

ON TIPTOE

Stewart Edward White

Illustrations by Henry Jay Lee

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WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY

LARRY DAVENPORT, author, invents an electric battery of startling power.

GRIMSTEAD, a capitalist, whom Larry meets while he is stranded on a California mountain side by the breakdown of his car, induces Davenport to sign an agreement by which he and the capitalist make and market the battery.

ROSS GARDINER, Grimstead's second-in-command, draws up the agreement. He and Grimstead are overheard by Larry as they discuss the manner in which they will profit from the battery and ignore Larry's idealistic aims for it.

BURTON GRIMSTEAD, the capitalist's daughter, has fallen in love with Davenport, impressed by his strange power of prophecy. She suggests that he "dissemble" so that Grimstead will think he agrees to his plan for handling the battery.

SIMMINS, butler-chauffeur, friendly toward Davenport, is persuaded to try to steal the signed agreement from Grimstead's bill-fold.

CHAPTER XIX

Simmins, a True Knight

The campaign of dissembling went off with a bang. Grimstead's hostility melted easily. The impact of Davenport's identity as a famous author, instead of the mechanic he had believed him, was tremendous. The engagement finished him.

Davenport was an excellent match, he was a manly chap, and if Grimstead could arrange it—he was going to be immensely wealthy. Of course he had a lot of damn-fool idealistic notions, but an author was supposed to be eccentric.

Supper passed joyfully enough. Then Grimstead caused the hearts of three of the party to skip a beat. "Simmins," he commanded, "here's my coat to clean up a little, it's got an awful fish smell about it."

As he spoke he took off the garment and hung it on a stub, replacing it with a sweater. He removed nothing from the pockets, and all three of the conspirators could distinctly make out a corner of the bill-fold showing from the inside pocket.

Simmins picked up the coat, and with it started toward the creek. "Hey!" called Grimstead after him. "Where you going? I don't want that thing washed!"

"No sir; of course not, sir. Merely a trifle of sponging, fresh running water, you know, sir," stammered Simmins at a loss.

"Well, go ahead. But there's some things in the pockets; look out you don't lose them. There's a tobacco pouch and a notebook in the side pocket, and my pocketbook in the inside pocket."

"Never fear, sir; I'll take the best of care," chattered Simmins, beating a hasty retreat.

"You're not afraid to trust him with a pocketbook?" Larry ventured to suggest.

Grimstead laughed. "I wouldn't trust him with my roll," he agreed. "But that pocketbook contains nothing but papers; and they can all be replaced. There's nothing there to interest Simmins."

Burton and Larry exchanged another glance. It was almost too good to be true.

After 10 minutes Simmins gilded unobtrusively into the freight and hung the coat again on the stub.

"Here," Grimstead commanded at once, "bring me that pocketbook out of the inside pocket."

For a moment Simmins' limbs refused to work; but he succeeded in extracting the pocketbook and bringing it to his master. Contrary to expectation, Grimstead did not open it. He examined Simmins curiously.

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

said Burton soberly. "I think that we should be very thankful that things come about so easily."

CHAPTER XX

Discovered

The moment the young people were out of hearing Grimstead turned to 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 the thought would soon suggest itself that if he could once get hold of the agreement he had signed, he could sell 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 mule, 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. 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 of all to steal the bill fold. So I made it easy for him."

"Did you suspect Simmins?" "Not at that 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 examine 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."

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-Snivvies 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-Snivvies soundly when that personage had been left in his charge. So, crouched in his place, Punketty-Snivvies 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 instant Punketty-Snivvies, 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 cowering 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.

CHAPTER XXII

And Rapsacallion Does His Stuff

By the campfire Grimstead strained his ears to catch the last sounds of Gardiner's departure. Things were going very well. They always did go well, he had found, when directed masterfully.

Burton, as he had foreseen, did not stir in her tent. She was young and slept soundly, especially in the first part of the night.

After a while he threw away his cigar, stretched and arose. First he leaned over Davenport for a moment, listening to his rather shortening breathing. Then he sauntered to the big redwood at whose base the kitchen had been made.

Here he deliberately unknotted a short piece of line that had been used to suspend a shading bit of canvas, and with it returned toward the sleeper. He was thoroughly satisfied, and was humming a little tune.

In his brief absence another had added himself to the scene. Rapsacallion had shared the tent with Burton. Now, however, urged by some vague restlessness, some telepathic uneasiness, some trickle from the current searching out a channel of his doggy mind, he had deserted the warm and grateful nest and had come forth to sit by his master.

Grimstead paid him no attention; but, cord in hand, advanced upon the sleeper. Now the queer thing happened.

gan again to bark rapidly and warningly.

As Grimstead continued to advance he bobbed forward and back a few inches as though propelled by a spring.

These things impressed Grimstead just so far as to cause him to pick up a heavy club-shaped billet of wood, a weapon that plainly outgunned the armament of a little red-dog who fought at 15 pounds.

At this moment Burton appeared from the tent.

"Dad!" she cried, "what are you doing with that club and that rope? I'll keep him quiet!"

Her first sleepy thought was that the dog's barking had awakened Grimstead and exasperated him to the point of canicide.

As her mind cleared and focused, however, her eyes widened with terror. Davenport's immobility amid all this noise, Grimstead's day attire; what did it mean?

She dashed forward to Larry, and, undeterred by Rapsacallion, fell on her knees at his side.

"What have you done? What have you done?" she cried, terror-stricken.

"Nothing—nothing at all—he's perfectly all right!" cried Grimstead, whose one idea was to reassure her before she lost control of herself.

"He's not hurt. He'll be as well as ever in the morning."

But by this time Burton had assured herself that Larry was living and unhurt, and rose slowly to her feet. Her brow was puckered in thought.

"You've drugged him!" she decided at last. She pondered for a moment more, then raised her head.

"The engine has stopped—you have stolen the car!" she cried in sudden enlightenment. A deep scorn

rose to the surface of her eyes.

"And now you were going to tie him up! You're afraid of what he might do!"

On the passing of the danger of hysterics Grimstead became himself again. This was too big a matter to permit of sentiment. He spoke brusquely.

"This is not woman's business, Burton," said he, "and you must not interfere. No harm is intended to your young man. Indeed, I am saving him from himself, and in

the future he will thank me for making him a rich man instead of permitting him to ruin himself by foolishness."

"He will never thank you; and I will never forgive you!" she cried passionately.

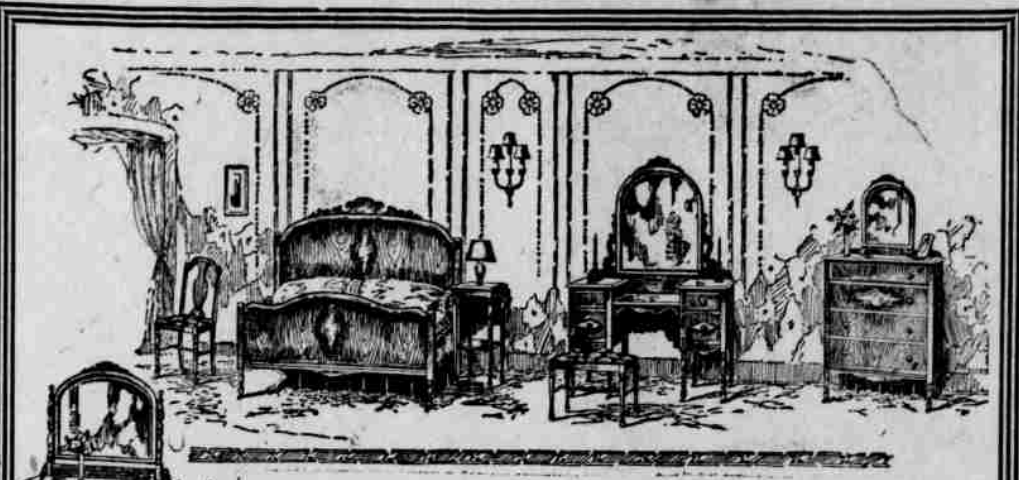
He shrugged his shoulders. Women always got over these things. Still, a slight change in minor tactics seemed desirable. It would no longer be possible or desirable to restrain the young man by force.

"I leave him to you," he told Burton.

ton. "Try to get some common sense into him, if it's possible. But be sure to tell him one thing: That his interests are going to be scrupulously protected. He'll get every cent that is coming to him."

He disappeared down the meadow. Burton looked after him, her bosom heaving with emotions too deep for reply. Then in a passion of mingled loyalty and anger she fell on her knees again beside the unconscious young man.

Concluded Next Week.



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LESSON No. 19

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