



# San Francisco Shorts

a duodecet of tales

by Mike Bozart

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another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



# SFO | \_\_\_\_ | SOFA

by Mike Bozart (Agent 33)      | |      November 2012

SFO | \_\_\_\_ | SOFA

by Mike Bozart

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I arrived at the SFO airport via BART train about an hour before Agent 32's flight from Manila would touch down. The sun was setting on a late August day, as fog billowed over Sweeney Ridge and funneled into the valleys above San Andreas Lake, just like dry ice vapors going down the side of a flask in a college chemistry lab.

Feeling restless, I kept moving around in the airport, taking the AirTrain to all four terminals. I kept thinking about what she said as I paced about the concourses. *What kind of surprise did she have in store? Would it really be a game changer? A mind blower? A tickle-me-goo-goo? Oh, what unabated nonsense goes through my mind.*

And then, peering around the food court, I wondered who knew I was here. With about 20 minutes left to kill, I ducked into a Peet's Coffee & Tea in the international terminal. I looked for something to read as I sipped the dark Colombian roast.

I quickly spied an *SF Weekly* that someone had discarded. I grabbed it and thought back to when I lived on lower Hyde Street, some 20 years ago. I remembered calling the paper's office. I was going to place a singles ad. It was kind of common back then. The girl who answered the phone was new. She wasn't sure whom I should speak with. We made some small talk, and then joked, 'who will remember this 20 years from now?' *I did, but I somehow doubt that she did. Or, did she? Well, who knows? Is she still alive? Oh, I'm sure that she is. She is probably married to a millionaire techie now, living in Palo Alto. She probably has too [sic] precocious little brats. Ah, how time ensnares everyone and everything.*

My mind drifted back inside that small studio apartment in the upper Tenderloin district. (This is where the novella *Mysterieu of San Francisco* begins.) I kept thinking about the surreal art I hid in the building before I left. *Was it still in the laundry room walls? Back behind that noisy commercial-size dryer? Oh, well, what does it matter now? Or, even then? Why did I do such frivolous things? And, still do them? MAD – Mad Artist Disease.*

Then I glanced at my cell phone. Ten minutes until Agent 32's plane would be rolling down the bay-bordered tarmac. *I hope there are no mechanical issues with her plane. No crash. Ughhh ... that would be too much to deal with.*

I took a seat on a green sofa. It may have been for customers only, but I was tired now. No one asked me to move. Then it dawned on me: *This would be a great place to*

*hide a copy of 'Galax\_ Galaxy'. [a short story] Yeah, let's do this. We'll leave a copy right here.*

I then surreptitiously placed an 8.5" x 5.5" (22 x 14 cm) copy between the padding and the base of the sofa. When I looked back up, an older Asian lady was wagging her finger. At first, I thought her ire was directed at me for my little literature-stuffing stunt. *Oh, crap. Here comes a lecture. Maybe she'll even alert security. Arrest this sofa-inserting freak now!*

However – to my great relief – she was actually scolding an Asian teenage girl, perhaps her granddaughter, who happened to be passing right behind me at that moment. They moved along. *Whew!*

I recomposed myself, and boldly exhibited what I felt to be a nondescript Silicon Valley businessman's face. I snapped the newspaper to ensure a crisp fold. It was way over-the-top, but hardly anyone even noticed. I then rubbed my eyes, and an announcement began over the public address system:

"Philippines Airlines flight 104 will be arriving at gate A-12 on time. Flight 104 arriving at gate A-12." *Five minutes!*

I gathered my things and scurried down the concourse. I was almost running. I wanted to make sure that I would have the sight line to see her first. I wanted to get the drop on Agent 32. But, as I hid behind a support column, I suddenly heard an unmistakable Filipina's voice behind me.

"You-hoo! Hello there, Agent 33. Are you holding up that post?"

"You sneaky thing! How did you get back there without me so much as noticing?"

"Ha-ha-ha ... This girl has her ways."

"I see. Well, you can call me Parkaar – my most recent ailing alias. How shall I address you, Agent 32?"

"Call me Monique. Monique by the creek!" She burst into uproarious laughter.

"Monique, you freak! You read that short story?" *Where did she find it? Ah, the magic of the internet, I suppose.*

"Yep! Sure did."

“That’s freaking amazing! The distribution was, shall we say, very limited.” I chuckled. “Know what I mean?”

“I do. Oh, yes, I do. I found a copy in the Pisgah National Forest, under a footbridge near the Mills River.” *How bizarre! When was she there? Who was she with? Anyone?*

“The South Fork?”

“Yes!” *Truly amazing. Never thought that anyone would ever find that one.*

“Ah, passerelle perfect!” *Passerelle?* “Well, how was the flight?”

“Long, so very long! The pinay [Filipina in Tagalog and Cebuano] beside me wouldn’t stop talking. So concerned she was about her boyfriend. Always asking me for advice. She was an emotional mess, Parkaar.”

“I see. Sorry to hear that, Monique. Hey, are you hungry?”

“Yes, I actually am a little hungry despite eating twice on the plane during the 11-hour flight.” *Eleven hours in a pressurized aluminum can. My butt hurts just thinking about it. Ugggh.*

“There are a couple of Asian restaurants in the food court.” *Oh, good. Yum-yum!*

“Ok, let’s do it!” *Wow, there’s an opening.*

“Uh, can we wait until the hotel room?” *What a horn-dog.*

“Very sly, Parkaar. Don’t get ahead of the situation.” *Must calm down. Take deep breaths. She’s so damn sexy.*

“Well, Monique, you left that line hanging out over the plate as we say in America in the summer.” *Only in the summer?*

“Yeah, and you had your fork ready.” She guffawed freely.

We ambled over to Fung Lum. Monique was rolling her luggage behind her. I noticed that she wasn’t carrying a purse or handbag.

“Only one piece of luggage?” I asked.

“I travel light, Parkaar.”

And there we were at one of those small round airport dining tables. I gazed at her intoxicating dark brown pinay eyes,

and could see all the years she spent in Siquijor (a small island province in the central Philippines). I started the volley of word salad.

“Well now, I do believe you have something to tell me.”

“No news is good news. Am I right, Parkaar?”

“You’re right most of time. And, you would be correct again, but this time, Monique ...” I turned to look at what Agent 32 was suddenly looking at.

Off in the near-distance, an overweight Caucasian middle-age man sat on the green couch – the one where I had left the copy of *Galax\_ Galaxy*. The sofa’s four-inch-high, front, right, pine peg leg broke, and the green couch lurched to the side. The man rolled onto the floor. Onlookers amassed. Some asked if he was hurt. But, he wasn’t. *That didn’t look good. Hope he’ll be alright.*

The sudden motion of the sofa pads caused a corner of the short story copy to protrude. The large rotund man got to one knee and snatched it. He then stood up, steadied himself, grabbed his luggage and hobbled away, muttering something about suing the airport for a million dollars.

“What did he grab from under that sofa cushion, Parkaar? Was it the manufacturer’s warning label?” She giggled for a few seconds.

“You know, Monique, the trick is for something to stay hidden for just the right amount of time. Discovery needs to be delayed, but not eternally denied.”

“You’re going daft.” *She may be right.*

“Daft due to the evening draft.” *What nonsense he speaks.*

“Whatever, 33. You really want to know my secret, don’t you?”

“Well, I came this far. And I couldn’t imagine returning as the same person.” *What did he just say?*

“You never ever stop, do you, Parkaar?” Another chuckle.

“Well, when the shark stops moving, it dies.”

“Oh, and are you the shark?”

Before I could answer, Monique placed a small coin in my right hand. I covered it with my cupped fingers.



“Is it safe to look at it here?” I asked.

“Let’s go in a family restroom.” *Wow!*

“What?!” *That sure was bold of her.*

“Just kidding. Gotcha.” *She sure did.* She started giggling like a schoolgirl. “Sure, you can look at it right here.”

I glanced into the palm of my hand. It was a gold-colored coin, about the size of an American quarter (2.5 cm). A snow-capped mountain image was on the obverse with the word *Teide* under it. On the back was a map of several islands with the words *Islas Canarias* and the number 2023.

“Ah, a coin from the Canary Islands,” I proudly stated, remembering my dos centavos del Español (two cents of Spanish). “Did you visit there recently?”

“No, I’ve never been there. I found it in my luggage.” *Strange.*

“Why, that’s kind of odd. Really odd.”

“Yes, indeed! But look at the year.”

“Oh, yes, 2023! Obviously, a dye error.” *Dhay? [Cebuano slang for a Filipina]*

“Is this mis-mint valuable?” *Mis-mint?*

“I’m not sure how much the coin is worth for having that future year stamped on it. But, it is no ordinary coin, I can assure you. I can tell you more about it over a drink.” *Hope that wasn’t too forward.*

“What did you have in mind?” *Ah, she’s game.*

“This airport has about everything now. How about that American cordial concoction, the mudslide?”

“I had one in the Cebu airport once. It was so sweet. You know, Parkaar, we pinays love sugary drinks. So, ok, sure.”

“Ok, I’ll be right back.” I left for the bar counter.

Monique noticed a pink, folded piece of paper on the vacant adjacent table. Curiosity got the best of her. She quickly reached over and grabbed it. There was a photo of a young lady inside. She appeared to be Southeast Asian.

Underneath her image was a one-line caption: Full-Body Massage by Jen ... 405-619-194\_

I returned with Monique's brown mixed drink. I looked at the photo. "Who is that? Our next assignment?"

Monique laughed. "Very funny, Parkaar. I found it on that table. Now, why in the world would this masseuse purposely leave off the last digit of her phone number?"

"What? Let me see that."

Monique then handed me the 3" x 5" black-and-white glossy photo. *Hmmm ... very strange.*

"Yes, that is very odd, indeed, Monique. Super-strange. We're in Psecret Psociety territory now."

"Ok, you've got your digital audio recorder on. I know it, 33."

"Of course, 32." I winked at her. "Monique, maybe it's a test to see how bad one wants her massage services."

"But, who is willing to call up to nine wrong numbers?"

"A lot of horny guys would after a few drinks."

"Yuck! You men are such dogs." She sneered.

"Wait. Are you sure that all but one are wrong numbers?"

"Well, I would think so, Parkaar." *Sometimes he is so dense.*

"Monique, what if her enterprise is so big that she owns all of the phone numbers with all ten last digits?"

"Well, I guess that's a possibility, 33. An outside possibility."

"You know, the more I think about it, 32 ... well, it just seems like an artful prank."

"Just a prank? Ok, I dare you to call just one number."

I then dialed the nine listed digits and depressed a random final key with my eyes closed. *Oh, what am I doing?*

One ring. Two rings. Three rings. Just before terminating the call, I heard a female voice abruptly ask: "Have you got the coin?"

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory

# Water Hammer



by agent 33 of psecret psociety

by Mike Bozart (agent 33) | May 2014 [rev. Dec. 2021]

## Water Hammer

by Mike Bozart

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I'll never forget the chance conversation that I overheard – and, yes, surreptitiously recorded – at a now-defunct, little, dingy, jaundice-yellow-paint-a-faded, hole-in-the-wooden-lapboard-wall-sided watering hole on Judah Street in the ever-foggy Outer Sunset district of San Francisco.

It was back in the early spring of 1992. It must have been about 7:00 PM when I sidled on in for a dark beer. Yep, that was the name: Sidle on N. A clever play on words with the N standing for the N Muni streetcar line that ran past the front door – the olive-colored front door that no one ever cared (or dared?) to close.

I remember looking at a tilted poster on the cracked-plaster wall: some purple-suited, skull-masked loon billing himself as Mysterieu of San Francisco. Ah, but that's another story (actually a novella) addressed elsewhere.

Well, without further ado, here's the verbatim transcript from that micro-cassette. *Hmmm ... where is that PLAY button? Oh, there it is.* <click>

[the sound of a city tram passing, clacking down the old, set-in-street, standard-gauge tracks]

Jim: "John, how do you think your civil-court case will go? Are you going to win?"

[the sound of a stein being set down on a wooden table]

John: "I don't know, Jim; I don't want to jinx it, but I feel pretty good about recouping the damages incurred. At least my lawyer says not to worry."

Jim: "Your lawyer says not to worry? Ha! Keep your hand on your wallet, sport."

[Jim laughs for a few seconds]

John: "Yeah, I know, Jim; I should probably fret. Hey, speaking of lawyers, I've got to tell you about the most bizarre conversation that I have overheard in some time."

Jim: "Ok, shoot. Let's have it."

John: "Well, I was down in the Lower Haight having lunch by myself in a tiny Chinese restaurant about two weeks ago."

Jim: "Ok, sounds very believable so far. Continue."

John: "And trust me, Jim; I wasn't eavesdropping, but the joint is so small that you just can't avoid overhearing conversations in there, especially if you're eating alone."

Jim: "Ok, I got the scene."

[a waitress walks up to their table; the sound of stiletto high heels on a concrete-slab floor]

Waitress: "Would you two gentlemen like another round?"

John: "Sure."

Jim: "Yes, thanks."

[the sound of her high heels walking away]

John: "Ok, where was I?"

Jim: "On her ass. Zing!"

[Jim chuckles]

John: "Well, I wouldn't pass that up. You know you wouldn't, either, Jim. You're a horn-dog, too – just a slyer one than me."

[Jim coughs and clears his throat]

Jim: "You were justifying your auditory snooping."

John: "Ok, well, there were about four conversations going on in there, but the one that won my mind's primary attention was the one just behind me. Apparently one of the guys had been screwed out of child custody by a borderline-unethical family-court lawyer."

Jim: "Ah, family-court attorneys. Such lovely creatures. The opportunistic predators of the hyper-emotional. The ghouls of the ghouls. Ok, I'm still following ya. What next?"

John: "Well, apparently he was really ticked-off by it. I mean REALLY ticked-off. So much so, in fact, that he had his buddy, a licensed plumber, take the lead in his revenge plot."

Jim: "A plumber? What did the plumber do? Did he whack the attorney in the head with a section of galvanized pipe for \$500?"

John: "No, nothing so horribly and bluntly violent like that. Something insidiously ingenious. Something that Hollywood could make a movie around."

Jim: "Ok, I'm now waiting with freshly baited [*sic*] breath. Keep your story pumping. Don't let your pipe get clogged now."

John: "You're a real comedian today, Jim. Are you high again on something?"

Jim: "No, I'm as sober as ever, and I'm all ears. Please do continue. I'll restrain myself for the remainder of your tale. I promise."

John: "I doubt that, Jim, but I'll recommence anyway. Alright, the guy says that he had his plumber-pal call the offending lawyer at his Diamond Heights [south-central San Francisco] residence, and that he offered him a free promotional water hammer arrestor installation, just on the whim that he might be experiencing a water hammer issue in his home, and, well, you guessed it: He agreed to the installation."

Jim: "Wait a second. Water hammer? What the hell is that?"

[the waitress returns and places two glasses (of beer, I presume) down on the table]

John: "Thanks."

Jim: "Thanks, again."

[the sound of the high-heeled waitress walking away]

John: "What is a water hammer? It's that banging sound in supply pipes that occurs in some houses and apartments after you turn the faucet off."

Jim: "Oh, yeah; I know what you're talking about now. Ok, resume, master storyteller."

John: "Well, next, the plumber gives the pissed-off-at-lawyer dude a new water hammer arrestor from his work van."

Jim: "Water hammer arrestor? Ok, let me guess ... it suppresses the pipe-banging."

John: "Jim, you must've taken your smart pills today."

[John laughs for a few seconds]

Jim: "But, is he going to install it himself? The lawyer would recognize him, right?"

John: "No, Jim, he gives it to him so that he can modify it. He takes it apart. Apparently, there is a piston mechanism in it and an air chamber. He places some water-soluble poison powder in the air chamber on the end. It becomes a time-released toxin-administering mechanism. The chemical that he inserted is called Thalene." [*sic*]

Jim: "Thalene? You must mean thallium, John."

John: "Yeah, yeah, that's it."

Jim: "That shit is nasty, John. They can't even use that on rats or roaches anymore."

[the sound of another N train passing]

John: "Well, slowly, over about six-to-seven months, the lawyer is poisoned to death. The autopsy leads them to believe that it was thallium, but they never find a source. They never find a single grain in the home. Not even a speck. Nothing. Über-clever, isn't it?"

Jim: "Woah! Hold on. Wouldn't others who drank the tap water in that home over that half year be poisoned, too?"

John: "No, not necessarily. I overheard them say that short-stay guests would never get a dangerous amount in their system after even a dozen visits. He was single and no one else lived with him. And, he had no pets. You would have had to have lived in that home with him to have died from it. He said that it slowly accumulates in the body. It was a chronic exposure; not an acute one."

Jim: "Wow, we've got a great screenplay on our hands here, John. The next epic revenge thriller. I can write it up. We'll be rolling in greenbacks! Hey, it didn't really come to pass did it?"

John: "Well, I don't know, Jim. I haven't been reading *The [San Francisco] Chronicle* or watching the local news as of late. I guess if we learn of a local lawyer's mysterious death in the last year, we should go to the cops."

[the sound of my wooden chair sliding on the concrete-slab floor]

The audio tape ended and I turned the old cassette player off.

Then Monique (Agent 32) walked into the den. I looked up at her. *What a cute pinay [Philippine lady] she is.*

"I thought I heard some men talking. What was that, Parkaar?" [my ailing alias]

"Oh, just an old taped recording of a conversation in San Francisco from a couple of decades ago. I used to use these analog audio snippets in multimedia art back then."

"What in the world! Did those people know that they were being recorded?"

"Uh, I doubt it, 32."

"Are you recording me now?"

<click>

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



# A SEARCH FOR SIDLE ON N

by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | | May 2014

## A Search for Sidle on N

by Mike Bozart

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So, there we, Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33), were on a seasonally cool August day in 2012, sauntering down Judah Street in extreme western San Francisco, descending towards the Pacific Ocean. Not that we could actually see the sea, as the marine fog curtain had already dropped by three in the afternoon. *Must log this fog.*

We had just got off the Muni N Judah streetcar at 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I felt almost certain that that little, now-defunct, jaundice-yellow-faded-paint-sided, olivine-colored-wooden-front-doored, break-in-the-lapboard-wall watering hole was somewhere in this area of the Outer Sunset district. *It has to be around here. It has to be!*

It was twenty years since I had stepped foot in there. Nothing looked like the little time-passer of a pub in the first block. We stopped at the intersection with 41<sup>st</sup> Avenue and waited for the crosswalk sign to turn white. *Now, where was it? Is my long-range memory sector already toast?*

“Well, maybe the next block is the one, Monique.” *He’s lost.*

“Ok, Parkaar, [my ailing alias] no problem. I’m enjoying the walk, though it is a little chilly for summer.”

“This town – or, more specifically, this side of town – has the best summer weather of anywhere in my book, princess. Well, Pacifica and Eureka may battle for a close second place.”

“Only you would say that, 33. You fog-loving freak.”

“That, I am. That, I am.” *Not the nonsense already.*

“Already repeating? It’s not even sundown, 33. Your mind’s clutch is totally shot now.” *She’s probably right.*

“Lotsa kewl [sic] fog and sun-shielding overcast skies with no rain. I call that parfait, [French for perfect] Monique.”

“Parfait, you say? I think I’ll take the dessert, instead.”

“Sure, we can do that later, too.” *Oh, boy.*

The crosswalk sign changed to WALK and we continued our very decent descent. I assiduously scanned the storefronts looking for a possible clue, just hoping to notice an architectural feature that would trigger a dormant memory. *It has probably been repainted by now. Heck, it needed a paint job three decades ago.*

Alas, we arrived at 42<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. Then, from out of the fog, a yellow Toyota sedan came whizzing up to the intersection. We were already mid-crosswalk, and I wasn't sure if it was going to yield to us.

"Hurry, Monique!" I shouted.

We both made it safely, as the car skidded to a stop on the first wide yellow crosswalk line. It then sped off across Judah.

"I thought that you said this town was pedestrian-friendly, Agent 33." Monique was a little shaken.

"Oh, he must be a former Charlottean." I chuckled to myself. "Or, maybe from Miami," I added. "He's probably cranked-up on meth or crack rock."

"Or, maybe his girlfriend just dumped him, [used in the novella *Mysterieu of San Francisco*] Parkaar."

"Yeah, maybe so. Either way, he's driving like a certified douchebag."

"I agree, 33. I just wish that the cops saw his bad driving."

"He's in a rush to get nowhere, and rapidly succeeding."

"I thought the saying was, 'in a rush to get knowhere, [sic] and arriving ahead of pschedule', [sic] Parkaar."

"If you used a silent k and a silent p, that would be above his mental grade." *What is he on about now?*

Monique gave me an odd look as our walk recommenced. *This already feels like a strange day. I'm sure he'll write it up later.*

I kept looking and looking for some façade familiarity. However, there were no businesses – nothing but residences. *Where did it go? Where was it?*

We crossed 43<sup>rd</sup> Avenue without incident. Still nothing. *Where the hell is that place? Monique must think I'm bonkers. / Has he lost his mind? What are we searching for?*

We walked past a Presbyterian church and stopped at an adjacent vacant lot. *I wonder if this is where it was.*

“Was it here, Parkaar?”

“Possibly, 32. Possibly.”

“Maybe they razed it, 33.”

“Yeah, maybe. That actually sounds believable. And, it's starting to look like the case.”

We walked to the next edifice, a gray building with boutique retail on the first level and two stories of apartments on top. I stopped and studied the building.

Monique then looked at me. “Was this it, 33?” *Hmmm ... this is close, so very close.*

“This one has that Sidle on N vibe, Monique. Just not totally sure.”

“Are you sure that we're on the right side of the street?” *Or, even on the right street?*

“Yes, we're on the right side of the street as we walk away from central San Francisco towards China.”

“Ok, silly-dilly ... I mean, do you think it was on the other side of the street, as in over there?” Monique quickly pointed across Judah.

“No, I am certain that it was on this side, astute Agent 32.”

“What makes you so certain of that, 33?”

“Well, I can remember seeing a few shards of heavily filtered sunlight hit the concrete floor for a few seconds. I can see the dust in the air. Those scenes would not have occurred on the other – south – side of the street.”

“You remember that?”

“Absolutely.”

“You remember the oddest things, Parkaar. But, yes, it sounds believable.”

“My brain is not totally baked just yet, 32; it’s just slightly parboiled.” *Parboiled loon.*

“That’s what you say.”

“Why, of course it’s what I say, Monique. Or, is it that chip you planted behind my left ear last night?” *What?*

We both laughed and continued our fabled-bar-seeking trek. Nothing of consequential note appeared between 44<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Avenues. We walked in silence, letting our thoughts bounce down the in-street railroad tracks. *If I were a superball ...*

Then as we neared La Playa, Monique chirped out her plea.

“Hey, want to duck into Lava Peach for a cup of hot coffee? I’m freezing!” She even shivered a couple of times.

“Sure, 32; let’s do it.” *I know what he wants later.*

We entered the corner coffeehouse and ordered a couple of caramel mochachinos, or something like that. While waiting, I spotted a psecret psociety quadra-fold on a table near the front window. I showed it to Monique.

“You sent copies of your short stories here?”

“I did. To here and many other places in the Bay Area.”

“Knowing you all too well, 33, I bet you’ll use this occurrence in a future short story.” *Of course!*

“Yeah, I would think that is a safe bet, Monique.”

Our coffees came and we sipped at them at a corner table. They were piping hot and delicious. The whipped cream laced in liquid caramel was sinfully divine. I had to have more.

I went up and paid for an extra blast-n-drip. Maybe I was at a low-blood-sugar-level moment. But if I was, that for sure corrected the deficiency.

We sat back and relaxed, just taking in the scenery and the peoplery. [sic] The busy South American college-age barista was all a-hustle. *I don't think that I could do her job. Hell, I know I couldn't. What a tough gig when it's this busy.*

A Caucasian, very bookish-looking, 40-something lady with dark hair was reading at a window-side table. She had the largest-lensed glasses that I had ever seen. She was buried in her new hardback novel. *I wonder what she is reading. Romance? Mystery? Mysterious romance? Romantic mystery? How in the world can she read in here? The light is so low and the noise is so high. I couldn't stay story-focused for one paragraph.*

A bronze-faced, athletically thin, 20-something surfer dude in a black wetsuit walked in with his board under right arm, exhaling visible vapor. *He's probably balling some hottie around here tonight. / I bet he likes the barista ... likes to pump her hard.*

A pair of Asian female high-school students were doing their math homework together on a bench seat, while occasionally giggling. *It was probably a text message. One of them has a crush on some schoolboy. Yeah, it's obvious.*

An Amerasian businessman was now getting some pastries to-go, while juggling with his cell phone. *The wife sure has him jumping. She must be hungry back at the house. / This guy is obviously hen-pecked.*

More sounds of the cash register drawer opening and closing. <cha-ching> *Business sure is brisk. I wonder how much money this place brings in.*

Then the mixing of soft conversations. *Oh, my Lord! Did she say something about an utin? [utin is Tagalog and Cebuano for penis] Is she from the Philippines?*

Some workers were leisurely fixing some issue with the side window's sill. They were getting ready to shim it and re-caulk it. *They seem to be milking this task. They're probably getting paid by the hour and not by the job.*

And then the sound of the waves in the distance. *I wonder how high those waves are. I haven't even seen the ocean yet due to this dense fog.*

All of a sudden, I noticed separate eddy streams of fog wafting and curling past the open door. *This really is Fogville USA. I love it! Wish I could afford it. / His mind is lost in the fog.*

Three Caucasian guys in college sweatshirts were talking about the upcoming ball game near the counter. A skinny white dude in a sleeveless T-shirt was leaning against a utility pole, just outside the front door. Monique was studying him. *I wonder if he is bayot. [gay in Cebuano]*

An Hispanic plumber at a table across the room had a water hammer arrestor in his hand. (Reference the *Water Hammer* short story.) He seemed to be measuring the pipe gauge.

Then an older white man walked in, saying, "Yep, yep, yep ..." *That phrase and that man. Very familiar. Is that really him? Is that Malloy?*

I studied him closer. Then I walked up to the late-60-ish-appearing fellow, who was donning an SF Giants cap.

"Is that you Mr. Malloy?" I politely asked, now fairly confident it was him.

"Yep, yep, yep," Mr. Malloy repeated without a stutter. (Mr. Malloy also appears in the *Mysterieu of San Francisco* novella and in the *Vermont Street* short story.)

"You've aged well, Malloy. Very well."

“Yep, yep, yep, and much, much, much thanks.” *He’s still got that repetitive shtick down pat. Or, is it involuntary?*

“Hey, want to pull up a chair and chat with us? I’d love the catch-up conversation. We can put some questions to rest.”

“Sure, sure, sure.”

Malloy followed me back to our table. I grabbed a vacant chair from a nearby table for him. He quickly took a seat and cracked his knuckles a few times.

“Mr. Malloy, this is my wife, Monique,” I announced.

“Ah, yes, the lovely Agent 32. Yep, yep, yep.” *WTF! How did he know her agent number?*

“Nice to meet you, Mr. Malloy,” Monique said.

“So, so, so, what would you like to talk about?” Malloy asked, as if time were suddenly of the essence.

“Oh, just a few of things,” I said. “We won’t keep you long.”

“Would you like to know how I won the multi-million-dollar lottery?” Malloy asked out of the blue. *Holy cow! He won the lottery? Well, that would explain him being able to drop C-notes in Sidle on N. Yeah, it would make sense. He never seemed like the business millionaire type, anyway. This would explain his idle wealth.*

“Why, sure,” I said, not sure of what I would hear.

“It’s two strikes, not three,” Malloy firmly stated.

“What do you mean, Mr. Malloy?” Monique asked, very interested to know.

“Once you pick your set of numbers, don’t change any of them until they have been called twice – not once,” Malloy said while rubbing his right hand across his forehead. “It’s two hits and you’re out at the old Malloy lottery game.”

“So, don’t change a number the first time it’s called on a non-winning ticket?” Monique asked, while taking mental notes.

“No, not the first time,” Malloy said while tapping his left index finger on the wooden table. “But, don’t wait for the third strike, either. And, make sure you play every drawing. Skip one and you may be skipping out early.”

“Thanks for the gambling advice, Malloy, and a big congrats. I guess you’ll be buying the next round of drinks. Hey, I’m just kidding.”

“Yep, yep, yep,” Malloy beeped out. “What is your second question, Agent 33?” *He must know Ernie.*

“Well, Malloy, the real reason that we’re out here in the sunless Sunset today is to revisit the old Sidle on N,” I confessed. “However, we can’t seem to find it. Would you happen to remember exactly where it was?”

“Sidle on N. Sidle on N. Sidle on N.” Malloy now looked sad.

“Yeah, Sidle on N,” I confirmed. “Back in ’92. Wasn’t it in the mid-40 avenues, somewhere around 44<sup>th</sup> or 45<sup>th</sup>?”

“Yep, yep, yep. It surely was, Agent 33. But, after Tsula [a character in the *Mysterieau of San Francisco* novella] died in there, they soon scraped it away.” *Oh, no!*

“Tsula is dead? How?!” I could hardly believe it.

“She was all party-party-party one night with the owner. Too many pills and booze. Overdose, the coroner said. There was a fire, too. Many suspect that there was foul play, and that the fire was intentionally set to cover it. But, no murder or arson conviction ever came about. The place was a total loss. It was finally bulldozed back in January of 1995. The owner later did go to prison, but it was for tax evasion. Yep, yep, yep.” *Wow!*

“Woah, what a tragic ending to our old haunt, Malloy,” I said while looking down at the table. *What a horrid ending.*

“Where did you end up?” Malloy asked me.

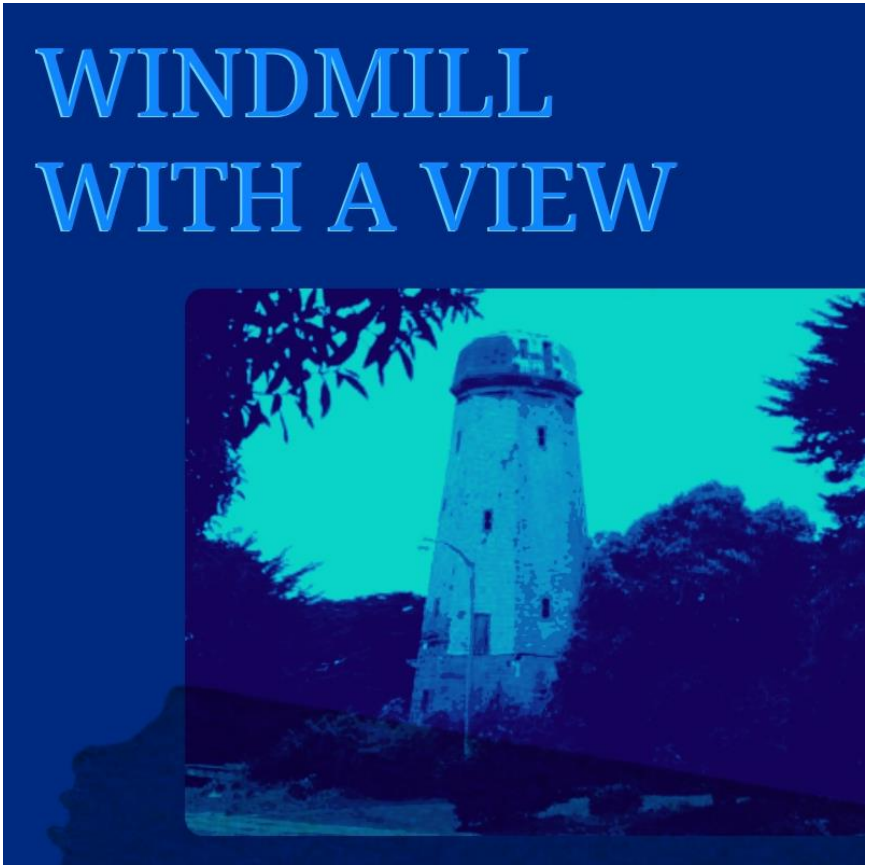
“Back in Charlotte. But, I bet you already knew that.”



“Oh, just checking your veracity, Agent 33, Yep, yep, yep.  
Just check-check-checking.”

Monique was speechless.

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**Windmill with a View**  
by **Mike Bozart** (Agent 33) | June 2014; revised Sept. 2015

**Windmill with a View**  
by Mike Bozart  
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Prefa orial [*sic*] remarks.

Yes, another short story centered around that knowhere [*sic*] bar called Sidle on N. I know what you are thinking: *Jeez, Mike, another one? Really?*

Please bear with me for just a few more. The vault of 2014 is now almost emptied.

These Sidle on N short stories led up to the *Mysterieu of San Francisco* novella. Some of the characters, scenes and plot ideas made it to the novella; others are lying in the fog somewhere in westernmost San Francisco.

Curiously enough, Mr. Malloy was on holiday for this one. Maybe there was a [San Francisco] Giants home game.

Any ways and all waves, thanks for your interest, time and mind space.

*-MB*

It was back in the summer of 1992, while in a small studio apartment in downtown San Francisco (the infamous Tenderloin) – way before psecret psociety was created and formally promulgated on Facebook (and obviously long before such) – that I imagined myself as some kind of meta-real agent. I knew the agency part would fall into place sooner or later (actually, much later).

I found myself having another end-of-day grog at Sidle on N on Judah Street. (The bar, Sidle on N, is featured in the *Mysterieu of San Francisco* novella, as well as in the short stories, *A Search for Sidle on N*; *Water Hammer*; *Ok, Roll the Dice*; and *The Right Triangle*.) As usual, and as prescribed, only three people were in the little dive bar in the Outer Sunset district of San Francisco.

There was a 40-something, slightly pudgy, mustachioed, white guy in a cowboy hat, who kept nervously looking out the door at the perennial late-day fog passing by. He seemed paranoid. *Who is he looking out for? Is he hallucinating? Is he a marked gaucho from a lost gulch? I need to write that line down on a piece of napkin. Might use it twenty or so years from now.*

There was an Asian couple, probably college age, talking softly in a corner. *They're probably reviewing notes for an exam.*

Behind the bar today was an Amerasian dude named Dash. I was never sure if that was his birth name or just an adopted American nickname. I never asked him. He was about my age at that time: 28.

I got used to seeing him in there on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Today was a Wednesday. A Wednesday near-evening that seemed to hang by a mid-week tendril on a branch of disbelief. Well, perhaps.

However, no one in this so-easy-to-pass-right-on-by joint was howling for abstract poetry at this moment. And, believe the essence of yew, they weren't aware of the cancer-fighting potential. And, for that matter, neither was I.

I laughed to myself when that last couplet sailed through my cranium, glancing off some remnants of gray matter. Dash caught my nascent chortle.

"Something funny, eh?" *Where did he pick up that Canadian accent? Toronto? Montréal? Hamilton? Or, maybe in Yellowknife with a steak knife?* Internal laughter.

I recomposed my countenance for anyone counting. But, wasn't sure if Dash was.

"Yeah, just a one-two combination that I might use sometime in the future. That's if I ever start writing."

"Twenty-two years from now?" *How odd that he would pick 22 years. It's always odd in here, though. Shouldn't really be surprised anymore.*

"Maybe so, Dash."

"You think that you'll still be alive?"

"I don't know. Hard to say. Do you mean exactly 22 years from now, not an even 20?"

"Yeah, I think that I will stick with that number. Repeating digits, you know. Maybe some magic there."

"Dash, you're mad, man. But, you're no madman."

"You funny American guy, Mike."

"I'll let you in on a little secret: It's only parfait [perfect in French] if you can make it pay, mon ami. ['my friend' in French] Got to pay those bills. Must stay afloat in this stagnant moat."

"You better write that one down, man, before you forget it."

He handed me a red ball-point pen and a cardboard PBR (Pabst Blue Ribbon) beer coaster. I jotted the line down and dated it. Then I tossed it into my green backpack and zipped it shut.

"Speaking of making it pay, how do you make it, Dash, just working three days a week? Do you have a second job somewhere? I mean, this is one expensive-ass city."

"You aint kidding, pal. Let's just say that I cut out a big expense."

"Let me guess: You drive an older car that is already paid for; thus, no car payment."

"True in part, Mike; I have no car payment. But, it's because I have no car."

"Well, I don't have a car, either. This is one of the few American cities that you can live in delightfully without an automobile."

"True dat, bro."

"But, Dash, how do you make the rent if I may be so bold to ask?"

"I live rent-free, man." *What?!*

"Are you a squatter in some Lower Haight, soon-to-be-razed, faltering flophouse? Or, are you in government-subsidized housing in the Western Addition?"

"No, no, Mike; nothing like that." *I bet he camps in Golden Gate Park and showers at the Y.*

Dash grabbed his stringy goatee and ran his fingers through it like a four-tined rake. "I live in a very interesting, unique place," he cautiously announced.

"A mental hospital?" I chuckled at my little zinger.

"You are very funny guy, Mike."

"Oh, I'm just joking with ya."

"You must want to be comedian."

"No, not me."

When Dash noticed that I was serious again, he continued with his lodging revelation. "I have a place in Golden Gate Park for the time being." *Ah-ha! Golden Gate Park. I knew it. Just as I suspected: a camper in the bushes.*

"Oh, is that so?"

"Listen, I'd like to tell you where, but my girlfriend has sworn me to secrecy. She doesn't want us to lose our kewl [*sic*] digs." *Digs? Maybe they live underground. Or, semi-underground, in a lean-to-a-sand-dune.*

"So, somewhere in Golden Gate Park. That's some prime, publicly owned, surreal estate if you can maintain the subterfuge. I hope they don't find your tent behind North Lake."

"Oh, trust me; we're not living in a tent. I'll give you a hint: It's a permanent structure. That's all I can say. I think that I shouldn't have even said that. Can I take that hint back?"

"Sure, Dash, consider it erased from my bean." *Not.*

He looked at me and grinned. "One more dark brew to-go for the train ride back home?"

"Sure, put it in a brown paper bag, Dash. Thanks in advance and in retrograde." *What a strange one he is.*

"I remember the routine, Mr. Mike."

“And that is why I tip you so well.”

“You just want my sister’s phone number.” *He’s onto my scheme.*

“Yeah, maybe so.” *Of course you do.*

“Maybe so next time,” Dash concluded.

I put a \$5 bill and five quarters down on the bar and exited the tantalizing travesty of a tavern. I crossed Judah. Lucky me, an N-line train was waiting at the western terminus. *Ah, just like I ordered it.*

I jumped aboard the front car. I couldn’t stop wondering where Dash and his girlfriend were living in Golden Gate Park. *Are they living in a large storm drain vault? No, that would be too damp. Couldn’t imagine a 20-something female voluntarily living in such a space. Are they really living in some subterranean void? Where do they use the bathroom? Outside in the woods? No, I couldn’t imagine a girl living like that. I can tell that he’s not living like that, either; he is getting a fresh shower every day. Does he have a key to some park maintenance building? I bet that’s it. I’ll have to poke around out there this weekend.*

The MUNI train stopped at 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The man from Sidle on N with the cowboy hat crossed the street with his head down, headed south. He glanced at the front of the train as he passed by. The last new passenger got on the rear car of the train, and we were rolling again. *I never saw him leave the bar. I wonder what his story is. Lost to time. Another mystery gone to the fog.*

Twenty-two minutes later, the N train pulled into Civic Center station. I got out and walked up to my Hyde Street studio apartment, wading through the aggressive panhandlers. I couldn’t stop wondering about where Dash and his girlfriend were living in Golden Gate Park.

Four days later, I spent a whole Sunday checking out the various structures in the park for signs of human habitation. Nothing looked remotely lived in, even when I zoomed in on the shed and shop windows with my binoculars. I was ready to call it quits in the southwestern corner of the park, when I noticed the old, broken-down, closed-up, sail-less Murphy Windmill.

I glanced at the little rectangular windows. In a middle one, I thought I saw a face. I quickly looked through my binoculars. There was a young Asian female’s face surrounded by long

black hair. She was looking down at me. *What the heck! Is she a ghost? Am I really seeing this?*

I saw her just for a few milliseconds. Then she was gone. She disappeared that quickly. So suddenly in fact that I wondered if I had truly seen a real living person. I then doubted the visage altogether, and wrote it off as just another one of my dehydration delusions. *Need some water, and quick.*

However, a trip to Sidle on N the next Wednesday confirmed my initial impression.



another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



by **Mike Bozart** | June 2014 (rev. Sept. 2015, and again in Feb. 2016)

**Ok, Roll the Dice**  
by Mike Bozart  
© 2021 Mike Bozart

Staying in the summer of '92 in San Francisco, and staying planted in that how-did-I-ever-stumble-into-and-root-myself-into-such-a-displacement-in-knowhere [*sic*], the mind-sink called Sidle on N; well, this me wondered, as yet another MUNI train clanged its way on by, parting the fog with well-learned pry-cision. *Molecular memory?*

It was another mild, overcast, foggy-in-spots, August Thursday. Another one that I had grown to love.

Dash wasn't working today, as he only worked on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Ok, I think we covered that in a previous installment (but, just in case you are reading this first, Dash was an Amerasian bartender at a fabulously forlorn joint in the Outer Sunset district of San Francisco that went under the pun-ishing [*sic*] moniker of Sidle on N.)

Yeah, I can remember the little, silhouette-style, rusty metal sign. *Or, was it made out of wood and painted to look like metal? I should've taken it as a souvenir. Darn it!*

Often times the trio of Shoulda, Coulda and Woulda would be spreading Gouda cheese on some thin windmilled crackers. Ok, ok, enough nonsense. Message received, loud and clear. Let's get this tale moving nose-ward.

Maria was behind the cherry wood bar today. She was originally from Honduras, in her late 40s, and worked as you might have surmised, every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. (The 333-square-foot demi-lounge was closed on Sundays; at least, I tend to think it was.)

It was now about 3:30. They usually opened the door at three. And once it was open, no one seemed to close it.

We were the only two people in the place. I never said much to Maria. I just figured – ignorantly – that she took the part-time gig to pay bills, and had no creative interests or inclinations, or any attention to be paid outside of the day-to-day mundanities [*sic*] of life.

Boy oh boy, was I wrong, as I shelled out my sails to sea. I mean, as I shall set out to see. Or, wri-type. I think you get the jist [*sic*] of my drift.

Anyway, I was doodling mindlessly on a copy of *SF Weekly* when Maria walked by the little table where I was sitting. She glanced at my little cartoonish rendering.

"Are you an artist?" she asked with just a slight south-of-the-border accent.

I looked up at her. “I think the jury is still out on that, Maria,” I replied.

“What do you mean by that? Does someone have to certify that you’re an artist now? What is this silly city coming to?”

“I mean that I’ve been shopping my art to dozens of galleries in the Bay Area [chronicled in the novella *Mysterieu of San Francisco*] over the past five months, and I all have is two walls in a South-of-Market coffeehouse and a handful of low-dollar sales. I’m not exactly the next Andy Warhol. I’m just another forever unknown, it would seem.”

“Oh, I see; you think that only if you become famous can your art be deemed good, worthy or valuable. And, until such time, it must be caca. [Spanish for crap] That’s such Americano loco [‘crazy American’ in Spanish] nonsense. Just keep doing your art and let the chippies [*sic*] fall where they may, amigo. [friend in Spanish] You understand me?”

“Sí, [Yes in Spanish] I do. I’ll take that advice. Muchas gracias, [‘Much Thanks’ in Spanish] Maria.”

“Hey, I really like that little spaceman drawing. Can I buy it?”

“Buy it? Oh, please. Here, I’ll give it to you.”

I carefully tore the nine-square-inch doodling off of the back page of the newsprint periodical. I looked at her as I handed it to her. “I hope this brings you some good luck.”

“Hold on now, amigo; I have got to pay you back with something.”

“No, really; it’s ok. I don’t want anything for this little sketch.”

“You stay right there, artistimodo.” [*sic*] *Artistimodo? Did I hear her right?*

“Ok, I’m not going anywhere.”

“Just uno minuto. [‘one minute’ in Spanish] Let me get my magic dice.” *Magic dice? Is she going to hustle me in a craps game? Probably some loaded dice.*

Maria walked back behind the bar. She then bent down and retrieved a small cardboard box. She seemed very excited about the box. *Honduran jumping dice?*

When she put the box down on the table where I was sitting, I noticed that it was actually covered in well-worn black velvet. She then sat down across from me.

“You’ve had this box for a long time, huh, Maria?”

“For three decades now,” she said with pride.

“I can tell that you greatly treasure what’s inside this box, Maria. You don’t have to give me your dice. Really. I already have some.” *Él no tiene estos. [Spanish for ‘He doesn’t have these.’]*

She didn’t even acknowledge my declination of offer. Maria just undid the interlocking bands and opened the small box to reveal a pair of slightly blue-tinged white dice.

“I don’t usually play craps, but when I do, I wear man diapers.” *Couldn’t resist saying that one. Probably just confused her.*

“What did you just say, amigo?” She was indeed confused by my lame joke.

“I’m not sure, Maria. It’s like the words just got shot out of my mouth from somewhere, maybe from Yellowknife.” *I really need to tone down the nonsense. It’s not fair to her.*

“All of you artists in this town are so silly.”

“Yeah, you may be right on that, Maria.”

She then intently looked in my green eyes with her dark brown eyes. “Do you want to know about your future?” she asked.

“Sure, who doesn’t?”

“Ok, amigo, grab both dice with one hand.”

I scooped up the dice, which felt very department-store ordinary, with my right hand. *I wonder if she has ever done this trick with Dash.*

I cleared my throat. “Ok, what now, Maria?”

“Ask a question to yourself – silently – don’t tell me – in which the answer is a number.” *Now I see where this is going. A little fortune-teller action. I’ll just play along so as to not hurt her feelings. Well, I may as well ask a numerically answerable question. I know one: When will I get married?*

I nodded to Maria and then rolled the dice. A lucky seven came up, made up of a six and a one. *Too bad I’m not in Reno. Maybe do a weekend next month.*

Maria looked at the dice for a few seconds. She then placed her left hand on her forehead and told me to roll again. She didn’t exactly look happy; in fact, she looked fairly distressed.

“Ok, Maria, here goes roll number two. Wish me better luck.”

And with that remark, I rolled the dice again. Boxcars. A twelve – a pair of sixes. *Hmmm ...  $7 + 12 = 19$ . Do I get married 19 years from now? Jeez, I'll be 47! I don't want to be in some cheesy singles bar at 47! Or, does it mean that I get married on July 12<sup>th</sup>? Or, is it going to be on December 7<sup>th</sup>? Oh, it's just nonsense. Just stop thinking about it!*

“Would you like to know what your two dice rolls mean?”

“Why, certainly! How much does it cost?” *Here's the rub.*

“It's free, hombre tonto. [‘silly man’ in Spanish] The price is nada. [nothing in Spanish] Nada, nada, nada thing. Remember, amigo, I owe you for that drawing you gave me.”

“Oh, ok.”

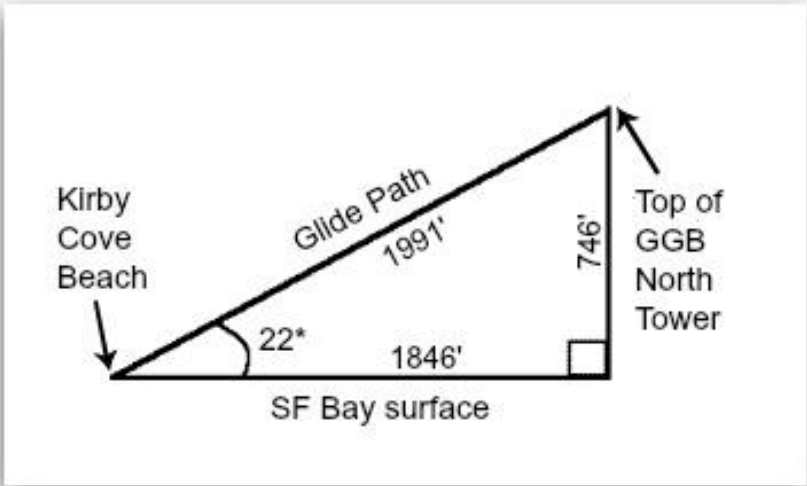
“Here's the interpretation as I learned from my maternal grandmother. Your roll of seven had the six die above the one die. While rolling a seven is usually seen as good, this particular combination is not favorable. Due to this result, I had you roll again. You then rolled a twelve. What this means is that something of importance will happen in seven units from now. It could be days, weeks, months, years; only you will know. But, that endeavor will not be successful. However, that endeavor will be re-attempted twelve units later with success. This is all that I can tell you.”

“Well, thank you, Maria, for that interesting and very intriguing reading of the dice. Buenas noches. [‘Good night’ in Spanish] I'll probably be back next Tuesday.” *If I don't get run over by a red-light-running car like that guy on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor of my apartment building, that is. Man, did that car send him sailing through the air. Brutal. Ughhhh.*

I got up to catch the N train back to downtown. My thoughts as I waited at the tram stop: *Divining the future. Such an old game. If it were only as easy as rolling dice. She seems to really believe in it, though. I won't burst her bubble. That would be cruel and so unnecessary. When I see her next time, I'll just tell her that I'm still trying to figure out the units of her interpretation.*

In 1999 I would get married to the wrong woman; in 2011 I would get married to the right one.

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



**The Right Triangle** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | June 2014

**The Right Triangle**  
by Mike Bozart  
© 2021 Mike Bozart

Got time for one more tale from Sidle on N (a perpetually fogged-in, tiny, dive-to-the-depths-of-knowhere [*sic*] bar in the Outer Sunset district of San Francisco)? It's just a short one. I sure-really hope that when/if you whisper 'Oui' (Yes in French) that no eavesdropper assumes that you are now referring to yourself in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural, as they say that it is much worse than referring to oneself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular. And that Mike guy, well, he should know us. *I can sense that one falling flatter than last year's cooler-compacted pancake.*

Ok, enough with the preliminary noodling. I'll behave from here on out. Well, maybe.

It was a late Friday afternoon in mid-September of '92. No, not 1892 at a Haverlys minor league baseball game – a century of change and re-arrange later than that in the city by the bay.

Dash, the ever-hip, late-20-something, Amerasian M-W-F bartender at Sidle on N, was chatting on his clunky early-1990s bag-phone with his girlfriend Dish. (You know, you can't make these nicknames up – well, maybe you can. A couple named Dash and Dish, eyes will kid yew in knots.)

I had just third-sipped my off-brand dark beer (today's \$2 impromptu, unadvertised, unannounced special), when Dash hung up his two-pound, scraped-up, bandage-taped, cellular phone by attaching it to a side of the large, dusty, black battery bag. <clunk>

Dash was excited and all a-smile. He quickly and proudly made an announcement: "Dak is going to do it! Yes, Dak is really going to do it!" *Dak? Never heard him mention a Dak before.*

"Do what?" I asked. "And, who in the whole wide bay area is Dak?"

"He's going to soar, man. Dak is my computer-whiz friend. He aced the SAT. Well, at least the math and logic parts." *Wow, a little bit better than my 960.*

"Very impressive, Dash. So, you've got a compu-genius [*sic*] friend. I would think that is very beneficial to have in this new digital age."

"I think so, too, Mike. He will be getting his master's degree from UC Berkeley in only five years." *Not too shabby. A bright diode there.*

“Ok, and what will he be doing with all that brain power, Dash?” *Binary fusion?*

“Dak is going to jump off the Golden Gate Bridge and soar away!” *So, the ultra-smart one has an exotic death wish. How sublime.*

“Lovely. Just lovely, Dash. Tell him to wait a few years, and then he can be suicide number 1,000. That way his name will be on a bronze plaque at Fort Point. Oh yeah, and then his name will also be the winning answer to trivial bar bets.”

“No, he’s not planning on committing suicide, Mike.”

“Well, that’s what just about always happens when you jump off that bridge. Less than one in a hundred survive the fall. The bridge’s road deck is 245 feet above the bay’s surface. Mean sea-level, of course.” *Mean sea-level. Too much.*

“Yeah, I know, I know. But, really, Dak has it all figured out. He’s mega-smart. Top of the league.” *Too smart for this life?*

“Dash, the bridge leapers reach speeds approaching 80 miles per hour. At those speeds, the water’s surface is like concrete. Dried, cured, hard concrete.”

“He knows that. Dak told me that he’s going to take off from the top of the North Tower. He’s done the calculations and has come up with the right triangle.” *The right triangle?*

“Well, Dash, his chances of surviving just went from 1% to zilch. Those towers are over 700 feet tall. Seven hundred and forty-six feet to be exact.”

“How do you know the exact height of the towers and all these other bridge specs?”

“I took a free brochure from the bridge’s gift shop yesterday. My memory chip has a soft spot for random facts.”

Dash then handed me a white business card with a right triangle on it in black ink. (Click [here](#) to see graphic.)

> [return mark] Thanks for coming back. You know, I was beginning to wonder.

I noted the numerical amounts and terms like *Glide Path*, *Top of GGB North Tower*, *SF Bay surface* and *Kirby Cove Beach*.

“Wait, did you say take off?” *What kind of stunt is this?*

“I sure did. He’s going to have wings, Mike.”



“His arms will be torn off, Dash. Has your genius-pal not done his homework properly? The human body can’t take those kinds of stresses. We’re not birds.”

“He’s done all the math, even triple-checked it. Almost all of the stress is taken by an ultra-lightweight, carbon-fiber, slightly curved, 18-foot beam that will go across his back, behind his shoulder blades. The wing material is some new synthetic, composite material. It all weighs less than nine pounds.”

“You’re kidding me.” *This is nutzoid. [sic]*

“Man, I have seen his contraption. It’s real, dude. And, it’s really very light, yet super-strong. He’s already done some testing in the Marin Headlands at night. But please, don’t tell anyone.”

“Don’t worry; I won’t. I wouldn’t want to short-circuit the upcoming spectacle.”

“Mike, he can fly with these wings, I tell ya. It’s no joke. It really works. Well, fly is not exactly correct; glide is a better word. He told me that he glided – or is it glid? – for over 500 feet off a 200-foot-high knoll just a few nights ago.”

“Ok, Dash, let’s just say that I believe that his math is right and his glide-wings will work. That still leaves a big problem: How does he transport an 18-foot-long apparatus to the top of the North Tower without being seen?”

“Inside help, dude. He has a cousin who works in the bridge maintenance division. He will have a key.”

“But, he can’t just walk down the bridge’s sidewalk with that 18-foot wingspan. Hundreds of passing motorists and pedestrians will see him and report him to the police as a suspected terrorist.”

“He’s way ahead of you, Mike. It’s no problem. It all folds up into six three-foot-long sections. He’ll re-assemble it in the top of the tower, just under the hatch.” *Just under the hatch? What?!*

“If your Dak pulls this off and lives, I’ll give you five Malloy-approved lottery numbers.” *Mike knows Malloy?*

“Only five?” Dash laughed. “Listen, Mike, he already has a special duffel bag for it with a customized logo: SoarFree.” *I’ve heard everything now. This place never fails to amaze.*

“Dash, your test-genius friend is too smart for his own, dumb, good health.”

Dash was unfazed by my remark. “Oh, I forgot to tell you this: He wants me to film his epic Golden Gate glide from Battery Spencer.”

“Oh, so you will be the videographer who documents this poor guy’s death. I’d be careful with that video tape, Dash; you could get called into a courtroom.”

“Relax, Mike; it’s going to work out fine. Dak is an all-world genius; he’s not some corn-fed rube.” *Where did that come from?*

“Is he an epik [sic] with a k all-leaguer?” *I think my American friend has had enough drink for today. I will politely cut him off. He won’t miss the alcohol. I think that he has ingested some of those ‘granules of grandeur’ that are going around.*

“Mike, my crazy art-friend, he has done stunts like this before. Many times. And, get this, his record is perfect. No mishaps. No accidents. No injuries. No, not even a scratch. His preparation is always ultra-meticulous.”

“Ok, ok, Dash. Just for non-argument’s sake, I’ll believe every single word that you have just said. However, there is still a problem. A big all-engulfing problem. I’ll give you a hint: three letters, begins with the letter F.”

“Fog?” *Wow! He guessed it on the first try. Just like in a short story.*

“Yes, fog, Dash. The seemingly ever-present, summertime, pea-soup fog. How will he be able to see where he is going? And, how on Earth will you be able to film him in flight?”

“I hear you loud and clear. But, have you noticed that the fog is getting thinner, and is sometimes not even present at dusk anymore?”

“Color me oblivious to it.”

“There have even been some sunsets this week where you could actually see the Pacific Ocean.”

“All the way out to Seal Rocks.” I guffawed.

“No, not the surf. I mean like seven miles out. We’re getting out of the dense summer fog season.”

“So, he is just waiting for a fog-free evening?”

“Fog-free and wind-free. A calm twilight.”

I swilled down the last two ounces in my dark brown beer bottle and got up to leave. “Dash, call me the day that Dak decides to take his leap of faith.”

“I will.”

“Give me at least four hours of lead time.”

“You got it, man. You still want my sister’s phone number?”

“No, I already have it.” *What?! He does?*

“You fucking dog! Get the hell out of here.” He was laughing.

“Just one last question before I go: Have you seen Malloy [a character in the novella *Mysterieu of San Francisco* and in the short stories *A Search for Sidle on N* and *Vermont Street*] lately?”

“He was in last Tuesday. He told me that before he won the lottery he won the treble.” *What?*

“The treble? Isn’t that a European soccer term that refers to winning three trophies or cups in one season?”

“Yeah, I think so. But in Mr. Malloy’s case, his treble was divorce, foreclosure and bankruptcy. And in that order.” *Ouch!*

“I wouldn’t call that winning.”

“He said that it set him up to win the lottery.”

“Malloy is just one lucky bastard. One very amusing old loon. I love how he rationalizes his most propitious stroke of chance, and makes it seem like anyone can win if they follow his golden precepts. Lovely lunacy.”

“Yep, yep, yep,” Dash said, mimicking Malloy perfectly.

I exited with a grin. However, when I looked across Judah Street, I saw the back of an N train climbing the incline. *Drats! Just missed it. Well, can’t make them all.*

Next, I decided to walk down to Lava Peach for a cappuccino to pass the wait time for the next train.

Business was brisk at Judah & La Playa. The strong coffee was just what I needed. (I was running on feral fumes.)

I then looked around for something to read and found a folded sheet of paper in a basket with a story on it – one very similar to the one that you are reading right now.

An idea flashed across my interior screen: *Maybe I should do some zany little quadra-folds like this someday.*

I finished my cup o' joe as the MUNI streetcar came into view. *The fog is thinning, just like Dash said.*

The ride back to Market Street was pleasantly uneventful, except for the man who kept looking for something on the floor. *Maybe mentally ill.*

Days passed with me and Sidle on N in separate worlds. To be honest, I forgot about the upcoming Dak event.

Then at three on Sunday afternoon, October 4<sup>th</sup>, Dash called me. Tonight was the night.

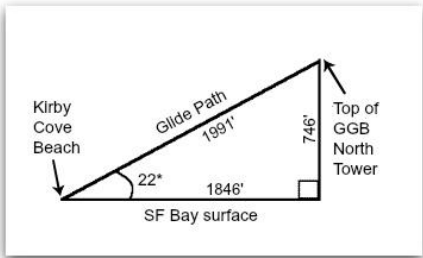
I met Dash at Battery Spencer at 7:07 PM. With my binoculars I saw the be-winged Dak atop the North Tower. *Wow! There he is with his wing-set. It looks like he is really going to do this. Is he going to fall like a winged boulder?*

Then he leapt. He glided like a giant black raptor. He curved a little and quickly came towards us. Fast. Very fast. And, he zipped right by us with a tight-lipped grin. *Wow! It's working. He's zooming right along!*

Dak, however, overshot Kirby Cove Beach and disappeared into a fog bank to the west. *Where'd he go?*

Dash and I never found him that evening. We just assumed that he glided a few hundred yards out to sea. Since he had a wet suit and life jacket on, we figured that he would be ok and float back in. And tomorrow he would tell us the astonishing details.

However, later, on the 10:00 PM local news, the Chinese American anchorwoman led off the broadcast with: "Wing-suited man crashes into Point Bonita Lighthouse and dies."



Click [here](#) to return to story.

**A PSECRET PSOCIETY PSHORT PSTORY**



**by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | APRIL 2015**

**Vermont Street**

by Mike Bozart

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We, Monique (Agent 32) and I (Agent 33), decided to check out San Francisco's second-most curvy street – the largely unheralded Vermont Street – before the Giants-Padres (MLB) game on Wednesday, August 24, 2011. I remember thinking at that time: *A psecret psociety pshort pstory [sic] could come out of this.* And, of course, I had my DAR (Digital Audio Recorder) running on a fresh charge.

It was a quiet, uneventful, still-foggy, noontime, mid-week N Judah train ride from our two-star Outer Sunset motel to the subterranean Civic Center MUNI station. Once there we exited and walked up to Market Street to the sound of drums and the sight of beaming sunlight. *Darn, I preferred the fog and overcast sky.*

At the route 19 bus stop on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, we saw the source of the percussive reverberations: a bright-red-vested street musician with a dozen miniature drums of various types strapped to his body. *What an odd act. Only in San Francisco.*

The 40-something, brown-bearded, portly Caucasian dude billed himself as Beat the Con-Un-Drum. He actually seemed to have some rhythm. I placed several silver coins in his black top hat. *Maybe import him to a Timbers [MLS] match in Portland.*

Then a mid-to-late-60-ish, white-haired, Caucasian guy of slight build, sporting an SF (Giants) baseball cap, walked up to the bus stop. Monique surveyed him. I spoke first.

“Going to the game tonight?”

“Yep, yep, yep. Malloy never misses a home game. Well, not since the big earthquake.” *Wow! It's him. The real Malloy.* [The Mr. Malloy character also features in the novella *Mysterieu of San Francisco* as well as the short story *A Search for Sidle on N.*]

“The one in 1906, Mr. Malloy? Hey, I'm just kidding. Just having a laugh. We'll be there, too. Great to see you again after nineteen years.”

“Likewise and wise-like,” Malloy said. “So, where are you two wily wascals [sic] going now?”

“We're going to check out Vermont Street – the serpentine section,” I said. “Ever been there?”

“Many times. Many, many times. We used to roll old bowling balls down that street back in '79. We invented a game.

Even had a league. The Potrero Hill Potatoes was our team's name." *Huh?*

"The Potrero Hill Potatoes?" I asked out of bemusement.

"Yep, yep, yep. We would call our heavily gouged bowling balls potatoes, as they would wobble like misshapen spuds. Yep, yep, yep."

"Ok. So, how did the game work?" I was very curious to know what kind of street game a younger Malloy would partake in.

"It was uh ... well, it was kind of like bowling, but with just one pin at the end of the run. Play would start about a hundred feet [30 meters] south of 20<sup>th</sup> Street, just before the switchbacking descent. Yep, yep, yep. We would chalk a foul line across the street. The object was to bowl your team's ball down the street, alternating bowlers, in as few bowls as possible to set up for the first easy shot at the lone pin. Whenever the ball touched – or jumped – the curb, it was out of bounds and a chalk mark was scratched where the ball struck or jumped the curb. The next bowl would then be from that spot, and so on until someone knocked down the pin at the bottom of the zig-zigging slope." *Wow!*

"Sounds pretty cool, Malloy," I said.

"As in K-E-W-L? That's the hepcat way to spell it. I invented that spelling long before the hipsters of today." *I doubt that, but I won't challenge him on it.*

"Ok, I'll make a note of that." I then looked down and saw the green light on the DAR (Digital Audio Recorder) inside my shirt pocket. *Excellent. It's on. We got that recorded.*

"Let me tell you something. [I immediately thought of the Durutti Column song when he said that.] Yep, it was a helluva game. We would hoot and holler. The neighbors despised us at first, but we won most of them over; they became epic all-leaguers." *Epic all-leaguers?*

"How did your team do?" *I bet Malloy was on the misfit team.*

"We won a few Saturday night extra-spatials." [*sic*] *What the hell did he just say?*

"Extra-spatials or extra-specials?" I calmly asked, seeking some clarification.

“Yep, yep, yep. We lost in the quarter-finals, though. Won a ribbon or something. I think Ed has it now. Late at night was the only safe time to bowl.”

“I see. Did any bowling balls ever hit any people, cars or houses?”

“No, not that I am aware of. Bowlers were spaced up and down the hill, wearing thick gloves and steel-toed shoes. However, we did lose a ball one night. I never heard it hit anything. It just quietly disappeared in a hairpin turn.”

“Did that cost your team a penalty? Did your team have to forfeit the match?”

“Yeah, I think we lost that round. Yep, yep, yep.” *He sure still loves to say, ‘yep, yep, yep’. Nothing has changed on that count. It must drive his wife insane. Or, maybe he has no wife now.*

The orange-and-white, freshly washed MUNI bus pulled up to the bus stop. We all got on, but Malloy sat up front and we drifted to the back. *Maybe we should have sat behind him and just kept the DAR running. There’s a novel in that guy. Make that three. At least.*

Malloy got off at Mariposa. Monique, who had been mute thus far, then spoke up.

“I wonder what his life story is, Parkaar.” [my ailing alias]

“Oh, it’s probably an interesting tale, Monique. A most propitious tale, no less.” *What?*

“Propitious?”

“Yeah. You know, he won the state lottery back in ’90 or ’91. That lucky bastard.” I chuckled. “But, he likes to appear near-destitute as he wanders around San Francisco, muttering ‘yep, yep, yep.’ What a life.”

“Ah, well, there goes the rich man in disguise,” Monique said as she looked back at Malloy one last time as the bus pulled away.

“Yep, yep, yep,” I said as Malloy-esque as I could manage.

Monique laughed. “You almost sound like him.”

“Well, maybe in good time.” *‘Good’ time?*



We had a chuckle and then quieted down. It was a splendid day by the bay (even if the sun was too bright now for my liking).

Two minutes later, I pulled down on the stop-request cable. The sign illuminated and the bell dinged.

“Well, this is our stop, Agent 32.” *He obviously has his DAR on. That’s the only time he calls me ‘Agent 32’.*

We got off at 20<sup>th</sup> Street. We were now on Rhode Island Street. Vermont Street was only two blocks to the west.

“Well, Monique, it’s just a short walk from here.”

“Ok, lead the way, Parkaar.”

“I like how you pronounced the Dutch double-ah, sexy Agent 32.”

“You always say that, 33.” *She’s right. I’ve probably worn that groove out. I’ve worn everything out. My mind is worn out. My time is worn out.*

“Are you sure that your great maternal grandfather wasn’t Dutch, Monique?”

“Maybe Spanish or Chinese, but probably not Dutch.”

Soon we were on Vermont Street, looking down at the series of curves through the cypress trees. *What an über-super-duper [sic] street.*

“Well, this is it, 32: the other curvy street in San Francisco that some say is more crooked than the famous Lombard Street on Russian Hill. Want to walk down it?”

“Sure. But, let me take a picture here first.”

“Yeah, sure, go ahead. It’s some view.”

Monique then got her cell phone out of her handbag and snapped a few pics at the top of the hill. We walked down the sidewalk to the bottom of the curvaceous section, occasionally stopping to snap some more photos.

“What is that green space over there, 33?”

“It’s McKinley Square. Want to check it out?”

“Sure. Why not? We’ve got time, right?”

“Yeah, plenty of time before the gates open for the game.”

We then began walking up a trail that roughly paralleled the sinuous section of Vermont Street. About halfway up, Monique stopped, needing a water break. She gulped down some mineral water from Iceland. (I noticed the text on the bottle.)

While Monique was drinking the Icelandic glacier water, I looked down at an evergreen shrub. There seemed to be something bulging under its mulch. I bent down and brushed the mulch and thin layer of earth away to reveal a third of an old, black bowling ball. I used a nearby stick to dig around it. Three excavating minutes later, I had the ball extricated.

I held up the old, chipped, black bowling ball like a trophy and made a pronouncement. “Well, Agent 32, I truly believe that this is the one that got away from Malloy’s gang.”

“Maybe so, 33. Does it have any deep gouges in it?”

I twirled it around in my hands, and sure enough it had some chasms of missing plastic.

“It sure does,” I said, noticing a jet flying overhead at a low altitude. *Wonder if any of the passengers on that airliner can see me. If so, are any of the window-seat passengers now saying to a middle-seat passenger, ‘There’s some guy holding up a bowling ball down there.’ Oh, why do I think such ridiculous things?*

“Yes, I would bet that that is Malloy’s missing bowling ball,” Monique said. *That that.*

“Yeah, this has got to be the one that went AWOL [absent without leave] thirty-two years ago.”

“It really does look about three decades old, Parkaar.”

“What should I do with it, 32?”

“I’d just leave it right there, 33.”

“Oh, I know ... I’ll leave it in the playground.”

“A small child may get hurt by it.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right, 32. Hmmm ... I’ll just let it roll down this open area towards US 101.”

“Are you crazy, Agent 33?! It might hit a hiker or jogger. It could be rolling fast enough to kill someone. Do you want to

be charged with murder for some silly stunt and serve ten years in a California prison?"

"Uh, no, I most certainly don't, Monique. But, I don't see anyone – not a soul ... anywhere." *And, he's a safety guy?*

"You're not really going to do it, are you?" *Please don't.*

"I think it will be ok. There's no one in harm's way. And, there's no chance of it reaching the freeway. It will be fun to video it bouncing down the dusty slope." *Fun? He's getting loonier by the minute.*

Monique sighed and relented. "Ok, go ahead. But, if it strikes and kills someone ..."

"Yep, yep, yep." *Sheez.*

We watched the old, deformed bowling ball bounce down the nearly grassless, barren hillside, spinning up a cloud of trailing dust. It then careened off a cedar tree trunk near the bottom of the slope and disappeared into some low brush. *Thank God that no one got hit by it. I hope that he's done with the crazy stunts now.*

"It's gone now, 33."

"Maybe someone will find it in 2043." *2043? Why 2043? No, don't even ask. / Probably way before then, but who knows?*

- Game Note: SDP 1 SFG 2

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



GLEN PARK GIRL by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | SEP 2016

Glen Park Girl  
by Mike Bozart  
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It was a sunny Monday afternoon in June of 1992 at the Glen Park BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) station. The time was around four o'clock. I had just returned to the station via San Francisco Muni bus route 36 (Teresita), having done some hiking and scouting up on Mount Davidson. I was thinking of having a small 28<sup>th</sup> birthday party up there in a few weeks.

As soon as I cleared the turnstile to enter the fare area of the platform, a Japanese-appearing female with purple-highlighted hair, probably 21 to 24 years old, accosted me.

"Hey, you like get high?" [sic] she brazenly asked in chopped English. *What the hell? Is this a setup by BART police? Or, is she a prostitute? Better answer carefully.*

"Uh, maybe," I mumbled, even though no one was in earshot. *Hope this isn't a sting. Was that recorded? Is she wearing a wire?*

"If you help me to boyfriend, we get high," [sic] she clarified. *So, she has a stoner boyfriend, and is too stoned to figure out how to get to him.*

"Ok, I'll help you," I stated. "Where does your boyfriend live?"

"We live in the Oakland," [sic] she said while twirling her hair.

"What part of Oakland?" I asked, doubting a workable reply.

"In west of that Oakland," [sic] she answered with a smile. *She's really cute. Lucky dude. I wonder how they met.*

"Ok, you need to take a train to the West Oakland station."

"Yes. Thank you, sir."

Just then an eight-car Richmond-bound train slid into the station. A pressure wave of air from the tunnel blew her hair across her face. *Such a cutie. A baked cutie.*

"We can take this train," I said.

She followed me and we boarded the seventh car. We sat down together in the third seat on the right. The car was only 25% full.

"Oh, by the way, my name is Mike," I announced from the window seat. "What's yours?"

"I'm Sayuri. My name means lily. I am from Okinawa. My boyfriend was in United States Navy. We marry very soon."  
[sic] *Oh, I get it now. She was probably a 'base girl'.*

"I see. Very nice. Congratulations in advance."

"Thank you."

"You're most welcome, Sayuri."

"Mike, is your red hair natural?" she then asked, seeming genuinely unsure.

"Yes, it's natural. Irish genes. Is your purple shade natural?"

She laughed. "Of course not! You silly boy, Mike." [sic]

"Many say that."

Sayuri giggled. "I like a guy with sense of humor. Serious type no fun. [sic] My boyfriend is a joker like you." *Maybe he laughs as he shoots people. Why'd I think that?*

The train slithered into the 24<sup>th</sup> Street Mission station. More people got on than got off. The train was now 32% full. Maybe 33%.

"Tell me, what does your boyfriend do in Oakland?" I asked as a Latino dude sat behind us.

"He grow weed." [sic] *Wow! She sure is loose with her tongue. Boyfriend needs to have a talk with her.*

"Oh, I see. Green for green." *Huh?*

"Green for green? What does that mean, Mike?"

"Oh, I don't know, Sayuri. I just like playing with words."

"You write book, Mike?" [sic]

"Maybe someday. Just phrases for now." *What?!*

"Just phrases for now? Mike, you sound mental!" She then had another laugh as the train screeched into 16<sup>th</sup> Street Mission.

Once again, it was a net increase of passengers. Our car was now 42% full.

As the train rolled out, I suddenly thought about seismic activity. "It would suck if an earthquake happened right now, as we are underground," I said.

"Yes, very terrible," Sayuri replied. "We have earthquakes in Japan."

We were then silent for a few minutes. Then the train zipped into Civic Center station. A net wash: The train remained 42% full.

"This is where I normally get off," I said. "I live on Hyde Street, about halfway up Nob Hill. But, I'll stay onboard with you to make sure that you get to the right station."

"Oh, thanks, Mike. I still new to BART train. *[sic]* And, remember, we get high. It's primo shit, man!" *Spoken just like an Oaksterdammer. [sic]*

I just smiled and the conversation died. A couple of minutes later we were pulling into Powell Street station. This was a big net gain. Our car was now 75% of capacity.

At the next station, Montgomery Street, all of the seats filled up. And at Embarcadero, they were standing in the aisle.

"Remember the long tunnel?" I asked Sayuri.

"Is this where we go under the water?"

"Yes, this is where we go under San Francisco Bay for two miles." [3.2 kilometers]

"The worst time for earthquake," Sayuri said with a frightened face.

"But, since we thought of it happening, it won't."

"What kind of philosophy is that, Mike?"

"I don't know, Sayuri, but so far it has worked."

"Are you superstitious, Mike?"

"Only in this Transbay Tube."

"Look. I cross my fingers like you Americans do." *What cute petite fingers. Ah, and there's her engagement ring. I wonder where they'll get married. Probably in a hot tub in Marin.*

After a few minutes we shot out of the tunnel into the industrial west side of Oakland. It was still a sunny day as the train eased into the West Oakland station.

“Well, here’s your stop, Sayuri.”

“Yes, this it. *[sic]* I recognize it.”

“Listen, I’m just going to stay on the train.” *Huh?*

“You not like get high with us? *[sic]* You helped me. Now you get reward.”

“No, that’s ok. I’m going to take care of some business further up the line.” *He’s lying. Why is he afraid to join us? / I wonder if she believed that. I don’t want to show up with the dude’s fiancée at some clandestine grow house. No, it’s just too risky. He would wonder how we met, and probably suspect some funny business.*

“Well, here; have this, Mike,” Sayuri said as she handed me a lavender-colored, bulging, miniature envelope from her fuchsia purse.

I put it in my front pants pocket. “Thanks,” I said. *I wonder what’s in there.*

She stepped into the aisle and made her way off the crowded train. At the doorway she paused to wave goodbye. Then the doors slid shut. *Well, that’s that.*

The train soon took off for downtown Oakland. I waved as my car passed Sayuri, but I wasn’t sure if she saw me, as she had just turned for the steps. *I wonder how life will turn out for her. Hope they don’t get busted. Hope they don’t overdo it and get addicted.*

I stayed on the train to El Cerrito Plaza. There I got off and began walking west on Fairmont Avenue. I then plucked Sayuri’s envelope from my front jean pocket as I strided down the sidewalk. I carefully opened it. *Ah, just as I suspected: a nice hydroponic bud. Need to get some rolling papers and a lighter.*

At a corner convenient store (San Pablo Avenue), I got what I needed. I then continued to Carlson Boulevard, where I turned left. In a tenth of a mile (161 meters) I was going around a guardrail barricade and beginning the Cerrito Creek Path. I continued west through the eucalyptus trees to



Creekside Park, where I was able to ford the shallow creek on stepping stones. On the other side, the trail led up Albany Hill, linking the dead ends of Jackson and Taft Streets.

My timing was propitious. When I arrived at the summit, I was the only one there. San Francisco Bay was glistening in the late afternoon sun. Though, a fog bank was already engulfing and passing the Golden Gate Bridge, grasping for Angel Island.

I rolled a joint (marijuana cigarette), sparked it, and took a deep draw. *Man, it don't get any better than this. [sic] This is super-sublime. What a view. Marvelously majestic.*

I then opened up Sayuri's homemade tiny envelope all the way. There was some Japanese on the inner side:

いつか今かもしれません  
*Itsu ka ima kamo shiremasen.*  
[translation: Sometime could be right now.]

I would take it all in until a troupe of mid-30s Asians and Caucasians arrived for the approaching sunset. I graciously yielded the prime spot to them. *Never good to be a view hog. Time to get moving along.*

The BART ride back to Civic Center station was a stream of pleasant thoughts. *It's not as insipid as it often appears. There's still magic in this world. Jon Anderson [of Yes] once drove a milk truck. And, when you least expect it ... Shazam! It leaps out. It's not all mapped-out. Life's mystery remains. Assumptions are inevitable, but boy can they be wrong. Beautifully wrong. Blissfully incorrect. Well, every once in a while. This day's a keeper. Must make some notes.*

Once back at my studio apartment at 737 Hyde Street, I placed Sayuri's flattened envelope in a Zen koan book.

**another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory**



by Mike Bozart (Agent 33)      ..|.|.|..      November 2016

**PhragMeant**

by Mike Bozart  
[Edition 1717]  
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One cool November afternoon, way back in 1992, when I somehow managed to live in über-expensive San Francisco (CA, USA), I stumbled upon a small, scruffy convenience store/head shop/florist on Geary Boulevard in the Outer Richmond area. It was on the corner of an avenue in the high 30s, but I forget the exact one now. The store's exterior was decidedly nondescript and passively rundown. I remember thinking: *How does a ragtag operation like this make enough money to afford the high rent? Maybe it has been owned by the same family for generations.*

I pulled open the heavy steel door, looked around, and headed for the soft drink cooler, as I was thirsty from walking from Spreckels Lake in Golden Gate Park (a remote-control model sailboat regatta). After grabbing a bottle of Gatorade, I turned and headed for the front counter. Out of the corner of my left eye, I saw an Asian man topped by a brown beret in his mid-40s sitting behind a small display. I stopped and turned my 28-year-old redhead and saw an array of small pill bottles on the glass shelves. *What in the world is this guy selling? This must be the head shop part of the store.*

I walked over to his counter. "Hello, what are we selling today?" I asked him as he looked up at me.

"PhragMeant," he said with a grin. *Fragment? What a crazy name. I bet it's some kind of synthetic marijuana knockoff.*

"Ah, artificial weed in a bottle," I posited.

"No, it not marijuana. It much better." [sic]

"Is it legal?" I asked as I caught his eye.

"Totally legal. Old Chinese natural remedy with the postmodern deconstruct." *What did he just say?*

"Ok, could I see a bottle?"

He then reached into the display case, plucked a white pill bottle, and handed it to me. I read the label, which was actually spelled *PhragMeant*. I had an internal chuckle. *What joker came up with such a daft spelling? Was it him?*

"So, what does this PhragMeant stuff do?" I asked.

"It give you fragmented clues to higher meaning. No boring long sentence. Your mind span the gaps. No side-effects reported. Many happy customer. All like. Only \$19.95." [sic] *Twenty bucks for some high-strength aspirin? What a racket.*

"Fragmented clues to higher meaning, eh?" *This guy could have been a Beat poet.*

"If not satisfy, return unused portion for full refund." [sic] *Oh, what the hell. Let's give it a whirl.*

"Ok, you sold me. I'll take a bottle." *Hope it's not toxic.*

"Thank you, sir," he said as he began to ring me up on his small Casio cash register. *I sure was an easy sell. He probably knew that I was on every sucker list.*

"How long do the effects last?" I asked as I rotated the plastic bottle in my right hand.

"Only three hour." [sic]

"Do I take it on an empty or full stomach?" *I hope this isn't emetic like those damn morning glory seeds back in '83. I wonder where Chuck Markey is now. Is he dead now like Frank? [Agent 107] Or, did he hit the bigtime? Did he marry his Southern belle and settle into a genteel existence? Did he have another automobile accident? Though, that one on Sharon Road on that cold February night wasn't his fault.*

"Take it both ways." *What a cryptic answer.*

I left the little shop with my bottle of PhragMeant, my blue Gatorade, and a lone deep-red rose that I bought with the intention of giving to some strange single girl at random. I wasn't sure if I would actually do it, though.

I marched north one long block to Clement Street. The sky had become mostly gray while I was in the corner store. At 40<sup>th</sup> Avenue, I took an inviting foot trail beneath the windswept overstory. Only 40 feet (12.2 meters) in, I stopped behind a large bush and popped down one of the white PhragMeant pills. It was slightly chalky. I chased the aftertaste away with the Gatorade. *Well, we're committed to something now. I wonder how strong it will be.*

The well-worn dirt path led me right to the Legion of Honor, an art museum in Lincoln Park. It happened to be open with a free afternoon admission. *This is too good to pass up. I feel ok – not zooming out of my gourd by any stretch. Yeah, let's check this out. I bet I just ate an acetaminophen tablet. I bet nothing happens. Another yawner.*

I walked into the courtyard and immediately saw a casting of Rodin's famous sculpture *The Thinker*. Surprisingly, no one was gathered around it, so I moved up close to the striking artwork. *Wonder what Auguste was thinking when he created this. Thinking about thinking. Upon further pondering. The human dilemma. No escape. Thoughts she knew. He didn't. And then a turn for the worse. Oh, m'eyes!*

*[sic] The pill. Fragmented thoughts. Remember. Once. It. Starts. Camille Claudel. Dark despair. That growing paranoia. Reclusive years. Deceptive dementia. Unaccepted initially. But, this time. And that time. And not enough time. Dithering differences. A way out. Or, just a trapdoor. A dank dungeon. The slow months. The low-flying moths. The steel-gray war machine. Stupid with fear. Cracks and chips. Crumbling decades. Vanishing memories. Forgotten notions. Gone.*

"Sure is a nice day to think away, isn't it?" an Asian lass in her early 20s suddenly remarked to me. *Whence did she come? She's probably an art student.*

"Quite," I replied. *Quite cute.*

"What do you think *The Thinker* was thinking?" she asked.

"Was?"

"Ok, 'is'." *He's baked.*

"Yeah" left my mouth before I could construct, or attempt to construct, a coherent sentence.

"Yeah, well, what do you think?" *Mind fast. Time slow. Pretty young lady. Question. Answer. Quick.*

"PhragMeant," I said like a robot. *Fragment? He's on something good. I want it, too.*

"A fragment of what?" she asked, appearing to be very intrigued by my inebriated state of mind.

"A rose," I said as I handed it to her.

She took it and smiled. "Why, thank you, sir!"

"Welcome," emanated from my lips, but the source was deep in my discordant neural network.

"How did you get here?" she then asked.

"From there?" I sought clarification.

"Tell me; where is there?"

I pointed south. "Corner store. Back counter."

"What corner store?"

I knew that I would never be able to satisfactorily give her directions in fragments; thus, I looked around. No one appeared to be watching us. I then reached into my jeans pocket to extract the pill bottle. I handed it to her.

She took it with her small left hand. "Thanks!" She seemed to know the score, and quickly swallowed a PhragMeant tablet. She chased it with her mineral water. *Now what?*

The fog was billowing in now. It felt like I was in a dreamscape. *Pleasantly surreal. Caution: mishap ahead. But, so far, so much to the good. So good, so much to afar. Anomalous day. Wondering astray.*

“Hey, we should go somewhere,” she then suggested.

“Right,” I replied, sounding like a recording.

“It won’t be good if we are both fragmented here. So, what’s your name?”

“Mike.” *So high. Now. So something. Else. Too.*

“I am Yùwén.” *You. Win.*

“Oh.” *Speech difficult. De-enunciated. [sic]*

“I am from Taiwan.” *Red skirt. Cardigan sweater. Nice style.*

“Ok.” *He sure is short on words. Massively fragmented.*

“Let’s take a short hike on the Lands End Trail.”

“Yeah” was as good as I could do.

We walked out with Yùwén leading the way. She turned left on 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue and I followed, feeling like a lost dog. Then we crossed El Camino Del Mar to arrive at the trailhead. *Step by step. Journey to nowhere. [sic]*

After walking less than 800 feet (244 meters), we arrived at a nice overlook with a commanding view of the Golden Gate Bridge and the Marin Headlands. *Splendid scene. That creeping fog. Those crashing waves. / I’m safe with him; he’s way too fragged [sic] to make an unwanted move ... or even a wanted one. Hee-hee.*

“So, Mike, tell me what brought you to the museum today?” Yùwén asked. “Was it the free admission?”

“Just walking,” I replied.

“Just walking?!” She then guffawed. “You studied that Rodin sculpture for over 15 minutes, Mike. Yes, I saw you. You must be a big fan of Rodin.”

“Just looking.”

“Just looking?!” Yùwén laughed again. “Listen, Mike, how long until I get fragmented like you?”

“Maybe five minutes. Maybe four.”

“Ah, very soon. The countdown is on.” *Can’t wait!*

Then the conversation ceased momentarily. We gazed at the Pacific Ocean. A large cargo ship was headed west.

“Where do you think that ship is going, Mike?”

“That ship?”

“Yes, ‘that’ ship.”

“Far away,” I replied, proud of my answer.

“Mike, you are no help.” She then laughed once more. It was a very hearty laugh. Her right elbow bumped my left side.  
*She – from good family. / He – silly boy.*

“Feeling how?” I asked.

“Yes. The effects. Now. Ok. Commencing.” *Oh boy.*

“Safe here,” I stated as I looked around.

“Yes. On land. Not in cold sea.” *What a thought!*

“Away from cliff.” *Certainly!*

“Good,” Yùwén said, looking a bit zapped.

“Yes,” I muttered.

“Yes? ... to what?” *She’s fragmented.*

“Here,” I said calmly.

“And now,” she concluded.

Gusts of wind buffeted our grassy knoll. The fog increased in opacity. I laid my torso down, feeling drowsy all of a sudden.

“Just resting,” I stated.

“Sure” was the last thing I heard Yùwén say.

I fell asleep for two hours. When I awoke, I was in dense fog. It was almost dark. And Yùwén was gone. *Was it just a dream?*

I returned to the corner store in a stupor. Once inside, I strided over to the Chinese male florist.

“Sir, did I get a rose in here, say around one o’clock?”

“You sure did,” the effeminate florist stated.

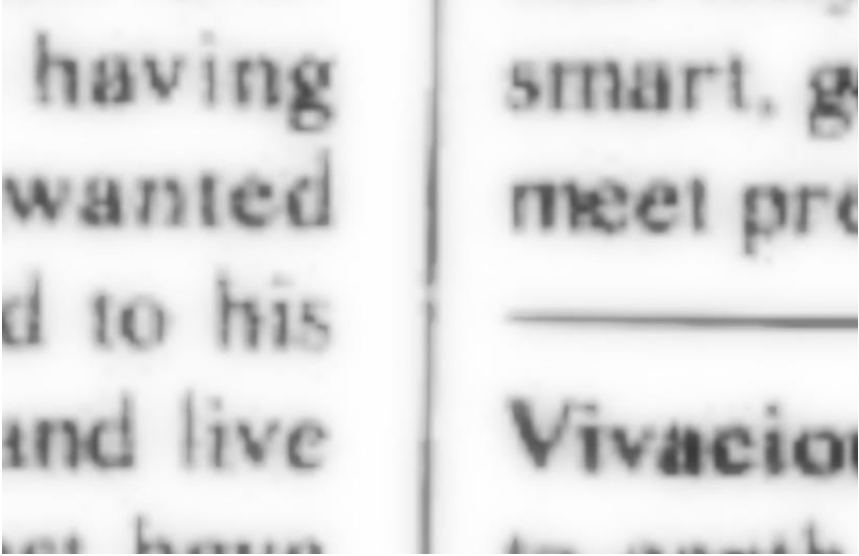
“Thanks,” I said.

“Who got that cerise fresh-cut?” he asked.

“A young lady who I met at the Legion of Honor.”

“Was her name Yùwén?”

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



The Classified Ad by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | MAY 2017

The Classified Ad  
by Mike Bozart  
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December 1986. I was 22 and living alone in an older but by no means historic, though recently renovated, one-bedroom apartment at 235 Maryland Avenue (now razed). It was just south of the old Sunset Park neighborhood (a dicey area at the time) in Wilmington (NC, USA). I had been living there for several months. After getting settled in, I was ready to take a trip to somewhere new. When I saw the Piedmont Airlines ad in the local newspaper with discounted airfares to the West Coast, I jumped at it. A day later I had my tickets. I was now all set for my first visit to San Francisco (CA, USA).

On Tuesday morning, the 30<sup>th</sup> – the eve of New Year's Eve – I flew from ILM (Wilmington) to CLT (Charlotte) to SFO (San Francisco). I had a whopping \$105 in my wallet for the three days and nights in the city by the bay. And, not a single credit card. Yes, I was astoundingly naïve and quite foolish.

At 3:13 PST the Boeing 737 landed on a wet asphalt runway. Twenty-seven minutes later, I emerged from the lower level domestic arrival area. Assorted motor vehicles were scurrying and splashing about. I had a dull headache (later diagnosed to be related to aqueductal stenosis). It was raining, cold, and already almost dark. With an occluded mind, I considered my transportation options. *Hmmm ... Where is that darn MUNI bus stop? Hey, there's a taxi! No, can't take a cab – that would eat up half of the money. Would love to just lie down somewhere and pop some aspirin.*

Then I saw a green van for a lower-tier hotel stopped at the concrete median. My line of thinking suddenly changed. *That's a free shuttle to a nearby budget hotel. Why not just 'splurge' the first night? Yeah, let's. Probably get a free breakfast, too. Then go ultra-cheap the next two nights. Maybe stay in a hostel downtown.*

I walked up to the van. The front door was open. *Here goes.*

"Any vacancies at the hotel?" I asked the late-50-ish, rotund, African American driver.

"Plenty of rooms available, sir," he kindly answered.

"How much is the rate?" I queried.

"The cheapest room with taxes is \$48.48 tonight, sir. That includes a complimentary continental breakfast." *That's*

*almost half of my loot. But, a warm, dry room with a clean bed sure would be nice right about now.*

“Ok, you sold me.” I promptly stepped into the van and took a seat in the back. There were only three travelers inside, all having dense, opaque, rainy-day thoughts. *Did I leave the stove on?*

After checking in at this frugal name-forgotten Burlingame inn, I flopped down on the queen-size bed and slept for three hours. Around eight o’clock I walked over to a convenience store and bought a jug of tea and a frozen pizza. I paid the Arab-looking man \$4.52. *Ok, the first day here has cost exactly \$53. Only fifty-two dollars left. Must go much cheaper the next two. Have already blown over half of my wad o’ cash.*

The raindrops slowed on the window pane as I ate the cardboard-crust microwaved pizza. After watching the ten o’clock news, I was lights-out.

A nightmare soon engulfed me. I was completely broke with 24 hours to go. It felt so real. Too real. *Prescient?*

Early the next morning after a nice hot shower, I indulged – or overindulged – at the free breakfast bar in the lobby. I must have consumed over 2,500 calories in carbs and sugars. I was completely refueled now.

At noon I checked out of the hotel and moseyed over to Max’s Restaurant on Old Bayshore Highway. I just had ice water and a baked potato with butter and Worcestershire sauce (still a cheap favorite). Yes, I was living it up on the peninsula. Another high roller. Ok, maybe not. Even close.

Well, the middle-aged, brown-haired Caucasian waitress was quite convivial. She told me that she had seen a lot of change in sleepy Burlingame over the past decade. Despite my bill coming to a grand total of \$1.93, I left her a \$2 tip. *Forty-eight dollars and seven cents left to cover forty-three hours and sixteen minutes. What does that come out to per hour? [\$1.11] A little over a dollar an hour. Got to be super-thrifty from here on out.*

As I sipped my water, I considered transportation options to downtown San Francisco. *A taxi? Nope. Even more expensive from here. The bus? Doubt there is a MUNI stop*

*in Burlingame. Oh, let's just go for it. Add a slice of risk. Live a little, sport. Write about it later. Well, if we don't die.*

At 1:11 PM my left thumb was getting wet. Yes, I was hitchhiking in a downpour in my lurid, highlighter-green, hooded K-Mart raincoat at the US 101 freeway entrance ramp. And, boy was it ever chilly. It was a damp coldness that reached the phalanges. *How long until I get a ride? Will it be some homicidal nut-job? Or, will the local cops pick me up? Another red-haired freak trying to get to Frisco. Book him, Danno.*

To my astonishment, a tan sedan pulled up just four minutes later. The passenger-side window lowered. The driver was a 60-ish, white-haired, beret-topped Caucasian man in a royal-blue jogging suit. *Is he some old lech cruising for a twink? Hope not.*

"Where are you headed?" he asked.

"Downtown," I replied.

"Ok, get in," he implored.

We made small talk as he motored north on the Bayshore Freeway (US 101). The rain ceased as we paralleled the bay, but the skies remained decidedly overcast. It turned out that Gary was an apartment landlord heading to Market Street for a lease signing. I told him that I was on a limited budget, seeking ultra-cheap lodging. Thus, he dropped me off in front of the old YMCA Hotel on Turk Street. I thanked him profusely. Gary wished me well before driving off into the gray mist. *That sure was nice of him. A free ride with no hassle. Serendipity, don't run away.*

I checked in at the turn-of-the-century-appearing front desk. I got two nights for a total of \$22.50. I suspected that the 30-something Caucasian lady reduced the rate for me. Maybe she could sense my forlornness. *Another lucky break.*

Over to the old-style elevator I marched. Upward the brass-trimmed car clanked. *Hope the cable doesn't snap. Or, an earthquake strike.*

Room 601 had a little desk, an ancient dresser and a well-worn single bed, which I sat down upon. *Excellent. Shelter is now taken care of for the remainder of the trip. Let's see ... I now have \$25.57 for food and drink for a day and a half.*

*Well, no more restaurants. Just hit a convenience store. Or better, hit a grocery store. So much cheaper. Need bus fare back to SFO on Friday morning. Must not drop below two dollars.*

I took an hour-long nap on the slightly lumpy bed. When I awoke my window was completely gray: The fog at 3:03 PM was incredibly dense; I couldn't even see the buildings across the street. *There's your classic pea-soup San Francisco fog. Such a strange town with weird weather. Would love to live here. Well, maybe someday. [I would live there for nine months in 1992.]*

My headache was long gone, but I now had a persistent cough. I hocked up a big green oyster. And then another. And another. *Oh, jeez ... Do I have walking pneumonia? Need to get groceries before it gets dark and rainy. Would be nice to check out Golden Gate Park, too. Maybe ask for directions.*

The desk clerk informed me that I could pick up the (route) 5 on McAllister Street. The bus stop was only two and a half blocks away.

Soon I was headed west on a MUNI electro-bus. At 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, I got off and took a muddy path over to an eerily serene Spreckels Lake. Then I wandered by the bison-less paddock to North Lake. And then, yet another squall moved in from the Pacific Ocean. *So much for this hike.*

I took another footpath from Chain of Lakes Drive to 47<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and was soon back on Fulton Street. The raw rain was arriving in sheets as I walked west on the multi-pooled sidewalk. In two blocks I was at La Playa. *Yey! There it is – Safeway. Just as she said.*

Inside the grocery store I briskly went. I bought a loaf of dill-rye bread, three tins of sardines and a half-gallon of tea. The total: \$7.57. *The bus ate a dollar and will eat another one going back. Will have \$16 left.*

While waiting at the bus stop at Cabrillo Street, my coughing worsened. I was spitting out green mucus left and right. Luckily, I was alone under the shelter. As I looked at the plastic seats, I noticed a free weekly publication that had been left for dead. Just as the bus arrived, I grabbed the discarded *SF Netherground* copy. *Reading material for the ride back. Wonder what the personal ads are like in this rag.*

I took a middle seat and flipped to the classified ads at the back of the thin 16-page newsprint periodical. There were the usual categories. Stuff for sale, including a real Mellotron. Services available – lots of exotic massage ads. And of course, the personals. Under the ‘Women seeking Men’ rubric was an intriguing four-liner:

SAF, 21, seeking SWM for a rarest reality.  
Unconventional lifestyle. No TV. No radio.  
Income is not an issue. Questionnaire first.  
Describe yourself in four words. [Box 241]

I read it again. And again. Well, I couldn’t stop reading it. *Wow! Too bad I don’t live out here. It would be worth it just to meet this chick.*

The bus stopped for a red light at Stanyan Street. The rain had now subsided, but darkness had moved in. A reflective-taped young Asian woman was jogging through the crosswalk. *Is that her? Ha! Boy, you really need to settle your mind down.*

I exited the bus on Market Street about 15 minutes later. My eyes immediately started to scan the dark, wet, gray sidewalks. And there it was at Golden Gate Avenue and Taylor Street: a payphone. And, even better – an available payphone. *Just want to hear her voice. I can afford it. Already have food, drink and shelter covered.*

I deposited 35 cents into the vertical slot. Two seconds later I heard a dial tone. *Good. This phone isn’t broken.*

My right index finger depressed the 11 digits. I heard a recording that prompted a box number. I had memorized it.

Two seconds later I heard a young Asian lady’s voice: “Please do what the ad stated. Thank you. Chanda.” *Huh? That’s it?*

And then, I heard a beep. *Ok, that’s the cue. Talk now, fool.*

“Hello Chanda. My name is Mike. Tomorrow is open for me if you want to conduct your questionnaire over coffee somewhere in downtown. I’m staying at the YMCA Hotel.

Not sure what the phone number is. Ok, describe myself in four words: Not here for long.” *Well, it’s the truth.*

I placed the black plastic handset back in the U-shaped chrome cradle. *Well, I did it. Won’t ever hear from her I bet. But, I heard her soft voice. Wonder what she looks like. She sounded like she is petite.*

Back to the YMCA Hotel I trudged. There were some neo-hippie New Year’s Eve revelers in the lobby. They were all getting ready to go somewhere.

“Where are you guys off to?” I asked the goateed, long-blond-hair-in-a-ponytail dude in his mid-20s.

“Oakland, man,” he replied with a stoned-out-of-his-gourd expression. “The [Grateful] Dead are playing again at Kaiser [Convention Center] tonight. BART [Bay Area Rapid Transit] goes right there – Lake Merritt Station. You going?”

“No. I think that I may have walking pneumonia. But, you guys have fun.”

“Ok, we’ll spark one up for you at intermission.”

I chuckled. “Ok, thanks.”

The straggly, tie-dyed octet then shipped out. I went back to my room. The sardines on rye weren’t that bad.

I coughed and sputtered myself to sleep. The only dream that I recalled in the morning was that of a young Asian lady waving goodbye to me from the edge of a jungle cliff. I awoke just before hitting the ground. *Whew! Those caraway seeds are strong.* Internal chuckle.

Around nine o’clock I went down to the lobby for a free cup of coffee. It was vacant, save for a white guy of about 50 years who was holding his half-bald head. *He’s probably hungover. His new year arrived with a thud. And is still thudding.*

As I was passing by the front desk, the female clerk looked at me.

“Mr. Bozart, you have a message.” She then extended her left hand which was holding a small pink envelope.

I took it from her. “Thanks.”

“No problem. Happy New Year! Hope '87 is better than '86.”

“Likewise,” I replied as I headed for the elevator. *Wonder what this is. Let's keep the suspense going; read it back in the room.*

I unlocked the old deadbolt and sat down at the desk. I opened the envelope with my penknife and retracted the bifolded lavender pastel note. I silently mouthed:

*I will be in the back corner of the coffee shop at Golden Gate & Larkin at 11:00 AM with the questionnaire. - Chanda*

Disbelief consumed my psyche. *Wow! Guess I should take a shower and get presentable. Never expected this. I can afford two coffees. Hope she doesn't want anything else.*

At 10:47 I left my hotel room. It was mostly cloudy, but it wasn't raining as I walked down Hyde Street. I then turned right onto Golden Gate Avenue. In just a block I was looking across the street at the coffeehouse. *That was quick. Should I go in now? I'm probably five minutes early. She may not be there yet. Maybe wait three minutes.*

I watched the traffic lights cycle once more, and then I crossed the street. The java joint's aluminum-framed glass door opened easily. I peered to the back. And, there she was – an elfin, red-sweatered Asian lass in the rearmost corner.

Towards her I drifted. Chanda then looked up and waved. She was attractive, but not in the classic sense. I took a seat across from her in the ¾-of-a-circle brown booth. She already had the questionnaire in front of her.

“You must be Mike,” she plainly stated. *What is her story?*

“Yes, and you must be Chanda.” *Of course.*

"Indeed, I am." *She's cute.*

"Where are you from, if I may ask?" *He's inquisitive.*

"Cambodia. Just outside of Phnom Penh, the capital." *My Laos guess was close.*

"Oh, nice." *Has he been there?*

"Do you know any Khmer?" [the language of Cambodia]

"I'm afraid I don't." *He's never been to Cambodia.*

"I won't hold it against you this time." She then giggled strangely. *She's an odd one – an enticingly odd one.*

"Thanks." I smiled.

"Well, are you ready for the nine questions?" *Only nine? Good. This should be easy.*

"Sure. Only eight to go now, right?" *Huh?*

"Ah, you are a sly one." She waved her left index finger. "Question one: Could you live your life as an experiment?" *What?!*

"Well, I guess that it would depend on whom else was in the test tube with me." *Not bad.*

"Question two: How much external stimulation do you require?" *Where is this going?*

"Not that much. My mind constantly amuses me." *Good answer.*

"Question three: How do you rate your imagination?"

"Fairly high if I may answer honestly." *If? Hmmm ...*

"Question four: What would you think about a couple living in isolation from the modern world?" *Primitive. Is she recruiting for some off-the-grid cult?*

"With the right person, it might be just fine." *Might?*



“Question five: Do you want to be famous for something extremely unique?” *Like making morons vanish?*

“Sure, why not? As long as no one is getting violated or injured.” *Ok, that was a decent answer.*

“Question six: Would you agree that two people will always get bored with each other over time?” *She’s probing.*

“Um, no, not necessarily.” *Hmmm ... He stuttered.*

“Question seven: Would you consent to having a year of your life being recorded and documented?” *Is this some new art-form? I bet she’s an art student. Or, maybe a psychology student at SFSU. [San Francisco State University]*

“Depends on the end product.” *Fair answer.*

“Question eight: Could you live on a tiny island with someone like me?” *Ok, now she cuts to the chase.*

“Sure. You’re not a headhunter, are you?” *He’s a bit paranoid.*

“Question nine: Can humans transcend their evolutionary biology?” *Woah! What does she have in mind?*

“Let’s find out together.” *Nice brash answer.*

“Ok, that’s it. All done. Not that painful, was it?”

“Not at all. Is phase two on Phnom Aural?” [Cambodia’s tallest peak] *He knows?!*

“I’ll be getting back in touch with you. What is your mailing address?”

“I’ll jot it down for you. I live on the other side of this continent.”

She handed me her purple felt-tip pen. I printed my address on a coaster and handed it to her.

“Oh, you’re way over on the Atlantic side of North America.”

“Yep. Hey, would you like some coffee, Chanda?”

“Sure, Mike. Black but extra-sweet.”

“You got it. I’ll be right back.”

I returned with our coffee and retook my seat.

“Thanks.” She turned her head to gaze out the window.

I then noticed a scar under her left ear. I kind of liked it, but wondered what had happened. *Just ask her later.*

“So, am I the 500<sup>th</sup> interviewee, Chanda?”

“No, you’re number 501, Mike.” She had a chuckle. “I disqualified 80% of the respondents right from the start. Most couldn’t follow simple instructions. Your description was four words, just like I requested. So many went way over the limit. I just deleted their messages. Goodbye.”

“I see. Well, by ‘not here for long’ I meant that I will be gone tomorrow. I’ll be flying back home.”

“Oh, I’m leaving, too. On Sunday I’m gone. Don’t worry; I will contact you through the mail.”

“Can you give me a hint about what this is about? Are you looking for someone to live in a cavern with you and then write a novel about it?”

“Oh, Mike, you are very warm.” Chanda laughed again.

“You stated that income is not necessary. Who is picking up the tab?”

“My folks. They are filthy rich from export business.”

“I see.” *Ah, a free-to-roam-and-do-whatever rich girl.*

“Mike, it was great meeting you. But, I must go now. You were on time, unlike most, so you got extra points.” *Extra points? Yes, I’ll take all that I can get.*

“Ok, I’ll be awaiting your letter in my rusty mailbox.” *Rust on his mailbox? Why doesn’t he repaint it?*

“I will contact you. Chanda is not a liar.” *Third person. Nice. She’s something else.*

“I believe you. Well, this has been mega-interesting. It was so nice to meet the lovely lady behind the beguiling ad. Hope we meet again in the second round. Have a splendid New Year’s Day, Chanda.” *Lovely lady? Me? With my ugly scar? Hmmmm ...*

“You, too, Mike.” Chanda then got up and walked away. *What a strange, captivating, sexy thing she is.*

I would safely make it back to my apartment in Wilmington with \$2 in my wallet and 41 cents in my pocket.

An off-white envelope with a Cambodian postmark would arrive on February – Friday the 13<sup>th</sup> – 1987. The embossed card had just two words:

## **HONORABLE MENTION**

*Well, at least we didn’t come in second.*

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



**The Toothache** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | October 2017

**The Toothache**  
by Mike Bozart  
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Forty-nine-year-old John was out the door at dawn. It was a chilly 48° (Fahrenheit; 9° Celsius) morning. Low gray clouds and mist hovered over the Richmond District of San Francisco (CA, USA) on this date of November 21, 1954. Once on the 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue sidewalk, the sweater-clad, dark-haired Caucasian gent of average build thought: *No rain is forecast today. The fog should be gone soon. A good day to do some walking. Clear the mind. Maybe burn some belly fat off. Don't want to have to buy new pants. Sure could go for some hot coffee. Yeah, let's hit that joint on Lake Street. It's not that far away.*

Three long blocks later, John was at his intended java joint. It had just opened. The owner, an immigrant from Zadar (a city in present-day Croatia), was still taking the chairs off the red with gold speckles, Formica-topped, round tables.

"Good to see ya, John," the curly-brown-haired, thin, 50-ish, mustachioed café owner said. "A black coffee with just one lump of sugar?" *Wow! He remembers. Haven't sleepwalked in here in months. Does he not have that many customers?*

"Sure," John replied. *Wonder why Ivan emigrated from Yugoslavia to America. Probably to escape [Josip Broz] Tito and Soviet hegemony. Hell, I'd want to leave, too.*

"What brings you out so early on a Sunday?" Ivan asked.

"Oh, exercise, I guess," John answered. "Didn't want to sit around all day again." *And drink.*

"That's a good reason," Ivan concurred. "This new television thing is very passive. Just sit, watch, and eat."

"So true, Ivan."

Soon Ivan was placing a white porcelain cup of dark coffee down on the saucer in front of John. "Drink up," Ivan implored. "Don't let it get cold; that brings bad luck." *Must be some Eastern European superstition.*

John inhaled the *coffea arabica* aroma and took a big gulp. And then another. *This will wake me up and get me going.*

"How is it?" Ivan asked from across the small sitting area.

"Perfect: hot and strong. Good job, Ivan."

"Thank you, sir," Ivan said as he slid behind the counter.

“Ivan, I have a question for you,” John announced.

“I’ll answer only if it’s off the record,” Ivan replied with a compressed grin. *Off the record? Surveillance back home.*

John laughed for a few seconds. “Ok, here it is: You see a discarded commode on the curb. You could use one. It looks fine and still has all the parts intact. Do you take it?”

“Are you low on cash, John? If so, the coffee is on me.”

John chuckled. “No, I could go out and buy a new one. I just thought, well, if it’s still good, why not grab it and save some money?” *What a tvrdica! [miser in Croatian] No wonder he’s alone.*

“No, I wouldn’t advise it, John. There could be a rat or a snake hiding in it.” *Ouch!*

“Ok, thanks for your answer, Ivan. I’ll pass on that toilet.” John scratched his scalp as he took another swallow. Suddenly the pang hit with full fury. Ferociously. His misaligned wisdom tooth was raging again. *Yow! God Almighty it hurts! Did the hot coffee set it off? Darn! My dentist is closed today. All dentists in the city are closed today. What to do? Should I just get drunk to kill the pain? But, I’ll be hungover tomorrow morning and have to miss work again. No, that’s out. What about aspirin? Take half a bottle and start bleeding again? No, that’s out, too. Damn, that tooth hurts. Satan has occupied my mouth.*

Ivan saw John grimace. “Are you ok, buddy?”

“I’ve got a bad toothache, Ivan. It’s a back molar.”

“I have some clove oil,” Ivan offered. *Clove oil? Must be some Old World folk remedy. No thanks!*

“Uh, that’s ok, Ivan. I think the pain will subside once I start walking. Thanks anyway.” *He doubts its effectiveness.*

“Ok, suit yourself,” Ivan stated. *Another stubborn American.*

John then got up and paid for the coffee. He managed to force a somewhat normal facial expression as he said farewell to Ivan. *This guy is in some kind of severe pain. Well, I tried to help him.*

John continued walking north and was soon on the grounds of the Presidio (an old US Army fort). He continued trekking

northward on Wedemeyer Street and then on Battery Caulfield Road. There was hardly any automobile traffic. *This damn toothache seems to be subsiding a little. Let's just keep walking. Try to think of something else. Anything.*

At a eucalyptus-canopied Washington Boulevard, he turned left. *Wonder if Ike [President Eisenhower] can get the North Koreans to sign a peace treaty. Wouldn't expect any help from Russia. Wonder how the world is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Still an unsettled mess, I would eagerly bet. Wonder if World War III has occurred by 2020. Ow! The pain is back with a merciless vengeance. What did they do for toothaches in the old days? Ether and pliers? This pain is unendurable. Have to do something. Soon. Very soon.*

John stopped at a west-facing overlook. He faintly heard the surf and could occasionally see the Pacific Ocean through the wispy fog. *If only saltwater cured toothaches ...*

After a brief stop, John continued his agonizing northward journey. He was lost in thought. *That little café/souvenir shop is less than a mile [1.6 km] from here.*

Eighteen throbbing minutes later, John was in a small, window-walled, round building. He quickly found and bought a pre-stamped postcard from the 20-something female Chinese American clerk. After borrowing her pen, he scrawled a short message on the back. Then he dropped the *Greetings from San Francisco* postcard into the cast-iron mailbox. *Done with this toothache. Done with it all.*

John would jump from the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge's main span nine minutes later, and die almost instantly from impact trauma sustained from the 243-foot (74-meter), 70 MPH (113 km/h) fall. During the four seconds of freefall, John thought about another jumper. *'Well, Harold Wobber, [a World War I veteran who was the first Golden Gate Bridge suicide in 1937] this is where I got off, too. This is where I get permanent relief. This is where ...' <splat>*

The single sentence that was written on the postcard: *Absolutely no reason except I have a toothache.*

Note: This fictionalized vignette about John Thomas Doyle's last day is in memory of the late Russ Newsom, an original NoDa visual/video artist, sci-fi savant, and cogent contrarian.

another pSecret pSociety pshort pstory



**WEST PORTAL** by Mike Bozart (Agent 33) | November 2021

**West Portal**  
by Mike Bozart  
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After a brisk-to-bracing, misty-to-spritzly morning walk from the MUNI Route 28 Welcome Center bus stop to the south tower of the Golden Gate Bridge and an uneventful-save-for-the-sudden-boarding-of-a-dozen-or-so-very-excited-giggling-and-screaming-schoolgirls California Street cable car ride, Monique (latent Agent 32) and I (overt Agent 33) find ourselves seated at a sidewalk dining corral on West Portal Avenue in the southwest quadrant of San Francisco. It is a sparsity-of-patrons, earlier-engrossing-conversations-now-dissipated, late-lunch hour. The large Goat Hill cheese pizza slices are filling our breakfast-skipped empty tanks. Monique's pumpkin-orange Juice Portal (the adjacent establishment) turmeric concoction gets a thumbs-up reaction. Life was merely – and mutedly merrily – passing by under the low, pewter-gray sky on this quasi-auspicious late October Friday, our 10<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

“So, did you ever come out here in 1992?” [the year that I lived in the city by the bay] Monique asks as she rakes her slender, short, left-hand fingers through her medium-length, caramel-streaked, raven Filipina hair.

“No, never stopped here, hon. I just passed by this area many times on the K and M [MUNI light-rail] trains. Seems nice enough, though – not stratagorically [*sic*] hip like the Inner Sunset.” *Strata-gore-ick-ally? Huh?*

“Did you have lunch here with any charming Asian ladies?”

“Just with you now, dear. I only dated – briefly – one enigmatic lass, a Vietnamese college exchange student.” *What was her name? Where is she now? Saigon? 29 years ago. Wow! Almost three decades. What became of her? Did she become a Forex trader? A Bitcoiner? [sic] Did she keep that small piece of neosurreal art? Or promptly trash it? Bet I'm long forgotten now. She's probably happily married with two kids. A son and a daughter, I would wager. With a good, hardworking, faithful husband. Or, was there some tragedy? A fatal mishap? A terminal disease? The things one will never know. Jeez, why does my mind always gravitate towards such grim thoughts? Old, jaded, downcast, and bitter. Sounds like the name of a Central Coast [CA] microbrewery's thick-as-molasses stout dark beer.*

“Oh, how did the relationship end?” Agent 32 enquires as I catch her dark-chocolate-brown eyes. *Will he tell me the real reason? Hmmm ... I wonder.*

“Oh, it just fizzled out after five dates. When she announced that she was leaving the U.S. for good in September, [1992] I just thought: ‘Well then, there’s no future for us.’ It was kind of like she was politely ending it. Well, it appears that you liked the pizza.” *That sure was a quick change of subject. Hmmm ...*

“Yes, it was delicious. It was just what I needed: some carbohydrates for immediate walking energy. You can have the crust, bana.” [Filipino for husband]

I accept the 47° arc wedge of golden-crusty-topped dough. “Salamat, [Filipino for ‘thank you’] Agent 32.” *Hmmm ... ‘Agent 32’? Bet he’s recording this conversation for a future short story. The last one [The Tray] was unnecessarily vulgar. Hope he keeps it clean.*

“You look like you’re lost in thought, Agent 33. What are you thinking about?” *Need to get the mental locomotive back on the neural tracks to synapsosis. [sic]*

I rub a granule of sleep out of the inner corner of my left, oxidized-avocado-green eye, right-hand-brush my haircut-long-overdue, fading-crimson bangs off of my right eyebrow, and dryly announce: “There’s no earthly way for a square to be cut in half to yield two squares. The result is going to be either matching 2:1 rectangles, two right triangles, or a pair of mirror-image trapezoids.” *Sheez ... Why’d I ask? Only my dodoy. [a made-up-by-Monique Filipino slang term for me]*

“Only you would think of such on our long-overdue, return-to-the- [San Francisco] Bay-Area mini-vacation,” Monique broadcasts. *Bet he was thinking of that cute Latina housekeeper at the motel. [El Camino Inn in Daly City] Caught him leering at her like a perv. So pathetic. 57 and trying to flirt with a 27-year-old. ‘Oh, my silly old kano, [Filipino for American] give it a rest, please. You’re not going anywhere. And she has no interest in you. No high roller would ever stay in such a flophouse.’*

Agent 32 then begins to watch a video in Tagalog on her refurbished iPhone 7 featuring a gay pinoy (Filipino male) comedian. She begins chuckling. Noisily. *She really likes that guy’s jokes – a lot more than mine. We don’t seem to laugh together that much anymore. Nor talk as much. John Lezley [a pre-Trump-era acquaintance] said that that was normal at the 10-year mark. That that. This this. Pfft-pfft.*

“He’s so funny!” she blurts after seeing my hand gestures to quiet down. “He’s a major YouTuber.” *Über tuber. A hyper-hilarious mega-spud. Maybe I’m jealous. I have the charisma of a paperclip.*

Monique then begins to review photos taken four hours earlier on the Golden Gate Bridge. “Wow! You caught me six inches [15 cm] off the sidewalk. Perfect lens snap, 33. Good job.” *A new position for me: lens snapper. How much does it pay? Wonder how Kirk [my son] is doing at Carowinds [an amusement park on the NC/SC state line] tonight. Hope he checked the oil level in that old Honda [Accord] before rolling out. Sure hope he doesn’t get stranded on I-77 again. Well, his nearby [Filipino] cousins are on standby.*

“Bridge security got very concerned when you started singing ‘I believe I can fly’ while doing jumping jacks next to the eastern railing, 32; you became a flashing blip on their radar screen; the cameras were all on you. ‘We may have a jumper here, Ed; send someone out to check on this loony pinay.’ [A Philippine woman] You probably ruined some poor guard’s coffee break.” *What a ridiculous overreaction.*

“Oh, please, 33. Enough with your paranoid fantasies. Please give it a rest; it’s tiresome.” *Is it?*

Unfazed, I rub the stubble on my unshaven-because-I-forgot-to-pack-the-old-Norelco-electric-shaver chin. “I really miss the mild, foggy, overcast weather out here, 32; this is right in my atmospheric wheelhouse.” *‘Atmospheric wheelhouse’? Huh?*

“Well, yes, no sun is great, 33,” Monique declares. “I love it!” *Still an area of agreement.*

“We’re like vampires, 32,” I add. *No, just you, bana; I don’t want to bite anyone’s neck.*

“This is a day that I wish we could liquefy and funnel into a wine bottle, 33. And then pop the cork, tilt, and let it flow out ten years from now on our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.” *Doubt I’ll be alive for that. My innards are shot. The casket countdown has started in earnest. In Ernest, too?*

“Come back here in ten years?” I enquire.

“Not here, maybe somewhere else on the California coast. Hey, how about Monterrey Bay? Have you been there?”

“Yes, but just once. A brief trip a long time ago.”

“What were you doing?” Monique asks with a raised right eye. *Just know that he must have been up to something mischievous. Or downright illicit.*

“Moving product. Cutting a deal with Clint Eastwood. No, just kidding. ‘Twas only sightseeing.” *Scoping upper-class, drug-addled chicks, I’d bet.*

“Alone?” Monique quickly asks with a deadpan expression.

“Yup. Another me-myself-and-I jaunt.” *Hmmm ...*

A MUNI K tram then rattles down the tracks in the middle of the street. We both watch it pass by. *The route remains the same. –Sled Zeppelin [sic]*

“Where does that line go to, 33?”

“To Meta-Mentality Heights, 32. It’s quite a beyond-self-referential prospect of an exo-compoundment.” *[sic] Huh? What did he say? Such an abnormantality [sic] now.*

“Exo-compoundment? Puh-lease talk in rational terms, 33. All of this was barely amusing seven years ago.” *And not now? Or ever again?*

“Ok, it curves back and winds up in Ingleside at Balboa Park [BART/MUNI] Station. *Bals vs. Boas at Balboa Park tonight. ‘Thad, those British anti-Lewisites better be up for it; the Boas can methodically compress and choke off a game.’ ‘Ten in the box. How is that still allowed, Alton?’*

“When we got on the MUNI train in downtown, [Embarcadero Station] you said that it went to a mall,” [Stonestown Galleria] Monique reminds. *She wants a [Golden State] Warriors jersey so bad.*

“The M train does, 32. Three lines pass through that tunnel: the K, the L, and the M.” *KLM to Amsterdam. Whew! What a trip that was. What year was that? 2002? Yeah, that was it. All those stoned 20-something lovers ... what percentage are still together now? How many mumble-bumble-stumbled into a canal? Hmmm ...*

“I know that the N Judah train goes through another tunnel. [the Sunset Tunnel] The J runs along Church Street in Noe Valley. And the newest line, the T, runs along Third Street in the eastern part of the city near the bay. So, where are the O, P, Q, R, and S lines, geo-nerdo [sic] Agent 33?” *Yow! Forgot about the S Shuttle. Not sure if I could explain that one in my current mental state. Will just let it go for now.*

“I’m not able to determine that at this moment, Agent 32. Please try again later this evening.” *Oh, brother.*

“You are functionally useless!” Monique is exasperated. *Aporia appends.*

“I thought that I was hopeless. I’m only going to sign on to one ‘-less’ term at a time.” *He’s so crazy. Now more than ever.*

We finish our drinks and remain seated, taking in the casually-to-causally-unfolding, mid-afternoon tableau. Our minds silently meander. *Financial situation sure is becoming bleak. Again. How I wish that I could go back in time and buy that damn Powerball ticket on February 10, 2016 – the darker-than-unmined-coal date never to be forgotten. [chronicled in two short stories, ‘Powerballed’ and ‘That Day’] Those six numbers, 2-3-40-50-62-(5). Ingrained in my brain forever. She picked all of them correctly. Dreamt them. Skipped the wrong Wednesday. Severely punished. Not sure where our ship is headed now. For the jagged rocks it sometimes/often seems. / If he just would have done what I said, and not skipped the mid-week drawing, we could be living here instead of merely visiting for four days and three nights. And staying in a one-star motor lodge. Talk about dropping the ball. I often won raffles in Lazi [Siquijor, Philippines]; the neighbors called me ‘the lucky girl’. However, he is cursed. Why? He must have done something evil. God doesn’t like him, or we would have a vault-load of cash. Instead, we’re living in a dank basement apartment in east Charlotte. Oh, what could have been? Think I am ready to just move back to the Philippines and look after mom. Will he want to come over, too, after he retires from the college? [CPCC] His pension could carry us. The dollar goes so much farther in the Pinas. [slang for the Philippines] Only time will tell, I suppose.*

“Ready to hop on a train now?” Monique finally asks, now feeling impatient; wanting to get moving mall-ward. *Wonder what she was pondering. Could almost ‘feel’ her this-sure-*

*aint-2011 thorny vine of thoughts. Might she divulge later at the motel? 17:1 odds.*

“Sure,” I answer. *Bet she can’t wait to get into that store.*

We walk all the way back to West Portal Station without talking. After waiting about five minutes on the masonry platform, we are boarding a scantily occupied M train.

As the tram passes behind backyards between Lagunitas Drive and Woodacre Drive, I look at Google Maps to track the train. I notice that Sloat Boulevard, Junipero Serra Boulevard, Ocean Avenue, and 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue form a trapezoid. *Ah, another trapezoid: the shape of the day. Trapped and voided in a zoid. [sic]*

“Why are you staring so intently at your [cheapo android] phone, bana?” Monique demands from my left side, looking a wee perturbed.

“The city streets form interesting shapes; I just spotted a glaring trapezoid,” I reply. *‘A glaring trapezoid’? What in the world?! Did the sly weasel take something psychoactive?*

“Oh, why did I even ask?” Another eye-roll admonishment.

In the Eucalyptus Drive Muni M train right of way, there is another grinding slowdown. To a lunging stop. Our minds race ahead. *Better write this up. Soon. Before I forget. Maybe use the memo feature on the phone. This will probably be the penultimate psecret psociety adventure for us. Nothing lasts forever. Things change over time. Had a fun run with Monique. For the most part. No one is perfect – certainly not me. Could have done much worse. / What’s he thinking? Hmmm ... Ellipses? Hexagons? No telling. Seems we may be headed for a fork in our road. How I miss Lazi.*

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## Endnotes:

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