



ON TIPTOE

by Stewart Edward White

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WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY:

GRIMSTEAD, the "Buccaneer" of this swashbuckling story, is stranded among the California redwoods in his "private craft", a high-powered car, when its gasoline tank is broken.

BURTON GRIMSTEAD, his "spoiled" daughter, is with him against her will, especially so as she perceives her father's object in insisting on her going on the trip is to throw her into the company of

ROSS GARDINER, Grimstead's sinister "Second in Command," a capable, good looking young man.

SIMMINS, the Grimstead's English butler-chauffeur whose gay spirits are repressed by his dignity.

DAVENPORT, a youth, comes by and astonishes them first by saying his small car runs on electricity so he has no "gas" to give them, and next by winning a \$10,000 bet from Gardiner by predicting a rain storm, and the revelation (to her alone) that he is "the" Lawrence Davenport, a famous writer, make his vastly interesting to Miss Burton Grimstead.

Impressed by the commercial possibilities of the battery, Grimstead has Gardiner draw up a contract for its exploitation, which Davenport formally agrees to sign after it is stipulated that it will not be pushed so fast as greatly to disturb capital and labor. Davenport tells Burton that every one possesses the same power he possessed and she tries to learn the secret.

Grimstead and Gardiner are overheard by Larry and Burton as they discuss the manner in which they will profit from the battery and ignore Larry's idealistic aims for it. Larry is angered in a conversation with Grimstead. Burton suggests that he "dissemble" so that Grimstead will think he agrees to his plan of handling the battery. Simmins is persuaded to try to steal the signed agreement from Grimstead's bill-fold.

He examined Simmins curiously.

"You're trembling like a leaf," he said. "What's the matter with you?"

Simmins muttered something about its being chilly by the stream.

"Well, bring me my small leather kit bag."

He opened the kit bag, burrowed down to the bottom, and tucked the bill fold beneath the flap.

"There! She'll stick safe enough there until we go. Take it back, Simmins."

"Yes, sir," said Simmins, "and if there is nothing more, sir, I ask permission to return to my camp to turn in."

"Well, take a drink before you go," offered Grimstead. "Here's the key. Your teeth are chattering."

Simmins gratefully swallowed the whiskey, returned the key and disappeared.

Larry and Burton wandered off toward the car and found Simmins waiting for them.

"Here, sir; here it is," he burst out, thrusting the paper into Larry's hands. "What is to happen when he discovers his loss, sir, I cannot for the life of me imagine."

"Nothing! Don't worry, Simmins. If he finds it out, I will take the blame. You have acted very nobly in this matter. Neither Miss Burton nor myself will ever forget it."

"Indeed we shall not, Simmins," added Burton; "you are a true knight!"

Simmins retired, his heart glowing. The two young people made their way to the bank of the little stream, where they would be screened from the camp. There Larry lighted a match and cast a hasty glance of inspection at the document.

"It's all right," he assured Burton relievedly. "This is it! Blessed be Simmins!"

He tore it into small pieces and cast them into the current.

"I feel as though the weight of the world had been lifted!" he cried.

"It does seem as though some one or something was helping us," said Burton soberly. "I think that we should be very thankful that things came about so easily."

CHAPTER XX.

Discovered

The moment the young people were out of hearing Grimstead turned on Gardiner with an almost savage intensity of manner.

"Listen here, Ross," he said rapidly. "The time has come for action, and we must get busy. Things are at touch and go with us and the stakes are the biggest ever played."

Gardiner looked at him blankly. "Never mind figuring it out. Listen to me and take orders. This man Davenport is a fool, but he has brains. It was perfectly evident that the thought would soon suggest itself that if he could once get hold of the agreement he had signed, he could tell us to go whistle."

"But since he and Miss Burton—" "Poppycock! Do you think that type of fanaticism ever becomes reasonable?"

"Then why—" "A blind. It wouldn't fool a mudhen, let alone a wise old coot like me. I'm an old bird; I can put two and two together. The first thing to try was obviously to get hold of it peaceably, by stealing it. If that didn't work, he was going to get it some how, if he had to hold us up or sandbag us. I know the type. He's a fanatic, and the most dangerous kind. He'd commit murder before he'd give in."

Gardiner was excited. "Get him before he gets us!" he suggested.

"I began to take my measures at once," Grimstead went on. "Obviously he'd try first to steal the bill fold. So I made it easy for him."

"Did you suspect Simmins?" "Not at the time. But I figured Davenport would begin to manoeuvre to get hold of the coat or near it."

"A test," murmured Gardiner. "Precisely. Well, when he did not, I began to think I might be wrong. Then Simmins came back scared as a rabbit, and I realized he was in it. I'll settle with him later!"

"But the agreement—" "Was not there, of course! I substituted the carbon copy."

"They'll detect the difference; it isn't signed."

"I signed it for him," grinned the older man, "It isn't a very good forgery but all he'll do tonight will be to ex-

amine it with a match to see if it's what he wants."

"Clever work, chief," cried Gardiner. "But I don't see that it gets us far."

"It gets us until morning. And it corroborates my suspicions."

"Now listen carefully, Ross," continued Grimstead, "for this is what you must do. You've got to get out of here, and you've got to take this agreement with you to the nearest recorder's, and get it entered. That means you start tonight; just as soon as everybody has turned in."

Gardiner nodded.

"So far, so good. But there's another thing. This man is absolutely capable of laying down on us, no matter what agreements we may have."

"What do you mean?"

"Refuse his formula."

"But you can ruin him."

"He'll stand that. He'll stand for anything now he's got his head set! That's the sort they used to use the thumb rack on without much success. Could you analyze this battery if you had it, and reproduce the formula?"

"Certainly, if what he says is true, that the plates are a simple alloy, and there is no further secret. It will only be necessary to analyze them, measure their exact proportions, determine their specific gravity, and observe carefully any peculiarities of their shape and position."

"Remember, their distance from each other is important."

"That of course. I see your idea. We are to steal the battery."

"It must weigh 40 pounds," objected Gardiner. "Do we hide it somewhere?"

"No, you'll drive it out. The roads will carry you; I've been watching them. Put the battery back in that rattletrap of his and drive it out."

Gardiner pondered.

"When we stop that self-starter it will be noticed," he objected, "and there'll be a lot of noise getting away. Simmins sleeps right next door. What do I do with him?"

"Simmins is already taken care of," said the pirate chief calmly. "He will continue to sleep. That drink I gave him will fix that."

"Doped?" surmised Gardiner.

"Just that. Morphine from the medicine case. And we'll feed Davenport a little of the same."

"Chief, you're a wonder! You think of everything!" cried Gardiner admiringly. "I'd suggest you tie him up after he goes under or he'll raise hell when he comes to."

"I expect to," said Grimstead. "Look out; here they come! You understand your job and remember, it's the biggest stake in the world!"

CHAPTER XXI.

Punketty-Snivvel's Revenge

Events ran smoothly along the plan laid out for them by the pirate chief. Burton and Davenport returned shortly to the campfire. At a suitable time a night-cap was proposed and drunk. Soon after with Burton in her darkened tent and Davenport deep in stupor, the conspirators had the place to themselves.

Silence rushed in upon the dying clatter as into a vacuum. Gardiner paused long enough to look in on Simmins. That worthy had not stirred.

It was the work of but a few moments more to reinstall Davenport's strange storage battery in the other car.

Gardiner found the engine much more flexible than any gasoline car he had ever driven. For a few minutes he amused himself by bringing it almost to a stop and then picking up smoothly and positively by merely opening the throttle. He then started out and settled down to the sheer pleasure of driving as fast as his skill would permit.

He was a good driver, and he understood well how to pick up on the straightaways and just how much to check at the curves. And he was a safe driver, as genuine skill is usually safe.

But Gardiner was not alone in the car. No less a personage than Punketty-Snivvels occupied the seat next him, but the little dog's protective coloration had concealed him from Gardiner's notice.

Now Gardiner had once cuffed Punketty-Snivvels soundly when that personage had been left in his charge.

So, crouched in his place, Punketty-Snivvels fixed his beady eyes in malevolence on his enemy, and worked up a fine big hate.

Gardiner flashed around a last corner to see ahead of him a straight bridge. The lights showed him its approach on a slight rise, and that it was built on a high trestle. Then the nose of the car touched the slight rise and the lights lifted.

At the same instance Punketty-Snivvels, whose hate had worked up to a point of action, reached out and bit Gardiner in the wrist!

Gardiner, who had not known of the dog's presence, jumped in surprise and alarm. The car swerved, but he was too cool a driver to permit it to leave the road. However, for three seconds his attention was deflected, and that time was sufficient to shoot the car on to the planking of the bridge.

Gardiner saw all this with the corner of his eye and steered straight and true, while at the same time his direct vision was occupied in identifying the covering little dog. Then he looked back to the front.

Before him yawned an abyss. The bridge had been carried away by the flood!

Even while he reached for the brake his brain photographed clearly the jagged edges of the bridge, the opposite bank picked out clearly by the lights, and dimly far below a white and phosphorescent tumble of waters hastening to the sea.

The brakes checked the momentum almost but not quite enough. The car slowed, ran off the edge, seemed for

an instant to hover right side up like a bird.

Then down it plunged and the foaming, turbulent waters seized it and bore it shouting away.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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