# Sally

Isaac Asimov

Sally was coming down the lake road, so I waved to her and called her by name. I always liked to see Sally. I liked all of them, you understand, but Sally’s the prettiest one of the lot. There just isn’t any question about it.

She moved a little faster when I waved to her. Nothing undignified. She was never that. She moved just enough faster to show that she was glad to see me, too.

I turned to the man standing beside me. “That’s Sally,” I said.

He smiled at me and nodded.

Mrs. Hester had brought him in. She said, “This is Mr. Gellhorn, Jake. You remember he sent you the letter asking for an appointment.”

That was just talk, really. I have a million things to do around the Farm, and one thing I just can’t waste my time on is mail. That’s why I have Mrs. Hester around. She lives pretty close by, she’s good at attending to foolishness without running to me about it, and most of all, she likes Sally and the rest. Some people don’t.

“Glad to see you, Mr. Gellhorn,” I said.

“Raymond f. Gellhorn,” he said, and gave me his hand, which I shook and gave back.

He was a largish fellow, half a head taller than I and wider, too. He was about half my age, thirtyish. He had black hair, plastered down slick, with a part in the middle, and a thin mustache, very neatly trimmed. His jawbones got big under his ears and made him look as if he had a slight case of mumps. On video he’d be a natural to play the villain, so I assumed he was a nice fellow. It goes to show that video can’t be wrong all the time.

“I’m Jacob Folkers,” I said. “What can I do for you?”

He grinned. It was a big, wide, white-toothed grin. “You can tell me a little about your Farm here, if you don’t mind.”

I heard Sally coming up behind me and I put out my hand. She slid right into it and the feel of the hard, glossy enamel of her fender was warm in my palm.

“A nice automatobile,” said Gellhorn.

That’s one way of putting it. Sally was a 2045 convertible with a Hennis-Carleton positronic motor and an Armat chassis. She had the cleanest, finest lines I’ve ever seen on any model, bar none. For five years, she’d been my favorite, and I’d put everything into her I could dream up. In all that time, there’d never been a human being behind her wheel.

Not once.

“Sally,” I said, patting her gently, “meet Mr. Gellhorn.”

Sally’s cylinder-purr keyed up a little. I listened carefully for any knocking. Lately, I’d been hearing motor-knock in almost all the cars and changing the gasoline hadn’t done a bit of good. Sally was as smooth as her paint job this time, however.

“Do you have names for all your cars?” asked Gellhorn.

He sounded amused, and Mrs. Hester doesn’t like people to sound as though they were making fun of the Farm. She said, sharply, “Certainly. The cars have real personalities, don’t they, Jake? The sedans are all males and the convertibles are females.”

Gellhorn was smiling again. “And do you keep them in separate garages, ma’am?”

Mrs. Hester glared at him.

Gellhorn said to me, “And now I wonder if I can talk to you alone, Mr. Folkers?”

“That depends,” I said. “Are you a reporter?”

“No, sir. I’m a sales agent. Any talk we have is not for publication. I assure you I am interested in strict privacy.”

“Let’s walk down the road a bit. There’s a bench we can use.”

We started down. Mrs. Hester walked away. Sally nudged along after us.

I said, “You don’t mind if Sally comes along, do you?”

“Not at all. She can’t repeat what we say, can she?” He laughed at his own joke, reached over and rubbed Sally’s grille.

Sally raced her motor and Gellhorn’s hand drew away quickly.

“She’s not used to strangers,” I explained.

“We sat down on the bench under the big oak tree where we could look across the small lake to the private speedway. It was the warm part of the day and the cars were out in force, at least thirty of them. Even at this distance I could see that Jeremiah was pulling his usual stunt of sneaking up behind some staid older model, then putting on a jerk of speed and yowling past with deliberately squealing brakes. Two weeks before he had crowded old Angus off the asphalt altogether, and I had turned off his motor for two days.

It didn’t help though, I’m afraid, and it looks as though there’s nothing to be done about it. Jeremiah is a sports model to begin with and that kind is awfully hot-headed.

“Well, Mr. Gellhorn,” I said. “Could you tell me why you want the information?”

But he was just looking around. He said, “This is an amazing place, Mr. Folkers.”

“I wish you’d call me Jake. Everyone does.”

“All right, Jake. How many cars do you have here?”

“Fifty-one. We get one or two new ones every year. One year we got five. We haven’t lost one yet. They’re all in perfect running order. We even have a ‘15 model Mat-O-Mot in working order. One of the original automatics. It was the first car here.”

Good old Matthew. He stayed in the garage most of the day now, but then he was the granddaddy of all positronic-motored cars. Those were the days when blind war veterans, paraplegics and heads of state were the only ones who drove automatics. But Sajn Harridge was my boss and he was rich enough to be able to get one. I was his chauffeur at the time.

The thought makes me feel old. I can remember when there wasn’t an automobile in the world with brains enough to find its own way home. I chauffeured dead lumps of machines that needed a man’s hand at their controls every minute. Every year machines like that used to kill tens of thousands of people.

The automatics fixed that. A positronic brain can react much faster than a human one, of course, and it paid people to keep hands off the controls. You got in, punched your destination and let it go its own way.

We take it for granted now, but I remember when the first laws came out forcing the old machines off the highways and limiting travel to automatics. Lord, what a fuss. They called it everything from communism to fascism, but it emptied the highways and stopped the killing, and still more people get around more easily the new way.

Of course, the automatics were ten to a hundred times as expensive as the hand-driven ones, and there weren’t many that could afford a private vehicle. The industry specialized in turning out omnibus-automatics. You could always call a company and have one stop at your door in a matter of minutes and take you where you wanted to go. Usually, you had to drive with others who were going your way, but what’s wrong with that?

Sajn Harridge had a private car though, and I went to him the minute it arrived. The car wasn’t Matthew to me then. I didn’t know it was going to be the dean of the Farm some day. I only knew it was taking my job away and I hated it.

I said, “You won’t be needing me any more, Mr. Harridge?”

He said, “What are you dithering about, Jake? You don’t think I’ll trust myself to a contraption like that, do you? You stay right at the controls.”

I said, “But it works by itself, Mr. Harridge. It scans the road, reacts properly to obstacles, humans, and other cars, and remembers routes to travel.”

“So they say. So they say. Just the same, you’re sitting right behind the wheel in case anything goes wrong.”

Funny how you can get to like a car. In no time I was calling it Matthew and was spending all my time keeping it polished and humming. A positronic brain stays in condition best when it’s got control of its chassis at all times, which means it’s worth keeping the gas tank filled so that the motor can turn over slowly day and night. After a while, it got so I could tell by the sound of the motor how Matthew felt.

In his own way, Harridge grew fond of Matthew, too. He had no one else to like. He’d divorced or outlived three wives and outlived five children and three grandchildren. So when he died, maybe it wasn’t surprising that he had his estate converted into a Farm for Retired Automobiles, with me in charge and Matthew the first member of a distinguished line.

It’s turned out to be my life. I never got married. You can’t get married and still tend to automatics the way you should.

The newspapers thought it was funny, but after a while they stopped joking about it. Some things you can’t joke about. Maybe you’ve never been able to afford an automatic and maybe you never will, either, but take it from me, you get to love them. They’re hard-working and affectionate. It takes a man with no heart to mistreat one or to see one mistreated.

It got so that after a man had an automatic for a while, he would make provisions for having it left to the Farm, if he didn’t have an heir he could rely on to give it good care.

I explained that to Gellhorn.

He said, “Fifty-one cars! That represents a lot of money.”

“Fifty thousand minimum per automatic, original investment,” I said. “They’re worth a lot more now. I’ve done things for them.”

“It must take a lot of money to keep up the Farm.”

“You’re right there. The Farm’s a non-profit organization, which gives us a break on taxes and, of course, new automatics that come in usually have trust funds attached. Still, costs are always going up. I have to keep the place landscaped; I keep laying down new asphalt and keeping the old in repair; there’s gasoline, oil, repairs, and new gadgets. It adds up.”

“And you’ve spent a long time at it.”

“I sure have, Mr. Gellhorn. Thirty-three years.”

“You don’t seem to be getting much out of it yourself.”

“I don’t? You surprise me, Mr. Gellhorn. I’ve got Sally and fifty others. Look at her.”

I was grinning. I couldn’t help it. Sally was so clean, it almost hurt. Some insect must have died on her windshield or one speck of dust too many had landed, so she was going to work. A little tube protruded and spurted Tergosol over the glass. It spread quickly over the silicone surface film and squeejees snapped into place instantly, passing over the windshield and forcing the. water into the little channel that led it, dripping, down to the ground. Not a speck of water got onto her glistening apple-green hood. Squeejee and detergent tube snapped back into place and disappeared.

Gellhorn said, “I never saw an automatic do that.”

“I guess not,” I said. “I fixed that up specially on our cars. They’re clean. They’re always scrubbing their glass. They like it. I’ve even got Sally fixed up with wax jets. She polishes herself every night till you can see your face in any part of her and shave by it. If I can scrape up the money, I’d be putting it on the rest of the girls. Convertibles are very vain.”

“I can tell you how to scrape up the money, if that interests you.”

“That always does. How?”

“Isn’t it obvious, fake? Any of your cars is worth fifty thousand minimum, you said. I’ll bet most of them top six figures.”

“So?”

“Ever think of selling a few?”

I shook my head. “You don’t realize it, I guess, Mr. Gellhorn, but I can’t sell any of these. They belong to the Farm, not to me.”

“The money would go to the Farm.”

“The incorporation papers of the Farm provide that the cars receive perpetual care. They can’t be sold.”

“What about the motors, then?”

“I don’t understand you.”

Gellhorn shifted position and his voice got confidential. “Look here, Jake, let me explain the situation. There’s a big market for private automatics if they could only be made cheaply enough. Right?”

“That’s no secret.”

“And ninety-five per cent of the cost is the motor. Right? Now, I know where we can get a supply of bodies. I also know where we can sell automatics at a good price—twenty or thirty thousand for the cheaper models, maybe fifty or sixty for the better ones. All I need are the motors. You see the solution?”

“I don’t, Mr. Gellhorn.” I did, but I wanted him to spell it out.

“It’s right here. You’ve got fifty-one of them. You’re an expert automatobile mechanic, Jake. You must be. You could unhook a motor and place it in another car so that no one would know the difference.”

“It wouldn’t be exactly ethical.”

“You wouldn’t be harming the cars. You’d be doing them a favor. Use your older cars. Use that old Mat-O-Mot.”

“Well, now, wait a while, Mr. Gellhorn. The motors and bodies aren’t two separate items. They’re a single unit. Those motors are used to their own bodies. They wouldn’t be happy in another car.”

“All right, that’s a point. That’s a very good point, Jake. It would be like taking your mind and putting it in someone else’s skull. Right? You don’t think you would like that?”

“I don’t think I would. No.”

“But what if I took your mind and put it into the body of a young athlete. What about that, Jake? You’re not a youngster anymore. If you had the chance, wouldn’t you enjoy being twenty again? That’s what I’m offering some of your positronic motors. They’ll be put into new ‘57 bodies. The latest construction.”

I laughed. “That doesn’t make much sense, Mr. Gellhorn. Some of our cars may be old, but they’re well-cared for. Nobody drives them. They’re allowed their own way. They’re retired, Mr. Gellhorn. I wouldn’t want a twenty-year-old body if it meant I had to dig ditches for the rest of my new life and never have enough to eat.... What do you think, Sally?”

Sally’s two doors opened and then shut with a cushioned slam.

“What that?” said Gellhorn.

“That’s the way Sally laughs.”

Gellhorn forced a smile. I guess he thought I was making a bad joke. He said, “Talk sense, Jake. Cars are made to be driven. They’re probably not happy if you don’t drive them.”

I said, “Sally hasn’t been driven in five years. She looks happy to me.”

“I wonder.”

He got up and walked toward Sally slowly. “Hi, Sally, how’d you like a drive?”

Sally’s motor revved up. She backed away.

“Don’t push her, Mr. Gellhorn,” I said. “She’s liable to be a little skittish.”

Two sedans were about a hundred yards up the road. They had stopped. Maybe, in their own way, they were watching. I didn’t bother about them. I had my eyes on Sally, and I kept them there.

Gellhorn said, “Steady now, Sally.” He lunged out and seized the door handle. It didn’t budge, of course.

He said, “It opened a minute ago.”

I said, “Automatic lock. She’s got a sense of privacy, Sally has.”

He let go, then said, slowly and deliberately, “A car with a sense of privacy shouldn’t go around with its top down.”

He stepped back three or four paces, then quickly, so quickly I couldn’t take a step to stop him, he ran forward and vaulted into the car. He caught Sally completely by surprise, because as he came down, he shut off the ignition before she could lock it in place.

For the first time in five years, Sally’s motor was dead.

I think I yelled, but Gellhorn had the switch on “Manual” and locked that in place, too. He kicked the motor into action. Sally was alive again but she had no freedom of action.

He started up the road. The sedans were still there. They turned and drifted away, not very quickly. I suppose it was all a puzzle to them.

One was Giuseppe, from the Milan factories, and the other was Stephen. They were always together. They were both new at the Farm, but they’d been here long enough to know that our cars just didn’t have drivers.

Gellhorn went straight on, and when the sedans finally got it through their heads that Sally wasn’t going to slow down, that she couldn’t slow down, it was too late for anything but desperate measures.

They broke for it, one to each side, and Sally raced between them like a streak. Steve crashed through the lakeside fence and rolled to a halt on the grass and mud not six inches from the water’s edge. Giuseppe bumped along the land side of the road to a shaken halt.

I had Steve back on the highway and was trying to find out what harm, if any, the fence had done him, when Gellhorn came back.

Gellhorn opened Sally’s door and stepped out. Leaning back, he shut off the ignition a second time.

“There,” he said. “I think I did her a lot of good.”

I held my temper. “Why did you dash through the sedans? There was no reason for that.”

“I kept expecting them to turn out.”

“They did. One went through a fence.”

“I’m sorry, Jake,” he said. “I thought they’d move more quickly. You know how it is. I’ve been in lots of buses, but I’ve only been in a private automatic two or three times in my life, and this is the first time I ever drove one. That just shows you, Jake. It got me, driving one, and I’m pretty hard-boiled. I tell you, we don’t have to go more than twenty per cent below list price to reach a good market, and it would be ninety per cent profit.”

“Which we would split?”

“Fifty-fifty. And I take all the risks, remember.”

“All right. I listened to you. Now you listen to me.” I raised my voice because I was just too mad to be polite anymore. “When you turn off Sally’s motor, you hurt her. How would you like to be kicked unconscious? That’s what you do to Sally, when you turn her off.”

“You’re exaggerating, Jake. The automatobuses get turned off every night.”

“Sure, that’s why I want none of my boys or girls in your fancy ‘57 bodies, where I won’t know what treatment they’ll get. Buses need major repairs in their positronic circuits every couple of years. Old Matthew hasn’t had his circuits touched in twenty years. What can you offer him compared with that?”

“Well, you’re excited now. Suppose you think over my proposition when you’ve cooled down and get in touch with me.”

“I’ve thought it over all I want to. If I ever see you again, I’ll call the police.”

His mouth got hard and ugly. He said, “Just a minute, old-timer.”

I said, “Just a minute, you. This is private property and I’m ordering you off.”

He shrugged. “Well, then, goodbye.”

I said, “Mrs. Hester will see you off the property. Make that goodbye permanent.”

But it wasn’t permanent. I saw him again two days later. Two and a half days, rather, because it was about noon when I saw him first and a little after midnight when I saw him again.

I sat up in bed when he turned the light on, blinking blindly till I made out what was happening. Once I could see, it didn’t take much explaining. In fact, it took none at all. He had a gun in his right fist, the nasty little needle barrel just visible between two fingers. I knew that all he had to do was to increase the pressure of his hand and I would be torn apart., He said, “Put on your clothes, Jake.”

I didn’t move. I just watched him.

He said, “Look, Jake, I know the situation. I visited you two days ago, remember. You have no guards on this place, no electrified fences, no warning signals. Nothing.”

I said, “I don’t need any. Meanwhile there’s nothing to stop you from leaving, Mr. Gellhorn. I would if I were you. This place can be very dangerous.”

He laughed a little. “It is, for anyone on the wrong side of a fist gun.”

“I see it,” I said. “I know you’ve got one.”

“Then get a move on. My men are waiting.”

“No, sir, Mr. Gellhorn. Not unless you tell me what you want, and probably not then.”

“I made you a proposition day before yesterday.”

“The answer’s still no.”

“There’s more to the proposition now. I’ve come here with some men and an automatobus. You have your chance to come with me and disconnect twenty-five of the positronic motors. I don’t care which twenty-five you choose. We’ll load them on the bus and take them away. Once they’re disposed of, I’ll see to it that you get your fair share of the money.”

“I have your word on that, I suppose.”

He didn’t act as if he thought I was being sarcastic. He said, “You have.”

I said, “No.”

“If you insist on saying no, we’ll go about it in our own way. I’ll disconnect the motors myself, only I’ll disconnect all fifty-one. Every one of them.”

“It isn’t easy to disconnect positronic motors, Mr. Gellhorn. Are you a robotics expert? Even if you are, you know, these motors have been modified by me.”

“I know that, Jake. And to be truthful, I’m not an expert. I may ruin quite a few motors trying to get them out. That’s why I’ll have to work over all fifty-one if you don’t cooperate. You see, I may only end up with twenty-five when I’m through. The first few I’ll tackle will probably suffer the most. Till I get the hang of it, you see. And if I go it myself, I think I’ll put Sally first in line.”

I said, “I can’t believe you’re serious, Mr. Gellhorn.”

He said, “I’m serious, Jake.” He let it all dribble in. “If you want to help, you can keep Sally. Otherwise, she’s liable to be hurt very badly. Sorry.”

I said, “I’ll come with you, but I’ll give you one more warning. You’ll be in trouble, Mr. Gellhorn.”

He thought that was very funny. He was laughing very quietly as we went down the stairs together.

There was an automatobus waiting outside the driveway to the garage apartments. The shadows of three men waited beside it, and their flash beams went on as we approached.

Gellhorn said in a low voice, “I’ve got the old fellow. Come on. Move the truck up the drive and let’s get started.”

One of the others leaned in and punched the proper instructions on the control panel. We moved up the driveway with the bus following submissively.

“It won’t go inside the garage,” I said. “The door won’t take it. We don’t have buses here. Only private cars.”

“All right,” said Gellhorn. “Pull it over onto the grass and keep it out of sight.”

I could hear the thrumming of the cars when we were still ten yards from the garage.

Usually they quieted down if I entered the garage. This time they didn’t. I think they knew that strangers were about, and once the faces of Gellhorn and the others were visible they got noisier. Each motor was a warm rumble, and each motor was knocking irregularly until the place rattled.

The lights went up automatically as we stepped inside. Gellhorn didn’t seem bothered by the car noise, but the three men with him looked surprised and uncomfortable. They had the look of the hired thug about them, a look that was not compounded of physical features so much as of a certain wariness of eye and hangdogness of face. I knew the type and I wasn’t worried.

One of them said, “Damn it, they’re burning gas.”

“My cars always do,” I replied stiffly.

“Not tonight,” said Gellhorn. “Turn them off.”

“It’s not that easy, Mr. Gellhorn,” I said.

“Get started!” he said.

I stood there. He had his fist gun pointed at me steadily. I said, “I told you, Mr. Gellhom, that my cars have been well-treated while they’ve been at the Farm. They’re used to being treated that way, and they resent anything else.”

“You have one minute,” he said. “Lecture me some other time.”

“I’m trying to explain something. I’m trying to explain that my cars can understand what I say to them. A positronic motor will learn to do that with time and patience. My cars have learned. Sally understood your proposition two days ago. You’ll remember she laughed when I asked her opinion. She also knows what you did to her and so do the two sedans you scattered. And the rest know what to do about trespassers in general.”

“Look, you crazy old fool—”

“All I have to say is—” I raised my voice. “Get them!”

One of the men turned pasty and yelled, but his voice was drowned completely in the sound of fifty-one horns turned loose at once. They held their notes, and within the four walls of the garage the echoes rose to a wild, metallic call. Two cars rolled forward, not hurriedly, but with no possible mistake as to their target. Two cars fell in line behind the first two. All the cars were stirring in their separate stalls.

The thugs stared, then backed.

I shouted, “Don’t get up against a wall.”

Apparently, they had that instinctive thought themselves. They rushed madly for the door of the garage.

At the door one of Gellhorn’s men turned, brought up a fist gun of his own. The needle pellet tore a thin, blue flash toward the first car. The car was Giuseppe.

A thin line of paint peeled up Giuseppe’s hood, and the right half of his windshield crazed and splintered but did not break through.

The men were out the door, running, and two by two the cars crunched out after them into the night, their horns calling the charge.

I kept my hand on Gellhorn’s elbow, but I don’t think he could have moved in any case. His lips were trembling.

I said, “That’s why I don’t need electrified fences or guards. My property protects itself.”

Gellhorn’s eyes swiveled back and forth in fascination as, pair by pair, they whizzed by. He said, “They’re killers!”

“Don’t be silly. They won’t kill your men.”

“They’re killers!”

“They’ll just give your men a lesson. My cars have been specially trained for cross-country pursuit for just such an occasion; I think what your men will get will be worse than an outright quick kill. Have you ever been chased by an automatobile?”

Gellhorn didn’t answer.

I went on. I didn’t want him to miss a thing. “They’ll be shadows going no faster than your men, chasing them here, blocking them there, blaring at them, dashing at them, missing with a screech of brake and a thunder of motor. They’ll keep it up till your men drop, out of breath and half-dead, waiting for the wheels to crunch over their breaking bones. The cars won’t do that. They’ll turn away. You can bet, though, that your men will never return here in their lives. Not for all the money you or ten like you could give them. Listen—”

I tightened my hold on his elbow. He strained to hear.

I said, “Don’t you hear car doors slamming?”

It was faint and distant, but unmistakable.

I said, “They’re laughing. They’re enjoying themselves.”

His face crumpled with rage. He lifted his hand. He was still holding his fist gun.

I said, “I wouldn’t. One automatocar is still with us.”

I don’t think he had noticed Sally till then. She had moved up so quietly. Though her right front fender nearly touched me, I couldn’t hear her motor. She might have been holding her breath.

Gellhorn yelled.

I said, “She won’t touch you, as long as I’m with you. But if you kill me.... You know, Sally doesn’t like you.”

Gellhorn turned the gun in Sally’s direction.

“Her motor is shielded,” I said, “and before you could ever squeeze the gun a second time she would be on top of you.”

“All right, then,” he yelled, and suddenly my arm was bent behind my back and twisted so I could hardly stand. He held me between Sally and himself, and his pressure didn’t let up. “Back out with me and don’t try to break loose, old-timer, or I’ll tear your arm out of its socket.”

I had to move. Sally nudged along with us, worried, uncertain what to do. I tried to say something to her and couldn’t. I could only clench my teeth and moan.

Gellhorn’s automatobus was still standing outside the garage. I was forced in. Gellhorn jumped in after me, locking the doors.

He said, “All right, now. We’ll talk sense.”

I was rubbing my arm, trying to get life back into it, and even as I did I was automatically and without any conscious effort studying the control board of the bus.

I said, “This is a rebuilt job.”

“So?” he said caustically. “It’s a sample of my work. I picked up a discarded chassis, found a brain I could use and spliced me a private bus. What of it?”

I tore at the repair panel, forcing it aside.

He said, “What the hell. Get away from that.” The side of his palm came down numbingly on my left shoulder.

I struggled with him. “I don’t want to do this bus any harm. What kind of a person do you think I am? I just want to take a look at some of the motor connections.”

It didn’t take much of a look. I was boiling when I turned to him. I said, “You’re a hound and a bastard. You had no right installing this motor yourself. Why didn’t you get a robotics man?”

He said, “Do I look crazy?”

“Even if it was a stolen motor, you had no right to treat it so. I wouldn’t treat a man the way you treated that motor. Solder, tape, and pinch clamps! It’s brutal!”

“It works, doesn’t it?”

“Sure it works, but it must be hell for the bus. You could live with migraine headaches and acute arthritis, but it wouldn’t be much of a life. This car is suffering.”

“Shut up!” For a moment he glanced out the window at Sally, who had rolled up as close to the bus as she could. He made sure the doors and windows were locked.

He said, “We’re getting out of here now, before the other cars come back. We’ll stay away.”

“How will that help you?”

“Your cars will run out of gas someday, won’t they? You haven’t got them fixed up so they can tank up on their own, have you? We’ll come back and finish the job.”

“They’ll be looking for me,” I said. “Mrs. Hester will call the police.”

He was past reasoning with. He just punched the bus in gear. It lurched forward. Sally followed.

He giggled. “What can she do if you’re here with me?”

Sally seemed to realize that, too. She picked up speed, passed us and was gone. Gellhorn opened the window next to him and spat through the opening.

The bus lumbered on over the dark road, its motor rattling unevenly. Gellhorn dimmed the periphery light until the phosphorescent green stripe down the middle of the highway, sparkling in the moonlight, was all that kept us out of the trees. There was virtually no traffic. Two cars passed ours, going the other way, and there was none at all on our side of the highway, either before or behind.

I heard the door-slamming first. Quick and sharp in the silence, first on the right and then on the left Gellhorn’s hands quivered as he punched savagely for increased speed. A beam of light shot out from among a scrub of trees, blinding us; Another beam plunged at us from behind the guard rails on the other side. At a crossover, four hundred yards ahead, there was sque-e-e-e-e as a car darted across our path.

“Sally went for the rest,” I said. “I think you’re surrounded.”

“So what? What can they do?”

He hunched over the controls, peering through the windshield.

“And don’t you try anything, old-timer,” he muttered.

I couldn’t. I was bone-weary; my left arm was on fire. The motor sounds gathered and grew closer. I could hear the motors missing in odd patterns; suddenly it seemed to me that my cars were speaking to one another.

A medley of horns came from behind. I turned and Gellhom looked quickly into the rear-view mirror. A dozen cars were following in both lanes.

Gellhorn yelled and laughed madly.

I cried, “Stop! Stop the car!”

Because not a quarter of a mile ahead, plainly visible in the light beams of two sedans on the roadside was Sally, her trim body plunked square across the road. Two cars shot into the opposite lane to our left, keeping perfect time with us and preventing Gellhom from turning out.

But he had no intention of turning out. He put his finger on the full-speed-ahead button and kept it there.

He said, “There’ll be no bluffing here. This bus outweighs her five to one, old-timer, and we’ll just push her off the road like a dead kitten.”

I knew he could. The bus was on manual and his finger was on the button. I knew he would.

I lowered the window, and stuck my head out. “Sally,” I screamed. “Get out of the way. Sally!”

It was drowned out in the agonized squeal of maltreated brakebands. I felt myself thrown forward and heard Gellhorn’s breath puff out of his body.

I said, “What happened?” It was a foolish question. We had stopped. That was what had happened. Sally and the bus were five feet apart. With five times her weight tearing down on her, she had not budged. The guts of her.

Gellhorn yanked at the Manual toggle switch. “It’s got to,” he kept muttering. “It’s got to.”

I said, “Not the way you hooked up the motor, expert. Any of the circuits could cross over.”

He looked at me with a tearing anger and growled deep in his throat. His hair was matted over his forehead. He lifted his fist.

“That’s all the advice out of you there’ll ever be, old-timer.”

And I knew the needle gun was about to fire.

I pressed back against the bus door, watching the fist come up, and when the door opened I went over backward and out, hitting the ground with a thud. I heard the door slam closed again.

I got to my knees and looked up in time to see Gellhorn struggle uselessly with the closing window, then aim his fist-gun quickly through the glass. He never fired. The bus got under way with a tremendous roar, and Gellhorn lurched backward.

Sally wasn’t in the way any longer, and I watched the bus’s rear lights flicker away down the highway.

I was exhausted. I sat down right there, right on the highway, and put my head down in my crossed arms, trying to catch my breath.

I heard a car stop gently at my side. When I looked up, it was Sally. Slowly—lovingly, you might say—her front door opened.

No one had driven Sally for five years—except Gellhorn, of course—and I know how valuable such freedom was to a car. I appreciated the gesture, but I said, “Thanks, Sally, but I’ll take one of the newer cars.”

I got up and turned away, but skillfully and neatly as a pirouette, she wheeled before me again. I couldn’t hurt her feelings. I got in. Her front seat had the fine, fresh scent of an automatobile that kept itself spotlessly clean. I lay down across it, thankfully, and with even, silent, and rapid efficiency, my boys and girls brought me home.

Mrs. Hester brought me the copy of the radio transcript the next evening with great excitement.

“It’s Mr. Gellhorn,” she said. “The man who came to see you.”

“What about him?”

I dreaded her answer.

“They found him dead,” she said. “Imagine that. Just lying dead in a ditch.”, “It might be a stranger altogether,” I mumbled.

“Raymond J. Gellhorn,” she said, sharply. “There can’t be two, can there? The description fits, too. Lord, what a way to die! They found tire marks on his arms and body. Imagine! I’m glad it turned out to be a bus; otherwise they might have come poking around here.”

“Did it happen near here?” I asked, anxiously.

“No... Near Cooksville. But, goodness, read about it yourself if you— What happened to Giuseppe?”

I welcomed the diversion. Giuseppe was waiting patiently for me to complete the repaint job. His windshield had been replaced.

After she left, I snatched up the transcript. There was no doubt about it. The doctor reported he had been running and was in a state of totally spent exhaustion. I wondered for how many miles the bus had played with him before the final lunge. The transcript had no notion of anything like that, of course.

They had located the bus and identified it by the tire tracks. The police had it and were trying to trace its ownership.

There was an editorial in the transcript about it. It had been the first traffic fatality in the state for that year and the paper warned strenuously against manual driving after night.

There was no mention of Gellhorn’s three thugs and for that, at least, I was grateful. None of our cars had been seduced by the pleasure of the chase into killing.

That was all. I let the paper drop. Gellhorn had been a criminal. His treatment of the bus had been brutal. There was no question in my mind he deserved death. But still I felt a bit queasy over the manner of it.

A month has passed now and I can’t get it out of my mind.

My cars talk to one another. I have no doubt about it anymore. It’s as though they’ve gained confidence; as though they’re not bothering to keep it secret anymore. Their engines rattle and knock continuously.

And they don’t talk among themselves only. They talk to the cars and buses that come into the Farm on business. How long have they been doing that?

They must be understood, too. Gellhorn’s bus understood them, for all it hadn’t been on the grounds more than an hour. I can close my eyes and bring back that dash along the highway, with our cars flanking the bus on either side, clacking their motors at it till it understood, stopped, let me out, and ran off with Gellhorn.

Did my cars tell him to kill Gellhorn? Or was that his idea?

Can cars have such ideas? The motor designers say no. But they mean under ordinary conditions. Have they foreseen everything!’

Cars get ill-used, you know.

Some of them enter the Farm and observe. They get told things. They find out that cars exist whose motors are never stopped, whom no one ever drives, whose every need is supplied.

Then maybe they go out and tell others. Maybe the word is spreading quickly. Maybe they’re going to think that the Farm way should be the way all over the world. They don’t understand. You couldn’t expect them to understand about legacies and the whims of rich men.

There are millions of automatobiles on Earth, tens of millions. If the thought gets rooted in them that they’re slaves; that they should do something about it... If they begin to think the way Gellhorn’s bus did....

Maybe it won’t be till after my time. And then they’ll have to keep a few of us to take care of them, won’t they? They wouldn’t kill us all.

And maybe they would. Maybe they wouldn’t understand about how someone would have to care for them. Maybe they won’t wait.

Every morning I wake up and think, Maybe today....

I don’t get as much pleasure out of my cars as I used to. Lately, I notice that I’m even beginning to avoid Sally.