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New 2-Piece TV
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“But the way things look, you won’t even get it rolling.”

Gus Takes a Stitch in Time

By Martin Bunn

DON’T mess around with that mower!” growled the beefy, red-faced man to a group of small boys gathered around the rear of his truck. “Look, but don’t touch—or I’ll tan your hides!”

Stan Hicks came out of the Model Garage. “Can I help you, sir?”

“Gas up the truck and give me five gallons in that can back by the mower.”

“Hot day for mowing,” Stan said.

“ Might be for some mowers, but this here’s a Trail Blazer. Me and it is gonna win the competition at the County Fair this afternoon.”

Stan inserted the hose in the gas tank and said, “Oh, you mean that Park Commission contest?”

“Yep. Winner gets a contract for nine mowers. That’s me. Hop to it, son. Time’s a-wastin’.”

“All set,” said Stan, handing up change for an extended $10 bill.

Then away I go,” roared the man, settling his belly behind the wheel. “I’m a-headin’ for the Fair Grounds! Yahoo!”

SOME hours later Gus came out of the Model Garage office in his good suit, holding a needle and a spool of thread.

“Pulled a button off my coat,” he said to Stan Hicks. “I wouldn’t go at all if it weren’t that Hank Sawyer wants all us Park Commission members to be at the
grounds for the power-mower judging.”

“Yeah,” said Stan. “I talked to one of the contestants this morning.”

“Nice commission for the winner,” said Gus. Standing in the light by the open shop door, he poked the thread at the eye. It bent, the needle fell to the ground, and Gus, muttering, “Dagnab it!” stooped to pick it up.

A shabby station wagon pulled up and a young woman stepped out. “May I use your phone?” she asked.

“Yes, ma’am,” Stan said, beaming. “Right here on the desk.”

“Oh, thank you. I want to let my mother know that Bill—that’s my husband—and I won’t be home for dinner. We’re giving a demonstration at the Fair Grounds, and it looks like we’ll be late.”

Stan grinned. “My boss, Gus Wilson,” he nodded toward the figure bent over a needle and thread, “was just on his way
to the fair when he lost a button. Been trying to sew it on for five minutes.”

The girl walked over to Gus. “Let me do it.” She threaded the needle deftly, and had the button in place in a jiffy.

“Thanks,” said Gus. “Guess I’m handier with a wrench. Well, I’m off, Stan. Probably see you at the fair, Miss.”

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 right up, Gus,” Ted Miller barked, “and get some real old-fashioned cotton candy.”

Gus ambled up and plunked a quarter down on the counter.

“Things sure have changed since we were kids,” he mused. “Used to buy this stuff for a nickel.”

“I know,” Ted agreed as he spun off a generous ball onto a paper cone. “Here, wrap your tonsils around this.”

Gus had barely swallowed a mouthful when he began to cough and choke. Ted thumped him on the back.

“I’m too old for this stuff,” Gus said, grinning. “Clogged my windpipe.” He moved along toward the power mowers.

The display was housed in a large tent at the far end of the midway. Gus sauntered inside, nodded to some friends, and stopped in front of the Trail Blazer.

“If you’ll give me just one minute of your time,” spied the fat-faced, paunchy salesman, “I’ll show you the best rotary mower you ever saw.”

“It’s a fine-looking mower, all right,” Gus agreed.

“Best buy the county can get. Here, I’ll give you a little demonstration—on the house.” He chortled, poking Gus in the ribs. “I tell you, mister, you better get your order in right now because after I win I’ll be short of stock. A small down payment’ll hold it for you.”

“Well,” Gus said, “I’m not exactly in the market for one. You see…”

“In that case, Jack, keep moving. Make way for the paying customers.”

Two stalls away a young couple bent over a mower that was coughing asthmatically. Gus moseyed over.

“You seem to be having some trouble,” he said. They both looked up, and Gus recognized the young lady who had sewed on his button.

“Hello, Mr. Wilson,” she said. “I’m Ann Hawkins and this is my husband, Bill.” She pointed to the stalled mower. “We just can’t get the thing to go.” She explained to her husband, “Mr. Wilson is a mechanic. Maybe he can help us.”

“I can fix it myself,” said Bill.

“But, Bill, you’ve been working on it for over an hour.” Ann turned to Gus. “Mr. Wilson, Bill just has to win.”

“Couldn’t you get another demonstrator?” Gus suggested.

“Not in time,” Bill said. “All the others are in my shop at Vernon.”

“You see,” Ann explained, “Bill just bought this franchise for the Perfection Mower. We put all our money in it. Honestly, Mr. Wilson, it’s the greatest.”

“According to that supersalesman of the Trail Blazer, he’s got things all sewed up,” Gus said.

“That guy!” snorted Bill. “His mouth is too big. Why, this morning he was over, poking around, telling me how much better his mower is. Practically took mine apart finding fault with it.”

“What have you looked for?” Gus asked.

“Well, I checked the condenser and there’s plenty of spark. I replaced it, just in case. Still no luck.”

“These little one-cylinder jobs can be pretty tricky,” Gus said. “How about a high-resistance connection? Did you try that?”

“Yes, I did. There’s nothing wrong with the coil.” Bill checked his watch. “Confound it, we’re running out of time!”

“Why not let me give it another check,” Gus said. “That is, if you’ll let me return your wife’s good deed.”

“Please, Bill, he might just find something you missed,” she pleaded.

“What have I got to lose?” Bill said.

“You guys might as well save yourselves a lot of trouble.” It was the fat Trail Blazer man, a smug grin on his face. “You seem pretty sure of yourself,” Gus said. “The battle isn’t won before it’s started, you know.”

“Don’t you be too sure,” he sneered. “Maybe that mower could beat mine, but the way things look you won’t even get it rolling.”

“Sounds like a challenge,” Gus said as the man walked away. “How about the points, Bill?”

“Okay, but let me try again now that it’s rested.” He pulled the rope. A couple of splutters—then pfft!

“I see you put in a new plug,” Gus said. “The way I figure, a gas engine has
to run if it's got enough gas and enough spark." With that he plunged in with both
hands. "The carburetor screens and jets are clean." He checked timing, camshaft
and gears.

"I'll run through the valves. Four-
cycle engines sometimes balk."

"Gosh, Mr. Wilson," Bill said, "we've
only got 15 minutes. What'll I do?"

Ted Miller walked by with a cone of
cotton candy. "Have another, Gus," he
invited, "or is your windpipe still
clogged?"

Gus looked up and scratched his head.
"By golly," he said, "maybe that's it." He
stooped down and disconnected the
muffler. Then he grabbed the starter rope
and yanked. The mower engine exploded
just as a loudspeaker was announcing:
"And now, folks, the final demonstration,
the Perfection Power Mower."

Bill got his machine down and pulled
the starter. As the motor purred, he de-
scribed its features over the public-ad-
dress system. Then he put it through its
paces, finishing his cutting right in front
of Gus and Ann, in the grandstand.

A FEW minutes after Gus returned
from the Park Commission meeting,
the announcer's voice came over the air.
"The judges have reached a decision. The
contract goes to"—he paused and looked
down at a piece of paper—"to the Per-
fection Power Mower."

"We're made!" shouted Bill as he
hugged Ann and clapped Gus on the shoulder.

"You did a good job, Bill," Gus said. "And now
I've got to see a man about his conscience."

At Ted Miller's stand he
bought a double-sized ball
of cotton candy, and headed
up the power-mower
tent. The disgruntled Trail
Blazer man was packing his
gear.

"Say, mister," Gus said,
"I think you deserve a con-
solation prize." He thrust
the candy into a flabby
hand. The guilty expression
on the man's face cleared
up any doubt Gus might
have had as to how the wad
of cotton waste had gotten into Bill's
mower.

"I don't get you," the man said.
"I think you do," Gus snapped. "You've
got a nice clean mower there. Why play
dirty with it?"

He turned and walked back to Bill and
his pretty wife. Ann took his hand.

"How can we ever thank you, Mr. Wil-
son? You know ..."

Gus interrupted her, a twinkle in his
eyes. "All this somehow reminds me of
an old saying."

"What's that?"

Gus stroked the button on his coat. "A
stitch in time saves nine. In this case the
stitch saved an order for nine power
mowers."

END

Next Month: Gus makes the right contact.