

POPULAR SCIENCE

July 1949

5¢

25¢

Monthly



***How You Are Thrilled
...but Not Killed***

PAGE 82



Horace roared, shook his shaggy head, and leaped from the cage to disappear into the dark underbrush.

Gus Has a Wild Night

By Martin Bunn

GUS WILSON guided his car along the bumpy dirt road. Beside him dozed Ez Zacharias. It was nearly midnight. They had seen a boxing card in the city, and Gus was driving Ez home. He lives just outside of town, and the side road was a short cut.

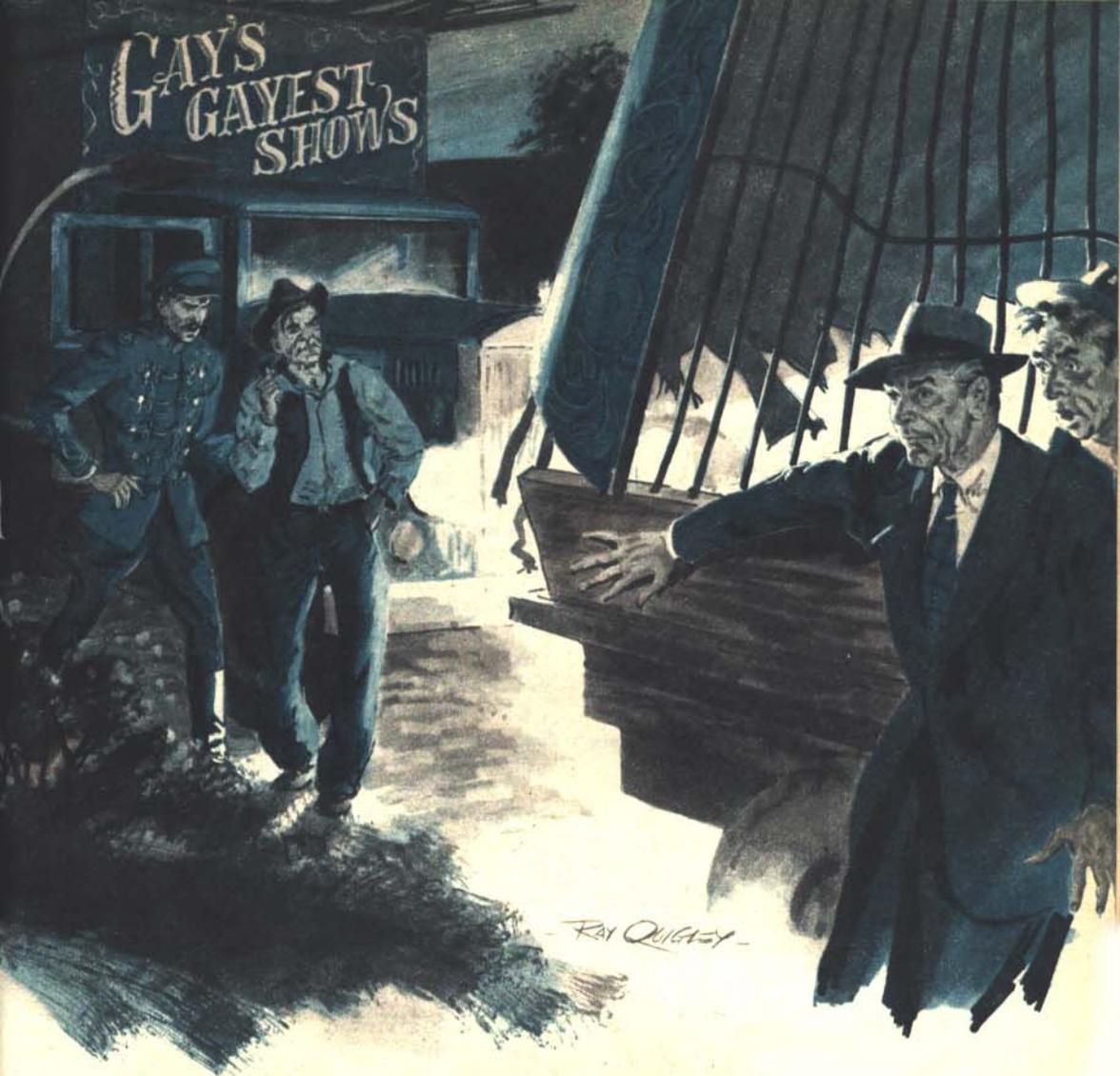
High in the summer sky, a big moon coasted along, overtaking a stray wisp of

cloud from time to time. Down in the bottoms, ribbons of mist hung close to the dark earth. The road twisted sharply up a steep grade and Gus drove slowly until he topped the rise. Then he kicked on the brakes.

"Hey, what goes?" he exclaimed. "There's a light in the old Coster house."

"City feller living there," Ez answered, stirring himself fully awake. "I wouldn't."

"Why not?" Gus asked.



"Because it's haunted, that's why," Ez said flatly. "Been ghosts around there ever since old man Coster chopped his wife's head off near sixty years ago."

Gus laughed.

"All right—laugh," Ez growled, "but I've seen 'em—pale, blue, glowing things."

Gus let in the clutch. As the car moved forward, red lights showed dimly through the mist in the hollow below.

"There's a car parked down there," Gus pointed out. "I wonder . . ."

He was cut off by the blast of a horn and glaring headlights as a truck swept up behind them and clattered past down the hill. In a moment a resounding crash sounded from the hollow. Gus coasted his car down the hill and braked behind the truck. He and Ez saw

that it had crashed into the rear of another truck, parked partly off the narrow road.

The body of the one that had been hit was an iron-barred cage occupied by a large and annoyed lion. The other was loaded with canvas and poles. On both trucks were emblazoned the words: Gay's Gayest Shows. Gus recalled that a small carnival had been playing nearby towns.

The two men who climbed down from the trucks seemed neither surprised nor upset by the accident. The driver of the cage truck was a tallish man with a waxed mustache. He wore a faded blue uniform lavishly decorated with tarnished gold braid. The other driver was a bandy-legged little fellow.

"Thought you'd be coming along, Tom," the uniformed one said mildly. "Something's

busted on my truck. The engine runs but the truck won't move. Thought maybe you could tow me to a garage—and now you've gone and hit my rear end and got old Horace upset."

"Wasn't my fault, Joe," Tom replied. "Brakes ain't been workin' any too good here lately. Old Gay's too tight to get 'em fixed. And my emergency just wouldn't hold."

"Ain't much harm done—I guess," Joe said. "Let's pull 'em apart and see."

Horace Takes a Powder

Tom climbed into his truck, shifted into reverse, and stepped on the gas. There was a grinding squeal as the trucks pulled apart, and then the harsh rending of metal. Tom's truck lurched backward, leaving the rear of the cage a tangle of twisted bars.

Horace roared, shook his shaggy head, and leaped from the cage to disappear into the dark underbrush.

"Horace!" Joe yelled. "Horace! You come back here right now." Joe looked reproachfully at Tom. "Now you've done it."

Gus and Ez had gotten out of the car to look at the crashed trucks. When Horace took off, they edged back toward it.

"Now what?" Gus asked them.

"I dunno," Joe said. "I'm a lion tamer and he's a canvasman. Neither of us knows about fixin' trucks."

"I might be able to help," Gus told them. "I run a garage in the next town. I'd take a look at your trucks, but I don't like to be standing around with that lion running loose."

"Oh, you don't need to be afraid of Horace," Joe said. "He's just an old pet."

"I'll stick to standard-size cats," Gus put in.

"Don't worry about Horace," Joe went on. "Nearly all his teeth fell out long ago."

"Who wants to be gummed by a lion?" Ez asked.

"He won't bother you," Joe insisted. "Anyway, he won't come back for a half hour. He never does."

"You mean he's escaped before?" Gus asked.

"Sure, lots of times," Joe said.

"Anyway," Tom interrupted, "how about fixin' up these trucks?"

"All right," Gus agreed reluctantly. "I'll have a look."

He got in the cage truck, flipped the ignition key, and stepped on the starter. The engine didn't fire. He tried again, giving it a little choke. Finally the engine caught, but it ran raggedly.

Leaving the engine running, Gus got out



and raised the hood. A faint blue glow danced around the spark-plug wires and terminals.

"Look at that!" Ez exclaimed, jumping back. "Pale blue ghost lights, like I told you. This whole place is haunted."

"What are you talking about?" Gus snapped. "That's nothing but a corona—electrical leakage of high voltage." He turned to Joe. "You need new spark-plug leads. That's why it's hard to start here in the fog and damp."

Back in the cab, Gus eased the truck into first. But when he let up the clutch, the truck didn't move. He cut the switch and got out.

"It could be any one of several things," Gus said. "Might be the clutch, transmission, universal, drive shaft, or rear end. At any rate, it's a job for a shop. I can check the universal right here." He took the flashlight, walked around to the side of the truck and crawled under it. In a minute he pulled himself out, brushing grass and leaves from his trousers.

"Universal's broken," he told the group. "Have to put in a new one."

"Old man Gay'll flip his lid about this," Joe said.

"And you've got brake trouble?" Gus asked Tom.

"That's right," the man said. "They been gradually getting worse and when I came down this hill here, they just plain wouldn't hold."

Pinhole Trouble

Gus slipped into the driver's seat and stepped on the brake pedal. There was no resistance to the pressure of his foot.

"Got a wrench?" he asked Tom as he climbed from the cab.

Tom rooted around back of the driver's seat and produced an adjustable wrench. Meanwhile Gus had raised the hood. He took the wrench and, while Ez held the light, unscrewed the plug on the brake system's



master cylinder. Then he peered within.

"No wonder your brakes wouldn't hold," Gus said. "You've lost just about all the fluid in the system."

Gus took the flashlight and inspected the lines and hoses leading to each brake. The two rear ones and the left front brake seemed okay. But when he came to the right front wheel, he noticed a small amount of the missing fluid on the line. Closer inspection revealed a pin-sized hole in the hose through which the fluid had oozed.

"There's a pinhole in that hydraulic line," Gus said. "Have to replace the hose and add fluid to the system."

"That's funny," Tom said. "When I started out the brakes weren't perfect but they at least worked."

"Nothing funny about that," Gus said. "The leak's so small that it didn't cause your brakes to fail immediately. The leak probably began just about the time you started this trip. Each time you hit the brakes you lost some fluid. By the time you got here and went rolling down that hill, you just didn't have enough fluid to stop the truck."

"Well," said the lion tamer, "we got to get these trucks fixed, but how we gonna get 'em to your shop?"

"My idea," Gus answered, "is for you to catch Horace and then I'll drive you into town. I'll send a tow car out in the morning."

"That won't do," Joe said. "I'm afraid we're gonna be late now. We're due to set up the show in Middletown tomorrow morning. We open at three in the afternoon."

"Can't you go get your tow car now?" Tom asked.

"That wouldn't save much time," Joe said. "He'd have to go get the car and then make two trips to get both trucks in."

"This is bad," Tom said. "That canvas on my truck is part of the main tent."

"That's gonna be a mighty funny-looking show," Ez put in, "with a big chunk of the

main tent missing. Plenty of fresh air, though," he added.

"That's one of those things Old Man Gay won't think is funny," Joe said.

"Ever hear the story of the lame man and the blind man?" Gus grinned. "You two are in pretty much the same situation. Anyway, here's how we'll get your trucks to the shop. Tom's truck has power, but no brakes. Joe's truck has brakes, but no power. Tom tows Joe and Joe's brakes stop both trucks."

"That's what I call real smart," Joe smiled.

"But you're going to have to drive slowly and use a lot of caution," Gus said. "Not that I'd recommend this if it weren't an emergency. You, Joe, will be in the rear. You'll have the brakes but you won't be able to see so well."

"Suppose I sound a long blast on the horn when I need brakes," Tom suggested.

"That's a good idea," Gus agreed.

"And keep the tow line tight," Tom added. "Especially goin' down hills. I don't want that line to snap and let me go."

"Okay," said Gus, "now get going. I'll lead you to the garage. First thing in the morning we'll put two men on the job, and you'll be rolling by 10:30."

Who's Scared?

As the two men busied themselves hooking up the tow line, Gus got into his car and slammed the door. But reaching for the ignition key, he felt hot breath on his face. Turning, he looked squarely into the whiskered, yawning face of Horace, poked into the opposite window.

"Horace!" Joe yelled. "You come here right now." The lion crouched and Joe slipped a collar on him.

Ez, who had watched the lion's capture from a nearby tree, slid down and slipped into the seat beside Gus.

"Say," he asked, "what's the matter with you?"

"I . . . I . . ." Gus began weakly.

"Haw, haw," Ez laughed. "Gus Wilson afraid of a toothless old lion."

"Not as scared as you," Gus retorted. "And I can prove it."

"Yeah? How?"

Gus got out of the car and walked to the tree Ez had climbed. In a minute he was back waving something dark and floppy.

"We'll leave it to the boys around the garage when I show 'em this," Gus chuckled. "Maybe I was scared—but not enough to leave the seat of my pants up a tree." END