Gus Settles a Family Quarrel

By MARTIN BUNN

IT WAS a warm, sunny May afternoon. In the little office of the Model Garage Joe Clark was busy over his ledgers. But outside, his chair tilted back against the wall beside the open office window, Gus Wilson sat idly smoking his pipe. His peaked black mechanic's cap lay on the ground beside him, and he was lazily enjoying the tickling sensation on his scalp caused by the languid breeze blowing gently through his close-cropped gray hair.

"What I'd like to do," he said through the window to his partner, "is go up to the lake and go fishing. And what I ought to do is get right back there in the shop and finish up that transmission job on the Kelly's old bus. Hey, Joe, you old fossil—don't you ever feel like doing anything except just working?"

A rubber stamp thudded dully on an inked pad and banged more sharply on the desk as Joe stamped "paid" on a bill, and his pen scratched as he wrote his initials and the date carefully under the stamp. "I'd a darned sight rather work here in comfort than sit in a boat all day with a million bugs biting me, the way you got me to do last summer," he answered at last. "But if you want to go fishing so bad, why the heck don't you take tomorrow off, and go? Things are sort of slow right now. I'll be around, of course, and Harry'll be able to take care of 'most any rush job that's likely to come in."

Gus laughed. "Fishing season doesn't open for two weeks," he said. "I was just talking. But d'you know, Joe, you hit on just what's the matter with the garage business nowadays, when you said that Harry could take care of any job that's likely to come in. Sure he could—Harry or any other competent motor mechanic. That's the trouble—one repair job is getting to be too much like all the rest of them to suit me. What I'd like would be a good, old-fashioned brain-teaser—something that would get my old bean to working full speed again. Yes, sir, that's what I need to wake me up!"

Joe grunted disdainfully. He knew the sort of job that his partner was wishing for—the sort of job that he could fool around with for the better part of a half day locating the trouble—and then charge the customer fifty cents because it took him only a couple of minutes to remedy it!

A shiny new roadster came rolling smoothly along the highway, slowed down, and then turned in at the garage. As Gus put down his pipe, pulled on his cap, and started for the gas pump, he saw that the car was driven by a middle-aged, pugnacious-looking little man who had a youngish and very stout woman sitting beside him. To his surprise, the driver didn't pull in at the gas pump, but drove right up to the office door, where he stopped and cut off his engine.

"This the Model Garage?" he demanded. "You Gus Wilson?"

"Right both times," Gus assured him, grinning as he approached the car. "My name's Snodgrass," snapped the little man. He gave a sideways jerk of his head toward his companion. "That's Mrs. Snodgrass."

The stout woman smiled constrainedly. Gus noticed that her face was flushed and that the light of recent battle lingered in her blue eyes. "They tell me that you're a real trouble-shooter," went on the little man, "a regular J. Edgar Hoover when it comes to tracking down grief in a motor."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," Gus began modestly. "But sometimes I'm able to—"

"All right!" interrupted Snodgrass. "Well, see if you can find out what's the matter with this car. The devil's in it—or in my wife. Open up the hood."

Gus opened it. The little man turned the ignition switch and stepped on the starter. The engine purred as creamily as a radio crooner's voice. "What about that?" demanded the little man.

"What about what?" Gus asked. "There's nothing wrong with that engine—never heard one run more smoothly."

Snodgrass switched off the engine and hopped out of the car. "Now you do it!" he ordered his wife. Her face redder than ever, she moved over into the driver's seat, switched on the engine, and stepped on the starter. Nothing happened. She tried again and again, an expression of mingled amazement and disgust on her face.

Snodgrass was dancing with rage as he pointed an accusing forefinger at her. "It's her fault!" he yelled. "Just what I've been telling her. It always will run for me, but it never will run for her. She does something wrong. But what the devil is it?"

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the door. "Let me try it, Mrs. Snod- 
grass," he suggested. She got out, the 
running board groaning under her 250 
pounds. "This is my car," she said, 
"that little bantam gave it to me for my 
birthday. Just get it running, mis-
ter, and then tell me how to get on 
the Lincoln Highway from here. That's 
all I want!"

"Lincoln Highway!" shouted her hus-
hband. "What do you think you want 
to get on the Lincoln Highway for?"

ACCORDING to the road map it runs 
through Reno," the woman said 
bitterly. "I'm going to get on it, and 
stay on it until I get there!"

"Well, now, let's see," Gus said sooth-
ingly. He got into the car and pressed 
the starter with his foot. Again the 
gine purred smoothly. He got out, 
leaving it running. "Try again, please, 
Mrs. Snodgrass," he said. She climbed 
in—and before she had settled her 
ample self in the driver's seat the 
engine had stopped! "I've had just 
about enough of this monkey business!" 
she snapped ominously.

Gus slowly scratched his head just 
above his right ear. Then he leaned 
over and began fussing with the floor 
boards. When he straightened up he 
had one of them in his hand. "Step on 
the starter—just this once more, Miss 
Snodgrass," he requested.

She did as he asked. The engine 
started—and kept on running!

Gus laughed. "We've chased out that 
devil!" he said. He held up the floor 
board and pointed to a little metal 
bracing plate screwed to its lower 
side. "That's him. See what happened? 
When this floor board is in its place, 
that metal plate is just over the fly-
wheel generator plug. Mr. Snodgrass 
and I aren't heavy men, so when either 
of us was in the driver's seat nothing 
happened. But Mrs. Snodgrass weighs 
ever—weighs a little more, so when 
she got behind the wheel the floor 
boards were pressed down on that side 
of the car until the metal plate came 
into contact with the top of the gen-
erator plug and grounded on the engine 
block. Naturally, that shorted the igni-
sion system. You'd better leave that 
floor board out, Mr. Snodgrass, until 
you can get a carpenter to do a little 
job of bracing under that side of the 
floor."

The little man was all smiles now. 
"You're a wonder, Mr. Wilson," he 
said generously. "You've lived right up 
to your reputation as a trouble sleet. 
How much do I—"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," Gus 
said. "That's a brand-new one on me, 
and it's restored my faith in the 
general cussedness of automobiles. 
When they get all the little devils 
chased out of 'em, I'll have to look 
around for another one."

He turned to the woman with a wide 
smile. "Now you can drive anywhere 
you want to—except maybe on that 
Reno road?"

The stout woman smiled and blushed 
as she let in her clutch. "Maybe I'd 
better go on a diet instead!" she said. 
"Thanks a lot, Mr. Wilson!"

When Jack Kelly came in for his 
car late that afternoon, Gus told him 
about the Snodgrass affair. "Say, 
Gus," Kelly said admiringly, "doesn't 
it amount to anything ever stump you?"

Gus leaned against his workbench 
while he crammed long cut into his 
pipe, and Kelly knew that he was go-
ing to hear a yarn.

"Yup, I've been stumped many times 
—plenty stumped," Gus said. "And it 
was what you might call an ignition 
problem that had me stumped worse 
than I've ever been stumped before 
or since.

"When I was younger, anita used to 
get in my pants—I wouldn't have stayed 
in business, you know, more than once 
in my life. Well, that was O.K.—I wasn't 
moved, and I never had any trouble 
finding a job. So when I'd seen enough 
of one town, I'd just roll along to an-
other one."

ONE spring day, a few miles back 
from the nearest Colorado and a 
friend of mine out there told me one of 
the queerest motor-trouble stories I 
think I've ever heard. He had an 
almost new Dort six, and it was purring 
along the road one day at maybe forty 
or forty-five miles an hour, and every-
thing was lovely—except that a strong 
northeast wind was blowing a lot of 
dust around.

"He was traveling through rolling 
country, and pretty soon he noticed 
that a couple of cars were stopped in 
a cut a half mile ahead. He got into 
the cut, he looked ahead, and he could 
see a parked car, its engine running, 
starting in the same mysterious way. The 
air was blue with dusting, and no one 
could get started. Inside of an hour he 
claimed there were fourteen cars stalled 
in that cut.

"Then another funny thing hap-
pended. A Model T Ford came along, 
and its engine kept right up on running. 
The driver couldn't help the other cars 
to get started, but he did the next best 
things—he took off ahead of them, 
and hooked up to a ranch house a couple of 
miles down the road, where he could tele-
phone to the nearest town for a wrecker. 
By the time this fellow had walked back 
to the cut, the cut was empty, and two 
three cars stalled in it. But a half 
dozens Model T Fords had gone through 
without the slightest trouble!

"After a while the men saw the 
wrecker coming along the road. It was 
only an old Chevrolet, but it was an 
business." (Continued on page 127)
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was driving it had kicked at his starter for a while without getting any action, he got out and started to pull tools out of the back of the wrecker, cursing because some one had thrown a lot of pieces of chain over them. My friend noticed that he left one length of chain trailing down over the tailboard onto the road.

The mechanic fooled with his motor for a while, and then got in and gave his starter another kick. And his engine started! So he threw all his tools back into the car. Then he noticed the piece of chain hanging over the tailboard, and threw that in, too. And his engine stopped!

"That was the tip-off. All of the drivers fastened skid chains or pieces of wire to the backs of their cars, so that they would trail in the road, and they all got started without any trouble. After they'd gone a few miles, my friend got out and put his skid chain back in the car, and she went on running all right." Gus stretched and yawned. "Well, guess it's time for me to go home for supper," he remarked.

"Wait a minute—wait a minute!" sputtered Kelly. "Finish your story. What made all the cars but the Model T Ford go?"

"That's what I couldn't figure out," Gus said. "And it bothered me plenty. So when I got to Boulder I went up to the University of Colorado and told a fellow who taught electrical engineering about my friend's story—half expecting him to think that one of us was a liar. But he said that he'd seen the same thing happen before when there was still wind blowing. Seems that the shifting sands created static electricity that short-circuited batteries, and that the chains or wires hanging out of the cars onto the road grounded it. Naturally, it didn't affect the old Model T Fords—they ran off magneto, and didn't have any batteries!"

Highways in Colors
To Guide Motorists

HIGHWAYS tinted in pink, blue, lilac, and various other distinctive colors, may be among the roads of the future, if an English plan is carried out. Because there are so many highway signs on modern roads, it is argued, motorists are frequently confused rather than informed by the written directions. When a representative of the British Road Federation suggested to the British Ministry of Transport that lamp posts and other roadside poles on a certain route be marked in various distinguishing colors, critics declared this would merely add confusion to the already confusing welter of signs and symbols. As an alternative, the critics suggested the use of tinted concrete or asphalt for the roadway itself.

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