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Gus Joins the Rescue Squad



A rumor, like a fire, proves a lot easier

By Martin Bunn

GUS WILSON, after a hard day in the Model Garage, was in bed when he heard the fire sirens. A strong wind was blowing, and Gus decided it must be a chimney fire. He was almost asleep when the phone rang.

"Mr. Wilson—" the voice was on the edge of hysteria—"this is Amelia Brown. They're saying my son, Tommy, set fire to the creamery."

"What!" said Gus. "But Amelia—what can I do about it?"

"I know," Mrs. Brown said apologetically. "I guess I'm all flustered. You see, it's an awful fire and Mike Pagett is trapped in the ice tower. Tommy phoned me about it and said I should call you. You know, Tommy hasn't any father . . ."

"Where are you, Amelia?" Gus's voice was sharp. "Where's Tommy?"

"I'm at home. I don't know where Tommy is. The police called . . ."



Looking upward, they saw the youngster clinging to the moving conveyor, already out of reach.

words, yet vaguely understood. A fatherless boy who had been forced to help his mother scramble for a living ever since he had been in knee pants might turn in time of trouble to a man who had given him an occasional word of encouragement through the years.

WHEN Gus drove up to the creamery he was appalled by the sight. The old wooden structure was a mass of flames. Every piece of fire-fighting equipment in town was gouting water into the inferno. A crowd of onlookers was milling about and Officer Jerry Corcoran had his troubles keeping the way clear for the firemen. Fire Chief Captain Jerome Maloney was directing operations in a voice that rose to a bellow above the wind and crackling flames.

"It's bad, Gus," Jerry Corcoran said as Gus fought through to his side. "Mike Pagett's trapped up there."

Gus's eyes followed Jerry's pointing finger, to where a small building was perched high above the roof of the creamery on wooden stilts. Gus knew its purpose. Behind where he stood was the ice-making plant of the creamery. Here huge ice cakes were made, crushed and sent up to the ice tower by an endless conveyor belt, which was mounted on a wooden, spidery structure. The crushed ice was dumped into a vat in the high building where Mike Pagett was trapped. Sheet-iron tubes led down to

to start than stamp out.

"Stay where you are until you hear from me," Gus said, leaping out of bed. "I'll go right down to the creamery and see what I can do."

When Gus ran out to his car the wind hit him like a solid wall. There was a red glow in the direction of the creamery. As Gus drove he asked himself why Tommy Brown, of all persons, should have insisted that his mother call Gus Wilson. The answer to this question was one he found that he couldn't put into

various parts of the creamery. By opening these tubes, Mike Pagett, maintenance foreman of the plant, could deliver crushed ice by gravity to all parts of the creamery, for use in packing ice-cream tubs for shipment and other purposes.

"Jerry," Gus said as the situation struck him full force, "we can't just stand here and let a man die. We've got to get Pagett down from there, some way."

"How?" Captain Maloney spat out the

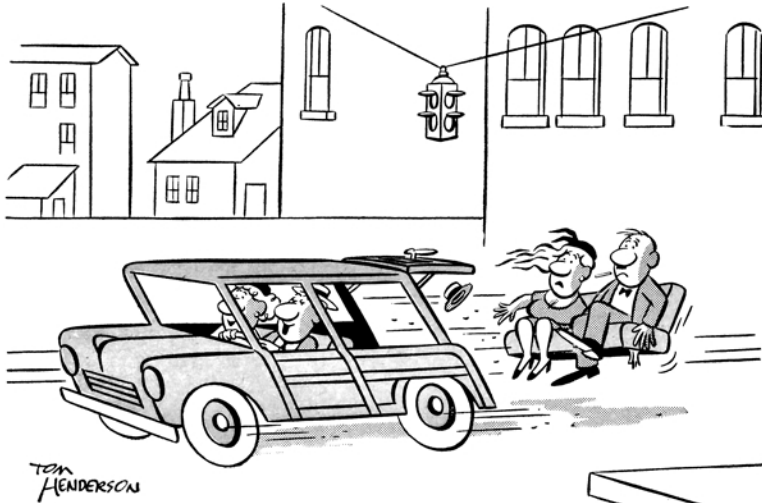
"No," Corcoran agreed, "it doesn't. But Tommy got a bit riled at Mike. Before witnesses he told him he'd like to see him burn. Tommy could face a manslaughter charge. We've got men out now looking for him."

"We can't let Pagett burn," cried Gus. "How about that conveyor chain? Couldn't we send a man up it to Mike?"

"We've thought of that," Captain Maloney said. "I'm not going to trade one

man's life for the bare possibility of saving another. The conveyor only runs one way—up. Even if one of my men could ride it up, how would he get down again with an unconscious man in his arms?"

"We'll see," Gus said, and he was running for the ice plant.



"Watch the pickup on this baby!"

one word. "How, Gus? We didn't know he was up there until he appeared at the window. The roof below the ice tower was already aflame. We tried to put ladders up to him but it's too high—and too hot. We shot a rope up there but by that time Pagett had collapsed."

Maloney leaped to where firemen were directing twisting, writhing hoses toward the ice tower.

"WHAT about Tommy Brown?" Gus asked Corcoran.

"Tommy quit school last week," Corcoran said, "so he could take a full-time job here. Tommy was green at the work, I guess, and Mike Pagett's an impatient man. He fired Tommy this morning. I guess it hit the kid pretty hard, Gus."

"That doesn't necessarily mean he set fire to the place," Gus protested.

INSIDE the ice plant Gus was relieved to find that the lights would still turn on. He slapped his hand down on the switch lever of the 10-horse electric motor that ran the conveyor belt.

The motor began to hum and the endless conveyor belt started clacking away on its sprocket wheel.

Gus stooped and removed the cover from the wiring junction box at the base of the motor, and inspected the metal number tags on the wires. Maloney came to join him.

"If you send a man up on the conveyor," Gus told him, "I can switch the wiring on this motor and reverse the direction of its rotation. That will make the conveyor run down instead of up."

"Are you sure, Gus?" Maloney asked doubtfully. "If I send a man up into that inferno, there won't be any time for fiddling around with wires. Once he dives in after Pagett we'll have to get him down, and fast."

"We will," Gus said grimly, "if the

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Gus Joins the Rescue Squad

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power stays on. That's the chance we'll have to take."

"I'll have to take," Maloney snapped. "I'll go up myself. I wouldn't ask any man under me to take such a risk."

Gus felt a hand on his shoulder.

"I'll go," a voice said. "Let me go, Mr. Wilson—please."

Gus turned, and through the open door of the ice plant the light from the flames lent the features of Tommy Brown a haggard look beyond his 18 years. He stood there, thin-shouldered, gangling.

"They say I set this fire," he said. "I didn't. Telling a person you'd like to see him burn is just a saying the kids have. When Mike fired me I got riled, but I wouldn't—"

"Stand back, kid," Maloney bellowed as he dove through the ice-plant door, waving at his crew. "Men, get those hoses on this conveyor. I'm going up."

Tommy Brown was at Gus's side as he leaped after Maloney, and then he was gone. Looking upward, Gus saw the youngster clinging to the moving conveyor chain, already out of reach. Gus and Maloney ran back into the ice plant. Gus put his hand over the switch.

"If we stop it now, Maloney," he said, "the kid may burn halfway up. We've got to let him go. Get outside and tell me exactly when you want the conveyor stopped, and when to reverse it."

GUS didn't know what was going on outside, but he knew what he had to do in the ice plant. Two lives depended on his quick, sure actions. There were 440 volts of juice connected to this motor. A blown fuse, a moment's hesitation, a wrong move, would be fatal. Gus stooped, selected two wires, spread them apart from the others.

"Gus," Maloney bellowed, "the kid's in the tower."

Gus slammed off the switch lever. Swiftly he separated the two wires he'd selected, reversed them, twisted them into two pairs again.

"There he is!" Corcoran's voice was a

scream. "He's got Pagett. Pagett's out on the chain."

"Bring him down, Gus! Bring him down!" Maloney roared.

Gus threw the switch even as his last movement twisted the wires together, and the motor hummed in the opposite direction. The top half of the endless conveyor chain now moved down from the ice tower instead of up. Gus ran outside and looked upward to see Mike Pagett's body stretched full length on the chain. Behind him, face down, lay Tommy Brown, clutching his shoulders. A lash of wind-whipped flame from the roof enveloped the pair for a moment, and then they were in the clear, coming down, clothing blazing.

"That," Jerry Corcoran breathed, "is the bravest act I ever saw in my life. That kid couldn't have set this fire, Gus."

FIREMEN rushed forward to lift the unconscious Pagett from the conveyor and beat out the fire on his clothing. Gus helped Jerry Corcoran support Tommy Brown as they put him into the police car and rushed him to the hospital. A few minutes later Gus had a near-hysterical mother on the phone.

"Tommy's in the clear, Amelia," he told her. "You see, as soon as Mike fired him he went right to work at the lumberyard, piling lumber. That's right. Jerry Corcoran's already checked it—he was there all day."

"But you said you were phoning from the hospital. Is Tommy hurt?"

"Singed a bit," Gus said. "A few black and blue spots where the conveyor chain pinched him. You can expect him home in an hour, safe and sound."

"Conveyor chain!" Mrs. Brown queried. "What do you mean, Mr. Wilson?"

"I mean," Gus told her, "that your son is a hero, Amelia. He saved Mike Pagett's life . . . You can tell him from me that whenever he needs a father I'll be proud to act in that capacity." END

NEXT MONTH: Gus tackles some strange machinery.