



# ON TIPTOE

by Stewart Edward White

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### WHO'S WHO IN THE STORY:

**GRIMSTEAD**, a capitalist, is stranded by the breaking down of his car on a California mountain side.

**BURTON GRIMSTEAD**, his charming, if "spoiled" daughter, is with him. She is not overly pleased when she finds that her father has insisted on her coming in order that she may be thrown in with

**ROSS GARDINER**, her father's second-in-command, a capable young man whom, however, she does not like.

**SIMMINS**, their English butler, chauffeur, is sent after help and returns with

**LAWRENCE DAVENPORT**, a young fellow in a ludicrous home-built car with a battery that is shown to be a marvellous invention, producing, by some mysterious agency, from the air, the electricity by which the car runs. His winning a \$10,000 bet from Gardiner by correctly predicting a rain storm, and the revelation (to her alone) that he is "the" Lawrence Davenport, a famous writer, make him 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 everyone possessed the same power he possessed and she tries to learn the secret.

The pool yielded a rise that immediately developed into an indignant rainbow, which, by an unexpected dash, trailed the dropper fly across a part of the snag, where it became firmly embedded. After that Mr. Rainbow proceeded to pull himself loose and depart.

Grimstead had to wade out to the snag, roll up his sleeves, and plunge his arm in nearly to the shoulder before once more his leader swung clear. The pool, and it was a promising one, was of course completely ruined.

"This is not a propitious moment Burton. 'Keep quiet!'"

"I got into one of those starfish cannons that young fool Davenport told us about, and it took me some time to find it out and to get back," he said to Grimstead in explaining his delay in joining him.

Burton now considered the time right for her surprise, and she, began to make moss balls to toss over on to them. The next words, however, arrested her.

"Now I've caught up, chief," Gardiner was saying, "for heaven's sake tell me why you gave this fellow the right to limit sales for five years. You heard him talk. You'll be making batteries for rowboats only, if you don't watch out."

"Suits me!" returned Grimstead calmly.

"I don't believe I get your idea."

"Well, you asked me if I heard him talk. Yes, I heard him talk and I've heard that kind of talk all my life. It always comes from a half-baked, impractical chump who is so full of impossible ideals that he never gets anywhere, and who couldn't see the main point if you wrapped it in his breakfast napkin. You got to handle that kind, and handle 'em right, or you'll never get an inch."

"That's true enough," commented Gardiner.

It is probable that Davenport would have broken in at this point in some spectacular fashion had not Burton held his arm and placed her fingers over his lips.

"All he sees is that these batteries of his will replace the world's power and that a lot of high falutin' things will happen for the benefit of the human race and all that visionary rot that's never worked out yet and never will."

"What do we care what he thinks as long as we can sell the batteries?" queried Gardiner. "It's going to take quite some few batteries of any size you name to replace the world's power, and that is the eventual market, if the thing works."

"We're assuming that it works," growled the older man, "otherwise there's nothing doing."

"Then why limit the sale to what this nut thinks proper?"

"You're nearly as bad as he is, Ross," observed Grimstead, a note of good humor creeping into his voice. "I'll give you a demonstration that will impress it on you."

"Shoot!" observed Gardiner.

"You asked me last night how many shares in this thing you get. Well, you don't get any."

### CHAPTER XVI

#### Treachery

A blank silence of some seconds ensued.

"I don't believe I understand," then said Gardiner in a strangled voice.

"Me and this young man will hold all the stock," emphasized Grimstead. "Then where do I come in?" demanded Gardiner with a note of rising indignation.

Grimstead chuckled.

"You wouldn't come in one cent's worth if we should do as you seemed to think we would—begin to manufacture and market these things promiscuously!"

Gardiner apparently regained his equanimity.

"Well, chief, I don't get you yet; but I've been on the job long enough to know you have some notion of taking care of me."

"I told you that; and that I am going to use you."

"I think we ought to let them know we are here," whispered Davenport uneasily.

But the girl's eyes were blazing.

"I don't like this," she whispered back. "It's your business they're discussing—and mine!"

Davenport's heart leaped at the last words, but she was leaning forward again, eavesdropping with all her might.

"If I can get one good working model I don't care whether another of the things is made for 10 years, let alone five," stated Grimstead. "My Lord, man! Think of the shake-down! This is going to put every hydro-electric company, every public utility outfit out of business! Not to speak of all the oil and coal and such things. The securities of those companies won't be worth a red cent. The stock market, man! Think of the market! There are a hundred dollars to be had there for every dollar out of the mere sale of those things! Why, you and I will have the world by the tail!"

"You're right," Gardiner replied slowly, "with capital—"

"Which I supply! I'll smash Corbuser first of all, blast his hide; and I'll twist the necks of the Northwest Electric bunch; and I'll have them in packs begging at my office door. They'll see the point, don't worry; and those of them who don't will go to the poor-house. They'll be crying to get aboard; and you and I will sit there and decide the terms. We can buy their stocks and bonds for song."

"And resell at the market," caught up Gardiner, "but that means secrecy as to this battery," caught up VZ:IV as to this battery."

"That's one place where you come in. You ought to be able to handle the publicity."

"I can if there aren't too many of the confounded things attracting attention—"

"I'll see to that. There won't be any of them! The contract says manufacture must start in six months; it doesn't say anything about marketing."

"There are bound to be leaks."

"A thousand of them. But who would pay any attention to the mere rumors of another perpetual motion machine? That part's your job."

A short pause ensued while the two men evidently envisaged the opportunity.

"Why, chief!" cried Gardiner at length, his voice vibrant with excitement. "It's tremendous! It's half the money in the world! It's all the power! You will rule the globe!"

"Just about that. Give me five years and I'll be the richest man in the world; that much is certain. But what is more, I'll have the old crowd down and out or taking my orders. There'll be the biggest smash in history, and you and I, Ross, my boy, will push the button and take our pick of the prices. Then when we've got the whole situation in our hands we can decide just how far we'll go with this battery proposition. One thing certain: We'll be in a position to do just as much or just as little with it as we choose." Grimstead chuckled.

"This man Davenport, isn't he likely to upset the apple cart?" inquired Gardiner.

"That's part of my job," answered Grimstead. "I'll guarantee to handle that young man." There were sounds of rising. "So you better string with me, Ross, and take orders, and not ask too many questions."

"I intend to!" cried Gardiner fervently.

They moved off down stream, and were almost immediately lost to sight around the lower bend.

### CHAPTER XVII

Burton was aflame with indignation, and was bursting out with comments suitable to the occasion; but

Davenport silenced her with a gesture.

"Please," he begged, "let me think."

He was very grave.

"This is rather terrible," he said at length.

"It is atrocious!" she cried. "It is treacherous! That had not even occurred to me! I saw only the releasing of pressure—"

"You aren't going to lie down and let them do this!"

"No; that must not be."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"I don't know."

He arose without further words, and the two took their way back to the camp. Grimstead roared at them jovially.

"Come and look at the rainbow!" he shouted.

Davenport stood gravely unsmiling before the chief.

"Mr. Grimstead," said he, "I overheard your conversation with Mr. Gardiner at the bend of the stream." Grimstead's face flushed darkly.

"Well?" he challenged.

"I cannot be party to the program I heard outlined."

Grimstead considered a moment.

"Sit down," he invited. "Have a cigar. There's plenty of time to talk this thing out, so there's no excuse to go off half-cocked."

Davenport declined the cigar, but sat on the log.

"Now, what's the trouble?" demanded Grimstead.

"The trouble is that your program is destructive," stated Davenport succinctly, "and aims merely at personal power without a thought to the welfare of other people. The thing is likely to prove a curse rather than a benefit. I think you are intelligent enough to understand my point without going into it further."

"I understand your point all right. And I understand your sort too well to argue with you. Argument's the long suit of your kind. So I'm just telling you. It's too bad you don't like my program, but I play the cards I hold and that is final!"

"In those circumstances I shall refuse to enter into this deal."

"In those circumstances it doesn't matter a damn whether you do or not. You've already entered into it."

"I shall refuse to sign the contract."

"You've already agreed to sign it," Grimstead pointed out, "and if you don't sign it, a court decree will put it into effect anyhow."

He eyed Davenport shrewdly.

"You are thinking that you can refuse to divulge your process," he continued. "Eh? No go! You'll either have to produce it or be buried for life. Your battery would be buried along with you. Nobody but me would be allowed by the courts to touch it. It, as well as you, would be lost to the world."

Grimstead paused a moment to allow this to sink in. Then he went on in a more reassuring tone.

"You're not a business man, Mr. Davenport, and you don't realize that the business world is a fight from start to finish. It will be to the interests of every one affected to suppress that battery; in fact, it will be a matter of life and death to them. And believe me, they'll fight to do so. I don't believe you quite appreciate what it means to have nearly the whole business world solidly against you, nor what a tremendous power they wield to crush you. It is a case of fight back harder than they fight, and to get the jump or them first."

He went on developing his point, showing that only by this early and unexpected raid into the enemy's camp could the ultimate success of the project be assured.

Then he went on to point the moral by drawing a contrasting picture—Davenport in jail for contempt of court for refusing to tell Grimstead his process, discredited, broke, and above all, inefficient; Davenport possessed of practically untold wealth, with the opportunities, if he so wished, of repairing damage inevitable to the readjustment.

It was a pretty good plea, for a specious one. Grimstead himself was admirably impressed by it, and convinced of the entire justice and expediency of his course. Davenport, however, did not seem impressed. He arose from his log, remarked curtly that the situation was perfectly clear, and strode away in the direction of the creek crossing.

### CHAPTER XVIII

#### The Papers

Burton overtook Larry at the stream's edge. She saw at once that he was furiously angry, so angry that he could not permit himself to utter a word. She took his hand. He seized her hungrily, and they clung together for several moments

while the calming, soothing influences swept through them. At length he released her with an explosive sigh. They had not kissed.

"Well, that is over!" he said.

"Burton, oh, blessed one, if it had not been for you I should have killed them both as they sat there. But I just kept thinking that he was your father—"

"I know," she soothed him. "I feel with you in every bit of it, whether he is my father or not. But let's not talk about it or we shall just be crazy angry again, and that will do us no good."

"Where do you get your wisdom, Burton?" he asked her, and smiled.

At the smile she clapped her hands.

"That's better!" she cried. "Now we can talk about it. What are we to do?"

"There's one thing I'm not going to do," he stated with conviction, "no matter what the price to pay; I'm not going to permit this scheme of destruction!"

"How can it be stopped?" she asked. "Let's be practical."

"For one thing, I can refuse to give them my formulae."

"And lose all you own and go to jail besides, as father told you," she pointed out.

"Well, I'll do that, if necessary."

"Listen, Larry, dear," she said. "You're not using your head. Wouldn't destroying that agreement you signed settle it all?"

"Burton, you blessed damsel!" he cried, "you've got more sense in your little finger than I have in my whole body! Of course that's the answer! Regular old melodrama stuff. Why, here's even the papers!"

He turned as if to put this new idea into immediate execution; but again she stopped him.

"Larry, you poor infant!" she cried. "It's time you had somebody to look after you! What do you think you're going to do?"

"Get the agreement. Don't you worry about their not handing over when I tell them to!"

"Yes; but they can swear that it was taken from them by force."

"Well, what would you do then?"

"I'd steal it. Then what proof have they except each other's words! You could deny that. Would you lie nicely in a good cause, do you think?"

"I don't know; it wouldn't be necessary. I think the burden of proof would be on them. How will we do it?"

"Dissemble," she cried. "Make them think that your opposition has blown over; that you're all ready to go ahead with father's scheme. Then father won't hang on to his bill fold too closely and—"

"How do you know it's in the bill fold?"

"I saw him put it there," she explained.

"Such a sudden about face on my part may not appeal to him."

"I've thought of that," she said.

A slow color was mounting to her cheeks. "First of all it must become known who you are. He thinks you are a garage man, remember."

"I forgot that," laughed Davenport. "All right; I drop the disguise and appear in my full royal regalia as the Celebrated Author. Do you imagine that will impress him?"

"Then—she hesitated—then we give him the plausible reason for your changing your mind."

"Which is?"

"The announcement of our engagement," she said in a voice so low that he barely heard it.

At this most unpropitious moment there came around the bend Simmins, lugging two infinitesimal trout.

"Damn!" muttered Davenport fervently.

But at Burton's suggestion Simmins was let into their secrets. "The paper belongs to me, and it is vitally necessary I get it back," Larry concluded. "Will you help?"

"It will affect all our future happiness," put in Burton.

"It is only fair to say that if you are caught, it is probable I could help very little. If you succeed my wife and I"—Davenport glanced triumphantly toward Burton—"will take care of you."

"It's a sporting chance, sir," said Simmins stoutly. "You have treated me like a gentleman and ere moonrise the papers shall be in our power!"

"Now, Simmins, listen," Larry impressed the point. "There are two papers. One is on a single sheet of paper; the other is on several. I want the one on the single sheet. The other doesn't matter. But if you should be in any doubt whatever, bring them both. All set?"

And then Simmins was dismissed from the scene, and matters were taken up at the point of interruption. They would not interest us.

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