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on All 1957 Models**

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him down the steep way,
and across to the car.*



GUS SKIDS INTO TROUBLE

By Martin Bunn

DOC SNODGRASS, a retired physician of the horse-and-buggy school, whose waspish exterior covered a heart as large as an oaken water bucket, was having his tank filled at Gus Wilson's Model Garage when he was called to the telephone. A moment later, he came rushing out of the garage office with a speed that belied his 60-odd years, and leaped into his car just as Gus hung up the gas hose.

"Climb in, Gus!" the aged physician snapped. "Don't stand there goggle-eyed, man. This is an emergency."

The car zoomed away even as Gus hit the seat beside Snodgrass.

"The old fool," Snodgrass declared as he took a corner with howling tires. "Chasing around in the hills after those dogs at his age!"

Gus didn't need to ask who "the old fool" was. Since Doc had retired, there was only one man in the country who would call for him in an emergency, only one man who could arouse the old physician to such activity as this. That man was Todd Meacham, boyhood chum of Doc's, and now his constant hunting and fishing partner.

"Todd Meacham," Gus said. "How serious is it, Doc?"

"Serious!" Ashes flew out from Snodgrass's huge meerschaum pipe. "Todd's up there in the hills, all torn to bits. Dat it, Gus, can't this car go any faster?"

Looking down at the speedometer, Gus doubted that it could. The ancient Packard was really rolling them off. It was

a ride that Gus would long remember—the old horse-and-buggy doctor tooling the long-nosed old car down the highway, off on a branching, graveled road, up on a dirt trace into the timbered stretches of the back country's snow-clad mountains which stood out in bold relief in the late afternoon sun.

"**T**ODD'S been following hounds since he was knee-high to a bobcat," Snodgrass told Gus as he drove. "Ain't likely to quit, neither, until they slap him in the face with lilies and slow music. He's been after that killer black bear that's been raiding stock in the hills these past three years. From what young Barstow told me over the phone, he's finally caught him—right in the belly."

They were driving on a dirt road now that Gus hadn't even known existed. It was the kind only men like Alex Snodgrass and Todd Meacham would know about—a hunter's road, lonely and long forgotten, that rabbitted upward, overhung by winter-naked brush that reached out to slap at the windshield. The trace was bare of snow by now, but six inches or more of the white stuff still lay in the shelter of the forest. The day had been warm, bringing to the trace a thin



covering of water that the old Packard sprayed to both sides as Doc hit the throttle hard.

"The Barstow kid was with Todd when it happened," Doc said as he topped a steep ridge and shot down a steep incline. "The kid was so excited and exhausted that I couldn't find out over the phone exactly what did happen, but it sounded as if Todd got to close quarters with the bear, probably trying to save one of his hounds, and the beast brought him down. The kid ran six miles over the mountain to phone me from Widow Bracken's place—he was completely played out and I ordered him to bed. All I know for sure is that Todd's lying somewhere in the brush on Tempest Creek."

AS THE car plummeted down into the deep ravine of Tempest Creek, the ridge behind them shut off the rays of the westerling sun and the air carried the bite of the approaching February night. Snodgrass slowed the car now, driving with his head out the window, eyes searching the roadside. Suddenly he yanked on the brake and cut the motor, leaped out. Gus hastily followed him, to find him kneeling there, looking at the huge, almost human footprints of a bear, mingled with the spoor of Meacham's hound pack.

"The chase crossed here," Doc said, and started to move in to the brush. Gus laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"The bear?" he queried. "Are you armed?"

The old physician snorted. "That bear didn't tangle with Todd Meacham and come off scot-free. Young Barstow said it was dead."

They fought through brush and fallen timber, following the signs of the chase plainly written in the snow. And then, at last, they found him, lying in the brush, his dogs about him, lop-eared and sad-eyed, moving restlessly about, pausing now and then to worry the great furred beast that was stretched out near the injured man.

"Hello, Doc," Todd Meacham said weakly. "I knew you'd come."

"Serve you right if I didn't," Snodgrass snapped as he knelt down with swiftly probing fingers. "Where'd it get you, Todd?"

Meacham didn't answer. His supporting elbow fell away from him and his

head rolled back into the trampled, bloody snow.

"Gus!" Doc's cry was urgent. "Quick—my bag!"

IN THE next few minutes Gus came to realize that whatever the old physician's age, he was still a doctor to the tips of his skillful fingers. A hypodermic was swiftly given. The hasty handkerchief tourniquet that young Barstow had bound about Meacham's lacerated arm was replaced with a proper bandage. Four broken ribs were probed and bound.

"Got a knife, Gus?" Snodgrass snapped. "Good. Cut branches for a litter. Quickly, now—this man has lost a lot of blood and is in shock. We've got to get him to the hospital, and fast."

They got him out, but not fast. An unconscious man of Meacham's size, with four broken ribs, is not quickly moved through forest tangle. Bit by bit they edged him down the steep way, and across the flat to the car.

"Put that box of groceries in the rear deck, Gus," Doc panted. "We'll put him in the back seat."

They had a time of it there, turning the long-scouted car around on the narrow trace. Snodgrass drove slowly now, easing the car over bumps. It was nearly dark when they hit the last steep pitch up to the summit of the range—after that, grades would be down. They made it halfway up, and then the wheels spun. Doc cursed under his breath, nursed wheel and gears and throttle. They made a few feet, spun and slewed, made a few more and then could go no farther.

"Ice," Gus said. "With the sun down, the water on the road has frozen. You'll save time, Doc, by putting on your chains."

"Chains," Snodgrass groaned. "I have no chains with me."

Gus climbed out, put his shoulder to the rear of the car while Doc tried again. It was no use—the ancient vehicle was too heavy for any pushing.

Next, Gus took the wheel, using every driving trick at his command, but the steep pitch and glare ice made it useless. Gus got out, opened the rear deck.

"Have you anything in here, Doc, that we could use?" he asked. "Rope, wire, cable?"

"Nothing. If he dies, Gus, I'll never

forgive myself. Why didn't I remember to get chains?"

Gus knew why. In that terrifying moment when he'd answered the telephone, Doc Snodgrass had almost gone into shock himself. There had been nothing on his mind but the fact that his old friend was badly injured, and that he was still a doctor. Now Todd Meacham groaned hollowly in the back seat and Doc Snodgrass went to him.

GUS flashed his pencil light about in the trunk of the car, searching for something that might help get the Packard over the ridge. He moved the box of groceries about so that he could peer into the dusty corners—a few rusty tools, hunting boots, a tattered hunting coat. Gus ripped pieces from the coat and wrapped them around the rear wheels.

The cloth, torn to shreds, flew from the spinning wheels. He tried branches under the wheels, and when that didn't work, searched in vain for rocks or gravel. At last he reached into the rear seat to shake Snodgrass by the shoulder.

"It's no use," he said. "I'd better hike out for help."

"No!" Doc's voice held a note of terrible urgency. "Get this car over, Gus! You've got to do it, somehow."

Once again, Gus probed through the rear deck, hoping to find something that he had previously overlooked. His light beam fell on the box of groceries.

"Ah!" he said softly.

He dug into the box, brought out a large bottle, opened it, poured some of its contents on a torn piece of the hunting coat, swabbed it around the rear tires, got in, started the motor.

"Hang on, Doc," he said. "We may be going over the top this time."

THEY went up, slowly, skidding and spinning at times, but they did go up. Gus stopped several times on the ascent to apply the contents of the bottle to the rear tires. At last they topped the ridge, came down into the valley.

Gus waited a long time at the hospital after they had taken Todd Meacham in. He broke the monotony, and anxiety, of the wait once, when he disappeared for a few minutes. Almost immediately on his return, Doc Snodgrass emerged from the operating room, boiling mad.

"Ungrateful old coot!" he fumed. "He's raising Cain because we didn't bring out those dratted dogs, and that bear. If you ask me, we should have left Todd in there to eat it—raw. Say, how did you manage to finally get the car over that icy ridge?"

"Easy," Gus grinned, "after I found that two-quart bottle of household bleach-



"While I'm here, could you fasten this on a little tighter?"

ing fluid that you were taking home to your wife. To tell you the truth, Doc, I didn't know whether it would work or not. While I was waiting for you, I went down to the druggist to see if I could find out why it did work. He told me that this bleach is made by electrolysis from a dilution of salt, and that it will do a faster job cutting into ice than salt will, although of course it's more expensive. It sure handled our emergency.

"You know, Doc, a man meets a lot of folks in the garage business, hears a lot of tales. A traveling salesman told me about this use of bleach on tires when fighting ice. At the time, I figured he was probably pulling my leg."

"Thank heaven he wasn't," Doc Snodgrass said fervently. Then he grinned. "You know, Gus, that was one traveling-salesman story worth listening to." **END**

Next Month: Gus fixes a traffic ticket.