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*Your Home:
Your Own Firetrap!*

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Col. Lindbergh, We Don't Agree With You



Frowning, Senator Bombay leaned forward. An instant later both he and Gus jumped. A photographic flashbulb had flared vividly in their faces.

Politics and cars shouldn't mix, but Gus has to do some fast diagnostic thinking to keep them apart.

By Martin Bunn

SENATOR BOMBHEY'S red face had flushed to an apoplectic purple. His multiple chins quivered with righteous indignation. "Again, and again, it has happened!" he boomed. "And again, and again mechanics of the highest competency have examined and tested my car, and have found in it no slightest mechanical defect. I suspect—nay, I *charge!*—that nefarious forces are working in a dastardly effort to prevent me from presenting my program for prosperity, productivity, and peace to my beloved fellow citizens!"

"Gee, Senator!" There was awe in Stan Hick's voice. "You mean someone's sabo-

taging things—international spies, maybe?"

The Senator hadn't the slightest suspicion that anybody had tampered with his car—but election day was close at hand, and experience had taught him that the public often reacts to a scattergun accusation in a manner highly profitable to its maker. Puffing his fat cheeks, he frowned portentously, and rumbled: "Subversive forces—working, possibly without his knowledge, in the interest of my opponent in the coming trial at the polls, J. Lester Smith!"

Joe Williams, who covers the town for the *Evening Alarm*—a city paper that beats the drum for Bombay—had driven into the Model Garage shop with the Senator, and had listened to his remarks with an expres-

Gus Troubleshoots an Election



sion of fathomless boredom. Now he asked: "Can I use that, Senator?"

Bombey saw a heavenly vision of big, black headlines. "Yes, you may use it! And you may quote me!"

While Williams scribbled, the Senator turned back to Stan. "Well," he demanded, "what do you propose to do about my car?"

"Gee, Senator—I dunno!" Stan sputtered. "If you think someone's been monkeying with it, and everything, I guess the boss had better look it over. He's in the office. I'll call him."

The Senator is no favorite of Gus Wilson. "That old windbag here again?" he groused when Stan told him he was in the shop. "What's the matter with him now?"

"His car goes flooey on him every once in a while. He says he's had it in a lot of good shops, but none of them could find out what makes it act the screwy way it does." Stan lowered his voice to a cagey half-whisper. "The senator just told Joe Williams, from the *Alarm*, that J. Lester

Smith is doin' something to his car to keep him from makin' his speeches and gettin' reelected—it'll be in tonight's paper!"

Gus grinned sardonically. "If I thought J. Lester was that big a dope," he scoffed, "I wouldn't vote for him—even against Bombay." He turned serious. "But a charge like that, made too late for it to be proved false, might do Smith a lot of harm." He thought hard for a minute. "Yes—that might do it."

Gus picked up the telephone from Joe Clark's desk, and called a number. "*Sentinel*?" he said. "Mary there? . . . Hello, Mary. Gus Wilson. Bombay's here with Joe Williams, hurling charges that J. Lester's minions have been doing things to his car to keep him from getting to political meetings. It might be worth your while to come over. . . . Yes—just drop in, casual like. . . . Okay."

Followed by Stan, he went into the shop. Senator Bombay extended a fat hand while he extracted a cigar from a pocket of his



vest with the other one. "Ah, my good friend Gus Wilson!" he sounded off. "Have a see-gar, Gus!"

"Thanks, Senator—never smoke 'em. Stan, here, tells me you're having trouble with your car. What seems to be wrong with it?"

Senator Bombay narrated his automotive tribulations with his usual oratorical trimmings. The hard core of his recital was that because his chauffeur had broken an arm he had been compelled to drive himself for the past ten days. During that period the performance of his car had been reatured by a high degree of undependability. One day it would climb a steep hill like nobody's business; the next day it would limp up the same grade with its engine laboring and just manage to make it to the top. One day it would cruise on the level at a smooth and effortless 65; the next day it would have to be coaxed over that same road at a ragged and sputtering 30, its engine cutting out and giving every indication of being starved for gas—although a check always showed that there was plenty in the tank.

"The sinister aspect of the matter," the senator wound up, "is that these unexplained failures practically always occur while I am on my way to speak at some important political rally. Yesterday evening I was to address a large and enthusiastic gathering in Brookville at nine o'clock. I started in good time, but my car almost stalled on a hill, and subsequently ran so badly that I had to stop at a crossroads garage. When I reached Brookville, the Town Hall lights were out and everyone had gone home!"

Mary Manning, our local *Sentinel's* combination reporter-photographer, had driven her convertible into the shop, and had sat listening to Bombay's peroration. Now she got out and went breezily over to his car.

"Hello, Mr. Wilson!" she hailed. "There's

something the matter with my lights—will you look at them, please?" She seemed to see Bombay for the first time. "Why, Senator! How nice to run into you like this!"

Bombay looked at her the way an amateur gardener might examine the first blisters of ivy poisoning between his fingers. He grunted.

"Well, Senator," Gus said briskly, "you tell me you've had your car in several shops. What did they do to it?"

They had done plenty, Bombay growled, and charged him plenty for doing it. One mechanic had diagnosed the trouble as a defective fuel pump, and had installed a new one. Another had diagnosed intermittent internal collapse under suction of a flexible fuel hose, which he had replaced. A third decided that the fuel pump's filter-bowl gasket was defective, and put in another one. Others had suspected dirt in the fuel line, the screens, the gas tank, or the carburetor, and had carefully cleaned—or re-cleaned—all of them. The car had responded to each of these treatments, but never for long. Always, after a few hours or a few days, it had relapsed into the same unpredictable, unreliable behavior.

"All of those fellows who worked on your bus can't be dopes," Gus told the Senator. "We'll have to do a thorough job of troubleshooting. That may take quite a while."

Joe Williams whispered urgently in Bombay's ear—the *Alarm* reporter didn't want to lose the first-page story he was building around the senator's vague accusation. After a moment Bombay nodded agreement—he wouldn't get headlines if Gus found some mechanical condition which would explain his car's queer goings-on. Thinking fast, he consulted his watch, and then shook his head.

"I must be in Glendale at five," he said.

"It's an hour's drive over there, and it's past three now. I'd be wasting my money if I paid you to start an important and—er—complex examination which you couldn't complete in the limited time that is available for your expert labors."

He started to climb into his car, followed by Williams. Mary laughed. "Scared of what Gus will find, Senator?" she taunted.

Bombey glared. Joe Williams scowled. Gus grinned and returned Mary's lead. "I'll make you a sporting proposition, Senator," he offered. "If I don't find out what's the matter with your bus inside half an hour, I won't charge you a cent. Is it a go?"

Bombey couldn't think of any way of wiggling out of that. He nodded sour agreement.

Gus jumped into the Senator's car, and drove out of the shop and up the highway. When he was clear of town he speeded up. The car ran smoothly and with reserve power at 65, and whizzed up a steep grade without a falter.

Back in his shop he didn't waste time checking things he knew already had been checked and rechecked. "Whatever's causing the grief," he reasoned, "it's something that happens only part of the time. It could be an electrical connection that works loose under certain operating conditions."

He checked the ignition system, giving particular attention to the connections. He didn't find anything wrong with it.

Gus scratched his ear. "Let's see, now. It can't be the fuel pump—that's been changed . . . The fuel line has been cleaned out more than once . . . The carburetor—"

He examined it, its connections, and the automatic choke linkage. All seemed in excellent working condition. Bombey was grinning. Gus glanced at the shop clock and saw that he had less than ten minutes left.

As he turned back to his tough problem he noticed the new flexible hose running from the car's frame to the fuel pump. It had been installed after the trouble had developed, so it couldn't be causing it. But there was something about the 45-degree pipe-threaded elbow fitting connecting the hose and the pump which didn't seem quite right. Twisting it gently, he found that it wasn't snug. He tried to set it up snugly but couldn't do it because of the drag of the hose.

Gus chuckled as he straightened up. "There's the cause of your trouble, Sena-

tor," he said. "If that fitting was connected as snugly as it should be, it would make up toward the engine so that the hose couldn't be connected to it. So the mechanics who have worked on your car haven't been drawing it up tight, and under the pull of the hose it has backed off a half turn—enough to allow an air bleed sufficient to reduce fuel pump suction and starve your engine for gas. That's easy to fix. I'll install another elbow, one that fits properly, and—"

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" barked the senator. "I refuse to accept such an absurd explanation, or to pay for a repair which obviously won't help matters! If what you say were true, my car wouldn't run perfectly most of the time!"

"That's the tricky part of it—why those other fellows didn't find out what was the matter," Gus said. "Even under the handicap of that air bleed, the pump was able to deliver sufficient fuel *under most conditions*. But it always was a close thing, and any additional handicap—such as a slightly dirty carburetor filter, or the low fuel head of an almost empty tank—would result in faulty performance." Gus pointed at the elbow fitting. "Try it yourself, Senator—you can feel that it is loose."

Frowning, Bombey leaned forward. Then both he and Gus jumped. A flashbulb had flared vividly in their faces.

Mary Manning smiled at them. "Just a candid shot of Senator Bombey being shown the cause of the car trouble which he charged was the result of sabotage by J. Lester Smith," she said sweetly. "It'll look swell on the front page." Her tone sharpened. "How about keeping this campaign more or less clean, Senator? The *Sentinel* won't use this picture unless the *Alarm* publishes your groundless accusation. Which way do you want it?"

Senator Bombey looked at Joe Williams. Joe shrugged helplessly. The senator puffed out his fat cheeks. "In all my years in public life," he boomed, "I never have made a charge which I have been unable to back up with convincing proof. Like everyone who knows him, I have unbounded faith in Gus Wilson. He says that this—er—gadget is the cause of my difficulties. I accept his opinion!"

Gus grinned. Then he looked at the shop clock. "Five minutes to go!" he said. "I'll install that new fitting, Senator—and if you have any more trouble—maybe I'll even vote for you!"

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