been kind enough, since they had been trusting enough, to give him their confidence with but little question, Mr. Wallingford felt it his duty to reassure them, even though they needed no reassurance, that he was what he was; and he called upon his friend and their secretary, Mr. Lamb, to read to them the few letters that he understood had been received from the Mexican and Rio Grande Rubber Company, the St. John's Blood Orange Plantation Company, the Los Pocos Lead Development Company, the Sierra Cinnabar Grant, and others.

Mr. Lamb – Secretary Lamb, if you please – arose in self-conscious dignity, which he strove to taper off into graceful ease.

"It is hardly worth while reading more than one, for they're all alike," he stated jovially, "and if anybody questions our president, send him to his friend Eddy!" Whereupon he read the letters.

According to them, Mr. Wallingford was a gentleman of the highest integrity; he was a man of unimpeachable character, morally and financially; he was a genius of commerce; he had

been sought, for his advice and for the tower of strength that his name had become, by all the money kings of Boston; he was, in a word, the greatest boon that had ever descended upon any city, and all of the gentlemen who were lucky enough to be associated with him in any business enterprise that he might back or vouch for, could count themselves indeed most fortunate. The letters were passed around. Some of them had embossed heads; most of them were, at least, engraved; some of them were printed in two or three rich colors; some had beautifully tinted pictures of vast Mexican estates, and Florida plantations, and Nevada mining ranges. They were impressive, those letter-heads, and when, after passing the round of the table, they were returned to Mr. Lamb, four pairs of eyes followed them as greedily as if those eyes had been resting upon actual money.

In the ensuing week the committee on factories, consisting of Mr. Wallingford, Mr. Lamb and Mr. Jasper, honked and inspected and lunched until they found a small place which would "do for the first year's business," and within two days the factory was cleaned and the office most sumptuously furnished; then Mr. Wallingford, having provided work for the secretary, began to attend to his purely personal affairs, one of which was the private consulting of the patent attorney. Upon his first visit Mr. Christopher met him with a dejected air.

"I find four interferences against your application," he dolefully stated, "and they cover the ground very completely."

"Get me a patent," directed Mr. Wallingford shortly.

Mr. Christopher hesitated. Not only was his working jacket out at the elbows, but his street coat was shiny at the seams.

"I am bound to tell you," he confessed, after quite a struggle, "that, while I *might* get you some sort of a patent, it would not hold water."

"I don't care if it wouldn't hold pebbles or even brickbats," retorted Mr. Wallingford. "I'm not particular about the mesh of it. Just you get me a patent – any sort of a patent, so it has a seal and a ribbon on it. I believe it is part of your professional ethics, Mr. Christopher, to do no particular amount of talking except to your clients.

"Well, yes, sir," admitted Mr. Christopher.

"Very well, then; I am the only client you know in this case, and I say – get a patent! After all, a patent isn't worth as much as a dollar at the Waldorf, except to form the basis of a lawsuit," whereat Mr. Christopher saw a great white light and his conscience ceased to bother him.

Meanwhile the majestic wheels of state revolved, and at the second meeting of the board of directors the secretary was able to lay before them the august permission of the Commonwealth to issue one hundred thousand dollars of stock in the new corporation. In fact, the secretary was able to show them a book of especially printed stock certificates, and a corporate seal had been made. Their own seal! Each man tried it with awe and pride. This also was a cheerful board meeting, wherein the directors, as one man, knowing beforehand what they were to do, voted to

Mr. Wallingford and Mr. Lamb sixty thousand dollars in stock, for all patents relating to covered carpet tacks or devices for making the same that should be obtained by them for a period of five years to come. The three remaining members of the board of directors and the one stockholder who was allowed to be present by courtesy then took up five thousand dollars' worth of stock each and guaranteed to bring in, by the end of the week, four more like subscriptions, two of which they secured; and, thirty thousand dollars of cash having been put into the treasury, a special stockholders' meeting was immediately called. When this met it was agreed that they should incorporate another company under the name of the Universal Covered Tack Company, dropping the word "Carpet," with an authorized capital of three hundred thousand dollars, two hundred thousand of which was already subscribed.

It took but a little over a month to organize this new company, which bought out the old company for the consideration of two hundred thousand dollars, payable in stock of the new company. With great glee the new stockholders bought from themselves, as old stockholders, the old company at this valuation, each man receiving two shares of one hundred dollars face value for each one hundred dollars' worth of stock that he had held before. It was their very first transaction in water, and the delight that it gave them one and all knew no bounds; they had doubled their money in one day! But their elation was not half the elation of J. Rufus Wallingford, for in his possession he had ninety thousand

dollars' worth, par value, of stock, the legitimacy of which no one could question, and the market price of which could be to himself whatever his glib tongue had the opportunity to make it. In addition to the nine hundred shares of stock, he had a ten-thousand-dollar house, a five-thousand-dollar automobile and unlimited credit; and this was the man who had landed in the city but two brief months before, with no credit in any known spot upon the globe, and with less than one hundred dollars in his pocket!

It is a singular commentary upon the honesty of American business methods that so much is done on pure faith. The standing of J. Rufus Wallingford was established beyond question. Aside from the perfunctory inquiries that Edward Lamb had made, no one ever took the trouble to question into the promoter's past record. So far as local merchants were concerned, these did not care; for did not J. Rufus own a finely appointed new house in Gildendale, and did he not appear before them daily in a fine new automobile? This, added to the fact that he established credit with one merchant and referred the next one to him, referred the third to the second, and the fourth to the third, was ample. If merchant number four took the trouble to inquire of merchant number three, he was told: "Yes, we have Mr. Wallingford on our books, and consider him good." Consequently, Mrs. Wallingford was able to go to any establishment, in her own little runabout that J. Rufus got her presently, and order what she would; and she took ample

advantage of the opportunity. She, like J. Rufus, was one of those rare beings of earth for whom earth's most prized treasures are delved, and wrought, and woven, and sewed; for transcendent beauty demands ever more beauty for its adornment. In all the city there was nothing too good for either of them, and they got it without money and without price. The provider of all this made no move toward paying even a retainer upon his automobile, for instance; but, when the subtle intuition within him warned that the dealer would presently make a demand, he calmly went in and selected the neat little runabout for his wife, and had it added to his bill. After he had seen the runabout glide away, the dealer was a little aghast at himself. He had firmly intended, the next time he saw Mr. Wallingford, to insist upon a payment. In place of that, he had only jeopardized two thousand dollars more, and all that he had to show for it were half a dozen covered tacks which J. Rufus had left him to ponder upon. In the meantime, Lamb's loan of one thousand had been increased, upon plausible pretext, to two thousand.

There began, now, busy days at the factory. In the third floor of their building a machine shop was installed. Three thousand dollars went there. Outside, in a large experimental shop, work was being rapidly pushed on machinery which would make tacks with cross-corrugated heads. Genius Wallingford had secretly secured drawings of tack machinery, and devised slight changes which would evade the patents, adding dies that would make the roughened tops. A final day came when, set up in their shop, the

first faulty machine pounded out tacks ready for later covering, and every stockholder who had been called in to witness the working of the miracle went away profoundly convinced that fortune was just within his reach. They had their first patent granted now, and the sight of it, on stiff parchment with its bit of bright ribbon, was like a glimpse at dividends. It was right at this time, however, that one cat was let out of the bag. The information came first to Edward Lamb, through the inquiries of a commercial rating company, that their Boston capitalist was a whited sepulcher, so far as capital went. He had not a cent. The secretary, in the privacy of their office, put the matter to him squarely, and he admitted it cheerfully. He was glad that the *exposé* had come – it suited his present course, and he would have brought it about himself before long.

"Who said I had money?" he demanded. "I never said so."

"Well, but the way you live," objected Lamb.

"I have always lived that way, and I always shall. Not only is it a fact that I have no money, but I must have some right away."

"I haven't any more to lend."

"No, Eddy; I'm not saying that you have. I am merely stating that I have to have some. I am being bothered by people who want it, and I cannot work on the covering machine until I get it," and Mr. Wallingford coolly telephoned for his big automobile to be brought around.

They sat silently in the office for the next five minutes, while Lamb slowly appreciated the position they were in. If J. Rufus

should "lay down on them" before the covering machine was perfected, they were in a bad case. They had already spent over twenty thousand dollars in equipping their office, their machine shop, and perfecting their stamping machine, and time was flying.

"You might sell a little of your stock," suggested Lamb.

"We have an agreement between us to hold control."

"But you can still sell a little of yours, and stay within that amount. I'm not selling any of mine."

Mr. Wallingford drew from his pocket a hundred-share stock certificate.

"I have already sold some. Make out fifty shares of this to L. W. Ramsay, twenty-five to E. H. Wyman, and the other twenty-five to C. D. Wyman."

Ramsay and the Wyman Brothers! Ramsay was the automobile dealer; Wyman Brothers were Wallingford's tailors.

"So much? Why didn't you sell them at least part from our extra treasury stock? There is twenty thousand there, replacing the ten thousand of the old company."

"Why didn't I? I needed the money. I got twenty-five hundred cash from Ramsay, and let him put twenty-five on account. I agreed to take one thousand in trade from Wyman Brothers, and got four thousand cash there."

The younger man looked at him angrily.

"Look here, Wallingford; you're hitting it up rather strong, ain't you? This makes six thousand five hundred, besides two

thousand you borrowed from me, that you have spent in three months. You have squandered money since you came here at the rate of three thousand a month, besides all the bills I know you owe, and still you are broke. How is it possible?"

"That's my business," retorted Wallingford, and his face reddened with assumed anger. "We are not going to discuss it. The point is that I need money and must have it."

The automobile drew up at the door, and J. Rufus, who was in his automobile suit, put on his cap and riding coat.

"Where are you going?"

"Over to Rayling."

Lamb frowned. Rayling was sixty miles away.

"And you will not be back until midnight, I suppose."

"Hardly."

"Why, confound it, man, you can't go!" exclaimed Lamb. "They're waiting for you now over at the machine shop, for further instructions on the covering device."

"They'll have to wait!" announced J. Rufus, and stalked out of the door.

The thing had been deliberately followed up. Mr. Wallingford had come to the point where he wished his flock to know that he had no financial resources whatever, and that they would have to support him. It was the first time that he had departed from his suavity, and he left Lamb in a panic. He had been gone scarcely more than an hour when David Jasper came in.

"Where is Wallingford?" he asked.

"Gone out for an automobile trip."

"When will he be back?"

"Not to-day."

Jasper's face was white, but the flush of slow anger was creeping upon his cheeks.

"Well, he ought to be; his note is due."

"What note?" inquired Lamb, startled.

"His note for a thousand dollars that I went security on."

"You might just as well renew it, or pay it. I had to renew mine," said Lamb. "Dave, the man is a four-flusher, without a cent to fall back on. I just found it out this morning. Why didn't you tell me that he was borrowing money of you?"

"Why didn't you tell me he was borrowing money of you?" retorted his friend.

They looked at each other hotly for a moment, and then both laughed. The big man was too much for them to comprehend.

"We are both cutting our eye teeth," Lamb decided. "I wonder how many more he's borrowed money from."

"Lewis, for one. He got fifteen hundred from him. Lewis told me this morning, up at Kriegler's."

Lamb began figuring. To the eight thousand five hundred of which he already knew, here was twenty-five hundred more to be added – eleven thousand dollars that the man had spent in three months! Some bills, of course, he had paid, but the rest of it had gone as the wind blew. It seemed impossible that a man could spend money at the rate of one hundred and twenty-five dollars a

day, but this one had done it, and that at first was the point which held them aghast, to the forgetting of their own share in it. They could not begin to understand it until Lamb recalled one incident that had impressed him. Wallingford had taken his wife and two friends to the opera one night. They had engaged a private dining room at the hotel, indulging in a dinner that, with flowers and wines, had cost over a hundred dollars. Their seats had cost fifty. There had been a supper afterward where the wine flowed until long past midnight. Altogether, that evening alone had cost not less than three hundred dollars – and the man lived at that gait all the time! In his home, even when himself and wife were alone, seven-course dinners were served. Huge fowls were carved for but the choicest slices, were sent away from the table and never came back again in any form. Expensive wines were opened and left uncorked after two glasses, because some whim had led the man to prefer some other brand.

Lamb looked up from his figuring with an expression so troubled that his older friend, groping as men will do for cheering words, hit upon the idea that restored them both to their equilibrium.

"After all," suggested Jasper, "it's none of our business. The company is all right."

"That's so," agreed Lamb, recovering his enthusiasm in a bound. "The tack itself can't be beat, and we are making progress toward getting on the market. Suppose the man were to sell all his stock. It wouldn't make any difference, so long as he finishes

that one machine for covering the tack."

"He's a liar!" suddenly burst out David Jasper. "I wish he had his machinery done and was away from us. I can't sleep well when I do business with a liar."

"We don't want to get rid of him yet," Lamb reminded him, "and, in the meantime, I suppose he will have to have money in order to keep him at work. You'd better get him to give you stock to cover your note and tell Lewis to do the same. We'll all go after him on that point, and get protected."

David looked troubled in his turn.

"I can't afford it. When I took up that five thousand dollars' worth of stock I only had fifteen hundred in the building loan, and I put a mortgage on one of my houses to make up the amount. If I have to stand this thousand I'll have to give another mortgage, and I swore I'd never put a plaster on my property."

"The tack's good for it," urged Lamb, with conviction.

"Yes, the tack's good," admitted Jasper.

That was the thing which held them all in line – the tack! Wallingford himself might be a spendthrift and a ne'er-do-well, but their faith in the tack that was to make them all rich was supreme. Lamb picked up one from his desk and handed it to his friend. The very sight of it, with its silken covered top, imagination carrying it to its place in a carpet where it would not show, was most reassuring, and behind it, looming up like the immense open cornucopia of Fortune herself, was the Eureka Company, the concern that would buy them out at any time for a

million dollars if they were foolish enough to sell. After all, they had nothing to worry them.

David Jasper went up to the bank and had them hold the note until the next day, which they did without comment. David was "good" for anything he wanted. The next day he got hold of Wallingford to get him to renew the note and to give him stock as security for it. When J. Rufus came out of that transaction, in which David had intended to be severe with him, he had four thousand dollars in his pocket, for he had transferred to his indorser five thousand dollars of his stock and Jasper had placed another mortgage on his property. The single tack in his vest pocket had assumed proportions far larger than his six cottages and his home. It was the same with Lewis and one of the others, and, for a week, the inventor struggled with the covering machine.

No one seemed to appreciate the fact that here their genius was confronting a problem that was most difficult of solution. To them it meant a mere bit of mechanical juggling, as certain to be accomplished as the simple process of multiplication; but to glue a piece of cloth to so minute and irregular a thing as the head of a tack, to put it on firmly and leave it trimmed properly at the edges, to do this trick by machinery and at a rate rapid enough to insure profitable operation, was a Herculean task, and the stockholders would have been aghast had they known that J. Rufus was in no hurry to solve this last perplexity. He knew better than to begin actual manufacture. The interference report

on the first patent led him to make secret inquiries, the result of which convinced him that the day they went on the market would be the day that they would be disrupted by vigorous suits, backed by millions of capital. He had been right in stating that a patent is of no value except as a basis for lawsuits.

There was only one thing which offset his shrewdness in realizing these conditions, and that was his own folly. Had he been content to devote himself earnestly to the accomplishment even of his own ends, the many difficulties into which he had floundered would never have existed. Always there was the pressing need for money. He was a colossal example of the fact that easily gotten pelf is of no value. His wife was shrewder than he. She had no social aspirations whatever at this time. They were both of them too bohemian of taste and habit to conform to the strict rules which society imposes in certain directions, even had they been able to enter the charmed circle. She cared only to dress as well as the best and to go to such places of public entertainment as the best frequented, to show herself in jewels that would attract attention and in gowns that would excite envy; but she did tire of continuous suspense – and she was not without keenness of perception.

"Jim," she asked, one night, "how is your business going?"

"You see me have money every day, don't you? There's nothing you want, is there?" was the evasive reply.

"Not a thing, except this: I want a vacation. I don't want to be wondering all my life when the crash is to come. So far as I have

seen, this looks like a clean business arrangement that you are in now; but, even if it is, it can't stand the bleeding that you are giving it. If you are going to get out of this thing, as you have left everything else you were ever in, get out right away. Realize every dollar you can at once, and let us take a trip abroad."

"I can't let go just yet," he replied.

She looked up, startled.

"Nothing wrong in this, is there, Jim?"

"Wrong!" he exclaimed. "Fanny, I never did anything in my life that the law could get me for. The law is a friend of mine. It was framed up especially for the protection of J. Rufus Wallingford. I can shove ordinary policemen off the sidewalk and make the chief stand up and salute when I go past. The only way I could break into a jail would be to buy one."

She shook her head.

"You're too smart a man to stay out of jail, Jim. The penitentiary is full of men who were too clever to go there. You're a queer case, anyhow. If you had buckled down to straight business, with your ability you'd be worth ten million dollars to-day."

He chuckled.

"Look at the fun I'd have missed, though."

But for once she would not joke about their position.

"No," she insisted, "you're looking at it wrong, Jim. You had to leave Boston; you had to leave Baltimore; you had to leave Philadelphia and Washington; you will have to leave this town."

"Never mind, Fanny," he admonished her. "There are fifty towns in the United States as good as this, and they've got coin in every one of them. They're waiting for me to come and get it, and when I have been clear through the list I'll start all over again. There's always a fresh crop of bait-nibblers, and money is being turned out at the mint every day."

"Have it your own way," responded Mrs. Wallingford; "but you will be wise if you take my advice to accumulate some money while you can this time, so that we do not have to take a night train out in the suburbs, as we did when we left Boston."

Mr. Wallingford returned no answer. He opened the cellar door and touched the button that flooded his wine cellar with light, going down himself to hunt among his bottles for the one that would tempt him most. Nevertheless, he did some serious thinking, and, at the next board-of-directors' meeting, he announced that the covering machine was well under way, showing them drawings of a patent application he was about to send off.

It was a hopeful sign – one that restored confidence. He must now organize a selling department and must have a Chicago branch. They listened with respect, even with elation. After all, while this man had deceived them as to his financial standing when he first came among them, he was well posted, for their benefit, upon matters about which they knew nothing. Moreover, there was the great tack! He went to Chicago and appointed a Western sales agent. When he came back he had sold fifteen

thousand dollars' worth of his stock through the introductions gained him by this man.

J. Rufus Wallingford was "cleaning up."

CHAPTER VII
WHEREIN THE GREAT TACK INVENTOR SUDDENLY DECIDES TO CHANGE HIS LOCATION

"In two weeks we will be ready for the market," Wallingford told inquiring members of the company every two weeks, and, in the meantime, the model for the covering device, in which change after change was made, went on very slowly, while the money went very rapidly. A half dozen of the expensive stamping machines had already been installed, and the treasury was exhausted. The directors began to look worried.

One morning, while Ella Jasper was at her sweeping in the front room, the big red automobile chugged up to the gate and J. Rufus Wallingford got out. He seemed gigantic as he loomed up on the little front porch and filled the doorway.

"Where is your father?" he asked her.

"He is over at Kriegler's," she told him, and directed him how to find the little German saloon where the morning "lunch club" gathered.

Instead of turning, he stood still for a moment and looked her slowly from head to foot. There was that in his look which made her tremble, which made her flush with shame, and when at last

he turned away she sat down in a chair and wept.

At Kriegler's, Wallingford found Jasper and two other stockholders, and he drew them aside to a corner table. For a quarter of an hour he was jovial with them, and once more they felt the magnetic charm of his personality, though each one secretly feared that he had come again for money. He had, but not for himself.

"The treasury is empty," he calmly informed them, during a convenient pause, "and the Corley Machine Company insist on having their bill paid. We owe them two thousand dollars, and it will take five thousand more to complete the covering machine."

"You've been wasting money in the company as you do at home," charged David, flaring up at once with long-suppressed grievances. "You had thirty thousand cash to begin with. I was down to the Corley Machine Company myself, day before yesterday, and I saw a pile of things you had them make and throw away that they told me cost nearly five thousand dollars."

"They didn't show you all of it," returned Wallingford coolly. "There's more. You don't expect to perfect a machine without experimenting, do you? Now you let me alone in this. I know my business, and no man can say that I am not going after the best results in the best way. You fellows figure on expense as if we were conducting a harness shop or a grocery store," he continued, whereat Jasper and Lewis reddened with resentment of the sort for which they could not find voice. "Rent, light, power, and wages eat up money every day," he reminded them, "and every

day's delay means that much more waste. We *must* have money to complete this covering machine, and we must have it at once. There is twenty thousand dollars' worth of treasury stock for sale, aside from the hundred thousand held in reserve until we are ready to manufacture. That extra stock must be sold right away! I leave it to you," he concluded, rising. "I'm not a stock salesman," and with that brazen statement he left them.

The statement was particularly brazen because that very morning, after he left these men, he disposed of a five-thousand-dollar block of his own stock and turned the money over to his wife before he returned to the office in the afternoon. Lamb received him in a torrent of impatience.

"I feel like a cheat," he declared. "The Corley people were over here again, and say that they do not know us. They only know our money, and they want some at once or they will not proceed with the machinery."

"I have been doing what I could," replied Wallingford. "I put the matter up to Jasper and Lewis and Nolting this morning. I told them they would have to sell the extra treasury stock."

"You did!" exclaimed Lamb. "Why did you go to them? Why didn't you go out and sell the stock yourself?"

"I am not a stock salesman, my boy."

"You have been active enough in selling your private stock," charged Lamb.

"That's my business," retorted Mr. Wallingford. "I am strictly within my legal rights in disposing of my own stock. It is my

property, to do with as I please."

"It is obtaining money under false pretenses, for until you have completed this machinery and made a market for our goods, the stock you have sold is not worth the paper it is printed on. It represents no value whatever."

"It represents as much value as treasury stock or any other stock," retorted Mr. Wallingford. "By the way, make a transfer of this fifty-share certificate to Thomas D. Caldwell."

"Caldwell!" exclaimed Lamb. "Why, he is one of the very men we have been trying to interest in some of this treasury stock. He is of our lodge. Last week we had him almost in the notion, but he backed out."

"When the right man came along he bought," said Wallingford, and laughed.

"This money should have gone into our depleted treasury," Lamb declared hotly. "I refuse to make the transfer."

"I don't care; it's nothing to me. I have the money and I shall turn over this certificate to Mr. Caldwell. When he demands the transfer you will have to make it."

"There ought to be some legal way to compel this sale to be made of treasury stock."

"Possibly," admitted Mr. Wallingford; "but there isn't. You will find, my boy, that everything I do is strictly within the pale of the law. I can go into any court and prove that I am an honest man."

Lamb sprang angrily from his chair.

"You're a thief," he charged, his eyes flashing.

"I'm not drawing any salary for it," replied Wallingford, and Lamb halted his anger with a sickened feeling. The two hundred dollars a month that he had been drawing lay heavily upon his conscience.

"I'm going to ask for a reduction in my pay at the next meeting," he declared. "I cannot take the money with a clear conscience."

"That's up to you," replied Wallingford; "but I want to remind you that unless money is put into this treasury within a day or so the works are stopped," and he went out to climb into his auto, leaving the secretary to some very sober thought.

Well, Lamb reflected, what was there to do? But one thing: raise the money by the sale of treasury stock to replenish their coffers and carry on the work. He wished he could see his friend Jasper. The wish was like sorcery, for no more was it uttered than David and Mr. Lewis came in. They were deeply worried over the condition into which affairs had been allowed to drift, but Lamb had cooled down by this time. He allowed them to hold an indignation meeting for a time, but presently he reminded them that, after all, no matter what else was right or wrong, it would be necessary to raise money – that the machine must be finished. They went over to the shop to look at it. The workmen were testing it by hand when they arrived, and it was working with at least a fair degree of accuracy. The inspection committee did not know that the device was entirely impractical. All that

they saw was that it produced the result of a finished tack with a cover of colored cloth glued tightly to its head, and to them its operation was a silent tribute to the genius of the man they had been execrating. They came away encouraged. It was Mr. Lewis who expressed the opinion which was gaining ground with all of them.

"After all," he declared, "we're bound to admit that he's a big man."

The result was precisely what Wallingford had foreseen. These men, to save their company, to save the money they had already invested, raised ten thousand dollars among them. David Jasper put another five-thousand-dollar mortgage on his property; Mr. Lewis raised two thousand, and Edward Lamb three thousand, and with this money they bought of the extra treasury stock to that amount. J. Rufus Wallingford returned in the morning. The stock lay open for him to sign; there was ten thousand dollars in the treasury, and a check to the Corley Machine Company, already signed by the treasurer, was also awaiting his signature.

The eight thousand dollars that was left went at a surprisingly rapid rate, for, with a love for polished detail, Wallingford had ordered large quantities of shipping cases, stamps to burn the company's device upon them, japanned steel signs in half a dozen colors to go with each shipment, and many other expensive incidentals, besides the experimental work. There were patent applications and a host of other accumulating bills that gave Lamb more worry and perplexity than he had known in all his

fifteen years of service with the Dorman Company. The next replenishment was harder. To get the remaining ten thousand dollars in the treasury, the already committed stockholders scraped around among their friends to the remotest acquaintance, and placed scrip no longer in blocks of five thousand, but of ten shares, of five shares, even in driblets of one and two hundred dollars, until they had absorbed all the extra treasury stock; and in that time Wallingford, by appointing a St. Louis agent, had managed to dispose of twenty thousand dollars' worth of his own holdings. He was still "cleaning up," and he brought in his transfer certificates with as much nonchalance as if he were turning in orders for tacks.

Rapid as he now was, however, he did not work quite fast enough. He had still some fifteen thousand dollars' worth of personal stock when, early one morning, a businesslike gentleman stepped into the office where Lamb sat alone at work, and presented his card. It told nothing beyond the mere fact that he was an attorney.

"Well, Mr. Rook, what can I do for you?" asked Lamb pleasantly, though not without apprehension. He wondered what J. Rufus had been doing.

"Are you an officer of the Universal Covered Tack Company?" inquired Mr. Rook.

"The secretary; Edward Lamb."

"Quite so. Mr. Lamb, I represent the Invisible Carpet Tack Company, and I bring you their formal notification to cease using

their device;" whereupon he delivered to Edward a document. "The company assumes that you are not thoroughly posted as to its article of manufacture, nor as to its patents covering it," he resumed. "They have been on the market three years with this product."

From his pocket he took a fancifully embellished package, and, opening it, he poured two or three tacks into Edward's hand. With dismay the secretary examined one of them. It was an ordinary carpet tack, such as they were about to make, but with a crimson-covered top. Dazed, scarcely knowing what he was doing, he mechanically took his knife from his pocket and cut the cloth from it. The head was roughened for gluing precisely as had been planned for their own!

"Assuming, as I say, that you are not aware of the encroachment," the attorney went on, "the Invisible Company does not desire to let you invite prosecution, but wishes merely to warn you against attempting to put an infringement of their goods on the market. They have plenty of surplus capital, and are prepared to defend their rights with all of it, if necessary. Should you wish to communicate with me or have your counsel do so, my address is on that card," and, leaving the paper of tacks behind him, Mr. Rook left the office.

Without taking the trouble to investigate, Lamb knew instinctively that the lawyer was right, an opinion which later inquiry all too thoroughly corroborated. For three years the Invisible Carpet Tack Company had been supplying precisely the

article the Universal Company was then striving to perfect. What there was of that trade they had and would keep, and a sickening realization came to the secretary that it meant a total loss to himself and his friends of practically everything they possessed. The machinery in which their money was invested was special machinery that could be used for no other purpose, and was worth but little more than the price of scrap iron. Every cent that they had invested was gone!

His first thought was for David Jasper. As for himself, he was young yet. He could stand the loss of five thousand. He could go back to Dorman's, take his old position and be the more valuable for his ripened experience, and there was always a chance that a minor partnership might await him there after a few more years; but as for Jasper, his day was run, his sun had set. It was a hard task that confronted the secretary, but he must do it. He called up Kriegler's and asked for David Jasper, and when David came to the telephone he told him what had happened. Over and over, carefully and point by point, he had to explain it, for his friend could not believe, since he could not even comprehend, the blow that had fallen upon him. Suddenly, Lamb found there was no answer to a question that he asked. He called anxiously again and again. He could hear only a confused murmur in the 'phone. There were tramping feet and excited voices, and he gathered that the receiver was left dangling, that no one held it, that no one listened to what he said. Hastily putting on his coat and hat, he locked the office and took a car for the North Side.

J. Rufus Wallingford himself was busy that morning, and in the North Side, too. His huge car whirled past the little frame houses that were covered with mortgages which would never be lifted, and stopped before the home of David Jasper. His jaw was hanging loosely, his big, red face was bloated and splotched, and his small eyes were bloodshot, though they glowed with a somber fire. He had been out all night, and this was one of the few times he had been indiscreet enough to carry his excesses over into the morning; usually he was alcohol proof. At first, blinking and blearing in the sunlight, he had been numb; but an hour's swift ride in the fresh air of the country had revived him, while the ascending sun had started into life again the fumes of the wine that he had drunk, so that all of the evil within him had come uppermost without the restraining caution that belonged to his sober hours. In his abnormal condition the thought had struck him that now was the time for the final coup – that he would dispose of his remaining shares of stock at a reduced valuation and get away, at last, from the irksome tasks that confronted him, from the dilemma that was slowly but surely encompassing him. In pursuance of this idea it had occurred to him, as it never would have done in his sober moments, that David Jasper could still raise money and that he could still be made to do so. Lumbering back to the kitchen door, he knocked upon it, and Ella Jasper opened it. Ella had finished her morning's work hurriedly, for she intended to go downtown shopping, and was already preparing to dress. Her white, rounded arms were bared to the elbow, and

her collar was turned in with a "V" at the throat.

The somber glow in Wallingford's eyes leaped into flame, and, without stopping to question her, he pushed his way into the kitchen, closing the door behind him. He lurched suddenly toward her, and, screaming, she flew through the rooms toward the front door. She would have gained the door easily enough, and, in fact, had just reached it, when it opened from the outside, and her father, accompanied by his friend Lewis, came suddenly in. For half an hour, up at Kriegler's, they had been restoring David from the numb half-trance in which he had dropped the receiver of the telephone, and even now he swayed as he walked, so that his condition could scarcely have been told from that of Wallingford when the latter had come through the gate. But there was this difference between them: the strength of Wallingford had been dissipated; that of Jasper had been merely suspended. It was a mental wrench that had rendered him for the moment physically incapable. Now, however, when he saw the author of all his miseries, a hoarse cry of rage burst from him, and before his eyes there suddenly seemed to surge a red mist. Hale and sturdy still, a young man in physique, despite his sixty years, he sprang like a tiger at the adventurer who had wrecked his prosperity and who now had held his home in contempt.

There was no impact of strained bodies, as when two warriors meet in mortal combat; as when attacker and defender prepare to measure prowess. Instead, the big man, twice the size and possibly twice the lifting and striking strength of David Jasper,

having on his side, too, the advantage of being in what should have been the summit of life, shrank back, pale to the lips, suddenly whimpering and crying for mercy. It was only a limp, resistless man of blubber that David Jasper had hurled himself upon, and about whose throat his lean, strong fingers had clutched, the craven gurgling still his appeals for grace. Ordinarily this would have disarmed a man like David Jasper, for disgust alone would have stayed his hand, have turned his wrath to loathing, his righteous vengefulness to nausea; but now he was blind, blood-mad, and he bore the huge spineless lump of moral putty to the floor by the force of his resistless onrush.

"Man!" Lewis shouted in his ear. "Man, there's a law against that sort of thing!"

"Law!" screamed David Jasper. "Law! Did it save me my savings? Let me alone!"

The only result of the interference was to alter the direction of his fury, and now, with his left hand still gripping the throat of his despoiler, his stalwart fist rained down blow after blow upon the hated, fat-jowled face that lay beneath him. It was a brutal thing, and, even as she strove to coax and pull her father away, Ella was compelled to avert her face. The smacking impact of those blows made her turn faint; but, even so, she had wit enough to close the front door, so that morbid curiosity should not look in upon them nor divine her father's madness. Just as she returned to him, however, and even while his fist was upraised for another stroke at that sobbing coward, a spasmodic twitch crossed his face as he

gasped deeply for air, and he toppled to the floor, inert by the side of his enemy. Age had told at last. In spite of an abstemious life, the unwonted exertion and the unwonted passion had wreaked their punishment upon him.

It was David's friend Lewis who, with white, set face, helped Wallingford to his feet, and, without a word, scornfully shoved him toward the door, throwing his crumpled hat after him as he passed out. With blood upon his face and two rivulets of tears streaming down across it, J. Rufus Wallingford, the suave, the gentleman for whom all good things of earth were made and provided, ran sobbing, with downstretched quivering lips, to his automobile. The chauffeur jumped out for a moment to get the hat and to dip his kerchief in the stream that he turned on for a moment from the garden hydrant; coming back to the machine, he handed the wet kerchief to his master, then, without instructions, he started home. When his back was thoroughly turned, the chauffeur, despite that he had been well paid and extravagantly tipped during all the months of his fat employment, smiled, and smiled, and kept on smiling, and had all he could do to prevent his shoulders from heaving. He was gratified – was Frank – pleased in his two active senses of justice and of humor.

Just as the automobile turned the corner, Edward Lamb came running down the street from Kriegler's, where he had gone first to find out what had happened, and he met Mr. Lewis going for a doctor. Without stopping to explain, Lewis jerked his thumb in the direction of the house, and Edward, not knocking, dashed

in at the door. They had laid David on his bed in the front room, and his daughter bent over him, bathing his brow with camphor. David was speechless, but his eyes were open now, and the gleam of intelligence was in them. As their friend came to the bedside, Ella looked around at him. She tried to gaze up at him unmoved as he stood there so young, so strong, so dependable; she strove to look into his eyes bravely and frankly, but it had been a racking time, in which her strength had been sorely tested, and she swayed slightly toward him. Edward Lamb caught his sister in his arms, but when her head was pillowed for an instant upon his shoulder and the tears burst forth, lo! the miracle happened. The foolish scales fell so that he could see into his own heart, and detect what had lain there unnamed for many a long year – and Ella Jasper was his sister no longer!

"There, there, dear," he soothed her, and smoothed her tresses with his broad, gentle palm.

The touch and the words electrified her. Smiling through her tears, she ventured to look up at him, and he bent and kissed her solemnly and gently upon the lips; then David Jasper, lying there upon his bed, with all his little fortune gone and all his sturdy vigor vanished, saw, and over his wan lips there flickered the trace of a satisfied smile.

Hidden that night in a stateroom on a fast train, J. Rufus Wallingford and his wife, with but such possessions as they could carry in their suit cases and one trunk, whirled eastward.

CHAPTER VIII
MR. WALLINGFORD TAKES A DOSE OF HIS OWN BITTER MEDICINE

As the lights of the railroad yard, red and white and green, slid by, so passed out of the ken of these fugitives all those who had contributed to their luxury through the medium of the Universal Covered Carpet Tack Company. Lamb, Jasper, Lewis, Nolting, Ella; what were all these people to them? What were any living creatures except a part of the always moving panorama which composed the background of their lives? Nomads always since their marriage, when Mrs. Wallingford as a girl had run away from home that was no home to join this cheerful knave of fortune, they had known no resting place, no spot on earth that called to them; had formed no new ties and made no new friendships. Where all the world seemed anchored they were ever flitting on, and the faces that they knew belonged but to the more or less vivid episodes by which the man strove after such luxurious ideals as he had. Only a few of the dubious acquaintances which Wallingford had formed in his earlier days of adventure remained for them to greet as they paused before fresh flights afield. "Blackie" Daw, who had recently

removed his "office" from Boston to New York, was the most constant of these, and him they entertained in one of the most exclusive hostelries in the metropolis soon after their arrival. Mr. Wallingford's face still bore traces of the recent conflict.

"Fanny's the girl!" he declared with his hand resting affectionately on his wife's shoulder, after he had detailed to Mr. Daw how he had squeezed the covered carpet tack dry of its possibilities. "She's little Mamie Bright, all right. For once we got away with it. I'm a piker, I know, but twenty-eight thousand in yellow, crinkly boys to the good, all sewed up in Fanny's skirt till we ripped it out and soused it in a deposit vault, isn't so bad for four months' work; and now we're on our way to ruin Monte Carlo."

"You're all to the mustard," admired Blackie; "you're the big noise and the blinding flash. As I say, I'd go into some legitimate line myself if I wasn't honest. What bites me, though, is that you got all that out of my little Lamb and his easy friends."

"Easy! Um – m – m – m," commented Mr. Wallingford frowningly, as he unconsciously rubbed the tips of his fingers over the black puff under his right eye. "You've got it wrong. I like to sting the big people best. They take it like a dentist's pet; but when you tap one of these pikers for a couple of mean little thousands he howls like a steam calliope. One old pappy guy started to take it out of my hide, and he tried so hard it gave him paralysis."

Mr. Daw laughed in sympathy.

"You must have had a lively get-away, to judge from the marks the mill left on you; but why this trip across the pond? Are they after you?"

"After me!" scorned J. Rufus. "There's no chance! Why, I never did a thing in my life that stepped outside the law!"

"But you lean way over the fence," charged Blackie with a knowing nod, "and some of these days the palings will break."

"By that time I'll have enough soft money in front of me to ease my fall," announced Wallingford confidently. "I'm for that get-rich-quick game, and you can just bank on me as a winner."

"You'll win all right," agreed Blackie confidently, looking at his watch, "but you're like the rest of us. You'll have to die real sudden if you want to leave anything to your widow. That's the trouble with this quick money. It's lively or you wouldn't catch it on the wing, and it stays so lively after you get it."

He arose as he concluded this sage observation and buttoned his coat.

"But you're going to stay to dinner with us?" insisted Mrs. Wallingford.

"No," he returned regretfully. "I'd like to, but business is business. I have an engagement to trim a deacon in Podunk this evening. Give my regards to the Prince of Monaco."

It was scarcely more than a week afterwards when he somberly turned in at the bar room of that same hotel, and almost bumped into Wallingford, who was as somberly coming out. For a moment they gazed at each other in amazement and then both

laughed.

"You must have gone over and back by wireless," observed Blackie. "What turned up?"

"Stung!" exclaimed J. Rufus with deep self-scorn. "I got an inside tip on some copper stock the evening you left, and the next morning I looked up a broker and he broke me. He had just started up in the bucket-shop business and I was his first customer. He didn't wait for any more. That's all."

Daw laughed happily, and he was still laughing when they entered the drawing room of Wallingford's suite.

"It's the one gaudy bet that the biggest suckers of all are the wise people," he observed. "Here you go out West and trim a bunch of come-ons for twenty-five thousand, and what do you do next? Oh, just tarry here long enough to tuck that neat little bundle into the pocket of a bucket-shop broker that throws away the bucket! You'd think he was the wise boy, after that, but he'll drop your twenty-five thousand on a wire-tapping game, and the wire tapper will buy gold bricks with it. The gold-brick man will give it to the bookies and the bookies will lose it on stud poker. I'm a Billy goat myself. I clean up ten thousand last week on mining stock that permits Mr. Easy Mark to mine if he wants to, and I pay it right over last night for the fun of watching a faro expert deal from a sanded deck! Me? Cleaned with-*out*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.