

THRILLING
WONDER
STORIES



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THE MOON

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Lunar Conquest

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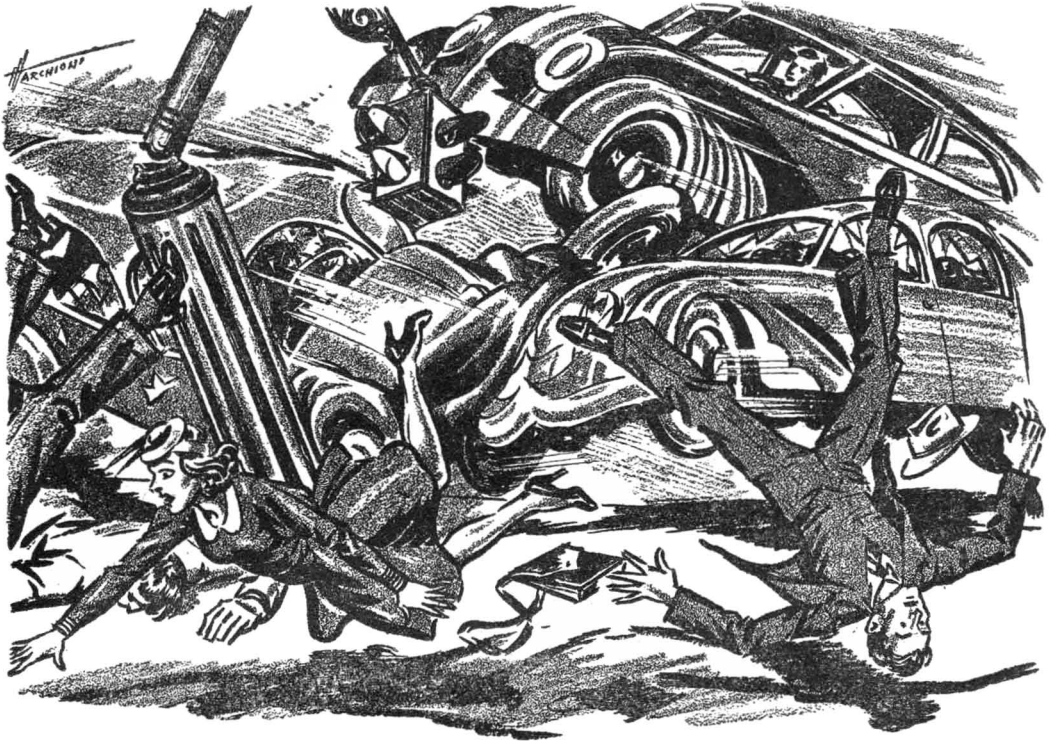
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Timothy Tompkins Had an Invention That Could Annihilate All Friction—But There Was One Rub!



Automobiles plunged in every direction, with surplus power

NO MORE FRICTION

By DR. DAVID H. KELLER

Author of "The Revolt of the Pedestrians," "The Human Termites," etc.

IT was odd, Timothy Tompkins was thinking, how sometimes just a word, or a phrase, or some little human action—or lack of it—could give an idea to a man with an inventive mind.

As now. Caroline, his wife, had given him the idea of a lifetime! He knew it, but she didn't! She thought she was bawling him out. Caroline never had had much patience with him and his ideas. She called his experiments, whatever they were, "wasting time." Just because he had never

come home one day and poured a golden flood into her lap, she thought . . .

"I don't see why we can't get along without clashing and quarreling all the time," Caroline was saying petulantly. "Always about the same old thing—money, money, money that we haven't got. It's come to a point where we rub each other the wrong time every time we open our mouths. Other people can get along without friction, but we—"

There! She had said it again. Friction! Timothy Tompkins' mind was

immediately off on roller-bearing wheels. He didn't even hear the rest of his wife's familiar complaint about how she had to make one dollar do the work of two, and how could he expect her to be sweet and amiable when she had a dreamy idiot in the house, instead of a go-getter who could bring home enough cash to make the domestic wheels go round.

Just one word was ringing in his mind—friction!—and a vast vision of what he meant to do with it. This time he would not fail! He could not! It was too plain in his mind—the greatest dream of his life that had been born of an idle word.

"When I was a kid," he said dreamily, "I was riding in a carriage, and the man had forgotten to grease the axle. It started to get hot, then to smoke, and—"

"That's more than you do!" snapped Mrs. Tompkins biting. "And what an answer to *me!* I'm talking about serious things, practical things, and you—Timothy Tompkins, are you crazy?"

"Maybe." He shrugged. "The jury isn't in yet."

His mind was too busy for argument. He was thinking about friction, and ball bearings and cylinder bearings, and now lubrication was the big thing that made carriages and automobiles and even airplanes possible. In a deep brown study, he moved toward the door.

"Here!" called Caroline peremptorily. "Where do you think you're going? I told you—"

Timothy Tompkins looked up at his wife and grinned.

"Eh?" he said vaguely. "Oh, yes. Pardon me, my dear, but I've got to go out and buy a pair of roller skates."

"Well!" said Caroline Tompkins, and sat down hard as the door closed on her vague-eyed husband. She knew the symptoms. And it seemed hopeless.

BUT Timothy Tompkins got his roller skates. Nightly he rolled along on them on back streets, and when he thought himself expert enough, he started in to make reality

of the dream that one word from his exasperated Caroline had conjured up.

But wasn't it always like that? Every time he got Caroline on her high horse, whatever the reason, he always came out a winner. Invariably she said something that started a train of thought toward a new invention. And this one had sprung full-panoplied into his brain.

When Timothy Tompkins was sure of his balance on the roller skates, he fastened a little box, about an inch square, on each skate, pressed a little button on each box and started to skate. The little button was part of a control switch he had made that pulled a neutralizing screen from the magnets, allowing them to exert their field.

He started to roll along. And he kept on rolling! He didn't even have to move a muscle. He had it! The secret of controlling friction! All in this little machine he had based on such a simple idea! It was so elementary that the wonder to him was why nobody had thought of it before.

Gravity and friction, the two forces that slow things down, could neither one be entirely removed, he knew, but it would help if their effect could be *reduced*. If gravity could be given just a slight twist aside, it might not grip so strongly. And if a more perfect lubricant could be made, friction would be reduced.

He had found his answer to both problems. By creating a field of strain between two small but powerful magnets made out of a new alloy, he was able to give gravity the slight twist. He had done even better. The force was the type that could make small bodies repellent to one another; it was the very opposite of magnetism! That made it the ideal lubricant. Ball bearings rotated without friction in the field's sphere of influence, simply because they never touched the axle! Naturally there was no friction.

So successful was his first try-out of his invention on his roller skates, that when he got going he could not stop. He went for several miles before he could turn around a block and come back. When he finally managed to

press other little buttons and stop, he sat down on the curbstone, breathless, a little uncertain whether he was more elated or dazed.

"It's not perpetual motion," he told himself. "Because it just can't be! But it's practically the same thing. It's motion without friction. That means that once a machine equipped with it is started, it will go on for a mighty long time with practically nothing except the force necessary to start it."

His eyes glistened at the vision.

"Why, I can make these boxes as large as is necessary for any machine! I can attach them to automobiles, or even to trains!"

His brain buzzed with the vastness of the possibilities that opened up before him. If he could sell his invention to a railroad company, trains could be run at a fraction of what they cost the companies now. The railroads could make a comeback—which meant to Timothy Tompkins that if the X. & G. Railroad, in particular, came back, the stocks his father had left him would pay a nice dividend, and maybe Caroline would have something else to talk about instead of his ineffectiveness.

NO time was like the present to Tompkins—which was why he appeared at the country home of George Blunt, president of the X. & G. Railroad early the next morning. Blunt was eating breakfast, but he was not enjoying it. Too many other things were on his mind. His road had passed another dividend—completely passed it—and it looked as if it were only a question of time before it passed into the hands of a receiver.

"Tell this man Timothy Tompkins I'm not at home," he growled at his butler.

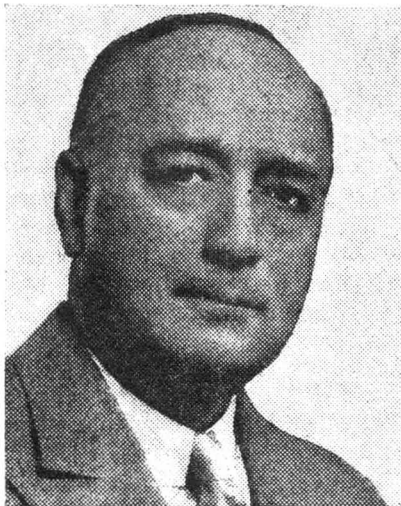
"Pardon me, but he says he has to see you, sir."

"What does he want?"

"He says," the butler murmured deprecatingly, "that he wants to put your railroad on its feet."

"Hell's bells! It hasn't any shoes! I'll fire him off the place myself, if you can't."

Presenting Dr. Keller



Dr. David H. Keller

SINCE he made his bow in 1928 with a science fiction story, "The Revolt of the Pedestrians," Dr. David H. Keller has contributed nearly 100 stories to the American magazines.

All his stories are written in a style peculiarly his own, paying particular regard to the human element. Hugo Gernsback, with whom he was associated, and whose conversations with him produced the inspiration for much of his work, held him out to amateur authors as a shining example to follow.

About himself, Dr. Keller says: "My story is that of a busy life—vocation, physician; avocation, writing. Always in my writing there has been the urge to attain, which goes far deeper than financial reward, or even the clamorous praise of the crowd, who will praise anything if the proper psychology is used on them. I was fourteen years old when I wrote my first story, and 47 when I had my first story accepted and paid for. There was a period during which I wrote for the sole pleasure of writing."

The worried Blunt rushed through the house to Tompkins.

"What do you mean by disturbing me?" he demanded. "Get out!"

"You have to listen to me, Mr. Blunt," Tompkins announced firmly. "I've invented something that will put your railroad on its feet. It's about friction. Understand? *Friction!* You are spending money for coal, oil, wear and tear. I can stop that! You can carry freight and compete with trucks, carry passengers at half a cent a mile and make money. You must listen!"

"'Must' is a big word," snapped Blunt.

"But my idea is a big idea. Look!

"I'll show you on this concrete walk. You can't slide on that, can you, like a boy would on ice?"

"Of course not."

"Why not? The answer's plain. Too much friction between the concrete and the shoes. But if there were no friction you could slide. Now I have two little boxes here in my pocket, and I'm going to fasten them on my shoes. I'm going to press this little button, take a short run and slide. You just watch me!"

He fastened the boxes to his shoes, took a short run and started to slide. He went on, and on, down to the end of the walk, and down the street.

"Get the idea?" he asked, when he came back. "No friction. Just start and keep on going. Make other boxes like these bigger, a little more powerful. Place one on every locomotive, every freight car, every passenger train. Turn off the steam. You keep on going at no cost. A hundred yards from the station turn off the little boxes and put on your brakes. Reduce your rates, but make more money because you can carry more freight and more passengers, and carry them a lot cheaper than your competitors can."

Blunt looked at him. Suddenly he said:

"The power, or force, or whatever you call it that's in those little boxes—would it run an automobile?"

"Of course," the inventor said confidently. "Though I haven't tried it yet."

"Well, we will fasten them on my runabout and see," Blunt said. This was beginning to look more important to him than eating breakfast.

When they were in the car, with the boxes fastened to the running board, the inventor gave Blunt one final injunction.

"Just remember that your brakes won't work very well so long as the anti-friction boxes are working. Those brakes work by friction. Better select a flat straightaway that is a little upgrade."

THEY reached such a spot shortly and Blunt shut off the power and

started the machine coasting. Timothy Tompkins pressed the buttons.

The car kept on going. Not fast, but on and on. Then they came to a curve and Blunt suddenly yelled:

"Shut off the power! This car is not steering right!"

At last they came to a stop. Blunt took off his hat and wiped the sweat off his bald head.

"We went five miles without a bit of gasoline!" he gasped. "I can hardly believe it, but I saw it myself! You're got something here—something big, if it can be controlled. Our engineers will have to work out the proper proportions between the weight of the car and the friction surfaces. Come on back to the house and I'll give you five hundred dollars for a seven-day option on your invention."

Dinner had been ready for two hours when Timothy Tompkins got home. Caroline was not in the best of humors, but what he said cheered her up.

"We're eating out," he told her, laughing at her impatience. "At the best place you know. I made some of that household axle grease you were talking about. Five hundred dollars! And that's just a start! We're going to be rich, honey. At last I have something that is going to bring in money—more than you can ever spend!"

The next five days were busy ones for Timothy Tompkins. He, Blunt, and three expert engineers spent the time experimenting with the new power. Then Tompkins was handed five thousand dollars and asked to sign on the dotted line of the thirtieth page on an agreement. He read the first fifteen pages, but by that time was so confused by the legal wordage that he took the last fifteen pages for granted. He thought the five thousand was a first payment though Blunt had a different idea.

Tompkins and his wife went to Europe on a second honeymoon. They did not return for four months, which brought to an end a perfect vacation and a perfect five thousand dollars. The first thing the inventor did on his return was to take his X. & G. Railroad stocks and bonds to a stock

broker. He wanted to know their value since the new invention had gone into use.

The broker laughed shortly.

"They're worth about thirty cents a hundred pounds," he said. "Don't you know what happened?"

A worried frown creeping over his brow, the inventor shook his head. "No. I've been in Europe for four months."

"Hmm! Well, the X. & G. roads went smash. Blunt and his associates formed a new company and bought out every crippled railroad in the country—and every one of them is a paying proposition now. Looks as if they were headed for control of the entire railroad system of America. That new invention of theirs enables them to operate at a tenth of their former cost. They have the automobile manufacturers gasping. The truck business is at a standstill. Blunt and his associates probably have made several millions. But your stocks and bonds are just so much paper."

"So it worked?" Tompkins said slowly.

"What worked" asked the surprised broker.

"My invention. I sold the idea to Blunt. Well, at least I have an agreement with him."

"That agreement had better be shown to your lawyer," the broker advised brusquely. "Blunt is as smart a man as there is in the country—and about the crookedest."

Timothy Tompkins took that advice—and got one of the surprises of his life about what the lawyer found on the thirtieth page of the contract.

"It means, Mr. Tompkins," the lawyer explained, "that you will not get another red cent from him than the five thousand dollars you have already received."

"But he told me that was the first payment," objected the shocked inventor.

"And neglected to tell you it was also the last."

And that was that. But Tompkins discovered a number of other things during the next few days. For one thing, he learned that Blunt had

bought the famous Metropolis Building where he occupied the two upper floors. And he learned that the anti-friction machine, carefully guarded by patents, was revolutionizing transportation by rail.

TWO months after Timothy Tompkins had returned from Europe, his betrayer, George Blunt, was faced with some startling information that stared out from the front pages of every newspaper. A dozen automobile and lubrication men who had come to the Metropolis Building to try to negotiate with Blunt had slipped and fallen on the polished marble floor in front of the ground floor elevators; most of them old men, with brittle bones. One had a severe head injury; three had broken wrists, one a dislocated hip joint, and several had bad ankle sprains.

"The total amount of damages asked for will be over a million dollars," the magnate's confidential lawyer told him.

"We will fight every one of them!" Blunt yelled angrily.

"But there will be more unpleasant newspaper publicity," the lawyer murmured. "And you know how you dislike it."

The next day there were similar inexplicable accidents in front of the elevator doors on the nineteenth floor. The following day the thirty-third floor seemed to be the sliding place. Damage suits were being filed every hour. It was Christmas time for the legal profession. When three hundred people fell on the first floor again the next day, hysteria reached a climax. Half of the tenants moved out.

Total damage suits against Blunt as owner of the building amounted to a million and a quarter. He had been doing a lot of thinking and a lot of sweating, but finally believed he knew what was happening. So he made a call at the home of Timothy Tompkins.

Mrs. Tompkins did not know where her husband was, she said. The last she had heard from him he had been on his way to China. She hoped Mr.

Blunt would find him as she was practically destitute. She cried, and he would have felt sorry for such a pretty woman if he had not been so concerned with his own troubles.

Nor was his mind eased the next day. Elevator service in his office building was at a standstill. The machinery in the basement was running wild. Flywheels were breaking from the terrific speed of their revolutions. And who could expect rich, elderly men to walk up thirty to fifty flights of stairs?

Blunt at once went into conference with the scientists who had worked for him making the anti-friction boxes practical for railroads.

"I KNOW what happened!" he exploded. "That idiot Tompkins is planting his little boxes around in strategic positions that's what! Everybody in this building is mad as hell about it—but that's not the worst. If he can do it here, he can do it anywhere. A smash-up on one of our railroad lines, two or three bad accidents, would make the passengers abandon them, no matter how low we put the rates! One of his little boxes will effect everything in its radius."

"Why don't you compromise with Tompkins?" suggested the chief engineer. "Or have him arrested, if you think he's the cause of all these accidents?"

"Got to find him first," growled the railroad magnate. "And I can't. Nobody can. I've got bills for over a hundred thousand dollars from the city's best detective agency. But no results. His wife says he's on his way to China." He snorted. "Maybe."

"Well, all I can say," one of his advisers remarked grimly, "is that you'd better find him. Before you have wrecks all over the place."

Blunt hated to do it, but he swallowed his fury and inserted a personal in the *Morning Blade*. It did not bring the inventor, but it brought his lawyer.

"For various reasons it is impossible for Mr. Tompkins to see you himself," the lawyer explained. "We feel that he was robbed when he signed a cer-

tain agreement with you he did not understand. He also had fifty thousand dollars worth of stocks and bonds in the X. & G. Railroad, and you know what happened to the value of that stock."

"What I did was legal!" snapped Blunt. "But what this insane man has done—why, it's only Providence that prevented anyone being killed."

The lawyer shrugged. "Perhaps. But he does not think so. He's a pretty desperate man, too, Mr. Blunt. Feels that he invented a device that should be given to the world, and wants the world to know about it and how it would add to the wealth and happiness of mankind. What are you going to do about it?"

"I'll give him a reasonable income for the rest of his life."

The lawyer laughed shortly. "Generous of you," he drawled. "But here's what he wants: He wants his device on every automobile, on every machine, in every home. He wants it to be given to the world just as insulin was. He declares that a hundred million of his little boxes scattered throughout the nation would bring back prosperity."

Blunt brought his fist down on his desk with a smash. "I won't do it!" he cried. "That's final!"

And that was the end of that conference.

The next day seven of the swankiest stores on Fifth Avenue were anonymously advised to notify customers that it would be dangerous to enter their stores between three and four o'clock. If they wanted further details, it was suggested they consult Mr. Blunt, the railroad magnate.

Naturally he declared he knew nothing about it and refused to accept any responsibility. Some refused to heed the warning, with the result that between three and four a choice collection of society matrons, casual strollers and dowagers slid, slipped, and skidded in front of these stores to their mutual distress and the frantic annoyance of the owners. Even the police could do nothing, though they besieged Blunt.

The railroad magnate figuratively
(Continued on Page 123)

NO MORE FRICTION

(Continued from Page 98)

tore his hair, but after that affair he was on the verge of surrendering, of giving Timothy Tompkins whatever he asked for. But Timothy Tompkins did not know that—Timothy Tompkins who took off his overalls as janitor in Blunt's Metropolis Building that night and tumbled into bed.

Tompkins sighed heavily. Well, he had done almost all he could, and he seemed to be getting nowhere with Blunt. He would have to strike at Wall Street now — the heart of the money district, the pulse of America.

...

WITH his new and better demagnetizers that would work by remote control from the basement of the Metropolis Building, Timothy Tompkins was ready. Sending a trusted assistant down to Wall Street to throw the switch at the proper time, he threw aside his cloak of silence and gave a startling story to the newspapers through an advertisement he inserted. The papers carried the story with scareheads, as well as the ad which warned New Yorkers to stay out of a two-mile radius of Wall Street between nine and five that day, and to start no machinery of any kind within that area. Shipping was warned; also airplanes.

The inventor felt shivery tremors down his back as he read those stories.

"Maybe I'd better call it all off," he muttered. "Something might go wrong and there'll be thousands of curious down there. No! I won't call it off! Blunt must be made to pay. If they won't heed the warning, let them blame him! At nine I'll phone Pete to push the button."

Down in Wall Street business was starting as usual. And unusual crowds were in the streets, curious crowds, milling about looking for promised excitement; in carnival moods. Subways, elevated lines, buses and automobiles brought their quotas to add to the thousands trying to get inside the two-mile circle.

Vendors had grasped the opportunity

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(Continued from Page 123)

nity for gain, and were crying their wares—flags, balloons, ground grippers to be put on shoes. One man was even selling skis. His was the spirit of the crowd that did not believe anything was going to happen, but wanted to be there if it did.

“Slide on the cement!” he yelled. “Don’t wait for winter!”

Suddenly, a few seconds after nine, it happened!

Through field glasses, as he stood on the roof of the Metropolis Building, Timothy Tompkins saw a hundred elevators crash through the tops of buildings, sail into the air, then crash sickeningly down to the streets. Thousands of people were sliding helter-skelter. Ferry boats, steamers, crashed into each other. Automobiles plunged in every direction, with surplus power and no control.

In Timothy Tompkins’ wildest dreams he had never expected totally to eliminate friction in that region, and much of the gravity.

“I’ve got to stop it!” he screamed. “Hundreds will be killed! They’re dying now!”

He raced for the telephone.

“Hello! Hello! Peter? Listen to me — *listen!* Turn it off! Turn — What? You can’t hear me? I’m screaming now! Turn it *off!* I *am* talking as loud as I can! There’s something wrong with my voice — it’s squeaking! Turn it off, turn—”

He dropped the phone suddenly.

“The line is dead!” he groaned. “Every piece of electricity in the city is out of commission, I suppose—motors running wild. I can hear it—tearing loose! I’ve got to stop it—God, I can’t walk! Everything is sliding. I’m slithering into hell with the blood of thousands on my hands, and I cannot talk above a whisper!”

* * *

SOMEONE had him by the shoulders, shaking him.

“Wake up! Timothy! You’re having a nightmare.”

He opened his eyes. Surprisingly he was still on his basement cot. Beside him stood Caroline, George

Blunt, and a woman he had never seen before. They all seemed happy and excited.

"This is Mrs. Blunt," said Caroline. "She came to see me and we decided to put an end to that nonsense outside of the Fifth Avenue stores. It interferes with our shopping terribly. She and I have brought Mr. Blunt so you two can get together and fix it up."

"Right, Tompkins," Blunt admitted ruefully. "I'm surrendering unconditionally, and I advise you to do the same."

Timothy Tompkins looked wildly around.

"Then—then it was a dream—that disaster in Wall Street? I didn't kill anybody?" He let out a sigh of relief. "Whew! I dreamed that I used my demagnetizers downtown and killed a lot of people."

"Of course you didn't kill anybody," said Mrs. Blunt. "And you won't. The trouble between you and George is all over, and he's going to build you a laboratory where you can invent things all day long. He will market them and you can share the profits equally."

"And we can play bridge every night!" exclaimed Caroline.

Tompkins' eyes twinkled. "I see I shall have to invent something to make bridge games pleasant for married people," he murmured.

"You're a great inventor, darling," said his wife, as she kissed him. "But not even you are likely to do anything about taking the friction out of bridge."

