

The K-Town Caper Contest

SECOND PLACE

The Fireworks Felony

By Becca Habegger

It was a dank and muggy night.

That is to say, it was late July in Knoxville, Tennessee.

I was sitting in my dimly lit office with my feet propped up on my old wooden desk. Despite my creaky ceiling fan's best efforts, sweat poured down my back like the cascading waterfall at World's Fair Park.

Business had been slow. It seems nobody has much use anymore for a social media-savvy private investigator; people are pretty good at snooping around the Internet on their own nowadays.

I had just finished updating my Facebook status and composing my final tweet of the evening when *she* walked in.

With her tastefully professional business attire, confident demeanor and smart streak of silver in her otherwise jet-black hair, I recognized her immediately.

"Ms. Rogero, to what do I owe this honor?" I asked.

There she stood, Knoxville mayor Madeline Rogero, and she looked distressed. Cool, calm and collected—but also distressed.

"Oh, Gal Noir, something terrible has happened," she said. "We have thousands of visitors coming to play, dine and sleep in our fair city over Labor Day weekend for our annual Boomsday Festival, and somebody has stolen all the fireworks!"

Yikes, I thought. This is no good. Without the "Boom!" our local economy can't go, "Vroom!" which could mean *doom* for many local businesses. Knoxville's annual Boomsday Festival is the nation's largest Labor Day weekend fireworks spectacular.

"That's terrible," I said. "Any idea who would do such a thing?"

"Well, we have one set of clues," the mayor said. "Somebody who goes by the handle @NicerKnoxville has been bragging about the heist on Twitter."

She handed me her smartphone, on which she had pulled up the potential transgressor's timeline.

July 18, 2015, 12:01 a.m.: We're driving off with this dynamic dynamite! Undefeated so far...
#NicerKnoxville

July 18, 2015, 6:00 a.m.: Pyrotechnically speaking, people will be sprinting to the #NicerKnoxville this Labor Day weekend! #BoomGoesTheDynamite

July 18, 2015, 11:00 a.m.: Rocky Top has nothing on our rocky road! We left those Sunsphere suckers in our dust. Made it home safely with the sparklers! #NicerKnoxville

Interesting. Whoever conducted this caper left a course of social media crumbs.

I told the mayor I'd have to sleep on the matter.

The next day, I decided to take a morning stroll through Market Square. My old pal Frank was working at Local Motors, so I figured I'd stop by to roll some ideas his way.

"Hiya, Frank," I said, making my way past the 3D printed chairs and motorcycle.

"Hey, Gal," he replied. "Are you in hot pursuit of some perpetrator today?"

"Well, that's just the problem. We have social media skid marks, but the getaway vehicle is *got-away*," I said.

I showed him the series of telling tweets.

"It looks like this suspect is a fast car aficionado," he said. "And if the first tweet immediately followed the theft, it looks like it took the pilferer 11 hours to get home."

"How observant of you Frank," I phonated. "Got anything else for me?"

"Well, we have a special right now on reflective bicycle helmets," he offered.

"That's fine, Frank, but I'm spinning my wheels right now on this case. I'll stop by another day," I replied.

We said our goodbyes and I found a bench outside.

The *Nicer Knoxville*... Hmmm... *11 hours... Sprinting...*

Suddenly, it clicked!

I returned to my office, made a few phone calls and – 12 hours later – asked Mayor Rogero to return.

"Well, what have you found?" she asked eagerly.

"Ms. Rogero, I have unraveled your woes!" I exclaimed. "Knoxville's Boomsday will be a burst of fire, not a bust of failure."

Just then, Knoxville police chief David Rausch walked into my office, accompanied by a man in handcuffs.

"Knoxville mayor Rogero, meet Knoxville mayor Hatch!" I said.

"What?!" a confused Rogero exclaimed.

"Brian Hatch," I explained. "He's the mayor of Knoxville....**Iowa**! Sprint car capital of the world and home to the Knoxville raceway."

“You see,” I continued, “sprint car racing hasn’t been drawing in as many visitors as it once did, so mayor Hatch – in a desperate move to boost his local economy – stole our fireworks in hopes of stealing visitors from *our* Knoxville and bringing them to *his*. Knoxville, Iowa is a 12-hour drive from Knoxville, Tennessee, but in a sprint car, he shaved an hour off the time.”

“Drat,” Hatch said, “you caught me fair and square. But how did you figure it out?”

“Oh,” I replied, “a little bird told me.”

Crime is a dirty track to be traveling.

Turning to me, Mayor Rogero said, “Gal Noir, how can KnoxVegas ever repay you for your service to our scruffy city?”

“All in a day’s work, ma’am,” I said. “Though I wouldn’t object to a couple of front-row seats to the Boomsday festivities on the deck of Calhoun’s by the River.”

“Done!” she said.

“Oh, and I have Frank to thank,” I said. “I know he’s a big fan of Prairie Home Companion. Perhaps a couple of tickets to that show as well?”

So that’s the story of how I solved the Fireworks Felony: a case that started on a dank and steamy night in a city that knows how to creep on tweets.

Gal Noir, social media private-I.