

**YOU ASK
ANYBODY**

BY
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Tumultuous “Casey” Ryan had driven horses since he could stand on his toes, and as one of Nevada’s last stage-drivers speed was his middle name. Wherefore the ubiquitous Ford finally claimed him for its own—and so did The Widow at Lucky Lode Mine. A combination prolific of complications. You will be glad to continue Casey’s acquaintance in future numbers.

From Denver to Spokane, from El Paso to Butte, men talk of “Casey” Ryan and smile as they speak his name. Bearded men with the flat tone of age in their voices will suck pipes and cackle reminiscently while they tell you of Casey’s tumultuous youth—time when he drove the fastest six horses in Colorado to the stage line out from Cripple Creek, and whooped past would-be holdups with a grin of derision on his lips and bullets whining after him, and his passengers praying and clinging white-knuckled to the seats.

Once a flat-chested, lank man climbed out at the stage station below the mountain and met Casey coming off the box with whip and six reins in his hand.

“Sa-ay! Next time that gang starts in to hold up the stage, by gosh, you *stop!* I’d ruther be shot than pitched off into a cañon som’eres.”

Casey paused and looked at him, and spat and grinned. “You’re here, ain’t yuh?” he retorted finally. “You ain’t shot, and you ain’t laying in no cañon. Any time a man gets shot outa Casey’s stage, it’ll be because he jumps out and waits for the bullet to ketch up.”

The lank man snorted and reached under his coat tail for the solacing, plug of chewing tobacco. “Why, hell, man, you come down around that hairpin turn, up there, on two wheels!” he complained.

Casey grunted and turned away uninterested. “I’ve done it on one,” he belittled the achievement. “The leaders wasn’t runnin’ good, today. That nigh one’s tenderfooted. I gotta see about havin’ him shod before the next trip.” He started off, then paused to fling reassurance over his shoulder. “Don’t you never worry none about Casey’s driving. Casey can *drive*. You ask anybody.”

Well, that was Casey’s youth. Part of it. The rest was made up of reckless play, fighting for the sheer love of action, love that never left a scar across his memory and friendships that laughed at him, laughed with him, and endured to the end. Along the years behind him he left a straggling procession of men, women, and events, that linked themselves reminiscently in the memory of those who knew him. “Remember the time Casey licked that Swede foreman up at Gold Gap?” one would say. “Remember that little girl Casey sent back to her folks in Vermont—and had to borrow the money to pay her fare, and then borrow the money to play poker to win the money to pay back what he borrowed in the first place? Borrowed a hundred dollars from Ed Blair, and then borrowed another hundred off Ed the next day and boned Ed to set into a game with him, and won the money off Ed to pay Ed back. That’s Casey for yuh!”

As for the events, they were many and they had the Casey flavor, every one of them. A few I should like to tell you, and I’m going to begin with one which shows how Casey was born an optimist and

never let life get the better of him, no matter what new wallop it invented.

From the days when his daily drives were apt to be interrupted by holdups—and once by a grizzly that rose up in front of his leaders on a sharp turn and all but made an end of Casey and his record for shaving death close and never drawing blood—Casey drifted from mountain to desert, from desert to plain, blithely meeting hard luck face to face and giving it good day as if it were a friend. That was the remarkable trait which Casey possessed. Nothing downed him, because he never seemed to know when he was whipped, but thought it merely an incident of the game. Cheerfulness was in the bones of him—though he had a temper as Irish as his name.

So, in time, it happened that Casey was driving stage from Pinnacle down to Lund and making boast that his four horses could beat any automobile that ever infested the trail. Infest was the word Casey would have used often had he known the dictionary contained it. Having been deprived of much knowledge of books, but having a facile imagination and some creative ability, Casey invented words of his own and applied them lavishly to all automobiles and, in particular and emphatically, he applied the spiciest ones to Fords.

Put yourself in Casey's place and sympathize with him. Imagine yourself with a thirty-mile trip down a twisty, rough mountain road built in the days when men hauled ore down the mountain on wagons built to bump over rocks without damage to anything but human bones. You never stopped for stage robbers or grizzlies in the past, and you have your record as the hardest driver in the West to maintain. You pop the lash over the heads of your leaders and go whooping down a long, straight bit of road where you count on

making time. And when you are away halfway down and the four horses are at a gallop and you are happy, around the turn below comes a Ford, rattling its various joints, trying to make the hill in “high.”

More likely than not, the driver honks his horn at you to turn out—and you are Casey Ryan, of whom men talk from El Paso to Butte, from Denver to Spokane. Wouldn't you writhe, and wouldn't you swear, and wouldn't you hate the man who invented Fords? Yet you would turn out. You would have to, unless the Ford did—and Fords don't. A Ford will send a twin-six swerving to the rocky rim of a road, and even Casey Ryan must swing his leaders to the right in obedience to that raucous challenge.

Casey had the patience of all optimists, and for a long while he had contented himself with his vocabulary and the record he held of making the thirty miles from Pinnacle to Lund in the same time a Ford would make it. He did not, by the way, say what his stage cost him in repairs, nor did he mention the fact that Lund and Pinnacle citizens rode with him once and then never again, and that his passengers were mostly strangers picked up at the railroad station at Lund because they were tickled with the picturesque four-horses-and-Casey stage. He had never killed anybody with his record, but he had almost.

Once Casey did not turn out. That morning he had been compelled to stop and whip a heavy man who came up and berated him because the heavy man's wife had ridden from Pinnacle to Lund the day before, and had fainted at the last turn, and had not revived in time to catch the train for Salt Lake, which she had been anxious to catch; so anxious that she had ridden down with Casey rather than take the narrow-gauge train which carried ore and passengers

and mail to Lund every day, arriving when most convenient to the train crew.

Casey had managed to whip the husband, but the difference in weight had given him the victory by a narrower margin than Casey liked. Besides, the fight delayed him so that he started out ten minutes late. He was reflecting upon the injustice of the case, and asking himself if he, Casey, were to blame because a woman fainted inconveniently and missed her train, and had answered emphatically that he was not, and that he would like to have given her husband another good punch, and would have given it, if he'd had the time—when the Ford came chugging around the turn and honked at him impertinently.

Casey popped his whip, yelled and charged straight down the road. He would make that Ford turn out, or bust something. He would show them that Casey was Casey Ryan. Wherefore Casey was presently extricating his leaders from his wheelers, ten feet below the grade. On the road above, the Ford stood still with one front fender cocked up rakishly and a headlight smashed, mulishly balking while the driver cranked and cranked and swore down at Casey, who squinted into the sun that he might see the man he likewise cursed.

They were a long while there exchanging disagreeable opinions of one another. When the leaders had veered to the edge of the grade at the last second before the collision, and the wheelers had responded, the left front wheel of the stage did something to the Ford. It would not start, and Casey finally freed his four horses, mounted one and led the others and so proceeded to Lund, as mad a little Irishman as Lund ever beheld.

“That settles it,” he snorted when the town came into view in the flat below. “They’ve pushed Casey off’n the grade for the first time and the last time! What pushin’ and crowdin’ and squawkin’ is done from now on, it’ll be Casey that’s doin’ it—mind what I’m telling yuh, now! Faint? I’ll learn ’em what to faint over. They can’t hand it to Casey. They never did and they never will. If it’s Fords goin’ to rule the country from now on, and take the road away from the horses, you can climb a tree if yuh like, and watch how Casey’ll drive the livin’ tar outa one! Go ’em one better—that’s Casey Ryan, and you can go tell ’em I said so. Hawnk! Wait till yuh hear the hawkin’ Casey’ll be doin’!”

I tell you his horses knew the mind of Casey and all his fell purpose by the time he rode into town and up to one of those ubiquitous “Ford Agencies” that write their curly tailed blue lettering in one endless chain from the high nose of Maine to the shoulder of Cape Flattery.

“Gimme one of them gol-darned blankety bing-bing Ford *autymobils*,” he commanded the garage owner who came to meet Casey amicably, in his shirt sleeves. “Here’s four horses I’ll trade yuh, with what’s left of the harness. And up at White Ghost turn you’ll find a good wheel off the stage, ’t I’ll make yuh a present of.” He slid down from the sweaty back of his horse and stood bow-legged and determined before the garage owner.

“Well—there ain’t much sale for horses, Casey, and I ain’t got a place to keep ’em, nor anything to feed ’em. I’ll sell yuh a Ford.”

Casey glanced over his shoulder to make sure the horses were standing quietly, dropped the bridle rein and advanced a step, his Irish eyes fixed upon the face of the other.

“You *trade*,” he stated flatly.

The Ford man backed a little. “Sure, Casey. What yuh want for the four, just as they stand?”

Casey did not trouble with triumph. He continued to forge straight at his object. “Me? I want a Ford autymobil. I want you to put on the biggest horn you got, so I c’n be heard from here to Pinnacle and back in one hawnk. And run the damn thing out here and show me how it works, and how often yuh gotta wind it and when. I’ve got my stage line to take care of, and I’ve missed a run on account of being pushed off’n the road. I’ll sign papers tonight when I get in. Show me the biggest horn yuh got.”

Thus was the trade effected, with much speed and few preliminaries, because the garage man knew Casey well, and had seen him in action when his temper was up. He adjusted a secondhand horn he happened to have; one of those terrific things warranted to lift a medium-sized man off his feet at one hundred yards or money refunded. Casey tried it out on himself, walking down the street several doors and standing with his back turned while the garage man squawked at him.

“She’ll do,” he approved, coming back. “What’ll kink Casey’s backbone oughta be good enough for anybody. Bring her out here and show me how you run the darn thing. I’ve got a load of bohunk muckers to take up to the Blackbird Mine. Meant to haul ’em up to-morrow morning, but I guess I’ll take ’em this afternoon for practice.”

Naturally, the garage man was somewhat perturbed at the thought. The road from Pinnacle to Lund was the kind that brings a sigh of relief to many a seasoned driver after it has been safely driven. It is

narrow in spots, has steep pitches both ways, and in the thirty miles there are sixteen sharp turns and others not so sharp.

“Better let me write you out some insurance on the car, Casey,” he suggested, not half as jokingly as he tried to seem.

Casey turned and looked him in the eye. “Say! Never you mind about insuring *this* car. What you want to do is insure the cars I’m liable to meet up with!”

The garage man said no more about insurance, but took Casey down the cañon where the road was walled in on both sides by cliffs and was fairly straight and level, and proceeded to give him a lesson in driving. Casey made two round trips along that half mile of road, killed the engine, and figured out for himself how to start it again.

“She’s tender bitted, and I do hate a horse that neckreins in harness,” he criticized. “All right, Bill. I’ll put you down at the garage and go gather up the bohunks and start. Better phone up to Pinnacle that Casey’s on the road and it’s his road so long as he’s on it. They’ll know what yuh mean.”

Pinnacle did know, and waited on the sidewalk that afforded a view of the long hill where the road swung down around the head of the gulch into town.

Much sooner than his most optimistic backers had a right to expect—for there were bets laid on the outcome there in Pinnacle—a swirl of red dust on the brow of the hill grew rapidly to a cloud. Like a desert whirlwind it swept down the road, crossed the narrow bridge over the deep cut at the head of the gulch, and rolled on down the steep little, narrow street. Out of the whirlwind

emerged the pugnacious little nose of a new Ford, and behind the windshield Casey Ryan grinned widely as he swung up to the post office and stopped with a lurch that sent the insecure fourth bohunk in the tonneau hurtling forward into the front. Casey threw up an elbow and caught the bohunk in the collar button and held him from going through the windshield. The others made haste to scramble out, until Casey stopped them with a yell that froze them where they were.

“Hey! Stay right where y’are! I gotta deliver yuh up on the hill to the Blackbird, in a minute.”

There were chatterings and gesticulation, and one who was not scared out of all the English he knew protested that they would “Walk, mister, if you *please*, mister!” Whereat the crowd slapped thighs and laughed long and loud.

Thereafter Pinnacle and Lund had a new standard by which to measure the courage of a man. Had he made the trip with Casey?

Casey did not like that. Freely enough he admitted that he was a hard driver. He had always had the name of being the hardest driver in the country, and he was proud of it. When a man started out to go somewhere, he wasn’t much, in Casey’s opinion, if he did not immediately proceed to get there. But he was a safe driver, he argued.

Casey had an accident now and then, and his tire expense was such as to keep him up nights playing poker for money to support his stage. You can’t whirl into town at a thirty-mile pace—which is fast driving in Pinnacle, believe me—and stop with a flourish in twice the car’s length without scouring more rubber off your tires

than a capacity load of passengers will pay for. Besides, your passengers generally object.

In two weeks—perhaps it was less, though I want to be perfectly just and give him a full two weeks if possible—Casey was back, afoot, and standing bow-legged and nonchalant in the doorway of the Ford Agency at Lund.

“Gimme another Ford autymobil,” he requested, grinning a little. “I guess mebby I oughta take two or three, if you’ve got ’em to spare. But I’m a little short, right now, Bill. I ain’t been gitting any good poker, lately. I’ll make out with one for a while.”

Bill asked a question or two while he led Casey to the last arrival from the factory. Casey explained.

“I had a bet on with a fellow up in Pinnacle, y’see. He bet me a hundred dollars I couldn’t shave off another ten minutes on my run down, and I bet I could. I’d a got his money, too. I had eight minutes peeled off, and up here, at this last sharp turn, Jim Black and me butted noses together. I pushed him on ahead of me for fifty rods, Bill—and him a-yelling at me to quit—but something busted in the insides of my car, I guess. She give a grunt and quit. All right, I’ll take this one. Grease her up, Bill. I’ll eat a bite before I take her out.”

You’ve no doubt suspected before now that not even poker, played industriously o’ nights, could keep Casey’s head above the financial waters that threatened to drown him and his Ford and his reputation. Casey did not mind repair bills, so long as he achieved the speed he wanted. But he did mind not being able to pay the repair bills when they were presented to him. Whatever else were his faults, Casey Ryan had always gone cheerfully into his pocket

and paid what he owed. Now he was haunted by a growing fear that an unlucky game or two would send him under, and that he might not come up again.

He began seriously to think of selling his car and going back to horses which, in spite of the high cost of feeding them, had paid their way and his, and left him a pleasant jingle in his pockets. And then he bumped hard into one of those queer little psychological facts which men never take into account until it is too late.

Casey Ryan, who had driven horses since he could stand on his toes and fling harness on their backs, could not go back to driving horses. The speed fiend of progress had him by the neck. Horses were too slow for Casey. Moreover, the thirty-mile stretch between Pinnacle and Lund was too tame for him, too monotonous. He knew in the dark every twist in the road, every sharp turn, and he could tell you offhand what every sharp turn had cost him in the past month, either in repairs to his own car or to the car that had unluckily met him without warning. For Casey, I must tell you, forgot all about that ear-splitting klaxon at his left elbow. He was always in too much of a hurry to blow it, anyway, and by the time he reached a turn he was around it, and there either was no car in the road or Casey had already scraped paint off it or worse. So what was the use?

Far distances called Casey. In one day, he meditated, he could cover more desert with his Ford than horses could travel in a week. An old, half-buried passion stirred, lifted its head, and smiled at him seductively. He would go away into the far distances and look for the riches which Nature hides so miserly in her hills. A gold mine, or perhaps silver or copper—what matter which mineral he found, so long as it spelled wealth for him? Then he would buy a

bigger car and a faster car, and he would bore farther and farther into yonder. In his past were tucked away months on end of tramping across deserts and up mountain defiles, with a packed burro nipping patiently along in front of him and this same, seductive passion for finding one of Nature's little hoards of mineral beckoning him over the next horizon. Burros had been slow. While he hurtled down the road from Pinnacle to Lund Casey pictured himself plodding through sand and sage and over malapi and up dry cañons, hazing a burro before him.

“No, sir, the time for that is gone by. I could do in a week now what it took me a month to do then. I could get into country a man'd hate to tackle afoot, not knowing the water holes. I'll git me a radiator that don't boil a tea kettle over a pitch fire, and load up with water and grub and gas, and I'll find something that'll put me in the clear the rest of my life. Couldn't before, because I had to travel too slow. But shucks! A Ford can go anywhere a mountain goat can go. You ask anybody.”

So Casey sold his stage line and the good will that went with it, and Pinnacle and Lund breathed long and deep and planned trips they had refrained from taking heretofore, and wished Casey luck. Bill, the garage man, laid a friendly hand on his shoulder and made a suggestion so wise that not even Casey could shut his mind against it.

“You're starting out where there won't be no Bill handy to fix what you bust,” he pointed out. “You wait over a day or two, Casey, and let me show yuh a few things about that car. If you bust down on the desert you'll want to know what's wrong, and how to fix it. It's easy, but you got to know where to look for the trouble.”

“Me? Say, Bill, I never had to go lookin’ for trouble,” Casey grinned. “What do I need to learn how for?”

Nevertheless, he remained all of that day with Bill and crammed on mechanics. He was amazed to discover how many and how different were the ailments that might afflict an automobile. That he had boldly—albeit unconsciously—driven a thing filled with timers, high-tension plugs that may become fouled and fail to “spark,” carburetors that could get out of adjustment, spark plugs that burned out and had to be replaced, a transmission that absolutely *must* have grease or something happened, bearings that were prone to “burn out,” if they went dry of oil, and a multitude of other mishaps that could happen and did happen, if one did not watch out, would have filled Casey with foreboding, if that were possible. Being an optimist to the middle of his bones, he merely felt a growing pride in himself. He had driven all this aggregation of potential grief, and he had driven with impunity. Whenever anything had happened to his Ford *automobil*, Casey could trace the direct cause, and it had always come from the outside instead of the inside, save that time when he had walked in and got a new car without probing into the vitals of the other.

“I’d ruther have a horse down with glanders,” he admitted when Bill finally washed the grease off his hands and forearms and rolled down his sleeves. “But Casey Ryan’s game to try anything once, and most things the second and third time. You ask anybody. Gimme all the hootin’-annies that’s liable to wear out, Bill, and a load uh tires and patches, and Casey’ll come back and hand yuh a diamond big as your fist, some day. Casey Ryan’s goin’ out to see what he can see. If he meets up with Miss Fortune, he’ll tame her, Bill. And this little Ford *automobil* is goin’ to eat outa my hand, this summer. I don’t give a cuss if she does git sore and ram her

spark plugs into her carburetor now and ag'in. She'll know who's boss, Bill."

Taking that point of view and keeping it, Casey managed very well. Whenever anything went wrong that his vocabulary and a monkey wrench could not mend, Casey sat down on the shadiest running board and coned the Instruction Book which Bill handed him at the last minute. Other times he treated the Ford exactly as he would treat a burro, with satisfactory results.

Away out on the high mesas that are much like the desert below, except that the nights are cool and the wind is not fanned out of a furnace, Casey fought sand and brush and rocks and found a trail now and then which he followed thankfully, and so came at last to a short range of mountains whose name matched well their sinister stare. The Ghost Mountains had always been reputed rich in mineral and malevolent in their attitude toward man and beast. Even the Joshua trees stood afar off and lifted grotesque arms defensively. But Casey was not easily daunted, and eerie places held for him no meaning save the purely material one. If he could find water and the rich vein of ore he dreamed of, then Casey would be happy in spite of snakes, tarantulas, and sinister stories of the place.

Water he found, not too far up a gulch. So he pitched his tent within carrying distance from the spring, thanked the god of mechanics that an automobile neither eats nor drinks when it does not work, and set out to find his fortune.

Now this is not a story of Casey's quest for gold. It's a love story, if you please. Until the lady entered Casey's orbit there was no

logical reason for telling you, nor for stating that the Ford automobile played the part of Fate—and played erratically.

Casey knew there was a mining camp on the high slope of Furnace Butte. He knew the name of the camp, which was Lucky Lode, and he knew the foreman there—knew him from long ago in the days when Casey was what he himself called wild. In reaching Ghost Mountains Casey had driven for fifteen miles within plain sight of Lucky Lode. But gas is precious when you are a hundred miles from a garage, and since business did not take him there Casey did not drive up the five-mile slope to the Lucky Lode just to shake hands with the foreman and swap a yarn or two. Instead, he headed down on to the bleached, bleak oval of Furnace Lake and forged across it straight as he could drive toward Ghost Mountain.

But the next time Casey made the trip—needing supplies, powder, fuse, caps, and so on—Fate took him by the ear and led him to the lady. This is how Fate did it—and I will say it was an original idea.

Casey had a gallon sirup can in the car, which he used for extra oil for the engine. Having an appetite for sour-dough biscuits and sirup, he had also a gallon can of sirup in the car. It was a terrifically hot day, and the wind that blew full against Casey's left cheek as he drove, burned where it struck. Casey was afraid he was running short of water, and a Ford comes first, as every man knows, so that Casey was parched pretty thoroughly, inside and out. Within a mile of the lake he stopped, took an unsatisfying sip from his big canteen and emptied the rest of the water into the radiator. Then he replenished the oil in the motor generously, cranked and went bumping along down the trail worn rough with the trucks from Lucky Lode.

For a little way he bumped along the trail, then the motor began to labor and, although Casey pulled the gas lever down as far as it would go, the car slowed and stopped dead in the road. It was after an hour of fruitless monkey-wrenching and swearing and sweating that Casey began to suspect something. He examined both cans, “hefted” them, smelled and even tasted the one half empty, and decided that Ford automobiles did not require two quarts of sirup at one dose. He thought that a little sirup ought not make much difference, but half a gallon was probably too much.

He put in more oil on top of the sirup, but he could not even move the crank, much less “turn ’er over.” He did not know what to do. So long as a man can wind the crank of a Ford he seems able to keep alive his hopes. Casey could not crank, wherefore he knew himself beaten even while he heaved and lifted and swore, and strained every muscle in his back. He got so desperately wrathful that he lifted the car perceptibly off its right front wheel with every heave, but he felt as if he were trying to lift a boulder.

It was past supper time at Lucky Lode when Casey arrived, staggering a little with exhaustion both mental and physical. His eyes were bloodshot with the hot wind, his face was purple from the same wind, his lips were dry and rough. I cannot blame the men at Lucky Lode for a sudden thirst when they saw him coming, and a hope that he still had a little left. And when he told them that he had filled his engine with sirup instead of oil, what would any one think?

Their unjust suspicions would not have worried Casey in the least, had Lucky Lode not possessed a lady cook who was a lady. She was a widow with two children, and she had the children with her and held herself aloof from the men in a manner befitting a lady.

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