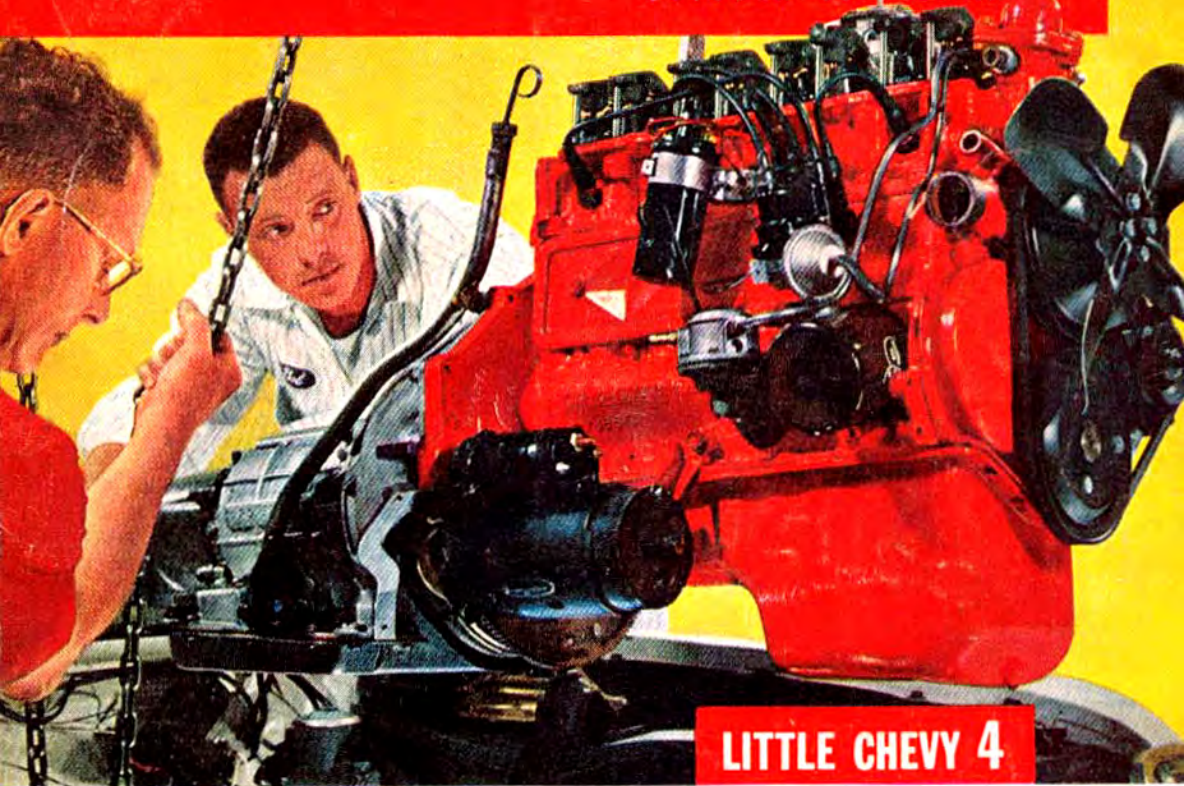


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# Gus Pulls the Switch on Murder



By Martin Bunn

**A** SHADOW fell on the starter Gus was working on just inside the Model Garage. He looked up at Silas Barnstable, the town's stingiest motorist.

"Come to pay for the differential-cover gasket you sold me," said Silas.

"Find somebody who'd install it and pour back the same old grease?"

"Yup!" retorted the other triumphant-ly. "Didn't pay any hijackin' gas-station feller, neither."

"Congratulations," said Gus curtly.

"Talked one into lettin' me use his lift for free!" cackled Barnstable. "Done the job myself. Found out somethin', too."

Gus made no answer, and Silas went on. "Always knew them gas stations put in more grease'n necessary. After I poured back enough to run out the plug hole, there was enough left to last me a couple years, now the leak's fixed."

"That's just fine," said Gus dryly.

"Here's your gasket money—less two-percent discount," finished Silas.

Gus sighed. "It's lunch time, Silas, and I'm too hungry to argue with you."

Returning from lunch, Gus found a powerful three-year-old sedan in the shop. It was loaded with accessories, including two spotlights. Curious, Gus looked inside. Despite its lavish equipment, the car evidently got hard use. Floor mats were gritty, seat covers smudged, visors crammed with papers.

"The man said it's missing or out of time," said Stan Hicks, Gus's assistant. "Sure sounds like it."

Gus started the engine. It shook so hard that the whole car vibrated. He shorted two of the eight plugs at a time. All cylinders were firing.

"Hook up the timing light, Stan," ordered Gus. "Then we'll see."

Stan was reporting that the timing checked out, when a short, stocky, white-haired man strode into the shop.

"Find the trouble?" he asked. "My own mechanics said you were good."

"Not that good," returned Gus. "We need just a bit more time."

The man pulled an old pocket watch



*Gus jumped out of the patrol car and raced back to Gregor's sedan.*

from a checkered vest. "Go ahead. My boys know diesels better than gas engines. I'm Dan Gregor, from the parkway job through Newtown."

Gus recognized the name of an important contractor. "Guess you take this car right on the job, don't you?"

"Where I go, it goes," replied Gregor.

Gus motioned to Stan to get the car on a lift. "Go through much loose rock lately?" he asked Gregor.

The contractor shook his head. "Not till this morning. I parked under a rise and a dozer man almost buried the car before he spotted it."

The car rose. Gus got under it with a light and a tire iron. Presently he came out with something in his hand.

"There's your trouble—this rock wedged in one engine mount. Jammed it solid, so all the give was on the others. Let me take another look."

Gus found no more rocks. In the floor pan just behind the engine were two small holes a few inches apart. They were new—the drilled edges gleamed. Nearby, snaking down from the cowl

area, was a length of wire. He wondered what new accessory it might be for.

After the car had sighed down to the floor, Gus started the engine. It idled smoothly. Gregor paid and drove off.

**T**WO days later, Barnstable's eight-year-old car rolled back in.

"What's wrong, Silas?" asked Gus.

"Want your money back for that gasket?"

"Humph! Might be. Got a new noise."

"What does your gas man say?"

"Smart-aleck kid! He thinks it's a dry rear-axle bearing."

Silently Gus got into the car. Barnstable drove around the block to the accompaniment of a dry screech.

"Now," asked Silas, "what is it?"

"A dry rear-axle bearing," said Gus.

With the car on the lift, Gus turned both rear wheels. The left-hand one screeched bitterly. Walking under the car, Gus scraped at the differential cover.

"Didn't bother to clean this off?"

"Dirt outside never done no harm," growled Barnstable. "My time's worth money. Cleaned off all the old gasket and

drew them bolts up good 'n tight."

"Car make any noises afterwards?"

"Just a couple scrapes. It quit when grease got to the dry spots."

"Come and look, Silas. See if you can't figure why that dirt you didn't scrape off is going to cost you cash."

Puzzled, the town's stingiest man hunched under the lift beside Gus. "It's dry—ain't leaking any more."

"No, but see this bulge in the cover that I scraped clean? That's the cavity your ring gear runs in."

"Fiddleflap!" muttered Barnstable. "It slants. Ring gear runs up and down."

"It slants," agreed Gus, "because you put the cover back one bolt hole clockwise of its proper position. All that caked dirt hid the bulge, so you never noticed. What you heard first was the gear chewing itself a new groove."

Barnstable made a moaning sound.

"Also," Gus went on, "turning the cover one hole lowered the plug hole, so grease flowed out when you'd put back only two-thirds of it. The level was too low to reach the axle bearings."

Barnstable shakily emerged from under the car. "Fix it," he muttered weakly.

"But remember, I ain't made of cash."

"Gear's pretty hard," said Gus cheerfully. "Chances are it's not damaged."

"Fix it," mumbled Silas as he left.

Gus found the cover dangerously thin where the gear had scraped it. Grinning, he installed a new one after flushing out the housing. Just as the job was over, a state police car roared in.

"HIYA," called Trooper Jerry Corcoran. "Mind setting my points? She's missing at high speed, and the bar-

racks shop's closing right about now."

"Sure, Jerry," said Gus, and hooked up the dwell meter. "What's new?"

"We're hunting some explosives stolen from the Newtown road job."

"Gregor's? He was in just today."

"Uh-huh. He's a tough old boy. We've caught him carrying dynamite and detonators in his car at the same time, when his powder men ran short. Some day he's going to blow himself up."

"How much is missing?" asked Gus.

"Ten sticks. Couple of electric caps. That's a bad combination. All the men on the job are clear. Only one missing is Gregor's own nephew."

"Maybe he'll have the answer for you when he gets back," suggested Gus.

"Not likely. He walked out after a big scrap with his uncle yesterday. He's kind of wild, doesn't like the discipline old Gregor dishes out."

Gus tightened the points with an eye on the dwell meter, snapped back the distributor cap. "Okay, Jerry."

"Thanks Gus." Jerry got into the car. "Wouldn't think a young chap would run out on a fortune.

The timekeeper says

he's Gregor's only kin and heir."

"Maybe he swiped the dynamite to go into business for himself," joked Gus. Then his grin faded. "How big a pack is that many sticks?"

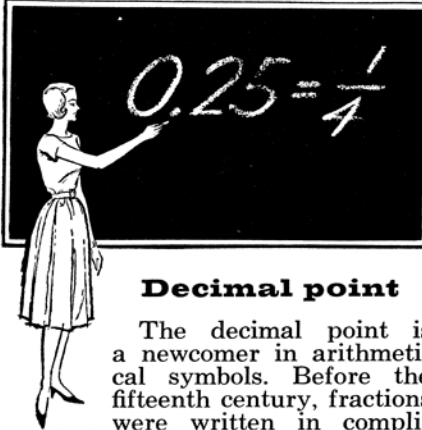
Jerry made a circle of two hands.

"This is crazy," said Gus. "But . . ." Briefly he told of the two holes under Gregor's car and the dangling wire. "With a metal strap and two drive screws, you could fasten something under there."

Corcoran sat silent for two seconds. Then: "Get in, Gus. We're traveling."

Almost before Gus was in it, the car

### Where'd it come from?



### Decimal point

The decimal point is a newcomer in arithmetical symbols. Before the fifteenth century, fractions were written in complicated forms, sometimes using powers of 60 as denominators. Thus 14.58'.13" meant 14 units plus 58/60 plus 13/3,600. The decimal method (with 10 as the base) was first used about 1620, but with a line drawn under the fractional part of the number. Only in the last 150 years has the decimal point come into general use. In early textbooks, older symbols are used side by side with it. In an arithmetic book published in 1822, 387(65:2 is used to designate an amount of money: \$387.65 and 2 mills.

was roaring out. As Corcoran swung onto the highway, he spoke briefly into the mike. A crackling voice answered.

"No phone at the construction site," said Jerry. "A patrol car's on the way to stop Gregor from using his car."

"Hey, now," protested Gus. "That was a crazy-wild guess of mine . . ."

"Could be a good one," retorted the trooper, gripping the wheel harder. It was a cold morning, and the chill seeped in with a 90-mile-per breeze as the car gulped distance.

"Turned real cold," grunted Jerry, switching on the heater. "Your guess may not be so wild. It was young Jeff who

breath as they roared onto the asphalt just ahead of a trailer truck, siren screaming.

Ahead appeared a black sedan. It wasn't Gregor's. The patrol car roared by.

"Two miles right now," said Jerry.

A car appeared, vanished over a hill. "That's it!" said Gus.

CORCORAN bore down on the car, siren wailing.

"Pull alongside so he can see me," suggested Gus, hanging on grimly.

The big V-8 seemed to gather its energy for a spurt, bent out around the other car. Gus gestured urgently, aware of Gregor's startled recognition and of both cars slowing their frantic race. But he never remembered opening the door and running back.

"What the devil?" demanded Gregor, his hand moving almost unconsciously toward a button midway on the dash.

Gus reached in, switched off the ignition—just as Gregor turned on the heater—and snatched out the key.

"You've got a nerve . . ." began Gregor.

"Hold everything," said Gus breathlessly. "The

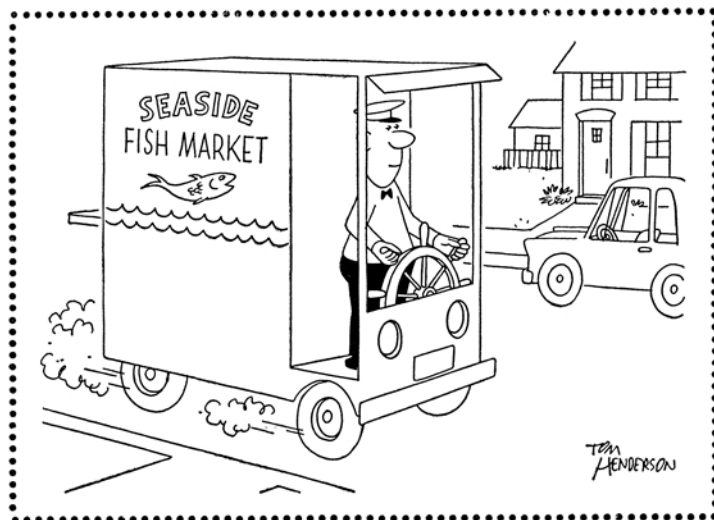
trooper will explain."

Corcoran did, but it was Gus who slid under the car. His heart skipped a beat when he saw the ominous package fastened there, with small cylinders inserted in two of the sticks. He crawled out without touching anything and nodded gravely to Jerry . . .

"Jeff rigged it," Corcoran told Gus that night. "Since we caught the old man hauling caps and dynamite together, we would have put it down as an accident."

Corcoran lit a cigarette thoughtfully. "Our experts found that the heater *had* been turned on. Somebody switched off the ignition a split second before, killing the heater circuit. Pretty cool nerves, Gus."

"Cool?" asked Gus. "They were frozen stiff from riding with the wildest driver in the state police."



tipped us off that his uncle sometimes carried caps *and* dynamite."

Gus said nothing. The car screamed up a short hill, made a hair-raising turn, bucketed along a dirt road onto a scene of raw earth and giant machines. A trooper came over from a patrol car.

"Gregor just drove out. I was too late; but the car must be clean if he could start up and drive off without accident."

Jerry grinned. "Enjoy the ride, Gus?"

"Told you it was a wild guess," muttered Gus. "Never meant—" he paused.

"What is it?" asked Jerry.

"To fake a dynamite accident," said Gus slowly, "I'd hook the cap to the heater. Gregor would turn that on after his engine's warm, two or three miles from here."

Corcoran's jaw snapped shut. He backed the car around on two wheels and tore back to the highway. Gus held his