

The Stuck Truck

The stars were still visible as the long, tall eighteen-wheeled truck rolled noisily away from the warehouse loading dock.¹ Its driver, Sal, had just finished loading its cargo² into the 48-foot long, sixteen foot tall trailer. Its contents were all products made from Washington apples.

Inside the truck were hundreds of cases of apple juice, apple cider, apple sauce, and apple pies. Sal would be driving his truck, filled to the doors, from the orchards³ east of Seattle, all the way to a large grocery store in southern California.

It would take two days of driving, nearly nonstop, to bring the products the nearly 2,000 miles that lay between the place where the products were grown and packaged, to where they would be sold. To make this long trip in such a short time, Sal hired⁴ an old friend from high school, Vince, to be the second driver.

Vince wasn't exactly a model student. He was a kid who

¹ **Warehouse loading dock** is the place where trucks back up next to a building to put boxes in for deliveries.

² **cargo** is/are the things the truck is carrying.

³ **orchards** are hundreds or thousands of trees that are grown on farms to produce apples, oranges, peaches and other fruits.

⁴ **hire** means to give someone a job.

had his share of run-ins⁵ with teachers and principals over the years. Sometimes he'd get caught running in the hallway, trying to avoid being late to class. Other times he'd be seen shaking a vending machine, trying to get a bag of chips to come down from its perch,⁶ after it had been paid for. On more than one occasion, he was seen standing between two kids fighting out on the ball field.

Sal was a year older than Vince, and he looked after him like a kid brother. Sal was one of the few people Vince would really listen to. They were only in a couple of the same classes over the years, but they spent a lot of time hanging out together at the neighborhood bowling alley after school. In the summer, they'd ride the bus to ball games to sit in the cheap seats, and in the winter, they used to go snowboarding in the mountains near their home. Now that they were out of school, the two friends had stayed friends, and Sal tried to offer Vince work when he could.

Behind and above the driver's seat, there was a sleeping compartment⁷ where one driver would rest while the other took his turn behind the wheel. It was a small space, just big enough for one man to lay down, pretty much straight on his back. If he

⁵ **run-ins** is another way of saying troubles with another person.

⁶ **perch** is the high place where an animal (or bag of chips) is sitting.

⁷ **compartment** is a small space for storing something.

sat up too quickly, he'd surely bump his head.

The two men only planned to stop for fuel and to eat. They knew there were several truck stops along the way that had pumps where they could fill the truck's large diesel⁸ tanks and get a quick bite to eat at the same time.

Sal took the first turn at the wheel because he knew the rough, unmarked roads⁹ through the Washington farmlands so well. Though it was a bit bumpy, he managed to get the truck out onto the main highway, heading south, in less than an hour. Sal continued driving for four more hours. Vince wasn't tired, so they passed the time talking about Seattle's football team, called the Seahawks, the war in Iraq, and friends they both knew from high school.

When they reached the Oregon border, they stopped for gas and food. Rather than hurriedly¹⁰ eating, though, the two men sat down for a relaxing meal. They knew they'd be in that truck again for a long time without stopping. They even stayed a bit longer, sipping black coffee and chatting with other truckers who were driving the same route.¹¹

⁸ **diesel** is a kind of gasoline used by trucks, buses and some cars.

⁹ **unmarked** is what we call roads that had no street signs.

¹⁰ **hurriedly** is a synonym for quickly; doing something fast.

¹¹ **route** means going in the same direction, possibly to the same place.

The drive through Oregon was uneventful.¹² The traffic was light, and the road was smooth. The two men alternated¹³ driving the truck. And this pattern continued through northern and central California. But when they neared the highway that traversed¹⁴ the Sierra Nevada Range, something unexpected did happen.

A recent rockslide¹⁵ had forced the closure of the highway in both directions. Warning lights were flashing, warning vehicles to stop. A highway patrolman walked up to Vince's window. The officer told Vince that the highway was expected to be closed for a week or so until the massive rockfall could be cleared away.

Vince was directed to a detour that had been set up. It was designed to take vehicles¹⁶ from the new highway onto an old, seldom-used highway a few miles east. Unlike the newer highway, the old one was quite narrow,¹⁷ had lots of cracks in the pavement,¹⁸ and still had tunnels in some places.

¹² **uneventful** means nothing special happened.

¹³ **alternated** means taking turns, first one, then the other.

¹⁴ **traversed** means crossed over or through.

¹⁵ **rockslide** is when lots of rocks and dirt come loose from a mountainside and end up in a big pile on the road below.

¹⁶ **vehicles** are cars, trucks, buses, etc...

¹⁷ **narrow** is the antonym of wide.

¹⁸ **pavement** is another word for asphalt or blacktop, used for roads.

Fortunately, the detour¹⁹ was only three miles long and only required them to pass through one tunnel.

It was still dark when Vince, who had been driving overnight, approached the the tunnel's entrance. It looked like a very old tunnel. Ivy was growing around its mouth, and there were many broken pieces of concrete,²⁰ big and small, lying in the roadway.

There was no traffic on the road at that early hour, so Vince slowed down to try to read the clearance sign posted to indicate the height of the opening. He remembered Sal telling him that the truck was sixteen feet in height. The tunnel's top had to be higher than that for their truck to fit through.

As he neared the entrance, he saw a sign, but its letters and numbers were unreadable from 50 yards, where he had stopped. The sign appeared to have been worn by years of rain, snow, sun, and wind. Paint was peeling off everywhere. Vince pulled the truck forward to within 10 feet of the opening and stopped.

He jumped down from the truck's cab²¹ and walked

¹⁹ **detour** is another way of going somewhere that was not expected.

²⁰ **concrete** is the material made from sand and rocks used to make sidewalks, walls, and tunnels.

²¹ **cab** is the place where the drivers sit, in front of the cargo trailer.

around the archway²² checking to see if there were any other signs. Finding none, he decided to try and compare the height of the tunnel's opening with the top of the trailer,²³ just by sight. They appeared to be just about the same.

Not wanting to damage Sal's truck, Vince climbed on top of the truck's cab carefully to get a better look. He stepped softly on the roof, as his friend slept just a few feet below. From the top of the truck, looking around, Vince could see the faint²⁴ rays of the sun beginning to creep over the horizon.²⁵ It was cold up in those mountains so early in the morning. Vince could see his own breath, too. Vince eyed the tunnel's highest point again, and then turned to look at the leading edge of the trailer just behind him.

To Vince, it appeared that the truck could just barely make it through. The thought of trying to turn the truck around on that narrow mountain road made him shiver.²⁶ He sighed deeply²⁷ when he considered how long it would take to finish the journey using another highway miles away.

²² **archway** is an opening like a half-circle.

²³ **trailer** is the name given to the long rectangular box used to carry the cargo.

²⁴ **faint** means visible, but hard to see.

²⁵ **horizon** is the line where the sky and the land, or sea, meet in the distance. Sunrises and sunsets are seen on the horizon.

²⁶ **shiver** means to shake inside, like when you're cold.

²⁷ **sighed deeply** means to show disappointment using body language, making your shoulders go down, and letting out a long breath.

While he had been surveying the situation,²⁸ a car pulled up behind the truck. It couldn't go around because the truck was now blocking the opening. Vince couldn't see the driver very well, but it looked like a tall man was behind the wheel. There wasn't enough room for even a small car to get by. Vince figured more cars would come along soon, and that he'd better do something.

Sal was still asleep in the cab. Vince didn't want to wake his friend. Sal had driven ten straight hours yesterday while Vince rested. He looked back and forth at the tunnel and truck again, for what now must have been the fifth or sixth time. He was fairly certain²⁹ that he could make it through. Vince counseled himself,³⁰ "If I stay in the center of the road, and I go slowly, I'll make it." As he started to climb back up into the cab, another car pulled up behind the truck.

Vince didn't look long to try to make out who the driver might be. This car looked like it was driven by a woman with big hair. Big enough to touch the ceiling inside her car. Both of the cars' drivers waited patiently as Vince started the truck's

²⁸ **surveying the situation** means to look at a problem for a long time, hoping to come up with an answer.

²⁹ **fairly certain** means "pretty sure".

³⁰ **counseled himself** means talked to himself as though he was giving himself advice.

engine and slowly rolled forward. Vince made sure his high-beam headlights³¹ were on. For even though the sunrise was brightening the mountain sky, it was dark in that tunnel. As an old tunnel, it had only been fitted with a few lights years ago, and not many of them were working since the new highway opened.

In just under a minute, Vince brought almost the truck's entire length through the opening. As the wheels rolled slowly forward, his eyes darted³² up and down between the road's faded center line he was trying to straddle,³³ and the darkness overhead. The cars behind, (and now there were nearly a dozen), stood idle. Some of their drivers had gotten out to see what would happen.

One car contained a young man, who kept nodding his head forward while tapping on the dashboard just over the radio. Another car was driven by a woman who looked in the mirror every so often to check on the child asleep on the back seat.

Vince continued inching the truck forward. He started to hear a scratching sound come from overhead. The truck kept moving, though, and after a few seconds, the sound faded.

³¹ **high-beam headlights** are extra-strong lights that shine straight ahead as well as down.

³² **darted** means moved really fast.

³³ **straddle** means keeping one leg (or wheel) on one side, and one on the other.

Vince kept going. He knew the fit was tight. Even the back of the truck was now completely past the entrance, rolling slowly in the darkness.

The tunnel appeared to be less than an eighth of a mile long by Vince's estimation.³⁴ He was already able to see the opening at the other end. The going was slow, but he smiled as the truck kept moving. "Sal would be happy about this," he said to himself. Then, a moment later, he heard the scratching sound of rock against metal again, but this time it was louder, and even painful to his ears. To Vince, it sounded like that awful fingernails-on-the-blackboard sound troublemaking kids sometimes make in class when the teacher isn't looking.

Though the truck slowed somewhat, it didn't stop, and Vince kept his foot pressed gently on the gas pedal. He was afraid the engine would stall³⁵ at that slow speed, and might not restart.

The truck's pace³⁶ picked up again, and the screeching sounds faded. It was quiet in that tunnel now, even with the engine running, It was so quiet, he could hear Sal snoring overhead. Vince was beginning to relax as the opening at the

³⁴ **estimation** is a best guess, made without measuring tools.

³⁵ **stall** when talking about a car's motor, means "stop running".

³⁶ **pace** is a synonym for speed.

tunnel's opposite end got bigger. He could see in his rearview mirror that the cars behind him were beginning to enter the tunnel.

Suddenly, the truck stopped. Vince thought he had heard the scratching sound announce itself again, but it stopped instantly. He heard a loud thud,³⁷ and then its echo, almost as loud. The truck's engine stalled. Sal stirred³⁸ up above and grunted, "What the ----!"

Vince felt a lump rise in his throat. He slowly turned his head to the right, up, and back. Sal was climbing down from the sleeper. Their eyes met for a moment as Sal was dropping down into the seat next to Vince. "We're in a tunnel," Vince muttered.

"That I can tell," Sal said, his voice tailing off.

"Well, it's an old tunnel, off the main highway. I thought we could make it through...."

Vince's voice trembled³⁹ as he continued to explain what had happened. Sal could tell his friend felt bad. "Don't worry

³⁷ **thud** is a low, deep sound, like when you drop a heavy book on the floor.

³⁸ **stirred** means "moved a little".

³⁹ **trembled** means a little shaky, with a voice, it can show nervousness.

about it, Vince. I'm sure I would've done the same thing."

Sal punched Vince's upper arm the way guys do when they try to help another guy feel better. "Hey, it's probably not so bad," Sal said calmly. "Let's get out and check."

As the two drivers got out of the truck, cars began honking. Vince was about to raise his fist and yell back at them, but Sal stepped in front of Vince and just put his arms up in a 'What can I do?' gesture. "Those guys are probably in a hurry to get to work," Sal chuckled to Vince. The honking quickly died down.

The child sleeping in the back of his mom's car awoke, rubbed his eyes, and felt around for his GameBoy™. In the car just ahead, the woman with the big hair opened her purse, looking for another piece of gum. She unwrapped it, held the new stick in one hand, spit the old one into the paper of the new and closed the paper around it.

Sal and Vince continued looking over the situation. Some drivers got out of their cars, walked up to the truck, and started gazing⁴⁰ up. Some walked to the front to look at the place where the top of the truck's trailer first made contact with the top of the tunnel. A few of the drivers were pointing fingers

⁴⁰ **gazing** means looking and wondering.

upward and sharing their ideas.

Sal and Vince knew they couldn't go forward any more without further damaging the truck. Vince asked Sal if they ought to try and back the truck out. "It's worth a try," Sal said. "Hop up there and try to start the engine. I'll get these cars to back up."

Vince got the engine started and the drivers of the cars behind the truck moved back out of the way. The boy in the back asked his mom, "What's going on, Mom?" without lifting his head or slowing the movement of his fingers. His mother answered, "I don't know, honey." Sal gave Vince a wave to go. He held up his thumb and first finger together, indicating to Vince to back up just a little. The truck did move a tiny bit, but Sal waved at Vince to stop, because not only did he hear a terrible grinding noise, but he also saw sparks cascade⁴¹ from the top of the truck.

Vince cut the engine and slowly stepped out. His head was down and his shoulders were slumped as he walked toward Sal. Sal again tried to lift his buddy's spirits.⁴² "We'll solve this problem. Don't worry." Sal continued, "Vince, get on the

⁴¹ **cascade** means for things to pour down, like water in a waterfall.

⁴² **spirits** means feelings that a person has that can be good or bad.

radio⁴³ and call to see if there are any truckers that have any ideas. If there are any driving nearby, maybe one of them can give us a hand.”

Vince called around, and while all the truckers who answered were happy to help, the only ideas they had were to unload the truck’s cargo into another truck. Vince thanked them, but said they hoped another solution could be found.

After backing their cars out of the tunnel, several of the cars’ drivers returned to where the truck stood. One suggested that they gather as many people together as they could and rock the truck side to side to try and unlodge it from its stuck position. About two dozen people volunteered to help. They assembled on both sides, placed their hands on the sides and pushed back and forth, but nothing moved.

Once that effort failed, Sal called for a large, truck-sized tow truck to pull them out. There was one not too far away. The tow truck driver said he could get out to their location within half an hour.

“Ah, shucks!” the boy announced. “My batteries died!” He looked out the window and saw lots of people gathered just

⁴³ **radio** means something like a walkie-talkie or cell phone truckers use to talk to each other.

outside the tunnel. “Mom, can I go see what’s going on?”

“No, honey,” the boy’s mother cautioned. “Just stay in the car where it’s warm and let those grown ups figure it out.”

While they waited, the drivers and their passengers milled around, looking up in the darkness. Some shook their heads, and others rubbed their chins. A few put their hands on their hips and pointed, while still others scratched the hair on the back of their heads just next to their ears.

The boy called again from the back seat, “Mom....”

“Sweetheart,” his mother called back without turning. She yawned the yawn of someone who had been driving all night. “Don’t you have a book back there, or a puzzle you can play with?”

“Maybe I can help,” the boy insisted. His mother didn’t answer.

An older man, tall, thin, and wrinkled, shut his car door. He slowly walked up behind Vince. He mumbled to himself, but loud enough for the people around him to hear, “Maybe they

could use some 'a 'dem big crowbars⁴⁴ like chisels to loosen it up. It might take a while, to break that rock up there away...couple'a days, maybe...." No one around thought that was an idea worth trying.

He stood there for a few more minutes and then headed back to his car. As he walked out of the tunnel, he passed a boy who looked to be about 8 years old standing by the side of the archway.

A lady with tall red hair, a pink dress, and a white waitress apron walked up to Sal, swinging her hips. She looked him over, then took a step back. Sal could see the name tag pinned to her apron. The letters read, **ALICE**. She was working a wad of chewing gum from side to side. Sal looked back at her, wondering what she had in mind. Alice put her hands on her hips, tilted her head upward to the right, smacked her lips, and said, "Honey, you got one heck of a jam up there, an' it ain't strawberry!"

Alice laughed at her own joke, but Sal just gave her a polite smile. "Why don't you try slatherin' some cookin' oil up'on there and try to slide 'er out!"

⁴⁴ **crowbar** is a long metal bar used for prying two connected things apart.

“Hmmm... Thanks...,” Sal said. “We got a couple of other ideas we might try first.”

“All right, Darlin’, Alice replied. “Y’all figure it out, then.” She swung her hips again as she turned away. “Good luck.”

“Thanks, M’am.” Sal answered, kind of thankful that she had kept it short. “Cookin’ oil, geez...,” he whispered to himself.

A few minutes later, a huge tow truck arrived. The driver pulled it carefully past the line of cars. The left side tires were perilously⁴⁵ close to the mountain’s edge. Gravel under the tires was kicked outward and tumbled down. He stopped near the entrance of the tunnel, got out and walked toward the stuck truck inside. Sal and Vince walked back to meet him. “Thanks for comin’,” Sal and Vince said together.

The man, wearing dark blue overalls, just stood there, gave a little grunt, and nodded. He had a name tag too, but his was sewn on in cursive, centered in a white oval. It read, *Willy*. “Do you think you can help us?” Vince asked.

“Depends on what you mean by ‘help’,” Willy answered.

⁴⁵ **perilously** is a synonym for dangerously, but usually about dangers related to falling.

His head was down, and his long brown hair hung down over his eyes.

“Can you pull our truck out?” Sal said.

“I could, but the top ‘a yer trailer’s gonna peel off like the top’a sardine can⁴⁶ if I do,” the scruffy tow truck driver replied.

“I can help ya try an’ take the trailer box down off the rig, but you’re gonna have to unload it first.” Willy continued, “Got another truck comin’?”

“Nope. We was hopin’ you’d have better news for us,” Sal said.

“Sorry, Boys. The only way I know is to unload. I’ll hang ‘round a while in case you change your minds.”

“Thanks,” Sal and Vince said together.

“Man, I’m real sorry for screwin’ up like this, Sal,” Vince said. He had his head down again and had his hands in his pockets. He kicked a piece of fallen concrete of the side of the road and tumbled out of sight. “How come you ain’t mad?”

⁴⁶ **sardine can** is a small, flat can of small fish. The tops of these cans would open with the metal rolling back, as the person turned a “key”.

“Stuff like this happens to everybody,” Sal answered.
“Like I said, don’t worry ‘bout it. We’ll think of somethin’.”

Lots of people were walking round and round the truck now, some talking to each other, and some silent. While Sal and Vince were talking, another man approached. The little boy watched him as he passed. The man was wearing a wrinkled white button-down shirt, brown pants, and a blue and green striped tie. He wore glasses that he kept pushing back up toward his forehead. “Uh.... I was wondering if you men needed any help.” He paused, waiting for some response. Sal turned his head a bit and nodded. “I was sitting back there in my car thinking about your predicament.⁴⁷ My name’s Lee.”

“Got any ideas?” Sal asked as he again looked up to the top of the truck, scratching his head.

“Well,” said Lee. “You guys got any rope?”

“Sure, lots!” Vince said, excitedly, hoping Lee had the answer to the problem.

“Well,” Lee started again, “If you had enough rope and

⁴⁷ **predicament** is a difficult, problematic situation

enough people to help, maybe you could slip lengths of rope through the cracks over the top, hanging the ends down on the sides, and people could pull down. Maybe that would lower the truck enough to get it back out.”

“I don’t know--” Sal started to say, but Vince got more excited.

“Sal--” Vince interrupted. “It might work. Don’t you think it’s worth a try? I mean, we got the rope!”

“Yeah, okay,” Sal said.

Vince smiled, took a little hop and turned toward the truck’s cab. He rummaged around inside for a minute and came back with a long coil of heavy rope. He dropped the coil on the ground, held one end and climbed over the cab to the top. He nearly hit his head on the tunnel’s rocky ceiling in his excitement.

He started feeding the rope through the first gap over the top. The end of the rope came out the other side. Sal crawled under the truck to grab it as it came down. He pulled most of the rope through, leaving a single length hanging on the other side. The boy at the opening of the tunnel watched with great

interest.

Vince had to ask Willy, the tow truck driver, for a ladder to lean along the side so he could put the rest of the rope through. Back and forth, this went on, leaving U-shaped loops, hanging down, on both sides, about every five feet. With Willy, Lee and several other men helping, they completed the weaving project in only twenty minutes. When they were done, Sal called out loudly down the highway for volunteers. More than twenty people came and took hold of a loop after Vince, Willy, and Lee showed them. The boy stepped forward to help, but Sal waved him away.

When everyone was in position, Vince jumped up into the cab, revved the engine, and threw it in reverse. Sal called out, “1, 2, 3, pull!” Everyone pulled. The trailer box appeared to drop a bit. Vince pushed the gas pedal down. The truck lurched back, but went nowhere.

Vince wasn't ready to give up. “One more time!” Vince yelled out. Sal counted and everyone pulled, this time harder than the last. Vince hit the gas harder. Lots of exhaust came out, but the truck didn't move. The rope pullers toward the back started coughing, their throats irritated⁴⁸ by the foul air.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ **irritated** is a synonym for “bothered”.

⁴⁹ **foul air** is smokey, smoggy, bad-smelling air.

Vince got down from the driver's seat and stood next to Sal, wondering what he would say. Sal thanked all the people for trying, shook a few hands, and patted a couple others on the back as they walked back out toward the fresh air.

Sal went back to the cab and grabbed a bottle of water. He turned away from the truck and walked out into the light, hoping some idea would occur to him. He sat down on a rock, leaned over with his elbows on his knees and stared at the pavement.

“Hey, Mister...” the boy called.

“Son, you shouldn't be out here,” Sal's face looked pale. You might get hurt,” he said gently.

“But I--”

“What?” Sal said, too quickly. He was starting to show signs of frustration.

“I just wondered if that tow truck driver had an air compressor on his truck.”

“Sure. All tow truck drivers do,” Sal said to the boy.

“You know, they gotta fix a lot of flat tires...just about every day, I imagine. Why?”

The boy walked sheepishly closer to Sal. “What if you--”

“Uh?” Sal didn’t look up, but he didn’t tell the boy to go back to his car.

“What if you...,” the boy started shyly again, “...if you let some air out of the tires? I mean not all the air, just some. Could the truck still go?”

“Yeah, I suppose,” Sal answered.

The boy went on, again in his quiet voice, “If you let some of the air out of each tire, wouldn’t the truck be lower?”

“Hum, well yeah--” Sal stopped. “Sure!” he blurted out. Slowly his eyes got bigger and rounder. Blood was flowing back to his cheeks. His mouth turned up at the corners. He grabbed his water bottle and took a big gulp. Some water leaked out of the sides of his mouth and ran down onto his shirt.

Sal took a breath and wiped his mouth with his sleeve. “So you’re saying, if we let some of the air out of each tire,

without lettin' each tire go completely flat, the truck would be low enough to get out?"

The boy smiled. "Uh-uh. I think it would work. Sometimes I gotta ride my bike with soft tires 'cause they leak a little, and I don't have a pump at my house. I gotta ride my bike over to the gas station to fill 'em back up. It's hard to ride that way, but it's still better than walkin'. Once you get the truck out, maybe the tow truck driver could fill your tires back up."

Sal was listening intently⁵⁰ to the boy's words. "Hey Vince, come here!" he called to his friend. "This young fellow's got an idea that might work!"

Vince was standing by the tow truck, talking to Willy. They both came over, and so did a couple of other people who were nearby. Sal asked the boy to tell Vince his idea. Vince smiled just as big as Sal had when he heard the boy's idea. Willy just whispered a 'yeah'. The circle of people grew larger around the boy and heads were nodding all around.

Sal told those that were going to help that they would need to remove the valve cap, hold the center pin down, and bleed the air out.

⁵⁰ **intently** means listening carefully.

Like a football team's huddle breaking to start a play, everyone in the circle walked back into the tunnel, surrounded the truck, and each person stood near a wheel.

The tires on an 18 wheeler are all paired up, except for the two at the front of the cab. Sal and Vince thought it would be too dangerous for the well-meaning volunteers to reach past the outside tire to get to the inside ones, so they did that themselves. They bled⁵¹ the air from the tires one at a time from each side. But when they were done, the truck's height hadn't dropped a bit.

Now they were ready to try the outside tires. The boy watched from the shadow cast at the tunnel's entrance. Sal had asked him to wait there. Sal started his count, "1, 2--"

Vince called out, "Remember, don't let all the air out!"

Sal started again, "1, 2, 3!" The sound of air hissing from the tires filled the tunnel. The next sound they heard was the a faint sound of the juice bottles jiggling inside their boxes.

Squeaks, groans, and creaks came from the springs. The truck started to slump. First an inch, then two, then more. Sal took a

⁵¹ **bled** is the past tense form of "bleed". To allow air to come out of a tire slowly, as from a tire 's valve, is the bleed the air out.

few steps back from the tire he was working on. He could see light between the tunnel's ceiling and the top of the truck. Sal scanned the tires from front to back as they sagged. "Hold it, everyone!" Sal yelled. "That's good!"

Vince ran around to the side where Sal was standing. "Sal, I think we can back the truck out now!"

"Back?" Sal laughed. "I'm pretty sure we can get it all the way through. There must close to six inches of clearance up there now."

"I think so, too," said Willy. "I'll follow you in my truck, and when you come out the other end, I pump 'em all back up!"

There sure was a difference now. The truck was a whole lot lower. Vince looked at the rope still draped across the top. He gave it one tug⁵² in the middle and it all came crawling down from the other side.

"Let's go!" said Sal. Vince didn't bother to pick up the rope. He hopped back up into the cab and turned the engine

⁵² **tug** is a quick, hard pull.

over.⁵³ He was so fired up,⁵⁴ he gave it some extra gas. He rapped on the outside of the door with his left hand. He grasped to shift knob and shoved the long lever into first gear.

“Take it easy,” Sal reminded Vince. “I’ll walk on ahead. If I see a problem, we’ll stop.”

The truck started forward. It took a little more gas to get it moving with the sagging tires. Vince had no problem with that. But it did roll, and not a single scratching sound was heard; just the sound of loose rubber from slumping tires rubbing against one another. Within two minutes, even at their careful pace, the truck exited the tunnel. A loud cheer came from the people in the tunnel, and even those who were waiting now, as far as a half mile back.

Willy drove his tow truck through, got out, and started refilling the tires. The cars then proceeded through as well. The sun was rising in the sky, and the day warmed. Drivers waved as they went by, gave a thumbs up sign, or tooted their horns. Sal and Vince smiled and waved back. About half an hour later, Willy had filled the last tire. The truck was standing tall again.

Cars were still coming by as the two truckers thanked Willy

⁵³ **turned the engine over** means started the motor.

⁵⁴ **fired up** means excited.

for his help. The three men shook hands and Willy took off on his way. “Sure was a nice fellow,” Vince said.

“Sure was,” Sal replied. He scratched his head and looked around.

Vince noticed Sal’s eyes scanning the roadway. “Whatcha’ lookin’ for, Sal?”

“That kid,” Sal answered. “That kid who thought of the tire trick. I wanted to thank him.”

“Maybe his mom was in a hurry. You know those people were waiting a long time back there.”

“Yeah, probably,” Sal replied. “Just the same, he really helped us out.”

Just then one of the last cars going by pulled to the side of the road ahead of the truck. The passenger door opened. “I’ll be back in a second, Mom.”

Sal and Vince were just climbing back up into the truck. When they saw the boy coming, they got back down out of the

truck and met the boy at the roadside. Vince tossed⁵⁵ the boy's hair and patted his back. Sal shook his hand, "Thanks again, kid. For a while, I thought we were gonna be stuck there all day!"

Sal asked the boy if he wanted to sit up in the truck, but he said that he couldn't, because his mom was in a hurry. The two men thanked him again, and the boy headed back to his mom's car. Sal and Vince climbed back into the truck, closed their doors and started it up.

As the boy's mom pulled away, the boy leaned out the window and made an up and down pulling motion with his arm. Sal was happy to oblige⁵⁶ and yanked⁵⁷ on the truck's horn lever up above. A huge, joyous blast of air came from the top of the truck, echoing from the mountain walls, and came again and again until the boy's car was out of sight.

⁵⁵ **tossed** is when a grown up puts their hand on a child's head (usually a boy's), and messes up his hair.

⁵⁶ **oblige** means to agree to do something.

⁵⁷ **yanked** means pulled hard.