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The girl turned to Gus. "Do you have any idea what he's talking about?"

Gus and the Case of

By Martin Bunn

IT WAS Saturday, and business was slow at the Model Garage. Stan Hicks had finished a job due at noon and was on his way to wash up for lunch when a car drove in.

"I'll take care of that," said Gus, coming from the office. "You go along to the diner."

"Thanks, Gus. I . . ." Stan swallowed his words as the driver got out—a petite brunette, no more than 19, and pretty enough to have stepped off a magazine cover. She wore a white satin blouse and a brightly colored skirt and cape.

"I've got time," Stan hastily assured Gus. "I'll see what I can do."

Gus looked toward the girl, grinned, and went back to the office.

The little brunette was scowling as Stan came up, her jaw set angrily, her eyes giving off sparks.

"Well, don't just stand there; go ahead and start," she demanded.

"Start? Start what, Miss?" asked Stan.

She banged a small fist against the side of the car, a popular six-cylinder model about seven years old. "Just listen to it!"

Stan tore his attention from the pretty face. The car engine was idling irregularly, sometimes almost stalling.

"It sounded like Jack Benny's old Maxwell all the way from home," the girl cried. "Hurry up! I don't want to miss the *whole* meet!"

Stan opened the hood. "Has it been running like this for long?"



the Mysterious Miss

"Days and days. I've already had brand-new plugs put in the thing, so don't tell me it needs *them*."

The wiring was old but not visibly cracked. All six plugs evidently were new, although their porcelain was almost hidden by long, hardened rain caps. Stan gunned the engine briefly. It responded raggedly but there was none of the sputtering typical of fuel failure.

Letting it idle again, he wrapped a rag around his fingers and gently tugged on the cable to the number-six plug. It was tight on the plug terminal. So were the cables to plugs five and four. But the engine's off-beat rhythm changed as he pulled on the cable of number three. He yanked it off, and the engine stalled. Squeezing the cable socket a trifle, he pushed it back

on and restarted the engine. The miss was still there. The other two cables seemed tight.

"Look here, Miss—" began Stan.

"Ann Bliss. You look. Can't you fix it while I go to the track meet? I've come all the way from Stanville, and it's already half over. I tried three gas stations—and they couldn't fix it. One suggested I come here."

A horn blared outside.

"That's Betty!" shrieked the girl. "She's come to take me back; I've got to rush. *Please* see what you can do."

She was gone in a swirl of skirt.

"In a hurry, wasn't she?" commented Gus.

"Going to that junior-college track meet at the stadium," answered Stan, dreamily. "Cute name she's got—Bliss."

"Uh-huh. And you have about one hour to find that miss for Miss Bliss."

Methodically, Stan removed the plugs, reset the gaps on two, wiped the porcelains, and replaced all six plugs. He checked the point setting, made sure the high-tension cables were well spaced—neither cross-firing nor shorting to engine parts—and the low-tension wiring tight.

The engine still ran raggedly.

Nursing his hunch that ignition rather than the fuel system was at fault, Stan opened the distributor again. He pulled the center cable from the cap, held it near the engine, and, with the ignition on, flicked the points open by hand.

A juicy spark gave coil and condenser a clean bill of health.

Making sure that the cable end and its socket were clean, Stan examined the cap for corrosion, cracks, or spark tracks. He found none. The rotor seemed all right, but he put in a new one before trying the engine again.

It sounded just the same. Stan, head cocked, was puzzling out his next step when Gus came out.

"Just had a phone call from Mrs. Brownell. She's at the stadium and she says one power window is jammed and she can't move her car."

"Can't drive because a window's jammed? Sounds goofy."

"I know, but she's a sensible woman, and a good customer. I have to wait for Judge Toler to come for his car. You go—she's in parking lot B—and I'll take a look at this job."

Stan nodded, hastily explained what he'd done so far, and drove out.

Traffic was heavy as homeward-bound cars spread out from the stadium. But section B wasn't empty when Stan arrived. It held a milling, cheerfully noisy group of students—and Mrs. Brownell's big two-door sedan.

A serpentine line of students was rhumba-

stepping around it. They cheered as Stan, toolbox in hand, broke through to the car.

From an almost-closed rear window hung a girl's arm.

Mrs. Brownell was standing beside the car. "Please do something, Stan," she said breathlessly. "You can see why I didn't dare drive—with her arm hanging out the window."

"I'll sure try," promised Stan.

"Some boys were teasing her," the woman explained. "So I thought I'd close the window with the button up front, not knowing they'd grabbed her hand and were holding it."

Stan opened the driver's door—and stared.

The trapped girl was Miss Bliss.

"Hey—never expected to see you here. But don't worry; the boss is fixing your car."

"Stop talking nonsense and get me out of this," the young woman retorted.

Turning the key to "radio," Stan tried the control button at the front window. It slid down obediently. Pressing the remote button for the rear window had no effect. The one at the window itself produced only a ratcheting

sound much like sprocket teeth jumping out of mesh.

Stan disconnected the battery. Getting into the rear of the car, he took the screws out of the window frame.

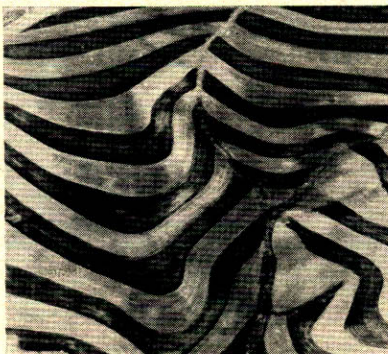
The girl shifted lithely out of the way as far as possible, while outside the crowd yelled encouragement, much of it suggesting a more personal approach.

Perspiring, Stan got the frame free of the window and hung it on the girl's shoulder.

To detach the armrest he had to put one arm around the girl. Then, with the lining panel off, he loosened the screws holding the inspection plate.

Now he could see that the driven sprocket, overloaded when the girl's arm blocked the rising window, had sprung out of mesh. On-the-spot repairs were im-

What's this a photo of?



ANSWER: Not a shimmering zebra, but strip farming out west, following contours on each side of a draw.

possible. The only course was to remove a bolt that served as the pivot of the lifting arm.

Stan considered, with some agitation, the task before him. The nut was hard to reach; to hold the bolt, too, he'd have to use two wrenches, working close to the window. He began to wish the crowd outside would all go home.

He explained to the girl. She gave him a blistering glance and shrank back, arching her body to let him reach past. Stan became acutely aware of her perfume, while quips from the crowd grew louder. The wrenches felt grease covered. Once Stan almost dropped one inside the window space. The nut could be turned only a little at a time.

Finally it came off, to his relief. He tapped out the bolt and caught the window-pane just as it dropped.

A cheer rang out as the girl drew in her arm and squirmed away, across the wide seat. Mrs. Brownell was by her side at once with a first-aid kit. Stan scrambled out of the sedan.

"Drive to the garage and we'll fix the window, ma'am," he said, turning toward the pickup.

Suddenly the ground fell away under him as hands clutched and raised him. To a chorus of "He's a Jolly Good Fellow" he was carried to the truck.

Gus was writing out a bill for Judge Toler when Stan drove in and made for Gus. "How'd you make out?" he asked.

"Didn't get far with your job," confessed Gus. "The judge had a million questions, as usual."

"Got an idea," said Stan. He started the engine, then switched off the droplight he had been using.

For a moment they could see little. Then Stan spotted a faint bluish thread snapping along number-one plug.

"You got it, Stan," agreed Gus. "Intermittent shorting—there it is at numbers two and three, too."

Sparks were jumping between the rain caps and the screw shells of the plugs. Stan tugged at number-three cable. The sparking ceased, and the engine seemed to steady slightly. He pushed the cable on hard, and immediately the sparks appeared again.

"Haven't you finished *yet?*" The last word was a squeak of dismay.

Both men turned to confront the owner of the car—and the white satin blouse.

"Been kind of busy with a few other things," returned Stan. "Like getting you loose at the stadium."

The girl turned to Gus. "Do you have any idea what he's talking about?"

"No, but let me ask one," said Gus. "Has this car had a radiator leak?"

"Uh-huh. Water sprayed all over before it was fixed. Why?"

Gus had pulled off a plug cable. He folded back the edge of its rain cap.

"Look at this, Miss," he said. "Here's why—and Stan found it. These old hoods are loose on the plugs, so some spray bounced off the engine and got into them. Old radiator water's rusty. It dried inside these caps, but the rust stayed. That made a dandy path for short-circuiting ignition juice."

"How long will I be held up here?" asked the girl, sounding worried.

"I'll put on all new caps," said Stan. "Quickest way to finish this job."

The girl watched coolly as he set to work. Just as he finished, the Brownell car drove in.

"I didn't come about the window," the driver called. "Just to bring Katy. She's so grateful to Stan. So am I."

Stan swiveled his head in bewilderment from the girl beside him to the one getting out of the car. Their dress was identical—swirly skirts and white satin blouses.

"Hey! There are two!"

"There always are—of twins," said Mrs. Brownell. "I'll be back with the car on Monday."

She drove out. Stan started the engine. It idled perfectly.

"That does it, gals. No more missing, now."

Stan closed the hood and turned to find himself facing Ann Bliss. He grinned tentatively.

"Guess I acted like a creep," she said, smiling. "I'm sure grateful to you for fixing the car, and I get the idea that you did something nice for my sister, too. So thanks awfully."

Stan's grin widened.

"Did you know," asked Ann Bliss, "that three other mechanics flunked out on this job? It took *you* to solve the case of the mystery miss."

"Two misses," returned Stan. "The car part was only half of it." ■ ■