

# 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 Kellys' 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 inking 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. "Bass 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!"

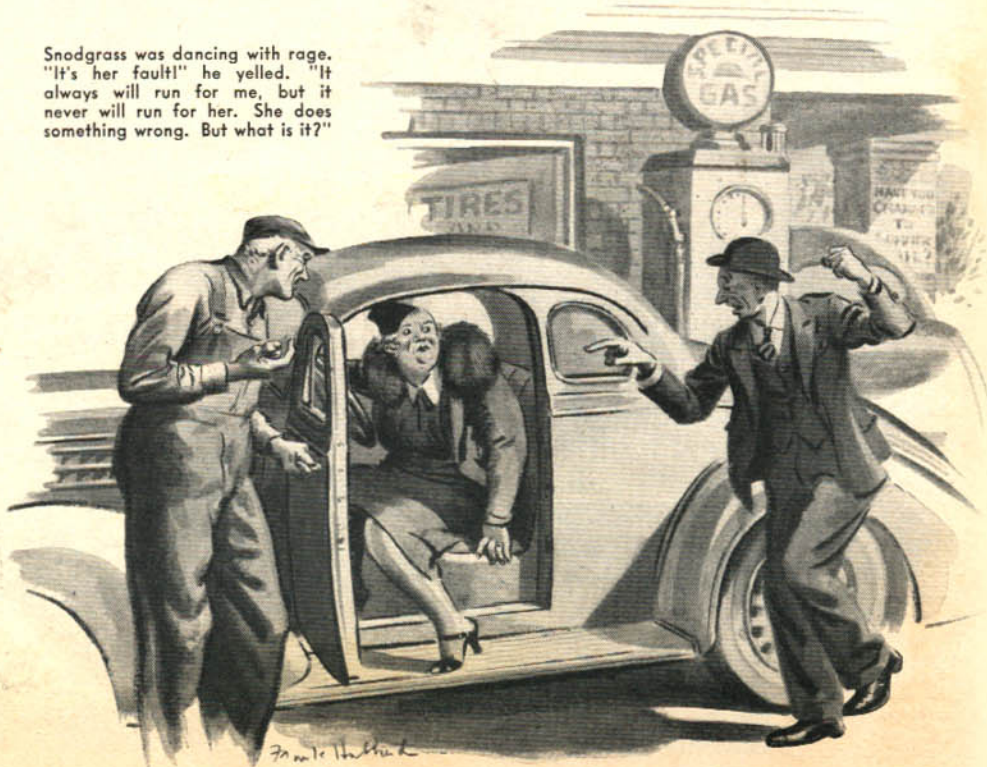
Joe grunted disdainfully. He knew the sort of job that his partner was wishing for—the sort of job that he could fool around with for the better part of a half day locating the trouble—and then charge the customer fifty cents because it took him only a couple of minutes to remedy it!

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

Snodgrass was dancing with rage. "It's her fault!" he yelled. "It always will run for me, but it never will run for her. She does something wrong. But what is it?"



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?"

Gus opened (Continued on page 126)



# Gus Settles a Family Quarrel

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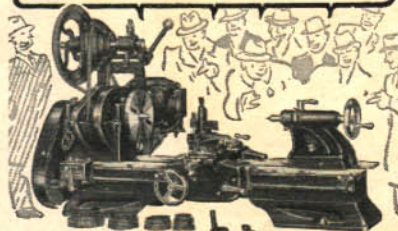
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the door. "Let me try it, Mrs. Snodgrass," he suggested. She got out, the running board groaning under her 250 pounds. "This is *my* car," she said. "That little bantam gave it to me for my birthday. Just get it running, mister, and then tell me how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

"Lincoln Highway!" shouted her husband. "What d'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 soothingly. He got into the car and pressed the starter with his foot. Again the engine 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, Mrs. 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—er—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 generator plug and grounded on the engine block. Naturally, that shorted the ignition 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 sleuth. How much do I—"

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," Gus said. "That was 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 line of business." He turned to the woman with a wide

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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 anything ever stump you?"

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

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

"When I was younger, ants used to get in my pants—I couldn't have stayed in one place more'n six months to save my life. Well, that was O.K.—I wasn't married, and I never had any trouble finding a job. So when I'd seen enough of one town, I'd just roll along to another one.

ONE spring day, years ago, I was out in eastern 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 everything 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. When he got into the cut his motor went dead. He stepped on the starter, but the engine wouldn't take off. He tried everything he knew—nothing doing. Several other cars came along, and stopped in the same mysterious way. The air was blue with cussing, and no one could get started. Inside of an hour he claimed there were fourteen cars stalled in that cut!

"Then another funny thing happened. A Model T Ford came along, and its engine kept right on running. The driver couldn't help the other cars to get started, but he did the next best thing—he took one of the men along to a ranch house a couple of miles down the road, where he could telephone to the nearest town for a wrecker. By the time this fellow had walked back to the cut, there were twenty-three cars stalled in it. But a half dozen Model T Fords had gone through without the slightest trouble!

"After a while the men saw the wrecker coming along the road. It was an old Chevy, and when it got into the cut it stalled. After the mechanic who



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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 trailed 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 Fords stall?"

"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 a stiff 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 magnetos, and didn't have any batteries!"

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