

The Stuck Truck

Henry Anker



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Chapters 9-10

Written by Henry Anker

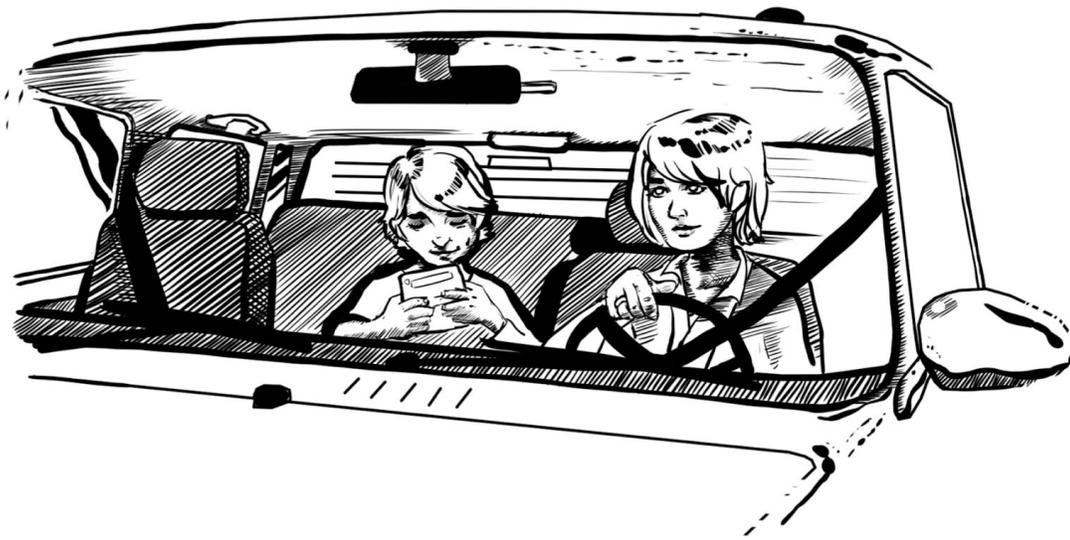
Illustrated by Job Lopez

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This book is dedicated to my wife Barbara, our two sons, David & Steven, to my lifelong friend Jimmy, and to dedicated truckers who transport goods around the world.

Chapter 9

After backing their cars away from 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 **dislodge**¹⁰³ it from its stuck position. About two dozen people volunteered to help. They assembled on both sides, placed their hands on the sides of the trailer, and pushed back and forth, but it was no use. The truck was fully loaded and too heavy. It just wouldn't **budge**¹⁰⁴.



Once that effort failed, Sal used the radio to call for a large, super-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 the hour**¹⁰⁵.

“Ah, shucks!” the boy announced. “My battery died!” He looked out the window and saw lots of people gathered just outside the tunnel. “Mom,” the boy asked shyly. “Can I see what’s--what’s going on?”

“No, Mikey,” the boy’s mother said with a big yawn, fighting to keep her eyes open. “Just stay in the car where it’s warm and let those grown ups figure it out.”

“But, but... What’s happening?” The boy asked.

“I’m not sure, but I think there’s a truck stuck in the tunnel,” the boy’s mom

¹⁰³ **dislodge** means to loosen something that is stuck in place

¹⁰⁴ **just wouldn’t budge** means that the truck wouldn’t move

¹⁰⁵ **within the hour** means in an amount of time that is less than one hour

answered.

“But--but,” the boy persisted.

“Mikey. Just relax, the boy’s mother responded calmly. “Everything’s going to be okay. We’ll just have to wait a bit.”

While they waited, some of the delayed drivers and their passengers milled around, looking up in the darkness. Many 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, with a big yawn, and without turning. “Don’t you have a book or puzzle back there you can play with? Or maybe you want to work on more on your pictures....”

“Maybe I can help,” the boy whispered. His mother didn’t answer. She yawned again as her head **slumped**¹⁰⁶ over to one side.



An older man, tall, thin, and wrinkled, whose car was further back in the line, got out and shut his car door. He slowly walked past the line of cars and into the tunnel. He stopped and stood just behind Vince. He mumbled to himself, but loud enough for the people around him to hear, “Maybe they could use one ‘a those big **crowbars**¹⁰⁷ up on top to loosen it up, or maybe call the fire department to come with those ‘**jaws of life**¹⁰⁸’.” Vince just nodded his head politely when he heard the man’s suggestion. No one around thought either of those were ideas worth trying due to the size of the truck.

The man stood behind Vince for a few more minutes, but then headed back to his car. As he walked out of the tunnel, he passed a boy who appeared to be about eight years old, standing by the side of the tunnel’s archway entrance. “Hey, kid. How you doin’?” the man said as he nodded in the boy’s direction. The boy took a couple steps back and

¹⁰⁶ **slumped** means leaning over, to one side, a bit lower than when something or someone is up straight

¹⁰⁷ **crowbar** is a long metal bar used for prying two connected things apart, like a door stuck in its frame

¹⁰⁸ ‘**jaws of life**’ is a powered tool firefighters use to open stuck car doors to free accident victims after a serious car crash

turned his head away as the man passed.

A lady with tall red hair walked up to Sal swinging her hips. She wore a white waitress apron, on the front of which had a picture of an oversized spoon. She looked Sal over, then took a step back. Sal could see Flo's name **embroidered**¹⁰⁹ on her apron. She was working another wad of chewing gum from side to side. Sal looked back at her, wondering what she had in mind. Flo 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!" Flo 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!"

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

"All right, Darlin', Flo replied. "Y'all figure it out, then." She swung her hips again as she turned away. "Good luck."

"Thanks, Ma'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 rolled **perilously**¹¹⁰ close to the mountain's edge. Pieces of gravel under the tires were kicked outward and tumbled down the mountainside. The tow truck driver stopped his truck near the entrance of the tunnel. He got out on the passenger side 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 embroidered on his shirt too, in **cursive**¹¹¹, centered in a white oval with blue trim. It read, 'Willy'. "Do you think you can help us?" Vince asked.

"Depends on what you mean by 'help'," Willy answered in kind of a low, scratchy voice. His head was down, and his long sandy blonde hair hung down over his eyes.

"Can you pull our truck out?" Sal **inquired**¹¹².

The scruffy tow truck driver walked a few steps along the side of the trailer looking up, and then a few steps back, now noticing the rock fragments in the road. Willy replied, "I could, but I think the top 'a 'yer trailer's gonna peel off like the top 'a **sardine**

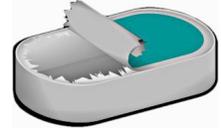
¹⁰⁹ **embroidered** is lettering, or a design of some kind, sewn onto material like an apron, shirt, or ballcap

¹¹⁰ **perilously** is a synonym for dangerously; usually about dangers related to falling

¹¹¹ cursive means handwriting as it is done in a signature; celebrities write in cursive when they sign their autograph. Here are a few examples: *Sal, Vince, Flo, Willy*

¹¹² **inquired** means 'asked'

can¹¹³ if I do.” Willy continued, “I can help ya try an’ take the trailer box down off the rig, but you’re gonna have to unload it first. 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 awhile 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 to the side of the road and it tumbled out of sight. “How come you ain’t mad?”

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

¹¹³ **sardine can** is a small, flat can of small fish. The tops of these cans open with a thin sheet of metal pulling or rolling back, as the person pulls on a finger tab or, long ago, turned a “key” with the thin metal coiling around it (ask your grandparents about them...)

Chapter 10

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 kept sliding down his nose 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 van thinking about your **predicament**¹¹⁴. My name’s Lee.”

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

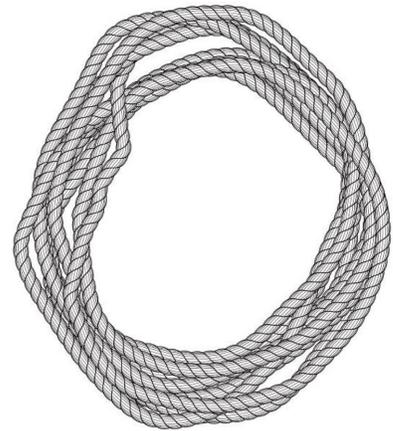
“Well,” said Lee. “You guys got any rope?” “Sure, lots!” Vince said, excitedly, hoping Lee had the answer to the problem.

“Well,” Lee started again, “If you had enough rope and enough people to help, maybe you could slip lengths of rope through the cracks over the top, hanging loops 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 a lot of 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 standing at the opening of the tunnel watched with great interest.

¹¹⁴ **predicament** is a difficult, problematic situation

Vince asked 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 the stuck truck every five feet. With Willy, Lee and several other people helping, they completed the weaving project in only twenty minutes. But the line of cars behind kept getting longer. And while they were working on this plan, drivers from cars backed up at the other end of the tunnel were wandering in to see what was going on. When they were done, Sal called out loudly down the highway for more 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 politely waved him away, saying that they had enough helpers.

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 moved no more than a few inches.

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 black diesel smoke came out of the exhaust pipe near the ceiling of the tunnel, but the truck didn’t move at all this time. The rope pullers in the tunnel started coughing, their throats **irritated**¹¹⁵ by the **foul air**¹¹⁶.

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.

¹¹⁵ **irritated** is a synonym for “bothered”

¹¹⁶ **foul air** is smoky, smoggy, polluted, bad-smelling air

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