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It's a Gas, Gas, Gas

Timothy Nunes

Back when guys was tough, dames was worth lookin' at, and crooks was left with watery eyes.

It was a dark and stormy night in a city that keeps its secrets (mostly 'cause no one's interested in hearin' 'em). Lodi, California, a city with an underbelly as seedy as a bingo parlor on Saturday night.

I'm a detective and this is my town. I was born in a cheap flophouse on the bad side a' town, behind the old bratwurst factory. Dad had abandoned us when I was just a kid, ran off with a young [Zinfandel](#) Grape stomper named Helga; and Mom, a good, hard-workin' woman who used to work two, maybe three jobs to keep her growin' boy in [sausages](#) and sneakers, raised alone 'till I reached the ripe ol' age of fifteen.

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I'd saved up enough money by then to send off for my own Private Detective's License official like, from the back pages of "True Gumshoe" magazine. With that paper in my gr teenage hands and a warm bratwurst and kraut sandwich in my pocket, I left home and ne looked back ('cept for Mother's Day and the odd Sunday Dinner, of course).

My office is downtown, on the top floor of the city's tallest building, the old Kepplemeyer Feed store. There, four stories up, above the hustle and bustle of the streets of the little 'burg I call home, I sit in a dusty office, wearin' an old, wrinkled brown suit, sippin' cheap [whiskey](#) and waitin' for that brass ring to walk through my door.

The knock on the door startled me like a stuck pig with its tail on fire. I righted my desk chair and responded. "Come on in, the door's unlocked!"

Come in she did, all five foot seven of 'er. My eyes caught the expensive pumps, shapely gams, and a body that looked like a million bucks all in a single glance, ending with her face. And what a face it was! The bre whistled through my front teeth before I realized I was whistlin', as I lost myself in her d brown eyes.

She had the kinda eyes a guy could drown in, and lips redder than a ripe, beefsteak tom She slowly crossed the office, hips swaying with a rhythm my eyes could hardly keep up v then sat down in the chair I kept for clients and crossed those incredible gams.

"Mister Flash? Excuse me, Mister Flash? Is anything wrong??"

I shook my head clear the cobwebs that the hot number in front of me had spun and trie



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find my voice. "Uhhhh, huh?"

"You are Sam Flash, aren't you?"

"Yeah, Flash. That's me, [baby](#). [THBLSFLST!] What can I do for ya?" I'd finally gotten hold of my senses enough to respond to her use of my chosen moniker, Sam Flash. I'd changed name when I left home, as I hadn't thought my Christian name, Kraus Von Schmeckleheir would look as good on a PD's license.

"I need your help, Mr. Flash. There's this man...um, excuse me...." She stopped to wipe tears from her eyes, somethin' a guy in my line a' work is used to.

"Take your time, sister. I'm listenin'" [BBBBBLBPST!!]

"Um, well, [cough-cough!] Yes. You see, there's this man who's been followin' me. I noticed a few weeks ago as I was leavin' work. I work for the travel agency up the street, Brachmeier you know?"

"Yeah, sure, I know the place. Next door to Max's Kraut Hut. Max sure cooks up a mean sausage sandwich!" [PLBLBLBLBST!]

"Yes, well... [cough! cough-cough!!] Do you, um [[cough](#)-cough!] think you can help?"

Again with the tissues. Dames sure get emotional 'bout things, don't they?

"Yeah, babe, no problem. It's twenty bucks a day, plus expenses. That sit right with ya?"

"Yes, yes [cough!], no problem. Now, if you'll [cough-cough] excuse me, I really must [[cough](#)] get back to work." She stood, showin' off that amazing rack of hers, and quickly headed for the door, obviously relieved I'd decided to take the case.

"Don't worry 'bout a thing, babe. Sam Flash is on the job!" [PPPPPPSSST!]

* * * * *

I spent the next few days checkin' out my "meal ticket" every chance I got. She had a pretty regular routine, arriving at work at 8:00 sharp each mornin', takin' lunch at noon on the street, then back out the door by 5:05 at the latest. It was times like this that I really enjoyed my job. Just in the past few days, my daily expenses had allowed me to stash away a couple a' extra quarts of Max's famous red cabbage and [potato salad](#) in the icebox at home. Plus, the subject of my surveillance work and current client, one Ms. Candy Weber, was sure easy on the eye and hard to admit.

Still, by day three it was pretty obvious who was followin' Ms. Weber. And, as much as I would have liked to milk the job awhile longer, it was pretty tough to get away with such things in a small town like Lodi. No, the time had come to confront the little weasel, and that's just what I did.

I waited until around 5:03 PM, when Candy walked by the alley where I'd been watchin' for her. She then grabbed the guy as he walked by, his attention understandably on the package walking down the sidewalk in front of him. He was a little man, maybe five foot three, with thin black hair combed over a mostly [bald](#) little head; dark, beady eyes; and the smell of canned sauerkraut on his breath (if there was anything I hated, even more than taxes or Joes who hit women, it was canned 'kraut). I lifted him up by his lapels, slammed his back against the rough brick wall of the alley, and started talking.

"Spill your guts, little man. Why 'ya followin' the nice lady?" [PLBLBLBLPPPST!]

"Uh, er..." [cough!] The little rat licked his thin lips, his eyes shootin' this way and that, looking for a way out he wasn't gonna find, and wrinkl'n his nose like the rodent he was. "V [cough-cough!] lady? I wasn't following any [cough!] lady!"

I acquainted him a little better with the wall of the alleyway and kinda smiled at the clatter of teeth was makin', then asked again.

"Talk, 'ya little weasel! The whole story, now, or else..." [BRRRRRRRRRRRAPP!!]



That was all the little guy could take I guess, as he had a look in his eyes I'd seen many times before, like a trapped wolf ready to gnaw off his own [leg](#) to get away, and proceeded to tell a long, sordid story it was, too; one that I wasn't lookin' forward to retelling to the fine piece of work who was payin' my expenses.

Still, I was gettin' paid by the day, so I didn't have much choice in the matter.

* * * * *

"You, uh, asked me here to your office today, Mr. Flash?" Ms. Weber, looking better than a Reuben sandwich on fresh rye, seemed uncomfortable about something that morning. I was sure if it was 'cause she knew what was comin', or if she was simply overcome with my rugged good looks. "Have you found out anything about the man who's been following me?"

"Yeah, well, I hate to be the one to break it to ya, dollface, but...[PHLBLSPLT!] well, it's not good, I'm afraid."

"Oh, uh, really???" Her voice quavered with emotion and her pretty nose crinkled in distaste. "Please, [cough!] Just tell me, quickly!"

"Okay, well, [brrrrRRRAP!] Here's how it is. That ol' divorced, Lutheran minister you was dating a few years back, the one that took ya to all a' them ice cream socials? [phpssssSSST!] Well, I'm afraid he whadn't no minister. He was a real bad'in, from down south, near Merced, was mixed up in all sorts a' things. Black market pistachios, almond smugglin', you name it. The Farm Bureau finally caught up with him around Visalia way and, well, lets just say he's gonna be attendin' no more ice cream socials, if ya get my drift." [BLBLBLBLAT!]

"Oh [cough-cough!] DEAR! That's [cough!] quite HORRIBLE NEWS! But it still doesn't explain who the man was who was [cough!] following me!" She removed a tissue from her purse and daintily dabbed away at the feminine waterworks I knew had been comin'.

"Well, it seems the guy wasn't all bad, after all. The guy who was tailin' ya was his family lawyer. Apparently your ol' boyfriend left ya a couple hundred pounds of roasted almonds of assorted flavors. That guy was just tryin' to confirm you was the dame he was lookin' for. I got the papers from him [FLBLFLBLPSSST!!], got 'em right here. It appears you'll be set in nuts for the next five or ten years."

"Uh, [cough-cough!!] never mind the nuts, Mr. Flash. You see, [cough] I'm allergic. You know them, all right? And here's your money." She threw a roll a' green on my desk and made a beeline for the door. Before I could stop her, she was long gone.

I sat down in my chair, leaned back, and thought about the case I'd just solved. As usual, my keen nose had sniffed out everything [brrrrraAAAP!]. And to top it all off, I'd come away with more almonds than I knew what to do with! It looked like I'd be eatin' alot of 'em over the next few months, or years. I wondered how they'd taste with sausages and kraut?