

.38 In the Glove Compartment

by Jerry Ratch

His name was Gino. I'll leave out the last name, not that I think it matters anymore. He came into my dad's gas station on the near North Side of Chicago to have work done on his fancy car. I was still a teenager. I accidentally opened the glove compartment and stumbled upon his snub-nose .38 caliber. He saw me looking at it and smirked. "Protection," he said, picking his teeth with a wooden toothpick after lunch. "In my line of business, you hafta have it."

"What do you do?" I asked. I was a total innocent then.

"I collect coins from vending machines. You know, cigarettes, candy, that sort of thing. Condoms. You know."

"Yeah." I found my head bobbing up and down automatically.

"I got two wives and a bunch of kids," he said. "I need protection. You never know, you know?"

"Yeah. I know."

"In my line of business, your lifespan's only about as long as the caliber of your gun. And I'm already ten years overdue. So... Fast cars, and fast women. Gotta live. Right?"

My head kept on bobbing. "Yeah," I said. Then I closed up the glove compartment and got the heck out of his car. I let my dad finish the rest of the work, and I went into the bathroom to take a giant crap.

I don't remember Gino ever coming back in for service on his car anymore after that.

